

Drink Versus Printer's Ink: Temperance and the Management of Financial Speculation in *The Life of P.T. Barnum*

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P.T. Barnum (1810-1891) was by far the most famous American showman of his time. Born in the small manufacturing town of Bethel, Connecticut, he witnessed changes in American life that in many respects serve as reflections of broader social and cultural shifts in nineteenth-century America. Although many Americans today associate the Barnum name with his traveling circus, "The Greatest Show on Earth" was not established until relatively late in his career. Prior to the circus's development in the 1870s and 1880s, Barnum had made himself famous—and infamous—as an exhibitor of curiosities. Barnum's first foray into such popular entertainment came in 1835 when he purchased the right to exhibit Joice Heth, a slave woman who was billed as George Washington's 161-year-old nurse, and who caused sensation in every city to which she traveled. Following his financial successes with Heth, Barnum also managed several people he made nationally and internationally famous, from General Tom Thumb—the perfectly-proportioned midget who so delighted Queen Victoria in 1844—to Jenny Lind, the Swedish vocalist who in the early 1850s became a singing phenomenon in the United States. Other well-known exhibitions include the Fejee Mermaid, a half-monkey/half-fish that captured public interest in 1843, and the woolly horse allegedly sent east by far-flung John C. Frémont in the mid-1840s. By the 1850s, Barnum became most known for his American Museum, a collection of natural—and not-so-natural—wonders from around

the globe that *Harper's Weekly* once called “certainly the most notable of the landmarks” of New York City.¹ In these and many other endeavors, Barnum proved himself a resourceful self-promoter and notorious humbug who capitalized on a string of popular enterprises through his considerable talent at manipulating public opinion.

Because of Barnum's singular position as a public personality known for his popular entertainments, scholars have begun to see him as a representative figure in the rise of American mass culture. His career not only illustrates deft constructions of signs and their meanings, but also touches on social and political concerns central to American cultural life in the nineteenth century. Barnum's insight into the power of the image and the word has made him the subject of much recent scholarship that addresses his relationship to American culture.² Benjamin Reiss's *The Showman and the Slave* (2001), for example, examines the complicated social and racial politics manifest in both Barnum's exhibition of Joice Heth and in his subsequent manipulation of the press when critics questioned whether she was really George Washington's nurse. For Reiss, the Heth exhibition made visible the “silently cohesive social factors and the voluble discord surrounding the grounds of knowledge, authority, and identity” that Barnum exploited so well throughout his career, and that make Heth the “distorting mirror of the public sphere and the capitalist culture of antebellum America.”³ With the recent outpouring of scholarship on Barnum, we are beginning to understand why Barnum's public delighted in witnessing “freaks” from home and abroad, why they smiled at his flagrant humbugs, and why they flocked to hear him speak.

Given the growing critical attention to Barnum, it seems useful to explore in depth his own self-representations. His 1854 autobiography, *The Life of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself*, was wildly popular; one scholar reckons it the second most-read book, after the Bible, in nineteenth-century America.⁴ Barnum himself once remarked that the book had sold over a million copies, an estimation that his most exhaustive biographer thinks is conservative.⁵ Barnum's autobiography offers a unique window into the mind of a figure who was both product and co-creator of popular American culture—at least into his mind as he wished to present it publicly. James Cook has characterized a passage in Barnum's autobiography as “a kind of primer on the nineteenth-century arts of deception”; in addition to such deceptions, the whole of Barnum's book might be read as a primer on many attitudes nineteenth-century Americans held regarding spectacle and speculation.⁶ With the cultural importance of *The Life* in mind, this essay turns from the frauds and the freaks to examine how Barnum represents his own financial escapades as eminently temperate, a focus that exposes cultural links among temperance, rationality, and market relations.

Reading *The Life*, one finds Barnum faced with the autobiographer's perennial challenge: crafting a persona that will, with luck, be taken as fact by posterity.⁷ In his autobiography, Barnum explains his humbugs—from Joice Heth

to the Fejee Mermaid—as good-natured fun over which everyone, huckster and sucker alike, could enjoy a retrospective laugh. But by the end of his autobiography, Barnum shifts the overt focus from his exhibitions to himself so that the persona found in *The Life*, the temperate hard-worker and philanthropist, is showcased. As the final pages make clear, in fact, Barnum's recipe for "Success in Life" is predicated on temperance; thus two great strands in his life and career—his humbugs and his temperance—are not so distinct as they might first appear. For Barnum, drinking is a problem because it separates one from reason, threatening chances of financial success. In other words, the intemperate man, like a gambler, is engaged in needlessly risky speculation.⁸ Barnum's solution to the dangers of drink is "printer's ink"—not only the ink of the temperance pledge, but also the ink of written contracts, market exchange, advertising, and print media. While Barnum admits that he authored numerous potentially-risky financial schemes that may seem at first glance no better than drinking or gambling, he insists that as a temperate man he is better able to manage and orchestrate them as sound investments with "printer's ink." Playing to a culture that valued wealth gained through hard work, Barnum wants his reader to see that far from being speculations, his exploits were actually sure-fire ventures. By linking drink and ink, Barnum's particular brand of money-wise temperance suggests that successful negotiation of the market in nineteenth-century America depended upon professed self-mastery and self-control. While the temperance pledge was one readily-available form of such control, Barnum's self-promotion in *The Life* suggests that his temperance sensibility was also a strategy for mastering capricious market relations.

This essay, then, explains first how Barnum positions his book within a specific temperance discourse, and then how in *The Life*, he represents drinking as above all a financial risk equivalent to speculation. I then demonstrate how Barnum attempts to legitimate retrospectively his own dubious endeavors—which could themselves be accused of being speculative—by creating antagonistic tropes of drink and ink. In *The Life*, drinking is akin to speculation, but it may be managed by signing the temperance pledge; similarly, Barnum insists that his putative humbugs were actually temperately controlled by him through printer's ink. With such insistence on his own temperate "headwork," Barnum attempts in *The Life* to resuscitate his legacy by converting it from mere humbug into respectable work.

Barnum and the Confessing Washingtonians

Barnum's exploitation of temperance rhetoric in *The Life* makes sense in light of the cultural and political moment in which it was written. Although temperance movements have risen and fallen, they have been a part of American cultural life since colonial days.⁹ Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1771-1790), a text that serves as a touchstone for Barnum, lists temperance as the first of thirteen virtues that Franklin wants to master.¹⁰ Although Franklin, unlike

Barnum, does not propose total abstinence, he does serve as a clear ideological antecedent on the matter because he links moderation in drinking with rationality and control: “*Temperance* first, as it tends to procure that Coolness and Clearness of Head, which is so necessary where constant Vigilance was to be kept up, and Guard maintained, against the unremitting Attraction of ancient Habits, and the Force of perpetual Temptations.”¹¹ Like Barnum, but unlike many early nineteenth-century reformers, Franklin is not primarily motivated by religion or morality, but rather by the conviction that drinking subjects one to the whim of “ancient Habits” and other forces that undermine one’s will and self-mastery. Barnum sees this self-mastery as essential to building a fortune.

The tumultuous history of temperance reform from Franklin’s time to Barnum’s and beyond is too complex to detail here, but the Washingtonian movement of the 1840s has particular relevance to Barnum and *The Life*. The Washington Temperance Society was founded in 1840, and although it had faded by the early 1850s, it marks an important moment in American temperance reform.¹² The Washingtonians were secular, working-class reformers whose meetings centered around the testimonials of reformed drunkards and required adherents to sign a pledge of complete abstinence.¹³ Because the Washingtonians focused less on the sin of intemperance and more on the notion that drinking was dangerous because it led to loss of self-control, the temperance pledge became a way to avert the effects of intemperance.¹⁴

For the Washingtonians, the pledge amounted to a binding contract never to drink again. In *The Life*, Barnum demonstrates a similar faith in the power of both the written temperance pledge and the binding legal contract. The difference between a temperance pledge and a legal contract, however, is that the former has only one evident participant, thus raising the question: with whom is a temperance pledge signer entering into a contract? With himself, certainly. As Charles Griffin shows, however, Washingtonian rhetoric often suggested that a drinker was also pledging a contract to America itself. Griffin relates an anecdote about a temperance meeting held in Boston in 1841. When the speaker managed to persuade one man to convert, he cried: “‘Drunkard, come up here, you can reform—take the pledge in this Cradle of Liberty and be ever free!’”¹⁵ Washingtonians thus urged that the pledge of teetotalism stood not only as a former drunkard’s badge of self-mastery, but also as a liberating step. However paradoxically, then, the binding contract of the pledge granted one freedom from irrationality, which led in turn to political liberty.¹⁶ The pledge of abstinence was a contract not just with oneself, but also with society at large; to be a good citizen was to be a sober citizen.¹⁷

But from an economic point of view, the trouble with the teetotaler’s pledge was that it put tavern keepers and rum-runners out of business. One finds, for example, a corollary to the rhetoric of the temperance pledge in discourse about the very coin used to purchase liquor. In 1834, the Council of the Massachusetts Temperance Society published a pamphlet called *Making Money by Selling Rum*,

which insisted that tavern keepers were threats to families. The pamphleteer argues that every coin used to purchase alcohol should read “This certifies that the bearer has made a man beat his wife.”¹⁸ Such rhetoric helped fuel the temperance movement.¹⁹

An early legislative result of the movement was the 1851 Maine Law, which banned the sale of liquor except for medicinal or mechanical use.²⁰ Ian Tyrrell puts the controversy in perspective: “Americans debated the Maine Law with roughly as much emotion as they devoted to the fugitive slave issue.”²¹ By the time Barnum was writing *The Life*, Maine Laws had been enacted in his home state of Connecticut—which passed the law in 1854—as well as in Massachusetts, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Michigan; by 1855, variations on the law had spread to twelve states.²² Placing *The Life* in this context suggests that part of the book’s function is to promote prohibition. Barnum writes: “the Maine Law was enacted, and its successful workings filled the hearts of temperance men and temperance women with hope and joy. We soon learned that in order to stay the plague, we must have a total prohibition of the sale of intoxicating drinks as a beverage” (362).

To stay “the plague” of intemperance, Barnum planted himself in the camp that worked for legislation to ensure that the “moral suasion” of the Washingtonians was enforced through legal prohibition: “the Washingtonians . . . had discharged their mission of peace and love; but . . . large numbers who were saved by these means, fell back again to a lower position than ever, because the tempter was permitted to live and throw out his seductive toils. Our watchword now was, ‘Prohibition!’” (362).²³ Beyond advocating prohibition in his autobiography, Barnum would, as we shall see, actively work toward it decades later as mayor of Bridgeport (1875-6) and as a Connecticut legislator (1865-6; 1877-9).²⁴

Although more interested in legal reform than the Washingtonians were, Barnum’s autobiography includes anecdotes about reformed drunkards that betray a distinct rhetorical indebtedness to them.²⁵ He revises Washingtonian rhetoric by equating signing the pledge not only with abstinence, but also with success in the American marketplace. As Barnum himself ultimately attests, the self-mastery embodied by the “printer’s ink” of the written pledge thwarts the failure attributed to alcohol and better positions one to succeed in the marketplace. Barnum’s innovation in his autobiography is not that he concentrates on the financial ruin that accompanies drinking—which he does—but rather that he insists on the idea that abstinence is profitable.²⁶

Drink: The Great Financial Risk in *The Life*

Unlike most temperance rhetoric of the mid-nineteenth century—the Washingtonians’s included—that tended to locate the dangers of drinking in its power to estrange a man from his family, Barnum understands liquor’s power to destroy families as less damaging than its power to disrupt a man’s ability to

make money.²⁷ Early in *The Life*, when he recounts the dealings and double-dealings that characterized his hometown of Bethel, Connecticut, Barnum offers a brief sketch of a “poor sot” who could not function in this community. Introducing the “Drunkard’s Keg” episode, Barnum focuses on the man’s diminished wage-earning capacity: “Before he took to drink he was an industrious, thriving, intelligent, and respectable man—by trade a cooper; but for ten years had been running down hill, and at last became a miserable toper” (36). For Barnum, the problem with the man’s drinking is that it prevents him from “thriving” and being as “industrious” as he could be. The stores of Bethel are central to this anecdote’s purpose, for though Barnum mentions that the “poor sot’s” family life was as troubled as his professional one (he “beat his wife as he had often done before” (38)), he credits the man’s ultimate conversion to abstinence to his banishment from the village marketplace. Despite protests from his wife and friends, the man refuses to “pledge” himself to temperance, and will only begrudgingly acknowledge that “drinking liquor is a bad business” (37). Only when the town enforces the idea that liquor is bad for business does the man finally take the pledge. After his wife refuses to buy him more rum, the drunkard heads to the Barnum family store in order to stop her credit; the proprietor’s reply is startling:

‘Oh, Mr. ——, you need not have taken the trouble to forbid me trusting your wife, for *I would not trust you!*’

This repulse, so sudden and unexpected, at once overwhelmed and saved him. He was astonished to find himself brought so low, and indignantly drawing the empty bottle from his pocket and dashing it into a thousand pieces upon the floor, he exclaimed:

‘There! thou cursed *leveller* of humanity, and destroyer of man’s respect! I pledge myself before God, I will never again taste a drop of any thing that can intoxicate;’ and he kept his word. He is now a wealthy man, has frequently represented his town in the State Legislature, and his family, including several grand-children, is one of the first in the country in point of respectability and moral worth (39).

