REVOLUTION’S AFTERLIFE:
THE PARIS COMMUNE IN AMERICAN CULTURAL MEMORY, 1871-1933

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Abstract

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*Revolution’s Afterlife* traces the uncanny persistence of the Paris Commune—as specter and spectacle—in the U.S. literary and cultural imaginary from the Gilded Age into the Modernist period. Despite, or perhaps because of, the spectacularly transnational traumas of the twentieth century, scholars and theorists have most often regarded cultural memory as a phenomenon of distinctly national (or intra-national) proportions, an ongoing cultural process of remembering or forgetting a nation’s *own* past triumphs or crises. In turn, both the “culture of memory” and the critical turn to memory studies itself have been figured as distinctive to—or symptomatic of—our own historical moment. By contrast, my project uncovers the thoroughly international contours of American cultural memory in the nineteenth century. Recovering the ways Americans represented and consumed the revolution of 1871 across a variety of literary forms and mass-cultural mediums, from illustrated weeklies and touring panoramas to periodical poetry and the novels of Henry James, I argue that the Commune’s American afterlife fundamentally shaped anxieties about the New Woman and burgeoning imperial ambitions in the U.S. even as it transformed the terrain of Paris—and what it meant to be an American there—in American memory.
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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Ann White Lyons (1930-2000)
Introduction

Spectacular Afterlives

This project traces the unexpected—and now largely forgotten—persistence of the Paris Commune in American cultural memory. In so doing, it recovers how a revolution came back to life as a commodity, and how for decades another nation’s memory became, affectively-speaking, our own.

My use of “afterlife” is indebted to Kristin Ross’s important study of the memory industry surrounding the events of May 1968 in France. I invoke the term here because it registers not only the longevity of the Commune as specter and spectacle on this side of the Atlantic long after it was crushed (and systematically forgotten) in France, but also the uncanny displacement—the geographical and temporal dislocations—ghosting the event’s spectacular second life in the United States. But my title marks another problem of signification and translation that, in turn, haunts that story. For while “the Paris Commune” designates, most explicitly, the radically anti-hierarchal and revolutionary municipal government which governed Paris for seventy-three odd days in 1871, the term comes to signify the entire period from March 18 through the Bloody Week in May that brought that experiment in, as Terry Eagleton has described it, “the transformation of everyday life” to an end. ¹ And by an odd stroke of historical remembering, “the Commune” eventually comes in the American imaginary largely to stand in for, even to encapsulate, the story of its end, the blood and fire and chaos of its final hours. The

¹ Eagleton writes in the Foreword to Kristin Ross’s The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune, “More than most classical revolutions, the Commune was a question of
term, like the revolution to which it points, functions, then, as a kind of palimpsest, uncannily signaling that its presence—like its time—is always out of joint. It thus serves as a palpable sign of the way in which the event and its memory functions as a site of ongoing contestation. For as Marita Sturken points out, “The process of cultural memory is bound up in complex political stakes and meanings. It both defines a culture and is the means by which its divisions and conflicting agendas are revealed” (Tangled Memories 1). But my title also signals, finally, that the revolution haunting us from across the water is always already at once foreign and familiar, as much Parisian as our own.

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Scholarship on American memory hinges on a central paradox: namely, U.S. reluctance to have a past and near total amnesia of any historical moment (let alone, national entanglement) prior to the present. In his monumental volume on the rise and mobilization of (selective) memory in American culture from the Gilded Age to the 1990s, Michael Kammen sums up that commonplace by turning to a 1965 Esquire cartoon: “Mexican troops,” writes Kammen, “are storming the Alamo and an American soldier responds, ‘Oh, stop worrying. The public has a short memory’” (9). The critical consensus would seem, moreover, to be that while we everywhere lament our lack of memory, our current historical moment is nevertheless marked by memory-mania. A number of excellent studies have turned their attentions to the question, then, of what pasts Americans remember and what material forms (and to what political ends) this memory takes, but these studies overwhelmingly examine U.S. memory as a phenomenon rooted squarely in domestic experience, in our nation’s own triumphs or crises: taking up, for example, the Alamo, the Civil War, Vietnam, the Aids epidemic, Oklahoma City and 9/11 as critical loci
of American cultural memory.\textsuperscript{2} My readings of U.S. literary, visual, and performative representations of the Commune as not only archives of now buried pasts but also technologies of memory is indebted to these studies, but \textit{Revolution’s Afterlife} argues for the necessity of approaching cultural memory as a phenomenon within and beyond the nation and, in turn, rethinking these media—in particular, the newspaper, the panorama, and the novel—as crucial sites for the construction not simply of national but of transnational memory. For the tenacity of the Commune’s second life does not simply attest to its continuing usefulness in American culture. It also crucially reverses the assumption that transnational circuits of memory—that memory without borders, as it were—are uniquely or definitely a product of our own historical moment, countering, among others, Andreas Huyssen’s claim that “historical memory is not what it used to be” (1).\textsuperscript{3}

Yet as Ross aptly argues, “Even to raise the question of memory…is to confront the way in which the whole of our contemporary understanding of processes of social memory and forgetting has been derived from analyses related to…World War II. World War II has in fact, 


\textsuperscript{3} Huyssen argues in \textit{Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory} that historical memory “used to mark the relation of a community or nation to its past” (1) but that relation is now overwhelmed by an endless barrage of mediated pasts. “Untold recent and not so recent pasts impinge upon the present through modern media of reproduction like photography, film, recorded music, and the Internet, as well as through the explosion of historical scholarship and an ever more voracious museal culture” (1).
‘produced’ the memory industry in contemporary scholarship” (1). The field of memory studies has, as yet, largely failed to theorize collective memory as a phenomenon that is not ultimately reducible to the category of trauma. But my archive indexes a range of affective responses to the Commune—repugnance, horror, disavowal, and loss, but also deep-seated fascination, radical enthusiasm and empathic identification. The Commune’s purchase for Americans and ongoing currency in American culture cannot, therefore, be read as simply symptomatic of the revolution rescripted as cataclysmic catastrophe—whatever the hyperbole of its contemporary critics on both sides of the Atlantic. 4

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It was Trotsky who opined that every time you look at the Commune, you see something new in it, but perhaps it was America that most bore this truth out. For well into the mid-twentieth century, the specter and the spectacle of the Paris Commune was never too far from reach in U.S. culture. Garnering more headlines in U.S. newspapers than nearly any other single event, domestic or foreign, in 1871, 5 the Commune and its aftermath remained a topic au courant of American periodicals into the fin-de-siecle. Yet its circulation in serious American magazines and newspapers of all stripes only echoed and reinforced its continuing circulation in cultural parlance.

4 Take, for example, The New York Times’s vitriolic claim that the Commune waged war “against civilization itself” (“The Commune and Liberty,” NYT May 31, 1871: 4) and Guy de Maupassant’s suggestion that the Commune was “Paris in the throes of a hysterical attack” (qtd. in Beizer 206).

5 As Samuel Bernstein explains, “No political or economic issue in the United States, save governmental corruption, received more headlines in the American press of the 1870s than did the Paris Commune...Anarchy, assassination, slaughter, incendiarism, streets covered in human gore—such blood curdling scenes were monotonously reported in the news” (60). See his article, “The Impact of the Paris Commune in the United States” in Revolution and Reaction: The Paris Commune 1871. Eds. John Hicks and Robert Tucker. University of Massachusetts Press, 1973.
Reformer Charles Loring Brace pointedly evoked its memory in his 1872 memoirs to inspire support for his Children’s Aid Society, while Henry James casually remarked to his sister that the 1871 riot in New York’s Irish district was “really quite Parisian.” Survivors of the Great Fire instantly turned to Paris to make sense of what happened in Chicago, describing the charred cityscape, for example, as “more dismal than…an excursion among the [post-Commune] wrecks of Paris” (qtd. in Katz 124). Chicago’s newspapers, in turn, made much of this metaphor, running sensational headlines linking Chicago’s fire to the final incendiarism of the Paris Commune, at times even ascribing the culpability for the fires to the Commune’s handful of vocal American supporters, among them the celebrated feminist firebrand Victoria Woodhull and abolitionist agitator Wendell Phillips. Indeed, though now almost entirely erased from American memory, “the Commune” quickly became the catchall phrase for domestic unrest. Native American uprisings throughout the 1870s and onwards were likened to it, with the “Red Specter” conveniently serving as a sliding synecdoche for both. The Tompkins Square riots were immediately dubbed “The Commune in New York” in newspapers across the country. And the Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette colorfully claimed—as the Great Strike of 1877 broke out in Pennsylvania and quickly swept the Midwest and Northeast—that “it was as though the French Commune had suddenly been vomited over us” (qtd. in Katz 171).

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6 Brace writes in The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years’ Work Among Them, “It has been common, since the recent terrible Communistic outbreak in Paris, to assume that France alone is exposed to such horrors; but in the judgment of one who has been familiar with our ‘dangerous classes’ for twenty years, there are just the same explosive social elements beneath the surface of New York as of Paris” (29).

Descriptive turns to the Commune often implicated more prescriptive and pedagogical ones as well.\(^8\) Allan Pinkerton, in the aftermath of the Great Strike, fanned fears of the Commune at home to further interest in his detective agency, while Episcopal Rev. W. C. Doane, addressing the 1895 graduating class at an Albany girls’ school, invoked the figure of a female Communard to rail against “The New Woman.” A year later, Teddy Roosevelt, on the campaign trail, turned to the Commune and its suppression to argue for wider latitude in quelling the tide of post-Haymarket labor unrest: “The sentiment now animating a large proportion of our people can only be suppressed as the Commune in Paris was suppressed, by taking ten or a dozen of the leaders out, standing…them against a wall, and shooting them.”\(^9\)

A number of historians in urban culture and labor history (Christine Stansell, Frank Donner, Gerald Grob, Samuel Bernstein, H.C. Richardson among them) have apprehended and detailed the ways in which the Commune’s specter closely shadowed American urban reform movements, repeatedly resurfacing in postbellum discourses on crime, strike-breaking and Red-baiting. But in these accounts the Commune’s continuing cultural reverberations are consistently figured as synonymous with and cipher for only the very real anxieties about Gilded Age urbanization and labor agitation, and most often linked to the unprecedented upheaval of the Great Strike of 1877. As Nell Irvin Painter emphasizes in *Standing at Armageddon*, “the Commune, with its scenes of violent confrontation, served as the prevailing image for Americans

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\(^8\) As Frank Donner, in particular, points out, the Commune as metaphor was mobilized by business-interests, Pinkertons, anarchist hunters, and politicians alike to call for and justify increasingly repressive measures against labor unrest and union organizing. See *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America*, Berkeley: U of California P, 1990.

faced with labor unrest” (18). Visual historian Joshua Brown thus notes, for example, that the engravings of the strike that ran in *Harper’s Weekly* and the New York *Daily Graphic* bore an uncanny resemblance to earlier pictorial coverage of the Commune (162-3), while literary critic Russ Castronovo, in his recent account of the Great Strike in *Beautiful Democracy*, details the ways that time and again government officials and the press figured 1877 as “a revenant of the Commune” (84). And in his compelling study of Americans and the Paris Commune, historian Philip M. Katz similarly points to the ways that 1871 colored and was colored by the experience of the Great Strike. Yet 1877 marks, in this account, the apotheosis of the Commune in America even as it augurs its nadir. For Katz argues that “the Commune” became such a tarnished touchstone (or savage epithet) in the aftermath of the nation-wide strike’s failure that “the only workers in the U.S. who still celebrated the Commune uprising after 1877, or even consistently remembered it, were foreign-born workers—and not even all of them” (186). And while he notes that “a lurid image of the Commune continued to haunt [the mainstream U.S.] vision of domestic social unrest” he nevertheless insists that “even this image dimmed shortly after the Great Strike, as the image of the Commune ceased to be an active force in American culture” (187).

By contrast, *Revolution’s Afterlife* argues that the Commune remained a central force in American culture well into the Modernist period, and always meant more than labor in U.S. memory. For while the work of remembering the Commune was no doubt often bound up with the specter of labor unrest and anxieties about labor organization, and many reformers actively and necessarily distanced themselves from ties to the revolution of 1871—take, for example, Samuel Gompers’s resounding omission of any mention of the Commune in his account of 1871 in *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* (1925) and Edward Bellamy’s suggestion, in an 1888 letter to W.D. Howells, that “the word socialist I never well could stomach…It smells to the average
American of petroleum” (qtd. in Morgan 192)—my study suggests that there is far more to the story of this revolution’s U.S. afterlife. Long before the Moderns made it their hometown, Americans felt Paris to be curiously their own. And, from the start, they not only felt a particular stake in remembering and revisiting the Commune, but saw themselves as having a further stake in insisting that its rise and fall need be narrated from a specifically American standpoint. In recovering this broader archive of U.S. commodifications, commemorations and recirculations of the Commune—in particular, its ongoing presence across American literary, visual and performance culture—I show how the story of the Commune becomes a pivotal site for addressing post-bellum gender trouble as well as negotiating regionalism and reconciliation, even as it became a crucible for reconstructing revolution and empire in American memory. In turn, I argue that the work of remembering the Commune becomes a key locus for rethinking Paris and what it meant to be an American there well into the twentieth century.

But to recover the Commune as specter and spectacle in American culture is also to uncover dimensions of the event often overlooked in historiography of the uprising. Excavating the Commune as an international sensation refracted through U.S. mass-cultural memory unexpectedly brings into relief the profundity of the epistemological shake-up that the experience


of March-May 1871 represented in the nineteenth century: crucially unsettling the distinctions between metropole and periphery, domestic and anti-domestic figures, past and future, battlefield and homefront, national and transnational memory. *Revolution’s Afterlife* thus adds to the conversation, begun in recent years, on the gender politics of the event, but also crucially recovers the degree to which the brutal reconquering of Paris by the Third Republic must be understood as at once a civil war waged in France and a colonial war waged at home. For even as American novels in the 1890s surprisingly re-imagine Paris under the Commune as an imperial frontier where American boys might be made men, French writers vilifying the Commune in the 1870s had decried the spectacle of “Paris in the hands of Brutes and Negroes” and likened the Communards to “savages, a ring through their noses, tattooed in red, dancing a scalp dance on the smoking debris of society” (qtd. in Ross 149).

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1877 is, as we’ve seen, typically read as marking the watershed irruption of the Commune in postbellum U.S. memory. In what follows, I turn instead to 1876, and the Paris Commune’s spectacular presence at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, as a way not only of charting the instant commodification of the Commune in the U.S. and exploring the archive of memory made possible by such spectacularizations,13 but also of opening up the larger material terrain of this project.

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12 Perhaps unsurprisingly, the general summoned to subdue the insurrection in Paris, Marshal MacMahon, served as Governor-General of Algeria until the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war.

13 Allison Landsberg argues that “new technologies like the cinema…transformed memory by making possible an unprecedented circulation of images and narratives of the past” (2); in particular, she defines the cinema “as a site in which people experience a bodily, mimetic...
REVOLUTION RE-VISITED: THE COMMUNE IN ‘76

If the Republic of America is right, the Commune of Paris was right.
–Theodore Tilton

To relive a moment that could not properly be called one’s own, and further, to revisit a scene that one did not oneself live through, to inhabit—indeed “try on”—someone else’s memories is a desire for paradoxically both an impossible immediacy and a virtual reality most often associated with our own cultural moment. Although Allison Landsberg specifically encounter with a past that was not actually theirs” (14)—experiences she terms forms of “prosthetic memory.”

14 Editorial in Tilton’s newspaper The Golden Age, 1871. Quoted in historian Samuel Bernstein’s 1973 article, “The Impact of the Paris Commune in the United States.” While Bernstein cites this exception, he ultimately contends that it is “safe to assume that the volume of abuse [meted out by press and pulpit in the U.S.] caused Americans, irrespective of social status, to look upon [the Commune] with repugnance” (60). But what interests me about this editorial is the way that it gets at, perhaps, the most pressing (and dangerous) question which the Commune posed for Americans—a question repeatedly invoked or disavowed in the literary resurgence of the Commune in the 1890s. For a further discussion of Tilton’s editorial, see Timothy Messer-Kruse’s The Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 1988.
identifies such “prosthetic memories” with the rise of film and “experiential museums” and other more modern cultural technologies, the panorama similarly functioned as a technology that made available such experiential, *embodied* memory.\(^{15}\) Put simply, if Angela Miller compellingly suggests that “the key to the panorama as a particular visual medium was a way of seeing—the panoramic” (47), the “panoramic” brokers a new way of remembering as well. For in my reading the panorama as a cultural form and practice points to and exemplifies the desire to “Americanize” the Commune, the fascination and compulsion to return to witness it for oneself through a variety of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century literary, visual and performative mediums. For even as radical speeches, tableaux-vivants, pageants, commemorative festivals, pamphlets and later pulp fiction would enjoin leftist audiences to “Remember the Commune” in order to activate and re-emboby not simply insurgent memory but revolutionary change, the Commune’s memory was alive and well in the realm of American highbrow and mass culture, with a series of periodical poems, historical romances, popular adventure fictions, photographic albums, periodical remembrances and even a Coney Island pyrotechnic show assuring

\(^{15}\) It seems worth mentioning that the great irony—and archival challenge—of writing about these larger than life, spectacularly visual forms—spreading out in 360 degrees across, at times, more than 20,000 square feet of canvas and reaching such vast audiences of men, women and children in 19th century America—is their paradoxical *spectrality*: few examples of the panoramic form are now extant, and only a few contemporary images of them remain. As Griffiths points out, a panorama’s accompanying circular is often our “key text”: “Combining a general introduction to the artist with a legend that detailed each of the identified locales, these [descriptive booklets], a cross between a conventional map and tourist guidebook, often represent the best surviving records of the 19th century panorama” (44). My own reading of panoramic memory and the Commune has been necessarily confined to ephemera archived from the Centennial Exposition—catalogues, guidebooks, letters, and newspaper reports documenting the popularity of Henri Felix Philippoteux’s cyclorama, “The Siege of Paris.” My study of this material is indebted to Daphne Brooks’s insightful readings of 19th century performance culture as refracted through and mediated by transatlantic print culture in *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006.
Americans the Commune was dead even as they promised another opportunity to be tourists at, witnesses to, and often participants in its bloody end.

Recent scholarship on the panorama has drawn our attention to the sense of heightened embodiment and uncannily “immersive spectatorship” experienced by panorama-goers. Miller argues, for example, that “the [panoramic form’s] combination of striking visual effects, apparitional space and real time, albeit collapsed or telescoped, was not only new, but a mode of experience generically linked to the cinema” (“Panorama” 4), while Alison Griffiths has recently pointed out that “the reenactment was a key organizing principle of many nonfictional panoramas and, in a wider sense, came to define the very idea of panorama spectatorship as one of revisitation, of witnessing again, in modified form, that which has occurred in a different space and time” (emphasis mine 42). Critics often underscore, however, the spectacularly nationalist contours of both panoramic shows and spectatorship in the U.S.; the way, for example, that the panoramic scene itself represents a form of what Miller so well terms “romantic nationalism,” dehistoricized natural landscapes (like John Banvard’s tremendously popular Mississippi River panorama) displayed to forge an imagined national body politic or, in the wake of the Civil War, enormously popular battle scenes like Philippoteux’s “Gettysburg” that helped to reconstruct a fractured one (92). But as Robert Aguirre reminds us, “The panorama was [always] at once a technology, an art form, and a complex instrument of power” (36). What thus most interests me about the panoramic form—a form which debuted in London in the 1790s and peaked in popularity in the mid-19th century, only to enjoy an international revival that reached, by one estimate, “one hundred million spectators between 1870 and the appearance of

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16 In her compelling study, Griffiths, for example, emphasizes that “there…remains something very strange (even uncanny) about the ['peculiarly embodied'] nature of panorama spectatorship” (37). See *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums, and the Immersive View*. NY: Columbia, 2008.
the movies” (Miller 35)—is what kinds of memory it facilitated, and, in its curious compression of time and space, what sorts of pasts and futures it allowed its patrons to revisit.

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The Centennial Exposition opened on May 10, 1876 in Fairmount Park in Philadelphia; by the end of its run that October, some ten million visitors had attended the fair, nearly one-fifth of the total U.S. population. While it most visibly commemorated the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the Exposition most often stands out in scholarly memory for its menagerie of things (typewriters were introduced at the fair, along with a mechanical calculator, Bell’s telephone, Edison’s telegraph, Heinz ketchup, Fleischman’s yeast) and its intricate controversies of exclusion. (Frederick Douglass nearly barred from sitting on the platform on opening day; African American women’s groups raising funds for but receiving no official place within the Woman’s Pavilion; the “Southern Restaurant” that re-created life on the Old Plantation; Native American participation limited to exhibits that showcased the “Vanishing American.”). But if the specter of the Civil War and the failures of Reconstruction hovered over the proceedings, there was another, now largely forgotten specter of revolution never too far from reach, the most spectacular example of which, “The Siege of Paris Cyclorama,” was located just outside the gates of the Main Exhibition Hall, reportedly garnering between 1000 and 2000 Centennial visitors a day (Fig. 1).

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18 In the 1870s and 1880s the static circular panorama was dubbed a “cyclorama.” Stephan Oettermann suggests that “since the static panorama [had] never achieved popularity [in the U.S.] as in Europe,” the new name “distinguished them from better-known moving panoramas”
Indeed, in my reading, there were at least three Centennial sites spectacularly haunted by the Paris Commune of 1871: “The Siege of Paris” cyclorama, commissioned at the behest of an American for the Exposition, $^{19}$ “Paris By Night,” a competing cycloramic view of Paris on display at the newly opened Colosseum building nearby, and the labor delegation which arrived from France to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of its “sister republic.”

(342); Joseph Jackson claims the term “was first used in Philadelphia in 1876” (536). Miller argues that the popularity of Philippoteux’s “Siege of Paris” near single-handedly sparked the so-called Panorama Revival of the late 19$^{th}$ century (“The Panorama” 54). For a further discussion of the “box-office success” of “The Siege of Paris,” see Ralph Hyde’s *Panoramania: the Art and Entertainment of the ‘All-Embracing’ View*.

$^{19}$ Ralph Hyde explains in *Panoramania: the Art & Entertainment of the ‘All-Embracing’ View*, “An American on a pleasure tour in Europe, a descriptive book tells us, visited [the original ‘Siege of Paris’] in the Champs-Elysees in 1874. So vivid an impression did the panorama make on him that he resolved to exhibit it two years later during the celebrations of the one hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence” (170).
Fig. 1. “Siege of Paris…On Exhibition Daily” handbill (1876), Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.
No American trade unions were allowed to participate in the Centennial festivities, but French trade unionists raised funds for an official visit to Philadelphia in July 1876. Although the suppression of the Commune—and systematic repression that followed it—had done much to stifle the labor movement in France in the 1870s, reports of the delegation’s impending trip spurred fears that these trade unionists might infect American labor, bringing with them “Commune-istic” ideas. As historian Philip Foner explains it, “American authorities reasoned the delegates had probably been Communards and certainly were sympathetic to the Commune” (240). In April 1876, The New York Herald warned readers in no uncertain terms that French workers were “nearly addicted to Commune-istic ideas”—joining the chorus of American newspapers who suggested the French delegation might inspire Americans “to model themselves after the Commune” (Foner 241). American labor, for its part, responded by appropriating that epithet to redirect the accusation: criticizing the vast numbers of immigrants employed in the construction of Exposition buildings in Fairmount Park during the deepening economic recession, the National Labor Tribune of Pittsburgh asked pointedly, “Are our authorities cultivating an American Commune?” (emphasis mine; qtd. in Foner 264).

The French delegation spent nearly twelve days touring the Centennial grounds, but in Foner’s account they were “evidently not taken to see the [Great Siege of Paris Building]” (277), perhaps purposefully missing out on the spectacle of the “Assassination of the Archbishop of Paris at the Hands of the Commune of 1871.” But if their presence catalyzed fears of an impending “Commune” in the United States, the panoramic spectacle housed on Elm Avenue and Fortieth Street signaled the way those fears were always already imminent in the U.S. in the 1870s. For the cyclorama also points to the way that Americans, throughout the 1870s,
consumed the spectacle of the Commune by way of guidebooks to Paris, popular histories, melodramas, widely anthologized periodical poetry, Pinkerton tracts, editorials, sermons, and magazine “remembrances.” But what was the appeal of returning to the scene in 1876, revisiting revolution at the same moment that the U.S. was remembering its own?

The two cycloramas mounted for the Centennial, “The Siege of Paris” and “Paris By Night” offered visitors, as their titles suggest, competing visions of Paris; art historians such as Ralph Hyde have noted the juxtaposition allowed viewers “the unique opportunity to compare an old-fashioned panorama from the Regent’s Park Colosseum, ‘Paris By Night’, with a new-style panorama from Paris” (7). But in my reading these juxtaposing views did far more ideological and mnemonic work, for their opposing depictions of the city nevertheless proffered strikingly complimentary visions of the Commune. And both spectacles notably billed themselves as intended to be especially of interest to Centennial visitors: “The Siege of Paris” was commissioned specifically for the event, while the the Colosseum Hand-book details, “It was decided to place the ‘Paris by Night’ [rather than ‘London By Night’] on view during the Centennial season, as a work which would probably be most pleasing to the greater number of persons congregated in Philadelphia during this festival time” (5). (It seems worth noting that the Siege of Paris Cyclorama was such a success that it garnered crowds for twenty-six months straight in Philadelphia (long after the Centennial itself had ended), before eventually moving on to Boston for an eight-month showing (“The Boston Cyclorama”).)

When “Paris By Night” (Fig. 2) originally debuted in London in 1848, audiences flocked to see a glimpse of the capital precisely at the moment that a revolution was unfolding in Paris

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20 From the Boston Center for the Arts (housed in the former Boston Cyclorama Building) website. Its historical page on the “Siege of Paris” suggests that the cyclorama left Boston in 1879 for a run in San Francisco (“The Boston Cyclorama”). My research has unearthed “Siege of Paris” descriptive booklets for runs in Chicago and Los Angeles as well.
(Brooks 78); as Daphne A. Brooks has argued, some of that revolutionary fervor seems to have seeped into the panoramic experience, perhaps inspiring William Wells Brown to develop his own abolitionist panorama in the 1850s (78). But by the time “Paris By Night” re-opened at the newly constructed Colosseum building in Philadelphia in 1876, the view of Paris it put on display was distinctly anachronistic and its charm was less “armchair travel” to the city than that the Paris it allowed one to visit quite literally no longer existed. As its accompanying brochure self-consciously informed viewers, “[the cyclorama] recalls, in many cases, the pleasure of earlier days” (3) and more specifically, “represents the city as it was prior to the riots of the Commune” (8). It thus claimed at once to give viewers access to “the Paris of the guidebooks” and a far more ghostly one. Much like the birds-eye views of “Paris in ruins” that ran in American illustrated weeklies like Harper’s and Frank Leslie’s in the aftermath of the week-long suppression of the Commune by the Versailles army, the detailed map included with the “Paris By Night” circular repeatedly lingers over the sites “Destroyed” by the fire, invoking the Commune’s incendiary and its fiery demise to revivify the Commune as its end, even as it erases the “Bloody Week” and reconquering of Paris by French government troops—the fighting and summary execution of some 25,000 Communards—from the landscape. For the move to show Paris “as it was” and implicitly blame the Commune for its ruin echoes broader transatlantic trends in visual culture: art historian Albert Boime argues the Impressionists, for example, moved to paint city scenes as if the ruined buildings in their sightlines were invisible, to fill in the missing landscape, and imagine the cityscape whole.\(^{21}\) As Gay Gullickson describes it: “[They] painted Parisian streets, gardens and parks, rivers, bridges and train stations, erasing the destruction widely and erroneously attributed to the Commune, returning workers to their

proper place (work not politics), and symbolically reclaiming the public spaces of Paris and its environs for the bourgeoisie” (1222).
If “Paris By Night” at once invoked and effaced the Commune from memory, the “Siege of Paris and Assassination of the Archbishop of Paris at the Hands of the Commune of 1871” offered visitors a far more spectacular re-laying of memory. Commissioned at the behest of an American and largely subsidized by the French government, the static cyclorama—more than 400 feet long and 50 feet high—billed itself as “the largest ever shown in America” (“Cyclorama of the Siege of Paris”) and debuted in New York in the winter of 1875 before moving to Philadelphia. Ostensibly, the cyclorama depicted the courage of the French troops facing the Prussian siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1, presenting shelled houses, collapsed walls and broken bodies amidst scenes of “sorties” and actually fighting. Indeed, “The Siege of Paris” registered the scars of war with such realism that its accompanying booklet claimed that “to realize this magnificent pageant is, after all, only an illusion requires a stronger mental effort than to accept it for reality” (Fortune 8); but like “Paris By Night,” the panoramic experience it afforded viewers enacted a spectacular displacement of memory.

The original panorama entitled “The Siege of Paris” was painted under the direction of Henri Felix Philippoteux in 1872 and seems a conventional case of panoramic memory invoked

22 “The Siege of Paris” circular remarks on this subsidization in detail, and Hyde adds that “the French government gave encouragement and support, supplying the [corps of artists] with military data and remitting half the freight and export charges” (170).

23 The Franco-Prussian war began in July 1870; by September 4, the Emperor Napoleon III, along with 100,000 French troops, had been captured at Sedan and a republican coalition voted to overthrow the Second Empire and inaugurate a new Government of National Defense (a government that would eventually become the Third Republic). Following a four month Prussian siege that encircled Paris and cut it off from all lines of communication with (and food supplies from) the provinces, a disastrous peace accord was signed on 28 January 1871. In February, Adolphe Thiers, a royalist with only the vaguest of republican sympathies, was elected chef du pouvoir executif of the new republic. His decision not only to allow the victorious Prussian army to parade through Paris, but also to dissolve the National Guard, end the war-time moratorium on rent and debts in Paris, and attempt to seize the National Guard’s munitions in Paris would help to spark the popular uprising on March 18 that led to the election of the Commune.
to facilitate nationalist fervor. As Hyde describes it, “A renowned painter of military subjects, [Philippoteux] was commissioned after the Prussian victory to record the heroism of the Parisian resistance in a new panorama for the Champs-Elysees rotunda…[it] provided a populace, stunned and embittered by the acceptance of Prussia’s humiliating peace terms, with a source of solace for their injured pride” (169). Showing the siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian war from the perspective of French lines, its popularity lasted for decades, and the spectacle remained on display in Paris at least until 1890 (Oettermann 342). The version commissioned by an American for the Centennial was, however, a view of the siege from the exact opposite vantage point, its line of sight shifted over to the Prussian lines menacing Paris in January 1870.  

As one contemporary viewer describes it:

The visitor ascends a stairway to the top of the mound of earth, representing a hill near Paris, and from the supposed high ground looks down upon Paris in the distance and the fight between Prussian and French soldiers in the earth works. The hill on which the visitor is supposed to be standing is covered with earth, littered with brushwood, debris of battles… forms of dead soldiers…. At the foot of the hill, painted imitations of stones, debris, etc. on the immense canvas of the picture adjoin the palpably real earth at the visitor’s feet, and they are such accurate representations that the dividing line between reality and illusion is not easily traced. (qtd. in “Cyclorama of the Siege of Paris”)

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24 A reviewer in Forney’s Morning Press (a local Philadelphia newspaper) notes, “We saw the same idea in Paris symbolized from the inside or French view of the siege…the present diorama, by the same artists, is from the German attack on the French capital…Schools with their teachers, and families with their parents, and citizens and strangers, should see and study this fine work; and, as they leave, let them gaze upon the touching, descriptive tragedy of the massacre of the Archbishop of Paris by the Commune in 1871” (qtd. in “Cyclorama of the Siege of Paris” advertisement).
The sensation of the line between reality and illusion “not being easily traced” effectively points to the panorama-goer’s experience of being transported outside of herself, into a space and time not her own. And this effect was particularly heightened here by Philippoteux’s innovation of three-dimensional faux terrains that helped to “minimize the optical disjuncture between 3-D foreground and 2-D background” (Griffiths 63). The “Siege of Paris” thus did not simply restage the past for visitors, but rather allowed them to imagine themselves able to recapture it, to experience a memory that is and is not their own, and the—as Griffiths describes it—“cognitive dissonance that comes from feeling like you’re elsewhere while knowing that you haven’t moved” (4). But what sort of panoramic memory did this spectacle allow Americans to consume?

The shift in perspective in Philippoteux’s Centennial cyclorama certainly allowed for a much finer view of Paris, no small selling point. And it would seem, paradoxically, to align American visitors with the Prussian perspective in order to better sympathize with the French. But I would argue that the move to place visitors outside Paris looking in actually functions as a kind of screen memory, summoning the once-rampant fears about a Prussian invasion of the city so as to counter the memory that it was actually to be the French government troops who bombarded, besieged, and eventually re-conquered the city later that year (Fig. 3). But if the cyclorama spectacularly displaced the violence of the Commune’s repression by the Third Republic, it also offered Americans the invitation to celebrate their own revolution while

25 Although the Germans did not, ultimately, bomba the city, fears were rampant in the 1870-1 that they would do so. Paul Fisher notes in his recent biography of the James family, House of Wits, that Henry James, like so many of his contemporaries, “avidly monitored the Prussian occupation of Paris during the autumn of 1870 by means of telegraphed reports in newspapers” (275).
imagining themselves in the hills overlooking Paris, on the cusp of tacking back the metropole from the red “savages” elected to govern it—and thus to reclaim revolution, in 1876, as uniquely our own.

Fig. 3. Cover of Harper’s Weekly 10 June 1871.  

Unlike “The Siege of Paris” Cyclorama, Nast’s 1871 illustration explicitly satirizes the fraternal war in Paris from the German vantage point (“They Do Unto Themselves What They Would Have Done Unto Us”), and implicitly invokes the damage the French themselves did to the city as well.
Much as “The Siege of Paris” worked to subtly screen the brutality of the Commune’s end, its sensational companion piece, “The Assassination of the Archbishop of Paris at the Hands of the Commune” painted by Jean Alfred Desbrosses specifically for the U.S. edition of the cycloramic spectacle, further dispelled—or displaced—that event.²⁷ For in a calculus of memory that echoed much of the original transatlantic press coverage of the Bloody Week, to revisit the harrowing scene of the Archbishop Darboy’s execution by Communards on May 24, 1871 was conveniently to forget the unprecedented violence of the Third Republic’s retaking of Paris that in no small measure helped to incite it. The Philadelphia Evening Star notably insists that “The bloody scenes embodied in the picture representing the Assassination of the Archbishop should be seen by every Centennial visitor,” while The Evening Telegraph went so far as to suggest that the spectacle was “quite as great a curiosity as the Exhibition itself” (qtd. in “Cyclorama of the Siege of Paris”).

And yet it is, nevertheless, tantalizing to think that panoramic memory might be able to work otherwise, that invoking the Commune in 1876 might not simply re-lay the past but might imagine other, more radical futures. In a letter dated January 27, 1876, a twenty-one year old Eugene V. Debs wrote home from New York to ask his brother to “Tell Pa and Ma that I am going to see that great painting of the “Siege of Paris” and the Franco Prussian War—which came from France and is going to be exhibited at the Centennial.”²⁸ To imagine the future

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²⁷ By 1872 images of the Commune had been banned in France, and no doubt such a spectacular invocation of the event would have been deemed too sensational for French audiences. For a discussion of “the politics of forgetting” in France, see Collette Wilson’s excellent recent study, Paris and the Commune. I find it all the more telling that the painting, partly funded by the French government, was crafted for an American audience primed for yet another representation of the Commune.

socialist organizer visiting this “curious” spectacle en route to Philadelphia is to begin to recapture, I think, the potential for reading articulations of memory against the grain, for seeking out contrapuntal notes embedded within even the most reactionary or vitriolic reconstructions of the Commune. But Debs’s visit also forecasts the ways that radical appropriations of the Commune often took spectacular forms, reusing and turning inside out the sensational tropes embedded within the most condemnatory commodifications of the Commune. Tracking the Commune’s spectacularization in America, is also, I argue, to chart the unlikely transit between radical and mass cultural forms, high-brow literary and radical print culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

**Chapters**

In the wake of sermons, editorials, and illustrations that railed against the Commune and claimed its “overly emancipated” females might pose the most terrifying domestic threat of all, a number of American periodical poets revisited the scene of the Commune and its immediate aftermath. Chapter One examines the way Margaret Junkin Preston, John Hay, and Edward King domesticated and recuperated the figure of the Commune, before focusing its attentions on Sarah M.B. Piatt’s remarkable response to the execution of a female Communard in “The Palace-Burner.” Piatt’s subtitle for the poem—“a picture in the newspaper”—immediately reminds us that her plaintive but incendiary “Palace-Burner” first entered American homes by way of periodicals. Resituating Piatt’s poem within the larger discourse of Harper’s coverage of the Commune, I argue that Piatt’s reading and reworking of the figure of the female petroleum-thrower both relies on and resists the ways in which the “Women of the Commune” were pictured in the newspaper. In re-reading this double domestication of the Commune alongside
Harper’s Weekly illustrations and editorials on the “man-woman” of the Commune, I suggest finally that Piatt—in bringing the pétroleuse “into the parlor”—crucially re-imagines both the fiery Communardes and the specter of domestic firebrands they were so often used to portend.

