The Secret Lives of Plot

by

Wendy Veronica Xin

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Ian Duncan, Chair
Professor D. A. Miller
Professor Kent Puckett
Professor Mary Ann Doane

Summer 2016

The Secret Lives of Plot

by Wendy Veronica Xin

Abstract

The Secret Lives of Plot

by

Wendy Veronica Xin

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Ian Duncan, Chair

The Secret Lives of Plot is a study of the "plotter," a seemingly peripheral but in fact necessary figure within the nineteenth-century novel and twentieth-century narrative cinema. A creature of *ressentiment*, melancholy, and political insufficiency, the plotter, although often cast as a minor or merely functional foil to a narrative's more respectable cast of characters, nonetheless exerts a fascination at the levels of both narrative content and narrative form. The narratives I look at indeed rely on "low" moments of self-interested plotting—Frank Churchill's flirting, Lady Audley's bigamy, Miss Havisham's revenge—in order to move their own plots forward, while also rooting for the failure of exactly the characters on whom they rely. What results is a strange and sometimes hypocritical entanglement between traditional narrative form and the frustrated desires of the *arriviste*, the social climber, the parasite, or the conspirator. If, as I argue, particular social and class distinctions persist as a set of formal problems embedded in the relationship between plot, literary character, and narration's hierarchical structures of power, the plotter is one site at which social anxiety becomes narrative form. Often seen as the least complicated aspects of narrative form, plots and plotting emerge as points at which social anxiety is expressed in and informs the very logic of what we might call the novelistic. At its broadest level, my project addresses ways in which the plotter's base and insatiable desire for the "mastery of form" that Pierre Bourdieu places at the crux of cultural refinement allows us to understand traditional narrative's own self-consciousness about both its own aspirations toward aesthetic prestige and its fantasy of capturing a reality that remains always out of reach.

Unfolding through chapters that constellate a specific sociohistorical and ideological problem with a narrative technique, *The Secret Lives of Plot* opens with a theoretical framework for "reading for the plotter" that focuses on sensation fiction's *parvenus*, false baronets, and bigamous wives longing for social assimilation in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. Drawing from Gerard Genette's reformulation of the concept of metalepsis, I argue that these plotters' rule-flouting social ambitions register as "transgression[s] of narrative boundaries" that render narrative levels the literary equivalent of class hierarchies. My second chapter reveals a secret plot in Jane Austen's *Emma*, in which Frank Churchill conceals his engagement to Jane Fairfax by diverting the focus of gossip—and the novel's use of free indirect discourse—toward "next-to-nothing details" like a haircut, a pianoforte, and a broken pair of spectacles. Concerned with appearing natural so that their plots go undiscovered, both plotter and novel share in a concern over verisimilitude, or how a scrupulous self-representation can better persuade an audience that what lies on the surface is all there is to see, thus masking damaged social origins and troubling histories. My third chapter argues that *Great Expectations* demonstrates a structure of attachment I call the "melancholy of form," in which the plotter enacts an always-futile dream of applying the temporal form of fictional plotting to his or her own life in an attempt to overcome *ressentiment*. While the concerns at the heart of my project

are inextricable from research into the particular historical conditions of nineteenth-century Britain, *The Secret Lives of Plot* proposes a widely applicable formalist argument that sets plotting at the core of a narrative grammar of social knowledge as a mode of fictionality, one that aims to reinvigorate conversations about the relationship between form, agency, and ideology. A final chapter on Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* extends my theory of narrative plotting into a different medium, as I examine the afterlife of Victorian high narrativity in the technical and material devices of filmic style—montage, frame rate, and seriality—in order to consider how the act of plotting once again emerges as a meta-discourse about the mastery of form at the heart of narrative, cinematic, and social desire.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What a joy to finally say those things—and bestow those thanks—that so obviously go without saying they often do go unsaid. First thanks are due to my wonderful co-chairs, Ian Duncan and D. A. Miller. Ian Duncan, whose good cheer and bolstering advice were always at the ready, has provided me with a durable model of intellectual eclecticism and unflagging curiosity. His deep dedication to his students consistently reminds me that extraordinary brilliance thrives on true generosity. And, what can I say about David Miller? His refrain, "Only the obvious is worth saying—have the courage to be naïve," has taught me that dismissing seemingly simple things as "ordinary" only makes the most fascinating questions disappear. More than anything else, his imperative to "just say the thing!" has been a steady expression of belief in the worth of articulating in this project the ways the personal and intellectual intersect. Kent Puckett's style of thinking has a sheer depth and scope to it that is often as dazzling as it is terrifying, and this dissertation has benefited from his knows-no-bounds theoretical liveliness. How lucky I am to have benefited from his Midas touch of making muddles into things of beauty, which elevated my ideas and lent this project some of his characteristic flair. And, last but not least, my admiration and gratitude are due to Mary Ann Doane, the influence of whose work is evident in so many of the concerns in the project, and who, in the final stage of the process, appeared by some timely magic to offer praise and skepticism in equal doses. It has been a privilege to work with these formidable scholars, whose books served as my ideal intellectual interlocutors years before I had met their authors.

It has been nothing short of invigorating to be part of the English department at Berkeley. Faculty working in different fields—Peggy Anderson, Anne-Lise François, Mark Goble, Kevis Goodman, Celeste Langan, Joseph Lavery, Tom Laqueur, Jeff Knapp, Eric Naiman, Namwali Serpell, Katie Snyder, Elisa Tamarkin, and Sam Otter—were inexhaustibly nurturing at various stages of the project when they had students and schedules of their own. What a stroke of luck it was not only to take part in the wonderful Chernin Mentoring Program, but to find an excuse to work—and to share work—with such lovely fellow graduate students as Sarah Mangin, Chris Mead, Ella Mershon, Ryan Perry, Samia Rahimtoola, not to mention the dedicated, enthusiastic faculty fellows, Eric Falci, Kathleen Donegan, and Nadia Ellis. Getting the opportunity to mentor undergraduate English majors in the Chernin Program was a little like winning the lottery; their luminous combination of wonder, humor, and insight afforded much brightness during a difficult writing year—Jessie Bilse, Linda Choi, Sophia Kang, Justin Matos, Christine Ricksanrud, Holly Sanderson, and Nick Seogono deserve special mention and sincere thanks. Conferences helped me to sharpen the ideas that follow, and the panels on plot in particular—one organized by Yoon Sun Lee at the American Comparative Literature Association Convention in 2016 and another at the Victorian Modernities conference at the University of Kent in 2015—were particularly edifying. Finally, I could not have asked for more brilliant fellow graduate students in my field than those I found amongst the Berkeley Victorianists and Romanticists, and co-chairing the Townsend Center for the Humanities Nineteenth Century and Beyond British Cultural Studies working group with Sanders Creasy was an added pleasure.

A testament to the discerning wisdom of my friends, I have never found writing about the investments at the core of this project as easily as I have found talking about them with individuals who understood so well what I wanted to say that they almost rendered the articulation superfluous. In this light, I have often regarded this dissertation as a vestige of seven years' worth of divine, time-annulling conversations with Sarah Chihaya, Jessica Crewe, Rhiannon Dowling, Christopher Fan, Trevor Fuhrman, Charity Ketz, Margaret Kolb, Rachel Lewis, Peiting Li, Leila Mansouri, Christopher Miller, Megan O'Connor, Jesse Cordes Selbin, Adeline Tran, and Gabriella Wyatt. Such sustaining friendships have enlivened my time in graduate school and register as blessings I enjoy out of grace alone. Miriam Bailin, Katharina Boehm, Elaine Freedgood, and Kent Carroll cheered me on throughout the years by offering congratulations when I

triumphed, a sympathetic ear when I felt unsettled, and encouragement for all the intervals in between. Finally, my old friends—Vanessa Chan, Duretti Hirpa, Joanie Lam, Katie Lau, Melanie Leung, Elizabeth McCauley, Sophie Meissner, Kathy Ploshay, Martha Ploshay, Lissy Reiman, and Kendra Waldsmith—always remind me of the richness of the world outside of the text.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my Mom—impossibly witty and wise, with her trademark sense of humor—who has fielded countless late-night phone calls to dole out inspiration and reassurance by the paragraph. She has given me a lasting image of what it looks like for strength and kindness, integrity and tolerance, serious inquiry and playfulness, to coexist as orienting paradoxes in this life. Her faith in me exemplifies an optimism so staunchly unshaken that it all but conjures into being all that it hopes for and more.

"…there is a creation of a fiction which has many roles (doubts, reproaches, desires, melancholies)."
—*Roland Barthes,* A Lover's Discourse

INTRODUCTION

Reading for the Plotter

"There has to be trickery."
—Frank Kermode

Miss Prism: *"The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means."*
Cecily: *"I suppose so. But it seems very unfair."*
—*Oscar Wilde,* The Importance of Being Earnest

The nineteenth century was the age of plots. Squabbles over inheritance, schemes for revenge, political intrigues, murder mysteries, and conspiracies; in the Victorian novel and Code-era genre film there is usually someone at the bottom of these plots, and only by detecting the plots and disciplining the plotters do we have the stuff that narratives are made of. This is, indeed, what we have come to associate with and demand of nineteenth-century narrative fiction and of early to mid-twentieth-century film. Miss Prism—governess, aspiring novelist, once and future handbag-owner—takes for granted fiction's supreme dictum: that the good ought to end happily, and the bad unhappily. More than simply the means by which the novel secures its meaning, this is also "what Fiction *means*," a dénouement the novel has invariably meant to reach from the story's very inception.[1] In light of fiction's stubborn intentions, her pupil Cecily utters a skeptical "I suppose so. But it seems very unfair," perhaps seeing in this cycle of crime and punishment not just the traditional novel's ideology of closure but a teleology of foreclosed possibility and suspended agency for these "really wicked people."[2] Of course, the messy fates of literary antagonists could be briskly dismissed with the refrain "they had it coming"—after all, who could they blame for their sorry state but themselves? But more than merely put in their place, these characters are almost set up to fail, and this project is interested in reading these naturalized and neutralized failures as instances where narrative's aesthetic investments are rendered particularly visible. Unjust or not, the rise and fall of "the bad" bears further scrutiny insofar as it stands in some as-yet unclear relationship to both the ups and downs of plot and the "good" of fiction itself. How do the failures of the "really wicked" secure the success or achievement of narrative itself? How do the stories they tell end up in competition with the story told about them, with their eventual failure? And if these unhappy-ever-afters are meant to send a message, what is the nature of such cautionary tales?

This dissertation is about plot and character, and especially the "plotter" standing at the intersection of the two. It is first of all a study of the conning and the cunning, of the scoundrels, social climbers, and schemers that form a category of characters who seem to "know too much" and thus stand at a peculiar remove from systems of plot, narration, and characterization. As a preliminary working definition, the plotter is a literary character who possesses a story of his or her own, a secret content that competes with the narrative's story yet simultaneously gives that story an overarching shape. This brand of foresight lines

[1] Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 273.
[2] Ibid., p. 273.

discursive structures with an insider knowledge and *savoir faire* traditionally associated with features of the world either above the text—the realm of the narrator—or outside of it, the domain of imperfect, asymmetric, and competitive information structuring social spaces and political arenas. The plotter, to which Cecily precociously gestures in the above quote, often fails in order to bring about the timely closure of a narrative account. Yet before this closure occurs, plotters facilitate the workings of plot precisely because they orchestrate and organize the hidden schemes at the midst of the narrative's overarching story. And because narrative structures itself around both the incendiary plotting that these literary figures put into practice, as well as the eventual punishment of those characters' crimes—the bad, after all, must "end unhappily"—the plotter emerges in this project as a productive point of tension between the form of the novel's discursive plotting and the diegetic content of those plots, traditionally difficult to pull apart from one another.

In the chapters that follow I focus on a set of novels and films—Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815), Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859), Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), and Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Stage Fright* (1950), among others—in order to make an argument about the intersection of narrative form and social consciousness, and especially how characters' mastery of narrative form stands as the novel and film's meditation on self-consciousness and social identity as itself a product and process of narration. Through a lingering—perhaps too slow and too close—look at the pleasures and perils of plotting, an enterprise that fiction both admits as its undertaking but is nevertheless deeply uncomfortable in executing. Working at the intersection of literary studies, media studies, narratology, and sociology, this project claims that plot represents a powerful though hitherto unexplored mode of representation that registers forms of social, psychic, and narrative self-consciousness on both the level of content and of form. Rather than focusing on fictional protagonists to chart the relationship between plot and character, I look to those characters charged with a certain responsibility over the plots of novels and films. These plotters surreptitiously orchestrate, manage, and direct the progress of the plot with exquisite prescience and thus stand in opposition to the protagonist, whose gradual discovery of that hidden plot provides the contents of the narrative's plot more broadly. With insight on the one hand and blindness on the other, the almost instinctually perceptive plotters in question seem as different from those protagonists endlessly falling prey to the mercy of other people's whims that to lump them all in together into the category of the "literary character" feels heavy-handed and lacking in nuance. By exceeding the ontological confines of the literary character and aspiring toward something short of omniscience yet in excess of the limited knowledge of most of its counterparts, plotters complicate traditional boundaries between plot, character, and narration.

More importantly, in doing so they serve as formal analogues to the threatening boundary-crossing which attended the gradual fall of class barriers at the forefront of British prose writing on culture, taste, and reform. Such actors, in other words, formalize the political and social content of narrative, and socialize the distinctive forms of narrative representation. I argue that it is only in and through their position within the spatial politics of plot that the novel places the individual within the universalizing framework known as "the social," thereby meditating on plotters' often melancholic—because inevitably frustrated—desires to effect the form of fiction within the history of their lives. In this I hold fast to Rosemarie Bodenheimer's assumption that "it is in the shape and movement of narrative rather than in its proclaimed social ideology that we may find the 'politics' of a novel in its deepest, most problematical expression."[3] Through the plotter, fiction's self-

[3] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 3. For Bodenheimer, social-problem novels ranging from Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* to Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* present both an explicit topical content that exposes social conditions of factory life and trade unions, as well as a meditation on certain "patterns of contradiction and paradox which characterize the formal fantasies of people living through a period of unprecedented social change." These patterns, she argues, "points to a middle-class crisis of self-definition…[and] display conflict about the nature and diversity of a newly empowered and newly fragmented middle class as they attempt to reimagine the roles that it should play in the maintenance of social order" (5). In this case both the content and the form of the

reflexive affirmation of the impossible structural logic of plotting also affirms, paradoxically, the authority of its own mimetic enterprise. I take seriously Kent Puckett's recent claim that "worked properly, narratology might emerge as a productive kind of sociology."[4] And Bernard Williams writes, for instance, that something like an impulse toward narrative lies in some strange relationship to the reflexivity and performativity of personal identity: "There is a special problem about personal identity…[the] first is self-consciousness—the fact that there seems to be a peculiar sense in which a man is conscious of his own identity."[5] Narrative self-consciousness and epistemological self-consciousness are related in productive ways, extending all the way back to the sixteenth century's preoccupation with the fact and practice of dissembling, from Shakespeare's Iago and on through Restoration comedies and the melodramatic structure of eighteenth-century epistolary fiction. As Lionel Trilling points out in light of the villain's storied past, "it is thus that the conception of [this figure] survived well into the Victorian era…Tartuffe, Blifil, *la cousine* Bette, Mme Marneffe, Uriah Heep, Blandois, Becky Sharp—these wolves in sheep's clothing are not free fantasies, and it is a misapprehension to think of them as such. The possibility of their actual existence *is underwritten by social fact*."[6]

What is the relationship between the novel form and these "social facts"? Telling, indeed, were Hitchcock's reflections on the "unwritten law" of motion pictures during his interview with Truffaut: "Why are none of the people [in *Stage Fright*] ever in danger? Because we're telling a story in which the villains themselves are afraid. The great weakness of the picture is that it breaks an unwritten law: The more successful the villain, the more successful the picture. That's a cardinal rule, and in this picture the villain was a flop!"[7] What "unwritten" rule of cinema and narrative tells us that the success of a picture depends on the success of the villain? What logic or principle of narration might govern such a rule? And, why did the novel in particular become popular during the nineteenth century, when manipulations of cultural and aesthetic form served as one of the most dangerous threats to the coherence of the social body, and the positioning of individuals within it?

That there is a discomfort with the idea of plot might not be altogether surprising. Plot has always had something of a bad reputation, a source of narrative's classically neurotic status. Critical discourse has tended to dismiss plot as the most elementary aspect of fiction—elementary in the dual sense that it is at once essential and rudimentary. An object of "suspicion" and a mark of prosaic if not vulgar taste, reading for (nothing more than) the plot has remained one of the most fundamental and yet also one of the most divisive aspects of the novel. According to Peter Brooks, "with the advent of Modernism came an era of suspicion toward plot, engendered perhaps by an overelaboration of and overdependence on plots in the nineteenth century…If we cannot do without plots, we nonetheless feel uneasy about them, and feel obliged to show up their arbitrariness, to parody their mechanisms while admitting our dependence on them."[8] And Paul Ricoeur begins his epochal treatment of plot with skepticism: "We might ask…whether 'plot' has not become a category of such limited extension, and such an out-of-date reputation, as has the novel in which plot

---

representation of class dynamics compels us to direct our attention toward the problems that emerge when the two are disjointed or fractured from one another. By so focusing on the disjuncture between the representation of class and the lived reality of class positions, the politics of story—and, more specifically, the politics of social fictions—emerges as meditations on the ways that the disparity between social form and narrative form can be made to speak a certain truth about both.

[4] See "Introduction," in Kent Puckett's *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 9.

[5] Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1.

[6] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 14-5, my italics.

[7] François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985) p. 191.

[8] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 7.

predominates."[9] As recently as 2015, Caroline Levine in her *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* boldly asserts what has now become a commonplace even amongst self-nominated "New Formalist" critics: that the study of plot seems like a "surprising approach" to adopt, since "plot has rarely been considered a sophisticated or valuable interpretive practice by any literary school, and describing the movement of narrative events might risk what New Critic Cleanth Brooks most strongly decried as the 'heresy of paraphrase'."[10] The serious study of plot is accompanied by disclaimers that, with almost palpable embarrassment, attest to the "irreducible complexity" that emerges when through the "enthusiastic embrace" of a lesser formalist dimension affords, much to our surprise of the critic, "a way to theorize the relations among forms that appear both inside and outside of fiction."[11] This project hopes to provide both a history and a theory of plot and plotting, seeking to explain why the historical, cultural, and social conditions of the nineteenth century caused the novel to exhibit what Brooks calls an "overdependence" on plot, in addition to how the novel itself used the concept of plotting to meditate on and exorcise this very dependence on the conventions and structures of that plot.

Perhaps due to plot's uncanny ability to pave the way for surprising theories of "the relations among forms," plot endured despite all the snubs it has received, first in the flourishing of the "novel in which plot predominates" in the long nineteenth century and then later in those twentieth century inheritors of a distinctively Victorian brand of high narrativity, the thrillers, screwball comedies, and melodramas that clung as tightly to the unwritten rules of plot as they did begrudgingly to the exacting stipulations of the Motion Picture Production Code which regulated their moral content. However, both literary history and narrative theory have left plot to drift off in the sidelines, as if its recuperation as a barely-respectable object of inquiry was already to give the topic more due than it should deserve. This project proposes to think seriously about the ways that plot—as simultaneously a substance and a structuring device of narrative discourse—provides us with a formidable representational technology with which to assess the content of individual characterization with respect to the forms that allow individuals outside the fictional to carve out identities and chart different modes of being.

For, more than anything else, plot comes into existence in the face of imbalances in knowledge. The very fact of plot renders anyone existing in its presence into either those who know and those left in the dark, those endowed with the privileged language of the exclusive and the elite, who can discern the true nature of affairs despite the falsities and illusions attending their representation, or those others that are always at the mercy of the surface presentation of the facts that continually deceive them and, in so doing, continue to make dupes of them. The notion of narrativity, Frank Kermode insists, "always entails a measure of opacity," and stories divide individuals into insiders and outsiders: "To divine the true, the latent sense, you need to be of the elect, of the institution. Outsiders must content themselves with the manifest…"[12] Plot, in this case, seems to supply both a movement of narrative and a movement of narrative *knowledge*. Organizing characters according to their understanding of this fact allows us to position them between narrative form and the social fields that those narratives hope to represent. Incessantly misled by their veiled vision of what they believe to be happening, the protagonists in the novels and films in question exist in a fog of misapprehension and confusion, while their plotting counterparts seem always to already exert a mastery of the forms at work below the perceptible surface of a manifest plot. Plots are therefore, more often than not, structured around

---

[9] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 2, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 7.

[10] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 20.

[11] Ibid., pp. 20, 136.

[12] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 25, 3. See especially Chapter 4, "Necessities of Upspringing." As to the functionality of literary character, Kermode writes: "A function develops into a proper name; so it becomes a character, whose life and death have a narrative; and then the function is lost in the character" (94).

characters' sudden recognitions of the plots in which they are enmeshed, and those recognitions carry with them a feeling of transcendence precisely because they are moments of awareness that suture together the rise and fall of conventional narrative structure and the burgeoning awareness of the forms that those social structures attempt to translate. Story-level differences in this or that character's social fluency and cultural mastery, I contend, get cast as discursive differences in hinging on fictional characters' relative command over the plots and schemes in question.

The Secret Lives of Plot thus develops an account of the plotter, that third term that stands at the intersection between these long divided and divisive elements of narrative fiction. We might wonder which literary characters generate the plot and, more importantly, how a literary character's command over or knowledge of the novel's governing plot then allows us to analyze literary character in terms of its fundamental self-consciousness, both of the narrative world in which they exist as always-degraded inhabitants, and of the systems of social, political, and cultural mastery that that narrative world seeks to reflect.[13] Plotting arises, I will argue, out of the plotter's desire to cover over his or her damaged history through a management of fictional narratives that overturn and overwrite these prior shames, embarrassments, and insufficiencies through an exhibition of aesthetic prestige and socioformal mastery. A particular category of literary character that seems to generate and foretell the plot, the plotter always "knows too much," arising at the point where his or her autonomous social performances cannot be told apart from their strategic functionality on the level of plot.[14] No mere coincidence, the very grounds where plot is wrought are also those instances where form and content become difficult to pull apart. Rather than recapitulating the trenchant divide between plot and character, it would be far more interesting, I suggest, to position the plotter between these categories as the novel's self-reflexive commentary on the tension between the two. For, as Jacques Rancière puts it, "The aesthetic sovereignty of literature does not therefore amount to the reign of fiction. On the contrary, it is a regime in which the logic of descriptive and narrative arrangements in fiction becomes fundamentally indistinct from the arrangements used in the description and interpretation of the phenomena of the social and historical world."[15] In what follows, I read characterological function as operating at the intersection of—and as the anxiety suffusing—the novel's aesthetic commitment to a structured plot, and its mimetic aims to represent the vicissitudes of the life of a literary character who invests his or her hopes for a brighter or better future in the very endeavor that is plotting.

In the nineteenth-century British novel and the Code-era genre-film that inherited many of its defining structural features, narrative fiction uses the figure of the plotter to motivate the relationship between story and discourse to particular ideological ends. These ideological functions range from meditations on the rhetorical properties of the novel—omniscient narration, free indirect discourse, metalepsis—to considerations of realism itself as a broad category of self-reflexive desire and melancholy inflected by an irony

---

[13] See Amanda Anderson, "Character and Ideology: The Case of Cold War Liberalism," *New Literary History*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Spring 2011), pp. 209-229.

[14] We might think of Bruce Robbins's work on the role of the servant in nineteenth-century fiction: "the servant "seems to enjoy an uncanny life of its own, producing effects incongruous with its social position and moments of vision incongruous with literary functionality." Rather than a stable social class—the servant, the aristocrat, the shopkeeper, etc.—the plotter embodies narrative motion itself in the form of a literary character who seeks to attain upward social mobility. Plotters are frequently tough to spot, the bedrock of a hidden plot, precisely because they do not all always belong to the same social class, or because their status is often obscured by the very effects of their plots (in my previous I examine how Lady Audley's class origins are disguised by her recent marriage to Sir Michael Audley, as well as how Sir Percival Glyde forges his baronetcy in order to maintenance the *appearance* of being a gentleman—crucially, these conspiracies rouse Braddon's and Collins's sensation novels into being and further entangle the plotter in the novel's own design). See Robbins, *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. xi.

[15] Jacques Rancière, "Is History a Form of Fiction?," *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 33.

that makes itself apparent through the figure of the plotter. Unlike most literary characters and, as I will claim, challenging conventional definitions of literary character more generally, the plotter recognizes a gap between story and discourse, offers us a fantasy of overcoming the opposition between the two. If the difference between story and discourse can only exist in the face of the "narratable," in the presence of the conflict that narrative attempts to put to rights, then the plotter represents something like an embodiment of the narrative impulse itself, arising in the amorphous shifting spaces between story and discourse, between social content and aesthetic form; he or she resides within the contours of the story at hand yet tries to but fails to supplant this story, giving formal shape and characterological form to all that might be deemed the "narratable." And it is especially significant that social mastery, as with the novel's adherence to plot's conventions, often hinges in the nineteenth century on the command of a set of rules, fashions, conventions, and customs that just "always done one way" that make standards of taste and distinction manifest. In this context, the plotter stands not just *at* the intersection of story and discourse, but *as* the tension between the novel's aim to allow literary characters to act in a natural way and its desire to contain or constrain those actions within the frame of its own plot. All of this is to advance the proposal that the plotter stands at the intersection of the novel's mimetic and aesthetic aims, and it is in their paradoxical, inscrutable, or irreconcilable relationship with plot that allows the novel's formal self-commentary to emerge most palpably as an excursus on the contradictions, paradoxes, and irreconcilabilities at both the heart of social performativity and narrative verisimilitude.

Each of the plotters that appear in the subsequent chapters bear different names, pursue different ends, and attempt to achieve their ambitions in distinctive ways. But what joins these figures together is their shared entanglement with the form of the novel, or rather with the novel as it takes form in relation to its content-level plot. The plotter is, in many ways, encoded into the very etymology of the term "plot" itself, though it rises to the surface only when the two principal meanings of plot are taken together. Etymological confusion surfaces between a sense of plot as either a narrative design and as a scheme or secret that is kept to oneself as a knowledge privately possessed, held over the heads of those who know little—or just less—of the matter. Familiar to most is plot's primary reference to the temporal configuration or causal logic at the structural heart of narrative, to which the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s entry on the term gives pride of place: it is "the main events of a play, novel, opera, etc., or a storyline." Only by straying from convention do we stumble across the term in its secondary sense, encompassing characters' schemes, conducted in secret, underhanded, and getting underfoot. The concept splits into two levels of signification, denoting a sequence of events, on the one hand, and a series of intents, on the other. Indeed, within a few lines the *OED* has given us no less than seven definitions of the term "plot," several of which include a fairly small piece of ground; a map, a plan, a scheme; and, importantly, a plan made in secret by a group of people. This "plan made in secret by a group of people" seems important, especially in light of Fredric Jameson's argument in his recent *The Antimonies of Realism* that the villain embodies a necessary evil, an excess left over from the early melodramas that preceded the novel: "there remains one actantial feature that…continues to seem indispensable for plot as such: this is something like the other face of the protagonist, namely the villain, the agent of conflict and opposition." But, to return to the central query orienting this dissertation, why was there a need for this "agent of conflict and opposition" in the genre during this particular moment in history? And how might this agent of plot allow us to generate a theory of plot and plotting?

As a term commonly associated with narrative design and with intentionality, "plot" splits into two distinct levels of signification, denoting a sequence of events, on the one hand, and a series of intents, on the other. Though the two meanings fork from a single and ostensibly simple word, "plot," literary critical emphases on plot as narrative design rather than as a structure of feeling guarded over by plotters, has resulted in a thorough though nonetheless one-sided understanding of plot, always seen less as an investment or premeditated action and more as a temporal or causal structure recalling, for instance, Forster's injunction about plot: "The king died and then the queen died is a plot…" Though the critical discourse surrounding plot reaches back to Aristotle's conception of the "unity of time" and continues to resound with a polyphonous exuberance of critical voices—serving as a subject of serious inquiry for critics as diverse as Paul

Ricoeur, Northrop Frye, Roland Barthes, Vladimir Propp and, more recently, Caroline Levine—few have read the two meanings of plot together and, perhaps more importantly, as existing in tension with one another. A "dynamic logic" or a "structuring operating"? A meaning-generating causality or a random sequence of events? A smooth arc or a punctuating event? Such seeming antimonies of plot can be reconciled in the figure of the plotter. In serving both aesthetic and mimetic functions, these characters rescue plot from its barest meaning as a sequence of events and recuperate a vision of plot as a kind of affective, psychic, and social management. Indeed, such distinctions elevate the notion of plot from the "order" of narrative discourse to a concept of both social desire and of fiction's commitment to mimesis that is ultimately capacious enough to accommodate those experiences of social impoverishment that the novel describes thematically and embodies formally.

Take, for instance, Becky Sharp from William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. A self-avowed "Novel Without a Hero," the novel's plot revolves around a fundamental rivalry between narration and character, story and discourse, between the novel's overarching plot and the plots that Becky Sharp concocts that constitute the novel's telling. At the very end of the novel, we are told that Jos Sedley has died and that circumstances surrounded his death are odd to say the least: "[Dobbin] never saw Jos more. Three months afterwards Joseph Sedley died…It was found that all his property had been muddled away in speculations, and was represented by valueless shares in different bubbles companies…The solicitor of the Insurance Company swore it was the blackest case that ever had come before him…they declared that [Becky] was the object of an infamous conspiracy, which had been pursuing her all through life, and triumphed finally."[16] Here the omniscient narrator dramatizes the insufficiency of its descriptive faculties. At a basic level, the only thing that adequately quickens narration's pulse is its knowledge that its description is made possible by, comes at the expense of, a consciousness in competition with it for information. This positions Becky Sharp in a strange epistemological category, exceeding that of the literary character, yet falling short of the omniscience of the narrator—we never do find out if she is responsible for Jos's untimely end. The plotter, in other words, represents the figure of plottedness itself in the guise of a literary character.

If we think back on *Vanity Fair*'s narrator's description of Miss Rebecca Sharp, we might recall that her comprehension of the need to plot is accompanied by a familiarity with the rules of the social game: "Rebecca's wit, cleverness, and flippancy made her speedily the vogue in London among a certain class. You saw demure chariots at her door, out of which stepped very great people. You beheld her carriage in the Park, surrounded by dandies of note. The little box in the third tier of the Opera was crowded with heads constantly changing; but it must be confessed that the ladies held aloof from her, and that their doors were shut to our little adventurer" (*VF* 468). I am therefore suggesting that in indulging in a close look at plotters, we can recognize that plot is a point at which social and narrative awareness become impossible to pull apart, as Becky's custodial supervision of the plot itself exists at the intersection of story and discourse—her instrumental position within the aesthetics of *Vanity Fair*'s plot finds a counterpart in the character's desire for socioformal mastery to offset her precarious social standing. And, we are told that this plotting emerges out of some desperate need or longing, for Becky's lack of resources leaving no other recourse but that of plotting: "If Miss Rebecca Sharp had determined in her heart upon making the conquest of this big beau, I don't think, ladies, we have any right to blame her; for though the task of husband-hunting is generally, an with becoming modesty, entrusted by young persons to their mammas, recollect that miss Sharp had no kind parent to arrange these delicate matters for her, and that if she did not get a husband for herself, there was no one else in the wide world who would take the trouble off her hands" (*VF* 26). Her exceptional relationship to the novel's practice of omniscience does not merely grant the novel an effectively modulated sense of suspense, guaranteeing the sustained mystery behind Jos Sedley's untimely death. It also allows the novel to flesh Becky out as a literary character keenly aware of the disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance, thus enhancing the character's self-consciousness about her uncertain social position and imperiled financial

[16] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 876. Hereafter cited parenthetically in-text as *VF.*

livelihood. For if there's anything we are certain of when it comes to Becky Sharp, it is that she was "determined at any rate to get free from the prison in which she found herself, and now began to act for herself, and for the first time to make *connected plans for the future*" (*VF* 19, my italics).

In other words, if social identity takes shape through the interaction between a person's agency and structure, then a literary character's self emerges through the intersection of their agency on the level of content and their power over discourse on the level of form. As a result, plot emerges as something more than just the logical ordering or temporal chronology of story, to approximate more closely a social space sustained by its own inimitable rules that certain characters can master and others cannot. Plotting thus serves as a social system in and of itself, predicated on aesthetic mastery, on an awareness of distinctions between *forms* (which, not coincidentally, is both how Peter Brooks defines Pip's recognition of "the plot of his life," and on how Pierre Bourdieu might describe the "good player" who has internalized the "rules of the game"). Eminently self-conscious, Becky's plots and plotting become the novel's form of self-presentation and self-commentary, indexing the plotter's own labor to promote an outward manifestation of aesthetic mastery that masks the labor, the plotting, that the acquisition of that mastery required.

Existing scholarship on readerly responses to plot and the structural component generally conjured into being when we use the term "plot" has been particularly rich, extending from Lubbock, Barthes, and Todorov to Brooks and Chatman, orienting our conception of plot away from determinations of its logical priority and toward characters' manipulation of, investment in, and desires for the plots around which they orient their lives provides us with a new and productive strategy for refreshing both these fundamental concepts, no matter how outdated or old-fashioned this examination might at first appear to be. Despite these tantalizing threads of inquiry, critical work has neglected to think about plot as a serious object of concern, much less of a structuring shape that something that contains character, this project reads plot as a set of codes, conventions, and structures that characters contain, possess, invest in, shape and take shape through. Indeed, we might rather imagine plot as both something that contains—possesses—literary character and, conversely, as something that literary characters themselves "in the know" might aspire to possess. Such an interpretation of character at the intersection of the dual registers of the term "plot" renders narrative itself as an object of the novel's self-consciousness, manifesting on both the arenas of plot and literary character. We will see a bit later that plot's forking meanings implicate—and complicate—nothing less than the broader categorical binaries that undergird contemporary narratology and narrative studies: story and discourse, plot and character, temporality and spatiality.

A Brief History of Plot

That there has been much talk about plot and character in literary critical discourse, but little about the plotter, may in many ways come as no surprise. Too one-dimensional, minor, or flat a character to elicit sympathetic or affective identification, the plotter has been passed over in recent accounts that constellate cognitive science with readerly tendencies to invest fictional characters with "care," usually in favor of his or her more psychologically "nuanced" and complexly developed protagonist counterparts.[17] Studies of minor or

[17] Critics like Blakey Vermeule, Martha Nussbaum, and others have tended to invest the literary character with care, while Vladimir Propp, A. J. Greimas, etc. have tended to reduce character to a set number of functions within a text: they are "actants," individuals created to carry out a particular role and attesting to the strength of the narrative near tyrannical rule over the characters that exist under its rule. Summing up the impassioned but seemingly endless dialectic, Alex Woloch writes: "Building on the earlier work of Vladimir Propp, [A. J.] Greimas categorizes all characters within an 'actantial' model, according to six positional functions that are homologous to syntactic elements. This model of criticism has both relied on, and continually generated, an opposed perspective on characterization, which defines characters by their referential aspect. While formalists and New Critics attacked the psychological and moralistic basis of

marginal characters have tended to parse the relatively compressed space given to anyone who isn't the protagonist as markers of their inherent insignificance, political inefficacy, or insufficient content, thus reaffirming the minorness of the minor character in the name of narrative function or spatial scarcity. Too obviously a manufacturer or secret motor of plot itself, the figure of the plotter has also been regarded as a foregone conclusion in arguments about plot's designs and structures, nearly synonymous with the machinery behind plot itself and coolly dismissed as pure "function," operating on behalf of narrative requirements or to satisfy certain narrative conventions, evacuated of agency or representative potential. Indeed, for many the reduction of character to a delimited set of functional types (sometimes 32, other times 10, though Vladimir Propp whittled it down to six) harbors the threat of a return to outdated actantial models of literary character, such as the Russian Formalists'. As Thomas Pavel notes, for Propp "what counts are the action invariants, called 'functions'…[they] are the essential elements of a story, while the various circumstances of their performance, such as the agents, the means, the intentions, play only a secondary role."[18] Instances of a necessary functional "type," villains and "opponents" have been treated as fixtures of literary plot rather than figures for it, mere cogs and levers in a larger narrative apparatus. Plotters have thus suffered from a double exclusion: largely ignored, because habitually implied, by conversations about both plot and character.

The plotter verges between categories of character and plot, and character and plot have been notoriously difficult to reconcile along one axis of interpretation. Questions of causality have riddled theories of plot and character far before the inception and rise of the novel as a discrete genre. Since Aristotle famously reasoned that the categories of plot (*mythos*) and action (*praxis*) are "logically prior" to something like character (*ethos*), plot and character studies have largely been concerned with tracking a causal relationship between these two aspects of fiction. "For Aristotle the fable came first, and character (*ēthos*, admittedly not perfectly translated by 'character') followed; though this does not mean character is without importance, only that it lacks autonomy, could never originate a narrative."[19] Debates in support of the logical priority of the one or the other have dominated discursive interest in both the function of character and the character of function, with sympathetic readings of fictional character as embodied personalities on the one end, and the Russian formalists on the other. And although Frank Kermode begins his magnificent account of Though Kermode's reading of Judas is attuned to the ways in which character itself arises out of plot, out of the self-perpetuating narrative unfathomable, "unfollowable world." His summary of Aristotle's intervention in the tension between plot and character runs thus: "For Aristotle the fable came first, and character (*ēthos*, admittedly not perfectly translated by "character") followed; though this does not mean character is without importance, only that it lacks autonomy, could never originate a narrative."[20] Theorists of narrative and of history thus attempted to trace the logical priority of either plot or character, refusing instead to see them as mutually constitutive.

Peter Brooks, in his authoritative treatment of plot, writes that, "Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions—what we do—that we are happy or the reverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in order

---

character-criticism, some recent studies have been increasingly troubled by the excision of the human from narratology. Throughout the twentieth century, analysis of character repeatedly seems to devolve into polemics, where both sides ironically depend on the viewpoint that they are dismissing."[17] Reference and structure, anthropomorphism and pure linguistic signification, psychology and function, major and minor: how are we to resolve these warring concepts? See, for instance, Blakey Vermuele, *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?,* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010 and Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 16.

[18] Thomas G. Pavel, "Literary Narratives," *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mieke Bal, Vol. 1: Major Issues in Narrative Theory (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 27.

[19] Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p. 77.

[20] Ibid.

to portray the Characters; they include the Characters for the sake of the action."[21] "There is no self-evidence reason to argue the primacy of action as a source of traits, nor for that matter the other way around. Is the distinction between agent and character really necessary? Let us argue that plot and character are equally important and escape the awkwardness of explaining how and character (*ethos*) are 'added' to agents."[22] Yet even despite Seymour Chatman's attempt to quell the intense dispute surrounding the primacy of plot in relation to character, "events" and "existents," plot and people are often read apart from one another, often occupying discrete chapters in narrative studies rather than being read together Character at the intersection of novel's plot and their own plots. Plot offers an ever-imperiled feature of narrative theory due to the mistaken view that plot and character exist separately, event and existent constantly measured against one another in a ceaseless pursuit of causality. If we think about the trajectory of the novelistic form from the nineteenth century on through twentieth-century modernism, what we find is the gradual decay of plot and plotting in the face of a flourishing psychologically-driven character based form. Henry James seemed to settle the question of plot's or character's priority when he forcefully declared "What is incident but the illustration of character? What is character but incident?," perhaps a reverberation of George Eliot's "Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds" in *Adam Bede*.

What I intend is not, first off, to argue that the temporal dimension of plot can be forgotten, tossed to the side. Nor am I seeking to claim that we do away with the traditional literary-critical interpretation of plot as narrative design and cling instead to character-generated plots on the level of story. Rather, I propose reading these two crucial dimensions together in order to explore the tensions, contradictions, surprises, and desires that rise to the surface when temporality and spatiality, plot and character, are fused and confused in the figure of the plotter, who seems to flicker into being at the hazy juncture where plot and character meet. My argument simultaneously addresses and takes the form of a central sustaining paradox: character burgeons into an individualizing humanity when it encounters action, but action or function in critical studies have been neglected due to function's synonymy with instrumentalization, with ideologies that elide the notice of literary character, and with actantial theories valuing action over individual. We might escape the bind of individual action and narrative function precisely by defining character as arising as self-conscious participant in the plot, stories, and schemes that swirl within the novel. Character resists mere functionality in plot precisely insofar as we read that functioning as operating within a tension between their own desires and the novel's structural requirements, between a novel that is attempting to mimetic representation of character and attempting to preserve aesthetic coherence of the plot. Though function has traditionally been read as something imposed from above by the requisites of the novel form, as a capitulation to the demands of plot dismissed by James for instance as "nefarious name." It would be far more interesting, instead, to read function as operating at the intersection of the novel's aesthetic commitment to a structured plot, and its mimetic aims to represent the vicissitudes of a human consciousness that invests its imaginings of a political or social future in the very action that is plotting.

In his treatment of the European *bildungsroman*, Franco Moretti touches briefly upon the concept of the villain, what he calls "a monster *inside* an unyielding system." According to Moretti, it is with the entry of the villain that "narrative becomes possible: or rather—alas—unavoidable. For with the villain's every action anomalies multiply, and with them disequilibrium suspense, unpredictability. The villain, in fact, generates plot merely by existing: from his point of view, after all, it is the only way to achieve what he wants. He needs plot, the 'story' is his element and also (as we will see) his trade."[23] Despite this intriguing aside on the villain's

---

[21] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 10-1.

[22] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 110. The discussion of "Story: Existents" provides an immensely helpful critical history of the debate between plot and character from the Aristotelian model onwards through to Russian Formalism, structuralism, and post-structuralism.

[23] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture* (New York: Verso, 2000), p. 201.

figure and function, *The Way of the World* primarily concerns protagonists whose private growth marks their gradual incorporation into the social structures governing a broader and external public. In this study as in others, the plotter once again finds his spot on the sidelines of critical conversation, content to play second fiddle to the protagonist who has continued to consume the bulk of both critical and narrative consideration. What is left unexplained is the residual presence of the oft-referenced "villain" in these nineteenth-century narratives. Why, according to such diverse scholars as Jameson, Moretti, Trilling, and Spacks, is a figure that resembles the plotters—a figure at once perfectly integrated into the narrative system yet posing a threat to that same system—so necessary to plot? And how does the plotter differ from the villain, with whom it shares an uncanny family resemblance? In reading the villain's presence in the text as an implication of the forms of that text, I have necessarily translated the figure of the content-level villain to the action that that figure exhibits: the plotter, we might say, "generates plot merely by existing." Far from a natural task of a literary character, this project will begin by denaturalizing this assignment of discursive responsibility to a literary character, problematizing theories of the novel and formal conventions traditionally associated with the "inner forms" of that novel around the plotter.

Between Function and Space

This reading does not attempt to reduce character to mere functionality. Rather, it is to see self-consciousness of plot itself as a metaphor for that pervasive self-consciousness about the presentation of the social self that often interferes with or unsettles the flourishing of that same self. In reading and rereading a wide range of nineteenth-century British fiction, what emerges is how often the novel as a form is concerned with the dissembling and pretenses at the core of plots. "Importance to the plot might seem to be the most fruitful criterion."[24] "The decisive step in the direction of a narrative conception of personal identity is taken when one passes from the action to the character. A character is the one who performs the action in the narrative. The category of character is therefore a narrative category as well, and its role in the narrative involves the same narrative understanding as the plot itself. The question is then to determine what the narrative category of character contributes to the discussion of personal identity. The thesis supported here will be that the identity of the character is comprehensible through the transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment, first applied to the action recounted; characters, we will say, are themselves plots."[25] "Where and how is this truth revealed? It is clear not only in science and in politics founded on a scientific basis but also in man's everyday practical commonsense that truth is revealed only in practice, in deeds and actions. Men's words, subjective reactions and thoughts are shown to be true or false, genuine or deceptive, significant or fatuous, in practice—as they succeed or fail in deeds and action. Character, too, can be revealed concretely only through action. Who is brave? Who is good? Such questions can only be answered solely in action. And only in activity do men become interesting to each other; only in action have they significance for literature."[26]

Plotting supplies the basis for a human condition, an unconscious drive to keep hidden the repressed causes and latent desires of externalized action provides a fitting insight into both the mechanisms of literary characterization and for a way to unpack the novel's own carefully concealed plots, just as an inspection of psychic processes illuminates "the dynamics of temporality and reading, of the motor forces that drive the plot forward."[27] Peter Brooks's influential *Reading for the Plot* grapples explicitly with psychoanalysis as a channel through which to approach "the way in which the narrative texts themselves appear to represent and reflect on

[24] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 140.
[25] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 143.
[26] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, p. 121.
[27] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. xiii, xiv.

their plots," and I will return more extensively to Brooks a bit later on.[28] "A rock-bottom paradigm of the dynamic of desire can be found in one of the very earliest novels in the Western tradition, *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), where all of the hero's tricks and dodges are directed initially at staying alive: Lazaro, the ragged, homeless picaro, must use his wits, his human ingenuity, to avoid the ever-present threat of starvation. Each chapter develops as a set of tricks and stratagems devised to overcome a specific form of the threat, and thus literally to enable life, and narrative, to go forward."[29] Here the plotter begins to look not just like a type of personality within a large cast of characters, but one whose "tricks and dodges" for his own survival becomes intertwined with the forward motion of both "life, and narrative." As if to pick up this thread, Patricia Meyer Spacks in an article on fiction of the 1790s makes mention of bad characters, "those opposed to the interests the text appears to support," who "generate events and stories by *plotting*" in an attempt to rescue a quality she calls "energy of mind."[30]

Yet this has meant that conceptions of literary character have been prioritized over theories of plot without ever having been adequately conceptualized in terms of their lively and intentional participation in that plot. Plot has been read as a mark of readerly desire—what Peter Brooks famously calls "narrative desire"—rather than as an impulse shared by readers, narratives and, I argue here, literary characters alike. Fredric Jameson points out in his recent *The Antimonies of Realism* that the villain embodies a necessary evil, an excess left over from the early melodramas that preceded the novel and that, at the form's height in the nineteenth century, required quick and complete scraping off: "So even with this structural and as it were evolutionary change in the status of the characters (or perhaps it would be better to say, in our distance from them), there remains one actantial feature that, surviving from out of a distant narrative past, continues to seem indispensable for plot as such: this is something like the other face of the protagonist, namely the villain, the agent of conflict and opposition, the hero's obstacle and the enemy of desire."[31] For Jameson, this vestigial structure remains despite the novel's growing pains as it attempts to be rid of its historical reliance on a Sartrean inflection of *mauvais foi*, an element of bad faith at the heart of realism. The realist novel inherits the trope of the plotter from earlier modes of representation, in this account, heralds a slow secularization of causes that goes against the grain of the "providential interiority" of earlier Gothic novels, spiritual autobiographies, and other theological dramas.[32] I differ slightly from Jameson here, in that I read the plotter as a close cousin to the villain who, in bridging the divide between story and discourse, remains in fiction because of, rather than despite, the novel's *mauvais foi*. Or, putting it differently, I argue that the plotter is the device that allows the novel to exorcise the bad faith accompanying its plotting.

As such, this project is neither a theory of plot nor a theory of literary character, with the two aspects of fiction held far apart from one another and standing on opposite sides of a causal binary, but a theory of the novel that attempts to account for the relationship between these long divided and divisive elements of narrative fiction. In other words, to ask whether plot or literary character comes first, whether one springs out of the other, is to miss the question completely. We might more productively wonder, instead, about how

---

[28] Ibid., p. xii.

[29] Ibid., p. 38.

[30] Patricia Meyers Spacks, *Desire and Truth* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 40. Spacks goes against the critical grain in tying character to plot rather than seeing them as interlinked but ultimately independent entities: "Telling their own stories or acting as subjects of a narrator's story, [characters] declare the overwhelming fact of their own existence: existence in and through story…The nature of [their lives] depends on the plots they inhabit and on the patterns of psychic action that underlie plot." See *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 10, 20. These so-called patterns hit upon the space and shape of plot-as-discourse, rather than plot as merely a line or thread of action, that I am attempting to theorize.

[31] Fredric Jameson, *The Antimonies of Realism* (New York: Verso, 2014), p. 114.

[32] Jameson, "Experiments of Time: Providence and Realism," in *The Novel, Volume 2: Forms and Themes*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 107.

knowledge of the plot organizes literary characters into those who are in the know and those that are on the outs. In refusing to participate in naming the origin point of the dialectic of plot and character, we might rather muse over which literary characters generate the plot and, more importantly, how a command over or knowledge of that plot then allows us to analyze literary character in terms of its fundamental self-consciousness, both of the narrative world in which they exist as always-degraded inhabitants, and of the social one that that narrative world seeks to reflect in which their damaged histories leads directly to their production of stories that overturn and overwrite these prior shames or embarrassments. In reading story and history as entwined, I hope to argue that the depiction of the resolute temporalities of historical progression become an explicit subject of novelistic stories, whose mechanisms of plotting seek to depict history without hoping to adopt its immutable chronologies. Attuning us to the existence of a particular category of literary character who seem to generate and foretell the plot, the plotter similarly invites us to examine a particular strategy of literary characterization, where a consciousness of and investment in the plot at hand reconciles narratively imposed function on the level of discourse with their singularly self-actualizing actions on the level of story.

Driven inexorably toward scheming but finally destroyed by it, plotters are caught in a double bind that is foundational to the underlying machinery of the novel form. They plot as a desperate grab for a social agency that finds itself converted into a form of narrative know-how, even as they pretend to disavow this agency over the plot and recede into the background, strategically claiming "minor" status. Yet that same figure must be disciplined by narrative's end for the greater good of aesthetic coherence and formal closure. The plotter surfaces, thus, as both stand-in and scapegoat for the novel's bad conscience about the embarrassing—if necessary—machinery of plot. Even though plots themselves seemed to supply the stock and trade of the nineteenth-century novel, with the heavily "plotted" novel declining with the Modernist character-based aesthetic, plots were nevertheless highly dependent on either satisfying or overturning convention. Whether the novel's chose to adhere to generic codes or to willfully disregard them, its mimetic project suffered as a consequence; as Ricoeur has "In the words of Tony Tanner…'conventional plot slightly reality by its habit of erecting a spurious structure of eventfulness.'"[33] "Because it was so well contrived, the plan disappeared. Every work of art must have a point, a climax, must form a pyramid, or else light must fall on some point of the sphere. But in life nothing like this exists. However, art is not nature."[34]

One of the central arguments of this project is that, contrary to critical tradition, we might begin to read plot and character as mutually constitutive and mutually complicating aspects of fictional narrative.[35]

---

[33] Quoted in Robert Caserio, *Plot, Story, and the Novel*: *From Dickens and Poe to the Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 11. See Tony Tanner, *The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 195.

[34] Quoted in Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?," *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays,* ed. and trans. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 2005), p. 121.

[35] "If Pamela's virtue is ensured in part by her inability to plot her actions to achieve particular results, it is equally so by her exclusion from the narrative plotting of her story as it unfolds. As Cynthia Baughman has argued, part of the function of the whole machinery of intercepted and appropriated letters in *Pamela* is to give Mr. B. a form of access to Pamela's experience unshaped by any consciousness of him as audience—and, more particularly, by any suspect 'design and intention' of narrative" (25). Just as Pamela's innocence is figured by her ignorance of surveillance, so her character is shaped by her rootedness to story rather than her contamination by discourse. "…formal closure in fiction has generally dictated the end of a woman's 'ambitious' plot, while the end of a female 'erotic' plot in marriage bears an uncanny resemblance to death. But the premature closure of the female quest plot, and the predominance of the romance plot leading either to marriage or death, does not close the play of the *discourse* along with the *story*. How the novel ends often exposes the difference between the narrative 'expression' (3) and its 'content', and either or both of these intertwined elements may serve to undermine social and literary convention. The woman's story and the design of the text itself may find ways to contradict the last words that ostensibly control the meaning of the

And far from the plotter's demise standing as a signal of the triumph of novelistic convention over realistic representations of frustrated hopes, this project will argue that it is precisely these discordances of form and content that best capture the simultaneously compromised and complex structures of social desire, and especially social desires that incite literary characters to plot. We might complicate this further by observing that a rivalry often emerges between plot and character, and between character and narration itself, a rivalry that fuels the very motion of narrative itself. Hatching plots and developing schemes on the outskirts of the novel, where there do not seem to be any laws whatsoever to obey, these perfidious few never long for discovery, exhibiting a preternatural understanding that the act of being narrated is tantamount to the end of narration and to the fruits of their labor. In a characteristic paradox, a plotter that risks exclusion from the narrative by not caring much whether he is excluded from it or not is, as luck would have it, exactly the sort of person the novel desperately wants to include. For the key to the novel's power is that its plot requires the character-plotter to fail so that it, in turn, can exert its own mastery, live long, and prosper.[36] This provides an internal logic that renders the plotter the interconnected, intentional line that runs through the narrative, as well as the figure toward which the protagonist at once gravitates and frantically attempts to resist. Whether as minor or major characters, these fictional personae are "somebodies" in the most crucial sense of the word—they must be regarded as somehow sovereign in the story by the characters that really matter so that these

---

ensuing silence" (2-3). See Alison Case's "Introduction" in *Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure*, ed. Alison Booth (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1993), p. 2, as well as Nancy K. Miller's "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," *PMLA*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (Jan., 1981), pp. 36-48, and Robyn Warhol's *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989). The "double valence of *plotting* is one of the most striking ways that story and discourse interact in novels with female narrators. In general, such novels exhibit a clear parallel between the heroine's power to plot actual events at the level of story—to manipulate patterns of cause and effect in action—and her power to shape her narrative at the level of discourse. What Lanser terms 'the plot of narration' thus often parallels, prefigures, or even catalyzes changes in the 'story plot'—and does so precisely via the implicit analogy between, and moral anxiety about, narrative and material plotting" (quoted in Case, "Introduction," pp. 15-6) and the purportedly "unsavory" nature of plotting (15). See also Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, p. 357: "I would be eager for narratology to talk about such a crossing of the plot of narration with the story plot." To speak of narrative voice, as Lanser does, in relation to social identity is to think about how performances of class, gender, and ideology emerge through the properties of discursive power, thus addressing the ways in which too often and with "few exceptions, feminist criticism does not ordinarily consider the technical aspects of narration, and narrative poetics does not ordinarily consider the social properties and political implications of narrative voice" (4).

[36] Mary Ann Doane casts the femme fatale in classical film in a similar light, arguing that the characterological archetype meaningfully exploits a disjuncture between appearance and essence. An emblem of duplicity, she is both tough to handle and tough to deal with, both in the diegetic realm and, accordingly, in criticism: the femme fatale is "a figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma. For her most striking characteristic, perhaps, is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be. She harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable." Because the threat of the femme fatale "must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered," it emblematizes the urges of the text itself, "fully compatible with the epistemological drive of narrative, the hermeneutic structuration of the classical text." Doane's exploration of the femme fatale's characteristic illegibility and unmanageability assumes a crucial link that this project hopes to track through more explicitly narratological terms, namely, how the plotter's content-level duplicity becomes converted into a uniquely "discursive" unease that mobilizes novelistic and filmic plots, as well as how a literary character's power—that often shades into and stands for the "epistemological drive of narrative" itself—finds itself curbed by the aesthetic demands of plot, such that this tension produces an unease that captures certain psychic and affective negotiations with structural impoverishment in formalist terms. See Doane, *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 1.

characters can recognize, imitate, and finally foil these schemers' carefully laid plans. The plotter encodes in his or her very being a narrative function on which plot hinges yet tries to conceal. As such, plotters rather than protagonists, I claim, possess a deeply nuanced but often unobserved measure of "book-smarts," an awareness of the narrative purpose they serve and for which reason they exist. Formally constituted as part and parcel of the plot to which they belong, they index the elasticity of the rules of a game that the novel sets up and at which it is often cheating.

As I mentioned above, the plotter takes shape at the intersection of narratology and sociology. Within the story, the plotter is the literary character whose command of social rules stimulates narrative intrigue and action into being. Within the discourse, the plotter activates the novel and film to structure the aesthetic shape of its plot and plotting around the plots concealed by plotter. The novel relies on the figure of the plotter to generate its narratable materials, the inheritance plots, secret marriages, and otherwise sensational schemes at the center of narrative structure. The plotter, by the same token, generates these narratable materials in order to enact a kind of sociological dream, to redefine or reshape the contours of their socially constricted existences. In a nineteenth-century novel increasingly engrossed in and fascinated by the forging of identity within a burgeoning social sphere and the potential for identities in formation or in flux to serve as the mesmerizing content of novels, these topics are not just themes resting on the surface of the plot, but embedded within the forms of high narrativity and the concept of "the novelistic" itself. This is to argue that literary character takes shape, and takes place, not just on the surface of story or at the intersection of story and discourse, but in the moments where he or she is made by narrative to realize, and to capitalize on, the difference between the two.

My argument in the chapters that follow comprises three parts. I first offer a theory of the novel that reconciles the longstanding opposition between plot and character by reading for the plotter. Reading for the plotter exposes a previously ignored aspect of narrative form: that characters' awareness of and relationship *to* the plot, rather than merely *within* it, supplies a potent representational technology that parses what has unilaterally been called "narrative space" hierarchically rather than territorially and animates nineteenth- and twentieth-century notions of selfhood as a process of cultivation and self-conscious presentation. The social self is a product of the narrative impulse, just as the narrative impulse is itself a product of the self-making that plotters attempt to effect. I then use the narratological category of the plotter to reflect upon the sociological underpinnings of class passing as structural analogues to the aesthetics of narrative plotting. The hierarchical arrangement of character generates a new structure of agency within narrative that translates the possession of social or cultural capital in an era of increasingly permeable class boundaries into discrete levels of characterological ontology. Finally, I argue that characters' self-reflexive management of the plots at hand allegorizes narrative's own self-consciousness about the "artifice" of an overt plottedness that was consistently seen as a mark of the novel's failure.

Covering Up

Lingering over the plotter's unique silhouette set against the backdrop of the distinction between story and discourse, an opposition that has supplied narratology with its essential elementary sequence, is in this light vastly illuminating.[37] Structuralist theory has generally split narrative into two component parts.

[37] Narratology has typically formulated events with a substantial emphasis on the question of temporal sequencing. For Russian Formalists as Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky, the concepts of *fabula* and *sjužet* reference the actual sequencing of the discrete events that are depicted in the narrative and the sequencing of discrete events as they are actually depicted in the narrative's discourse. Between the dislocation, dismissal, or disorientation of story events and their eventual reordering narrative finds its natural, narratable place. If Mieke Bal suggests that *histoire* consists of "the set of events in their chronological order, their spatial location, and their relations with the actors who cause or undergo them," then chronology, as the first named and oft-

There is, first, a story (*histoire*), "the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting)," then, later, a discourse (*discours*), "the expression, the means by which the content is communicated." If story on the one hand is the thing told, then discourse on the other consists of the telling. This telling ranges from the ordering of the events in the story to their style of presentation.[38] Franco Moretti's appropriately titled "The Conspiracy of Innocents," part of his sweeping study of the Bildungsroman, distinguishes between the related concepts of *fabula*, akin to story, and *sjužet*, or discourse*: "Fabula*, in other words, is the story 'as it is': established, unchangeable, independent of enunciation. *Sjuzhet* is a way of *evaluating* the story, dissecting it according to specific viewpoints and values: it is a perceptual schema, an implicit 'comment' projected on to the 'facts'."[39] Chatman distills this binary opposition into its crystallized essence: "the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how*."[40] In a certain light, plotters impose an "implicit comment" onto the facts prior to the discourse's; they are responsible for Ricoeur's notion of "emplotment" is of an "operation that draws a configuration out of a

---

parsed feature of narrative, cannot help but overshadow the latter listed elements of "spatial location" and the relationship between all the parts to "the actors who cause or undergo them." Quoted in Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 171. Just as Eliot asked "Why always Dorothea?" in a fleeting effort to pay heed to the other actors who populate *Middlemarch*, we might wonder about narratology's prioritization of narrative order over and above the more abstract stylistic dimensions of that ordering. Why not, in other words, orient a typology of character at the intersection of story and discourse, their degree of removal from the knowledge of the fracture that is discourse working through story? Rather than reproducing a narratology where all characters are left behind, we might instead argue that a character's splintered existence in the separate camps of story and discourse constitutes a strategy, rather than a unwanted effect, of narrative plotting. Refusing to cut character out of the equation entirely, and especially resisting treating character as an effect separate from plot, we can theorize character as cutting *across* conventional considerations of story and discourse. Putting it a different way, character carries out functions in plot, but similarly plot in order to carry on functioning in their lives. Also Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968) and Victor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose,* trans. by Benjamin Sher (Normal, I.L.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998).

[38] Story and discourse stand at the forefront of narratology, though they have themselves taken on several different guises with the movement from Russian formalism, structuralism, and formalism: *sjužet* and *fabula*, *histoire* and *récit*, among others. Though the critical history of these terms is as interesting as it is intricate, here I am leaving aside the subtle differences between *sjužet/fabula*, *histoire/récit*, and story and discourse, opting instead to import wholesale the most widely used distinction of story and discourse borrowed from Barthes, Chatman, and Genette, as well as feminist narratologists Robyn Warhol, Susan Lanser, and Alison Booth.

[39] Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 70.

[40] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 19. Ann Banfield notes the differences between Todorov and Benveniste's interpretations of the story and discourse divide. While the former defines *histoire* as the content of the story told and *discours* as "the point of view and style in which the story is told," the latter sees the fission between the two stemming from the presence or absence of the "speaker-addressee relation," which makes itself known through the intrusion of the first- and second-person pronouns. Though these minute narratological quibbles are not my concern here—Catherine Gallagher's "Formalism and Time" incisively provides the nuances that narratology misses even despite its "notorious…fondness for graphs and charts", as for example the difference between form as *structure* and form as *style*—reading for the plotter nevertheless hinges on a similar question: whether we can discern in narrative discourse the presence of an *individual* who is, above all, engaged in perpetual self-styling that pushes story beyond its own limits. See Banfield, "Narrative Style and the Grammar of Direct and Indirect Speech," *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mieke Bal, Vol. 1: Major Issues in Narrative Theory (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 147-8.

simple succession."[41] An overtaxed and underappreciated plot overlays, reorganizes, and alchemically transforms the ordinary, unadorned contents of the story into a discourse refined and polished to gleaming perfection. As if it were a statue chiseled from a block of marble, discourse lives out its existence in the contours of something worked over, carved out. Composed of the same substance as story, discourse's rearrangement nevertheless shows off the old material in a completely new style, as when a servant dresses in the garments of the gentry and passes for a gentleman. And, as I will discuss in further detail a bit later on, narrative discourse, like any execution of good form or good fashion, similarly conceals the state of the story before it had been "made-over," lest the difference betray some of this polishing off process. This, in any case, provided Trollope with a rubric for criticizing Wilkie Collins's too-perfectly plotted novels: the "construction is most minute and most wonderful. But I can never lose the taste of the construction."[42]

If, taking after Chatman, we assume for a moment that the events in a story are "turned into a plot by its discourse, the modus of presentation," then plot signifies more than just a chronological series of events in real-time or the later-stage temporal resequencing of those events.[43] It instead approximates the novel's form of self-conscious "presentation" or configuration, providing a way of seeing the novel "as process rather than as form."[44] The function of plot, or "story-as-discoursed," consists of "emphasiz[ing] or deemphasiz[ing] certain story-events, to interpret some and to leave others to inference, to show or to tell, to comment or to remain silent, to focus on this or that aspect of an event or character."[45] Plotting implies a series of choices that combine to make up a socially-inflected style of being. This is especially true when we think of nineteenth-century novels, whose modulation of suspense, revelation, and surprise provided grounds for critics and readers to evaluate their success, as if their performance of a truth gradually revealed was equivalent to the success of fictionality itself. Whereas we can look to story to supply the actual facts and brass tacks of a history—the immutable chronologies of a life in ceaseless progress and bound always by time—discourse can be said to refer to the style in which such events are unstrung, flung apart and looped together again to spell out a narrative of that history, a "modus of presentation" synonymous not only with the management of an identity but with the construction of a reality that is at once the plotter's and the novel's aim.

If plot, if narrative, can be said to exist in interstices between story and discourse, then the plotter stands at once as the literary character endowed with control over the shape of this space, and as the novel's figure of self-conscious meditation on fiction's own project of achieving coherence within the overarching plot. Put another way, the figure of the plotter stands at a point of intersection between a characterological self-consciousness about the plots he or she devises, and a novelistic self-consciousness about the formal devices that anchor the traditional novel's plotting within the generic constraints of nineteenth-century realism. They are the figures of emplotment embodied and enlivened by narrative function, literary characters implicated in both the creation of story elements and discourse elements. Moreover, concerned with appearing natural so that their plots go undiscovered, both plotter and novel share in a concern over verisimilitude, over what gets presented as plausible or truthful, and over how a scrupulous presentation of events can better persuade the audience of its mimetic qualities.

Plotters therefore stand at a fundamentally shifting—and shifty—point of intersection between plot, character, and narration. Belonging exclusively to none of these categories yet still selectively sharing in the qualities of each, the plotter emerges as the hinge point of narrative form. It persists, to borrow from the language of psychoanalysis, as the Freudian "navel" of the dream that exposes how an entire system of

---

[41] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume I*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 65.

[42] Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), p. 257.

[43] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 43.

[44] Fredric Jameson, "Realism and Desire: Balzac and the Problem of the Subject," in *The Political Unconscious*: *Narrative as a socially symbolic act* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 138.

[45] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 43.

deliberation, forward-planning, and gradual revelation is structured and surges forward as "plot."[46] And if we go a step further and think of the novel as the nineteenth century's dream, its way of working through the large-scale changes in perceptions of the self and of history both within England and from without, then the plotter allows us what, again alongside Freud, we might call the "royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious" of the novel form itself. Awakening the dreamer in the midst of his or her anxieties, both the dream's "safety valve" and the novel's plotters allow us to unearth the submerged structural faculties undergirding dream-world and realism's reverie of representing life as it is. Slippery in affect and slipping past traditional narratological categories, plotters could be said to emerge most clearly at the site at which the "tangle of dream-thoughts…cannot be unraveled," the "spot where it reaches down into the unknown."[47] Indeed, if the task of narrative has come to be identified by its "Penelope-like work of undoing, unthreading, unraveling," then the plotter represents the point at which this unfurling first becomes visible as a set of desires and motivations localized in particular embodied literary characters and for those literary characters to offer instances where the hitherto imperceptible work of plotting starts to fray.[48]

Vigilantly coordinating all those snatches of "hermeneutic code…that cannot be deleted without destroying the narrative logic," these very characters achieve a strange synthesis with the aesthetic form of narrative which has, generally but not always correctly, been seen as a story of and oriented by the protagonist.[49] Fitting into the machinery of narrative as its secret engine but existing in complicated relation to the stratified hierarchies of that same narrative system, plotters unsettle traditional conceptions of plot, character, and narration within the carefully regulated rules of novelistic construction. The plotter in this case provides the novel with both its uncanny surrogate and unlikely rival: while story flourishes by virtue of its proliferating plotter-driven plots analogous to the novel's own overarching plot, discourse bears the heavier charge of at once encoding and exposing these plots. But it is a challenge that the novel cannot do without, since it relies on these characters to first animate its narratable material, a material that takes the form of the plotter's secrets, plans, dreams, and desires that emerge slowly and lurk silently in the background behind what is explicitly announced and serve as what Chatman calls "kernels" (a translation of Barthes's notion of the "*noyau*").[50] These secrets constitute the plotter's own special ammunition, ammunition deployed by and disposed of at their discretion at the most opportune moments but in any case exposing the ever-vulnerable authority of narration to a somewhat nerve-wracking scrutiny.

---

[46] One might also think o f the Lacanian "quilting point" (*le point de capiton*) or "upholstery button." Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection,* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), p. 303. See also *The Seminar: Book III, The Psychoses, 1955-56,* trans. by Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 268.

[47] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text,* trans. and ed. by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p. 528.

[48] Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 13. Here François speaks particularly of the "uncounted" experience of her title, in which "the open secret as a gesture of self-canceling revelation permits a release from the ethical imperative to *act* upon knowledge" and thus offers a golden mean in the form of a "minimal contentment" between the choices of heroic self-denial and passive refusal (3). This concept is especially relevant for the category-confounding status of the plotter in narrative, for the task of passing the plotter over makes light of the minor experiences of a minor character that becomes, essentially, a form of *narrative* dispossession recapitulating the social dispossession traditionally read by Woloch and others as allegorically enacted in the condensing of underprivileged individuals into the cramped corners and claustrophobic quarters of novelistic space. It is, in other words, to read these minor figures' quantitative absence from the main stage of plot as a qualitative abjection or to see François's open secret where there is actually an active and unsettled working-through of experiences that are fundamentally discontent—neither providing contentment nor even (re)counted in the plot proper, which belongs largely to the protagonist—to take shape as either active or passive labor.

[49] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 53.

[50] Ibid.

As Georg Lukács has argued: "The dissonance special to the novel…produces a problem of form whose formal nature is much less obvious than in other kinds of art, and which, because it looks like a problem of content, needs to be approached by both ethical and aesthetic arguments, even more than do problems which are obviously purely formal."[51] I have been conceiving of the plotter's role in the novel's plot as an expression of his or her insight into the distinction between personal history and surface appearance, between the story that they are plotting and the discursive configuration of that story—this locus of intersection may therefore supply a mode of accessing the "true politics of literature." If we follow Lukács, after Novalis, in holding that philosophy is the expression of the distance between the self and the world, then the plotter embodies this narratable difference, sees his or her social insufficiencies and hopes that action, that plotting, will help to bridge that gap. "'Philosophy is really homesickness', says Novalis: 'it is the urge to be at home everywhere'. That is why philosophy, as a form of life or as that which determines the form and supplies the content of literary creation, is always a symptom of the rift between 'inside' and 'outside', a sign of…the incongruence of soul and deed."[52] The plotter—in on the plot but outside the spatial center of the novel—embodies the ironies of an acquired social fluency always melancholically aware of, and doomed to self-consciousness over, its own former exclusion.

Perhaps clear by now, the term "plot" does not, in the end, merely affirm that what happens in a plot bears the potential to tell us things about character. This much is indisputable, and Brooks's *Reading for the Plot* amply explores the consequences of a psychoanalytic analysis of the moods and modes of plot. Rather, a sociology of the novel emerges when we think of characters as possessing an awareness of the constraints of their narrativized embodiment, or when they arrive at what is tantamount to a novelization of their existences through the plots that they engage with and invest in. This simultaneously imbues our considerations of literary character through their function in relation to form, and inflects our understanding of form as it meditates on its own sense of constructedness or plottedness. Reading plot through the lens of a sociology reveals that plot is not just a representational mode of expressing structures of attachment; plotting itself literalizes a structure of just such attachments, just these kinds of faith that the energies invested in an enterprise can finally produce results, pave a way toward distinction. If, as I will argue in the following chapter on Jane Austen's *Emma*, narrative discourse presents something other than what it knows to be the whole truth in order to present the better, because fragmented, story, then so too does the plotter present a little more or a little less on the surface than what lies beneath, so as to better pass for something that they are not. Forms of plotting thus illuminate forms of passing, not only be reflecting it, but by making the psychic negotiation of class into form of negotiation that registers that negotiation of class as infused with complexities of balancing that which is simultaneously systemic and devastatingly individual.

Such a revelation of the fictive structures undergirding their experiences does not denaturalize novelistic technologies under what we usually call meta-fiction, constituting a moment of vulnerability for a realist enterprise always protecting its mimetic qualities. Rather, the thematization of knowledge as a thing to be had—literally, a character's knowledge of social, historical, or political form as a possession, as a sort of cultural capital that one can tap into—naturalizes what we now call plot, explains the initial impulse toward

---

[51] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature,* trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 84. See especially Chapter 4, "The Inner Form of the Novel," pp. 70-83.

[52] Quoted in Lukács, "Integrated Civilizations," *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 29. A formulation of classic Lukacsian "totality" comes later: "Totality of being is possibly only where everything is already homogenous before it has been contained by forms; where forms are not a constraint but only a becoming consciousness, the coming to the surface of everything that had been lying dormant as a vague longing in the innermost depths of that which had to be given form; where knowledge is virtue and virtue is happiness, where beauty is the meaning of the world made visible" (34). In the ages where this sense of totality may be attained, there is no sensation of totality: totality nullifies the very need for self-consciousness, even for that awareness of the inner coherence of a "world made visible" and taking sublime and seamless shape through form.

plot as that which within nineteenth-century fiction was thought to enhance the verisimilitude of a literary work. Thus we might say that plot never just tells a story, or tells just one story: it is also a story of a story told, a story of one form of telling elevated over another and inseparable from the content of its communication. Plot is, in other words, not just a compulsory or generically mandated arrangement of story and discourse, but a story of that discourse, a discourse secretly speaking to us—as if it had no other way—about its own arrangement. "Formal invention in the novel," as Michel Butor has written, "far from being opposed to realism…is the *sine qua non* of a greater realism."[53] Within this framework, the plotter manifests as the residue, personified or embodied, left by the story *in its process of becoming discursive*. By telling us of the limits that limit its telling, the novel says through the plotter all that it could never say on its own.

[53] Michel Butor, *Inventory: Essays by Michel Butor*, ed. Richard Howard (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 25. See especially "The Novel as Research."

CHAPTER ONE

The Conning and the Cunning[54]

"Know that thou seemest to me e'en to have helped in plotting the deed."
—Oedipus to Tiresius

"Spatial distances on paper are equivalent to social distances."
—Pierre Bourdieu, Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action

A Case of Identity

That the nineteenth-century novel is plotted is of so little surprise that the genre almost seems synonymous with the idea of the plots it contains. That the novel is, simultaneously, also full of *plotters* may seem less obvious. If plot takes shape through time as an elaborate orchestration of signs and schemes, such plots necessarily implicate a fictional character or set of characters, far-sighted figures capable of viewing, shaping, and underpinning the story before it takes place. As such, plotters enjoy an oddly privileged access to the hidden and detail-ridden life of the plot that the detective, reader, or protagonist can only discover after a length of time, a duration usually commensurate to the span of the novel itself. This access is granted by the plotter's designated role as the novel's furtive architect, its secret engine and structural double. In thus doing some of the dirty work of plot in the name of generating the conflicts, misunderstanding, and mysteries that constitute "the narratable," plotters end up giving narration itself an airtight alibi.

Beginning, for instance, with the plot of *Lady Audley's Secret.* Lady Audley's ability to disguise her true intentions makes her a suitable subject and object of narrative interest, and she often hides the requisite clues on her person, playing it quite literally close to the chest: "She wore a narrow black ribbon round her neck, with a locket or a cross, or a miniature, perhaps, attached to it; but whatever the trinket was, she always kept it hidden under her dress."[55] Again, as in the earlier example of *Vanity Fair*'s Becky Sharp, it almost seems as if the literary character possesses some unholy knowledge that she willfully occludes from the narration. Take, for example, the following scene:

> "I wish I could show you the jewels, Luke," said the girl; "but I can't, for she always keeps the keys herself; that's the case on the dressing-table there."
>
> "What, *that*?" cried Luke, staring at the massive walnut-wood and brass inlaid casket. "Why, that's big enough to hold every bit of clothes I've got!"
>
> "And it's as full as it can be of diamonds, rubies, pearls, and emeralds," answered Phoebe, busy as she spoke in folding the rustling silk dresses, and laying them one by one upon the shelves of the wardrobe. As she was shaking out the flounces of the last, a jingling sound caught her ear, and she put her hand into the pocket.

[54] Thanks to Elaine Freedgood for this phrase.

[55] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 8-9. Hereafter cited parenthetically in-text as *LAS*.

> "I declare!" she exclaimed, "my lady has left her keys in her pocket for once in a way. I can show you the jewellery if you like, Luke." (*LAS* 82)

Patrick Brantlinger writes: "even before we are aware of specific crimes, Braddon makes us listen to the jingling of the keys to the mystery, all of which are in the narrator's possession. We learn at the outset how ignorant we are about the story to come…and how much knowledge and power the narrator has."[56] Yet this is not completely true, as the keys are not always "in the narrator's possession." In fact, it is closer to the truth to say that the process of narration's coming to acquire all the keys dictates the conditions of both narrative power and narrative plot. We see this again when Robert Audley and George Talboys visit Audley Court and ask to tour the house:

> They were going up-stairs, when Alicia turned and spoke to the girl.
>
> "After we have been in the drawing-room I should like to show these gentlemen Lady Audley's rooms. Are they in good order, Phoebe?"
>
> "Yes, Miss; but the door of the ante-room is locked, and I fancy that my lady has taken the key to London."
>
> "Taken the key! Impossible!" cried Alicia.
>
> "Indeed, Miss, I think she has. I cannot find it, and it always used to be in the door."
>
> "I declare," said Alicia impatiently, "that it is not at all unlike my lady to have taken this silly freak into her head. I dare say she was afraid we should go into her rooms, and pry about amongst her pretty dresses, and meddle with her jewellery. It is very provoking, for the best pictures in the house are in that ante-chamber. There is her own portrait, too, unfinished, but wonderfully like." (*LAS* 66-7)

Once again, Lady Audley serves as custodian of the keys to both narrative plot and to her boudoir, and the only thing that allows narrative to penetrate the recesses of the latter is to force her hand, attributing to her an uncharacteristic lapse in her usually vigilant supervision of narrative data. On the level of description, narration literalizes an authority wrested at the expense of the literary character, who, as in any zero-sum game, undergoes an ontologically arrested development in the form of a scapegoating on the level of content in addition to the level of form. Narration, already degrading character, adds insult to injury by projecting the story of this subordination onto the larger—or at least more immediately visible—screen that is the novel's manifest content.

Suppose we understand this dramatization of omniscience's failure less as the feint of an always-in-control narrative authority, but as a meditation on that very authority, on its own proffered façade of power-lost and power-found. Assume, also, that the management of this façade constitutes the plot of a novel itself: in this case, the figure of the plotter serves as both a vessel endowed with enough consciousness of that story to adequately drive its progress, but simultaneously too little actual agency over the discourse to finally decide its outcome. The plotter, in this case, is fallible enough to leave crumbs to follow in our pursuit of signs, but not so infallible as to preclude telling in the first place. As we know, narratibility gets situated between the nothing-told and the everything-revealed, and the plotter, I argue, is the place where the novel modulates and manages this crucial balance of disclosure and suspense. Say too much, and the suspense dissipates. Say nothing at all, and there is no suspense in the first place. Reading for the plotter within narrative lays opens a little-known passage, like the secret hallway that leads to Lady Audley's boudoir, that leads to the guarded inner recesses of the novel's functioning itself, where nothing is disguised, and everything left in "elegant disorder." What happens, put another way, when we start to see the success of plotter's plots as necessary to, yet always subordinated by, the novel's own plot?

---

[56] Patrick Brantlinger, "What Is 'Sensational' About the 'Sensation Novel'?," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (June 1982), p. 14.

This chapter will sketch out a representative if still provisional silhouette of the plotter through the lens of sensation fiction, a genre often criticized for its trademark emphasis on plot. Mid-Victorian critics frequently debated the logical priority, and the relative value, of plot and character, a line of reasoning inherited from Aristotle, and—like their modern successors—consistently divided "popular stories" from "psychological novels," "events" from "existents," and "plots" from "people." Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Edward Bulwer Lytton made the question a frequent topic of their letters: "I have thought very much over what you said in your last letter with regard to a novel in which the story arises naturally out of the characters of the actors in it, as contrasted with a novel in which the actors are only marionettes, the slaves of the story."[57] Though the long-standing antithesis between "novels of incident" and "novels of character" might seem old-fashioned, few scholars have hitherto read these two foundational aspects of the novel together.

I begin with an implicit hypothesis that plot and character are not only mutually constitutive, practically impossible to hold apart, but also intentionally confused by a novel that struggles to arrive at an aesthetic balance between action and interiority. My argument in this chapter, and indeed in this dissertation more broadly, is that plot provides literary theory with a crucial but overlooked strategy of characterization, whereby certain characters find a full form of expression in their relationship to, consciousness of, and control over the novel's narrated plots. We can start to grapple with this representational technique through what I have been calling the plotter, limited to the ontological category of the literary character yet charged with a specific kind of management over the plot, a management conventionally associated with narration. From this ontological hierarchy, which maps onto the social stratifications represented in the novel, emerges a kind of sorting of characters into different levels of epistemological mastery or plot-smarts. That certain individuals finally come into their own after discovering the plot or plots against them do not equate to mere happenstance, merely (or literally) a matter of "what happened." It is not simply *anagnorisis* as Aristotle put it, a "recognition" that ends the narrative dalliance with unawareness, with the limited knowledge that drives a novel's movement toward its moment of closure. Rather, characters' game-changing recognition of the formalization of plots within the form of the novel is tantamount to a recognition of the fictionalization that anchors and agitates the tumultuous experience of everyday life. In contrast to the plotter who knows more, and knows better, the protagonist comes-to-know, at the expense of his originary innocence of the ways of the narrative world.

I argue that something akin to a formal self-consciousness—to what Gérard Genette has dubbed "metalepsis"—becomes part and parcel of the literary character's development as a literary and social being. In what I cite as those instances of plotter-managed metalepsis, the novel seems not only to meditate on the process of its own construction, but also to be offering an active theorization of itself and its own discursive practices. In other words, my argument hinges on the dialectic of plotter and novel that manifests in both the plotter's striving to transgress the limits of its own ontological category, and in narration's commentary on the ways in which it achieves its characteristic subordination of everything that is secured outside, against, and at the expense of its own hermetic authority.

There is both a sociological and a narratological dimension to this chapter and to this project more broadly. If sociologists have "recast social analysis along the central axes of the interaction between *agency* and *structure*," it will be my suggestion that we can conceive of characters' relationship to the content-level story or plot as expressive of a similar sort of aesthetic or political agency that nevertheless productively contradicts, interferes with, or unsettles their role within the formal structure of a narrative more broadly.[58] I thus follow Lionel Trilling in isolating strains within the kinetic play of manners "a culture's hum and buzz of

---

[57] Quoted in David Skilton, "Introduction," *Lady Audley's Secret* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xix. See Letter of 17 January 1864, Robert L. Wolff, "Devoted Disciple: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1862-1873," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, Vol. 12 (1974), p. 19.

[58] Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 5 (Oct., 1994), p. 614.

implication."[59] But even though the novel's classic intent might be propelled by a "perpetual quest for reality" that always takes as its "field of research" a social world that elevates an analysis of manners as a anemometer registering "the indication of the direction of man's soul," I am interested in how the form of the novel and, conversely, the novel as a form, makes this explicitly and exceptionally possible.[60] In other words, I am keenly invested in how the novel's "investigation of the problem of reality beginning in the social field" constitutes not just its topical obsession, but takes shape through literary or narrative forms particularly charged with and colored by homologous social valences.[61]

And if we claim, again with Trilling, that "All literature tends to be concerned with the question of reality—I mean quite simply the old opposition between reality and appearance, between what really is and what merely seems," then placing characters at the intersection of story and discourse allows these content-level plots to expose both the structures of identity-skewing or passing and the structures of form-level plotting around which the nineteenth-century novel—often sheepishly—stakes its identity.[62] Characters' custody of plot-sense thus translates into a form of social know-how that positions character somewhere between story and discourse rather than merely as "existents" within a novel's overarching plot. When we explore the nuances of characterological development against the yardstick that is their distance from the plot, knowledge, and narration, plot materializes as more than either narrative content or its ordering, but as an intricate system organized by varying degrees of sociological, political, and narrative consciousness.[63] This is particularly apt if we remember that both narrative plot and cultural mastery rely on a meticulous and instrumental play of distance from distinct but related bodies of knowledge: "the manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of 'class' and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction, that is, as Proust put it, 'the infinitely varied art of *marking*

---

[59] "I mean the whole evanescent context of explicit statements. It is that part of a culture which is made of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or special meaning." See Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Winter, 1948), p. 12.

[60] Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," pp. 17-8.

[61] Ibid., p. 18.

[62] Ibid., p. 13.

[63] Alex Woloch's *The One vs. The Many* has trenchantly divided the space of the novel into smaller or larger segments for major and minor character as an inflection of "structures of inequitable distribution," and a modulation of a limited span of readerly attention or interest.[63] Woloch persuasively reconciles the tension between the whole and its constituent parts by highlighting parallel social and political tensions driving the nineteenth-century bourgeois imagination. Indeed, a discussion of the one and the many seems to lie at the foundation of several adjoining fields prominent in current understanding of the Victorian period. Despite the usefulness of this mode of thinking about the minor character, however, I resist this territorial model, and instead examine characters in relation to their degree of knowledge of or agency over the plot, their development and embodiment in and through the deed of plotting; this is not merely to argue that plot provides representative contexts through which characters are described, embodied, enlivened. Rather, it is to view narrative space as inherently and ontologically hierarchical, and to track an intricate "character-system" alongside the systematic scheming in which they are embroiled, either knowingly or unknowingly. Crucially, this space frequently operates against the spatiality that Woloch tracks: indeed, the territorial asymmetry at the heart of *The One Vs. The Many* frequently provides the novel with its plot; certain characters, namely, plotters, are necessarily minor in order to fulfill a function on behalf of the narrative writ large. Instead of collapsing literary character into simplistic linguistic or narrative parts, cogs in a whirling and inscrutable machine, functionality provides a necessary aesthetic and affective tool with which to apprehend the singular psychology of the represented individual whose attempts to exert mastery flourish and then inevitably fail in the service of what they recognize as their "plot."

distances'."[64] Plot thus offers narrative space to us in the shape of an epistemological and ontological hierarchy, and furthermore comments on the making of those narrative levels through the figure of the plotter. Both novel and plotter, then, are defined by the way they seek actively and vigilantly to make themselves legible in a particular and peculiarly controlled way. What we start to construct by reading for a plotter that constructs that reading is a theory of the novel that installs the stories that orient the lives of character within the multi-tiered stories of narrative form itself.

"If we see history only in the narratives it produces, and if those narratives are unconscious ideologies, then ideologies will have narrative structures that are politically charged. And those structures may of course be congruent with the generic and narrative structures of literature."[65] Loesberg's claim makes explicit not just the fact that sensation fiction's ideological sparks find conversion into specifically formal charges, but rather a way in which the relationship between the two have become so naturalized, so obviously a part of literary technologies of representation that the technology itself, so obvious it goes without saying, has long gone unsaid. Critical tendencies to treat the status of marginal figures as more or less powerful within the content of the plot have thus disregarded these figures' status within a narrative structure separates into many and multilayered spheres of agency. The sentiment that "the literary" vanishes in the leap from the world of the fictional into the world of the real is perhaps best captured by Jacques Rancière, who writes in "Why Emma Bovary Was Killed": "The main problem is that when you jump from the fictional reasons to the social, nonfictional reasons, you drop what is in the middle, between fiction and nonfiction: the invention of the fiction itself…In short, you discard what is at stake in the construction of the fiction and what might be the true politics of literature."[66] Emma Bovary, as all readers of *Madame Bovary* would know, kills herself at the level of story, yet Rancière provocatively argues that she is killed by Flaubert, by and in discourse. This argument leads him on into an analysis of what he dubs "the true politics of story," a politics that garners interest precisely because it is plot, and plot alone, that can analogize and meditate metaleptically, subtly, but always quite marvelously, on the events of its own construction. That Emma takes a fatal dose of arsenic and dies because she has been poisoned by chemical and degraded aesthetic substance means that her literal way of reading literally kills her. By skipping the level where characters are oriented in relation to the plot, seeing characters merely as receptacles into which she can deposit her consciousness. Rather than positing the plotter as that which grounds the novel's vision of its own totality, we could venture instead that the figure, in serving two masters (its own plot and the novel's), suffers from and makes visible a subtle sway of literary character between the exigencies of novelistic design and the fraught individual experience that that design sacrifices to secure its own coherence. And far from serving as a mark of the novel's failure, this plottedness might actually say something about plot and character that neither could say on its own.

My argument proceeds through readings of two prominent works of sensation fiction oriented by different narratological concepts. In the first section on *Lady Audley's Secret*, I look at discourse's scrambling of story's chronological contents and argue that this arrangement / disarray? or representation of events mirrors plotters' desires to present a manipulated or managed version of their selves for a public increasingly unsettled by shifts in the categories that defined and organized aggregate populates along the lines of class. This form of self-management or self-conscious presentation drives plotters' ambitions toward social ascent or the continued cultivation of social prestige. Such dreams of upward mobility find themselves reflected in both the plots that attempt to secure greater wealth, control of the self, or impressive titles, but also through the crucial metalepses that plotters put into motion by knowing more than their characterological, and ontological, counterparts. Though many studies have focused on the significance of the novel form within the arena of the

---

[64] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 66, my italics.

[65] Jonathan Loesberg, "The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction," *Representations*, No. 13 (Winter 1986), p. 116.

[66] Jacques Rancière, "Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 34 (Winter 2008), p. 234.

social, I argue that the novel itself is a formalized social space.[67] It is a hierarchy ranging from literary character to narrator that plotters, by interfering in its midst, aim to upset. In other words, narrative power in the novel are organized hierarchically, and plot tells the story of how individuals acquire agency in the represented world by amassing knowledge in its representation. Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* is as much about Sir Percival Glyde's attempts to hide his illegitimacy and reestablish his position as a member of the landed gentry as it is about the hierarchical divisions of agency in narrative that tell a story of the legitimacy of class as an indication of identity—and allegorize the construction of narrative authority itself—as it comes under attack in the nineteenth century.

What Lies Beneath

Braddon's immensely popular *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861-62) tells a story whose premise can be distilled into a single statement made by one of the novel's minor characters: "Sir Michael Audley was a widower for sixteen years, and married a penniless young governess about a year and a half ago. The story is quite romantic, and Lady Audley is considered the belle of the county" (*LAS* 260). So the history of how Wealth came to wed Beauty might start and end. There is as yet nothing particularly sensational about the story: the rules of the genre—together with the too-predictable laws of attraction—all but compel the elderly Sir Michael to fall quickly and hard for the captivating Lucy Graham. That he is immediately struck, with all the force of fate, by that "terrible fever called love" comes as no surprise whatsoever to either readers or to the other characters who know already that Lucy's "soft and melting blue eyes," "showering flaxen curls," and gentle lulling voice that "pervaded every charm" would soon seal the baronet's fate ("Destiny! Why, she was his destiny!") (6). As a sensation novel, however, *Lady Audley's Secret* finds itself destined not for the "pleasant picture" of perfect domestic bliss but rather for the "diabolical delusion" that only offers a perfect simulation of it (231). There must be "some secret at the bottom of all this" else the novel would no longer fit its elected genre. And sure enough, we eventually discover that Lady Audley is not Lucy Graham, but Mrs. Helen Talboys, neé Maldon. Deserted by her husband and disgusted by the poverty of her surroundings, Helen Talboys stages her own death, abandons her infant son, and takes a position as a governess in a distant town. From these private offenses, she moves on toward greater stakes and grander stages of her criminal career: bigamy, arson, and the (it turns out, merely attempted) murder of her first husband.

Lady Audley's centrality to the narrative structure of *Lady Audley's Secret* pivots around her management of schemes to leave her former life behind, to see "every trace of the old life melt away" ("No more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations") (12). She pushes the narrative forward by pushing her husband into a well, and without her *Lady Audley's Secret* would not longer provide the drama-saturated stuff of the "narratable." As such, W. F. Rae writes, "Lady Audley is at once the heroine and the monstrosity of the novel."[68] This "female Mephistopheles," Rae claims, flourishes for a time because among other things her appearance and essence seldom cleave together and, if we cannot count on Lady Audley for marital fidelity or loyalty, what we can take for granted is that "her manner and her appearances are always in contrast with her conduct," leading to something "very exciting" but "also very unnatural."[69] Most obviously, Lady Audley's impeccably managed stories successfully fuel the suspense, sensational discoveries, and shocking scandals that comprise the novel's discourse. Her mastery of varying and visible forms of aesthetic distinction—dressing the right way, making old clothes look new, wearing the right jewels—analogize the

[67] See, for instance, Nancy Bentley, *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Peter Brooks, *The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); and Susan Winnett, *Terrible Sociability: The Text of Manners in Laclos, Goethe, and James* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

[68] W. F. Rae [anon.], "Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon," *North British Review*, No. 4 (1865), pp. 186-7.

[69] Ibid., p. 187.

near-perfect form of her conspiratorial plotting: she covers up what's really there in order to generate an effect of unity between surface and depth. If clothing makes the man, then Lady Audley's affable expressions, timely blushes, and modest deprecations suggest unmanageable affect rather than too-deliberate artificiality, a sense of endless pondering behind her posturing that in fact serves to mask the madness that makes her don one in the first place (*LAS* 7). Like Benjamin's storyteller, whose "ability to tell a tale properly" lies in his "proper distance and angle of vision," Lady Audley perceives a certain moveable or flexible channel between story and discourse, and is thus able to control the way that the tale is told by almost forcing it to adopt her own angle of vision.[70] Her management supplies the novel with a character whose brilliantly modulated performance on the level of story makes possible the novel's own presentation on the level of discourse, even as the two motions are generally read as antithetical both in deed and definition. Her will to scramble up the social ladder is tied to the fate of the novel, and there must first be Lady Audley's secrecy before there can be *Lady Audley's Secret*. Casting it in these terms, we can perhaps venture that the secret world that narration tries to *invade* constitutes the plot, while the secret world it perpetually allows to *evade* finds its embodiment in the plotter.

Because she can supply a figure for and force behind the narratable, Lady Audley, and the "secret of her life," share with the novel a manic energy for plot-construction and subsequent plot-suppression that then secures the elaborate and often euphoric rise and fall of both plotter and the novelistic action she harbors as plot. Even early in the novel the plotter emerges as a sort of discordant visionary who both sees and knows too much. During Sir Michael's proposal, for instance, we are told that "Lucy Graham was not looking at Sir Michael, but straight out into the misty twilight and the dim landscape far away beyond the little garden. The baronet tried to see her face, but her profile was turned to him, and he could not discover the expression of her eyes. If he could have done so, he would have seen a yearning gaze which seemed as if it would have pierced the far obscurity and looked away—away into another world" (*LAS* 10). This "far obscurity" may well take the shape of the novel itself, as Lady Audley finds herself positioned within the narrative as both the double it counts on to energize its plot and the deviance that plot ultimately seeks to counter. Longing for "anywhere, anywhere out of the world," Lady Audley, like one of Deleuze and Gauttari's "far-seers" blessed with "long-distance vision," wishes to elevate her social status and winds up uncannily exceeding her limitations of character first.[71]

Let us look, as another example, at Lady Audley's casting of her schemes as a kind of "plotting" of "horrible things":

> "I can't plot horrible things," she muttered presently; "my brain isn't strong enough, or I'm not wicked enough, or brave enough. If I met Robert Audley in those lonely gardens, as I—"
>
> The current of her thoughts was interrupted by a cautious knocking at her door. She rose suddenly, startled by any sound in the stillness of her room. She rose, and threw herself into a low chair near the fire. She flung her beautiful head back upon the soft cushions, and took a book from the table near her. (*LAS* 298)

Lady Audley's finely finessed performances, the narrator's all-too-knowing explanation for the acquired compulsion it attempts to mask, and the complicity of the narrator with the character all bear remark, as they each produce weird boundary-crossing effects. "Insignificant as this action was it spoke very plainly. It spoke

---

[70] "Viewed from a certain distance, the great, simple outlines which define the storyteller stand out in him, or rather, they become visible in him, just as in a rock a human head or an animal's body may appear to an observer at the proper distance and angle of vision." See Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. 83.

[71] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 197.

very plainly of ever-recurring fears—of fatal necessities for concealment—of a mind that in its silent agonies was ever alive to the importance of outward effect. It told more plainly than anything else could have told, how complete an actress my lady had been made by the awful necessity of her life" (298). In this moment the "awful necessity" of her life, whether we read it as her madness or as the homicidal impulse that serves to confirm it, converts Lady Audley into both a subject of and a figure for discourse. She becomes a medium for the novel's own self-commentary, almost as if, "[taking] a book from the table near her," that same book in Lady Audley's hands turns into the one that we are currently reading, text and reader reduced to nothing but props in the character's unsettling display of inverted power. Or, put another way, the novel's handling of Lady Audley's management of "outward effect" conflates her status as a character with a weird meta-discourse, as if the plot were not only thinking about, but telling us of, its own corresponding entanglement with a genre-affirming set of "fatal necessities for concealment." It would be difficult for us to trace an originary moment in this odd twinning of character and discourse: does Lady Audley's secret reproduce at the level of discourse its own socially inflected insecurity? Or is her secret merely a version, decked out in the flashy finery of plot and character, of an instability endemic to nineteenth-century plots as a whole? Rather than weld a causal link between the two, it is more useful to describe this ghostly dialectic as precisely the tension that the plotter condenses in crossing at will between story and discourse, precisely the substance of the plot, or the story-as-discoursed, that she needs to suppress if she is ever to succeed.

Still, couldn't we dismiss the plotter out of hand as just another social climber, striver, or *parvenu* so frequently found, and inevitably found out, in the pages of nineteenth-century novels? Isn't getting put in your place just a thing that happens, one of the small justices or satisfying comeuppances in what seems an otherwise mercilessly competitive social world? Or, couldn't we put it down as one of the homologies between plot's form and its content, whereby plot ends up saying exactly what it enacts formally? That Lady Audley looks good even in her hand-me-down dresses, has the proper word to offer on every occasion, paints beautifully, and speaks perfect French might seem, to a distinction-conscious observer, only appropriate and even minimal qualifications for a governess doomed to exceed her station and then fall swiftly back to reality. In no way does this seem to distinguish Lady Audley as a figure from any of her counterparts bent on marrying up, from George Wickham and Lucy Steele to Ginevra Fanshawe and Blanche Ingram, who are constantly biting off more than they can chew and, finally, getting spit out by both social world and novel in distaste. The plotter could stand as just another character in the novel's well-oiled machinery, figuring into plot without ever becoming figures *for* it.

We might glance quickly at the historical figure of the *arriviste*. The *arriviste* evokes images of the *hommes forts* of a distinctly post-revolutionary age, emerging from the stale because static image of the Romantic aristocratic hero who had fallen into an effete, decadent aestheticism. Reacting against the regime into which, even in his disillusionment, he nevertheless sought to gain entry or arrival, the *arriviste* stood at the center of a "conflict of ambition" and began to stand as "the inevitable product of an age of transition, uncertainty, and turbulence"—this period of transformation and tradition-under-construction finds reflection in both the social form of the novel and in the narrative arc of its plots.[72] Despite his outsider status, the *arriviste* soon condensed all the anxieties and upheavals of an age, his exemplarity predicated on the conditions of his continued exclusion. Though the term is borrowed from nineteenth-century French texts, especially those by Balzac, Stendhal, and Flaubert, the *arriviste* bears particular relevance for a British novel engaged with the suppressed yet still manifest threats to class barriers giving way to rapid and perceptible erosion. The fact that the semiotic code of social identity could be managed and manufactured by the *parvenu* or *arriviste* signaled two divergent interpretations, a "doubly coded sign": status becomes a mark of the *arriviste*'s authentication, his demonstration of being inside the higher social echelon to which he aspires. Yet this blatant proffering of authority returns his authenticity to that which has been authenticated,

[72] M. E. M. Taylor, *The Arriviste: The Origins and Evolution of the 'Arriviste' in the 19th Century French Novel with Particular Reference to Stendhal and Balzac* (Bala, N. Wales: Dragon Books, 1972), p. 10.

thereby verifying the inherent failure of his membership.[73] Bourdieu distinguishes between these forms of status by highlighting the difference being *doing* and *being*, where "the holders of educationally uncertified cultural capital can always be required to prove themselves, because they *are* only what they *do*," such that they are always a "by-product of their own cultural production."[74] On the other hand, membership in the aristocracy or holders of titles of nobility possess a "being" which is "irreducible to any 'doing', to any know-how or function," and they "only have to be what they are, because all their practices derive their value form their authors, being the affirmation and perpetuation of the essence by virtue of which they are performed."[75] In other words, the struggle of the *parvenu* is laced with an irony, because what he wants to possess is a possession that should predate the faculty of wanting itself: "…the parvenu can never be authentic *because* he is not of noble birth, birth being the tautological signifier of virtue and authenticity. Authenticity constitutes a translation of the concept of *birth* at the social level: as an *essential* quality, it cannot logically be acquired."[76] The desire for nobility always implies its absence, an absence that in turn implies the inevitable frustration of nobility's acquisition. As Nancy Armstrong notes in "The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism," protagonists must often "give expression to asocial desires, which they can do only by bending the rules that define their given places in society. They are clearly misfits. The novel takes it upon itself to solve this contradiction by creating fantastic situations in which one can become a good member of society precisely by risking exclusion from it."[77] But for those plotters whose risking of exclusion paves the path toward its realization, the novel strategically plots and plans for a recapitulation of this "misfit" status in order to achieve formal closure. As such, we can read the novel's negotiation with plot not as a caving in to the demands of literary and generic convention, but as a canny mode of characterization, where an individual's content-level struggle against the inevitability of a system reifying itself finds its counterpart in the plotter who must always be scapegoated to bring about the "happily ever after" of the protagonist.

However, while the *arriviste* begins and ends his career on the playground that is society—so concerned with how a mastery of the ways of the world might pave a way in or through that world—the plotter is the *arriviste* turned textual being; he is the individual who recognizes in the laws of the social universe a sort of likeness to forms of narrative and can thus be managed as such. If we agree with Lukács, that to experience social distance and social desire is to understand on a fundamental level the expanse of dissatisfaction that goads the narratable into being, for "only insufficiencies, defaults, deferrals, can be

---

[73] Sarah Juliette Sasson, *Longing to Belong: The Parvenu in Nineteenth-Century French and German Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 5. The *arriviste* and the parvenu are not synonymous, though both generally designate a class of ambitious, self-conscious, and complicated outsider status. Both terms touch upon the plotter's curious position simultaneously beneath and above the systems from which they are excluded, and they thus present a "sociological phenomenon forged by capitalistic development and social upheaval, and a symbol of the great threat posed by modernity" (2). Sasson emphasizes, crucially, the parvenu's "misfit" status, though the plotter, albeit sharing a similarly liminal and discursively hazy space in narrative, successfully disguises his nuanced and subtle unbelonging. The parvenu is thus the plotter in reverse: if the parvenu's "considerable financial success has assured him of luxurious material goods and some social standing," he nevertheless remains the "pathetic if not ridiculous emblem of unsubtle naïveté and of blindness to social nuances." The plotter, on the other hand, has so fully incorporated the ticks and tricks of polite society into his own psyche that he passes under the radar of all the others in that class and, thus, passes off his outsider position as merely another instance of the "insider perspective" almost instinctively able to model and to monitor tasteful and tactful behavior (3).

[74] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 23.

[75] Ibid., pp. 23-4.

[76] Sasson, *Longing to Belong*, pp. 3-4.

[77] Nancy Armstrong, "The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism," *The Novel, Volume 2: Forms and Themes,* ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 350.

'told'."[78] And since the plotter-as-*arriviste* offers a point at which narrative's textual codes become visible, they also brilliantly index the mechanisms by which an entire represented world infuses the structures of the discursive space that constitutes the novel, and where large-scale questions regarding phenomenology, epistemology, and ontology of literary character merge together. Indeed, if the novel "represents a specific social content and strives to reproduce society's ability to translate raw experience into intelligible form," the plotter exposes the ways in which the rules of that social content get woven into the very thread of novelistic form.[79] "The ideals of equality and fraternity made [the *arriviste*] class-conscious, and merely served to produce bitterness and a sense of frustration in the young man without wealth or nobility, when the discrepancy between the ideal and the real became plain to him"—what's important is that the felt difference between the ideal and the real stimulates plotters on towards plotting, a plotting that jolts the novel out of quiescence into something that can be narrated.[80]

More than just maneuvering through the gown-bespeckled, bauble-littered battlefield that is the fashionable in-crowd's stomping ground, Lady Audley's plots to get to the top, to ascend the social ladder from tattered governess to the wife of a wealthy baron, hang upon a way of spinning the forms of discourse so that the truth behind her story never emerges in the first place. Familiar with the ins and outs of narrative itself—and especially the points at which that narrative becomes prominently and publically narratable—there seems to be little to stop Lady Audley from getting in on the game that is social life as a whole. Her mannered intelligence is a bit too perceptive, a bit too knowing to be a matter of pure substance; rather, it activates a paranoia both about the slow acculturation of the *parvenu* and, more crucially, about the gentle acquisition of plot-consciousness that lays waste to the boundary between omniscient narrator and limited character on which the traditional novel stakes its claims of authority and coherence. What I am arguing, then, is that the struggle of a represented individual for social mobility is, oddly and often, matched by a simultaneous struggle of a literary character for a kind of social control that is homologous with, and instrumental to, the powers of narrative omniscience. The ontological hierarchies of literary character and narration map onto the social hierarchies undergirding Victorian conceptions of a mutable class identity, and it is out of the restless settling and unsettling of these hierarchies that plot is born.

In other words, Lady Audley's ambitions within the realm of story are matched and indeed amplified by the novel's representation of that ambition through a status-consciousness that manifests itself *through* her sense of narrative agency. The niceties of her perfect social performance find their reflection in the finesse of her narrative maneuvers. The plotter's dependence on and implication of narrative techniques otherwise reserved for figures of omniscience therefore distinguishes this figure from the content-level *arriviste*, "un type d'énergie" emerging as a post-revolutionary phenomenon that made possible new forms of social mobility.[81] The plotter, put simply, is a literary character endowed with a certain kind of agency over his or her own plot and over the novel's as well. All told, we can see that the dazzling virtuosity of the novel's discourse in reconstructing the story depends entirely on the equal but opposite work of the "arch-conspirator" to harness her mastery of a certain kind of socioformal discourse as a mode of entombing rather than exhuming her shameful personal history. Represented through a mix of usually unmixable parts, composed of equal doses of story-mastery and discourse-mastery, it is as if the best and oddest parts of narration, character, and plot achieve synthesis in the plotter who stands both for and outside the system, a welcome guest of every category and a card-carrying member of none.

We can perhaps take this further: more than just supplying narrative with its fuel and its fodder, Lady Audley's awareness of structural management at the very base of her identity spurs narrative discourse on and so, stealthily and subtly, begins to mime its movements. What finally gives Lady Audley's plot away is an

---

[78] D. A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 3.

[79] Puckett, *Bad Form,* p. 44.

[80] Taylor, *The Arriviste*, p. 3.

[81] Ibid., p. 13.

artifact that her suspicious nephew, Robert Audley, uncovers at a boarding house: a dilapidated paper-covered bonnet box, battered with use, bearing the dog-eared fragments of half torn-off railway labels. The box's upper label is on the up-and-up, nothing more than a readily visible "Miss Graham" printed on its surface. But this label, once moistened, gradually peels away to reveal a different address underneath: that of "Mrs. George Talboys". The pair of labels pried apart ties together Lady's Audley's dual—and dueling—identities. The mystery is solved at long last: Lady Audley has been George Tabloy's presumed dead wife all along. What's more, alongside the appearance of this crucial carrying case the case against Lady Audley builds to a spectacular climax with the help of similarly layered, nestled, folded, crinkled objects: a ring wrapped in a slip of half-printed, half-written paper that was "yellow with age, and crumpled with much folding" (12), which was "always kept hidden under her dress" (9); a "baby's little worsted shoe rolled up in a piece of paper," ensconced within a secret drawer "lined with purple velvet" inside the lady's jewel case (30); and, finally, an inscription to her husband that Lady Audley had written as Helen Maldon in an annual of the year 1845, which had at first been wedged between "two blank leaves at the beginning [that] were stuck together (159). Lady Audley's characteristic compulsion about what is legible about her produces an irony: everything she touches becomes similarly and startlingly emblems of her narrative-governing techniques, for all these object-clues find themselves nested, nestled, layered within containers that at first glance look to be nothing much at all.

We could think of Hannah Arendt's description of the parvenu who "concealed his true nature wherever he went," yet cannot help but perpetuate images of the self he tries to hide in all the objects with which he comes into contact, the irony reaching such a pitch whereby "everything that he touched appeared to be masked…and through every hole in his costume his old pariah existence could be detected."[82] Enveloped within discourse, the objects contained in story become that story's secret content and structural twin. Kenneth Burke's *A Grammar of Motives* offers a vocabulary with which to think about this: "There is, of course, a circular possibility in the terms [act-agent ratio and scene-act ratio]. If an agent acts in keeping with his nature as an agent (act-agent ratio), he may change the nature of the scene accordingly (scene-act ratio), and thereby establish a state of unity between himself and his world (scene-agent ratio)."[83] The plotter stands at the pivot where a state of unity between himself and his social world becomes intimately connected to the unity of action that governs the Aristotelian sense of a well-formed plot. What occurs, then, is that the novel, looking into the mirror, catches a vision of itself in the visage of the plotter.

If the investigation reconstructs the crime, thereby constructing discourse through the reconstruction of the story, Lady Audley's bigamous plot enacts the opposite trajectory. Draping discourse over the bare bones of story, her performance cloaks a presentation of the events that rivals and indeed obstructs the narrative. Given this, Lady Audley frequently exercises an authority over narrative form both indispensable and indisputably odd. Indeed, the transformation of story into discourse finds itself enacted in the labels themselves which, stripped off from the box, are "placed very carefully between two blank leaves of [Robert Audley's] pocket-book" (238). What had once overlaid one another comes to stand side by side in a pocket-book, a movement from story into discourse. As Lady Audley's aesthetics of passing collapses the novel's own aesthetics of plotting asserts its structural integrity. Just as the "evidence of two labels" takes Robert Audley "two or three careful attempts" (238) of "dampening," "loosening," and "peeling" to remove from the box, the process of discovering Lady Audley's identity is similarly protracted. Yet this protraction is not only necessary to the narrative; it is nearly synonymous with it. Without an account of Robert's slow labors to solve the mystery of George Talboy's murder, there would hardly be any story to speak of, much less any

---

[82] Quoted in Sasson, *Longing to Belong,* p. 37. See Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). "For the [parvenu] being condemned to lead a sham existence, could seize possession of all the objects of a world not arranged for him only with the pseudo-reality of a masquerade."

[83] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 19. See especially the first chapter, entitled "Container and Thing Contained," pp. 3-20.

suspense or sensation to make the effort worth our while. But despite the increasingly proactive stance that Robert takes as the novel's detective and judge, his work remains fundamentally reactive, shaped by Lady Audley's better understanding of the game in motion and of the moves already played. While she constitutes discourse, he can only reconstitute it, piece it back together. Against Lady Audley's transformation of story into discourse, Robert performs an antithetical movement from discourse into story.

This might just as adequately describe Lady Audley's own cultivation of an external self containing—literally serving as a container for—all the discrepant internal stuff within. While discourse attempts to hide a story by "lying as little as possible," to borrow from *S/Z*, Lady Audley struggles to conceal her degraded class origins and desperate class aspirations through a kind of passing that relies as much on the literal manipulation of all the signs of fashion, taste, and breeding as on an awareness of how these signs might look when converted into narrative symbols. As Erving Goffman contends, the "maintenance of front" turns on the effective management of the "proper sign-equipment" used to "embellish and illumine one's daily performances with a favourable social style."[84] Indeed, "even if each woman dresses in conformity with her status, a game is still being played," such that fashion always constitutes a front, whether we, or she, likes it or not.[85] If passing can be understood "at the most basic level as an attempt to control the process of signification itself,"[86] then the plotter's attempts to pass allows her to sustain a fantasy of identity, just as narration indulges in a "fantasy of omniscience" and the nineteenth-century realist novel, too, invests in a fantasy of verisimilitude. Plot's ability to capture both the plotter's desire for illusion, for ruse, for a conservative impulse to simply "pass" under the radar, for being legible *on one's own terms* is thus intimately bound to the novel's own cultivation of an aesthetic unity, wherein plots are recognized in the moment they are revealed and not a moment sooner. Her plotting and her passing, fused together in a double helix-like structure, provides the character that is Lady Audley with an almost hereditary instinct to hide herself within a presentation of that self, of a "beautiful veil under which she hides her wickedness" (*LAS* 253). Given the novel's eventual diagnosis of her madness, Lady Audley's genetic code seems all the more suspect, as her socially motivated structure of passing is presented as an insanity of sign-manipulation.

Plot might then be regarded as the transformed, refashioned, and newly ordered substance of story's raw material. Analogous to the novel's "implicit comment" projected on to the facts, the plotter's self-conscious presentation of a style that covers up the labor of that style's acquisition at once resembles discursive tendencies toward its own interpretation and illumination and gives rise to the cold, unyielding "facts" on which discourse performs its characteristic adaptation. In fact, we might arrive at a more nuanced definition of plotting as an exploitation *of* the difference between story and discourse, between character and narration, that gives rise to narrative in the first place. Because plotters possess a keen sense of plot-smarts, driving and determining both the shape and substance of discourse, they draw out the element of narrative that always-already registers the gaze of its audience or reader. As such, plotters cross between and thus confuse categories like *complot* and plot, plot and character, story and discourse. Standing at the uneasy intersection between these pairs of binaries, the plotter occupies a blind spot in current conceptions of narrative form. And,

---

[84] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Center, 1956), pp. 23-4.

[85] Quoted in Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, p. 37.

[86] Maria Sanchez and Linda Schlossberg, "Introduction: Rites of Passing," *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 2. "Passing is not simply about erasure or denial, as it is often castigated but, rather, about the creation and establishment of an alternative set of narratives. It becomes a way of creating new stories out of unusable ones, or from personal narratives seemingly in conflict with other aspects of self-presentation. The passing subject's need to create a coherent, plausible narrative to account for his or her past suggests, on a very basic level, that every subject's history is a work in progress—a set of stories we tell ourselves in order to make sense or coherence out of a frequently confusing and complicated past" (4). As such, Sanchez and Schlossberg helpfully identify identity itself as "primarily a form of storytelling" (4).

furthermore, to hone in on the plotter is to single out a kind of character with a particular relationship to novelistic power, individuals imbued with the sudden but persistent "conscious[ness] of a world looking on" that Carlyle and others read into the everyday experience of post-revolutionary social politics.[87] Their position is both guaranteed and jeopardized by the distinction they put into practice: commanding a too-good-to-be-true affinity for the proper and the polished—the raw, affectation-free self at the level of story and the mannered exhibition of that self at the level of discourse—the plotter ensures the work of the novel's plot only by finally bowing down to—and getting consumed by—what the novel has always deemed its characters' proper functioning.

This is, ultimately, not just to read Lady Audley's performance as analogous to or allegorical of discourse, for on the most literal level she *provides* narrative with its discursive material and thus creates a causal link between her own plots and the novel's. Her plots are necessary, bound up within the novel's plot and therefore confuses the boundaries that should keep narration coloring its character within the lines. Difficult to escape and even harder to manage successfully, this incessant self-fashioning offers plotters a way in the world in the text and of the text. Narrative plotting, like the plotters who put it into social practice, relies on a particularly laborious cycle of anticipation, cultivation, revision, deliberation, supervision. For, of course, "class symbols serve not so much to represent or misrepresent one's position, but rather to influence in a desired direction other persons' judgment of it."[88] And indeed, this is by no means a far cry from the desire that motivates the plotter's plotting in the first place: the nineteenth-century novel is populated by individuals attempting to better themselves, in appearance alone if not in essence as well. Self-consciously making themselves anew, plotters yearn so desperately for the improvement and upward mobility that belongs to the realm of discourse. Because discourse can say some things while leaving other things unspoken, it accommodates a utopian stance, becomes the sanctuary and sanitarium of broken things made whole again (or repurposed, at the very least). In this light, story and discourse shade from strictly (and blandly) narratological categories rooted in the temporal into broadly epistemological categories perceptible only through the intersection and contradiction that arises between the two.

We only have to look to Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* to see that even the late revelation of one's illegitimacy throws into question the "inherent" or "intrinsic" qualities of having been—and suddenly not being—a gentleman all one's life. The burden of a Sir Percival Glyde, who discovers that his mother and father were not married, is that in the face of his father's dying after "having done nothing—not having even made a will," that "the son (who can blame him?) wisely provided for himself." Thus the character's role in narrative reflects his peculiar genealogical situation, where he functions to make up a story of his life that tethers him to the false presentation, and continual representation, of that story. In the midst of this is his possession of the hidden clusters of information that the novel itself, and readers along with it, strenuously struggles to put together. Plotters always-already have access to the truth of the matter, acting as the "plump pasteboard" that conceals the "bare bones beneath" despite their facetious claims to the contrary: "'I say what other people only think,' the outspoken Fosco boasts; 'when all the rest of the world is in a conspiracy to accept the mask for the true face, mine is the rash hand that tears off the plump pasteboard, and shows the bare bones beneath'."

We might then argue that *The Woman in White* arises out of Sir Percival's desire—and Count Fosco's gleeful assumption of that desire—for assimilation. The father dies without making up for his sin, so Percival is left with no other choice but to make it up himself, through a content-level plotting that generates the entire narrative as a whole. Indeed, the compelling intersection of the plotter's desire, narrative form, and class aspiration undergirds the structure of this and many other novels. Trilling, perhaps, puts it best when he observes that "the villain of plays and novels is characteristically a person who seeks to rise above the station to which he was born. He is not what he is: this can be said of him both because by his intention he denies and

[87] Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History* (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2002), p. 364.
[88] Erving Goffman, "Symbols of Class Status," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Dec., 1951), p. 297.

violates his social identity and because he can achieve his unnatural purpose only by covert acts, by guile."[89] What's more, while the rate of social mobility in England increased steadily from the sixteenth century onwards, the switches and levers meant to control that rate remained limited, woefully inadequate to satisfying the consuming impatience to leave one's original class as swiftly as possible. Absent any alternatives and in the face of such restrictions and impingements on ambition, "the scheme, the plot, do not seem alien; the forging or destroying of wills is a natural form of economic enterprise."[90] To carry Trilling further, this natural form of economic enterprise becomes, also, a necessary form of narrative activation: the plotter's desire creates the very conditions for plot to flicker into being and then to flourish.

Putting it another way, plotters comprise a category of literary character given a measure of authority not simply over story, but over discourse as well. Endowed with this power—call it insight or instinct—plotters stand in suggestive relation to the workings of narration and to the governing structures of narrative itself. If Lady Audley's authority over narrative discourse emerges as a metaphor for her mastery of cultural and aesthetic forms, her understanding of the slow culling of social prestige becomes a metaphor for the plottedness that Braddon's novel could not very well do without. What lies beneath discourse is not just of a plot about to erupt into full-fledged legibility, but also a complicated set of desires and strategies for hiding *within* the interstices between story and discourse such that discourse never slips up and reveals the shabby story that keeps poking and peeping out, like an accent barely disguised, a mispronounced word or outré term that continues slipping out. Recall Walter Hartright's exclamation upon discovering Sir Percival's forged baronetcy: "That space told the whole story!"[91] That space might inch and edge its way toward resembling the necessary structural distance between story and discourse, between the plotter's plot and the novel's plot which plots to eventually undo it.

Indeed, if plotters seek to enrich themselves culturally through a cultivated refinement, they can do so only within and alongside a novel whose plot must enact its own method of refinement, its own process of purification that paradoxically attempts to rid narrative of precisely those characters whose inculcation of the narratable relies on a spoiled sense of refinement as nothing more than a theatrical performance of sincerity. But by enacting this refinement, the novel also exacts a toll: it secures its story at the expense of the plotter's, whose plot it finally wages war against and, naturally, wins. Of course, the novel has "rigged the game" from the very beginning, since literary form takes on all of the power of Providential design and, for all of her spectacular boldness and artfulness, Lady Audley is finally a "foolish one" as well, "who looked at life as a game of chance, in which the best player was likely to hold the winning cards, forgetting that there is a Providence above the pitiful speculators, and that wicked secrets are never permitted to remain long hidden" (*LAS* 268). With no one left standing in its way, the novel gets finally and triumphantly to have its own way and call it justice. *Lady Audley's Secret* thus becomes the story of "a bold woman," who "thought to play her comedy out to the end without fear of detection, an "artful woman," who had concocted a conspiracy and who "had speculated upon the chances of her husband's death, and had secured a splendid position at the risk of committing a crime" (*LAS* 168). The novel's process of "refining" its own status as an aesthetic object, marked by its unified plot, thus comes at the expense of the literary character whose schemes must fail in order for narration to secure its own authority. Hard-won, and therefore somewhat hollowed out, narration's victory over the already-subordinate category of the literary character or plotter resembles what Nietzsche has famously theorized as *ressentiment*. By making the plotter at once sacrificial lamb and scapegoat for the greater good of narrative, novelistic form begins to condense and complicate the social conditions of a nineteenth-century British population endlessly constrained by a class position as unchangeable as a literary character's ontological status as character.

What would it look like to no longer read for the plot, and to instead read for the plotter? For one, it would involve leaving behind traditional arguments about plot's forward-moving impulses, attending instead

[89] Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p. 16.

[90] Ibid., pp. 15-6.

[91] Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. Matthew Sweet (New York: Penguin, 1999), p. 254.

to the characters, desires, urges, and strategies that resist this movement and compel the plot to slow down, stay hidden, or stop altogether. If in the traditional novel and film the reader yearns for a moment of full comprehension (or what Brooks terms an "anticipation of retrospection") that compels a feverish sort of narrative consumption, then the plotter opens up a shadowy dimension of self-management, modulated presentation, and instinctive performance or self-concealment that brings out that which novelistic discourse is always attempting to conceal: the labor behind, beneath, or—terrifyingly—before its existence. To read for the plotter, then, is to read for the *process behind* plot; it is to take the form of the plot not so much as a superficial or surface-level presentation of happenings and occurrences, but to see that plot as a process of management that yields a certain kind of product after fantastic effort, discipline, and pressure. It is also to address the poverty of a critical language regarding levels of plot-consciousness in the realm of character and narration and to breathe this consciousness into the very lifeblood of literary character itself.

Plotting Against Plot

But, after all of this, why look to sensation fiction for an example of the realist novel's struggle against plot? Sensation fiction reached the peak of its popularity in the 1860s, coming into full-fledged being at the height of the novel's reign as the dominant form of high narrativity. The genre was itself evaluated by the strength and escalating shock-value of the plots it contained, even though its vested interest in plot paradoxically secured its degraded valuation as a genre. "By a kind of Cartesian censorship, in which pulp-as-flesh gets equated with pulp-as-trash, the emphatic physicality of thrills in such literature allows us to hold them cheap. Accordingly, the sensation novel is relegated to the margins of the canon of approved genres…"[92] Collins, perhaps, best exemplifies the near-impossibility of reconciling immense popularity with literary seriousness; even though he was "justly recognized as one of fiction's most accomplished plotters," this recognition "was double-edged, granting [the novelist] talent as a carpenter of plot even as it simultaneously denied him the loftier position as a serious, well-rounded author."[93] Indeed, the sensation novel often received criticism for its overt over-dependence on generating thrills and chills that simultaneously mobilized individual reading bodies and the aggregate reading body en masse by activating their bodies rather than their minds. As if the unassailable circulation of library copies was linked directly to the rapid circulation of its readers, sensation fiction's status rested on its sensational bodily effects: its ability to excite the pulse, bring on a pallor, make the mouth dry and the hair stand on edge. [you are summarizing a familiar argument here, e.g. D.A. Miller's]

Yet this blood-curling, skin-creeping tendency was not simply confined to effects, finding its alteration of affect in an original cause that was the "emphatic physicality" or "proximity" that lay at the core of sensation fiction's narrative form. As Henry Mansel put it, "Proximity is…one great element of sensation."[94] "Without the comfortable distancing device of an authorial voice…readers were excitingly proximate to the sensations suffered by the protagonists."[95] Todorov, too, conceived of the 'suspense novel' as one in which "the narrator abandons his or her objectivity and is 'integrated into the universe of the other characters'."[96] It is in this case easy to see that although sensation fiction's vulnerability, its dependence on

---

[92] D. A. Miller, "Cage Aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," *Representations*, No. 14, The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century (Spring 1986), p. 107.

[93] Peter Thoms, *The Windows of the Labyrinth: Quest and Structure in the Major Novels of Wilkie Collins* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), p. 1.

[94] H. L. Mansel [anon.], "Sensation Novels," *Quarterly Review*, 113 (April 1862), p. 486.

[95] Matthew Sweet, "Introduction" to *The Woman in White*, ed. Matthew Sweet (New York: Penguin, 1999), p. xvi.

[96] Quoted in Sweet, "Introduction," p. xvii.

cheap thrills to entertain rather than educate its audience, fuels a sensationalism within readers who are brought "excitingly proximate" to the dangers on the facing page, it is itself fueled by a dangerous proximity between a narrator stripped of his "objectivity" and the world of his characters into which he finds himself perilously thrust. Todorov's point right? The narrative *effect* that is sensation fiction's calling card has thus far been confused with the narrative *form* that produces that effect, a nerve-wracking, heart-wrenching proximity between narrator and character that instantly gets passed on, like a contagion, to the susceptible reader.

Lady Audley, Sir Percival Glyde, Count Fosco: these characters are examples of what I have been calling the plotter of the novel. The plotter offers a locus of self-reflexivity where the manufacturing of discourse seems most taxed or tested by its knowledge of the as-yet hidden story below. Like an arthritic joint, the plotter stands at a point where narration and character meet and begin to creak. By inhabiting a preternatural, metaleptic, innate extending beyond their instincts toward social camouflage, they also serve as figures for the novel's own crucial and compulsive thinking about the structures, constraints, and anxieties attendant to the project of fictionality in general, or realist fiction in particular. Though critical discourse places sensation fiction outside or even in opposition to the mimetic aims of realist fiction proper, the genre nevertheless arose in response to and in the context of realism's rule. They thus both stand, in their divergent manifestations, as responses to a shared historical or literary problem, variations on a theme rather than diametrically opposed genres: "It is a significant departure from the realism of Trollope and George Eliot, and it exploits its sensational techniques with remarkable ingenuity. At the same time, it is founded in the realistic faith which it violates. The novel exhibits a double urge toward conventionality and innovation, taking full advantage of its sensationalism but at the same time demanding that it be read as if it were realistic."[97] As such, they provide a marvelously apt channel through which to approach a unitary problem precisely because sensation fiction resists the form of realism even while it champions its intentions.

"Others before [Braddon] have written stories of blood and lust, of atrocious crimes and hardened criminals, and these have excited the interest of a very wide circle of readers. But the class that welcomed them was the lowest in the social scale…She may boast…of having temporarily succeeded in making the literature of the Kitchen the favourite reading of the Drawing room."[98] The social threat of upturned values and overturned systems encodes itself in the very fabric of the narrative presentation, through the unruffled composure that Lady Audley exhibits even while she dabbles in a sort of plot composition that belongs rightfully under the domain of the narrator or implied author. What's more, it becomes exemplified in and by a sensational genre that, like the metalepsis that serves as the formal machinery of its plot and the social climbing that spoils the sanctity of the aristocracy, hangs on an aggressive flip or sudden switch of class values. The class that devoured these novels, as this reviewer notes disparagingly, "was the lowest in the social scale." And when the "literature of the kitchen" establishes itself as the "favourite reading of the Drawing room," what might ensue is not merely a revolution in literary taste, but in the very way in which literary, stylistic, and fashion choices constitutes a fraction of an entire economy of taste that then provide the basis for a trenchant system of class difference. If we are, to some extent, what we read, then the fact that kitchen-maids and gentlemen consumed the same materials marked the threat of a revolutionary shift in arbitrations of value for everyone who lived and died by such identity-constituting upstairs-downstairs distinctions.

We can thus begin to make out the strokes of a sort of character sketching that not only illustrates but intensifies Lady Audley's brilliant social faculties with her structurally related flair for promoting the force of her character in relation to the narrated plot. As a result, plotters could be said to resemble narrative forms rather than social contents. Or, more precisely, they offer instances where that social content is visibly converted—or encrypted—into narrative form. They give narrative, in a single move, both something to talk about and a style in which to talk about it. Plot hinges on the moment or moments when story is shaken loose from discourse, where style and substance, latent and manifest content show themselves to not be a perfect

[97] Walter M. Kendrick, "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jun., 1977), p. 22.

[98] Rae, "Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon," p. 204.

dialectic or mutually constitutive. The plotter draws our attention toward discourse as both the means and ends of refinement, less as a state of being or thing to be had and more as a time-bound and form-based process of flattening, finessing, and fine-tuning that roots the hidden story of the self to the plotter even as he attempts to weed it out of that story form. This process is embodied in the plotter that lives within the narrow channel formed by the fissures of story and discourse and by the novelistic plot that develops temporally in the very same space. As a narrative device, plot bears the potential to stand at once as the overall formal design of a narrative and as a content-rooted and character-directed object sharing in the structure of that design. It is, put another way, simultaneously a form of representation and its elected object.

It is in this case apt that similar debates over the meaning of "the social" have riddled both Victorian conceptions of manners, sincerity, and the makings of a gentleman, as well as contemporary theories of the social either as product or as process. The difficulty of arriving at definitions of the social is premised on the thorny task of pinning down a consistent sense of "plot," since plot gestures at once to narrative's aesthetic design and to a time-bound process. Like plot, the idea of the social rests on both its meaning as a "type of material" and as a "type of connection between things that are not themselves social."[99] Both plot and the social fracture across their dual implications, of substance, on the one hand, and a style or styling, on the other. The problem with casually calling some phenomenon or another "social" is that it either designates "a stabilized state of affairs," or else "a bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon," at which point "the meaning of the word breaks down since it now designates two entirely different things: first, a movement during a process of assembling; and second, a specific type of ingredient that is supposed to differ form other materials."[100] The social refers at once to the object and to the assembling of objects, just as plot refers at once to a chain of content-level events put into compulsively coordinated motion by plotters and to a discursive churning of those story events into a newly constituted narrative plot.

That we are able to trace a structural likeness between the plotter's upward-looking social aspirations and his accumulation of narrative agency is not just happenstance or happy coincidence—theorizing the role of the plotter in narrative reveals an equivalent range of impulses in the real world precisely because social mastery, like narrative authority, relies on a precocious command of the "rules of the game," the good or bad forms that serve as fulcrums of culture and fictional arrangement alike.[101] Ricoeur, indeed, reminds us that "making a plot is to extricate a 'good form' both on the plane of sequence and on that of configuration…To become a logic of narrative it has to turn toward recognized cultural configurations, towards that schematism of narrative constituted by the plot-types handed down by tradition."[102] Plot remains circumscribed by mandated cultural (or generic) forms, just as the "spirit of the age" endures in the form of plots; configural innovation exists within the ring of cultural prescription, a "sedimentation of tradition."[103] Resisting mere verisimilitude, the function of metalepsis keys us in to a certain unlikely commensurability between the narrative and the social, emphasizing their mutual dependence on the conventions, etiquette, rubrics, and strategies as much at home in narratology as in sociology (and all but constitute those fields). The plotter amasses structural significance by signaling an interaction within the field of literary characters that manages to achieve a near-impossible feat: doing justice both to their existence as linguistic, lexical, and narrative beings constrained by the ontology of fiction's unique structure, as well as to characters' reference to their flesh-and-blood counterparts in the authentic realm of extra-diegetic, non-fictional, "real" experience. Because the plotter implicates both narrative and social form, the figure offers—or indeed embodies—a conduit between signifier and signified that then allows us to start fleshing out an entire social world of interaction

---

[99] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 5.

[100] Ibid., p. 1.

[101] See, again, Puckett's discussion in *Bad Form* of how social mistakes and perfect social interaction enact a carefully choreographed dance with and around one another, thus generating the novel's effect of coherence.

[102] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 43.

[103] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 18.

within plots that exists as nothing if not as form, as a mastery of that virtue which is "proper to the form."

In other words, form supplies the essential denominator behind both the phenomenon of social mastery and the plotter's narrative or formal self-awareness. Under the jurisdiction of social and narrative systems, and indeed the very basis upon which these systems exercise their authority to exercise this jurisdiction, form is never just a metaphor; it is the essence of the homology between narrative and social interaction. Plotting not only renders the social narratable, it makes narrative into its own sphere of sociality. Narrative doesn't merely offer a sociology—it is almost a social subject itself. Rather than pure economic capital, however, the narrative's social system hinges on a version of intellectual capital or knowledge. Plot's mobilization depends on the mobility of individuals between social classes, as these classes slowly began to be muddled and reconstituted during and after the mid-nineteenth century. It is this social ambition, the antidote to stasis, that the novel captures through these startling intrusions of narration into character and, more oddly, of character into narration. Unlike Robbins's fascinating argument about the role of the servant in novels of the same period, the plotter does not apprehend the movement of a particular and preexisting social category. Rather, plotters are true to their name—they encompass a dynamic rather than a static social identity like the servant or the butler—and thus become eternally tough to spot: they capture the sense and essence of both social mobility and narrative movement. In their stretching out of social and psychic constraints and in the narrative figuration of these "transgressions," they nearly single-handedly give rise to the difficult negotiations, contradictions, and conflicts that make life narratable at all.

> There is a virtue proper to the form. And cultural mastery is always a mastery of forms. That is one of the reasons which make ethnology so very difficult: this cultural mastery cannot be acquired in a single day...All these modes of formalizing which, as can be seen by the euphemistic way of putting it, are also ways of getting round the rules of the game, and are thus double games, are a matter for virtuosi. In order to make sure you are on the right side of the authorities, you have to have rule, adversaries and game at your fingertips. If one had to propose a transcultural definition of excellence, I would say that it's the fact of being able to play the game up to the limits, *even to the point of transgression*, while managing to stay within the rules of the game.[104]

Here Bourdieu points both toward the nature of form as the sole currency of social exchange and to the element of transgression that accompanies the game-playing of only the most virtuoso participants. Turning to the notable concept of "distinction" in the Bourdieuian sense gives sociological expression to the plotter's mode of engagement with the story-world that it constitutes and by which it is in turn constituted: the plotter's position within narrative marks out the contours of the plot and of the boundary between character and narrator even as it deftly challenges the rules of narrative and social games. Indeed, if we take it as a possibility for someone to catch sight of their delimited status as a character within the span of a novel, moments where the plotter comes into their own mark out a mastery of distinction as an aesthetic mode and *distinctions* as narrative tactics for establishing agency within the space of fiction.

Staging the foundational elements of narratology around its awareness of an audience looking on, we can begin to see that discourse extends slyly beyond the temporal into the adjacent territory of the sociological; it itself hinges on the performance or putting forth of a "front" meant to take us in, a sort of fronting we are meant to think belongs solely to the run-of-the-mill social world that the novel ostensibly *only narrates*. This drops narrative form just a stone's throw away from that "presentation of self in everyday life" that can't help but make everyday life nothing if not a matter of self-presentation. If we agree with Bruce Robbins that, "whatever it may be to sociologists, upward mobility is also a story," then the story that narrative tells is at once about individuals' desires for upward mobility and about the spatial enactment of

[104] Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 82, my italics.

those ambitions measured out against the rungs of narrative's own hierarchies.[105] Upward mobility may approximate what Gerard Genette terms metalepsis—transgressive on both the levels of the social world of story and the narrative hierarchies of omniscient discourse, narrative collapses two wrongs together to make possible their righting that is the writing of the novel itself. In the plotter, then, we can discern instances where a "paradigm of social knowledge" cannot be winnowed out from the form of narrative itself, precisely because that narrative models itself on various strategies of social organization.[106] Recall Goffman's equation of levels of privilege with a "configuration of sources": "No matter how we define social class we must refer to discrete or discontinuous levels of prestige and privilege…Symbols of class status do not typically refer to a specific source of status but rather to something based upon a configuration of sources."[107] That configuration, as we shall see, is metaleptic on both the level of the social and the level of the formal, as the two constitute games about form played up to the limits, "even to the point of transgression."

Jumping Levels

I had argued in the previous section that the plotter troubles the boundaries between story and discourse. If this is so, we may go a step further and say that the plotter makes metalepsis happen, or rather that plotters as a device are inherently metaleptic. Plotters, for the most part, exceed the limits of literary character without fully inhabiting the space of narration—as such, they seem to carve out a liminal existence between different aspects of the novel. In fact, it is closer to say that the plotter's troubling of the boundary between plot, character, and narration on the level of story feeds into and fuels the closed loop that is discourse itself. This troubling manifests, I have begun to argue, as the surface-level social transgression that takes the form of Lady Audley's class aspirations and dreams of upward social mobility. Adding insult to injury, this represented social transgression reaches an all the more startling pitch due to the narrative transgression accompanying it, by the boundary-breaking that is metalepsis. As a social ill seeping into the fabric of narrative representation, the offensive stain bleeds from content into form. Indeed, Culler perceptively highlights the inseparability of the rules of etiquette and the codes of literary technique, for "Just as violations of etiquette testify to the existence of conventions which make it possible to be polite or impolite, so the flouting of linguistic and literary conventions by which literary works bring about a renewal of perception testifies to the importance of a system of conventions as the basis of literary signification."[108] It is, of course, important to note that these moments supply instances where metalepsis becomes a particularly useful metaphor for ambition within the realm of story that somehow serves as the secret engine of novelistic discourse; the plotters I am discussing never encounter the narrator in an actual instance of Borgesian magical realist confrontation, but this lack of a vocabulary with which we might adequately address the tiered layers of plot-consciousness in the realm of the literary character—in the space of one narratological level—gestures toward the insufficiency of a critical and narratological language for naming the differing degrees of knowledge as a powerful mode of characterization that has gone too long untheorized. In marvelous bouts of metalepsis, the plotter stands as fiction's own meditation on its dependence on a mediating figure, a figure that touches on the mechanisms behind discourse itself.

The importance of Genette's reformulation of the classical trope of metalepsis as it functions in tandem with plots and plotters in *Lady Audley's Secret* in particular, and nineteenth-century narrative in

---

[105] Bruce Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. xi.

[106] Terry Eagleton, "Introduction" to *Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History, and Literary Representation,* by Daniel Cottom (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. xii.

[107] Goffman, "Symbols of Class Status," p. 296.

[108] Culler, "In Pursuit of Signs," *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 37.

general, cannot be overstated—it is part and parcel of the novel's surprisingly rigid social and narrative hierarchies. Indeed, metalepsis seems to return us to the previous discussion of story and discourse, especially if we take Genette's statement about lower and higher levels to heart: "any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed."[109] According to *Narrative Discourse*, metalepsis designates "the transition from one narrative level to another" which can only be achieved by narration itself, the "act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation."[110] Metalepsis thus refers to the transgression of a line of demarcation that authors usually do not touch: "All these games, by the intensity of their effects, demonstrate the importance of the boundary they tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude—a boundary *that is precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself*: a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells."[111] Hinting at both the hierarchical stratification of narrative space and giving formal terminology to the uncanniness accompanying the breach of these strata, metalepsis provides us with a way to talk at once about the organization of authority with regards to narration and about narration's means of securing—by policing—the boundaries that ensure its effective organization of this authority.

Dorrit Cohn distinguishes between types of metalepsis—interior and exterior, metalepsis at the story level and metalepsis at the story level. For her, what defines metalepsis is its "radical rupture of the normally firm and closed boundary between…the narration of an adventure [*le récit d'une aventure*] and the adventure of narration [*l'aventure d'un récit*]," primarily because the moment that that witnesses the narrator descend to the ontological level of a character, he "ceases to hold authority over the narrative…the reader become[s] aware of the narrative authority that stands behind him—the authority that we call 'author'."[112] Though there exist few instances of actual metalepsis within nineteenth-century fiction.[113] So good at parsing out power

---

[109] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 228. See also Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983) p. 92: "…narration is always at a higher narrative level than the story it narrates."

[110] Ibid., p. 234.

[111] Ibid., p. 236. Basing her study of extradiegetic footnotes off of Genette's update on the classical interpretation of metalepsis, Elaine Freedgood extends the "breakdown of the boundary between levels of narration" to include the weirdnesses of reading about a fictional character venturing into a factual space. These uncanny geographic shifts also analogize narrative motions, a pushing or "intrusion of a narrator or character into a frame in which they do not belong" that gestures to a whole host of references to and between fiction and the world that "strictly speaking" would constitute instances of metalepsis ("a kind of virtual play in which an actor has a kind of fictional agency in a world with realist, which is to say restricted, limits"). Indeed, Freedgood points out that various sorts of virtual spheres or simulations allow us to break through the rigid, even "claustrophobic" strictures of diegetic space such that the subject gains a kind of "diegetic mobility": one is faced with the possibility of living "both in your own diegetic space and in fictional space at the same time." See Elaine Freedgood, "Fictional Settlements: Footnotes, Metalepsis, the Colonial Effect," *New Literary History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Spring 2010), pp. 398-9.

[112] Dorrit Cohn, "Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme," trans. Lewis S. Gleich, *Narrative*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 2012), p. 108. See also Félix Bonati-Martinez, *Fictive Discourse and the Structure of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Debra Malina, *Breaking the Frame: Metalepsis and the Construction of the Subject* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002); William Nelles, *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), especially p. 153; Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983); and *Métalepses: Entorses au pacte de la representation*, ed. John Pier and Jean-Marie Schaeffer (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2005).

[113] Freedgood explicitly notes that metafictional techniques emerge in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and twentieth centuries in self-referential texts like *Tristram Shandy* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, but tellingly skips over the nineteenth century.

between narration and character, metalepsis becomes just as useful in bracketing characters into various categories based on the range and reach of their knowledge over the plots in question.[114]

In a similar vein, Emile Benveniste reminds us of the vertical hierarchies undergirding narrative structure, thinking especially of the notion of level at the heart of analytical procedure, a top-down stratification which "alone is suited to do justice to the articulated nature of language and to the discrete nature of its elements; it alone can lead us to discover within the complexity of the forms the peculiar architecture of the parts and of the whole."[115] Barthes echoes Benveniste in his aim to almost project the temporal line or design of plot onto a vertical axis that might look like a division of character into a hierarchy of differing planes of omniscience. "Whatever the number of levels one proposes to study, and whatever their definition, there is no doubt that narrative is a hierarchy of levels or strata. To understand a narrative is not only to follow the unfolding of the story but also to recognize in it a number of 'strata,' to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative onto an implicitly vertical axis; to read a narrative (or listen to it) is not only to pass from one word to the next, but also from one level to the next."[116] Indeed, this "implicit," hence unsaid, "vertical axis" that Barthes references so obliquely may once again conjure up for us the image of a literary character defined against a social construction of relative worth that assumes similarly hierarchical form.

What is more frequently identified as social ambition or a breaking out of the constraints of a dictated political agency takes on the qualities of metalepsis, made possible by an intrusion or transgression in the sense of form that is frequently literalized as the content-specific conflict that sets plots into motion. Plotters sliding or sidling up the social ladder presumptuously scale the "sacred" ontological hierarchies within narrative fiction, producing nothing less than an "effect of strangeness," revolutionary traversals of narrative level that capture the excessive ambition and impossible assimilation of those who aspire to something *more* than they have been socially or formally given.[117] These are, in other words, characters attempting to transcend the stark unyielding bounds of their own narrative functionality. "What exists," Bourdieu reminds us, "is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as *something to be done*."[118] Putting it another way, if narrative constitutes a social space comprised not just of places and positions to be filled but also of functions to be fulfilled, metalepsis metamorphoses from a weird sort of narratological effect into the formal counterpart to social ambition or dissatisfaction, the mechanism by which the content of desire for upward social mobility gets translated into a form of narrative agency that sustains nothing less than an entire elusive and illusory system of narrative authority itself. Plotters can, in these terms, be thought of to represent the dynamic procedure of social striving, insofar as the plotters of many sensation novels register their desires for upward mobility on the rungs of the social ladder through a similar desire for an ascent through the hierarchical levels of narrative form itself. Indeed, one of the most interesting features of metalepsis comes with a recognition that its occurrence solidifies the boundaries between narrative levels in the very act of violating them, since the inevitably jarring encounter with any instance of metalepsis alerts the reader to the oddity of a breaking of narrative rules, rather than a bowing to its demands. The rule becomes evident precisely when it is broken.

---

[114] "Because it traverses an ontological hierarchy, metalepsis has the power to endow subjects with greater or lesser degrees of 'reality'—in effect, to promote them into subjectivity and demote them from it." Debra Malina, *Breaking the Frame: Metalepsis and the Construction of the Subject* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), p. 4 See especially her introduction, "Narrative Breakthroughs: Metalepsis and the Construction of the Subject," pp. 1-24.

[115] Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics,* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 101.

[116] Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, On Narrative and Narratives (Winter 1975), p. 243.

[117] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 235.

[118] Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 12.

Returning briefly to *The Woman in White*, what is so sensational about Collins's sensation novel? Though there are many contenders for the most shocking moment of *The Woman in White*, critics agree that Count Fosco's textual violation (reading and inscribing) of Marian Halcombe's diary condenses the novel's various infractions into one crystalline intrusion. Walter Kendrick notes that the Count "doubly violated this text by reading it and then by writing upon it himself."[119] This scene demands more of our attention, especially because its spatial mechanics seem to recreate and recapitulate the hierarchies of narrative knowledge on the level of plot. Marian, we might recall, climbs onto and then dangles precariously from the eaves of Limmeridge House, all too literally eavesdropping on Glyde and Fosco's plotting: "The plan which had now occurred to me was to get out, at my sitting-room window, on to [the verandah] roof; to creep along noiselessly, till I reached that part of it which was immediately over the library window..." (319). Though she schemes to success and follows the men's conversation "word for word," Marian's scaling of the roof results in a burning fever that then confines her to the sickroom (322). Crucially, her decision to venture out onto the ledge of the leaden roof affords the "admirable woman" a "means of baffling [Fosco's] precautions…of hearing what he and Sir Percival said to each other, *without the risk of descending at all into the lower regions of the house*" (318). This spatial hierarchy reinscribes the social hierarchy that Percival and Glyde slyly attempt to scale with a textual metaphor. This textual metaphor—of rewriting, of reinscription-as-mastery, of sign-manipulation—itself serves as a reinscription of the tiers and strata of both social and narrative space. In this moment, it is almost as if the novel's plot is not just about the plotter's desires for an impossible assimilation, for scheming to get to the top, but about the way that the ontologies of narrative and characterological figures are constructed by and through plot itself, via the creation of levels of knowledge in character-space.

No wonder then that Jonathan Loesberg describes Laura Fairlie and Walter Hartwright's descent in *The Woman in White* into the poverty-ridden neighborhoods of London as "a frightening immersion in a world without common boundaries," since this frightful and fluid drop from Limmeridge House into these unpoliced metropolitan slums evokes the topsy-turvy world of metalepsis itself—that transgression of "narrative boundaries"—where authority can be had by just about anyone, at a cost.[120] As plotters attempt to transcend the weighty lines between social classes through a careful manipulation of both style and story, so too do the forms of narrative discourse register these social "transgressions" in the form of metalepsis, where narrative authority breaks, fractures, or gets otherwise split between different ontological categories. Metaleptic transgression redoubles Glyde's and Fosco's social aggression, throwing both readers' affective states in diegetic space and characters' in fictional space simultaneously off-kilter. They allow the novel to depict a world that, turned on its head, needs to be set right—not to mention right side up—again in a righting of wrongs that constitutes the object of narrative movement itself. In these unsettling moments, plot transcends its common status as a mode of temporal configuration and becomes, instead, a way to describe the narrative constructions and social compromises that make that ordering possible.

With this in mind we can begin to trace out not just a formal reflection but a plot-based inflection of conventional narratological categories that hold the sphere of narration rigidly apart from the lower orders of character and plot. If, for instance, we can think of class as a measure of social ontology, the universal meter-stick against which we can measure the asymmetric assignment of more or less value to particular individuals, then it follows that narrative hierarchies of ontology index not just class membership but a desire to reach metaleptically through the glass ceiling that is the limit of literary character itself. This desire constitutes what I reference in the title to this chapter as a way of "reading for the plotter" rather than merely for the plot. Reading for the plotter recovers, among other things, a fundamental representational mechanism of aspiration through the use of metalepsis and the fracturing of story and discourse, moments where plotters are implicated in the novel's discourse, and where that discourse is similarly incriminated by its silent sanctioning of the plotters' story. It channels our attention toward the desires that drive narrative, and the structures of narrative that run contrary to these fantasies of accommodation and thus reveal a little bit more about the

[119] Kendrick, "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*," p. 29.

[120] Loesberg, "The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction," p. 119.

ideologies undergirding realism as a formal enterprise. To borrow from Žižek, plot is always therefore self-reflexive, as "the 'secret' to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, *the 'secret' of this form itself*."[121] We might paraphrase this and say that in addition to the duality of form and content, there exists another level of content, the secret story of form itself.

[121] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 3.

CHAPTER TWO

The Importance of Being Frank

"…there was something in the name, in the idea of Mr. Frank Churchill, which always interested her."
—Jane Austen

"Never, for example, do I shave without laughing, so stupid does it seem to me."
—Gustave Flaubert

The Secret Plot of *Emma*

Though critics have often cited Jane Austen for her purely disembodied voice, she comes closest to taking on human form in *Emma*. Contrary to expectation, she is not to be found in Emma Woodhouse—the heroine whom Austen claimed "no one but myself will much like."[122] Nor do we detect her presence in her namesake Jane Fairfax, Emma's "remarkably elegant" but "disgustingly…suspiciously reserved" rival.[123] In order to locate Austen herself in the novel, this chapter makes a bold, seemingly outlandish, claim: that the author lurks—strangely and stealthily—in the unlikely figure of Frank Churchill, an instance of the "plotter" of the novel. I will look at several examples of obtrusively obvious but seemingly negligible details: Frank's impetuous decision to ride to London "merely to have his hair cut," his disparaging discussion of Jane Fairfax's "outré curls," the mystery of the pianoforte that materializes the evening of the Coles' party, and Mrs. Bates's spectacles, ruined by an unfastened rivet. Our attentions riveted to everything from a piano and a pair of gloves to all the hairdos, haircuts, and curls that crop up—or get cropped off—in between, we look right past the secret plot at the hidden center of *Emma.*

This secret plot, I argue, offers the novel a strategy for thinking through the formal mechanisms that allow the novel to pull off its plot without a hitch: mechanisms that ensure the plot's aesthetic coherence but, paradoxically, draw attention to their artifice and thereby weaken the novel's claims of verisimilitude. Slipping past while shading into the structure of omniscient narration, manipulating the grammar of the realist detail, and rousing the narratable into being as nothing more than a diversionary tactic, plotters in *Emma* do not merely provide the author with a surrogate in the form of a character. Rather, knowing that the best place to hide something is in plain sight, they enact self-reflexive meditations on the ruses and illusions behind

[122] James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 204. Austen seemed to treat *Emma* as a favored child; as Austen-Leigh recounts, when the author sent a copy of the novel to a friend who had recently given birth to a daughter, an inscription accompanied the gift that said "I trust you will be as glad to see my 'Emma', as I shall be to see your Jemima" (203-4). For Austen's particular fondness for Emma Woodhouse, see *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 60-1.

[123] Jane Austen, *Emma,* ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 131, 132. Hereafter cited parenthetically in-text as *E.*

fictionality on the broadly visible surface of the plot itself, giving rise to instances of what Cynthia Chase has called "parabasis," shifts of attention "from the level of operation of the narrator, the reconstruction of the sequence of events in an imaginary human life, to the level of operation of the text or narrative as such, the construction of a discourse and a history."[124] Making use of the conventions of novelistic plotting even while it reflects on and disavows those same strategies through the figure of the plotter, *Emma* manages to excuse the so-called impossibility of certain rhetorical forms by providing an eminently visible excursus on them. This chapter will continue to argue that the novel reflects most clearly on itself through the form of its plots and plotters and that, in a further testament to its canniness, it both secretes and keeps secret its telling ironies by hiding these ironies in the most visible, what Georg Lukács has called in his *Theory of the Novel* the "new ethical self-correction, again determined by the work's content," in which "Wisdom can be expressed through the act of form-giving: it can conceal itself behind the forms and does not necessarily have to surmount itself, as irony, in the work."[125]

As I have begun to flesh out in the previous chapter, plotters perform an astonishing ontological trespass: keepers of a path through the plot in motion before narration is willing to disclose it, they seem nearly possessed by a shadow of omniscience itself, wielding a sort of all-pervasive knowledge usually reserved for narration's exclusive use. In thus rivaling its effects, plotters animate the novelistic system that will eventually expose them.[126] Yet this does not come without its own attendant side-effects: in putting plotting into motion, plotters exceed with an ecstatic pleasure the category of the literary character, whose epistemological and ontological range gets enthusiastically curbed by a narrative authority seemingly impervious to any restriction. For, as critics have pointed out, literary character has often invoked the sense of a threshold, an inescapable boundedness that, according to Audrey Jaffe, finds itself "imposed by physical

---

[124] Cynthia Chase, "The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-Reading *Daniel Deronda*," *PMLA*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (March 1978), p. 219. For Aristotle, "parabasis" constituted "an address from the poet to the audience, through the mouth of the chorus, occurring indifferently in any part of the play, and even, sometimes, at the end of it." See Thomas Twining's translation of Aristotle's *Treatise on Poetry* (London: W. McDowall, 1815), p. 175. And, as Robyn Warhol has argued of the rooting of meta-fiction to postmodernist texts, "self-conscious self-reference in fiction that is explicitly 'about' fiction, and that draws attention to its own structures of artifice, is as venerable a tradition as the English novel itself." Robyn R. Warhol, *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 22.

[125] Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel,* p. 84. See Chapter 5, "The Historico-philosophical Conditioning of the Novel and its Significance."

[126] "When the story is still told through third-person omniscient narration, as in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale*, the problem is most acute: the narrative persona shares the knowledge of the crime with the criminal characters but does not share it directly with the reader. The narrator therefore takes on a shady, perhaps even criminal look…This moral ambiguity is a bit like the relationship between Vautrin and the narrator of *Père Goirot*: both are men of the world, both have penetrated the "mysteries" of Paris in ways undreamt of by Eugène Rastignac, and both are interested in Eugene's journey from innocence to experience. Vautrin, of course, is a diabolical tempter, but it is also clear that the narrator's variety of experience is not exactly angelic." See Brantlinger, "What Is 'Sensational' About the 'Sensation Novel'?," pp. 15-6. Vautrin provides a fascinating test-case for the plotter within the context of Balzacian realism, and Kent Puckett also after scrutinizing several oddly "possessed" characters in the *Comédie humaine* that "in a strange inversion of free indirect style, characters speak narration and as a result are in better form and embody the law in a manner that cannot be reasonably sustained," and we see that Vautrin especially takes hold of "something like omniscience's view of the thoughts of the other." Oftentimes possessed by the voice of narration, these characters also lay hold of the possession of the plot. The correlation between this command of narration and power over plot is discussed in the previous chapter's readings of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*. See Puckett, *Bad Form*, p. 48.

being and by an ideology of unitary identity."[127] Jaffe thus sees narration's "fantasy of omniscience" as guaranteed by the fact that its other, the character, though "embedded in the novel's plot," could never "know what lies ahead, being but objects of a narrator's machinations, participants in a structure they cannot perceive." In this light, she notes rightly, "a narrator's relation to characters inevitably involves a demonstration of knowledge and an element of aggression."[128] This rhetorical act secures the authority of an iron-fisted structure of narration constantly posing a limit against which to set off the brilliance of its own *lack* of limitation.[129] What is narration? Anything—everything—that is *not* a literary character. Defining itself by way of an evasion emboldened by a negation, narration conflates its "vanishing act" with power, thereby taking shape through its very shapelessness, its antithetical existence in the negative space of a character who cannot help but be embodied, marked, and therefore inevitably subordinate. Narration thus seizes every opportunity to put its own power on parade, over and against an inviolable insufficiency naturalized under the guise of the literary character and enforced by that same structure of narration.

In order to guarantee its own authority, narration defines itself in opposition to literary character, "participants in a structure they cannot perceive." However, in order to elaborate its *plot*, narration endows certain characters with an agency over the story that allows both story and history to emerge, enlarging their function beyond that of mere "objects of a narrator's machinations." These agency-imbued characters are, as I've been arguing, plotters. They are not only participants but functionaries in a structure they *can* and *do* perceive with razor-sharp vision, and their functions lie at the intersection of their own willful plans and on behalf of the novel's narrative coherence. Defined by their narrative function, indeed achieving a brilliant synthesis with that function, these secret-keepers are nonetheless nothing if not full-bodied, enlivened characterological vessels. Narrative functionality seems only to further invigorate the depth of their representation. If, as the saying goes, to the novel belong the spoils, then to the plotter we owe the existence of the game in the first place. The novel, compelled to safeguard the unity of its story, places a fraction or fragment of its consciousness outside of narration proper into character—the very availability of this maneuver blurs the usually strict boundary between narration and characterization, rendering narration's distinguishing authority something less than starkly self-evident, a truth universally acknowledged and just as universally unexamined. For narrative to endow the plotter with a boundary-fudging amount of plot-sense is also to all but declare its dependence on literary character not only to look bad and thus make narration look good in comparison, but also as a strategy to secure its own elaborately constructed sovereignty by calling that very construction into question.

Thus a foundational paradox emerges from a discussion of the plotter who cuts slyly across the levels of story and story-form: narration's strategy of securing authority on the level of discourse requires it to outsource that authority on the level of story to the very category of literary character at whose expense it was originally secured: "Omniscient narration may typically know all, but it can hardly *do* all…Impotent to

---

[127] Audrey Jaffe, *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 5.

[128] Ibid., p. 7. D. A. Miller takes this a step further by contesting that narration's act of asserting power (contra character) expresses more fundamentally a desire to do away with the need to assert its power in the first place, since any such assertion necessarily reads as an embarrassing compensation for an authority already under attack: "…by now the gesture of disowning power should seem to define the basic move of a familiar power play, in which the name of power is given over to one agency in order that the function of power may be less visibly retained by another. Impotent to intervene in the 'facts', the narration nevertheless controls the discursive framework in which they are perceived as such…to speak of sham struggles is also to imply the necessity for shamming them. The master-voice…continually needs to confirm its authority." See Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 25.

[129] "A Victorian novel may most inclusively be defined as a structure of interpenetrating minds." See J. Hillis Miller's "Time and Intersubjectivity," *The Form of Victorian Fiction: Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), esp. p. 5.

intervene in the 'facts', the narration nevertheless controls the discursive framework in which they are perceived as such."[130] But how, in fact, to separate the circumstances of the novelistic world from the discursive framework in which they are perceived as such? The two are necessarily fused and confused—this fusion and confusion generates the conditions under which plot can flourish. And, upon further scrutiny, the plot of *Emma* unfolds due to Frank Churchill's brilliant acts of escape, where he dodges narrative scrutiny almost as if he can feel free indirect discourse at work on him. We might therefore complicate this even further still: the fundamental contradiction between authority-management on the level of content and the level of form does not escape narrative's notice; on the contrary, we have only noticed what the novel has left out in the open for us to find (as if it had been left out under a notice sign). It is in these very moments of omniscient narration's failure, those fleeting instances where free indirect discourse seems overtaxed by the task of making minds transparent, that it achieves its greatest success. For not only does the aesthetic unity of the plot flourish in these unnarrated gaps and slips of scrutiny: characters, too, find their most complex relationship to the notion of emplotment when they are given free rein to both to act out and to act on their desires, as they wish, to define themselves alongside the structural components of fiction that closely resemble—and not coincidentally, I think—the social configurations of imperfect information, secret-keeping, gossip, and such in the world outside that fiction.

If, as I have discussed in greater detail in the preceding chapter, metalepsis supplies a valuable gloss on the narratological counterpart to representations of social ambition, in *Emma* we stumble across something a little disguised, or a little mistaken, yet wonderfully productive as a locus of interrogating the novel's inner mechanisms. Frank Churchill occupies strange gaps or lapses in omniscient narration, timely subversions of omniscient narration's characteristic all-knowingness. In such instances we find the narrator enacting something like a reverse-metalepsis since, confronted with a consciousness she has herself assembled, a mind open for access through free indirect discourse supplies "the illusion of pure reference" that is finally just an "effect of a rhetorical device," Austen chooses nevertheless to see something, and say nothing.[131] Each secret well-kept, every flare of suspense kept softly and slowly burning in the background, permits an active resistance of literary character to the very intrusions that give narration its name and keep character under its thumb. As Jaffe writes, the very act of narration involves a self-affirming flash of "aggression" toward the characters that constitute it from without. With this in mind, this chapter claims that this aggression is part and parcel of novelistic plotting, scripted into the relationship that exists between the novel's play of story against discourse, of character against narration. As such, Frank Churchill as a character does not merely supply a large portion of the plot, he almost seems to *be* the plot, just as plotting itself becomes a compellingly complex, though often overlooked, form of characterization that allows us into the secret rivalry that the novel could not do without.

Just a Hair Off

Frank Churchill was one of the "boasts" of Highbury, over which Emma Woodhouse—handsome, clever, and rich—reigns supreme. Within this town a "lively curiosity to see him prevailed, though the compliment was so little returned that he had never been there in his life" (*E* 14). His coming to visit his father, the ever-affable Mr. Weston, had long been anticipated but never achieved. When the honorary

[130] Miller, *Jane Austen or, The Secret of Style*, pp. 24-5.

[131] "The advantage of third-person narration is that it is the mode which best produces the illusion of pure reference. But it *is* an illusion, the effect of a rhetorical device. We cannot escape the conclusion that 'the fact can exist only linguistically, as a term in a discourse', although we 'behave as if it were a simple reproduction of something or other on another plane of existence altogether, some extra-structural 'reality'." Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p. 117. For quotations cited by Kermode, see Roland Barthes's "Le discours de l'histoire," *Social Science Information*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1967), pp. 65-75.

member of Highbury society so eagerly awaited actually appears after much ado, he satisfies all the hype of months of expectation, the toast of the town immediately catapulted into the vacant space in Emma's willfully absent romantic life: "if she *were* to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character and condition. He seemed…quite to belong to her" (*E* 94). After being thrown together several times, Emma was largely disposed in his favor—"nothing could be more proper or pleasing than his *whole* manner" (*E* 154, my italics)—and Frank immediately gets stamped with that elusive brand of approval: "better than she had expected" (*E* 160). "Less of the man of the world in some of his notion, less of the spoiled child of fortune," Frank finds himself as much enhanced by the difference between what he could've been, and *isn't*, as he is by the similarity between what he is thought to be, and *is* (*E* 160). For once the reality merits the excitement, and "the name…the idea of Frank Churchill" (*E* 94) is fleshed out by an equally pleasing body, whose "height, air, address, all were unexceptionable" (*E* 149). Basking in the presence of perfection personified, a perfection trickling down to even the slightest feature, a thoroughly modern turn of phrase might spring to mind: Frank Churchill "doesn't have a hair out of place."

Yet it is precisely the character's scrupulous attention to the matter of his hair that supplies his only ostensible flaw. We are told that, on what seems to be another ordinary morning, Frank decides on a whim to ride sixteen miles to London "merely to have his hair cut" (*E* 160). In the slight and seemingly inconsequential seventh chapter comes a passage that can only be described as slightly off-kilter, starting off on the wrong foot and thus "a little shaken":

> Emma's very good opinion of Frank Churchill was a little shaken the following day, by hearing that he was gone off to London, merely to have his hair cut. A sudden freak seemed to have seized him at breakfast, and he had sent for a chaise and set off, intending to return to dinner, but with no more important view that appeared than having his hair cut. There was certainly no harm in his travelling sixteen miles twice over on such an errand; but there was an air of foppery and nonsense in it which she could not approve. It did not accord with the rationality of plan, the moderation in expense, or even the unselfish warmth of heart, which she had believed herself to discern in him yesterday. (*E* 160)

If perfect grooming can only work to enhance true breeding, and if a pristine presentation of the self puts the finishing touch on the natural charms of a "*very* good looking young man," too much attention paid to the state of one's hair renders that same individual a dilettantish devotee to style's management—a self-presentation ensured by over-attention starts to smell vaguely like desperation. In light of the haircut, Frank's grace must be taken down a notch: fashion that has to be worked at makes the doer himself nothing more than a self-conscious coxcomb, a "trifling, silly fellow" enslaved by superficiality and thus liable to a laundry list of bad qualities, from "vanity, extravagance, love of change," to a certain "restlessness of temper" and "indifferen[ce] to how his conduct might appear in general" (*E* 160). Although Emma dismisses the sudden trip as nothing more than a "little blot," reasoning to herself that "silly things do cease to be silly if they are done by sensible people in an impudent way," the narration lingers over and dotes on its own description of this hair affair. Moreover, this lingering-over and doting-on almost resemble symptoms of a narration plagued by a bad case of Frank's compulsive care of the texture of his appearance. "I have no pleasure in seeing my friends, unless I can believe myself fit to be seen," says Frank after he returns from London, ventriloquizing what might almost be the voice of Austen's own unexpectedly painstaking style.

Several conspicuous refusals take place here. Declining an opportunity to impose a declarative narrative statement, the novel similarly falls into the form of free indirect discourse while employing language that feels just a little too exact, noticeably precise; the intrusion of tentative qualifiers—"a sudden freak *seemed* to have seized him," "no more important view that *appeared* than to having his hair cut," and, of course, a "little" shaken at the "air of foppery and nonsense" in the idea—belies a sudden onslaught of deliberate prevarication. What results is an unusual situation in which the narrator doesn't seem so much to be "ingesting" Emma's thoughts as it is *spitting them out,* as if to resist integration even during the act of narrative

incorporation. Oddly repetitive and vaguely snippy, the phrase "have his hair *cut*," ends both the first two sentences. As if grappling in vain for a readily available synonym, "hair cut" curtly refuses the pronoun's right to take their place and stand as if obstinately in our line of sight, obtrusive as ever. Both equivocation and echo carry with them the impression that the hair cut is not only a phenomenon difficult for Austen to convert into an otherwise glossy narration of it, but also a stylistic and sonic hurdle for the tones of her rhetoric as well (*E* 160). As dissonant and astonishingly un-Austenian words like "freak" and "blot" begin to appear in the text, leaving us bewildered, it almost begins to look as if Frank's excess of vanity has unsettled not only Emma's "very good opinion" of him, but the measured tones of the text itself as well.[132]

A bit later on, in another curious moment of incomprehension, the narrator almost appears to stand speechless before the spectacle of Frank's haircut. The report comes thus: "His father only called him a coxcomb, and thought it a very good story; but *that Mrs. Weston did not like it*, was clear enough, by her passing it over as quickly as possible, and making no other comment than that 'all young people would have their little whims'" (*E* 161, my italics). And then, once more, a few lines later: "…[Emma] found she must not judge him harshly. *As Mrs. Weston observed*, 'all young people would have their little whims'," almost as if the excuse, insubstantial only moments before, has now become indisputable, signed into law (*E* 162, my italics). Not just a strange stutter in and of itself, here the narrator willfully withholds from casting judgment on the doer of the deed, opting instead for a striking *dis*avowal of narrative responsibility, an anomalous regurgitation of what "Mrs. Weston observed." What had been the voice of self-possessed omniscience indulges in a rare moment of unexplained ventriloquism, as if a narrator in full command of hard-to-articulate truths had been stunned into silence by a minor character of her own creation. Infected by and with such careful attention to the matter of grooming that it recounts, this instance of narration dwindles down to a similarly nit-picking attitude, suddenly beleaguered by an unlikely narrowness of vision where previously it had spared us the intricacies of all those negligible details it had found more appropriate *not* to narrate (recall, for instance, how adeptly the narrator speeds through a description of the Coles's dinner party by slimming down the "usual rate of conversation" into a more appetizing portion, summing everything up with a neat statement that "a few clever things [were] said, a few downright silly, but by much the larger proportion neither the one nor the other—nothing worse than everyday remarks, dull repetitions, old news, and heavy jokes" [*E* 172]). Here the paragraph suddenly begins to run on as if it had, like Frank's locks, gotten too long and should be cut off. As if for no other reason than to literalize the saying, the narration gets caught up in—what else?—splitting hairs.

Moving along its way, what lingers for us is a dim and distant remembrance of the way in which echoes of the haircut ricochet around the space of this paragraph, as if it could and *had* mussed the impeccable, erudite authorial voice whose sophistication had, unthinkably, been put in jeopardy. Hitherto marked by that unruffled manner of bearing which can only be chalked up as poise, Austen's novel had, in that slim space, displayed not only the exquisite work of narration but also, startlingly, the effort behind it. Why, we wonder aloud, devote so much narrative description to the service of so inconsequential a decision? Why not crop this description off sooner?

---

[132] "Blot" crops up several times in Austen, but "freak" is as startlingly rare a word in her works as "mermaid" or "trident" (both are Harriet's incorrect guesses as to the answer to Mr. Elton's charade; the correct response is "courtship," which, of course, makes far more sense). In her six novels, "freak" appears only three times, twice in *Emma* (the other instance occurs late in the text, "It would be a great comfort to Mr. Weston, as he grew older…to have his fireside enlivened by the sports and the nonsense, the freaks and the fancies of a child never banished from home") and again in *Mansfield Park* ("Henry Crawford, ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the *freaks* of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long.") Both instances relate indirectly to Frank Churchill: the first is a rather passive-aggressive comment on the failings of the young Frank himself, the child "banished from home" to which the narrator refers, the second concerns Henry Crawford's "cold-blooded vanity," of which Frank also seems guilty for quite a bit of *Emma*.

Our befuddlement finally pays off with more than just our own version of detail-ridden paranoia. Near the novel's conclusion are we let in on a secret: that this episode, which seemed trifling, had murkier stuff at its core. Now standing as one of the novel's central intrigues, it turns out that this "little blot" on Frank's record turns out to have been profoundly premeditated (*E* 161). His sudden "freak" to go to London was spurred by a hidden motive: to place an order for a piano at Broadwood's for Jane Fairfax. In other words, Frank's embarrassing haircut acts as a decoy distracting readers both from his actual London mission and thus, too, from his secret engagement to Jane Fairfax which had been established, without our knowing, before the novel begins at a small "watering-place" called Weymouth. In a curious paradox that will have ramifications for our understanding of the "narratable," it is precisely because the haircut calls attention to itself that it provides the best disguise: "What keeps gossip from becoming the subject of a narrative is, precisely, the narrative that is the subject of gossip. One way not to *have* a story is to tell one about somebody who does: narration is a solid protection against the narratable."[133]

The success of Frank's plot throws into complicated relationship the unfaltering, infallible nature of Austen's own performance. For one, the episode almost fills in the vacant center of a hollowed out omniscience with the voice of Mrs. Weston. No longer a display of Austen's usually uninhibited free indirect discourse, Frank's secret and Austen's plotted reticence intersect in an interesting manner—both masters of plotting, literary character and the lapse of omniscience somehow collide and collude in order to ensure the best outcome for plot on both levels of story and discourse. To add to this, that omniscience temporarily cuts out as the sight of the haircut turns the character's dodging of narration into a form of characterization. More specifically, Frank's insertion into the story of the haircut a completely different errand of piano-buying recreates the structures of free indirect discourse, whereby characters' thoughts are enveloped within and contained by the narrative's presentation of them. Austen seems to embed Frank's secret shadow-plot into the structure of her narration by making that narration complicit with his secret: "[H]e had sent for a chaise and set off…but with *no more important view that appeared* than having his hair cut" (*E* 160, my italics). And by rendering Emma's (mistaken) thoughts with its usual diligence, omniscient narration is not so much sacrificing its authority as borrowing from, and illustrating, Emma's own errors and misconceptions. Put another way, Emma's consciousness becomes a red herring for the real plot at hand. The novel's vague hesitations, repetitions, and deferrals now begin to feel more deliberate, themselves intentional little blots rather than inadvertent botches—between the novel's perfect inhabitation of Emma's mental framework and the subsequent guarantee of the secrecy of the secret engagement, what escapes censure takes the shape of Frank Churchill, and an analysis of his preternatural understanding of the structures of a fictionality that throws the entire system into question. For, in a move that feels like an instance of metalepsis, a character encloses his intrigues within a narrative that should, by all rights, enclose *him*. We might almost agree with Mr. Weston that the haircut is "a very good story," so well does it play like, and play up, the conventional structures of narrative plotting. There is no denying that the hair *cut* is just a hair *off*.

Critics, of course, have long regarded Frank's secret engagement to Jane as a particular weakness in *Emma*, a hurdle difficult to surmount in considerations of Austen's negotiation of mystery and irony. "A single phrase in her own name—'his secret engagement to Jane Fairfax'—or a short inside view of either of the lovers could have made us aware, on first reading, of every ironic touch," Wayne Booth all but scoffs.[134]

---

[133] Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents,* p. 124.

[134] See Wayne Booth, "Point of View and the Control of Distance in *Emma*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Sept., 1961), p. 106. Readers too, have reacted to Frank Churchill's ill-fit within Austen's oeuvre by voicing complaints that they, try as they would, couldn't fathom what to make or do with him. Comparing *Emma* with *Pride and Prejudice*, A. Walton Litz remarks that Frank Churchill's "dubious behavior is harder to comprehend than Wickham's simple hypocrisies" (142). Alistair M. Duckworth and Darrell Mansell both stress Emma's lack of agency in the Churchill plot: she is a "marionette in Churchill's more subtle show" (163). In stronger terms, Claudia L. Johnson tracks Emma's fall from self-assured author to just another character in someone else's plot: "Much to her humbled bewilderment, Emma herself has gone from

"The author must, then, choose whether to purchase mystery at the expense of irony. For many of us Jane Austen's choice here is perhaps the weakest aspect of this novel."[135] Indeed, the heavy cost of this irony has posed a problem for scholars of Austen and theorists of omniscience alike. Jonathan Culler, in particular, has reasoned that literary critical discourse ought to abandon the outdated concept of omniscience, since omniscience eventually forces the reader into the uncomfortable position of having to "explain why the omniscient narrator declines to tell us all the relevant things he must know."[136] For Culler, mustering justifications or rationalizations for such decisions are lessons in futility, all but senseless exercises, since omniscient narration's prevarications hinge more on the author's successful achievement of certain aesthetic effects rather than on her diligent adherence to the know-all, tell-all dictum of omniscience proper. In other words, the aesthetic necessarily comes at the expense of the verisimilar, as the poised, infallible display of omniscience is sacrificed in order to preserve the structural splendor of a well-modulated and suspense-inducing plot. The aesthetic and the mimetic come to a head, as omniscient narration stands at a crossroads from the coherence of the plot, and one must be tossed aside in order to ensure the survival of the other.

It comes as no surprise, then, that omniscience has always been a concept mired in double binds, since an overzealous performance of omniscience always-already grinds against the novel's ideal enactment of verisimilitude. As Patrick Brantlinger has maintained, "The early, naïve development of omniscient narration in fiction breaks down partly from the intrusion of mystery into it, but partly also from the recognition of the conventional—and logically preposterous—nature of omniscience."[137] Attacked from both sides now, omniscient narration discovers the impossibility of having its knowledge both ways at once without risking the above censures: on the one hand, to surrender its totalizing comprehension would be to admit its own insufficiency and its ruse of God-like power, to relinquish, that is, the very quality that makes omniscience *omniscient*; on the other hand—a hand that by no means yields a stronger play—to cling to a "fantasy of omniscience" would constitute a desperate grab at an illusion of divine authority all the while aware that the impossible fact of omniscience guarantees the novel's semblance of reality will inevitably and irrevocably slip through its fingertips. For omniscience, then, there seems to be no front left on which its ambitious fronting of absolute knowledge proves either effective or even convincing.

But even though Booth and Culler highlight productive points of tension in either *Emma* specifically or in the form of the omnisciently narrated novel more broadly, it is precisely what they cite as omniscience's limitations when it comes to plot that allows the novel to engage in its most explicit interrogation of the tension between artistic merit and realism's production. The plotter as a literary character stands at the exact

---

considering herself the confident author of other people's stories to realizing that she has instead been the hoodwinked and quite powerless subject of another very stale one…of an eminently flatterable provincial girl deceived by a duplicitous and mobile man who is pulling all the strings she herself could not" (139). Mr. and Mrs. Leigh Perrot, contemporary readers of *Emma* and friends of the author, wrote after the novel's first publication that they "pitied Jane Fairfax," but "thought Frank Churchill better treated than he deserved." And, in more composed tones, Nicholas Dames has read *Emma*'s uniformly happy ending as strange transfiguration whereby aberrations *within* the marriage plot are smoothly flattened out into eminently translatable signals that no alterations *to* the marriage plot have taken place. Frank and Jane, in fact, are in the novel's final chapters heralded as beacons of heterosexual and social normativity, rather than chastised for the very tangible threat they had posed to the coherence of the public body writ large. So Dames observes: "What had been the transgression of Frank and Jane, their asocial secrecy and longing, is metamorphosed into the very *binding force* of the novel's completed community." See *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 42-3.

[135] Booth, "Point of View and the Control of Distance in *Emma*," p. 106.

[136] Jonathan Culler, "Omniscience," *Narrative*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan., 2004), p. 25. See also Barbara Hernstein-Smith and Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

[137] Brantlinger, "What Is 'Sensational' About the 'Sensation Novel'?," p. 17.

intersection of aesthetic coherence and narrative development: holding the keys to the plot in question, the plotter guards these stores of knowledge while omniscient narration seems unwilling to disclose them. Ready for the denouement, the plotter is then called upon to slip up, drop a clue, leave a trace of their schemes, so that the novel can demonstrate the incontestable brilliance of its own machinations. By permitting the secret story-level plots to flourish even while it ensures discursive unity, the plotter meditates on the authority of an omniscient narration that must be sacrificed to ensure the plots and on the verisimilitude that these narrative procedures appear to undermine. It is important to remember two things here. First, that instead of thinking about how the systems of omniscient narration and novelistic plotting interrupt or interfere with one another, it may be productive to conceive of it as a radical style of characterization whereby such interruptions and interferences enhance the realistic quality of textual devices perpetually seen as "formal" or "narratological" rather than themselves cultural and social structures. And, second, that Austen's flaunting of Frank Churchill's distinctive style of plotting—impossible to miss yet, paradoxically, tough to see—imagines a stealthy novelistic mode through which to interrogate the very discomfort that the novel as a genre has experienced in the service of its two masters that often operate at cross purposes: the aesthetic and the mimetic. It furthermore employs the same strategy of plotting by obtruding Frank's plots onto the very surface of *Emma* itself: it displays its secrets through and in the plot.

Of course, there is no denying the perennial truth that "Those who chose to be idle, certainly might."[138] But even more artfully, those who chose not to remain idle can always pose as idlers, disavowing their secrets by blatantly disclosing them. As if the only way to defuse, or at least minimize the blast of, one explosive secret is to detonate another one elsewhere, the character's command of the mechanisms of distraction and misdirection, toward foppish freaks and extravagant errands, are exemplary of the novel's own surefire system of obfuscation, whereby it dwells more extensively on exactly those plot details that it would rather disguise. Why might someone make a mistake on purpose, merely to throw us off our scent? What happens, we wonder, when the plot of the novel proper is secured by a sacrifice of its usually foolproof formal techniques? Why, in other words, does the narrator's display of omniscience feel most imperiled when Frank Churchill's secret plot performs its operative movements and conducts its diversionary tactics? And what does it mean for a character to bear such an uncanny likeness to the functions of narrative form that he seems, at times, to disappear into them?

The Gentleman Vanishes

The overlap in the task of narration and characterization emphasizes a collapse of those hierarchical levels used to such productive effect in *Emma*. Not only is Frank Churchill's traveling a preposterous distance (16 miles) to get a haircut a narratable event precisely because of the distance he needs to traverse in order to achieve this effect of turning narration toward him, but his uncanny awareness of the mechanisms of distance and separation in the concept of free indirect discourse is, as I have begun to argue, a strange marker of his too-close distance to the cogs and gears of narrative itself. Frank cleverly presumes a radius of space from the protagonist wherein free indirect discourse works properly; outside those bounds the policing forces of omniscience begin to register certain limits of frequency and strength, as if free indirect discourse was a radio tower whose signal gradually weakens over lengths of space and, at long last, lost. "The narrator shares the characters' limits," R. A. York notices, and "never goes outside Highbury, to narrate Frank Churchill's London haircut, to meet Mrs. Churchill or Captain Campbell, those remote figures of power."[139] Frank's traveling quite literally to great lengths gets somehow conflated to conceal both his own shocking engagement and the novel's secret plot, bringing the character close to the functions of narration itself: "there is a stunning

[138] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993), p. 122.

[139] *Strangers and Secrets: Communication in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), p. 27.

demonstrations of how Jane Austen's psychological and historical acuteness is inseparable from her concepts of nature *in* social structures."[140] How else could we describe this cunning move than by saying that, in dodging free indirect discourse by going to London, the character himself evaporates into the thick air of a thin description?

After all, if we have learned anything from *Emma*, it is the importance of a hermeneutic suspicion whose epigrammatic slogan might go, "Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure" (*E* 339). This statement might obscure a secondary meaning. If seldom does complete truth belong to any human disclosure, disclosure itself might provide a semblance of the complete truth, of a confession or an admission worthy of confidence. In a baffling paradox, then, Frank's technique of obfuscation succeeds precisely because the implemented distraction away from the true cause for concealment (namely, his clandestine engagement to Jane) is just oddly insignificant enough to elicit and even demand an impassioned response in the wrong direction. It is exactly because it calls attention to itself that the hair provides the best disguise. Or, put another way, a way of characterizing Frank Churchill begins to look like a way for him to escape that very characterization, for him to be frank in name alone.

An episode from *Emma*, unsuspectingly buried in volume two, is at once inconsequential and essential. During a walk around Hartfield, Emma Woodhouse and Frank Churchill fall in with a larger crowd (including Miss Bates and her niece) and happen to pass Mr. Perry on horseback. The conversation touches languidly on the state of the horse, then the party falls silent. Seeing an opportunity to ask after Mr. Perry's plans to set up his carriage, Frank inquires after this plot for domestic improvement—unbeknownst to the rest of the crowd, his privileged information into this trivial, but secret, scheme has been passed to him by Jane Fairfax, with whom he has enjoyed both an illicit correspondence and a lengthy engagement. It is but a small slip, though it catches the attention of the more perceptive onlookers around. Mr. Knightley notices Frank attempting to meet Jane's eye in this moment of arrested motion and suspiciously divines some foul play at the heart of the matter, and the occasion is colored by Frank's blunder and the blush that gives it away as such: "…there was a blush on Jane's cheek which gave it a meaning not otherwise ostensible. [Mr. Knightley] feared there must be some decided involvement. Disingenuousness and double dealing seemed to meet him at every turn. These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play, chosen to conceal a deeper game on Frank Churchill's part" (*E* 273). When pressed on how he had discovered Mr. Perry's plans (Mr. Weston's surprised "You have it from himself, had you?"), Frank's response is good-humoredly dismissive: "'No, sir,' replied his son, laughing, 'I seem to have had it from nobody.—Very odd!—I really was persuaded of Mrs. Weston's having mentioned it in one of her letters to Enscombe, many weeks ago, with all these particulars—but as she declares she never heard a syllable of it before, of course it must have been a dream. I am a great dreamer. I dream of every body at Highbury when I am away—and when I have gone through my particular friends, then I begin dreaming of Mr. and Mrs. Perry'" (*E* 271).

The so-called weirdness of this dream-sequence-that-isn't lies precisely in its canny resemblance to the workings of free indirect discourse itself. Coming as if by magic from "nobody" and "nowhere," the news of Perry's carriage is received as doubtfully as wisps and drifts of information descended all-too-mimetic realm of reverie. As Mr. Weston remarks rather dismissively, "What an air of probability sometimes runs through a dream! And at others, what a heap of absurdities it is!" (*E* 271). Casey Finch and Peter Bowen have argued in their marvelous article on Highbury's penchant for prattle and "tittle-tattle," gossip is "not exactly

---

[140] Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 168. He continues: "'Self-command' in this novel is a matter of possessing your own tone of voice, of not surrendering it to artificial convivialities or to the styles of social pretension. Even while discussing the matter, however, Emma admits to a flirtatious game with Churchill—'perhaps I intended you to say so'—and to want or need flattery is in itself to be only precariously under 'your own management'. In the ensuing dialogue she is soon to lose her 'own management' to his, as he becomes first in tone and then by explicit admission the master of 'ceremonies' in a theatrical entertainment for the benefit of Miss Woodhouse. In what follows, as Emma is rapidly and audibly drawn into the artifices of Frank Churchill."

an instance" of the free indirect style, nor "simply a metaphor for it."[141] Rather, it "operates as a model of social authority that both naturalizes and authenticates the new novelistic authority of the free indirect style. *Like* the free indirect style—but not *as* it—gossip in Highbury functions as a dispersed rather than a concentrated form of authority that derives its power…from the collectivity of voices that whisper about neighbors in private rooms and across gateways."[142] In other words, dreams, gossip, and free indirect discourse function as the hidden limbs and levers of authority itself. The problem behind any interpretation of dreams is, of course, that one can't help but dream *like everyone else*. Dreams, ostensibly one of the most private and internalized modes of (sub)conscious processing, only reaffirm our situatedness within a heavily populated crowd of dreamers just like us. The collective is thus bound together by the hidden nocturnal musings that only appear to promote one's separation from "the others" when they, in fact, testify to the exact opposite: that there exists a staid and analyzable system of fetishes, complexes, pathologies, and preconscious censors shared by all. As if tapping into the communal consciousness that is Highbury's shared dream-space, Frank qua-Freud passes off the illicit source of his secret knowledge under the guise of a gossip that, one assumes, has razed hierarchies of knowledge and allowed everyone perfect insight into everyone else's business.

What is exceedingly surprising about Frank Churchill is that he has so effectively internalized the policing operations of gossip that he shrewdly cheats both the spatial range and the psychological reach of free indirect discourse. Used to our thrillingly magical access to characters' thoughts through free indirect discourse, here what happens is Frank somehow anticipating our intrusions and acting, feeling, and otherwise uttering as if he knows we might overhear him. It is thus that he comes as close to divulging the secret itself without actually committing oneself to truthful speech, since the silence that guards a secret guarantees to give the secret away as such. Jane Fairfax herself presents a cautionary tale of reserve taken too far: "If any thing could be more, where all was most, she was more reserved on the subject of Weymouth and the Dixons than any thing. She seemed bent on giving no real insight into Mr. Dixon's character, or her own value for his company, or opinion of the suitableness of the match. It was all general approbation and smoothness; nothing delineated or distinguished. It did her no service however. Her caution was thrown away. Emma saw its artifice, and returned to her first surmises. There probably *was* something more to conceal than her own preference…" (*E* 132-3). To be "reserved" is to be despised, the tendency to hazard nothing tending instead toward a "disgusting," "suspicious" detachment, a deafening silence that itself speaks of secrets poorly kept: "Wrapt up in a cloak of politeness, [Jane] seemed determined to hazard nothing. She was disgustingly, was suspiciously reserved" (*E* 132). As if himself aware of the repercussions of such unpleasant reticence, Frank boldly proclaims: "It is a most repulsive quality…Oftentimes very convenient, no doubt, but never pleasing. There is safety in reserve, but no attraction. One cannot love a reserved person" (*E* 160). Frank seems to realize that what is "narratable" can itself put into practice a subversive strategy of screening the truth precisely by dismantling the would-be screen in front of it. Fueling the town's circuits of gossip finally constitutes a mode of fooling it.

Characterization therefore proceeds through the formal mechanisms of which characters are metaleptically aware, and Frank's rivaling of the cogs and gears of omniscience only further adds to our understanding of the man himself as a socially conscious and self-conscious individual. Here social and narrative awareness become impossible to pull apart from one another, as character flourishes through the operations and functions they perform in the narrative plot alongside the position they occupy in the novel's narrated plot. Frank's strange custodial management of the plot itself—both his own engagement to Jane and of the novel's deployment of that critical information as an example of Emma's fallible modes of seeing into everybody's hearts—invigorates a sense of both the character as a represented individual and the character as a role in the narrative configuration.

---

[141] Casey Finch and Peter Bowen, "'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury': Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma*," *Representations*, No. 31, Special Issue: The Margins of Identity in Nineteenth-Century England (Summer 1990), pp. 1-19. See p. 7.

[142] Ibid., p. 7.

If a rule of the nineteenth-century novel's narrative plotters is that no one plots purely because they want to, Frank Churchill's secrecy and master-plotting only recapitulates his need to plot at all, reminding us of the ways in which his plotting compensates—even tries to even the stakes—of his belonging always to another's plot, subject to the whims of his ill-humoured and "odd-tempered" guardian, Mrs. Churchill, and the implicit conditions of receiving his promised inheritance. To balance out the "certainty of caprice" on his guardian's part, Frank Churchill seems to understand that the only way to offset his aunt's temperamental streak is to outsmart it. His mode of cheating, dodging, or otherwise escaping the novel's practice of free indirect discourse does not merely grant the novel an effectively modulated sense of suspense and the grand reveal of the secret engagement. Rather, the character's relationship to the policing mechanisms of gossip, free indirect discourse, and omniscient narration, all of which take on analogous structures, ingeniously recapitulates Frank's hyperawareness of his shaky social position and financial dependence, both of which seem subject at all times to the whims of an erratic guardian. The character's relationship to the narrative forms that he manipulates and that manipulate him is incredibly apt in light of his background, since his narrative canniness mirrors a social shrewdness cultivated more out of necessity than frivolity. As Judith Wilt has observed, Frank and Jane are "solitary figures in their worlds…Frank cut off from his father to the point where he doesn't bear his own name and lacking any profession except charm; Jane orphaned and adrift as only an unprotected woman can be in that society."[143] To rely on "anything, everything…time, chance, circumstance, slow effects, sudden bursts" provides the only management possible of an unmanageable social position.[144] Of course, Frank's way of warping and twisting the workings of narration works in contradistinction to Emma's own rampant misreadings. In a certain light, Emma has never had to become a master of the town's mechanisms of gossip or the novel's strategies of characterization for, having "lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her," her social position and financial security are never in question. Although Austen's accommodation of the character's omniscient one-upmanship appears at first glance to come at the cost of her own infallible penetration—recall Booth's "purchasing mystery at the expense of irony"—it emerges as a subtle and nuanced way to use the forms of narrative to further flesh out the literary characters at their midst.

Just as free indirect discourse can provide a useful mode of characterization, moments marked by its absence or passing over of characters' thoughts in significant moments can similarly serve as a potent means of that characterization—a characterization whose own passivity facilitates the strategic passing of a character under its radar. It seems interesting that, in many instances, Emma thinks she is performing a certain kind of free indirect discourse on Frank ("You…who can see into every body's heart; but nobody else—" [*E* 318]) when she in fact masters nothing more than a free indirect discourse of herself, attributing all of her contemplations to everyone else. Who can blame her, really, when her audience consists of so amenable a screen on which to project her every thought? Take, for instance, Harriet Smith's reliance on Emma to parse her every feeling and commit them to articulable speech: "Harriet could not long resist so delightful a persuasion. She read the concluding lines, and was all flutter and happiness. She could not speak. *But she was not wanted to speak. It was enough for her to feel. Emma spoke for her*" (*E* 59, my italics). Weirdly enough, this is an example of narration employing free indirect discourse to describe the very structure of elided thought—a character need only "feel" leaving narration to "speak for her"—that characterizes the technique itself. Just as Emma's status as a literary character rises to the complexity of personhood when the omniscient narrator takes on her limitations—binds itself to the same epistemological constraints as someone used to being the doted-on younger daughter of an indulgent father—so too does Frank Churchill take on a quality of dazzling dimensionality when he subverts the proper functioning of omniscience as a consequence of his mediated social identity. In becoming fused with the novel's own self-management of plot and getting elevated to full functionality in his role as the novel's plotter, Frank demonstrates how the life of the literary character is

[143] Judith Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot, and Lawrence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 159.
[144] Quoted in Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic*, p. 159.

inseparable from, and only takes on depth and breadth through, a knowing relationship to the narrative plot in which he (or she) is contained.

Just as Emma's status as a literary character rises to the complexity of personhood when the omniscient narrator takes on her limitations—binds itself to the same epistemological constraints as someone used not only to be the doted on younger daughter of an indulgent father, but the titular protagonist of the novel *Emma*—Frank Churchill takes on a quality of dazzling dimensionality when he subverts the proper functioning of omniscience as a consequence of his mediated social identity. In becoming part and parcel of the plot, in being reduced to full functionality in his role as the novel's plotter, Frank in fact transcends the status of the literary character, taking up some faint quality of omniscience, to be sure, but also tearing down some of the odd ontological barriers that have unproductively held literary character rigidly apart from the realms of narration and plot. What I am arguing, then, is that the life of the literary character is inseparable from, and only takes on depth and breadth through, their self-conscious or metaleptic relationship to the narrative forms in which they are held, and which take on the shades and gradients of homologous social systems.

In a now almost universally cited article on *Emma* in criticism around the novel, Frances Ferguson has advocated for a greater attention to the *form*, rather than the *style*, of free indirect discourse in the novel as a genre, a technical achievement she calls "the novel's one and only formal contribution to literature."[145] Having been referenced as *style indirect libre* for so long, its very name has "stunted the force of its identifiability as a form."[146] Ferguson argues that where form is instantly recognizable and substantial, style is comparatively ephemeral, tough to pin down. And unlike style, formal features persist in the face of misrecognition or an ignorance of them as such—her example is that a sonnet remains a sonnet even if its rhyme scheme and meter slip by unnoticed. Our access to the deposits of distinction in a particular character is, then, shown to be a mark of an important and already-assumed inconsequentiality of the individual subject of this discourse, one elevated to the realm of the individual or exemplary, only to be quickly reduced in scale from *the* focalizing consciousness to merely a normative member of the masses. In what Ferguson terms the "supple" Foucauldian strain of this ideological top-down body of criticism, the idea of power is, vis-à-vis this "style" of presentation, all-encompassing, supplying a method of rationalizing irrational, defiant, or unassimilable behavior as negligible examples of "conventional deviation."[147] However, as Miller has put it, narration nevertheless retains an absolute "epistemological advantage" over the characters contained by a form which has hitherto misleadingly been seen to enhance those affective stirrings repressed or otherwise internal: "When free indirect style mimics Emma's thoughts and feelings, it simultaneously inflects them into keener observations of its own; for our benefit, if never for hers, it identifies, ridicules, corrects all the secret vanities and self-deceptions of which Emma, pleased as Punch, remains comically unconscious. And this is generally what being a character in Austen means: to be slapped silly by a narration whose constant battering…its recipient is kept from even noticing."[148] Because these utterances take on an existence solely in the guise of narrator's speech, Dorrit Cohn has ascribed to this phenomenon a "simultaneity effect," whereby narrator and character are felt to blend, mingle, overlap in a complex kaleidoscope of intimate identification, here, and ironic detachment, there.[149]

Free indirect discourse has been seen to express the subjective thoughts and notions of literary characters but, crucially, only insofar as it eventually binds this individual to a larger collective, an aggregate and representative sum of diverse sample populations. It is, in other words, a way by which a character is

---

[145] Frances Ferguson, "Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (March 2000), p. 159.

[146] Ibid., p. 159.

[147] Ibid., p. 161.

[148] Miller, *Jane Austen or, The Secret of Style*, p. 71.

[149] Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 239.

brought to vibrant life even while it is simultaneously shown to derive this way of life from a broader governing system of latent, though ever present, social dictates.[150] Free indirect discourse thus stitches the individual to a broader tapestry of interwoven collective characteristics; what free indirect discourse tells us about one person, it tells us about everyone—individual subjectivity is merely a hurdle surmounted on the path to sweeping social generalization. More recently, Anne-Lise François's treatment of free indirect discourse in *Open Secrets* has provided an invigorating reimagining of the "disarticulative effects" of free indirect style stem directly from the relief that individuals are afforded when their thoughts are communicated via the narrator, thereby eliding or sidestepping their physical need for verbal communication as a mode of identity formation within a social space. Whether it is characterized as an "elision, undervaluing, or mystification," the fundamental detachment of experiential knowledge and verbal translation introduces a distance between the subject and their emotions, thoughts, or opinions. Left unparsed by characters in the first-person vein or through dialogue, the contents of free indirect discourse leave us wondering whether such material was processed at all. What is taken as dialogue between players on the stage is therefore reduced to mere whispers in and amongst the audience—there is a question of whether or not narration's performance of heavy-lifting, of ventriloquizing its subjects, is actually representative of or overheard by the characters who ostensibly think, feel, or otherwise experience these sentiments.

François argues that this type of third-person omniscient narration effectively allegorizes the workings of both trauma theory and ideology itself, whereby the "uncounted" comes to represent a style of uninspected and uninterrogated dispossession that fundamentally eludes the subjects of such discourses. François is in part responding to and reformulating Banfield's influential conception of the form as giving expression to "unspeakable" sentences, unspeakable precisely because they are *unspoken*—the words contained therein are only an approximation of what the character does not communicate in dialogue nor think aloud to herself. Free indirect discourse has thus been considered to give voice to "utterances" that would otherwise have no channel of release, otherwise merely moments of enraptured, though uncaptured, expression. Whether it manifests in a rhetorical move that speaks to intimacy or to a certain sort of alienation, the form preserves the subtly but ineluctably latent structures of power that divide, rather than bridge, the ontological distance between subject and object, character and narrator.[151] "It is for this reason that indirect discourse, *especially 'free' indirect discourse*, is of exemplary value: there are no clear, distinctive contours; what comes first is not an insertion of variously individuated statements, or an interlocking of different subjects of enunciation, but a collective assemblage resulting in the determination of relative subjectification proceedings, or assignments of individuality and their shifting distributions within discourse. Indirect discourse is not explained by the distinction between subjects; rather, it is the assemblage, as it freely appears in this discourse, that explains all

---

[150] Ferguson, "Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," p. 161.

[151] Berlant, writing on the notion of cruel optimism and drawing from Barbara Johnson's work on apostrophe and free indirect discourse, sees our willful ignorance of the inherently hierarchical status of narrative agency (exemplified by the supposed "speech act" that free indirect discourse only *pretends* to allow its subjects) as a manifestation of an optimism that chooses, however hopelessly, to believe in the futile reconciliation of these ever-divergent ontologies: "in a narrator's part-merging with a character's consciousness, free indirect discourse performs the impossibility of locating an observational intelligence in one or any body and therefore forces the reader to transact a different, more open relationship of 'unfolding' to what she is reading, thinking she understands, judging, and being. In sum, Johnsonian projection concerns the often ruthless optimism lining any kind of attachment and is often itself optimistic about the transferential openness that rhetorical forms of suspended intersubjectivity demand from the reader." This utopian vision of seamless intersubjectivity, one seemingly actualized in the democratic or chivalrous opening of omniscient narration to the thoughts of its characters, is thus annihilated by the structures of containment which foreclose upon, even as they appear to promote, the superficial freedom and democracy of a "transferential openness" we've come to naturalize in the guise of the free indirect style. See "Cruel Optimism," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (2006), p. 22.

the voices present within a single voice, the glimmer of girls in a monologue by Charlus, the languages in a language, the order-words in a word."[152] To be a subject of omniscience is to be symbolically consumed and thus configured as both possessing *and* supplying, like it or not, an interior—perhaps worst of all, it is to be ingested, digested, and filled out without your even knowing it's happening.

I wish to emphasize here, however, not the ideological potential that this opening, once breached, has left, but rather the distinctive formal dimensions with which critical considerations have endowed free indirect discourse. Here I would like to return briefly to D. A. Miller's argument about Robert Ferrars's "deliberately embraced project," that is, the assumption of the "purely felt blankness" that can at its most flattering be called style (17). A brisk but vivid account of Robert's all-*but*-brisk selection of an exorbitant case-and-pick set, adorned with ivory, gold, and pearls, allows Miller to contend that the splendid emptiness of the box itself stands in for the hollow nothingness at the core of style itself. "All style and no substance," Robert's "happy air of real conceit and affected indifference" to Elinor and Marianne only woefully exposes the workings of a style that must be *worked at* in order to exist, which finally functions best when it *doesn't function at all*. Or, in Miller's words, "style is presented as a thing of surfaces only: not a management of meaning but a capitulation to meaninglessness."[153] Unlike Robert's case, which speaks to both the case's literal emptiness and to the absence of symbolic meaning in the example in which he features, Frank mobilizes this purely-felt blankness as a masking of explicit denotation with the gibberish-like cover of a haircut. A passing but timely reference is made to Frank Churchill, who is cited as another wielder of that battering ram definitively known as autonomous male authority. As Emma says and Miller repeats, "silly things do cease to be silly...if they are done by sensible people in an impudent way"—a smart way to phrase the tautology that style is no longer a bad thing if it is done in a good way. In other words, to render it worth our while, style has to be carried out *stylishly*; for style to have substance, its substance has to be made into style. Given this, it seems all too apt and easy to take the hair cut as compliantly exemplary of Robert's exact brand of performative, though unpunished, femininity.

Curiously, however, this scene at Gray's in *Sense and Sensibility* has a direct analogue in an episode at Ford's in *Emma*, also involving that consecrated Austenian triumvirate of a man, a shop, and gloves. While Robert is said to have "[drawn] on his gloves with leisurely care" after a quarter of an hour determining the "size, shape, and ornaments" of his toothpick case, Frank patriotically goes to Ford's to purchase a pair of gloves, for "this must be the very shop that every body attends every day of their lives" (*E* 157). Interrupting Emma in the middle of a question, he seizes on the sight of the beloved and frequently visited Highbury institution: "[my father] comes to Highbury himself, he says, six days out of the seven, and has always business at Ford's. If it be not inconvenient to you, pray let us go in, that I may prove myself to belong to the place, to be a true citizen of Highbury. I must buy something at Ford's. *It will be taking out my freedom"* (*E* 157, my italics). On a first glance it might not be much a stretch to imagine Frank soon pulling on these gloves himself, after a sumptuous afternoon of shopping, in the same lavish and somewhat lascivious attitude as Robert Ferrars before him. While Robert employs style quite literally, though, in untethering it from form and purpose, Frank's maneuvers are flawlessly timed. For the question interrupted on the tip of Emma's tongue is one regarding his acquaintance with Jane Fairfax in Weymouth, and his affected interest in the store excuses and almost expunges from memory the brilliant evasion that immediately preceded it. The gloves are noteworthy because, unlike Robert's case, they serve as an object whose center quite literally will not hold (or, more precisely, holds *something else* in its hollow) by design rather than by accident. In this way Frank retains a freedom from the style that Robert soon loses by putting it into practice—his remarkable immunity from a concrete system of both fashion and narration manages to give signification itself the slip.[154] As much

---

[152] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* p. 80.

[153] Miller, *Jane Austen or, The Secret of Style*, p. 87.

[154] "A distinguished man is a man who marks himself off from the crowd using modest means, but it is a means whose power, which is a kind of energy, is immense. Since, on the one hand, his aim is to be recognized only by his peers, and on the other, this recognition relies essentially on details, the distinguished

characterized by what the narration tells us about him as he is by how he escapes the telling, the plotter always throws into pandemonium the lines between narration, plot, and character, riddling the traditional forms of narrative with a critical set of social valences. A theory of both the novel and of literary character, in other words, should continue to grapple toward a vocabulary capacious enough to account for the character's social, narrative, and formal awareness as represented through their implication and imbrication in the self-consciousness of plot.

Nothing if not ambitious, Frank Churchill not only cheats the workings of omniscience, but somehow manipulates the grammar of both the realist novel and of the clue. Looking, for instance, to the haircut's role as an instance of Barthes's "*l'effet de réel*" implicates, and allows us to reimagine, both the function of omniscience and the role of the detail in its relation to the plot. As Roland Barthes has now famously argued of Flaubert's barometer and Michelet's little door, novels intent on producing a "reality effect" make "insignificant notations" that cannot be properly slotted into any preexisting structural order, and in so doing invite speculation over whether a totalizing system could ever be posed to account for all those extraneous details that stand in for (and thus engender) the generic real.[155] Yet the barometer acts as the site of a paradox: connoting reality, it is elevated over and above the status of a mere object, but precisely because every "thing" could stand in exactly the same position as a signifier for the real, the barometer diminishes once more into its ordinary, undistinguished, and undistinguishable state. It is at once only itself, and also just like everything else. Elaine Freedgood trenchantly observes that "The object as reality effect loses its potential as a material thing outside the conventions of representation; the object as metaphor loses most of its qualities in its symbolic servitude."[156] Because the barometer and the little door stand concretely for nothing, they can conjure up traces of reality itself.[157]

Of course, the haircut is off-putting precisely because it is both a social and a narrative "luxury"; the 16 mile ride to London is nothing if not "lavish" to the point of jeopardizing Frank Churchill's character. For another, men's hair in particular seems to possess a being-in-itself nature, neither active nor passive, a mode of semi-automatic self-care. It is generally neither a source of the narratable nor a frequent subject of narration in the nineteenth-century novel.[158] At the beginning of chapter sixteen, Austen describes thus Emma's evening:

---

man adds to the uniform of his century a number of *discreet* signs (that is, those that are both barely visible and yet not in keeping with the outfit), which are no longer spectacular signs of a condition that is openly adopted but the simple signs of a tacit agreement. Indeed, *distinction* takes the signaling aspect of clothes down a semi-clandestine path: for, on the one hand, the group that reads its signs is a limited one, on the other the signs necessary for this reading are rare and, without a particular knowledge of the new vestimentary language, perceptible only with difficulty." In learning to recognize these signs of distinction on a second, third, or fourth reading of *Emma*, we become *like* Frank, ourselves implicated in a project of careful concealment. See Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, ed. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter (Oxford: Berg Press, 2006), p. 66.

[155] Ibid.

[156] *The Ideas in Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 11.

[157] Barthes continues: "It would seem, however, that if analysis seeks to be exhaustive (and what would any method be worth which did not account for the totality of its object, i.e., in this case, of the entire surface of the narrative fabric?), if it seeks to encompass the absolute detail, the individual unit, the fugitive transition, in order to assign them a place in the structure, it inevitably encounters notations which no function (not even the most indirect) can justify: such notations are scandalous (from the point of view of structure), or, what is even more disturbing, they seem to correspond to a kind of narrative *luxury*, lavish to the point of offering many 'futile' details and thereby increasing the cost of narrative information." Barthes, "The Reality Effect," *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), p. 141.

[158] Women's hair might require the latest fashions, intricate ornamentation, and perhaps even the added labor of a lady's maid: "Quentin Bell, basing himself on Veblen's 'theory of the Leisure Class', has argued that 'the hair or wig' have a major role in the 'exhibition of leisure' since they 'can be raised to precarious height, or

"The hair was curled, the maid sent away, and Emma sat down to think and be miserable" (*E* 106). But if women's hair merits narration even when it merely obstructs the way, delays us along our progress toward more important musings, men's hair should take care of itself. To dawdle too much on the particulars would expose the man himself as every bit the trifling, silly, vain coxcomb we had hoped he wasn't. Dismissed off-hand as a coxcomb, Frank enacts a methodology of cultivating not simply distinction, but difference—the dandy aims both at fashion but also at boasting those small excesses of style that might be easily read by anyone similarly predisposed to the semi-clandestine language of discreet signs. What the other inhabitants of Highbury might not recognize is that, in a Barthesian formulation following Baudelaire and Barbey, the dandy puts into practice "not only an ethos…but also a technique."[159] This technique is not merely a management of detail (a style of presentation of the "next-to-nothing" or the "*je ne sais quoi*"), but a manipulation of *appearance itself* as its object.[160][161] This appearance, most importantly, takes shape not only through the grooming to which Frank pays so much heed, but in how he contorts the contours of novelistic discourse. All of this is to argue, finally, that the secret plot finds itself cunningly covered by the "sudden freak" that makes us act as if the obvious intrigue is no longer very obvious—or intriguing—at all. The entire haircut goes, rather appropriately, over our heads.

We should remember, however, that Frank's haircut doesn't merely exist as a reality effect; in fact, strictly speaking, it more closely resembles an un-reality effect, a decoy giving him an opportunity to experience (and experience publically) the sort of embarrassment that, by acknowledging, might secure his perfection, but also to use that public display of feeling to simultaneously conceal and contain another more private—and potentially damaging—secret. In other words, what looks to be an oversight actually bears the mark of trenchant foresight, as he turns a case of hapless vanity into the talk of the town. As the town is monopolized by the hair affair, no attention remains to divert toward the clandestine affair of the heart the hair effectively disguises. Not just a display of his shrewdness in gaming the game that is social life itself, Frank harnesses both the denotative and connotative potential of the realist detail and bends it to his own version of the plot; as Nancy Armstrong has pointed out, "errant" objects such as the pianoforte do not

---

given an appearance of crushing weight as in the chignon'…Women's hair was the main focus of conspicuous leisure and consumption, and indeed, in this period it attracted an increasing public attention, as men's haircuts became shorter and less elaborate." Men's hair is usually relegated to the background of narrative action precisely because it educes no action or expenditure of labor—becoming "shorter" and "less elaborate" in fashion, it has tended to stimulate narrations of a similar length, brevity, and austerity. Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), p. 2.

[159] See Barthes, "Dandyism and Fashion," *The Language of Fashion*, ed. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter (Oxford: Berg Press, 2006), p. 67. "At first sight, human clothing is a very promising subject to research or reflect upon: it is a complete phenomenon, the study of which requires at an one time a history, an economy, an ethnology, a technology and maybe even, as we will see in a moment, a type of linguistics. But above all, as an object of *appearance*, it flatters our modern curiosity about social psychology, inviting us to go beyond the obsolete limits of the individual and of society: what is interesting in clothing is that it seems to participate to the great depth in the widest sociality" (21).

[160] Ibid., p. 66.

[161] A conversation between Henri Lefebvre and Barthes himself exemplifies the thunderous hush of a language that boldly asserts its covert properties: "Here we are in a very ambiguous domain, linked to the 'hygiene' of clothes, which is there both to veil and to show what it is hiding, to dissimulate or to suggest something other than what it is revealing. The trick is the way in which this ambiguity is used." Barthes's response, altogether apropos, is that "It is for this reason that, psychoanalytically, clothing has been likened to a neurosis, a slight neurosis, to the precise extent that it hides and advertises at the same time." "Fashion, a Strategy of Desire: Round-table Discussion with Roland Barthes, Jean Duvignaud, and Henri Lefebvre," *The Language of Fashion*, ed. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter (Oxford: Berg Press, 2006), p. 87.

inhabit a dimension on the other side of language but are completely in and of it."[162] Importantly, then, Frank counts as a plotter because his manipulation of the story-level haircuts, curls, and pianos exposes the novel's mechanisms of plotting, the novel's authorization of breaches in its own authority. There is something exceptionally deliberate about Frank's mobilization of the entire schema of realistic notation, including those gaps and lapses that, according to Roland Barthes, are "futile" in bearing no appropriative structural functions—in these bouts of discourse-contortion, the character becomes part and parcel of the very functions of the plot even while that identification with a plot function enhances our sense of his social wiles.[163] Or, rather, there is something marvelously canny in the way that Austen sacrifices her omniscience where Frank is involved, using his privileged access into the ideological apparatus of novelistic form as a mode of characterization in order to secure the coherence of her own plot. All of a sudden it appears as if she, too, is aiming for higher game.

As Naomi Schor has trenchantly argued in relation to the aesthetics of the detail, small, insignificant, and politically ineffectual trivialities have been relegated to the sphere of the domestic or feminine.[164] Irreverent of, because irrelevant to, a greater system of meaning, the detail stands in as a figure for a destructive, riotous, even apocalyptic potential, threatening to distract from or destroy the glossy uniformity of the whole. Schor, borrowing from Lukcás, has winnowing out the "good" detail from the "bad": "Before 1848, during the period of 'revolutionary realism,' the 'good detail reigns supreme, the detail that, according to Hegel's organicist ideal, scrupulously respects all the clauses of the aesthetic contract binding the part and the whole." She goes on to touch on the detail's narrative importance: "A good detail is any detail said to be dramatic and essential that *serves as a mainspring of the plot*."[165] On the other hand, Schor points out, the so-called "bad" detail is "situated on the border between the descriptive and the diegetic, Balzacian or Tolstoyan details, are the 'bad' details of a Flaubert or a Zola…'bourgeois' or 'trivial' or 'petty' Western realism is characterized by a predilection for, and inflation of, details variously described as 'inessential', 'isolated', 'superficial and unconnected', or 'superfluous'."[166] Given the explosion of inconsequential statements about roast pork, donkeys coveted but not yet obtained, baked apple dumplings, barouche-landaus, white satin, lace veils, yellow patterns, blue ribbons, and occasionally, even preferences for olives that begin to litter the pages of *Emma* whenever Mr. Woodhouse, Miss Bates, or Mrs. Elton appear on the scene, it comes as no surprise that we are inclined to dismiss the haircut as another such an instance of the narrative paying lip service to the niceties of Lukcás's bad detail.

And, yet, the only way the plot-detail can work is when the seemingly superfluous line of description masquerades its true function as a "good" detail that secretly holds the diegetic value of a clue. In other words, knowing which details are bad and which are good describes precisely the task of plot—knowing how to tell the difference between the two drives the bulk of narrative desire, and closure offers the newly enlightened reader a clear system of sorting out the essential from the excessive. Frank, in a curious turn, knows not only which clues are willful impediments to understanding the whole plot, but knows also which are "blunders," as well as how to deliberately confuse the two categories so that, lost in a deluge of detail, we can no longer strain out the real from the fake. In other words, Frank mobilizes a system of "notations which no function…can justify," details that allow for a slippage of reference and referent that allow his own plot to flourish.

---

[162] Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 17.

[163] Barthes, "The Reality Effect," p. 141.

[164] See Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987), esp. Chapter 1, "Gender: In the Academy," pp. 11-22. Schor claims that, "Unfortunately, not all woman writers are blessed with the delicate sense of proportion of Jane Austen, that master miniaturist. In most instances the feminine privileging of the detail entails a dangerous blurring of the line between the principal and the incidental event, the main protagonist and the secondary characters" (21).

[165] Ibid., p. 59.

[166] Ibid.

Transferring the scandal of his secret engagement from his hair—and, it follows, from the piano that he buys as a surprise for Jane and the romance that he hopes to put out of the way of discovery—the character capitalizes on the failings of the novel's form to account for the fugitive objects and futile details that make up its textual body. What is at first taken as a richness of narrative description gets exposed as a necessary clue. The exaggerated presence of an object estranges its narrative function, so that the excessive detail distorts the reality it ostensibly intends to render. Like a wolf in sheep's clothing, so too the good detail—that which acts as a 'mainspring of plot'—oftentimes finds itself dressed as the bad.[167] How, then, might we separate narrative facts from rhetorical flourishes when they look so much alike?

Both Emma herself and *Emma*'s readers are caught up in attempting to fit the hair into a larger schema capacious enough to account for all those "insignificant notations" crammed into this seventh chapter, only to subsequently discover that the idea is not in the thing itself, but in an idea of the idea of the thing that is obfuscated by its all-too-detailed, and therefore convincingly credible, surface. This surface bears so many markers of depth and breadth that it almost begins to supply the very texture or quality of the content it shields. When it comes to plotters, a means of expressing interiority actually masks a mode of *masking* it. If previously we had excused Austen's oddly disheveled narration of the hair cut as an effort to produce a so-called reality effect, focusing on the "nonsymbolic stuff" that comprises what Ian Watt has notably called "formal realism,"[168] we may be surprised to finally discover that the joke is on us: what we had tried in vain to excuse as a descriptive scenario carried away with itself is now smugly flaunted as that crucial piece of evidence that was staring us in the face the entire time.[169]

Austen thus ingeniously disguises plotting as a piece of description in order to purposely confuse the aesthetic value of narrative description with the mimetic power of an omniscience dismantled, and omniscience knocked off its pedestal by a narrator who refuses to put that total-knowledge into practice. Is the haircut just a whim or a fancy, an exception to Frank's general air of gentlemanliness, or is it an all-important slip, exemplary of his trivial nature? In the scheme of the novel's plot, is the haircut only a reality effect, or does it shoulder the burden of the plot-significant clue? That the two questions are connected demonstrates the haircut's ability to stand in for the mechanisms of plottedness that the novel both employs and actively questions. We can never tell, in this moment, whether Frank Churchill is just another one of those silly "coxcombs" who irresponsibly toss caution to the wind—after all, hair today is gone tomorrow—or if he is a strategic plotter, actively driving the plot of the novel.

Hidden in Plain Sight

Picture, if you will, the looks on the faces of the uninitiated *Emma* reader or the incorrigible Austen skeptic when they hear a summary of *Emma*'s secret shadow-plot: a man rides to London "merely to have his hair cut," risks being seen as frivolous and vain, only to order a pianoforte for his secret fiancée. As soon as Jane Fairfax receives her new instrument, the object and its anonymous donor become the talk of the town—utterly transfixed, no one can seem to speak of, or indeed *see*, anything else:

---

[167] Schor, *Reading in Detail*, p. 21.

[168] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957). It is almost needless to summarize the concept of formal realism, so established is it as a concept in literary critical studies of the early novel. Suffice it to say, a thorough account of food, dress, weather, scenery, landscape, plants, materials, atmospheres, sounds, textures, etc. comprise, for Watt, the "minute but inappropriate" (122) details that, when added up, produced "an air of total authenticity" (32), so that these inconceivably tiny "little glimpses that emerge win us over completely to its reality" (97).

[169] Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things*, p. 9.

> Mrs. Cole was telling that she had been calling on Miss Bates, and as soon as she entered the room had been struck by the sight of a pianoforte—a very elegant looking instrument—not a grand, but a large-sized square pianoforte; and the substance of the story, the end of all the dialogue which ensued of surprize, and inquiry, and congratulations on her side, and explanations on Miss Bates's, was, that this pianoforte had arrived from Broadwood's the day before, to the great astonishment of both aunt and niece—entirely unexpected; that at first, by Miss Bates's account, Jane herself was quite at a loss, quite bewildered to think who could possibly have ordered it—but now, they were both perfectly satisfied that it could be from only one quarter;—of course it must be from Colonel Campbell. (*E* 168)

Prominently positioned in the middle of the room, the piano forcibly strikes Mrs. Cole with its conspicuous presence "as soon as she entered." Striking just the right note as a symbol of romantic fidelity, but discordant in its narrative function, well-suited as a gift for the melodiously inclined songbird, but brazenly risking exposure of the secret delight that this fair mistress of music no doubt enjoys, the piano elicits and even *risks* narrative for the mere pleasure of narrative. As Mr. Knightley remarks later: "the pianoforte! Ah! That was the act of a very, very young man, one too young to consider whether the inconvenience of it might not very much exceed the pleasure. A boyish scheme, indeed!" (*E* 350). And the cleverness of the piano's resonances within a symbolic structure of tokens and affections could hardly be passed over. For one, Frank cuts off locks of his hair in a curious reversal of the conventional trope of a woman giving her fiancée a clipped curl as a sentimental souvenir—the cut hair for a hair cut, as it were, in a brilliant syntactical inversion that changes the sense of the two words altogether. Oddly enough, it finally blends in by doing its level best to stand out, providing fodder for a polite conversation that nevertheless continually elides the true subject of its own discourse. Perhaps more a symptom of my own over-reading than Frank's over-plotting, it nonetheless seems worth remarking that the piano is not, in fact, "on the level": it teeters and totters much like Emma's own contemplation of Frank's haircut; in one scene Frank proclaims he has spent a large portion of an entire afternoon trying to fix Jane's new pianoforte, which is symbolically, because quite literally, off-kilter: "'I have not been working uninterruptedly,' he replied, 'I have been assisting Miss Fairfax in trying to make her instrument stand steadily, it was not quite firm; an unevenness in the floor, I believe. You see we have been wedging one leg with paper'" (*E* 189). If in the previous chapter metalepsis stood in part for the hierarchical divisions of knowledge both in the novel generally and in the sphere of literary characters specifically, then the piano further implicates the spatial dimensions of narrative by reminding us that not everyone is on the same level of understanding, that our comprehension of the plot, like Emma's, is "not quite firm" and standing balanced largely because it has been wedged with paper, with narratable material.

"I have not been working uninterruptedly." The mystery of the materializing piano is a metaphor for both Frank's and Austen's strategy. There is no telling, until the end of the novel, what Frank's hair could have been covering up. And yet, like the barometer that hangs on the wall of Madame Aubain's parlour, it lies in the open, willfully calling attention to itself as an emblem of the pure signifier, denoting (merely) reality and nothing more.[170] The image offers itself up to the purely democratic spectatorial gaze—anyone may look upon the meteorological apparatus and read (into) it exactly as they wish. Just as haircut stands between the aesthetic and the mimetic—confuses the two so we don't know which is which while it accomplishes both at once—the piano offers a metaphor for Frank and the narrator's masking disclosures, a telling strategy for telling nothing. What had made the hair stand out in *Emma*'s textual body was the disproportionate narrative attention these petty follicles incited. Description often risks teetering over into the realm of distraction, wherein readerly attention is directed away from the "context of the narrated event" toward the blatant

[170] "An old piano, standing beneath a barometer, was covered with a pyramid of old books and boxes. On either side of the yellow marble mantelpiece, in Louis XV style, stood a tapestry armchair. The clock represented a temple of Vesta; and the whole room smelled musty, as it was on a lower level than the garden." Gustave Flaubert, "A Simple Heart," *Three Tales* (New York: Penguin, 1961), p. 17.

interruption or manipulation of the novel's temporal progression.[171] Susan Stewart writes of the miniature, for instance, that novelistic digression "*blocks the reader's view*, toying with the hierarchy of narrative events. What counts and what doesn't count must be sorted."[172] Her choice of words could not have been more fitting, as it is exactly the carefully curated inconsequentiality of what might seem immediately obvious or "in the way" that works in Frank's favor. While it may be all too easy to assert that Frank travels an incredible distance to London as a cover for his mission, it is perhaps more accurate to say that the one concrete signifier, his hair, paves the way for another, the piano. Dashing off to the city to have his hair shorn, it would almost appear that somewhere in the bustling metropolis Frank has struck upon a superb bargain: he will exchange these most tiny and useless of things, strands of hair recently lopped and cropped, for a piano, the single impulse-purchase conceivably *too large to be hidden*.[173] What else can we do but think back to Stewart and exclaim, with an echo of her choice formulation, that it "blocks the reader's view"? By making the hidden clue even bigger, it goes somehow out of sight.[174]

Counterintuitively, Frank insistently courts narrative only to better curb it. If the narratable does the work of disguising plot in something that usually does not belong to it, then the pianoforte is another marvelous instance of the everyday object that, like Barthes's barometer, has usually been content to stand *in* the background without standing *for* anything specifically. Such objects are, quite simply, present. No sooner had the hair begun to niggle and gnaw at our oversensitive, trigger-happy instincts to put a readerly hermeneutics of suspicion into practice was the hair itself magically whisked away and transmuted into a piano. Narration can depict the playing of the piano with varying degrees of virtuosity—ranging from, for instance, the questionable merits of Mrs. Elton's "musical club" to the "extraordinary talents" of a Jane Fairfax—but never do we experience the vaguest sensation that the instrument provides any means for the

---

[171] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 30. The miniature encodes within it a genetic cipher of sorts for the novel's central mystery, a key to all mythologies that is quasi-impenetrable because it is so tightly and so neatly contained within the descriptive bout of hair. "Whatever strange things I said or did during that fortnight, you have now a key to" (*E* 345, my italics). This is what Stewart describes as the "immediacy" of the miniature: in containing an entirely condensed, and therefore nearly indiscernible, world nostalgically hearkening back through history, it offers a locus of spatial rather than temporal "transcendence" that "erases not only labor but causality and effect" (60). Miniatures can thus possess the power to induce in spectators a sort of irresistible wonderment, compelling us to fantasize about the secrets contained between those too-tiny folds that even descriptive detail could not fully capture in all of their proliferating specificity. In other words, the narrative's odd digression about Frank's haircut is striking not only because it distorts our sense of proportion—too much narrative space devoted to too trivial a phenomenon—but because it lodges the mystery of the novel in a symbol of secrecy. The inherent risk of dwelling in the space of the miniature is that our previous lack of contemplation of its unplumbed depths might open up to a misguided, and enormously misleading, sense of scale.

[172] Ibid., p. 30, my italics.

[173] It is something of a splendid coincidence that, in Stewart's account, London itself comes to signify the "spirit of place and commercialism," especially in light of Frank's own sudden journey there. For the paring of his hair signifies not only a displaced ambition to exchange symbol for symbol, but a degree of semiotic sovereignty that approximates the inner workings of plot itself. The piano, unlike the hair, reifies a more familiar reading of the realist detail, returning our hair-induced bewilderment back to a state of gentle absorption—the piano is a standard enough, and useful enough, object to dwell on at length. Thus the haircut separates the intrigue of his secret engagement and, importantly, provides the mechanisms by way to indulge in two methods of obviousness that induces obliviousness in anyone who presumes to read him. See Stewart, *On Longing,* p. 82.

[174] Or, as Barthes quotes from a Chinese proverb, "The darkest place…is always underneath the lamp." See *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 59.

novel playing *us*. Unlike the "freaks," "blots," "curls," and "hair" that had seemed so shiftily un-Austenian, the term "piano" has all the narrative legitimacy not only of something Austen's novels have traditionally given their due, but as a necessary skill of any accomplished woman by none other than the would-be "great proficient," Lady Catherine de Bourgh herself.[175] What a blow, then, to finally discover that Frank manipulates the grammar of the realist detail and its synecdochic representation of the whole through a keen awareness of an instrumental play of physical scale. How delightfully apt, too, that his management of the physically small and the large is made possible by the very object on which one *plays scales*?

The piano seems like a humorous take on the object that you could not hide if you tried—and though it is not a Broadwood grand (as is the one Colonel Brandon purchases for Marianne toward the end of *Sense and Sensibility*) it is nevertheless described as a "large-sized square pianoforté" (*E* 168). Some, Frank ventures, "might think [a piano] too large for Mrs. Bates's house" (*E* 170). The number of times the term "large" is attributed to the piano is certainly striking, and our mind's eye might soon summon a gargantuan Lewis Carroll-inflected image of a piano blown-up to the size of a small house, so many times is it said to dwarf the drawing-room that contains it. In point of fact, a piano is less likely to be hidden than it is to be the ideal hiding place. Tossing anachronism to the wind, one could think ahead those letters of transit belonging to two murdered German couriers ensconced in Sam's piano in *Casablanca* as an example of how a giant musical contraption could sit too much in the way for anyone to think to search it. There, as in *Emma*, the instrument is almost too substantial, paradoxically filling too much of our view to further attract our vision. Our contemplation of the scene depicted in the paragraph above is more likely to snag on the bewildered Miss Fairfax and the identity of the secret sender than on the piano's timely arrival from London during the same week that Frank had been seized by a "sudden freak" to take a trip there. The telling coincidence is ignored in favor of the empty gossip that surrounds the apparatus itself. If the obvious is the very thing that we accept without question, then assuming the air of the unmistakable or apparent is also the wiliest way to evade such questioning in the first place. Like those infamous letters of transit, such feats of manufactured false-obviousness comes to command all the authority of truth, for they "cannot be rescinded, not even questioned!" Such goes another version of the crucial paradox that lies at the heart of this chapter: in crowding our path, the piano ensures it no longer crosses our minds.

Trading in the miniscule for the massive, Frank further performs several feints to give rise to a baffling counterfiction that will then obscure the secret plot of promoting his secret romance. The piano, impossible to conceal because it is both colossal in its size and commodifiable as an object of public consumption, is transformed into its own version of the "obvious": not just readily observable, but placed almost obnoxiously in the way of our reading of, and the characters' entering, the Bates cottage. But this altered proportionality is perverse precisely because it paradoxically undermines our expectations of a secret as being monumental in its consequence but minuscule in its concealment. The smaller something is, we suppose, the easier it is to suppress. And yet the harnessing of extraneous detail through further excess, incomprehensible as a strategy to "the many," is nevertheless fully deployed by "the one." Here we might defer to Mr. Knightley, whose remark about the instrument hits the nail on the head precisely because it *misses the point*: "…the pianoforte! Ah! That was the act of a very, very young man, one too young to consider whether the inconvenience of it might not very much *exceed* the pleasure. A boyish scheme, indeed!" (*E* 350, my italics). Such a sense of excess makes up the stuff of narrative itself. In *Emma*, it is not silence that preserves the secret but speech itself. Frank's unprovoked garrulousness, his performance of semiotic play, his mode of elevating the detail or digression to the order of magnitude of the consequential, constitute not just the narratable, but narrative itself. Courting scrutiny and judgment in order to mask the actual courtship taking place, the piano is nevertheless superfluous, expressing a fundamentally perverse and purposeless whimsy to revel in narrative intrigue for nothing more than the sake of intrigue itself. Luxuriating in the sense of stunned wonderment that other guests experience in seeing the grand piano, which, like Jane herself, is

[175] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 128.

"very elegant looking," Frank creates an alibi to excuse an excessive action that cannot itself be folded into the structure of the narrative.

There is, then, a central paradox at play both in Austen and around Austen: just as the obvious is the thing that goes without saying, so too is stating the obvious a perfect way to ensure its perfect concealment. By hiding in plain sight, what is cast aside as a "quick succession of busy nothings" assumes both the form and function of the ruse itself.[176] Looking the plotter straight in the eye is often the best way of being wrongly led to look past his guilt. Too much text for such inconsequential "objects" as hair, the proportionality of narrative description is restored through the introduction of a piano that is immense enough to merit such ample discussion. In consolidating, and blurring the lines between, the irrelevant haircut and the even more unnecessary gift of the piano, Frank further refines his superbly strategic system of plotting. He not only conceals significance behind the appearance of insignificance (indeed, we should all know by now that "young people must have their whims"), the engagement behind a seemingly inexplicable trip to London, but is moreover able to almost pronounce the engagement through the exhibition of an instrument in public.

Outing the Outré

Why does the novel embed a bounded figure of omniscience within its diegesis, when omniscience itself is defined by its very lack of boundedness? Why does it naturalize omniscience as a ritualized part of realism itself, only to denaturalize and denude that showman-like display of knowledge as nothing more than its own fantasy of knowledge? What might the novel gain by ritually exposing the devices it has just as ritually embedded? The question of being no one or someone is narrated as the plot of *Emma*, and to start to question the motives of the plotter, the realist detail, and narration itself is to start to see—as in *Lady Audley's Secret*, *The Woman in White*, and *The Moonstone*—a meditation on the exquisite intensities of social and narrative presentation.

The other side of omniscience is not the absence of omniscience in the form of limited knowledge or limited communicativeness, but omniscience *embodied*. This confrontation of embodied and disembodied omniscience produces what Moretti in *The Way of the World* calls "internal logic of formal contradiction."[177] As we see, the plotter troubles the boundaries between narration, plot, and character, and that this troubling is not only necessary to narrative but literarlized within the plot itself. In other words, the formal mechanisms that feel to most belong to the world of literature—free indirect discourse, which Ferguson has called "the novel's only formal contribution"—figure heavily into the social world depicted in the plot. Those who can master the rules of the narrative game are also, not coincidentally, those who shape and structure the contours of the plot on the level of discourse. In the plotter's sly attempts to subject, direct, and essentially *overwrite* the novel's story, he at once foils the basic configuration of the narrative's formal control even while he allows it to flourish as a self-commentary on how formal acts bear the potential to metaphorize the workings of social interaction more generally.

Discussions of omniscience frequently revolve around issues of narration—who is speaking, what does the speaker know, what is the speaker's relationship to the characters subject to narration. Strangely enough, omniscience seldom attaches itself to characterological systems, as a measurement of the extent to which certain characters exercise a broad and incisive power of penetration and foresight into the plots swirling and unfurling around them. As such, questions regarding the hatching of narratable events themselves are often left to the wayside—who is responsible for a given narrative? Which individuals give rise to plot? What does each character know about the plot or plots in progress? These questions are infrequently asked, either because they seem synonymous with the unfolding of plot itself, or because psychological studies of character are less concerned with events than with the means by which externalized data conveys

[176] Austen, *Mansfield Park* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2012), p. 81.
[177] Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 6.

information about subtler, and more complex, interior vicissitudes. When characters have been described in terms of plot, critics have often deflated them into "flat" archetypes or narrative functions, thus conflating them with the role they play within the plot. This, however, ignores the remarkable ways in which characters can do plotting themselves, achieving depth and dimension through, rather than despite, their participation in intrigues, conspiracies, and schemes at hand in the novel. Indeed, for the characters in *Emma*, and for Emma herself, a knowledge of the plot—the secret engagements, romantic dalliances, flirtations, and serious affections swirling around in Highbury—becomes nothing short of a formal metaphor for the limits and possibilities of the self in the social world and a letting go of the "real evil" that is as simple, and as pernicious, as having "a disposition of to think a little too well of herself" (*E* 5). In other words, in Austen's novel and in other nineteenth-century counterparts, characters are figured by and through their consciousness of the narrative and the social as both contingent on the desire to plot, and to ignore function as a crucial component of characterization is to ignore the lives of the characters as they take shape in the structure of the novel as a figuration of their naïveté or knowledge in the world within the novel.

As in sensation fiction, the spaces in *Emma*'s narrative come to resemble the spheres of the social world, and the up-and-coming upstarts of the novel's story simultaneously figure, and become figures for, the allocation of narrative authority within the discourse itself. Instead of slyly submerging the artifice and arbitrariness of plotting by attempting to invent ever more ingenious ways of disguising its own fictionality, it is my contention that *Emma* revels in the strategies, feints, and disguises that make that fiction possible. In so doing, the novel lays hold of an immensely powerful for the burgeoning nineteenth-century realist novel: thereby owning up to and essentially exerting an ownership over even its most peculiarly formal elements. Just as the plotter throws us off his scent by airing out his plans in a deliberately public and legible manner, so too does the novel meditate on the conventions of fictional composition in the most immediately comprehensible forum: on and across the surface of the plot itself. In other words, if plotters can be understood as a class of characters relentlessly imbricated in the creation of the story-world that centers around their usually underhanded plots, narration is similarly implicated by its dependence on a plotter to generate plots whose exposure is both its ostensible object and its own self-erected obstacle. The plotter becomes the emblem of omniscient narration's willful sidesteppings, standing at the site at which the novel meditates, by way of its formal expression, on its strategies of disclosure and disavowal. The way in which the figure of the plotter has thus far escaped critical notice exemplifies its repressed but meaningful centrality within novelistic form as a sort of surreptitious meditation on, and exorcism of, the tensions and anxieties of fictionality itself, a way to reconcile the dual aims of the novel to attain coherence as both aesthetic and mimetic projects.

Boasting of a far-reaching clairvoyance so that, in hindsight, all of the novel's small tangents, deviances, and details can assume a certain degree of coherence, Frank consciously shores up the arbitrary, the obvious, and the staunchly *there* in support of his deceptive social schemes. Rather than refusing to participate in "the order of the notable"—a passive abstention from narration that becomes the ultimate safeguard of the undisclosed—Frank's insistent "indenturing" of the detail to an comprehensive counterfactual makes us inspect the very thing he wishes to sweep under the rug. Such an explicit discussion of the haircut more successfully obfuscates the true nature of its relationship to both Frank and to the piano that suddenly arrives at the Bates cottage out of nowhere. In changing the signification of these object-rooted notations, he creates significance where earlier there was only triviality, opacity where previously there was transparency, "the beauty of truth and sincerity" given way to "gallantry and trick" (*E* 273). Paradoxically, it is precisely because Frank permits an escape from the rigid supervisory work of narration that secures the strength of the narrative itself. Put another way, if the narrative's display of omniscience finds itself weakened in this moment of active plotting, it takes place in the service of the broader scheme: to enlarge and ensure the surprising denouement of the novel's plot writ large.

It comes as something of a surprise when Emma catches Frank Churchill quite obviously inspecting Jane from across a room during the Coles's party:

> The rest of the gentlemen being now in the room, Emma found herself obliged to turn from him for a few minutes, and listen to Mr. Cole. When Mr. Cole had moved away, and her attention could be restored as before, she saw Frank Churchill looking intently across the room at Miss Fairfax, who was sitting exactly opposite.
>
> "What is the matter?" said she.
>
> He started. "Thank you for rousing me," he replied. "I believe I have been very rude; but really Miss Fairfax has done her hair in so odd a way—so very odd a way—that I cannot keep my eyes from her. I never saw any thing so outrée!—Those curls!—This must be a fancy of her own. I see nobody else looking like her!—I must go and ask her whether it is an Irish fashion. Shall I?—Yes, I will—I declare I will—and you shall see how she takes it;—whether she colours."
>
> He was gone immediately; and Emma soon saw him standing before Miss Fairfax, and talking to her; but as to its effect on the young lady, as he had improvidently placed himself exactly between them, exactly in front of Miss Fairfax, she could absolutely distinguish nothing. (*E* 174)

All of Frank's guilt is displaced onto an unwitting third party—in this case, his rightful disgrace is instead further denaturalized and externalized, conferred onto a Jane Fairfax whose "outré curls" mark her out as both the unhappy receiver of our and Emma's suspicions and as the would-be governess whose state of financial dependence is recast as a deviance of style excused, or cruelly laughed off, as a "fancy of her own." Perhaps more dazzling a move than simply excusing, by foregrounding, his predilection for those idiosyncratic freaks and fancies blanketed under the term "fashion," this act of such obvious displacement ensures it can only be interpreted as *anything but*. Indeed, Frank's "improvident" placement of his body "exactly between" Emma and Jane allows him to rebuff the shame of his own confidently-wielded vanity and to additionally manipulate the positioning of his physical form in just such a way as to induce the blindness of Emma's visual, and our own critical, faculties. Austen goes to the trouble of using three descriptions of Frank's improvident (for us, though deliberate for him) stance: he is sitting "exactly opposite" Miss Fairfax, placed "*exactly* between them, *exactly* in front of Miss Fairfax." Is there need for a reiteration of "exactly"? The second and third appearances of the word "exactly" in fact works to throw this very exactness into question, as if the more exact Frank's position the less exact the narrator in positioning him in relation to both the two women and to the character's secret design. Is Frank's position really as improvident as we are made to believe? Is he really so indifferent? And why, more importantly, has exactness become necessary in a seemingly unnecessary tangent on Jane's outré curls? Seeing Emma seeing nothing, we can distinguish little else but the exquisite manner in which Frank's body, unlike so many others, gets in our (but never his own) way.

This passing of shame from Frank to Jane seems particularly apt within the economy of the realist novel. If narrative discourse exhibits an unremitting self-consciousness about its own adherence to the formal conventions of plot-construction that, taken collectively, constitute nothing more than an arbitrary range of acceptable deviations from those conventions. "In the beginning, it was the representative intention that motivated the convention. At the end, the awareness of the illusion subverts the convention and motivates an effort to break away from every paradigm. The questions of the limits and perhaps of the exhaustion of the metamorphoses of plot stem from this reversal."[178] This is a self-consciousness that, as I began to discuss in the preceding chapter, the plotter shares and, in doubling, serves as the novel's form of analysis and disavowal. Just as the haircut, outré curls, and piano are willfully flaunted in order to better hide their plot significance, so too are their attendant plot conventions exposed so as to further naturalize them as conventions of realism itself.

Supposing that plot is always self-reflexive, reflecting on the conditions of its own making, and that "to narrate a story is already to 'reflect upon' the event narrated," we might then claim that the plotter emerges as a figure of that self-reflexivity encoded into the very story that that plot is telling us about the

[178] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 2, p. 14.

artifice suffusing its own construction.[179] This occurs because plotters occupy that space where omniscience breaks down so that the plot can get built up. The plotters that I have focused on in the previous chapter—Lady Audley, Count Fosco, Sir Percival Glyde—share with Frank Churchill a metaleptic awareness of the narrativization of social life and the sociology of narrative form. Various structures endemic to fiction assert their own fictionality and, in letting us peer behind the curtain to catch a glimpse of usually-invisible narrative mechanisms at work, begin to theorize themselves in deeply self-conscious and nuanced ways. As such, these characters provide a theory of the novel with a vital locus of self-reflexivity, a point at which that novel seems to actively meditate on the circumstances and contrivances of its own techniques. Exposing an inside view both of where and how the novel generates its plot as discourse, the plotter gets simultaneously endowed with a self-consciousness within the story form of the novel; they are frequently individuals who most express and energize narrative desire, harboring secrets, devising schemes, and otherwise attempting to invest in the activity of plotting their hopes for a different life. Having internalized the mechanisms of discourse so well so as to fly in the face of the rules, plotters become agents posing as mere actants, exposing the hidden rules of plotting.

Because the plotter-as-villain has generally been dismissed by critical studies either as a figure of diabolical evil too one-dimensional to drive a full-bodied analysis of literary character or else, on the flip side, as an actantial feature of the plot, the open secret of narrative's public avowal of its own plottedness has slipped below our notice. In order for the plotter to work as he should, his plot must take on some of the discursive potency of discourse itself: the animating duel, in order to work as a story, must take place on the field of discourse. This discourse, we might then say, is not just the setting, but the latent content of the novel itself as its component parts resolves their internal inconsistencies in and through the plot. This is not, finally, to play a meaningless game of "spot the plotter," assigning narrative responsibility where it might lie and then ourselves lying back, critical tasks completed. Instead, orienting a reading of nineteenth-century novels around the figure of the plotter lays bare the mechanisms by which a literary character is roused into being precisely when it becomes most conscious of the narrative apparatus in which it functions and into which it figures, achieving a synthesis between function and functionary, action and agent, plot and role—this consciousness of the narrative forms that contain it (story and discourse, omniscience, free indirect discourse, metalepsis, montage, etc.) allows us to begin to see that literary forms are not impossible figurations of rhetorical acts, fundamentally untethered from an experience of a reality outside the pages of the text. They are, rather, homologous with those foundational configurations of social interaction—gossip, inheritance, self-presentation, shame, betrayal, desire, despair—that contribute most profoundly to the rending experience of narrative outside narrative, moments where life becomes an intolerable combination of the surreal and the real and begins to resemble, at last, what might be called the fictional.

Is Emma finally correct, then, in deciding "Plain dealing was always best" (*E* 268)? All we know is that, all too late, we find it possible to apprehend the novel's dazzlingly subversive yet deviously subtle strokes of cutting—or exorcising—the content of its secret plots from the form of its narration. The secrecy of the plotter's embeddedness in the novel is the key to omniscient narration's simultaneous inexhaustibility—it knows all—and its fallability, its sophistication and embarrassment. The plot of every novel can thus be said to narrate the plot of its own concealment. For Emma, "there was something in the name, in the idea of Mr. Frank Churchill, that always interested her" (*E* 94). It is only in that rush of understanding form's secret spoken content that we too come to appreciate the unrivaled importance of being, for lack of a better word, *frank*.

[179] Ibid., p. 61.

CHAPTER THREE

Great Expectations and the Melancholy of Form

"No, I am ignorant and backward*, Joe."*
—Pip, Great Expectations

"Discontented with your present state…you may wish to be able to go backward…"
—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on the Origins of Inequality Among Men

"Only by turning back on itself does the ego acquire the status of a perceptual object…"
—Judith Butler

On Being Backward

In a scene as famous for its fantastic decaying objects—a "once white, now yellow" silk-stocking, trodden ragged, half-packed trunks with a scattering of dresses around them, clocks stopped at twenty minutes to nine, the figure of a woman of "waxwork and skeleton" that sits immobile, almost corpse-like, amidst this confused heap—as for its role in initiating the pairing of early shame and early love that Pip comes to feel for Estella, Pip first sets foot in Satis House.[180] Though the place is "so new…so strange, and so fine—and melancholy," and though he feels he "can't play right now" despite Miss Havisham's insistence that he do so, Pip sits down to a game of beggar my neighbor (*GE* 58). Before the first game is played out, he has committed several unforgiveable offenses: called the knaves, Jacks, misdealt the next hand, been reprimanded for his "coarse hands" and "thick boots," and declared by Estella outright to be a "stupid, clumsy laboring-boy" (*GE* 59). The slow creep of shame comes in the form of an alienation from that "indifferent pair" of "vulgar appendages": "I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair," he writes (*GE* 61). And again, later, another close examination of those shameful "accessories": "They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now…" (*GE* 61). Once merely limbs like any other, the dirt-streaked hands are elevated into visibility by Pip's shameful awareness that they only deserve getting looked at because they are inordinately below-par, giving Pip's lack of gentility away as easily as a stain that "She gave me a triumphant glance in passing me, as if she rejoiced that my hands were so coarse and my boots were so thick" (*GE* 63). An array of ugly feelings rise to the surface as our protagonist wishes that Joe had been rather more genteely brought up, so that he could have been too: "I took the opportunity of being alone in the court-yard, to look at my coarse hands and my common boots…I determined to ask Joe why he had ever taught me to call those picture-cards, Jacks, which ought to be called knaves. I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too" (*GE* 61).

[180] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (New York: Penguin, 2002), p. 58. Hereafter cited in-text as *GE*.

Already there exists a conflation between Pip's yearning for social advancement as a gentleman and a time-bound mode of regret that has been newly awakened at that precise moment.

After this incident of the Knaves, Pip returns to his sister's comparatively humble home, of which he has become suddenly and irrevocably embarrassed. "'He cannot go back', Hoggart writes…'with one part of himself he does not want to go back to a homeliness which was often narrow: with another part he longs for the membership he has lost, 'he pines for some nameless Eden where he never was'."[181] Indeed, though Pip might try, his previous conception of home has been shattered. Though it had never been "a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper," still "Joe had sanctified it, and [he] had believed in it" (*GE* 104). Pip reflects nostalgically on this lost faith: "I had believed in the best parlour as a most elegant saloon; I had believed in the front door, as a mysterious portal of the Temple of State whose solemn opening was attended with a sacrifice of roast fowls; I had believed in the kitchen as a chaste though not magnificent apartment; I had believed in the forge as the flowing road to manhood and independence." Now, once shattered, that illusion of home has been stained, such that "Within a single year, all this was changed. Now it was all coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account" (*GE* 104).

When asked by the insufferable Pumblechook about the visit, Pip makes up a fantastical story about veal cutlets, golden carriages, black velvet-lined seats, games of flags, and cupboards stuffed with pistols and pills and jams, which his audience eagerly gobbles up. But, later, he confesses to Joe that it had all been lies, saying remorsefully, "I wish you hadn't taught me to call Knaves at cards, Jacks; and I wish my boots weren't so thick nor my hands so coarse" (*GE* 69). And then I told Joe that I felt very miserable, and that I hadn't been able to explain myself to Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook who were so rude to me, and that there had been a beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's who was dreadfully proud, and that she had said I was common, and that I knew I was common, and that I wished I was not common, and that the lies had come of it somehow, though I didn't know how…I am ignorant and *backward*, Joe" (*GE* 69). It is this oft-repeated sensation of being "ignorant and backward" that I will focus on here, constellating that longing with plot's peculiar power to go back and forth in time. As Paul Ricoeur observes, this form of time-travel traverses and transcends the usual obstacles attendant to the limits of physical embodiment and epistemological constraints of a present-tense perception: "The narrator may walk in step with the characters, making the present of narration coincide with his or her own present, and thereby accepting the limits and lack of knowledge imposed by this perspective. Or, on the contrary, the narrator may move forward or backward, considering the present from the point of view of the anticipation of a remembered past or as the past memory of an anticipated future, etc."[182] A narrative device available to, and indeed definitive of, the structure of fictional composition, this ability to simultaneously navigate and contort the otherwise immutable chronologies of historical reality lies at the core of the novel's design.

For what Pip desires is not merely to no longer be backward—to assimilate, to become a gentleman, to deserve Estella—but to go backwards and erase the very sensation of backwardness itself. Of course, having been the wrong way from the very outset, Pip can only continue to go the wrong way, psychically throwing himself back into his past, reliving it as if starting over meant starting from the beginning, rather than wiping the slate clean and moving on. The present is continually constructed as a comparative surpassing of—or regressing into—an ever-looming history ceaselessly revivified, an anxiety that never recedes into the background: "I fancied, as I looked at her, that I slipped hopelessly back into the coarse and common boy again. The sense of distance and disparity that came upon me, and the inaccessibility that came about her!" (*GE* 232). Plotting thereby exposes the structures of feeling and forms of psychic management captured through form, through certain characters' knowledge of the unmendable fracture between a hoped-for effect and an unerasable cause. Orlick's *ressentiment*, Miss Havisham's interrupted wedding, and Pip's sudden and shameful awareness of his "indifferent" pair of coarse hands: these literary characters' dreams of undoing remembered moments of shame through future-oriented action exists in contradistinction to the temporal

[181] Quoted in Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good*, p. 59.

[182] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 94.

privilege of novelistic form to move backwards and forwards in time. It is almost as if, in entertaining the plots and plans that may yet come to pass, these figures taste the extra-temporalization of a novel form whose mistakes can always be glossed over after the fact, made to seem coherent where there was previously none to be had.

As I have explored in previous chapters, the figure of the plotter carries with it not just a narrative function but a social content as well, since the formal nature of the plotter reveals an equivalent range of impulses, desires, and struggles in the world. One of the secret conduits between form and content, and endowed with a startling sense of intentionality that imposes sense on both, the plotter offers an instance through which the novel reflects on its own making. It alerts us, in other words, to particular social and affective problems inscribed into the formal and representational strategies that constitute the novel as a form—the glaring paradox that I begin with is, of course, the scapegoating of the plotter in order to secure novelistic closure or, as Miss Prism once proclaimed, "The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means."[183] Capable of seeing and supervising plot's structure as it unfolds, the plotter can then decide how to act in a deliberate way, taking into account a knowledge of the future, of the plot, that other characters cannot yet comprehend or command. They witness a history unfolding and can only do what the novel's form dictates. Hence, both Miss Havisham and Magwitch's plots must fail in order to secure the ending of the narrative writ large; their failure is what enables the novel's triumph *over* failure, or at least over charges of incoherence or disunity. It may be easy enough to read the plotter's failure as another unfortunate side-effect of narrative closure, or else as the consequence of a closure that gives the entire enterprise away as blatantly reality-flouting. But if we resist this initial impulse to point out plot's un-realities, we can instead interpret the plotter's eventual scapegoating as a more complex formal representation of the difficulties of overcoming certain structural or formal hurdles that nevertheless keep both social and narrative systems going.

Although their plots seek to project or to anticipate events yet-to-come, plotters can nonetheless never alter or remove the sites of original trauma, condemned to a linear chronology of time. Indispensable to the plot, these characters' futile investment in the recuperative powers of scheming comes to represent narrative's melancholic meditations on form itself as a utopia of fulfilled desires and successful incorporation impossible outside the confines of the text. Holding onto this unchanging past instead of relinquishing it to the past means that at some point such individuals will no longer be able to hold up under the burden of their fantasies of undoing that which has already been done. Melancholy, "cruel optimism," shame: theories of these structures of feeling and of form are governed by a critical sense of anachrony, a reliance on causal fallacies and temporal logics that defy the constraints of a linearized chronology. In what follows, I will argue that these constraints are instantiated in and become illuminated by the plotter whose desire for plot operates, finally, at cross-purposes with the novel's need to punish them and to impose aesthetic closure. Such moments of closure have often been read as novelistic capitulations to formal convention at the expense of realistic representation—the novel's success at imposing closure only recapitulates its failure to merge with "the real." Contrary to these claims, I will argue in what follows that the consciousness, intentionality, and knowledge of literary character in relation to the discursive plot allows us to discern that way in which affects and forms of impoverishment are scripted into the very dynamics of a novelistic form attempting to reconcile diegetic with mimetic conventions. Rather than reading closure as the novel's exposure of its fictional artifice, it might instead more accurately represent a meditation on the telling openness of experiences of social inadequacy, *ressentiment*, and micro-traumas that never seem to arrive at any form of resolution.

Of course, these examples seem wholly irreconcilable with the fictive temporalities of novelistic discourse. As Cynthia Chase and Jonathan Culler have argued, fictional plotting often relies on a relationship between cause and effect that challenges the time-bound nature of "the real," whereby the past is not the actual cause of an event, but "an effect of its effects," an event later appended to ensure narrative and structural coherence. In Culler's words, while narrative postulates "the priority of events to the discourse which reports or presents them," narrative simultaneously falls often and oddly into the trap of presenting

[183] Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, p. 273.

events "not as givens but as the products of discursive forces or requirements."[184] For instance, Daniel Deronda's Jewishness is not an origin point but a genealogical fact added late in the story in order to impose a line of design through the character's history. Facts, tacked on after the fact, confirm the novel's privilege to append, revise, alter, or otherwise torque historical chronologies to suit its own design. Culler continues to point out the double bind of narrative's two competing logics: "One logic assumes the primacy of events; the other treats the events as the products of meanings. One could argue that every narrative operates according to this double logic, presenting its plot as a sequence of events which is prior to and independent of the given perspective on these events, and, at the same time, suggesting by its implicit claims to significance that these events are justified by their appropriateness to a thematic structure."[185] Here we may recognize that the aesthetic necessity of certain causal events goes against the grain of its thematic requisites. And as it pulls off sly shifts and switches between causes and effects, beginnings and endings, narrative finds itself in the curious position of violating the temporal logic of the realist experience it seeks to represent. History is no longer reconcilable with story and, in the hands of plot, chronological immutability turns into endless alterability. Delusions of possible revision obscure for the plotter the solidity of succession, and time gets imagined into the future as fluidly moving backwards, where causes are only effects of effects and subject always to the consequences of one's actions in the present moment. What is, for the novel, a causal fallacy situated at the theoretical center of the field of narratology becomes, for the plotter, an experience of grief that is stuck in a rut that takes on the exact structure of that logical fallacy.

This chapter looks at *Great Expectations*, and especially the tension between the novel's style of plotting and the structure of plotting made available within the psychic or social lives of literary characters. Those who rely on the act of plotting in this novel resort to forms of magical thinking, optimistic though finally irrational reliance on schemes projected into the future in an attempt to revise, rewrite, or somehow recuperate the past—it is a hope founded in the crevice or crack between story and discourse, between being a narrator and being a character. Such strategies operate in contradistinction to deconstructive narratologies that show how novelistic traversals of past, present, and future work in related but finally incommensurable ways to the kind of plotting that happens in life. As I will explore in more detail in what follows, Pip's yearning for social assimilation takes on a similar structure of impossible causality, for assimilation spells out a condition that extends beyond mere belonging or an occupation of an unimpeachable social position, but more closely masks a desire to erase or write over a history of dispossession prior to that assimilation, the lingering legacy of exclusion that by definition renders that assimilation necessary. Seen from the perspective of their inverted temporal orientations, the desire for assimilation becomes a desire for analepsis, an anachrony of one's socially constituted identity that hopes to write backwards as much as it seeks to move onward (and upward). When characters long to effect catharsis through plotting, they are longing—in essence—for the novel as a form. For these individuals, to plot is to revel in the hope of a fictional temporality that comes asymptotically close to the reality toward which it eternally inches and into which it aches to disappear.

By way of a conclusion, I will discuss how this desire to escape into—and meld with—reality renders the plotter a figure for the realist novel's own rickety negotiation with its own status as fiction. Indeed, seen this way, the novel's exercise of its power constitutes simultaneously an instance of giving it up, just as the plotter's desire for assimilation persists, always in spite of his melancholic knowledge that assimilation has been compromised the moment it is seen as necessary. Like the logic of fetishism so succinctly and so exquisitely encapsulated by Octave Mannoni's famous statement, "*je sais bien, mais quand-même*," the plotter's planning for the closure that never finally arrives seems most potently mirrored in the novel form whose active impositions of closure seem only to further underscore that closure's mirage-like essence, the

[184] Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 172. See especially chapter 9, "Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative," pp. 169-87.
[185] Ibid., p. 178.

infrequency and incredulity that attends the neat little phrase, "happily ever after."[186] Living out a homologous set of frustrated desires, the plotter's frustration acts as a finishing touch to a novelistic structure imperfect in its very state of perfection—like Cathy Caruth's formulation of trauma, in which a history "can only be grasped in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence," the novel's acknowledgement of its temporal privileges intensifies the plight of a realist enterprise whose "truth is bound up with its crisis of truth."[187] The plotter, I hope to demonstrate, offers a figuration of how truth and crisis become entwined and harnessed by narrative as a formal technique of self and social commentary.

"I could never, never, never, undo what I had done"

On a "stormy and wet, stormy and wet" evening, a week after his twenty-third birthday, we see Pip reading by lamplight in his top-floor chambers in Garden-court. Smothered by a foreboding air of menace, the scene is preceded by an ill-favored disclaimer by the narrating, older Pip, that we would be "pass[ing] on, unhindered, to the event that had impended over me longer yet; the event that had begun to be prepared for, before I knew that the world held Estella" (*GE* 330). The close of the previous chapter had ended with an ominous pronouncement that, as in the Eastern story of a sultan sleeping just below a heavy slab who, severing the rope holding it in place with a sharpened axe, is crushed by the ceiling crashing down upon him, so too in Pip's case had "all the work, near and afar, that tended to the end" been accomplished, such that "in an instant the blow was struck, and the roof of my stronghold dropped upon me." Several lengthy paragraphs then proceed before our enlightenment, before we are let in on the secret that the younger Pip could no sooner suspect, and the older Pip would no sooner disclose: that the convict from the marshes has been his secret benefactor all along. But still these paragraphs go on, their lengthy descriptions further elongating the shadows bleakly cast over his, and our, scene of reading, as the narrator speaks endlessly of "mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets," "gloomy accounts…of shipwreck and death," "violent blasts of rain" and "rages of wind." Amidst this pervasive darkness, still no illumination of any kind: the narrator describes how the few lights still flickering abruptly falter and fade rather than on what we now know to be Pip's soon-to-be diminished expectations, lingering over an account of how "the lamps in the court were blown out, and the lamps on the bridges and the shore were shuddering, and that the coal fires in barges on the river were being carried away before the wind like red-hot splashes in the rain" (*GE* 309).

All of this, of course, prefigures Abel Magwitch's sudden reappearance, on the top-floor landing and in the novel, and the stunning revelation that Pip's mysterious benefactor was none other than the convict on the marshes from the opening scene rather than Miss Havisham. The enshrouding darkness of the narration now becomes nothing short of enlightening, as the narrator acknowledges his defining lack of knowledge—"I did not know him"—and compensates for this state of ignorance with an all-too-knowing remembrance of

---

[186] See Mannoni, "*Je sais bien, mais quand-même…*", *Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou l'autre scène* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), pp. 9-33.

[187] Quoted in Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 4. See especially the introduction. See also Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," "Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Trauma," ed. Cathy Caruth, Special Issue *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture*, Vol. 48 (Spring 1991). "The nature of the confessional narrative is to offer an unfolding allegory of the temporality of all language. It presents an example of the collapse of the temporal distance in the act of self-narration. As the self of the past catches up with the self of the present, and as narrated time threatens to coincide with the time of narrative, a crisis beckons. In the case of memory, this crisis would happen regardless of the conspiracy of moral and temporal distance of confession. When narrated time catches up with the time of the narrative, there is nothing left to remember but memory itself, and nothing left to write about but the act of writing." See Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction, and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 64.

how the obscuring gloom of that particular evening corresponded to the shady revelations that had finally come to light. "All the truth of my position came flashing on me; and its disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds, rushed in in such a multitude that I was borne down by them and had to struggle for every breath I drew" (*GE* 336). It is a small moment of revision, an instance where the narrator's perspective from a moment after the events recounted allows him to set up a fitting symmetry between momentous disclosure and portentous atmosphere, and thus to set us up for as jarring a narrative climax as possible. Many such instances occur in the first-person retrospective narrative, moments where the older, narrating Pip lets us in on a glimmer of something yet to come, information that the younger Pip does not know will signify: "I could have had no foresight then…" (*GE* 81). Enacting the temporal logics of the novel's plotting which, by the magic of hindsight, such exemplary examples of what Genette has termed analepsis and prolepsis of the narrator's revisionary authority moves backwards and forwards through time with extraordinary ease.

In this light, the novel's enchantment of unyielding temporal structures such that they bend to the sway of design rather than confirm the unchangeability of fate seems a utopian power. Indeed, Christian Metz claims that one of the tasks of narrative is to "invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme."[188] Genette uses the term "narrative anachronies" to refer to the "various types of discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative."[189] But instead of bending the mode of representation, the discourse, to suit the time of the represented, plotters attempt to live out a form of narrative time in their relation to the time of the story. Plotting, I am therefore contending, expects subjective anticipations of the present from the past to offer a form of revisionary history that can only exist within the forms of realist fiction. "Thus fiction unexpectedly—and, I think, unintentionally—points to its own status as purely verbal artifice by the ways in which it demonstrates the persistence of significant structures in modern life."[190]

To think of Orlick is to remember, for instance, that the sense of being a literary character is always accompanied by a kind of degraded status compared to the forms of narration standing always at a remove—and at a height—in relation to that character. For Pip's slouching, surly double and rival, being a character in someone else's plot (the novel is, after all, narrated in retrospect by the grown Pip, and named after "great expectations" which will never be Orlick's) seems at once a formal representation and a thematic recapitulation of his experience of entrenched *ressentiment*: "You cost me that place. You did…You did that, and that would be enough, without more. How dared you come betwixt me and a young woman I liked?...(*GE* 419). It was you as always give Old Orlick a bad name to her…You was favoured, and [Old Orlick] was bulled and beat. Old Orlick bullied and beat, eh? Now you pays for it" (*GE* 421). Perpetually thwarted as a subject within the structure of someone else's story, Orlick's significant awareness of his own subordination seems both cause and effect of his eventual punishment in the novel by its mechanisms of closure—by harming Mrs. Joe and attempting to murder Pip, Orlick moves the plot forward yet guarantees his own expulsion from it, and its attendant social order. If, as Max Scheler puts it, *ressentiment* manifests as "an incurable, persistent feeling of hating and despising which occurs in certain individuals and groups…tak[ing] root in equally incurable *impotencies* or weaknesses that those subjects constantly suffer from," then Orlick's feelings of thwartedness emerge through his self-conscious subordination in both *Great Expectations*'s story and in its discourse.[191] Most notably, feelings of *ressentiment* are "irritated by the *unattainability* of positive values that others represent"—it is as if this character recognizes the impossibility of becoming one with narration, excluded from the circle of power to which Pip eventually advances in narrating and writing *Great Expectations*.[192] Resentment borne of social inadequacy or class discrimination becomes,

---

[188] Quoted in Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 33. See also Metz, *Film Language*, p. 18.

[189] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 36.

[190] Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), p. 65-6.

[191] Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007), p. 6.

[192] Ibid., p. 7.

thus, a marker of ontological insufficiency, an always-already unachievable heights to which the individual in question hopes against hope to ascend. Recall Pip's prison when Orlick captures him: "I made out that I was fastened to a stout perpendicular ladder a few inches from the wall—a fixture there—the means of ascent to the loft above" (*GE* 418). Binding his captive to a ladder that almost marks again a kind of formal metalepsis that takes an analogue in upward social mobility, Orlick's response to Pip's cry—"Unbind me. Let me go!"—seems altogether too appropriate: "'Ah!' [Orlick] returned, '*I*'ll let you go. I'll let you go to the moon, I'll let you go to the stars. All in good time" (*GE* 418). To know you suffer from *ressentiment* doesn't undo the fact of it, and it certainly does not undo Orlick's function within the plot to both acknowledge the resentment that drives him and to be completely consumed by it, in order to further the plot against Pip and the murder of Mrs. Joe.

Rather than assigning one character in *Great Expectations* the responsibility of being the novel's plotter in an ad-hoc game of "Spot the Plotter," the very positioning of literary characters within a complex matrix of awareness of the story-level plot exposes a subtle mode of characterization, wherein discursive requirements of a literary character's functionality exposes individuals' psychic negotiation with (what they know to be) the immutable systemic and temporal structures underpinning experiences of trauma, mourning, and loss. Because the plotter stands at a strange remove from the literary character that generally secures the epistemological advantage of a narration that does not suffer from similar constraints in knowledge, the figure helpfully straddles the thematic content of the novel and the formal repackaging of those contents. In other words, characterization of individuals who plot are always fraught with a certain level of implication with both the strategic operations of the novel on the formal level and the deliberate management of their psychic lives on the social level. When these levels contradict one another—when, in other words, the plotter seems psychically undone by the plots meant actively to do something for them—we can understand both something about the novel form and about the paradoxes endemic to such desires as social assimilation, revenge, and *ressentiment*.

Theories of compromised expectation, subjectivity, and attachment—Anne Cheng's notion of the melancholy of race, Lauren Berlant's formulation of "cruel optimism," and Jean Laplanche's reformulations of Freudian mourning through the framework of temporality—have explored how the affects that emerge from the dissonance between a content of attachment and a form of attachment are already encoded into the dynamics and structures of plotting. For many of the characters in *Great Expectations*, the object or state of being so desperately and indefatigably sought after seems to stand in the way of their development—these moments of plotting yield damaging psychic results for the individuals in question, yet sustain the progress of narration motion more generally by furthering the plot. Here, then, the very institution of plotting offers us something like an insight into the literariness of a novelistic enterprise that requires its own anachornies to capture the thwarted temporalities of thwarted desire.

When Berlant, for instance, argues that certain attachments exceed the "inconvenient or tragic" and become cruel, she articulates a difference between an attachment to contents and quite a different inability to relinquish a *form*: "What is cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have *x* in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object or scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the *content* of the attachment, the continuity of the form of it provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world."[193] When we consider that these punishing forms of endurance or proximity of threatening or damaging emerge organically when we understand literary character in relation to functional demands of its role in a narrative discourse and its own story-level desires, we can begin to grasp the manner in which structural or systemic negotiations takes place in the dual commitments of narrative to plot, on the one hand, and to character, on the other. If the novel scapegoats the plotter, in other words, to guarantee its own coherence and closure, this scapegoating might well do more than merely enact one of the instances where the novel fails to capture reality, offering instead a nuanced self-commentary on how the

[193] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 24.

novel necessitates such negotiations for the purposes of its plot: "In short, the novel employs a form of scapegoating, the arbitrary assigning to an individual of responsibility that should properly be seen as systemic."[194] For, as we know well by now, only bad forms of mourning and hanging onto that which has been shown to be harmful or degraded can generate the kinds of misplaced and frustrated actions that incite narrative into being. The enticing thing about attachments or attractions—however fruitless—is that they seem to confer a kind of agency onto the represented individual even as they recapitulate his or her inability to locate a more productive, and thus unnarratable, outlet for mourning.

The dual concepts of forms of plot and forms of subject-constituting grief, both of which rely on a sense of what Jean Laplanche has described as "afterwardsness" (Freud's concept of [*Nachträglichkeit*]). Such theories of attachment are significant, for not only do they allow us to more thoroughly articulate the underlying desires that drive the act of plotting, they also demonstrate that novelistic depictions of loss, mourning, and grief can be understood as problems of temporalization and, it follows, also problems of emplotment that get simultaneously structured through and subverted by the plotter. For these plotters, we can see that the act of knowing or of controlling the plot nevertheless cannot change the difficult fact that is known. This is the particular and excruciating impasse of those who cannot act on what they know or, rather, those whose actions diverge fundamentally from the end that those actions are meant to achieve. Note, as an example, the following exchange between Pip and Biddy:

> "Do you want to be a gentleman, to spite her or to gain her over?" Biddy quietly asked me, after a pause.
>
> "I don't know," I moodily answered.
>
> "Because, if it is to spite her," Biddy pursued, "I should think—but you know best—that might be better and more independently done by caring nothing for her words. And if it is to gain her over, I should think—but you know best—she was not worth gaining over."
>
> Exactly what I myself had thought, many times. Exactly what was perfectly manifest to me at the moment. But how could I, a poor dazed village lad, avoid that wonderful inconsistency into which the best and wisest of men fall every day? (*GE* 126)

Knowing the difference between "gaining over" and "spiting" Estella does not change the thing that is known, that this "wonderful inconsistency" sustains a damage that should be forgotten, thus presenting a theory of social assimilation capacious enough to grapple with the central paradox of assimilation: no matter how much of a gentleman Pip becomes, he can nevertheless never change the fact that he has not always been a gentleman. Again, this is the paradox of assimilation more generally, where the attempt to assimilate already implies assimilation's absence. This resembles the loop by which Freud, Butler, Puckett, and others have described the constitution of the ego, wherein "The subject, in other words, emerges here as the story of its own development; it *is* its own story."[195] Or, as Butler puts it:

> The story by which subjection is told is, inevitably, circular, presupposing the very subject for which it seeks to give an account. On the one hand, the subject can refer to its own genesis only by taking a third-person perspective on itself, that is, by dispossessing its own perspective in the act of narrating its genesis. On the other hand, the narration of how the subject is constituted presupposes that the constitution has already taken place, and thus arrives after the fact. The subject loses itself to tell the story of itself, but in telling the story of itself seeks to give an account of what the narration function has already made plain. What does it mean, then, that the subject, defending by some as a presupposition of agency, is also understood to be an *effect* of subjection?...A power *exerted* on a

[194] Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good*, p. 87.

[195] Puckett, *Bad Form*, p. 65.

> subject, subjection is nevertheless a power *assumed by* the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming.[196]

Necessary to a novel that not only tells but depends upon the bad mourning of plotting, the inadequate coping strategy of always laboring, hoping, longing to get back some quality of existence that an individual might well get over more quickly motivates the novel's plot and provides it with its contents. Narrative emplotment, as Ricoeur describes, enacts and indeed relies on reversals in causality, necessities masquerading as contingencies, temporal inversions of configuration:

> The paradox of emplotment is that it inverts the effect of contingency, in the sense of that which could have happened differently or which might not have happened at all, by incorporating it in some way into the effect of necessity or probability exerted by the configuring act. The inversion of the effect of contingency into an effect of necessity is produced at the very core of the event: as a mere occurrence, the latter is confined to thwarting the expectations created by the prior course of events; it is quite simply the unexpected, the surprising. It only becomes an integral part of the story when understood after the fact, once it is transfigured by the so-to-speak retrograde necessity which proceeds from the temporal totality carried to its term.[197]

The plotter's schemes to achieve unity with the causal form of a novelistic plot speaks to the psychic structure of time-bound desires at the heart of social performativity and upward mobility. According to Jonathan Culler, "In the phenomenalism of the 'inner world' we invert the chronology of cause and effect. The basic fact of 'inner experience' is that the cause gets imagined after the effect has occurred. The causal scheme is produced by a metonymy or metalepsis (substitution of cause for effect); it is not an indubitable foundation but the product of a tropological operation."[198] Through an elaborately constructed and sustained set of schemes, plotting manifests as the symptom of a never-satisfiable longing to believe that the past is yet subject to alteration, that there remains a way to "get over" the past that isn't simply letting it go. Rather than an indication of who he *was*, Pip's conception of who he *is* constructs itself around that frantic attempt to shake off "all this taint of prison and crime," which is "like a stain that was faded but not gone" (*GE* 260). Though Pip readily admits the impossibility of "never, never, never undoing what he's done" and entertains various alternate realities in the guise of the optative, his is a striving for a gentlemanly status that seeks impossibly to undo the memory of initial unbelonging directly linked to Estella's rejection. This is a lack of inclusion originating in Pip's status as an orphan and, following Bruce Robbins, we might here interpret orphanhood as "the disguised vestige of an earlier murder" that "shoves out of sight in the past a murderous rejection that was a logical necessity in order for upward mobility to happen."[199] Though Estella's rejection is necessary in catalyzing Pip's progress toward assimilation, that assimilation gets paradoxically premised on a desire to erase that necessary causal scene.

Obliged to cling to an identification that only further entrenches forms of damage and indignity, plotters must plot, and that plotting itself is both origin and result of a trauma that cannot be readily assimilated but is nevertheless necessary to the "narratable." Plotting takes on the content and the form of a melancholy acted on in such a way—with a certain deluded sense of hope—that it brings about the activation of a novelistic plot. This kind of bad mourning, in other words, is not merely the content of plot, it is also

---

[196] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 11.

[197] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 142.

[198] Jonathan Culler, "Deconstruction," *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 86-7.

[199] Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good,* p. 57. See also Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1957).

and importantly its formal prerequisite, the thing that breathes life into narrative, since only these snags and wrinkles in the fiber of psychic life can generate the narratable. In this way, the plotter supplies a figure for the novel's unease with the element of plotting, simultaneously linchpin and loophole of realism's near-contractual obligation to represent "the real," and with that unease the novel finds a way to represent the plotter's melancholic relationship to a form of desperate striving that masks a resentment for that striving's necessity. To plot is to express a desire in the shape of the scheme for an atonement that bears the structure of an impossible analepsis.

Bad Mourning

Pip's penultimate visit to Satis House is spurred by his discovery that the convict he met on the marshes as a child has been his benefactor all the while, rather than Miss Havisham as we, along with Pip, had long believed. Reproaching her with his account of the true source of his "great expectations," he asks: "But when I fell into the mistake I have so long remained in, at least you led me on?" (*GE* 359-60). Miss Havisham's response subtly conflates declaration and equivocation: "'Yes', she returned, again nodding steadily, 'I let you go on'." (*GE* 355). In the slight syntactical shift where actively "leading" Pip on slides willfully into a passive stepping back from responsibility—"letting him go on"—we may locate the very act of escape that the plotter frequently puts into practice and that this chapter will continue to explore. Admitting little guilt and even less narrative responsibility, Havisham-like figures simultaneously engender and evade the task of plotting: "You made your own snares. *I* never made them." (*GE* 356). Such is the credo of an entire class of fictional characters who have evaporated from scholarly thought as artfully as they have renounced their involvement in the contrivances that would not have existed without their participation, like one of Goffman's "misinformers" who perpetually "profit from lies without, technically, telling any."[200] If Miss Havisham is the supposed secret origins of Pip's fortunes and the beginning of *Great Expectations* itself, her eventual demise seems similarly entwined with the ending of the novel-the introduction of Pip's true benefactor precipitates the conclusion's events. But how exactly do the closural politics of the overarching narrative plot intersect with and comment on the eventual failure of the plotter's schemes? How might we explain plot's convenient caesuras, these gaps in knowledge over which the plotter alone, tasked with secrecy, stands guard?

We could say that Miss Havisham has no option but to let the plot go on, perhaps because she cannot find a way to let it go. Having been left at the altar, she adopts a beautiful young girl, Estella, in order to break men's hearts, harboring a futile hope that her desire for revenge can somehow undo or resolve the cause of that desire for revenge in the first place. Habituated to the exact moment that loss was in its first blow—at "twenty minutes to nine," "when she was dressing for her marriage…at which she afterwards stopped all the clocks"—Miss Havisham ceaselessly lives out her grief in its most undiluted and immediate form, her grief becoming itself a matter of a time and a trauma stuck at the exact moment they struck (*GE* 180).[201] Indeed, in this respect we recall that time and mourning are so intimately connected that Laplanche's

[200] Such profitable and evasive non-lies emerge from "[c]ommunication techniques such as innuendo, strategic ambiguity, and crucial omissions…" See Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* p. 41.

[201] "It was then I began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock, a long time ago. I noticed that Miss Havisham put down the jewel exactly on the spot from which she had taken it up. As Estella dealt the cards, I glanced at the dressing-table again, and saw that the shoe upon it, once white, now yellow, had never been worn. I glanced down at the foot from which the shoe was absent, and saw that the silk stocking on it, once white, now yellow, had been trodden ragged. Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objected, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud" (*GE* 59). Brooks calls

interpretation of psychoanalysis rests on an assumption that "the dimension of loss is…co-extensive with temporalisation itself."[202] Eugenie Brinkema writes that, for Laplanche, mourning is "'the work of memory' and 'an affect with a duration (*Daueraffekt*): it has a beginning and an end, it occupies a *lapse* of time'."[203] "And sometimes, when her moods were so many and so contradictory of one another that I was puzzled what to say or do, Miss Havisham would embrace her with lavish fondness, murmuring something in her ear that sounded like 'Break their hearts my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!'" (*GE* 93). To borrow from Daniel Hack, revenge "is usually understood as belonging to the past, both structurally and historically: although the seeking of revenge involves planning for the future, this future is conceived of as a direct product of and response to the events in the past."[204] Yet this notion of a cruel optimism depends on vesting faith in the presence of an object or form that one already possesses, that nonetheless is harmless to our existences, since it "is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic *in advance* of its loss."[205] What is truly cruel about plotting is that it does not know what it is plotting for—the cathartic aftermath of revenge, for instance, or the feeling of perfect assimilation before the fact. This plotting takes on an interminable quality—the thing that is sought-after would be unrecognizable even in possession, precisely because the desired object has *never been* possessed, as any possession would nullify the ensuing sensation of insufficiency or dispossession that had created the very conditions for that desire's awakening.

In this case, Miss Havisham's thirst for revenge makes visible a tension between the novel's style of plotting and the structure of plotting made available to literary characters. Yet her dramatic not-acting demonstrates a certain necessity on the part of narrative discourse: she is only imbued with this knowledge in order to *keep it to herself*.[206] This is the space of plotting: the character functions as an actant within the discourse, furthering its suspense, while also expressing through her silence some willful, misguided hope that her revenge will provide the closure she seeks (in this case, the closure is an end to her melancholy). As Brooks has put it, "The analysand 'is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past."[207] In other words, the novel's recognition scene relies on her deliberate concealment of the plot at hand, and it is a marvelous

---

this the "deviated eroticism" that renders impossible the natural forward movement of the plot. See Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 119.

[202] Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 57. See also Laplanche, "Time and the Other," *Essays on Otherness* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 241.

[203] Ibid., pp. 57-8.

[204] Daniel Hack, "Revenge Stories of Modern Life," *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2., Papers and Responses from the Third Annual Conference of the North American Victorian Studies Association (Winter 2006), p. 277. "…the very characters specifically identified with such signal features of modernity as geographical and social mobility, self-making, breaking with the past, and technological innovation becomes instead—or as well—agents of revenge" (280). Hack also points to the prominence of the "revenge plot," even going so far as to make a claim that he rightfully suspects will "haunt" him, arguing that "of the limited number of basic plots we find in nineteenth-century novels, the one that has received the least critical attention is the revenge plot" (277).

[205] See Berlant's article version of her book-length study of "cruel optimism," where she discusses the temporal and formal differences between her formulation of this kind of optimism—doomed as it is from the start—and the condition of melancholia. "Cruel Optimism," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, p. 21.

[206] "It is commonly assumed that knowledge without acknowledgement is worthless, not only inconsequential but morally void because the truth (whether the truth of your suffering or of the way I distort my relation to you, to use Cavell's examples) asks to be met—demands acknowledgement; knowing and not saying that I know represents a failure to meet my truth—take 'possession' of it—and hence a moral shortcoming toward myself and other." See François, *Open Secrets*, p. 82; also, Stanley Cavell's "Knowing and Acknowledging" in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[207] Brooks*, Reading for the Plot*, p. 98. See especially the chapter titled "Freud's Masterplot."

coincidence that Magwitch entrusts Jaggers with the great expectations and two conditions that become watchwords for plotting: "the name of the person who is your liberal benefactor remains a profound secret, until the person chooses to reveal it" (*GE* 135).

I discussed Anne-Lise François's conception of the open secret more thoroughly in an earlier chapter. Her notable reformulation of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and D. A. Miller's work to emphasize a "peculiar exercise of power that consists not in a knowledge claim…but in the privilege to ignore—the right to go on not knowing or pretending not to see," bears another mention here.[208] Both a theory of the "epistemology of the closet" and the release from garrulousness into blissful reticence (to use Miller's terms, the "privilege of *not having to know he knows it*"), turn on what François calls a "gesture of self-canceling revelation permit[ting] a release from the ethical imperative to *act* upon knowledge." "formal problem of how to evaluate, recognize, and name a dramatic action so inconsequential it yields no *peripeteia* and seems to evade the Aristotelian definition of plot…"[209] Yet these evasions masquerade under the guise of aphasias in their relation to the development of plot, such that the passive, undesiring, self-abnegating resistance to disclosure begin to constitute the secret open only to insiders and not to those naïve outsiders. In other words, narrative action frequently emanates out of characters' inaction, the narratable contingent on that which one individual refuses to put into circulation or stops short of articulation. Such moments make visible the way that strategic nondisclosure gives rise to the non-closure of narrative, or what critics have theorized as the "narratable" that allows narrative movement to continue until its final end.

> "What have I done! What have I done!" She wrung her hands, and crushed her white hair, and returned to this cry over and over again. "What have I done!" I knew not how to answer, or how to comfort her. That she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child *to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride, found vengeance in*, I knew full well. But that, in shutting out the light of day, she had shut out infinitely more; that, in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that, her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that *reverse the appointed order of their Maker…*" (*GE* 394)

And so again, later, to make a total of three scenes in which Miss Havisham utters the repeated cry of repeated words—"What have I done!"—lamenting the revenge that is itself only an infraction because it is a repetition and transference of her own experience of "spurned affection" onto another: "'Until you spoke to [Estella] the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done! What have I done!' *And so again, twenty, fifty times over,* What had she done!" Miss Havisham's revenge takes the form of a repetition—a merciless recasting of Pip in her role as the rejected lover cast off and left broken-hearted—yet this punishing repetition simulates but never instantiates the desired "reversal of the appointed order of the Maker," even as the phrase "What have I done?" muttered twenty or fifty times over endlessly inscribes into the present succession of moments attempts to grapple with a past that one can yet never change. "I know very well, but all the same," "What have I done?," "What a shame." Each of these formulations begs for and excuses the presence of a plot, gesturing either toward a plot followed through despite the certainty of its failure. There is no chance of success given the novel's closural proclivities, "but all the same," there must be plots and plotting to sustain the novel's progress toward that final closure. Forms of closure that require the scapegoating of a plotter's always-futile scheme begins to look like the psychosis of desire, where one's clinging to a lost object provides a kind of living on, even though it is built on the insubstantial wisps of fantasized possibility: "this rebellion is sometimes so intense that the

[208] François, *Open Secrets*, p. 2.
[209] Ibid., note 3.

subject may reach the point of rejecting reality and clinging to the lost object by means of a hallucinatory psychosis of desire."[210]

> There was a stage, that evening, when she spoke collectedly of what had happened, though with a certain terrible vivacity. Towards midnight she began to wander in her speech, and after that it gradually set in that she said innumerable times in a low solemn voice, "What have I done!" And then, "When she first came, I meant to save her from misery like mine." And then, "Take the pencil and write under my name, 'I forgive her!'" She never changed the order of these three sentences, but she sometimes left out a word in one or other of them; never putting in another word, but always leaving a blank and going on to the next word. (*GE* 398)

With regards to this ending to Miss Havisham's plot, Brooks argues that "The novel in fact toward its end appears to record a general breakdown of plots: none of the schemes machinated by characters manages to accomplish its aims. The proof *a contrario* may be the 'oversuccessful' result of Miss Havisham's plot, which has turned Estella into so heartless a creature that she cannot experience emotional recognition of her benefactress. Miss Havisham's plotting has been a mechanical success but an intentional failure…Miss Havisham's deathbed scene transits a 'wisdom' that is in the deconstructive mode, a warning against plot."[211] But we should remember that Miss Havisham's need for revenge coincides with the novel's need for the narratable; Dickens was responding to criticisms about the form of his plots and was actively attempting to craft a tighter story along the lines of Wilkie Collins's detective novels…the surprise the novel hinges on relies on Pip's operative blindness (he wanted to keep Pip in the dark via Havisham-as-red-herring so that comic-tragic surprise that convict is Pip's benefactor could achieve its intended effect…) "But we experience a double suspense, that of the story, Pip's own fears, and that of the discourse, for we foresee trouble that Pip is not aware of…the narratee is expressly misled by the narrator Pip into accepting what the character Pip believed, namely that Miss Havisham was his benefactor."[212]

Indeed, Miss Havisham strikes Pip as "an eccentric rich lady," with eccentricity denoting in its more common meaning a kind of deviation from accepted norms, but also a more particular form of deviation, a sort of going in circles, a penchant for precisely those elliptical structures that undergird melancholy and plotting both (*GE* 407).[213] Set to the tune of "Old Clem," which Pip whistles while he pushes Miss Havisham "round and round" her room, melancholy becomes a never-ending waltz with loss whose constraining circularity finds solace in its own separation from the world: "It was like pushing the chair itself back into the past, when we began the old slow circuit round about the ashes of the bridal feast…The time so melted away, that our early dinner-hour drew close at hand…" (*GE* 236). As Brooks puts it, "Satis House, as the circular

---

[210] Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, p. 109. As Barthes discusses, this measureless cathexis on that which subverts reality seems like a denial of a loss that has already taken place, as if an endless anxiety about the possibility of loss would be a more digestable and desirable process than the wrenching realization that that loss that had been so feared has actually already taken place: "The psychotic lives in the terror of breakdown (against which the various psychoses are merely defenses). But 'the clinical fear of breakdown is the fear of a breakdown which has already been experienced (*primitive agony*)…and there are moments when a patient needs to be told that the breakdown, fear of which is wrecking his life, has already occurred.' Similarly, it seems, for the lover's anxiety: it is the fear of a mourning which has already occurred…Someone would have to be able to tell me: 'Don't be anxious any more—you've already lost him/her'" (29-30).

[211] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, pp. 135-6.

[212] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 63.

[213] Thanks to Kent Puckett's forthcoming *War Pictures: Cinema, History, and Style in Britain, 1939-1945* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), especially the portions in the introduction concerning the function of "eccentricity" in British culture, where through readings of J. S. Mill and Edith Sitwell, Puckett argues that eccentricity launches a powerful critique of, and protest against, "the way things are."

journeys of the wheelchair to the rhythm of the blacksmith's song 'Old Clem' may best suggest, constitutes repetition without variation, pure reproduction, a collapsed metonymy *where cause and effect have become identical, the same-as-same*."[214] But Satis House can only achieve the sustained collapse of cause and effect because it is cut off from the world, it is "enough" to the extent that one can be satisfied with a totalizing possession only made possible by complete isolation. This fear of the unconscious repetition that gives the secret away seems scripted not only into the novel's concerns with the circular structures of revenge and, as I'll explore later, of assimilation, but also into the fact that *Great Expectations* bears certain similarities to *David Copperfield*. Dickens "To be quite sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read David Copperfield again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe."[215] Of course, the security of repetition—its predictability and its rhythm—seems to provide a path of protective succession for those who must cling to the deluded hopes "We walked round the ruined garden twice or thrice more, and it was all in bloom for me. If the green and yellow growth of weed in the chinks of the old wall had been the most previous flowers that ever blew, it could not have been more cherished in my remembrance" (*GE* 236). "I made my way to the ruined garden. I went all round it; round by the corner where Herbert and I had fought our battle; round by the paths where Estella and I had walked. So cold, so lonely, so dreary all!" (*GE* 396).

In his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud describes mourning as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on."[216] However, he complicates this by noting that the loss implicit in or constitutive of mourning is perhaps not premised on death, but merely the deprivation of an object of love, as perhaps, he states, "in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted": "Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its 'character'."[217] My interest here, however, is to examine the underlying structure of Freudian formulations of mourning and melancholia: how can someone properly grieve—or improperly enact through melancholia—a lost object that he or she never possessed? From the integrity of self that Pip demonstrates as a young boy, not only in the recognition of the self but in its very naming ("I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip") begins to look like a melancholy for an ego before it was simultaneously split and constituted. According to the logic of Freudian ego-formation, to know oneself at all is to know oneself as damaged. The process of coming to possess a self to be known is tantamount to the experience and insistence of loss: "Mourning incites the ego to renounce the object by declaring that this latter is dead and by offering the ego the reward of remaining alive."[218] The ego may only come to be through its simultaneous genesis and splitting; this is to say, in other words, that the splitting is constitutive to the formation of the ego or, to borrow from Butler, "melancholy is precisely what interiorizes the psyche…The turn from object to ego is the movement that makes the distinction between them possible, that marks the division, the separation or loss, that forms the ego to begin with."[219] Barthes might call this the "horrible Ebb of the Image," where "the horror of spoiling is even stronger than the anxiety of losing."[220] For losing the idealized image is to lose a structure of attachment that provides a mode of continuation in the face of inevitable disintegration.

---

[214] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 119, my italics.

[215] Quoted in Angus Calder's "Introduction," *Great Expectations*, ed. Angus Calder (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 13.

[216] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans. James Strachey. Vol. XIV, "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement Papers on Metapsychology and Other Words (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74), p. 243.

[217] Ibid., p. 245.

[218] Quoted in Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, p. 106.

[219] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 170.

[220] Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, p. 28.

To call Estella or Miss Havisham's fiancé a "lost object" is to either assume or imply its initial possession—but Estella is only possessed insofar as she stands in for some measure of pervasive dispossession or falling short, known as the thing that Pip could never have. Indeed, for quite some time Estella will not say Pip's name ("It was the first time she had ever called me by my name. Of course she did so, purposely, and knew that I should treasure it up") (*GE* 267). Notes Martin Hägglund, this kind of dispossession spurs on the desire to fill this absence since the knowledge of the object's disappearance—chronophobia—leads inexorably to and gets constituted by that same object's durable desirability—chronophilia. "The lack of such fullness is for Lacan the *cause* of desire, since it is precisely because desire cannot be fulfilled that there is desire."[221] For what would it mean to take out the cause of every ego-constituting desire? It would be tantamount to removing the "formation of the first link on one memorable day," and so also forgo the entire novel as it stands. Indeed, "it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day" (*GE* 71).

Melancholy is itself optimistic or, rather, melancholy as a concept assumes a degree of optimism in its presumption that the lost object to which the ego is bound has previously been possessed and then reluctantly relinquished. The discourse of melancholy surrounding the lost object implies that an object was in possession before it was subject to loss; is the object of melancholy the object itself, or the object in its ideal state of not-being-subject-to-loss before it is relinquished? What is lost is an idealization of an object—in the confrontation with the object's fallen status, melancholia must inevitably feed on itself, since the ideal object has been shown to be illusory. But perhaps more poignant than this is the realization that the desire for the ideal object is, perhaps, a desire to shed one's consciousness of the loss of ideal, to return to a past where the object is still believed to possess a potential of which it has been stripped in the present. This is tantamount to the plotter's drive towards plotting, toward an endless future-oriented and forward-moving scheming that at heart seeks to make peace with an unchangeable past that has produced a present disillusionment. It is a longing, in some ways, for the form of the novel, just as the melancholy of the novel is that it can never itself experience this form of longing.

Not a prescription for how to "get over" melancholia but an inscription of forms of loss into the requirements of novelistic narratability, the demands made of the figure of the plotter draw our attention to the closural policies of the novel, of course, but in so doing makes us see that the very impossibilities of narrative closure said to detract from the novel's representation more accurately device that could be dismissed as a moment where form falls short could instead grasp with the nuances of getting over a lack not just before its loss but before its possession. Put another way, the desire of the plotter is to lose his shame-inducing sense of a lack, his desire is for the *lack of a lack.* In this desire to go backwards, I argue, we see simultaneously a desire for novelistic temporalities so strong that it becomes a masked desire to live out within the space of plot, within the confines of an imagined plot where one cannot suffer any shame or, better yet, where can does not even know the meaning of the feeling, and has somehow magically undone that "primal scene" where "all those wretched hankerings after money and gentility that had disturbed [Pip's] boyhood…those ill-regulated aspirations that had first made [him] ashamed of home and Joe" (*GE* 233).

"The formal logic of such a scheme…"

Instead of reading the closural policies of plot as moments where the novel slips up, failing to render its object of study and thereby exposing the inherent insufficiency of its representational and formal mechanisms, it seems that this blatant incommensurability marks the novel's acknowledgment of a certain

[221] Martin Hägglund, *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 3.

privilege available to modes of realist plotting. Such modes are almost willfully withheld from characters unable to effect in their own experiences of social assimilation and the proper mourning the kind of revisionary repetition that would serve as a more meaningful and certainly more merciful way of being and persisting in the world.[222] Still, however, these literary characters continue to vest their faith in the power of the plot, continue to persevere in their attachment to a form of active getting-over that nevertheless only provides an illusion of freedom. In this overturning of privilege precisely by exposing it, the novel recalls what Jameson describes as "Adorno's insight that palpable anachronism or historical falsification in the work of art are privileged symptoms of the latter's deeper representational dilemmas and contradictions. It is not because the facts have some prior claim over fiction that such 'flaws' are significant; it is rather because this violence to the logic of facts betrays a deeper weakness within the very fiction itself, and a structural incapacity, for whatever reason, to construct a narrative that can map totality."[223] Rather than recapitulating the fundamental temporalities governing psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and trauma theory, however, a theory of the plotter allows us to begin to discern that these foundational questions are addressed by the novel through the double bind of plotting as a form and as a content. This enterprise provides a powerful technique for thinking about the agency of individual actors within structures precisely because they operate in the midst of a crucial tension between coherence and chaos, between novelistic closure and reality's messier, more capricious subversions of that closure. We can use this to arrive at a definition of literary character as a structure of desires made visible through a particular form of participation in the plot—in the intersection of story and discourse—this tucked-away core of narrative, social, and psychic machinery. These epistemological distinctions stem from the plotter's definitive status as a literary character that is somehow aware of his or her role as a character; subject to and suffering from the limitations of a literary character, the plotter nonetheless manifests an awareness of these limitations and thus its function in plot does nothing less than thematizes the conditions of its own insufficiency. The plotter, already self-conscious about social self-fashioning, seems endowed with an identity-producing awareness of participation in the game that is narrative, subjected to the rules of a system. In these instances, the novel's scapegoating of the plotter—who is inevitably punished by the end of the novel—makes available a device through which the novel can appropriate this most obviously unmimetic move as a mark of its realism: an admission not that narrative closure is impossible, but that the only possible closure belongs in and to the world of narrative form.

Zižek draws on Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pointing to the absence of totality as an "an acknowledgement of an original 'trauma', an impossible kernel which resists symbolization, totalization, symbolic integration. Every attempt at symbolization-totalization comes afterwards: it is an attempt to suture an original cleft—an attempt which is, in the last resort, by definition doomed to failure."[224] Owning up to the privileged aspect of plotting, narrative marks itself as both a master and a slave to the temporalities it longs simultaneously to serve and to defy. "Neither of the famous Victorian, insistently realist texts turns out to be really realistic. Nor can any literary text be. Beyond the epistemological problems, realism, it is also often suggested in recent discussions, at least in its manifestation in English, is

---

[222] "There is a deception in amorous time (this deception is called: the love story). I believe (along with everyone else) that the amorous phenomenon is an 'episode' endowed with a beginning (love at first sight) and an end (suicide, abandonment, disaffection, withdrawal, monastery, travel, etc.). Yet the initial scene during which I was ravished is merely reconstituted: it is *after the fact*. I reconstruct a traumatic image which I experience in the present but which I conjugate (which I speak) in the past…" No wonder that this "temporal deception" stems from the structures of a lover's "discourse" or *discursus*, which Barthes describes as a "running here and there, comings goings, measures taken, 'plots and plans': the lover…cannot keep his mind from racing, taking new measures and plotting against himself." See Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, pp. 193, p. 3.

[223] Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 41.

[224] Zižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. xxix.

always an act of 'containment', an effort at 'naturalizing', and thus no disinterested rendering of things as they are but imaginations of ways of keeping things under control, fashioning them so as to exclude their disruptive possibilities."[225] This denaturalization and self-deconstruction, I claim, comments on and confirms the impossibility of "realism" to truly capture the vicissitudes of a life outside the text, thereby encrypting certain tendencies to cling to that which is always-already diminished in spite of a full knowledge of this fact into the dynamics of plotting itself, where the drive to plotting continues even though all hope for its success has been rendered impossible by a novel whose closural policies must put that plotting to rights. Or, borrowing from Ian Duncan, we might claim that they very fissure between the plotter's structures of plotting and the novel's enhances a view of how fiction moves from mere representation to active commentary:

> Romance is the essential principle of fiction: its *difference* from a record of 'reality', of 'everyday life'. A novel could describe, by metonymy and metaphor, the shape of the world and everything in it; it could also narrate its historical formation through time….But even as the novel began to totalize its mimetic range it reasserted fiction, and not mimesis, as its critical principle, in an elaborate commitment to plot. *Fiction in these novels is the effect above all of plot*, conspicuous as a grammar of formal conventions, that is, a shared cultural order distinct from material and historical contingency. To read a plot—to take part in its work of recognition—is to imagine a transformation of life and its conditions, and not their mere reproduction.[226]

We might remember Forster's definitive claim that "All that is prearranged is false."[227] The finality of the statement recalls Tony Tanner's claim that "conventional plot slights reality by its habit of erecting a spurious structure of eventfulness."[228] Such an inevitability of the final choice creates a sense of teleology and necessary closure in the novel, yet the inevitability of this event is almost opposed to inevitable, since the final choice can alter the past… "The novelist has no misgivings He is competent, poised above his work, throwing a beam of light here, popping on a cap of invisibility there, and (*qua* plot-maker) continually negotiating with himself *qua* character-monger as the best effect to be produced. He plans his book beforehand: or anyhow he stands above it, his interest in cause and effect give him an air of predetermination."[229] "I do not enter into details; I merely set up my landmarks. In doing this the main situations of the story present themselves; and at the same time I see my characters in all sorts of new aspects. These discoveries lead me nearer and nearer to finding the right end. The end being decided on, I go back again to the beginning, and look at it with a new eye."[230] Such a discussion is perhaps even more pertinent in relation to Dickens's fiction and to *Great Expectations* in particular, given that sales of *All the Year Round* had, in the fall of 1860, begun to fall precipitously and the novelist relied on the management of tightly-wound and perfectly turned plots to rein

---

[225] "Realism," in George Levine, *Realism, Ethics, and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 186.

[226] Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 2, my italics. See especially "Prologue: fiction as fiction," pp. 1-19.

[227] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1955), p. 101.

[228] Quoted in Caserio, *Plot, Story, and the Novel*, p. 11. There exists a stark sense of mathematical inevitability to the punishment of the plotter, for "The formal analysis of a poem is largely the demonstration of a probability through all the parts. Or better, in the beginning anything is possible; in the middle things become probable; in the ending everything is necessary.'…the working out of plot (or at least some plots) is a process of declining or narrowing possibility. The choices become more and more limited, and the final choice seems not a choice at all, but an inevitability." Quoted in Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p. 46.

[229] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 96.

[230] Quoted in Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 208.

readers back in.[231] Yet Dickens struck out on the writing of *Great Expectations* with unflagging confidence, telling Forster that he could "see the whole of a serial revolving on it, in a most singular and comic manner," reassuring him that "Of course I have got in the pivot on which the story will turn too—and which, indeed, as you remember, was the grotesque tragi-comic conception that first encouraged me."[232] We see here that Ricoeur correctly notes the appearance whereby the novel and its characters seem to coexist within the same temporal constraints: "The narrator may walk in step with the characters, making the present of narration coincide with his or her own present, and thereby accepting the limits and lack of knowledge imposed by this perspective. Or, on the contrary, the narrator may move forward or backward, considering the present form the point of view of the anticipation of a remembered past or as the past memory of an anticipated future, etc."[233]

Backwardness, already a problem of class, becomes also a problem of temporal fracture, a problem that makes the issue of social exclusion a problem of learning not just the classic marks of successful social assimilation—which fork to use or which club to belong to—but, more importantly, a proper way to assimilate or incorporate degraded personal histories into the story of the upwardly mobile self without constituting the ego around that very lack of assimilation called backwardness. Instead of the too-heavy baggage whose overpowering drag keeps the subject lagging behind, the moment of transformation occurs precisely when the fact of that history's permanence makes it no longer exist at all. Plotting thus resembles the ways in which literary characters produce internal worlds, such that the "topographical set of fictions that structures the psyche" take on narrative form, make the transition from psychic structures into novelistic ones.[234] This very temporal incommensurability illustrates the unresolved realities of experience. Desire is not for presence but for the lack of a lack; it is the desire, in other words, of an erasure of that very element of the narratable without which the novel would not have existed—herein lies the distillation of the oppositional yet mutually constitutive relationship between plotter and novel. In this light, the novel's plot and the plotter's are directly opposed and we can add a turn to this argument by noting that the nineteenth-century novel not only involves but finds its foundation in the bad or improper mourning of its spatially minor but functionally major characters.

Indeed, this missed intersection of knowledge and action produces the conditions of the narrative to come into being, such that the character's position within the plot enhances the sense of vertigo attendant to the recognition that, though he figures at the center of *Great Expectations*, he is in fact merely a pawn in another character's plot. Dickens's novel in particular plays on this fundamental aspect of fictional form, both acknowledging and amplifying the effect of this kind of temporal warping by refraining from employing his more characteristic omniscient mode, employing, instead, a first-person retrospective narration under the command of the older Pip. Crucially, this first-person perspective allows us to experience both Pip's previous ignorance in all of its disconcerting blindness, and to savor in his final insights with its plot-ensuring narrative foresight. As a novelist equipped with knowledge of the full measure of his story, the older Pip could shuffle the presentation of the events surrounding of his great expectations, though the opportunity to enact actual action has passed; the younger Pip could have acted differently, though he could not have known that his expectations had come from Magwitch. In this light, Pip's particular pathos lies in his ability never to have mastered the plot of his life at the right time, with experience and knowledge never quite intersecting to produce the correct form of action. Our sense of Pip as a character exists by virtue of his relationship to the form of the plot; it is his lack of narrative understanding that reflects and reinforces our sense of his naïveté as a social being. Indeed, as I will explore, it is this missed intersection of knowledge and action that produces the conditions of the narrative to come into being, such that the character's position within the plot enhances the sense of vertigo attendant to the recognition that, though he figures at the center of *Great Expectations*, he

---

[231] Angus Calder, "Introduction," *Great Expectations* (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 13.
[232] Quoted in Calder, "Introduction," p. 13.
[233] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 94.
[234] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 171.

is in fact merely a pawn in another character's plot. The affective and psychic lives of literary character only emerge when we consider his standing as an actant in the story with his consciousness—his social mastery of form—at the level of discourse. This is, in fact, similar to the critique most often launched against actantial interpretations of literary character. Literary characters' self-reflexive management of the plots at hand allegorizes narrative's own self-consciousness about the "artifice" of an overt plottedness that was consistently seen as a mark of the novel's failure.

Yet the peculiarly heartrending discovery of the source of his wealth is, for *Great Expectations*'s protagonist, heightened by an ancillary realization that, come what may, "I could never, never, never undo what I had done" (*GE* 341). For the literary character, as opposed to the writer of the text we now read, the accumulated affective burden of guilt, regret, and shame hinges on the perceptible difference between the temporalities of the realist novel and the more constraining, because mercilessly time-bound and future-oriented, experience of reality itself. This form of melancholy is cast, in other words, as a felt distance between story and discourse, between the ordering of events and their rearranged or restructured presentation. Although the novel as a form revels in a certain freedom from causality, the experience of the novel's characters seems tethered to an irreversible chain of cause and effect. Recall, for instance, that famous passage from *Great Expectations*: "Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of irony or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day" (*GE* 101). Even in this moment of desperation—indeed, a desperation so intense it nearly suffocates the newly enlightened Pip, who grasps at the nearest chair while "the room began to the surge and turn"—he registers the impossibility of going back as a mutual implication of cause and effect that cannot be torn apart, even as the narrator displays his privilege of dwelling in this past, reanimating these old sensations, and plotting their timely recovery (*GE* 337). This realization finds itself further inflected by the irony that, try as he might, all the narrator can alter about this past is a narrative *description* of the darkness of that fateful evening, an atmospheric intensity which only serves to further sharpen the recounting of a history that, rigid and unyielding, itself resists alteration and refuses any attempt at revision.

This desire for assimilation is the desire, also, for the causal fallacy at the heart of narrative form to assert itself as a possibility in the experience of class-based anxieties around insufficiency, status, and the imagined security of what it must feel like to finally "make it." Making up a narrative seems sometimes the only way to make it up the social ladder, and whether we see in it glimmers of self-fulfilling prophecy, performative prolepsis, reversed causation, at the broadest level we could describe plotting as a particular self-consciousness in relation to narrative time. To conceive of assimilation as the final product of assimilating seems to rest on a causal fallacy itself, since only those who did not try to assimilate can be said to "belong" in the true sense of the word. And plotting, the ceaseless present participle which serves to move the events of the novel forward, demonstrates a certain kind of itinerant wandering between past causes and future effects that can never find its place; it is an action that so arises out of the contemplation of regrets undone by revenge, social anxiety expunged by ambition, that it captures a sense of temporal confusion, of never quite being sure where and when it is. "This kind of structure of supplementarity is in fact no more surprising than the idea of an intention, a fear or a hope as the motivating force of an action."[235]

We can turn again to Pip's psychic negotiation of his class origins through the geographic detours and sideroads that he takes in order to finally avoid seeing the old forge, and Joe along with it.

> It was clear that I must repair to our town next day, and in the first flow of my repentance it was equally clear that I must stay at Joe's. But, when I had secured my box-place by to-morrow's coach and (223) had been down to Mr Pocket's and back, I was not by any means convinced on the last point, and began to invent reasons and make excuses for putting up at the Blue Boar. I should be an inconvenience at Joe's; I was not expected, and my bed would not be ready; I should be too far from Miss Havisham's, and she was exacting and mightn't like it. All other swindlers upon earth are

[235] Currie, *About Time*, p. 74.

> nothing to the self-swindlers, and with such pretences did I cheat myself…Betimes in the morning I was up and out. It was too early yet to go to Miss Havisham's, so I loitered into the country on Miss Havisham's side of town—which was not Joe's side; I could go there to-morrow—thinking about my patroness, and painting brilliant pictures of her plans for me. (*GE* 229)

If only dodging the past were as easy as walking around one's home—the circular detour enacts a temporal wish that the future might if pursued far enough loop back around to the past. It is no surprise that Pip's meanderings around the country are accompanied by self-swindling, "cheating [him]self" by plotting out the course of his life as a gentleman. As if the projected, future presence of a gentility could make up for his "coarse and common" past's lack of it, Pip gets psychically stuck in negotiating the beforeness and afterwardsness of his "great expectations" by walking on the right side of town—"which was not Joe's side"—and imagining Miss Havisham's schemes in his favor. Hope becomes characterized by a fundamental "stuckness within a relation to futurity that constitutes a problematic defense against the contingencies of the present…hope often involves waiting for something specific to happen."[236] It comes as no surprise that the newly-made gentleman travels in a circle through his old hometown, almost reenacting the wished-for ring of causality, in which enough effects into the future might come full circle and change the past cause so desired: "By then making a loop of about a couple of miles into the open country at the back of Pumblechook's premises, I got round into the High-street again, a little beyond that pitfall, and felt myself in comparative security" (*GE* 242).

By employing the term "backward" Pip is reflecting on this acute experience of social inadequacy and a poverty of cultural capital, being a common laboring boy. This process of reflective meditation backwards to a shame which had, a moment ago, been so little felt as to not even be subject to naming or to articulation (the smart that had no name "I hadn't been able to explain myself…the lies had come of it somehow, though I didn't know how"), now has become a decisive moment of self-constitution that will determine an entire future of orientation toward a recalled past of impoverished and diminished origins continuing to motivate Pip toward overcoming his damage even while it recapitulates the history of that damage. Importantly, this sense of rueful backwardness is accompanied by and represented through an associated lack of knowledge of the plot or plots that orient social life. The impossibility of characters' desires to go backwards so successfully as to undo the primal scene—which for Pip is the experience of backwardness itself and for, say, Miss Havisham, is the traumatic event of having been jilted, left at the altar—gets paradoxically captured by the very possibility of analogous novelistic forms. The fantasy lies in the optimistic or merely uninterrogated or self-deluding—and ultimately self-defeating—belief that social assimilation is tantamount to historical revision or eradication of the feeling of exclusion, or as if the fact of incorporation could ever erase the requisite presence of the desire that made the labor of incorporation necessary. Such is the poignant despair of this double bind where, damned if they will, damned if not don't, plotters start to capture the paradoxes attendant to any compromised attachment. Translated into narrative terms, such psychic negotiations could

---

[236] Quoted in Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 13. See Anna Potamianou's *Hope: A Shield in the Economy of Borderline States* (London: Routledge, 1997) and José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). Potamianou, in particular, focuses significantly on hope's way of providing an excuse for passivity even as it disguises itself as fruitful activity, such that hope's "binding cathexis" takes "the place of lost objects, so as to maintain unity in a psychic organization that would otherwise be potentially at the mercy of an as it were hurting narcissism. As an ultimate internal possession of the ego, hope here also guarantees lack of change, lack of mourning, and the least expenditure of energy" (3). Her brilliant reading of the Pandora myth, where "hope is what remains to her, once the afflictions [of her jar] have been unleashed upon the world," demonstrates that even in the face of transgression, regret, nostalgia, despair, and pain, the eternally open nature of hope—which keeps the faith and does not give up against the odds—provides a way for mankind to continue living despite the near-certain suspicion that all is indeed lost (5).

be put in this way: narrative plot hinges on the existence of the plotter, just as aesthetic and moral coherence rests on the disappearance of that same figure. Put another way, the paradox of mimesis and diegesis runs thus: the novel at once needs and needs to no longer need the plotter.

This turn backwards makes itself palpable within the historiography of a range of critical discourses about homosexual desire, racial melancholy, romantic mourning, and theories of social exclusion more broadly. Such experiences of "social negativity"—so-called "disqualified" identities, to borrow from Heather Love's aptly titled *Feeling Backwards*—seem to be as much enlivened by the hope of one day overcoming an early grief as it is predicated on a sense of a diminished identity that it can never fully give up, thus erecting on the very grounds of its original abjection the lived-out reality of a newly valorized existence, triumphant because rather than in spite of its history of damage.[237] As Anne Cheng asks, what is the path of persistence for those experiencing racial melancholy, confronted always with a "symbolic, cultural economy" that has "preassigned them as a deficit," those "deep-seated, intangible, psychical complications for people living within a ruling episteme that privileges that which they can never be"?[238] I argue that these structures of power can only be apprehended in the novel through a close interrogation of individual literary characters' access to knowledge within the many orders of plot and, far more importantly, plotters' actions against a system that they can perceive in all of its inevitabilities yet nevertheless do nothing to change. Rather than treat the literary text as a representation of political impoverishment indexing real-life counterparts, focusing on the plotter allows us to see how narrative's very divergences from its objects of representation, and its scapegoating of the plotter to achieve aesthetic closure, in fact begins to apprehend and to allegorize the more knotty nuances of self-perception within unbudging systems that negate the very possibility of agency.[239]

For such examples of transformative criticism, an optimistic investment in a brighter future arises directly out of a suffering so deeply engraved into its history that there can be no investment without that primary motivation borne precisely out of originating violence. As Love writes, the paradox that continues to haunt homosexual identity takes the form of a balancing act between the two rallying cries: "We will never forget," on the one hand, and "We will never go back," on the other. No simple or simply experiential sensation of (social) backwardness, this circular construction of a future by a past it cannot fully discard but similarly cannot seem to move beyond or possess in the full sense of "owning" it creates a bind as much structural as it is psychic and affective, in which it is precisely the memory of one's once-unbearable baggage that now lightens the load of a weighty burden. And, where baggage becomes the very thing that sets one free, "affective legacies of loss," writes Love, get "mobilized for flashes of political hope."[240] Of course, what Love is grappling with here is specific in its mapping out in the context of queer theory, but it simultaneously articulates a crucial structural problem endemic to historiography and to the psychosis of plotting equally—the problem of assimilating a past cause which is generative of the present effect without either abandoning it

---

[237] Heather Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 4.

[238] Anne Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 7.

[239] "The philosophy of time, for Ricoeur, will always run up against some version of the dichotomy between clock time and mind time and experience this dichotomy as a kind of aporia. The philosophy of time from Zeno to Derrida can be read as a failure to escape the tensions involved in these aporias, or to banish the dualism from which they derive. But these tensions and aporias are the very fabric of the novel: the tensions between narrated time and the time of the narration, chronology and plot, objective and subjective time, cosmological and phenomenological time, time as topic and time as technique, and the constative and performative layering of the novel's dealings with time make it the discourse in which the dynamics and dialectics of time are most faithfully and properly observed." Currie, *About Time*, pp. 92-3.

[240] David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning,* ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2003), p. 16.

altogether or incorporating it and thereby taking it as constitutive or foundational.[241] This problem is, as I've been arguing, at once temporal and formal, made visible in the figure of the plotter so defined by and entwined with his insights into the fracture between the two that that he finds himself finally destroyed by it. This is another way of saying that the oft-offered injunction to "just move on" condenses and reverses the temporalities of mourning as much as it flattens the complexities of structures of being and formations of identity paradoxically impeded by the very content that also enables their existence. Such a casual fallacy exists at the intersection of the novel's paradoxical need for the plotter and need for the plotter to stop plotting. Any contemplation of plotting thus meditates simultaneously on the novel's formal convergences and divergences from structures undergirding reality.

In this light, the lingering presence of remembered loss is continually conjured into being—reinscribed—by the new existence that now stands in its stead, precisely because the emergence of that transcendent identity rises up from amidst the embers of histories of oppression and deficit by which narratives of triumph are continually haunted.[242] As Love puts it, "a central paradox of any transformative criticism is that its dreams for the future are founded in a history of suffering, stigma, and violence."[243] "My dream was out; my wild fancy was surpassed by sober reality: Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale" (*GE* 135). Looking forwards while longing backwards, the desire for transcending or leaving behind a history of violence begins to undo the constitutive origins of that desire as fundamentally lodged *in violence* in the first place. Without the negativity of the original cause, there would be no effects whatsoever, dark or bright or otherwise. In spite of histories of oppression, a rise to power becomes possible; through the memorialization of damage, acquired freedoms marking contemporary social movements and civil rights, examples of what Love aptly cites as Foucauldian notions of power's ability to get advantageously reversed.[244]

Plotters' impulses toward in some way authorizing, orchestrating, or otherwise manipulating events in the future as both a mode of inclusion in a narrative realm from which they are always-already excluded, as well as a causal fallacy that resembles a form of "magical thinking," wherein an optimism persists that the future can remedy histories already written. Plotting thus names a structure not just of passing but of a relationship or negotiation with the irrevocable pastness of history, the sense that authorizing the future only ever constitutes a failed or futile attempt at altering what is or has already *passed*, that which no amount of passing or plotting can recuperate or revise. Reading for the plotter tracks that which is necessary for but cannot finally be successfully assimilated into the structure of the novel. For Pip, for instance, the primal scene, also the primary scene in the novel as a whole, occurs at the graveyard where he first encounters Abel Magwitch. From there on in, the "taint of Newgate" is upon him, and wash his hands as he might, as if he could "wash his hands" of his past: "When I woke up in the night…I used to think, with a weariness on my spirits, that I should have been happier and better *if I had never seen Miss Havisham's face*, and had risen to manhood content to be partners with Joe in the honest old forge" (*GE* 268). But why search for a lost object that has been tainted? Getting Estella back becomes a strangely illogical compensation for the memory of

---

[241] We see a related discourse over reparations in the middle of the twentieth century, where financial measures are offered in an attempt to provide relief—or a reprieve—from the guilt and grievances of violence inflicted during the second World War. Marianne Hirsh's theory of "postmemory" tackles the problematic that arises out of the task of monetizing instances of inarticulable loss: "At stake is precisely the 'guardianship' of a traumatic personal and generational past with which some of us have a 'living connection' and that past's passing into history…those of us working on memory and transmission have argued over the ethics and the aesthetics of remembrance in the aftermath of catastrophe." See "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 2008), p. 104.

[242] "I try to wrest myself from the amorous image-repertoire: but the Image-repertoire burns underneath, like an incompletely extinguished peat fire; it catches again; what was renounced reappears; out of the hasty grave suddenly breaks a long cry." See Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, p. 109.

[243] Love, *Feeling Backwards*, p. 1.

[244] Ibid., p. 2.

having lost her, or of having been inadequate or insufficient to get her. Recall, for instance, Biddy's conversation with Pip, where when asked "Do you want to be a gentleman, to spite her or to gain her over?" (*GE* 126). The difference between retaliation and possession seems too baffling to parse out from one another, and thus an invective against a past social shame and an incentive for a prospective romantic conquest appear similarly confused. This slanted or skewed form of melancholy, where a possible future presence imaginatively makes up for the remembered absence of the "lost" object, offers a crooked kind of compensation that remains persistently misaligned. Remedying a regretted and immutable event merges with a desire for the object before its tainting, a nostalgic yearning for what once was or might have been. Such a melancholy seeks a way back that is indistinguishable from a way around the object's diminishment, a sidestepping of trauma that negates even the present desire of desiring a way back. Here Miss Havisham forgets about the inefficacy of plotting, she believes it still carries with it a possibility for redemption or recuperation. And, of course, the represented individual's struggle with the time-bound nature of grief seems reflected in the same literary character's necessity to the narratable, such that recuperation and revenge offer instances of plottable conflict that in fact say something significant about the structures of feeling that hold people back and prevent them from moving on.

Certain forms of assimilation borne out of experiences of backwardness—sexual, racial, and socioeconomic—always-already take on the structure if not also the feeling of melancholia; these similarities in structure emerges most clearly in the subject's ceaseless reckoning of present and future identities with past histories. This negotiation finds its analogue in the figure whose future-oriented desires to effect actions that might conceivably come to pass are exposed as convoluted attempts to alter the causes of those effects, the cause that is the sudden awareness of one's *lack* of assimilation in the first place. Nothing can change what has already happened, yet this fact produces little effect on the plotter whose future-oriented scheming seems always a case of backwards desire or, quite literally, the desire to go back. Plot thus begins to take on an exquisite pathos, no longer the privileged action exercised by those who "know" enough to do so, but the last bastion of individuals whose seeming total-knowledge fails only in the comprehension that such a path taken will nonetheless fail to remedy wrongs long past. Like the operator in Henry James's "In the Cage," Miss Havisham paradoxically "ended up knowing so much that she could no longer interpret anything. There were no longer shadows to help her see more clearly, only glare."[245]

Indeed, the product of plotting takes on the same causal cycle that characterizes the process of plotting, for "The double aspect of subjection appears to lead to a vicious circle: the agency of the subject appears to be an effect of its subordination."[246] Or, as Kermode puts it, "being an insider is only a more elaborate way of being kept outside."[247] Such an act of plotting gestures beyond the design of narrative that hinges on readerly suspense, excitement, Brooks's "anticipation of retrospection," but rather on that enterprise always-already doomed to a sort of teleology, a misplaced hope that the endless beating on of a future trembling into being can be swayed from its inevitabilities solely by plotting, by those best-laid plans that never seem to materialize. If we can agree with Said, who writes that "I should like to consider the institution of narrative prose fiction as a kind of appetite for wanting personally to modify reality," the very task of plotting embodies narrative fiction's desire to modify reality, and situates that impulse in the form of a plotter

[245] Quoted in Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* p. 197.

[246] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power,* p. 12. We also see this logic at work in theories of authorship in the making of national literary traditions, where author and character become fused: "Character was the genius that animated the national literary tradition: its image of the eternal subject. The figure of the author occupied a potent, ambiguous position…He was at once its origin and its effect, the sign of his mastery being his very status as one of his own inventions: his own greatest character." See Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 181.

[247] Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p. 11.

whose very existence becomes governed by the activity that stands as a testament to his own badly masked social anxieties.[248]

When Pip writes that "I…considered how the things that never happen, are often as much realities to us, in their effects, as those that are accomplished," he is gesturing to what Andrew H. Miller theorizes as the optative mode.[249] The optative mode comes into being as "fantasies of atomization" that seek to isolate the one (traumatic) event so as to extract from the lived present all the remembered shames of the past in an imaginative engagement with the perennial wondering over what "might have been." Plotters necessarily confuse the optative with the real, while the novel suffers, like a melancholic, from the knowledge, or the acknowledgement, that it can always go back and give the unled life of the optative the full-fledged existence of a path actually taken. We might say that the greatest regret of the plotter's is that, try as he might, his life is bound to the novel's narratable contents but the temporal form of his existence will always be at odds with it. For the character who imagines a life not led, a path not taken, the optative is the fantasy of a better reality subject to fictional revision through plotting, to live out a novel form whose present demands can achieve alternate pasts. Narrative fiction indulges in the optative; that is both its task and its tragedy. No plotter can induce the optative into existence, and that is his, as he is left saying "We cannot change what happened," "What a shame!," or, as Pip laments at the end of the first volume as nothing but pride forces him to leave home without Joe, "it was now too far and too late to go back, and I went on" (*GE* 157).

Realism's Magical Thinking

The novel's use of the plotter's frustrated plots both expose the causal fallacies at the core of novelistic plotting itself and, crucially, begin to capture the almost ineffable truth that the circumstances of life, unlike in novels, can never revisited and revised. This pitting of the plotter's plot against the novel's captures the futility of certain forms of recuperation through revision—or, perhaps more precisely, the impossibility of revision itself. To be a plotter, as I have attempted to show, is to exert some degree of mastery over the plot at hand, and thus to bear a significant relationship to history and to an uncanny consciousness not just of the unfolding of a historical moment but of one's embeddedness within that history. While the problem of causality always recedes beyond the point at which it can be seen or understood in the full light of its systematic unfolding, some hopeless inscrutable bind, for plotters the effects of certain causes can already be foretold in advance, since to plot is to venture to control the course of certain futures by projecting, by plotting, into that very future. Orlick's attack on Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham's awareness that she is not Pip's benefactor, and Magwitch's indebtedness to Pip that causes him to elevate the boy to the status of a gentleman: all of these secrets are known to none but their plotters, the characters with knowledge of the plot. However, for many of the plotters in *Great Expectations*, attempts to invest in the reparative or redemptive measures of plotting finally prove futile, as characters discover themselves trapped in a reality that presses on into the future, without ever bearing within it the ability to alter or expunge a damaging history long past.

These forms of psychic and affective management only emerge when we conceive of literary characters' relationship to the plot at hand, since these plots bear their own temporalities and structures that often underscore or unsettle the desires that these individuals place in the act of plotting. Because plotting is always an exertion of control without any guarantee that these actions will bear fruit, characters' knowing or unknowing is less a matter of fact-based understanding and more a relationship to the structures of contingency, convention, and chance. Endeavoring to mitigate what Lukács calls the "metaphysical dissonance of life" by imposing a plot on the events that swirl around them, these plotters occupy a purely

[248] Edward Said, "Molestation and Authority," *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. with forward by J. Hillis Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 48.
[249] Quoted in Andrew H. Miller, "'A Case of Metaphysics': Counterfactuals, Realism, *Great Expectations*," *ELH*, Vol. 79 (2012), p. 773.

imaginative space between narrative time and the time of narration, filling it with their compensations, projections, delusions of a future that may come to pass rather than facing the immutabilities of historical chronology. An irony ensues when plotters—positioned between story and discourse—nevertheless find themselves constrained by the temporalities of realist plotting. But far from another instance where the 'literariness' of the novel manifests as a condemnation of its reality effect, it is this very paradox of plotting—the irreconcilability of the novel's temporalities and strategies of closure with that of a cathartic psychic or social closure—that more aptly captures the contradictions attendant to the experience of a class-based social melancholy, grief, or paranoia, that smart that always remains somehow nameless, somehow difficult to pin down, beyond language or plot and yet lingering on nevertheless.

What I have called the "melancholy of form" captures an irrepressible and otherwise inexpressible fact of life: that plotting becomes realism's deliberate strategy of disavowal or exorcism, in which its most blatantly "plotted" features realize that form itself offers a utopia of fulfilled desires and successful incorporation impossible outside the confines of fiction as such. If desire at first creates the conditions under which the novel flourishes, then the only way that desire can achieve closure is to address the despair that originates the narrative impulse lodged in fiction's failures of verisimilitude and, thus, its own reading of the space between literature and life itself. In what follows I continue to develop a theory of the plotter torqued around the role of literary character within the framework of the plot, of the story-as-discoursed. I hope to show that plotters' metaleptic awareness of the structures of plotting can oftentimes turn against them: duped by their own anticipatory schemes and projections of future events, plotters make that fatal mistake, equal parts fantasy and delusion: they confuse the causally constrained conditions of their reality with a fictionalized, novelized, or imagined plot of their own making. They become enmeshed, that is to say, in a novelization of their reality that confuses novelistic temporality with the ceaseless unchanging linear temporality that governs historical—as well as biological and material—existence. What else, indeed, could be more narratable than the desire to banish all trace of the narratable, that longing for the seemingly dull everyday realities free from narrative, from that impulse to want neither more nor less but merely something *else*? So the longing to alter the past by plotting forwards can only be actualized by the chronologies of novelistic revision, wherein effects of effects magically generate causes, defying all the laws of history and physics that time only ever presses forwards, almost as if to declare, rather than disguise, the very impossibility of that gesture outside of fiction.

This is a classic structure of deconstructive accounts of novelistic causation, or what is known as Derrida's "logic of supplementarity," a "recurring logic" of his approach that stages deconstruction's foundational "disruption to classical logic": "[t]his is a kind of temporal loop by which things which happen later in a sequence are understood as the origins of things from which they apparently originate…A possible future produces the event to which it is said to be added on, or the archive produces the event as much as it records it."[250] What I have been arguing is that this purely structural notion of supplementarity captures something utopian about the hopes that individuals vest in the power of plots to effect cathartic revisions of the past. Considered in tandem with the figure of the plotter, the engine of the plot's forwards motion, the novel's governing logic of supplementarity may be elevated from the realm of pure theory into the realm of psychic management of personal history, the management of expectation, the forms in which ambition may seem like a way to get past previous traumas but becomes, in fact, just another way of never letting it go. "The *for-itself* would be an *in-the-place-of-itself*: put *for itself*, instead of itself. The strange structure of the supplement appears here: by delayed reaction, a possibility produces that to which it is said to be added on."[251] This logic of supplementarity offers a utopian structure, a way out of the bind of relentless forward motion—it approximates the elusive desires of the plotter to formulate through their investment in form a response to the unsightly remains of the past.

Neither making it up in the sense of inventing a fictional narrative about oneself nor making it up the

[250] Currie, *About Time*, p. 42.

[251] Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. by David B. Allison and Newton Garver (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 89.

social ladder quite make up for that peculiar agony of shame. "But if middle-classing [the protagonists] means keeping them up in the air, hovering uneasily between lowlife and high society, they must also, given the strong teleologies that impel nineteenth-century narratives, seem to be on the move, going places, up and coming, even if only on the intellectual and ethical scale that a novel like *Great Expectations* would have us substitute for a social and economic one. (Pip may end up having to lower his expectations, but, in renouncing the 'bad' sophistication of snobbery, he accedes to the 'good' sophistication of quasi-authorial narrative privilege.)"[252] An obvious point that bears restating, the link between worldly sophistication and authorial or narrative privilege takes shape through the management of plot, and literary character emerges in our sense of their self-conscious formal mastery on both the levels of social content and narrative form. The plotter gets embodied in his or her transformation—or negotiation—of the depth of the literary character and the functionality of the actant. And, as Michel Peled Ginsburg argues, the social calculus wherein knowledge morphs into experience "implies a certain kind of economy: a loss on one level allows (and necessitates) a gain on another, presumably higher level. Knowledge is gained at the expense of experience, but the loss of experience, the experience of loss, is recuperated through knowledge of this experience (and of this loss)."[253]

Perhaps the starkest example of this is evident at the end of *Great Expectations*, where the novel deals with a seeming excess of narratable material. Now enlightened as to the source and history of his own fortune, Pip must command his newfound mastery over the plot by bringing closure to the novel—the protagonist's inculcation in social awareness is matched by his accumulation of narrative knowledge, and his sudden ascent in the plot's chain of command. When Pip discovers Estella's true parentage, a more difficult question crops up: what he will do with this information, and how or when must this truth be deployed? In the often literal flashes of illumination through which the central characters are finally confronted with the true visage and image of their antagonist, where the protagonist finally understands the actantial roles of the individuals around him, the plot turns, thickens, and must ultimately be put right once more by the newly initiated member of the plot. It would seem that the novel must always rely on the presence of a plotter—even in the event the plotter himself is done away with, the protagonist himself plays the part of the plotter for a solitary instant, as if to shake off irrevocably the lingering traces of having once been one of the "plotted-against" and to finally gain solidarity with those sadder but wiser characters who had seen and perceived the plot from its inception: "his adventure over, the protagonist reenters society, more skillful, less naïve, but by no means reluctant to play its games…the worldly plot replaces naïve ineptitude with jaded expertise, [and] its structure resembles the demystificatory 'transformation of fatal essences by human praxis' that Barthes identified in the maxims of La Rochefoucauld."[254]

"She read me what she had written, and it was direct and clear, and evidently intended to absolve me from any suspicion of profiting by the receipt of the money. I took the tablets from her hand, and it trembled again, and it trembled more as she took off the chain to which the pencil was attached, and put it in mine. All this she did, without looking at me. 'My name is on the first leaf. If you can ever write under my name, ''I forgive her,'' though ever so long after my broken heart is dust—pray do it!' 'O Miss Havisham,' said I, 'I can do it now. There have been sore mistakes; and my life has been a blind and thankless one; and I want forgiveness and direction far too much, to be bitter with you'" (*GE* 393). Miss Havisham finally gets the little ivory pencil off her chest and so releases herself to the present moment, liberated from the plotting that had so shut out the healing powers of time. "To write is perhaps to bring this assemblage of the unconscious to the light of day, to select the whispering voices, to gather the tribes and secret idioms from which I extract something I call my Self (*Moi*). *I* is an order-word. A schizophrenic said: "I heard voices say: *he is conscious of*

---

[252] Joseph Litvak, *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 37.

[253] Michal Peled Ginsburg, *Economies of Change: Form and Transformation in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 10.

[254] Winnett, *Terrible Sociability*, p. 20-1.

life'."[255] Though the cycle of revenge has ostensibly been broken, this very transposition of plotting into writing, into the inscription rather than the articulation of forgiveness, seems to render the reality-bound temporalities of fruitless *plotting* into the utopian time-bending structure of a novel's *writing*. "I can do it now" is an admission of temporal synchronicity—the past action that has to be forgiven reaches absolution in the present rather than in an imagined future—and it is this rare simultaneity that offers a brief moment where what is wished for can be asked and granted at the same time, without the anticipation of plots or plans realized. As Lukács writes, "Indeed, the irony is a double one in both directions. It extends not only to the profound hopelessness of the struggle but also to the still more profound hopelessness of its abandonment—the pitiful failure of the intention to adapt to a world which is a stranger to its ideals, to abandon the unreal ideality of the soul for the sake of achieving mastery over reality."[256]

To indulge in the paradoxes that attend plot's closural policies, trauma, and the sensation of backwardness is to recognize that it is the novel's scapegoating of the plotter that exposes the causal fallacies at the core of novelistic plotting itself and, crucially, begin to capture the almost ineffable truth that in the traumatic, cataclysmic, or regretted circumstances of life, unlike in novels, can never revisited and revised, even though the drive toward plotting could resemble the galvanizing, invigorating action characteristic of those who have "gotten over" loss and are seemingly restored to themselves, back in fine form. As in the preceding chapters, plotting fractures around the narratological binaries that orient narrative time, consciousness, and characterization. It is the pitting of the plotter's plot against the novel's that captures the futility of certain forms of recuperation through revision—or, more specifically, the impossibility of revision itself. To be a plotter is to exert some degree of metaleptic mastery over the plot at hand and thus to bear a significant relationship to history, highly cognizant of one's place in a totality and within a burgeoning historical narrative subject to malleability. While the problem of causality is for others a hopeless bind, for plotters the effects of certain causes can already be foretold in advance, since to plot is to venture to control the course of certain futures by projecting, by plotting, into that very future.[257]

The disjuncture of the novel's form of plotting with the type of fictional plotting that it depicts might seem at first to further evidence the realist novel's mimetic failures. For Brooks, "…the very point of the discrepancy between the narrative of actions and narrative of internal dispositions is their fundamental lack of congruence, the inability of either ever fully to coincide with or explain the other."[258] However, Northrop Frye complicates this, arguing that "Real life does not start or stop; it never ties up loose ends; it never manifests meaning or purpose except by blind accident; it is never comic or tragic, ironic or romantic, or anything else that has a shape."[259] By definition that which both bears and endows shape on the novel and creates narrative beginnings, middles, and ends out of nondescript unstructured events, plot seems to go against the very grain of "life" itself. As such, a nineteenth-century novel known for its tidy narrative arcs and

---

[255] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 84.

[256] Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 84.

[257] When Said refers to "molestation" he is grappling with a sort of meta-consciousness that approximates the role of the plotter in the plot of the novel: "Now 'molestation' is a word I use to describe the bother and responsibility of all these powers and efforts. By that I mean that no novelist is ever unaware that his authority, regardless of how complete, or the authority of a narrator, is a sham. Molestation, then, is a consciousness of one's duplicity, whether one is a character or a novelist. And molestation occurs when novelists and critics have reminded themselves traditionally of how the novel is always subject to a comparison to reality and thereby found to be illusion. Or again, molestation is central to a character's experience of disillusionment during the course of a novel. To speak of authority in narrative prose fiction is also inevitably to be speaking of the molestations that accompany it." See "Molestation and Authority in Narrative Fiction," p. 49.

[258] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 32.

[259] Northrop Frye, "Dickens and the Comedy of Humours," *Northrop Frye's Writings on the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,* Vol. 17, ed. by Imre Salusinszky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 308.

perfectly timed coincidences is necessarily shot through with a sense of preordained plottedness and, it follows, with a capitulation to the blatant fictionality of established literary structures. Questioning one of the novel's chief strengths and fatal flaws, Hayden White asks "Common opinion has it that the plot of a narrative imposes a meaning on the events that comprise its story level by revealing at the end a structure that was immanent in the events *all along*…Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see 'the end' in every beginning?"[260] Warping, torqueing, or otherwise bending time around in order to further its own coherence, the novel's lack of subjugation to temporal constraint arises as the point at which its realist project starts to unspool: it benefits from a privilege of pure plotting associated with fiction as a form but never with the lived and frequently lamented linearity of time. As Frye argues, reality only arrives at meaning and purpose by "blind accident," and the novel's plot is far from accidental. True to their name, plots are nothing if not *plotted*—purposive, deliberate, and preconceived. As such, the novel has no defenses against critics who fault the genre for scanting reality—social, political, or otherwise—for aesthetic coherence.

Far from the concept of closure inciting critique, it is more specifically the way that the novel secures this closure that seems reprehensible. E. M. Forster hints at these embattled foundations of the novel played out alongside the debate over the primacy of plot and character when he mobilizes this central tension of novel theory— the dialectic of plot and character—in order to demonstrate the form's "feeble[ness]," writing that: "In the losing battle that the plot fights with the characters, it often takes a cowardly revenge. Nearly all novels are feeble at the end. This is because the plot requires to be wound up…and usually the characters go dead while he is at work, and our final impression of them is through deadness."[261] Plot triumphs over character; the good and the passive succeed, and the bad yet active (and necessary) are sacrificed. Narrative closure was often seen as a strike against a novel's realism, even as it also became one of the genre's defining features and its mode of securing its trademark "literariness": "…to the extent that the 'failure of closure' has been transformed into a compelling, even compulsive critical success, it may well be a text's most powerful and seductive effect. In most recent criticism, for instance, sometimes despite the most rigorous intentions to the contrary, the effect has operated to preserve for literature—as the very category of the literary—an almost or even frankly ontological difference from the worldly discourse in which it would otherwise be implicated."[262] Capitulating to the demand for aesthetic coherence, plot has been derided because the closural mechanisms of the structure seemed to impose an ending that is just too neat, happy, or utopian, parallel to a sense of resolution present nowhere else in life. Not of this world nor of any known reality, the formal symmetries of narrative plotting conjures into being lines and lives of perfect proportion, thereby detracting from the verisimilitude with which the novel represents that world. In what seems like an unavoidable slip, the form of representation diverges starkly from the form of the reality that that particular representation seeks to capture—this divergence, I have been arguing, takes on the shape and sensation of plotting, an undertaking so necessary to narrative form and yet so futile for plotters in their misspent drive toward unavoidable—because narratively mandated—failures.

But if Brooks holds that "there is a pervasive suspicion that plot falsifies more subtle kinds of interconnectedness…[modernist novels] cannot ultimately do without plotting insofar as they remain narrative structures that signify, they plot with irony and bad conscience, intent…to expose the artifices of formal structure and human design."[263] I will pursue a line of argument that may at first seem paradoxical:

---

[260] Quoted in Hilary P. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), p. 9. See also Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. 19-23.

[261] Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 95.

[262] D. A. Miller, "Balzac's Illusions Lost and Found," *Yale French Studies*, No. 67, Concepts of Closure (1984), p. 164.

[263] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, pp. 113-4.

that plot's incoherent closures, formal artifices, and temporal fallacies apprehend the structural complexities of a grief that always looks backwards and struggles with a future it cannot face, and individuals who can imagine no kind of satisfying closure to their and thus finds its mirror in the novel's fragile attempts to hold everything together when it all may as well fall apart. This chapter, then, is about how the psychic negotiations of characters who plot—in order to variously maintain a fantasy of social mobility, cathartic revenge, and the power of laboriously plotted action to even out those injustices doled out arbitrarily—in fact prolong their own miseries and stand in the way of their own growth. Though these literary characters could be read in a superficial light as mere functionaries working on behalf of the novel's sustained narratability, I argue that the novel's reliance on the bad mourning of these apparent actants in fact apprehends the nuances of psychic processing who have nothing left to believe in but the slim hopes and second chances seemingly offered by their scheming. It is, put another way, all too easy and all too familiar to claim that characters' capitulation to plot functionality reduces them to nothing but instruments in an elaborate aesthetic enterprise, "nothing can ever take the place of a lost being, a text's "drive toward a completed, synthesized meaning, its assertion of symmetry of unity, and its confidence in mimetic representation," its imposition of closure, gets "perpetually thwarted by the infinite openness of loss…"[264] But by focusing on the plotter, whose end is never happy, novelistic closure begins to turn back on itself and to dismiss its own symmetry as nothing more than a dream conceived of but never actualized outside of fiction.

"At least it'll be a good story." But plotting never emerges as a satisfying—nor even adequate—compensation for having had to experience the event that can only *later* be recuperated as a good story; the catharsis of narration in no way erases the trauma of inarticulation that precedes it. The "best case" scenario provides little consolation for the compromised position, of a needing to weigh scenarios, best or worse or otherwise, in the first place. Indeed, this is where the language of narration becomes useful in thinking about the ability to tell a story, that very telling already a testament to the recuperation, the product of a letting go, of a trauma that would otherwise only provide an always-regretted experience of that which one did not want to experience. The condition ceases to exist but the memory of that condition persists, outside history, outside narrative, and outside plotting. What is the benefit of giving an account of oneself, if that self only emerges out of those founding moments—so strategically useful to nineteenth-century plots yet so exquisitely shameful, embarrassing, and unforgettable to these plotters? Rather than merely scapegoats sacrificed at the altar of aesthetic unity, the fates of these ill-fated characters demonstrate finally that those with the most purchase on the rules of the game often invest most heavily and most recklessly in it, precisely because they buy into plotting's empty promise to supply some form of coherence or closure where there is none to be had, neither by narrative nor by those charged with its custody.

[264] Richard Howard Stamelman, Lost Beyond Telling: Representations of Death and Absence in Modern French Poetry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 69.

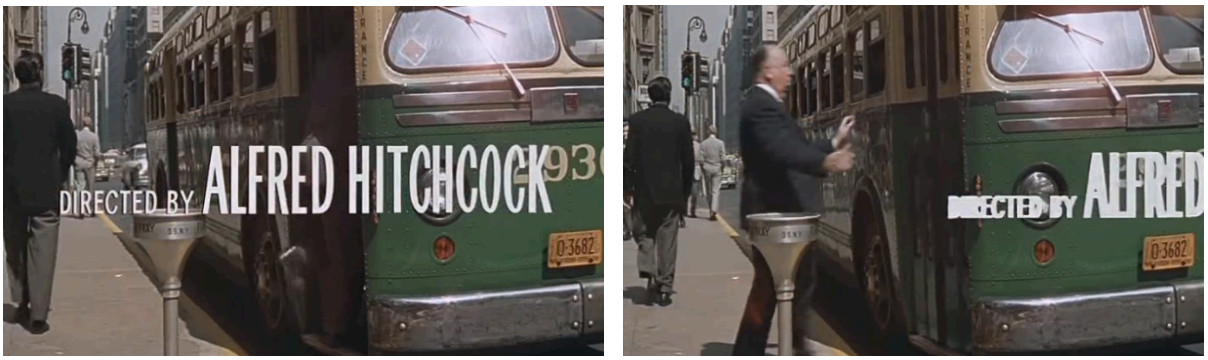
Fiction's Flicker Effects: Montage/Framing/Hitchcock

"I try to achieve the quality of imperfection."
—Alfred Hitchcock to André Bazin

"…your camerawork is becoming almost invisible."
—François Truffaut to Alfred Hitchcock

Looking into the Cameo

North by Northwest opens to Bernard Hermann's dramatic score, synced up with a symphonic array of animated lines emerging from all sides and intersecting to form a slanted grid onto which the typographic credits skate. The words "Directed by Alfred Hitchcock" slide in and glide out from left to right, passing momentarily before immediately being pushed out of the screen by the director himself. That venerable rule of treasure hunting, "X marks the spot," here is shown to be quite literally correct: the "Alfred Hitchcock" that existed typographically is supplanted and fully embodied by the portly man that suddenly materializes, in that exact spot, diegetically.



Figures 1 and 2: Hitchcock's name emerges first as type and is then unceremoniously pushed out of the frame in the film's characteristic use of suspension-effects.

The director's notoriously stout profile is, of course, immediately recognized as such (here especially because we have been implicitly primed by an exposure to the signifier which paves the way for the signified stimulus to appear). Martin Scorsese wrote of Saul Bass's pioneering innovations in the genre of the title sequence: "Bass fashioned [them] into an art, creating, in some cases, like *Vertigo*, a mini-film within a film. His graphic compositions in movement function as a prologue to the movie—setting the tone, providing the mood and foreshadowing the action of the picture. His titles are not simply unimaginative 'identification tags'—rather

they are integral to the film as a whole."[265] But if Bass's opening credits create a "mini-film within a film," then Hitchcock is no longer merely the director of that picture but a star *in it* as well. Hitchcock's cameo, which in uncommon fashion occurs before any of the film's characters enter the story, ventures to set the stage in a film obsessively preoccupied with performers and performances (recall Phillip Vandamm's remark to Roger Thornhill: "With such expert play-acting, you make this very room a theatre.")[266]

As for exposition, there is little to go on: Hitchcock is attempting to catch a bus, is, in fact, in enough of a hurry to try to sprint and catch it, but he slams into the bus door just as soon as it, in turn, slams shut. In fact, it looks almost as if he is not clamoring to get on board the bus, but is chasing after his own name, emblazoned on the screen for a few seconds and then blazing off just as rapidly. The mystery is regrettably but predictably left unexplained. The camera cuts away from the "fatso," and that is the last that is seen or heard of the fellow. Cut off without further ado, there is nothing left for *us* to do but to follow where the camera may lead. And when one door closes, another opens—out steps Cary Grant from within a polished silver elevator of a Madison Avenue corporate building. Dashing, debonair in his dapper grey suit, he barks orders while his assistant Maggie trails frenetically behind, seeming every bit the sick woman Grant makes her out to be in order to pinch a taxi from a "good Samaritan" who is left standing street-side and cab-less. The story begun, the minor plot featuring Hitchcock as star is, likewise, forgotten, suspended in an everlasting moment of uncertainty and inaction. Contrary to the old theatre adage, "the show must go on," that supplies the title for one of *Singing in the Rain*'s musical numbers—the tune of which Grant hums in the shower as he waits for Eva Marie Saint to leave her hotel room—this short episode comes to a sputtering halt and refuses to go on, and it is Hitchcock's replacement and understudy, Grant, who actually "goes on" in a bravura move that induces in us a feeling of happy amnesia. Under a cloud of blissful disregard, our attentions diverted, we mosey back along on our merry way.

I began with this moment in order to think about the relationship between Hitchcock's plots and the materiality of film form—the film's opening shot is exemplary of the sort of filmic suspension effect that this movie uses to stitch its many sets and scenotopes together into a visually and narratively intact design. *North*

---

[265] Quoted in Peter Hall, "Opening Ceremonies: Typography and the Movies, 1955-1969," *Architecture and Film*, ed. Mark Lamster (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), pp. 131-2.

[266] *North by Northwest*, Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, Written by Ernest Lehman, With Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint, and James Mason (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1959). On the subject of making his cameo appearance so early in this film, Hitchcock dismissively attributes it to an effort to give viewers the satisfaction of having "spotted" him at the very beginning so they can watch the rest of the film "without distraction." To read his cameo as initiating a drama of directorial desire to be in front of, rather than behind, the camera is perhaps a naïve way to explain the appearance that contemporary moviegoers anticipated with all the conviction of a convention expected: only a very naïve audience member would expect Hitchcock to actually take on the part of the protagonist in the picture. Yet, even still, there is something odd about the "troublesome gag" that had to be slipped in and then suspended as early as possible—preferably within the first five minutes—with the very aim of *ending our suspense*. In response to Truffaut's question about whether Hitchcock's "personal appearance" in *The Lodger* was a "gag" or "superstition" or due to a dearth of extras, the director responds: "It was strictly utilitarian; we had to fill the screen. Later on it became a superstition and eventually a gag. But by now it's a rather troublesome gag, and I'm very careful to show up in the first five minutes so as to let the people look at the rest of the movie with no further distraction." See Truffaut, p. 49. The cameo is interesting because it is troublesome, generating the wrong kind of suspense, a suspense that ends in distraction rather than heightened attention or narrative absorption. Here the cameo's "narrative" threatens to tear away from the central storyline and so must be introduced and then concluded as early and as quickly as possible. Putting it another way, Hitchcock's cameo convention converts into a circumvention of his elaboration of suspense. As I will argue, *North by Northwest* is especially plagued by the difficulty of sustaining an organic and fluid system of suspense and, given this, resorts quite often to gags that are masterfully and tellingly hidden and enfolded into the diegesis.

by Northwest continues in a condition of perceived continuity, legibility, and intelligibility because it sutures both material film frames and, significantly, diegetic fram*ings* together effortlessly. Unencumbered by its unending barrage of narrative detail, *North by Northwest* generates a system of impeccable fissures that, it anticipates, we cannot discern or, in discerning, we will quickly forget. The film revels in its fractured structure, a structure that then refers back to the ghostly material undertext haunting every film as such.[267] For a film is, of course, nothing more than a stirring string of images sped up and projected at twenty-four frames per second in order to create that vital element of cinematic magic: the illusion of natural movement. The celluloid still entombs a single moment in a temporal casket, a space of perpetual suspension. This is what André Bazin calls time "embalmed" within an archival image that halts the passing of moments within its edges.[268] Linked together, enlivened by speed, and roused into moving substance, photographic stills always simultaneously create and annihilate a façade of real motion to which it is insistently anchored and which it ceaselessly attempts to suppress. Yet film's illusion of movement is both its trade and its widely known but warily concealed secret, since its rapid catalogue of the past conflicts with the discrete historical moments frozen beneath (or within) it. What is projected on screen, in other words, belies an inner mechanism that is screened from us, a series of gaps and lapses that, try as they will, the spectator could never discern with the naked eye. Like early celluloid film's hazardous propensity of combusting under the sustained heat of a projection lamp, the stuff that movies are made of would only ignite under the too close or too slow scrutiny of eyes which, paired with the glare of the backlight on flatbed editing tables, would reveal the filmstrip's imperceptibly ripped seams.

Frames therefore constitute a "sequence of spaces" that "generates a sense of completeness (or a totality-effect) which can scarcely be explained by its content alone."[269] Similarly, the deliberate manipulation of testimony or evidence to produce wrongful accusations (framing as a common category of criminal activity) occurs repeatedly in this movie—the framing-based narrative, structurally analogous to film's invisible material seriality—brings to light theories regarding the cinematograph's ability to seize and reconstitute mobility. It also, more importantly, allows for an interrogation of plot's own alliance with its representations of, and resonance with, film's spatial form.[270] Cinema's fraudulent mobility is eternally belied by the recalcitrant stasis of the filmstrip's constitutive shots or frames. In much the same way, we cannot discern the flicker of faulty plotlines and fleeting narrative fault lines due to *North by Northwest*'s proclivity toward narrative suspension and inception in single dramatic, rapid, and eminently theatrical moments. Rather than

---

[267] During the opening credits alone, small pockets of apprehension and anticipation beyond the cameo are filled and then evacuated in swift succession. Just prior to Hitchcock's name appearing on screen, we see two older women, their arms full of brown-paper packages tied up with string, making a fuss over a cab. We assume that one can take it and move on, and that the other must be left behind. Nevertheless, even this minor commotion does not finally lead to resolution, and their fight seems to hover in time, their gestures frozen in a blank space beyond the camera's gaze. The secret places beyond or off the screen, a land of indeterminacy, always press on the space of the narrative. Stephen Heath describes this off-screen space as possessing only an intermittent, fluctuating existence that metonymically performs the cinema's intrinsic feat of technological magic—we fill the unseen space with our imaginative conjectures of what might lie outside the parameters of the camera's frame just as we repress the knowledge of the breaks in a filmstrip that the brain retains but cannot make visible to the eye. Confronted with this little bout of blindness, the mind chooses, instead, to cling to its faith in the mimetic, moving scene that the cinema presents on screen.

[268] André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?,* trans. and ed. Hugh Gray, Vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

[269] Fredric Jameson, "Spatial Systems in North by Northwest." *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 1992), pp. 53-6.

[270] Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader,* trans. Alan Williams, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 43.

denying film's "flicker effect," an inevitable component of the medium endemic to pre-digital cinematic technology, it is my argument in this chapter that Hitchcock replicates its illusive qualities within the structure of *North by Northwest*'s comparably episodic—teetering on spasmodic—plot. Of course, the film's plotters manipulate framings and seem aligned with the seriality of montage-based framing, more specifically. This recalls Erving Goffman's brilliant insight cast in starkly cinematic language: "Observe that for those in on the deception, what is going on *is* the fabrication; for those contained, what is going is *what* is being fabricated. The rim of the frame is a construction, but only the fabricators so see it."[271]

More importantly, it allows for an interrogation of plot's own alliance with film's spatial form and social content.[272] Rather than denying film's "flicker effect," endemic to pre-digital cinematic technology, it is my argument in this article that Hitchcock replicates its illusive qualities within the structure of *North by Northwest*'s comparably episodic plot in order to reflect on the very mechanisms of both fictional plotting and cinematic technology itself. Hitchcock's own self-consciousness about the material limitations of his medium is, as I will show, encoded into the very vicissitudes of the plot itself. Frequently ignored as the least complicated aspect of narrative fiction and dismissed as mere paraphrase, what we call "plot" emerges instead as a meta-narrative consideration of form itself. Plot's fraudulent mobility is eternally belied by the stasis of the filmstrip's constitutive shots or frames in a way that bafflingly confuses the content and the form of the film. Often seen as the least complicated aspects of narrative form, plots and plotting emerge as points at which social anxiety and criminal desire are expressed in and inform the very logic of narrative and cinematic form. At its broadest level, this article addresses ways in which the plotter's base and insatiable desire for the "mastery of form" that Pierre Bourdieu places at the crux of cultural refinement allows us to understand plot's own self-reflexivity, both about its own aspirations toward aesthetic coherence and its fantasy of capturing a reality that remains always imperiled by the material limitations that make that reality representable.

Far different from Hitchcock's other films, in which a bulk of narrative suspense is generated by a relatively streamlined, self-propelled mystery (i.e. Is Miss Froy a figment of Iris's imagination? Did Jonathan murder Charlotte Inwood's husband? Will Margot discover her husband has been conspiring to kill her?), *North by Northwest* operates as if it had at its core a similarly clear, straightforward question, carefully obscuring the fact that, like the "O" in Roger O. Thornhill that "stands for nothing," the story has that same "nothing" filling out its (hollow) center.[273] Compared to a film like *The Lady Vanishes*, set on a train and thus featuring repeated passenger compartments going continuously at a set speed, *North by Northwest* doesn't benefit from Iris Henderson's smooth ride through narrative terrain, driven by a single question and characterized by even progress. Roger Thornhill's stalling, stop-and-go tour through various geographic territories yearns for the continuity that Iris spends most of the film hoping to disrupt. In *The Lady Vanishes*, Iris Henderson befriends a "harmless" old woman by the name of Miss Froy. When the lady disappears, Iris pulls the emergency brakes on the train in an attempt to alert the authorities and to confirm Miss Froy's reality, and her own sanity. Her plan fails, and she passes most of the movie walking back and forth through the length of the train—it is the dining car's eventual detachment from the rest of the compartments, and its unscheduled stop in a forested region off the main line, which signals the breach of motion that initiates the action of the final plot device: the armed standoff between the passengers and the soldiers. Soon to be

---

[271] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), p. 84.

[272] Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," p. 43.

[273] This is, perhaps, a mocking reference to David O. Selznick, born David Selznick, who added the "O" to his name as a caprice. Famously, Hitchcock had a term for the obtrusive nothingness of the "O": the "MacGuffin," the plot device that serves as the engine for narrative action but finally exposed as an empty or broken signifier. I will discuss this trope further a bit later in this chapter. Though *North by Northwest*'s statuette is frequently referred to as the MacGuffin *par excellence,* the fact that it contains microfilm in its belly radically adjusts the function of the conventional MacGuffin. Instead, the figurine serves as a meta-critical figuration of the embeddedness and self-referentiality of performance and materiality in the film.

accosted by gun-wielding German officers, on the border of the fictional country of Bandrika, the passengers' interrupted journey finds an analogue in the pseudo-film-strip made of serial, replicable train compartments. Apprehending the plot at hand, Iris's final move is to somehow author it, by authorizing the starts and stops of the train itself, the closest analogue to the apparatus of mechanical reproduction that she can control from *within* the diegesis. Automotive and diegetic motion reach a state of synthesis by the end of the film—representation and formal figuration intersect in order to broker the eventual resolution of the movie's plot. But Hitchcock's cameo, his name appearing first visually as type and then photo-realistically as figure, and finally vanishing without a trace, exemplifies a very different sort of suspense at work in *North by Northwest*, mobilized by a systemic suspension, rather than extension, of the agitation classically associated with an excruciatingly sustained and self-sustaining form of suspense.

Seeing the Big Picture

North by Northwest famously lacks a "big picture," a tidy and orderly structure that reaches dizzying highs and lows in the course of completing its narrative arc (even though one could certainly say that, in terms of altitude alone, the film ascends to some daring peaks). *The 39 Steps*, *The Wrong Man*, *Young and Innocent,* and *Murder!* each enacts the well-worn plight of the innocent but falsely accused man. *North by Northwest* is unusual in that it situates this plot against the familiar backdrop of international Cold War espionage and conspiracy. Despite its treatment of an all-too-recognizable story, the movie has generated a good amount of confusion for everyone involved, a disorientation that afterwards prompted a great deal of complaining about this sense of film-induced befuddlement. "It's a terrible script. We've already done a third of the picture and I still can't make head or tail of it," Grant had once said to Hitchcock, an aside from which the director seemed to take no little pleasure.[274] Calling the many distractions in the film "an amusing sidelight of the shooting" and, as if verifying his boast to Truffaut that the audience would follow him wherever he takes them, the director delighted most in transporting perplexed moviegoers to a virtual no-man's land that offers no explanation or escape, a "flat landscape" literalized by the austere, bleak, barren fields at Prairie Stop, off Highway 41. This no man's land constitutes the site of Thornhill's ill-fated meeting with the nonexistent George Kaplan (who is, taken literally, no man, only decoy) and the famous encounter with the plane that's "dusting crops where there ain't no crops."[275] As if anticipating the vast, silent stretches in Antonioni's *L'avventura*—released a year after *North by Northwest*—empty spaces like this are absent all connotative meaning and, in this very absence, constitute an emblem of the narrative opening or aperture—we cannot fathom exactly what they might contain or, still yet, set into motion. Hitchcock, it seemed, believed that plot itself was a mere mechanism for manipulating the reactions of his audience, even dreaming one day of attaching electrodes to spectators' brains so that a push of a button would elicit the desired response of anxiety, fear, excitement, laughter, etc. [276] Such a magnificent switchboard for the human sensorium would permit him to circumvent the need for plot, perception, and mediation altogether.

---

[274] Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 249.

[275] Ibid., p. 249. See also Robin Wood on "flat landscapes," *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 139.

[276] In a chat with his screenwriter on the set of *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock famously marveled: "Ernie, do you realize what we are doing in this picture? The audience is like a giant organ that you and I are playing. At one moment we play this note and get this reaction, and then we play that chord and they react that way. And someday we won't even have to make a movie—there'll be electrodes implanted in their brains, and we'll just press different buttons and they'll go 'oooh' and 'aaah' and we'll frighten them, and make them laugh. Won't that be wonderful?" Quoted in Jan Jagodzinski's *Psychoanalyzing Cinema: A Productive Encounter with Lacan, Deleuze, and Žižek* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 169.

Hitchcock harbored a longstanding interest in the dreamscape's capacity to conjure up a world contorted by fantasy or delusion, as in the famous Salvador Dalí sequence in *Spellbound*. Truffaut remarks on the director's adherence to arcane, impenetrable strands of narrative formulae: "the logic of your pictures, which is sometimes decried by the critics, is rather like the logic of dreams. *Strangers on a Train* and *North by Northwest*, for instance, are made up of a series of strange forms that follow the pattern of a nightmare."[277] Truffaut incisively employs the phrase "a series of strange forms," citing the baffling logic and terrifying pandemonium of nightmare. Though there is nothing especially nightmare-ish or frightening about the film's plot, a pervasive air of the incredible, implausible, or marvelous hangs over the entire story. Raymond Chandler, who worked with the director on *Strangers on a Train*, "did not enjoy the experience, claiming that Hitchcock possessed no sense of 'dramatic plausibility'…Hitchcock felt that if you kept the action moving fast enough the audience wouldn't spot the inconsistencies and errors in the story. His films are full of them…"[278] Given the film's reliance on coincidence and accident, how else can *North by Northwest* be described if not as a quick succession of hopelessly tangled storylines, whose knots are somehow or another (improbably) straightened out and sorted through by movie's end? A review published on July 29, 1959 in the *Los Angeles Mirror-News* only strengthens the suspicion of chaos lurking, shared by actors, critics, and audience-members alike: "One of the film's weakest links is the loose ends and stray plot threads which are never quite stitched together."[279] Asked by another interviewer about the "ingeniousness" of the plot, and how "it keeps working itself out, how it keeps progressing," screenwriter Ernest Lehman responded: "Since I never knew where I was going next, I was constantly painting myself into corners, and then trying to figure a way out of them."[280] He continues, "the picture has about ten acts instead of three, and if I'd tried to sit down at the beginning and conceive the whole plot, I could have never done it. Everything was written in increments: moving it a little bit forward, then a little bit more, one page at a time."[281]

Lehman's comment tethers the spluttering composition of *North by Northwest*'s screenplay to the incremental progression that comprises both the development of its plot and the underlying technology of filmic motion. Composed "page by page," moving "a little bit forward, then a little bit more," the screenwriter's sketching of the sporadic storyline gestures to the material undertext of filmic composition, namely, the way in which film's frames are "stitched together" and spurred into motion much like the hasty hemming of those "loose ends and stray plot threads." *North by Northwest* frequently casts its viewers as the wrong men in Hitchcock's canon, caught up in a drama they can't comprehend, just as Lehman becomes the man who desires to know too much, even as he was hastily forestalling the reality that he "never [knew] where [he] was going next." To put it another way, it is not just plot that gives the film its organizing shape or structure, but a spatially induced concern with plotting itself, with schemes to sustain suspense at whatever cost, come what may, coherence be damned.

The French auteur sheepishly confesses that "it's always difficult to sum up all the ups and downs in stories in a few words, but this one is almost impossible"[282] But if *North by Northwest* leaves seasoned viewers and reviewers like Truffaut bewildered, how has it acquired a reputation for possessing the lucidity and phenomenal breadth to make it, in his own estimation, a States-side compendium of Hitchcock's work, "the picture that epitomizes the whole of [his] work in America"?[283] For, perhaps most strangely, viewers of this

---

[277] Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 260.

[278] William Boyd, "*North by Northwest,*" *Le Figaro* (July 2007). Online. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.williamboyd.co.uk/film-north-by-northwest.

[279] Dick Williams, "Hitchcock Returns to Spy Chase Formula," *Los Angeles Mirror-News* (29 July 1959).

[280] Bill Baer, "*North by Northwest*: Interview with Ernest Lehman," *Creative Screenwriting Journal*, Vol. 34 (Nov./Dec. 2000). See also Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot* for a reading of the careful scheming of the analyst who plots his way out of a session with his patient at the end of the hour.

[281] Ibid.

[282] Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 260.

[283] Ibid.

motion picture do not necessarily remember *North by Northwest* as *one* picture, but as many. Characterized by a rapid succession of episodic plots—not only narrative plots but secret plots on Thornhill's life, themselves consequences of plots dreamed up by the nameless Professor on behalf of the CIA, an organization plotting against the Soviet Union in the Cold War, we could plot more if time and space allowed—it is all too remarkable that, for all its plottedness, the film is never plodding. It is safe to assert that *North by Northwest*'s regularly shifting vistas are like snapshots "'pinned side by side in some photograph album' or a tourist guidebook."[284] Those who, in 1959, were taken in by the promising tagline, "The Master of Suspense presents a 3000 mile chase across America!," might have felt disappointed or even cheated had the film only documented one location. (Though, as Roger Thornhill glibly proclaims in the film, "Ah, in the world of advertising, there's no such thing as a lie, there's only the expedient exaggeration. You ought to know that!") The theatrical trailer tempts us with tastes of "sand and sunburn," "mountain-climbing and the Charlie horse," vacation and voyeurism, featuring Hitchcock himself in a travel office pronouncing "We should all have some type of holiday, so, my suggestion is a quiet little tour of say, about, 2000 miles? I have just made a motion picture, *North by Northwest*, to show you some of these delights." There is no denying the picture-postcard feel of *North by Northwest*. Its promotional posters offered the public "the American Dream at 24 frames per second," a directionally north/northwesterly trip (on Northwest Airlines) from Madison Avenue and the United Nations building to Chicago, Rapid City, and Mount Rushmore, and it makes good on this promise.

But what of the weirdly specific pace of the journey that Hitchcock mentions? What would it feel like to travel across the country "at 24 frames per second"? And, more importantly, why this analogy of story time and frame rate? With the introduction of sound film in 1926, the motion picture industry elected to use a standardized frequency rate of 24 frames per second on traditional 35 mm film stock—the human ear, more sensitive than the eye, was more attuned to breaks in audio quality and thus demanded greater consistency of projection. Silent films were generally shot at lower speeds anywhere between 16 and 26 fps, but such speeds produced an effect called "image drag," wherein the action seemed to display a "hiccup" or flutter.[285] (Higher speeds would run too quickly through the film, a wonderful zero-sum game balancing film's length against its visual density.) Though Kevin Brownlow attests that Thomas Edison "recommended a speed of 46 frames per second—'anything less will strain the eye'," he also cites Gordon Hendricks's skepticism in *The Edison Motion Picture Myth* as to whether such a high rate was needed to produce the "persistence of vision"—according to Brownlow, H. A. V. Bulleid apparently agreed with Edison, claiming "'To obviate flicker from white light projected on a bright surface requires about 48 obscurations per second.'"[286] Regardless of the actual calculations involved in achieving an optimal blend of the retina's limited perceptual durability with a reel's limited durationality, it suffices to say that film's inbuilt formal feature, frame rate, gives breath and being to image's fairy tale-like transformation into motion picture. This is not so much the "American Dream" as it is a rudimentary cog in Hollywood's magical movie-making machine: the harnessing of time itself through the motion picture camera. *North by Northwest*'s economy of suspense draws an illuminating affinity between the diegetic composition of underhanded plots and cinema's own material constitution in frame-by-frame

---

[284] Steven Jacobs, *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2007), p. 50.

[285] See Thomas Elsaesser's *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 284. Also Kevin Brownlow, "Silent Films: What Was the Right Speed?," *Sight and Sound* (Summer 1980), pp. 164-7.

[286] Brownlow, p. 165. For more on the difference between an ocular "persistence of vision" and a cognitive "perception of motion," as well as how the history of the cinematic apparatus incorporates such perceptual illusions as the phi phenomenon and beta movement, see David A. Cook's *A History of Narrative Film* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004); Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Joseph Anderson and Barbara Anderson, "The Myth of Persistence of Vision Revisited," *Journal of Film and Video* 45:1 (1991), pp. 3-12.

animation, the illusion of movement built upon the hidden immobility of its constitutive parts. Far from merely supplying film's frequently suppressed, almost unmentionable "medium," filmstrips provide an analogue to both the construction of plot and, crucially, a discourse of plot as primarily concerned with characters' acquisition of a metaleptic awareness of film form as such. Getting around the law, it seems, is a marvelous way to get in on the plot, and getting in the plot can perhaps be achieved by getting ahold of narrative form.

Of course, to note the figuration of suspension in Hitchcock's works is by no means to venture into new territory; indeed, it only restates a commonplace of Hitchcock criticism. Within his canon many characters, valiant heroes and smarmy villains alike, are shot dangling from heights and holding onto their lives (sometimes literally) by a thread, and several studies have already meticulously examined the "hanging man figure" in his films.[287] The final chase scene atop Mount Rushmore, a cinematic monument by our present moment in film history, speaks to the trope of literal suspension from national landmarks over an impenetrable abyss: famed examples include L. B. Jeffries's tumble in *Rear Window* out of his Greenwich Village apartment window, having been shoved by Lars Thorwald, *Saboteur*'s titular saboteur, Fry, and his fatal fall from the edge of the Statue of Liberty, and John "Scottie" Ferguson's rooftop chase in *Vertigo* that lands him in the gutter. Such cliffhangers, by nature, leave us breathless with terror and, while we wait nervously to see if these characters plunge to their deaths we, too, are practically falling off the edge of our seats in that state of exquisite suspense which can only be described as Hitchcockian. Yet what is interesting about *North by Northwest* is that it sustains its suspense best in the elusive act of suspending it. Storylines are dropped, then picked up again, but these dips and divots are as little seen as the black spaces, or 8 mm "frame lines," holding cascading frames apart.

Caroline Levine has recently argued against the notion that suspense encourages readerly passivity and "political submissiveness."[288] Rather than providing a "means of social regulation," suspense in the nineteenth century supplied "rigorous political and epistemological training, a way to foster energetic skepticism and uncertainty rather than closure and complacency."[289] As such, Levine posits that suspense was "on the side of anyone who wanted to disrupt the deadening routines of the status quo."[290] Her argument, though broadly convincing, nevertheless cannot fully account for the imperceptible intermissions or "disruptions" so characteristic of *North by Northwest*. Rather than visible breaks or "pauses" that allow for a reader or viewer to exercise their powers of speculation—lulls and lags precipitating a stimulus to an "active skepticism, infinite irregularity, and revolutionary freedom"—the film engineers its 136 minute running time as if it were an economy driven toward an ideal of maximal efficiency. Here we find that energy is never wasted and conversions of storylines, one into another, do not generate any entropy that threatens the sustainability of the narrative system.[291] Instead, *North by Northwest* masters its suspense by giving it the impression of the unrelenting, perfectly contingent, and fracture-free, thereby cajoling spectators into submission while it itself is barely struggling to present Roland Barthes's vision of suspense as an "organized set of stoppages."[292] This is a feat of constant chaos kept at bay. In other words, it is a suspense that works in spite of itself—never stopping for breath, the film is also seemingly never short of it. Suspense is based on a complete overturning of the logical imperatives, and predictive values, of plausibility. There is nothing safe about Roger Thornhill's adventures, because all of it is characterized by the unlikely sequence of events that

---

[287] See Christopher D. Morris, *The Hanging Figure: On Suspense and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (Westport: Praeger, 2002).

[288] Caroline Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p. 2.

[289] Ibid., p. 2.

[290] Ibid., p. 6.

[291] Ibid., p. 36.

[292] See Roland Barthes, *S/Z* and *The Pleasure of the Text*. Quoted in Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense*, p. 1.

should rightfully belong to a "nightmare." Perhaps most unlikely of all, like dreamers with eyes wide shut, the audience is lulled into the bizarre rhythms of *North by Northwest*'s design without recognizing its fundamental violations of traditional narrative logic, causality, and closure. This is not just an invitation to or inculcation in readerly passivity, but a bad suspense whose discontinuities are masked by the blinding speed at which they are "projected" or plotted. How does this bad form of suspense masquerade as not just a good one, but one exemplary for all the rest?

Who Framed Roger Thornhill?

Taking the scene of Townsend's murder as an exemplar might help to illustrate the crafty model of narrative suspension that has been introduced, aptly manipulated, and put to such effective use in *North by Northwest*. I will be narrowing my own frame to three scenes in particularly, moments in which one suspense narrative is suddenly suspended, fused with and melded into another. The first is the oft-discussed case of mistaken identity in the Oak Bar, where Vandamm's ludicrously garish goons wait to apprehend the mysterious George Kaplan and mistakenly kidnap Thornhill in his stead; the second, Thornhill's 'murder' of Lester Townsend at the United Nations; and, finally, the third, in which Thornhill now frames Eve Kendall for his own death in order to deflect Vandamm's misgivings away from the *real* spy (Eve Kendall herself). Somewhat eccentrically, I hope to toss chronology to the wind, starting with the second paradigm this time rather than beginning from the very beginning, and then proceeding to use the first and third moments as scaffolding for the former.

Let us retrace Thornhill's steps the second time we see him at the Plaza. Our protagonist, posing as Kaplan, leaves the hotel and, following a lead, goes to the United Nations to seek out Mr. Lester Townsend of UNIPO. Once paged, Townsend quickly appears, but it is not the Townsend that we might have expected. A bulky, balding man with an air of formality about him, he enters from the left, looking as little like the suave, urbane Vandamm as Cary Grant might resemble the dandruff-ridden, short-statured George Kaplan, if the latter had been anything but pure fiction. After establishing that Townsend is most definitely not the man who has been gallivanting around New York kidnapping advertising executives at will from the Plaza Hotel and then arranging their deaths by forced libation and drunken driving, Townsend poses the question nagging at all of our minds: "Now, Mr. Kaplan, suppose you tell me who you are and what you want." Who *is* Mr. Kaplan? What *does* he want? The answer, we assume, has finally come after forty minutes of anxious, nail-biting viewing—we even might have whispered to ourselves with a sigh of relief: *the suspense is over at last*. Hanging onto word after crucial word as if our very lives depended on it, we expect to be shown a way out of the muddle and to see that long-awaited light at the end of the tunnel. Thornhill procures the photo of Vandamm he had found in Kaplan's room, asking, "Do you know this man?" As if in response, Townsend gasps audibly, a reaction that we might have initially construed as a sign of recognition. But here, our hopes are thoroughly dashed. It takes no more than a few micro-seconds for us to realize that the glistening flash of a knife shooting through the air at Townsend's back has indicated another unexpected turn—Townsend has been stabbed, Thornhill, framed, and our gazes, redirected. Only later, perhaps while discussing the film with our fellow Hitchcock aficionados, do we cast our memory back to the strange case of Mr. Townsend, that General Assembly member who was apportioned three insignificant minutes of screen time and then was quite callously dropped, onto the lounge floor and from the picture.

If indeed we did feel somewhat disappointed by the terse twist of one narrative thread into another, made a focal point by the knife's cursory glint as it raced into Townsend's body, we forget about it instantly. A dim shadow of a doubt looms then lifts in the unrelenting action sequences that follow. In the seminal *Analyse du film*, Raymond Bellour dissects *North by Northwest*, virtually one frame at a time, to conclude that Townsend's murder "takes the double mistake to its extreme: it marks the culmination of an initial enigma whose dissolution ends the first movement…this clue ushers in a displacement of the enigma that alone will justify a revelation that could otherwise seem clumsy and that, far from alleviating the playful anxiety of

suspense, intensifies it."[293] But in this very intensification we become much too shocked to notice the displacement, dissolution, and alleviation to which Bellour refers. Those television procedural devotees among us know that, at the instant, things do not look good for Grant: not only has he been caught with his fingerprints on the murder weapon, a motive for homicide supplied by his embarrassing arrest the previous evening, and photographic evidence gathered by the cameraman who just so happened to be in the room to catch the scoop of a lifetime, but a full-length account of the crime has run on "every front page in America." From the looks of it, things could not get any worse. We are so concerned for his safety that the flawlessly executed coincidence of one suspense plot ending (Who is Townsend, and did he recognize the man in the photograph?) and another beginning (How will Thornhill get himself out of *this* one?) passes by our immediate notice. Our need for redirection is insistent, and therefore our readjustment is also instantaneous.

Recalling an articulation of the film's symbolic structuring, which occurs in an incessant movement back and forth and "an endless recuperation," it strikes us that the symbolic is "never beneath the film or above it"; instead it "constitutes its matrix only through the movement that carries it from enigma to enigma and from action to action."[294] This is reminiscent of Bellour's definition of symbolic blockage, writing poignantly: "By an effect that only appears paradoxical, the force that produces the narrative also enables it to be brought to a halt. This force endlessly opens it and closes it, in one and the same movement; reproduces, in order to define it and define itself, this continual movement, which hierarchizes, as it were to infinity, the productivity of the filmic text. This effect can be called SYMBOLIC BLOCKAGE."[295] Following this, I would dispute that the disconnected, unsystematic, and semi-haphazard series of plots, joined together by sudden explosive events (i.e. guns going off or knives getting thrown), functions in a similar fashion. That perfect economy of nervous anxiety on our parts, dissolving and resurfacing in altered form, transferred from one story to the next, happens with incredible swiftness. Though distressed by these upheavals, we respond to the master's overt pushes toward new plotlines (compelling us to leap over clear narrative chasms) as if they had been the lightest and gentlest of nudges. When we have some time to reflect, it becomes apparent that Thornhill's two framings, the one mistakenly as Kaplan and the other deliberately as a homicidal, knife-wielding criminal, were joined together as seamlessly as the photographic stills which make up the scenes' picture-perfect, unvarying visual projection. How, we ask ourselves ruefully, could we *not* have noticed it before?

To return to the first framing now, itself more an innocent case of mistaken identity, I wish to point to a curious manipulation of camera movement. At this early stage in the film, we know very little about this Roger Thornhill, except that he has had not one, but two, divorces on account of his leading a boring life, an off-and-on girlfriend named Gretchen Sabinson, who has a sweet tooth (and "other sweet parts") and a penchant for things in gold wrappers, and a crazy-making mother/bloodhound mix named Clara, who loves to "sniff [his] breath." The one narrative strand that follows Thornhill to his meeting with his colleagues at the Oak Bar is the repetition of the words "mother" and "theatre tickets"—he is obviously concerned about getting in touch with his mother about a show at the Winter Garden Theatre in New York. Though we do not really expect this pretext for an exposition to last, it is still quite startling when the story is dropped and quickly left behind. Entirely by chance, Thornhill snaps for the boy's attention to send a telegram to his mother at the apartment of one of her 'cronies' exactly when the bellboy calls for "George Kaplan." Inscrutably, the camera does not merely do a shot/reverse-shot to show that the ruffians hired by Vandamm have been scrutinizing Thornhill, which of course would have conventionally and adequately clued us in. After all, to quote from Jean-Luc Godard, it is the gaze which creates fiction, and it is the task of the

---

[293] Raymond Bellour, "Symbolic Blockage (On *North by Northwest*)," *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 78-9.
[294] Ibid., p. 81.
[295] Ibid., p. 190.

shot/reverse-shot to give us a glimpse.[296] Resisting the transparency and ease of that maneuver, the camera pans from left to right across the bar's entrance, lingering briefly (but longingly) over Thornhill's companions, Nelson, Wade, and Weltner, before finally zooming into a short close-up shot of the conspicuous pair, Valerian and Licht. The camera's strange indeterminacy, prior to its zoom and before its lens focuses in on Vandamm's hired goons, hints at its natural affinity for resuming and resolving the original plotline of Roger in the barroom with his colleagues. The pan across, the subtle but jerky pivot, the zoom in, and finally the cut back to a shot of the bellboy approaching Roger belie, however subtly, the malignant artificiality of such a hasty transfer.[297] It is as if, in this moment of suspension, of suspense taking a spontaneous turn in a different direction, something has been lost in translation, even unto the camera itself. Such sorts of visual stutter, the likes of which usually go unobserved in the Hitchcockian universe, emphasize and enunciate the camera's inability to fix its eye continuously on an object to which it had grown accustomed. The one man show featuring Cary Grant has officially come to a full stop, for he has been formally ensnared by the world of international political intelligence—as audience members we wonder if, finally, the movie has begun, feeling a little like we, too, have been caught in a trap.

The third and final framing, in which Thornhill pretends he has been shot by Eve in the observation deck of Mount Rushmore, arrests time and frame without really possessing a logical narrative function. Put differently, there seems to be no reason for Vandamm to suspect Eve's loyalties at this point, and the firing of the blank (thereby forcing us to transfer our sympathies and the object of our suspense from Roger to Eve) is, in fact, a mere blank, an "absent referent" evacuated of real mimetic matter.[298] Stage-struck, the film's viewers are rendered oblivious to even this obvious lack of substance. Even the film's final scenes are incomplete, but sutured together flawlessly as symbol upon layered symbol determine our protagonists' fates. In the last several minutes of footage, we see Eve hanging perilously off a ledge on Mount Rushmore, then pulled up to an upper berth in a sleeper cabin, then a long shot of the train whistling and speeding into a tunnel. "The End," then, finally comes, though the consequences of that ending are nebulous. In an interview published in *Cahiers du Cinéma,* Hitchcock acknowledges this, affirming: "There are no symbols in *North by Northwest*. Oh yes! The last shot, the train entering the tunnel after the love-scene between Grant and Eva-Marie Saint. It's a phallic symbol. But don't tell anyone."[299] This instantiation of narrative suspension is important in that it points to the lack of resolution that propels the narrative even unto the last shot, *in* this moment of resolution.

Spellbindingly, a majority of the framing scenes in which one character is plotting against another is shot in industrial sets which, in their homogeneity and reproducibility, seem to resemble single celluloid frames placed side by side. From afar, there is no distinguishable difference between the lot of them—these replicated spaces are evocative of the army of porters in red caps which create such a sense of uniformity in the railway station or, in the noted assassination incident in *Foreign Correspondent,* the endless expanse of black umbrellas under which the murderer-disguised-as-photographer hides. Structural repetition carries over gracefully into the design and narrative realms as an emblem of mechanical reproduction. Sleeper cabins on the Twentieth Century Limited, hospital rooms in Rapid City, South Dakota, and ticket windows at Grand Central station are all placed in a sequence, figured as a row of compartments that all look the same, as if repeatedly replicated and reeled together onto a ribbon.

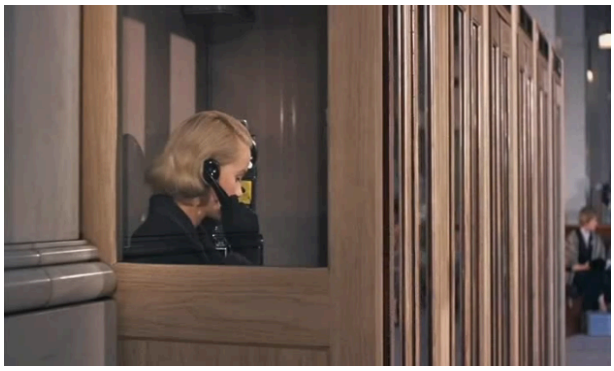
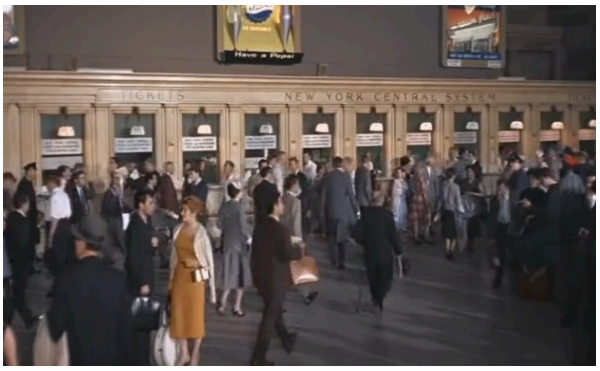
---

[296] Quoted in Pascal Bonitzer, "Hitchcockian Suspense," *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock),* ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 1992), p. 19.

[297] For the theme of transference, see Éric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol's *Hitchcocck: The First Forty-Four Films* (New York: Roundhouse Publishing Ltd., 1992).

[298] Christopher D. Morris, "The Direction of *North by Northwest," Cinema Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Summer, 1997), pp. 43-56.

[299] Quoted in Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p. 131. See Alfred Hitchcock, "Interview," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 102 (Dec. 1959).

Figures 3 and 4: Repeated structures (telephone booths and ticket windows).

We might think of the physical appearance of the processed filmstrip, momentarily recalling the physical limitations and illusions on which the cinematograph is dependent. Combined they present a dizzying motif of geometric precision that hearkens back to Bass's memorable opening sequence and the painstakingly gridded façade of the United Nations Secretariat Building.[300] Quoting from Jean Louis Baudry: "on the technical level the question becomes one of the adoption of a very small difference between images, such that each image, in consequence of an organic factor (presumably persistence of vision) is rendered incapable of being seen as such. In this sense we could say that film—and perhaps in this respect it is exemplary—lives on the denial of difference: the difference is necessary for it to live, but it lives on its negation."[301] He resumes, "This is indeed the paradox that emerges if we look directly at a strip of processed film: adjacent images are almost exactly repeated, their divergence being verifiable only by comparison of images at a sufficient distance from each other. We should remember, moreover, the disturbing effects which result during a projection from breakdowns in the recreation of movement, when the spectator is brought abruptly back to discontinuity—that is, to the body, to the technical apparatus which he had *forgotten*."[302] