

During the first half of the nineteenth century, American culture witnessed a growing conflict between new and old cultural paradigms exemplified by the rise of diverse sensational romances and novels. Some of these popular texts, such as George Lippard's *The Quaker City* (1845) and George Foster's *New York in Slices* (1858), criticized social and political corruptions and address the urgent need to reform the state. Among the writers of these popular texts, Robert Montgomery Bird (1806-1854) emerged as an important figure in this social context. Bird had been a medical practitioner at first, and later pursued his literary career by writing fiction and drama. One of his novels, *Sheppard Lee* (1836), is unique in the sense that it incorporates a diversity of literary genres including, most notably, adventure, gothic, pastoral tales, and other sensational elements. Edgar Allen Poe, as Bird's contemporary, had a mixed attitude toward Bird's novels. On the one hand, Poe criticized scenes of "slaughter and violence" in Bird's war novels (Reynolds 229).¹ On the other, he praised *Sheppard Lee* as "an original in American Belles Lettres" in his book review (Poe 389).² Although this novel had received favorable reviews from the press, yet it was never favored on a large scale (Foust 96).

Recently, Bird's novels have received more critical appraisals than they had at the time of their publication.³ In a book-length study on Bird, for instance, Curtis Dahl regards him only as a minor writer even though his novels do have some merits of representing the social condition of his time; and Bird in *Sheppard Lee* satirizes various aspects of American society through picaresque fiction (105-6).⁴ Similarly Benjamin J. Doty reads the depiction of embodiment as "a source of comedy" in "lampooning all elements of Jacksonian life" (132).

¹ According to Curtis Dahl, among these war novels are *Calavar; or, The Knight of the Conquest, A Romance of Mexico* (1834) and *The Infidel; or, The Fall of Mexico* (1835). Both novels deal with the history of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Bird also wrote romances of backwoodsmen and Indians, such as *Nick of the Woods* (1837). The third type is the novels of satire on American life; *Sheppard Lee* belongs to this type. About the three main types of novels written by Bird, see Dahl, p. 72.

² Dahl points out that Poe may have used some ideas from *Sheppard Lee* for two of his short stories, "The Gold Bug" and "Some Words with a Mummy". See Dahl 110.

³ There have been a growing number of critical studies on *Sheppard Lee* in recent years, including Peter Jaros, "The Faculties of Law: Robert Montgomery Bird's *Sheppard Lee* as Legal Fiction," *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 3.2 (2015): 307-335; Matthew Reborn, "Ontological Drift: Medical Discourse and Racial Embodiment in Robert Montgomery Bird's *Sheppard Lee*," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 61.2 (2015): 262-296; Benjamin J. Doty, "Satire, Minstrelsy, and Embodiment in *Sheppard Lee*," *Early American Literature* 51.1 (2016): 131-156; Sari Altschuler, "From Empathy to Epistemology: Robert Montgomery Bird and the Future of the Medical Humanities," *American Literary History* 28.2 (2016): 1-26. All these studies seem to prove that scholars have regarded this novel as an important contribution to early nineteenth-century American literature.

⁴ Alexander Cowie in *The Rise of the American Novel* also sees Bird as a minor writer. Although Cowie thinks that "Bird equaled neither Brown nor Poe in originality and emotional power," he is willing to give the novel's ingenuity its due as he comments that "his *Sheppard Lee* is an ingenious tale" and it was the first time that Bird "achieved clarity and proportion" (252).

The importance of *Sheppard Lee* is also evidenced by the inclusion of a portion of the novel in Paul C. Gutjahr's anthology of popular American literature during the 19th century. Gutjahr makes a brief comment on the novel by saying that Bird attempts "to explore the complexities of individual responsibility in a world where natural and supernatural influences commingle to help direct human behavior" (201). In his introduction to the novel, Christopher Looby conceives the adventure of Sheppard Lee as "an allegory of social mobility and a meditation on personal identity" as he traverses "a broad array of antebellum American social roles" (xv). Another recent critical study suggests that this novel explores the meaning of "sympathy" and sees it as an act of "fellow feeling" and as "a physiological process" that entails "the intersubjective relations of the body", and "the disorders of the internal sympathies of the body", such as hypochondria, tend to "signal unhealthy social relations" (Murison 18). In a sense, Murison's view provides an insightful interpretation that is related to what this paper tries to explore; namely, the interrelation between body and politics embodied in light of biopolitical discourse, especially regarding medical intervention for establishing the healthy body of population. And yet the multiplicity of diseases addressed in the novel and their connection with body politics need further exploration.

