

GIFTS AND INTERESTS: *JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN* AND THE PURITY OF BUSINESS

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Even if the gift were never anything but a simulacrum, one must still *render an account* of the possibility of this simulacrum and of the desire that impels toward this simulacrum.

— Jacques Derrida, *Given Time*

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to *The Question of the Gift*, Mark Osteen claims that “economism . . . is the land mine of gift theory” (5). For many theorists, he explains, gift-giving and market exchanges share the same forms of calculation; for others, more specifically, self-interest is the “objective truth” of the gift.¹ The challenge that gift discourse has taken up in recent years is how to rethink reciprocity, altruism, and generosity while at the same time avoiding both the “Scylla of sentimentality and the Charybdis of economism” (Osteen 31).² In this paper I discuss Dinah Mulock Craik’s mid-Victorian bestseller, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), using gift theory (or some insights thereof) as my main analytical tool. Why is gift theory relevant to the understanding of a novel that openly extols the advantages of self-help and economic individualism?

Altruism often appears as the public face of individualism in Craik’s novel. The narrative treads a fine line between the “good-faith economy” (Bourdieu 1980: 114) and the rationality of self-interest in an attempt to redefine the social and symbolic capital of the industrious middle classes. *John Halifax* promotes a vision of disinterested generosity as much as it affirms the benefits of self-interest. Craik does not take for granted what today appears as the “paradigmatic privilege” of instrumental rationality (Godbout 23). However, the symbolic operations her novel performs might have contributed to naturalizing self-interest, at a time when the lure of profit was still the object of much social and cultural criticism.

My analysis focuses on the interplay of gifts and interests that constitutes an important feature of this narrative of economic success. First, I briefly rehearse some Victorian arguments on the vulgarity of commercial and industrial modernity by looking at business manuals that evoke the ethic of the gift in order to legitimate money-making activities. Craik’s essay on “benevolence” is relevant in this context: she redefines the true gift of charity as not extraneous to the logic of productivity or the profit motif. I then address the issue of the

“double truth” of the gift (Bourdieu, *Raisons*). This issue is crucial to an understanding of how Craik’s novel responds to the historical and ideological process whereby instrumental rationality comes to be naturalized as the “founding act . . . of sociality” (Amariglio 270). Finally I focus on the interaction between different “regimes of value” (Appadurai 15) in the novel. The text acknowledges the “subjective” truth of the gift (the *habitus* of generosity and altruism), especially through the narrator’s voice. Yet, the plot never fails to reward the pursuit of self-interest with symbolic and material gains. In other words, “sentimentality” and “economism,” the Scylla and Charybdis of gift theory, are represented simultaneously in *John Halifax*. My analysis emphasizes the latter because economism was not a dominant or unquestioned paradigm in Craik’s cultural template. That her novel articulates a story in which the pursuit of self-interest is not stigmatized or considered vulgar is significant in historical terms. Equally relevant is the emphasis on disinterestedness that marks the representation of John Halifax’s upward mobility. Ultimately, the narrative distills the innocence or purity of business by a continuous re-negotiation of the balance between giving and taking, between the virtue of disinterestedness and the logic of maximization.

1. *The smooth cataplasm of gratitude*

“I NEVER BEGGED IN MY LIFE,” objects John Halifax at the onset of the story, “I’m a person of independent property, which consists of my head and my two hands, out of which I hope to realize a large capital some day” (9; ch. 2). What complicates this straightforward representation of the self-possessing individual, whose labour power can be sold on the market, is the singularizing gaze of the first-person narrator, Phineas Fletcher.³ He catches the reader’s attention, in the novel’s opening scene, by admiring the hands and the physical prowess of the unknown “lad” who will become the hero of the tale: “A strong hand it was – roughened and browned with labour – though he was scarcely as old as I. What would I not have given to have been so stalwart and so tall!” (1; ch. 1). This comment sets the general tone for the story that unfolds: the reader is encouraged to sympathize with Phineas’s subjective perception of the “lad” and his physical and mental attributes.⁴ Phineas’s admiration of John’s “hand,” his “reverence” for the “physical strength” and the beauty of his “muscular limbs” (2; ch. 1) are in tension with John’s non-aesthetic understanding of the market value of his hands, limbs and strength. In other words, John’s labor power is appreciated simultaneously according to two different “regimes of value” (Appadurai 15): it is a commodity to be bought and sold in the market as well as a singularized entity to be admired and loved for its beauty and intrinsic moral worth.

In this paper I discuss the subtle interaction between these “regimes of value.” More specifically, I look at the symbolic negotiations, the rhetorical and narrative strategies Craik’s text adopts in order to come to terms with a profoundly ambivalent Victorian perception of the process of commodification, the lure of profit and the social status of tradesmen, businessmen, and entrepreneurs.⁵ In *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold eloquently exposes the vulgarity of the Philistines. The kind of “perfection,” the “sweetness and light” Arnold perceives as the trademarks of his idea of culture are not the natural legacy of wealth: economic capital and cultural capital do not converge in the experience of the English Philistines. Their habits, manners, and even thoughts betray a philosophy of life that centers on money and is, therefore, highly condemnable. Arnold’s indictment of the profit-oriented way of life of the English Philistines and his critique of the spread of commodification are not surprising, given that

his perspective is predicated upon a passionate defense of the values of “culture” in a world dominated by the market.

Even Victorian business manuals, geared to instructing a new generation of tradesman and businessman on the virtues of prosperity, construct money-making as a dubious end. Although profit is the obvious goal of any business activity, it is not openly sanctioned as a legitimate object of male desire. “Mammon and Manhood are incompatible,” as the author of *Worth and Wealth* (1857) bluntly states (Hunt 140). These manuals describe the lure of profit as a “temptation” to be resisted and a dangerous “Moloch” to whom the man of business sacrifices his life. But they also acknowledge that the desire to make money is a powerful incentive to individual exertion, especially for those “who began with nothing” (Tyng 112).⁶ These handbooks, in other words, share with much Victorian fiction a degree of ambivalence that is symptomatic of the deep-seated cultural anxiety engendered by the rapid rise in prosperity of the English middle classes. Unlike Dickens’s novels, however, these texts cannot reward the subject who nobly resists the profit impulse without defeating their own pragmatic purpose. What they propose, instead, are quibbling distinctions between lawful and unlawful business practices, between a noble dedication to and an excessive absorption into one’s own occupation, between lofty and petty aims. Only by sublimating the “lust of gain” can the businessman act as a trustworthy mediator between the individual and the community in such a way as “to benefit the world” (Stearns 163). Sublimating the “lust of gain” very often means transforming money into a gift to the community. Ultimately, what distinguishes the true, successful businessman from the vulgar upstart is the use to which his money is put:

But I think that our business men are beginning to learn the true use of money. They are beginning to understand that he who digs a well, like Jacob, which will gush up with fresh water for ages, has done a good and great deed; that he who has used his money to found a school where the little feet of children will gather, and the hum of young voices be heard, ages after he is dead, has done a good and great act (Todd 69)

Reverting to the ethic of the gift, or to what Bourdieu calls the “subjective” truth of the gift (liberality, generosity, altruism), the author of this essay defines “the position, influence, and duty” of the man of business by emphasizing the public benevolence of altruism rather than the egoism of self-interest. Only through the sublimation of money-making activities into public acts of gift-giving can those activities be fully justified. To use money in business “for the sake of its increase” and “to spend it upon ourselves and our families” (Todd 68) is in fact a “temptation” to be resisted in view of a superior type of gain – reputation, prestige, immortality even, or in other words symbolic capital.

Sally Mitchell claims that *John Halifax* can be read “both as a story and as a practical guide to virtue and prosperity” (40). Indeed, this novel shares with Victorian business manuals a common emphasis on the basic rules of self-help: punctuality, honesty, hard work, patience and the stamina to bear a high degree of oppressive cares. It also shares an awareness of the dubious cultural reputation of the profit motif, despite the fact that the heroism of John Halifax is imbued with the values of the commercial and industrial middle class. And in this novel too, as I hope to demonstrate, the logic of the gift (if there is such logic) plays a strategic role in redefining, for a middle-class audience, the benefits of self-help, economic individualism, and success.

Gift-giving and altruism are discussed, often in jaded terms, in some of the essays Mulock Craik wrote and later collected under the provocative title *Sermons out of Church* (1876). In “Beneficence or Benevolence” the author distinguishes between two different styles of public charity: wasteful “beneficence,” implicitly motivated by egoism or “self-love” and by the wish to enjoy “the smooth cataplasm of gratitude” (133) and genuine “benevolence” motivated by the wish to do good and to help others help themselves. The latter style of charity – which appears as the more disinterested type of gift – is however not extraneous to the logic of the market, since what qualifies good acts of benevolence is the *productive* use to which the gift is put. Craik quotes enthusiastically the example of a charitable London lady who, while benefiting the poor by providing them with little jobs, housing and food, “succeeds in what almost all charities fail in – she actually makes it pay” (125).

Remarkable in Craik’s essay is the interconnection between gifts and interests, between altruism and instrumental rationality. The gift of charity is genuine and laudable only when it proves its market worth. By the same token, the gratuitous gift of money – “a handful of coppers to be scrambled for in the street” (117) – is condemnable because the donor does not consider “how far the recipient has a right to it, or will benefit by it” (117) by using it productively. In *John Halifax* a similar juxtaposition between the logic of the gift and the logic of the market can be traced in various episodes throughout the narrative. The story of John Halifax, of his success in the world of industry and business is built upon a careful balancing of gifts and interests, with the hero himself featuring as both a “priceless boon” (96; ch. 10), a gift jealously guarded by the narrator, and a commodity in the labor market. This oscillation between the “lure of gift” and the “lure of profit” (Godbout 35) is a strategy whereby the narrative naturalizes the profit motif, especially by way of the plot, while simultaneously acknowledging, in Phineas’s narrative discourse, the “ghost” of generosity, altruism, and gentlemanliness.⁷

2. *A collective misrecognition*

CAN GIFT EXCHANGES BE DISTINGUISHED from market exchanges? Is the spirit of the gift opposed to that of the commodity? Gifts and commodity economies, as John Frow observes, “are always intertwined in various hybrid configurations”, they are not “mutually exclusive modes of transaction, since they tend to have in common certain forms of calculation, strategy and motivation” (124).⁸ In Pierre Bourdieu’s understanding of the “subjective” and “objective” dimensions of the gift, the practice of gift giving appears to each agent as free because of the time interval that separates the gift and the counter-gift: “the interval that makes it possible to experience the objective exchange as a discontinuous series of free and generous acts is what makes gift exchange viable and acceptable by facilitating and favoring self-deception, a lie told to oneself, as the condition of coexistence of recognition and misrecognition of the logic of the exchange” (“Marginalia” 232).

Bourdieu does not share with the economic approach the assumption that agents perform conscious calculations.⁹ Rather, individual agents participate in a “collective misrecognition” of the “objective truth of the game” without which the game cannot be played (*Logic of Practice* 106). If reciprocity is the structural truth of the gift, that truth is collectively denied or repressed:

The gift economy, in contrast to the economy where equivalent values are exchanged, is based on a denial of the economic (in the narrow sense), a refusal of the logic of maximization of the economic profit, i.e. of the spirit of calculation and the exclusive pursuit of material (as opposed to symbolic) interest. . . . It is organized with a view to the accumulation of symbolic capital (a capital of recognition, honor, nobility, etc.) that is brought about, in particular, through the transmutation of economic capital achieved through the alchemy of symbolic exchanges . . . and only available to agents endowed with dispositions adjusted to the logic of ‘disinterestedness.’ (“Marginalia” 234–35)

Because of its emphasis on the denial of self-interest and calculation, and the concomitant accumulation of symbolic capital made possible by such a collective denial, Bourdieu’s theory provides an interesting framework for analyzing the way in which the maximization option or the pursuit of material interest is articulated in Craik’s novel.¹⁰ The denial – *illusio*, self-deception – theorized by Bourdieu can be detected, first of all, in the novel’s reliance on the rhetoric of gentlemanliness, which is characterized by an investment in disinterestedness that is (or should be) democratically open to all, regardless of their income and social status.¹¹ McKendrick reads the novel’s insistence on the gentleman ideal as a kind of betrayal of the text’s overall commitment to the values of the new commercial and industrial middle classes. The standards against which John Halifax’s business successes are judged, McKendrick observes, are inspired by the same kind of “literary and educational Luddism” that he sees as hegemonic in British culture.¹² The contrast between the business ideal (entrepreneurial excellence, competitive individualism, the pursuit of economic self-interest) and the gentleman ideal is, in fact, a recurrent concern in nineteenth-century cultural constructions of the vulgarity of industrial modernity. However, I suggest that the representation of social mobility, in Craik’s novel, is characterized by a more nuanced interaction between self-interest and disinterestedness, between gift and commodity economies. Attuned to the logic of disinterestedness, the gentleman ideal Craik deploys in her version of the rags-to-riches narrative is never extraneous to the lure of profit. Likewise, the maximization of individual utility is never simply portrayed as the result of a conscious calculation.

3. *A priceless boon*

AS A PARAGON OF ECONOMIC and civic virtue, Craik’s hero has appeared both convincing (to a vast number of Victorian readers who have determined the commercial success of this story of commercial success) and disproportionate.¹³ “We know of no scales that will hold him,” writes Henry James “and of no unit of length with which to compare him. He is infinite; he outlasts time; he is enshrined in a million innocent breasts; and before his awful perfection and his eternal durability we respectfully lower our lance” (168). The somewhat suspicious perfection of this hero might very well be an effect of the novel’s narrative structure. The story is narrated by Phineas Fletcher, a bachelor invalid, who occupies a liminal position between the domestic sphere and the market.¹⁴ The son of a wealthy tanner, Phineas is a failure in the genetic process, for he is unfit and, most importantly, unwilling to pursue his father’s calling: “Mentally and physically I alike revolted from my father’s trade” (24; ch. 3).¹⁵ Endowed with a sophisticated, civilized, proto-Arnoldian conscience, able to appreciate the “sweetness and light” of culture despite a Philistine ascendancy, Phineas provides the most appropriate mediation for the legitimization of John Halifax’s incredible rise from beggar-boy

to gentleman. “Trade” and “culture” are equally represented in the genealogical tree of the Fletcher family. Craik’s narrator is imagined as a descendant of the sixteenth-century poet, Phineas Fletcher, who wrote “The Purple Island,” a long pastoral poem often quoted in the novel: Phineas may be a failure as far as trade goes, but his credentials as the rightful heir of the cultural heritage of literary forefathers are impeccable. As an insider in the contemplative world of high culture, Phineas is immune from the instrumental rationality that drives the outside world and from the desire to make money or to prove one’s worth in the marketplace. This aloofness, suffused with feminine-type sympathy, is the prerequisite for his appreciation of John’s style of entrepreneurial manhood. For this style to become an object of admiration and desire the narrative needs a pure conscience, a self untainted by the market and therefore able to validate the beauty and purity of business properly understood, from his privileged position outside the arena of commercial strife.

Craik’s novel, in other words, brings together two different models of masculinity: one is based on the languid self-discipline of contemplation, the other on the forward-looking self-discipline of productivity. What binds these two “styles” of masculinity together is the plot of homosocial love that occupies center stage in the first half of the novel.¹⁶ It is to this plot that the reader is first invited to respond – so that, when the time comes for John Halifax to embark upon a business life, after the death of Phineas’s father, his ambition, his desire to make a fortune and to climb the social ladder will not appear in a detrimental light. Phineas’s love, admiration and approval ensure that the identity of the businessman remains uncontaminated by any taint of vulgarity.

As Sally Mitchell remarks, Phineas’s narrative discourse “enlist[s] the reader’s emotional response by tapping sources of sentiment and encouraging identification” (49). More specifically, his singularizing voice allows the text to switch value regimes so as to create a symbolic space, a “commodity-free zone” (Gregory 95), where the logic of the market is temporarily suspended. For instance, at the beginning of the story, when John’s self-image is predicated on a commoditized perception of his labor power, Phineas’s eroticizing gaze transforms the body-as-commodity into the body-as-gift, for the benefit of the reader: “It gave me something I did not possess,” remarks Phineas of his friend’s presence “something entirely new. I could not look at the dancing brown eyes, at the quaint dimples of lurking fun that played hide-and-seek under the firmest mouth, without feeling my heart cheered and delighted, like one brought out of a murky chamber into the open day” (11; ch. 2).¹⁷

The same kind of singularization occurs in the representation of commercial and industrial activity. The initial setting of John’s slow but steady rise to success is the malodorous tannery of Phineas’s father, unequivocally described as revolting: the tan-pits are “deep fosses of abomination” (25; ch. 3), the “familiar odour” (25; ch. 3) of the tan-yard is an offense to the senses and Phineas does not hesitate to vent his “abhorrence” (24; ch. 3) for the kind of business to which his father and John are devoting so much energy. The cloth-mill, on the other hand, provides an altogether different setting for the realization of John’s ambition. The strategy of singularization the text enacts in order to distinguish between different types of industrial activity is based on a series of carefully drawn symbolic boundaries. Whereas the tannery is the site of the impure, both metaphorically and literally (the “sanguinary exuviae of defunct animals” are the impure at its most tangible, 26; ch. 3), Enderley Hill, the location of John’s successful entrepreneurship, is an Arcadian dream, replete with intertextual allusions to the pastoral tradition. “Do you like this Phineas?” enquires John Halifax, while facing the idyllic rural scenario where his talents will be most profitably spent,

'I do, very much. A dear, smiling, English valley, holding many a little nest of an English home. Fancy being a patriarch over such a region, having the whole valley in one's hand, to do good to, or ill. You can't think what primitive people they are hereabouts – descendants from an old colony of Flemish cloth-weavers: they keep to the trade. Down in the valley – if one could see through the beech-wood – is the grand support of the neighbourhood, a large cloth-mill.' (100; ch. 10)

Images of "secure, productive, and tranquil rural Englishness" (Helsing 8) are here enlisted on the side of industrialism. The "fine cloth-mill" (100) upon which John has set his ambition is made to appear as the natural extension of a beautiful *English* rural scene, soon to be reclaimed as a national symbol – a "portable icon of England" (Helsing 7) – by the inventiveness, "the thoroughly English quality of daring" (277; ch. 27) that marks John Halifax's style of entrepreneurial manhood. Enderley Hill is a place at once new and familiar – "it seems as if I had known the place before" (91; ch. 9), remarks Halifax – where the transition to industrial modernity will not be experienced as a painful rupture between the rural past and the urban present. The narrative, in fact, frames this transition in stylized, literary terms. Halifax's move from the tannery to the cloth-mill is prepared by descriptions of the "quiet, free, Arcadian life" (101) that John and Phineas have the privilege of leading in Enderley, when John is still working as an apprentice at the tannery. In this section (chapter 9) the narrator most explicitly capitalizes on the pastoral tradition, quoting extensively from "The Purple Island" as if the shepherd's "ideal of a happy life" (88; ch. 9) were meant to provide a blueprint for the kind of happiness in store for John (but not for Phineas).¹⁸ With its literary resonance and emotional intensity, the pastoral interlude prepares the reader to perceive John's future entrepreneurship (after he obtains the lease of the cloth-mill) as contiguous with the Arcadian life idealized in this section.¹⁹ Unlike the tannery, the cloth-mill is both the epitome of the Industrial Revolution and a de-commoditized economic object that can be (re)valued for its association with the peculiar literary aura of rural scenes, rendered even more poignant by the novel's display of blissful homosocial bonding.²⁰ John's acquisition of Enderley Mill is his smartest career move. It is significant that the text should couch this move, this triumph of "trade," in the suffusing glow of "culture" and poetry, through Phineas's mediation.