In Chapter Two, I explore the returns of the Paris Commune in American popular fiction in the 1890s, arguing that this now largely forgotten fin-de-siècle preoccupation with the revolution of 1871 consistently reframes Paris as a frontier of empire even as it critically reimagines it as a site where American tourists (or, more specifically, postbellum American men) might be said to “find” themselves. Setting Edward King’s bestselling 1895 boys’ book, Under the Red Flag, alongside G. A. Henty’s A Woman of the Commune, and two other immensely popular but virtually forgotten grown-up historical romances of the period, The Red Republic and An American in Paris, I show that the 1890s were a particularly apt time to revisit the Commune not simply because of the very real labor unrest plaguing the country, but more importantly because the “romance of the Commune” served to revise American conceptions of revolution at a moment when the U.S. was reimagining its role abroad and reevaluating its attitude towards empire.

In the second half of the project, I turn from the ways Americans re-imagined their own national and cultural identity through the stories they told about the Commune, to consider the way those stories in turn shaped their encounters—as tourists and later as Modernists—with “the City of Light.” Chapter Three excavates the space of the Commune in Henry James’s Paris. While The American Scene has heretofore been the privileged site to examine James’s fascination with—and affective responses to—lost landmarks and newly-minted ruins, landscapes of loss that have come in turn to stand in for modernity, American-style, I turn instead to the sights of and detours around the post-Commune ruins of Paris in his writings.
Situating James’s attention to charred landscape and vanished tourist sights alongside ongoing returns to these sites in contemporary U.S. culture, I suggest, crucially reconfigures James’s transformative and uncannily embodied “historic sense” even as it recovers the post-Commune ruinscape that came to function as an unexpectedly charged site of transnational memory in U.S. literary, visual and performance culture. Examining Strether’s encounter with the “irremediable void” left by the cleared-away ruins of the Tuileries in *The Ambassadors* and Hyacinth’s ghostly tour of the barricades in *Princess Casamassima* light of James’s formulation of the “strange aftertaste” of ruin in his 1872 letters and early sketches from Paris, I argue that James’s visits to—and meditations on—the “charred sites” and lost landmarks of Paris serve as an intimate, indeed synesthetic, indexing of social space, uncovering the spaces where more than one history—indeed, more than one Paris—ghost the present.

In Chapter Four, I explore Guy Endore’s 1933 best-seller, *The Werewolf of Paris*, a novel whose unlikely return to the Commune interrupts both its ostensible horror plot and its initial setting in 1920s expatriate Paris. Drawing on archival materials from UCLA’s Special Collections, I set Endore’s experimental monster novel alongside radical labor pamphlets like George Spiro’s “Paris on the Barricades” (1929) and William Siegel’s remarkable graphic retelling of the Commune in “The Paris Commune: A Story in Pictures” (1932), as well as Herbert Gorman’s recently rediscovered highbrow historical novel, *Jonathan Bishop* (1933). Reading Endore’s retelling of the Commune against both 1930s agitprop that drew on the conventions of pulp fiction to reclaim the event (and with it, that other Paris) for the American Left, and a reactionary counter-conversion novel that sends its “yankee spectator” to Paris to witness the Commune’s rise and fall, I excavate the way that *The Werewolf of Paris* uses the medium of horror to radically transform historical fiction and conventional histories of the
Commune. Laying bare the continuing relevance and threat of the Commune in the 1930s even as it redeployed the gothic tropes latent in mainstream American narratives of the Commune so as to rewrite the horror of the Commune as its suppression, the novel escapes the cul-de-sac of trauma by espousing an insurgent rather than simply melancholic fixity on the past, refashioning the space of the Commune in Marxist thought and U.S. memory.
Chapter One

Domestic Scenes: the Figure of the Commune in the 1870s

‘Shame,’ cried a spectator, ‘to treat a woman so.’ ‘Woman!’ exclaimed the gendarme. ‘That woman, as you call her, killed my captain, lieutenant and a sergeant with three shots from her revolver.’

-W. Pembroke Fetridge (1871)

In perhaps the most climactic moment of Henry James’ 1886 novel, The Bostonians, Basil Ransom, having successfully snagged Verena Tarrant away from at once Olive Chancellor, the suffrage movement, and a life on the public stage, does not watch Olive as she contemplates re-placing Verena by herself ascending the stage to face the increasingly mob-like crowd at the Boston Hall she had rented for Verena’s entrée into the public eye. Writes James, “If [Ransom] had observed her, it might have seemed to him that she hoped to find the fierce expiation she sought for in exposure to the thousands she had disappointed and deceived, in offering herself to be trampled to death and torn to pieces. She might have suggested to him some feminine firebrand of Paris revolutions, erect on a barricade (433).”

Olive is imagined here as at once martyr and virago, poised to face the public rather than an onslaught of bullets, or, rather, about to face the hissing crowd as if it were an onslaught of

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29 Quoted in Fetridge’s popular history of the Commune, The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871: With a Full Account of the Bombardment, Capture and Burning of the City, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871. Fetridge’s “instant” account of the Commune continued to garner a readership into the twentieth century: Jack London, for example, drew on it as he was writing The Iron Heel (1906).

bullets, the scenes melting into, or altogether overwhelming, one another. But what to make of the strange slippage here between mounting a platform and a barricade? For the connection is not quite as off-hand, or as strictly metaphorical, as James’s conditional tense implies. While the plurality of the reference—summoning any/all Paris revolutions—dispels its curious particularity, the figure of the “feminine firebrand” nevertheless quite strikingly conjures one of the most terrifying remainders of the Paris Commune, namely, the pétroleuse, even as it points to the way that this figure so often haunted that of the suffragist in the late 19th-century American imaginary: the danger that a woman on a platform (might be) a woman on a barricade.

The Nation opined in 1871 that “on the whole, the reign of the Commune must be pronounced the most extraordinary episode of modern times, and strikingly illustrates the truth of the observation that the barbarians whose ravages the modern world has to dread, live not in the forests but in the heart of our large cities” (“The Week” 351). This formulation of what “the modern world has to dread” concisely points, I think, to the “Red” scare provoked by the Commune, and comments like it have led historians to attend to the domestic threat the Commune posed to the twin realms of labor and capital in the 1870s. But that narrative flattens out—and quite strikingly forgets—the other fears the Commune provoked at this moment about savages lurking not so much in the cities as in the home and the “unsexed” women who threatened at once property and ballot-box. For while historians have noted that references to the fiery women of the Commune circulated widely in coverage of the Great Strike, and that female trade unionists were often equated with the figure of the “unsexed female incendiary” (Tax 42), the specter of the pétroleuse did not erupt out of nowhere in 1877. Indeed, as James’s

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31 Nell Irvin Painter explains, for example, that newspaper accounts of the Great Strike, noting the “singular” involvement of wives and mothers of the strikers “often described these unshrinking, uninhibited working-class women as ‘pétroleuses’” (18). Michael A. Bellesiles
reference to the “feminine firebrand” recalls, this terrifying figure repeatedly surfaced in sermons and editorials throughout the decade, and signaled the way in which U.S. feminist agitation was time and again figured to be as threatening to capital and the cult of domesticity as labor unrest.

Take, for example, Frank Leslie’s March 16, 1871 cover story, “A New Order of Amazons.” Even as the title summoned images of the “Amazons of the Seine” that splashed across American periodicals the previous spring, the editorial explicitly yokes the firebrands of Paris with the freewheeling feminist Victoria Woodhull and “her shrieking sisterhood”: “Events at home, as well as in France, must teach us the necessity of revising our old notions as well as our treatment of the sex which asserts itself so strongly of late on both sides of the Atlantic” (1). Insisting that the “crowing hen and the man-woman are equal anomalies and equally disgusting,” it goes on to exhort American women to “shine in their own sphere” (and thus, promptly step back into it), leaving both the “revolver and the ballot-box” to men (1). The editorial thus neatly invokes both the unruly women on the barricades and their spectacular incarnation in the figure of the female petroleum-thrower “shining” outside their properly domestic sphere, even as it signals the way in which the fierce furies of the Commune became an emblem of an emergent form of radically anti-domestic womanhood and a threat to gender categorization. (One French writer had refused to call these figures women at all out of, as he framed it, “respect for the women whom they resembled—when they were dead” (qtd. in Gullickson 4.).

similarly points out in 1877: America’s Year of Living Violently that “Respectable middle-class observers were deeply disturbed by the active participation of women in these events. (...) Sexual images mixed freely with the newspaper’s insistence that women lost their gender identity by their involvement in the strike” (179). And Meredith Tax writes in The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict that “trade union activism was equated by the press, police, and much of the public with being a “Commune-ist”—advocating something like the Paris Commune…. Any woman who was an active trade unionist in 1880 had to be willing to risk being jailed, being called an ‘unsexed female incendiary’” (42).
But the Parisian firebrands blamed for brandishing revolvers and petroleum were also held responsible for a further affront to the transatlantic homefront and with it the cult of true womanhood. For in the popular imagination, they were guilty not only of abandoning their homes to take up arms on a barricade, but also of recruiting children to join them in the struggle. As historian Gay Gullickson relates of the Bloody Week:

It was common for children to be regarded as women’s accomplices. [American Ambassador to France Elihu] Washburne, for instance, announced that ‘whenever it was possible, the pétroleuse…would find some little boy or girl whom she would take by the hand and to whom she would give a bottle of incendiary liquid’…. Children who were deemed suspicious looking, like women, were arrested and executed on the spot.32

Such unprecedented scenes of summary violence directed at women and children in Paris elicited, at the time, little outcry in the American press, for these anti-domestic domestic figures had, as Harper’s Weekly would put it, “generally brought it down upon themselves by the ferocity with which they took part in the fighting and the terrible work of burning down the city” (emphasis added).33

This chapter recovers the drama of that postbellum specter and reexamines Sarah M.B. Piatt’s remarkable response to the pétroleuse, and the danger the “women of the Commune” were figured to pose to the American home, in her 1872 periodical poem, “The Palace-Burner.” In my reading, Piatt relies on and resists the ways that “the women of the Commune” were

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represented in the American press, and works at once to bring the figure of the Parisian petroleum-thrower into the confines of the parlor and to restage the scene of her imminent execution for a distinctly domestic (distinctly American) audience. In tracking this double “domestication” of the Commune, I reconsider the public work performed by the private scene of parlor-side reading enacted in the poem, arguing that Piatt’s periodical piece most strikingly meditates on the pedagogical possibilities and ambiguities of her medium—the way that pictures jostled against the stories they pictorially represented—even as it registers her own ability to insert another story, or rather, another “picture” into the newspaper.

But in taking Piatt’s poem seriously as, in literary critic Matthew Giordano’s formulation, “a periodical piece,” I situate “The Palace-Burner” in dialogue with both the images of the “Women of the Commune” that ran in the illustrated press and a series of periodical execution poems that sought to refashion the memory of the Commune in mainstream U.S. print culture. I thus begin by exploring Margaret Junkin Preston’s “A Hero of the Commune,” John Hay’s “A Triumph of Order” and Edward King’s “A Woman’s Execution, Paris, May ’71” as unlikely sites of sympathy for the Commune. Tracing how these genteel periodical poets mobilized readerly identification with domestic figures whose bodies and beliefs utterly unsettled bourgeois domesticity and altogether redefined the terms of republican motherhood, I argue that each deploys a form of what I would term “subversive sentimentality.”

But as I show, in doing so these poets did not simply draw on and often radically rewrite the news of their day. For in

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34 A number of scholars have drawn our attention to the ways African American women writers similarly used domesticity for their own radical ends. As Lora Romera puts it in *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States*: “[These writers] (particularly those active in an abolitionist movement in which white, middle-class women had a significant presence) self-consciously appropriated the conventions of domesticity in order to communicate their critique of the racism and sexism of the Northern, white middle classes.” (3). See also Hazel Carby’s reading of Harriet Jacobs in *Reconstructing Womanhood*. 
domesticating the women and children facing execution in Paris so as to make them legible victims within the very system they would seem most to threaten, these poems often recontained the spectacle of violence they so purposefully revisited. The second half of the chapter turns to Piatt, reconsidering her work to recover the “fierce creature of the Commune” and her anti-domestic scene in light of three particularly emblematic images of “The Woman of the Commune” from Harper’s Weekly.

**Subversive Ends**

![Image](image-url)

Fig. 4. “A Gamin’s Heroism” Munsey’s Magazine, August 1897, 711.
On July 15, 1871, in its “Home and Foreign Gossip” section, Harper’s Weekly published what was to become one of the most enduring American anecdotes of the Paris Commune:

Heroism is found among the very children of France. A story is told of a boy of thirteen who was found, fighting in Paris, and was about to be shot. He did not seem frightened, but, taking a silver watch from his pocket, said: 'Captain, do let me take this first to a friend across the street; I borrowed it.' 'Oh, you scamp!', said the officer. ‘I understand—you want to run off.’ 'My word of honor, I will come back again,' said the boy; and the captain, seeing it was a child, was only too glad to be rid of him. In ten minutes the boy came back, and took his stand with his face to the wall. 'Here I am—fire!' Does Roman history tell us anything braver? The captain boxed the little hero’s ears, and ordered him never to show his face there again. They could not fire on him.

One month later, Appleton’s Journal republished the story of the plucky boy with the pocket watch nearly verbatim.35 Historian Philip Katz argues “this minor anecdote…could be tracked through hundreds of such repetitions” (79) and, indeed, for at least three decades, the story would resurface in a variety of cultural forms—from wildly popular histories of the Commune to widely anthologized poetry and bestselling historical romances. But while historians have read the anecdote itself as trivial, relegated to the back pages of the newspaper, and suggested its repetitions are notable merely as tokens of the Commune’s “ripples across the entire surface of

35 See Appleton’s Journal, August 19, 1871, 223. It seems worth noting that the original publication of the anecdote in Harper’s Weekly was itself a nearly verbatim citation of the story as it first appeared in Le Figaro on June 3, 1871. Katz suggests “an American correspondent…copied it directly from [the conservative French paper] or perhaps indirectly from a British newspaper, and cabled it home” (78). The version of the story that ran in Appleton’s Journal did not, however, echo Harper’s explicit framing of the story as an example of the heroism of the “children of France.”
American culture” (Katz 79), I argue that American’s compulsion to repeat it is testament instead to the fact the story—and the work it performed on this side of the Atlantic—was anything but minor. In my reading, the anecdote of the boy and the pocket watch played a pivotal role in helping Americans negotiate the Commune’s violent suppression and, quite often, in creating a counter-memory of that event. For in no small way, the fiction functioned as one of the most salient American “memories” of the Commune. That the story has received such scant attention even by those scholars most concerned with American responses to the Commune is, in turn, testament less to the anecdote’s own “minor” status—a quasi-ephemeral periodical good—and more to the way it so uneasily fits the narrative historians have come to tell about the Commune’s ripples in the United States in the 1870s—most particularly, American reactions to and representations of the spectacularly public role that women and children played in the story of the Commune.\(^{36}\) Put differently, if the anecdote as it first appeared in the pages of American periodicals like Harper’s and Appleton’s originally functioned as a kind of screen memory to dispel the horrific and unprecedented death scenes played out in Paris and graphically relayed to the American public by the illustrated weeklies, its returns-with-a-difference underscored and sometimes spectacularly repurposed the continuing cultural work (and relevance) of that story for a specifically American audience.

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In its “original” American iteration, the Harper’s Weekly story already functions as a

\(^{36}\) For some historians of the Commune, notably Stewart Edwards, the anecdote curiously becomes an occasion to forget (or at the very least, thoroughly delimit) the role children played in fighting and dying for the Commune. See, for example, Edwards’ discussion in *The Paris Commune of 1871*, London: Quadrangle Books, 1971: 175.
kind of citation, implicitly returning readers not to *Le Figaro* (where the story first appeared), but rather to the reports circulating in its own pages about the unprecedented breakdown in the home front in Paris, and the “unthinkable” scenes of women and children facing summary executions in the streets of the “capital of modernity.”

The boy’s story thus foregrounds the unrepresentable picture of a child fighting and dying for the Commune so as to dispel it. Displacing both barricades and bodies with the figure of the boy who was spared, the anecdote curiously takes pains both to make a Communard a hero—investing him with precisely the valor, trustworthiness, and respect for property *Harper’s Weekly* had so consistently framed the Commune itself as lacking—and to divest him in turn from any attachment to the Commune as such.

For the framing as it ran in *Harper’s Weekly* immediately unmoors the anecdote from its own explicit context—and distances the boy’s heroism from the Commune—by suggesting “the little hero” represents here *not* the children who fought so “ferociously” on the barricades and in the streets but rather more broadly “the children of France.” In turn, the story’s insistence that the soldiers “could not” (rather than simply would not) carry out the boy’s execution in the face of his innate nobility—the playful boxing of ears here displacing the otherwise imminent firing of guns—at once sanitizes and redeems the violence it averts by pointedly suggesting that the

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37 By this I mean that the scenes posed a spectacular challenge both to American periodicals’s ability to represent the scenes and for Americans to digest or make sense of them. I’m drawing here on both Michel Trouillot’s formulation of the “thinkable” event (the Haitian revolution was not, in his reading, “thinkable” for Europeans) and Kristin Ross’s work on the “representable” event in *May 68 and Its Afterlives*. The term “capital of modernity” is borrowed from geographer David Harvey; as in Harvey, it is also a play on Benjamin’s formulation of Paris as the “capital of the nineteenth century.”

38 An 1897 twist on the story amplifies this potential contradiction in terms by untangling the boy even further from any remaining ties to the Commune; in an even more vertiginous narrative move, the boy is represented as an innocent bystander who ironically sought refuge in the barricades *during the fighting* and was mistakenly captured as a Communard. See Molly Elliot Seawell, *The Commune of Paris, Munsey’s Magazine*, August-October 1897, 718-9.
Versaillais soldiers carried out summary executions on less noble, more deserving, subjects. (The story also crucially, if implausibly, insists that the soldiers about to kill the boy did not recognize him as such until he speaks—and once he is properly identified as a child, the captain is only too happy to send him safely on his way.)

French writer and diarist Edmond de Goncourt writes of the “Bloody Week”: “It is good that there was neither conciliation nor bargain. The solution was brutal…the bloodletting was a bleeding white; such a purge, by killing off the combative part of the population defers the next revolution by a whole generation” (qtd. in Harvey 329). In the logic of Goncourt, a logic echoed in editorials that ran in The New York Herald and elsewhere on this side of the Atlantic, no Communard could safely be spared. (As we’ll see, the point is quite explicitly re-articulated in the 1890s by a host of popular American writers.) The tale of the boy who lived does not, then, function simply to rewrite the memory of the brutality of the Commune’s end: it also oddly works to recontain the Commune’s future—on both sides of the Atlantic—by imagining that the transfigured “child of the Commune” can be safely sent away, an augur of France’s glorious future rather than a potential site of revolutionary relapse. For the boy here immortalized is not, in the logic of the anecdote, Goncourt’s terrifying and unassimilable remainder of the Commune but rather a sanitized site of (potential) national unity. Yet the anecdote, even in this original iteration, is haunted by the violence it averts, by the death against the wall that the boy so narrowly escapes and the question of whom, after all, can be said to be responsible for it. While the story works, in other words, to at once contain and justify the violent suppression of the Commune, its recirculation always augured the possibility it might be read—and, in turn, rewritten—against the grain.

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Commune and its coverage in American
periodicals, Margaret Junkin Preston and John Hay significantly recast the anecdote of the boy and the pocket watch—and with it, the picture that never ran in the illustrated weeklies—in their respective periodical poems of the Commune, “A Hero of the Commune” and “A Triumph of Order.” In doing so, both poets repurpose sentimentality to confront the violent ends the original anecdote intimates and averts, remembers so as to forget.³⁹ But while Preston’s work to sentimentalize the boy Communard ultimately serves to recontain the violence encrypted within the anecdote, Hay redeployes sentimentality to spectacularly unleash it. But in recovering the memory of the children who died in Paris, and pointedly questioning the salvation made possible by a boy’s death by firing squad, he pushes sentimental tropes of child sacrifice to their breaking point.

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Born in Philadelphia to an academic family that moved to Virginia but remained staunchly pro-Union, Margaret Junkin Preston married a Southerner and counted Stonewall Jackson as her brother-in-law. Opting to remain in Lexington while her father and sister returned home to Pennsylvania when war broke out, she eventually made a name for herself as the most famous “Southern” woman writer of the period. Although Preston’s poems were regularly published in prominent American periodicals in the late-nineteenth century, and widely anthologized into the twentieth, she has received scant recent critical attention.⁴⁰ Among her

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³⁹ I thank Briallen Hopper for first drawing my attention to the resonances between the boy with the pocket watch and such central figures of sentimental childhood as the plucky Ragged Dick and the ever-sacrificing Little Eva.

most widely anthologized poems, “The Hero of the Commune” appeared in *Scribner’s Monthly* in April 1872 and was later reprinted as a “cartoon of today” in her 1875 collection, *Cartoons*. Its inclusion in her latter volume recalls its original periodical milieu, but also highlights the way in which the poem foregrounds itself as a picture in a newspaper; in turn, its subtitle, “An Incident of the Siege of Paris” echoes a headline even as it immediately locates the scene the poem pictures and performs.

Preston notably dispenses with the narrative framing that appeared in the original anecdote, routing the drama of the boy and the pocket watch through the dialogue of two isolated speakers—“the garçon” and the “National.” In her retelling, the boy is notably younger—“scarcely ten years old” (4) in the National’s estimation—and unlike his predecessor in *Harper’s Weekly*, the poem allows the young Communard to explicitly express his *willingness* to face the execution that never comes:

> We’re here to be shot;  
> And there by the pillar’s very spot,  
> Fighting for France my father fell.  
> —Ah well!  
> That’s just the way I would choose to fall,


42 According to the OED, a cartoon originally denoted a “full page illustration in a paper or periodical”; Preston’s “cartoon” of the Commune thus foregrounds itself as an engraving in an illustrated weekly, as if it were the counter-image to *Harper’s* original text.
With my back to the wall! (10-15)

The boy hero thus identifies with the “cursed crew” (2) around him, and subtly aligns the cause of the Commune with that of France even as he imagines he will take the place of his father at the wall. The boy’s identification with the Commune is further solidified by the poem’s title, which quite explicitly draws on Harper’s Weekly’s characterization of him as a “little hero” (651); unlike Harper’s, however, the poem insists the boy is a “hero of the Commune” rather simply than a heroic child of France. But while the poem rather remarkably asks its readers to imagine that a Communard could be heroic, its title also functions to contain that re-reading; the child hero may be, in fact, the only hero in the bunch.

Yet the boy’s heroism is markedly overdetermined in the poem. Tweaking her source material, Preston repeatedly imagines the boy heroically seeking death with his “back” to the wall. But while Communards were frequently pictured facing execution with their backs “to the wall,” the boy’s repetition of the wish to so take his place, taken together with the poem’s articulation of the boy’s name in the final stanza (“Who said that his name was Ney?” (49)), suggests that the no longer nameless boy hero does not simply replace his father at the wall, but rather surrogates and recirculates an earlier French hero of the Napoleonic wars, Michel Ney, who was executed for treason and, like the child in the poem, purportedly gave the order to “fire!” at his own execution in 1815. In thus reinserting the boy Communard into French history—imagining him, back to the wall, stepping into the shoes at once of father and heroic forebear—the poem not only endows him with a more explicitly noble (and by extension, less working-class) lineage, but also effectively reorders the revolutionary scene as singularly masculine turf.
Drawing out the anecdote’s own latent unease about the act of shooting a child, in Preston’s version of the story it is the soldier who, recognizing the boy to be a child, first calls out to him: “Do you hear? Do you know? Why the gendarmes put you there, in the row?” (5-6). The poem’s admiration for the boy Communard is thus highlighted and complicated by its vantage point: we see the boy largely through the eyes of the “National” soldier. Much of the poem is in fact “The National’s” interior monologue, and though we are positioned to hear the boy’s words, we are given no access to his thoughts. While the soldier does not immediately spare the boy upon recognizing his youth, it is the soldier, rather than the boy, whose asides condemn the summary executions: “(…Who wants wolfish work like this to do?/ Bah, tis a butcher’s business)” (19-20); “I hardly think I could have braved/the ardor of that innocent eye” (37-8). The poem, in turn, positions us to condemn the “wolfish work” while sympathizing with both the boy hero and the soldier asked to shoot him. While the poem powerfully begs the question of who is responsible for turning the sympathetic soldier into a monstrous figure—part animal, part butcher—let loose in the streets of Paris, the boy is, as Preston’s original readers no doubt would have expected, ultimately spared. And Goncourt’s nightmare is averted by the future the boy hero represents, the promise of a happy ending to come: “France will hear of him some day!” (51). The glorious vision of future assimilation that the poem makes possible for its American readers allows them to forget that Communards who lived to stand trial were being shipped off to permanent exile in Nouvelle-Calédonie, their bodies, like the scarred landscape, marking an irremediable rupture point in the body politic of France. But in so doing it allows the exemplary boy of the Commune to stand in for the possibility that our own fractured nation might be made whole through the glorious future reabsorption of a rebel boy, and with him, a defeated South, into the annals of future American memory.
Although now most remembered for his role as Secretary of State under McKinley and Roosevelt, Hay was, in 1872, a promising young editorial writer for the *New York Tribune* whose work regularly appeared in highbrow periodicals like *Scribner’s Monthly* and the *Atlantic*. Recently returned from diplomatic stints in Paris, Vienna, and Madrid, he garnered significant acclaim with the publication of his volume of “western dialect” ballads, *Pike County Ballads and Other Pieces* (1871). His Commune poem, “A Triumph of Order,” ran in *The Atlantic Monthly* in April 1872, four months after Preston’s was published in *Scribner’s*, and seems directly in conversation with “A Hero of the Commune”—echoing key details of its reworking of the anecdote, but crucially rewriting the happy ending of both Preston’s poem and the story in the newspaper that inspired it. While “A Triumph of Order” is not written in Hay’s signature dialect style, it nevertheless draws on the ballad form that made him famous and remains one of his most frequently anthologized poems. (By no means simply periodical ephemera, it was cited among Hay’s poems “with continued appeal” into the 1980s, and garner specific mention in, for example, John Hollander and Eric Haralson’s *Encyclopedia of American Poetry*.)

Unlike “The Hero of the Commune,” Hay’s ballad precisely locates its scene as “by the wall of Père-la-Chaise” (4), the site where the Commune made its last stand. (The prisoners

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44 See *Reference Guide to American Literature*, Ed. D.L. Kirkpatrick, Chicago: St. James Press, 1987: 220. In the nineteenth century, “A Triumph of Order” was republished in, for example, Stedman’s important anthology. I have found it included in several early 20th-century textbooks as well; in 1907, it was reprinted in the journal of the Amalgamated Woodworkers’ International Union of America.
arbitrarily executed at the wall are commemorated by the “Mur des Fédères” at Père-Lachaise; a memorial march to the wall is made by the French Left each year.) The poem thus explicitly yokes the boy’s end with the Commune’s, and allows him to stand in for that other story. While the original anecdote offered no sense of the surrounding scene or vision of the Communards fighting and dying around the boy, and “The Hero of the Commune” leaves the company a largely undifferentiated mass of “wretches” (7), Hay’s poem opens by listing and lingering over the details of the scene:

There were desperate men, wild women
And dark-eyed Amazon girls
And one little boy, with a peach down cheek
And yellow clustering curls. (5-8)

Like Preston’s “hero,” the boy is a notably singular presence—the only child of the Commune facing death at the wall. His steely resolution is juxtaposed to the desperation of the men and women around him, but the poem’s iteration of his downy cheek and “clustering curls” not only mark his youth but also dreamily link him to the “dark-eyed Amazon girls” in the stanza and such consummate figures of sacrificial sentimental childhood as Little Eva. These Amazons, moreover, are not the brawny warrior women of the Commune. Such romanticization, together with the rhythm of the ballad meter itself, would seem to distance the reader from the horrors of the scene much as the diction—the captain, echoing Preston’s rather than Harper’s, asking, “What dost thou here”?—would seem to re-locate the story into the mists of a far less recent past. Yet such distancing works, however, to heighten both the drama of the boy’s heroism and the irony of the poem’s ending. For in Hay’s version of the story, the boy self-identifies as a Communist—“I’m a Communist, my dear!” (12) and notably refers to the captain in the
parlance of the Commune as “Citizen” (11). In turn, the poem, in ventroliquizing the captain, makes clear that given his loyalties, the boy’s youth will not save him: “Very well! Then you die with the others!” (13).

Rather than stand as a surrogate for his father (dying at the wall as his father died before him), Hay’s boy hero refuses to be spared and dies, quite insistently, for the Commune. But the father figure is not altogether vacated from the scene, however—it is, in fact, the father’s watch that must be returned home. In turn, although women fill the scene, the boy’s mother is remarkably imagined to be safely back at home, awaiting the boy’s arrival. By returning the watch to “the old lady” (19), the mother/wife figure is pictured in her proper sphere as the boy takes his place “against the bullet-pitted wall” (32)—a wall that marks time in the poem, hinting at the scenes of death that preceded the “frame” of its narrative.

Most importantly, however, the ballad’s final stanza repurposes the originary anecdote even as it strikingly rewrites the ending of “The Hero of the Commune”: while the boy will no doubt be heard about in the future, it will not, in Hay’s vision, be because he was allowed to live. This reworking of the end—and deeply ironic consummation of the “triumph of order” borne not through simply the willing death of a Christ-like (or shall we say, Little Eva-like) child but rather through the unmitigated force of a firing squad—bears, I think, specific pause:

“Now blaze away, my children!
   With your little one—two—three!”

The chassepots tore the stout young heart,

   And saved Society! (37-40)

As if to reinforce the synecdochal (if not quite allegorical) work of the poem itself—the substituting of the boy’s brutal end for the Commune’s and vice versa—the boy is represented
metonymically by his most characteristic feature, “the stout young heart” while the “children” in
the stanza point not to the boy but rather to the “chassepots” that shoot him. The elongated
caesura between the counting off—visually underscored by the repeating dashes—conjoins the
blazing of the guns all the more sonically to the enunciation of “society,” even as the brutal death
of the boy Communard, like the suppression of the Commune, is re-branded by Hay a singularly
unsalvific act. It’s crucial, in other words, that the poem catholicizes the end (or rather, breaks
through the explicit national borders of the poem)—the boy’s death is not figured here as the
death that saved France but rather the one that redeemed “Society”—and while the critique may
have been most trenchantly directed at the French government, the poem begs the question of
what republic can be built on such ashes. “A Triumph of Order,” like the watch in the poem
itself, acts then as an unlikely elegy of both the boy and the Commune, one that mourns even as
it questions at once the necessity of the boy’s death and the presumption, on this side of the
Atlantic, that the Commune’s suppression in fact saved “society” the world over. To do so, it
reads the anecdote against the grain, and rewrites Preston’s poem and the Harper’s anecdote so
as to capture the death so neatly averted in both narratives.

Two decades after it first appeared in The Atlantic, W.D. Howells would remark of the
poem’s continued sentimental power, “[It] is something that still makes the heart bleed as if the
boy communist had just been shot in Paris.” Howell’s articulation of the reader’s response,
while suggestive of the curious “immediacy” of the poem’s narrative, also strikingly points to the
limits of sympathetic identification (and introjection) underlying such “bleeding-heart”
sentimentalism. For the reader’s heart does not, in Howell’s formulation, simply bleed as if the

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45 Emphasis mine. Editor’s Study, “Mr. John Hay’s Volume of Poetry, Atlantic Monthly, 1890,
638.
boy is executed in front of our eyes, but rather as if the bullet that tears the boy’s “stout young heart” leaves the reader’s own heart rent and bleeding. Hay’s biographer would, however, liken the poem’s “almost photographic closeness to life” to the realism of “one of Manet’s drawings” (377). While I’m not sure that I entirely agree with that reading, the formulation of the poem’s “almost photographic” realism—a realism that might otherwise seem uneasily contained within the ballad form—is suggestive. For it gets at, I think, the way that the final stanza, not unlike a photographic close up, “captures” and suspends the moment of the boy’s death in a way that recalls the link between the shot of a gun and that of a camera, the way that Communards, as their critics rather gleefully noted, lined up to be photographed as they would later line up to be shot. But in so marking (or, re-marking) the boy as the emblem of the Commune, and calling on the reader to mourn at once his death and the “triumph” of order, Hay’s poem also quite strikingly displaces the other Communards in the final scene. With its line of sight trained on the boy, in other words, the poem, for all its unexpectedly radical sympathies, nevertheless occults the reader’s final view of the scene around him. In doing so, it displaces the boy’s comrades—those “desperate men” and quite strikingly the “wild women” and “Amazon girls”—even as the boy’s watch, returned home to his mother, neatly reestablishes the spheres of the private and the public otherwise fissured by these radically anti-domestic figures of the Commune.

**Death in Public**

The spectacular challenge that the “wild women” of the Commune posed to sentimentality and the cult of true womanhood is foregrounded in Edward King’s elegy to a

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female Communard, “A Woman’s Execution, Paris, May ‘71” which ran in *Scribner’s Monthly* in September 1871. Like Hay, King’s work to remember the violence of the Commune’s end is brokered by his redeployment of sentimental tropes to “domesticate” the female Communard, and thus at once to memorialize her martyrdom and render her a more legible—indeed, “thinkable”—victim of the Versaillais juggernaut. In confronting the summary brutality of another execution that purportedly “saved Society,” then, King must simultaneously work to contain the Commune’s domestic threat.

Although Katz suggests that King’s execution poem was neither “distinguished as poetry” nor an “apolog[y] for the Commune” (78), “A Woman’s Execution” garnered immediate recirculation in a variety of American periodicals and crisscrossed highbrow and radical print culture into the twentieth century. In the fall of 1871, for example, it enjoyed near-simultaneous publication in the genteel literary magazine *Scribner’s* and such radical journals as *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly* and *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*; and within weeks of its original publication, it had been reprinted in a variety of newspapers across the country. In 1880, King included the poem in his volume, *Echoes From the Orient*, and it received specific mention and none too little praise in both American and British reviews of the volume. (In its admiring review, *The Nation* insisted, for example, that it was “one of the best poems ” in the collection

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47 In 1871 King was an up-and-coming foreign correspondent who covered the Commune for the *Boston Journal*. He would go on to author *The Great South* (1875), a record of his journey through the Reconstruction South, along with a number of influential works on the political and social situation in Europe, several volumes of poetry, and an 1895 boys’s book on the Commune, *Under the Red Flag*, that I discuss at length in the following chapter.

48 The poem ran, for example, on the cover of the Little Rock *Morning Republican* (24 August 1871) and the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph* (5 September 1871), as well as in the Boston suffragist paper *Woman’s Journal* (2 Sept. 1871) and *Albion: A Journal Of News, Politics and Literature* (21 Oct 1871). It was later reprinted on the cover of the *Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette* (4 February 1881).
(“Books of the Week” 35). But even as it was republished in Edmund C. Stedman’s influential anthology of American Literature, “A Woman’s Execution” continued to circulate in labor periodicals throughout the nineteenth century, eventually popping up in Upton Sinclair’s 1915 volume of social protest literature, The Cry for Justice, and the Little Red Library’s 1927 pamphlet-anthology, Poems for Workers.

That it did so is suggestive of how successfully it wielded its brand of subversive sentimentality. Like Hay, King’s execution poem sets the scene so as to invite the reader to witness, seemingly directly, a sensational spectacle of not-quite-assimilable violence, drawing our attention first and foremost to its subject’s gender rather than her role in the Commune:

Sweet-breathed and young—

The people’s daughter:

No nerves unstrung—

Going to slaughter! (1-4)

The poem goes on to ventriloquize as it vindicates, returning to the final week of May ’71, re-animating the now dead woman and putting words into her dying mouth. 49 While King occasionally breaks the narrative continuity of that voice by interjecting descriptive parenthetical

49 Nearly two decades later, King would return to the story of “a woman’s execution” in his volume of journalistic reminiscences, Europe in Calm and Storm. Unlike the other incidents in the chapter, King does not himself witness the woman’s death, but instead cites its original circulation as proof of the story’s veracity: “a number of French and American persons told me the following incident” and narrates the event as if he had seen it: “On Thursday a very beautiful young girl…was marched down the Rue de la Paix to the Place Vendôme for execution” (488). Central details of the poem remain here intact—the remarkable beauty of the long-haired girl about to be shot, her resolution in the face of death, and the transposition of the violence of the execution scene to the “snarling women” in the crowd rather than the soldiers carrying out the summary execution—details that, as we’ll see, strikingly echo the image “The End of the Commune—Execution of a Pétroleuse” that ran in Harper’s Weekly.
asides from the narrator (“women are snarling” (10)) and the crowd (“Give me your beams, / Liberty’s darling!” (11-2)), from the second stanza onwards the poem is framed as the soon-to-be executed woman’s own testimony.

