ON PAYING ATTENTION: PARTICULARITY IN VICTORIAN FICTION AND EMPIRICAL THOUGHT

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This dissertation is an examination of particularity in Victorian fiction, biological science, and empirical philosophy. Focusing on works by Charles Dickens, Charles Darwin, George Eliot, John Stuart Mill, and Walter Pater, this study shows how Victorian writers sought to engage their readers with the seemingly insignificant details of ordinary life—as a way of troubling conventions and habits of thought that deaden human existence and as a means of inciting human capacities of thought, feeling, and imagination. These writers, I argue, shared a common conviction that the challenges of modern social, political, and intellectual life could only be met through a closer engagement with the unnoticed specifics of everyday life. In some cases, these texts bring a heightened attention to the aesthetics of material life (as we see in *Bleak House*, *Marius the Epicurean*, or even *The Origin of Species*). In other cases, it is a greater sympathetic notice of the details of human nature (as in *Bleak House* and *Daniel Deronda*). In still other cases, it is a matter of bringing intellectual notice or scientific analysis to the seemingly irrelevant specifics of social and natural life (as we see in *On Liberty* or *The Origin of Species*).

Recent literary critical scholarship on the Victorian period, shaped by twentieth-century poststructuralist thought, has shown a lack of interest in the era's own self-estimation—in a sense of purposefulness integral to the major literary, scientific, and philosophical works of the day. In correction to this criticism, I read the primary texts of this dissertation as purposive, as

seeking to have some effect upon the minds of their readers and the conditions of their historical present. At the same time, I read these works as textual performances, and argue that their discursive form is a central component of the moral, intellectual, or political interventions they aim to make in their contemporary moment.

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PREFACE

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank my dissertation co-chairs Professors Jonathan Arac and Paul Bove, and committee members Eric Clarke, Ronald Judy, and James Lennox for their careful reading and input throughout the various stages of this dissertation. I would also like to thank the administrative staff of the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh, especially Connie Arelt.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

"And in the process something new and elemental appeared: nothing less than the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment to which we surrender ourselves without prejudice."
-Erich Auerbach

The central texts of this study are educations in noticing, in paying attention. They are works that seek to intervene in their Victorian moment, to act upon their audience, to make some difference in their reader's relationship to reality. Awakening their readers to the unnoticed details of life in time, they aim to make everyday life educational, in the broadest sense of the word.

Each of the diverse texts of this dissertation attends to the social or natural world at the level of the particular: to the peculiarities of individual character, the minutiae of material existence, the slight irregularities of plant and animal life, or the singular feelings of a moment in time. Each exhibits and encourages an attunement to the specifics of life that are left out or left behind when we only understand life in the abstract. Focusing on works by Charles Dickens, Charles Darwin, George Eliot, John Stuart Mill, and Walter Pater, this study shows how Victorian writers sought to engage their readers with the seemingly insignificant details of ordinary life—as a way of troubling conventions and habits of thought that deaden human existence and as a means of inciting human capacities of thought, feeling, and imagination.

An interest in the smaller stuff of life was a part of a general turn toward more individual, local, and historical thinking in an age that saw the rise of industrial economy and democratic culture. We see this turn in the realist novel, at its height in the mid-Victorian period, with its special concern for the small happenings of ordinary human existence. We recognize it in Victorian efforts to extend the empirical principles of the enlightenment into historical sciences like geology and sociology. But for the writers studied in this dissertation, attention to detail is more than just a component of the individual and local representations of the novel or the "inductive" methodology of the empirical sciences. It is a common conviction that the challenges of modern social, political, and intellectual life demand a closer engagement with the unnoticed details of life in time.

The writers studied here sought to inspire in their readers a renewed engagement with the specifics of everyday life; at the same time, they recognized that their treatment of reality had to be somehow different from their readers' routine experience of it. The realist novel aimed to be like reality in its subjects, but unlike reality in its effects. The scientific and philosophical essay sought to find ways of presenting reality anew, so that the reader could bring a new set of eyes to problems of organic change or social policy. Paying better attention to reality, in this way, required a certain artistry or creativity on the part of the writer. How did these texts accomplish this? In this study, I answer this question by giving special focus to the discursive techniques and styles of these works.

Each of the writers studied here employs the imagination to expand and amplify experience, and to trouble habits and conventions of thought that limit human thinking. In his fiction, Dickens creates poetic or romantic representations of everyday life that aim to awaken his readers' imaginations and affections; as we will see, he creates a way of seeing the mundane

details of human existence anew by concentrating upon their aesthetic or formal qualities. Through the use of thought experiments, Darwin and Mill invite readers to use their imaginations to test established interpretations of the natural and social world and to visualize the complex processes of historical change. In Eliot and Pater's imaginative histories of human life, the routine details of ordinary existence become the beginnings of a broadened knowledge of human life and an expanded sympathy for humanity.

These writers also take advantage of the pliable forms of the novel and essay to encourage a renewed attention to the details of routine existence. Employing "mixed discourse," or a combination of discursive styles, these texts ask the reader to bring a greater flexibility and freedom of mind to the examination of life. We see this in the interjections of the narrator in Daniel Deronda, which interrupt the immediate action of the novel with philosophical commentary, bringing more mindful and sympathetic notice to the small happenings of social life. We also see it in The Origin of Species, which combines scientific argument and concrete description to trouble conventional thinking about the social and natural world, and to encourage a greater attunement to species difference.

1.1 VICTORIAN REFORMS OF MIND

Through their writing, Charles Dickens, Charles Darwin, George Eliot, John Stuart Mill, and Walter Pater sought to address a troubling disconnection in Victorian culture: between the specifics of life and the ideas and ideals that made it possible to think and talk about social and natural life in general terms. Dickens, for instance, spent his career dramatizing the incongruity between Victorian principles of justice, philanthropy, or charity and the material details of

modern social existence. Eliot devoted her writing life to creating what I call a "history of the unhistorical" in the novel, giving special attention to the internal lives of unexceptional individuals—to the small shifts in feeling, perspective, or understanding that make up larger developments of human mind. This kind of fictional history, in Eliot's estimation, offered an alternative to summary narratives of human experience that dominated Victorian public life—such as those provided by utilitarian philosophy, Christian orthodoxy, or "whiggish" history. Mill's critical essays set about reevaluating the institutions and ideals of Victorian culture in light of the specific conditions of contemporary life, correcting a conventional understanding of the concept of character in On Liberty, and critiquing the institution of marriage in The Subjection of Women.

The writers studied here contributed, in this way, to a broader Victorian endeavor to reevaluate inherited ideas. In some instances, this reevaluation was in the spirit of conserving or resuscitating traditional ideals: we see this in the cultural and literary criticism of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, and Matthew Arnold, or in the rearticulation of natural theology in the Bridgewater Treatises.[1] In other cases, it was in the spirit of reform, as in the utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, or in John Stuart Mill's philosophy of scientific logic. Dickens, Darwin, Eliot, Mill, and Pater may each be called reformers in some sense of the word, although not all of them relished this role.

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[1] Published between 1833 and 1840, the Bridgewater Treatises were a series of works treating different areas of scientific investigation within the framework of natural theology, in the tradition of William Paley's 1802 Natural Theology. The treatise on physics and astronomy was authored by William Whewell, and the treatise on geology and mineralogy by William Buckland.

Each of the works studied here similarly registers the force of inherited ideas in contemporary life. Eliot describes this force in her 1851 review of R.W. Mackay's The Progress of the Intellect: "Our civilization, and, yet more, our religion, are an anomalous blending of lifeless barbarisms, which have descended to us like so many petrifactions from distant ages, with living ideas, the offspring of a true process of development. We are in bondage to terms and conceptions which, having had their root in conditions of thought no longer existing, have ceased to possess any vitality, and are for us as spells which have lost their virtue."[2] Eliot's portrayal of a contemporary moment held captive by ideas and ideals that have too little connection to present life is shared by the group of writers studied here. Inherited customs and habits of mind are only insidious, in Eliot's estimation as in Mill's, when they are cut off from active thought, from the "living ideas" of the historical present. These entrenched ideas have a deadening effect upon our minds like "spells," limiting human capacities of learning and development.

1.2 LIVING IDEAS

What were the "living ideas" of the Victorian period, the concepts that sprang from the specific conditions of the present? Chapters on Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species and John Stuart Mill's On Liberty and The Subjection of Women bring two contemporary

[2] George Eliot, "R.W. Mackay's the Progress of the Intellect," in George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19. The strength of Eliot's criticism here may be somewhat misleading, being directed primarily at religious tradition; while Eliot urges a careful reevaluation of received ideas in her criticism and fiction, she by no means advocated throwing out all human custom.

developments to the forefront of this study. The first is a turn toward historical and relative thinking in the biological and human sciences, following advancements in geology, biology, and social science. With its gradualist and actualist[3] approach to geological study, Charles Lyell's three volume Principles of Geology, published between 1830 and 1833, made geological "deep time" a subject of serious scientific discussion, paving the way for Charles Darwin's work on the problem of species origins. At the same time, Jeremy Bentham and James Mill formulated a utilitarian system of social science, making man and society an object of scientific analysis; John Stuart Mill's 1843 Logic historicized this system of social science, making the study of human society and character a condition of both the basic laws of psychology and the complex conditions of history.

The writers studied here understood themselves to be living in an era increasingly defined by a historical and relative worldview. Whether this was a liberating idea or a sad reality, they sought to prepare their readers for a world in which "nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions."[4] They did this by creating works that encourage a heightened attention to the unnoticed details of life in time—and by connecting these details to larger categories of intellectual, cultural, and political history. We see this, for instance, in the way that the narrator of Daniel Deronda links the small happenings of the world of the novel to the larger events of a greater "historical stream": referencing, for instance, the events of the American civil war in the midst of a scene in which Gwendolen struggles to decide whether she will accept

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[3] An "actualist" methodology asserts a uniformity of process; it understands that the geological past can be fully explained by processes currently in action. A "gradualist" theory asserts uniformity of rate, seeing geological change as slow, steady, and gradual.

[4] Walter Pater, "Coleridge," in Appreciations, with an Essay on Style (London: Macmillan and Company, 1910), 66.

Grandcourt's proposal of marriage. We see this in the way that Marius the Epicurean concretizes the broad terms of intellectual history through a depiction of the everyday experiences of the novel's central character Marius.

These writers also did this by promoting capacities of mind best suited to a historical and relative world: most centrally, an acuteness of attention to historical difference, a flexibility of thought required for comparative perspective, and a breadth of imagination to think in both concrete and abstract terms. The novels Bleak House, Daniel Deronda, and Marius the Epicurean invite a multiplied view of human life. The Origin of Species promotes a flexibility of mind, showing how natural selection works abstractly and concretely, locally and globally. The arguments of On Liberty and The Subjection of Women employ comparative historical analysis as a way of bringing a fresh set of eyes to contemporary social existence.

The second development is the transformation of the British political system following the 1832, 1867, and 1883 Reform Acts; these reforms began a slow extension of parliamentary power to the middle and working classes and a gradual enlargement of the electorate—granting the vote first to a portion of middle class men and then later to all middle and working class men. As political reforms brought the country closer to a democratic system of government, mid-Victorian writers like John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin contributed to public discussions of these reforms and their effects. They asked whether new members of the electorate were ready for the responsibilities of suffrage, and disagreed about the best means of preparing the middle and working classes for a greater role in government.

Mill was more optimistic about these changes than most mid-Victorians, but he too worried about the growing political and economic strength of the middle classes and the

extension of the vote to the largely uneducated working classes. On Liberty weighs the difficult relationship between equality and freedom in a democratic society, and urges the importance of liberal culture in a democratic state. For Mill, liberal culture required a level of attentiveness—to each other and to the conditions of our historical moment—too often stunted in contemporary society. For this reason, anything that frees the mind from the deadening effects of convention and habit, and brings our attention to ways of life different from our own is a benefit; any means of awakening human capacities of thought, feeling, and imagination—of cultivating the mind—ought to be cherished.

The Victorian realist novel, in the hands of writers like Dickens and Eliot (and even to some extent Pater), sought to accomplish all of these things; and in this sense the novels studied here shared a common purpose with the liberal philosophy of Mill. Victorian literary critics acknowledged this connection; an 1870 article on Dickens in The Spectator, for instance, asserts that Dickens "has taught us by his humour, as nothing else could have taught us, how full to overflowing what is called 'vulgar' life is of all the human qualities, good and evil, which make up the interest of human existence. His delight in the grotesque has done far more than ever Mr. John Stuart Mill by any philosophical defense of liberty could do, to make us tolerant toward individual eccentricity of almost every shade, and even to teach us to pat it with something like parental fondness…"[5] Dickens's fiction, in this reviewer's estimation, is democratic in its form and liberal in its aims. It sheds light on details of social life that go unnoticed by the wider world, finding "human qualities" in the most unlikely of places. In this way, it brings something

[5] This was one of many articles that appeared in the year following Dickens's death that provided a retrospective of the writer's career. "Charles Dickens." The Spectator (1870): 716-717.

to the examination of social life that Mill's critical essays are lacking—a ready affection for the peculiarities of human character.

As Eliot articulates in her literary criticism, the realist novel is specially equipped to bring this kind of sympathetic attention the specifics of human existence. Unlike science, philosophy, or history, the realist novel promotes not only a broadened and more reflective knowledge of human life but also an amplified sympathy for humankind. In this way, the novel encourages capacities of mind required for a mindful and compassionate participation in democratic culture. Eliot's fiction, like that of Dickens and Pater, actively promotes these capacities, inviting readers to bring a broader perspective, more flexible imagination, and readier sympathy to the contemplation of human life.

1.3 CONNECTIONS

With chapters on Dickens's Bleak House, Darwin's The Origin of Species, Eliot's Daniel Deronda, Mill's On Liberty and The Subjection of Women, and Pater's Marius the Epicurean, this project finds unexpected affinities among a diverse selection of literary, scientific, and philosophical texts. I will give a brief sketch of some of the most significant connections I see among these texts here.

The fiction of Dickens, Eliot, and Pater is not typically studied together. But in the pages that follow, we see how each of these writers saw the special capacity of art to check the benumbing effects of convention in contemporary society, to work against entrenched habits of mind, and to reanimate human capacities of thought, feeling, and imagination. Each wrote novels that create what I call a history of the unhistorical, depicting broad historical events,

social and cultural norms, and abstract moral principles in the concrete terms of unexceptional individuals. Each used fiction as a way of extending experience by giving imaginative and reflective notice to aspects of life and mind that appear useless, inconsequential, or irrelevant.

Reading these writers together reminds us of their many and various ties to British romantic thought. We see their common commitment to a form of British literary realism that is realist in its objects but romantic or humanistic in its aims. These writers not only created fiction that was, in the broadest sense of the word, educational—fiction that spurred human thinking. They also wrote fiction that aimed to make life more educational, preparing the minds of their readers for a more vital and mindful engagement with the details of everyday experience. In this sense, their allegiance was not to art itself but what art could do in the world, what difference fiction could make in the minds of its readers.

Of course, Pater's aims were decidedly narrower than those of Dickens and Eliot; he was not comfortable with the idea that art should have civic responsibilities beyond its capacity to animate individual experience. Pater, writing a generation after Dickens and Eliot, is usually read as a figure of British aestheticism, and might seem an unlikely writer to include in this study. But Pater did, however, write a novel—in his estimation the art form best suited to modern existence. Reading Pater alongside more canonical Victorian realist novels like Bleak House and Daniel Deronda, we begin to see how Marius the Epicurean bridges the concerns of mid-Victorian realism and late-Victorian aestheticism. As Pater asserts in The Renaissance, the novel has the ability to promote a modern form of humanism, which is defined by its attention to—and sympathy for—all things human; by this standard, Pater's own novel joins those by Dickens and Eliot in its humanistic aims.

Reading Darwin's The Origin of Species together with the critical essays of Mill is not much of a stretch: both men were a part of and contributed to a tradition of British empiricism that has its roots in Baconian science and Humean philosophy. Both celebrated the inductive method and used empirical analysis in their published works to qualify and correct a-priori interpretations of the natural and social world. What my readings enlighten is a commonality between their works that is not frequently noted by historians of science. This is their mastery of a form of writing that also has its roots in the work of Bacon: the essay. In my chapters on Darwin and Mill, I study the qualities of their writing that are most essayistic: how their works move nimbly from one form of discourse to another, appeal directly to the familiar experience of their readers, and reform conventional knowledge about the natural and social world through an attention to the details of everyday life.

The essay is notoriously difficult to define as a discursive form, but if we look at Bacon's Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral,[6] for instance, we recognize a style of writing that combines information, analysis, and counsel—all with a congeniality of tone that expresses the writer's familiarity with and interest in everyday life. This congeniality of tone is, perhaps, a quality seen more readily in Darwin than Mill. But in the chapters that follow, we see how both writers create arguments that are multiply oriented—that seek at once to inform, examine, and advise. Their work shares an objective that was central to the Baconian essay: the analysis of abstract ideas that are thought to be sufficiently well-understood. Bacon's Essays or Counsels includes essays such as "Of Truth," "Of Envy, "Of Friendship," "Of Empire," "Of Discourse," and "Of Custom and Education" that deal with the ideas and ideals that define social, intellectual, and

[6] Francis Bacon, Francis Bacon: A Critical Edition of the Major Works, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 341-456.

political life. The scope of Darwin and Mill's writing is, of course, narrower than Bacon's in Essays and Counsels. But they, too, sought to rethink the abstract categories of established knowledge, Darwin redefining the term "species" in The Origin of Species and Mill refashioning the concept of "character" in On Liberty.

Focusing upon the essayistic qualities of Darwin and Mill's writing brings their work into closer affiliation with the central concerns of the realist novel. This is not only because the essay and the novel have certain discursive affinities.[7] It is also that when we read Darwin and Mill in the light of British traditions of essay writing, we see how their work affirms certain humanistic values integral to these traditions—values shared by novelists like Dickens, Eliot, and Pater. I have shown, above, how the realist novel shares some of the humanistic concerns of Mill's liberal philosophy; but it is, perhaps, a strange idea to read The Origin of Species as a humanistic text—although not if you read The Origin as Stephen J. Gould does, both as a scientific argument for descent by selection and as an essay that celebrates the immense capacities of the human mind.[8] My reading of Darwin in Chapter Two affirms this idea, showing how The Origin actively promotes human abilities of critical thinking and creative imagination.

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[7] In the chapters that follow, I focus on one of these affinities, a mixture of discursive styles seen in each of the central texts of this dissertation.

[8] Gould is a master of the essay form himself. In The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Magister's Pox, he argues that science and humanistic study are not mutually exclusive endeavors. Stephen J. Gould, The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Magister's Pox: Mending the Gap between Science and the Humanities. (New York: Random House, 2003).

1.4 METHOD AND CRITICAL ORIENTATION

Recent literary critical scholarship of the Victorian period, shaped by twentieth-century poststructuralist thought, has shown a level of disinterest in the era's own self-estimation—in a sense of purposefulness integral to the major literary, scientific, and philosophical works of the day. For critics writing at the end of the twentieth-century, this was an effect of a reigning critical interest in problems of textuality and interpretation that served to divorce Victorian texts from their social, political, and historical circumstances. More recently, scholars who have a greater concern for historical context have, nevertheless, shown more allegiance to current literary critical categories than to the native terms of Victorian writers. We see this, for instance, in the number of books and essays on the topic of Victorian subjectivity. At the same time, scholars who attend more carefully to the era's self-estimation, such as those primarily engaged in biography and intellectual history, often have little to say about how Victorian texts work on a formal or discursive level.

I read the primary texts of this dissertation as purposive, as spirited responses to their contemporary moment that seek to have some effect upon the minds of their readers. In these responses are clear articulations of what these writers sought to do with the written word—what effect they aimed to have upon the conditions of their present. I take time in each chapter, for this reason, to read these works in the light of the literary critical, philosophical, or scientific discussions of the day. For instance, I preface my examination of Dickens's fiction with a discussion of Victorian concepts of realism; I pause to consider The Origin of Species in relationship to nineteenth-century standards of scientific method; and I read the fiction of Eliot and Pater in the light of their own literary critical work.

But most of all, I pay close attention to how this sense of purpose is woven into the textual fabric of these works. I argue that the discursive form of these works is a central component of the moral, intellectual, or political interventions they aim to make in their contemporary moment. I show, for instance, how each of these writers takes advantage of the flexible forms of the novel and essay, using "mixed discourse," or a combination of discursive styles, to check conventions and habits of thought, bringing attention and imagination to the unnoticed details of life in time.

Mixed discourse is employed to different effect in the texts studied here. Looking at the novels, for instance, we see how active and purposeful the narrators of Bleak House, Daniel Deronda, and Marius the Epicurean are—how often they interrupt the immediate action of the story with their comments, qualifications, explanations, and corrections. [9] The narrator of Daniel Deronda, for instance, is a constant presence in the novel; at no point is the reader permitted to get too caught up in the events of the novel's plotlines. There is always some aspect of Gwendolen's character to explain, some commonplace idea about human nature to correct, some moment that requires the enlightenment of the narrator's philosophical analysis. With these interjections, the narrative shows just as much interest in promoting the cultivation of its readers'

[9] These interruptions, which many critics call authorial interjections, are also typical of the comic-realist fiction of the Victorian period—especially the novels of William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope. The narrator's treatment of Becky Sharp in Vanity Fair has ready affinities with the way Gwendolen Harleth is depicted in Daniel Deronda; both characters are subject to the narrator's constant commentary. Trollope's interjections often speak directly to the reader; see, for instance, the number of times the narrator interrupts the immediate action of The Eustace Diamonds to invite the reader to bring a more critical eye to the contemplation of the novel's characters. In the fiction of Thackeray and Trollope, as in that of Dickens, Eliot, and Pater, these interruptions are purposive, exhibiting the kinds of moral and intellectual interventions these novels seek to make in their contemporary moment. William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair (London: Penguin, 2001). Trollope, The Eustace Diamonds (London: Penguin, 1986).

minds as it does representing the moral transformations of its central characters Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth.

While I rely primarily upon sources contemporary to the five writers studied here, there are a range of critical and theoretical sources in the background of this project that predate and postdate the Victorian period. Reading the central texts of this dissertation in terms of both their historical situation and discursive form has made for an unlikely mix of critical works on my bookshelf. These are texts that I return to again and again, not necessarily because my conclusions always match theirs, but because they grapple with the same set of problems I am concerned with here.

My readings of the Victorian novel are informed by the central works of German and British romantic thought, taking into account the ways that Romantic writers articulate the aims of art and the value of aesthetic experience. Working with Victorian reviews of Dickens's later social novels that loosely employ the key terms of romantic poetics in Chapter One, I have read and reread William Wordsworth's "Preface" to the second edition of Lyrical Ballads and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Biographia Literaria. Alongside Victorian critics like George Henry Lewes, David Masson, Walter Besant, and Henry James, I try to make sense of the realist novel's relationship to romantic concepts of human imagination and emotion, the structure of literary form, and the moral value of literature.

My readings of Dickens, Eliot, and Pater are informed in many ways by Friedrich Schiller's On the Aesthetic Education of Man, which articulates the purpose of art as a means of education—as a way of liberating the mind from the limitations of both interior mind and exterior world. Twentieth-century critics that rework the aesthetic philosophies of Schiller and

Hegel, such as Georg Lukacs and Erich Auerbach, have also informed this study. Mimesis has been a generative work for this project, on the whole, both because of its focus upon western traditions of literary realism and its critical practice.

In Mimesis, Auerbach pinpoints two typical components of realist literature that are integral to the arguments of this dissertation: the first is the act of noticing; the second is narrative interruption.[10] In ways similar to Auerbach, I see an important relationship between attention to detail and narrative interruption in the realist novel, showing how discursive disjunction and interruption in the novel invites greater notice of the details of life in time. Auerbach is interested in the significance of what he calls the "random occurrence" in the novel, describing how works like Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse put an "emphasis on the random occurrence to exploit it not in the service of a planned continuity of action but in itself." Although his analysis of this modernist novel has concerns not applicable to my studies here, much of what he draws from his treatment of Woolf readily applies to my reading of the realist novel—especially Eliot's Daniel Deronda. In my examination of Daniel Deronda, I argue that the narrator's attention to the seemingly insignificant moments of internal and external life promotes a broadened knowledge of human experience and amplified sympathy for humanity. In this novel, then, we see that "it is precisely the random moment which is comparatively independent of the controversial and unstable orders over which men fight and despair; it passes

[10] See especially Auerbach's discussion of Homer's Odyssey in Chapter One and Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse in Chapter Twenty. Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953).

unaffected by them, as daily life. The more it is exploited, the more the elementary things which our lives have in common come to life."[11]

I also value Mimesis for the priority it gives to its primary texts, and the way Auerbach writes a literary history through textual analysis. In this, Auerbach models a style of criticism that demonstrates equal interest in the history and textuality of literary works. Like Auerbach, I give most of my critical attention to the interpretation of the central works of this dissertation; and I aim to show how the discursive techniques and styles of these texts can tell us something about their historical moment. Using discursive analysis to show how these works seek to intervene in their historical moment, to "place themselves in the world," I find another important critical model in the literary criticism of Edward Said, especially in the essays contained in The World, the Text, and the Critic. Indeed, much of the work of this introduction has been to enlighten the specific historical circumstances that these works respond to and participate in—and to show how the affiliations seen among these texts add to our understanding of these historical conditions. Reading these works as purposive, as texts that seek to make some effect upon the minds of their readers and the conventions of their contemporary moment, I affirm the "connection between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies, and events." I understand that "the realities of power and authority—as well as the resistances offered by men, women, and social movements to institutions, authorities, and orthodoxies—are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to readers, that solicit the attention of critics."[12]

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[11] Ibid., 552.

[12] Edward Said, The World, the Text, and the Critic (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 5.

Thinking about the mixed and flexible forms of the novel and essay as they are employed in the Victorian period, I have had recourse to a wide range of critics and theorists dealing with problems of narrative and discursive form. Victorian critics, including George Henry Lewes, George Eliot, David Masson, Walter Besant, and Henry James, were preoccupied with problems of narrative uniformity and harmony. Twentieth-century critics and theorists of the Victorian realist novel have also been concerned with the narrative unity of novels like Bleak House and Daniel Deronda; and in many ways, the feminist, Marxist, and poststructuralist readings of the later half of the twentieth century have sought to bring a greater coherence to Victorian fiction—a coherence that Victorian critics found lacking.

My priority in this dissertation is not to bring a greater unity or totality of meaning to the novels studied here. Indeed, in my readings of the Victorian realist novel, I agree with Victorian critics and reviewers in their estimation that the realist novel is often rambling, disjointed, and miscellaneous; the novels studied here do not make tidy, coherent "wholes." But I disagree with Victorian critics like Lewes and Bagehot who see this lack of narrative unity as an artistic failing. Instead I read the mixed and multiple style of the realist novel as an important aspect of its engagement with the conditions of modern social life. In the chapters that follow, I show how the mixed, multiple, and often disjointed discourse of the Victorian novel troubles habits and conventions of mind and invites a greater attunement to the unnoticed details of life in time.

Although I cannot agree with his estimation of the realist novel in S/Z, Roland Barthes has helped me to be more precise in the ways that I describe the narration of each of the novels I study here: to be patient, for instance, with the narrator's interjections in Daniel Deronda, giving a more comprehensive account of what they do for the text and the reader. I agree with Barthes that narrative interruption invites a greater independence of mind in the reader; and by

illustrating how the novels studied here encourage a certain freedom of mind, in some sense I am showing how they are "writerly" rather than "readerly" texts. But in my argument, this freedom is not textual but liberal: these texts invite not so much a multiplication of meaning as a plurality of understanding and perspective that is best described as liberal-mindedness.

1.5 CHAPTERS

Chapter One, "The Discrete Details of Bleak House," reads the novel Bleak House (1852-1853) in the light of Victorian discussions of literary realism in order to rethink the novel's depiction of the unnoticed details of social life. I focus upon the earlier chapters of the book where the third person narrator creates an overview of the world of the novel that hovers at the level of aesthetic detail. I argue that the novel's double narration makes this overview possible by separating the objective perspective of the third person narrator from the personal viewpoint of Esther Summerson. Before the reader has been tapped into the central plotlines of the novel in Esther's narrative, the third person narrator gives a survey of the details of society without totalization or generalization by concentrating upon aesthetic surface. The overview of the third person narrative both counters and replicates the institutional overview that Dickens critiques in Bleak House. Promoting a way of seeing the discrete details of society without collapsing their differences, it corrects the totalizing forces of convention that the novel condemns.

In Chapter Two, "The Peculiar Facts of The Origin of Species," I contend that The Origin (1859) is both an argument for the theory of descent by natural selection and a text that prepares the minds of its readers for understanding the organic world as Darwin depicts it—a

world subject to chance variation and natural selection. I show how Darwin employs a mixed style of discourse in The Origin to unsettle established ideas about organic change, inviting readers to bring a greater flexibility and freedom of mind to the contemplation of the natural world. With the use of imaginative descriptions and thought experiments, Darwin's writing encourages a heightened attention to the small and seemingly insignificant irregularities of organic life, just as the other central tests of this dissertation promote a greater attunement to the unnoticed specifics of social life.

Chapter Three, "George Eliot's History of the Unhistorical," reads Daniel Deronda (1876) alongside Eliot's literary criticism, which describes the capacity of the realist novel to cultivate the minds of its readers. I show how Daniel Deronda gives special attention to the small events of internal human life: to the small shifts in feeling, perspective, or understanding that make up larger developments of mind. While Daniel Deronda depicts reforms of mind in central characters Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth, it simultaneously encourages transformations of mind in its readers. Looking at the narrator's commentary on the immediate action of the novel, I illustrate how the narrative's mixed discourse invites a more noticing, flexible, and sympathetic contemplation of the novel's subjects. The narrator's interruptions correct commonplace ideas about human life with the specifics of character and event, and bring broader sympathetic attention to the seemingly insignificant details of life and mind.

Chapter Four, "A Moral Philosophy of Attention," focuses on John Stuart Mill's essays On Liberty (1859) and The Subjection of Women (1869). I show how Mill's writing, like Darwin's, encourages critical practices of attention that heighten our awareness of individual, local, and historical specificity—and incite our interest in the unnoticed details of life in time. For Mill, a critical attunement to the specifics of life is the central practice of liberal culture and

the special responsibility of the liberal social critic. In these essays, Mill acknowledges that a renewed attention to the details of everyday existence requires a certain liberty of mind too often dampened by convention and habit in contemporary culture. I demonstrate how Mill takes advantage of the mixed and flexible form of the essay in On Liberty and The Subjection of Women, making arguments for liberal culture while simultaneously encouraging liberal-mindedness.

Chapter Four, "Walter Pater and the Art of Paying Attention," concentrates on the relationship between Pater's aesthetic criticism and his novel Marius the Epicurean (1885). I argue that, in Pater's criticism, the seemingly useless particulars of everyday life are the source of a new aesthetic stance towards the external concrete world—a stance that has the capacity to reanimate the colorless existence of modern life. As in prior chapters, I focus on the combination of discursive styles in Marius, examining the relationship between the novel's modern narrator and its depiction of the concrete world of ancient Rome. While the novel's central character Marius searches for a more vital aesthetic experience of the material world, the narrator seeks to enliven ancient concepts that have become dislocated from their original contexts—through an attention to the aesthetic details of everyday Roman life. The novel's narration transforms, in this way, the abstract teachings of Epicureanism, Stoicism, and early Christianity into the kind of aesthetic experience Pater promotes in his criticism.

2.0 CHAPTER ONE: THE DISCRETE DETAILS OF BLEAK HOUSE

Recent Dickens scholarship, shaped by twentieth-century poststructuralist thought, has produced criticism that is highly interesting in its own right, J. Hillis Miller's for instance, but that seems oddly separate from the actual experience of reading Dickens's fiction and problematically divorced from the literary critical terms of the novelist's own period. This critical trend has leant Dickens's most unwieldy novels a unity of meaning that most Victorian critics, like George Henry Lewes or Walter Bagehot, found lacking in Dickens's fiction. But it has also shown a certain disregard for what Dickens and his contemporaries thought the novel should be and should do, and exhibited a level of inattention to what Dickens's Victorian critics estimated as his greatest strength, which was his attunement to the distinct and miscellaneous details of social life.

For instance, recent critical interpretations of Bleak House (1852-1853) have focused almost exclusively upon themes of detection and inspection in the novel. Following the work of J. Hillis Miller, D.A. Miller, and Nancy Armstrong, [13] readings of Bleak House have focused on

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[13] See especially Miller's 1971 Introduction to Bleak House. J. Hills Miller, "Introduction," in Bleak House, ed. Norman Page (New York: Penguin Books, 1971). See D.A. Miller, The Novel and the Police (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1988). Although Armstrong does not give special focus to Dickens in her 1987 Desire and Domestic Fiction, her ideas about Victorian subjectivity (or perhaps more precisely, her reading of Foucault's ideas about subjectivity) have informed numerous readings of Dickens's novels, Bleak House among them. Nancy Armstrong, Desire and

those aspects of the novel most integral to the unfolding of its mysteries—especially on characters like Esther and Inspector Bucket who make narrative connections and uncover secrets. But with so much attention given to the later sections of the novel, there are fewer readings that concentrate on the social landscape presented by the third-person narrator at the start of the novel, apart from its significance for the novel's detective storyline. The exception to this are critics primarily interested in Dickens's representation of society and social forms, with an emphasis upon the novel's topicality, in the spirit of Barbara Hardy, Raymond Williams, or Jonathan Arac. [14]

In agreement with many of Dickens's own contemporaries, I read Bleak House as a novel more interested in noticing than understanding, more committed to paying attention to the multiple details of social existence and the differences of individual character than to comprehending the deeper meanings of the world. Unlike his contemporaries, I see this commitment not as an artistic failing but as a purposeful engagement with the conditions of Victorian social life. This becomes clear when we consider Dickens's own evaluation of the proper aims of realist fiction, as articulated in his correspondence and editorial commentary. Fiction, in Dickens's estimation, had a special ability to mediate the forces of convention in contemporary life. These forces included the operations of institutions (of government, law, education, or charity) that were, for Dickens, alarmingly disconnected from the specifics of

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Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[14] See Barbara Hardy, Charles Dickens: The Later Novels (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1968). Also Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens (London: Athlone Press, 1970). See Williams's reading of Dickens in The English Novel. Raymond Williams, The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). See Jonathan Arac, Commissioned Spirits: The Shaping of Social Motion in Dickens, Carlyle, Melville, and Hawthorne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

human existence. They also included habits of thought that limited his readers' emotional and imaginative experience of the world.

As Dickens asserts throughout his editorial career, fiction should be like reality in its subjects but unlike reality in its effects, because experiencing fiction as we do everyday life accomplishes little. Fiction must be somehow more than, or perhaps other than, routine experience in order to break through the conventions of thought that block life's vividness of detail and action and that stunt feelings of sympathy. While habitual experience often prevents us from seeing the basic truths of reality, fictional representations of reality have the capacity to cut through habit to exhibit what is most important or most meaningful about human life. Fictional experience, then, can be a better conduit of truth than actual experience. But access to this truth requires that the reader become newly captivated with the familiar, with the everyday.

In Dickens's fiction, as in the other central texts of this dissertation, only the particularities of human existence have the capacity to correct conventions of life and mind, and prompt a reengagement with the everyday. Only the discrete details of social life can reawaken readers to the interest and charm of ordinary experience. Creating individuality of character and specificity of detail above and beyond his contemporaries, Dickens's novels work against convention by bringing life and color to those aspects of life that have little value outside of the aesthetic realm of fiction. These are details that mean little to social policy or empirical science, or for that matter, the rules of Victorian morality. They go unnoticed by the social institutions that Dickens so often takes as his subjects. But in the fictional world of his novels, Dickens's attention to these unnoticed details demonstrates a way of seeing the world alternative to rational analysis, empirical examination, or moral estimation. This is because, for Dickens, these

particularities need only be appreciated aesthetically to be the beginnings of an enlivened imagination and an enlarged affection.