4. *I have gained something today*

AS IGOR KOPYTOFF CLAIMS, "[s]ingularisations of various kinds, many of them fleeting, are a constant accompaniment of commoditization, all the more so when it becomes excessive" (83). The story of John Halifax, beginning in 1794 and ending in 1834, traces the advent of industrial capitalism and the extension of commodification to the English countryside. As a "historical allegory" (Mitchell 41), it tends to emphasize the positive effects of industrial modernity, rather than its disruptive implications. Like many other women writers, Craik foregrounds the enabling potential of industrialism, albeit within the residual context of ruralism.²¹ The narrative tactics she adopts hinge on Phineas's personal mediation, and on his position of sympathetic detachment from the masculine world of competition and commercial combat. The horizontal tie of friendship between Phineas and John – cemented on solidarity, reciprocity and mutually positive indebtedness – provides the emotional and sentimental light that illuminates the plot of economic individualism this narrative also celebrates.

The opposition between gifts and interests, solidarity and egoism is never unproblematic in Craik's fictional take on the "good-faith economy." In "Benevolence or Beneficence" Craik exposes the forms of calculation that preside over apparently gratuitous acts of generosity, undertaken in order to gratify "our self-love" (116). Likewise, in her novel, she has Phineas admit, at the beginning of the second chapter, that "simple selfishness" has driven him to befriend the unknown lad, John Halifax: "To say that what I projected was done out of charity or pity would not be true; it was simple selfishness" (9; ch. 2). The "taint of selfish joy" (96; ch. 10) and of possessiveness that marks Phineas's generosity is counterbalanced by what appears as the totally gratuitous, unselfish gift of friendship Halifax tenderly bestows upon the invalid boy – whose place in the business genealogy of the Fletcher family he is nevertheless about to appropriate.

In other words, Halifax's disinterested acts of generosity are construed, at the level of the plot, as acts that, in one way or another, contribute to promoting his self-interest. It is as if liberality, altruism, generosity – the Christian values that distinguish Halifax from other, less perfect industrial heroes – were justified, in the "economic unconscious" of this novel, not because they are opposed to self-interest and instrumental rationality but because they lead to material and symbolic rewards.²² There is a disjunction between Phineas's narrative discourse, based on love and admiration for John's virtuous, Christian style of entrepreneurship, and the linear succession of events – the plot – in which that style is often rewarded as the best strategy to achieve economic and social ends.

Broadly speaking, Halifax gets a chance to prove his worth in the capitalist game because Phineas has willingly opted out. As Abel Fletcher remarks, upon accepting John as apprentice and future partner: "'But' – and he looked at me, then sternly, nay, fiercely, into John's steadfast eyes – 'remember, thou hast in some measure taken that lad's place. May God deal with thee as thou dealest with my son Phineas – my only son!'" (84; ch. 8). Less a usurper than a rightful heir of the business faculty that failed to materialize in Phineas's genes, Halifax is there to inject new blood in the administration of the family business – which he does, in several instances, by flaunting a noble disregard for petty, short-term material and personal gains. Before becoming an apprentice, John has more than one chance to prove his sense of duty, dedication to the job, and unerring efficiency. When a flood threatens to destroy the tannery, he promptly anticipates the turn of the tide and helps Abel Fletcher save what he can from the "work of ruin" (40; ch. 4). The master reaches for his pocket, ready to reward the useful lad with a gift of money. But Halifax proudly turns away: "It is quite enough reward that I have been useful to my master, and that he acknowledges it" (43; ch. 4). The reward he obtains, however, is cashed in at a different counter as an increase in symbolic capital realized when John is granted admittance at the master's household every Sunday "as our equal and my friend" (43; ch. 4). Since this narrative openly acknowledges the status anxiety issue in its representation of social mobility, the countergift of hospitality John receives is decidedly more valuable than a few coins.

In this case, the denial of self-interest has contributed to augmenting the "capital of recognition" (Bourdieu, "Marginalia" 235) John Halifax needs in order to become the "gentleman" promised in the title. In another episode, the topical scene of the food riots, the ethic of the gift is deployed by John Halifax in devising a successful business plan that will definitely prove his potential as *homo economicus* of a new generation. This episode is evocative of many other scenes in industrial novels where the overt explosion of clashing class interests in acts of violence threatens to unsettle the precarious ideological equilibrium

of the narrative as a whole. But John Halifax's approach to the threat of violence coming from the mob is distinctly managerial rather than authoritarian or sentimental. In this episode, Abel Fletcher plays the part of the old-fashioned, despotic master who refuses to sell wheat "under famine prices" – while poor people are "starving in scores" – waiting for a bad harvest to increase the exchange value of his grains (66; ch. 7). Blindly pursuing economic self-interest, Abel Fletcher hoards his bags of wheat, "worth almost as much as bags of gold," indifferent to the demands of the rioters who implore him to "throw down the corn" (70; ch. 7). Rather than giving in to their wish, however, he flings a bag of corn into the river "in the very sight of the famished rioters!" (70; ch. 7).

This act of conspicuous destruction, meant as a warning and a lesson in social hierarchy, aggravates both the frustration of the mob and the bad reputation of their master. Only John Halifax's timely intervention prevents any further destruction of property. What qualifies his agency in this crucial instance is a tactful deployment of the ethic of the gift. Acting as mediator between the two antagonists, Halifax placates the famished rioters by offering them the gift of food – "all the food of every kind that there was in the house" – in exchange for the "promise to be peaceable" (80; ch. 8). This simple gift, however, is only a prelude to the more ostentatious act of donation whereby Halifax restores the circulation of the goods Abel Fletcher had refused to sell: "[John] called me aside, explained to me, and asked my advice and consent, as Abel Fletcher's son, to a plan that had come into his mind. It was to write orders, which each man presenting our mill, should receive a certain amount of flour" (82; ch. 8).

This act of donation can no doubt be intended as an "affirmation of goodwill" (Hyde 35) as well as a "vehicle for dialogue."²³ But it is also an affirmation of authority, on the part of the giver, who generously disposes of Abel Fletcher's own possessions (first the food in his house, then his precious bags of grain), under the assumption that "if he does not give some, he may lose all" (82; ch. 8). Unlike his master, Halifax seems better to understand the "paradox of keeping-while-giving."²⁴ He distributes "little bits of paper – precious as pound-notes" (82; ch. 8) in order to save not just material properties but also the reputation and prestige of their owner, thereby re-establishing the social hierarchy threatened by the rebellious mob.

'Isn't this better than hanging?' said John to the men when he had distributed the little bits of paper – precious as pound-notes – and made them all fully understand the same. 'Why, there isn't another gentleman in Norton Bury, who, if you had come to burn *his* house down, would not have had the constables or the soldiers, have shot down one-half of you like mad dogs, and sent the other half to the country gaol. Now, for all your misdoings, we let you go quietly home, well fed, and with food for children, too. *Why*, think you?' (82–83; ch. 8)

Why, indeed. The "orders" Halifax distributes are an example of "commodity coupons." These coupons represent, in Appadurai's definition, "a transformational mid-point between 'pure' gift and 'pure' commerce" (25). Although they resemble money, their power of acquisition is not generalized and their "restricted flow is at the service of the reproduction of social and political systems" (Appadurai 25). They circulate as gifts, but they also share with barter the "spirit of calculation" and the "openness to self-interest" (Appadurai 25). The temporary solution to social violence and class conflict this narrative imagines, unprecedented in the tradition of industrial novels, is based on a clever mixture of gifts and interests geared

to reducing economic losses by a public display of altruism and magnanimity. Furthermore, such a display is acknowledged by the narrator as a managerial strategy of sterling quality. Here is Phineas's eloquent comment on Halifax's successful mediation:

He sat down composedly as if he had been alone in the counting-house, and wrote. I looked over his shoulder, admiring his clear, firm, hand-writing; the precision, concentrativeness, and quickness, with which he first seemed to arrange and than execute his ideas. He possessed to the full that 'business' faculty, so frequently despised, but which, out of very ordinary material, often makes a clever man; and without which the cleverest man alive can never be altogether a great man. (82; ch. 8)

This apology of the business faculty is all the more appropriate, in ideological terms, because it winds up an episode in which the triumph of the good-faith economy is also functional to the pursuit of economic interests. What qualifies John Halifax as an excellent businessman is his ability to switch from *homo economicus* to *homo donator*, and to understand both the logic of intertemporal optimization and the "mechanisms of obligation" (Maus 29) that are implicit in the act of gift giving. In fact, the plot promptly rewards this ability with a job promotion: after the episode of the food-riots Halifax obtains his apprenticeship and the chance of a future partnership. As this episode shows, the text does not capitalize on the simple polarization between the business ideal and the gentleman ideal, or between the profit motif and the investment in disinterestedness. The hero's generosity and "infinite" goodness, celebrated by Phineas's voice and lampooned by Henry James, are at the same time a collective *illusio* which the reader is encouraged to share, and a formula for accumulating symbolic and economic capital, as the plot indeed suggests.

My point is not that Craik's novel exposes the "objective" truth of the gift or the paradigmatic primacy of instrumental rationality. Rather, by oscillating between the lure of gift and the lure of profit, between singularization and commoditization, this novel tries to clear a symbolic space where 'business' might be perceived as not antithetical to 'culture,' and success might be redefined by what one gives as well as by what one has. This compromise may appear idealistic or ideological, but it is interesting from a historical point of view, because it runs counter to hegemonic Victorian representations of the tragic vulgarity of business, as in *Dombey and Son*, or the fatal appeal of money and profit, as in countless Victorian novels. Craik was too much of a clever and disenchanted businesswoman herself not to attempt a different approach.²⁵ Instead of condemning the profit impulse for its selfish implications, she shows that it might indeed be compatible with social unselfishness. Instead of deploring the inevitable commodification of all spheres of human life, she tries to accommodate that process within the text by imagining a story that re-singularizes the agents and the objects involved in it. *John Halifax* may not be a brilliant critique of ruthless capitalism. But it speaks volumes about the way in which the English middle classes came to terms with the cultural anxiety engendered by their own wealth and economic performance. "The true picture of life as it is, if it could be adequately painted" observes the narrator in *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873), "would show men what they are, and how they might rise, not, indeed, to perfection, but one step first and then another on the ladder" (Trollope 357). Craik's "true picture" of a business life undoubtedly tilts towards "perfection" and has often been perceived as false. But in the depiction of Halifax's progress toward success, however idealized or false, "perfection" is not at odds with the pursuit of self-interest. As a result, generosity and economic individualism can be construed as two

mutually reinforcing dispositions. This compromise, rather than the impeccable goodness of the hero, is the novel's tentative solution to the ideological contradictions or the "symbolic overload" generated by the advent of industrial modernity.²⁶ The sentimentality of *John Halifax* might seem unpalatable today, and its economism ideologically suspicious. But both should be understood, in historical terms, as instrumental to the redefinition of the social and symbolic capital of the industrious middle classes that Craik attempts in her narrative. Ultimately, this novel foregrounds the power of fiction to confer symbolic prestige.

5. *A very Pariah of prosperity*

THERE ARE SEVERAL OTHER EPISODES in the novel that might be read along the same lines. I will concentrate on one more incident in which an increase in symbolic capital accrues as the result of the affirmation of non-instrumental interests. By chapter 30, John Halifax has become a wealthy and respected member of the business community by a mixture of good luck (his wife's inheritance allows him to get the lease of the cloth-mill), hard work and inventiveness. In the "panic year" 1825, when "speculations of all kinds sprung up like fungi, out of dead wood, flourished a little and dropped away" (311; ch. 30), Halifax's credit and reputation are not threatened by ill-fated speculative schemes (which he dutifully avoids) but by his unstable position as "a very Pariah of prosperity" (318; ch. 31) in the midst of commercial distress. He is not losing money while everybody else is, and since "misfortune makes people unjust" (308; ch. 30), his public image begins to suffer from slander: "I feel sorry, because of the harm it may do me" he confides to Phineas "especially among working people, who know nothing but what they hear, and believe everything that is told them" (308). He gets into the habit of carrying pistols, but it is not sheer force that will restore his good name. What does the trick, this time, is a financial transaction couched in the rhetoric of the gift. Contrary to sound business judgment, Halifax opens an account with the local bank on the day the bank is about to announce its insolvency or to stop payments: "'Mr. Jessop,' John said, in a loud, distinct voice, that all might hear him, 'I have the pleasure to open an account with you. I feel satisfied that in these dangerous times no credit is more safe than yours. Allow me to pay in to-day the sum of five thousand pounds'" (323–24; ch. 31).

The canvass bag full of money that Halifax places on the counter, in full view of the anxious customers, is apparently similar to the other bags "full of gold" that surround the "old banker" (323; ch. 31). Yet it possesses a special aura that reverses the impersonality and anonymity of money. At the sight of this "precious bag," which as Phineas recounts contains "the consolation – perhaps the life – of hundreds in it," the bank door "flew open like magic" (323; ch. 31) and the credit of the banker was quickly restored. The aura, the magical halo of Halifax's money has something in common with the "hau" of the gift, as Mauss explains it.²⁷ Money is not, strictly speaking, a personal possession, but in this instance the bag of gold has a "spirit" that impels the receivers to reciprocate: the customers "who had been scrambling, swearing, almost fighting to reach the counter" (324; ch. 31) generously refrain from requesting immediate payment. Halifax's gesture is not exactly an act of donation, but it is perceived as generous and unselfish because of the risk involved in opening an account with a bank that is about to fail. Indifferent to potential losses, Halifax relies on the exemplarity of his gesture to achieve the hoped-for result. Gifts, writes Mary Douglas "are given in a context of public drama, with nothing secret about them. In being more directly cued to public esteem, the distribution of honour, and the sanctions of religion, the gift

economy is more visible than the market” (xviii). If in the public drama of the panic year, intangible financial speculations troubled the workings of the invisible hand of the market, it is a tangible gift of gold that openly and magically ensures, in this novel’s interpretation of the financial crisis, not just “universal confidence” (324; ch. 31) but the restoration of Halifax’s good name. The *hau* of the gift, as Sahlins explains, can also be understood as its “material yield,” and in this transaction too the *hau* is handed over to the original donor when the whole community acknowledges Halifax’s prestige.

Far and near travelled the story of the day when Jessop’s bank was near breaking, far and near, though secretly – for we found it out chiefly by its results. . . . To drive with [John] across the country – he never carried pistols now – or to walk with him . . . was a perpetual pleasure to the rest of the family. Everybody knew him, everybody greeted him, everybody smiled as he passed – as though his presence and his recognition were good things to have and to win. (357–58; ch. 35)

It is hard to imagine a more profitable return for what appears as an irrational act from an economic viewpoint. In this instance the narrative wants us to believe that solidarity and generosity are indeed possible and also, perhaps, that the history of the panic year might have been less dramatic, had people heeded the same logic by which Halifax is able to save his property and his business from the “universal crisis.” What the text also shows is that the hero who balances profits and losses on a symbolic as well as material scale is a more accomplished businessman than the one who one-sidedly pursues monetary gains.

In fact, the question of understanding or redefining what constitutes a symbolic gain in a world dominated by market exchanges is more crucial in this text than the issue of gentlemanliness *per se*. The two are indeed related for Halifax’s gentlemanly acts are precisely those acts that increase his capital of reputation. At the beginning of the narrative, Halifax shows Phineas a Greek Testament, inherited from his father, with the inscription “Guy Halifax, gentleman”. The function of this object, the only heirloom John possesses, seems to be that of certifying his noble pedigree and origins. In the novel, however, the “common-sense doctrine of the advantages of good descent” (5; ch. 1) is endorsed only by Abel Fletcher, whereas Phineas reads the meaning of that inscription in an altogether different way: “He was indebted to no forefathers for a family history: the chronicle commenced with himself, and was altogether his own making. No romantic antecedents ever turned up: his lineage remained uninvestigated, and his pedigree began and ended with his own honest name – John Halifax” (11; ch. 2).

In Victorian discussions of the gentleman ideal, the issue of whether one is born or becomes a gentleman was an unsolvable conundrum (Waters 28). Craik chooses the latter option for it is more in line with her celebration of individual merit and of the bourgeois dream of total freedom. The novel conveniently parades a series of stock aristocratic figures – Lord Luxmore *in primis* – that run the whole gamut of social, political and economic vices. Hence, aristocratic titles and land are not automatically signs of prestige; being a gentleman by birth is no guarantee of genuine gentlemanliness. As *The Athenaeum* explained, the inscription “gentleman” on Halifax’s Greek Testament, was “the inalienable possession of every human being” (Martin 536). Not surprisingly, therefore, Craik’s hero refuses to defer to lineage, titles and blood. In one instance, in particular, this refusal involves the exchange of women in the marriage market. Halifax rejects Lord Ravanel’s proposal to marry his

daughter Maud – “Her mother and I would rather see our little Maud lying beside her sister Muriel than see her Countess of Luxmore” (378; ch. 36) – despite the fact that the Lord in question is not much of a villain and has always been welcomed in the Halifax circle. It is in name of the superior moral rectitude and honour of his bourgeois world – “your world is not our world, nor your aims our aims” – that Halifax objects to this wedding, although it would have been a love match, as the readers are well-aware. Too much is at stake, the narrative seems to imply, in terms of real social prestige for love to interfere. What better way to reassure middle-class readers that titles are indeed irrelevant than to show the triumph of bourgeois honour over love and desire, the most equalizing force in the tradition of English fiction? What is also at stake, however, as the plot soon afterwards discloses, is the insolvency of the aristocracy. Upon Lord Luxmore’s death it is discovered that “his liabilities, like his extravagances, were enormous” (385; ch. 37) and that the match Halifax had thwarted, in the name of honour, would have been a bad match indeed in financial terms, since Lord Ravanel “had succeeded to an empty title – and beggary” (385; ch. 37). So, in this case, economic rationality triumphs alongside bourgeois honour – while defending his own ideal of the true gentleman and showing a noble disinterest in nominal nobility, Halifax is also defending his economic capital, his material possessions and his own solvency in the market.

More interesting, however, is the process of symbolic reformation that Lord Ravanel has to undergo in order to become a suitable husband for Maud. This process entails a spectacular act of renunciation whereby the legacy of vice and corruption, implicit in his name and aristocratic title, is magically purified. Before Lord Luxmore dies, his son talks him into cutting off the entail, “thereby making the whole property saleable and available for the payment of creditors” (385; ch. 37). It is by turning signs of aristocratic prestige into saleable commodities that such purification is achieved and the morality of the market is established. Land, heirlooms and titles of nobility can be considered “inalienable possessions” – possessions, that is, that are inherited rather than freely exchanged, and whose elusive value is the result of “an exclusive and cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time” (Weiner 33). In the social life of these properties, their “commodity candidacy” (Appadurai 15) becomes apparent only at certain junctures.²⁸ Lord Ravanel’s commendable act of renunciation is a value-switching moment that allows the reinsertion of these properties in the circuit of market exchanges: gifts become commodities, their singularized aura becomes quantifiable exchange value, and through this process of commodification the text distils its own idea of symbolic gain.

Something in this young nobleman’s noble act – it has since been not without a parallel among our aristocracy – silenced the tongue of gossip itself. The deed was so new – so unlike anything that had been conceived possible, especially in a man like Lord Ravanel, who had always borne the character of a harmless, idle, misanthropic nonentity – that society was nonplussed concerning it. (387; ch. 37)

By accepting and deferring to the logic of the market – “founded on the immediate and permanent liquidation of debt” (Godbout 25) – Lord Ravanel discovers the benefits of modern bourgeois freedom and the profits to be reaped from disinterestedness: no longer a “nonentity,” he becomes, after a convenient lapse of time, Maud’s husband and a valuable partner of the Halifax family firm.

6. Conclusion

THE INCORPORATION OF THE ARISTOCRACY into a middle-class value system is the obvious ideological stake played out in the Luxmore-Ravanel subplot. The question however is how the novel constructs and defends that system; how value is conferred upon different types of action, and what regimes of value come into play in a story that seems to describe one thing – the patient and well-rewarded pursuit of self-interest – and to prescribe another – the *habitus* of generosity and altruism of the true gentleman. Although the distinction between a descriptive and a prescriptive side is arbitrary, it is useful in order to understand what kind of cultural work this text is performing. On the one hand, *John Halifax* describes a society in which there truly are no free gifts since strategies of intertemporal optimization prevail (or seem to prevail according to today's standards): the hero is seen to maximize his interest over time “by implicitly rewarding [his] own present generosity with a discounted gift to be received in a more or less distant future” (Ansperger 77). The representation of Halifax's upward mobility is punctuated by episodes in which, for each act of disinterested generosity, there accrues a return, at a later time, in terms of symbolic capital as well as material gain. On the prescriptive level, on the other hand, *John Halifax* tends to encourage the ethic of the gift, i.e. human solidarity, positive mutual indebtedness and the *habitus* of generosity – certainly not disavowed by Phineas's narrative as standards of value that any honest businessman might want to reconsider. In her discussion of Smith's invisible hand as an “obviating device,” Emma Rothschild explains that the “utility of every individual is an end, but it is not an end which the individual has himself devised or explained” (146). In Craik's novel too maximization is not “devised” by the hero as his own end, but it is constructed as a likely result of his individual efforts.

The polarization between a purely altruistic gift and a purely interested utilitarian exchange is not endorsed in the novel's representation of commercial and industrial modernity, just as it is not endorsed in Craik's essay on benevolence and self-sacrifice. Rather, through the continuous re-negotiation of the balance between gifts and interests this novel constructs the innocence of commerce and redefines the prestige of business. Whether this is a laudable goal or not is irrelevant. Craik's novel is interesting not because it argues for or against the spirit of capitalism. It is interesting, historically speaking, because of the symbolic operations it performs in order to come to terms with and naturalize the commodified world that spirit has ushered in. In the economic world this novel constructs, money and commodities are not intrinsically bad, just as altruism and gifts are not intrinsically good. The pursuit of self-interest does not stand condemned, as in much Victorian fiction, because it is synonymous with the triumph of the cash-nexus over solidarities and communal bonds obtained in an idealized pre-modern world. By the same token, in a world where market exchange dominates, the gentleman ideal is not fetishised as the opposite of commerce, trade and business.

Perhaps the appeal of this novel to different generations of middle-class readers has something to do with the kind of compromise it imagines. If, as Franco Moretti claims, novels have a problem-solving vocation, the value-switching operations this narrative performs – operations whereby the so-called middle-class virtues fluctuate between the allegedly opposite poles of disinterestedness and instrumental rationality – are a tentative solution to the Victorian problem of the morality of the market. The cement of sociality, this novel seems to suggest, is not just self-interest, instrumental rationality and the conscious calculation of

individual benefits. Rather, it is the ability to switch regimes of value, to be attuned to the gift economy and the market economy in an imagined capitalist community where good actions are the shadow of exchange and successful business transactions welcome the ghost of the gift. A degree of idealization or sentimentality is inevitable in a story that would, otherwise, have appeared a touch too prosaic even for the mundane standards of novelistic discourse. But the idealized nature of this story is also in tension with an ambivalent mid-Victorian perception of trade as vulgar but useful, of money as a plausible ending (of novels) but never an end in itself, of commodification as both contaminating and fascinating. Craik's intervention shifts the balance in favor of trade, contesting the issue of vulgarity, personalizing money as a gift, imagining the purifying effects of inalienable possessions turned into commodities, and encouraging the readers to see, through Phineas's eyes, that business may not be just business, after all. So, as Derrida's argues, the gift may be only a simulacrum, but in this novel it is certainly one without which market exchange can hardly be imagined.

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NOTES

1. On the distinction between "subjective" and "objective" dimensions of the gift see Bourdieu (*Logic of Practice and Raison Pratique*).
2. On this challenge see also the collections of essays edited by Vandeveld and by Parry and Bloch.
3. The issue of singularization, as I hope to demonstrate, is crucial in Craik's fictional celebration of trade and the self-help myth. In his essay "The Cultural Biography of Things," the anthropologist Kopytoff analyses the cultural strategies of singularization whereby objects move out of the commodity state. Although in his model "the singular and the commodity" tend to be seen as opposites, Kopytoff concludes that in many empirical cases "the forces of commoditization and singularization are intertwined in ways far more subtle than our ideal model can show" (87–88). The most interesting cases are those in between: "from these cases we can learn how . . . one breaks the rules by moving between spheres that are supposed to be insulated from each other, how one converts what is formally inconvertible, how one masks these actions and with whose connivance, and, not least, how the spheres are reorganized and things reshuffled between them in the course of society's history" (88). The biography of a thing, especially in commercialized, monetized societies, becomes "the story of the various singularizations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context" (90). In Craik's novel, Phineas's narrative discourse carries out the work of singularization.
4. Mitchell writes that "Phineas Fletcher's primary function is to admire John Halifax. He unabashedly loves his friend; he can dwell on John's character, praise his strengths, and approve of his actions in a way that would be impossible for an omniscient author. Thus he controls the emotional response; his personal mediation gives the reader permission to feel and supplies the emotions that Craik wants to elicit about her central character" (49). On the "tactic of sentiment" see also Showalter.
5. On the lack of symbolic prestige of the business ideal in British culture see Wiener, McKendrick, and Dauton.
6. For a more detailed discussion of Victorian business handbooks and the issues they raise see Colella.
7. "The instability of the gift," writes Callari, "makes it impossible for economics to set its gaze upon the thing and fix the terms of its relationship to it. The instability, that is, produces the functional equivalent of the *visor effect*, and the gift thus wears well a ghostly garb, haunting economics" (249).
8. On this score see also Osteen (229–31).