The move to allow a Communarde to speak from the highbrow pages of Scribner’s is, in itself, quite astonishing. While the press often relayed the furies of the Commune meeting their death, it rarely allowed them to utter anything beyond the slogans “Vive La Commune” or “La Commune or Death!” which in turn captioned the illustrations of them reprinted in the pictorial press. Instead, their bodies spoke for them: as we’ll see, the “warrior-woman” of the Commune was typically characterized as “coarse, brawny, unwomanly, degraded” (“Women of Montmartre” 620), “unsexed” and “dressed in semi-masculine attire” (“Women of Paris” 485). The poem thus draws on a repertoire of sentimentality to re-feminize the Communarde, to not let her body, as it were, speak against her plight. She is thus figured as “young” (1) with “hair to her waist/limbs like Venus” (17-8) and as the “people’s daughter” (2) rather than the brazen child of Liberty or Revolution. Like Piatt’s “Palace-Burner,” she faces her death with unflagging resolution and it is that singular presence of mind—“no nerves unstrung” (3)—which most signals her innate grace—a certain classiness if you will—even as it suggests she is not the mad woman or Fury she has been made out to be. Her composure is in fact juxtaposed with the “snarling women” in the mob around her—a sleight of hand that arouses our sympathies by shifting the ferocity so often embodied within the figure of the female Communal onto the bourgeois women who here so furiously condemn her.

The poem further humanizes—or rather, domesticates—the figure of the Communarde by introducing her soldier-fiancé into the scene: “He at the front? / That is my lover” (21-22). The move smacks perhaps more soundly of melodrama than sentimentality, and the poem leaves it
somewhat ambiguous whether said fiancé stands in front of the line to be shot or in front to do the shooting, but the pathos of the scene—dying beside the man she intended to marry, dying at the hands of a soldier whose loyalties to the State supercede his private feelings—only amplifies the irony of such a young girl facing death in such a way, in such “bright weather” (28).

Yet for all that King’s poem works to champion this woman as a sympathetic figure of the Commune, one who courageously goes to her death crying “Vive la Commune!” (32) even as she participated in both fighting and caretaking during its final days, giving out “powder and bread” (25-6), to do so it must simultaneously neutralize the threat posed by that very breakdown of the homefront. Banished, in other words, is any hint of the radical anticlericalism of the Commune, as well as its radical gender politics (in particular, women’s clubs that advocated for divorce and “unions libres”). Marie becomes, in King’s reconstruction, a conventional figure of womanhood who looks forward to marriage and sees no shame in bearing “Christ mother’s name” (14). Countering reports that painted the Amazons of the Seine as “mad with wine and the smell of blood,” this woman of the Commune is sober and “sweet-breathed” (1). Her ideals are, however, intact and she remains, however tenuously, a true believer, driven to the Commune by faith rather than desperation: looking at the crowd, she is able to call them “friends” (6) and urge them to “make us amends” (7), reminding them that “we’ve burst your fetter” (8). Even her resounding anticipatory injunction to the crowd——“you’ll love us better” (7)——would seem to summon a future moment when she and the Commune she fought for will be acknowledged for having broken France’s fetters—as if to echo another Communard’s claim that “The only crime of the Commune...was to have anticipated the future” (qtd. in Beaumont 163).

Which raises, finally, the greatest tension within the poem. In asking the reader to identify with this now executed woman, it invites us at once to occupy her speaking voice in the
poem and ponder her death against the wall. Yet in asking us to question her treatment at the hands of the French government—and the American press—the poem works to make this unconventional sentimental figure a legible female body and conventionally domestic speaker. To do so is, however, to beg the question of how to square such utter conventionality with her role in the Commune, how to recognize a pétroleuse when you see one. More to the point—and herein lies the danger—if a woman of the Commune can register here as such a recognizably domesticated figure, how can her threat remain, for King’s readers, altogether alien? It is exactly this terrain of liminality and unsettling identification that Sarah Piatt will take up as she restages the encounter with a Communarde’s execution as a specifically domestic scene.

*The Pétroleuse in the Parlor*

Increasingly central to the critical understanding, and recent recovery of, Piatt’s work, “The Palace-Burner” serves as the title for Paula Bennett’s groundbreaking 2005 volume of *The Selected Poetry of Sarah Piatt*. The haunting image Bennett chooses for the volume’s cover is in fact the *Harper’s Weekly* illustration “The End of the Commune: Execution of a Pétroleuse” that seems in turn to have inspired “The Palace-Burner,” with the face of its soon-to-be executed female Communard shadowing our very entry into Piatt’s verse. The illustration, along with the subtitle for the poem—“A Picture in a Newspaper”—immediately reminds us that Piatt was not only among the most published American periodical poets of the late nineteenth century, but also one whose work quite self-consciously meditates on her medium. In turn, the subtitle concretely illustrates the way in which the plaintive-but-fiery figure evoked in Piatt’s poem entered the domestic scene by way of periodicals such as *Harper’s Weekly, Every Saturday,* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*—an event that the poem itself specifically dramatizes.
But while critics like Matthew Giordano have shrewdly pointed to Piatt’s “manifestly public form of poetic authorship,” (24) and suggestively argued that “if we ever hope to understand the breadth and depth of her achievement, we must recover the periodical context of her poems and read them precisely as periodical pieces—that is, as literary works that are constituted by and that respond to the particular circumstances of their periodical publication” (24), little work has been done to recover the dense political and representational intertextuality of “The Palace-Burner.” I turn therefore to three particularly emblematic images of “The Women of the Commune” that ran in Harper’s Weekly during and immediately after the Commune’s suppression to help us better situate Piatt’s reworking of the way these women, and most particularly, the pétroleuse, were popularly depicted in the U.S. press.

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In his landmark study of the Gilded Age “news image,” visual historian Joshua Brown highlights the ways that the wood-engraved graphics in the illustrated weeklies like Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper instantiated rather than simply depicted the crises of the volatile era (5), and exceeded their scant textual descriptions—often relying, for example, on readers to recognize the figures in the illustration, and complicating or contesting the frame provided in the cut’s title. But while Brown compellingly suggests the dynamic performance enacted in the graphics, and offers rich readings of their visual and typological codes, he rarely meditates on the tensions between pictorial and print reportage, the ways in which pictures jostled against—rather than simply supplemented—the pictorial and print texts around them.\(^5\) My primary aim, then, is

\(^5\) While Brown most often focuses on the way in which the visual codes of an image work in concert with the text around them, he does note that the images of the Great Strike in Frank Leslie’s “contradict[ed] the visual typing suggested by its words” and thereby “reformulated the meaning of the Great Uprising” (162). He is, however, less interested in what that means for how
to read the engraving that inspired Piatt’s “Palace-Burner,” “The End of the Commune—Execution of a Pétroleuse,” alongside and against both the text it most explicitly illustrated and the host of images of and texts on “The Women of the Paris” that ran in Harper’s Weekly in the wake of the Commune.

In approaching these images, my reading practice is indebted both to Brown’s analysis of wood-cut illustrations as dynamic narratives—or, better, performances—that registered “a sequence of events” both within and outside the framing proscenium (68), and his suggestion that these stylized images were “activated” by the reader who interpreted the news images in light of antebellum visual codes (typing, tableaux, and the like), codes themselves deeply strained by the turmoil and mobility of the Gilded Age. In my reading, however, these “dynamic narratives” were read in tandem with—and cannot be separated from—either the “descriptive” or contextual content of their titles and the texts—both print and images—around them. In turn, the texts “around them” must themselves be considered broadly, for the “news images” illustrated not only the print reportage in the weeklies themselves but also “the events of the day” covered elsewhere (namely, in the newspapers). (Frank Leslie’s explicitly acknowledged this interaction between traditional print and pictorial reporting, describing its service to readers as a supplement to the coverage of daily newspapers, “representing pictorially and vividly those things and events which the daily press at best can imperfectly describe” (qtd. in Joshua Brown 71).) ***

The “Women of the Commune” marching across the pages of Harper’s Weekly, fists upraised, posed a spectacular challenge to readers, breaking at once visual codes and social mores with their stridently masculine and insistently public presence. Indeed, their presence was we might read the images in concert with the news than in what these images suggest about the changing representational face of the Gilded Age.
all the more striking (indeed, terrifying) because the figures they presented and gestures they
struck were, visually-speaking, without precedent for Harper’s readers. For despite American
women’s increased presence in the public sphere in the 1870s, representations of women
assertively occupying public space were markedly absent from the illustrated weeklies. As
feminist scholar Barbara J. Balliet has pointed out, “In the engravings of …weeklies such as
Frank Leslie’s and Harper’s, women were typically represented as victims, criminals, workers of
manual trades, denizens of the household, or shoppers” and the images themselves were most
often “static” and “constrained.”51 Not surprisingly, the Communardes were also, quite often in
the same edition of Harper’s Weekly, set off against illustrations of the “other” (more properly
bourgeois) women of Paris—women most often depicted as feminine figures cradling a child or
publicly mourning a fallen husband or, when nestled at home, waving a handkerchief (rather than
a firearm) to encourage passing troops from the remove of their Haussmannian balconies.52

The dynamic and not-quite-assimilable representations of the “Amazons of the Seine”
stood in stark contrast with genteel characterizations of properly domestic American women and
fit into no discernibly recognizable type, being neither hunched over their worktables nor
inhabiting a discernibly domestic interior of the home or the department store. But these
engravings do not simply reveal the way in which the “Women of the Commune” presented an
unassimilable female figure for American readers, or underscore how Harper’s attempts to
domesticate the “female firebrand” specifically falters over the problem of how to read her
against her unsexed sisters-in-arms. Rather, they most crucially recover the way in which the

51 See in “Let them Study as Men and Work as Women: Georgina Davis, New Women and
Illustrated papers,” Revolution in Print: Graphics in Nineteenth-Century America, Special issue

52 See, for example, the cut “Vive la Ligne” which appeared in the July 15, 1871 edition of
Harper’s Weekly (653).
emergent “man-woman” of the Commune, later condensed and retroactively re-embodied within the mythic figure of the Pétroleuse, not only materially textured American readings of the Paris Commune as event and as revenant, but also rhetorically and visually layered images of American feminists—for example, Harper’s later illustration of Victoria Woodhull (and her upraised arm) “asserting her right to vote” during her failed 1871 trip to the ballot box (Fig. 5).

![Image of Mrs. Woodhull asserting her right to vote](image)

**Fig. 5.** “Mrs. Woodhull Asserting Her Right to Vote,” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 25, 1871, 1109.

**Picturing the Amazons of the Seine**

The engraving entitled “Women of Paris” (Fig. 6) appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* on May 27, 1871—in the midst of the French government’s week-long reconquering of Paris—above an
article bearing the same headline. The picture, in capturing this group of women on the march, suggests at once their movement and their number: female figures “crowd” the scene, dissolving into the background and occupying most of the foreground; their number is uncertain, but vast enough to extend far beyond the frame of the illustration. These figures are notably unarmed but a Phrygian cap sits prominently on the head of the single figure whose fist is upraised as she flashes not a revolver, but a nevertheless brawny arm. Next to her another woman bears a flag, but it unfurls behind her and does not intimate its message beyond presumably gesturing to and implicitly echoing the redness of the Phrygian cap despite the black and whiteness of the image itself. The figures in the frame are “recognizably female”—costumed in working-class dresses and aprons rather than male attire—but their faces are rough and aged, their attention fixed on variously the flag, the Phrygian cap, or the distance ahead of them. Although the accompanying article describes them “shrieking the watch-cry, “To arms!,” only a single figure has her mouth open (as if in surprise), and the rest seem strangely silent. A male figure in military dress drums in the foreground of the image, as if to lead them into battle, but his gaze seems directed firmly at his drum and away from the marching women. This averted gaze brings into further relief the rapt captivation of a small boy, dressed in long blouse and dirty knickers with the hands-in-pockets pose of a street “gamin,” who lounges against a wall beside the marching women—his attention seemingly fixed entirely on the procession. His presence does not fit the scene and goes unmentioned in the article, but he registers a kind of failed “domestic scene”—the women do not

53 The same illustration ran concurrently in Every Saturday and Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper; in Frank Leslie’s it appeared with no accompanying text and the title “Procession of Citizenesses or ‘Vengeuses’ at Paris.”
recognize or meet his gaze—even as he foreshadows the cross-gender identification we will see in the “Palace-Burner”; he stands in for, in other words, the presence or participation of children in the march and on the barricades, a presence the illustrated weeklies do not otherwise pictorially depict.
The accompanying article suggests the illustration “represents a [shrieking] band of Vengereuses, or female avengers” (485) marching down the Boulevards with “a high priestess in the middle crowned with the orthodox red cap of Liberty” (485). The unruly redness of the cap comes to oddly link the women of Paris to a band of unruly “red Indians”—though Harper’s raises that equivalence so as to suggest the women of Paris might in fact present a far worse threat: “the malcontent [in their path] would be almost safer in the hands of a tribe of red Indians than in the power of these infuriated Paris women” (emphasis mine, 485). While that threat is imagined finally to be one of body, it is also, in Harper’s version of the story, figured to be one of purse. For while the article opines, “There is nothing more terrible, either in peace or war, than one of these unsexed women” (emphasis mine 85), it does so on the very heels of suggesting that though “the ostensible object of these Amazons is to fight, it is whispered that these patriots…have no objection to pillage” (emphasis mine 485). These unsexed women pose, in Harper’s formulation, a serious threat to onlookers—their bodies arresting the viewer’s gaze and transgressing gender boundaries even as they augur a doubly “Red” threat to capital.

The cut, “‘The Commune or Death’: The Women of Montmartre” (Fig. 7), while echoing the marching masses in engravings like “Women of Paris,” displays martial women who seem far more imminently bound for battle. Although they are significantly not identified as petroleum-throwers, swirls of smoke billow in the background, even as fires rage and buildings burn in their wake. (While only one torch is discernible in the midst of a sea of upraised rifles

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54 The “Red” analogy cut both ways, at once condemning Communards for their savageness and the Native Americans for their threatening “Communist” tendencies. For further discussion of this pervasive equation, see Paul C. Rosier’s “‘They Are Ancestral Homelands’: Race, Place, and Politics in Cold War Native America, 1945-1961,” *The Journal of American History* 92.4 (2006): 1305. See also *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (131-6).

55 The illustration appeared concurrently in Every Saturday.
and sabers, its smoke billows up and blends with the fire in the background, visually compressing the temporality of the frame—jumbling past and present in a single image.) The central figure in the engraving, a “brawny” woman—fist upraised, revolver at her waist, saber at her side—shouts upwards and bears aloft a flag in her other clinched fist. The flag is obscured by its fluttering, but seems to read “Vive La Commune.” Beside her another female figure bears a flag whose words read unmistakably “La Commune ou La Mort.” This other figure’s face is turned away from us, but her precariously elongated stride visually underscores the unstoppable motion of the scene even as it suggests the uncontrollable nature of the mob as it moves outside the frame and onwards to the barricade. Although the central figure wears recognizably female attire, the women around her are dressed in markedly military caps and coats (a lone female figure at the front even appears to be wearing bloomers). With the exception of the central figure, their faces are roughly sketched and largely androgynous, and the figure directly behind the flag-bearer shouts monstrously, her face not-quite-human.
Fig. 7. “The Commune or Death”—Women of Montmartre,” Harper’s Weekly, July 8, 1871, 620.
The accompanying text “Women of Montmartre” suggests the sketch was made as the “band of women” marched to defend a barricade (620), and the article describes them as anything but sympathetic figures poised on their way to death. Instead, they are characterized as “defiant, jeering, shameless” (620), and “the Amazons of the Seine” (620). And the article further anatomizes so as to defeminize and dehumanize them, lingering on their “muscle, sinew, ferocity”—a ferocity that notably exceeds “the weaker vessel, man” (620). The text seems, in other words, explicitly bent on dispelling any “romantic” pictures of the woman warriors that might make them sympathetic (or more “thinkable”) figures for Harper’s readers steeped in the rhetoric of bourgeois domestic ideology: “These are the Amazons of the Commune, and they give us an idea of what the warrior-woman really is—coarse, brawny, unwomanly, and degraded; picturesque certainly, but by no means pleasing” (620).

Their “unwomanly”-ness is signaled here, however, not simply by their sinew, or the uneasy space they occupy in public—a space on the cusp of both petroleum-throwing and the barricade. For an “eyewitness” on the scene writes that “I fancied I recognized at the head of the company one of the favorite orators of the club at the Boule Noire, who seemed to take the place of an officer” (620). The uncertainty of the account is, perhaps, as suggestive as the addition of the eyewitness itself. For the presumably male speaker who here gazes on the march authenticates the illustration despite the fact he cannot say for sure what he saw—thus standing in for the confusion of the “normative” male reader—even as his “fancy” sets off a chain of curious substitutions. The head of the company “seem[s] to take the place of an officer”—thus at once usurping and inhabiting a masculine role that he cannot fathom as rightfully or possibly her own—and therefore the speaker cannot quite believe what he sees, can only “fancy” what his eyes here register even as the face of the “head of the company”—the circumlocution itself
registering the difficulty in saying, what, in the end, she might be said to be—finally assumes the features of “one of the favorite orators of the club at the Boule Noire” (620). Put simply, the struggle of the “eye-witness” is, I think, symptomatic of the larger trouble that the “Woman of the Commune” posed for the *Harper’s* reader: how to make sense of such “unthinkable” figures?

The image to which Piatt most directly responds, “The End of the Commune—Execution of a Pétroleuse” (Fig. 8) was, spatially-speaking, separated by nearly 10 pages from “The Women of Montmartre”; visually-speaking, the cut is strikingly distant from both the treatment of the “Women of Paris” and the depiction of an execution of (male) Communards on the obverse page of the illustration itself. Unlike the other illustrations of the “Women of the Commune,” this cut is a “close up” which focuses our attentions almost entirely on the central figure, with only a hint of the crowd around her; it thus places us in uncomfortable proximity to the drama, our line of sight positioning us less as an observer and more as a member of the crowd itself. The wall behind the figure is pockmarked with bullets—a visual reminder of the battle that raged in the streets—but otherwise nondescript. A Versaillist soldier in the foreground keeps back an unruly crowd with a rifle, but a single figure’s face—with a seemingly bonneted head—can be made out over the shoulder of the soldier, gnashing teeth, arm raised and hands out as if to grab the soon-to-be executed woman. A pair of hands in the foreground, both gripping revolvers, stand in for the soldiers carrying out the woman’s summary execution, and the barrel of the guns are so close to the female figure—a few steps at most—that it is nearly impossible to identify the scene as one of summary military execution rather than mob violence. And the

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56 The *Boule Noire* was an infamous Montmartre nightclub turned political club during the Commune. Women’s clubs met there regularly to discuss, for e.g., wages and “free unions”; under the direction of Sophie Poirier, the “Boule Noire Women’s Club” organized a women’s “vigilance committee” for the defense of the 18th arrondissement. For a further discussion of the club’s activities, see in Carolyn J. Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune*. Indiana UP, 2004, 111.
dramatic presence of the hands clenched around revolvers and reaching upwards out of the crowd visually underscores that the woman herself is “unarmed,” hands tied behind her back, no revolver or milk pail of petroleum in sight. (In her re-reading, Piatt notably unbinds them.) As in King’s poem, the pétroleuse is thus figured here as unmistakably female—young, with long, unruly hair, and simple dress—resting against the wall, leaning as if away from the angry crowd. She remains silent, and the angle of her gaze suggests that her eyes rest with some composure on the faces of the men about to shoot her. That grace is perhaps echoed too in her stance, which mirrors the feet of the soldier next to her—the positioning of her foot an ever-so-slight hint at her strength and a visual rejoinder to the rampant reports that pétroleuses were savages or altogether mad women.
Fig. 8. “The End of the Commune—Execution of a Pétroleuse”, *Harper’s Weekly*, July 8, 1871: 628.
Gullickson cites this illustration (which originally appeared in London in *The Graphic*) as a rare example of a sympathetic representation of the Pétroleuse, but argues that such representations, in picturing the pétroleuses as “captured and afraid” and most of all as markedly feminine (187), stripped them at once of their horror and their power. As she puts it, “These [figures] were not the furies of the bourgeois imagination but the innocent victims of the Versailles soldiers” (187). Such ambivalence is echoed in the engraving’s accompanying article, “La Pétroleuse.” The accompanying text begins by remarking on the “courage and ferocity shown by the women of Paris during the late insurrection” (628), suggesting that the “fair sex”—in war and in peace—occupies a notably more “public” position in France. It goes on to explain—or, rather, to justify—without-justifying—the pétroleuse by re-configuring her as a recognizably female type (in other words, as a victim). Rather than explicitly alluding to the femininity of the figure in the illustration—nowhere does it “anatomize” her in the way it earlier lingered on the sinew of her sisters—it instead reframes her conversion to the Commune—and participation in the burning of Paris in the final week of fighting—as a kind of “fall”: “Twelve months ago, probably enough, the Pétroleuse was an industrious, well-behaved woman, with a husband and children” (628). As if in response to the charge, in the *New York Herald* and elsewhere, that the pétroleuses were “debased and debauched creatures, the very outcasts of society…knowing no shame, dead to all feeling, without homes, without friends, no little ones to claim their attentions” (qtd. in Gullickson 177), Harper’s insists instead that the pétroleuse is a “poor creature” driven into the arms of the Commune by want and desperation (628).

*Harper’s* attempt to reconstruct the pétroleuse as a sympathetic, domesticated figure articulates the limits of traditional bourgeois sentimentality, for it requires first retroactively inserting her into her proper sphere (at home) and role (“well-behaved” mother and wife), and
cordonning her off, rhetorically and visually, from her “unsexed” comrades. But in attempting to narrate the genesis (or, rather, the fall) of the female incendiary, the article insists it has “no desire to extenuate the crimes of which many of the insurgent women in Paris ha[ve] recently been guilty” (628), and the qualification immediately if unwittingly (re)aligns the “poor creature” of the picture with the earlier image of the “insurgent women” of Montmartre and the “Women of Paris” more generally. Moreover, while the article attempts to cordon her off from her peers by rooting her in a singular newness—“La Pétroleuse! (petroleum-thrower): what a terrible significance has this newly invented name. Is it possible that those who belong to what is emphatically styled the gentler sex can perpetuate such atrocities?” (628)—its suggestion that a “well-behaved woman” can be “converted” to a petroleum-thrower—laying waste to capital and domesticity—points to perhaps the most vexing problem posed by this incarnation of the pétroleuse. Put differently, in attempting to contain or dispel her threat, might Harper’s not inadvertently accentuate it?

Re-thinking “The Palace-Burner” and its relation to both the public sphere and American memory of the Commune thus requires that we attend to the way in which Piatt reconsiders that threat, mobilizing the genteel, domestic setting to stage a breakdown of the public and the private, of domestic and (trans)national space. But in light of Paula Bennett’s recent contention in Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of American Women’s Poetry that “resituating nineteenth-century American women’s newspaper and periodical poetry within the tradition of social dialogue and debate from which it sprang and to which it belongs, will clarify this poetry’s function as a form of public speech addressed to concrete, empirically identifiable others” (5), it further requires digging into the particulars of Piatt’s signature poem as a specifically “periodical piece.”
“The Palace-Burner” first appeared in *The Independent*, an influential Congregationalist weekly with close ties to the Republican Party and Henry Ward Beecher’s Plymouth Church, nearly a year and half after the Commune’s bloody weeklong suppression. That a sympathetic portrait of a Parisian incendiary was printed in a progressive, abolitionist journal with a wide readership now seems altogether unremarkable. Critics, in taking any notice of the poem’s publication history, point out that over the course of her career, Piatt placed “some sixty-nine poems” in the pages of *The Independent* (Bennett 136), and more to the point the New York paper was a direct rival with *Harper’s Weekly*; in responding to the image in *Harper’s*, Piatt’s poem is therefore taken to be simply all the more savvily self-conscious of its own (periodical) milieu.\(^{57}\) But while Piatt’s connections with Henry C. Bowen’s paper no doubt made it easier to place “The Palace-Burner” there, *The Independent*’s own coverage of the Paris Commune would seem to make it a rather unlikely spot for the poem: only a year before the paper had detailed in elegiac terms the damage to public buildings and monuments wrought by the savages of the Commune and its mythic band of petroleum-throwers. Unlike the illustrated weeklies, *the Independent* could not offer readers a “birds-eye” view of the fires or the charred landmarks, but it soundly condemned “the savages who have laid in ruins the great and beautiful city.”\(^{58}\) While

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\(^{57}\) Giordano writes, for example: “In light of the magazine’s support of both her work and of poetry in general, it is wholly appropriate that it was in the *Independent* that she placed ‘The Palace-Burner,’ a poem that, by expressly referencing items from a magazine, reaffirms how pointedly Piatt was enmeshed in her periodical milieu. And given that the poem is built on an intertextual allusion to *Harper’s*, a competitor of the *Independent*, it indicates Piatt’s self-conscious awareness of, and preoccupation with, her cultural role as periodical poet” (25). See in “‘A Lesson from’ the Magazines: Sarah Piatt and the Postbellum Periodical Poet” *American Periodicals* 16:1 (2006): 23-51.

Harper’s mustered some sympathy for the dying pétroleuse (if not for the women and children who died fighting on the barricades), The Independent’s editorial on the Commune’s end could not have more firmly stated its case: “The Commune has gone down in blood and we hope may never have a hideous resurrection.”

What to make, then, of Piatt’s resurrection of this “fierce creature of the Commune” within the pages of The Independent? I will propose two answers to this question, both of which reframe the way we might read the poem’s wielding of irony and public speech.

As with so many of her poems, Piatt couches her remembering and re-reading of the Commune in an explicitly domestic setting—and therefore strategically relies on the conventionality of the scene (a mother and son perusing old newspaper clippings) in order to “slip in” her lesson. Indeed, the poem turns on the undoing of those readerly expectations: rather than being a poem about the lesson the mother teaches the boy, as we might expect it to be, it actually seems to unwork the maternal scene of disciplinary instruction altogether. Or, as Mary Wearn so aptly puts it: “The critical message of the poem concerns not what the mother teaches the boy, but what the boy teaches the mother.” In this reading, the boy’s sympathetic identification with the unruly woman—his desire not so much to feel her pain as to be, like her, “a palace-burner” and in turn see his own mother as a “palace-burner” too—momentarily maternalizes the pétroleuse and radicalizes the mother, and in doing so forces the mother to

59 Ibid, 6.


61 Such identification is not, I want to argue, sentimental identification (i.e., identification as introjection). It relies on sympathetic reading, but the desire it incites is not imagined martyrdom but rather active emulation—“acting like” rather than “feeling the pain” of another.
“reread” the picture in the newspaper through her son’s eyes. But while critics (most notably Bennett) have suggested this re-reading puts the mother and by extension, bourgeois domesticity, on trial, I argue the poem simultaneously takes aim at another target. For while the irony of the poem has often been read as directed at the mother (for failing to read as the boy does) or the boy (for naively identifying with a soon-to-be executed woman), it also seems quite strikingly directed at its own periodical readers.

Take, for example, the mother’s initial reaction to her son’s desire to burn a palace in stanza three:

You wish that you had lived in Paris then?—
You would have loved to burn a palace, too?
But they had guns in France, and Christian men
Shot wicked little Communists like you. (9-12)

Weearn compellingly suggests that the harsh rebuke that some critics finds here—“But they had guns in France, and Christian men shot wicked little Communists like you”—is tempered by the playfulness of the mother’s tone. But much as Janet Gray has argued of Piatt’s “A Child’s Party,” I want to suggest the poem speaks on several registers here, addressing at once the child, the mother and the reader. Thus, the potential rebuke to the child is turned back on the mother in the final line of the poem, as she comes ultimately to find in this woman who has been burning palaces “a being finer than [her] own soul” (37). But the threat of the child sharing the petroleum-thrower’s fate if he steps into the “role” of the palace-burner cannot be regarded as simply the “fanciful” stuff of nineteenth-century conduct books for children; for it was, as Hay and Preston’s poems strikingly remind us, by no means an empty threat. Indeed, the introduction of “Christian men” with guns directly invokes the violence of the original Harper’s illustration—
the way it captures the woman on the cusp of her death, back to the wall, facing a mob of guns—even as it signals the specter of another picture that never ran in the illustrated weeklies: namely, the summary executions of children who fought alongside their parents on the barricades, or stood accused of burning houses. And the specter of such executions literally and spatially faces the Pétroleuse in the newspaper; on the obverse page of the original illustration, Harper’s ran a far more graphic engraving of the shooting of several male Communards, and below it another of row upon row of (male) dead bodies. In the text between them, the article “Bloodshed in Paris” alludes to and evinces a certain horror at the unprecedented slaughter and summary executions of women and children in the streets of Paris, but argues finally they “generally brought it down upon themselves” (emphasis added).62

The poem does not, then, simply raise the threat of such violence, but rather strikingly underscores its reality: while in this stanza the boy desire to “be” a pétroleuse remains still in the safely subjunctive mood—here he wishes only that he could have been in Paris, only desires to have burned a palace, the speaker’s turn to the concrete past tense again reminds us what the men in Paris had (guns) and did (shoot children). But the speaker’s invocation of “guns” as a threat seems here excessively unnecessary. The boy, after all, has been looking at the picture. The pétroleuse facing execution might be her own best object lesson—to step into her shoes is to take your place against the wall, young man as it were. The reminder that “they had guns in France, and Christian men/ shot wicked little Communists, like you” (11-12) seems not, then, for the boy so much as for the reader. And if the poem, through the eyes of the mother, passes judgment on the pétroleuse, “a wicked little Communist,” and finds her finally “a being finer than my soul,” it does so by in turn echoing the irony of good Christian men who participated in the slaughter of

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women and children, an irony similarly mobilized in Hay’s “A Triumph of Order”; but so too, I would argue, by wielding that irony against the good Christian men reading the Independent who condoned these executions.

In raising the pétroleuse from her ashes, both literally and figuratively, the poem does not, however, simply recuperate this woman of the Commune, and more pointedly does not actually absolve her of the guilt of the crime for which she is executed. For while the poem works to maternalize “this fierce creature of the Commune”(34)—“Ah! In the dusk and distance sweet she seems/With lips to kiss away a baby’s cry” (22-3)—this “domestication” of the pétroleuse largely echoes Harper’s own narrative of the fallen housewife (who turns out of desperation not to prostitution but rather to burning houses) but it does so with a significant twist. For Piatt’s palace-burner is not a woman driven to petroleum-throwing by desperation; she is instead a figure resolutely “bright with bitterness” and “serene” (35). Moreover, unlike the illustration, the poem begins by pronouncing her guilty of the worst crimes of the Commune, immediately labeling her not a “pétroleuse”—the term coined in 1871 specifically for the Parisian incendiaries that circulated widely in the U.S. well into the 20th century, and one that could have registered the guilt of “simply” burning homes or private property—but rather a “palace-burner”—thus signaling her direct participation in the destruction of the Tuileries and the Communard’s “vandalism” of Paris.

In turn, under the guise of a child playing with pictures, the poem goes on to resurrect and reenact the worst fears about the female incendiary: namely, that she would in fact recruit children to her cause, and that her “madness” might, after all, be communicable. In the dangerous scene of reading that Piatt stages in the parlor, the boy’s captivation with the pétroleuse in the picture leads him to at first want to be like her (“You wish you had lived in
Paris then?” (9)) and then to want not simply to emulate her but rather to “be” her (the flexibility of the term that Piatt coins for the Parisian petroleum-thrower—and in particular its gender neutrality—allows the term to slide seamlessly from the picture to the boy and briefly from the boy to the mother). And the danger here seems doubled: summoning at once the corrupting influence of the pétroleuse and contemporary fears about the effects of boys’ reading. Literary critic Glenn Hendler, for example, details the “explosion in the 1870s of articles and conferences on the reading of boys and young men,” and argues that these fears “almost replaced the worries over women’s reading that had pervaded literary criticism in the first half of the century.”

Misplaced sympathy could lead boys, in other words, to behave like the bad boys they read about, it was feared, and on the surface of it, one would be hard pressed to find a less sympathetic figure for a boy to wish to be. As literary critic David A. Zimmerman explains,

> For most Americans, the image of the pétroleuse setting buildings and homes ablaze… confirmed the connection between feminist agitation, political revolution, economic conflict and cultural catastrophe. ‘Pale, frenzied… [and]…fierce,’ as a poet in Harper’s Weekly described them, the pétroleuses presented a nightmarish specter of women aggressively repudiating bourgeois norms of womanhood.

Yet it is the boy’s “naïve” sympathy for and identification with the “palace-burner”—his assertion that he would burn palaces and his mother would too—which leads his mother to re-read both “the picture in the newspaper” and her own subjectivity. But in bringing the pétroleuse

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into the parlor, and more crucially in, as Wearn suggests, briefly “melding” the speaker and the palace-burner in the boy’s eyes, the poem does not simply leave us with the unexpected lesson that the Communard is a “finer soul” than the bourgeois domestic subject. Such a suggestion would itself be an admittedly significant (and largely unprecedented) “lesson”—a far different “picture” to circulate in an American newspaper. But of even more moment, I want to suggest, is the ironic insinuation that the pétroleuse and the mother might not, after all, be diametrically different; that, as Havelock Ellis would later put it, “every woman carries a slumbering pétroleuse in her bosom” (310). That, in other words, the pétroleuse may always already have been in the parlor. While it is a possibility that the speaker herself tries to contain in the final stanza: “The child has seen /.../ A being finer than my soul, I fear” (33, 36)—this ironic reversal is not, as it were, complete. For while the speaker “fears” she would not be like the palace-burner, her final question—“Would I burn palaces?” (32)—remains forever open.

In conclusion, then, I want to turn again to the subtitle with which I began: “a picture in a newspaper.” Unlike “A Lesson in a Picture” and “From North and South: A Lesson from the Newspaper,” poems Piatt placed in journals as varied as the youth-oriented Wide Awake and as influential as the Atlantic Monthly, “The Palace-Burner” quite markedly does not signal itself as a poem with a message. Instead, it points to and aligns itself simply with an illustration set demurely beside—even as it jostles against—the texts around it. That it does so suggests, I think, the poem’s own “shadowy power” (32). For its most subversive act is not, finally, its lesson but rather the domestic scene it manages to get printed in a newspaper.
Twenty years after “The Palace-Burner” appeared in *The Independent*, the Episcopal Rev. William Croswell Doane, a man *The New York Times* characterized as “one of the most prominent anti-women’s rights men in the country,” addressed the 1895 graduating class of young ladies at St. Agnes’s School of Albany, New York. That he chose on that occasion to denounce the New Woman and rail against woman’s suffrage is, in itself, less than remarkable. It is, however, striking that his denunciations summon the specter of Piatt’s poem, and with it the uncanny slippage between the parlor, the platform and the barricade:

One gets sick and tired of the way that the talk of woman’s vocation fills the air, not merely in the wild vagaries of its blatant assumptions, but in the parade and push of its claims for recognition….Meanwhile, when constitutions shall have been altered, to disturb the equipoise of the relation between man and woman, when motherhood shall be replaced by mismanaged offices…when ‘woman,’ as has been well said, ‘once the superiour, has become the equal of man,’ then the reaped whirlwind of some violent political reaction will be gathered in tears by those who are sowing the wind in the mad ‘joy’ of the Pétroleuse of the French revolutions. (11)

Like the figure of James’s “feminine firebrand,” the pétroleuse of the Commune has here multiplied: the female fiend that torched the city of Paris merging with earlier visions of

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bacchanal women revolutionaries in France. The slippage is, however, anchored in the name specifically coined for the female incendiaries of the Commune, as if this final incarnation of the Parisian revolutionary could safely signal and outdo all its progenitors. Perhaps this is why, in Doane’s speech, the work of organizing for legislative rights can collapse so easily into “the mad joy” of petroleum-throwing. Although the term itself originally, albeit oddly, disarmed the Communardes—a hideous woman with a milk pail full of petroleum was not, after all, a brawny Amazon fighting the Versaillais army shot for shot—the myth of the pétroleuse largely sprang from a vision of Communard women who did their fair share of both organizing and barricade fighting. Doane’s pluralizing of the Pétroleuse thus serves to blur the boundaries between the pétroleuse and the domestic firebrand—or, rather, to insinuate the way those boundaries were, as Piatt shows us, always already artificial. It also serves to summon and translate her threat for an audience of potentially homegrown pétroleuses. Some two decades after her “ashes” had grown cold, the radical sympathies and domestic scene invoked by Piatt’s “Palace-Burner” continued to haunt the landscape of the American imagination. In the next chapter, I explore how that threat is reconfigured in a series of bestselling boys’s books and historical romances that reframe Paris as an imperial frontier—and with it, “the gospel of Americanism”—in the 1890s.
Chapter Two

Becoming an American in Paris: the Romance of the Commune in the 1890s

What America means is the gospel for which his life stands, his only tant-mieux to show for his time in Paris.

-Eugene Savidge, The American in Paris (1896)

In the late 1990s, PrestonSpeed Publications began reissuing the adventure fiction of popular fin-de-siècle British boys’ writer G.A. Henty for an American homeschooling audience. Several more small presses followed suit, and soon the “smashing success” of Henty’s sales in the homeschooling market began to garner attention in such prominent publications as The New Criterion, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Times even as the books themselves became the centerpiece of the popular “Robinson Curriculum” for homeschoolers. This resurgence of Henty mania in America was itself marketed as and fueled by an investment in déjà vu: publishers like Robinson Books and Lost Classics take pains to remind parents that these boys’ books were wildly popular with U.S. readers at the turn of the 20th-century, while Evangelical ministry sites like the Vision Forum, as if taking a page from Theodore Roosevelt,

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aim to “rebuild a culture of courageous boyhood” through, among other things, the reading of Henty (“All-American”).