This alternative stance toward the external social world is the focus of my reading of Bleak House, which deals primarily with the earlier chapters of the novel where the third person narrator creates an overview of the world of Bleak House that hovers at the level of aesthetic detail. The novel's double narration makes this overview possible by separating the objective perspective of the third person narrator from the personal viewpoint of Esther Summerson. Before the reader has been tapped into the central plotlines of the novel in Esther's narrative, the third person narrator manages to give a survey of the world of Bleak House without totalization or generalization by concentrating upon its aesthetic surfaces. In these chapters, each detail of everyday existence strikes the reader anew, affecting a re-enchanted—if disjointed—picture of British social life. The overview of the third person narrative both counters and replicates the institutions that Dickens critiques in Bleak House. Promoting a way of seeing the discrete details of this world without collapsing their differences, it corrects the totalizing forces of convention that the novel condemns.

2.1 DICKENS AND REALISM

While mid-Victorian novelists like Thackeray or Eliot shared his interest in the details of everyday life, Dickens held a singular place among other Victorian realists. By mid-Victorian standards of realism, Dickens was a realist in his subjects but not in his style; for Victorian critics, he inhabited a kind of middle ground between Victorian realism and more romantic and/or dramatic literature (for instance, the romances of Scott or the gothic novels of Wilkie

Collins). Dickens's reviews over the course of his lifetime reveal an increasingly predominant Victorian critical ideal, at its height in the 1860s and 1870s, which placed the fiction of Thackeray and Eliot over that of Dickens. This realist ideal, formed in the last three decades of Dickens's life, articulated a set of rules for what a novel should be—a set of rules that Dickens's own fiction did not fully follow.

Twentieth century critics who study Victorian responses to Dickens, such as G. H. Ford and Richard Lettis, describe the status of his fiction in contemporary discussions of the novel. At the start of his career, during the period of Pickwick Papers through David Copperfield, the novel had barely been acknowledged as a legitimate art form, worthy of the kind of literary critical attention given to poetry or drama. Reviews of Dickens's earliest works were almost entirely positive, but were shaped by no apparent literary standards for the novel. But by the time Dickens began to write his "social novels," beginning with Bleak House in 1850, mid-Victorian critics of the novel like David Masson, Walter Bagehot, and George Henry Lewes had developed a set of critical standards for the novel. There were critics like Masson who upheld the "ideal" style of fiction over the "real," believing that novels should put their readers in touch with something higher and better than what they could meet with in everyday life.[15] But by the

[15] Ford explains that "what differentiates Masson from most critics of the 1850s is that he was not so obsessed with the virtues of realism as to rule out Dickens' kind of art. Instead of insisting that realism is better, he indicates that it is different. In his view, both kinds are legitimate. Dickens, he says, has an 'essentially susceptible and poetic nature," and his style, while often exaggerated, reaches heights of which Thackeray is incapable…" which is similar to that of Homer, Shakespeare and Cervantes. George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism since 1836 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 116. For Masson's comparison of Dickens and Thackeray, as representative of the "ideal" and "real" styles, respectively, see his "'David Copperfield.' 'History of Pendennis'" in The North British Review (1851). Reprinted in Fred. G. Kitton, ed., Dickensiana: A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to Charles Dickens and His Writings. (New York: Haskell House, 1971), 106-09. See also David Masson, "Pendennis

last two decades of Dickens's life, critics promoting the "real" style of fiction outnumbered those who saw value in more idealized or romanticized representations of reality. Dominant ideas about the novel created a hierarchy of fiction which placed the realist novel at the top and more "fanciful" fiction (such as the gothic novel or domestic romance) at the bottom. During this time, Ford explains, the "most persistent advice of [Dickens's] reviewers was to avoid exaggeration and imaginative distortion…'Art' to those critics was looked down upon as a contrived distortion of reality such as one finds in romances or in poetry and drama. It was hoped that the novel would be something different from other forms of literature, an untouched transcript of real life as accurate and uncolored as history." [16]

A reviewer for the Athenaeum in 1841 expressed a view of the novel that would be commonplace by the time of Dickens's death:

> Is it not that a novel is, or aims at being, a picture of daily life,—a reflex of human nature under the modifications of an actual state of society? … A romance, on the contrary, pretends to no such fidelity of delineation. It strives to paint man as a being of passion alone; its view of life is taken by the flare of torches … dazzling brilliancy and fathomless gloom … If this definition be correct, a romance is at variance with the spirit of the present age. The

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and Copperfield: Thackeray and Dickens," in Victorian Fiction: A Collection of Essays from the Period, ed. Ira Bruce Nadel (New York: Garland, 1986), 57-89.

[16] Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism since 1836, 131.

> nineteenth century is distinguished by a craving for the positive and real—it is essentially an age of analysis and criticism.[17]

This passage echoes one of the earliest definitions of the novel, by Samuel Johnson in 1750, as an "exhibition of life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world"[18] and prefigures the literary criticism of George Henry Lewes. Here the reviewer compares the reality of the novel with the fancy of romance in order to stress the compatibility of the novel with the empirical spirit of the nineteenth century. The focus is upon the novel's subjects, its discursive techniques seemingly invisible (it is simply a "picture of daily life"); but with romance, the primary concern is its style. With this contrast, the reviewer suggests that the novel somehow avoids the fictionality of all other forms of literature. It, like history or science, can facilitate the "analysis and criticism" of human life; it speaks to the head rather than the heart, presuming man to be a rational rather than passionate being. There is, in this passage, little possibility that more imaginative fiction might be able to convey truth—presumably because in an empirical age legitimate truths can only spring from the rational analysis of concrete reality. In other words, the novel suits an age in which the real is synonymous with the true. (There is no acknowledgment here that realist fiction, like history and science, uses as many discursive techniques to represent the world as romance does.)

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[17] Quoted in Ibid., 131-32.

[18] In Samuel Johnson's short piece for The Rambler, dated the thirty first of March, 1750, he asserts that the defining characteristic of contemporary fiction is its relationship to life: "The works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind." Samuel Johnson, "The Rambler, No. 4," in Selected Writings, ed. Patrick Cruttwell (New York: Penguin, 1968), 149.

Dickens consistently claimed that his novels were accurate depictions of real life,[19] but did little to counteract critical misunderstandings of his fiction during his lifetime. He provided only short prefaces to his novels and was usually silent on the subject of his own fiction in his personal and editorial correspondence. But occasionally Dickens's correspondence does offer some window into his ideas about realist fiction—and some sense of what it meant to create fiction that was at once faithful to reality and different from our daily experience of it. In a letter written in 1859, Dickens explains the importance of novelistic artistry in the representation of reality—and in the communication of truth:

It does not seem to me to be enough to say of any description that it is the exact truth. The exact truth must be there; but the merit or art in the narrator, is the manner of stating the truth. As to which thing in literature, it always seems to me that there is a world to be done. And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like—to make the thing, in short, a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do in that way—I have an idea (really founded on the love of what I profess), that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment.[20]

The distinction here is clear: for Dickens, fiction might represent reality but not convey truth. Anyone might create fiction that has "exact truth" in it, but it takes an artist to present truth in such a way that the reader actually recognizes it. A "catalogue-like" representation of

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[19] See, for instance, his preface to Oliver Twist. However, as both Ford and Lettis have argued, Dickens's prefaces are often misleading because they were usually direct responses to reviewers who criticized the lack of reality in his fiction. Because of this, they tend to overstress Dickens's adherence to the kind of strict realism that demands an uncolored "transcript of real life."

[20] Quoted in Forster's biography. Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism since 1836, 135.

the world, Dickens suggests, may actually appear less true than a more artful one. Here Dickens uses the word "true" to describe fiction that not only represents the actual facts of reality, but also has a life of its own in the reader's mind. A "dry as dust" sum of reality has little chance of communicating the truths of human life to its readers because its depictions are simply uninteresting. The truths contained in this kind of fiction have no effect because the "manner of stating the truth" fails to captivate the reader's imagination and affection. Without art, in short, our experience of realist fiction is too much like our experience of real life, its dullness and tedium offering little reminder of what is most valuable, meaningful, or interesting about human existence.[21]

Dickens expresses a similar sentiment in the first number of Household Words, in the "Preliminary Word" which describes the publication's spirit and aims:

> No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our Household Words. In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor, we would tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished. To show to all, that in all familiar things, even those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough, if we will find it out:–-to teach the hardest workers at this whirling wheel of toil, that their lot is not

[21] In this, Dickens's view is closer than that of his contemporaries (such as Thackeray or Eliot) to an Aristotelian concept of the techniques and social benefits of mimesis.

> necessarily a moody, brutal fact, excluded from the sympathies and graces of imagination; to bring the greater and the lesser in degree, together upon that wide field, and mutually dispose them to a better acquaintance and a kinder understanding—it is one main object of our Household Words.[22]

Here Dickens reconfigures the tension between realism and romance that shaped so much of mid-Victorian literary criticism. He begins with an apparently clear-cut distinction between a utilitarian viewpoint, which sees the world through the light of science, and that of Household Words, which looks at the world through the light of fancy. While fancy or imagination is innate to all human beings, Dickens says, it is in short supply in the current climate of England—a climate that values empirical analysis over all other human pursuits, including those of imaginative invention or sympathetic communion.[23] But in the middle of the passage this strict distinction between realism and romance is softened: Household Words does not intend to turn away from fact and escape entirely into fancy. While the start of the paragraph might easily be describing a view of the world transformed by a kind of poetic vision, it soon becomes clear that the focus here is not upon the artist or poet and his capacity for transforming familiar objects through imaginative invention. Instead, Dickens explains, Household Words will concentrate

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[22] Quoted in Charles Dickens, The Writings of Charles Dickens, ed. Gilbert Ashville Pierce (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1894), 44.

[23] With this complaint, Dickens echoes Wordsworth's estimation of the nineteenth century in the "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Selected Critical Essays, ed. Thomas M. Raysor (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1958). John Stuart Mill expresses a similar sentiment in his Autobiography, which describes the deficit of imagination and emotion in his strictly utilitarian upbringing. See Chapter Four and Five in J.S. Mill, Autobiography (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).

upon these everyday details themselves—upon the surfaces of life that appear uninteresting or even repellent at first glance. These surfaces will not be transformed but rather seen anew; they will not be colored by art but rather art will allow us to see them again with a difference. Here fancy is a tool rather than a place of escape, allowing the reader to see the romance—the interest and charm—in the everyday facts of their existence. [24] Indeed, fancy is already at work in the "Preliminary Word" itself: "fact" in this passage is no longer value-free, divorced from the "sympathies and graces of imagination," but has been given emotions and intentions—it is "moody" and "brutal."

Dickens's priority, then, was to write novels that had a vitality of impression—to write fiction that created parallel realities. He often stated that one of his goals as an author was to produce fictional characters that would become a part of the daily lives of his readers, a sentiment echoed in the printed description of The Household Narrative, a monthly supplement to Household Words, which states that the journal would "aspire to live in the Household affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts, of our readers."[25] The

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[24] The "Preface" to the first edition of Bleak House expresses a similar idea, Dickens stating that "in Bleak House, I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things." Robert Newsome's book-length study of Bleak House takes its thesis from these words, using them as a touchstone for understanding Dickens's peculiar brand of realism. He sees Dickensian realism not so much as a mix of romance and realism as a productive tension between two genres, which imposes "upon the reader a kind of unsettled and unsettling double perspective which requires us to see things as at once "romantic" and "familiar." See especially Newsome's "Introduction." Robert Newsome, Dickens on the Romantic Side of Familiar Things: Bleak House and the Novel Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

[25] Quoted in Richard Lettis, Dickens on Literature: A Continuing Study of His Aesthetic (New York: AMS Press, 1990), 138. In the years immediately following his death, most critics attested to Dickens's ability to create fictional characters that lived among the British public as if they were real people. In an 1870 article in St. Pauls Magazine, Anthony Trollope asserted that "No other writer of English language except Shakespeare

independent life of his novels was so important that he avoided disrupting it by asserting his own persona as author. His view, stated many times throughout his life, was that art should speak for itself, and should require no authorial interference to be understood. He felt that authorial interference, which he called "dissection," detracted from the reality of fiction. He was critical of this kind of authorial presence in contemporary fiction and advised against it in his editorial commentary.[26] Long prefaces detailing a novelist's intentions or aims, authorial interjections explaining characters' motivations, or too-apparent plotting devices only reminded the reader that they were reading a fictional creation rather than experiencing a parallel reality.

But Dickens's reluctance to comment on his own fiction added to the critical opinion that his novels were more amusing than thought-provoking. Acknowledging the vividness of his fictional creations, critics like George Henry Lewes and Walter Bagehot judged that Dickens's tendency to stay at the surface of reality showed a lack of interest in the psychological lives of

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has left so many types of character as Dickens has done,–characters which are known by their names familiarly as household words, and which bring to our minds vividly and at once a certain well-understood set of ideas, habits, phrases, and costumes, making together a man, or woman, or child whom we know at a glance and recognise at a sound—as we do our own intimate friends." Quoted in Kitton, ed., Dickensiana: A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to Charles Dickens and His Writings., 432-33. In the same year, a writer for The Spectator asserted that the British public not only read Dickens's novels but "lived with" their cast of characters as if they were real people. "The Genius of Dickens." The Spectator (1870): 749, 51. A reviewer for St. James's Magazine repeated Dickens's own words from Household Words to describe his characters: "All his books are household words; all his characters are our friends or our foes…" "Charles Dickens. With a Portrait." St. James's Magazine. (1870): 696, 99.

[26] For instance, Lettis states that "though he liked some things about Wilkie Collins' The Woman in White, he criticized its propensity to 'give an audience credit for nothing, which necessarily involves the forcing of points on their attention…' In his 'Address' in the Cheap Edition of Pickwick Papers (1847) he wrote 'It is not for an author to describe his own books. If they cannot speak for themselves, he is likely to do little service by speaking for them." Lettis, Dickens on Literature: A Continuing Study of His Aesthetic, 164.

his characters and an absence of coherent thought on the part of the author. In this view, the narrative fragmentation characteristic of Dickens's novels (acknowledged by most nineteenth-century critics) was a result of the inadequate intellectual sophistication of Dickens himself. In his influential 1858 article for the National Review, Walter Bagehot saw in Dickens much lively detail but little coherence of thought, asserting that "vivid facts stand out in his imagination, and a fresh, illustrative style brings them home to the imagination of his readers; but his continuous philosophy utterly fails in the attempt to harmonize them—to educe a theory or elaborate a precept from them…His abstract understanding is so far inferior to his picturesque imagination as to give, even to his best works, the sense of jar and incompleteness, and to deprive them altogether of the crystalline finish which is characteristic of the clear and cultured understanding…"[27] For Bagehot, Dickens's strength is in his ability to create illustrations that surprise readers into attention to everyday life, and that enliven their imaginations with the vivid specifics of human existence. But in Bagehot's analysis, Dickens's strength is also his weakness; failing to create a coherent theory of human nature or a moral lesson for social life, the details of his narratives give a sense of "jar" and "incompleteness" to his writing. His novels do not transform the varied and miscellaneous particulars of social life into polished and harmonious wholes, but stage a series of imaginative encounters with real life that are often only casually connected.[28]

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[27] Bagehot, W. "Charles Dickens." The National Review (1858). Excerpted in Philip Collins, ed., Charles Dickens: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge, 1995), 403-12.

[28] Several other critical summations in the years following Dickens's death praise Dickens's attention to detail but regret the superficiality of his fiction. For instance, see the London Quarterly Review's 1871 article, in which the author discusses the qualities that prevented Dickens's collected works from achieving the status of "high art." He describes Dickens's style as having an "eye receptive of the whole surface, whether the

In his derisive "Dickens in Relation to Criticism," George Henry Lewes describes Dickens's talent as an "animal intelligence": he asserts that "thought is strangely absent from his works. I do not suppose a single thoughtful remark on life or character could be found throughout the twenty volumes. Not only is there a marked absence of the reflective tendency, but one sees no indication of the past life of humanity having ever occupied him; keenly as he observes the objects before him, he never connects his observations into a general expression, never seems interested in general relations of things."[29] For Lewes, as for Bagehot, Dickens's fiction is characterized by its striking details but marred by its lack of reflective and abstract thought. Dickens's representations have immediacy but no philosophy, Lewes asserts, offering no general theory of human life or coherent system of thought.

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object were a character or a landscape, and he painted the same things with a hand reproductive of a whole surface in perfect distinctness, often rising to an impetuous vividness peculiarly his own: but his representations generally leave the impression, not so much of men and woman whose life is a deep and serious thing, but of persons who have assembled on a stage to amuse other persons, or to appeal to the senses of the same…" "Charles Dickens." The London Quarterly Review (1871). Excerpted in Charles Dickens: The Critical Heritage, 565-67. H. A. Taine's History of English Literature, published in 1871, similarly laments Dickens's enthusiasm for the numerous small details of life over and above the high-minded and/or beautiful. H.A. Taine, History of English Literature, trans. H. Van Laun (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1871).

[29] Fred. G. Kitton, ed., Dickensiana: A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to Charles Dickens and His Writings (New York: Haskell House, 1971), 475. George Eliot expresses a similar, although more tempered, estimation of Dickens in her essay "The Natural History of German Life": "We have one great novelist among us who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population; and if he could give us their psychological character—their conceptions of life, and their emotions—with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies." George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings, ed. A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin, 1990), 264.

Bagehot and Lewes, among other Victorian critics, portray Dickens as having an overdeveloped sense of the particular and an underdeveloped sense of the abstract, which resulted in fiction that was more interested in exteriors than interiors, that was more devoted to portraying difference than creating narrative coherence. Twentieth-century critics have attempted to bring greater unity to Dickens's novels.[30] But in many ways, my reading of Dickens's fiction has more in common with the criticism of Dickens's contemporaries. Like Bagehot and Lewes, I read Dickens's fiction as more about noticing than understanding, more about striking the reader with the miscellaneous details of social life than searching out the deeper meanings of human existence. Unlike these critics, I read Dickens's interest in the surfaces of life not as an artistic failing, but as a purposive engagement with the conditions of contemporary life. With his attention to detail, Dickens sought to act upon his readers: to surprise them out of habits and conventions of thought, to awaken human capacities of feeling and imagination, and to enlighten truths of human life that are often effaced in routine experience. In this, Dickens's allegiance was not to art itself—to the coherence of his fiction or the reigning ideas of his representations—but what art could do in the world, what difference his fiction could make in the minds of his readers.

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[30] The problem of narrative unity in Dickens's fiction has continued to be a major concern for literary critics into the twentieth century. While the criticism of George Henry Lewes and Henry James is very different from, say, the psychoanalytic and Marxist readings of the first half of the twentieth century or the post-structuralist and feminist criticism of the late twentieth century, they share a critical attention to problems of unity in Dickens's novels. Whether the aim has been to find hidden order in Dickens's fiction (a quality of early twentieth-century psychoanalytic and Marxist readings) or to show that the disorder of the novels has an underlying ideological significance (a more recent trend in criticism that draws from poststructuralist thought), this attention has led to readings more interested in the "insides" of Dickens's novels than in their "outsides."

2.2 BLEAK HOUSE

My reading of Bleak House begins by considering what the world of the novel looks like with only the third person narrator as our guide. Studying the opening chapters of the novel, we see how the third person narration effects a re-enchantment of the scenes of everyday social life by matching its narrative style to its central subjects. These chapters introduce the Court of Chancery and the Dedlock family, both worlds in which there is an alarming distance between appearance and reality. In Chancery law and aristocratic tradition, all is performed according to custom regardless of whether these rules have any contemporary use or value. Here the form of the system itself is more important than the purpose it was originally intended to serve, more pressing than any individual who might benefit or suffer from it. Convention, dislodged from the concrete details of human life, has taken on a life of its own in these two worlds.

Like these two systems, the third person narrator is interested in the appearance of things over their substance, in form separated from its uses and effects. Here characters as well as places and objects are depicted as mere surface, differentiated from other surfaces only by certain exterior characteristics. Like the workings of Chancery law or the conventions of the British aristocracy, the opening chapters of the novel have movement and activity but little progression or development. Here the third person narrator transfers the reader from one scene to another, from one chapter to the next, but does little to further the novel's central plot lines. In this way, the third person narrator is more of a surveyor than a storyteller at the start of Bleak House, [31] the narrator's collections of details creating more of a landscape or map than a story in

[31] Of course, this is a narrative mode characteristic of mid-Victorian omniscient narration in general, although Bleak House combines a panoramic point of view with narrative fragmentation—not something readily seen in George Eliot, for instance. For a historical

any traditional sense of the word. [32] Beginning the novel with "In Chancery" and "In Fashion," the third person narrator places the reader in the landscape of Bleak House, but we must wait for Esther's first chapter, "A Progress," to give us a narrative path to follow within this landscape.

By matching style and subject, the third person narrative strikes the reader with the truths of these two British institutions that are effaced in everyday experience: their self-fulfilling repetition, social uselessness, and perverse effects upon the human beings that are subjected to their rules and operations. It also, ironically, creates a view of social life that counters the kind of totalization of human experience upheld by such institutions. Representing British social life at the level of aesthetic detail, with characters, objects, and events divorced from their emotional or moral significance, it introduces the reader to the world of Bleak House without totalization or generalization. Of course, the totalization that the third person narration resists is not institutional but discursive, the disjointed storytelling of the first two chapters prohibiting the kind of hierarchization of detail required for building clear plotlines and creating fully-drawn characters. Creating a "democratization of detail," the third person narrator invites a certain

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contextualization of the importance of narrative "overview" in Victorian fiction and culture, see Arac, Commissioned Spirits: The Shaping of Social Motion in Dickens, Carlyle, Melville, and Hawthorne. For the relationship between fictional and scientific "overview" in the Victorian period, see the first two chapters of George Levine, Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[32] The third person narration stands in sharp contrast to Esther's narration, which is linear and developmental; it is a narrative of "progress" as her first chapter attests. While Esther's view is much more limited than the third person narrator's, her depiction of characters and scenes is more comprehensive—having none of the narrative fragmentation characteristic of the other half of the novel. Like Dickens's own David Copperfield, Great Expectations, or Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, Esther's half of the narrative is in the spirit of a "novel of education." It is what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a biographical narrative in his discussion of the *bildungsroman* in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 22.

expansiveness of mind and breadth of attention in the reader.[33] Before the reader has been tapped into the central plotlines of the novel and introduced to its key characters, we are presented a picture of social life remarkably unlike our everyday experience of it—in which every detail strikes us with equal importance.

But the third person narrative also replicates the totalizing institutions that the novel critiques, having no power to intervene in the world it depicts. In other words, there can be no benevolence in the overview presented in the opening chapters of the novel. The third person narrator has access to a broad and multiple view of British society, but has no capacity to act in this world—for good or ill. This is because, as Esther's narrative makes clear, goodness can only come from the individual in Bleak House. Famous for skewering British philanthropy and organized charity, any systematic effort to better the lives of individuals is suspect in Bleak House. There is an important critique, then, in the early sections of the third person narrative, which is easily lost if we focus our critical attention upon the second half of the novel. This is a critique of the solutions that Esther's narrative offers to the social problems depicted by the third person narrative. These solutions, the third person narrative suggests, are distressingly narrow because they are limited to the random good deeds of individuals (such Esther and John Jarndyce).

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[33] In Bleak House, as elsewhere in this dissertation, narrative interruption invites new freedoms of mind in the reader. Here we can say that the third person narrative of Bleak House invites a more "writerly" reading, in Roland Barthes's sense of the word. Roland Barthes, S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

2.3 IN CHANCERY

The first two chapters of Bleak House establish the central subjects of the third person narrative, two British institutions: the Court of Chancery and the Dedlock family, a branch of the aristocracy. In these chapters, "In Chancery" and "In Fashion," we are introduced to the worlds of Chancery law and aristocratic fashion as if we are one of their regular inhabitants. For instance, the opening passage of the novel represents Chancery not only as a place (both the court and surrounding neighborhood) and an institution of law (governing estate disputes), but also an experience of a system of useless and circular activity. The readerly experience of this passage is like the daily life of the characters whose lives move within the circles of Chancery law, such as Mr. Gridley or Miss Flite. For the reader, as for these characters, Chancery is a world of perpetual activity but no progression, allowing no rest for its inhabitants and offering no means of escape. The Court is a closed and self-fulfilling system: once you are "in" Chancery it seems impossible to get "out" of it.

The narrator establishes the atmosphere of an unrelenting and yet unproductive system in the opening analogy of the novel, which compares the workings of the Court with the miserable London weather. With this metaphor, the third person narrator makes the familiar strange by transforming the abstract legal system of Chancery law into a vivid sensory experience:

> London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots,

> making a soft black drizzle with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.[34]

Discursively this passage has a cumulative effect, speeding up as its sentences grow longer, moving from the staccato of its first three sentences to the longer rhythms of its middle section. Reading this passage is like slowly being submerged into the world it presents—or perhaps more accurately, being gradually inundated by it as if by a rainstorm or mudslide. Because many of the lines are missing verbs, and there appears at first to be little connection between them, the forward movement of this passage is accumulative rather than progressive. The action verbs are almost all in present progressive tense, denoting events that are ongoing: the Lord Chancellor is "sitting," smoke is "lowering," foot passengers are "jostling," "slipping," "sliding," "adding," and mud deposits are "sticking," and "accumulating." The action in this passage is always happening and never concluded: the weather is, has been, and will be terrible; the Lord

[34] Charles Dickens, Bleak House, ed. Nicola Bradbury (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 13. Hereafter cited as BH.

Chancellor sits in Lincoln's Inn Hall in the past, present, and future. There is perpetual movement, but no change.

Chancery, in the reader's experience of it, has no beginning, middle, or end: the style of the third person narration matches the repetitions and accumulations of the Court of Chancery, and the continual but never concluded actions of the opening passage (the "jostling," "slipping," and "sliding") correspond with the interminable case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce.[35] As I have noted, this is characteristic of the third person narrative in the novel as a whole, its style of representation having none of the teleology of Esther's narrative. What connects all the elements depicted in the first paragraph of the novel—what links the Lord Chancellor, the weather, the foot passengers—is seemingly only their location in the neighborhood of Chancery. They are all "in Chancery," but their relationship beyond spatial proximity is unclear.

This passage does employ forms of connection alternative to linear storytelling, such as accumulation, which is depicted both thematically and discursively in the first chapter. There is an increasing buildup of mud in the streets, just as there is an ongoing accretion of legal documents in the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, just as there is a steady accumulation of repeated words and phrases in the opening passages of the novel. This discursive accumulation continues throughout the first chapter, the narrator returning to phrases such as "High Court of Chancery" and "Lord Chancellor," as well as "Lincoln's Inn Hall" again and again, and mentioning in almost every paragraph the words "fog" or "mud." Importantly, this repetition of

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[35] Dickens began writing Bleak House following a series of exposés, published in the Times in 1850, on the Court of Chancery which detailed several cases that had run on so long that court costs absorbed all available funds, much like Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Paul Davis, Critical Companion to Charles Dickens: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work, 2nd ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 42.

certain words and phrases does nothing to expand their description or characterization in any substantive way. In most cases, there is nothing of significance added with each repetition. The effect of these words is stylistic: the repeated sound of them and the repeated look of them upon the page create a kind of alliterative accumulation—what amounts to a kind of geological layering of certain words and phrases within the other details of the chapter. Like the jostled foot passenger caught in the rain and fog, or the law clerk standing in the midst of the documents of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, the reader has to slog through these layers of accumulated words.

In this chapter, characters are named in a peculiar kind of metonymic short-hand, the whole of a person being represented by a single part of their body or dress. For instance, in the description of the Court of Chancery, Mr. Blowers does not wear an "eminent silk gown." He *is* an eminent silk gown. When the Lord Chancellor calls Jarndyce and Jarndyce before the court, it is "maces, bags, and purses" not whole persons that laugh at the Lord Chancellor's joke. [36] The woman we will later come to know as Miss Flite is a "little mad old woman in a squeezed bonnet."[37] In this narrative short-hand, distinct people, places, and objects are dwarfed by the larger atmosphere of fog and dirt encompassing Chancery and those that inhabit it. With an accrual of both the words written in the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce and the words repeated throughout the chapter, it is as if the few human characters named here are buried or being buried by an accumulation of words.

Combined with the image of the Megalosaurus, described in the opening scene of the novel, this geological accrual of words in chapter one suggests an analogy for the place of

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[36] BH, 17.

[37] BH, 15.

individual characters within the world of Chancery: fossilization.[38] If the literal and discursive build up of words creates something like "strata," we can imagine the few human characters buried within these layers as "fossils." Depicted in the metonymic short-hand of the third person narrator, Miss Flite is in a similar state in the first chapter as was the Megalosaurus skeleton before it was discovered and reconstructed. Like the Megalosaurus fossil, Miss Flite is barely visible within the accumulations of this chapter, requiring the expanded portrayal of Esther's narrative to transform the "little mad old woman in a squeezed bonnet" into a fully drawn human character. Of course, we can see this only retrospectively, because the narration in Chapter One offers no indication that any of the sparsely-drawn characters mentioned in this chapter are of any particular significance to the novel as a whole.

Indeed, in the first chapter, all details appear equal, the third person narrator achieving a kind of "democratization of detail" in the depiction of the world of Chancery. The difficulties of dogs and horses in the mud-filled streets seem no more or less important than the same struggles of the foot passengers. Most of the people present in Lincoln's Inn Hall are unnamed, and appear to be interchangeable, there being no apparent reason to be interested in one lawyer or law clerk over another. There is no central actor in this chapter, and no sense that we are meant to follow any particular character with special attention. The Lord Chancellor is certainly at the center of the scene, and his appearance is given more description than most; but there is a sense that this depiction is merely another feature of the landscape being sketched, rather than a

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[38] The incomplete skeleton of the Megalosaurus was discovered in 1823 by William Buckland, who constructed a complete picture of the animal from a collection of separate fossils discovered deep within the earth's strata. Buckland describes the fossil in the first published description of a dinosaur in the 1824 article "Notice on the Megalosaurus or Great Fossil Lizard of Stonesfield." William Buckland, "Notice on the Megalosaurus or Great Fossil Lizard of Stonesfield," Transactions of the Geological Society of London 1 (1824).

characterization of an individual that will be central to the novel as a whole. Nor do the individuals depicted in the first chapter appear to act from any internal motivation or interest. Instead, they act according to the roles prescribed to them by the Court, every decision and action apparently dictated by a larger system of legal rules and conventions. They are more like automatons than human characters, performing as if a part of one large machine. They can only be called characters in the alphabetical sense: formal differences define them, rather than actions or personalities. They are just another exterior feature of the map of Chancery and the reader can only see their importance as a part of the larger landscape of this scene.

2.4 IN FASHION

In the second chapter of Bleak House, which turns from Chancery to the Dedlocks' London house, locations are not linked in any way they would be in Esther's narrative: through action (for instance, Esther walking from one to the other to visit a friend) or through emotion (for instance, each place having personal significance for Esther). Instead, Chancery and Chesney Wold are connected by analogy. Chapter two, "In Fashion," begins: "It is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from the one scene to the other, as the crow flies."[39] The narrator can move "as the crow flies" from one scene to the other, from Chancery to the Dedlock family, because both the world of fashion and the world of Chancery run on the same laws of "precedent and usage." In this way, it is a stylistic affinity that links these two different British

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[B] BH, 20.

institutions. Importantly, this analogy is made possible through the third person narrator's broad survey of the world of Bleak House. In the narrator's disjointed short-hand, with little explicit narrative connection between things, other kinds of relationships suggest themselves—just as analogy does here.

Like Chancery, the world of the British aristocracy is a system in which the present has already been decided by the past, the new prevented or curtailed by the traditions of the old. According to the narrator, they are both systems that have lived beyond their time; they have overslept "like Rip Van Winkle or Sleeping Beauty," only to awake in a world for which they are unequipped.[40] In other words, the laws of these two worlds—the rules of Chancery law in the one and the conventions of aristocratic society in the other—are at a disconnect with the contexts of the present. They have become separate from the purposes they once served in the past, having outlived their original usefulness. The system itself has become more important than the individuals it was created to serve, the personal always being second to the traditional, the conventional, the precedented. The third person narrator tells us that the aristocracy "is a world wrapped up in too much jeweler's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun. It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air."[41] In the third person narrator's eyes, this world has as little humanity as the Court of Chancery. It does not acknowledge the importance or even existence of human society beyond its own boundaries. Its own traditions and habits order all that is acknowledged to exist. This state of isolation has consequences not only for the outside

[40] BH.

[41] BH.

world it ignores, but also for its own inhabitants, who are dwarfed by the aristocratic conventions that rule them.

There is just as little human action and interest here as there was in the first chapter, the third person narrator devoting the majority of this chapter to describing states of being rather than speech or action: "Sir Leicester is honorable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man."[42] Mr. Tulkinghorn "is surrounded by a mysterious halo of family confidences; of which he is known to be the silent depository." [43] This chapter is primarily about what Sir Leicester Dedlock, Lady Dedlock, and Mr. Tulkinghorn are rather than what they do or say, and the sense is that these are rather unchanging states of being. What they are now is what they have been in the past and will be in the future. The repetition of certain phrases in this chapter, such as "My Lady Dedlock," supports the idea of each character as a steady state. The passages that introduce each of the three central characters are mostly structured in the same way, the sentences following a subject / verb / adjective pattern. For instance, the paragraph on Sir Leicester begins: "Sir Leicester is twenty years, full measure, older than my Lady. He will never see sixty-five again, nor perhaps sixty-six, nor yet sixty-seven. He has a twist of gout now and then, and walks a little stiffly."[44]

In this chapter, there is only sparse dialogue, and the conversation between Sir Leicester, Lady Dedlock, and Mr. Tulkinghorn on the subject of Jarndyce and Jarndyce is slow and halting. There is so little apparent human interest, so little evident animation in this dialogue that the reader wonders whether there is anything of importance in the exchange—that is, until Lady

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[42] BH, 22.

[43] BH, 23.

[44] BH, 22.

Dedlock becomes suddenly engrossed in the law-hand of the document Mr. Tulkinghorn is reading. Even Lady Dedlock's fainting spell, which is the most dramatic event of the chapter by far, is not particularly dynamic, because the third person narrator describes no change or movement in her face or manner until Mr. Tulkinghorn has started from his seat and exclaimed that she is ill. Here, as elsewhere, the style of the third person narrative matches its subject, the depiction of the Dedlocks in Chapter Two being defined by a kind of disinterested detachment from the human beings being presented. It is as if the narrator is wrapped up in "jeweler's cotton," allowing us to get only so close to the characters depicted in this chapter. We get a detailed picture of what these characters are in general—My Lady Dedlock is a chilly woman, Sir Leicester is a proud man, Mr. Tulkinghorn is a rusty legal type—but very little information about them in the present scene of the Dedlock's drawing room. We are certainly not close enough to our subjects to see the expression on Sir Leicester's face as he dozes by the fire or the style of handwriting on the affidavit that draws Lady Dedlock's attention.

In this chapter, as in Chapter one, the third person narrative is both like and unlike the institution it presents, depicting aristocratic characters in a way that discursively exhibits certain truths about the British system of aristocracy. Importantly, these are truths that may never be recognized in routine experience or readily seen in Esther's narration, but strike the reader with full force in the third person narrative. In the narrator's depiction of the court of Chancery, we recognize this institution's self-fulfilling repetition, social uselessness, and perverse effects upon those who have been named by one of its suits; in the portrayal of the aristocracy, we recognize this system's disconnection from the wider world of human life and its suffocation of the emotional and imaginative lives of those that live under its rules.