9. Bourdieu makes this point most clearly in chapter 6 of *Raisons Pratiques*.
10. Bourdieu's theory is particularly relevant to the issues Craik's novel raises as problematic or simply more urgent (economic success *and* social status, the businessman *and* the gentleman, money *and* prestige). I am aware that Bourdieu's theory has been charged with economism and that his distinction between different types of capital has appeared debatable (see Osteen 20–26). But I am reluctant to forego the explanatory power of his analysis especially when dealing with a work of fiction that is very much concerned with the redefinition of the prestige of *homo economicus*.
11. Waters discusses the “democratization of gentlemanliness in the nineteenth century” as a “transformation of a male stereotype from an essentially aristocratic, inherited privilege to a middle-class, materialistic desire” (3).
12. McKendrick uses the term “‘literary Luddism’ in its general sense of anti-industrial, anti-entrepreneurial and anti-technological rather than in the sense of actual machine-breaking” (102).
13. On the favorable reception of *John Halifax* and its enduring popularity up until the 1950s see Mitchell, Spilka, and Nagel.
14. Analyzing the figure of the bachelor narrator in a number of fictional and non fictional texts, Snyder argues that “bachelors often served in cultural and literary discourse more generally as threshold figures who marked the permeable boundaries that separate domesticity, normative manhood, and high-cultural status, from what was defined as extrinsic to these realms” (7).
15. For an interesting discussion of the adoption schemes Victorian fiction deploys in order to emend genetic failures in the transmission of property see O'Tool. John Halifax does not become, strictly speaking, the adopted son that, by replacing Phineas, ensures the preservation of the family property. But he is instrumental in safeguarding the interests of the Fletcher family business with which Phineas fails to identify.
16. Adams uses the word “styles” to indicate different and often competing constructions of Victorian masculinity, because this expression “hints at the intractable element of theatricality in all masculine self-fashioning, which inevitably makes appeal to an audience, real or imagined” (11). In Craik's novel too masculinity is represented as a spectacle, especially in the mirror of Phineas's desire. Evoking the biblical story of Jonathan and David (“the soul of Jonathan was knit into the soul of David,” 8; ch. 1) Phineas refers to John as “my David” and rarely refrains from using possessives when mentioning John's name. Their relationships has some elements in common with what Snyder defines as “the ‘other Oedipus’: the Oedipus of loving brothers, rather than, or as well as, patricidal sons. Desirous and identificatory collaboration, rather than sibling rivalry, crucially defines such fraternal relations” (10).
17. In the first half of the novel, there are several other comments that convey an idealized and eroticized perception of Halifax's body: in John's eyes Phineas detects “a beauty absolutely divine” (14; ch. 2); his mouth is described as “flexible, sensitive, and, at times, so infinitely sweet” (35; ch. 4); and in one instance at least Phineas is rendered speechless by the spectacle of John's “manhood”: “But he was – I cannot describe what he was. I could not then. I only remember that when I looked at him, and began jocularly ‘*Imprimis*,’ my heart came up to my throat and choked me” (46; ch. 5).
18. The pastoral ideal of happiness that the two friends are debating includes a normative plot of heterosexual love. John's desire is already attuned to this plot – he will soon be married to Ursula – whereas Phineas's is not. He is reluctant to share his “David,” his precious possession or gift, with another human being, and in several instances refers to his contradictory feelings about the unavoidable turn of John's affections: “I thought any father might have been proud of such a son, any sister of such a brother, any young girl of such a lover. Ay, that last tie, the only one of the three that was possible to him – I wondered how long it would be before time changed, and I ceased to be the only one who was proud of him” (91; ch. 9).
19. As Glifford remarks “[p]astoral is essentially a discourse of retreat which may either simply escape from the complexities of the city, the court, the present, ‘our manners’, or explore them. This is the

- difference between the pejorative and the primary senses of the pastoral” (46). Craik uses the pastoral discourse in order to explore the complexities of industrialism.
20. In his 1858 review of *John Halifax*, Hutton writes: “During the early part of the tale, it is difficult to suppress a fear that Phineas Fletcher will fall hopelessly in love with John Halifax, so hard it is to remember that Phineas is of the male sex” (258).
 21. For an interesting discussion of gendered responses to industrialism see Zlotnick.
 22. As Simon J. James writes “Frederic Jameson has suggested that, ideologically, texts uniformly possess a ‘political unconscious’; one might add that indeed all texts possess an ‘economic unconscious’ as well, and in nineteenth-century realist fiction this unconscious can never be successfully repressed” (7).
 23. Emphasizing the “communicative capacity of gifts,” Fennel remarks that “a gift acts primarily as a vehicle for dialogue between the parties, rather than as a commodity in its own right” (90).
 24. According to the anthropologist Annette Weiner, this paradox is crucial in all gift economies (5).
 25. Craik’s literary output has not attracted much critical attention, with the notable exception of Mitchell’s book. Mitchell portrays a persuasive picture of Craik as an author who quickly “learned, of necessity, to be forceful in her business dealings” (13).
 26. In his introduction to *Opere mondo*, Moretti repeats his claim that literature always follows great social mutations, “it always comes *after*,” which does not mean, however, that literary texts “repeat” or “mirror” a given reality. It means the exact opposite: they have a vocation for “*solving*” the problems created by history. Literature, in his view, serves the purpose of reducing the tensions generated by what he calls the “symbolic overload” – ethical problems, ideological contradictions, confusing and conflicting perceptions of the new – that accompanies every major transformation. This view of literature might appear a little sedate, but the problem-solving vocation is indeed a powerful drive of much Victorian fiction.
 27. “The *Taonga* and all goods termed strictly personal possess a *hau*, a spiritual power. You give me one of them, and I pass it on to a third party; he gives another to me in turn, because he is impelled to do so by the *hau* my present possesses. I, for my part, am obliged to give you that thing because I must return to you what is in reality the effect of the *hau* of your *taonga*” (Mauss 15).
 28. Appadurai defines the “commodity situation in the social life of any ‘thing’” as disaggregated into: “(1) the commodity phase of the social life of any thing; (2) the commodity candidacy of any thing; (3) the commodity context in which any thing might be placed” (13).

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