But Henty’s appeal for U.S. homeschoolers also has its roots in the successful packaging of his formulaic historical fictions as history: indeed, as one publisher puts it, they altogether “alleviate the need for [history] textbooks”—a claim that itself rehashes Henty’s own turn-of-the-century marketing schemes (Cothran). Although much critical work remains to be done on Henty’s renewed purchase for American boys, the case of cultural déjà vu surrounding his fictions runs still deeper: for as a rising generation of homeschoolers turn to Henty to learn about history, we seem to be revisiting many of the debates about democracy and revolution, manliness and empire, that originally framed the popularity of—and often were explicitly enacted within—the genre of historical romance and boys’ adventure fiction in the U.S. in the 1890s.

In this chapter, I read Henty’s recently reissued but altogether critically overlooked 1895 title, A Woman of the Commune, alongside several now forgotten American bestsellers of the period, Edward King’s boys’ book, Under the Red Flag: Or, the Adventures of Two American


68 Although Henty was by trade a reporter, several American publishers have repackaged him as a “historian” because of his own claims to historical authority in his fictions. In an article that ran posthumously in the Boy’s Own Paper, for example, Henty insists that “I have never permitted myself to deviate in the slightest degree from the historical facts, except when the boy hero is, so to speak, on the loose” (qtd. in Butts 153).

69 Although a broad body of scholarship exists on Henty as a writer of empire—Seth Lerer, for example, dubs him “the most prolific of the [Victorian] imperial boys’ writers” (162)—virtually no work has been done on Henty’s popularity in the U.S. with turn of the 20th and 21st century readers.
Boys During the Paris Commune (1895), Robert W. Chambers’ The Red Republic: A Romance of the Commune (1895), and Eugene Savidge’s The American in Paris: The Siege and Commune of Paris from an American Stand-point (1896). My interest in Henty’s boys’ book is, then, not simply that it garnered a significant fin-de-siècle American audience, and is increasingly popular today. Instead, I will focus on the way in which A Woman of the Commune sheds light on another, little remembered U.S. literary resurgence: namely, the unlikely afterlife of the Paris Commune in American fiction of the 1890s. For Henty’s choice of subjects was far from an anomalous one for the 1890s. In fact, by tracing the transnational historical context for his work to its origins, we find an array of popular adventure fiction revisiting precisely the same scene. Indeed, although now virtually forgotten, the US literary resurgence of interest in the Commune was one of particular intensity, prompting one Literary World reviewer to lament, in 1896, “we have had the Commune from the perspective of the novelist ad nauseam” even as America’s appetite for yet another “story of the Commune” continued unabated. In what follows, Henty’s boys’ book serves as a crucial counterpoint to the romance of revolution that American fictions of the Commune packaged for U.S. readers because it dispels its own fears about the Commune by embodying them within an American who “falls” for the Commune in precisely the manner that the American romances render altogether invisible or impossible, even as it showcases a strikingly similar imperial template for re-emplotting Paris.

Replotting the Romance of Paris

Thomas Gold Appleton suggested in the 1850s that “good Americans, when they die, go to Paris” (qtd. in Holmes, The Autocrat 125). But by the turn of the twentieth century, it was already a commonplace that most Americans needn’t die to go: “innocents abroad” and would-be bohemians alike flocked to, as one American writer put it, “the capital of pleasure and happy hunting-ground of the Cook’s tourist” (Shorey 167). But even as Americans looked to the City of Light for a taste of culture and corruption, another memory—or more precisely, another Paris—repeatedly resurfaced not only in seemingly anodyne remembrances of “life under the Commune” that ran in periodicals like The Century and Munsey’s but also in bestselling American fiction of the 1890s.\(^1\) Returning over and over to the Paris of 1871, these boys’ books

\(^{71}\) The Century Illustrated Magazine, for example, ran three extensive articles on the Paris Commune between 1892 and 1901: a front-page, two-part series by celebrated British war correspondent Archibald Forbes (whom the New York Times called, in 1899, “the most notable war correspondent now living”), an account of what an “American Girl” saw of the Commune, and an explicit rejoinder to Forbes’ 1892 piece published nearly a decade later by William Trant, a British-Canadian economist who, like Forbes, had covered the Commune firsthand. Given Forbes’ renown, the Century’s heavy marketing of the article—making it part, for example, of its “Year Ahead” ad campaign—is not surprising. The series’ notice in the American Monthly Review of Reviews in turn might have much to do simply with the appeal of a famous journalist returning to the scene of a volatile political event. “What an American Girl Saw of the Commune” bears, however, closer scrutiny. Serving as a supplement to the second installment of Forbes’ reminiscences on—and reconstitution of—the Paris Commune, it too capitalizes on the popularity, particularly in the 1890s, of the eyewitness account. But while the piece bears titular witness to the Commune, and asserts—as if in contrast with Forbes’ testimony—that it will give readers the Commune from an American standpoint, the article is signed only with the initials C.W.T. and offers its readers a lengthy but extremely limited account of the events it claims to resurrect for display. (Of the Versaillais troops’ entry into Paris, she writes, for example: “I cannot say I saw very much, for I was not the first at the window, but I do not believe my youngest brother saw anything.”)\(^{71}\) Indeed, given the author’s primarily parlor-side view of the event, the article might more aptly be titled “What an American Girl Didn’t See of the Commune.” Yet the piece was printed in a highly respected American magazine with some 200,000 subscribers, and warranted specific notice in both the Review of Reviews and the Century’s own advertisements. That it did so suggests that high-brow American readers in the
and historical romances recycled an ostensibly conventional plot—sending their heroes to the City of Light to be painters or tourists—so that Americans, in turn, could be privy to and participants in the brutal reconquering of Paris by French government troops. These Commune romances thus reworked both “the International theme” and the appeal of Paris for Americans by consistently re-imagining Paris not as the seat of civilization, however fallen, but rather as a frontier of empire overrun by “red” savages. In turn, the City of Light is again and again figured in these novels not as a locale of sexual or high cultural awakening (or disillusionment), but rather as a site of political contamination or conversion for Americans—the terrain where, quite literally, men become “Americans” in the political sense. That their republicanism—or “Americanism,” as one novel puts it—is borne by the witnessing of, and in some cases the direct participation in, the decimation of a nominally republican uprising seems a particularly apt fiction in the decade leading up to the Spanish-American War and the U.S. intervention in the Philippines—for, in other words, an America contemplating its role abroad and its own burgeoning imperial ambitions. As literary critic Amy Kaplan and historian Gail Bederman have so persuasively suggested, America’s relationship with its diminishing frontier and expanding role abroad was a deeply vexing preoccupation for fin-de-siècle Americans.\textsuperscript{72}

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1890s might be hooked by its title alone—by, in other words, its promise of yet another (American) sighting of the Commune.
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\textsuperscript{72} Kaplan argues that American imperialists like Senator Albert Jeremiah Beveridge “saw imperial warfare as an opportunity for the American man to rescue himself from the threatening forces of industrialization and feminization at home.” See in The Anarchy of Empire, 92-3. Bederman similarly details the way in which anxieties about American masculinity and racial superiority were twinned in America’s fears about the declining frontier. She suggests in turn that “Anglo-Saxonist imperialists insisted that civilized white men had a racial genius for self-government which necessitated the conquest of more ‘primitive’ darker races.” See in Manliness and Civilization, 22. In my reading of American Commune romances, the Communards are primitivized and racialized so as to more easily demonstrate their unsuitability to self-governance in the logic of these novels.
\end{footnotesize}
Recovering America’s romance with the Commune in the 1890s thus significantly reconsiders the cultural work of Paris—and what it meant to be an American there—in fin-de-siècle U.S. fiction. But it also critically revises the traditional historical account of the role the Commune played in America’s cultural memory during this period. Put simply, the story that historians have come to tell about the Commune’s “afterlife” in America suggests that while it deeply scarred the American psyche for decades, it had largely faded from the cultural scene by the 1890s, and more to point, that as touchstone and epithet it became synonymous with—and cipher for—only the very real labor unrest of the Gilded Age. These novels tell another story, insisting not simply that the Paris of 1871 was far from dead in the 1890s, but also that it resurfaces so frequently because the Commune served as a crucible for redefining American democracy even as it provides a crucial terrain for forging both American men and their imperial ambitions.

*Remembering to Forget*

Ernest Renan famously argues in “What is a Nation?” that it is selective amnesia rather than collective memory that most holds a nation together. Yet even as he elaborates the nature of that very forgetting which has allowed France to become a nation—“no French citizen knows

73 Oddly, the Great Fade Out of the Commune in American memory is, for historian Philip Katz, a product of it being “too firmly linked to what can be called the age of democratic civil wars” (191). It is his contention then that precisely because the Commune became “a focal point in America’s changing view of popular uprisings abroad, which shifted “from the romantic traditions of rebellion towards the new traditions of social revolution and terrorism; [a shift] inspired by fears of domestic unrest” it eventually faded from view (Katz 192). 1877 marks, in this narrative, the end not only of Reconstruction but of hope, and with it the “age of democratic civil wars, at least for Americans” (Katz 192). But this contention does not account for the literary resurgence of the Commune in the 1890s, and largely glosses over the fact that the struggle for what would constitute a democratic civil war was far from settled in 1877.
whether he is Burgundian, an Alan, a Taifale, or a Visigoth, yet every French citizen has to have forgotten the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century” (11)—Renan demonstrates that all forgetting is not equal, and some lapses of memory are far better left unsaid. For when this lecture was delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882, what *citoyen* would not have remembered—or rather, would not have had to forget—the “Bloody Week” that consolidates the rise of the Third Republic? Perhaps for all that MacMahon and Thiers had done to eradicate and then banish the Paris Commune, it had not yet been laid to rest in the way that those other, more speakable massacres had been.

In her essay on the role of the 1878 *Exposition Universelle* in effacing the Commune from public memory, Colette Wilson similarly foregrounds the spectacle of forgetting that France stages around the Commune, pointing out that when General Amnesty finally was granted to the exiled Communards in 1881 by the centrist republican government under Gambetta and Grévy, the act signaled not a political remembrance but—however paradoxically—a willful forgetting. Indeed, in Gambetta’s own words, the Amnesty was intended not to reopen the question of the Commune but rather finally to set “the tombstone of oblivion over the crimes and traces of [it]” (qtd. in Wilson 59). In his formulation, then, the living body of Communards would return to France so as to lay the event of the Commune firmly to rest, and in an inversion of Hugo’s phrase, the body would be resurrected to show the world that the idea is now safely à terre.74

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74 Several lithographs of the Mur des Fédères in the Musee d’art et d’histoire in Saint-Denis bear Hugo’s phrase. « Le cadavre est à terre mais l’idée est debout ». (“The body is buried but the idea is still standing” (translation mine).)
G.A. Henty, British boys’ writer extraordinaire, and Edward King, a respected American foreign correspondent for the Boston Journal, experienced the Paris Commune firsthand, and in a move that oddly, if inadvertently, echoes at once Gambetta and Bram Stoker, both choose to resurrect so as to re-inter the Commune in the 1890s for an audience of British and American boys born too late to remember the event themselves. That almost a quarter century after the Commune’s brutal demise both writers manage to revive it in often elaborate and exacting detail—description not seen since the flurry of memoirs and diaries published in the U.S. and Britain in the wake of the Commune itself—seems only to underscore their very desire to lay the events of March-May 1871 to rest once and for all. The Commune is dead, the novels insist—“[It] was crushed. The serpent of the insurrection was dead at last” (King 548). Yet as both Henty’s A Woman of the Commune and King’s Under the Red Flag symptomatically demonstrate, its specter needs nevertheless to be put back in the ground, remembered into oblivion as it were.

Their willed anamnesis is all the more curious given its timing: while Engels might have hailed the Commune as the exemplum of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” as late as 1891, its threat by example was laid safely to rest, at least in the United States, in the aftermath of the Great Strike of 1877—or so argues historian Philip Katz. Continuing anxiety of the U.S. readers, particularly before the International Copyright Act of 1891, read British books extensively; Henty’s tremendously popular boys’ books were read in both authorized and pirated editions. His books were also regularly advertised in The Dial and received notice in, for example, The Bookman, the American Monthly Review of Reviews and The Literary World. For a further discussion of Henty’s transatlantic popularity, see Peter Hunt, “G.A. Henty,” Children’s Literature, London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001. A Woman of the Commune was published in both London and New York editions in 1895 under the title A Girl of the Commune.

Katz emphasizes the initial power of the Commune to consume the American public: “Few American media, from small-town newspapers to the New York stage, proved immune to the excitement it generated…Gradually, however, the excitement faded away” (1). He argues that the Commune “remained a vital issue in American culture because it had the power to mask and
Commune’s return nevertheless overlays these boys’ books that would write history so as to occlude memory. And in their respective restagings of the event of the Commune, both novels work to exorcise contemporary anxieties of impending political change by confining the threat firmly within the geographical space of France even as they reimagine Paris as a colonial space, rather than cosmopolitan metropole—as, in other words, a frontier where boys might be made men.

_Empire Boys_

The publication of Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s _Story of a Bad Boy_ (1869) sparked what Steven Mailloux has dubbed the postbellum “Bad Boy Boom” in America (104), and the popularity of, or contemporary concerns about, “Bad Boy Books” continues to dominate recent scholarship on the nineteenth-century U.S. boys’ book. Indeed, the “Bad Boy book,” which allowed its boy hero—and, by extension, its boy readers—to be “gentle and temporary savage[s]” (Kidd 55), has largely come to define our sense of the boy-book genre. But as Lorinda B. Cohoon suggests, the trouble with this conflation is the way it privileges a select set of texts as the “definitive site[s] for explaining American boyhood in the nineteenth century” (xiv), overlooking, for example, the surging market for boys’ imperial adventure fiction on both sides of the Atlantic beginning in the 1880s and fueled in part by the rise of “global magazines” like _Beeton’s Boys’ Own_. Offering readers formulaic tales of “boys participating in the projects 

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77 See Kidd, Mailloux, and Jacobson.
of Empire” (Cohoon 154), these fictions afforded their readers not an escape from civilization, but rather the experience of direct participation and initiation into it.

While his initial transatlantic appeal and recent resurgence has received scant scholarly attention, Henty was the premier purveyor of British adventure fiction in the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic. Penning over a hundred boys’ books between 1868 and 1903, his sales were unprecedented: “No other author could with equal success sustain the attention of boy readers. His adventure fictions…outnumbered even Haggard’s, as do their sales figures, which may run to a total of 25 million copies” (Bristow 147). And Henty’s U.S. sales were no less impressive (Hunt 71); although Scribner and Wolford of New York was his official American publisher, some 58 others sold pirated editions until the International Copyright Act of 1891. Indeed, by 1899, J.P. Lippincott hailed him as “the most popular living writer for boys” (qtd. in Wheeler and Crane 111).

Yet as Joseph Bristow notes of these formulaic fictions, Henty’s among them, British boys’ books tirelessly presented their readers with a “fearless endeavor in a world populated by savage races, dangerous pirates, and related manifestations of ‘the other’ to be encountered on voyages towards dark and unexplored continents” (1). The critical attention that has been paid the genre has therefore primarily centered on how these books sought to underwrite the British imperial project. (That project was never conspicuously veiled, however, in the books themselves: as Henty himself once boasted of his works, “I know that very many boys have joined the cadets and afterwards gone into the army through my stories” (qtd. in Bristow 147)).

While Henty’s recent resurgence in the American homeschooling market seems to have flown under the critical wire of Henty scholarship, the critical attention paid Henty as an imperial writer has focused exclusively on his some 20 novels that explicitly adopt a colonial theme and
locale, with the bulk of his canon going mostly unremarked upon—despite their ongoing popularity and claims to historical authority.\footnote{In “G.A. Henty and the Vision of Empire,” conservative critic Brooke Allen criticizes Henty’s newfound popularity in the American home-schooling community on the grounds that homeschoolers mistake Henty for literature—when quite properly his books—of the adventure or empire variety—can only be read as history. See in *New Criterion* Apr. 2002: 21.} In categorizing Henty’s work, then, the critical line dividing his role as the writer of historical adventure fiction for boys from that of a propagandist of empire has so far been nearly impermeable; Gail S. Clark thus asserts in a landmark essay “Imperial Stereotypes: G.A. Henty and the Boys’ Own Empire” that “[Henty] is identified with the aggressive imperialist sentiment of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, even though fewer than one-fourth of [his novels] had imperial settings” before drawing our attention only to those 23 novels of empire (44).

In Henty’s explicitly imperial fictions, Empire is quite literally where men are made: “In virtually every story, the hero leaves England to seek his fortune abroad. After achieving great success in his endeavors the hero then retires young and returns to England to live out the rest of his days in quiet prosperity” (Clark 47). In this tried and true formula, Empire no doubt also provides, as Bristow suggests, a place to encounter—and usually subdue—the Other, allowing Henty’s intrepid Englishman to return home further emboldened by his cultural chauvinism and faith in the imperial project.

While Paris and its bohemian *Quartier Latin* at first glance might not seem the ideal frontier for trying an Englishman’s mettle in the Henty vein, *A Woman of the Commune* nonetheless closely follows the plot of his more traditionally regarded empire fiction. Cuthbert Hartington, after suffering the loss of his father and a rejection at the hands of his British sweetheart, Mary, duly sets out to seek his fortunes and become something more than a dilettante, if only to prove said sweetheart wrong. And so he finds himself in the Paris of 1870-
I—the terrain upon which he solidifies his vocation as a painter, sorts out his finances, joins the military offensive against the Prussians, and wins the girl; by book’s end readers are assured in turn that he will eventually return to London with Mary, his once opinionated and now duly submissive bride. Even the dark continent of imperial imagination has resurfaced in the novel, here resituated firmly in Montmartre and populated by workers-cum-savages who briefly commandeered control of the city before being crushed by the oncoming Versaillais army. Indeed, Cuthbert, awaiting the chance to strike out at the Prussians during the Siege, insists that he would much prefer to take on the racaille of Belleville and Montmartre instead: “I would rather fight against the savages than level my rifle against the honest German lads who are led here against us. I should think no more of shooting one of these [Belleville] roughs than of killing a tiger” (emphasis mine 108).

In reconstituting the frontier, A Woman of the Commune would seem then to unwork the Henty critical divide, embodying adventure fiction of both the historical and the imperial variety. That it might do both is indicative of larger generic shifts of the 1890s, albeit across the Atlantic. For as Amy Kaplan has so persuasively argued, the wildly popular historical romance genre served in the 1890s as a vehicle to forge and foreground masculinity while expanding the geo-temporal frontier at precisely the moment when the American frontier was diminishing, its heyday exactly coinciding with expansionist debates about where authentic masculinity would be

79 Hartington’s move to Paris to become a painter will be echoed by Philip Landes in The Red Republic. Cutting across boys’ adventure fiction and the genre of historical romance, not to mention high and middlebrow fiction, the motif draws on Henri Murger’s The Bohemians of the Latin Quarter (1851) and surfaces in such canonical figures as Chad Newsome in The Ambassadors. It is a commonplace, in other words, that an American or British man might go to Paris in search of a Bohemian lifestyle, seeking cultural and corruption in the city Benjamin dubbed the ‘Capital of the 19th Century.’ I am less interested, then, in the conventional trope that gets these characters to Paris, than in these novels’ reworking of that plot—with Paris figured as the site of potential political contamination or conversion for these men rather than as a site of sexual or high cultural “awakening.”
made in an America without wars to be fought or territory to be gained (“Nation, Region, Empire” 259). Thus, in these major if formulaic best-sellers, “settings from European and American history function as the fictional equivalent of the Philippines for Beveridge…where a man can reassert his ‘militant manhood’” (“Romancing” 659).

It is perhaps not altogether surprising then that Under the Red Flag—Edward King’s only attempt at boys’ adventure fiction—closely echoes this imperial-historical formula, with a touch of Henry James for good measure: in search of a prodigal son corrupted by Europe, Grandpa Drubal—“the affectionate appellation given to Mr. Hasdrubal J. Corners, a prominent citizen of St. Joseph, Mo., by his grandsons” (18)—carries young Frank and Will to France. With their arrival to Paris timed to coincide with the opening days of the Commune, the American family is immediately privy to life “under the Red flag” even as young Frank is granted unlimited access to the military battles with the Versaillais by an unlikely friendship he strikes with the Communard General Dombrowski. Ultimately, the family finds itself mixed up in the Bloody Week, before finally welcoming the dawn of a “liberated” Paris under Marshal MacMahon—a celebration tempered only slightly by the sight of piles upon piles of the dead.

While King’s plucky American boys are—at 6 and 14, respectively—too young for a marriage plot in the Henty fashion, there is space enough in the text for libidinal energies to be

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80 In her suggestive reading, Kaplan posits that historical romances represent and render invisible the politics of empire building: “To call these novels escapist, however, is not to show their avoidance of contemporary political discourse, but their reproduction of it” (“Romancing” 667).

81 Although King’s writing for adults—particularly his 1875 volume on his travels during Reconstruction, The Great South—has received continuing scholarly attention (see Jennifer Rae Greeson’s 2006 piece in ALH), no previous critical work has been done on his writing for children.

82 Frank’s unlikely friendship with the General parallels Archibald Forbes’ time with Dombrowski in “What I Saw of the Commune” which ran as a cover story in The Century in October and November of 1892.
discharged otherwise. Frank thus chivalrously saves Laurette, a young cantinière, from death by a Versaillais soldier, before finally lending a hand in the suppression of the Commune. (Early in his Parisian meanderings, Frank befriends Sny, a fellow American boy who, as it turns out, is actively spying for the Versaillais.) Paris, in other words, yet again becomes the frontier where men are fashioned: “The few weeks of adventure had transformed [Frank] into a resolute and purposeful youth, who had almost the strength of a man” (335). And by book’s end, the lost father has been found, having repented his former ways, while Marcelle, a newly reformed Communarde, “no longer seem[ing] ‘the warlike virago,’” will be carried back to, as Sny so aptly puts it, the “land of the free and the home of the brave” with the newly reunited Corners family (420). As in Henty, Under the Red Flag closes by assuring readers that life will go on—elsewhere.

In immersing its readers in life “under the red flag,” King’s novel alludes to the frontier back home, the gallantry of Grandpa Drubal during the Civil War, and the way in which the boys are born horsemen during the Commune because of their pioneering lifestyle back in the States. Sny, in setting his imperial sights on the city, looks out over Paris-as-frontier and confides to Frank that “[he] could lead an army or found a colony. Where shall we go to-day?” (159). Yet even as Under the Red Flag references the frontier and pauses over the American Civil War, it is vigilant never directly to link the situation in Paris with the situation at home; indeed, the bloody civil war they are witnessing in France summons no memory of the internecine warfare Grandpa Drubal participated in even in those moments when the novel explicitly frames the Commune in terms of a fraternal, if not exactly civil, war: “Here and there were piles of dead bodies, regulars
and Communists, in the fraternal embrace of death” (503). Moreover, though the Communards immediately hail the Americans as representatives of *L’Amérique*, “land of freedom,” no reciprocal sentiment can be entertained by Americans in the novel.

Indeed, much as we will see in the historical romances aimed at adults, great care is taken to prevent any such identification. When, for example, the Corners family encounters Jules Raisin, a Frenchman they had known formerly in Missouri, he immediately questions “General Corners” about his failure to support the Commune’s fight by invoking an uncomfortable kinship between the Commune and the American Revolution: “We want the same liberties for Paris that American cities have always enjoyed…and we will fight to the death to secure them. America revolted against unjust government; we have done the same thing” (62). Such a relationship is quickly quashed, however, by Grandpa Drubal’s rejoinder—“Yes, but America didn’t raise the red flag; which means pillage and abolition of private property” (63)—after which point no further consideration of Raisin’s argument can be accommodated by the novel.

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83 Admittedly, the novel’s forgetting of the Civil War is, in itself, not surprising, as many novels of the period attempt to gloss over or reconcile the divisions between North and South. The text’s attempts to forestall any parallels between “the Civil War in France” and the American Civil War are symptomatic, however, of its larger work to obscure any broader identification between the Commune and the United States.

84 En route to their hotel near the Place Vendôme, Grandpa Drubal and his grandchildren encounter a line of Communard National Guardsmen who let them pass after one Communard in the ranks cries out: “Citizens, I ask you to allow this son of liberty from free America, with his protégés, to pass through the lines to regain his hotel. In the name of liberty the Commune must accord all favor to the land of freedom!” (13). Though the scene is layered in a certain irony, with the burly soldier unexpectedly speaking English with “a grand theatrical air and a pompous flourish of the hand” (13), it nevertheless summons a vexing identification between the land of liberty and the Commune that is difficult to lay to rest, and echoes Frank M. Pixley’s reports in the *San Francisco Chronicle* that “Americans had a universal pass in the city” during the Commune (qtd. in Friedman 87-8). For a further discussion of Pixley, see in *State-Making and Social Movements: France and the United States, 1876-1914*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.
Under the Red Flag’s reticence towards—if not repression of—any significant parallels between the “Red Republic” and the republic across the Atlantic is brought into greatest relief when read against Henty’s novel. For A Woman of the Commune entertains exactly this connection, distancing it from the British hero by embodying it within a convenient double, Arnold Dampierre, a fellow artist and, in the words of the Communards, a “representative of that great Republic across the seas” (259). Henty makes Dampierre a Southerner, metonymically linking his passion for the Commune to time spent with slaves and his swarthy, vaguely mulatto complexion; the confederacy Arnold feels with the Commune is, in other words, from the outset racially suspect. And the novel somewhat overdetermines his “fall,” at times attributing his political conversion to the Commune to his fatal love for Minette, the working-class model turned fiery priestess of the Commune who echoes Louise Michel in her devotion to the Commune and affords the only view of working class Paris that Henty’s novel will tolerate. (Communards are otherwise represented primarily as crouching, scurrying vermin or dismissed simply as racaille.)

Yet for all that Henty does to banish the dynamic spatial and social changes occurring in Paris during the Commune by focusing Cuthbert’s line of sight on the military events of April-May 1871, the single window onto the Commune’s political dimension is proffered by

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85 Henty explains of Dampierre that “he was a native of Louisiana, and his dark complexion showed a taint of mulatto blood in his veins” (37); Hartington later links his friend’s misguided political sentiments to his time on his father’s plantation: “He is passionate, I grant, but that is the effect of his bringing up…surrounded by his father’s slaves, for though they are now free by law, the nature of the negro is unchanged, and servitude is his natural position” (54). In Hartington’s view, much the same could be said for the workers of Belleville and Montmartre.

86 As if to underscore the relation to Michel, albeit in the slightly domesticated and eventually conveniently killed off version, Minette is described as: “one of the priestesses of the Commune [who] rides about on horseback with a red flag and sash” (242). At her death, she is marked as the worst of her lot, shooting from every barricade, rallying troops at every turn.
Cuthbert’s American friend, who passionately if naively relates that “the people are fairly roused now and will soon sweep away the butchers of Versailles before them, and a reign of perfect freedom and equality will be established, and the world will witness the spectacle of a free country, purging itself from the tyranny of capital and the abuse of power” (260).

Dampierre’s words are quickly reduced by the novel to the ramblings of a madman who has been seduced by a Communarde. Moreover, Arnold is only given the right to speak for the Commune because he is of noble birth and therefore, the novel insists, the only one of any consequence or sense that is party to it. (René, a fellow artist at Cuthbert’s studio and a supposedly raging republican, thus confides that, “Although I hate tyrants I should be tempted to take up a rifle and…defend them if they were menaced by scum such as this,” before elaborating that “there is among them, save Dampierre, a single man of birth and education, if only, perhaps, you except Rochefort. There are plenty of Marats, but certainly no Mirabeau” (243).) Yet the very fact that this identification between the vaguely aristocratic Arnold Dampierre and Minette, the fiery woman of the Commune, is made by Henty rather than King underscores the latent tension of America in the 1890s over what revolution and republicanism would constitute and which people could be determined worthy of self-determination. Cuthbert, in the early days of the Commune, admits from the outset an uneasy parallel between the two governments before admonishing Arnold for not seeing their great difference: “I can, of course, understand your predilections for a republic, but between your Republic and the Commune, for which the organs of the mob are already clamouring, there is no shadow of resemblance” (74). Yet it is the “shadow of resemblance” that both novels most disavow, even as the grounds on which Cuthbert dismisses the parallels between America and the Commune—namely, on the social inclusiveness
of the Commune rather than on its relationship to private property—only summons further contradictions within the “Republic across the Seas.”

The irony of America’s stance towards the Commune was not lost on all its contemporary witnesses; the American sculptor Olin Levi Warner, for example, returned to the States in the 1870s to lecture on the Communards. Reacting to the initial onslaught of negative press coverage, he points out the uncomfortable parallels between the two peoples:

Here in America we are supposed to be a freedom loving people. This is regarded as the great home of freedom. Then why is it that we who are such a liberty loving...people are so willing, as we seem to be, to decry and brand as assassins and incendiaries a band of men who fought for the sovereignty of the people, but not being as fortunate as we were when we struck for our liberties, they lost their cause? (qtd. in Boime 201)

This position is marked, moreover, by Under the Red Flag’s absolute identification of—and insistence on—America as the land of the free and home of the brave, words sprung from the mouth of Sny, the young American who, in spying for the Versaillais, most proactively fights to bring the Commune to its bitter end. (It seems telling that Henty’s British hero, for all his spouting off about game hunting Bellevillois, is never more than an avid observer of the demise of the Commune.) King’s resolute dismissal of the Commune—and eventual characterization of MacMahon’s government as republican—only accentuates the shift in American thinking towards revolution that Kaplan details.

This dismissal is all the more telling, for unlike Henty, King’s novel is invested in giving the boys—and its readers— an insider’s view of the Commune, epitomized by Frank’s relationship with Dombrowski. Yet the novel makes clear that the General, while heroic, does
not hold out any faith in the Commune per se: “I will be frank with you, my boy. I hope the insurrection will succeed but I know that it will not” (268). Dombrowski’s resignation to the failure of the Commune parallels both novels’ curious sense of timing: their view of the Commune, while always in the present tense, seems oddly always already retrospective. In an early occasion of the historiography of “it could not have been otherwise,” there is never, in other words, a sense in either book that the Commune would, or could, succeed. This narrative certainty only serves, however, to heighten the brutality of a suppression that would seem at once overdone and unnecessary. As if to compensate, the books employ a strategic blend of foresight and hindsight: both insist, for example, that the streets of Paris will run with blood because of the Commune. (Grandpa Drubal is keen to say they might be killed in their beds, while Cuthbert’s future bride Mary repeatedly alludes to the streets themselves awash in blood.) Certainly the intuition is correct—but reworks an intimation of the Bloody Week as in fact the rationale for it, with the Commune’s suppression rescripted as a pre-emptive strike against a Terror that never materializes.

In thus reviving-to-reinter the Commune, the boys’ books find themselves on most perilous ground then in their showcasing of the day-to-day experience of the Commune’s suppression. For May 21-29 of 1871 were far bloodier than any Paris had yet experienced, and as historian Gay L. Gullickson emphasizes, the Versaillais slaughter of Communards in that final Semaine Sanglante was as ferocious as it was unrelenting:

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87 In The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune, Ross elaborates her strategic use of space and time to avoid “the metaleptic ‘it couldn’t have been otherwise’ dead end” style of analysis (11). While this move is directed most explicitly against new historicist analysis, it also characterizes much of the analysis of the Commune, and not simply from its vitriolic critics. Even Eagleton, in the Foreword to Ross’s book, cannot refrain from pointing out that “There are those who overlook one of the most significant points about the Paris Commune, the fact that it failed” (xiv).
Those who fought were shot; those who surrendered were shot; those who hid in houses were dragged into the streets and shot, until the last barricade fell on Monday, May 29, at eleven o’clock in the morning. Even then, the killing did not stop; prisoners continued being taken, lined up in parks and cemeteries, and mowed down by machine guns. Not everyone died immediately, of course, and, at night, screams of agony could be heard from the piles of bodies. (124)

For all that The New York Herald might editorialize, from the other side of the Atlantic, that “our advice is no cessation of summary judgment and summary execution. Devils let loose from their own place cannot be too soon sent home…. Root them out, destroy them utterly, M. Thiers, if you would save France. No mistaken humanity!” (qtd. in Gullickson 169), said paper need not (and did not) elaborate for its readers an exacting daily accounting of the horrific spectacle unfolding under these very auspices. The boys’ books, on the other hand, thrust their young heroes in the thick of things, making readers an eyewitness to the Bloody Week even while working to contain the ghastly sight that they retroactively summon for display. Both novels are ultimately unequivocal in their condemnation of the Communards, and do much to detail and in turn tailor the events so as to mitigate against any inadvertent readerly sympathy for—or identification with—the Commune. Yet even in choosing when to avert eyes, or from what slant of light to view the mounting death toll, the novels nevertheless make the demise of the Commune available to readers in often gristly detail—detail that might turn against its makers, and cannot always be scripted so as to be contained.

In a prophylactic mode, Henty adopts a pronounced strategy of aversion in narrating these events: despite its title, A Woman of the Commune allots a mere fifty of its nearly 300 pages to the experience of the Commune itself. But while roughly half of these pages are devoted
to the Bloody Week, in keeping with the novel’s overall revision of the Commune as primarily a military event rather than a radically socio-political one—the sight it grants its readers of the week itself is mostly obstructed. The novel’s reticence to “see” the piles of bodies—to hear the screams of agony—is complicated, however, by its swaggering hero’s earlier posturing. Cuthbert has, in other words, no qualms about wanting to shoot the workers of Belleville and Montmartre like big game in the midst of the Franco-Prussian War—but when the moment arrives when Communards are hunted down in just such a fashion, he is consuming the spectacle from the remove of a rooftop.

Appropriately relegated to the bourgeois quartier of Passy, the novel’s initial rooftop view permits Cuthbert to describe and re-imagine the Versaillais’s entrance into the city. Hailing the troops as liberators rather than invaders, their entry precipitates a marked linguistic shift in the novel: whereas the troops under Thiers have so far been principally denoted as Versaillais, the moment they break through the fortified walls around Paris, they are rechristened the “Loyalists”; thus, “at one o’clock in the morning the Loyalists were in position of this important position [in the Trocadero]” (278). The shift in registers allows the novel to revision the Communards—rather than the Versailles government—as the “capitulards” in the Franco-Prussian War debacle, and in turn retroactively condemn them for their initial cowardice. For as Cuthbert tells his future bride, “I have no sympathy for the Communists…not one spark. They would not pull a trigger or risk a scratch for the defense of Paris against the Germans, now they are fighting like wild cats against their countrymen” (282).

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88 The novel’s revisioning assiduously forgets that the National Guardsmen were rarely given a chance to fight: as Hollis Clayson points out, “‘Combat as its absence’ could title so many National Guardsmen in Paris during the fall and winter of 1870-71. Paris was indeed dramatically fortified in 1870 and Parisian men were militarized and mobilized in record numbers, but the processes of fortification and mobilization were nonetheless militarily ambiguous phenomena.” See in Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life under Siege (97).
This failure of memory facilitates another radical re-imagining of the Bloody Week. Upon entering Passy, the Versaillais put down their arms to a jubilant welcoming, with the neighborhood rushing to meet them: “at two o’clock the head of the French column came down the street. In an instant…the inhabitants poured into the street and welcomed their deliverers with shouts of joy. The troops piled their arms and fell out, and as soon as they did so men and women brought provisions of all kinds” (278). The staging of such an encounter, with the army evaporating into the people by laying aside their weapons, seems a strikingly unmarked reenactment of the first moments of the Commune itself. Indeed, the scene closely echoes the energetic accounts of the March 18 encounter between the people and the army on Buttes Montmartre given by Lissagaray and others (here filtered through Henri Lefebvre):

   All the people of Montmartre are there. Who are among them? Certainly, there are men with guns, but above all there are women. They arrive from everywhere, [and] cry ‘Long live the soldiers!’ ‘Long live the army!’ They hold out bottles of wine. Did [the soldiers] not march all night without food or drink? And all of a sudden, something extraordinary happens: in one hour or so, the army disappears, dissolving [into the crowd] like sugar in water. (42, translation mine)\(^89\)

Such a reworking of the Commune’s birth is in keeping with the novel’s overall refusal to recognize or remember any Paris that is not explicitly bourgeois: while the workers might be spoken of, and promptly written off as racaille, they rarely find a space in the novel. (Cuthbert

suggests from the outset that all you need to know about them can be found in novels of Balzac.\(^{90}\)

It is perhaps all the more fitting then that when *A Woman of the Commune* ultimately grants Cuthbert a means to safely witness the street fighting, the pass is signed by no less a personage than Marshal MacMahon himself.\(^{91}\) Yet Cuthbert’s walks and expressed desire to see the fighting do little to bring the ghastly spectacle into focus, instead offering readers an account of the military’s sweep through Paris that is riddled with amnesia: despite the mass summary executions occurring throughout the city, hostages are everywhere in Henty’s novel, but bodies are nowhere to be found. (The text eventually estimates that twenty thousand will fall before Paris is conquered, but nowhere does it represent for its readers a sense of the scale of that number.) Indeed, the economy of violence is orchestrated so that it is the burning of the city and the killing of hostages by the Communards that unleashes the violent reprisals of the Versaillais: “The fury excited by such a deed will be so great that the troops will refuse to give quarter, and the prisoners taken will have to suffer to the utmost for the crime committed by perhaps a handful of desperate wretches” (285). While such a restructuring of the chronology of the Bloody Week is in general keeping with the contemporary vitriol leveled at the Commune—Marx points to the way in which the bourgeoisie throughout the world mourned the loss of

\(^{90}\)“You would obtain a much closer insight into French lower-class life by studying Balzac [than by walking around the working class sections of Paris]” (63).

\(^{91}\)“The astronomer downstairs turned out a very useful acquaintance, for, hearing from Cuthbert that he was extremely anxious to obtain a pass that would permit him to move about near the scenes of fighting without being seized and shot as a Communist, he said that he was intimate friend of Marshal M‘Mahon, and should be glad to obtain a pass for him” (281).
buildings rather than the loss of life in Paris—\(92\) it conveniently glosses over the fact it was Thiers’ refusal to allow prisoners of war that initially prompted the Commune to take hostages many weeks before the Bloody Week. (\textit{Under the Red Flag}, on the other hand, acknowledges the case matter-of-factly: “The conquerors were instructed to shoot first and apologize afterward. And in nine out of ten cases they obeyed their instructions to the letter” (390).)

\textit{A Woman of the Commune} ultimately condenses the violence overwhelming the city into a single scene of summary execution, with Arnold and Minette standing in for all those other, unseen bodies. (Their tombstone appropriately closes the novel.) Minette crystallizes the terror of the Commune in Henty’s reading of it, and her death signals the wiping out of its threat: the soldiers at her execution assure Cuthbert that “[the Communards] are not human…and their women are worst of all” (289). Indeed, throughout the novel Minette has been characterized as a tigress in waiting, seducing Arnold to his ruin even as she is eventually held symbolically responsible for the literal ruination of Paris by fire. She enacts, in her highly public political role within the Commune, the rights for women that her English double, Mary, early on espouses before finally giving up altogether.\(93\) And she is a female fiend—of the variety Cuthbert wants thoroughly to mark off as uniquely French: “It is well for you that your country does not breed such as these,” or so the soldiers assure the Englishman (289). As the summary execution of Minette is characterized as summary justice—she has been caught torching houses—her

\(92\) “The bourgeoisie of the whole world, which looks complacently upon the wholesale massacre after the battle, is convulsed by horror at the desecration of brick and mortar.” See in \textit{The Civil War in France}, 113.

\(93\) Much as King avoids or glosses over the spectre of the Civil War, Henty’s novel takes pains to put to rest the question of women in politics. We see Mary engaged early in the novel with the cause of women’s suffrage. But the novel never allows its readers to glimpse the political clubs where women were meeting daily during the Commune, and Mary renounces politics altogether at the moment she succumbs to Henty’s hero.
incendiaryism almost too neatly collapses the imagery of the “overly emancipated” female with the destroyer of homes. And her treatment parallels the way in which the adventure plot of *A Woman of the Commune* is ultimately subsumed by the Woman Question in the novel: Cuthbert watches the suppression of the Commune from afar, but Minette’s double, Mary, demonstrates the threat of the Commune that has not (entirely) been averted. Resettling in England and wedded out of any further ideas about women’s rights, Mary neatly exorcises the incendiary figure of the emancipated female. The novel thus draws to a close on an almost impossibly happy note: “Cuthbert has often declared that the most fortunate event in his life was that he was a besieged resident in Paris through its two sieges. As for Mary, she has been heard to declare that she has no patience whatever with the persons who frequent platforms and talk about women’s rights” (292).

King’s novel assumes what would seem—by contrast—a more neutral stance towards the events of the Bloody Week. For it not only looks the violence in the face, but also brings its young hero into closest proximity with the Versaillais juggernaut. Indeed, for a moment, even Frank is a hair’s breadth from losing his life to a Versaillist bayonet. *Under the Red Flag* thus allows its readers to meet and mingle with Communards, befriend Dombrowski, see the brutality of the Versaillais army, and even offers an unflinching look at the horror of the Bloody Week; Henty’s jubilant portrayal of the Versaillist entrance into Paris is tempered by King’s characterization of one Versaillais in the early stages of the army’s entrance into Paris: “Is the fellow dead or asleep? he said. Oh, asleep is it? Well, begin with him, so that I can take his chair” (388). But while the Communards are for King never simply *racaille* and the reprisals of the Versaillais never go unacknowledged, much is done to keep the reader on the “right” side—which requires quite a bit of narrative maneuvering.
Dombrowski, while a hero for the Commune, thus becomes in King’s narrative one of its harsher critics, so that Frank ultimately realizes that “the general had a deep contempt for the gross and vulgar errors of the insurrection for which he was fighting” (305). No sympathy, in other words, can be meted out, finally, and MacMahon is characterized as both liberator and republican—another re-laying of memory and willful forgetting: “On Sunday at four o’clock all was over, and Marshal MacMahon’s proclamation announced the deliverance of Paris. ‘Order, labor, and tranquility will now revive,’ wrote the Marshal, who was a few years later to be President of the French Republic” (550). The most elaborate staging of strategic amnesia in the novel is, however, the clearing away of “true” Communards in order to leave behind only the worst elements in society: “wearied by the incessant fighting, the poor Communards, finding that they had been misguided—that the uprising which they had made in the name of liberty and local self-government had been slowly perverted to a Socialistic revolution—melted away…[leaving behind] only the desperate and resolute—the men who had vowed a terrible vengeance upon society—remained” (358).

It is an evacuation all the more curious because it implies that some vestige of recognizably republican sentiment provided the impetus for the Commune—an impetus that might have appealed to American readers—despite having never elaborated this as a possibility in its account of Commune’s earliest days. 94 And in keeping with the move to redefine republicanism, the novel duly recodes Thiers, a man of dubious Republican sentiments who had

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94 Katz finds in this passage a striking attempt on King’s part to draw attention to the parallels between the Commune and the American Civil War: “As Edward King continued to remind his readers in 1895, the Commune was started in ‘the name of liberty and local self-government,’ even if later it was ‘perverted to a Socialistic revolution’; at least in its origins, it shared something with our own Civil War” (191). I would argue, however, that while the passage makes explicit a tension that permeates the novel, it is overshadowed by the way in which the text can only make this parallel in retrospect, for to make such a claim earlier in the novel would have required too terrifying a political concession.
built his career as a Royalist, who “ever contemptuous of ‘the vile multitude,’ had long had a plan for dealing with them—a plan he proposed to Louis Philippe in 1848 [but could only enact in 1871]” (Harvey 323). In King’s version, however, Thiers is both patriot and republican: “Slowly the old patriot, Thiers, who had worked so vigorously for the young republic when it was under the heels of the Prussians…was massing a large army, ready to be hurled into Paris” (356)—a hurling that would result in, as David Harvey puts it, “one of the most vicious of bloodlettings in an often bloody French history” (236).

Under the Red Flag pointedly leaves aside “the Woman Question,” seeming instead most preoccupied by the liberty question. The novel affords, for example, a Frenchman with Versaillais sympathies a moment to regret the scene outside his window, and lament the summary judgments. But a hardened Frank, our American boy hero, turns a cold eye to the bodies piling in the streets, the mass executions, and the seemingly endless processions of men on their way to internment and exile. The lesson the boys have gained—and thereby impart to their readers—is both that the American Revolution is exceptional and that revolution is never, under any circumstances, justified; extemporizes Sny, “If anybody is to be judged harshly, I think it is the man who turns against his country, his city, his nation, just to gratify a miserable ambition or whim, in the hope of establishing some petty doctrine. I have not got any sentimental objections to thinking that such men deserve exactly what these fellows…are going to get” (558).

It is a lesson that echoes Kaplan’s contention that historical romances of the 1890s culminated in reproductions—and restagings—of the American Revolution that effaced any trace of politics or conflict out of it in order to “repossess and…neutralize it” (“Romancing” 681): in fine, “these novels whitewash the Revolution as an exclusive inheritance against both the influx
of immigrants aspiring to national identity and the claims of colonial subjects, such as Cubans and Filipinos, to revolution and self-government” (“Romancing” 689). Under the Red Flag no doubt dramatizes lingering anxieties over the degree to which revolution needs to be reclaimed from workers. (The eight-hour workday is briefly introduced—only in jest—at the beginning of the novel, though the need for passage of such a law would prove the touchstone of labor unrest in America in the 1890s.95) But its work to reconstitute Revolution in the minds of its boy-readers serves more crucially to reclaim it from immigrants and colonial subjects. (In Henty, the worker and the colonial subject would be nearly interchangeable.) For King’s novel is most shrewd, perhaps, in its reading of the threat of the Commune, and in the elaborate distinction it wants to draw between the respective revolutions.

A Woman of the Commune, on the other hand, explicitly insists—quite notably before the Commune takes place in France—that it could never happen in England: “Thank god such a thing is never likely to happen—at any rate in my time...Our workmen have sense enough to know that a mob rule would be ruin to them as well as the rich and, were it needed, in twenty-four hours half a million men could be sworn in as constables, and these would sweep the rabble in the Thames” (108). Perhaps the novel protests too much: the outburst betrays a certain hesitation, as its certitude lies finally only in the fact—or is it hope?—that in Cuthbert’s lifetime it would be an unthinkable event. (Given that the novel appears some two decades later, Cuthbert’s outburst seems most directly leveled at Henty’s young readers.) And the urgency of mobilization in Cuthbert’s scene—the speed with which the rabble would be swept into the Thames—only further gestures toward the possibility that such an insurrection might not be, anymore than with the woman of the commune herself, uniquely a product of France.

95 “Ho, ho! laughed Frank. You would have to have an eight-hour law passed, I reckon, or Will would work you to death [with all his questions]” (113).
Yet both books contend, in varying ways, that their work is done. No one is left to speak on the Commune’s behalf by novel’s end, and its specter seems safely laid to rest: “Paris was conquered, the Commune was stamped out, its chiefs dead or fugitives, its rank and file slaughtered” (290). Arnold and Minette lie in peace at “Père La chaise,” Mary has been weaned of her heterodox gender ideas, and Marcelle recants any lingering faith in the Commune. In turn, France is left behind and readers are assured, to varying degrees, that the Republic has come to stay: Paris is, after all, liberated, and such things could never happen at home. But the cost of the peace, and its tenuousness is—even in only a sidelong glance—a vexing remainder.

**New Designs of Empire**

The cost of the Commune’s suppression, and the problem of the potential parallels between the respective revolutions, are explicitly addressed in the popular American romances of Robert W. Chambers and Eugene C. Savidge. Indeed, the motif of Paris as the site of “republican” conversion and frontier of empire is put into further relief by these fictions that retell the Commune for an adult American audience in the 1890s. For their work to at once domesticate the Commune—often by repopulating the scene with Americans—and in turn to Nativize it—both in the sense of primitizing the Communards and in redefining the American man as “native born”—not only reconstitutes Revolution, but also more thoroughly defines American republicanism and manhood as inextricably coterminous.

Chambers, one of the most popular American historical romance writers in the late-nineteenth century, titles his bestselling novel of the Commune, somewhat ambiguously, *The Red Republic* (1895) and suggests “the separation of the romance from the facts would leave the
historical basis virtually intact (1).” But his assertion that the artifice of the romance plot can be separated from the historical narrative does not simply privilege the latter: it also suggests the ready-made audience for yet another fiction that seeks to refashion the history of the Commune in elaborate detail. A Dial reviewer of Chambers’ novel writes, later that year, “The Paris Commune of 1871 is likely in the course of time to yield as many good stories as any episode in modern history. Perhaps the best of them that has yet been told is ‘The Red Republic’” (“Recent Fiction” 335). Indeed, contemporary reviewers of The Red Republic often focused their attentions most on the value of its historical plot: the 1897 Encyclopædia Britannica, for example, hailed it as “a vivid, realistic, and in some ways the most valuable, account of the Commune that has been written,” (741) while the Dial review most applauds the novel’s attention to detail—as if it had been an act of reportage rather than fiction: “The day to day happenings of those terrible weeks are chronicled with the attention to detail of a newspaper report” (335).

The popularity of The Red Republic is, in my reading, part and parcel with its effectiveness at packaging itself as the inside story, as if Chambers (like Henty and King) had been there to see the events himself. Savidge, on the other hand, offers readers “a biographical novel”—though one most interested in relating the biography of an event rather than a

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96 The Bookman: a Literary Journal quips in its Mar-Aug 1897 edition that “the adjective ‘red’ seems to have a peculiar attraction for novelists lately, judging from the frequency with which it appears on the title-page of recent fiction. It would seem too that it is a lucky word to use, for strangely enough, nearly all the ‘red’ books [including The Red Republic and Francis Gribble’s novel of the Commune, The Red Spell] have been more than usually successful” (emphasis mine, 87).

97 In laying claim to this “eye-witness”-style credibility, these novels are also cashing in on larger U.S. publishing trends. As Matthew Schneirov persuasively suggests, the Magazine Revolution of the 1890s—the birth of the popular magazine—had everything to do with the turn to immediacy in the form of eyewitness accounts of both the muckracking and the quotidian varieties. See The Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America 1893-1914. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
personage. Like Chambers’ romance, *The American in Paris* establishes its authority by textual allusions—in this case, by layering each chapter in epigraphs by famous historical players in the drama unfolding within the novel. The novel thus allows the historical actors to speak for themselves, while nevertheless suggesting that the body of the novel allows them to voice their opinions in their own words as well (“Liberties have obviously [only] been taken with the time and connection” (Savidge, Preface).)

While both *The Red Republic* and *The American in Paris* warranted notice in *The Bookman* for their sales, Savidge’s novel was taken to task by a *Dial* reviewer who suggested that the novel could not be adequately separated from its historical rather than literary ambitions: “*The American in Paris* may be best described as an anecdote history of the Franco-Prussian War, the siege of Paris, and the Commune, interspersed with numerous quotations from state papers and personal memoirs...the story, aside from this, is hardly worth mentioning” (“Recent American Fiction” 384). *The American in Paris* enjoyed, however, at least three print editions.

Given their reliance on—and claims to—historical immediacy and veracity, it is all the more important to focus our attentions on the way *The Red Republic* and *The American in Paris* specifically mobilize a selective history of the Commune in the service of dramatizing a certain kind of American identity formation. The history they forget is a telling one, particularly in light of the fact that it often ignores or de-emphasizes details that figure prominently in both anti-and pro-Communard histories and memoirs published on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, *The Red Republic*, for all its attention to day to day life under the Commune, offers a limited portrait of it, making no mention of the felling of the Vendôme Column, and—in perhaps the strangest acts of narrative revision—entirely overlooking the prominence of women during the Commune. (A single Frenchwoman, Faustine, is the sole vivandière and barricade rouser pictured in the
novel—and she is armed only with words.) The fierce and fiery female incendiaries of the Commune make no appearance, and the Bloody Week—while alluded to only via its death toll (as in Henty)—is nowhere put on display in a novel that regularly indulges its readers in spectacles of acute violence. (Characters are routinely shot in the back, and a fatal stabbing is the catalyst for the marriage plot.) And though the text labels the Commune a “republic,” it aligns its narrative energies absolutely with the forces that will eventually crush it. (We witness, for example, the birth of the Commune on March 18 from the perspective of French government troops, rather than of Parisian bystanders or American tourists.)

In a novel that allows the Commune to be called a Republic, albeit a “Red” one, it seems all the more glaring that Communards in the text are rarely—if ever—allowed to voice their political aims. Faustine is permitted to cry “Vive La République”—and make clear the elision between La République and La Commune in many Parisian minds—but the workings of the Commune are otherwise reduced to thievery and murder rather than daily administration or even, as in Gribble’s The Red Spell (1895), an ineffectual propensity for meetings. The political clubs—and politics of everyday life—are nowhere discussed. (There is no mention of the clearing of rent, of the closing of night bakeries, or of the changes in the educational system.) This clearing away of the revolutionary politics of the Commune is all the more important given the novel’s reception as an authority on the event: a reviewer in the Atlantic Monthly writes, for example, that “the tale depicts with exceeding vividness and truth the Paris of the Commune and the sort of men who ruled therein” (“Recent Fiction” 426).
Chambers’ narrative revolves on the marriage plot between Jeanne de Brassac, a young Frenchwoman from an aristocratic military family, and Philip Landes, a young American come to Paris to be a painter. This narrative draws on the vaguely incestuous love plot most associated with the domestic novel, with Landes, a close friend of Jeanne’s deceased brother and essentially Jeanne’s protector after the death of her father at the opening of the novel, seeing Jeanne as both “little sister” and lover, and Jeanne often slipping in her reference to him. This nominal slippage between amant and frère functions somewhat to underscore the powerlessness of Jeanne: by infantilizing her, the plot emphasizes her essential fragility. (“She was so gentle, so winning in her innocence, so helpless, so dependent” (366).) While Faustine, her lower class contemporary, spends time with rabble-rousers and works tirelessly for cause of the Republic, the domesticated Jeanne is quite content to stay at home and Landes loves her for it.

In a novel that so conspicuously evacuates women from the scene of the Commune, Jeanne’s demurring presence cannot be read as simply a function of the romance plot itself. Indeed, the historical romances of the 1890s often presented readers with a New Woman-type heroine. But Jeanne can reek here neither of the New Woman nor the pétroleuse. Chambers’ choice of heroines is, in my reading, at once political—Jeanne wards off even as it contains the peril of the emancipated female—and strategic. For the active forgetting of “the Women of the Commune” seems to work in the service of the novel’s decided interest in the development of its American hero.

98 Amy Kaplan notes that “in contrast to the domestic novels of the 1850s, heroines of the 1890s romances escape from the home to participate in imperial adventures” (95). See in The Anarchy of Empire.
Landes is an inadvertent hero who unwittingly becomes a spectator at (and at times unwilling soldier of) the Commune. But while the narrative emphasizes his heroism, it takes pains to emphasize as well that as an American he fights only those fights forced upon him. And though the novel does not seem to fit the imperial romance genre, it nevertheless draws heavily upon it. Much like *A Woman of the Commune*, *The Red Republic* recasts Paris as a frontier where Landes can prove his mettle, subdue the natives and win his lady. But even as Paris’ population is, in turn, “nativized”—with Communards rendered as essentially primitive—99—the Commune itself is curiously Americanized.

_Americanizing the Commune and Nativizing Americans_

Chambers’ romance immediately sets up an antagonism between “the red republic” and the American one; indeed, the narrative opens with the line “All Englishmen are pigs” and the speaker, Isidor Weser, is quick to add “I’m not fond of Americans” (3). In turn, Weser is central to both the historical and fictional narrative threads, and is immediately identified in the narrative as party to the Commune. (The novel’s opening is positioned at the eve of the uprising, and Weser, as confidante to the Commune’s future head of police, Raul Rigault, is part of the movement to bring it into being.) The enmity between the Commune and America is stated then explicitly and early on, and is further woven into the fabric of the romance plot by making the persecution of Landes for personal reasons (he prevents Weser from robbing Jeanne de Brassac’s

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99 The move here to “primitivize” the Communards is not a new one. Contemporary French commentators on the Commune likened it to “savages with rings through their noses ruling the city” (Ross 149). It is rather its recurrence at this moment that interests me here—particularly in Henty and Chambers, but also in, for example, Molly Elliot Seawell’s movement to liken the pétroleuses to uncivilized “cannibals in Africa” (707).
family diamonds) central to the actions we see taken by the Commune—with the origins of the
Commune thus rescripted from a call to municipal government to a direct attack on private
property. Put simply, although the narrative dwells at length on the events of March 18, it
implicitly makes robbery and enmity towards an American the “real” originary moment of the
Commune. It thus quite effectively neutralizes the Commune’s political ends, and works in turn
to make any allusion or attention paid to the day to day workings of the Commune entirely recast
in the light of pillage, greed, and personal grievance.

This narrative repurposing forgets the Commune’s amity towards both the American
Minister to France and American citizens, and further the affinity many Communards saw
between themselves and Americans—an affinity that we saw, for example, fictionalized in both
_Under the Red Flag_ and _A Woman of the Commune_. More crucially, it brings into relief the
way in which _The Red Republic_ “Americanizes’ the Commune—making the actions of the
Commune’s central characters about America (in the figure of Landes) and their personal enmity
towards him, and in the more obvious sense of repopulating the ranks of the Commune with a
number of American citizens.

In her three-part history of the Commune, Molly Elliot Seawell wards off the possible
contamination—or contagion—of the Commune in the 1890s by insisting that no American
fought for it, excepting General Cluseret (who, after all, was only a naturalized one). She further
contains the Commune by emphasizing its fundamental foreignness; in her account, few French
participated in it. Although she thoroughly overstates the case, many foreigners did in fact take

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100 As we have seen, in _Under the Red Flag_, Grandpa Drubal encounters Communards, such as
Jules Raisin, who claim a fraternity between the two Republics, despite the fact the novel quickly
forestalls this identification, while in _A Woman of the Commune_, Minette’s love for the
American Dampierre concretizes this possible affinity. It bears remarking again that the
American boys’ book can only imagine Communards—rather than Americans—indulging this
sentiment.
part in the Commune, though the number of Americans who did so remains uncertain. While only naturalized French Americans appear in King’s text, and Henty offers only a token Anglo-American as part of the fray, in Chambers’ novel Americans are everywhere during the Commune. Wilton, a fellow painter in the Quarter and friend of Landes, gets swept up in the idea of a good fight and the enthusiasm of Faustine, his grisette turned Communarde, while a host of Irish-American immigrants fresh from New York fill a battalion on the Commune’s behalf. (New York is also specifically marked as the home for Communard exiles, Weser among them.)

This Irish-American presence in the text is particularly perplexing because the narrative neither explains their enthusiasm for the Commune nor how they came to be in Paris to fight in the first place. This American presence in the novel complicates Landes’ assertion—a few pages after he encounters these foreign compatriots—that Americans cannot identify with the Commune. For when asked by a Communard, with some disbelief, “You do not care for the Commune?” Landes replies only: “Care for it! I’m an American!” (314). While the phrase implies that fundamentally an American must be opposed to “the red republic,” the novel has already suggested Americans have been swayed—or taken in—by it. And the phrase itself could be read against the grain to imply that because of being American, Landes would care for it (or, rather, feel some identification with it). For even within the novel, there is some slippage between the two republics.

The novel works to ward off the threat of that identification (or mis-allegiance) by most thoroughly embodying it within the New Yorkers voluntarily fighting for the Commune, and

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101 The exact number of Americans who fought with the Commune is murky. Katz does not, for example, focus on any American Communard except Cluseret.

102 “Is it true that Weser escaped after all?” ‘There seems to be no doubt of it,’ interposed Philip. ‘He has been located in Hester Street, New York. They can’t extradite him either.’ (469). In my reading, the novel “domesticates” the Commune—exporting its threat home—while also working, through the figure of the “native-born” Landes, to contain that very threat.
thus more clearly marking off the term “American” for the native born only. The text thus works, in other words, to primitivize the non-native born Americans in the text, while at the same time defining American manhood and republicanism through the figure of Philip Landes, the “native” American. Indeed, these Irish Americans become, for Landes, more foreign and more primitive than the “evil” Communards: “When he first heard the familiar sound of his own language he had felt for a moment comforted and hopeful, but now, the ruffians at the next fire seemed more distant and foreign to him than the worst ragamuffin in the battalion” (302).

Savidge’s “biographical novel,” on the other hand, quite explicitly grapples with the vexing possibility that the Commune and its excesses are themselves the progeny of American democracy set loose upon the world. This anxiety is embedded in both the American protagonist’s political *bildung* (or conversion) in Paris—it is there that he realizes what it is to be an American—and in his doomed love plot with the Court *cocodette*, Hortense. It is Hortense, the half-French, half-American, who, in the opening pages of the novel, questions Kent about the evils of democracy. (At their first meeting, she teasingly says “The tendency to rich uncles is the only redeeming feature in democracy,” before going on to add, when asked if democracy required “redemption” that “the whole race needs rescuing from the mediocrity entailed by this era of equality” (11).) In turn, it is she who is converted to its cause by Kent’s own enthusiasm. But while Kent leaves Paris—and the corrupted love affair—to go home and spread the gospel of “Americanism,” that gospel is fissured by his experience of Commune. For Hortense goes to her death because of Kent’s enthusiasm for America, and dies not only fighting for the Commune but also crying out “My darling! My angel! See what I have done for your love and for your

103 “What America means is the gospel for which his life stands, his only *tant-mieux*—to show for his time in Paris” (18).
cause!...Vive l’Amérique, Vive---”. While the phrase is cut short by a bullet, her death marks the unmistakable elision between the Red Republic and the American one. And the “lesson” of Savidge’s text is further complicated by the multiple American viewpoints it seeks to offer on the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune—while it does not populate the Commune with Americans, it largely populates the novel with Americans of various stripes (Hortense is half-American, her other suitor, Jaeger, is a naturalized German-American, and Kent is converted to his absolute faith in the cause of America by Clarke, an American doctor he meets in Paris.) Each of them is meant to eventually adopt the properly American idea—Jaeger, who fought in the American Civil War before returning to participate in the unification of Germany, is perhaps the most striking case of being forever touched by his American experience (even as he tries to reconcile it with his German identity and faith in the monarchy). Yet Hortense is not the only example of the failure to properly comprehend the meaning of the American “gospel” in the novel. The most potent spectacle of miscomprehension (or, rather reimagining) of that idea is borne of the entrance of Cluseret, that naturalized American, into the text. He enters the scene as Kent as forcibly conscripted to build barricades for the Commune. As an American, Kent refuses to participate (much as Landes does in The Red Republic). But Cluseret fought in the American Civil War, and calls on Kent to work for the Commune explicitly in the name of his nationality: “I too am an American citizen…and that is all the more reason why both should fight for France. Get back to your place, or I will have you shot as a recreant American who refuses to fight for liberty, equality and fraternity” (254).

Hortense is, in one sense, then, simply a stand-in for Kent: her death prevents his “fall,” and preserves his properly American view of democracy. Yet Kent, in witnessing Hortense’s execution, cannot help but reflect on his own role in her misplaced enthusiasm: “Oh, those
misinterpreted phrases which had made Hortense one of the infuriated crowd; and his well-meaning phrases, too!” (267). The effect of Kent’s “well-meaning phrases” taught Hortense the “wrong” lesson—and fatally so. But while the novel insists that Kent leaves Paris with the “right” gospel, the narrative everywhere suggests the instability of such gospels and the troubling, irrepressible contagion of well-meaning phrases. During the final days of the Commune, the narrator observes, “And yet among these wild beings were thousands transported in their frenzied exaltation, believing honestly that they were giving their lives for France and for humanity” (260). The text thus destabilizes such hopes, even as it allows its hero to claim them in the name of a republic with which the Communards—those “half-frenzied” enthusiasts—cannot be identified.

Kent leaves France, in other words, as both an avid enthusiast for American democracy and as staunch critic of self-determination in practice. He thus amplifies the young boy American’s sense, at the end of Under the Red Flag, that revolution is no longer possible, and its Parisian enthusiasts received what was coming to them. Indeed, both protagonists resolutely carry that lesson back to America with them. That they must do so seems intimately bound up with America’s own larger struggle to imagine its Revolution as at once exceptional and no longer fathomable as it grappled with the prospect of, in Kaplan’s phrase, “the anarchy of empire.” Perhaps Twain, writing on the U.S. intervention in the Philippines, put the conundrum best: “There must be two Americas: one that sets the captive free, and one that takes the once-captive’s new freedom away from him” (qtd. in Anarchy of Empire 92). In the following chapter, we turn from sights of Paris as frontier to sites of Paris in ruin, from unexpected forms of imperial adventure to uncanny forms of affective possession—to other senses, in other words, of seeing history “firsthand.”
Chapter Three

Aftertastes of Ruin: the Space of the Commune in Henry James’s Paris

Not that an urban vista is quite the same as a loved face, but it isn’t quite different, either: the despoiled view was suddenly a toothless face, say, or suddenly preoccupied, or suddenly dead—to say nothing, even, of the historical implications surrounding that particular change of landscape.

-Eve Sedgwick, Touching Feeling

What would it mean not to see the remainders of history as they are writ in space, but rather to taste them? To smell buried pasts simmering below the otherwise glassy surface of a cityscape? And finally, to possess—and be possessed by—pasts that didn’t, in any real sense, belong to us?

At least since what Bill Brown has termed its “literary-critical apotheosis” in the 1990s (178), 104 The American Scene has been the privileged site to examine Henry James’s fascination with—and affective responses to—lost landmarks and “instant” ruins, landscapes of loss that have come, in turn, to stand in for modernity, American-style. 105 But while Brown has suggested that “the most unnerving aspect of AS is the volubility of its buildings” (177), I would add it is also James’s response to them. For such affecting and untimely absences—in particular, the

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104 Notes Brown, “Once respected by few readers (but readers who included W.H. Auden), The American Scene [is now] regarded both as an august exhibit of the ‘late James’ and as a compelling commentary on America at century’s turn” (178).

105 See Wendy Graham’s recent ELH piece, Brown’s reading in A Sense of Things, and Yablon’s discussion in Untimely Ruins. In “Notes of a Native Son,” Graham writes for example: “Not James’ nostalgia, but his consciousness of what social geographers call ‘emplacement’ (the spatial dimension of being) disrupts the inexorable master-narrative of progress extolled by Harbison, interpolating a vivid sense of milieu, locality, and personal history into the breach left by the wrecking ball” (252).
“ruthlessly suppressed birth-house” in Washington Square and the unexpectedly vanished home in Ashburton Place—register for James as tourist sights quite literally felt as much as seen (or, for that matter, heard) (91). In the section entitled “The Lost Chord,” he writes of the disappearance of his Cambridge home, for example: “I had been present, by the oddest hazard, at the very last moments of the victim in whom I was most interested; the act of obliteration had been swift, and if I had often seen how swiftly history could be made I had doubtless never so felt that it could be unmade still faster. It was as if the bottom had fallen out of one’s own biography, and one plunged backward into space without meeting anything” (emphasis mine 229). And as urban historian Nick Yablon has recently suggested, James “feels these architectural losses so intensely and personally [that] they linger on his mental map of the metropolis as absent presences, phantom limbs representing a history ‘amputated’ from him” (260). James’s uncannily embodied experience of both space and memory—or, rather, his curiously Jamesian “historic sense”—has thus most often been read as at once deeply personal and deeply national in scope, provoked by memory sites bound up simultaneously with James’s own past and his reading of America’s future.106

This chapter turns instead to Henry James’s Paris, and, in particular, the sights of and detours around the post-Commune ruins of Paris in his writings, to chart James’s transformative reading of space and uncanny connection to more broadly transnational sites of memory.107

106 For example, James’ celebrated biographer, Leon Edel, insists, in his 1968 edition of the volume: “The American Scene contains an exuberance of observation, a depth of historical feeling, and a personal involvement not to be found in his other travel writings. The others had been written mainly to bring home to Americans—then still distant from Europe—a sense of the picturesque, the quaint, the beautiful, in foreign lands” (viii).106

107 I’m borrowing here but also departing from Pierre Nora’s formulation of “lieux de mémoire,” most particularly his notion of the memory site as purely self-referential—cut off from history—and his implicit sense of the national boundaries that structure collective memory and sites of
Examining Strether’s encounter with the “irremediable void” (111) left by the cleared-away ruins of the Tuileries Palace in *The Ambassadors* and Hyacinth’s ghostly tour of the barricades in *Princess Casamassima* in light of James’s curious formulation of the “aftertaste” of ruin in his 1872 letters and early sketches from Paris, I argue that James’s visits to—and meditations on—the “charred sites” and lost landmarks of Paris should be read not as a return of the picturesque, but rather as an intimate—indeed, synesthetic—indexing of “social space”—of space experienced, in Elizabeth Abel’s formulation, as “a sphere of contestation and negotiation through which multiple histories are enacted and…produced” (17). But as we’ll see, the space of the Commune in Henry James’s Paris uncovers and restages another forgotten transatlantic story: namely, the ways that the now-forgotten ruins of Paris, and the traces of the Commune they came to stand in for, continued to haunt American experience of the City of Light throughout the Gilded Age. In resituating James’s own fascination with the Paris in ruin memory—memory culture organized by archives, monuments, and orchestrated celebrations of a “shared” national past. See Nora’s discussion in “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-24.

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108 See in *Signs of the Times: The Visual Politics of Jim Crow*. Berkeley: U of C Press, 2010. Examining the “resistant features of space” charted by Henri Lefebvre and later by Marxist geographers, Abel suggests that these theorists regarded space as both a product and a producer of social relations, thus “redefining [it] as the dynamic medium through which history occurs, rather than the static backdrop to historical action” (17). See also Kristin Ross’s important formulation of the concept in *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* and Andrew Merrifield’s helpful discussion in *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City*, New York: Routledge, 2002.

109 In his recent biography of the James family, *House of Wits*, Paul Fisher points out that “[Henry James] avidly monitored the Prussian occupation of Paris during the autumn of 1870 by means of telegraphed reports in newspapers as if he himself were a cane-wielding bourgeois Parisian on the boulevard” (emphasis mine 275). While James’ fascination with the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune that followed on its heels was actually far from exemplary—many Americans shared it—what interests me is Fisher’s notion that James followed the events in Paris as if he were French. That unlikely feeling of possession nicely points to the way the sensational (ostensibly international) news from Paris comes to seem deeply personal as well, but
within the broader mass cultural archive of American returns to the scene of the Commune by
way of pilgrimages to vanished landmarks and ruined buildings, I simultaneously aim to recover
the way these spatial remainders of the Commune came to function as unlikely sites of memory
in American culture, sustained by an ongoing visual and discursive industry of memory.

Landscapes of Loss, Terrains of Memory

Before examining James’s early writing from Paris in ruin, I want to turn to the broader
mass-cultural archive that textures them. For an essential context for understanding James’s
curiously embodied spatial register—not only in his early travel writings, but most particularly in
his later novels—lies in these popular mediums of memory: namely, the photography, periodical
remembrances, tourist sketches and spectacles of Paris in ruin.

In Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag writes, apropos of the Spanish Civil War
photographs that Virginia Woolf recalls in Three Guineas:

They show how war evacuates, shatters, breaks apart, levels the built world…. To
be sure a cityscape is not made of flesh. Still, sheared-off buildings are almost as
eloquent as bodies in the street. (Kabul, Sarajevo, East Mostar, Grozny…) Look,
the photographs say, this is what it’s like. This is what war does. And that, that is
what it does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War
dismembers. War ruins. (8)

Of course, Sontag reminds us, such scenes were not, in 1938, new. While Hitler’s Blitz and the
Bombing of Dresden were yet to come, much of the horrific destruction meted out by Franco’s
also the way the Commune seems to jumble notions of the strictly national/transnational, private
vs. public memory.
bombing raids had already been carried out, without much outcry, on Moroccan villagers in the preceding decade. And, we might add, the broader photographic archive of war’s ruin recedes further into the past, summoning images of the torn villages and cratered battlefields of World War I even as it conjures the scorched landscape of the post-Sherman U.S. South. But what interests me most about Sontag’s compelling initial description of “what war does” is the slippage here between bodies and the built world, the way in which the ruins left in the wake of war—and their representation—might seem to speak not only “as eloquently as bodies in the street” but often quite literally in place of them. That elision need not necessarily substitute or occlude the one for or from the other, but its potential to do so haunts my own reading of another archive of the way war scorches, dismembers, ruins: the spectacular scenes of Paris aflame—and later, in ruin—that greeted Americans in the wake of the Commune’s weeklong suppression in May 1871 (Fig. 9).
As I discussed in Chapter One, the events of the Commune and its end made front-page headlines in local and national newspapers in the U.S. and garnered significant coverage in the illustrated weeklies. Paris’s newly charred landscape became, in turn, an instant tourist destination. As historian Harvey A. Levenstein explains, “when the conservative troops finally fought their way into the city, [American] tourists followed hard on their heels, sniffing through the ruins” (140);110 travel companies began arranging “ruin tours” a mere two weeks after what

110 Levenstein notes that “[The Commune] disrupted tourism, but not as much as one would imagine. When the war broke out, Thomas Cook began making preparations for postwar battlefield tours….The continuing resistance in Paris dashed these hopes, but in the summer of 1871, as the noose tightened around Paris, other enterprising tour companies organized one-week tours for groups who picnicked on the hills surrounding the city and watched the bombardment”

Fig. 9. “The Burning of Paris” Harper’s Weekly July 1, 1871, 596.
came to be known as the “Bloody Week.” In July of 1871 Charles Dickens was among the tourists that flocked to the ruined Paris, documenting for his *All the Year Round* readers the industry that sprang up to hawk rubble-related memorabilia and maps of Paris “with all the recent burning coloured so as to represent real flames” (152). For those who could not afford to make the trip, illustrated weeklies like *Harper’s*, *Frank Leslie’s*, and *Every Saturday* provided “bird’s eye” views of the damage, and elegiac accounts of the damaged buildings and lost landmarks—and thus allowed Americans to partake in the scene from the remove of their parlors. Foreign correspondents offered eyewitness accounts of the destruction in the newspapers, while French photographers took to the streets, capturing and exporting hundreds of images of “Paris in ruins” before the Third Republic cracked down on the circulation of Commune-related images.111

American appetite for experiencing this new Paris first-hand was such that New Yorkers could take “virtual tours” of the city aflame by way of stereopticon shows like “Paris en Feu,” which debuted in New York in the autumn of 1871 (Katz 81-2). Ghostly traces of lost landmarks and charred landscape would figure in popular revivals of the panoramic spectacle “Paris by Night,” later cyclorama shows that toured the US into the 1880s, and even a Coney Island pyrotechnic show, “Paris, from Empire to Commune” staged at Manhattan Beach in September (140). See in *Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.