2.5 THE SURFACE OF CHARACTER

In the first two chapters of the novel, the third person narration centers upon three central areas: Chancery and the two Dedlock homes (the London house and Chesney Wold in Lincolnshire). These three areas constitute the initial borders of the third person narration's map or landscape. After these chapters, the third person narrator returns to survey these areas repeatedly, sometimes adding a new location within or adjacent to their borders. For instance, after Esther's narrative in Chapters Three through Six, the third person narrator revisits Chesney Wold in Chapter Seven. This chapter depicts a few key locations within the Dedlock estate: the inside of Chesney Wold, presided over by its housekeeper Mrs. Rouncewell, and the path of lime trees known as the "ghost walk." In Chapter Ten, the third person narrator returns to Chancery to designate three more sites within this neighborhood: Snagsby's shop, Tulkinghorn's residence, and Nemo's room in Krook's shop. This map gets significantly larger at the point of Bucket's introduction to the novel, when he takes Mr. Snagsby through Tom-All-Alone's in Chapter Twenty Two. Of course, all of these places become significant in the central plot lines of the novel—particularly for the mystery surrounding Esther's parentage. Nevertheless, as we have seen, early in the novel the reader is unsure of the relationships between each of these locations as they are marked by the third person narrator.

The third person narrator's representation of characters is performed in a similar way: as the novel progresses, the narrative gradually includes more characters within each of these central locations. This supports a certain non-differentiation of character and material world in Bleak House, since characters are marked by the third person narrator in much the same way as physical locations. Further, most of the characters exclusive to the third person narration are introduced by their location in the landscape of the novel, the narrator giving more details

about the physical aspects of their home than about the characters themselves. In this way, we can almost imagine the large cast of characters in Bleak House as constituting a "landscape" in and of themselves. The third person narrator turns his eye upon some characters repeatedly throughout the whole of the novel, such as Miss Flite, Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester, Mr. Tulkinghorn, and later Mr. George and Mr. Bucket. Others only get one or two mentions and are never heard from again, such as Mr. Tangle, a lawyer named in the first chapter, Guster, Mrs. Snagsby's serving-woman, Little Swills, a performer at the Sol's Arms, or Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins, who have one conversation together in the street following Krook's death. Other characters appear in several chapters over the course of the novel, but then drop from view, like Mr. and Mrs. Chadband or Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet. These incidental characters, literally only relevant to the incident or episode at hand, are never fully drawn for the reader in the third person narrative. Similar to the condensed characters of the opening chapter of the novel, these incidental characters are portrayed in only a slightly more expanded metonymic short-hand. They are each known by a particular aspect of their dress, speech, or manner, of which the reader is reminded each time they appear: Guster has seizures, Mr. Chadband's head is an "oil refinery," Young Smallweed wears an overly-large hat in imitation of Mr. Guppy, and Mr. Weevle (a.k.a Jobling) "grows up" as he eats his food. Mr. Smallweed is a bag of clothes slumped in a chair and calls his wife "poll-parrot." Phil is lame and gets from place to place by sliding along walls.

Characters that get more page-time do not fare much better: although the third person narrator does have "central characters," like Lady Dedlock and Mr. Tulkinghorn, their portrayal expands very little with each appearance. As I have suggested, the exterior surface of these characters is the third person narrator's primary subject, and we are offered little more beyond

appearances and overt actions. Lady Dedlock is always bored and looking out the window; her facial expressions are almost always bland, revealing very little about her inner thoughts and desires. Mr. Tulkinghorn is rusty and secretive, with the ability to fade into the woodwork whatever his setting. Mrs. Rouncewell, in her stomacher, is a proud old lady. Mr. Guppy wears a large hat and ends his sentences in exclamation points! Mr. Snagsby says "not to put too fine a point on it" after most sentences. Hortense is French and shrewd, and Rosa is mild and beautiful. Mr. George has a military manner, standing as if waiting for an order and sitting as though his sword still hung by his side.

It takes Esther's personalized narrative to expand the portrayals of several of the novel's central characters, as well as to create connections between characters that appear unrelated in the third person narration. However, Esther's narrative does not entirely abandon the short-hand caricatures of the third person narrator. For characters that reappear in Esther's narrative after being established in the third person narrative, the peculiarities of dress, manner, or speech are still present, but are added to and contextualized. Mrs. Flite still wears her tight bonnet and carries her bag full of "documents." George still has his military mannerisms, and Lady Dedlock continues to reveal little in her facial expressions. Characters exclusive to Esther's half of the narrative also have their little characteristic peculiarities: Mr. Jarndyce worries about the east wind, Richard has a silly logic about money, and Mr. Skimpole is "a child." Mr. Boythorn has a canary that perches on his head, Charley is a child in a grown-up's clothes, and Mr. Turveydrop has deportment. But in Esther's narration, these peculiarities are depicted with affectionate interest, while in the third person narration they offer only a low-level differentiation of one character from another.

This kind of characterization has important effects for the novel as a whole. To start, these caricatures allow the inclusion of a larger number of people in the novel than would be possible if every character were fully developed. In a novel as long as Bleak House, there are practical difficulties in depicting a great number of characters, especially when the majority of people included in Bleak House are not a part of the story for the whole length of the book. With fifty-plus characters, to count only those named, there is an apparent danger that the reader will forget who is who. This is particularly problematic when characters move in and out of the story, for instance, first appearing in an early chapter and then only reappearing ten chapters later.[45] The short-hand characters depicted in the third person narrative, and to some extent in Esther's narrative, serve to mark individuals with what makes them peculiar—with what makes them distinct from others. For the third person narrator, who is more interested in broad overviews than personalized storylines, immediately recognizable characters encourage the reader to take in more details of a particular scene at once. These caricatures allow the narrator to move quickly from one detail to the next, giving little more attention to any one character than to any one part of the material world. Caricatures, then, allow for the kind democratization of detail that we see, for instance, in the opening passages of the novel, where every detail of the social scene strikes us with equal importance.

The way that the third person narrator chooses to introduce characters that will later become important in the novel's central plot lines shows a further attempt at this kind of democratization of detail. Central characters are presented as if they are merely a part of the landscape in a given scene, no more important than anything else—and perhaps just as likely to

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[45] This would have been even more of a concern for the first readers of Bleak House, it being published initially in monthly installments.

disappear in the next chapter as any other character. These characters are slipped into the third person narrator's surveys as if they are part of the furniture, as in Chapter Ten's introduction of Mr. Snagsby:

> On the eastern borders of Chancery Lane, that is to say, more particularly, in Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, Mr. Snagsby, Law Stationer, pursues his lawful calling. In the shade of Cook's Court, at most times a shady place, Mr. Snagsby has dealt in all sorts of blank forms of legal process; in skins and rolls of parchment; in paper—a foolscap, brief, draft, brown, white, whitey-brown, and blotting; in stamps; in office-quills, pens, ink, India-rubber, pounce, pins, pencils, sealing wax, and wafers; in red tape, and green ferret; in pocket books, almanacks, diaries, and law lists; in string boxes, rules, inkstands—glass and leaden, penknives, scissors, bodkins, and other small office-cutlery; in short, in articles too numerous to mention; ever since he was out of his time, and went into partnership with Peffer."[46]

Here as elsewhere, the third person narrator begins Chapter Ten by focusing on the location of Mr. Snagsby's stationary shop within the larger landscape of the novel, giving the specific location of Cursitor Street in the neighborhood of Chancery. The syntactical structure of the first sentence frontloads details about locality and backloads details about character, the specific aspects of Cook's Court seeming to be more important than Mr. Snagsby himself. Indeed, reading further, the name Mr. Snagsby is absolutely dwarfed in the paragraph as a whole by the

[46] BH, 154.

list of law-stationer products he sells. This list is engrossing in its subjects and style. A reader unfamiliar with the trappings of the legal trade will puzzle over the specifics of each product and perhaps wonder about its particular uses. Stylistically this paragraph has affinities with the opening passages of the novel, giving a similar sense of continuous action: Mr. Snagsby has dealt in these numerous articles since his apprenticeship and will continue to do so through the imaginable future. Here, too, there is an accumulation of both products and words: even though Mr. Snagsby sells "articles too numerous to mention," the third person narrator does mention a great number of them. Almost buried under an accumulation of paper products, Mr. Snagsby himself is only named twice.

In this way, the third person narrator introduces characters who will play a key role in the novel as a whole on the sly, so to speak. The reader is put in a position, particularly at the start of new chapters, very similar to that of Mr. Snagsby in Chapter Twenty-two, when he is surprised at the sudden appearance of Mr. Bucket in Mr. Tulkinghorn's office:

> Mr. Snagsby is dismayed to see, standing with an attentive face between himself and the lawyer, at a little distance from the table, a person with a hat and stick in his hand who was not there when he himself came in, and has not since entered by the door or by either of the windows. There is a press in the room, but its hinges have not creaked, nor has a step been audible upon the floor. Yet this third person stands there, with his attentive face, and his hat and stick in his hands, and his hands behind him, a composed and quiet listener. He is a stoutly-built, steady-looking, sharp-eyed man in black, of about middle age. Except that he looks at Mr.

> Snagsby as if he were going to take his portrait, there is nothing remarkable about him at first sight but his ghostly manner of appearing.[47]

In this scene, somehow Mr. Bucket has managed to become one with the furniture in Mr. Tulkinghorn's room, no more out of place than the press or table until Mr. Snagsby notices his figure all at once as if he has appeared by magic. Notice that what is wholly missing from this passage is any overt action on the part of Mr. Bucket. One minute Mr. Bucket is not there, and the next he is. This is the experience of both Snagsby and the reader, since the reader's gaze follows Mr. Snagsby's in this scene. Tulkinghorn's rooms are already familiar to us, as they are to Mr. Snagsby: in their description at the start of this chapter, we see familiar aspects of the room: the painting of Allegory on the ceiling, the dusty furniture, the large table, etc.—but no Mr. Bucket. But then, all of a sudden, he is there. Here readers recognize their own experience in Mr. Snagsby's reaction. Reading Bleak House, we too are often "dismayed to see" that key characters and details have snuck up upon us unawares in the third person narrative. Introduced as a part of the landscape of the novel, we are apt to give them no special notice until their importance is brought immediately into view (usually by Esther or Mr. Bucket).

2.6 COLLECTING

I have described the style of the third person narrator as that of a surveyor rather than a storyteller, a kind of a collector of locations, people, and objects rather than a builder of overt

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[47] BH, 354.

storylines. Collection is also, of course, a prominent theme in the novel. Both narratives are populated with characters that collect: early on in the novel, Miss Flite shows Esther her growing collection of birds which appear somehow connected to the group of "documents" she carries to court every day. Esther happily accepts an assortment of housekeeping keys to Bleak House, "the large bunch" for the housekeeping and the "little bunch" for the cellars. Of course, not all the collectors in Bleak House acquire material objects: some collect information, like Mr. Tulkinghorn or Mr. Bucket, while Mr. Jarndyce appears to amass not objects or information but people—especially orphaned children, like Esther, Richard, Ada, Charley, and Jo.

The novel makes an explicit link between the style of the third person narrator and the theme of collection in its depiction of Krook's rag and bottle shop. Krook's shop is an overt metaphor for the Court of Chancery, and a kind of metaphoric microcosm of the law profession as a whole. Among his neighbors, Krook is known as the "Lord Chancellor" and his shop is called the "Court of Chancery." Echoing the opening scenes of Chancery in the first chapter of Bleak House, Krook's shop illuminates both the valuelessness and uselessness of the Court's endless operations. As Esther tells us, in Krook's shop "everything seemed to be bought, and nothing sold..." Chancery's suits are similarly devalued, as we have seen, within the court's unproductive cycles of paper and ink. In other words, nothing of value has ever come out of either the real court of Chancery or Krook's "Court," because neither Krook's pile of junk nor Chancery's "wall of words" provide anything useful to anyone in the outside world. Of course, the irony is that hidden within the mess of Krook's shop is a piece of paper that could decide the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce once and for all. Krook has a vague awareness of this document, knowing he has within his collection something that might be extremely valuable. But because he is unable to read, he cannot apprehend the exact value of the final Jarndyce will.

There is an apparent correlation between Krook's collection of useless objects and the accumulation of places, people, and things in the third person narration: in both, we are initially unsure which things are worthless and which have value. But it isn't until a chapter narrated by Esther that we see Krook's shop as a metaphor for the relationship between the two narratives of Bleak House. After visiting Miss Flite's lodgings one afternoon, Esther passes back through Krook's shop and sees him hard at work storing waste paper. As he puts each packet of paper down, he makes a "crooked mark on the paneling of the wall" with a piece of chalk. Beckoning to Esther,

> He chalked the letter J upon the wall—in a very curious manner, beginning with the end of the letter, and shaping it backward. It was a capital letter, not a printed one, but just as such a letter as any clerk in Messrs Kenge and Carboy's office would have made. "Can you read it?" he asked me with a keen glance. "Surely," said I. "It is very plain." "What is it?" "J." With another glance at me, and a glance at the door, he rubbed it out, and turned an a in its place (not a capital letter this time) and said, "What's that?"…He went on quickly until he had formed, in the same curious manner, beginning at the ends and the bottoms of letters, the word JARNDYCE, without once leaving two letters on the wall together.

Krook explains to Esther that he has "a turn for copying from memory" but can "neither read nor write." As the course of the novel reveals, Krook is actually copying letters from the final Jarndyce will. Here there is an apparent thematic parallel between Krook's inability to

apprehend the value of the Jarndyce will and the Court of Chancery's incapacity to conclude the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. But more importantly, this scene between Krook and Esther offers an analogy for the relationship between the two narratives of the novel. Though these passages are narrated by Esther, Krook's awkward chalk letters strangely correspond to the style of the third person narrator. Or rather, the readers of Bleak House are oddly allied with Krook's "reading" when faced with the chapters related by the third person narrator, especially early in the novel. Krook can copy individual letters but cannot connect these linguistic parts into a whole word; for him the word Jarndyce is merely a collection of letters without apparent meaning. We stand in a similar position as readers of Bleak House: we see the collection of parts presented by the third person narrator, but cannot make a coherent story out of them without help from Esther's narrative.

2.7 ESTHER AS CONNECTOR

I have explored how the third person narration surveys locations and characters within the map or landscape of Bleak House. Once introduced, these sites become central to the plot lines of the novel—particularly to the mystery surrounding Esther's parentage and Tulkinghorn's murder. But as I have suggested, with merely the third person narrator as guide, the reader has only a short-hand understanding of the links among the numerous places, people, and things that make up the world of the novel. The third person narrator admits as much in chapter sixteen, as if speaking for the reader, asking: "What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabout of Jo the outlaw with the broom…? What connexion can there have been between many people in the

innumerable histories of this world, who, from the opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together!"[48] The double narrative of Bleak House actually offers two answers to this question, the third person narrator bringing things together spatially or stylistically (as a part of a landscape or through analogy) and Esther making connections affectively (by means of her own personal relationships, choices, and actions).

But of course it is Esther who "curiously brings together" the collections of the third person narrator into a coherent storyline. There are several key scenes in which a place or person previously established by the third person narrator reappears in Esther's narration. In Chapter three, in which Esther travels to London for the first time, we are reintroduced to the neighborhood of Chancery through her personal narrative. In front of Kenge and Carboy's law offices, as Mr. Guppy helps Esther from the coach into a fly, she asks "whether there was a great fire anywhere? For the streets were so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen." She looks from the window and relates what she sees: "We drove slowly through the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world (I thought), and in such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how the people kept their senses, until we passed into sudden quietude under an old gateway, and drove on through a silent square until we came to an odd nook in a corner, where there was an entrance up a steep, broad flight of stairs, like an entrance to a church."[49] Esther provides a second look at the streets of Chancery, which takes the condensed descriptions of the third person narrator and expands them through her personal narration. In this way Esther's "long-hand" narration translates the third person narrator's short

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[48] BH, 256.

[49] BH, 43.

hand into complete sentences and coherent descriptions. Through Esther's eyes, Chancery is a more lucid world of streets and buildings—new to Esther but by no means fantastical. Each aspect of the landscape is given shape and coherence by Esther's direct relationship to it—by her interest in it or by its interest in her.[50]

Esther's narrative "fills in" characters much like she describes the landscape of Chancery.[51] When Esther meets Miss Flite for the first time in chapter three, she initially repeats the third person narrator's characterization from the first chapter, except that the "little mad old woman in a squeezed bonnet" becomes in Esther's words "a curious little old woman in a squeezed bonnet." This is not so different ("mad" is softened to "curious") but Esther's characterization does not conclude here. Over the course of her personal narration, the short-hand "little mad old woman" is enlarged into a fully-drawn character. Miss Flite, through Esther's descriptions, becomes a character with a face and voice, a home and belongings, neighbors and friends. Importantly, it is Esther's emotional relationship to other characters that most markedly distinguishes her style of narration, her affection for Miss Flite, Mr. Gridley, Lady Dedlock, or Jo bringing another dimension to characters that often only have a single feature in the third person narration. In short, characters become humanized in Esther's sympathetic portrayals. They also become independent from their surroundings: Miss Flite, for

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[50] Later, Esther gives a second look at both Chesney Wold and the interior of the Court of Chancery.

[51] Even when Esther does not personally connect characters and places, the idea or thought of Esther performs a similar function in the actions of other characters. That is, connections and contexts are often formed by other characters who have an interest in Esther—who seek to assist or please her in some way. For instance, in order to impress or oblige Esther, Guppy attempts to unravel the mystery surrounding the relationship between Esther and Lady Dedlock.

instance, is no longer just one aspect of Chancery's landscape, but a human being with a will of her own. Emotional interest is what brings all of the characters of Esther's narrative into relationship with each other, just as disinterest maintains emotional distance between the characters of the third person narrative.

2.8 CONCLUSIONS

In Esther's personal narrative, there is no question as to the importance of a particular event or character because everything is understood in relationship to Esther herself: for Esther, particular people, places, and things have apparent emotional, intellectual, or moral value. We never wonder why Esther is relating a particular conversation or describing a certain character's actions. Even the details she makes some attempt to disguise, mostly regarding her feelings for Alan Woodcourt, are hardly unintelligible to the reader. But in the third person narrative, it is often difficult for the reader to figure out which of various details portrayed are (or will be) important to the novel's central plot lines. Given its short-hand style description and tendency toward narrative disjunction, one thing may appear as significant as another in the third person narrative, resulting in a kind of democratization of details. Because we only get the surface of things, nothing more, the reader merely takes in each aspect of a particular scene, rather than differentiating between the inconsequential and important. If the development of a story is the (ultimate) aim of the novel, it is only possible to describe this characteristic of the third person narrative as negative, as it frustrates the story rather than furthering it. But if we think about the third person narrator as surveyor rather than narrator, it is this democratization of details that makes an overview of the world of Bleak House possible. When aspects of a scene are

differentiated as consequential and inconsequential, significant and insignificant, there is a hierarchization of detail which causes the majority of details to slip away—because they are forgotten as soon as they are read.[52] The style of the third person narration, particularly in the opening chapters of the novel, prevents this—inviting the reader to hold in mind all the miscellaneous details of social existence without collapsing their differences.

Since access to the multiple and vivid particulars of social life is central to Dickens's novelistic project, we can see that the democratization of details in Bleak House has value beyond its role in the novel's detective storyline—beyond its support of the novel's mysteries. If we ask what the novel would be missing if Esther was its sole narrator, one important answer would be the aesthetic overview created by the third person narrative—a kind of poetic survey that presents the details of society without totalization or generalization. It is not only that Esther's personal view brings hope (if only on the small scale) to the bleakness of the third person narrative, but also that the third person narrative brings a breadth of view to the narrowness of Esther's narrative. Let me be clear: it is not that Esther's world is narrow in the majority of the novel. For a Victorian heroine, she meets a great number of characters and sees a great deal of London. But her ending at the close of the novel, at the miniature Bleak House in Yorkshire, belies the multiple connections of her earlier life. It suggests that a model of human benevolence based merely on individual connections provides only a slim hope for humanity as a whole.

And yet, Bleak House suggests no larger system of benevolence; the third person narrator, unlike Esther, has no power to intervene in the world of the novel. Optimism, it seems,

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[52] We see how this process works on the linguistic level when Krook writes the word "Jarndyce" for Esther.

can go no further than a hope for human goodness on a personal level. But, as the double narrative of Bleak House underlines, fiction can be preparatory to individual acts of kindness by presenting a view of social life alternative to that of British institutions (such as law, religion, organized charity, etc.). This is not by offering any kind of systematic moral intervention, but merely by giving readers the opportunity to see everyday life again with a difference. Fiction holds this promise because only an artist values all the unnoticed and seemingly insignificant details of human existence that are, for Dickens, the beginnings of a reawakened imagination and an enlarged sympathy in his readers.

3.0 CHAPTER TWO: THE PECULIAR FACTS OF THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

The Origin of Species (1859) urges a reorientation to the known facts of the natural world. But this reengagement with the particulars of organic life requires that certain habits of thought be revised or set aside, especially those that uphold an understanding of life as fixed and unchanging. The Origin is, then, both an argument for the theory of descent by natural selection and a text that invites a certain freedom of mind required for understanding the organic world as Darwin depicts it—a world subject to chance variation and natural selection.[53] The mixed discourse of this work promotes this freedom of mind by unsettling the reader's relationship to the natural world, just as the varied discourse of the other central works of this dissertation troubles the reader's relationship to the social world. Combining scientific argument with concrete description and creative narration, The Origin brings both attention and imagination to details of organic life that have been previously overlooked or considered irrelevant.

While most of Darwin's readers (professional or otherwise) doubted theories of species transmutation or evolution, even the most cursory observation of plant and animal life showed that variation within species existed. Using an abundance of familiar examples taken from local British life in The Origin, Darwin has the opportunity to draw from his readers' own

[53] Here I mean chance in the sense of following no synthesized teleology or "plan" of change. All organic change follows fixed and natural laws, but the results of these laws can only be predicted with probability—never with certainty.

observations to confirm the evidence for his theory, but only if his readers bring a new set of eyes to their experience of organic life. Concentrating upon organic difference, Darwin's factual descriptions bring interest to even the most ordinary aspects of organic life. The representation of the natural world in The Origin is, like Dickens's depiction of the social world in Bleak House, both like and unlike the reader's everyday experience of it, its factual examples somehow both familiar and unfamiliar, both ordinary and strange.

Darwin's vivid and imaginatively drawn depictions of organic difference encourage the reader to develop an attunement to the small and seemingly insignificant irregularities of organic life, just as the works of Dickens, Mill, and Eliot promote this kind of attunement to the unnoticed differences of social life. Darwin does this even before he shows the full importance of these organic "exceptions" for his theory of species change. These are aspects of life that have been previously considered unimportant in established interpretations of organic history, which were at this time underwritten by an epistemology of natural kinds.[54] Indeed, the details of organic life that Darwin is most keen to bring to his readers' attention would not have been deemed "facts" (in the sense of evidence contributing to systematic knowledge) for the majority of Darwin's professional audience. In the leading theories of the origin of species, slight variations seen among individuals of a species or variety did not have the status of facts. This is

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[54] This epistemology understands the organic world in terms of a natural order of metaphysical kinds. In Darwin's own day, the most prominent scientists in geology, botany, and anatomy maintained essentialist interpretation of organic history—although this essentialism took several forms. See Chapter Five, "Essences," in Hull. David Hull, Darwin and His Critics (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 67-77. Also Elliot Sober, "Evolution, Population Thinking, and Essentialism," in Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Biology, ed. Elliot Sober (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980). John Beatty, "What's in a Word? Coming to Terms in the Darwinian Revolution," in Nature Animated: Historical and Philosophical Case Studies in Greek Medicine, Nineteenth-Century and Recent Biology, Psychiatry, and Psychoanalysis (Dordrecht, Holland, 1983).

because in a system of natural Kinds, these small differences are meaningless. But the reader need not consider these differences as "facts" in the sense of constituting scientific proof, at least initially, in The Origin. Indeed, Darwin uses their non-evidentiary status to his advantage in the performance of his argument in the opening chapters of The Origin, captivating the reader with concrete descriptions of organic difference before providing a full explanation of the mechanism of natural selection.

While Darwin's factual descriptions bring a greater attunement to organic "exception," there remains a distance between recognizing the reality of species variation and accepting the efficacy of natural selection as the sole mechanism behind all species history. There is, in other words, a significant disconnect between a concrete understanding of species difference and an abstract knowledge of species change. Making this connection obliges not only a renewed attention to organic detail but also the capacity to recreate and reconfigure these details in the imagination. Darwin models this capacity through the use of thought experiments throughout The Origin. These imaginative experiments, which Darwin supplies in place of direct evidence of descent by selection, create pictures of natural selection in action. They materialize, in this way, the operations of mind that Darwin had to undertake to develop his theory of species change.

They also exhibit the kind of imaginative extrapolation that the mixed discourse of The Origin invites even when no thought experiment is provided. Throughout the text, Darwin's use of factual example serves to break up his scientific argument, prompting the reader to consider organic change in the concrete. These examples invite the reader to visualize how familiar aspects of organic life might have been (or might be) effected by the mechanism of natural selection. These visualizations, like Darwin's thought experiments, have the potential to test the

strength of both the theory of descent by selection and competing theories of "special creation." Seen in this light, every example in The Origin is an opportunity to practice the kind of independent, imaginative thinking necessary for all future scientific work on the origin of species.

3.1 INDUCTION AND THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

Studying the role of factual description in The Origin, we see that the text is a subtle negotiation of Victorian standards of scientific methodology—a mediation between the strict inductivism that Darwin's readers expected and the imaginative speculation that his study of organic history required. We can pinpoint several different expectations of empiricism that a Victorian reader may have brought to The Origin. The first is a general expectation of naïve empiricism that had become commonplace in popular scientific writing, and that was supported by a preference for realist representation in broader Victorian culture, in both literature and the visual arts.[55] The second is a requisite assurance that scientific theories have been developed inductively without any "flights of speculation," a requirement that was softened later in the Victorian period. The third is the requirement that scientific arguments demonstrate inductive proof. As we will see, Darwin's use of factual example in The Origin appeals to the first two standards: to both the general reader's expectation of naïve empiricism and the specialist reader's

[55] See Chapter One of this dissertation for a discussion of Victorian literary critical standards of realism. See also the first and second chapters of George Levine's Darwin and the Novelists for an overview of the relationship between literary realism and scientific empiricism in the Victorian period. Levine, Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction.

requirement of an inductive method of discovery. While he could not fulfill the standard of inductive certainty demanded by many of his professional readers, Darwin's depiction of factual detail in The Origin is integral to his demonstration of the "explanatory potential" of natural selection—which is the strongest inductive proof Darwin can provide in The Origin.

The Origin was written just at the moment when the standards of empirical method or induction were being newly articulated by British philosophers of science. Beginning with John Herschel's Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy (1830), a group of Victorian thinkers became occupied with the problem of scientific method, returning to the questions of empirical methodology that originated in Francis Bacon's Novum Organum and seeking to better articulate the methods Newton had used to develop his theory of universal gravitation. In the years Darwin was working on the problem of species change, the so-called "induction debates" between William Whewell and John Stuart Mill brought the topic of scientific method to the forefront of scientific discussion. These published disagreements over the nature of the inductive method were widely read. Whewell's argument for an intuitive system of inductive science in The Philosophy of Inductive Sciences, as Founded upon their History (1840) and Mill's massive treatise on scientific logic System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive (1843) went through multiple editions in the 1840s and 1850s.[56] At the center of Herschel, Whewell, and Mill's examinations of scientific method were questions about the relationship between fact and theory in the scientific enterprise, and the role of speculation in the

[56] Recent studies by Laura J. Snyder have given these debates thorough examination. See Laura J. Snyder, Reforming Philosophy: A Victorian Debate on Science and Society (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006). Laura J. Snyder, "The Mill-Whewell Debate: Much Ado About Induction," Perspectives on Science 5, no. 2 (1997). Laura Snyder, "It's All Necessarily So: William Whewell on Scientific Truth," Studies in History and Philosophy of Science 25, no. 5 (1994).

generation and presentation of new scientific knowledge. Although each of these thinkers recognized the role of speculation in the actual practices of science, all agreed that certain knowledge was best obtained by adhering to the inductive method and avoiding more deductive methods. This was the way, they agreed, to bring the successes of the physical sciences to the "younger" natural sciences.

The initial reception of The Origin was significantly shaped by these newly articulated standards of scientific method. The term "induction" was used in one of two ways in the early reviews of The Origin: [57] to describe the proper process of discovery in scientific practice and/or a method of presenting proof in a scientific argument. Darwin insisted on his adherence to an inductive method of discovery throughout his published works. In his Autobiography he asserts that he had developed his theory of species change by working "on true Baconian principles and without any theory collected the facts on a wholesale scale"[58] In the opening paragraph of the "Introduction" to The Origin, Darwin sketches the history of his species studies with the

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[57] Many reviewers faulted The Origin for not being "inductive enough." See especially two early reviews of The Origin in 1860, written by two of Darwin's most severe critics: "Objections to Mr. Darwin's Theory of the Origin of Species" written by Adam Sedgwick for The Spectator, and "Darwin on the Origin of Species," written by Richard Owen for the Edinburgh Review. Both reviews were published anonymously. See Hull for these reviews and Darwin's responses to Sedgwick and Owen's critiques. Hull, Darwin and His Critics, 155-70, 71-215.

[58] Darwin says in his Autobiography: "After my return to England it appeared to me that by following the example of Lyell in Geology, and by collecting all facts which bore in any way on the variation of animals and plants under domestication and nature, some light might perhaps be thrown on the whole subject. My first note-book was opened in July 1837. I worked on true Baconian principles, and without any theory collected facts on a wholesale scale, more especially with respect to domesticated productions, by printed enquiries, by conversation with skillful breeders and gardeners, and by extensive reading." Charles Darwin, The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809-1882 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1993).

assurance that he had developed his theory of natural selection through a long and careful process of induction:

> When on board H.M.S. "Beagle," as naturalist, I was much struck with certain facts in the distribution of the inhabitants of South America, and in the geological relations of the present to the past inhabitants of that continent. These facts seemed to me to throw some light on the origin of species—that mystery of mysteries, as it has been called by one of our greatest philosophers. On my return home, it occurred to me, in 1837, that something might perhaps be made out on this question by patiently accumulating and reflecting on all sorts of facts which could possibly have any bearing on it. After five years' work I allowed myself to speculate on the subject, and drew up some short notes; these I enlarged in 1844 into a sketch of the conclusions, which then seemed to me probable: from that period to the present day I have steadily pursued the same object.[59]

This examination started, as Darwin portrays it, merely with a "striking" impression of certain facts of geographical distribution in South America. These facts appeared to "throw some light" upon the question of how species originate, not the other way around. Darwin's initial years of study consisted in gathering as many facts related to this problem as he could, reflecting upon

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[59] Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species by Mean of Natural Selection: A Facsimile of the First Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1. Hereafter cited as OS.

each in turn but not allowing himself to "speculate" in a theoretical way until he had completed five years work. The question that Darwin allowed himself to ask at this point in his studies was "What theory of species origins can adequately explain all of these difficult and various facts?" It was not, Darwin promises, "What facts can I gather to provide evidence for my theory?"

Darwin was less assured regarding his critics' second requirement of inductive proof. On the one hand, some of Darwin's most combative critics (such as Adam Sedgwick and Richard Owen) required a level of proof now understood to be impossible in the historical sciences. The Origin helped to show that this standard of inductive certainty (for instance as it is understood by John Stuart Mill in his Logic) is untenable in the study of organic life—because it is underwritten by an epistemology of natural Kinds. Arguing in The Origin that species are historical entities, Darwin could not satisfy critics like Sedgwick and Owen who believed that species were fixed and "real" (in the sense of corresponding to natural Kinds). The Origin is devoted, after all, to showing how an essentialist interpretation of organic life (which underwrote theories of "special creation") is insufficient to explain the many and diverse facts of nature.[60]

On the other hand, even readers inclined to consider the possibility of species change questioned the strength of Darwin's inductive proof in The Origin, because Darwin had not

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[60] When Victorian scientists approached the subject of the origin of species, which they were often loath to do, the leading theory was one of "special creation," or the idea that every living species was created individually by God (or by some unknown process). The idea of special creation was not confined to the work of natural theologists such as Adam Sedgwick or William Buckland; Charles Lyell, too, speculated in the first edition of his Principles that each species had been specially created at intermittent periods over the course of the earth's history. See the second volume of Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology, especially Chapter Eight. Sir Charles Lyell, Principles of Geology: Volume II (New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1969).

provided direct evidence of the process of natural selection in action.[61] What Darwin does offer, in place of this direct evidence, is what philosophers of science call The Origin's "short" and "long" arguments. These arguments work together to show: first, that natural selection operates in nature, given the laws of variation, inheritance, and struggle for existence (which is the argument of the first four chapters); and second, that natural selection is sufficient to explain the many and diverse facts of organic history, including the origination of new species (which is the argument of chapters five through fourteen).[62] This reading is consistent with Darwin's own estimation of the scientific argument he was attempting to make in The Origin, which sought to "establish a point as a probability by induction and to apply it as hypothesis to other parts and see whether it will solve them."[63]

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[61] Using the standard of inductive proof articulated by John Herschel in his Preliminary Discourse, there was a legitimate question as to whether Darwin's theory of natural selection had met the criteria for a "vera causa." For Herschel, this is a cause that has a real existence in nature and that is adequate to the phenomena that it explains. There is a discussion of whether The Origin meets these criteria in James Lennox, "Darwin's Methodological Evolution," Journal of the History of Biology 38 (2005): 85-99.

[62] The exact nature of these arguments (how they fit within Victorian definitions of deduction and induction, as well as how they might be described in twenty-first-century scientific terms) is still an active subject of debate. See especially Richard A. Richards, "Darwin and the Inefficacy of Artificial Selection," Philosophy of Science (1990). Matt Sintonen, "Discussion: Darwin's Long and Short Argument," Philosophy of Science (1990). However, for the purposes of this Chapter, I will assume that the first four chapters of The Origin make a "short" inductive argument by inference that natural selection exists in nature, and then the remaining chapters of The Origin make a "long" inductive argument that the principle of natural selection sufficiently explains the many and diverse facts of organic history.

[63] Gavin de Beer, Charles Darwin: A Scientific Biography (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), 142.

Although the standard of increased probability was not sufficient proof for many of Darwin's critics, [64] his supporters described the strength of The Origin in terms of its explanatory potential, or capacity to account for the many and diverse facts of organic life. For Thomas Henry Huxley and Charles Lyell, for instance, the probability that natural selection operates in the ways that Darwin says it does increased with every group of facts this theory explained. Noting the two parts of Darwin's argument, Huxley asserts in On the Relations of Man to the Lower Animals (1863) that "it cannot be doubted, I think, that Mr. Darwin has satisfactorily proved that what he terms selection, or selective modification, must occur, and does occur, in nature; and he has also proved to superfluity that such selection is competent to produce forms as distinct structurally, as some genera even are." Huxley references, in this way, Darwin's "long" and "short" arguments in The Origin, asserting that Darwin has proven, first, that natural selection occurs in nature and, second, that his theory of descent by selection is sufficient to explain the diversity of species found in the organic world.

Huxley continues: "Now, Mr. Darwin's hypothesis is not, so far as I am aware, inconsistent with any known biological fact; on the contrary, if admitted, the facts of Development, of Comparative Anatomy, of Geographical Distribution, and of Paleontology, became connected together, and exhibit a meaning such as they never possessed before; and I, for one, am fully convinced, that if not precisely true, that hypothesis is as near an approximation

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[64] As reception studies of The Origin show, this point was debated throughout the nineteenth century into the twentieth century. See Alvar Ellegard, Darwin and the General Reader; the Reception of Darwin's Theory of Evolution in the British Periodical Press, 1859-1872 (Gothenburg, 1958). Ernst Mayr, One Long Argument: Charles Darwin and the Genesis of Modern Evolutionary Thought (New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1991). Peter J. Bowler, Charles Darwin: The Man and His Influence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Michael Ruse, The Darwinian Revolution: Science Red in Tooth and Claw (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999).

to the truth as, for example, the Copernican hypothesis was to the true theory of the planetary motions."[65] Here Huxley describes the explanatory power of Darwin's theory: its capacity to bring together under one overarching explanation the facts of all the different disciplines of organic study. Lyell, too, finally gave reluctant approval to Darwin's theory of natural selection in the 1867 edition of Principles of Geology, allowing that "if we assume this principle, much light is thrown on many very distinct and otherwise unconnected classes of phenomenon, both in the present condition and past history of the organic world."[66] Again, for Lyell, Darwin's achievement in The Origin is the way his argument is able to bring together so many previously unrelated classes of facts.