Drawing from bio-political discourses, this paper attempts to show that, through Sheppard Lee's embodiment and disembodiment, Bird, as a member of medical institutions, tries to mix different social, racial, and even scientific discourses, while empowering himself as the agent of sovereignty and governmentality practicing the rhetoric of exclusion to eliminate the sick body as socially and economically undesirable and thereby cultivate the vital power of the healthy subject.⁵ Such a practice entails a way of regularizing the population and rationalizing the construction of the ideal and healthy body. All these discourses reflect the working of biopolitics in American culture and politics during the early nineteenth century.

This study will be divided into two parts. The first section focuses on the discourses of biopolitics, and addresses the issue of the politics of exclusion. The second part analyzes how the politics of exclusion is employed in a series of transmigrations of soul Lee has experienced; in other words, from bodily sickness to spiritual debasement at the individual, social and political levels. More importantly, after going through these transformations, Sheppard Lee

⁵ One of the chief interests throughout Bird's life was science and scientific experimentation (Dahl 16). Bird had entered the Medical School and College of Pharmacy at the University of Pennsylvania and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1827. Bird practiced medicine for just a short time, and yet he was very concerned with those illnesses he could not cure during his practice of medicine. For Dahl, it is conceivable that his educational background and medical practice have helped shape *Sheppard Lee* and other writings (16).

returns to his own healthy body that is “immune” from all those physical and social defects, thereby allowing him to live a quality form of life proposed by Bird.

I. The Politics of Exclusion

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Michel Foucault attempts to conceptualize the art of governing, and more precisely, the best possible way of governing, and to study the practice of government and to identify “the rationalization of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty” (2). According to Foucault, between the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, one way of the rationalization of governmental practice is political economy, which means any method of government that can enhance the nation’s prosperity and imposes the self-limitation of governmental reason (13). All the governmental practices aims to establish what he called “the regime of truth” that articulates a particular type of discourses (such as political economy) and a set of practices (such as the regulation of the market and production), and legislates such articulation in terms of truth and false (Foucault 18). The concept of the regime of truth can also be applied to analyze a set of practices that govern madness, disease, delinquency, and sexuality (19). The purpose of all these, as Foucault has emphasized, is to show how the articulation of a set of practices and a regime to truth “form an apparatus of knowledge-power” (19).

While the power of sovereignty disciplines madness, disease, and sexuality, one of the basic phenomena of the nineteenth century, Foucault has suggested in *Society Must Be Defended*, is “power’s hold over life” (239). Foucault points out that previously “the right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live” whereas the new right is to “make live and to let die” (241). This new technology of power, i.e. biopolitics, involves a set of processes, such as “the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population” and “a whole series of related economic and political problems” (243). More relevant here is the issue of endemics that denotes “the form, nature, extension, duration, and intensity of the illnesses prevalent in a population” and that might “[sap] the population’s strength, [shorten] the working week, [waste] energy, and cost money” (243-44). Thus, it is crucial to set up some rational mechanisms to medicalize the population or establish charitable institutions (244). This new bio-political discourse does not entirely exclude disciplinary technology; it attempts to regularize the population and ensures “the continuous living of the human species” (Cambell

xx-xxi). Thus, health apparatuses (medical and psychiatric institutions) and biopolitical authorities (physicians, health experts) attempt to establish “new disciplines” that form “the practices and value orientations of the population” (Nadesan 94).

Indeed, in his address delivered to graduates of Pennsylvania Medical College, Bird emphasizes the “great treasure of medicine” has been accumulated by “the industrious” through “centuries of painful research” and encourages them to use reason and conscience to fulfill “the moral obligations” (5-6). For Bird, it is also crucial for practitioners of medicine to be competent; he calls for the school system and those graduates to take the obligation to resist “the admission of incompetency and unworthiness” in order “to maintain the honour of the profession” (11). Bird here seems to employ the politics of exclusion for the purpose of maintaining the continuing progress of medical profession and accomplishing “the advancement in the respect of your fellow-men” (11). In the same vein, those who are physically and socially incompetent in the novel become the objects of exclusion in order for the state to maintain the population’s vitality.

Agamben furthers Foucault’s biopolitical discourse by proposing the concept of “the inclusive exclusion.” Drawing on the Greek ideas of *zoe* (the simple fact of living applied to all living things) and *bios* (the way of living fit for an individual or a group), Agamben contends that Western politics “were the place in which life had to transform itself into good life and in which what had to be politicized were always already bare life” (7). The idea of “inclusive exclusion” lies in the fact that “Bare life remains included in politics in the form of exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion” (11). This politics of exclusion echoes the basic biopolitical structure of modernity that is based on the belief that “life is subject to a judgment of worth, a judgment that can be made by oneself (suicide) but also by others (doctors, relatives) but is ultimately guaranteed by a sovereign authority (the state)” (Rose 57). In the case of *Sheppard Lee*, Bird employs the strategy of the inclusive exclusion as a way of judgment of life since, in order to exclude the social and political misfits, it is necessary to include them so that society can have its constitutive internal negativity, and maintains what is good life delimited by the sovereignty.

Opposing Agamben’s negative form of biopolitics, Robert Esposito proposes the paradigm of “immunization.” The term “immunity” originally means a biomedical condition in which a living organism can produce a natural resistance to a given disease, while in political aspect immunity refers to an “exemption on the part of subject with regard to concrete obligations or

responsibility that under normal circumstances would bind one to others” (45). This paradigm also avers that life and politics constitute as a single whole. “Not simply the relation that joins life to power, immunity is the power to preserve life” (46). As a negative form of the protection of life, immunization “saves, insures, and preserves the organism, either individual or collective”, but it also “subjects the organism to a condition that simultaneously negates or reduces its power to expand” (46). Esposito’s purpose is to reverse the negative biopolitics characterized by Nazi-thanatological project into “a qualified form of life” and a “communal form of life” that is open to others” (Campbell xxviii-xxix). In the end of the novel, it turns out that all the diseases and moral depravities seem to help Sheppard Lee establish a strong “immunity,” a way of preserving his life exempted from the infection of social evils.

In order to perpetuate this politics of exclusion and biopolitics, Bird has blended in some supernatural and scientific discourses in his novel. As Sheppard Lee is getting poor and miserable, he happens to have a dream in which John Hazlewood Higginson with a black pig leads him to a grave in the Owl-roost and Lee digs out a coffin inside of which is full of gold and silver. He tries to find the treasure as he wakes up under the full moon with “a constant alternation of light and darkness” (43). While finding nothing in the Owl-roost, he somehow enters a magical world and falls into a trance. When he wakes up as a spirit, he sees only his own dead body. For Sheppard Lee, it is like “two persons, one of which lives and observes, while the other is wholly defunct” (48). Due to this fantastic event, Lee is empowered to transmigrate his soul from body to body while experiencing the politics of exclusion as well as the “immunity” of life during the process.

The concept of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls, could be traced back to Greece and India.⁶ In these ancient cultures, the concept “was not only a popular belief and a religious doctrine, but it was taken up into philosophy and metaphysics” (Moore 6). Moore suggests that for the Greeks metempsychosis functions as “an expiation of guilt”, while in India it is “the inexorable law of cause and effect, the deed and its consequence, which pursues man from existence to existence” (66-7). Perhaps more relevant here is its modernized variation; as Moore points out, “The successive reincarnations are stages in the soul’s progress toward perfection” (Moore 65). As in the case of Sheppard Lee, the series of transmigration does help

⁶ For the definition of metempsychosis, see also the English translation of Voltaire’s *A Philosophical Dictionary* (1824). As Voltaire states, “The idea of metempsychosis is perhaps the most ancient dogma of the known world, and prevails still in a great part of India and of China” (42).

him to regain his healthy life physically and economically.⁷ It can also be said that Lee's soul progresses through trials and errors into a realm of perfection.⁸

As for the effect of the transmigration, as Sheppard Lee indicates, "the associations of mind, as well as many of its other qualities, are more dependent upon causes in the body than metaphysicians are disposed to allow" (140). In other words, as Looby rightly points out, the spirit in the novel is more physically determined, and it is merely "a passive occupant of the flesh, changed and affected by its physical container" (xx). As such, while entering the bodies of other individuals, Lee finds himself "invested with new feelings, passions, and propensities—as it were, with a new mind—and retaining so little of my original character" (140). Moreover, an ordinary spirit like Lee's lies "in their bodies like water in sponges, diffused through every part, affected by the part's affections, changed with its changes, and so intimately united with the fleshly matrix, that the mere cutting off a leg, as I believe, will, in some cases, leave the spirit limping for life" (141). It can be deduced from this comment that one's spirit will be debased if one gets sick or suffers bodily deformity and illness. In the novel, the sickness of one's spirit can also be deployed as a figuring device for the illness of the nation. Thus, one way of getting rid of these social evils is to "make live and to let die" and to exclude them so that the nation can maintain the vital force of the citizens.

Another way of resurrection from the dead body in the novel is through galvanism. The Italian physician and philosopher, Luigi Galvani, in his *De Virbius Electricitatis* (1791), proposes that there is electricity in animals that appears mostly in muscles and nerves (136).

⁷ In American literature, the concept of metempsychosis, for instance, is introduced in Poe's "Metzengerstein," in which Count Berlifitzing transmigrates his soul into a horse to exact a revenge on Baron Metzengerstein. Beside this, John Michael Corrigan in his study on American metempsychosis includes Emerson and Whitman. Corrigan suggests that Emerson's conception of metempsychosis recombines the forces of ancient philosophy and mysticism with "a new awareness of the historical series of being and the individual's provisional place in, and negotiation with, that series" (8). As for Walt Whitman, Corrigan indicates that Whitman modernizes the project of formulating the metempsychotic self in America (9).

⁸ It is interesting to note that two years after the publication of *Sheppard Lee*, a Scottish physician and writer, Rober Macnish (1802-1837), wrote a tale called "The Metempsychosis" in his *The Modern Pythagorean* (1838). The tale, originally published in Blackwood's Magazine in 1825, describes how the narrator, after experiencing "a slight shudder," transforms himself into another person, Wlostang. See Macnish, 1-55. A dozen of years after the publication of *Sheppard Lee*, another "system of belief," spiritualism, began to spread from Europe to America. Spiritualism generally refers to "the belief in intercourse with the spirits of the dead" (Podmore xi). Among spiritualistic practices are witchcraft, Mesmerism, clairvoyance, trance writing and speaking, and so on. Joseph McCabe specifically dates Spiritualism from 1848 and emphasizes an organized movement for communication with the dead. See McCabe, 10-11. According to Emma Hardinge, it was estimated that the spiritual movement had reached eleven millions of person on the American continent in 1867 (13). William Howitt in discussing Spiritualism in North America also makes a similar claim by saying that Spiritualism "established itself a great and significant fact in the convictions of more than three millions of people of all classes, professions, and persuasions" (187). Perhaps it signals a growing subversive movement that prevailed even after the Enlightenment.

For Galvani, the muscle “should be the proper seat of the electricity”, while the nerve “performs the function of a conductor” (137). He also believes that electric fluid comes from one common source, the cerebrum; therefore, “electricity is prepared by action of the cerebrum, and that it is extracted from the blood and that it enters the nerves, and that it runs through them within” (139-40). The debates about the idea of animal electricity had lasted until the mid-nineteenth century, especially the one between two professors, John Abernethy and William Lawrence, at London’s Royal College of Surgeons.⁹

The most prominent literary work that makes use of this concept is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). In the novel, Victor Frankenstein devotes himself to study the theory and practice of natural science, especially chemistry, and later focuses on physiology in order to understand the principle of life. After his painstaking effort on analyzing “all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life”, he finally discovers a secret that allows him to be “capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter” (32). Similarly, in the case of Tom the slave in *Sheppard Lee*, after Tom is executed and buried, a group of young doctors dig up his body and try to show “the effects of that extraordinary fluid, galvanism, on our lifeless bodies” (372). Through this experiment, Tom’s dead body does get animated. This is to make sure that Sheppard Lee could return to his more healthy and productive body later on.

In sum, this paper argues that Bird’s *Sheppard Lee* can be read in a broader context in terms of biopolitics. The novel implements the politics of exclusion to eliminate the deviated, sick, unproductive living man while keeping the healthy body to ensure the vitality of the population in the state. In other words, as a member of biopolitical authorities with the power of medical knowledge (physician), Bird functions as the agent of sovereignty, employing the politics of exclusion to discipline those sick bodies and let them perish through transmigration while allowing those productive ones to live contentedly. The ultimate purpose is to let Sheppard Lee “immune” from various physical, psychological, and social diseases that prevent the subject from living a contented and productive life.

⁹ For instance, Abernethy follows Mr. Hunter’s *Theory of life* by suggesting that there is a connection between the phenomena of electricity of life and it is electricity that “performs all the chemical operations in living bodies” (49); therefore, it is possible that “electricity is life” (51). However, for Lawrence, the peculiar features of organized bodies show no analogy to those found in chemistry, mechanics, and other physical sciences; therefore, the reference to “gravity, to attraction, to chemical affinity, to electricity or galvanism, can only serve to perpetuate false notions in physiology” (161). He contends that “The truth is, there is no resemblance, no analogy between electricity and life” (170). For a more detailed analysis of this debate, see Marilyn Butler, 406-409.

II. (Dis-)embodied Soul

At the beginning of the novel, Sheppard Lee has inherited a large sum of wealth from his father. It is conceivable that as long as he follows his father's farming career, he will live a fruitful and contented life. But as Sheppard Lee gives himself up in laziness and fails to manage the household properly, the economy of household becomes deteriorated. Although he entrusts his property to Aikin Jones, it turns out that Aikin has been planning all along to swindle him out of his fortune. To reverse his fortune, he has tried to buy lottery, purchase and sell stocks, and even engage in marriage and politics.¹⁰ But misfortunes befall upon him as all these efforts turn out to be nothing. On top of that, he fails to accept the advices of his family, including his sister, Prudence, and sister-in-law, Alderson, and even his slave, Jim Jumbles. As a result, he can't help but lament that "I was left to bear my misfortunes alone; which was a great aggravation of them all" (8).

In a sense, because Sheppard Lee cannot make use of his body economically and practically, his soul becomes contaminated and even damaged. Therefore, to cure the corruption of his mind, the novel starts with a whole series of transmigration. Since he possesses the power of entering any human body, he "had merely uttered a wish, and the transformation was instantly completed" (194). These transformations include John H. Higginson (apoplexy), I. Dulmer Dawkins (a flamboyant dandy), Abram Skinner (a dying and greedy miser), Zachariah Longstraw (a failed philanthropist), Tom (an idle and ungrateful slave), and Author Megrim (a rich young man with the dyspeptic). Most of these characters in one way or another contract certain diseases (literally and metaphorically) or idle away in their everyday life. As the practitioner of medical institution, Bird act as the agent of sovereignty who attempts to exclude the above social misfits in order for the nation to regularize the population, and to make proper use of human labor in conformity with economical productivity.

In the novel, John H. Higginson is the first target for Sheppard Lee to enter. Higginson is a wealthy brewer who embodies "a picture of happiness" (31). At first, Lee thought himself being "the happiest man in the world" (71). However, he found himself getting a kind of gout

¹⁰ In a sense, Sheppard Lee's life more or less reflects Bird's real life experience during early nineteenth century. Throughout his life, in addition to being a literary man (novelist, playwright, poet, and journalist), Bird had tried farming, practiced and taught medicine, done scientific experiments, and was also temporarily involved in Whig politics. See Dahl 15-31.

in his foot, which makes him lying on the bed for quite some time. As he is getting more familiar with Higginson's house, he has become more "melancholy and desperate" because of a series of misfortunes. Therefore, he wishes himself Sheppard Lee again. In order to escape from his misfortune, he tries to drown himself in the river. For Sheppard Lee, Higginson should be "a man of spirit of figure," but physical and spiritual deficiencies seem to reduce his vital strength required to establish the healthy population and thus make him socially undesirable. As a result, Bird uses the device of transmigration to exclude Higginson-like figures.

But his next transmigration, I. Dulmer Dawkins, is not much better than the previous embodiment. Dawkins is a young man of twenty-five in pursuit of the noble trade of "pigeon-hunting," which means to mingle in elegant society by attaching himself to rich young fellows. In this trade, he has incurred a large sum of debts, thereby constantly facing "a siege of dunning." As he complains, they are "as noisy, made, and ferocious as any mob of free and independent republicans I ever laid eyes on" (131). To solve this pressing problem, he hopes that his uncle, Wilkins, would help him pass through those duns. However, his purpose is solely for getting money out of his uncle. He even tries to seduce Patties to marry him in order to get her share of a large sum of money given by Wilkins while also planning to elope with Alicia in case of accident. But his scheme just falls apart and he is left with nothing except the pursuit of creditors. In a sense, people like Dawkins should be excluded from a healthy society since he produces nothing on his own and endangers the vitality of the population; thus, Sheppard Lee's spirit is forced to transmigrate into another body.

Among those bodies the spirit of Sheppard Lee has resided, Abram Skinner exemplifies the case of a sick body, or "human corpse" as undesirable in the politics of exclusion. Skinner is known for his greed for money-making, or more specifically, "stock-jobbing." As Lee's soul enters Skinner's sick body, Lee discovers that "The spirit of Abram Skinner had left such a taint of rascality in his body, that my own was thoroughly imbued with it" (209). Infatuated with money-making greed, Skinner somehow ignores the proper education of his two sons, Abbot and Ralph. As Skinner confesses, "Their education neglected from indifference, or a miserable spirit of parsimony, their minds and morals uncultivated" (193). As a result, the two alcoholic sons become "demoralizing species" (215), making a drinking party celebrating the pending death of their father. More diabolical is their calculative scheme to make sure that their father is really dead so that they can get their share of fortune quickly. In a sense, Skinner's sick body seems to imply that without the healthy body the family relation will be endangered, which

might produce the dysfunctional family that drains the vital energy out of the population. From Skinner's greed to his sons' "rascality," Bird singles out the defect of "demoralizing species" that may contaminate the vital force of the population. Through the device of transmigration, such social evils embodied by Skinner and his sons can be excluded.

Witnessing all the undesirable former characters, Sheppard Lee in his next transmigration is able to become a philanthropist, Zachariah Longstraw. As mentioned earlier, Foucault suggests that, during the nineteenth century, the power of sovereignty tries to set up certain mechanisms, such as charitable institutions, in order to maintain the population's strength in terms of biopolitics. As such, philanthropists and other social workers had played an important role in dealing with problematic populations and helping the state to govern life forces during the nineteenth century (Nadesan 26). In order to help maintain the vital force of the population, Longstraw's ambition is to "make the afflicted smile," to "win the blessings of the poor," and to "devote myself to a life of virtue" (267). Unfortunately for Longstraw, whatever he has done to help the poor, the infant, the prisoner, and various merchants seems to turn against him. All his efforts turn out to be futile, which makes him realize, "benevolence is the great parent of ingratitude" (277). Moreover, his trusted friend, Abel, and his cousin, Jonathan, conspire to cheat Longstraw and strip of his wealth in the name of philanthropy, though Jonathan in the end confesses that the conspiracy is to expose Abel's rogueries and secure Longstraw's property. Shocked by all these turns of events, Longstraw feels ashamed and disgusted of his philanthropic enterprise. He finds himself "becoming just as miserable a man as I had ever been before" (293).

At first glance, Longstraw attempts to cure the social diseases, such as poverty, idleness and baseness so that social well-being can be established and the society can be more productive. But his moral complacency and mismanagement foster the internal corruption of his aspiring enterprise. In addition, he refuses to accept Jonathan's view that music and painting are "the foundation of the divine arts in Nature" that can "add to the happiness of our existence, and they do so without corrupting our morals or injuring our neighbours" (264). Jonathan believes that these artistic creations can reform philanthropy, but Longstraw thinks that the only way to fulfill his philanthropic enterprise is to make more money by investing stock market or impose a tax "upon the gains of chartered money" so that "evil might be made productive of good" (292). The greed for getting more money for his enterprise seems to contradict what a philanthropist should do.

For Longstraw, more devastating misery is that he is mistaken as a famous abolitionist and is kidnapped by two body-snatchers, Joshua and Samuel, who happens to help Abel Snipe to transport Sheppard Lee's dead body to the doctors. The captors make a long journey to Louisiana and intend to sell him to the mob there (republicans) solely for getting lynched.¹¹ Sheppard Lee realizes that when he transmigrates his soul from body to body, his own body is "subjected to the knife of an anatomist, his bones scraped, boiled, bleached, hung together on wires, and set up in a museum" and he has to endure "more afflictions in each than it had ever mourned even in the original dwelling it was so glad to leave" (317). Fortunately, during the execution process, he is able to jump into a black slave who happens to drop from the tree around the scene. Overall, although Longstraw belongs to one of biopolitical mechanisms (charitable institution), he fails to fulfill his mission set up by the sovereignty. It can be said that the failure of Longstraw as a philanthropist makes him the object of exclusion in terms of biopolitical discourse.

One of the controversial figures in the novel is Tom, a black slave who lives in the household of Master Jodge in Ridgewood Hill. Tom is treated like a human being and lives a carefree and happy life without exerting much labor in the plantation. As Sheppard Lee transmigrates himself into Tom, he finds himself "for the first time in my life, content," and his condition is "free from cares, far removed from disquiet, and, if not actually in love with my lot, so far from being dissatisfied, that had not the least desire to exchange it for another" (341). The fact that Tom seems to enjoy his *status quo* as slave seems to be quite perverse from the abolitionist standpoint. However, as Looby proposes, it would be premature to judge Bird's settled stance regarding Tom's perversity (xxxix).

Unfortunately, the easy and contented life makes Tom indolent and unproductive in the economy of the household. He also helps his black companions to explicate the message of an abolitionist pamphlet that is supposed to give the slave owners.¹² Instead, it falls into the hands

¹¹ Bird's account of how Longstraw is kidnapped to the South may refer to an incident in late 1835. William Lloyd Garrison, the founder of the Abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, had been intimidated and almost got lynched by an anti-abolitionist mob. He was saved by the mayor of Boston. See Looby xxxii-xxxiii.

¹² This pamphlet may resemble David Walker's *Appeal* (1828-1830) that appeared in William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*. See Leavell 679. While the pamphlet in *Sheppard Lee* is targeted at slave-owners, Walker's *Appeal* is mainly for black slaves as he writes that the object is "to awaken in the breasts of my afflicted, degraded and slumbering brethren, a spirit of enquiry and investigation respecting our miseries and wretchedness in the Republican land of Liberty" (5). Several years before the publication of *Sheppard Lee*, there was actually a slave insurrection led by Nat Turner that occurred in Southampton County, Virginia in 1831. In his confession, Turner claimed that he had been inspired by divine revelations to perpetuate the uprising and attack Joseph Travis's family and property. See Turner 8. For the contemporary interpretation of his confession, especially the double voices of its narrative, see David F. Almendinger, Jr., 24-44. As for the motive of his insurrection, Turner said

of the slaves and instigates “a feeling of revolution” in them. Thus the slaves contrive an insurrection against the benevolent master, and cause the entire plantation to ruin. It seems fair to say that Bird did his best to treat his characters equally as most of these characters in the novel that are objects of exclusion are white people. In addition, according to Looby’s suggestion, Bird is more inclined to expose “hypocrisy, moral self-importance, and dangerous naiveté—among abolitionists and slaveholders alike” than providing his stance on abolitionism; in other words, Bird’s purpose of writing this episode is to disturb “the smugness of the slaveholding South” (xxx). More importantly, in terms of biopolitical discourse, Tom’s idleness and his unproductivity should be the target of exclusion. Bird seems to suggest that regardless of racial difference Tom’s exclusion is to make sure that the vital energy of the state can be maintained.

After Tom is executed for his treason and “buried as well as hanged,” his dead body is dug out and animated by a group of doctors through electrical current. Even so, since the galvanism should be expired in the end, and the animated body will return to lifeless form, Sheppard Lee’s soul makes his next transmigration into Authur Megrim’s body. Megrim is a young man of fortune, and he “possessed all those requisites which are thought to ensure happiness to a human being” (383). And yet he is subject to insufferable dyspepsy. To cure this disease, he is forced to eat bran bread and hickory ashes. The inconvenience makes him feel that “the sweets of life” is just “as disgusting as the bitters” (384). As his digestive apparatus gets worse, Megrim begins to suffer hypochondriasis, imagining himself as a coffee-pot, a barking dog, an icicle, the Emperor of France, and other absurd hallucinations. As a result, he is tired of “the young and affluent Mr. Megrim” and he would be glad to “exchange his body for some one’s else” (398). Like Dawkins and Tom the slave, Megrim is also counter-productive economically, contracting those insufferable diseases and wasting life away without contributing to the well-being of the household or even to the community. Because of this, he is also the target of disembodiment and exclusion.

Later Megrim attends a scientific exhibition held by Feuertuefel, a German doctor who claims that the reassembled body parts can be animated. In the exhibition, there are “an infinite variety of fragments from the bodies of animals and human beings” (399). When the doctor

that “ours is not a war for robbery, and to satisfy our passions: it is a struggle for freedom. Ours must be deeds, and not words” (Brown 23; Aptheker 45-46). According to William Wells Brown, about 55 whites and 73 blacks lost their lives in the rebellion. Nate Turner was later captured and after going through the trial, he was executed at Jerusalem (24-25).

discloses a human figure in the case, Megrim discovers that the lifeless mummy is Lee's lost body, which means that the doctor has stolen Sheppard Lee's dead body and made it into a lifeless and "flesh" mummy. After going through a whole series of transmigration, Sheppard Lee finally realizes that mummified body is the best "for my purposes in the whole world" (408). As a result, he seizes upon the mummy and cries out "Let me live again in my own body" and "never in another's" (407). As a result, his soul leaves Megrim's body and returns to his own body that has been cleansed from the threat of physical and social diseases.