Aside from offering a brief encapsulation of the arc of Barnum’s own life as told in the autobiography, this anecdote shows that if one imbibes, one cannot participate in the town’s market economy. Here the drunkard’s loss of credit is the only thing that can make him see the folly of liquor because it demonstrates to him how drinking is literally “bad business.” When the drunkard had earlier refused to pledge abstinence, he informed the townsfolk “I can control myself” (38), but in this passage the proprietor denies him credit precisely because he lacks self-control. In order for him to be “trusted” enough to participate in the

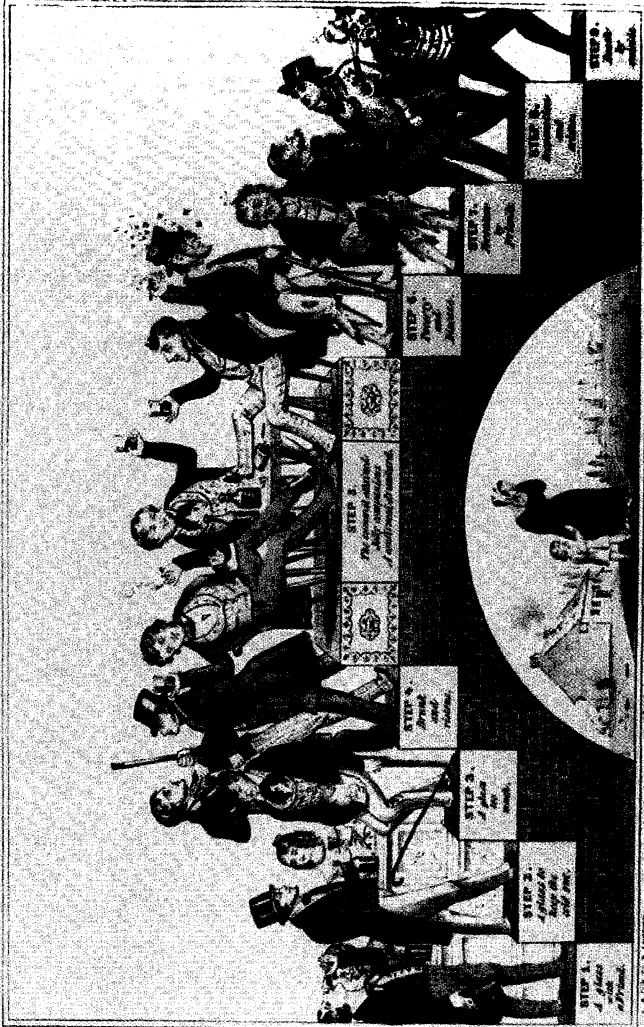


Figure 1: *The Drunkard's Progress* by Nathaniel Currier (1846). This lithograph illustrates a narrative familiar to Barnum's mid-century reader: liquor's power to destroy all aspects of a man's life. Note that "Poverty and Disease" mark the drunkard's decline while a weeping woman and child are left behind. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (LC-USZ62-2841).

local economy, the man must first gain control of himself, which can only be demonstrated to the town's satisfaction if he has a binding contract, or "pledge." Barnum's emphasis on the financial prosperity that came with signing the pledge suggests that wealth-building and civic duty combine with familial responsibility to contribute to the man's "moral worth." This contrasts to the Washingtonian rhetoric that identified the Boston man's conversion in the "Cradle of Liberty" first as an act of citizenship. For Barnum, the citizens of Bethel are primarily bound by their mutual participation in the local economy, one that depends on credit and trust, both of which are undermined by alcohol but can be restored by the pledge.

Given that the drunkard's credit is withdrawn because the town no longer trusts him, it is curious that in the first third of his autobiography Barnum describes a number of events in which he exploits the public's trust for profit. Surprisingly, early in *The Life*, Barnum's money-making ventures are often associated with alcohol. Barnum's very first financial enterprise, in fact, grows from an experience at the "village tavern," where his grandfather exchanges "pennies and sixpennies" for a silver dollar. The effect of the consolidation is immense: "I believed, without the slightest reservation, that this entire earth and all its contents could be purchased by that wonderful piece of bullion, and that it would be a bad bargain at that" (21). Although Barnum smiles at the wide-eyed financial naïveté of his youth, he invites the reader to connect this moment with his later success, when he indeed went on to showcase "this entire earth and all its contents" with his American Museum and assorted other curiosities.

Immediately following his acquisition of the silver dollar, Barnum describes his first business, which relied on a "demijohn of New-England rum": "I soon learned that the soldiers were good cherry-rum customers, and no sooner did I hear the words 'halt,' 'ground arms,' than I approached the 'trainers' with my decanter and wine-glass" (21). It seems strange that a dedicated temperance activist would admit to getting his start by having "drawn and bottled more rum than would be necessary to float a ship" (102) until one realizes that Barnum is again appropriating the aesthetic of the Washingtonian meeting in which the reformed drinker laments the errors of his ways: "True, I have in my time drank liquor, and have even been intoxicated, but generally I wholly abstained from the use of intoxicating beverages, and am happy to say, that for a number of years past, I have been strictly 'a teetotaller'" (190). Barnum, moreover, justifies his liquor trafficking by insisting that he was always in control of his consumption and dispensation of alcohol, just as he will later be in control of the flow of information regarding such ventures as Joice Heth (148-159) or the American Museum (214-45). From these instances where drinking turns up in the first third of *The Life*, it is clear that Barnum shows how intemperance leads not merely to a general loss of control, but specifically to an increased susceptibility to the strictures of the marketplace.

In *The Life*, the speculative nature of drinking is linked to the instability of verbal contracts and bets, and Barnum couples drinking and betting in order to

demonstrate the inherent financial risk in both. What makes a contract binding is adherence to the literal meaning of its terms, an idea to which Barnum returns numerous times. In the last minor anecdote that Barnum tells before elaborating on the Joice Heth exhibition, for example, he wins a bet that takes place in a “bar-room” for “a treat for the company.” Like many of the bets in *The Life*, Barnum’s success here depends upon the literal meaning of a wager’s terms. Darrow, an acquaintance and “inveterate joker,” bets Barnum that he is not wearing a whole shirt on his back. Barnum, having anticipated this bet, lets his reader in on the trick:

The catch in this proposition consists in the fact that under ordinary circumstances only *one half* of that useful garment is upon the back. Anticipating this proposition, however—in fact having induced a Mr. Hough to put Darrow up to the trick—I had taken a shirt from my valise, and nicely folding it, placed it exactly on my back, fastening it there by passing my suspenders over it (146).

Barnum’s triumph takes place in a bar room, and after the bet is paid “All hands went up to the bar and drank with a hearty good-will” (147). Far from estranging people from their community, in this case liquor creates an atmosphere of “hearty good-will” that brings the community together.

Such fellowship in the bar room nonetheless also depends on Darrow’s financial loss, which estranges *him* from the rest of the people present.²⁸ Furious that Hough assisted Barnum, Darrow stutters: “H-H-Hough, you infernal r-r-rascal, to go against your own n-n-neighbor in favor of a D-D-Danbury man. I’ll pay you for that some time, you see if I d-d-don’t” (147). Not only does Darrow’s financial loss underscore his removal from the circle of “good-will,” but his stutter also seems to resonate with his inability to manipulate verbal contracts. Barnum relates this inability to Darrow as an “inveterate joker” and a drinker who is “generally the life of the bar-room” (146).²⁹ The small-town sensibility found in the Bethel section of *The Life* offers a glimpse into a waning culture of oral deals—best represented by the Darrow bet—that was, over the course of Barnum’s career, supplanted by the mass print culture that he himself helped create, and that he certainly mastered.³⁰

As the Darrow/Barnum wager suggests, taverns were often the site of gambling and informal bets in the first half of the nineteenth century. Drinking and gambling were so intertwined that to reform someone from drinking could be tantamount to reforming him from gambling. Ann Fabian has pointed out that:

A few reformers made gambling the parent of all other vices, but most preferred to concentrate on drink. . . . to give up drink and to renounce tavern fellowship might also mean to give up gambling, and to give up gambling might well mean

abandoning certain traditional forms of recreation and traditional companions who might propose a friendly wager.³¹

Fabian shows not only that the loss of control embodied by drinking and gambling were linked in the minds of many reformers and the public, but she also reminds us that tavern scenes like the ones Barnum mentions were familiar to readers in mid century. Karen Halttunen's explanation of the nineteenth-century gambler helps clarify how Barnum manipulates this trope. Halttunen shows that gambling was condemned because it was a form of speculation: "Gambling was evil because it produced nothing. . . . Because it brought gain without production and without industry through a game of chance, gambling was a kind of speculation."³² Where Barnum differs from Halttunen's description of the typical gambler/speculator is that he converts gambling from a risky enterprise dependent on chance to a sure-fire financial investment.³³ Although the bar room setting and Darrow's drinking suggest that the shirt wager is risky on Barnum's part, it is completely free of risk because he has rigged the outcome beforehand. Thus while Barnum may still be producing nothing but another round of drinks for the bar, his concealed industry allows him to win the bet.