3.2 THE FAMILIAR EXAMPLE

Many, if not most, of the examples used by Darwin would have been familiar to both the specialist and non-specialist reader. Domestic breeds and wild species local to the British Isles make up the majority of Darwin's evidence, while many instances taken from the British colonies would not have been wholly new to the reading public. In this way, given the variety and number of examples, it is easy to imagine that most of Darwin's readers would have had second-hand knowledge of most examples, and personal experience with at least one or two.

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[65] Philip Appleman, ed., Darwin: Texts, Commentary (New York: Norton, 2001), 284-85.

[66] Ibid., 287.

Even the most casual reader, for instance, would know something of the different breeds of dogs or of the behavior of honey bees.[67]

The sheer number of examples of The Origin has, in this way, a kind of democratizing effect in the text—offering different points of entry for different readers. This is certainly the case for the popular reader, given Darwin's frequent use of local examples. But even for a specialist reader, the copious details of The Origin broaden its accessibility across scientific disciplines. In The Origin, Darwin speaks to thinkers across many and different fields, making easy reference to the authorities, central works, and key terms in each area of study.[68] Its chapters move nimbly from one scientific discipline to another, switching from comparative anatomy to embryology, from geology to geography. By analogy, Darwin even brings in some of the social and human sciences, referencing the study of human population and the history of languages. He also makes note of many practical sciences, including animal husbandry and farming.

In Chapter One on domestic variation, local and familiar knowledge gives independence to the facts Darwin relates, especially for the non-specialist, because readers can confirm what Darwin is telling them by referring to their own experience. For the professional reader, the facts of domestic breeding would have been familiar, but most likely not a part of their own research.

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[67] Considering the heuristic value of the analogy Darwin draws between artificial selection and natural selection, Richard A. Richards discusses the importance of familiar ideas and imagery in scientific arguments. Richards, "Darwin and the Inefficacy of Artificial Selection," 97.

[68] This is an aspect of Darwin's capacity to think and write as a "generalist" that has been noted by several historians and philosophers of science. This is a special focus of Janet Brown's two volume biography of Darwin, which draws extensively from Darwin's correspondence. See Janet Brown, Charles Darwin: Voyaging (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Janet Brown, Charles Darwin: The Power of Place (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

In this way, Darwin could assume that the majority of his audience had familiarity but not expertise with the subject Darwin chooses to open The Origin—which has clear advantages for the performance of his argument in this first chapter. His readers having a little bit of knowledge on the subject, but not too much, Darwin has the freedom to reintroduce this part of the natural world with a heightened attention to the slight differences within and among breeds. The reader does not need to recognize the importance of these small organic "exceptions" for Darwin's theory of descent by selection at this point in The Origin. Darwin's priority in Chapters One through Three is not to convince his readers of the efficacy of natural selection but to encourage the capacities of mind they will need to understand how natural selection works—as it is described in The Origin and as it currently operates in nature. The reader is better off, in this way, if they maintain a certain independence from any theoretical interpretation of the facts being presented and focus, instead, upon organic life at the level of concrete appearance and behavior.

In Chapter One, "Variation under Domestication," Darwin introduces the example of the domestic pigeon, initially to show the amount of variation seen in domestic breeding (which is a step towards establishing the first two laws upon which his theory of natural selection depends: the law of variation and the law of inheritance). Darwin explains in this chapter that "Believing that it is always best to study some special group, I have, after deliberation, taken up domestic pigeons. I have kept every breed which I could purchase or obtain, and have been most kindly favoured with skins from several quarters of the world…Many treatises in different languages have been published on pigeons, and some of them are very important, as being of considerable antiquity. I have associated with several eminent fanciers, and have been permitted to join two

of the London Pigeon Clubs."[69] Darwin asserts a familiarity with the facts of the domestic pigeon on multiple levels: he has personal experience not only in observing the many varieties of pigeons but in keeping them himself, having made an effort to obtain as many breeds as possible; for those breeds he could not obtain live, he has collected skins from all over the world; he has read widely on the subject, including ancient texts that tell something of the history of the breed; finally, he has sought the expertise of current authorities on pigeons and pigeon breeding, not only as a scientist seeking specialized knowledge but also as an amateur fancier himself.

But after taking time to state these qualifications, Darwin devotes the next six pages of Chapter One to describing the domestic pigeon from the perspective of a fascinated but naive observer. He first compares the English carrier and short-faced tumbler:

> The diversity of breeds is something astonishing. Compare the English carrier and the short-faced tumbler, and see the wonderful difference in their beaks, entailing corresponding differences in their skulls. The carrier, more especially the male bird, is also remarkable from the wonderful development of the carunculated skin about the head, and this is accompanied by greatly elongated eyelids, very large external orifices to the nostrils, and a wide gape of mouth. The short-faced tumbler has a beak in outline almost like that of a finch; and the common tumbler has the singular and

[69] OS, 20-21.

> strictly inherited habit of flying at a great height in a compact flock, and tumbling in the air head over heals.[70]

These descriptions evoke such a different readerly experience than what has come before in The Origin that they create a distinct pause in the pace of Chapter One. They are more engaging to the ear and more captivating to the eye. Adopting a more essayistic tone, Darwin's syntax in these passages is looser and his language more playful: he uses alliteration ("elongated eyelids" and "singular and strictly") and striking word choices (such as "carunculated," which means having a wrinkled overgrowth of skin). With this language, Darwin's pigeon descriptions read more like portraits or character studies than scientific descriptions. They are imaginative—creating pictures in the mind that the reader is apt to dwell upon, even to embellish. In this we take our cue from Darwin himself, who is more of a wonderer in this passage than an observer. Notice how many words he uses in this short passage to express his amazement over the differences seen among domestic pigeon breeds: the diversity is "astonishing," there are "wonderful" differences in the carrier and tumbler's beaks, the carrier has "remarkable" and "wonderful" characteristics, and the tumbler has a "singular" habit of flying. Each breed is peculiar, in the sense of being both strange and highly distinct: like Darwin, the reader is first captivated by their oddity, becoming attuned to the qualities that distinguish one breed from another in the process.

Darwin continues with his comparative descriptions in the passages that follow, detailing the external differences and similarities seen among several other breeds of pigeon: the runt, the barb, the turbit, the Jacobin, the trumpeter, the laugher, and the fantail. He then proceeds to describe the many kinds of skeleton seen among the various breeds, noting the size and shape of

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[70] OS, 21.

bones and their function. We learn all this before we get to Darwin's central point about the pigeon, which is the analogy he wants to draw between the breeds of the domestic pigeon and the species and varieties of the wild pigeon (an important part of the larger analogy being drawn in the first four chapters between artificial selection and natural selection). This is characteristic of Darwin's use of factual example in The Origin, in that he frontloads the details of the domestic pigeon and backloads their relevance to his argument. Indeed, there has been only one passing mention of natural selection at this point in the work; we may say at this moment in The Origin that the reader knows considerably more about domestic pigeons than the theory of natural selection. In this sense, fact appears relatively independent from theory in these early passages, the reader being free to interpret the facts of the domestic pigeon in whatever way they see fit. However, these lengthy descriptions of the domestic pigeon are preparatory to the articulation of Darwin's theory. This is because they encourage the reader to attend to organic difference in ways that are crucial to an understanding of the mechanism of natural selection—and in ways that enlighten the weakness of alternative theories of "special creation."

Darwin's treatment of the pigeon does not end in Chapter One: being brought into almost every chapter of The Origin, Darwin mentions his favorite example nearly fifty times over the course of the work. For instance, in his discussion of natural selection in the wild in Chapter Four, he argues that the color of certain wild breeds of pigeon have been subject to selection; in the same chapter, Darwin returns to the example of the domestic pigeon to explain his principle of divergence and its role in the creation of distinct species (or breeding groups) in the wild. In Chapter Five, Darwin mentions the pigeon in his discussion of the unknown laws of correlation of growth, which must explain features like the "feathered feet and skin between the outer toes in

pigeons."[71] In Chapter Seven on the natural selection of instinct, Darwin employs the example of the pigeon while arguing that some of the most distinctive animal behavior, such as the "tumbling" flying of the tumbler, might have developed over the course of many generations through natural selection. In his interpretation of the geological record in Chapter Nine, Darwin uses the illustration of the rock-pigeon to discuss the problem of intermediate forms; in Chapter Eleven, he suggests the influence of birds, specifically the pigeon, in the geographical dispersal of plants.

Tracing Darwin's special example of the pigeon over the course of The Origin enlightens how this species easily becomes a special example of the reader as well—serving as a familiar touchstone in the midst of long (and sometimes dull) passages on species extinction or embryology. Most often Darwin mentions the pigeon in incidental ways, as an additional illustration of how an individual might inherit a slight variation or as a brief demonstration of how natural selection within one species can explain inconsistencies in the geological record. With these examples creating pauses in Darwin's argument, the reader is called to remember what they have already learned about domestic and wild pigeons—and to consider the theory of descent by selection in light of these concrete facts. We might even call these pauses an invitation to put the text down in order to imagine exactly how these facts might have resulted from the operation of natural selection. [72]

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[71] OS, 114.

[72] Indeed, the reader might use this familiar example to test different aspects of Darwin's theory even when the pigeon is not being directly referenced.

3.3 HABITS OF MIND

We begin to see how Darwin reintroduces his readers to the facts of organic life in order to encourage an independent evaluation of the different aspects of his theory of descent by selection. But certain patterns of mind are apt to stand in the way of this evaluation—especially those that uphold the fixed and unchanging status of species. In Chapter One, after Darwin has discussed his view that all breeds of domestic pigeon have descended from the wild species the rock-pigeon, he explains why he chose the pigeon as his special study:

> I have discussed the probable origin of domestic pigeons at some, yet quite insufficient, length; because when I first kept pigeons and watched the several kinds, knowing well how true they bred, I felt fully as much difficulty in believing that they could ever have descended from a common parent, as any naturalist could in coming to a similar conclusion in regard to the many species of finches, or other large groups of birds, in nature. One circumstance has struck me much; namely, that all the breeders of the various domestic animals and cultivators of plants, with whom I have ever conversed, or whose treatises I have read, are fully convinced that the several breeds to which each has attended, are descended from so many aboriginally distinct species. Ask, as I have asked, a celebrated raiser of Hereford cattle, whether his

> cattle might not have descended from long-horns, and he will laugh you to scorn...[73]

Characteristically, Darwin allies himself first with the dominant view (the idea that all domestic breeds have a counterpart in the wild) and then narrates the process by which he has changed his mind. When he first began to study pigeons, Darwin tells us, he was no different from most breeders; he was so struck by the distinct character of each breed that the possibility of their being descended from a common ancestor seemed impossible. Here he compares his initial conclusion regarding the different breeds of domestic pigeon to the conclusions of naturalists studying separate species of birds in the wild. Their mistake, he hints, is the same as the breeder's.

Darwin offers an explanation for this insistence upon the fixity of breeds that draws further similarities between breeders and naturalists. It is no wonder, Darwin suggests, that the naturalist, who does not have a breeder's specialized knowledge of inheritance, does not see the probability that all the different breeds of domestic pigeon have descended from the same parents—or that two different species of wild bird have an ancestor in common. But why does the breeder not see this probability? The explanation, Darwin asserts,

> is simple: from long-continued study they are strongly impressed with the differences between the several races; and though they well know that each race varies slightly, for they win their prizes by selecting such slight differences, yet they ignore all general arguments, and refuse to sum up in their minds slight differences accumulated during many successive generations. May not those

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[73] OS, 28-29.

> naturalists who, knowing far less of the laws of inheritance than does the breeder, and knowing no more than he does of the intermediate links in the long lines of descent, yet admit that many of our domestic races have descended from the same parents—may they not learn a lesson of caution, when they deride the idea of species in a state of nature being lineal descendants of other species?[74]

The problem, according to Darwin, is that breeders think only about the present state of each breed, disregarding the historical significance of small differences within breeds—despite their careful attention to these same slight variations when selecting individuals to reproduce. So powerful are the habits of mind that regard the organic world as a fixed natural order that even the breeder, who knows best the potential plasticity of domestic breeds, is prevented from seeing the possibility of common descent. Local and practical knowledge, in this way, is oddly divorced from broader systematic understanding; where the pigeon breeder has the benefit of specialized knowledge, his narrowness of focus prevents him from seeing that his knowledge of domestic varieties might be the starting point for a new theory of organic change.[75]

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[74] OS, 29.

[75] The naturalist too can suffer from an analogous narrowness of focus, as Darwin makes clear in Chapter Two: "When young naturalist commences the study of a group of organisms quite unknown to him, he is at first much perplexed to determine what differences to consider as specific, and what as varieties; for he knows nothing of the amount and kind of variation to which the group is subject; and this shows, at least, how very generally there is some variation. But if he confines his attention to one class within one country, he will soon make up his mind how to rank most of the doubtful forms. His general tendency will be to make many species, for he will become impressed, just like the pigeon or poultry-fancier before alluded to, with the amount of difference in the forms which he is continually studying and he has little general knowledge of analogical variation

3.4 IMAGINARY ILLUSTRATIONS

The majority of readers of The Origin were in the same state as the pigeon fancier, unable to recognize how the small differences seen within and among species might "sum up" over time, creating a new species or variety. While the opening chapters of the work prompt the reader to give greater attention to the slight irregularities of organic life, there remains a distance between acknowledging the reality of organic "exception" and accepting the efficacy of natural selection. Needing the reader to see what these breeders have not, but having no direct evidence of natural selection currently in action, Darwin uses thought experiments to create pictures of what organic irregularities might become given the right circumstances and enough time. In these thought experiments, Darwin recreates the details of organic life in his mind's eye, thinking both backwards and forwards in time to visualize how natural selection has acted in the past, is acting in the present, and could act in the future.

A term used by modern philosophers and historians of science, thought experiments work similarly to real-life experiments except that they are performed in the mind. In the most basic sense, they posit a set of hypothetical conditions and then visualize their effects in the imagination. But Darwin's thought experiments in The Origin function differently than, for instance, Newtonian thought experiments. According to James Lennox, Darwinian thought experiments are "(a) tests of a theory's explanatory potential which, (b) posit hypothetical or counterfactual test conditions and (c) invoke particulars which are irrelevant to the generality of the theory, and which (d) are selected to instantiate features of the theory under special

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in other groups and in other countries, by which to correct his first impressions." OS, 50-51.

consideration."[76] Lennox asserts that in order to constitute support for a theory, a thought experiment must have three features: its objects and processes must be concrete, its illustrations must be plausible, and the relation of the concretes to the abstract terms of the theory must be clear. Concreteness gives imaginary illustrations their feeling of experimentation, an "experiment" involving the manipulation and observation of concrete objects and processes. Plausibility provides the assurance that familiar objects are doing things we expect them to do under realistic conditions. Finally, the theory (or part of the theory) being tested must be instantiated in the concrete illustration, so that we can see, for instance, what the struggle for existence might look like in a specific geographical location or how natural selection may have worked upon an individual of a specific species.[77]

Thought experiments in The Origin all function in roughly the same way: positing a set of circumstances and consequences, they seek to exhibit the ability of Darwin's theory to account for the known facts of organic history. They aim to show, in this way, what is impossible through traditional observation and experiment, namely, how natural selection actually acts (or might act) upon individuals and species in a particular geographical area at a given time in organic history.[78] In Chapter Four, Darwin moves to show how species variation, inheritance, and the struggle for existence act together to make natural selection possible.

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[76] James Lennox, "Darwinian Thought Experiments: A Function for Just-So Stories," in Thought Experiments in Science and Philosophy (Savage: Roman and Littlefield, 1991), 236.

[77] Ibid., 229-30.

[78] In the Principles of Geology, Charles Lyell also employs thought experiments to test the explanatory potential of his geological theory of uniformity when observation or experiment was impossible. This connection is discussed in Ibid., 224-25.

Because he has no direct evidence of this process in the present and only indirect evidence in the geological record, he has to employ thought experiments to show that natural selection can work in the way he says it does. Darwin begins by visualizing the probable actions of natural selection upon a population of wolves:

> In order to make it clear how, as I believe, natural selection acts, I must beg permission to give one or two imaginary illustrations. Let us take the case of a wolf, which preys on various animals, securing some by craft, some by strength, and some by fleetness; and let us suppose that the fleetest prey, a deer for instance, had from any change in the country increased in numbers, or that other prey had decreased in numbers, during that season of the year when the wolf is hardest pressed for food. I can under such circumstances see no reason to doubt that the swiftest and slimmest wolves would have the best chance of surviving, and so be preserved or selected,—provided always that they retained strength to master their prey at this or at some other period of the year, when they might be compelled to prey on other animals.[79]

This imaginary illustration asks the reader to hold several things in mind: the basic facts of wolves and their behavior, the basic facts of wolves' prey, as well as the laws of variation, inheritance, and struggle for existence that Darwin has set forth in the first three chapters of The Origin. In this passage, Darwin is merely asking his readers to recognize the following probability: given the fact that species vary and these variations are often inherited, and given the

[79] OS, 90.

"competition" among species and individuals of species for survival, a wolf with some advantageous difference from its fellow wolves (like increased speed or better agility) would be more likely to catch its prey (here, a deer) and thus would be more likely to survive and reproduce.

Darwin continues, asking his reader to think about the generational effects of natural selection's preservation of individual wolves:

> Even without any change in the proportional numbers of the animals on which our wolf preyed, a cub might be born with an innate tendency to pursue certain kinds of prey…Now, if any slight innate change of habit or of structure benefited an individual wolf, it would have the best chance of surviving and leaving offspring. Some of its young would probably inherit the same habits or structure, and by the repetition of this process, a new variety might be formed which would either supplant or coexist with the parent-form of wolf. Or, again, the wolves inhabiting a mountainous district, and those frequenting the lowlands, would naturally be forced to hunt different prey; and from the continued preservation of the individuals best fitted for the two sites, two varieties might slowly be formed.[80]

What this thought experiment adds to the first is a picture of natural selection operating not only upon individuals but also populations (here, breeding communities of wolves). This imaginary illustration explicitly links the hypothesized preservation of a single wolf with greater speed and

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[80] OS, 91.

agility and the known facts of existing species and varieties of wolves. Beginning with a slight advantage in an individual wolf, Darwin asks the reader to imagine all that must happen between this one instance of preservation in the past and the current state of this species in the present. We can see, then, how these thought experiments fulfill Lennox's requirements: the objects and processes are concrete (we can visualize the wolf, the deer, the mountain district, the lowlands; the struggle for food); the illustrations are plausible (the wolves behave in ways we expect them to); and there is a clear relationship between these objects and the theory being tested (natural selection). They are tests of the explanatory power of the theory of descent by selection, exhibiting in what ways the mechanism of natural selection can adequately explain all the many and distinct species of wolf that currently exist.

Darwin's thought experiments in The Origin cannot, of course, demonstrate with certainty the effects of natural selection in any given case. As Darwin carefully explains, these effects depend upon the laws of variation, inheritance, and struggle for existence, but we can only speculate what these effects have looked like in the past or will look like in the future. We can only decide, with some certainty, that nature "selected" one variation over another in any given instance well after the fact. There is no way, Darwin stresses, to know exactly how natural selection will act in the future. However, it is possible to better equip ourselves to recognize the operations of natural selection currently in action: by bringing both our attention and imagination to bear upon the small irregularities or "exceptions" of organic life.

3.5 THE INDEPENDENT LIFE OF FACT

Darwin's thought experiments, many of which come early in The Origin, serve to prepare the reader for the kind of imaginative work invited throughout the text—even when no thought experiment is provided. We have already seen how this might work with the often-cited pigeon example in The Origin. But every time Darwin interrupts his argument to provide yet another example is an opportunity for the reader to contemplate his theoretical argument in the concrete. For instance, when Darwin mentions the woodpecker of La Plata in his discussion of transitional habits and structures in Chapter Six, the reader wonders with Darwin over the possibility of a member of the woodpecker species that never climbs trees—and perhaps pauses to imagine what series of natural events could bring about this peculiar difference.[81] In Chapter Twelve on geographical distribution, Darwin sets out to answer how it is possible that species of fresh water mollusks have such a wide geographical range if they are descended from a single source. He relates a brief experiment in which he suspended a duck's feet in an aquarium full of the ova of fresh-water mollusks, and found that "numbers of the extremely minute and just hatched shells crawled on the feet, and clung to them so firmly that when taken out of the water they could not be jarred off, though at a somewhat more advanced age they would voluntarily drop off."[82] Holding all the details of this real life experiment in mind, the reader has the opportunity to imagine how this species of mollusk developed the ability to attach to the feet of ducks by mean of natural selection, this adaptation allowing some shells to travel a great distance away from other members of its species.

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[81] OS, 184.

[82] OS, 385.

If every factual example in The Origin is an invitation to test Darwin's theory of descent by selection in the imagination, this kind of independent evaluation is especially important in sections where Darwin shows how natural selection can account for the most difficult or extraordinary aspects of organic life: for instance, the complexity of the human eye or the strange and wonderful instincts of the "slave-making" ant and the honeybee. In Chapter Seven, which focuses on the problem of instinct, Darwin takes the slave-making instinct of ants as a special study. He begins this topic characteristically, stressing his own "wondering" skepticism about this strange behavior. In a series of lengthy stories, Darwin's relates his own observations and experiments with various species of ants. He tells us: "I tried to approach the subject in a sceptical frame of mind, as any one may well be excused for doubting the truth of so extraordinary and odious an instinct as that of making slaves. Hence I will give the observations which I have myself made, in some little detail. I opened fourteen nests of F. sanguinea, and found a few slaves in all." What follows are a series of highly detailed narratives recounting Darwin's observations, a section of which I excerpt here:

> One day I fortunately chanced to witness a migration from one nest to another, and it was a most interesting spectacle to behold the masters carefully carrying, as Huber has described, their slaves in their jaws. Another day my attention was struck by about a score of the slave-makers haunting the same spot, and evidently not in search of food; they approached and were vigorously repulsed by an independent community of the slave species (F. fusca); sometimes as many as three of these ants clinging to the legs of the slave-making F. sanguinea. The latter ruthlessly killed their small

> opponents, and carried their dead bodies as food to their nest, twenty-nine yards distant; but they were prevented from getting any pupae to rear as slaves. I then dug up a small parcel of the pupae of F. fusca from another nest, and put them down on a bare spot near the place of combat; they were eagerly seized, and carried off by the tyrants, who perhaps fancied that, after all, they had been victorious in their late combat.[83]

These are dramatic little scenes that have concreteness of visual detail and vividness of action. They are captivating, in the fullest sense of that word, in that they hold the reader's attention at the level of concrete and local actions. The reader is not thinking, necessarily, about the mechanism of natural selection during these scenes, and yet this story has a clear purpose in a chapter that seeks to show how the most complex instincts can be explained by natural selection. In this section, the reader is allied with Darwin, who portrays himself as both a skeptical and "chance" observer of these ants. The living facts of these ants—the "spectacle" of an ant migration and a skirmish between two species—are what capture Darwin's attention and prompt him to explain their behavior through natural selection, rather than the other way around. That is, at the start of this passage, Darwin is not out looking for some instances of ant behavior that can be happily explained by his theory of species change. (At least, this is not how Darwin portrays it.) Halfway through the second scene, this story of casual observation suddenly becomes something more like demonstration, as Darwin begins to interfere with the ants by way of experiment. This experiment is the first link between the details of these stories and the larger

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[83] OS, 221.

aim of the chapter, which is to show how even the most unusual or specialized instincts can be explained by natural selection.

But it is not until the very end of the section on the slave-making ant, after four pages of ant stories, that Darwin spells out exactly how natural selection might have preserved this instinct for gathering the pupae of other species to raise as slaves. He does this with a thought experiment that creates a picture of natural selection in action—by means of imaginative extrapolation from the known facts of the F. sanguinea. He assures the reader that

> By what steps the instinct of F. sanguinea originated I will not pretend to conjecture. But as ants, which are not slave-making, will, as I have seen, carry off pupae of other species, if scattered near their nests, it is possible that pupae originally stored as food might become developed; and the ants thus unintentionally reared would then follow their proper instincts, and do what work they could. If their presence proved useful to the species which had seized them—if it were more advantageous to this species to capture workers than to procreate them—the habit of collecting pupae originally for food might by natural selection be strengthened and rendered permanent for the very different purpose of raising slaves.[84]

As he has detailed in the story quoted above, Darwin has direct evidence that the F. sanguinea species will carry off the pupae of other species in order to raise them as slaves. But he does not have direct proof that this species, at some point in its distant past, brought the pupae of another

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[84] OS, 223-224.

species back to its nest and stored it as food. He needs to use his knowledge of other ant species (that are not slaving-making) to create an imaginary scenario that visualizes what might have happened if the pupae of a foreign species, stolen for food, had developed and proved "useful" to the F. sanguinea species. Like Darwin's other thought experiments, this imaginary illustration has concreteness (we can see in our mind's eye the ants and the stolen pupae), plausibility (the ants are behaving in a way that is likely), and a clear connection between its objects and the theory of natural selection (the experiment shows how the raising of slaves might have been naturally "selected" over time).

But what is most significant about this section of Chapter Seven is not that Darwin uses a thought experiment to demonstrate, in lieu of direct evidence, that the slave-making instinct of the F. sanguinea can be explained by the operation of natural selection. It is that this imaginative exercise, coming at the very end of the discussion of the slave-making ant, only serves to materialize the kind of imaginative work that Darwin's ant stories have already invited. As we have seen, Darwin's series of ant descriptions are both separate from and integral to the larger argument of The Origin. Easily excerpted from Darwin's theoretical argument, they have a life of their own as narratives. In this way, a reader might even consider them disruptive, because they take us away from the main line of Darwin's theoretical argument in this chapter. But while stories like these in The Origin do not—like Darwin's thought experiments—draw explicit pictures of the operation of natural selection, the pauses they create in Darwin's argument encourage the reader to do imaginative "tests" of their own. In the instance of the slave-making ant, readers already have the same information as Darwin (he has provided all the facts used in his thought experiment in the preceding ant narratives). They need only recreate these facts in

their own minds, connecting them with the theoretical mechanism of natural selection, to make their own pictures of natural selection in action.

There is, of course, the possibility that the reader's own thought experiments might prove counterproductive to Darwin's argument: the reader could decide, for instance, that they have thought of a better interpretation of this instinct or that they have found some difficulty in visualizing how this instinct might have been brought about through natural selection. At the same time, providing the reader opportunities to independently confirm his interpretation of this ant behavior, Darwin strengthens his argument that natural selection can explain even the most difficult and strange aspects of organic life. Moreover, any reader interested in continuing to study the problem of species origins outside of the pages of The Origin will need to be able to do this kind of independent, imaginative testing.

3.6 CONCLUSIONS

Darwin wrote The Origin with the recognition that some scientific problems can only be solved with the right preparation of mind. The problem of the origin of species, in his estimation, required a capacity for critical and historical attentiveness discouraged by established interpretations of organic life. Darwin explains in his Autobiography, that he had followed a "golden rule" in his many years of species study: "that whenever a published fact, a new observation or thought came across me, which was opposed to my general results, to make a memorandum of it without fail and at once: for I had found by experience that such facts and

thoughts were far more apt to escape from the memory than favourable ones."[85] Because the human mind, Darwin suggests, is apt to follow the tracks of habit, the study of the natural world requires a deliberate attunement to facts and ideas that escape serious notice. Only with the continual scrutiny of assumption can we recognize those aspects of the natural world that do not fit within current scientific understanding. This is especially important for the study of historical entities like species, which are constantly varying. In the study of species change, then, this critical scrutiny must be constant and ongoing—the investigation of current organic change obliging a mind that is willing to adjust with every new observation.

The Origin promotes this kind of mind on several levels. Its mixed discourse works against habits of thought by unsettling the reader's relationship to the facts of organic life, continually prompting the reader to see abstract scientific concepts in the concrete. Its vivid and imaginatively drawn depictions of organic difference attune its readers to the exceptions of both the natural world and the scientific enterprise. These exceptions are, as we have seen, central to both Darwin's theory of species change (its mechanism of natural selection preserving "irregularities" beneficial to a species at a given time and location) and the performance of his scientific argument in The Origin (which prompts readers to attend to aspects of organic life that have little or no meaning in established interpretations of organic history). Finally, The Origin's employment of imaginative experimentation cultivates a freedom and flexibility of mind needed for future study of organic change. All of these aspects show how The Origin sets out not only to transform the science of organic life, but also to reform the minds of its readers—to foster the critical and historical attentiveness necessary for understanding life as Darwin depicts it.

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[85] Darwin, The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809-1882, 47.

4.0 CHAPTER THREE: GEORGE ELIOT'S HISTORY OF THE UNHISTORICAL

Writing what I call a "history of the unhistorical," Eliot's fiction offers a way of understanding broad historical events, social and cultural norms, and abstract moral principles in the concrete terms of unexceptional individuals—and a way of seeing historical possibility in the unnoticed details of human life in time. While orthodox history writes an account of the actualities of speech and event, in Eliot's hands, the novel creates a history of the potential by focusing on the small shifts of feeling, perspective, or understanding that make up larger developments of mind. Eliot's fictional histories not only create a record of the unrecorded through imaginative invention; they also invite more reflective and sympathetic attention to aspects of life and mind that are likely to escape our notice—both in the world of the novel and in real life.

Daniel Deronda (1876) is a novel dedicated to creating a history of both the actual and the potential. It is Eliot's most sustained study of mental development, charting the moral reform of its central characters Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth. In Daniel Deronda there is a primacy of internal life over external event: mental conversions can be as revolutionary as war within the parameters of the novel; and it is not external action but small movements of thought and feeling that are the major moving forces of the novel. At the same time, reforms of mind in the novel are not produced apart from experience or living history, but are the result of extensions of sympathy. In Daniel Deronda human thought and affection have the capacity to

transform the small, seemingly useless details of everyday existence into the beginnings of a broadened knowledge of human life and an amplified fellow-feeling for humanity. This is a capacity not only depicted in the characters of Daniel Deronda but also promoted in the reader, the novel's mixed discourse inviting the reader to bring a more noticing, flexible, and sympathetic mind to the contemplation of the details of life in time.

4.1 NATURAL HISTORY OF HUMAN LIFE

Eliot's literary criticism of the 1850s outlines a novelistic project that is brought to fruition in her novels. In her criticism, George Eliot elaborates aims for the realist novel greater than the current state of contemporary fiction, [86] describing the novel's ability to create opportunities for the exercise of sympathy through its imaginative extension of experience. The novel, Eliot asserts, can teach practices of sympathetic attention that have a social benefit beyond the pages of fiction.[87] Such practices are integral to the kind of active and mindful engagement

[86] In promoting such literary realism, Eliot writes in agreement with both her long-time companion George Henry Lewes and her contemporary Henry James, and in disagreement with Victorian champions of the "ideal style" of fiction such as David Masson. See Lewes's 1865 essay in the Fortnightly Review and James' "The Art of Fiction," originally published in 1984. George Henry Lewes, "Criticism in Relation to Novels," in Victorian Fiction: A Collection of Essays from the Period, ed. Bruce Nadel (New York: Garland, 1986), 352-60. Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in The Nineteenth Century Novel: A Critical Reader, ed. Stephen Regan (London: Routledge, 2000), 68-78. See also Masson's 1851 review for the North British Review. David Masson, "Pendennis and Copperfield: Thackeray and Dickens," in Victorian Fiction: A Collection of Essays from the Period, ed. Ira Bruce Nadel (New York: Garland, 1986), 57-89.

[87] In this essay, Eliot affirms one of the central claims of romanticism as it is articulated, for instance, in Wordsworth's "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads. Like romantic poetry, the novel incites a greater sympathy for humankind through the imaginative extension of

with the contemporary moment that is, to use Mill's language, the foundation of liberal democratic culture. In "The Natural History of German Life," a review of the work of German social historian Wilhelm Heinrich von Riehl published in the Westminster Review in July 1856,[88] Eliot describes a project of fictional realism that would define her own career as a novelist.[89] In this essay she imagines the value of a novelistic "natural history" of human life, or a literary representation of human experience that uses some of the methods of the natural sciences.[90] This kind of history would be an alternative to more orthodox histories of English life—for instance, those of Eliot's contemporary Thomas Babington Macaulay. It would not make major figures or historic events its central study; nor would it affirm any idealized view of human life or grand narrative of human history. It would, instead, begin inductively, like the social histories that Mill urges in the sixth book of his Logic, aiming to represent human life in

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experience. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Selected Critical Essays, ed. Thomas M. Raysor (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1958).

[88] Rosemary Ashton discusses this essay and the circumstances of its publication in her biography. Rosemary Ashton, George Eliot: A Life (London: Penguin, 1996), 155-57.

[89] Eliot begins to write fiction herself just a few months later with Scenes of Clerical Life. The term "realism" is one that Eliot first uses in her brief review of the third volume of Ruskin's Modern Painters, published in the April 1856 issue of the Westminster Review. In this piece she explains that "the truth of infinite value that [Ruskin] teaches is realism—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality." George Eliot, George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 248.

[90] In this essay, Eliot uses the term "natural history" to mean empirical description that focuses upon the processes of life at the level of individual, local, and historical detail. In this, we can say that Eliot's employment of this term is more in keeping with the scientific treatises of her contemporaries Charles Lyell or Charles Darwin than to the works of an earlier generation of natural historians, like George Cuvier, that described the natural world as a realization of God's plan.

its local, individual, and historical specificity and to understand broad social categories in terms of these specificities.

It would be, in this sense, a history of the unhistorical: a chronicle of those aspects of life that mean little to social policy or social science—that go unnoticed by British institutions of government or law. In "Natural History," this kind of fictional history provides a window into the everyday details of working class life.[91] In the opening passages of this essay, Eliot calls for more direct empirical knowledge of the working classes and demonstrates the danger of making decisions based upon abstract notions instead of direct experience. Using the example of the word "railways," Eliot highlights the extent to which imaginative generalization dominates the thinking of individuals in everyday society. Just as the term "railways" will call up for an average man more abstract ideas than concrete realities, so too do the words "the people," "the masses," the "proletariat," or "the peasantry" bring to mind almost as little concrete knowledge. Literature, she asserts, is too often to blame for the vague notions that shape current thinking about the lower classes, because its sentimental depictions do not correspond with direct observation.

Even contemporary social novels, which "profess to represent the people as they are," are responsible according to Eliot—with the qualified exception of Charles Dickens. The "unreality of their representations" not only results in poor art but also constitutes a social danger. "The

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[91] When Eliot talks about "social and political reformers" or "policy-makers" in this essay, she means—in particular—those social leaders who represent the interests of the working classes. This might include factory owners, members of parliament from industrial cities and towns, and generally those in the middle class working toward the expansion of political representation. The 1832 Reform Act brought many middle class leaders the vote as well as greater representation in parliament; the 1867 and 1883 Reform acts extended suffrage even further, giving working men the vote.

greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist," says Eliot, "is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment." [92] Here Eliot distinguishes the moral potential of fiction from less accessible forms of knowledge, such as scientific or philosophical writing.[93] But the potential that Eliot locates is not for moral emulation or application, but for the extension of sympathy. [94] Arguments founded upon "generalizations and statistics" require a capacity for sympathy already activated, but "a picture of human life" surprises even the most thoughtless reader into sympathetic attention to what is separate from themselves. This kind of sympathy is the "raw material" of moral feeling, Eliot says, a form of imaginative extension valuable because its starting point is not abstract ideas but

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[92] George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings, ed. A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin, 1990), 110. Abbreviated hereafter as NH.

