Institutionalized

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“Marriage is a great institution,” so the old joke goes, “but who wants to be in an institution?” The punch line, of course, turns on the rhetorical play around the inexact but ubiquitous word *institution*—that it somehow applies both to the collective, legalized state of heteronormative marriage and to insane asylums. Christopher Castiglia takes this conjunction seriously, to our great benefit, in *Interior States*. “Institutional consciousness,” as Castiglia theorizes it, combines two modern constructions seemingly at odds: institutions and interiority. These two are conjoined forces in Castiglia’s narrative, in which the “emerging social theory of institutionalism” depended on the production of an interiority perceived as a private space of self-management (5). Shifting focus away from the nation and nationalism, Castiglia argues that interiorized citizenship was the necessary correlative to the new institutions that mediated and managed the public sphere in the antebellum United States. *Interior States* therefore revises two common working assumptions in antebellum literary scholarship, by arguing, first, that institutions, not the nation-state, produced citizenship in this era; and, second, that the discourse of the nervous system was central to American politics and literature well before George Miller Beard’s *American Nervousness* (1881). Of this second point, Castiglia re-

minds nineteenth-century scholars of the rich and complex language of the nervous system in the ante-bellum United States, which he uses to argue that interior self-management produced anxious citizens rather than reformed them. Thus, democracy turned from a radical sociality into a privatized internal struggle, with disruptive anxieties and desires continually deferred to impersonal and extrapoliical institutions for their proper management.

To explain how the sociability of revolution was rerouted into the interiority of citizenship, *Interior States* accounts for the temporal, as well as spatial, dimensions of the paradoxical process of becoming a citizen. Spatially, the bodily interior becomes misperceived as social; in other words, sociality between people, the jangling and discords of democracy, is “interiorized” and experienced as competing desires, faculties, or “organs.” In this way, *Interior States* argues, citizens mistake self-management for democratic participation. Temporally, this nervous self-management endlessly defers present pleasures to future goals, a deferral solidified by institutions. Castiglia tracks the process of interiorization in chapter 1, which introduces a useful term for the spacialization of the “deep self”: federal affect. Federal affect channels local affections into federal coherence at the level of the nation. Through this process, local forms of sociality become either a relic of the past mourned in a range of literature, including Hannah Foster’s *The Coquette* (1797) and Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” (1819), or a possibility foreclosed in the present as disruptive to civil peace. Crucially, as Castiglia emphasizes throughout *Interior States*, desire is not at odds with institutionalism but its most productive engine. It bolsters an emerging speculative capitalism that encourages citizens, as Castiglia notes, “to invest in pleasures deferred to some unspecified future” (190, emphasis in original).

Federal affect, as it turns out, was short lived, and Castiglia is most concerned with how emerging institutions replaced its aims and functions in the ante-bellum years. Thus, social theorist Francis Lieber, who famously promoted the institutions of democracy, is a key figure. Lieber voices what Castiglia calls a “theory of institutionality,” the promise of public participation through self-management and the deferral of pleasure and sociability. As Castiglia clarifies, Lieber’s theory of institutionality depended upon the assumption that the future will and should be maintained along the same premises as the present. Historians like Robert Wiebe and Cecilia Elizabeth O’Leary affirm what Castiglia traces: that national institutions in the United States preceded feelings of national loyalty. The Civil War is therefore
the absent conclusion to Castiglia’s historical narrative: the moment when an unsteady nationalism lost its coherence but was sustained by northern institutionalism.

The emergence of a theory of the nervous system, which Interior States introduces in chapter 5, grounds the production of “institutional consciousness” as Lieber imagined it. Castiglia dwells on the work of health reformer Catharine E. Beecher and phrenologist Orson Fowler to uncover the ways the “desiring citizen” became the “subject of anxiety” (171). Anxiety, in turn, is both the symptom in need of self-management and the trace evidence of dissent against the mandates of interiorized citizenship. As the examples of health reform and phrenology attest, Castiglia develops the implications of institutionalization and institutional consciousness in the emergence of antebellum reform movements. In a stunning chapter on temperance reform (chapter 4), Castiglia clarifies the way temperance societies sought to locate the cause of intemperance in unregulated social settings. By first misrepresenting alcoholism as a social problem—all of those working men in bars and taverns—temperance literature could suggest instead institutionalization and interiority (lodged within a safe, middle-class household) as remedies to this dangerous sociability. Or as Castiglia puts it in his discussion of Timothy Shay Arthur’s best seller, Ten Nights in a Barroom (1854), “Ten Nights ends in an orgy of institutionalization, with characters whisked off to prisons, insane asylums, and poorhouses,” a process that reassigns what were once community responsibilities to agents from these various impersonal institutions (149). Castiglia contrasts the rampant institutionalization of Ten Nights with an extended interpretation of Walt Whitman’s Franklin Evans (1842), a temperance novel Whitman wrote for a stand-alone issue of Park Benjamin’s New World. Whereas Arthur’s novel champions institutional interiority, Whitman’s novel hyperbolically enacts its logic, calling attention to its (failed) inner workings. As Castiglia contends, Franklin Evans reproduces the “dynamics of temperance reform” through its “never-ending series of ‘new starts’” and “backsliding characters” in a way that strategically reveals—rather than mystifies—the interlocking processes of desire and deferral that citizenship became in social reform (159).

Chapters 3 and 6 follow institutional consciousness into the realms of abolition, slavery, and race. Though separated structurally in the book, these two chapters together allow Interior States to present the impact of institutional interiority on the most pressing political issues of antebellum America. Chapter 3 posits that “civic interiority” accrued racial meaning through an abolitionist logic in
which “correct” affective interiors qualified people to become citizens. In turn, sympathetic whites like William Lloyd Garrison drew on their precarious identification with the suffering of racial others to authorize their moral authority. This exemplary participation in the construction of privatized, affective citizenship proves an obstacle, Castiglia contends, for African American novelists Martin Delany and Hannah Crafts. The reading of Delany’s _Blake; or, The Huts of America_ (1859–62) in chapter 6 stresses how Henry Blake’s organizing missions in the novel increasingly replace revolutionary goals with the construction of institutions that always anticipate, but never achieve, those goals. Crafts’s novel, on the other hand, suggests an alternative response to the civic interiority Garrison promotes. Rather than championing institutions, _The Bondswoman’s Narrative_ (2002) voices the desires and disavowals generated by the racial and gendered dynamics of interior expectations through the structural form of romance.

Romance is an indispensable category in Castiglia’s argument. While _Interior States_ weaves together the history of psychology with psychoanalytic terminology to model a theoretical breadth, it never loses sight of the texture of literary form. Indeed, though _Interior States_ collects an interdisciplinary archive, imaginative literature represents the most productive space for counterdiscursive responses to the twinned impulses to interiorize and institutionalize. In particular, _Interior States_ dwells on the role antebellum romances by (among others) Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hannah Crafts, and Herman Melville played in registering the dissatisfactions with and dissections to interiorized citizenship. Thus, readings of a diverse catalog of familiar and less familiar novels (and the occasional poem) expose both an irreducible space of fantasy about sociality and its containment within the logic of institutional interiority. As the texts that are most able to register what Castiglia calls at times a “dissenting interiority” (216) or “queer interiority” (278), antebellum romances like Melville’s _Pierre_ (1852) are stuck in a circular argument—registering dissent through fantasy in a way that always seems to recall the limits of fantasy itself. Ultimately, _Interior States_ argues, this circularity seems mandated by institutional consciousness: the production of an imagined (even fantastical) interiority depends on the disavowal of fantasy and its relation to “real world” problems.

According to _Interior States_, the quest for the self-managed citizen also produced the possibility of queer sociality. What may appear at first to be a leitmotif, queerness harnesses Castiglia’s insights about institutional consciousness to what it disavows: a sense of self and
community exceeding the logic of interiority. This is the real strength of Castiglia’s contribution: a vocabulary for the relation of citizenship to sexuality—particularly queer sexualities—before the solidification of sexual identity; how, in other words, queerness as both interiority and sociality disrupts self-managed interiors. Castiglia digs underneath the ubiquity of the term queer in antebellum literature, recalling its connotation as “counterfeit,” to understand how inversions of Victorian gender roles anticipate modern homosexual identities by representing counterfeit interiors that locate aspirations outside of self-management. Both queer interiority and sociality emerge, Castiglia contends in chapter 7, in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). In their refusal to make their interior secrets public or to participate in the reproduction of institutionality, Clifford and Hepzibah participate in a “counterfeit” privacy that exceeds institutional control and, in the garden scenes of the novel, becomes the basis for “an alternative collective life—a queer sociability” (281). Even as Castiglia demonstrates elsewhere the ways in which sociality transforms into interiority, this garden scene of queer sociability strikes a utopian chord in *Interior States* by imagining a community based on what Castiglia calls “post-interior democracy” in his conclusion.

Although a welcome break from the relentless vision of democracy’s betrayal, the call in the conclusion for a “post-interior democracy” also points to a methodological shortcoming. Most often, *Interior States* juxtaposes prescriptive social reform against uneasy antebellum romances so as to reveal the demands of interiority and resistances to it. Because of this structure, I yearned, on occasion, for the argument to dilate upon the uneven nature of this modern fantasy of interiority. *Interior States* presents the removal of revolutionary impulses from the political arena at the level of discourse and imagination, but they still remained in contests over working conditions and wages in cities like New York and Boston, for instance, or in struggles over states’ rights and slavery that produced both John Brown and Southern fire-eaters. The limitations to Castiglia’s analysis emerge most visibly when his argument for institutional consciousness brushes up against aspects of embodiment and experience orthogonal to its premises. The body as a physical experience was elusive throughout *Interior States*, most significantly in the chapter on the nervous system, in which the emphasis on a psychoanalytic vocabulary of anxiety and melancholy occludes the nervous system as it was understood physiologically in these years. Religious language likewise transitions too seamlessly, this time into a sec-
ular discourse of civic interiority, forestalling its ability to figure as a site of sociality or personal experience that predates institutional interiority and therefore may not always align with or support its assumptions.

It may well be a testament to the ambitious scope of Castiglia’s book that its limitations present just such opportunities to reimagine his thesis in light of these sites important to antebellum studies. In sum, Interior States is a welcome reading of antebellum literature and politics. It challenges antebellum literary scholars to recalibrate key terms like “nation” and “institution” (and the relation between them), and to do so in light of a rejuvenated attention to literary form. Perhaps most importantly, Interior States insists on the need both to theorize the relation of psychology to politics and to historicize the emergence of this intertwining in the new nation. If the political language of reform and institutionality strikes a familiar chord for readers, it attests to the longevity of the discursive shifts Castiglia traces in Interior States, and its endurance, likewise, reinforces the book’s sharpest insights.

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