The idea that Barnum's calculated rationality and his behind-the-scenes industry is what keeps his enterprises from being speculative ventures is important in understanding his reasons for chronicling potentially damaging accounts of his more notorious schemes. He depicts acts that at first glance seem to be like gambling or speculation rather as adroitly-managed, shrewd financial investments. Barnum alludes to the relationship between drinking and financial risk in his description of signing the teetotaler pledge: "I saw so much intoxication among men of wealth and intellect, filling the highest positions of society, that I began to ask myself the question, What guarantee is there that *I* may not become a drunkard?" (359). For Barnum, "wealth and intellect" are always bound together; as he mentions after his first foray into rum selling: "I always disliked work. Headwork I was excessively fond of" (21). If Barnum considers "intellect" or "headwork" his primary form of labor and thus money-making, then it follows that he finds drunken "men of wealth and intellect" harrowing; they force him to realize that drinking threatens both wealth and intellect. In order for Barnum to convert from a moderate stance on drinking to an absolutist one, he would have to recognize the link between temperance and success. Reverend E.H. Chapin, who would become a friend of Barnum's, convinced him that the smallest amount of liquor was ruinous:

The eloquent gentleman overwhelmingly proved that the so-called respectable liquor-seller, in his splendid saloon or hotel bar, and who sold only to 'gentlemen,' inflicted much greater injury upon the community than a dozen common groggeries . . . He urged that the higher a man stood in the community, the greater was his influence either for good or for evil (360).

Chapin argues that the more respectable an individual, the greater his commitment to temperance ought to be. It is not difficult to see why Barnum, ever-hungry for respectability, was convinced by such arguments. Following Chapin, Barnum views temperance as a marker of success and respectability.

Once Barnum equates temperance with success, he no longer accepts the co-existence of moderate drinking with money-making. Barnum's quest for respectability through temperance is indeed another version of his well-known desire to be seen as a respectable purveyor of legitimate exhibits.³⁴ In *The Life*, Barnum demonstrates that by controlling drink through the ink of the temperance pledge, he has also managed some of his most memorable exhibits and enterprises using printer's ink—a practice that, following its association with temperance, ought to be seen as both respectable and labor-intensive.

Should any of Barnum's readers miss his equation of temperance with financial success, he makes the association explicit in the final pages of *The Life* with "Barnum's Rules for Success in Business" (394). He advises his reader: "*Select the KIND of business that suits your natural inclinations and temperament*" and "*Let your pledged word ever be sacred.*" Following this, Barnum turns his attention to "*Sobriety*":

Use no description of intoxicating drinks. As no man can succeed in business unless he has a *brain* to enable him to lay his plans, and *reason* to guide him in their execution, so, no matter how bountifully a man may be blessed with intelligence, if his brain is muddled, and his judgment warped by intoxicating drinks, it is impossible for him to carry on business successfully. . . . How many foolish bargains have been made under the influence of the *nervine*, which temporarily makes its victim so *rich!* (395).

The "foolish bargains" here recall wagers like Darrow's; the idea that alcohol will always undermine intelligence in business matters recalls the "Drunkard's Keg" anecdote in which the drunkard, barred from conducting business transactions in the town, calls liquor the "cursed *leveller* of humanity" (39). Barnum thus locates sobriety as the fundamental criterion for success in business because it keeps one's reason grounded and head clear. It is not excess itself that Barnum decries, however, but rather the sort of excess that prevents one from performing "headwork" and subsequently building a fortune.

Printer's Ink: Barnum's Excessive Advertising

In his memoir, *Eccentricities of Genius* (1900), lecture-circuit manager J.B. Pond writes that he met Barnum when the latter was campaigning for the Maine Law in Wisconsin, where Barnum told him: "there was one liquid a man could

use in excessive quantities without being swallowed up by it, and that was printer's ink."³⁵ Barnum's condemnation of excessive indulgence in liquor is thus set against the one facet of life in which surfeit is desirable: advertising, or the employment of "printer's ink." In "Barnum's Rules for Success in Business" it is clear that while he dictates abstinence in drink, he also suggests that this forbearance is the only requisite one needs before indulging in printer's ink:

I freely confess that what success I have had in my life may fairly be attributed more to the public press than to nearly all other causes combined. . . . Men in business will sometimes tell you that they have tried advertising, and that it did not pay. This is only when advertising is done sparingly and grudgingly. Homœopathic doses of advertising will not pay perhaps—it is like half a potion of physic, making the patient sick, but effecting nothing. Administer liberally, and the cure will be sure and permanent. . . . [Advertising] needs *nerve* and *faith*. The former, to enable you to launch out thousands on the uncertain waters of the future; the latter, to teach you that after many days it shall surely return, bringing an hundred or a thousand fold to him who appreciates the advantages of "printer's ink" properly applied (396-7).

Like the Washingtonians who confessed to over-indulgence in drink, Barnum here confesses his over-indulgence in the ink of advertisements. The key difference, though, is that Barnum's over-indulgence is successful because it is productive. Drinking, on the other hand, was linked to gambling, speculation, and financial ruin. By indulging in ink rather than drink, Barnum is able to manage the speculative risks of the marketplace so effectively that he is assured of a "a hundred or a thousand fold" return on his investment. Significantly, in order to effect such gains, one must become like an inebriate of ink: "Administer liberally" and success is sure to follow. In this passage Barnum replaces the "foolish bargains [which] have been made under the influence of the *nerve*" with the economic certainty that comes from the "*nerve*" to indulge in the "advantages of 'printer's ink' properly applied."³⁶ In advising one to flood the public with advertising, Barnum reverses the popular claim that excess stalls industry by suggesting that excess in printed advertising will not only lead to success, but is itself a tangible form of labor.

Before he explains how he manipulated "printer's ink" to promote his varied exhibitions, Barnum tries to convince his reader that "headwork" can legitimate even the most suspect of financial enterprises. The example of his lotteries will illustrate. As Fabian has shown, though lotteries were popular in the colonial period, in the first half of the nineteenth century they were subject to increasing attacks by those who argued that they promoted idleness. For example, an 1827

anti-lottery pamphlet, *Lotteries Exposed*, explained that lotteries invited “idleness by holding forth prospects of gain without labor.”³⁷ In relating his experiences as a lottery manager, then, Barnum runs the risk of associating himself with an institution that is known for making gains without labor. He attempts to deflect potential criticism by dwelling on the mental labor involved in promoting his lottery:

Fully appreciating the powers of the press, (to which more than to any other one cause I am indebted for my success in life,) I did not fail to invoke the aid of ‘printer’s ink.’ I issued handbills, circulars, etc., by tens of thousands, with striking prefixes, affixes, staring capitals, marks of wonder, pictures, etc. The newspapers throughout the region teemed with unique advertisements. Immense gold signs, and placards in inks and papers of all colors, covered my lottery office (129).

The point of this concentration on the various typefaces and images Barnum used to draw attention to his lottery is to show that he himself worked to “Administer liberally.” The proliferation of “inks and papers” is evidence of his dedicated headwork. Barnum’s argument is that in the capacity of a lottery “manager,” he did not endeavor to “gain without labor,” but quite the contrary—through his labors of inking ubiquitous advertisements, he sold more than the typical number of tickets, thereby earning a well-deserved profit.

Barnum’s self-promotional strategy here turns out to be more complicated if we consider Fabian’s discussion about the consumers of advertisements like Barnum’s. According to Fabian, many anti-lottery writers blamed the foolishness of the ticket purchasers more than they did the purveyors of the tickets: “The fault, critics claimed, lay not with those who had created tempting advertisements but with those whose minds were too weak to resist their lures.”³⁸ When recounting his experiences as a lottery manager, Barnum too shifts the blame to those intemperate souls who ventured to buy a ticket. Fabian suggests that there was an explicit point of comparison between lottery players and drunks: “Lotteries attracted laboring men willing, as one wrote with horrified emphasis, to ‘throw away’ a portion of their wages. Like drunks they consumed for no good end, reveling in the simple dissipation of pure waste.”³⁹ Barnum makes an overt appeal to lottery players who, “like drunks,” allow themselves to indulge in the excesses of gambling; after explaining the mathematical formula for a lottery, he writes: “Thousands of persons are at this day squandering in lottery tickets and lottery policies the money which their families need. If this *exposé* shall have the effect of curing their ruinous infatuation, I, for one, shall not be sorry” (128). The sophistry here is winning: the older and wiser Barnum admits that lottery playing is a “ruinous infatuation” much like drinking because it inevitably leads to the loss of money. Yet it is unproblematic for Barnum to profit from this infatuation because, he would have his reader believe, the particular lotteries *he* sponsored

were eminently winnable: he is careful to mention a remarkable winning ticket that he had sold (128), and then to comment that “Selling so many tickets as I did, a prize of one or two thousand dollars, and numerous smaller ones, must occasionally turn up. These, being duly trumpeted, rendered mine the ‘lucky office’ in the estimation of many” (129). Here Barnum not only suggests that there is substance behind the things he advertises (which he emphasizes frequently throughout *The Life*), but that his customers were somehow more savvy or temperate than the average lottery player not because they could see through Barnum’s advertisements, but precisely because they saw that what had been “duly trumpeted”—fantastic financial gain—was legitimate and manifest in the tangible winnings of their fellow players.

Barnum’s foray into the lottery business complicates our understanding of his use of “headwork” to turn a seeming speculation into a sure thing not only because he uses “printer’s ink” to promote his ventures, but also because he insists that he is likewise delivering something worthwhile through his advertisements. In turning to his more well-known exhibitions, we see that though Barnum admits to occasionally fleecing the public, he generally maintains that his exhibitions all had substantive value.⁴⁰

Temperate Headwork

For much of *The Life*, Barnum insists that because he is particularly adept at “headwork,” and because he genuinely strives to give his customers value for their money, he deserves the fortune he has amassed. When Barnum narrates the foundations of the American Museum—one of his more successful enterprises prior to his circus—it is clear that he attributes his success in life to his deft deployment of ink. From the moment he first saw the Museum building, for example, his “speculative spirit” suggested to him that “only energy, tact and liberality were needed, to give it life and to put it on a profitable footing” (216).⁴¹ When a friend asks him what he will use to purchase the building, Barnum replies: “*Brass* . . . for silver and gold I have none.” Barnum’s emphasis on “silver and gold” is telling: in an economy in which banknotes were highly dubious signifiers of value, people viewed silver and gold as intrinsically more valuable than paper money.⁴² David Henkin reads banknotes as another form of printer’s ink that had to be negotiated and scrutinized in antebellum America—Barnum’s New York City in particular. “The circulation of antebellum money,” Henkin writes, “involved an exchange of precarious and potentially competing claims to authority, much like those advertisements in the daily paper or signs on a crowded street.”⁴³ Such “precarious and potentially competing claims to authority” also characterize Barnum’s elaborate humbugs. The difference, Barnum argues in *The Life*, is that unlike the chaotic marketplace symbolized by often-inscrutable banknotes, his printer’s ink—his advertisements, his humbugs, his autobiography—yields a legible value precisely because he has managed or orchestrated it. As Barnum explains, he has the “brass” to marshal

the local newspapers in order to turn public opinion against other would-be buyers of the museum. In substituting his “brass” for “silver and gold,” Barnum intimates that the value of his “printer’s ink” is as substantive as gold. Whatever the lasting worth of banknotes or similar speculations, *his* printer’s ink has sustained value.

Following the “silver and gold” statement, Barnum provides a complicated description of his attempts to buy the museum. After the owner agreed to sell it to Barnum for \$12,000, assuming substantial risk, he decides to sell it to a corporation for \$15,000 in a less risky deal, explaining to Barnum that they had “signed no writing” (219). This does not deter Barnum, however, who discovers that the corporation consists of a “company of speculators, headed by an unsuccessful ex-president of a bank [who planned to] . . . sell stock to the amount of \$50,000, pocket \$30,000 profits, and permit the stockholders to look out for themselves” (219-220). With his initial attacks on this corporation, then, Barnum depicts himself as the protector of the public against speculators who, like drunks and gamblers, seek to profit without work. Barnum’s own “speculative spirit” is different, as we have seen, because he manages his enterprises with “headwork” so that they are not in fact risky. As he tells the local newspaper editors: “if you will grant me the use of your columns, I’ll blow that speculation sky-high” (220). With a “perfect shower of squibs through the papers” (221) Barnum succeeded in discrediting the speculative corporation so thoroughly that the public lost its faith in the stock, and he ended up purchasing the American Museum.⁴⁴

Barnum’s musings about the American Museum evince a growing concern that his various enterprises be remembered as worthwhile. In order to build the case—however fragile it may seem from a twenty-first century perspective—that his career has been more or less legitimate, Barnum enlists the aid of “printer’s ink” once again. *The Life* itself becomes a printed testimonial to his temperate ability to manage the advertising ink spilled over the course of his career. For instance, in meditating on his nickname, “Prince of the Humbugs,” Barnum writes:

If I have exhibited a questionable dead mermaid in my Museum, it should not be overlooked that I have also exhibited cameleopards, a rhinoceros, grisly bears, orang-outangs, great serpents, etc., about which there could be no mistake because they were alive; and I should hope that a little ‘clap-trap’ occasionally, in the way of transparencies, flags, exaggerated pictures, and puffing advertisements, might find an offset in a wilderness of wonderful, instructive, and amusing realities (225).

Aside from insisting that the genuine exhibits in the American Museum should outweigh the occasional misrepresentation, Barnum also suggests that

the substantive nature of his museum is best embodied by its promotion of temperance. In 1850, the American Museum's Lecture Room reopened to showcase temperance drama alongside the unusual curiosities from around the world, a fact that Barnum reminds his reader of near the above passage: "the *moral drama* is now, and has been for several years, the principal feature of the Lecture Room of the American Museum." For Barnum, the museum enterprise is a legitimate public service not only because he has exhibited a "a wilderness of wonderful, instructive, and amusing realities," but also because he has mingled the curiosities with his commitment to total abstinence.⁴⁵

Such dedication to total abstinence stretched beyond the American Museum and into Barnum's lecturing and political careers. A popular lecturer, Barnum could command almost \$10,000 a year for his appearances.⁴⁶ In his temperance lectures, Barnum tended to stress the same relationship between temperance and financial success conveyed in *The Life*. He illustrated his points with folksy anecdotes: "Two men will start together in life, the one keeping his head cool with water, the other muddling his with liquor. At the end of ten years the former will have achieved success, the latter will be dropping into a drunkard's grave."⁴⁷ In extending the equation between temperance and financial success, Barnum would even insist that as an employer, temperance dictated his hiring practices: "I employ nearly 1,500 men. There are not 50 of them who touch intoxicating liquor at all, and these few know that as soon as I can get equally competent men who do not drink they will have to leave."⁴⁸ Once again, the persona that Barnum worked so diligently to cultivate through his autobiography and public speeches insists on the links between temperance and financial success.⁴⁹

So committed was Barnum to the temperance cause when elected Bridgeport mayor in 1875 that one of his most visible acts was enforcing the Sunday Law to help curb liquor sales. According to the *Bridgeport Daily Standard*, "Mayor Barnum argued well his point that everything depended in starting right, and no young man could start right without starting with strong temperance principles. He gave some very interesting facts touching the Sunday law and the duty of all, irrespective of party or creed, to aid in closing up the rum shops on Sunday."⁵⁰ Barnum-the-politician was so successful at associating his name with temperance that by 1887, a newspaper humor page could quip: "A custom with P. T. Barnum is to advise every man who has a wife to give her a signed temperance pledge as a New Year's gift."⁵¹

Barnum orders his autobiography so that the more dubious of his schemes are—chronologically and textually—in the past, to be forever amended by his more recent humanitarianism, philanthropy, and sober financial investments. In advocating teetotalism and its merits, Barnum is not simply urging public temperance, but is hoping that his accounts of managing drink as well as ink will yield tangible financial gain. In other words, the autobiography itself becomes an instance of Barnum's adept use of ink to turn a profit. In a letter of 4 September 1854, when he was writing *The Life*, Barnum confided to his friend Moses Kimball (proprietor of the Boston Museum) that the writing of the autobiography

was a kind of investment: "I am hard at work on my autobiography, the publication of which I *hope* will help make up my losses by Crystal Palace."⁵² In other letters in late 1854, Barnum calculates for Kimball the number of editions that will be printed, how much the publisher will charge retail, and even negotiates with him to again display the Fejee Mermaid at the Boston Museum concomitant with the debut of his book, in order to stimulate more ticket and book sales. He also sent heavy advance notice to newspaper editors boasting that "fifty-seven different publishers have applied for the chance of publishing" his forthcoming book.⁵³ Characteristically, Barnum liberally administers "printer's ink" both for his autobiography and for the advertisements that would help make it an extraordinary best seller.

Barnum considered himself a business man above all else, a captain of the growing entertainment industry whose self-characterizations in *The Life* confirm the suggestion of economist Richard Hildreth, who wrote in 1840: "When speculation proves successful, however wild it may have appeared in the beginning, it is looked upon as an excellent thing, and is commended as *enterprise*; it is only when unsuccessful that it furnishes occasion for ridicule and complaint, and is stigmatized as a *bubble* or a *humbug*."⁵⁴ As we have seen, in *The Life*, Barnum is working from—and marketing—a similar sensibility about speculation. By emphasizing that temperance is self-mastery, and that financial success depends on self-mastery, Barnum presents *The Life* as an argument that even the most dubious of his humbugs were calculated products of his clear-headed work. This demonstration of headwork's managerial power allowed Barnum to appear as though he had stabilized a chaotic marketplace through printer's ink, just as the inebriate could stabilize himself through the temperance pledge.⁵⁵ Perhaps the appeal of *The Life of P.T. Barnum* for the new nineteenth-century middle class was precisely this dramatization of Barnum's self-mastery and control—qualities that led to fortune and fame, but which the public itself, he always insisted, could also attain.

Notes

Thanks to David A. Zimmerman and my anonymous readers at *American Studies* for all their indispensable suggestions and criticisms.

1. "Burning of Barnum's Museum" *Harper's Weekly*, 29 July 1865, 1.

2. See, for example: James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum's America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

3. Reiss, *Showman*, 144.

4. Cited in *Ibid.*, 4.

5. A.H. Saxon, *P.T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 22. Saxon's biography is the most recent and most exhaustive study of Barnum's life available. Neil Harris's *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973) is also essential. Earlier seminal biographies include Irving Wallace, *The Fabulous Showman: The Life and Times of P.T. Barnum* (New York: Knopf, 1959) and Harvey Root, *The Unknown Barnum* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927).

6. Cook, *Arts of Deception*, 9.

7. *The Life of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (New York: Redfield, 1855) was technically published in December of 1854, but bears an 1855 imprint, so some scholars refer to the publication date as 1855. The most convenient modern edition is *The Life of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself*, ed. and intro. Terence Whalen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), to which all quotations in the present essay refer.

Beginning in 1869, 15 years after the publication of *The Life*, Barnum revised and expanded his autobiography to include his more recent exploits. The second edition is: P.T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs; or, Forty Years' Recollections of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (Hartford: J.B. Burr, 1869). The additions and excisions in the various editions of Barnum's autobiography are so convoluted that one of his biographers contends that the career of the book was "as complicated as Barnum's own life" (Harris, *Humbug*, 207). Another essay could chart these amendments and measure them against Barnum's changing bids for respectability. My purpose in this essay, however, is to focus specifically on the first, 1854, edition of *The Life of P.T. Barnum* in order to understand how and why Barnum creates apparently-intwined tropes of drink and ink. For more on the editions of Barnum's autobiography, see Saxon, *P.T. Barnum*, 417-18.

8. For a working definition of "speculation," see Robert Sobel, *The Money Manias: The Eras of Great Speculation in America, 1770-1970* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1973): "For centuries people have debated the differences between investment and speculation, and have come to no clear-cut distinction. But all would agree that speculation involves greater risks and hopes of greater rewards than does investment, which is safer if not as promising in terms of financial gain" (1).

9. Useful histories with discussions of the American temperance movement include: Thomas R. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998); Mark Lender and James Martin, *Drinking in America: A History* (New York: The Free Press, 1982); W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); and Ian Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979). Eric Burns's more recent *The Spirits of America: A Social History of Alcohol* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004) should interest readers looking for a general impression of the history of American alcohol use. For a valuable collection of essays on temperance and American literature, see David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal (eds.), *The Serpent in the Cup: Temperance in American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997). The introduction to that volume, by Rosenthal and Reynolds, is particularly pertinent, as is Reynolds's chapter "Black Cats and Delirium Tremens: Temperance and the American Renaissance" (22-59). Both chapters help one contextualize Barnum's autobiography in nineteenth-century temperance discourse. Finally, see Nicholas O. Warner's *Spirits of America: Intoxication in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), which covers major writers on alcohol, but does not mention Barnum.

10. For an example of Barnum's use of Franklin, see the "Anecdote of Franklin" passage in *The Life* (289-90), in which Franklin is figured as the prototypical American. For more on Barnum's uses of Franklin, see Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum*, 22; and Harris, *Humbug*, 156. See also Michael Zuckerman, "The Selling of the Self: From Barnum to Franklin," (in Barbara B. Oberg and Harry S. Stout (eds.), *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993: 152-70]), in which Zuckerman compares the similarities between Franklin's *Autobiography* and Barnum's *The Life*.

11. Benjamin Franklin, *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography*, eds. J.A. Leo Lemay and P.M. Zall (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 68.

12. For detailed views of the Washingtonians, see Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001): 29-52; Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 159-90; Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, 26-32; Robert Hampel, *Temperance and Prohibition in Massachusetts, 1813-1852* (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982): 103-28; and Charles J.G. Griffin, "The 'Washingtonian Revival': Narrative and the Moral Transformation of Temperance Reform in Antebellum America" *Southern Communication Journal* 66 (Fall 2000), 67-78. See also John W. Crowley (ed.), *Drunkard's Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair, and Recovery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

13. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, 24-42.

14. Prior to the secular, predominantly working-class Washingtonians, temperance work had been largely the province of evangelical Christians. See Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 58. As we shall see, however, being publicly temperate remained a mark of respectability throughout Barnum's lifetime, and one that he courted aggressively. Although Barnum was an outspoken Universalist, and insisted on his personal piety, in his temperance writings and lectures, he tended not to focus on the religious arguments against drinking in order to strengthen his association of temperance with financial success on terra firma.

15. Griffin, "Washingtonian Revival," 72.

16. For an analysis of the complicated relationship between contract and freedom—with particular reference to questions of slavery in postbellum America—see Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

17. According to Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, “every patriot from the Revolutionary period was represented among the names of the new societies, but the movement as a whole continued to be called the Washingtonian movement” (183 n.1).

18. Jerome Nadelhaft, “Alcohol and Wife Abuse in Antebellum Temperance Literature” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 25 (Winter 1995), 15-43: 20. Nadelhaft also notes that quotations like this “reappear often in temperance works. Minor [in *Reasons for Abolishing the Liquor Traffic*] (1853) uses it, and a variation: ‘This dollar is a memorial of seven days and nights of wretchedness, which were given to a whole family in exchange for it’” (39 n. 5). Thus the year before Barnum published *The Life*, the idea was pervasive that money spent on liquor was akin to pledging to destroy a family.

19. See Griffin, “Washingtonian Revival”: “Efforts to induce individuals to sign the pledge of total abstinence soon became a central focus of the temperance work. To be sure, the narrowness of the teetotal pledge drove from the movement many moderationists, who tended to be financially and socially well-to-do relative to the teetotalers” (68).

For a literary-rhetorical perspective on the fall of the Washingtonians, see David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1988). Reynolds suggests that the fall of the Washingtonians can also be attributed to their association with what Reynolds calls “dark-temperance,” a strain of temperance rhetoric that emphasized the grotesque and horrific results of drinking. Reynolds catalogues numerous examples of dark-temperance, including Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Black Cat” (1843) which has a drunkard gouging out the eyes of his cat with a penknife, and Maria Lamas’s *The Glass* (1849), which “gives dark temperance an unusual twist by describing a young boy, locked by his drunken mother in a closet, bleeding to death after having chewed his own arm to the bone in an effort to save himself from starvation” (68). This sort of temperance work was soon accused of being itself intemperate, which precipitated a growing anti-temperance movement in the 1840s. Interestingly, if critics were not accusing the dark-temperance reformers of intemperance, they were often accusing them of exploiting the dangers of drink for profit. Reynolds reminds us that Bayard Rust Hall’s *Something for Every Body* (1846) condemned the “itinerants, who wander about in very eccentric orbits and narrate their *rum* days at so much *per diem*” (73). For a succinct account of temperance and American literature that explores the influence of dark-temperance, see Reynolds’s more recent article “Black Cats and Delirium Tremens: Temperance and the American Renaissance” (in Reynolds and Rosenthal, *The Serpent in the Cup*, 22-59). For a more in-depth analysis of Poe’s “The Black Cat” see T.J. Matheson, “Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’ as a Critique of Temperance Literature” *Mosaic* (Summer 1986): 69-81.

20. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, 39. For more on the politics of the Maine Law, see Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, 39-42 and Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 260-4.

21. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 252.

22. *Ibid.*, 260.

23. Ironically, the pledge itself turned off moderates or even would-be teetotalers who could not accept the terms of a binding contract. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s well-known discomfort with temperance, for example, resulted at least partially from his dislike of the pledge. A 1839 journal entry by Emerson anticipates Barnum’s juxtaposition of drink and ink: “I will not pledge myself not to drink wine, not to drink ink, not to lie, & not to commit adultery lest I hanker tomorrow to do these very things by reason of having tied my hands” (quoted in Reynolds, “Black,” 44). For a more detailed analysis of Emerson’s attitudes toward drinking, see the chapter on him in Warner, *Spirits of America*, 32-49.

24. In 1851, Barnum had this to say about the Maine Law: “The great Maine Liquor Law, which is working so charmingly and beneficently, would, if adopted by the State, probably do more toward the abrogation of crime, misery, and degradation in Connecticut than any one thing else, and as I intend to devote my leisure time during the next five months to traversing our State and to urging the importance of this law upon our citizens, I wish them to understand that I go among them as a man and not as a politician” (quoted in Ernest Cherrington, ed. *Standard Encyclopedia of the Alcohol Problem, Vol. I* (Westerville, Ohio: American Issue Publishing, 1925), 279). Note also that Barnum makes an appearance in Mark Edward Lender, *Dictionary of American Temperance Biography: From Temperance Reform to Alcohol Research, the 1600s to the 1980s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984): 32-33.

25. Barnum’s anecdotal treatment of temperance was, at least in the early 1840s, unique to the Washingtonian sensibility. See, for example, Hempel, *Temperance and Prohibition*: “Before 1841, ex-drunkards rarely lectured on the benefits of abstinence. Few audiences listened to a drunkard’s autobiography. . . . Instead of bothering with drunks, the temperance reformers [prior to the Washingtonians] had sought the pledges of influential and respectable people” (103).

26. Barnum was of course not alone in noticing the economic dangers of drinking; see for instance Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 273.

27. The idea that alcohol disrupts families is recurrent throughout nineteenth-century temperance literature, and after the middle of the century, temperance became linked to the women's rights movement precisely because drunks made for bad husbands and women had little legal recourse if their husbands drank up their financial resources. Thus by mid-century, temperance enjoyed a renewed popularity partly because it was connected to women's rights. See Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998); Barbara Cohen-Stratynner, "Platform Pearls; or 19th Century American Temperance Performance Texts" *Performing Arts Resources* 16 (1991), 69-77; Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "Temperance in the Bed of a Child: Incest and Social Order in Nineteenth-Century America" (in Reynolds and Rosenthal, *The Serpent in the Cup*, 60-92); Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

28. Kenneth Greenberg, in *Honor & Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), offers a reading of the Darrow incident for quite a different purpose (12). Greenberg demonstrates how Barnum's humbugs—the Fejee Mermaid in particular—were received very differently in the North and South. Greenberg argues that far from being a friendly joke, had Barnum pulled the same shirt-trick in the South, his life would have been in danger, a circumstance that Greenberg attributes to the Southern codes of honor as opposed to Northern sensibilities about the marketplace (3-23). For Southerners, Greenberg shows, to call a man a liar was the worst possible offense, which helps explain why Barnum's antics never went over well in the South. See also Cook, *Arts of Deception*, 104-118; 287 n. 94.

For a history of the tavern as a unique social and cultural space, see David S. Shields, "The Demonization of the Tavern" (in Reynolds and Rosenthal, *The Serpent in the Cup*, 10-21).

29. There are numerous places in *The Life* in which drinking is associated with betting: two curmudgeons argue and bet over the variety of a particular rum that is on hand (78-9); a woodchopper is tricked into chopping firewood for free while drinking rum (88-9); and a quantity of champagne is wagered that a man could possibly become older than his father (186-7).

30. See Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994): 213-15; 265-7. Lears points out that in 1910, *Printer's Ink*, a trade magazine for the advertising industry, "disavowed the prophet [Barnum]" for having "admiration for trickery" (213-4).

31. Ann Fabian, *Card Sharps, Dream Books, & Bucket Shops: Gambling in 19th-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990): 40.

32. Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 10.

33. For a historical explication of "the link between luxury, gambling and speculation," see Karen A. Weyler, "'A Speculating Spirit': Trade, Speculation, and Gambling in Early American Fiction" *Early American Literature* 31.3 (1996): 207-42.

34. See Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 266.

35. Quoted in Harris, *Humbug*, 195.

36. In his pamphlet, *The Liquor Business; Its Effect Upon the Minds, Morals, and Pockets of Our People* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1854), Barnum elaborates on his use of the word "nervine," one of alcohol's "three most deleterious properties": "The nervine makes a man silly and happy as a fool. He feels as rich as Cræsus. We have a proverb in New England that 'A man is a fool if he don't get rich, as long as he can do it for 12½ cents.' That sum expended on liquor will make him imagine himself capable of buying the whole country" (5). The joke has a point: once again, Barnum couples finance and temperance to insist that, like a speculator, the drinker in the "nervine" stage thinks that tiny investments will yield fantastic profits.

The Liquor Business was Number 4 in the "Whole World's Temperance Tracts" series, which was distributed by Fowlers and Wells at cost in packets of a hundred or a thousand. Barnum wrote his tract in December of 1853.

37. Quoted in Fabian, *Card*, 120.

38. Fabian, *Card*, 123. For an analysis of the lottery phenomenon in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Fabian, *Card*, 113-28.

39. *Ibid.*, 120.

40. There has been much work on Barnum's fraud and why nineteenth-century Americans apparently loved him for it. See Richard Herskowitz, "P.T. Barnum's Double Bind" *Social Text* (Summer 1979): 133-141; Reiss, *Showman*; Cook, *Arts of Deception*, 1-29; 73-162; Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum*, 1-40; and Harris's influential chapter in *Humbug* on "the operational aesthetic," 59-89.

An example of a contemporary opinion of Barnum's humbugs comes from *Harper's Weekly* of 29 July 1865, after the American Museum burned down:

It is impossible to record this accident without sincere regret for the loss suffered by the whole community. If to presume upon a large measure of credulity designates a humbug, then Barnum was doubtless in so far a humbug. But when we consider that he afforded to thousands of visitors more agreeable and useful instruction, and at the same time more of amusement than could be obtained elsewhere for double the money, we must pronounce him the most innocent of all the many humbugs with which we are acquainted. (1)

41. Contrast Barnum's own "speculative spirit" with the "Spirit of Speculation" section in which he describes his dissatisfaction at being stuck having "to labor for a fixed salary" (107).

42. See David M. Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 137-165; Ann Fabian, "Speculation on Distress: The Popular Discourse of the Panics of 1837 and 1857" *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3.1. (1989): 127-142; Fabian, *Card*, 160; and Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 59-60. As Henkin shows, dealing in banknotes was seen by some as tantamount to speculation, and in certain circles, "the banknote itself came to represent such evils as monopolistic privilege, unearned wealth, social inequality, a loss of virtuous independence, and the dissolution of the republic" (142).

43. Henkin, *City Reading*, 139.

44. For another example of Barnum's personal temperance being linked to the Museum's success, see Barnum, *The Life*, 223.

45. For a highly informative account of Barnum's uses of the Lecture Room at the American Museum, see the "Barnum's Lecture Room" chapter in Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum*, 116-163. In J.C. Furnas's readable popular history of the temperance movement in America, *The Life and Times of the Late Demon Rum* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), he singles out Barnum's staging of *The Drunkard* in the Lecture Room. According to Furnas, *The Drunkard* "had racked up 'the first run of modern dimensions' (says George C.D. Odell, historian of the New York Stage), of some 150 consecutive performances" (142).

46. Harris, *Humbug*, 194.

47. "P.T. Barnum on Temperance" *New York Times*, 25 Feb. 1869, 4. The *New York Times* and other local periodicals occasionally printed accounts of Barnum's temperance lectures which are useful for their lengthy quotations.

48. "Barnum on Temperance" *New York Times*, 8 April 1878, 8.

49. In *The Liquor Business*, Barnum insists that the rum-seller be seen in "the same category" as "the gambler, the prostitute, the mock-auctioneer and the pickpocket" (7). Interestingly, Barnum devotes three pages of the 12-page pamphlet to explaining how liquor sellers—who are inherently dishonest—dupe the public by diluting and otherwise adulterating alcohol in order to sell the watered-down spirit at great profit (7-10). In other words, Barnum argues that the "liquor business" is a literal speculation.

50. *Bridgeport Daily Standard*, 26 June 1875, 2. For Mayor Barnum's response to detractors of his temperance policies, see also *BDS*, 7 June 1875, 2. An earlier example of Barnum's insistence on the need for legal sanction of temperance is a broadside called "Barnum's Appeal to the Democratic Electorate of Connecticut" (1852).

51. "By the Way" *New York Times*, 1 Jan. 1887, 4.

52. P.T. Barnum, *Selected Letters of P.T. Barnum*, ed. with an intro. by A.H. Saxon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983): 80. The Crystal Palace was a scheme to recreate London's Crystal Palace in the States that nearly bankrupted Barnum in 1854.

53. Barnum, *Selected Letters*, 81; 82-3; 83.

54. Quoted in Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 59.

55. Writing about the 1837 and 1857 financial panics that were the most salient reminders of when "profit and progress ceased to explain the nature of daily life," Fabian suggests that "Panics called for textual creativity because they revealed just how markets and their ills (their manias and their panics) were, like texts, mental constructions" (Fabian, "Speculation," 129). Although Fabian is referring specifically to non-professional treatises on economics here, her statement that "Panics produce text" might as easily apply to Barnum and his administration of "printer's ink."