[93] In this, Eliot affirms one of the earliest articulations of the moral value of the novel by Samuel Johnson. In a 1750 essay for the Rambler, Johnson asserts that this new literary form, which he calls "modern romance," has the capacity to exceed the teachings of religious sermons, philosophical essays, or prescriptive articles: "For this reason these familiar histories may perhaps be made of greater use than the solemnities of professed morality, and convey the knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and definitions." Samuel Johnson, "The Rambler, No. 4," in Selected Writings, ed. Patrick Cruttwell (New York: Penguin, 1968), 151.

[94] In her criticism, Eliot maintains that fiction need not reward goodness or punish evil to have moral value. In a short essay written for the Leader in 1855, "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister," for instance, Eliot gives no credence to "the so-called moral dénouement, in which rewards and punishments are distributed according to those notions of justice on which the novel-writer would have recommended that the world should be governed if he had been consulted at the creation." Eliot, George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings, 130. See also Ashton, George Eliot: A Life, 149.

representations based upon concrete observation. In Eliot's formulation, sympathy has an epistemological role: the surprise of affection for particular human beings pushes experiential knowledge of human life beyond the subjective, creating at the same time a more expansive fellow-feeling for humanity at large.[95]

A fictional natural history, Eliot asserts, sets itself up in competition with other narratives that currently dominate mid-Victorian social policy, such as those offered by political economy, Christianity, or aristocratic ideology:

> Any grand narrative created by the splendid conquests of modern generalization, to believe that all social questions are merged in economic science, and that the relations of men to their neighbors may be settled by algebraic equations,–-the dream that the uncultured classes are prepared for a condition which appeals principally to their moral sensibilities,—the aristocratic dilettantism which attempts to restore the 'good old times' by a sort of idyllic masquerading, and to grow feudal fidelity and veneration as we grow prize turnips, by an artificial system of culture,–-none of these diverging mistakes can co-exist with a real

[95] Sympathy is not, in this way, just a heightened feeling, which merely satisfies the self. It is an extension of mind that sets aside self-concerns in favor of a clearer understanding of human life and a fellow-feeling or benevolence for humanity at large. In this, we see the similarities between Eliot's concept of sympathy and that of Spinoza's. Eliot translated Spinoza's Ethics in 1854-1855; this translation is excerpted in Eliot, George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings, 75-81.

> knowledge of the People, with a thorough study of their habits, their ideas, their motives.[96]

The generalizations of these "grand narratives" reduce the complexity of everyday working class existence because they have more allegiance to their own conventions than to real life. These narratives are, in this way, no better than the idyllic representations of pastoral painting or the sentimental illustrations of current social fiction, which Eliot critiques earlier in the essay. They encourage a certain inattention to the concrete facts of social existence, to the pleasures and pains of actual working people. There is too much that goes unnoticed, in other words, in these summary narratives of human life.

With a realistic representation of the lower classes, Eliot says, "more is done towards linking the higher classes with the lower, towards obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness, than by hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations." Unlike religious or philosophical writing, "art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People."[97] This is especially important for the writer that seeks to depict "the people": if experience is the key to a more informed knowledge of the lower classes, fiction's "amplification" of experience is a way to communicate the material realities of the working classes to the public at large. This is why the novel should not stray into the realm of the ideal: "the thing for mankind to know is, not what are the motives and influences which the moralist thinks ought to act on the labourer or artisan, but

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[96] NH, 112.

[97] NH, 110.

what are the motives and influences that do act on him."[98] Sensational, sentimental, or idealized representations of the working classes offer no social benefit: drawing our attention away from the details of everyday human life, they are unable to provoke the recognition of human commonality that comes from an extension of sympathy.[99]

This is a sentiment repeated in Eliot's first full length novel, Adam Bede, which includes another articulation of the aims of her novelistic project; in Chapter Seventeen, the narrator speaks to an imagined critic of the novel, who recommends a more idealized picture of human life—so that "we shall be able to admire, without the slightest disturbance of our prepossessions..." But, the narrator counters, "these fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people—amongst whom your life is passed—that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire—for whom you should cherish all possible

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[98] NH, 111.

[99] The doctrine of literary realism articulated in this essay is, as Rosemary Ashton describes, "not merely a call for simple photographic realism or what Lewes later described as 'coat-and-waistcoat realism.' We are to be brought by the artists into sympathy with flawed, sometimes stupid characters ('mixed and erring humanity') because we are to be made to see, as Spinoza and Feuerbach urge in their philosophies, that we belong to the same species, share our humanity with them." Ashton, George Eliot: A Life, 157. This is a doctrine that shapes Eliot's scathing critique of contemporary fiction written by women in her October 1856 essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," also published in the Westminster Review, as well as "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Baron," the first of Eliot's Scenes from Clerical Life. In Chapter 5 of "Amos Barton," the narrator interrupts the story to acknowledge that the subject of the story is "in no respect an ideal or exceptional character; and perhaps I am doing a bold thing to bespeak your sympathy on behalf of a man who was so very far from remarkable,—a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his breast; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably commonplace; who was not even in love, but had had that complaint favourably many years ago." Eliot, George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings, 326.

hopes, all possible patience." It suits us better, the narrator explains, to look at pictures of human existence that improve upon real life; they do not question our assumptions and firmly-held opinions. But by improving upon reality—by softening actual differences of beauty, temperament, or intelligence—fiction gives up its ability to cultivate its readers' minds. Only a realist novel can be an education in human existence, because it asks the reader to look at, and care for, the raw materials of human life

Creating a world "so much better than this" in the novel, the narrator adds, will only invite the reader to "turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields—on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken brave justice."[100] The representations of the novel, by this standard, have real effects upon the daily lives human beings. Idealized or sentimentalized fiction prepares the reader for disappointment and impatience with the actualities of life; the realist novel, on the other hand, can ameliorate the unpleasant details of everyday existence—not by improving upon life but by inviting the reader to see it anew in the light of sympathetic understanding.

For Eliot, then, the realist novel has the capacity to be educational in the broadest sense of the word, expanding the reader's knowledge of human life and cultivating human faculties of reason, imagination, and affection. It is no less than a means of moral development or reform, a way of preparing readers for citizenship in a liberal democratic culture and a modern secular society. The realist novel is, moreover, specially positioned to reform conventional ideas about human life that have become disconnected from the concrete details of everyday existence: for instance, generalizations based upon social categories of class, gender, ethnicity, or religion.

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[100] George Eliot, Adam Bede (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 178.

These generalities serve to divide human beings from each other, preventing extensions of sympathy that invoke recognitions of human commonality. Wary of any view of social life that dissolves the specifics of individual and local experience, Eliot is interested in creating fiction that brings us closer to the mixed and diverse nature of modern social existence. This is because difference is what holds possibility for Eliot, as for Mill: in the realist novel, difference is what surprises the reader out of habits of thought and into attention to what is separate from themselves. It is the impetus for transformations of mind that have effects beyond the pages of fiction, instigating human choices and actions that bring the possibilities of mind into the probabilities of history.

4.2 DANIEL DERONDA

Eliot's own novels are centrally concerned with such transformations of mind. In narratives that chronicle the everyday thoughts and emotions of unhistorical individuals, Eliot creates a "natural history" of human mind that gives special attention to the small events of internal human life: to the small shifts in perspective or feeling that make up larger developments of understanding and sympathy. Eliot's most sustained study of mental development is Daniel Deronda, a novel that charts the moral reform of its central characters Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth. With Deronda, Eliot creates what appears to be an explicit realization of her moral-sympathetic ideal, as articulated in both her literary criticism and fiction: a character whose internal potential for sympathy finds fulfillment in purposeful moral action. But Gwendolen Harleth's may be the more interesting metamorphosis of the novel because of its inconclusiveness. With Gwendolen, Eliot writes a history not of the actual but of the possible.

Both before and after her moral transformation, Gwendolen's internal potential exceeds the opportunities afforded by her social circumstances. She is, in this way, a character better suited to fiction than to life: because her moral transformation does not lead to greater possibilities for action, the most dramatic events of her life are invisible to all but the reader. Defined by a "play of contraries" in both her physical aspect and mental constitution, Gwendolen offers the narrator opportunities to explore those open-ended states of human mind that are a central concern in Daniel Deronda. These are the aspects of human life not evidenced by concrete speech or action; they are wishful anticipation, moral indecision, and mixed feeling.

Reforms of mind, dramatized by Deronda and Gwendolen, are also asked of the reader. With its mixed discourse, Daniel Deronda invites the reader to bring a certain kind of mind to the contemplation of the novel's subjects: a more noticing, flexible, and sympathetic mind. As we will see, the narrator's continual interruption of the immediate action of the novel creates occasions for the reader to be multiply oriented: to attend at once to the small details of local experience and the large events of British history, to the peculiarities of human character and the generalities of social convention, to the concrete consequences of individual choice and the abstract aims of moral principle. [101]

This multiple orientation promotes a reformation of mind in the reader that is both intellectual and sympathetic. On the one hand, the narrator brings abstract ideas into closer relationship with concrete reality: in the narrator's hands, commonplace ideas about social life

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[101] Here I share the view, held by literary theorists like Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, and Mikhail Bakhtin, that narrative interruption promotes freedom of thought. Although the freedom I am describing is not textual but liberal. Here Schiller's idea of aesthetic "play" is perhaps the best way of describing the relationship between the narrator's interjections and the immediate action of the novel. In Schiller's terminology, there is a kind of "play" here between subject (author, reader, generalized knowledge) and object (representations of the novel, material particulars).

are corrected by concrete actions and small happenings are broadened by theoretical knowledge. In this way, Daniel Deronda often reads more like an essay than a novel, like social criticism rather than social representation. Here the narrator's priority is to find out, first, whether established ideas (about society, nationality, ethnicity, and so on) hold up when we scrutinize actual social life and, second, whether the analysis of particular human beings can bring some greater understanding of general humanity. On the other hand, the narrator's interjections encourage a readier compassion for the novel's characters, and a more extensive sympathetic understanding of the "mixed and erring" nature of human life. This might seem counterintuitive: taking the reader away from the immediate happenings of the novel's characters, these narrative interruptions appear to thwart rather than promote extensions of sympathy. But by checking habits of mind and correcting conventional knowledge, the mixed discourse of the novel makes it difficult for the reader to be single-minded about the novel's characters. It asks that we not judge them too quickly, showing how their mistakes and weaknesses could easily be our own.

4.3 TRANSFORMATIONS OF SYMPATHY

In Daniel Deronda, the source of sympathy is in the small details of local, everyday life, the specificity of home being the beginning of both knowledge and affection in every human child. The healthiest of sympathetic education, then, begins with the limited sphere of an established home. "A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of native land," the narrator states in the opening paragraph of Chapter Three,

> where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt

> it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affectation, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood. At five years old, mortals are not prepared to be citizens of the world, to be stimulated by abstract nouns, to soar above preference into impartiality; and that prejudice in favour of milk with which we blindly begin, is a type of the way body and soul must get nourished at least for a time. The best introduction to astronomy is to think of the nightly heavens as a little lot of stars belonging to one's own homestead.[102]

The effect of the material world upon the mind is at its greatest in childhood, the narrator asserts, our native home shaping our earliest affections and creating associations of mind that will be the instincts of later life. The meaning of this place and its people is not the effect of an extension of sympathy through an exertion of mind, but an effortless "habit of the blood." Affect is rooted in the familiar concrete world, in the everyday details of home that have little significance in the wider world but constitute the beginnings of moral sympathy in the individual. Children must be self-centered in this way because they are not ready for the more objective habits of mind demanded of "citizens of the world." The best introduction to an abstract knowledge of

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[102] DD, 16.

humankind, the narrator concludes, is through the specificity of home, its details having subjective meaning from which more generalized understanding may grow.

But both the hero and heroine of Daniel Deronda are lacking the rootedness the narrator describes. The passage above references the inconsistencies of Gwendolen's upbringing, in both home and parenting, but is no less relevant to the uncertainties of Daniel Deronda's early life. This affects the two characters' habits of mind in divergent ways: through early adulthood Gwendolen maintains the egoism of a child whose world is ordered by their own likes and dislikes, while Deronda's active imagination and "diffuse sympathy" prevent him from choosing a definite plan of life. In other words, Gwendolen suffers from a sympathy too narrow and Deronda from a sympathy too broad.

Deronda's early life, the narrator relates, is defined by uncertainty regarding his parentage and his purpose in life. Having a great capacity for sympathy with those less fortunate than himself, his desire to make some effect upon the world nevertheless remains at the level of vague intention rather than action. A tendency toward "reflective hesitation" is encouraged by his social position, there being "no need for him to get an immediate income, or to fit himself in haste for a profession; and his sensibility to the half-known facts of his parentage made him an excuse for lingering longer than others in a state of social neutrality."[103] With leisure affording opportunities to dwell upon the problems of the world in the abstract, Deronda finds ample reasons to stand outside the conventions of professional society and to abstain from choosing to pursue any one plan of life. Deronda's "early-wakened sensibility and reflectiveness," the narrator explains, "had developed into a many-sided sympathy, which threatened to hinder any

[103] DD, 153.

persistent course of action…His imagination had so wrought itself to the habit of seeing things as they probably appeared to others, that a strong partisanship, unless it were against an immediate oppression, had become an insincerity for him."[104] The compass of Deronda's sympathetic imagination, in other words, is more dominant than any particular intention. His mind having the habit of being many places at once, a strong allegiance to any one view of life feels unnatural and insincere.

This capacity for "many-sided sympathy" is a virtue in Daniel Deronda, especially when brought into contrast with the limited sympathies of Gwendolen Harleth. But, as the narrator cautions in Book II,

> A too reflective and diffusive sympathy was in danger of paralyzing in [Deronda] that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force; and in the last few years of confirmed manhood he had become so keenly aware of this that what he most longed for was either some external event, or some inward light, that would urge him into a definite line of action, and compress his wandering energy.[105]

Deronda's sympathetic habit of mind runs counter to the choice of purpose or action; his reflective compassion inspires no moral response, blunting the feeling that comes with the apprehension of wrong and setting him apart from a larger community of men.[106] What Deronda

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[104] DD, 307.

[105] DD, 308.

[106] Here there are apparent similarities between Deronda and Walter Pater's Marius of Marius the Epicurean. See my discussion of Marius's deliberation over two contrary

yearns for, according to the narrator, is some event that would rouse him from the routine of his present life and give him some definite outlet for his mental energies.

Deronda is urged by just such an event as he is rowing on the Thames one evening, singing a song from Rossini's opera Otello. On the riverside he sees "a figure which might have been an impersonation of the misery he was unconsciously giving voice to": a small, dark haired woman in a large cloak standing alone at the edge of the water, her "eyes fixed upon on the river with a look of immovable, statue-like despair."[107] Deronda is surprised by "the strong arrest of his attention which made him stop singing." He feels an "outleap of interest and compassion towards her, but the next instant she had turned and walked away to a neighboring bench under a tree." He begins to row away, "speculating on the probable romance that lay behind that loneliness and look of desolation," his mind glancing

> over the girl-tragedies that are going on in the world, hidden, unheeded, as if they were but tragedies of the copse or hedgerow, where the helpless drag wounded wings forsakenly, and streak the shadowed moss with the red moment-hand of their own death. Deronda of late, in his solitary excursions, had been occupied chiefly with uncertainties about this own course; but those uncertainties, being much at their leisure, were wont to have such wide-sweeping connections with all life and history that the new image of helpless sorrow easily blent itself with what seemed to

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philosophies of life, one historically aloof and sympathetically diffuse and the other historically rooted and affectively connected in Chapter Five.

[107] DD, 159.

> him the strong array of reasons why he should shrink from getting into that routine of the world which makes men apologise for all its wrong-doing, and take opinions as mere professional equipment—why he should not draw strongly at any thread in the hopelessly-entangled scheme of things. [108]

In a characteristic reverie, Deronda does not linger long over the particular misfortunes of this dark-haired girl, but allows his mind to "glance" over the misery of women in general—his thoughts leaping from the individual woman by the riverside, to the likely hardships of his own unknown mother, to a general conception of the invisibility of women's unhappiness. The event becomes meaningful for Deronda, characteristically, not on its own but because of the sympathetic and romantic connections it evokes with a wider web of experience and history. The girl by the riverside becomes, the narrator tells us, one more reason to shrink from choosing a profession in life—to maintain a certain passivity to the sufferings of the world.

In this scene, Deronda's perceptions of the wider world are speculative, his own self and purpose dwarfed by the larger connections of history or romance. On his way back down the river, looking at the city from his boat, he "was forgetting everything else in a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at, thinking how far it might be possible habitually to shift his centre till his own personality would be no less outside him than the landscape—when the sense of something moving on the bank opposite him…made him turn his glance thitherward."[109] Seeing that the girl by the riverside is now walking into the

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[108] DD, 160.

[109] DD, 160.

water, apparently attempting to drown herself, Deronda's imaginative speculations are abruptly interrupted. He is urged to action and, in this moment, sympathetic reflection becomes moral choice. As the narrative that follows reveals, this attempted drowning is the "external event" that urges Deronda "into a definite line of action," leading to his embrace of Judaism and marriage to Mirah Lapidoth. A metaphor for Deronda's moral transformation in the novel at large, Deronda's rescue of Mirah by the riverside is an affirmation of Eliot's moral sympathetic ideal: in this scene, thoughts shape events when internal capacities of mind are brought be bear upon external realities.

This chance meeting with Mirah opens a new world of thought for Deronda. He realizes his ignorance of modern Judaism and Jewish history, an ignorance typical of the British gentry. As the narrator puts it,

> The Chosen People have been commonly treated as a people chosen for the sake of somebody else; and their thinking as something (no matter exactly what) that ought to have been entirely otherwise; and Deronda, like his neighbors, had regarded Judaism as a sort of eccentric fossilized form which a accomplished man might dispense with studying, and leave to specialists. But Mirah, with her terrified flight from one parent, and her yearning after the other, had flashed on him the hitherto neglected reality that Judaism was something still throbbing in human lives… [110]

[110] DD, 306.

Deronda, like most British gentleman, regards the spiritual and intellectual traditions of Judaism as an anachronism, as irrelevant to the concerns of modern life. But his relationship with Mirah, which chance has asserted upon his life, enlightens a "neglected reality" or unnoticed aspect of British culture: contemporary Jewish life and thought. Seeing Mirah suffer the loss of her mother, as he has mourned the loss of his, Deronda begins to see Judaism in a new light. This feeling of commonality urges Deronda's friendship with both Mirah and Mordecai, which extend his experience and emends his education, opening up unseen possibilities for his life.

At the start of the novel, Deronda's character is defined by an imaginative diffusion of self, a hyper-awareness of existence outside of his own which dwarfs subjective experience. Gwendolen Harleth's character may be described as the inverse, having a seemingly unassailable egoism which orders the world according to her own interests. Our introduction to Gwendolen in the opening scene of the novel is significant: she is at a roulette table with a diverse group of other gamblers "absorbed in play." The conventional affect of the gaming table—enacted by Gwendolen's disinterested grace in both winning and losing—offers an effective metaphor for the first half of Gwendolen's story, up until the point of her marriage to Grandcourt. It is Gwendolen's dissemblance of impartiality, concealing the strong self-interest that rules her in both gambling and life, that Deronda sees when their eyes meet across the room:

> instead of averting [her eyes] as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested – how long? The darting sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of a different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above

her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict.[111]

Under the unaccustomed feeling of critical examination, Gwendolen is compelled by Deronda's gaze to acknowledge his moral scrutiny: she imagines that he is looking down on her in judgment as an inferior, from a standpoint both apart and above those gathered around the gambling table. The reader, having knowledge of events that predate this scene but which are not related until later in the novel, may imagine Deronda as inhabiting a "region outside and above" Gwendolen in this early scene, but not in quite the way that she imagines. At this point Deronda has already saved Mirah from drowning and thus entered a life "outside" of conventional British society. The reader may also see Deronda as standing "above" Gwendolen in his habits of mind, superior at least in his capacity for sympathetic extension and action. This moment marks the beginning of Gwendolen's moral reformation, which is a gradual realization of both the smallness of her own life in the grand scheme of things and a slow awakening to the moral consequences of her actions.

The narrative of Gwendolen's life preceding her marriage, the narrator tells us, is one that may be described as a small one in the wider world but which wholly ruled the lives of those around her. At the start of the novel, Gwendolen is a character who seeks to bend the circumstances of life to her own will and to order the world according to her own wishes. She believes that while "other people allowed themselves to be made slaves of, and to have their own lives blown hither and thither like empty ships in which no will was present, it was not to be so with her, she would no longer be sacrificed to creatures worth less than herself, but would make the very best of the chances offered her, and conquer circumstance by her exceptional

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[111] DD, 6.

cleverness."[112] What Gwendolen wants from life is not, perhaps, as specific as her resolution to get it; her intentions are merely, as they are expressed throughout Book One, to "do as she likes" and be exempt from what she doesn't like. The satisfaction she seeks, the narrator suggests, is not so much in the results of her choices but in the act of choosing itself, intending only "to do what was pleasant to herself in a striking manner; or rather, whatever she could do so as to strike others with admiration and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living…"[113]

But Gwendolen's need for admiration is, at least in part, a result of the narrowness of her social circumstances. While she "rejoiced to feel herself exceptional, the narrator asserts, but

> her horizon was that of the genteel romance, where the heroine's soul poured out in her journal is full of vague power, originality, and general rebellion, while her life moves strictly in the sphere of fashion; and if she wanders into a swamp, the pathos lies partly, so to speak, in her having on her satin shoes. Here is a restraint which nature and society have provided on the pursuit of striking adventure; so that a soul burning with a sense of what the universe is not, and ready to take all existence as fuel, is nevertheless held captive by the ordinary wire-work of social forms and does nothing particular.[114]

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[112] DD, 33.

[113] DD, 32.

[114] DD, 43.

Here there is a discordance between internal potential and external circumstance. Gwendolen has a desire for difference, even for experiment, but sees no possibility of action outside of the likelihoods of upper-class feminine society. Although she knows that she does not wish to lead "the same sort of life as ordinary young ladies," she has little idea as to "how she should set about leading any other, and what were the particular acts which she would assert her freedom by doing."[115] She has no opportunity to "climb up the matterhorn,"[116] as she puts it in the opening chapter of the novel, or to "go to the North Pole, or ride steeplechases, or go to be a queen in the East like Lady Hester Stanhope,"[117] as she says in Chapter Seven. So she settles for ruling over the people that surround her on a daily basis, such as her mother and sisters.

To her family Gwendolen gives little notice and scant affection. As the narrator points out, Gwendolen's need for supremacy among those that populate her social scene serves to cut her off from the sympathetic bonds of friendship and family. To Gwendolen, who "had never disassociated happiness from personal preeminence and éclat," as the narrator puts it, there seems no joy in life beyond the prospect of leading and mastering. She finds it hard to care for other people, as she says herself to Deronda later in the novel; but then, she has had little practice at it. Sympathetic affection, in Daniel Deronda, is a matter of both attention and imagination; it requires that we notice the specifics of each other, putting aside the self in order to visualize other perspectives, other ways of life. But all Gwendolen's attention, in the chapters leading up to her marriage, is absorbed by her own pleasures and pains, and her imagination rarely extends

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[115] DD.

[116] DD, 9.

[117] DD, 57.

beyond a visualization of future success and accomplishments. This is why there is no chance of Gwendolen falling in love with Rex or Grandcourt; she has no romantic interest in marriage, and recoils from any overt expressions of love. To acknowledge Rex's strong feelings for her, for instance, would mean that she would have put herself in his place—to imagine his acute suffering upon her rejection of his romantic advances.

Gwendolen is not entirely unaware of the smallness of her world in the wider scheme of things: she is liable to "fits of spiritual dread," meaning that "solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself."[118] The seeming inverse of the social persona she wishes to maintain, Gwendolen is often plagued with the vague feeling that her conception of the world is hauntingly incomplete—and this endangers her assurance in her abilities to bend others according to her own interests. In the imaginings of solitude, she has an idea of her own inconsequence in the "vastness" of the wider world, but this awareness is dispelled when the appearance of another person allows her to turn back to her self-ordered existence.

Following a series of events that bring Gwendolen uncomfortably closer to a world that is unbidden by her own wishes, she becomes aware of "an uneasy, transforming process."[119] One thing after another reveals itself to be against her and her belief in her own exceptionality: the surprise of Lydia Glasher's connection to Grandcourt on the day she had planned to accept his proposal of marriage, her sudden ill-luck at the gaming table at Lebroune, and the revelation that

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[118] DD, 52.

[119] DD, 362.

her mother's entire income has been lost through a bad investment. Her eyes are slowly opened to the workings of wider experience, the belief in her own power of mastery giving way to the realization that all she can do is brace herself for whatever circumstances may come.

Choosing to marry Grandcourt in spite of her promise to Lydia Glasher, Gwendolen makes one last attempt to gain what she has lost, to recalibrate what she "expected in her lot" to "what it was actually to be."[120] During their engagement, she finds ways to explain away the discomfort she feels about doing what she had once promised herself she would not do; but when she is alone at night, the faces of Grandcourt's children appear to her in her imagination, and she is filled with a dreadful foreboding for what is to come. "The brilliant position she had longed for, the imagined freedom she would create for herself in marriage, the deliverance from the dull insignificance of her girlhood—all were immediately before her; and yet they had come to her hunger like food with the taint of sacrilege upon it, which she must snatch with terror."[121] Gwendolen dimly perceives that her choice to marry Grandcourt will have moral consequences, but it is not until the delivery of the diamonds on her wedding day that she begins to imagine that her marriage will be a kind of punishment for past selfishness and wrongdoing.

Gwendolen's moral awakening urges her friendship with Deronda, and their conversations become a kind of sympathetic education. Although, in a sense, Deronda's moral education of Gwendolen begins well before her marriage to Grandcourt, their relationship being established in the opening scene of the novel in which Deronda looks disapprovingly upon Gwendolen's gambling. It is this unspoken reproach that prompts Gwendolen to speak with

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[120] DD, 231.

[121] DD, 262.

Deronda when they meet again at Diplow during her engagement, to chastise him for "casting an evil eye" upon her play at roulette that changed her luck for the worse.[122] When she asks Deronda why he thought it so wrong for her to gamble, he gives her a sermon on moral consequences, telling her that "'there are enough inevitable turns of fortune which force us to see that our gain is another's loss:—that is one of the ugly aspects of life. One would like to reduce it as much as one could, not get amusement out of exaggerating it.'"[123] Gwendolen's reply to Deronda is, in this scene, a flippant one, but we can see in this exchange a map of the relationship that unfolds between these two characters over the course of the novel. In every scene they are together there is a struggle between Gwendolen's personal philosophy of "doing as she likes" and Deronda's moral-sympathetic code of life; between Gwendolen's belief that life should shape itself to suit her own wants and Deronda's conviction that personal desire should come second to the needs of the outside world.

Gwendolen asks Deronda during her visit to the Abbey how she might lessen the misery she feels in her marriage, and he encourages her to turn her attention outward by looking "on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action—something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot."[124] In this way, Deronda attempts to make a lesson of Gwendolen's situation, urging

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[122] DD, 280.

[123] DD, 284.

[124] DD, 387.

her to see her own sufferings as an opportunity to widen her moral compass—to expand her sympathies to include the hardships of others unconnected to herself.

When Gwendolen describes her perpetual fear since her marriage, which is a kind of moral dread of future calamity, he tries to convince her that her fear can be morally useful:

> Turn your fear into a safeguard. Keep your dread fixed on the idea of increasing that remorse which is so bitter to you. Fixed meditation may do a great deal towards defining our longing or dread. We are not always in a state of strong emotion, and when we are calm we can use our memories and gradually change the bias of our fear, as we do our tastes. Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like the quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you. Try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it as if it were a faculty, like vision.[125]

With meditation and study, Deronda says, strong feelings—like fear or dread—can be the beginning of a moral reeducation of the emotions. The idea of emotion proposed here is far from passive: feeling can be a faculty like hearing or vision; it can be cultivated to bring about a greater attentiveness to the specifics of human life and a keener sensitivity to the moral effects of our own actions. But this reeducation of the emotions requires that we bring self-reflection to our own emotions, an attunement to our own states of mind.

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[125] DD, 388.

4.4 MIXED NARRATIVE

I have described how Gwendolen and Deronda are introduced at the start of the novel with certain limitations of sympathy, which are a result of the rootlessness of their upbringing. The reader, too, experiences a kind of rootlessness in Daniel Deronda, the narrator's critical interjections in nearly every scene dividing the reader's attention from the immediate happenings of the novel's storyline.[126] These interruptions urge a certain freedom of the mind in the reader, creating opportunities for an independent contemplation of the novel's objects, both concrete and abstract. The passage that begins Chapter three, quoted above, may be used as an example. The chapter begins with the sentence "Pity that Offendene was not the home of Miss Harleth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories."[127] Immediately following this specific comment about Gwendolen is the narrator's reflection that "A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land…" Here the reader is asked to move from the particulars of Gwendolen's life to the generalities of the narrator's interjection and then back again. Before we can get to the scenes of Gwendolen's introduction to her new home at Offendene, we must first contemplate the abstract idea of "home" and its importance for the cultivation of sympathetic feeling. While the idea of home links the details of Gwendolen's life to the common experience

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[126] The novel also has a non-linear narrative structure that introduces us to Gwendolen and Deronda "in medias res." The construction of the narrative and its connection to the novel's contrast of Gwendolen and Deronda is a central focus in Sally Shuttleworth, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[127] DD, 16.

of humankind, the specifics of her situation provoke analysis of an abstract concept that has only vague meaning in common usage.

Here and elsewhere, the mixed narrative of Daniel Deronda does not allow the reader to get too rooted in the immediate happenings of the novel, the interjections of the narrator continually taking us away from the specifics of character or event.[128] This is a technique evident in all of Eliot's previous novels, but which is perhaps even more prevalent in Daniel Deronda. The opening epigraphs to each chapter of the novel, for instance, function in a way similar to the example above. They begin chapters with short quotes, excerpts, or poems that express some philosophical principle, cultural anecdote, or literary theme relevant to the events narrated in that section of the novel. These epigraphs move the reader from the particular happenings of the novel to the abstract ruminations of the narrator and then back again, bringing commonplace ideas about human nature, abstract moral principles, or philosophical precepts into closer relationship with concrete referents.

Chapter Eleven, for instance, interrupts the description of Gwendolen's introduction to Grandcourt (begun in Chapter Ten) with a general observation about first meetings. This is a truism that will be upheld by the events that follow: "The Beginning of an acquaintance whether with persons or things is to get a definite outline for our ignorance."[129] This comment interrupts the final words of Chapter Ten, spoken by Lord Brackenshaw, "'Will you allow me to introduce Mr. Mallinger Grandcourt'" and the first words of Chapter Eleven,

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[128] The importance of narrative interruption in realist representation is discussed in Erich Auerbach's Mimesis. See the introduction to this dissertation, and Chapter One and Twenty of Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953).

[129] DD, 91.

> "Mr. Grandcourt's wish to be introduced had no suddenness for Gwendolen; but when Lord Brackenshaw moved aside a little for the prefigured stranger to come forward and she felt her face to face with the real man, there was a little shock which flushed her cheeks and vexatiously deepened with her consciousness of it. The shock came from the reversal of her expectations: Grandcourt could hardly have been more unlike all her imaginary portraits of him."[130]

The way this epigraph works is characteristic of the novel, disrupting one of the more dramatic moments of the novel's first book with a critical reflection that cautions the reader not to rely too much upon the estimations of the novel's characters. Although the epigraph and the opening paragraph of Chapter Eleven both center upon the theme of expectations, the epigraph actually refers to the new image of Grandcourt that is—in this moment—being created in Gwendolen's mind. Replacing the picture of what she had imagined Grandcourt would be like, this new image is no less mistaken than the one that has just been dispelled, as we soon find out.

For the scene being related, this epigraph's interruption underscores the mental events that are occurring, unseen, in the short moment of this introduction—preparing us, in this way, for a chapter as much about the internal drama of Gwendolen's mind as the external happenings of the Archery party. The epigraph also has an effect upon the reader's relationship to this scene: as much happens in this short moment for the reader as for Gwendolen, the epigraph pulling us away from the concrete details of the introduction to contemplate, on an abstract level, the difficulty of estimating the internal nature of a human being. Going back to the scene at hand,

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[130] DD, 91.

the reader is encouraged to consider the situation in at least two ways: from the individual perspective of Gwendolen, with whom we have been allied up until this point in the novel, and from the general perspective of the narrator, who has warned us not to accept too quickly Gwendolen's initial estimation of Grandcourt. In one sense, the epigraph asks that we look at Gwendolen with a more critical eye, but in another sense it deepens our sympathetic understanding of this character. If Gwendolen is mistaken in the image that she has formed of Grandcourt in her imagination, her error is only one that any human being is liable to make.

The epigraph that prefaces Chapter Sixteen is not only a general statement that serves to elucidate the events of that chapter, but also a larger explanation of the priorities of the novel as a whole:

> Men, like planets, have both a visible and invisible history. The astronomer threads the darkness with strict deduction, accounting so for every visible arc in the wanderers orbit; and the narrator of human actions, if he did his work with the same completeness, would have to thread the hidden pathways of feeling and thought which lead up to every moment of action, and to those moments of intense suffering which take the quality of action—like the cry of Prometheus, whose chained anguish seems a greater energy than the sea and sky he invokes and the deity he defies.[131]

Like the astronomer who reveals complex and unseen planetary movement by means of deduction, the novelist must portray the intricacy of thought and feeling that precede every human action. Internal suffering can have the vividness and distinction of action, the narrator

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[131] DD, 139.

asserts, the drama of the mind at times exceeding that of the external world. The truth of this statement can be tested in the chapter that follows, which focuses on the early life of Daniel Deronda and the internal suffering he experiences regarding the uncertainty of his parentage. It also, of course, describes a central concern of the novel as a whole, which makes the moral development of Deronda and Gwendolen its primary subject. In a way, the epigraph begs the question of what the novel would look like without its careful depiction these internal developments—without any insight into the small shifts of Gwendolen's perspective or the slight alterations of Deronda's affections. The answer to this question, the narrator suggests, is not only that Daniel Deronda would be a less interesting novel and an incomplete narrative of human life. It is also that it would be limited in its capacity to inspire sympathetic understanding.

There is usually a clear connection between the novel's epigraphs and the happenings of the chapter that follows, the novel's characters or events affirming the truth or significance of what the epigraph has expressed. In the two cases studied above, the epigraph offers a summary statement about human nature, and the chapters that follow serve to explicate this generalization. But in many cases, the narrator's interjections correct or qualify summary views of human existence—especially those that simplify the complexity of human nature or the mixed qualities of human mind. To give one example of many, in Chapter Fourteen after Gwendolen has met Lydia Glasher at the Whispering Stones, the narrator asserts that "Gwendolen's uncontrolled reading, though consisting chiefly in what are called pictures of life, had somehow not prepared her for this encounter with reality." Despite all of Gwendolen's novel reading, she is shocked to discover that Grandcourt has a mistress and three children. But reading about love affairs is one thing, the narrator explains, and seeing one up close is another: "Perspective, as its inventor remarked, is a beautiful thing. What horrors of damp huts, where human beings languish, may

not become picturesque through aerial distance! What hymning of cancerous vices may we not languish over as sublimest art in the safe remoteness of a strange language and artificial phrase! Yet we keep a repugnance to rheumatism and other painful effects when presented in our personal experience." Fiction that keeps the reader at a distance from the ugly details of human existence, the narrator asserts, cannot extend experience or teach us anything about human nature.[132] There is a contrast, then, between the kinds of fiction that Gwendolen is in the habit of reading and Daniel Deronda. This novel, the narrator seems to be saying, will not shy from the raw materials of everyday life; it will not escape into the picturesque or the sublime. The reader, like Gwendolen herself, will be acquainted with the unpleasant details of Grandcourt's relationship with Lydia Glasher, just as we will experience the disparity between Gwendolen's preconceptions about Grandcourt and the painful realities of their married life together.

Other interjections link the small happenings of the novel's characters to broader historical movements. For instance, as Gwendolen deliberates upon the benefits of a marriage to Grandcourt, the narrator waxes upon the theme of the smallness of women's lives within the greater scheme of history. At the close of Chapter Eleven, the narrator asks:

> Could there be a slenderer, more insignificant thread in human history than this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant? – in a time, too, when ideas were with fresh vigour making armies of themselves, and the universal kinship was declaring itself fiercely:

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[132] In this interjection, the narrator of Daniel Deronda echoes Eliot's criticisms of contemporary fiction in "Natural History"; see also the narrator's discussion of the value of literary realism in Chapter 17 of Eliot's Adam Bede.

> when women on the other side of the world would not mourn for the husbands and sons who died bravely in a common cause, and men stinted of bread on our side of the world heard of that willing loss and were patient: a time when the soul of man was waking to pulses which had for centuries been beating in him unfelt, until their full sum made a new life of terror or of joy.[133]

Although Gwendolen's thread is the one that has fully occupied the first book of the novel, and the world of her social scene is a vivid and large one for the reader, the narrator reminds us of the broader contexts of her historical moment. The events of the novel, being set ten years prior to its publication, are simultaneous with the "mighty drama" of the American civil war and the shortage of raw cotton in England, making hardships for British textile workers who nevertheless supported abolition. These are events of which Gwendolen has either no knowledge or no interest; but the reader is not allowed her ignorance. Here, as elsewhere in the novel, the narrator prevents the reader from getting too engrossed in the world of the novel's characters, in this case the drama of Grandcourt's courtship of Gwendolen. Drawing us up and out of the immediate happenings of the novel, the narrator's reference to these worldly events makes the reader wonder, perhaps, why we are giving so much attention to the fairly routine events of the British countryside—and to the matrimonial deliberations of a comparatively unexceptional young girl. But the major events of history are made up of the same materials as the "small inferences" of Gwendolen Harleth's mind, as this passage makes clear; Gwendolen's matrimonial deliberations, like the struggles of ideological wars, are made up of states and alterations of mind.

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[133] DD, 102.

While this interjection provides a broader historical perspective, others seek to correct certain habits of mind that might, in the narrator's estimation, prevent our ready sympathy with the novel's characters. In chapter Four, which introduces us to Gwendolen's virtual tyranny over her family, the narrator inserts a backhanded caution to the reader not to judge Gwendolen too harshly. Giving some explanation for her mother and sister's deference by pointing to Gwendolen's beauty and a certain "decision of will" in her manner, the narrator nevertheless advises the reader to "beware of arriving at conclusions without comparison. I remember having seen the same assiduous, apologetic attention awarded to persons who were not at all beautiful or unusual, whose firmness showed itself in no very graceful or euphonious way, and who were not eldest daughters with a tender, timid mother, compunctious at having subjected them to inconveniences. Some of them were a very common sort of men."[134] This is a characteristic interjection from the narrator, whose criticisms of Gwendolen are often tempered through comparative commentary and a sense of wit. The narrator's suggestion that we would hardly remark upon Gwendolen's behavior if she were a man aims to surprise the reader into rethinking a conventional distinction between women and men. This comparison, in turn, invites a more tempered judgment of Gwendolen's behavior.

While they ask for different kinds of reflection upon the novel's subjects, both concrete and abstract, each of the narrator's interjections encourage the reader to be multiply-oriented to the narrative of Daniel Deronda. Interrupting the immediate action of the novel, they encourage the reader to bring a certain freedom of thought and feeling to the contemplation of the novel, to attend to its central concerns with an increased intellectual flexibility and readier sympathy. Correcting overly simplified ideas about social life or entrenched assumptions about human

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[134] DD, 32-33.

nature, they serve to check summative judgments of the reader's characters. In this sense, they practice the reader in the many operations of mind that ought to be undertaken before making judgments in real life. Expanding the reader's knowledge of human life and cultivating human faculties of reason, judgment, reflection, imagination, and affection, these interjections make the novel educational in the broadest sense of the word.

4.5 MIXED MIND

In numerous instances in Daniel Deronda the narrator's critical interruptions allow the reader to make a more nuanced estimation of a character, scene, or concept, the novel's multi-layered narration giving confidence that we have judged the situation fairly and sympathetically. There are also, however, many other places in the novel where the narrator's additions, commentaries, and corrections leave the reader in a more suspended state of mind. In these moments, we may know more, having greater perspective, richer context, and improved critical awareness; but we are less secure in our ability to judge the situation with assurance. In these instances, the narrator provokes indecision in the reader, creating long moments in which the reader is held in a state of irresolution. Indeed, all of the narrator's interruptions may be read as serving to prolong more open-ended states of mind in the reader, even when they eventually bring us to a more decided evaluation of the novel's subjects. The novel promotes, in this way, the same kind of mental transition or development in the reader as it dramatizes in Deronda and Gwendolen—the narrator's interjections provoking moral estimations that are later revised or self-reflections that gradually become broader sympathies.

We need only return to the questions that open the novel to consider in what ways Daniel Deronda is centrally concerned with encouraging open-ended states of mind:

> Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents?[135]

In the paragraphs that follow, we learn that these are questions Daniel Deronda asks himself about Gwendolen Harleth. But even though the opening epigraph of the novel cautions that no knowledge can be produced without first creating a place to begin,[136] the first line of the novel asks the reader to consider Gwendolen without a beginning—without even knowing who it is we are judging. The novel, then, opens with the indecision that comes from a question without context.[137]

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[135] DD, 3.

[136] The epigraph states: "Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning. Even Science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars' unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his; since Science, too, reckons backwards as well as forwards, divides his nit into billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets off in medias res. No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in heaven or on earth, it is but a fraction of that all-presupposing fact with which our story sets out." See DD, 3.

[137] Instead of considering the uncertain effects of this question upon the reader, most critics focus on the origins of this uncertainty in Deronda. One of the more recent readings of this

The effect of Gwendolen in this scene, then, prefaces an idea articulated by the narrator a few pages later: that human thinking can be many things at once, that the most contrary ideas may be held in the mind in the same moment. Deronda's questions bear the weight of competing evaluations of Gwendolen's beauty and goodness. Gwendolen is, in this long moment, both beautiful and not beautiful, both good and evil. As this scene is set in the contexts of a gambling hall, there is also the suggestion that the answers to these questions may be more a matter of chance than the result of purposeful deliberation. Gwendolen's beauty, like the roulette game, evokes a multiplicity of possibility—Deronda's questions seeming to hang in the moment between a stake wagered and a stake won or lost.

The effect the opening paragraphs of the novel signal that Daniel Deronda will be a novel primarily interested in the multiple possibilities of mind: more a study of mixed emotion than decided action, more a narrative of moral indecision than certain judgment. It also suggests that the reader, like Deronda, will need the length of the novel to decide whether Gwendolen is beautiful or not beautiful, good or evil. Indeed, in a narrative of development and mental transition in which the possibilities of interior mind are of more interest than the certainties of exterior world, she is more thought-provoking when she is both. Moreover, in a novel that sets out to reform the minds of its readers, it matters less what we decide about Gwendolen than the phases of mind that bring us to some resolution.

Where Deronda resists the disquieting effect that Gwendolen has upon him, the narrator regularly celebrates it. Describing the mixture of fondness and fear that Gwendolen inspires in others in Chapter One, the narrator explains that these feelings are heightened

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scene is in Sarah Gates, "Gender, Genre, and Realism in Daniel Deronda," English Literary History 68 (2001).

> by what may be called the iridescence of her character—the play of various, nay, contrary tendencies. For MacBeth's rhetoric about the impossibility of being many opposite things in the same moment, referred to the clumsy necessities of action and not to the subtler possibilities of feeling. We cannot speak a loyal word and be meanly silent, we cannot kill and not kill in the same moment; but a moment is room wide enough for the loyal and mean desire, for the outlash of a murderous thought and the sharp backward stroke of repentance.[138]

Where Deronda is disturbed by the uncertainty Gwendolen provokes in him, the narrator is intrigued by the mixed effect she has upon other characters. This effect serves to highlight all the unseen possibilities of human mind. For MacBeth was wrong about the impossibility of being many contrary things at once, the narrator asserts. Action is one thing or another in the world but human thinking can be many-sided, with opposite thoughts or emotions contained in a single moment. This is a difference of possibility, many more things being possible in thought than in action, as Deronda's reaction to Gwendolen reminds us.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

It is fitting, then, that Daniel Deronda does not provide a clear resolution to Gwendolen's storyline at the close of the novel; and it is likely that the reader is still of two minds about

[138] DD, 33.

Gwendolen.[139] Deronda, who has been torn between Gwendolen and Mirah for the length of the novel, finally decides in the final chapters of the narrative that he will marry Mirah. Without the prospect of marriage to Deronda, or even his friendship, Gwendolen's ending is as undecided as her beginning. While Deronda's Jewish heritage promises multiple paths of thought, study, and action at the conclusion to the novel, the possibilities for Gwendolen's life appear to be closed by Deronda's marriage to Mirah. Her sympathetic transformation over the course of the novel, unlike Deronda's, does not urge her toward any purpose larger than a quiet family existence at Offendene. At the close of the novel, we know only what she tells Deronda at their last meeting—that she will be "better for having known him."

On the one hand, we can conclude that there is a kind of cruelty in Deronda's moral education of Gwendolen, because it has brought Gwendolen a broader sympathetic imagination without greater prospects of possible action.[140] Indeed, the parameters of Gwendolen's life at the close of the novel are just as narrow as they were at its start; her state of mind has changed, but the good that comes of her moral transformation appears limited. She learns to care better for her family, telling Deronda her intention to put their happiness before her own; and in the final chapters of the novel we can see how her small kindnesses towards her mother and sisters begin to lighten her feelings of guilt about Grandcourt's death. Back at Offendene with her

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[139] Critics have struggled with Gwendolen's ending in Daniel Deronda, as they have with Dorthea's in Middlemarch. See Gillian Beer for an overview of critical responses to the ending of Daniel Deronda as well as a comparison of Gwendolen and Dorthea. Gillian Beer, George Eliot (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 220. On the problem of endings in Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda, and the difficulty they pose to feminist readings of her novels see also Ashton, George Eliot: A Life, 327-28.

[140] For a broader treatment of the problem of action in Eliot's novels, including Daniel Deronda, see Markovits, Stephanie. "George Eliot's Problem with Action." SEL 41, no. 4 (2001): 785-803.

family, the narrator tells us that she begins to experience "some of that peaceful melancholy which comes from the renunciation of demands for self, and from taking the ordinary good of existence, and especially kindness…as a gift above expectation." By this standard, Gwendolen's ending is a lesson in finding meaning in a life less than extraordinary, in accepting the small comforts of everyday life. Gwendolen's prospects are limited, the narrator tells us, but she has escaped the misery of her marriage and is thankful for it.

On the other hand, we can judge Gwendolen's ending as Deronda does: as preface. In Chapter Sixty Five, near the close of the novel, Deronda encourages Gwendolen to think of her past as only a preparation for her future life: "'This sorrow, which has cut down to the root, has come to you while you are so young—try to think of it, not as a spoiling of your life, but as a preparation for it…Think of it as a preparation. You can, you will, be among the best of women, such as make others glad that they were born.'"[141] The idea that the phases of Gwendolen's life chronicled in Daniel Deronda are only a preparation—or education—for what is to come supports the idea of the novel as a narrative primarily concerned with characters that are "in the midst" of slow transformations—of gradual becomings. Deronda's words, like the narrator's commentary throughout the novel, stress the potential over the actual—focusing on the good that can come from the sufferings of Gwendolen's past.

In this sense, Gwendolen's ending reaffirms the novel's status as a "history of the unhistorical," which is in Daniel Deronda a history of the possible, the potential, or the forthcoming. This kind of history has the ability to open the reader's eyes to the many dimensions of internal life that regularly escape our notice. Paying attention to these dimensions,

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[141] DD, 658.

like contemplating Gwendolen herself, is both unsettling and enlivening. We may not always enjoy the novel's depiction of the "mixed entangled affair"[142] of human life; but an attunement to the details of human difference and development is the stuff of both moral cultivation and sympathetic extension—inviting in the reader a greater self-awareness of their own changing states of mind, and a broader consideration for the internal lives of others.

[142] The internal lives of real people are not always what the reader would like, as Eliot imagines in Chapter 17 of Adam Bede: "Perhaps you will say, 'Do improve the facts a little, then; make them more accordant with those correct views which it is our privilege to possess. The world is not just what we like; do touch it up with a tasteful pencil, and make believe it is not quite such a mixed entangled affair…." Eliot, Adam Bede, 177-78.

5.0 CHAPTER FOUR: JOHN STUART MILL'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF ATTENTION

The critical work of John Stuart Mill is a ready analogue to the novelistic projects of Charles Dickens and George Eliot. Each of these writers was troubled by the forces of conventional thinking in contemporary society; each believed that the challenges of modern life demanded a renewed attention to the unnoticed specifics of life in time. For Dickens and Eliot, poetic attention to the seemingly useless details of life has the capacity to animate everyday experience and awaken human capacities of thought, feeling, and imagination. For Mill, a critical attunement to these disparate details is the central practice of liberal culture—and the special responsibility of the liberal social critic.

Whether writing on science, society, or government, Mill aimed to shed light on the unnoticed specifics of human existence, giving special attention to those aspects of life that resist abstract representation or categorization: to empirical facts that do not fit within existing scientific principles or theories, to human eccentricities that stand outside of broader social norms, to local practices that deviate from national traditions. But, like Darwin, Mill recognized that a renewed attention to the details of life in time required a certain liberty of mind too often discouraged in contemporary culture. Mill's critical essays, such as On Liberty (1869) and The Subjection of Women (1859, actively promote this freedom of mind. Taking full advantage of

the looser and more flexible form of the essay, these works make arguments for social liberties while simultaneously encouraging liberal-mindedness.

In this way, these essays are critical interventions; they seek to make a difference in the minds of their readers. They are also historical interventions, encouraging a greater attentiveness to the effects of the major social and political changes of the Victorian period: most importantly, the growth of industrial economy and the gradual expansion of political enfranchisement over the course of the nineteenth-century. The growth of economic and political power among the middle classes, the normalization of middle class morality, the improved political organization of the working classes, and the increase of political activism in the professional classes: in Mill's estimation these developments held both promise and danger. They demanded a reevaluation of both the institutions and ideals of British culture in light of the specifics of contemporary life; as we will see in On Liberty and The Subjection of Women, for Mill this reevaluation is guided by one aim and end, the cultivation of human character.

5.1 SOCIAL SCIENCE AND SOCIAL CRITICISM

It is not difficult to read Mill's early work in scientific logic as preparatory to later critical essays like On Liberty and The Subjection of Women if we recognize that these texts are motivated by a common set of aims. The most central of these is Mill's conviction that modern life demands a renewed attention to the specifics of the natural and social world. This was as true, for Mill, in the arena of society and government as it was in the logic of scientific method. In his Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive (1843), Mill sought to rewrite the tenants of British logic without appeals to a-priori knowledge. With this work, Mill answered an intuitionist

tradition in British moral philosophy and natural theology[143] that was resurfacing in the new sciences of man and society. In Mill's estimation, this tradition served to uphold entrenched orthodoxies, giving justification for unexamined habits of thought and preventing needed social reforms.

In the sixth book of the Logic, entitled "On the Logic of the Moral Sciences," Mill calls for a renovation of the moral and social sciences in light of the empirical principles laid out in the first five books of the work.[144] Revising the utilitarian model of social science articulated by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, which explained all social phenomena deductively from a single principle of human nature,[145] Mill proposes a science of society that studies the basic

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[143] For Mill, this tradition was exemplified by the work of William Whewell, whose writings on the history and philosophy of science inspired Mill to write his Logic in response. Following the first edition of the Logic, Mill and Whewell debated the issue of inductive methodology through the multiple editions of their works. See William Whewell, Theory of Scientific Method (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989). On the specifics of this debate see Snyder, "The Mill-Whewell Debate: Much Ado About Induction." E.W. Strong, "William Whewell and John Stuart Mill: Their Controversy About Scientific Knowledge," Journal of the History of Ideas 16, no. 2 (1955). For the broader contexts of their disagreement, especially its relevance to contemporary discussions of geology, morality, and social policy, see Snyder, Reforming Philosophy: A Victorian Debate on Science and Society 33-94. See also Nicholas Capaldi, John Stuart Mill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 159.

[144] For Mill's articulation of this aim, see Chapter One, "Introductory Remarks." John Stuart Mill, The Logic of the Moral Sciences (Chicago: Open Court 1994), 19-21.

[145] This principle is that human beings are driven by their own interests—that they will seek pleasure and avoid pain. The influence of James Mill and Jeremy Bentham—as well as Auguste Comte and Samuel Taylor Coleridge—on John Stuart Mill's thinking about psychology and moral science is treated in Fred Wilson, "Mill on Psychology and the Moral Sciences," in The Cambridge Companion to John Stuart Mill, ed. John Skorupski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 203-54. For a highly readable evaluation of Mill's philosophy of moral science see John Skorupski, John Stuart Mill (London: Routledge, 1989), 248-82. Nicholas Capaldi and John Robson also discuss, at length, Mill's relationship to both utilitarian and Comtean models of social science. See Capaldi,

principles of human psychology in conjunction with the specifics of historical circumstance. Using a "historical method,"[146] as Mill names his methodology, social science would be able to predict to degrees of probability the outcomes of proposed changes in social, political, or economic policy.[147] Mill's science of society is, in this way, always a science of the contemporary social moment. This is because no amount of knowledge of human nature will begin to explain the complexities of either social life or human character without diligent attention to the details of the present.

In "The Logic of the Moral Sciences," Mill envisions social science taking on roles traditionally held by theology or moral philosophy as the authority on moral and social life. But, while a scientifically rigorous study of man and society would inform, for instance, new laws concerning political representation or national education, it must not dictate the aims or ends that these decisions seek. Science, to use Mill's words, must restrict itself to studying human life "in the indicative" and not seek to answer questions expressed in the "imperative"; what life is

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John Stuart Mill, 157-91. See Chapter One and Chapter Four in John Robson, The Improvement of Mankind (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968).

[146] For a discussion of Mill's choice of methodology for the sixth book of the Logic see Alan Ryan, J.S. Mill (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 84-94.

[147] This information can then be used to shape policy based upon human aims, as Mill explains in Chapter Five of "On the Logic of the Moral Sciences": "When the circumstances of an individual or of a nation are in any considerable degree under our control, we may, by our knowledge of tendencies, be enabled to shape those circumstances in a manner much more favourable to the ends we desire than the shape which they would of themselves assume." Mill, The Logic of the Moral Sciences, 55.

science can tell us in a more objective and historically nuanced way, but what life ought to be must be left to the arbiters of moral and social life.[148]

Reading this bold proposal of a new advisory role for science in social and political policy in the Logic, it is perhaps surprising that Mill did not publish any scientific study in the social sciences, beyond his Principles of Political Economy (1848). Nor did he offer any fuller explanation of the discipline he saw as central to the renovation of social science, ethology, or the science of the formation of character. Instead, for the next thirty years, Mill was almost entirely devoted to those questions expressed in the "imperative" that are the domain of the poet or philosopher (as he puts it in "On the Logic of the Moral Sciences") or the domain of the public critic (as we might put it). [149]

But while he may have abandoned the science of character after the publication of the Logic, the work that followed is dedicated to the articulation and justification of the aim of character. This aim is the common thread linking a remarkably diverse group of essays, pamphlets, and books written between 1843 and 1873 on subjects as diverse as political economy, government, poetry, international relations, slavery, education, and public health. It is

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[148] The scientist must not, in other words, become a cleric or legislator but rather an advisor and helpmate to the moral and political leaders of the day. Here Mill differentiates his social scientific system from that of his contemporary and correspondent August Comte.

[149] Capaldi describes Mill's turn from social science to social critique in the following terms: "Intellectual leadership consisted in vision—the combination of the artistic or imaginative discernment of the inherent norms, a store of reliable but qualified social generalizations, an understanding of their historical context and ongoing development, and a logical sense of how they held together. This was neither the program of the Benthamites, nor the alleged sciences of "ethology" as articulated in the Logic, nor the rigid historicism of continental historicists such as Comte. This was uniquely Mill. The role of intellectual leadership was not to be sullied by political activism or confused with journalism. Secure in this self-conception, Mill felt released from any attempt to compromise with the upper classes and reverted to a more Socratic stance with regard to society as a whole." Capaldi, John Stuart Mill, 186.

also the central concern of his major critical essays (in his estimation and in ours): On Liberty and On the Subjection of Women. Reading these works, it is not difficult to conclude that Mill's abandonment of the social scientific project laid out in the Logic may have been more deliberate than has been typically allowed.[150] In these works, Mill pursues a critical rather than scientific study of society, choosing the looser and more flexible form of the essay over that of the scientific treatise to examine the formation of human character. In this way, as we will see, Mill devotes himself to producing work that examines the components of liberal culture while simultaneously promoting liberal thinking—that both studies character and cultivates it.[151]

5.2 SOCIAL INATTENTION

In his critical works, Mill is differently concerned with the historical developments that so worried contemporary social critics like Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, including the expansion of industry, the growing political and economic power of the middle classes, and the concentration of the working classes in the urban centers of England. The danger, in Mill's opinion, was not these changes in and of themselves; the real threat was a lack of attention to the details of these developments and their relationships to the central institutions of British social, political, and economic life. This lack of attention to the historical present was indicative of a

[150] Capaldi argues in his biography of Mill that even in the Logic Mill shows a level of hesitancy regarding social scientific systems. Mill was never comfortable with the idea of a totalizing conceptualization of the natural and social world, seen for instance in the social science of Comte. Capalidi, John Stuart Mill, 179.

[151] Indeed, it is worth noting that Mill's most comprehensive study of the formation of character is undertaken in his most literary of works—his Autobiography.

disconnect, as Mill saw it, between British institutions (of law, government, social policy, etc.) and the concrete facts of everyday existence. Some form of this disconnect was, Mill allowed, a permanent part of any culture, of any community of individuals. But when institutional traditions and social customs operate without question or revision despite real changes in the circumstances of British social and political life, this disconnect threatened the basic conditions of liberal culture.

In a liberal society, where free-minded individuals actively and continually discuss the central aims and ideals of their culture, institutions are the subject of continual interrogation. Following such interrogation, any disconnect between individuals and institutions may be corrected by adapting institutions to their contemporary moment. As he most fully articulates in On Liberty, Mill believes that this process can only be realized in a diverse and intellectually vibrant culture that is educational in the largest sense of the word. In this culture, our knowledge of difference encourages a process of self-interrogation that is, for Mill, the first step toward the marked character of the self-cultivated individual.[152] This marked character, in turn, promotes self-interrogation in other members of society. There is a direct relationship, in this way, between internal and external culture for Mill: liberal culture is conducive to self-culture, just as

[152] For a thoughtful discussion of the central ideal of free thought in Mill's liberal philosophy, including its relationship to the work of other philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche see John Skorupski, Why Read Mill Today (London: Routledge, 2006), 5-8. Importantly, for Mill, free thought is only justified by the evidence of history, rather than by any a-priori authorization. As Skorupski explains, Mill believed that "free thought has only the vindication it can have: its own success in practice, as shown by its history. On its own record it does not lead to disaster but to the growth of knowledge and to an outlook that is humanistic and liberal." Skorupski, Why Read Mill Today, 10-11.

the marked character that emerges through self-culture brings about an increasingly varied and intellectually lively society.[153]

But, as Mill warns in On Liberty, the force of custom in contemporary life tends to rub out the human differences that are the impetus for liberal culture. Following more generalized standards of morality, public opinion currently inclines toward both intellectual moderation and increased regularity of conduct. "These tendencies of the times," he tells us in Chapter Three, "cause the public to be more disposed than at most former periods to prescribe general rules of conduct, and endeavor to make every one conform to the approved standard. And that standard, express or tacit, is to desire nothing strongly. Its idea of character is to be without any marked character; to maim by compression, like a Chinese lady's foot, every part of human nature which stands out prominently, and tends to make the person markedly dissimilar in outline to commonplace humanity."[154] There are, here, two competing ideas of character. For the majority of Victorians, having "character" means following faithfully the conventional rules of propriety; this form of character is defined by a lack of difference. For Mill, having "character" means being an individual, or having habits, thoughts, and desires that are peculiar to you; this form of character is defined by difference.

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[153] Remember that in Mill's system, our own individual freedoms are integrally linked to those of our neighbor: we only assure our own ability to improve ourselves by encouraging improvement in others. This is why, for Mill, liberty must always accompany democracy. Only self-cultivated individuals are fully prepared for citizenship in a democracy, in which individuals are responsible for the continual evaluation and adaptation of social, political, and economic institutions. At the same time, only a liberal culture has the capacity to educate the masses for the responsibilities of citizenship.

[154] John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," in On Liberty and Other Essays, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 77. Hereafter cited as OL.

Under the current standard of character, individuals look without rather than within when making decisions—even when these decisions affect only themselves:

> In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. Not only in what concerns others, but in what concerns only themselves, the individual or the family do not ask themselves—what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character and disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grown and thrive? They ask themselves, what is suitable to my position? what is usually done by persons of my station and pecuniary circumstances?"[155]

It is not, Mill explains, that individuals disregard their own preferences in order to bow to convention, but that it "does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke…"[156] Individual inclination, in this way, falls into preconditioned categories, with each person making choices based upon the norms of their gender, class, nationality, and so on. This has consequences for both individuals and institutions: it is not just that people are unable to think and act outside of abstract categories like "woman," "middle class," or "English," but also that broader society operates on the assumption that all of human life can and should be understood in terms of these general types.[157]

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[155] OL, 68.

[156] OL, 68.

[157] It should be noted that Mill himself is often guilty of these generalizations in On Liberty, especially in his portrayal of the middle class—showing a lack of attention to the

In this way, conformity to designated norms not only wears away the distinctiveness of each individual, but also stunts our capacity to recognize the difference of others. This is because difference is what draws our attention to each other: as Mill explains, "we should think we had done wonders if we had made ourselves all alike; forgetting that the unlikeness of one person to another is generally the first thing which draws the attention of either to the imperfection of his own type, and the superiority of another, or the possibility, by combining the advantages of both, of producing something better than either."[158] Without difference, we have no incitement to pay attention to each other; and without any specific knowledge of others, we have no occasion for the kind of comparative self-reflection that, for Mill, leads to self-improvement. For individuals, the opportunity to contemplate and evaluate ideas and ways of life contrary to our own is the central practice of self-culture. For culture as a whole, a community of diverse characters serves to check the homogenizing effects of custom that make this kind of self-culture difficult or even impossible.

5.3 QUIRKS OF CHARACTER

Mill's theory of progress places importance upon so called "exceptional individuals" who lead remarkable lives no matter their historical circumstances, the actions and ideas of lone

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individual and local differences seen within the "business classes." That said, Mill's priority in On Liberty is to articulate a moral philosophy by which different aspects of social life may be evaluated; it is less concerned with a detailed examination of society in light of this moral philosophy. The Subjection of Women, taking up just one component of modern life, is more nuanced in its social analysis.

[158] OL, 79.

individuals doing much to advance scientific knowledge, alleviate physical suffering, or bring about greater freedom of religion.[159] But however much Mill values exceptional individuals, a culture that nurtures the development of every person is his ultimate aim. This is because we only assure our own freedoms by protecting the freedoms of our fellow citizens, by making sure that every individual has the opportunity for self improvement. Indeed, he makes it clear in On Liberty that the problems of his own contemporary moment cannot be solved by a few free-thinking individuals. He explains that it is not "solely, or chiefly, to form great thinkers that freedom of thinking is required. On the contrary, it is as much and even more indispensable, to enable average human beings to attain the mental stature which they are capable of. There have been, and may again be, great individual thinkers, in a general atmosphere of mental slavery. But there never has been, nor ever will be, in that atmosphere, an intellectually active people."[160] The world will always have a few original thinkers, but a culture of free-minded individuals who have daily opportunities for self-reflection and growth of mind is what is needed to make human progress a normative tendency in modern culture. It is for this reason that the protection of liberty and the cultivation of character should be a central priority in contemporary Victorian society—the aim and end of British institutions of government, religion, and education.

But these institutions can only promote the conditions for the growth of character; character itself must originate in the individual. This is because character, for Mill, is a

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[159] These figures are also prone to persecution, as Mill explains in Chapter Two of On Liberty, and the importance of their ideas is often only fully recognized after their deaths. In this chapter, Mill uses both Socrates and Jesus as examples of figures whose visionary thinking were at odds with the majority opinion of their own historical period. The short-sighted actions of their historical peers now exemplify the fallibility of majority rule for Mill. OL, 29-30.

[160] OL, 39.

condition of practice—the practice of choice. "Human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference," Mill tells us, "are exercised only in making a choice." Without the daily use of these faculties, individuals can hardly be called human:

> He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of nay other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision.[161]

Character (like truth) is not something that can be permanently achieved, but is rather a quality dependent upon daily practices of thought, feeling, and judgment.[162] Without this daily practice, man is no more than an ape or a machine whose thoughts and actions are a mindless repetition of

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[161] OL, 65.

[162] John Skorupski provides an extensive discussion of the importance of the activity of choice in Mill's conception of character formation, explaining the relationship between choice and happiness in Mill's system in the following way: "The general rule, Mill thinks, should be that everyone pursues their own happiness in their own way, under the limitations set by the equal rights of everyone else. And even when it comes to pursuing other ends and achieving happiness by the way…The reasons for this have to do with some basic truths about what human beings are like, their history, and their shared situation. They best discover their own forms of happiness by making their own mistakes, they discover happiness by and large at least as much in heir own personal spheres of self, family and friends as in the impersonal sphere of ethical or political activism; above all, for human beings, the most cherishible forms of happiness require personal freedom, the freedom to get on with one's own life in one's own way." Skorupski, Why Read Mill Today, 15-18. On this issue see also Capaldi, John Stuart Mill, 283.

what has come before. We can distinguish character when an individual, who has self-knowledge of his own uniquely formed nature, makes a choice that is an expression of that unique nature: "a person whose desires and impulses are his own—are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture—is said to have a character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character."[163] The difficulty is that British culture, wary of strong desire and individual impulse, presently prefers the behavior of machines over men—of humans whose individuality has been whittled down to the point that they are hardly distinguishable from any other human being.

Reading Mill's discussion of character in On Liberty,[164] we can see that it constitutes a moral philosophy—a set of standards by which to evaluate all aspects of life based upon whether or not they encourage character. By Mill's standards we are most human when we are actively engaged in self-enculturation, when we have "character" in his definition of that term. We are most human, then, when we are most distinct from each other—when we do not fit easily into the normative categories of our social moment. When our thoughts and actions are expressions of choice rather than adherences to unthinking custom, it is likely (although not necessary) that these thoughts and actions will deviate from the conventions of current society, especially in

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[163] OL, 67. In his earlier work, "The Logic of the Moral Sciences," Mill defines character in more utilitarian language: "It is only when our purposes have become independent of the feelings of pain or pleasure from which they originally took their rise that we are said to have a conformed character. A 'character,' says Novalis, 'is a completely fashioned will.'" Mill, The Logic of the Moral Sciences, 29.

[164] This discussion is prefigured by the focus upon character in the sixth book of Mill's Logic, especially in Chapter Five "Of Ethology, Or the Science of the Formation of Character." The cultivation of character continues to be a major concern in essays like The Subjection of Women, as well as Mill's posthumous Autobiography.

periods where freedom of thought is in short supply. In this way, we might call the moral philosophy Mill articulates in On Liberty a moral philosophy of quirk—a set of rules for private and public life that seek to bring about a liberal culture of distinct and even eccentric individuals. This culture is not so much a coherent community, in which individuals are connected by convention, but a group of diverse individuals who share only the common value of freedom. [165] Although less connected through convention, individuals in this liberal society would be more attentive to each other—having daily incitement to reflect upon the differences between themselves and others.

We can understand, then, why Mill would prefer to see progress that originates with individual thought and action—even if it is uneven or halting—rather than more coherent improvement that emanates from some centralized body (such as national institutions of education or centralized systems of charity, etc.). "The spirit of improvement is not always a

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[165] Remember the purpose of On Liberty as an argument—and as a critical intervention in contemporary British society: to find and set the proper limit of interference of majority opinion over individual independence. The principle of human liberty, which is Mill's articulation of that limit, is justified by one aim and end—the cultivation of character. The utility of human liberty, in other words, is its promotion of the cultivation of character, because the cultivation of character is the best means of ensuring the progress of human civilization in Mill's system, as we have seen. This is, as several Mill scholars have noted, an expansion of the utilitarian aim of the greatest good for the greatest number, as it is articulated by Jeremy Bentham. As Mill explains in Chapter One of On Liberty, "I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded upon the permanent interests of man as a progressive being." OL, 15. Mill gives an earlier explanation of the relationship between character formation and progress in the sixth book of his Logic: "The character itself should be, to the individual, a paramount end, simply because the existence of this ideal nobleness of character, or of a near approach to it, in any abundance, would go further than all things else towards making human life happy, both in the comparatively humble sense of pleasure and freedom from pain, and in the higher meaning of rendering life, not what it now is almost universally, puerile and insignificant, but such as human beings with highly developed faculties care to have." Mill, The Logic of the Moral Sciences, 143.

spirit of liberty," Mill explains in Chapter Three, "for it may aim at forcing improvements on an unwilling people; and the spirit of liberty, in so far as it resists such attempts, may ally itself locally and temporarily with the opponents of improvement; but the only unfailing and permanent source of improvement is liberty, since by it there are as many possible independent centres of improvement as there are individuals."[166] Across the numerous and diverse works of his career, Mill almost always comes down on the side of individual and local choice over a centralized governing power—even when individual and local choice is in error.[167] This is because, for Mill, real progress is only assured when there are greater and better opportunities for the development of character; improvements that do not begin with personal and local choice cause the kind of disconnect between individuals and institutions that is Mill's central concern in On Liberty.[168]

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[166] OL, 79. See Chapter Two, "The Good for Human Beings" in Skorupski for a general discussion of the (sometimes fraught) relationship between free choice, happiness, and progress in Mill's system. Skorupski, Why Read Mill Today, 15-38.

[167] On Mill's localism and his views on decentralization of governing power, see Capaldi, John Stuart Mill, 301. See also Skorupski, Why Read Mill Today, 50-51.

[168] Put another way, Mill believed that social reform must be preceded by moral reform. Capaldi quotes Mill's December 19, 1842 letter to Robert Barclay Fox: "'[It] is becoming more and more clearly evident to me that the mental regeneration of Europe must precede its social regeneration & also that none of the ways in which that mental regeneration is sought, Bible Societies, Tract Societies, Puseyism, Socialism, Chartism, Benthamism &c. will do.'" Capaldi, John Stuart Mill, 256.

5.4 HISTORICAL MISFITS

In a culture that prefers the behavior of machines over men, in Mill's estimation, custom is a formidable opponent to the cultivation of character. Custom has such power, Mill tells us, because of its almost magical resistance to critique. In Chapter One of On Liberty, Mill explains that "no two ages, and scarcely any two countries, have decided alike; and the decision of one age or country no more suspect any difficulty in it, than if it were a subject on which mankind had always been agreed. The rules which obtain among themselves appear to them self-evident and self-justifying. This all but universal illusion is one of the examples of the magical influence of custom…"[169] This is why, as Mill asserts in the sixth book of his Logic, intuitionist philosophy is so often the helpmate of orthodox custom, providing logical support for beliefs and practices that have little truth beyond their familiarity as conventions.