111 Although she is most concerned with the mass press and French visual culture, art historian Jeannene Przyblyski notes that “the widespread demand for photographs quickly became a part of the hyped-up haze of notoriety and fascination through which mass journalism participated in the process of mythologizing and commodifying the Commune. In July, Jules Moinaux reported in *Le Charivari* that an English businessman had purchased fifty thousand images of the toppled Vendôme column for sale abroad. (…) Disderi took out a paid advertisement in the same publication for his *Ruins of Paris and the Surrounding Areas*, billed as a complete itinerary to aid the diligent tourist in visiting each site” (265).
The ruins of Paris thus functioned as and were capitalized upon as instant media sensation, tourist destination, and unlikely place of pilgrimage—a memory site topographically and textually constructed, kept alive in U.S. memory not by commemorative plaques, monuments or museums but rather by the ongoing circulation of panoramic spectacles, photographic albums, periodical illustrations, and travel sketches in the magazines.

Fig. 10. “Paris and the Commune” poster (1891), Courtesy of the Performing Arts Poster Collection, U.S. Library of Congress.

But while Americans revisited the spectacle of the Commune’s bloody end through the mass-circulation of and discourse on these images of ruins, in reading about the unprecedented cost of capturing Paris—the thousands of “insurgents” killed in a week in the streets of the city Walter Benjamin would later dub “the capital of the 19th century”—they most frequently encountered ruined landscapes and editorial elegies to Paris’s torn buildings and lost landmarks rather than images of dead or dying Communards in American periodicals, despite the precedent for the photography of bodily ruin sparked in the preceding decade by Matthew Brady’s Civil War photography and Gardner’s *Sketch Book*. In part, this emphasis of the camera and the press simply testifies to the difficulty of displaying the bodily toll of the “reconquering” of Paris, and the Third Republic’s attempts to control the terrain of memory around that event. (Of the nearly 1750 photographs registered with the Dépôt Légal between June-December 1871, for example, the vast majority concerned the ruins of Paris.) As art historian Alisa Luxenberg evocatively elaborates, “Avoiding the potent and uneasy charge inherent in representations of bodily ruin, French photographers [of both the professional and amateur enthusiast variety] focused on architectural ruins, using the technique of redescription,

113 It seems worth noting that despite the fact that few photographs of the Commune dead were officially circulated, a significant market for them seems nevertheless to have existed. The December 1871 edition of *Anthony’s Photographic Bulletin* warns readers, for example, that the demand for such images was so high that, in a curious case of body-swapping, negatives of Confederate dead were being reprinted in Paris and shipped back to the U.S. as “[authentic] pictures of the killed about the Paris fortifications” (397).

114 For a discussion of Civil War corpse photography, see for example Timothy Sweet’s *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography and the Crisis of the Union*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1990; Alan Trachtenberg’s *Reading American Photographs: Images a History from Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* and Anthony Lee and Elizabeth Young’s recent study, *On Alexander Gardner’s Photographic Sketch book of the Civil War*. Sweet, in particular, argues that “During and after the Civil War, photographic representation of corpses in the landscape was an important mechanism of the legitimation by appropriation” (85); conventions of landscape portraiture in the photographs allowed the photographer to capture “traces of violence [that were] transformed into signs legitimating the Union” (85).
transferring and transforming the war ‘wounds’ from bodies to buildings, skin to stone” (117). Such a slippage between building and body is doubly suggestive I think, imbricating not only the ways in which the image of the Parisian ruins stood in for and often marked the erasure of the bodies of the Communards, with the cinders of revolution in turn supplanting the revolution itself in the landscape of French cultural memory, but so too the ways in which the “wounds” of the Commune came to be transferred from the sight of bodies to the sites of lost or charred landmarks in transatlantic memory—particularly for Americans.

Tourists Among the (Uncannily New) Ruins

American foreign correspondents, tourists, and French commentators alike found themselves drawn to Paris’s newly minted ruins (Fig. 11), and most remarked on the unimaginable scale of the damage. An unsigned article in the June 16, 1871 *NYT* relates for example: “I own that before I came here I had expected to find the magnitude of the disaster had been exaggerated in the excitement of the moment. Having seen the ruins, it seems to me that no account I have read as yet has given any adequate idea of the extent to which Paris has suffered from fire” (2); a year later, Baedeker’s *Paris and Northern France: A Handbook for Travellers* would note that “there is hardly a single public building, or street, or park in Paris which does not bear numerous traces of the recent devastation, or to which some melancholy story does not attach” (vii). But the sight of these ruins presented often proved oddly illegible, or even deeply uncanny, for visitors. Like the Commune itself, the charred landscape seemed, to many, both out of and ahead of its time—“instant” relics vertiginously poised as at once from the past and the
The French writer Théophile Gautier, for example, would write of his tour of the city in the immediate aftermath of the fires: “it seems as if two thousand years have passed in a night,” [as if Paris were] “a dead city’ reduced to ‘some scattered debris on the banks of the deserted Seine’” (qtd. in Blix 2).

Gautier’s account is striking not only for the way that it figures Paris as having moved not only two thousand years into the future—leaving behind only ruins—but also two thousand years backwards, as well—thus leaving us with a scene more recognizable as antiquity than of either modernity or sci-fi futurity. Five years later, Laura Rees, a young Philadelphian recounting her continental travels in *We Four, Where We Went and What We Saw in Europe*, describes her (by then requisite) visit to the Tuileries ruins with a similar blend of “untimely” nostalgia, insisting that while the palace “received its death-blow in 1871” (81), the ruins left in its stead “were not made by Time!” (81). The poem she includes with her travel sketch echoes that what made these modern ruins most affecting was precisely their uneasy temporal positioning—a product of a too recent past but figured as oddly outside of time altogether. But where Gautier, in gazing on the smoking ruins, saw only a dead city—a city whose near-evaporation stands in for or effaces the way we might see Paris at the moment of his tour not so much as a “dead city” but rather as a city of the dead, with bodies quite literally littering its streets—Rees, anticipating James’s visit to his vanished house, chooses instead to personify the ruins themselves, mourning

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I’m thinking here of Communards who lamented that “the only crime of the Commune was to have anticipated the future” (qtd. in Beaumont 480), while their critics complained, instead, that the revolution portended or instantiated a turn to the (primitive) past.
their loss as if they, not unlike a person, were gone too soon: “All that was grand was prostrate there/Wrecked in its Glowing Prime” (81).

Fig. 11. “Les étrangers visitent nos ruines.” Courtesy of the Musee d’art et de l’histoire, St. Denis.

If Gautier and Rees’s respective travel sketches help to recover the ways that the Parisian ruinscape aroused fascination precisely because they were freshly made and immediately commodified (“Not made by time”/Not made by history?), their accounts also bring into relief the way that these ruins were, most notably in American accounts of them, so often in turn
imagined as a wounded, victimized body. Such a form of description—I’m tempted to say possession—signaled a trans-national loss that came to seem (or rather, to feel), for many Americans, strangely personal. And in my reading, the engraving above illustrates—even as it pokes fun at—the tourists’ fascination with these newly-minted ruins, but also suggests a certain ambivalence towards these “foreigners visiting our ruins” (emphasis mine), an ambivalence that registers a certain anxiety about the threat of dispossession.

In his groundbreaking study, *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of Urban Modernity, 1819-1919*, Nick Yablon persuasively argues that America’s nineteenth-century fascination with urban ruins—most specifically, *its own*—was rooted in the experience of its uniquely “instant” ruins: “The most glaring anomalies of America’s ruins…were their temporal properties, or what I call their *untimeliness*. The actual ruins forged by the great fires that periodically ravaged its cities, by the scorched-earth tactics of General Sherman’s rapid advance through the South, or by the equally swift and destructive swings of the capitalist economy, were all *instantaneous* and largely unanticipated, and thus radically different from those formed over time” (emphasis mine 10). And such domestic ruins were equally marked by their instantaneous consumption: “In addition to being produced in an instant, they were also *consumed* immediately, before they had time (even if they were made of stone) to attract foliage, accrue a patina, or merge into their surroundings” (10). Yet it is, I argue, a similarly “untimely” quality that helps make the

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116 “As citizens of a republic that was at an earlier state of its political, economic, territorial, and urban development, Americans assumed themselves—and were assumed by Europeans—to be spatially, temporally, and temperamentally distant from ruins, even if they still needed to heed their warnings. Not until this cyclical paradigm was superceded by new conceptions of temporality in the early nineteenth century did American ruins—and an American cult of the ruin—materialize” (20). Yablon notes in passing the “photographic outpouring” that followed the assault on the Paris Commune, but seems unaware of their transatlantic appeal, perhaps because he is most interested in the ongoing circulation of photographs of the San Francisco Earthquake (192).
Commune ruins such an immediate transatlantic sensation and tourist attraction, and in turn such a sight to be conspicuously revisited. Such symptomatic returns to Paris’s broken landscape would seem also always to stand in place of—and perhaps facilitate the forgetting of—the postbellum U.S.’s own war ravaged cities and landscapes of loss.117

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Visiting European ruins was, in itself, nothing new, but the sight of Paris en ruine presented a far different (and often far more discomfiting) picture for American tourists. Neither a product of “time,” nor an already well-trod ruinscape, their fate and their meaning were not immediately reducible to standard Grand Tour narratives of the picturesque. Put simply, the “scars” in the landscape (and the body politic) were still fresh; images of the pétroleuse and the “savage” Communards needed to be summoned to keep them in check, effectively cordonning off memories of the Commune’s suppression and scenes of fraternal urban warfare and replacing them with images of a scarred cityscape. Even more crucially, Paris’ “open ruins” did not look the way ruins were expected to—so much so, in fact, that American naturalist John Burroughs quipped in Appleton’s that they were “by far the best-behaved ruins I ever saw... I came near passing some of the most noted during my first walk without observing them….No litter or rubbish, no charred timbers or blackened walls, only vacant windows and wrecked interiors, which do not very much mar the general outside effect.”118 Literary critic Daryl Lee, in

117 Sweet argues that images such as “Ruins in Charleston” demonstrate “the restorative but evasive pastoralism” which allowed Northern viewers to re-appropriate the Southern landscape (163). Such images no doubt textured the way Americans read the photography of Paris in ruin. It seems worth noting, however, that no explicit connections to Civil War ruins are, as far as I can tell, ever made in American periodical coverage of post-Commune ruinscape, though scenes from the Chicago fire of 1871 are immediately likened to the “wrecks of Paris.”

118 See in “A Glimpse of France.” Appleton’s Journal 18 Jan 1873: 107. (The essay was also included in Burroughs’ well-reviewed (and several times reprinted) 1876 collection Winter Sunshine.) What intrigues me most about this passage is the way that Burroughs personifies and
examining the relationship between French literary forms and architectural ruin, emphasizes the radical spatial fluidity of Paris’s ruins: “By its physical form as by its symbolic associations, the open ruin links up with the azure sky, the desert, the abyss—so many anti-sites—because it tends towards the indistinct, undifferentiated, informe. If the ruin is an architectural object that disrupts the confines of architecture per se, if it undermines architecture’s attempt to divide and give measure to space, then the open ruin is one of its most synthetic models” (69). Yet as art historian Jeannene Przbyski explains, French photographs of Paris’s open ruins (and in turn their woodcut illustrations/engravings) often self-consciously re-framed them to more closely resemble more recognizable sites of antiquity: “The ruins are pictured through multiple frames of archways and apertures—the rubble-strewn streets of the modern city seen through timeworn, crumbled forms reminiscent of Roman viaducts. They are also painstaking in their richness of detail, less like sketches than like tracings of the spidery networks of cracked mortar, the jagged edges of broken lumbar and shattered stone” (264-5). But while these images were widely recirculated in the U.S., the discursive memoryscape that accompanied them resisted such visual cues, time and again emphasizing instead the painful impressions left by the sight of “broken lumbar and shattered stone.”

The ruins of the Tuileries Palace were the only remainders of the Bloody Week left to stand for over a decade in their charred state, and quickly became a pivotal Parisian tourist-pilgrimage sight and emblem of the what one American writer would describe as “gashes and
scars” in Paris’s landscape (Wister 673). Enshrined in American memory by way of ongoing periodical coverage in the form of commemorative histories of the site and dozens of tourist sketch-pilgrimages that appeared in both high and low-brow journals and magazines, the Tuileries largely came to stand in for the ruins of Paris in the American imagination; even more importantly, for many observers the Tuileries ruins seemed most acutely to testify to the crimes of the Commune. They thus function as a key site for considering American memory of—and affective responses to—the post-Commune terrain of Paris. “The pale ghost of the Palace that had died by fire” (as James will describe it in The Tragic Muse, 181) will, in other words, become so familiar a sight to Americans that Strether’s requisite return to the site in The Ambassadors seems highly overdetermined. We’ll return to this scene more particularly later in the chapter; for now, I want simply to highlight that Strether’s return—and more particularly, the historic sense awakened by the sight of the Palace that was not there—revisits and crucially reworks a well-trod mass-cultural scene.

With no little emotion, a writer for the New York Evangelist thus reports of his 1881 return to Paris after an eighteen-year absence: “Nothing saddens me more than to see the havoc wrought by the wild beasts of the Commune…Every day, almost, I pass what were the Tuileries; now, except at the ends, a blackened mass of crumbling ruins; I look across the Seine and there are the marks of the same fiendish fingers” (emphasis mine 1). The Philadelphia writer (and good friend of Henry James) Sarah B. Wister, echoes a similar sentiment in Lippincott’s: “It is not easy to say how long it will be before the deft and diligent hand can heal and hide the gashes and scars of that spring of 1871” (673). While both writers register the physical remainders of revolution as literal wounds, the marks of “fiendish fingers,” Wister’s figuring of the ruined Paris works at once to conjure the “gashes and scars” of the landscape and to imagine a future moment
when such wounds will finally have closed. Yet, as we’ll see, James’ account of the aftertaste of history suggests that the past will continue to speak, whether or not we see the physical remains of it in front of us.

Certainly the aim of the French government was to remove any visual remainders of the Commune and the Bloody Week—any remainders of the “gashes and scars of 1871”—starting with the Commune’s proclamations on city walls (“Ruins of Paris” 2). But debates about what to do with the Tuileries ruins curiously raged in France throughout the 1870s, and garnered continuing interest (and copy) in a variety of U.S. periodicals, from architectural digests and general interest journals to children’s magazines. An 1883 piece in *Youth’s Companion*, reporting on the Tuileries’s expected removal, lamented, for example, that “it will not be very long before the last vestige of the ancient palace of the Tuileries, at Paris, will have disappeared…Since [it was burned by the Communards] it has stood gaunt and grim, in the midst of the most beautiful quarter of the city, a mass of charred and blackened ruins” (60); while an American humor magazine, *Puck*, adopted a more sanguine take on the matter: “American tourists will be glad to hear that the French Chamber of Deputies has ordered the complete demolition of the ruins of the Tuileries. There will no longer be occasion to flounder about in the endeavor to get within pronouncing distance of the word” (55). A headline in *The Washington Post* suggested simply: “The Tuileries Doomed,” its accompanying article emphasizing that clearing away the ruins would leave behind a more gaping problem in the landscape: “Unquestionably the ruins in their present state are an eye-sore, and recall somewhat too vividly
the année terrible. But, as M. Haussmann pointed out to his colleagues in the chamber, when the eye-sore is gone, there will remain something yet more unsightly behind” (2).

The Nothing That is Not There & the Nothing That Is

As the “Tuileries Doomed” article already intimates, the clearing away of the Tuileries ruins in 1883 will leave something “yet more unsightly behind,”—or, as James will describe it in The Ambassadors, “an irremediable void” in the landscape; it thus marks neither their end, nor the finale of American fascination with the sight of them. Indeed, American periodicals helped to keep the memory site alive as a visual and discursive landscape, and in turn a “visitable” lost landmark, by way of a number of retrospective features that recounted the history of the now vanished palace and its savage “death” at the hands of the Communards. “Boston Brahmin” Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. noted of his 1884 return to the site where the Tuileries once stood, “The recollection of the sorrow, the shame, and the agony she [i.e., the Palace] passed through since I left her picking her way on the arm of the Citizen King…rose before me sadly as I looked upon the high board fence [surrounding the remaining ruins]… (Our Hundred Days 177). A decade later, the highbrow Century magazine would publish an article, “The Tuileries Under the

119 It seems worth noting the incredible incongruity of Paris’s venerable “demolition artist,” Baron Haussmann, championing the cause of leaving the Tuileries ruins intact.

120 Throughout the 1870s and into the 1890s, articles on the ruins of Paris—and the Tuileries ruins in particular—garnered copy in a variety of American periodicals, among them Harper’s Weekly, Appleton’s Journal, American Literary Gazette, Frank Leslie’s Sunday Magazine, Lippincott’s Magazine of Popular Literature and Science, The New York Evangelist, Puck, Michigan Farmer, The American Architect and Building News, The Century and The Youth’s Companion. And the shadow of these ruins is long: in 1931 The Christian Science Monitor ran a piece for those “curious to see some remnants of the building destroyed by the Commune”—detailing that pieces of the building had been relocated to a garden in Surenes (16).
Second Empire,” that not only echoed Holmes’s formulation of the “agony” the Tuileries had undergone, but weirdly figured the actual death of the building for its readers some two decades after its “demise.” In her nostalgic and otherwise anodyne reminiscences of court life at the Tuileries during the Second Empire, Anna Bicknell elaborates at length on the final hours of the Tuileries Palace, insistently (and uncannily) describing the building’s destruction as a kind of murder:

But the Tuileries was soon to perish in a catastrophe recalling memories of Ninevah and Babylon. Bergeret, the communist leader, had declared that the Tuileries would be in ashes before he left it, and he kept his word…. In this dreadful task he was assisted by a butcher named Benot. During the afternoon of that fatal day, omnibuses and carts loaded with gunpowder and petroleum repeatedly crossed the court of the Louvre and the Place du Carrousel…. When all was ready, with the delight of a madman, Benot set fire to the building. At a few minutes to nine the great clock stopped, under the influence of the fire. (…) It was an awful but magnificent spectacle…. The whole [of the Louvre] was threatened with destruction, including the picture-galleries and the museums. Happily MacMahon’s troops arrived in time to save the latter. (651)

Bicknell’s sensational account effectively displaces the violence of General MacMahon and the French government troops onto the Communards by emphasizing the “butchery” involved in their burning of the Tuileries. The Communard Benot, in her hyberbolic account, thus gleefully watches his “dreadful task” like a “madman”—and the Tuileries’ clock, not unlike a heart, comes to a stop as the flames ravage the building. The horror of the “catastrophe” is put to a happy end by MacMahon who “saves” the Louvre from the hands of the Commune, hands that already “defiled” the Tuileries before they had burned it by having “fetes” inside it. But what is most
striking about Bicknell’s account of the Tuileries is not simply the way it so vividly literalizes the wounded landscape so many Americans found in Paris, but rather the way it so effectively crystallizes the intensity of the loss Americans came to associate with Paris’s ruined landscape. In that sense it bears out Marx’s prescient contention in *The Civil War in France* that “the bourgeoisie of the whole world, which looks complacently upon the wholesale massacre after the battle, is convulsed by horror at the desecration of brick and mortar” (113). For that sensation of loss—and “convulsion by horror”—would, in turn, most often work to bury the memory of that other history of the Bloody Week, the spectacular death toll and, as James would put it, “the fresh made graves” in Paris (*Transatlantic Sketches* 100).

**History’s Aftertaste**

In *Transatlantic Sketches*, a volume of travel writing largely collected from letters and sketches Henry James wrote on his 1872-3 treks across England, Germany, Italy and the recently war-ravaged France, the young James lingers over the ruins that dot the well-trod tourist route he follows with his Aunt Kate and sister Alice. Aestheticizing his surrounding scene, he explores the sensation of what Rose Macaulay so well describes as “ruin-pleasure” (348)—the thrill occasioned by the curious perfection of a building in decay.¹²¹ Of England, James suggests, for example: “In so far as beauty of structure is beauty of line and curve, balance and harmony of masses and dimensions, I have seldom relished it as on the grassy nave of some crumbling church” (52), while in his sketch of Rome he writes a little self-consciously of that “great

¹²¹ Macaulay reminds us of Henry James’ own ambivalence regarding the great pleasure he takes from such tourist-sights: “‘A heartless pastime,’ [James] called his own ruin-questing…‘and the pleasure, I confess, shows a note of perversity’” (qtd. in Macaulay xvii). See also James’ “Roman Rides” in *Collected Travel Writings* (Library of America edition, 441).
neighborhood of ruins” (47), the hyper-mediated aqueducts: “the picture has a charm that has not yet been sketched away” (emphasis mine 147).

In his recent essay, “Henry James, Cultural Critic,” Pierre A. Walker draws attention to the new accessibility of James’ early travel sketches (thanks to the LOA publication of his Collected Travel Writings) and calls on Jamesian criticism to attend to these oft-neglected, harder to categorize writings. (A decade earlier, John Carlos Rowe sounded a similar clarion call in The Other James, suggesting that we might read Parisian Sketches alongside AS as works of “critical theory” (7-8).) Yet James Buzard’s influential 1993 PMLA piece, “A Continent of Pictures: Reflections on the ‘Europe’ of Nineteenth-Century Tourists,” was an early exception to the trend towards privileging AS to the exclusion of James’ earlier travel writings. In it, Buzard shrewdly suggests the ways that the young James repeatedly invokes only to subtly undermine “the time honored-conventions of picturesqueness” (35) in these early sketches. Deftly drawing our attention to moments of lingering textual tension and ambivalence, Buzard ultimately charts, however, the persistence of what he terms “picturesque politics”—the politics of, in other words, a status quo amenable to the persistence of the picturesque itself—across James’s travel writings and into his late novels. Even more importantly, he argues that “in the nearly four dozen essays collected in Transatlantic Sketches and Portraits of Places, ‘Europe’ hovers before the young James as a ‘poetic’ or ‘fairy precinct’ in which life, properly organized, tends toward a succession of lovely, poignant or sublime pictures” (36).

And yet the young James’ sightseeing tour of “the burnt-out ruins and barricades of the Commune” on his first day in Paris in June 1872 would seem a singular interruption in this

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otherwise fairy precinct (Conquest of London 63). For unlike French contemporaries, Gautier and Goncourt, who, in Daryl Lee’s phrase, see the “open ruins” of the Commune only in terms of “ruinist ideas from earlier in the century,” James finds in Paris a landscape of loss at once more unassimilable and more modern, an already “mediated” space that nevertheless cannot be neatly mapped onto either a charming sketch or sublime picture—indeed, a sight that cannot “speak” and cannot, in turn, generate for James such a sketch. Put simply, while the picturesque ruins of Chester or Rome might allow James to imagine a world where places might become, for the tourist observer, simply pictures, where the ruins themselves always already signify art, his encounter in Paris would seem precisely to interrupt the neatness of this picturesque narrative. For in Paris, James finds a landscape that he does not so much see, as sense.

In the 1872 sketch he titles “The Parisian Stage,” James details his most direct spatial encounter with (and detours around) the Commune:

I shall never forget a certain evening in early summer when, after busy, dusty, weary day in the streets, staring at the charred ruins and finding in all things the vague aftertaste of gunpowder, I repaired to the Theatre Français to listen to Molière’s ‘Mariage Forcé’ and Alfred de Musset’s ‘Il ne Faut Jurer de Rien.’ The entertainment seemed to my travel-tired brain what a perfumed bath is to one’s

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123 In The French Side of Henry James, Fussell suggests that James accesses the ruined Tuileries by way of Zola’s 1892 novel, Le DWBacle (187). Yet Edel notes that James specifically toured “the burnt-out ruins of the Commune” in 1872, and as James’s later biographer, Paul Fisher, points out, HJ and Alice toured the Louvre area extensively, “just to the west [of which], the charred stone shell of the Tuileries Palace stood starkly out” (289).

124 In “Rimbaud’s Ruin of French Verse: Spatiality and the Paris Commune Ruins,” Lee writes suggestively of the “open ruins” of the Commune: “If the ruin is an architectural object that disrupts the confines of architecture per se, if it undermines architecture’s attempt to divide and give measure to space, then the open ruin is one of its most synthetic models” (emphasis mine 69). See in Nineteenth-Century French Studies 32 (Fall-Winter) 2003-4, 69-82.
weary limbs, and I sat in a sort of languid ecstasy of contemplation and wonder—

wonder that the tender flower of poetry and art should bloom again so bravely

over blood-stained pavements and fresh made graves. (100)

On the face of it, the passage neatly anticipates readings of the “lesson” Hyacinth Robinson
draws in Paris—the consolation, indeed, the triumph of art against (or even borne out of) the ruin
of history,\textsuperscript{125} and James’s own languid ecstasy in—or perverse pleasure from—the scenes of
devastation before him. But while the theater’s ministrations no doubt soothe James’s “travel-
tired brain,” the passage suggests that his tour of the “charred ruins” have not, even in the
theater, entirely escaped him. The spectacular visibility of the ruins is, however, synesthetically
marked for James not as a sight (or even an afterimage) but rather as a taste—“the vague
aftertaste of gunpowder” that shadows the landscape.\textsuperscript{126} And James’s suggestive evocation of
gunpowder, in turn, occasions not a lingering sense of its smell or sound—remainders of a
figurative past presence—but rather their aftertaste—as if the city is (and will be) shadowed by
its presence, the “aftertaste” of ruin, even after the most outward signs of it—the ruins
themselves—have been cleared away. Even more intriguingly, the bodies and bloodshed
otherwise occluded by the ruinscape resurface in this moment, for even as the ruins lead James to
turn away from “the vague aftertaste of gunpowder,” the art James enjoys on the Parisian stage

\textsuperscript{125} While I am thinking here most specifically of Buzard’s reading in “A Continent of Pictures”
(42), it is more or less borne out in various readings of the novel.

\textsuperscript{126} I can’t help wondering here if there’s a connection between Henry James’s formulation of
multi-sensory memory and William James’ writings on memory and the senses. WJ’s description
of “afterimages” in \textit{Principles of Psychology} seems particularly intriguing in relation to HJ’s:
“As a rule sensations outlast for some little time the objective stimulus which occasioned them.
This phenomenon is the ground of those “afterimages” which are familiar in the physiology of
the sense-organs. If we open our eyes instantaneously upon a scene, and then shroud them in
complete darkness, it will be as if we saw the scene in ghostly light through the dark screen. We
can read off details in it which were unnoticed whilst the eyes were open” (645).
itself is here constituted by—and cannot help but recall, if only so as to cover over—the blood on
the Parisian pavements the theatergoer so readily seeks to forget. The “wounded” landscape thus
awakens in James a palpable historical sense, or more precisely a multi-sensory overload. Unlike
the tourist-in-ruin who mourns only lost landmarks and butchered buildings, James seems, in this
uncanny aftertaste of memory, to actually re-embodie (or reanimate) the bloody traces of the past.

The significance of James’s brief recollection of the sensation of the Commune ruins is
perhaps best underscored by their notable absence in his letters home from that same early
summer day. In his 28-9 June missive to his parents, for example, James writes of his brief stop
in Paris and tour of the city, emphasizing its unchanged quality: “I find the place very delightful,
too; surprisingly, so, for I had expected to receive all sorts of painful impressions and to feel the
shadow of Bismark and the Commune lying on everything. But to the casual eye, there are no
shadows anywhere, and Paris is still the perfection of brightness and neatness and form and
taste.”

The letter is curious for what it leaves out, for the way that it so insistently clings to the
idea of Paris as “the perfection of brightness and neatness and form and taste” and so assertively
claims that nothing, on the surface, has changed in the city, despite the ruins that were
everywhere around him and everywhere being written home about. Peter Brooks offers us, in his
excellent recent study of Henry James in the Paris of 1875-6, the prospect of a James on whom
something could be lost and it is tempting to read the young James’s omission of the visitable
and visible past that is right in front of his nose as an instance of curious, even willful, oversight
not unlike Strether’s failure in The Ambassadors to see what’s most plainly staring him in the

127 Henry James, “To Henry James, Sr. and Mary Walsh James,” 28 June 1872. This letter was
published for the first time in Pierre A. Walker and Greg W. Zacharias’s recent volume of The
Complete Letters of Henry James, 1872-6, vol. 1 (2009). I am extremely grateful to Dr. Zacharias
at the Center for Henry James Studies for providing me with the transcriptions and facsimiles of
the letters from James’ 1872 travels, and also for his thorough and helpful suggestions on the
1872 trip and James’ early Parisian writings.
But before we take James to task for seeing only what he wants to see, or worse, for delighting in overlooking the blighted Paris all around him, it seems worth noting that James’s disavowal of the scars of history written on the surface of the landscape also oddly anticipates his impressions of the “charred ruins” he claims not to see. For the mere anticipation of the sight of Paris in ruin already provokes in him a historic sense marked by sensory overload—a feeling that his body will become the surface upon which the memory will be written—indeed, tasted—the sight imagined to leave a “painful impression”¹²⁸ and the spectral presence of the past not registered for James as the very physical sight but rather imagined to be a spectral presence “lying on everything.”

The specter of the Commune resurfaces far more pronouncedly in James’s September 22nd letter to William, but he initially seems to overlook the “gashes and scars” in the landscape all around him. Unlike his fellow tourists, he laments that “Paris continues to be very pleasant, but doesn’t become interesting. You get tired of a place which you can call nothing but charmant” (qtd.in Edel, Letters 300).¹²⁹ Yet he goes on to write, “The want of comprehension of the real moral situation of France leaves one unsatisfied, too. Beneath all this neatness and coquetry, you seem to smell the Commune suppressed, but seething” (qtd. in Edel, Letters 300). James thus seems to suggest that the history right under his nose is something he smells more than sees, and even more crucially that everyone else is overlooking what’s right in front of them. In other words, in overlooking the ruins and instead “smelling” the Commune’s spectral

¹²⁸ What interests me most about James’s choice of the term “impressions” is the fact that it implies both a surface on which an imprint can be made (a writing surface, a spatial terrain, and skin/flesh/affect in the case of James) and the palimpsest upon which many impressions have been made and which always implies multiple layers and remainders inhabiting the same space.

presence below the surface, James not only senses that the revolution is not dead, but also anticipates that even when the visible “gashes and scars of the spring of 1871” have been cleared away, the revolution will continue to simmer below the surface of the landscape. The past otherwise so completely obliterated, the bodies otherwise so utterly forgotten, the revolution so thoroughly routed, nevertheless shadows the landscape, lurking “beneath” the surface, but nevertheless almost sensible. But what sort of subterranean “historic sense” is James here invoking? What sort of refusal to “see” that in turn becomes an injunction to smell what’s right in front of you, to feel (or revisit) the impression of a past that refuses to die?

**The Politics of Detours**

To begin to tackle those questions, I turn now to James’s invocations of—and even more intriguingly, his detours around—the Commune in *The American* and *Princess Casamassima* and what they reveal about James’s reading of both urban space and spatial memory. At least since the publication of Jonah Raskin’s 1965 article, “James and the French Revolution,” it has been something of a commonplace in Jamesian scholarship that 1789 was the revolution always on Henry’s mind, or, rather, “the most important year in history” (724). For as Raskin points out, James’s fascination with it surfaces again and again throughout his texts (724). But while 1789 is the revolution about which James no doubt speaks most often and most explicitly, the visitable

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130 Raskin emphasizes that James’ fascination with 1789 was shared by his contemporaries: “James’s entire generation focused on 1789, for the Victorians were terrified by the thought of social revolution” (725). While I do not doubt this, I do find it curious that Raskin overlooks the way Europe’s most recent (and more radical) social revolution—namely, the Paris Commune—fanned those fears.
remainders and strange “aftertaste” of 1871 pointedly circulate through his novels, often shadowing (and being overshadowed by) James’s more “speakable” fascination.

Although *The American* was written during his 1875-6 tenure in Paris, and coincides with his dispatches on the French artistic and social scene for the *Herald Tribune*, dispatches that demonstrate a keen awareness of the contemporary political scene, James nevertheless conspicuously avoids the specter of the Commune (and its visitable remainders) by antedating the novel, sending his protagonist, Christopher Newman, to the Paris of the Empire, a Paris as yet unscarred by the Franco-Prussian war and ferocious “fraternal” urban warfare.131 While this temporal relocation allows James to present Paris *as it was* (or as so many tourists wished it might be), a move not unlike that of the Impressionists who painted over the scars of the Commune by painting Paris *as if it were* (already, once again) *whole*, I wonder if we might read the move not simply as willful forgetting? For its detour provides, as John Carlos Rowe has suggested, insight into precisely the political scene—in particular, the forces of monarchism and republicanism—that will come to a boil in 1871.132

*Princess Casamassima*, written a decade later, seems then, on the face of it, James’s most explicit and most spectacular engagement with the memory of the Commune: its history is briefly recounted in the text, its memory is invoked by the novel’s radical underground, and its most visible remainder—the Communard refugee, M. Poupin—plays no small a role in its

131 In “The Politics of Innocence in Henry James’s *The American,*” John Carlos Rowe suggestively argues that “the political and historical aspects of the international theme were of considerable importance to Henry James as he began work on *The American*” (*At Emerson’s Tomb* 69), and contrasts Newman’s problematic ignorance of the political situation in France with James’ own avid reading of French newspapers and reports in the *Tribune*.

132 Argues Rowe: “The rapid changes in the political revenge drama acted out in France after the Franco-Prussian War has certain similarities with the cycles of revenge that organize the plot of *The American*” (190).
protagonist’s life.\textsuperscript{133} Yet even here the head-on engagement is marked by displacement and disavowal: the revolutionary scene is transplanted to London, and M. Poupin’s revolutionary credentials as a Communard are markedly re-routed through 1848.\textsuperscript{134} (“He was,” writes James, “a Republican of the old-fashioned sort, of the note of 1848, humanitarian and idealistic, infinitely addicted to fraternity and equality, and inexhaustibly surprised and exasperated at finding so little enthusiasm for them in the land of his exile” (114); the Commune’s entrance into the text is thus dressed, as it were, in the now safer garb of an earlier revolution.) Even more pointedly, it is also the text that would seem most assiduously to efface 1871 from the landscape of Paris during Hyacinth Robinson’s pleasure tour of the city.

Not unlike James himself in 1872, Hyacinth travels to Paris in the early 1880s, and finds no scars in the built world, no painful impressions or reminders of either the Commune or the terrible reprisals that followed it—despite the earlier evocation of them in the novel and ongoing presence in mass-cultural memory. James’ protagonist-tourist is dazzled instead by the crowds, the cafes, the shops and “the general magnificence of Paris on a perfect evening in June” (379); “he recognized, he greeted, with a thousand palpitations, the seat of his maternal ancestors—was proud to be associated with so much of the superb, so many proofs of a civilization that had no

\textsuperscript{133} It seems worth mentioning that while partisans of the Commune referred to themselves as Communards, their critics quickly labeled them—both in the U.K. and the U.S.—“Communists.” James’s choice of nomenclature is therefore surprisingly sympathetic. Of course, the novel never tires of ironizing Poupin, of pointing to the ways that there is something a little hollow—or rather, a little performative—to his politics and “the bitterness” of his exiled state (284).

\textsuperscript{134} Jeffory Clymer similarly suggests that “James’s terrorist fiction is particularly fascinating because it enacts a remarkable series of displacements. Despite the fact that working-class deprivation and anger loom everywhere in the shadows of the plotline, James’s model of terrorist violence and revolution is against aristocratic rather than capitalist foes. Moreover, his terrorists are Russian, German, and French rather than the Irish and Irish Americans who were performing terrorist acts throughout London in the 1880s. And most notoriously, he arms his ill-fated terrorist, Hyacinth, with a small pistol rather than with dynamite, the bête noire of the 1880s” (72). See in America’s Culture of Terrorism: Violence, Capitalism, and the Written Word.
visible rough spots” (emphasis mine 380). And though Poupin provides him with contact information for fellow Communards, the “radical” bookbinder notably fails to pay them a visit. For Hyacinth, by this point in the novel, has begun to show a change of heart, a falling away from revolutionary principles, and sees no reason to “pretend that he cared for what they cared for in the same way as they cared for it” (382).

In short, Hyacinth goes to Paris and finds it simply “splendid” (380). But what interests me about this visit is not the way that falling in love with Paris seems so coterminous with falling away from radical politics, but rather what Hyacinth’s walks suggest about Henry James’s reading of history written in space. For while Mark Seltzer persuasively argues that PC is “a novel about spectatorship, about seeing and being seen” (508), it is also a novel about what lies beneath and beyond the visible. Hyacinth is, for example, notably accompanied on his sightseeing tours of the city by “that vague yet vivid personage” (381), his ghostly grandfather, a fallen ’48er: “the pair had now roamed together through all the museums and gardens, through the principal churches (the republican martyr was very good-natured about all of this), through the passages and arcades, up and down the great avenues” (381). The “republican martyr” consents to the new Paris “good-naturedly” (381); there is no hint of “the ecstasy of the barricade” still lingering around him (380). But while this might seem simply a further detour

135 Collin Meissner argues that the “splendid Paris” that Hyacinth finds is largely one of his own design, mediated by his ideas about and early reading on the city: “James shows how Hyacinth has displaced the real Europe and substituted in its place his fictive impression of what he sees” (66). See in “The Princess Casamassima: ‘A Dirty Intellectual Fog.’”

136 Wendy Graham reads the intriguing presence of Hyacinth’s grandfather as part of the larger subterranean queer politics of the novel: “Hyacinth’s imaginary encounter with his maternal grandfather, the French revolutionary ‘who had known the ecstasy of the barricade and had paid for it with his life,’ exemplifies the novel’s parallel discourse, in which the political forces proscribing nonreproductive sexuality and the psychic forces repressing homogenic desire mirror each other” (181).
away from politics, Hyacinth’s refusal to see the scars of 1871—to see anything but a “splendid Paris”—makes his visit to the site that isn’t there—the (no longer visible) barricades of 1848—all the more remarkable: “Wondering, repeatedly, where the barricade on which his grandfather fell had been erected, he at last satisfied himself (but I am unable to trace the process of the induction) that it had bristled across the Rue Sainte-Honoré, very near to the church of Saint-Roch” (381). While the barricade that is not there functions here as a kind of tourist site, part of the list that Hyacinth seems to cross of as he tours Paris, it also points, however fleetingly, to the possibility that two contents can occupy one space, a site where space—not unlike the barricade that bristles—can be felt as much as found. And Hyacinth’s trip to the barricades anticipates Strether’s visit to the Palace that isn’t there in The Ambassadors, even as it draws our attention to the “irremediable voids” in the landscape and the layers that lie beneath them, the spaces in which more than one history (one might even say more than one Paris) spectacularly collide.

Landmarks and Marked Absences

E. M. Forster famously argues of The Ambassadors that “Paris irradiates the book from end to end. It is an actor, though always disembodied,… and when we have finished the novel and allowed its incidents to blur that we may see the pattern plainer, it is Paris that gleams at the

\[137\] In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud likens the unconscious and the subterranean strata of Rome’s history to one another, but ultimately suggests that “it is clearly pointless to spin out this fantasy any further: the result would be unimaginable, indeed absurd. If we wish to represent a historical sequence in spatial terms, we can do so only by juxtaposition in space, for the same space cannot accommodate two different things” (emphasis mine 9).
centre of the hour-glass shape.” Indeed, James, after some hesitation about the setting of his novel, writes in his notebooks: “I’m afraid it must be Paris; if he’s an American” (227).

It must be Paris, then, but which Paris must it be? More precisely, what is it that gleams back at us when, in Forster’s fine formulation, the action of The Ambassadors itself begins to blur? For many of James’s critics, the Paris of the novel seems not unlike the city that Mamie takes in “of a fine afternoon” from the balcony of her hotel, a place “she might in fact have extemporized, under the charm of the Rue de Rivoli, a little makeshift Paris of wonder and fancy” (TA 377)—a Paris, in other words, evacuated of memory and devoid of a history it could properly call its own. The Rue de Rivoli, in such a reading, is, as even Edwin Sill Fussell in The French Side of Henry James would have it, significant simply for its tourist hotels, with its view of the street and the Tuileries merely a fine vantage point from which to take in the sunshine on a summery afternoon. From this light, James’s Paris seems principally a city of tourists as ambassadors and ambassadors as tourists, a landscape of well-trod landmarks and well-lit boulevards designed for the pleasure of those who, like Jim Pocock, are simply passing through on holiday.

Such a reading does not, however, fully account for the ways in which the city of Paris, as in Hanna Nesher-Wirth’s suggestive reading of the modern novel, was in no small sense

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140 In Fussell’s reading of it, “The Pococks’s hotel is for its brief flaming hour the obvious antithesis of Strether’s. It’s windows, with balcony (but maybe not a continuous balcony) overlooks a famous tourist street, as his do not.” (191).
constituted by its relationship to these very public places.\textsuperscript{141} For in the period just preceding and intervening between Strether’s trips to France, Paris was experiencing its full-scale (and oft-discussed) move to what David Harvey, in his landmark work of urban history, \textit{Paris, Capital of Modernity}, terms a kind of “extroverted urbanism” (113). Modernity for Paris was signaled, in other words, precisely by this very collision of the private and the public spheres on the grand Boulevards, a collision lit by gas lamps and one that spilled over into the city’s cafes and grand \textit{magasins}. The space of the tourist—the cafes and theaters and shops elaborated by Nesher-Wirth as the site of the modern novel—was in Paris the space of the everyday as well, with bourgeois life increasingly one lived out in the open, a kind of sight-seeing—and spectacle-seeking—at home as it were.

To see the Parisian as just another sort of tourist is, however, not the point, for it glosses over the politics—and often violent history—underwriting this extroverted urbanity wherein the native and the tourist might meet on the roughly common ground of the cafe or the Boulevard. For as Terry Eagleton points out apropos of the work of Harvey, “there could be nothing more political than \textit{just the way objects are spatially distributed}” (xiii, emphasis mine).\textsuperscript{142} Indeed, Paris under Haussmann’s direction was quite famously remapped in space so as to be the Paris of the spectacle rather than of the barricades; taking up a theme that Benjamin would later revisit in his \textit{Arcades Project}, Marx remarks upon the way in which the tourist was subsumed within Haussmann’s economy of forced urban transformation. In his apologetics for the fires that raged

\textsuperscript{141} Nesher-Wirth regards the tourist as most appropriately if curiously at home not only in James’s novel of Paris, but in the modern novel more generally, emphasizing the way in which the rupture of “home as the dominant chronotype” in modern fiction lends itself to a “propensity for public space in modern novels, for coffee houses, theaters, museums, public gardens, restaurants, hotels, plazas, and shops. And hence the appropriateness of the tourist or traveler as the protagonist of such novels, the man or woman who inhabits public space” (244).

\textsuperscript{142} See his Foreword to Ross’s \textit{The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune}. 
during the final days of the Commune’s suppression, Marx thus argues in *The Civil War in France* that “[such destruction] was still less than the vandalism of Haussmann, razing historic Paris to make place for the Paris of the sight-seer!” (115).

To return then to the city that Mamie may have extemporized from her balcony, although the novel, in later invoking Victor Hugo, may fail to mention that the Rue de Rivoli was notoriously Hugo’s least favorite part of Paris, seeing in it, as many of his contemporaries did, a detested marker of the great transformation (and leveling) of the city under Haussmannization, the text nevertheless reminds us that Strether is everywhere encountering a none too silent landscape. Landmarks and marked absences strike a nerve, ghosts attend the windows of Parisian ateliers, the hum of city life—“the faint murmur of the huge collective life, carried on out of doors” (*TA* 375)—follows him everywhere, and voices speak to him from streets and interiors with such audibility that the text eventually even provides them a name: “the vague voice of Paris.” Strether is strategically positioned to hear this voice, for, as many critics have noted, he is marked as a “returning observer”—a foreigner and a flâneur in a city uniquely suited to his “long vague walks.” Certainly it is his long-desired return that allows him a perspective on and nostalgia for Paris that separates him from tourists like Waymarsh or the Pococks—but it is the specific chronology of his trips to Paris that most keenly positions him to experience the degree

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143 Harvey writes, “There was only one street in Paris—the Rue de Rivoli—and it was being replicated everywhere, said Fournel, which perhaps explains Hugo’s cryptic response when asked in exile if he missed Paris: ‘Paris is an idea’ he said, and as for the rest, it is ‘the Rue de Rivoli, and I have always loathed the Rue de Rivoli’” (263).

144 “From beyond this, and as though from a great distance—beyond the court, beyond the *corps logis* forming the front—came, as if excited and exciting, the vague voice of Paris” (*TA* 476).
to which the city itself changed between his voyage in the 1860s and his return in the early 1900s.

While the changes under Haussmann are numerous and numerous remarked upon, Jamesian scholars often fall silent on the single most climactic event of that interim: namely, the Commune and its aftermath. As Ross notes in *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, the Commune’s suppression was the bloodiest in French history, as “more people died in the final week of May 1871 than in any of the battles of the Franco-Prussian war, or than in any previous ‘massacres’ (for e.g., the Terror) in French history” (4). Moreover, the fires lit in the final dying hours of the Commune—fires that razed numerous landmarks, including the Tuileries Palace, the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais-Royal, the finance ministry, the Palais de Justice and parts of the Louvre—would reverberate for generations. But it was not simply the fighting or the fires that left its mark on the terrain of Paris, for the Commune itself was, as Eagleton has argued, “a revolution out on the streets from the start, an uprising for which the bone of revolutionary contention was the streets themselves, rather than the streets as a front-line defense of a proletarian seizure of capital” (ix).

Not unlike James himself, Strether arrives at a moment when that turbulent history literally speaks to him from Paris’s scars and empty spaces, from ancient streets razed to create its Grands Boulevards and no less so from its missing palaces. If it is a voice that haunts Strether throughout the novel—a vague disquiet that, like the relationship between Chad and Mme de Vionnet, cannot be directly articulated—it is nonetheless a voice that speaks of a past that has played upon the streets even as it has been erased—one might say literally—from the very geography of the city. Much as it does in Balzac, Paris opens up to Strether on foot; as Fussell duly notes, “[our hero] seldom takes cabs and the Métro never” (185). In his walks, James’
flâneur stumbles upon and sometimes would seem even to pass by this history that seems at once scrawled upon the streets and echoing from them. Such topographical lacunae are, however, suggestive, resurfacing in provocative and provocatively unspeakable ways. In the course of nearly five hundred pages, then, not a single mention of the Commune surfaces in James’s text. Yet as Fussell astutely points out of the novel more generally, “The Ambassadors is the world’s great testimony to the art of leaving things out (as of course also to the art of putting things in, without which inclusion the leaving out would have no relevance)” (183). And so it is with its treatment of the Commune: what is left out only makes what is left in all the more striking. For though the Paris Commune is never directly spoken of in The Ambassadors, its presence is underscored by two pronounced topographical absences—one textual, the other literal—within the novel: namely, that of the Colonne Vendôme and the Palace of the Tuileries.

James stations Strether a mere minutes walk from the Tuileries gardens, the Rue de Rivoli, and the Pocock’s hotel. Although the text does not care to name his hotel, it is nevertheless one located along a touristic side-street that is exactly mapped out for us; as Strether reflects on the figure on Chad’s balcony, the “sole attenuation of his excluded state was his vision of the small, admittedly secondary hotel in the by-street from the Rue de la Paix, in which [Maria Gostrey’s] solicitude for his purse had placed him” (TA 125). Although the text specifies that he makes at least one trip to the Tuileries, and several to Sarah Pocock’s hotel from whose balcony the garden can be seen, it falls silent on one particular point: the unavoidable landmark standing between Strether and the Rue de Rivoli. For the Rue de la Paix curves off the Avenue de l’Opéra in one steadfast spoke directed firmly at the Tuileries, and in the middle of this chic commercial street is the Vendôme Column, elevated—at 142 ft.—to such a height that it literally dominates all progress between the Rue de Rivoli and the bustle of the Opéra. None too
surprisingly, the column found its way onto the itinerary of travel bibles like *Baedeker’s; Paris in a Week*, a guide put out as a “detailed programme” for British and American tourists and published shortly after Strether’s trip, noting the Vendôme’s “imposing appearance” (5), begins its tour of the city by way of that very spot. (James himself claims it as the site of his first memory of Paris, glimpsed in his second year from the vantage point of a pram.)*145

Which somewhat begs the question of just how Strether might have missed it in passing. Yet to overlook the column, or even simply failing to mention it altogether, seems itself an intricate oversight. For such a silence seems, albeit obliquely, to gesture back to the landmark’s highly politicized past. Although it was rebuilt in 1874, well before Strether’s return, its unmarked presence in the topography of the text summons the spectre of the 1871 destruction of the monument, the moment when, amidst much celebration, the Communards—reading the Column as a sign intimately bound up in imperial ambition and authoritarian rule—literally toppled it to the ground. This staged erasure of the Vendôme—condensing within in it the fall of the Second Empire—was regarded by one particularly fierce critic of the Commune as nothing short of an attack on history itself. But the fall of the Column was not so much a destruction of history as a spatial marker for the crossroads of it; in Ross’s suggestive formulation, “An awareness of social space, as the example of the Vendôme column makes clear, always entails an encounter with history—or better, a choice of histories” (8). If an encounter with the *Colonne Vendôme* is a confrontation with such a choice of histories, its reentry into the landscape marked a none too subtle erasure of the Commune and the choice it implied for the city. But not to see

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As Edel elaborates, “Henry James always said that his earliest memory was of the Place Vendôme in Paris, with its column celebrating the victories of Napoleon. He had been taken to England when he was six months old. France was visited the following year. This means that Henry’s remarkable ‘recollection’ of the Place Vendôme dated from his second year” (25). See in *Henry James: A Life*. James himself discusses the recollection in *A Small Boy and Others*. 

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the Column—to forget or even to fall silent in the face of it—is no less an encounter with social space. Indeed, the lacuna marks Strether’s first encounter with history as it plays out in space, even as the landmark’s non-appearance in the novel opens a textual gap that will be filled in by yet another encounter with history as it is written on the landscape. This silent, unremarked upon landmark will be, in other words, coupled with a none too silent marked absence in Paris’s terrain. And what opens up to him by its remarked upon absence is a shadowy signifier that will not—indeed, cannot—be named.

Strether encounters the Tuileries palace, or rather, the palace that is not there, on his second day in Paris while strolling with an “accidental air” (TA 111) through the city, a bout of flânerie that forestalls a meeting with the first batch of letters from “his chief correspondent” (TA 111). His trip to the Tuileries is similarly underscored by its own deferment, with the text leading us first “across the Tuileries and the River, [where he] indulged more than once…in a sudden pause before the book-stalls of the quay…” (TA 111), before seamlessly returning Strether back to the gardens. In proceeding analeptically past it before folding back into it, then, the narrative delays his moment of arrest before the space that was the palace much as Strether determinedly delays the pause that will bring him face to face with the letters.

Yet that initial suspension of Strether’s visit to the Tuileries seems particularly unwarranted, for in the gardens, all would seem to be sweetness and light—the scene itself picturesque to the point of its becoming almost paradigmatic, its figures themselves predictable as the hands of a finely-wound clock. Strether, no doubt occupying the role of tourist, looks then for Paris and finds it in a multitude of senses, in the morning which like a well-tuned clock strikes its “cheerful notes,” in the smell that is so redolent of the morning that is said to be sprinkled before being inhaled, and finally in the sight of French life that is not simply well-
ordered but itself a kind of testimony to order under the ensign of the military and the church—
with the milder steps of the “straightpacing priest” meeting “the sharp ones of a…soldier.”

The staging of this scene of well-ordered Frenchness—everything in its place as it were—is
likened by Strether not only to a clock but to a kind of open-air restaurant (or museum): “the air
had a taste as of something mixed with art, something that presented nature as a white-capped
master-chef” (111).

Critics have found in this moment proof that Strether-as-tourist never encounters a Paris
beyond that of the picturesque. Yet the Paris as “work of art” (to borrow Roxanna Pana-Oltean’s
term) that Strether encounters in the gardens is ultimately shattered by his encounter—through
the experience of the missing palace—with Paris as social space, with sight-seeing recast as
rereading the lost landmark as a charged site of historical memory. All, in other words, is not in
its place, finely-tuned and finely-wrought. And in a turn away from the picturesque, a turn away
from Strether-as-tourist, it is the nothing that is palpably not there that painfully arrests his
attention:

The palace was gone, Strether remembered the palace; and when he gazed into the
irremediable void of its site the historic sense in him might have been freely at
play—the play under which in Paris indeed it so often winces like a touched
nerve. He filled out the scene with dim symbols and scenes. (TA 111)

The palace is gone, and while Strether clearly remembers it, with characteristic narrative opacity,
we are told nothing of where it went or how it got there. A tourist in ruins—but in ruins that are

146 Pana-Oltean writes suggestively of the tourist’s search for a touch of the real: “Engaged in a
quest for authenticity, local specificity which can only be grasped through signs of its own usage,
the tourist—Culler’s agent of semiotics—seeks sign complexes which articulate the world and
invest it with reality” (182).
now no longer visible—Strether is transfixed by the “irremediable void,” forced to fill in the gap of the burned down palace with “dim symbols and scenes” of what was. To do so relies not only on his own past—his own memories of seeing it as a sightseer—but also on that of the palace, a past that the text can dimly gesture to but wills not to explain. That the landmark’s absence is in turn marked by a wound that can never be alleviated is, however, pronounced—as is the way in which the memory—“the historic sense”—set in motion by the void is suggested to be itself a kind of violence; whereas the narrative is reluctant to speak affirmatively of what exactly Strether feels in the face of it, resorting to the hypothetical—“the historic sense in him might have been freely at play”—it nevertheless concludes that such a play of memory is palpable, as if the memory itself plays out directly on the body, “winc[ing] like a touched nerve” in the face of such a sight. And as Strether fills in the gap opened by the palace that is both present-in-memory and absent-in-fact, those “dim symbols and scenes” (111) with which he does so leave everything unsaid—namely, the history Strether confronts in the scene of the palace—while the very onslaught of such scenes nonetheless summons that very history that remains otherwise opaque and unspoken.

Though the text relates that the pang of historic sense set in motion by the missing palace is one that is often so struck in Paris, Strether’s first tumble into this visceral reading of Paris’s past is a particularly suggestive one. As we’ve seen, the burned palace is a remarkably densely coded site of historical memory. Its remarked upon absence cannot but recall the fires that leveled it, yet it is simultaneously these fires which come, metaleptically, to stand in for the Commune itself in collective memory—revolution subsumed into its fiery aftermath. Indeed, I would draw attention to the double metonymy at work, with the palace pointing to the fires that come to stand in for the Commune, so that Strether’s unarticulated memory of the palace is itself inflected in the occulted signifier of which the empty space of the palace in turn speaks.
representations of the palace’s destruction would be repeatedly used to illustrate the “crimes of the Commune,” and in the politics of memory, the summary executions of Communards in the Tuileries would be buried beneath the weight of this lost landmark; the palace that is not there becoming the most salient of signifiers.

Although nothing speaks here of the spectre of 1871, it is a very telling nothing. While the encounter with the palace is, strictly speaking, a non-encounter, and one that Strether is able to walk away from—“float[ing] him unspent up the Rue de Seine” (*TA* 111)—what he cannot name—the occulted signifier—will nevertheless haunt him, circulating within the text in a constellation of veiled specters that say more than they might wish to about this history that is not named.

The fires that are at once evident—etched in as it were by the missing palace—and yet left unremarked upon in the gardens thus find another entry into the text, erupting from an otherwise innocuous nighttime view of the City of Light. During Strether’s last night vigil—his long waiting up for Chad—Paris spreads out before him, from the interior of Chad’s rooms, no longer as an iridescent jewel but rather most markedly as a well-lit landscape: “The night was hot and heavy and the single lamp sufficient; the great flare of the lighted city, rising high, spending itself afar, played up from the Boulevard and, through the vague vista of the successive rooms, brought objects into view” (*TA* 425). No doubt the city is here most immediately lit up by the gas lamps for which it was most famous, but the description of the city evokes the spectre of a landscape devoured by light, with “its great flare…rising high, spending itself afar”—a Paris, in other words, consumed in one vast flame. Pana-Oltean thus argues that “Strether…sees [in the great flare] an already painted ‘city in flames’ or ‘urbs incensa’ composition, and his vista too is a trompe l’oeil” (192). Yet for all that she might wish simply to reinscribe—or perhaps, re-
— the scene as silent landscape, confining it to the rubric of the picturesque, her reading falls curiously short. To gesture, in other words, even in general terms to the genre of “city in flames” without striking some memory of the Commune seems an oddly glaring oversight, falling silent, as it does, on the way in which such paintings would directly recall Paris and those May days when, very literally, the city was awash in flame—and, moreover, the way in which those days came to be represented on canvas. (A famous example of such a representation, Numa fils’s *Paris Incendié* (1871), is itself a kind of *trompe l’oeil*—originally a photogravure, it was retouched and recolored to dramatically highlight the conflagration of Paris. Yet the moment it arrests is nevertheless a sweeping horizon of the cityscape whose flare, as in Strether’s view of it, “spends itself afar.”)

The historical nerve which winces under an “assault of images” in Gloriani’s garden and which trails him even into the deepest recesses of Parisian interiors is one that is, again, given to us as “easily so struck in Paris” (*TA* 111). And this is brought into further relief by Strether’s own increasing sense of the cost of stops—of sight-seeing—in the city: “Poor Strether had at this very moment to recognize that wherever one paused in Paris the imagination reacted before one could stop it. This perpetual reaction put a price, if one would, on pauses; but it piled up consequences until there was scarce room to pick one’s steps among them” (123). Indeed, this touched nerve is keenly felt for Strether, for he reacts to Paris much as he reacts to the Tuileries and the home of Gloriani: sensually, and is thereby often overwhelmed. He does not in fact so much see Paris as experience it, taking in the “charged iridescent air” (*TA* 146) of the Louvre even as he seems able quite literally to taste it: “The Paris evening in short was, for Strether, in the very taste of the soup…in the pleasant coarse texture of the napkin, and the crunch of the thick crusted bread” (130).
But if Paris is consumable, it is in turn all-consuming, its landscape insinuating itself on his body. Like his visit to the Tuileries, Strether’s walks are textured by multi-sensory overload, the constant hum of something that Strether can displace if not formally acknowledge: “It was the evening hour, but daylight was long now and Paris more than ever penetrating. The scent of flowers was in the streets, he had the whiff of violets perpetually in his nose, and he had attached himself to sounds and suggestions, vibrations of the air…a far off hum…a voice calling, replying, somewhere and as full of tone as an actor’s in a play” (TA 286). The crowd, the past, the hum overtakes him as readily as the smell of the violets which penetrate his nostrils, eventually putting such a premium on pauses that he is compelled to keep walking: “all voices had grown thicker and meant more things, they crowded in on him as he moved about—it was the way they sounded that wouldn’t let him be still” (TA 426).

The hum of the city comes, however, to be transposed from the terrain of the city onto the body of Sarah Pocock, with the effect she strikes on Strether intensifying and embodying that of Paris’s own. The disquiet awakened in the garden is thereby displaced, occulting not only the ghosts of the past but the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet that Strether is increasingly unwilling to comprehend. At Chad’s grand final soiree, Strether is so struck by her presence that he confides to Little Bilham that “the sound of Mrs. Pocock’s respiration drowns for me, I assure you, every other. It’s literally all I hear” (TA 400, emphasis mine). The hum is thus isolated, in other words, from the rumble of the city and the vague murmur of its streets and reevaluated as the sound of Sarah’s breathing. And even as her breathing swallows him, drowning out everything else, her presence plagues him so much that Strether in turn is assaulted by the sight of her much as he has earlier been assaulted by images, memories, and dull rumblings. Such a sight becomes then itself a kind of violent site of memory, with the landscape of her body
given as “dressed in a splendour of crimson which affect[s] Strether as the sound of a fall through a skylight” (390). Under the hallucinatory effect of her fiery dress, then, Strether experiences full-blown synesthesia, with the sight of it curiously likened not to an image at all, but rather to an intense sensation of sound. And the sound is itself a violent kind of rupture, one portending death or the onslaught of a dizzying, terrifying fall that once set in motion cannot be checked.

That under the sway of Paris sight for Strether becomes very literally experienced as sound—the crimson dress registered as the crash of a dizzying fall—is underscored—indeed, culminated—in Strether’s final encounter with Madame de Vionnet. She is perhaps the ultimate example of the unmarked landmark of the text, and Nesher-Wirth goes so far as to argue that “she is Paris…becom[ing] the city’s most compelling landmark” (248). Her home provides Strether with a sense of access to “the ancient Paris that he was always looking for” (TA 235), and from “the cold chambers of the past” (TA 363) the something that has haunted him throughout the novel finally crystallizes from a sight to a name:

From beyond the court, beyond the corps logis forming the front—came, as if excited and exciting, the vague voice of Paris. Strether had all along been subject to sudden gusts of fancy in connexion with such matters as these—odd starts of the historic sense, suppositions and divinations with no warrant but their intensity. Thus and so, on the eve of the great recorded dates, the days and nights of revolution, the sounds had come in, the omens, the beginnings had broken out. They were the smell of revolution—the smell of the public temper—or perhaps simply the smell of blood. (TA 475)
Behind the tranquil “plash of the fountain” lurk the omen of revolution and the “vague voice of Paris.” And what Strether hears echoing up from the court becomes in turn most readily figured as what he smells—the sound of thunder registering as the smell of blood, with the sight of blood itself displaced, free-floating, like the crimson of Sarah’s dress. Here, in other words, the intimation of blood does not take on the contours of a sound, with the color figured instead by its smell and by the very whiteness of Madame de Vionnet’s blouse—a whiteness that summons for Strether, albeit metonymically, the spectre of Madame Roland; “His hostess was dressed…in the simplest coolest white, of a character so old-fashioned…that Madame Roland must on the scaffold have worn something like it” (TA 475).

The text initially tries somewhat to contain the vague voice that here finds Strether—the historic sense awakened in his final fateful meeting with Madame de Vionnet—by ascribing such “suppositions and divinations with no warrant but their intensity” to “the effect of thunder in the air, which had hung about all day without release” (TA 475). The effect of thunder is pronounced, however, for the blouse of Mme de Vionnet is itself said to be the attire of “thunderous times” (TA 475). And it is her presence which speaks back to what the text has fallen most silent upon, her presence that summons most articulately the dim scenes and symbols that afflict Strether from the irremediable wound of the landscape.

Fussell writes energetically of the scene, “the habitat of Marie de Vionnet…is French history according to Henry James, and American revenant abroad, French history consisting almost entirely of the Revolution and the First Empire” (194). Yet the thunderous times that she portends, while it reaches back to Madame Roland, no doubt marshals the spectre of revolution more generally. And while her interior of Sphinx’s heads and the far-off roar of cannons might audibly invoke for Strether the space of the First Empire, the reference is nevertheless layered
and bound up with the sign of that world’s spatial destruction in the toppling of the Vendome Column. What is awakened for Strether in the Tuileries is not 1789 but 1871, and the echo of those thunderous times finds him here.

Perhaps it is not strange to find, in a novel itself marked by all it does not wish to say about its primary narrative coup, that the Commune, while present, is never spoken of and indeed finds a name only in “the vague voice of Paris.” That it does so only after the relationship between Chad and Mme de Vionnet has been glimpsed by Strether seems only to underscore the way in which the weight—or rather, the sense— of the city always shadows that plot. It is a voice that speaks of the Paris of Madame Roland and the guillotine, as John Landau persuasively points out, but also of the Paris of the Commune. As Strether puts it early in the novel, Paris must be reckoned with—and it is a Paris that is irradiated with memory, its symbolic space haunted by specters of the Commune, its terrain political, its streets contested, its very boulevards and monuments literally fraught with meaning and the remnants of mortar shells. It is, then, rather remarkable that James’s critics have often fallen silent on the extent to which James is aware of—and in conversation with—the Paris of the Commune as certainly as that of Third Republic. To return then to Forster’s formulation, for all its specificity and its specific turns to opacity, the Paris that gleams back at us in The Ambassadors is one whose vague voice speaks of blood in the streets as certainly as it murmurs the collective life of the Boulevard. In

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the next chapter, we turn from James’s visceral spatial memory to a series of radical texts that return to and reclaim precisely this “other” Paris in James’s fiction—and with it, the horror of its history—for the Popular Front.
Chapter Four

Making it New: the Horror of the Commune in the 1930s

The Paris lying so superficially quiet beneath its warm blanket of July days and nights was like a volcano about to vomit up the future.

-Herbert Gorman (1933)

Utopia’s deepest subject, and the source of all that is most vibrantly political about it, is precisely our inability to conceive it, our incapacity to produce it as a vision, our failure to project the Other of what is, a failure that, as fireworks dissolving in a night sky, must once again leave us alone with this history.

-Fredric Jameson

On March 15, 1925, the Worker’s Party of America, together with the Young Communist League, staged a lavish celebration to commemorate the fifty-fourth anniversary of the Paris Commune. The Boston Globe estimated that some 13,000 people “crowded into Madison Square Garden” for the event, while the New York Times noted that “from the cover of the program to the draperies of the platform, women’s blouses and men’s boutonnieres, the color scheme in the historic Garden was red.”149 The festivities were opened by Julia Stuart Poyntz, longtime labor advocate and founding member of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), who quipped that “We are now going to overthrow the United States government, so be prepared for the worst” (“Communists Crowd Madison Garden” 15), presumably for the benefit of the many policemen waiting in the wings to disband the gala. But the highlight of the evening was Alexander Arkatov’s production of The Paris Commune, a pageant that represented various scenes from the uprising in Paris and featured a cast of several hundred. Two days later, the

“Times acidly observed of the dancing that followed: “Apparently, the ‘proletariat’ of New York City has not been reduced to the hapless condition where it is incapable of response to the appeal of a good jazz band” (“Dancing Followed” 20). But the Workers’ Drama League production aimed both to “convey the spirit of the worker revolt” and to create a “new and modern technique”—incorporating humor, jazz, and dancing into its revolutionary repertoire (Marquardt 113). Even as the Commune was being remembered, then, it was also being made anew in New York City both in the show and its audience. Cries of “Long Live the Commune!” merged with “Long live the Soviet Republics!” as Moissaye Olgin, a founding member of the Worker’s Party, assured the Garden crowd that “The new Commune stands firm as a rock.” 1871 was alive and kicking, in other words, but now being relived through 1917. And even as the crowd commemorated the event, they were remembering its legacy and limitations with a blend of retrospective revolutionary memory and amnesia. As one particularly youthful Young Communist League member explained in the Times, “the Paris Commune failed because of a lack of organization, especially by youth” (“Reds in Garden” 6).

In The American 1930s, literary critic Peter Conn has recently suggested that radical writers were prone in the decade to utter conventionality: “The future might be ‘undreamed of’ …but its utterance was inscribed in strictly familiar vocabularies and forms (222). In this chapter, I turn to a series of radical fictions that, in reclaiming the Commune for the American proletariat, and repurposing pulp to do so, would seem to tell a different story. Resituating Guy Endore’s sensational 1933 bestseller, The Werewolf of Paris, alongside agitprop like William Siegel’s The Paris Commune: A Story in Pictures (1932) and George Spiro’s Paris on the Barricades (1929), I show how horror became the unlikely conduit for insurgent memory. Turning to Herbert Gorman’s recently rediscovered novel, Jonathan Bishop (1933), I reconsider
the work of gothic tropes in highbrow historical fiction, arguing that Gorman’s return to the Commune, and its plot of counter-conversion, crucially sheds light on the way in which Endore’s monster novel transforms and profoundly unsettles the work of writing the history of the Commune, even as it draws into further relief the threat and promise the Commune most seemed to hold for the 1930s.

**Pulp Fictions, Radical Memories**

Pound’s famous injunction to “make it new” became the battle cry of Modernism, yet the aesthetic and political stakes of doing so were of equal concern for Marx. For as Russ Castronovo has recently reminded us, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is a meditation marked in “technicolour writing” with the question of how exactly to make such a radical break with the past, how to translate tradition in a new language—how, in other words, to make a revolution “new” (74). William Siegel’s *The Paris Commune: A Story in Pictures* (1932) was sponsored by the John Reed Club, and joined the ranks of pamphlets like Grace Burnham’s *Social Insurance* and Harry Gannes’s *Yankee Colonies*. Yet in his introduction to Siegel’s pictorial retelling of the Commune, Alexander Trachtenberg emphasizes the innovation of the pamphlet’s graphics: “In the following pages the reader will find the story of the Paris Commune told in pictures. This is a medium in which little working class literature has previously been done. It is graphic, 

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150 Siegel’s work appeared regularly in *The New Masses* and his illustrations graced a range of radical texts in the 1930s, many of them aimed at children, including “American History Retold in Pictures” (1931). For a further discussion of Siegel’s career and illustrations for children, see Julia L. Mickenberg and Phillip Nel’s *Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children’s Literature*. New York: New York UP, 2008: 173.
dramatic, and simple and should give the reader the story” (3). Moissaye Olgin, in his introduction to George Spiro’s 1929 Little Red Library pamphlet, *Paris on the Barricades*, similarly underscores the newness of Spiro’s revolutionary method. Although Spiro would later go on to write *The Road: A Romance of the Revolution*, a text that Walter B. Rideout would dub an “unrepresentative anachronism” (211), Olgin suggests that Spiro’s short fiction of the Commune, anchored in the conceit of an aging Communard, Emile Ducasse, recounting his memories to a group of spellbound American workers who long to hear an eyewitness account of those days, should not be understood as a throwback to older forms of historical fiction. Instead, he insists, it should be read as a new form of radical history in the vein of “post-November Russian writers dealing with the Revolution” (4). The unremarked upon ingredients that both pamphlets draw on to “make it new” is, however, gothic horror and pulp fiction, but Olgin is quick to invoke the realism underlying the narrative’s most sensational turns: “As [Spiro] proceeds to visualize the butchery, horror is piled upon horror until the burden is crushing” but he “records events in their actual proportions” (emphasis mine 6).

While Spiro’s story offers glimpses of life during the Commune, in particular, the jubilation of its proclamation day, and a sense of a new Paris unfolding around the narrator, it focuses its central narrative energies on the unmitigated horror, or as its narrator, Ducasse, puts it, “the gory nightmare” (43), of the Commune’s repression. To convey that story, Spiro repeatedly offers the reader sensational scenes of violence, and gothic moments of fright. (Our narrator’s hair repeatedly stands up on his head, and—despite his young age during the

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151 Spiro, in the voice of Ducasse, describes a walk on the Boulevards in this new Paris: “Flowing with the moving mass we exchanged friendly nods and smiles with strangers—but there were no strangers in those blissful days in Paris! All were brothers, all were citizens of the first Universal Republic. French as well as foreigners, even the Prussians with whom we had just been at war. A new spirit pervaded the air” (19).
Commune—it eventually turns gray overnight from sheer terror (60).) Describing the street-by-
street fighting, Ducasse relates, for example, “my eyes fell upon the soldiers of our ‘brothers.’ 
Like ferocious, wild beasts they prowled through the barricade, dispatching the wounded” (36); 
when these “wild beasts” catch a boy Communard on the barricades, “they pounded him with 
their heavy boots and smashed his head into a mass of brains and blood. I raved in a fit of 
madness and fled aghast from this scene of horror” (37). But such scenes are everywhere. Diving 
into a cellar to hide from the Versaillais onslaught, Ducasse discovers “fifteen bodies of dead 
Communards, which accounted largely for the presence of these swarms of vermin. The slime 
that I had slipped on when I crept into that burial place was a pool of clotted blood” (39). And 
wherever he turns “as far as the eye could reach, were enormous piles of corpses white with 
chloride of lime” (43). Yet the goriness of the scene is perhaps best crystallized in Ducasse’s 
image of the Parisian sky: “A strange sight! A rain of blood was descending upon Paris. Large 
red drops out of a lead-colored sky were falling into the street, and, forming streamlets and 
rivulets, were running into sewers” (40). This “strange sight” is, in turn, made palpable for the 
reader: while the front cover to Spiro’s pamphlet depicts a scene of heroic fighting and a red flag 
waving, its back cover, echoing the visuals of a pulp magazine, depicts blood dripping from the 
book itself (Fig. 12). Michael Denning argues in his groundbreaking volume, *The Cultural 
Front: the Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, that “the impact of the 
Cultural Front was not simply the product of individual political commitment” but instead “the 
result of the encounter between a powerful democratic social movement—the Popular Front— 
and the modern cultural apparatuses of mass entertainment and education” (xvii). But these 
pamphlets signal, I argue, not only how central that encounter was to the movement, but how 
thoroughly radical writers appropriated mass culture for their own ends.
Fig. 12. Back Cover of George Spiro’s *Paris on the Barricades* (1929).
Siegel’s text similarly dwells most on the horror of the Commune’s final hours, its captions highlighting scenes of bayoneting as the “Commune [being] drowned in its own blood” (Fig. 13), “huge mounds of corpses and those not yet dead” (25), the “ghastly parade” of Commune prisoners (22). The starkness of his black and white images—their fierce angularity—might seem the antithesis of Spiro’s sensational “realism.” And yet here they work to heighten precisely the shock of Siegel’s story.