When returning to his own body, he makes a surprising discovery in that he has "an astonishing hardiness of constitution, particularly in resisting quinsies, catarrhs, and defluxions on the breast" and his body is "hardened by the process of mummifying" (425). Although his brother-in-law Alderson insists that all this is just a dream, yet the whole series of transmigration does help him realize his purpose in life; that is, to learn the proper way of revitalizing his small estate and live a contented and economical life. With the help of Alderwood, his estate becomes prosperous and flourishing, and he re-cultivates "new habits of industrious and active application" (417). Sheppard Lee starts to believe that "content is the secret of all enjoyment" (424).

Sheppard Lee's experience is much like the traveler's in Bird's *Peter Pilgrim: or, A Rambler's Recollections* (1838). As the narrator says, to travel is to "become better acquainted with human folly, to ponder more deeply on the extraordinary perversity of a race, which, with the means of making a paradise of the globe, its glorious dwelling-place, has laboured for six centuries to convert it into a house of mourning" (14-5). If all those characters in the novel demonstrate a variety of human follies, then it is Bird's intention to rectify them through a series of embodiments and disembodiments. And yet more importantly, the whole series of transmigration can be seen as gradually eliminating or excluding the social evils that contaminate the population, as a way to regularize the population to ensure a proper way of living for American people.

It should be noted that the politics of exclusion has its dangerous effect as it might violate the basic premises (such as freedom and equality) of the liberal state by excluding underprivileged minorities, such as the sick and the old. To insure that the politics of exclusion does not go to the extreme, Bird only focuses on those physical and social diseases that mainly derive from one's own making, especially laziness and greed, which echoes what the narrator in Bird's *The Adventures of Robin Day* (1839) has said, "every man's fortune, whether happy

or evil, is referable to his own agency, the direct result of his own wise or foolish actions” (13). In *Sheppard Lee*, the way of their being the object of metempsychosis can be regarded as disciplinary devices that point out a possible trajectory for those disembodied characters to regain their vital forces. In addition, the fact that Bird downplays the series of transmigration as a dream or hallucination at the end of the novel somehow reduces the politics of exclusion to expand. In other words, those disembodied souls actually continue to live in spite of their unhealthy and unproductive lives. It is just that they should be reformed in order for American society to advance in a way to live “a qualified form of life,” evidenced by the fact that Lee is able to rejoin his family and have a “communal form of life” and “a quality of life” as proposed by Esposito.

III. Conclusion

This paper re-examines *Sheppard Lee* from the perspective of bio-politics in order to show that the novel entails the function of sovereignty and the technique of governmentality in nineteenth century America. Through Sheppard Lee’s embodied and disembodied process, Bird articulates a variety of social, racial, religious, and even scientific discourses. The novel has confirmed what Bird tries to achieve as Sheppard Lee comments that it is “the great experiment my destiny permitted me to make of the comparative good and evil of different spheres of existence” (212). Bird also sees himself as the agent of sovereignty by employing the rhetoric of exclusion in terms of biopolitical discourse to tease out the sick body as socially and economically unhealthy and thereby establish the vitality of a healthy subject. The objective is to regulate the population and rationalize the construction of the ideal and healthy human beings, physically and psychologically, for American society.

In the end of the novel, Sheppard Lee develops a strong “immunity” that resists the contamination of diseases as well as the temptation of fortune-hunting. Sheppard Lee has experienced various physical, psychological, and social diseases, including, but not limited to, apoplexy, dyspepsy, hypochondriasis, laziness, flamboyancy, greed, deception, complacency, and relevant others. The Whole process of his soul transporting from body to body is to attain “the secret of all enjoyment,” being contented with what he has owned. More importantly, a series of transmigration entails the way of rationalizing the construction of ideal and healthy body for nation-building. By integrating the supernatural elements with various social and

political discourses, this novel undoubtedly calls for the necessity of social reform in American society during the early nineteenth century.

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