Given the magical force of custom, difference need not be useful to society in the grand scheme of things to be beneficial during a historical period in which conformity outweighs individuality. Eccentricity, Mill asserts, is important right now whether it does service to humanity as a whole or not: "In this age, the mere example of non-conformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric."[170] Whether or not an idea or practice has the potential to be adopted by British culture at large in the future, any aspect of life that distinguishes itself from the dominant conventions of contemporary society has social and moral value for Mill. That is,

[169] OL, 9.

[170] OL, 70.

as long as it does not impinge upon the liberty of others.[171] These peculiarities of thought or eccentricities of action call into question custom's appearance of ubiquity and permanence, checking both conformity and complacency in individuals and institutions. The mere presence of eccentricity is, in this way, a heuristic to anyone who pauses long enough to notice it.

We can see, then, why Mill gives so much attention in On Liberty and The Subjection of Women to aspects of British culture that do not fit within their own historical moment: customs from the past that have been marginalized in the present, "experiments in living" that may or may not be more widely adopted in the future, and practices that are at a disconnect with the norms of the present. Such "historical misfits" serve to reawaken us to the details of our present moment, jogging our capacity for self-evaluation and inciting our interest in the status of institutions that shape British social life. These misfits are, however, easily ignored in a culture that encourages conformity in individuals and complacency in institutions. For this reason, one of the central tasks of the liberal social critic is to draw our notice to these historical misfits.

Some historical misfits run counter to the negative tendencies of contemporary society. For instance, it is in the interest of diversity that minority groups maintain customs that were once dominant in the past but now have only a marginal presence in current society (to give a key example, the traditions of Catholicism). Moreover, since the progress of humanity is halting and uneven, such traditions probably have intellectual, moral, or practical value long after they have been discarded by the majority of British culture. As Mill explains,

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[171] This is the thorny question of what constitutes "harm" for Mill in On Liberty. There are instances where the state must limit the freedoms of some in order to secure the freedoms of all. In the final chapter of the work, "Applications," Mill attempts to deal with this question in the concrete.

> Even in revolutions of opinion, one part of the truth usually sets while another rises. Even progress, which ought to superadd, for the most part only substitutes, one partial and incomplete truth for another; improvement consisting chiefly in this, that the new fragment of truth is more wanted, more adapted to the needs of the time, than that which it displaces.[172]

With this view of human progress, marginalized or superseded customs are our only real access to the forgotten truths of the past. This is not only because these practices are a living record of past custom; it is also because these minority groups (for instance, a minority religion) are constantly called upon to explain their beliefs and practices to majority groups. Because of this, they have for Mill more "living truth" than many customs maintained by the majority of British people. Remember the distinction Mill makes between truth and dogma in Chapter Two of On Liberty. Most dogma was at one time truth, Mill warns: "However unwillingly a person who has a strong opinion may admit the possibility that his opinion may be false, he ought to be moved by the consideration that however true it may be, if it is not fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as a dead dogma, not a living truth."[173] Truth is, in this way, a condition of human thinking in Mill's system: unless it is the subject of active and continual interrogation, truth quickly becomes dogma.[174] For this reason, anything that has the capacity to

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[172] OL, 52.

[173] OL, 40.

[174] Of course, the interrogation of established knowledge has new truths or new dogma as its aim. The important point is that, for Mill, all knowledge should be continually and mindfully evaluated in light of the contemporary moment—even new truths that have recently emerged out of current historical conditions. At the institutional level, this means

spur reevaluation of held truths has social value for Mill—even minority opinions that appear to have no use or relevance in present society.

Just as discarded non-majority customs can offer access to past truths, "experiments in living" can provide entrance to future truths. Mill says in Chapter Three of On Liberty: "As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so is it that there should be different experiments in living; that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when any one thinks fit to try them."[175] Experiments in living can be any choice that runs counter to the conventions of the contemporary moment. As I have already discussed, Mill puts a great amount of value upon "exceptional individuals" whose original thinking and forward-looking deeds bring society closer to the ideal of liberal culture. Such exceptional individuals surely lead experimental lives in Mill's sense of the term. But experiments in living may also be practices or ideas that may or may not turn out to be beneficial to mankind as a whole or to be conducive to progress in any way. For instance, Mill was enthusiastic about several experiments in communal living that were undertaken during the early and mid-Victorian period. It was not so much that he thought a socialist society was a better or more practical system for England; indeed, he clearly states across numerous writings that he thinks a predominantly free market system is preferable to any other, given the current conditions of

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that Mill is most concerned with keeping the systems of society in close relationship with the details of the present. At the individual level, this means that Mill always values the activity of human thinking over the accumulation of human knowledge.

[175] OL, 63.

British society.[176] It was more that Mill valued the heuristic that alternative ways of life provided to the culture at large. Looking at experiments that followed the socialist systems of the Saint-Simonians or Robert Owen,[177] Mill imagines, British citizens would be prompted to reflect upon their own economic system by comparison. They would ask: what makes our present system better than these alternatives? What might these other ways of life offer that we do not have now? How might we adapt our present system to include some of the benefits of these alternatives?

Although truth is constant in Mill's theory of progress, what can be seen as truth is a condition of historical circumstance, and access to non-dominant truths is only possible through a culture of free and active dissent. Even if current ways of life are working well (for instance, the free-market economy), non-normative practices or beliefs may contain a portion of truth that we are lacking. Indeed, minority opinions should be nurtured, Mill asserts, because they are the opinions that "represent the neglected interests, the side of human well-being which is in danger of obtaining less than its share…When there are persons to be found, who form an exception to the apparent unanimity of the world on any subject, even if the world is in the right, it is always probable that dissentients have something worth hearing to say for themselves, and that truth would lose something by their silence."[178] In this way, attending to social and historical "exceptions" is a way of accessing a broader range of thought and action within a particular

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[176] See especially Mill's 1848 Principles of Political Economy. See Chapter Seven of Capaldi for a discussion of Mill's views on Victorian ideas of capitalism and communisim. Capaldi, John Stuart Mill, 192-224.

[177] See Capaldi for Mill's interest in the Saint-Simonians during the late 1830s. Ibid., 78-81. See also Robson, The Improvement of Mankind, 76-80.

[178] OL, 54.

historical moment. Or, put another way, it is a means of locating the unnoticed possibilities of the present. Bringing into question the self-evidence of custom, such exceptions may be used to reopen discussions that appear settled—to interrogate established systems of economy, government, education, and so on.

5.5 HISTORICAL RELICS

There are also historical misfits that run counter to the positive tendencies of contemporary society (such as progress toward broader enfranchisement and greater equality of opportunity). Often these aspects of life may have been justified in the past, but have become anachronisms in modern England. For instance, Mill agreed with utilitarians like his father James Mill and Jeremy Bentham that a feudal system of economy and social rank were British traditions that had outlived their usefulness. The Subjection of Women (1869) is Mill's most sustained analysis of a custom that has lived past its historical relevance and efficacy: the social, political, and economic inequality of women.

As Mill shows in both On Liberty and The Subjection of Women, custom makes it easy to live in a culture without actually seeing it for what it is; but attention to historical and social exception, Mill asserts, prepares us to resist social conformity, check institutional complacency, and recognize unacknowledged injustice. These exceptions, such as the "experiments in living" discussed in On Liberty, are worthy of our consideration because they provoke individual self reflection and institutional reevaluation. The current status of women, when recognized as discordant with the positive trends of modernity, also inspires the reinterpretation and reevaluation of individual belief and institutional tradition. Indeed, for Mill, recognizing an

injustice so integral to everyday life has the capacity to instigate a moral renovation of Victorian culture at the most local level—by beginning with the human family.

But to open his readers' eyes to the incongruity of women's status in modernity, Mill has to find ways of interrogating the seeming "natural order" of society in which women are subjugated by men—and to combat the "mass of feeling" behind popular opinion on this subject. Mill acknowledges that an argument based on reason alone would have little effect upon his readers, "for a cause supported on the one hand by universal usage, and on the other by so great a preponderance of popular sentiment, is supposed to have a presumption in its favour, superior to any conviction which an appeal to reason has power to produce in any intellects but those of a high class." It is, then, not a problem of his own ability to produce a reasoned argument, but the unreadiness of his readers to give a reasoned evaluation of this argument. The majority of his audience, Mill explains, is ill prepared to rely entirely upon "their own power of estimating arguments, as to give up the practical principles in which they have been born and bread…"[179] This is not because they are lacking the capacity to reason, Mill asserts, but because they have not had enough practice. Because of this, The Subjection of Women must be more than an argument; it must also be a text that finds ways of encouraging freedom of thought and imagination in the reader. If, as Mill describes, the minds of his readers "need to be much better cultivated than has ever yet been the case" to judge this issue fairly and reasonably, this essay begins some of the work of this cultivation.

To do this, Mill takes full advantage of the mixed and flexible form of the essay. Employing analogies, historical and cultural comparisons, and thought experiments, he attempts to sidestep habits of thought and to make strange one of the most routine aspects of

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[179] OL, 473.

contemporary existence. These rhetorical techniques are, in this way, more than components of Mill's argument; they are also preparations of mind—exercises in the kind of free thinking that Mill's argument demands. With these techniques, Mill attempts to reopen the settled question of women's status in modernity, taking on one by one the justifications for the present arrangement of society, especially the strongly-held belief that the power of men over women is "natural."

Beginning The Subjection of Women by describing the weight of strong feeling and staunch opinion that he is up against, Mill starts again in another direction, with a lengthy historical narrative that charts humanity's progression from a primitive state ruled by the law of strength to its current civil state. This history of force eventually reveals the anachronism of the state of inequality between men and women in modernity:

> …the course of history, and the tendencies of progressive human society, afford not only no presumption in favour of this system of inequality of rights, but a strong one against it; and that, so far as the whole course of human improvement up to this time, the whole stream of modern tendencies, warrants any inference on the subject, it is, that this relic of the past is discordant with the future, and must necessarily disappear….[180]

Answering those that would use history to show the suitability and benefits of a system of inequality between the sexes, Mill asserts that the course of western history—and specifically its general tendency toward social, political, and scientific advancement—offers no argument in favor of this system beyond its conventionality. Rather, a study of history enlightens the

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[180] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in On Liberty and Other Essays, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 487. Hereafter cited as SW.

"discordance" of this system with the future possibilities that may be inferred from past and present change. It is a "relic" or artifact: its original historical contexts have passed away, and its will disappear given the tendencies of modernity. As Mill elaborates later in Chapter One, its is "a single relic of an old world of thought and practice exploded in everything else, but retained in the one thing of most universal interest; as if a gigantic dolmen, or a vast temple of Jupiter Olympus, occupied the site of St. Paul's and received daily worship, while the surrounding Christian churches were only resorted to on fasts and festival."[181] The plight of women in modern society, Mill analogizes, is like a pagan temple occupying a central site of Christian worship and never being recognized as a contradiction among the Christian churches that surround it.

The reader is not, however, prepared to recognize this contradiction at the start of the essay. It takes the mental work of Mill's history of force to gradually reveal the status of women for what it is, a relic of the barbarous past. Drawing an analogy between women and slaves, for instance, Mill sets out to show the disturbing similarity between two practices that at first glance appear to have no resemblance whatsoever. But in order to use this analogy, Mill must reawaken his readers of aspects of their past that they would sooner forget. His history of force in Chapter One is necessary, Mill tells us, because

> people are mostly so little aware how completely, during the greater part of the duration of our species, the law of force was the avowed rule of general conduct, any other being only a special and exceptional consequence of peculiar ties—and from how very

[181] SW, 491.

> recent a date it is that affairs of society in general have been even pretended to be regulated according to any moral law; as little do people remember or consider, how institutions and customs which never had any ground but the law of force, last on into ages and states of general opinion which never would have permitted their first establishment. Less than forty years ago, Englishmen might still by law hold human beings in bondage as saleable property: within the present century they might kidnap them and carry them off, and work them literally to death.[182]

Here Mill describes a kind of cultural amnesia regarding the role of force in England's past, reminding his readers that a society ruled according to moral law is of a comparatively recent date. Whether it is the power of absolute monarchy over all British citizens or of individual masters over their slaves, forgetting the role of force in the nation's past means that no lessons can be learned from history by means of comparison. For Mill, the most important lesson of British history is that "unnatural generally means only uncustomary, and that everything which is usual appears natural." [183] Custom will always uphold present norms as right and good, no matter how odious they are judged to be afterwards. Of course, it is easier to learn this lesson from the past—from which the reader has some distance—than from the routine arrangements of social life.

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[182] SW, 480.

[183] SW, 483-484.

As Mill is careful to point out, even the most intelligent and forward-thinking figures in history have often been unable to see that what is customary is not necessarily natural. Considering the belief that slavery was justified by a "natural order" of human civilization, Mill reminds his readers that "no less an intellect, and one which contributed no less to the progress of human thought, than Aristotle, held this opinion without doubt or misgiving; and rested it one the same premises on which the same assertion in regard to the dominion of men over women is usually based, namely that there are different natures among mankind, free natures, and slave natures: that the Greeks were of a free nature, the barbarian races of Thracians and Asiatics of a slave nature." Indeed, Mill says that he need not go back that far in western history to provide an analogous example: "Did not the slave-owners of Southern United States maintain the same doctrine, with all the fanaticism with which men cling to the theories that justify their passions and legitimate their personal interests?"[184] Each of these historical examples reinforce Mill's observation, central to his argument in The Subjection of Women, that human beings have a surprising capacity to live with exception and never acknowledge it as such. These examples are meant, here, as a heuristic; they beg the question: if western culture has lived easily with moral injustice in the past, what wrongs are going unacknowledged in the present?

Mill ends his history of force by trying to explain why it is that this modern form of slavery, women's subjugation to men, has continued to survive in the present when the

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[184] SW, 483-484. Nor do we need to go back in time to understand the relativity of what is deemed "natural" in a given time and place; looking at British traditions from the perspective of foreign cultures will come to the same effect. For instance, Mill tells us, "nothing so much astonishes the people of distance parts of the world, when they first learn anything about England, as to be told that it is under a queen: the thing seems to them so unnatural as to be almost incredible. To Englishmen this does not seem in the least degree unnatural, because they are so used to it; but they do feel it unnatural that women should be soldiers or members of Parliament." SW, 484.

analogous systems of absolute monarchy and slavery have passed away. The power that men have over women has important differences from that of a monarch over his subjects or a master over his slave; according to Mill, the relationship between men and women exhibits a much more intimate form of force:

> Whatever gratification of pride there is in the possession of power, and whatever personal interest in its exercise, is in this case not confined to a limited class, but common to the whole male sex. Instead of being, to most of its supporters, a thing desirable chiefly in the abstract, or, like the political ends usually contended for by factions, of little private importance to any but the leaders; it comes home to the person and hearth of every male head of a family, and of every one who looks forward to being so.[185]

This kind of power is not only more ubiquitous (it is not confined to a certain class of men); it is also more personal, being more intimately integral to everyday life than public forms of force. It is a tradition desirable in the concrete rather than the abstract, as Mill puts it, and is therefore more resistant to the kind of self-reflective critique that would question the justice of women's status in contemporary society.

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[185] SW, 481.

5.6 HISTORICAL POSSIBILITY

Historical analogies can only go so far for Mill; with them, he can begin to enlighten the injustice of women's subjugation, but these comparisons cannot show what women could be and do without these social restraints. Mill's central strategy in The Subjection of Women is to awaken his readers to the reality of an integral aspect of everyday existence: the inequality of men and women. But once the facts of this relationship have been examined in the comparative light of history, Mill must turn to other means to envision alternatives to present norms. For instance, Mill employs thought experiments to ask his readers to imagine possibilities beyond those offered by history or their own experience. Early in his argument, Mill asks his readers to consider the popular opinion that the inequality of the sexes has been conducive to beneficial ends. This would be a perfectly good reason to maintain the custom, Mill says, if

> the authority of men over women, when first established, had been the result of a conscientious comparison between different modes of constituting the government of society; if, after trying various other modes of social organization—the government of women over men, equality between the two, and such mixed and divided modes of government as might be invented—it had been decided on the testimony of experience, that the mode in which women are wholly under the rule of men, having no share at all in public concerns, and each in private being under the legal obligation of obedience to the man with whom she has associated her destiny, was the arrangement most conducive to the happiness and well-being of both; its general adoption might then be fairly thought to

> be some evidence that, at the time when it was adopted, it was the best…[186]

Here Mill asks his readers to consider historical processes scientifically and consider an imaginary scenario in which history is a product of reasoned choice rather than convention. Implicitly, Mill asks: when we make choices about the best theory to explain the physical operations of the universe or the most efficient mode of manufacturing a product, we do so by testing all possibilities and making a reasoned and informed choice between them. Although social history will not allow this kind of experimentation, this thought experiment allows us to see that there are no grounds for supposing our present system to be the most beneficial to mankind. It stretches the limits of established thought on this subject, inviting readers to see that the current system, although justified by custom, need not be the only one.

The larger thought experiment of The Subjection of Women is, of course, the question of what society would look like if men and women were equal. In Chapter Two, Mill asks what marriage would look like if power was more evenly divided between husband and wife. It is not only that this change would make marriage a more just institution under the law; this change would also have the potential to transform society as a whole—by making the family a center of moral education and character formation. "The equality of married persons," Mill asserts, "is the only means of rendering the daily life of mankind, in any high sense, a school of moral cultivation."[187] This is because the "only school of genuine moral sentiment is society between equals," the ideal of liberal culture being grounded upon not only equality but also "cultivated

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[186] SW, 474-475.

[187] SW, 517.

sympathy," which is the understanding that comes from imagining what it is like to be someone else.[188]

Unfortunately, there is little in modern life that can give individuals practice in this kind of sympathetic exchange: "Citizenship, in free countries, is partly a school of society in equality; but citizenship fills only a small place in modern life, and does not come near the daily habits or inmost sentiments. The family, justly constituted, would be the real school of the virtues of freedom." [189] For Mill, equality in marriage does not mean sameness in marriage. It means, rather, that both husband and wife should have equal opportunity to pursue their own development as individuals, and that marriage should be a primary arena for the exchange of ideas between two free-minded individuals. In this way, Mill's ideal of marriage mirrors his ideal of liberal society: with greater equality between men and women, marriage would provide daily practice in many of the skills necessary for active and mindful citizenship in a liberal democracy—including a more sympathetic consideration of difference than is readily seen in more public venues.

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[188] Here there are ready affinities between Mill's conception of sympathetic exchange and Eliot's idea of sympathetic extension. In this sense, both the sympathetic communion between husband and wife and the expansion of sympathy invited by the novel are preparations for the broader responsibilities of citizenship in a liberal democratic culture.

[189] SW, 519.

5.7 CONCLUSIONS

Examining the argument of The Subjection of Women, we can see that Mill's aim in this work is not limited to bringing his readers' attention to an injustice that has gone unacknowledged in contemporary society. This work also seeks to prepare its readers, as does On Liberty, for a more mindful engagement with Victorian culture at large and a more self-reflective attention to the specifics of everyday life. This preparation, as Mill demonstrates in these two essays, is the central task of the liberal social critic. Through analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of the present social moment, social critics are both a part of and separate from contemporary culture. In this way, they inhabit the persona of the "historical misfit," not because they are exceptional or eccentric but because the critique of culture requires that they maintain a somewhat contrary relationship to the conventions of society. In On Liberty and The Subjection of Women, Mill stands apart from his fellow men—if only for the space of the essay—in order to see the circumstances of social life anew.

These two essays invite this apartness in the reader as well, making strange some of the most fundamental and familiar aspects of social life through reasoned analysis, historical comparison, and thought experiments. In this way, On Liberty and The Subjection of Women are not only arguments for liberal culture, but also exercises in liberal critical practice. This practice is multiple, attending to the unnoticed exceptions of human life at both the social and individual level. As we have seen, some of these exceptions link us to our past and some provide entrance into our future; some incite greater freedom of thought and others check moral complacency. But all have the capacity to awaken us to possibilities that are present—but too often unnoticed—in the details of everyday social life.

But as Mill demonstrates in The Subjection of Women, many of these possibilities can only be accessed by means of the imagination; often we can only see what contemporary society is—and what it could be—in the light of imagined alternatives. Mill shows that the social critic must do more than attend to the "historical misfits" of the present. He must also find ways to acknowledge individuals who might have stood out from the norm if only their historical circumstances had been different—who could have been exceptions if only they had lived in a different time or place. Concern for such individuals requires that Mill's readers extrapolate from the facts of British history to imagine what might have been, given another set of historical conditions.

For instance, in On Liberty, Mill describes the wasted possibilities of potential dissenters whose characters are stunted by social circumstance: "Who can compute what the world loses in the multitude of promising intellects combined with timid characters, who dare not follow out any bold, vigourous, independent train of thought, lest it should land them in something which would admit of being considered irreligious or immoral?"[190] Similarly, in The Subjection of Women, Mill describes the efforts of British women who have begun to publicly protest their political, legal, and economic status in society, wondering: "How many more women there are who silently cherish similar aspirations, no one can possibly know; but there are abundant tokens how many would cherish them, were they not so strenuously taught to repress them as contrary to the proprieties of their sex."[191] For Mill, the waste of potential described in these two passages acts as a heuristic; it prompts the following questions: What possibilities of mind are currently going unnoticed? Which experiments in living are never undertaken because of social

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[190] OL, 39.

[191] SW, 485.

restraints? What kinds of local changes are being thwarted by a cultural climate of conformity? But perhaps more important than these questions is another: What are the preparations of mind necessary for recognizing these unnoticed possibilities? Mill's critical essays, like the other central texts of this dissertation, promote these preparations of mind—asking the reader to bring an acute attention to difference, a comparative style of analysis, and a flexible imagination to the examination of the details of contemporary life.

6.0 CHAPTER FIVE: WALTER PATER AND THE ART OF PAYING ATTENTION

The late Victorian work of Walter Pater may seem an unlikely capstone to the preceding chapters of this dissertation. But reading Pater alongside Dickens, Darwin, Eliot, and Mill, certain unexpected affinities emerge. Each of these writers sought to extend and amplify experience through their writing; each aimed to check habits and conventions of thought, and to awaken human capacities of thought, feeling, or imagination—all by bringing attention to the unnoticed or disregarded details of life in time. An attunement to these details, as we will see, is the basis of Pater's aesthetic philosophy—and the central concern of his novel Marius the Epicurean, His Sensations and Ideas (1885).[192]

Pater, like Dickens and Eliot, sought to create fiction that acted upon its audience, that made some difference in its readers' relationship to reality.[193] It is not just that Pater created

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[192] Marius is Pater's only complete novel. It was intended to be the first in a three volume series; the second novel, Gaston de Latour, was unfinished at Pater's death. Pater's other fictional works include his 1887 collection of fictional portraits Imaginary Portraits. See Walter Pater, Imaginary Portraits (London: Macmillan and Company, 1910). Also, Gaston De Latour: An Unfinished Romance. (London: Macmillan and Company, 1906).

[193] Pater has typically been studied as a representative or forerunner of a larger literary category or movement, such as aestheticism or modernism. When he is read in the light of mid-Victorian predecessors, scholars have focused upon his relationship to writers like Matthew Arnold or John Ruskin who were similarly interested in the criticism of art. But when we study Pater in his own terms (rather than, for instance, Oscar Wilde's or T.S. Eliot's), his fiction and criticism becomes less estranged from the mid-Victorian realism of Dickens and Eliot. The first two chapters of Denis Donoghue's critical biography of Pater give an overview of twentieth-century literary critical discussions of Pater, and gives

fiction that was, in the broadest sense of the word, educational—fiction that spurred human thinking. It was also that his writing aimed to make life more educational, in the sense that it prepared the minds of its readers for a more vital and mindful engagement with the details of everyday experience. In this sense, Pater's allegiance was not to literature itself but what art could do in the world, what effect fiction could have upon the minds of its readers.

Pater's idea of aesthetic cultivation is not, in this way, so very different from Mill's idea of liberal education. For Mill an attunement to the unnoticed details of life in time is the central practice of liberal culture; for Pater it is the central practice of aesthetic culture. For both writers, self cultivation is promoted by encounters with the unfamiliar or strange, difference being the impetus for human thinking and self-making. For Pater, as for Mill, the study of history provides such encounters, inviting a comparative perspective that clears the mind of habit and convention, making it possible to see the details of present life anew.

In his criticism and fiction, Pater's attention to aspects of the forgotten past was a way of addressing the present; or more precisely, it was a way of preparing his readers for the conditions of the present. Pater's practice of aesthetic criticism, as it is articulated and modeled in his essays and fiction, asks that we attend to both art and life just as we attend to the discarded details of history. The everyday experience of life, and even art, is too often mediated by the conventions of contemporary life. By contrast, we can experience the discarded details of history with some distance from the norms of their own period, without any pressing concern for their scientific significance, rational truth, or practical usefulness. We are free, in short, to

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special focus to Pater's relationship to British modernism. Denis Donoghue, Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

experience these details aesthetically. In Pater's work, then, attention to the historical past—or the imagined historical past—prepares the mind for a fuller aesthetic experience of the present.

As we have seen in each of the central texts of this dissertation, there is a level of artistry or creativity involved in creating novels and essays that bring a renewed attention to the unnoticed details of life in time. There is, in Pater's vocabulary, an art to paying attention. We can see this in Marius the Epicurean, a novel that has ready similarities with Daniel Deronda, its narrator continually interrupting descriptions of the material world with philosophical reflections, literary quotations, historical comparisons, and modern commentary. Even more than Eliot, Pater merges the genre of the novel with that of the essay, the mix of styles inviting a more reflective and sympathetic notice of the details of everyday Roman life in the second century A.D. But in Marius, even the most straight-forward descriptions of the physical world are infused with ideas; and in this sense the novel has just as many affinities with Dickens's Bleak House. Matching its discursive style to its subjects, the novel invites the reader to experience the religions and philosophies of ancient Rome aesthetically. In this way, the novel's narration transforms the abstract teachings of Epicureanism, Stoicism, and early Christianity into the kind of aesthetic experience Pater promotes in his criticism.

6.1 THE MODERN RELATIVE WORLD

The first section of this chapter considers Pater's literary critical work, focusing on his early essay "Coleridge" and his collection The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry. Developing a theory of aesthetic experience and a practice of aesthetic criticism, these essays are responses to—and interventions in—Pater's contemporary moment. In these writings, Pater

portrays the nineteenth century as a period in which the meaning of human life has been hedged by scientific empiricism on one side and philosophical skepticism on the other. As Pater expresses in his early essay "Diaphaneite,"[194] modernity is a deadening existence for most: "Most of us are neutralised by the play of circumstances. To most of us only one chance is given in the life of the spirit and the intellect, and circumstances prevent our dexterously seizing that one chance. The one happy spot in our nature has no room to burst into life. Our collective life, pressing equally on every part of every one of us, reduces nearly all of us to the level of a colourless uninteresting existence" (252). For Pater, the narrowness of human life in the present demands a new stance towards the external concrete world—a way of knowing alternative to empiricism and skepticism that has the potential to reanimate human experience. This enlivening of human life will not be accomplished by an appeal to utility,[195] which seeks to enrich human life by stressing its usefulness, or to collective culture,[196] which aims to enlarge human experience through systematic enculturation. Instead, Pater suggests in his essay "Coleridge," individuals must seek out the possibilities remaining in our "modern relative world" through individual aesthetic experience.

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[194] Never published, this essay was circulated among Pater's friends and colleagues in the early 1860s.

[195] As in the aims of utilitarianism in the works of Jeremy Bentham or James Mill. John Stuart Mill, as we have seen, recognized that utility as an immediate aim cannot sustain human existence. It can only be an indirect aim that is achieved in the process of some other end. As I have suggested, Pater and Mill are in agreement that self-culture is what makes life worthwhile; but Pater does not theorize, as Mill and Arnold do, the civic importance of self culture.

[196] The clearest example here is Matthew Arnold's idea of culture in Culture and Anarchy, which Pater revises in the "Preface" to The Renaissance. Pater asserts in this preface that cultural consensus is impossible in modernity.

Pater's first published essay "Coleridge"[197] is typical of his critical approach: its subject is historical but its central concerns are contemporary. In this essay, a critical portrait of Coleridge occasions a discussion of the "relative spirit" of the modern era, a spirit that has taken the place of older absolutisms such as those sought for and promoted by Coleridge. For Pater, Coleridge's idealism, which draws from German transcendentalism, is currently losing ground to modern relativism:

> Modern thought is distinguished from ancient by its cultivation of the 'relative' spirit in place of the 'absolute.' Ancient philosophy sought to arrest every object in an eternal outline, to fix thought in a necessary formula, and the varieties of life in a classification by 'kinds,' or genera. To the modern spirit nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions. The philosophical conception of the relative has been developed in modern times through the influence of the sciences of observation. Those sciences reveal types of life evanescing into each other by inexpressible refinements of change. Things pass into their opposites by accumulation of indefinable qualities. The growth of those sciences consists in a continual analysis of facts of rough and

[197] This essay was published in 1866 in the Westminster Review and later included in the 1889 volume Appreciations; with an Essay on Style.

> general observation into groups of facts more precise and minute.[198]

No longer organizing the world through absolutes, as in the essential forms of Plato's metaphysics or the fixed categories of Aristotle's biology, modernity creates knowledge of the world only "relatively and under conditions." While absolute and relative modes of knowledge can be seen throughout human history, Pater explains, the modern dominance of the relative spirit has attended the rise of the empirical sciences. These sciences have demanded a reevaluation of the concept of change: for instance, biology replaces an ancient understanding of the species as fixed with a modern theory of evolution. The advance of the modern sciences, Pater asserts, is dependent not upon their ability to uncover the fixed categories of the natural world but upon their ability to analyze the raw facts of observation. Observation and analysis must be "continual," in Pater's characterization, because scientific knowledge must always be subject to revision in the light of new historical conditions.[199] As a result, in the modern sciences there is more confidence in the truth of the particular than the general, because "the faculty for truth," Pater explains, "is recognized as a power of distinguishing and fixing delicate and fugitive detail."[200]

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[198] Walter Pater, "Coleridge," in Appreciations, with an Essay on Style (London: Macmillan and Company, 1910), 66.

[199] Here Pater could easily be paraphrasing Mill's 1843 A System of Logic. Pater read many of the major works in science and philosophy of science in the Victorian period, including those by William Whewell, John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, and Thomas Henry Huxley. See Chapter Three of Donoghue, Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls.

[200] Pater, "Coleridge," 66.

Pater concludes that while the desire for absolute knowledge or fixed order in the world is a longing inherent to human nature, the time of systemic belief in absolutes has passed. But in the final passages of "Coleridge," Pater dwells more upon the possibilities offered by the modern relative world than the difficulties it poses. As science becomes more relative so has modern morality: more flexible means of ethical evaluation replace the moral codes of earlier eras that were based upon abstract and unchanging absolutes.[201] A modern morality, in Pater's estimation, is more attuned to the complex specifics of individual experience: the "relative spirit, by its constant dwelling on the more fugitive conditions or circumstances of things, breaking through a thousand rough and brutal classifications, and giving elasticity to inflexible principles, begets an intellectual finesse of which the ethical result is a delicate and tender justice in the criticism of human life."[202] Like Dickens, Eliot, and Mill, Pater characterizes modern morality as a practice of sympathetic attention. Older systems of absolute morality were "rough and brutal" because they were disconnected from the specifics of everyday life. A relative system of morality, by contrast, is attuned to the human complexities of ordinary existence; its judgments are not inflexible, rough, or brutal but tender, elastic, or delicate.

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[201] Ibid., 67.

[202] Ibid., 103.

6.2 ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE, OR THE ART OF PAYING ATTENTION

Pater's early essay on Coleridge can be read as a preface to his famous "Conclusion" in The Renaissance (1888), which returns to the status of human knowledge and meaning in the modern relative world. While "Coleridge" considers the consequences of relative thinking in modern science and morality, the "Conclusion" explores the possibilities it affords for both art and aesthetic experience. Pater begins with a description of two prevailing strains of relative thinking in nineteenth-century British intellectual culture, the first in science and the second in philosophy. Pater looks first at sensual experience from the viewpoint of empirical science, describing the human body within the vast organic complexity of the external physical world, then at psychological experience from the viewpoint of skeptical philosophy, picturing the inescapable circularity of the internal human mind. These sections are descriptive rather than prescriptive: it is not that Pater sees special value in either of these two ways of looking at the world, but needs to explicate these two points of view before suggesting an alternative.[203]

Pater begins with "that which is without—our physical life," looking first at our sensual experience and uncovering its basic physical and chemical elements. These elements are in constant movement of combination: what appears on the surface to be static experience is in fact the "perpetual motion" of processes like the "passage of the blood, the waste and repairing of the lenses of the eye, the modification of the tissue of the brain under every ray of light and

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[203] In this, I agree with Carolyn Williams; she notes the tendency in Pater scholarship to read the opening section of the "Conclusion" as an endorsement rather than an explication. See especially chapter one in Carolyn Williams, Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism. (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1989). See also Chapter Five in Donoghue, Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls.

sound."[204] With this scientific view, Pater reveals the hidden life of natural processes too small or two slow to be apparent to the naked eye of the everyday observer—processes which science makes even more unrecognizable by reduction into their basic elements. This unseen world of chemical change and physical action is one we share with our external environment; at the elemental level, there is no distinction between the human and inhuman because the same processes are at work in the human body as in any other substance in nature.

Where we end and the rest of the physical world begins—this is a product of our faculties of perception: "That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours, under which we group them—a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. This is at least of flame-like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways."[205] At the microscopic level, we are just a cluster of elements within a larger web, with no clear boundary between the elements that constitute our bodies and those that make up the world. Any distinct physical presence that we have is only a "concurrence of forces" which changes with each unfolding moment. Using a metaphor of flame, Pater suggests that our most intense moments of sensual experience are the result of these concurrences, the possibility for such moments being renewed by the passage of time.

Pater begins again from another direction in the second paragraph of the "Conclusion," offering another view of human experience by analyzing the "inward world of thought and feeling." Although common experience assures us that a "sharp and importunate" reality exists,

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[204] Walter Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 150.

[205] Ibid.

the concreteness of the physical world fades under the analysis of reflection. Once it is revealed that objects are composed of various sensual impressions, such as color, odor, and texture, the "cohesive force" of the physical world suddenly "seems suspended like some trick of magic." In this view, Pater explains, perception becomes a mass of "impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them." With perception circumscribed by individual impression, any 'objective' contact with the external world is impossible. The relationship between humans and their physical and social surroundings is, in this view, not an interconnected "web" of common elements, but a string of solitary cells within which each individual is a "prisoner" of his own mind.[206]

Continued analysis shows that our impressions are in "perpetual flight, that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it…To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down."[207] Impressions are only actual for an instant, and in the time it takes to apprehend them, they have disappeared. Infinitely divisible, our impressions of the world are a perpetually changing stream. Like the river in Heraclitus's paradox,[208] our experience of the world is both

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[206] Ibid., 151.

[207] Walter Pater, Marius the Epicurean, His Sensations and Ideas, ed. Anne Kimball Tuell (New York: Macmillan Company, 1926), 151. Hereafter cited as ME.

[208] Quoted variously throughout classical literature, Heraclitus's maxim states that "no one can step twice into the same river." Pater opens the "Conclusion" with an epigraph taken from the fragments of Heraclitus: "Heraclitus says 'All things are in motion and nothing at rest.'" Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, 174.

one and many: it appears to be a coherent whole, a perception supported by fixed language, but analysis shows that it is in fact infinitely divisible in time, our impressions of the present moment different from impressions of an instant past.

Thus the psychological view of human experience ends much like the scientific view, with the limits imposed upon human knowledge by time. But it is in the process of time that Pater sees possibility for a new stance toward human experience, alternative to the two he has just described. Taking the smallness of what we can know about the world as a given, Pater inquires what can be done to allow us as much access as possible to "what is real in our life." Because "a counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life," he asks: "How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?"[209] The question becomes, then, not how we can get around the relativity or subjectivity of human knowledge, but how we can train ourselves to move with the flux of time, so that we may experience as many "flame-like" moments as possible.

In answer to this question, Pater offers the first prescriptive statement of the essay: "To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits; for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike."[210] What was the enemy of certain knowledge about the world or

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[209] Ibid., 152.

[210] Ibid.

the self in the first two paragraphs, time, is now the necessary condition of ecstatic, aesthetic experience. Of course at this point in the "Conclusion," Pater is speaking in possibilities rather than likelihoods: habit, like a "stereotype," reduces the variety of experience in time. It virtually guarantees our failure at the kind of continual, heightened experience Pater prescribes—just as, for Mill, habit presents a constant challenge to self-culture. The fullest possible experience of the present, Pater asserts, is a matter of perceiving difference:[211] while habit makes us see likeness among actual differences, ecstatic experience requires an acuteness of attention so that we can distinguish one moment from the next.

Although it may initially sound as if Pater is merely promoting a passive reception of sensual phenomena, ecstatic experience actually requires an active preparation of mind, a "quickened, multiplied consciousness" as Pater puts it in the "Conclusion." Human experience, described in the opening passages of the "Conclusion" as a flickering flame or wisp of impression, becomes "hard" and "gem-like" only when certain capacities of mind are brought to bear upon the raw materials of experience. Ecstasy is, in this sense, less of an experience than a creation—the result of human capacities of discernment.

This is why, for Pater, education is a necessary preparation for ecstatic experience—just as it is a needed preparation for sympathetic extension in the fiction of Eliot and self-culture in the essays of Mill. Philosophy or "speculative culture" is valuable, Pater asserts in the "Conclusion," not as a guide to life but as a tool for clearing the habits of perception. A varied and eclectic study, ranging over the whole of human thought has the ability to "rouse" the human spirit, to "start it to a life of constant and eager observation." Critical study, then, makes for a more attentive, livelier mind which in turn "may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass

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[211] Here Pater joins both Eliot and Mill in his belief that difference spurs human thinking.

unregarded by us."[212] This kind of mind is more attuned to the slight variations of historical experience, giving notice to details of everyday life that are likely to pass by unconsidered.

But for Pater it is art,[213] more than anything else, that teaches us how to make the most of our fleeting experience of the world, because "art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake."[214] Art gives form to sensual experience, allowing us to register qualities of structure, color, melody, expression, etc. outside of the worldly concerns of routine existence. Experiencing the artist's capacity for discernment, for selection from the raw materials of sensual experience, our own capacities of attention and selection are "quickened" and "multiplied."[215] We are able to experience life as a landscape painting that changes from moment to moment, as a poetic narrative unfolding before our eyes, or as the movements of a complex musical score.

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[212] Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, 152-53.

[213] Here Pater means art in the broadest sense of the word, including sculpture, painting, literature, music, and so on. In the "Conclusion" Pater only mentions two artists by name: Voltaire and Victor Hugo.

[214] Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, 153.

[215] As Pater asserts in his imaginary portrait "Duke Carl of Rosenmold," "In art, as in all things of the mind, again, much depends upon the receiver; and the higher informing capacity, if it exists within, will mould an unpromising matter to itself, will realize itself by selection, and the preference of the better in what is bad or indifferent, asserting its prerogative under the most unlikely conditions." Pater, Imaginary Portraits, 129.

6.3 MODERN HUMANISM

This explains Pater's choice to include the "Conclusion," which makes no explicit reference to Renaissance art, at the end of his book of essays The Renaissance. As is characteristic in Pater's criticism, The Renaissance looks to the past in order to articulate something about the present, asking what sort of humanism is possible in the "modern relative world." Pater has two answers to this question in the final essay of The Renaissance, "Winckelmann," on Goethe's mentor Johann Joachim Winckelmann. The central practice of a modern humanist is the "quickened, multiplied consciousness" employed by the aesthetic critic. The art form that exemplifies this modern humanism, and that promotes this kind of consciousness, is the novel.

In contemporary life, Pater explains, the kind of systemic humanism of the Italian Renaissance is only possible in the aesthetic realm of art, since it is only in art that the idea of the human may still order the world. That is, the artist or aesthetic critic directs his energies towards the only arena in which the possibilities of man's mind and will are still limitless: the imagined world created by a painting, a poem, or a novel. Literature, more than painting and music, is the medium that has the facility to create this realm in modernity. Only the "varied literary form" of literature, Pater asserts, can "command that width, variety, delicacy of resources, which will enable it to deal with the conditions of modern life."

The novel in particular has a special capacity to meet this pressing need in modernity, which is a desire for a sense freedom that has been lost: "That naïve, rough sense of freedom, which supposes man's will to be limited, if at all, only by a will stronger than his, he can never have again. The attempt to represent it in art would have so little verisimilitude that it would be

flat and uninteresting."[216] This is a freedom that had been upheld in the past by a systemic belief in man's individual will and his preeminence in the natural world—a belief made untenable by modern developments in the geological, biological, and social sciences.[217] In modernity, the human point of view has shifted, Pater explains, and man becomes only one aspect of the natural and moral world—subject to the same laws of necessity, which are "a magic web woven through and through us."[218]

For Pater the question becomes, then, not whether modern humans can somehow recover this sense of freedom and preeminence but whether it is possible to create a comparable feeling of freedom and possibility in the fictive world of literature. Can the modern novel "represent men and women in these bewildering toils so as to give the spirit at least an equivalent for the sense of freedom?"[219] The novel's capacity to recreate this feeling of independence and possibility is, Pater asserts, a function of its form rather than its content—its mixed and eclectic

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[216] Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, 148.

[217] Here, and throughout Pater's collected works, there is a reworking of Friedrich Schiller's theory of aesthetic education, as articulated in On The Aesthetic Education of Man. Schiller's discussion of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister is especially relevant. Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2004). Pater taught himself German and French while a student at Oxford, reading Schiller and Hegel in the original German. See Donoghue, Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls, 27.

[218] Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, 148. This is a favorite metaphor for Eliot and Mill as well. Eliot uses the idea of a web throughout Middlemarch to evoke the laws of necessity that order both human action and thought. In Book III of Mill's Logic, he speaks of the uniformities of the natural world as "a web composed of distinct threads, and only to be understood by tracing each of the threads separately; for which purpose it is often necessary to unravel some portion of the web, and exhibit the fibers apart." John Stuart Mill, A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive. (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2002), 208.

[219] Pater, The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, 149.

style promoting a flexibility and freedom of mind that makes ecstatic experience possible. The novel can be, in this way, an instrument of self culture. It can teach its readers how to be free in the only way possible in a probabilistic universe: by bringing the human will to bear upon the circumstances of life through self-making.

Pater's own novel Marius upholds one of the most important traditions of Renaissance humanism: its assured belief in the life of all things human—even those aspects of life left behind by history. "For the essence of humanism," Pater explains in The Renaissance, "is that belief…that nothing which has ever interested living men and women can wholly lose its vitality—no language they have spoken, nor oracle beside which they have hushed their voices, no dream which has once been entertained by actual human minds, nothing about which they have ever been passionate, or expended time and zeal."[220] The dead language, the forgotten custom, the obsolete object—each may be brought back to life given the right frame of mind. A modern humanism, for Pater, is this frame of mind: a particular stance towards humanity and its history which refuses to concede the death of anything that once held meaning, purpose, or possibility for humans. As we see in Pater's novel Marius the Epicurean, the whole of human history is available to the modern novelist, regardless of its scientific factuality, philosophical validity, practical usefulness, or contemporary relevance. Indeed, those details of history that have been forgotten or discarded have special value for the novelist. Because they stand outside the conventions and habits of the contemporary moment, we are free to experience these aspects of human life aesthetically.

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[220] Ibid., 32.

6.4 MARIUS THE EPICUREAN

Walter Pater's novel Marius the Epicurean exhibits art's capacity to animate the dead: to revive by imaginative invention the objects, figures, actions, and ideas of past ages; and at the same time, to awaken capacities of mind in the reader that have been deadened by the effects of convention and habit in contemporary life. The novel is both a revitalization of a past era of human history, much like The Renaissance, and a dramatization of its central character's quest for animation in his own life. While Marius searches for a more enlivened experience of his external concrete world, the narrator seeks to revive Roman beliefs, philosophies, and ways of life that have lost the vitality and immediacy of their origins over the course of human history. Just as Marius adopts an epicurean philosophy of life in order to free himself from the effects of custom and tradition, the narrator aims to enliven ancient ideas that have become deadened by the passage of history. Marius's Epicureanism, as we will see, urges him to experience his own life as if it were art. The novel's narrator, too, encourages the reader to experience the religions and philosophies of ancient Rome aesthetically, transforming abstract categories like "paganism" or "stoicism" into vivid sensual experience.

As we will see, the narrator is never single-minded in the depiction of the ancient past. Marius is more than anything else a comparative text, in ways both large and small, both thematic and textual. In this way, the novel both models and promotes a "quickened, multiplied consciousness," its mixture of discursive styles, eclectic incorporation of historical and literary texts, and comparative point of view inviting a liveliness and flexibility of mind in the reader. We see this at the level of the novel's construction: the mixed discourse of the narrative shuttles between the general view of the historian or critic, interjecting a summary of the central ideas of Heraclitus or briefly noting the affinity between Marius and Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, and the

particular view of the literary realist, describing in detail the objects of the palace of Marcus Aurelius or the thoughts that go through Marius's mind as he walks from Pisa to Rome. We also see it in the syntax of the narrator, which regularly brings a doubleness to the immediate action of the novel: even the most straight-forward descriptions of the concrete world, in the narrator's hands, make subtle references to the experience of the modern reader.

Marius the Epicurean opens with a comparative view that will be employed throughout the novel, the narrator using knowledge of the present or more recent past to enlighten and enliven the events of second-century Rome:

> As, in the triumph of Christianity, the old religion lingered latest in the country, and died out at last as but paganism—the religion of the villagers, before the advance of the Christian Church; so, in an earlier century, it was in places remote from town-life that the older and purer forms of paganism itself had survived the longest. While, in Rome, new religions had arisen with bewildering complexity around the dying old one, the earlier and simpler patriarchal religion, "the religion of Numa," as people loved to fancy, lingered on with little change amid the pastoral life, out of the habits and sentiments of which so much of it had grown.[221]

We begin with the long-view of the scholar-narrator who has the dexterity of mind to shed light upon an obscure pagan religion, called the "religion of Numa" after the second king of Rome,

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[221] ME, 3.

through comparison with a more familiar period of early Christianity. Here the historical distance of the narrator allows him to distinguish affinities between dissimilar moments of history, breathing life into dead traditions through comparison with a more recent past.

Beginning with the description of this rural religion, all but lost to history except through classical pastoral poetry, it is not until the second paragraph of the novel that the narrator provides an explicit historical setting: the death of Antoninus Pius and the succession of Marcus Aurelius in the second century A.D. This is a telling choice, since the major events of orthodox history[222] will not be at the forefront of the novel, but will rather create a historical backdrop for its central character Marius. Marius is not a historical figure himself, but witnesses figures such as Marcus Aurelius and events such as the rise of early Christianity. Here the opening passages of the novel suggest that this will be a story interested in the details of experience lost to the broad terms of traditional history,[223] and that it will engage historical abstractions like "paganism" or "Christianity" through the representation of concrete human practices. However, the novel does not seek to dispose of such abstract terms. Indeed, the narrator of Marius, like that of Daniel Deronda, often revels in the broadly-drawn categories of philosophy and, as we have seen, the sweeping statements of comparative history. Rather the novel aims to tie these general terms to the everyday circumstances of an unhistorical individual.

And yet, the novel takes time to introduce Marius himself, who is not mentioned until the middle of the second paragraph of Chapter One. The construction of the sentence that names Marius is characteristic of the narrator's treatment of this central character: "More than a century

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[222] Or, at least, major historical events and figures that would have been immediately recognizable to the majority of Pater's late Victorian audience.

[223] Here Pater, like Eliot, writes what I have called a "history of the unhistorical."

and a half had past since Tibullus had written; but the restoration of religious usages, and their retention where they still survived, was meantime come to be the fashion through the influence, or imperial example; and what had been in the main a matter of family pride with his father, was sustained by native instinct of devotion in the young Marius."[224] The syntax of this sentence is Latinate, its lengthy dependent clauses and use of passive voice pushing the subject "Marius" to the end of the sentence.[225] The novel's treatment of Marius on the whole is like this sentence writ large, the central character often getting lost in the midst of the narrator's lengthy commentaries and extensive quotations.

This is perhaps off-putting for readers that have undertaken to read a book entitled Marius the Epicurean (in the same way that Eliot's long epigraphs can sometimes be in Daniel Deronda). But it is also consistent with the "multiplied consciousness" that the narrator promotes, at every turn, in the novel. We see, for instance, how the narrator unsettles an abstract understanding of Roman paganism with the details of daily religious practice; at the same time, the narrator is just as careful to disrupt the immediate action of Marius's early life with more general ruminations on the importance of pagan ritual. At every moment in the novel, in other words, we are meant to be multiply occupied, never getting too absorbed by the commentary of the narrator nor too rooted in the concrete world of the narrative.

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[224] ME, 4.

[225] This kind of sentence construction is a favorite of Vergil's in the Aeneid, a text that Pater quotes or paraphrases throughout Marius.

6.5 OBJECTS ANIMATED

Another way of saying this is that, in Marius, objects are never separated from ideas and ideas are never divorced from objects. One of the ways that the narrator accomplishes this is through scholarly commentary that brings a broader comparative perspective to the concrete practices of the ancient world, as we have seen in the opening passages of the novel. But even the novel's most straight-forward depictions of the physical world are infused with ideas, the narrator using sensual description to transform religious concepts and philosophical principles into vivid aesthetic experience. The pagan "religion of numa," a neo-Platonic "religion of beauty," Epicureanism, Stoicism, and early Christianity; in the treatment of each of these religions or philosophies, the narrative matches its style of representation to its subject.[226]

See for instance how the narrator introduces the reader to Marius's childhood religion in Chapter One and Two. What distinguishes the old religion of Marius's country home from the newer religions of Rome, the narrator explains, is its unity with the natural world. This pagan religion grew from the concrete habits of everyday rural life: it was "a religion of usages and sentiment rather than of facts and belief, and attached to very definite things and places—the oak of immemorial age, the rock on the heath fashioned by weather as if by some dim human art, the shadowy grove of ilex, passing into which one exclaimed involuntarily, in consecrated phrase, Diety is in this Place!"[227] The narrator, maintaining a comparative view, registers the strangeness of this pagan religion to a modern reader: in contrast with Christianity, it is a religion

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[226] In this, the discursive style of Marius is surprisingly similar to the third person narrative in Charles Dickens's Bleak House.

[227] ME, 3-4.

of external reverence rather than internal belief; it bows to the claims of immanent divinity rather than to the rules of a religious doctrine.

But this strangeness subsides once the narrator turns to the immediate events of the chapter, recounting the celebration of Ambarvalia, an agricultural holiday held in honor of Mars. In this description, unfamiliar concepts of external reverence and immanent divinity are represented concretely in an account of this pagan holiday. Here the style of the narration matches its subjects: the narrator adopts a reverential tone that conveys the quiet purposefulness of the rituals being depicted, and brings somber illustration to the material details of the scene. Through the eyes of the narrator, we see the tools of the laborers set aside and hung with "wreaths of flowers," the dry paths of the vineyard and cornfields, the cherry and apple blossoms set before the rustic altars of Ceres and Bacchus, and the "stiff" and "antique" robes of the priests. We smell the green herbs that are thrown into the sacrificial fire and the "scent of the bean-fields" mingling with "the cloud of incense." We hear the "monotonous intonation" of the Latin liturgy, the words of the chant having "long since become unintelligible."

The devotional rituals of this holiday are repeated daily, on the small scale, in Marius's childhood home. The narrator relates, in vivid detail, the urns of the dead in the family chapel and the simple gifts laid upon the altar: "a few violets, a cake dipped in wine, or a morsel of honeycomb." We see Marius leaving the table to place a "portion of his family meal" beneath his father's ashes. Turning from description to commentary, the narrator explains how the use of the everyday objects of farm life in religious service instills in them a meaning greater than their everyday functions. "Those simple gifts," the narrator tells us, "like other objects as trivial—bread, oil, wine, milk—had regained for him, by their use in such religious service, that poetic and as it were moral significance, which surely belongs to all the means of daily life, could we

but break through the veil of our familiarity with things by no means vulgar in themselves."[228] This interjection is decentering: the narrator tells us that these objects "had regained" for Marius a poetic or moral significance through their use in religious ritual. But surely these objects have had religious meaning for Marius since his earliest memories. Here, as elsewhere, the narrator's words are more descriptive of the experience of the reader than of Marius. Indeed, the second part of the sentence clearly refers to a modern reader's view of everyday objects, the "we" being the narrator and his readers. That is, it is us the readers, not Marius, who regard these useful objects as vulgar, our familiarity with them making it difficult to perceive their poetic or moral significance. It is us, the readers, who are offered an opportunity, through the novel's depictions, to look again at these objects and perhaps "regain" a view of their significance. Although, for us they reclaim an aesthetic rather than a religious significance, the beauty of the scenes of Marius's early life breaking through "the veil of our familiarity with things."

Chapter Three recounts Marius's childhood visit to a temple of Aesculapius,[229] a trip that introduces a new way of living to Marius and foreshadows his later adoption of an Epicurean philosophy of life. The narrator's description of this temple stands in stark aesthetic contrast to the earlier depictions of Marius's country home, the shadows of the farmhouse giving way to the brightness of the temple. As in the depiction of the pagan holiday in Chapter One, the sights, sounds, and smells of the temple of Aesculapius interrupt the general commentary of the narrator, who spends the first three paragraphs of Chapter Three ruminating on the history and

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[228] ME, 8.

[229] A son of Apollo, Aesculapius was a Greek and Roman god of healing and medicine. Temples of Aesculapius were part hospital, part religious retreat.

philosophy of the Roman priesthood of Aesculapius. The narrator describes Marius's arrival at the temple: "the evening came as they passed along a steep white road with many windings among the pines, and it was night when they reached the temple, the lights of which shone out upon them pausing before the gates of the sacred enclosure, while Marius became alive to a singular purity in the air. A rippling of water about the place was the only thing audible, as they waited till two priestly figures, speaking Greek to one another, admitted them into a large, white-walled and clearly lighted guest-chamber…"[230] The description of the temple concretizes what the narrator has told us about the medical philosophy of Aesculapius, which stresses the healing of the body through the lightening and purification of the soul. The narrator's prose, which has a heaviness about it in Chapter One, full of muted tones and muffled voices, becomes clearer, brighter, more distinct—more "alive" to colors and textures.[231]

At the temple, as at Marius's home, there is a correlation between the philosophy of life being introduced (to both Marius and the reader) and the aesthetics of the place. On the night of Marius's arrival, a young priest speaks to him at his bedside, and Marius "caught a lesson on from what was then said, still somewhat beyond his years, a lesson in the skilled cultivation of life, of experience, of opportunity" in the principle of the "diligent promotion of the capacity of

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[230] ME, 22.

[231] We can say that, here, Pater creates a visual representation of philosophy, just as Raphael "paints ideas" as Pater puts it in his 1892 portrait of the artist. Pater reminds the reader in this essay that "Plato, as you know, supposed a kind of visible loveliness about ideas. Well! In Raphael, painted ideas, painted and visible philosophy, are for once as beautiful as Plato thought they must be…" Walter Pater, Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays (London: Macmillan and Company, 1910), 57.

the eye."[232] The priest tells him to "have all about thee like the colours of some fresh picture, in a clear light…to keep the eye clear by a sort of exquisite personal alacrity and cleanliness, extending even to his dwelling-place; to discriminate, ever more and more fastidiously, select form and colour in things from what was less select; to meditate much on beautiful visible objects…"[233] Describing a cultivation of both internal and external life through the deliberate arrangement of the physical world, the priest articulates a kind of religion of beauty. The central tenant of this religion is selection, the choice of material surroundings refining the interior world of impression. This tenant is exemplified for Marius in the tranquil beauty of the temple and its surrounding gardens, which he sees in "full sunlight" when he awakes in the morning. In this moment, Marius feels that "simply to be alive…was a delight; and as he bathed in the fresh water set ready for his use, the air of the room about him seemed like pure gold, the very shadows rich with colour."[234]

For Marius, then, the priest's lesson is entirely at one with his experience of the temple, both the lesson and the beauty of this place quieting his mind and sharpening his senses. The reader experiences this too; but at the same time, perhaps, we feel the loss of the narrator's commentary in these sections. We wonder: who is this priest? What are the historical sources of this religion of beauty? How does this religion relate to the medical teachings of Aesculapius? But we need not wait long for an elucidation; the narration explains the words of the priest were "conceived from the point of view of a theory Marius found afterwards in Plato's Phaedrus,

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[232] ME, 23.

[233] ME, 24.

[234] ME, 25.

which supposes men's spirits susceptible to certain influences, diffused, after the manner of streams or currents, by fair things or persons visibly present—green fields, for instance, or children's faces—into the air around then, acting in the case of some peculiar natures, like potent material essences, and conforming the seer to themselves as with some cunning physical necessity."[235] With the narrator offering a philosophical source for the priest's lesson, the other aspects of this scene (the priest's dialogue with Marius, the feeling of health Marius experiences when he awakes, the physical description of the temple, and so on) are given another layer of meaning and significance. At the same time, the narrator provides multiple entrances to a difficult abstract idea (which has sources in both the medical teachings of Aesculapius and the philosophy of Plato), asking us to consider this religion of beauty in both the concrete and the abstract.

6.6 A REVISION OF MIND

The visit to the temple enlarges Marius's experience of the world, introducing a new stance toward the concrete world. But it is not until the death of his friend and schoolfellow Flavian at the end of Part One of the novel that Marius is shaken into a definite refusal of the old religion of his childhood home. As in the depiction of the farmhouse and temple of Aesculapius, the narrator links the state of Marius's mind to the conditions of his material surroundings. At the end of the first Part of the novel, Marius stands by the body of Flavian:

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[235] ME, 23.

> watching, with deliberate purpose to fix in his memory every detail, that he might have this picture in reserve, should any hour of forgetfulness hereafter come to him with the temptation to feel completely happy again…The fear of the corpse, which surprised him in his effort to watch by it through the darkness, was a hint of his own failing strength…It was the recurrence of the thing—that unchanged outline below the coverlet, amid a silence in which the faintest rustle seemed to speak…"[236]

Attempting to fix the image of Flavian's body in his memory, Marius is struck by the physicality of death. He is surprised by his fear of his friend's corpse, and recoils from its "recurrence," or the unmoving and silent presence of its concrete form under the sheet. It is the continued existence of Flavian's body after his mind has passed way that most horrifies Marius, the presence of Flavian as a thing or inanimate object rather than a human being. Marius begins to see death not as a spiritual transition, the narrator explains, but as an extinguishing of mind or soul: "To Marius…the earthly end of Flavian came like a final revelation of nothing less than the soul's extinction."[237] Marius associates this extinction of soul with the unmoving, fixed, and repetitious qualities of Flavian's corpse—qualities that Marius will eschew in his search for a new philosophy of life in Part Two of the novel.

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[236] ME, 84.

[237] ME, 87.

When Flavian's death forces the finitude of human life upon Marius, the teachings of his childhood religion suddenly appears "wholly inhuman and morose."[238] Commencing a program of independent study, which he describes as a reevaluation of human experience, Marius concludes that all that is real in the world is our fleeting impressions of physical life:

> And so the abstract apprehension that the little point of this present moment alone really is, between a past which has just ceased to be and a future which may never come, became practical with Marius, under the form of a resolve, as far as possible, to exclude regret and desire, and yield himself to the improvement of the present with an absolutely disengaged mind. America is here and now—here, or nowhere*:* As Wilhelm Meister finds out one day, just not too late, after so long looking vaguely across the ocean for the opportunity of the development of his capacities. It was as if, recognising in perpetual motion the law of nature, Marius identified his own way of life cordially with it, "throwing himself into the stream," so to speak. He too must maintain a harmony with that soul of motion in things, by constantly renewed mobility of character. Omnis Aristippum decuit color et status et res.—Thus Horace had summed up that perfect manner in the reception of life attained by his old Cyrenaic master…[239]

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[238] ME, 88.

[239] ME, 98.

This long excerpt exemplifies the mixed narration at this point in the novel, the narrator's style of writing matching the Epicurean philosophy that Marius is studying. As in the "Conclusion" to The Renaissance, Marius seeks the possibilities of experience still available to the skeptic and resolves upon a state of mind that is "disengaged" from both past memories and future hopes. He aims for a "mobility of character" that will maintain a "harmony" with the flux of time, renewing itself with each present impression. But following this fairly clear statement of Marius's "practical resolve" is a jumble of philosophical and literary comparisons that make it difficult to pinpoint the specific historical sources of Marius's Epicureanism. While Marius is apparently studying a variety of specific classical texts (for instance, the fragments of Heraclitus), the reader does not have access to these writings except through the narrator's short quotations or summaries, included alongside more modern references. Although we may have a fairly distinct idea of what this "practical resolve" means for Marius at this stage of the novel, in terms of his everyday life, our understanding of Epicureanism is multiple and historically dispersed. Here the narrator appears to prefer that the reader be more channeler than scholar, receiving a stream of cultural references much like Marius aims to receive the flow of sensory impressions in the present moment.

When, in the same chapter, the narrator describes Marius's aim to become a "complex medium of reception," the narrator is also depicting the intended role of the reader:

> And towards such a full or complete life, a life of various yet select sensation, the most direct and effective auxiliary must be, in a word, Insight. Liberty of soul, freedom from all partial and misrepresentative doctrine which does but relieve one element in our experience at the cost of another, freedom from all

> embarrassment alike of regret for the past and of calculation on the future: this would be but preliminary to the real business of education--insight, insight through culture, into all that the present moment holds in trust for us, as we stand so briefly in its presence.[240]

The aim of ecstatic experience is not pleasure but the insight that comes from a "completeness of life." Freeing the mind from habit, received doctrine, regret, and desire is only the first step towards the aim of insight; this only clears the "tablet" of the mind. It is culture, gained through education, that offers the insight needed to experience the present as fully as possible. Culture trains our faculties of perception and thought, exercising our multiple capacities for ecstatic experience. In other words, culture develops the "quickened, multiplied consciousness" described in the "Conclusion" to The Renaissance, a liveliness and multiplicity of mind required for the fullest experience of the world. This kind of mind is invited in the reader of the novel, and the process of enculturation described here is the central aim of the novel's mixed narration.

6.7 A REFORM OF SYMPATHY

After the death of Flavian, Marius gives up his childhood religion for an Epicurean philosophy, maintaining this way of life even after he becomes a secretary for the stoic Marcus Aurelius in Rome. But at the start of Book Three, a speech by the rhetorician Cornelius Fronto inspires Marius to reevaluate his philosophy of life yet again. The subject of Fronto's speech is

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[240] ME, 100-01.

the reconciliation of the Cyrenaic or Epicurean philosophy of life with the weight of Roman custom and tradition. Here Fronto asks his audience to weigh the aim of "ecstatic experience," which is hindered by received ideals or moralities, with a wider sympathy for humanity, which demands some deference to the rules of conduct in present Roman life.

Fronto's words at the forefront of his mind, Marius begins to see the emotional narrowness of his Epicurean philosophy, which denies a sympathetic connection with humanity. As the narrator tells us, "the discourse of Cornelius Fronto, with its wide prospect over the human, the spiritual, horizon, had set him on a review—on a review of the isolating narrowness, in particular, of his own theoretic scheme."[241] On the one hand, Marius concludes that "all that is real in our life" is our impression of the present moment; on the other hand, he longs for something larger and more permanent than this conclusion. Although his current life philosophy offers the possibility of a complete sensory experience, "yet these moments were a very costly matter: they paid a greater price for them in the sacrifice of a thousand possible sympathies, of things only to be enjoyed through sympathy." The Cyrenaic or Epicurean, explains the narrator, is detached from these sympathetic connections with wider humanity, "in intellectual pride, in loyalty to a mere theory that would take nothing for granted, and assent to no approximate or hypothetical truths."[242] The rigor of his personal philosophy, then, has denied Marius affective connections with his fellow men, and has offered no opportunity to commune with others who share his longing for an improved world.

In the pursuit of enlivened experience, however limited, Marius had given up his emotional ties to a system larger than himself—the collective experience of humanity: "a

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[241] ME, 183.

[242] ME, 188.

venerable system of sentiment and idea, widely extended in time and place, in a kind of impregnable possession of human life—a system, which, like some other great products of the conjoint efforts of human mind through many generations, is rich in the world's experience; so that, in attaching oneself to it, one lets in a great tide of that experience, and makes, as it were with a single step, a great experience of one's own, and with great consequent increase to one's sense of colour, variety, and relief, in the spectacle of men and things."[243] In his striving to stay in the present, Marius has detached himself from the combined experience of human history, sustained in the customs and traditions of contemporary Roman life (such as the rituals of Marius's childhood "religion of Numa"). This wealth of human experience is accessible to any who have a ready sympathy for the ways of the world; but up until now, Marius's fierce independence of mind precludes this kind of sympathy.

Soon after Marius hears Fronto's speech, his friend Cornelius invites him to the home of Saint Cecelia, and there Marius experiences a "strange, new hope" as he stands among the stone tombs marking the graves of the Christian dead. Here the narrator's description of this scene transforms the abstract idea of Christianity into an aesthetic experience that recalls, in many ways, the reverent rituals of Marius's childhood "religion of Numa." The care for the dead at the home of Saint Cecelia reveals, to Marius and the reader, an idea of divinity that is immanent in the material world—and a concept of charity that is made concrete through Saint Cecelia's purposeful care for both the living and the dead. In Marius's private diaries, excerpted by the narrator in Chapter Twenty Five, we see the effects of this introduction to Christianity upon Marius's thinking. These diaries, which are written in the style of Marcus Aurelius's

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[243] ME, 191.

Meditations, register Marius's loneliness and disconnection from other human beings. They are, as the narrator describes, "conversations with himself": lengthy and circular ruminations in which Marius weighs the different philosophies he has encountered over the course of his life, including his childhood Religion of Numa, the Epicureanism of the Cyrenaics, the Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius and Cornelius Fronto, and the Christianity of Saint Cecelia. Ultimately, he must choose between Epicureanism, which offers a life of vivid sensual experience, and Christianity, which offers a life of human connection.

It is the thought of his own approaching death that brings Marius closer to an adoption of the Christian faith. Marius writes in his diaries that "death, and old age as it must needs be, and that watching for their approach, which makes every stage of life like a dying over and over again. Almost all death is painful, and in every thing that comes to an end a touch of death…And what we need in the world, over against that, is a certain permanent and general power of compassion—humanity's standing force of self-pity—as an elementary ingredient of our social atmosphere if we are to life in it at all."[244] What was in his youth a promise of renewal in every changing moment becomes in older age a continual reminder of the finiteness of human life. Compassion, which Marius finds in the charity of Saint Cecelia and her followers, is the only balm for this inevitable grief. For Marius, Christianity means the possibility of a "permanent and general" compassion in human society, and the assurance that his own death will be mourned by other human beings. For the reader, Marius's embrace of Christianity means a release from the stifling interiority of his diaries, so different from the mixed discourse of the earlier chapters of the novel.

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[244] ME, 301-02.

Following the excerpts from Marius's diaries, the narrator becomes less and less obtrusive in the immediate action of the novel. The constant quotation and commentary—characteristic of the mixed and multiplied discourse of the narrator until this point—begins to subside. The final chapters of the novel are quieter than what has come before, the narrator taking on the meditative tone of Marius's diaries. As Marius takes leave of Rome, setting out to visit his childhood home to pay honor to the ashes of his mother and father, he dreams "only of the dead before him…he journeyed on rapidly through the night; the thought of them increasing on him, in the darkness. It was as if they had been waiting for him there through all those years. And felt his footsteps approaching now, and understood his devotion, quite gratefully, in that lowliness of theirs, in spite of its tardy fulfillment."[245] No literary quotation or comparative comment interrupts Marius's thoughts on this journey; the multiple and comparative view of the narrator has disappeared entirely. The strongest voices at the end of Chapter Twenty Seven are those of the dead, which Marius imagines he hears as the sun comes up: "To-day!"—they seemed to be saying…"To-day, he will come!" Nor does the narrator offer many concrete details of Marius's journey. The focus is, at this point, not upon Marius himself but upon the dead that wait for him at the farmhouse: somehow it is not Marius that draws closer to the dead, but rather the dead that are "increasing on him."

Marius reaches the house and once he has freed the door from the weeds surrounding it, he is struck by an "odd air of neglect" inside, "the neglect of a place allowed to remain as when it was last used, and left in a hurry, till long years had covered all alive with thick dust—the faded flowers, the burnt-out lamps, the tools and hardened mortar of the workmen who had

[245] ME, 317.

something to do there."[246] For Marius, as for the reader, the familiar place has been transformed by its estrangement from human cares: the everyday objects that had held, in Marius's childhood, so much significance rest discarded and in disarray. And yet, there is more life in the dust-covered hearth and crumbling mortuary urns than in anything else in these scenes: with the narrator almost entirely silent, the reader's attention—like Marius's—is entirely given to the physical presence of the dead. In a gesture that suggests Marius's tentative acceptance of Christianity, which is never explicitly stated by either Marius or the narrator, he decides to bury the urns containing his family's ashes, covering the graves with flowers as he has seen done at the home of Saint Cecelia.[247] But if this gesture is religious, it affirms Marius's Christian faith only on an aesthetic level: no priest attends this burial and Marius utters no prayers; we know nothing of Marius's internal thoughts as he throws flowers upon the graves "one by one, to mingle with the dark mould."[248]

6.8 CONCLUSIONS

On his return from this visit, Marius falls ill and dies in the care of Christian strangers far from this grave site. He leaves the world with no family or friends nearby and, since his acceptance of Christianity is unconfirmed at the close of the novel, with no assurance of his soul's immortality. In the final scenes of the novel, his solitude is unbroken—he exchanges no

[246] ME, 318.

[247] ME.

[248] ME, 319.

words with his caregivers. He receives some comfort in the kindly faces of these strangers, but looks longingly at "their simple, humdrum, everyday life, with a peculiar yearning to share it with them, envying the calm, earthy cheerfulness of all their days to be, still under the sun…"[249] Perhaps for the first time in the entirety of the novel, Marius yearns for the simple affections that link these people, an unphilosophical "feeling of human kinship" implicit in the way they go about the simple tasks of daily life.

In these scenes, in the absence of the narrator's additions and interjections, we recognize Marius's essential solitariness, his apartness from other human beings. This is not a solitariness that the reader has shared, up until the final chapters of the novel; unlike Marius, the reader has had the constant companionship of the narrator. The feeling of human kinship and connection with the dead that Marius yearns for at the end of his life has been, from the start, a part of the relationship between the narrator and reader. Introducing archaic beliefs, strange traditions, and forgotten ways of life with ready explanations, modern comparisons, or philosophical qualifications, the narrator is a teacher and helpmate to the uninitiated reader. Inviting a multiplied perspective and a quickened intelligence, the narration is in many ways demanding; and yet the novel cannot be called didactic in tone. It is educational, in the sense that it cultivates the mind of the reader; but the narrator's manner is never severe but "delicate and tender," to use Pater's words from "Coleridge."

As we have seen, no detail of the world of ancient Rome is too small, no religious or philosophical reference too arcane for the narrator's notice. For the narrator of Marius the Epicurean, like the humanist of The Renaissance, there is an assured belief in the life of all things human, even if left behind by history. These forgotten details, often unfamiliar and

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[249] ME, 326.

strange, are offered to the reader as incitements: they are intended to have effects beyond the pages of the novel, enlivening our aesthetic and sympathetic interest in the specifics of present life.

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