Fig. 13. Illustration from William Siegel’s The Paris Commune: A Story in Pictures (1932)
But the effect of such ghastly sights and palpable horror is, the pamphlets suggest, neither titillation nor stupefaction. Instead, they argue, the vividness of these scenes serves to immerse the reader in the story and enlist us in the action: “As the drama unfolds before our fascinated mind, we, ourselves, are swallowed up by the torrent of revolutionary action; we become part of those masses; we defend the Commune against the onrushing enemy” (Olgin 5). The horror invites the reader to remember that, as Siegel puts it, “The Commune was the first step” (31), and Spiro’s narrative explicitly suggests that its work is an injunction to pass on the baton of memory (and indignation): “You, comrades, children of the working class, remember the Paris Commune” (64). This brand of radical memory does not, in other words, shrink from returning to atrocities or “gory nightmares” but does not rest at mourning them. Dominic LaCapra, in discussing “scenes marked by the compulsive return of a traumatic past,” suggests we find therein that “the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop” (qtd. in Starr 169). Yet these pamphlets, in their returns to the Commune’s end, demonstrate anything but what Peter Starr, apropos of LaCapra, terms a “melancholic fixity on the past” (169). Instead, they rework horror to their own ends, redeploying horror itself as a form of protest, as a kind of memory that can spark a revolution and reanimate the future—a medium of what I want to call insurgent memory.

In mobilizing this insurgent memory, both pamphlets further invoke alternative itineraries of memory and an “other” Paris for Americans. *PC: A Story in Pictures*, for example, reminds readers that the wall in Père-Lachaise stands “at once a challenge to capitalist rule and a monument to the martyrs of the Commune” (25). *Paris on the Barricades* takes this move a step further, enjoining reader-comrades who visit Paris to experience a specifically alternative scene, and with it, an alternative memory of the city:
Thousands of American tourists, sons of the rich, go to Paris yearly. They live a gay life there. They visit theaters, restaurants de luxe, cabarets, houses of ill repute. You, comrades, if you ever happen to be in Paris, visit the cemetery of Père-la-Chaise. Visit the cemetery. Bare your heads before the wall, and think of the men, the women, and the children on whose blood and bones the French bourgeoisie has built its prosperity and happiness. Think of the martyrs of the Commune!” (Spiro 64)

Spiro’s injunction to avoid Expat Paris and visit “Père-la-Chaise” instead would seem, in other words, to open up for working-class Americans in Paris two simultaneous cities within a city. Jonathan Crary writes apropos of the Surrealist Manifesto, “[it was a case of] turning the spectacle of the city inside out through counter-memory and counter-itineraries. These would reveal the potency of outmoded objects excluded from slick surfaces, and of derelict spaces off its main routes of circulation. The strategy incarnated a refusal of the imposed present… implicitly figuring an alternative future” (107). In the case of Paris on the Barricades, Spiro similarly stages a counter-itinerary aimed at a revolutionary future.

As Trachtenberg makes clear, from the outset, the story these pamphlets relay is a familiar one: “again and again,” he writes, “the story has been told” (3). Yet he lays claim to that story—or, rather, memory—for the present moment: “Wherever workers will gather to hear the story of this heroic struggle—a story that has long since become a treasure of proletarian lore—they will honor the memory of the martyrs of 1871. But they will also remember the martyrs of the class struggle today who have either been slaughtered or still smart in the dungeons of capitalist and colonial countries” (3). Looking back, in other words, is figured here as also looking forward. In particular, remembering the Commune after 1917 requires remembering the
Soviet Union as at once the continuation and the successor of the Commune. For even as the final pages of the pamphlet depict Lenin under the caption, “The Commune lives again!” (30), Trachtenberg argues that the Soviet Union represents “the society of which the Paris Commune was a ‘glorious harbinger’” (4). Commemoration must be, in other words, kept in check: in recounting the “lessons” of the Commune, radical readers are exhorted to remember that “The absence of a disciplined, well-knit revolutionary leadership both prior to and after the establishment of the Commune spelled disaster at the outset” (original emphasis 5)\(^1\) — a subject that Endore will explicitly revisit in The Werewolf of Paris. The Commune in the 1930s served as touchstone for the left, but also an alternative past and future that needed to be redirected: what needed symptomatically to be remembered was, on some level, that the revolution hadn’t succeeded. (Terry Eagleton, writing some fifty years later, would make a similar claim: “There are those who overlook one of the most significant points about the Paris Commune, the fact that it failed” (xiv).)

Olgin similarly wrestles with the temporality of the Commune—the way in which it continues to inhabit the present, and yet should be remembered as simultaneously superceded by the Russian Revolution and brought to life by it: “A romantic halo surrounds the Paris Commune of 1871, yet the event is strangely vibrant with life. There is the ring of legend to the narratives of those heroic days, yet history clothes them with ever new flesh and blood” (3). Even more pointedly, Paris on the Barricades suggests that the Commune’s memory matters more than ever to Americans: “Now, after eleven years of Soviet rule, the Paris Commune is more alive and

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\(^1\) Marian Sawyer noted in the aftermath of the Commune’s centennial that “while the Paris Commune has become part of the living memory of the workers’ state, it has undergone a strange metamorphosis. Elsewhere a symbol of heroic protest against a treacherous government of privilege or privilege of government, in the Soviet Union the Paris Commune has become part of the legitimating apparatus of a bureaucratic state” (245).
more meaningful to the working class than it was fifteen years ago” (3). Concern over precisely this threat—and the “pointed modern implications” of a return to the Commune—everywhere marks the novel to which we now turn.

Looking Backwards

In his critical reevaluation of the 1930s, Conn singles out Herbert Gorman as a “first-rate but undervalued writer” too long overshadowed by modernism and more than deserving renewed critical attention (58). In particular, Conn cites *Jonathan Bishop* as an “eloquent defense of established orders, a counter-statement to the revolutionary texts of the 1930s that preached the need for fundamental and even violent change” (102). But that impulse was never deeply veiled in Gorman’s work. Indeed, *Jonathan Bishop* was, from the start, heralded and marketed as a novel set during the events of the Commune but aimed at its own historical moment. His publisher, Farrar and Rinehart, suggested in its advertisements that Gorman’s text drew on “the romantic and violent events of the past to illuminate problems of today,” while a *New York Times* review headlined the novel’s “pointed modern implications” (Southron BR6). And an acerbic reviewer slammed the book for precisely these reasons in the pages of the leftwing *Partisan Review*, dubbing the novel “a dilettante’s sermon on how a young American becomes disillusioned with revolution” (56).

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153 In the mid-Twenties Gorman authored a popular exegesis of *Ulysses* and, in turn, garnered the distinction of being Joyce’s authorized biographer. He also published a number of other biographies, historical romances, and works of criticism over the course of his extremely prolific career. For a further discussion of Gorman’s work, see Horace Reynolds’s review, “The Man Who Wrote Ulysses,” *NYT* 18 Feb 1940 and Peter Conn’s discussion in *The American 1930s* (12).
Jonathan Bishop, not unlike the Commune romances of the 1890s, sends its eponymous protagonist, a young Bostonian and recent Harvard graduate, to Paris to find himself. But unlike his fin-de-siècle predecessors, Jonathan goes to Paris neither to be a painter nor a tourist. Instead, he leaves home expressly in search of revolution, or more precisely, in pursuit of a radical revolutionary, Gautier Saint-Just, “the Man from Hyde Park,” whose radical sentiments had altogether captivated him during a chance encounter in London several years before. His search for Saint-Just conveniently positions him to observe the political clubs of the Paris Commune first-hand, and encounter a number of Communards up close, but his time in Paris pointedly wipes out any incipient radicalism he might have brought with him. For our “yankee spectator,” as Time Magazine described him, divides his time between the American colony—and more to the point, Americans cozying up to the collapsing Empire and the Court of Napoleon III—and the rough clubs of Belleville and Montmartre that the novel calls “the powder-magazine of Paris” (226). While Bishop’s first impressions of the Paris of the Empire are unsavory—not unlike Marx, he sees it as altogether illusory—he eventually falls for (and loses) a lovely cocodette, the mysterious Madame Zinh, gets mixed up in the Battle of Sedan, and, together with the real-life character, American dentist Dr. Evans, lends no small a hand in helping the Empress Eugénie escape from Paris as the Empire falls. In turn, this brush with imperial greatness ushers in a radical change of heart in our Yankee protagonist. While he continues to seek out Saint-Just, he comes to claim he does so only to find out what had come over him in the first place: “It was curious, now that he thought of it, that he still desired so violently to see his mysterious acquaintance while he no longer believed implicitly in the cause for which that acquaintance stood” (227).
As Walter B. Rideout first pointed out in *The Radical Novel in the United States* (1956), the “conversion” plot, wherein a middleclass protagonist is won over to the cause of class struggle after participating in a strike or radical demonstration at which his “middle-class faith in capitalist justice is shattered” (181), was a central developmental arc of proletarian fiction. Gorman’s historical fiction seems aimed, then, to be its exact antithesis, a counter-conversion narrative. For Bishop’s *bildung* in Paris is precisely to *lose* all faith in revolution and utopian futures. Bishop thus confronts Saint-Juste, and comes to see this fictional string-puller as the “organizational” core of the Commune. Unlike his predecessors in the works of King and Savidge, Bishop does not, however, establish his fortune, solidify his marriage prospects, and eventually leave home to spread the gospel of “Americanism.” Rather, by book’s end he has literally swapped places with a Frenchman, mistakenly shot while trying to surrender to the oncoming Versaillais soldiers. The book, rather than the hero, is thus left to stand as the proselytizing tract.

But if its lesson from Paris had been learned again and again in U.S. Commune romances of the 1890s, Gorman’s brand of counter-conversion differs from its antecedents in several crucial respects. *Jonathan Bishop* does not, in other words, simply rehash that terrain: instead, it imagines a native-born, Anglo-American who might be likely to fall for the Commune—a threat that no American text of the 1890s would be willing to entertain. Moreover, the novel underscores Bishop’s abolitionist pedigree, the radical Bostonian milieu in which he grew up, and his nagging sense that the revolution to come—the liberté, fraternité, égalité of which he has such mixed feelings—is connected to his own nation’s republican past: “Liberty should be star that all men followed. But he was doubtful about fraternity and he was quite sure he did not believe in equality. Yet his own country was based on these ideals” (21). And while the novel
shows him conscripted to build barricades against his will—and thus lending a hand for the Commune only by force, a staple of the earlier romances—it nevertheless betrays deep doubts over and anxiety towards (less savvy) Americans falling for the Commune. As Bishop is watching, with no little disgust, the festivities surrounding the Commune’s felling of the Vendôme Column, for example, he overhears in the lull between speeches the strains of “Hail, Columbia” (the unofficial anthem of the United States, replaced by the “Star Spangled Banner” only two years before the novel went to press) from a nearby hotel and stands transfixed as “a girl came out on the balcony [of the Mirabeau Hotel] and waved a small American flag” (372). That an American might be swept up by the possibilities of the Commune is historically accurate—certainly, some contemporary visitors were—but this flag-waver seems a stand-in for Americans who held out faith in the 1930s both in revolution and international solidarity. And the novel glimpses her so as to savage her misguided enthusiasm: “The young man felt a wave of disgust flow through him as he saw his young compatriot lean over and cheer the red-sashed orator. Poor foolish girl, with her delusions of liberty, her superficial knowledge of what was actually transpiring” (372).

To further ward off such misguided affiliations, Gorman’s novel explicitly positions the Commune as an unprecedented eruption of the future into the present: “The Paris lying so superficially quiet beneath its warm blanket of early July days and nights was like a volcano about to vomit up the future” (8). And in this contest between the future and the past, its hero

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154 It seems worth noting that the novel’s account is lifted almost word for word from British foreign correspondent Ernest Alfred Vizetelly’s description of the felling in My Adventures in the Commune, Paris, 1871: “Loud were the shouts of ‘Vive La Commune.’ Right quickly did one of the Guard’s bands strike up the ‘Marseillaise’ but amidst and above it I suddenly heard strains of ‘Hail, Columbia’ played violently on a piano by some Yankee girl belonging to a party of Americans who had installed themselves on the first floor of the Hotel Mirabeau. They came out on to the balcony and were loud in their plaudits” (281).
solidly sides with the latter. But in doing so, the Bostonian slowly begins to revise his views on American history and his own prior radical commitments. In a move that anticipates the backward glance of the runaway 1930s bestseller, *Gone with the Wind*, but this time from a pronouncedly “Yankee” perspective, the novel thus reimagines the defeat of the South during the Civil War as a defeat of “civilization” itself. While Bishop initially disdains those Americans he meets early in the novel who spend their days currying favor with the Emperor and likely sympathized with the Southern cause during the Civil War, by book’s end he explains—in a heated dialogue with the female firebrand Louise Michel—“We had a Revolution which succeeded in isolating us from all the finest civilization in the world…then we had the Civil War which destroyed that half of the Republic that was most richly steeped in tradition and the ease of living. And what have we to look forward to?” (402).

In this sense, Gorman’s novelistic return to the Commune echoes the broader racial politics of rightward writing in the 1930s—what literary critic Lawrence J. Oliver has diagnosed as the “virulent racism and right-wing Americanism that pervaded the ‘Red Decade’” (134). And the novel, in allowing Saint-Just to briefly state his case, has him take specific aim at America’s racial past and the hypocrisy of Bishop’s previous reformism: “You, being a Northerner, believed in the emancipation of the negroes but you would not marry your sister to one” (282); in turn Saint-Just rhapsodizes that “The day must come when the priest is cast down from his altar, when patriotism is an obsolete word, when national demarcation lines will be a memory, when all men will be joined in a vast international federation of equality” (275). In thus

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155 Oliver argues that while we tend to think of the 1930s as a “Red Decade,” the racial component of radical politics in the Thirties was met with a fierce counter-reaction in a variety of literary texts; the issue, he explains, became most pressing in the aftermath of the 1931 resolution by “the Communist International…stating that ‘the Negro Problem’ must be part and parcel of every campaign conducted by the Party” (Oliver 134).
accessing the Commune’s revolutionary designs, the novel is quick to quash Saint-Just’s revolutionary platform: “[Jonathan] realized that it was the tones and not the words that thrilled him so” (284). The novel thus sheds light on the anxiety that the Commune, rerouted through 1917, seemed to summon for the 1930s: in particular, the specter of internationalism, radical racial equality and the mesmeric sway of revolutionary ideas—or, as Gorman puts it, “of hocus pocus and mumbo jumbo” (365). For while the banner of the Commune was always international, the novel repeatedly emphasizes its threat to nationalism, formulating the most potent threat of the Commune for the present not as savages with rings through their noses overtaking Paris, but rather as internationalism and racial equality overrunning the nation-state.

To contain these threats, the novel emphasizes the “horror” of the Commune’s reign in Paris, a generic switch that erupts from its ostensibly historical narrative. But this switch helps to highlight the gothic tropes always already embedded in earlier accounts of the Commune, whether in the form of sensational histories, anodyne magazine remembrances, or bestselling historical adventure stories. Gorman thus suggests of the street-by-street retaking of the city as “The Commune was snarling and fighting like a cornered wolf” (380), even as he figures the fires in Paris as a kind of murder, with “blood-red bubbles” engulfing the city’s grand edifices (407). By book’s end, Gorman literalizes the monstrous metaphor further, offering readers a glimpse of the Commune as an explicitly monstrous body: “a blood-drunken, floundering, defeated and wounded monster called the Commune was staggering backwards from MacMahon’s ferocious blows and leaving destruction and death in the wake of his maniacal retreat” (408).

This metaphorical footwork takes our eyes off the French government troops and their, as Preston calls it, “wolfish work” in the city. But the narrative employs another sleight of hand to
contain the violence of the reconquering of Paris and the brutality of the violence that ultimately sweeps up Bishop himself. Although Conn reads Bishop’s death as meant to be simply meaningless—“[He] has simply disappeared into the reigning chaos. His inadvertent and pointless death, and the accidental name under which he is buried, comprise a grimly appropriate emblem for a world emptied of significance” (103)—the moment performs, finally, far more ideological and mnemonic work in the text. Let us turn, then, to Bishop’s grim final moments:

He held his hands high above his head as he walked so that they might know that he was unarmed and surrendering…. He had walked but a few paces when suddenly an invisible fist reached out of the smoke and struck him violently in the shoulder. He whirled side-ways and almost lost his balance. His legs seemed to fill with lead and a sickening sensation twisted his stomach. What was that? He…must keep his hands up. He walked swayingly forward with a faint smile on his thin lips and his slightly arched nose raised to the stinking air. It was difficult to see; the smoke appeared to grow more and more thick, like a sort of grey blanket from which the light on the opposite side was being removed. (…) And then the blanket seemed to tear apart and he was struck a terrible blow between the eyes…. He turned up his hands in a helpless gesture and fell heavily upon his face. (431-2)

Bishop is here caught up in the Versailles juggernaut, the “ferocious blows of MacMahon” that the novel otherwise fails to see. But as we experience this death from Bishop’s own perspective—the disorienting smoke covering his line of sight “like a sort of grey blanket”—we never actually observe who was responsible for his death or what is transpiring around him. His
confusion over what is in front of him becomes, in other words, our own. And as the novel makes clear, Bishop’s corpse is the only dead body that merits our attention as, in the novel’s closing, “the forces of law and order pass on to victory” (433)—a victory that Bishop himself championed and foretold throughout the novel. If Gorman’s text thus offers us a glimpse of the human cost of suppressing the revolution, his narrative everywhere obscures it. Guy Endore will, however, turn precisely to this scene in his weird fiction of the Commune, redeploing the genre of horror to bring that memory into spectacular relief.

Monstrous Histories

Alan Wald opens his study of misfit leftist writers, *Exiles From a Future Time*, with the case of Endore, popular novelist, committed Communist, and Oscar-nominated, later blacklisted, Hollywood screenwriter whose literary output (ranging from pamphlets for the Scottsboro boys to mystery novels and a bestselling biography of Joan of Arc) exemplifies Wald’s argument about mid-century radical writers in America: namely, that their cultural production bears scant resemblance to what we might imagine “proletarian fiction” would look like. But while he notes, in passing, that *The Werewolf of Paris* was Endore’s “masterpiece of the Paris Commune,” Wald gives it no further attention in his book (2). Barbara Foley, in her magisterial study of the proletarian novel, similarly sidesteps Endore’s pulp classic to offer an extended reading of *Babouk*, his remarkable 1934 novel of the Haitian revolution—a text less frequently read but more legibly political and more categorically radical. And to look, for example, at the 1951 Avon paperback edition of *Werewolf*, with its pulpy cover displaying a swooning blonde

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bombshell and menacing werewolf beneath a headline that sums up this radically experimental text as “A weird novel about a monster-wolf in human form,” it is perhaps not surprising that even those critics aimed at recovering radical writing from the 1930s have so often glossed over or altogether neglected this text (Fig. 14).

But Endore’s monster novel has not proved more legible for fantasy/horror circles, either, and not simply because werewolves have so far garnered less scholarly attention than vampires and other gothic monsters. To date the novel’s only extended critical treatments have appeared in the journal Studies in Weird Fiction, and for horror critics the novel presents almost as much of a conundrum. The frustration is perhaps best expressed by horror critic Jerry Ball, who concedes that Werewolf of Paris, by virtue of its early critical acclaim, success in the marketplace, and continued cult status, holds the title for the “definitive” werewolf novel. But as he goes on to argue, that title is troubled by “the novel’s rather annoying tendency to de-emphasize the werewolf”—its tendency, in other words, to “provide digressions (mainly historical) at nearly every opportunity.” That an early reviewer of the book praised it precisely for these historical meanderings—“the part of the book dealing with the Commune is by far the most interesting—a real contribution to fiction” (“Werewolf of Paris”)—is, for these literary critics, only a further a strike against it. What to make, then, of this “weird” novel?

In their introduction to the 2006 volume Bad Modernisms, Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz describe pulp fiction as “badly behaved and hard to pin down” (269), and suggest that what Paula Rabinowitz’s work on “pulp modernism” most helped to show us is that “pulp is in fact one of modernism’s ways of wandering beyond historical, categorical, and institutional

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157 Several otherwise excellent reevaluations of horror fiction have largely overlooked werewolves, among them Judith Halberstam’s Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters (1995) and Annalee Newitz’s Pretend We’re Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Popular Culture (2006). Newitz, for example, surveys “serial killers, mad doctors, the undead, robots and people involved in the media industry” (6) across late 19th- and early 21st-century pulp fiction, B movies, and classic novels but does not take up the case of werewolves. The most exhaustive text on the subject might be Brian J. Frost’s Essential Guide to Werewolf Literature (2003), aimed at scholars and fans of the genre.

boundaries and showing up, unannounced, where we least expect it” (269). But if modernist pulp is figured here as likely to show up almost anywhere, it has, as Leif Sorenson has recently pointed out in Modernism/Modernity, most often been read as synonymous with the realm of hardboiled noir. And this synecdoche crucially misses “the broad range of pulp writing” (Sorenson 501)—in particular, the horror and sci-fi fiction published between the wars in magazines like Weird Tales. Reading Endore as repurposing exactly this kind of pulp to his own radical ends, but also trading in a sensational form of modernism to rewrite history is, I want to argue, to begin to grasp this text.159

Judith Halberstam points out in the opening of Skin Shows that gothic horror is not simply marked by its monsters or its ability to generate a certain affective response in the reader. Instead, she argues, it is a matter of form as much as content: “The Gothic topos is the monstrous body à la Frankenstein, Dracula, Dorian Gray, Jekyll/Hyde; in its generic form, Gothic is the disruption of realism and of all generic purity” (11). Her formulation of the monstrous generic excess of horror, of the “story buried within the story buried within the story” (21), is a particularly apt description of Endore’s experimental proletarian horror novel (or modernist gothic historical fiction). The opening frame narrative of its narrative is set in Modernist Paris, where our never named American expatriate narrator is researching his dissertation on an unnamed topic. His quiet life of the mind and general distaste for “Americans who have just

159 I’m borrowing the concept of a “sensational” form of modernism from Joseph Entin’s recent work, Sensational Modernism. In it, Entin argues that artists like William Carlos Williams, Tillie Olsen, Richard Wright, and Pietro di Donato “aspired to arouse in their audiences a new, more urgent understanding of poverty, industrial violence, and racial injustice. To do so, [they] used striking images of pain, prejudice, crime and violence to create an aesthetics of astonishment” (2). In my reading, we might include both Endore’s bestselling werewolf novel and the agitprop pamphlets that most seem to energize it as examples of what Entin has termed “sensational modernism” (2).
come over” (3) are interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Eliane, an acquaintance from back home. Through their evening outing—an already clichéd circuit of celebrated cafes and well-trod Parisian places—our narrator stumbles on the monster story at the heart of the novel in the form of a manuscript pulled from a trash heap. Penned by Aymar Galliez, an aging ‘48er, for the 1871 court-martial of Bertrand Challiet, the eponymous protagonist of Endore’s novel, these “thirty-four sheets of closely written French” serve as the foundation—and authenticating historical document—for the rest of Endore’s werewolf novel. What follows is then, ostensibly, the report on the werewolf of Paris as recounted by his uncle Aymar, an eyewitness, but filtered and filled in by our narrator: “I had thought at first of publishing the resume as it stood and providing this curiosity with the necessary notes to help the reader to an understanding of the case. But on second thought, I determined to recast the whole material into a more vivid form, incorporating all the results of my own investigations” (13).

If for Prufrock the overwhelming question was “how shall I begin?”—for Endore’s American expatriate narrator it is always “where shall I begin?” (3). The refrain explicitly opens the narrative and is echoed in the “where shall I end my tale?” (295) that returns to close it, but the question also functions to structure much of the vertiginously nested plot of the novel. Like the ongoing narrative gesture of interruption at work here, the narrator’s question immediately problematizes the writing of the text and its narrative unfolding. And the novel further underscores the difficulty of beginning by suggesting where the story “might” commence: “I might, for example, begin with Eliane…She has nothing to do with the story, except that she happened to start it off” (3). While the text thus asserts that it has a singular story to tell, it simultaneously signals that to choose a beginning for the history of the werewolf is always already to begin to designate for your reader which characters—and more to the point, which
pasts—merit our attention. As Alex Woloch has shown in his influential study of the space of the minor character in realist fiction, “narrative meaning takes shape in the dynamic flux of attention and neglect toward various characters who are locked within the same story but have radically different positions within the narrative” (2). But Werewolf radically destabilizes the relationship between the protagonist and minor characters, even as it swerves between its ostensibly major and minor plots. That it does so is not, however, simply to foreground the difficulty of writing monstrous histories. In “The Moment of Deep Time,” Bruce Robbins invites us to consider the way that the narrative device of analeptic prolepsis, in interrupting the central narrative in order to flash forward into a future one, acts to inject suspense about a minor character—even one who enters the narrative only fleetingly—and thus to unsettle—if only for a moment—whose story, really matters. In my account, Endore’s narrative excess and ongoing gesture of interruption similarly work always to question whose stories—and even more crucially, whose histories—matter.

The novel thus begins in 1920s Paris and plunges backward to 1871 and further backward into the mists of time, into another possible beginning to the story. Turning to a bloody medieval feud between the rival houses of the Pitavals and the Pitamonts, the narrator admits “the incident herein noted would seem at first glance to have nothing to do with the case” (17). But while this detour does not explicitly untangle for the reader the genesis of werewolfism as an inheritable trait, the backward glance insists that Bertrand’s story, or, rather, his case, begins well before he is born. The novel then turns to the more immediate backstory of Bertrand’s life—his young mother, Josephine’s, arrival in Paris to be a serving girl to the Didier-Galliez family, and her rape by the monstrous priest, Father Pitamont. But the narrative also turns its attentions to Aymar

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Galliez, the author of the manuscript, relating how he fought and was injured on the barricades in 1848 and now lives as a struggling writer-pamphleteer in the bourgeois home of his widowed aunt, Madame Didier. As the novel proceeds, the narrator intersperses sections about Bertrand’s boyhood—and later crimes—with sections on Aymar—his slow turn away from radical politics, his long wrestle with what to do with Bertrand, and his dawning recognition that the preternaturally sweet-natured boy in his care is slowly becoming a nocturnal monster. The narrator continues to make his presence felt, however, intruding into the narrative and speaking through the various authenticating footnotes—a multiplying archive of other texts—inter-threading the narrative (one of which even directs the reader to “see copy in the Forty-second Street Library, New York” (323)).

Bertrand’s werewolfism dawns on Aymar long before Bertrand himself realizes what or who he is. Unexplained animal mutilations begin to crop up in their small village, but Bertrand has no memory of his nocturnal doings. Despite his uncle’s misgivings, the young man is primed to pursue his studies in Paris in the fall of 1870, and it is en route there that he begins to come to terms with what he is becoming. Having fallen asleep on the road to Paris, he wakes to find that “the ravaged face of his friend, Jacques Bramond, appeared plain before him. ‘Will these nightmares never stop?’ he complained….But there was no stepping down to the floor from this bed. This was reality. In the thinning darkness he saw the mutilated corpse. His own mouth was sticky with clotted blood” (145). In Paris, the young man is free to indulge his monstrous appetites, and eventually joins the National Guard because, as our narrator points out, during the siege that fall “the workshops were empty, there wasn’t a job to be had” (184). The meek National Guardsman by day/werewolf by night eventually falls in love with Sophie Blumenberg, a young woman of means and morals otherwise betrothed to the aristocratic Captain Barral de
Montfort. Bertrand’s love affair with Sophie in turn interrupts the romantic subplot begun between Sophie and Montfort, and eventually launches the latter into plotting the fall of the Commune. (“The task of spying for the Versailles government was a delicate one. He found in its intricacies the necessary antidote to his misery” (225).) In turn, Bertrand and Sophie’s increasingly sado-masochistic relationship seems to “cure” Bertrand’s werewolfism, and he assures his uncle as much when Aymar finally tracks him down in Paris some months later. But it eventually becomes clear to Bertrand that his nightly cravings are returning, and to save Sophie from himself he rushes out into the streets in search of another prey. This final plot twist lands him in prison, facing court-martial by the Commune for having attacked a fellow Guardsman; a trial at which Aymar presents his summation of the case.

Alexander Woolcott observed in his glowing 1933 review in the New Yorker that “[Endore] has artfully fabricated a sinister and subtly insidious yarn calculated to evoke in susceptible bosoms that nightmare shiver for which our own language has no name….More specifically, Mr. Endore has boldly gone out after the overrated scalps of “Dracula” and Huyssman’s “Là-bas” and, to my notion, come back with those ensanguined trophies dangling from his belt” (32). But for all that Endore’s hybrid text indulges Bertrand’s sanguinary appetites and its own horror plot—proffering readers scenes of disarrayed, disinterred corpses, gashed open bodies, and a man’s bloody forearm kept under the bed as a late night snack—it also takes equal pains to interrupt that plot to show the reverberations of Bertrand’s monstrous feeding. Turning its attentions to the lives lost in never being able to shake the guilt that was not theirs, the novel turns our attention—and its air time—to these minor characters, and confronts Bertrand with the aftershocks of his deeds even before his formal trial by military court. When Aymar finally tracks down his nephew, he pointedly elaborates the stories to which the reader has
already been made been privy: “In the matter of digging up the miser, Vaubois, it never occurred to you that the shepherd, Crotez, would be accused of the job. Or in the matter General Darimon’s daughter that a poor croque-mort, the coachman, Jean Robert, would go to jail for it, and his family become destitute? How many others have suffered through you I cannot say” (243).

But even as Werewolf draws on and disrupts the expectations of horror fiction, it further adapts conventions of the historical novel by conveniently placing its eponymous monster at the time of the Commune so that this other history unfolds in the background of Bertrand’s story. (As Bertrand’s real-life counterpart, Sergeant François Bertrand, was court-martialed in 1849 for disinterreing and rending corpses and other crimes whose “details were,” in the words of one nineteenth-century report, “too revolting for reproduction” (qtd. in Baring-Gould 255), Endore’s relocation of the story to 1871 seems all the more telling.) Yet what is most remarkable about Endore’s use of—and experiments with—the historical novel within the body of what purports to be horror fiction is the way that the narrative does not use its hero’s temporal position to give us insight into—or the slightest perspective on—the historical backdrop to which he is privy. For as Jonathan Bishop so well illustrates, the historical novel asks us to care as much for the protagonist and his doings as for the world in which he finds himself—he remains, in other words, our center of readerly attention and our entryway into the events unfolding around him. By contrast, Endore’s novel interrupts its presumably major plot—namely, Bertrand’s own story—precisely to shift our readerly attention fully onto the history ostensibly in the arrière-plan of the novel. To underscore that Bertrand is no longer the center of readerly attention, the character who matters, he is in jail—and thus, “offstage”—through this section of the novel. And our narrator details that it is he—rather than the original manuscript—that has brought this
history into such relief: “Writing as he did, when the cataclysms through which Paris were passing were at their height and fresh in everybody’s mind, Galliez makes little attempt to fill in the historical events of the moment. I have been at some pains to remedy this omission, for our day has forgotten these matters” (211). The novel thus enlists our unnamed American in Paris to excavate and reconstruct that otherwise buried history for a specifically American audience.

In retelling that history, the novel, like Paris on the Barricades, focuses on recapturing the horror of the Commune’s end and the methodically ferocious fighting that retook Paris. Of the Versaillais entry into the city, our narrator observes, “They were beginning to encircle the remainder of the city still in the hands of the Commune, and wherever their assaults carried a barricade, they set up at once their temporary booths of methodic, pitiless, thorough repression: court-martial, summary execution. And their revenge was 50 to 1” (285). Moreover, the narrative’s accounting of the judicially sanctioned executions—“No witnesses, no defense. A couple questions and off went another group of wretches to a convenient wall” (289)—is highlighted not as a filling out of Aymar’s manuscript, but rather as a filling in of the historical record. For, the narrator relates, in becoming the victors, the Versaillais “became the legitimists” (288) and the cruelty of their siege was in turn “lightly passed over by historians” (288). In turn, Werewolf begins to shift our perspective on the horror plot we have so far encountered, leveraging that very plot against the historical one now in front of us. Aymar, in looking out at “streets of cadavers” (291) comes to see, in other words, our eponymous werewolf as “but a mild case” (290): “What was a werewolf who had killed a couple of prostitutes, who had dug up a few corpses, compared with these band of tigers slashing at each other with daily increasing ferocity!” (290). In that sense, the novel would seem to suggest that horror is the proper genre not only for marshaling radical memory but for telling certain otherwise forgotten histories.
The novel goes on, however, to pose a question not usually brokered by horror fiction: namely, whose deaths really matter? After describing the thousands of Communards transferred to Versailles awaiting trial, the “scores…condemned to death, hundreds [who] were to be sentenced to imprisonment for life, thousands [who] were to be deported to tropical islands” (294), the narrator interrupts to suggest the novel could stop there. “Why should you want to know of the death of the werewolf rather than another? Consult your mortuary registers. Were these not men and women?” (295). Although the chapter ultimately indulges the reader by recounting the death of Sophie and Bertrand’s ultimate admission to an “enlightened” asylum, it nevertheless presses us on why it must do so, why the whereabouts of major characters like Bertrand and Sophie matter more than the fate of those masses in Paris.

Yet even as it fills in the gaps left by historians, the novel obsessively authenticates the history it relates by directing us to a series of other histories of the Commune in its footnotes. But it at once draws on and unsettles the authority of these texts, particularly in their treatment of the day-to-day doings of the Commune itself. For even as it offers us an unflattering portrait of Citoyen Gois, the Communard in charge of administering Bertrand’s trial who was rumored to be speculating in garlic, among other illicit things, the narrator interrupts himself to cast doubt on his sources: “Or are these tales mere anti-Communard inventions?” (262). That he does so further opens up the gaps in the historical record, and recalls San Francisco journalist, and future founder of the literary journal *Argonaut*, Frank Pixley’s 1871 assertion that “The history of the Commune is written by its enemies. Like all lost causes, it will be misrepresented. What there was of good in it will be suppressed. What there was of bad will be exaggerated” (qtd. in Benham 213).
As we have seen, horror critics tend to de-emphasize—or be utterly bewildered by—Endore’s historical machinations, while those leftist literary critics who have taken any note of the novel simply hail it as a “masterpiece of the Paris Commune.” But while the novel is unequivocal in its condemnation of the Commune’s suppression, Werewolf’s descriptions of the Commune itself are, however, often equivocal. So much so, in fact, that Greil Marcus claims in his sonic archaeology of the twentieth century, Lipstick Traces, that “the most convincing rejection of the Commune remains Guy Endore’s 1933 horror potboiler, The Werewolf of Paris” (127). That reading misses the degree to which Endore unsettles his sources and foregrounds the difficulty of piecing together the Commune’s history out of often anti-Communard materials, but it nevertheless merits attention. For the most damning critique of the Commune in its pages would seem to come not from conservative histories but rather leftist recuperations of the event post-1917:

The Russians have made a national holiday of March 18, when the Commune was formed. But they are worshipping a legend, though it is true that the Commune was a mistake from which a new generation of revolutionaries was to learn a lot. The Commune was a proletarian government, yes, but so is a hobo camp. (214)

Where Jonathan Bishop saw in the Commune a nightmare of organization—a revolution orchestrated by a single, mesmeric string-puller, Saint-Just—Endore’s novel finds in it the hapless assemblage of a “hobo camp” in dire need of just such revolutionary orchestration. That it does so has, I argue, everything to do with the cultural politics of what the Commune meant for the Left in the 1930s. For as both the sensational pamphlets that took up the Commune’s story and its spectacular Madison Square Garden revival attest, radical memory of the revolution of
1871 during the Red Decade most often returned to the lessons the Commune taught later revolutionaries, emphasizing, in particular, the way in which the Bolshevik state was both authorized by the Commune and always already supplanting its vision of revolutionary association and bricolage. And yet for all the narrator’s vitriol, the narrative’s return to this moment, and consistent challenge to conventional histories of it, opens up the possibility that insurgent memory might reactivate not simply the legend of March 18, but reclaim that other potential vision of revolution—and with it, the anarchic free-for-all of the future.

I conclude my discussion, then, with Endore’s invocation of the free-for-all of the hobo camp because this conjuration of the Commune—lacking the top down organization of a party, prone to spring up anywhere unannounced—would survive the reign of McCarthy and the anti-communist cultural crackdown that did so much to dissipate radical memory in the U.S. and, with it, the American afterlife of the Commune in the following decades. The story of the Commune that would survive that cultural turn, or as Denning puts it, that “cultural amnesia,” offered future radicals not so much a program as a promise—a memory of a revolutionary future that might be vomited up at any moment, a nagging vision of a democracy yet to come. During a thirty-six hour sit-in staged on UC Berkeley’s Sproul Plaza in 1965, the Commune would thus return in the mouth of Free Speech Movement leader Mario Savio, summoned as the ensign neither of vandalism nor a particular party, but rather as the banner for taking only what was ours to begin with: “I remember last semester at one point some of us were trying to decide, ‘Should we have the sit-in in Sproul Hall or in the Student Union? Since the latter would be more in the spirit of the Paris Commune—we don’t want anything you own, we want our things’” (qtd. in Cohen 334). Three years later, as student protestors occupied Columbia University, they, too, turned to 1871 to make sense of 1968, dubbing themselves “Communards” and reliving the
future via that not so distant past. As Mark Rudd, former leader of SDS, would write in his recent memoir, “The atmosphere in the occupied buildings was charged…. A strange, chaotic, and loving new life form had spontaneously erupted…. The term Commune was joyously seized upon, both as a historical reference to the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871 and even more so as a symbol of a new, collective future” (78).


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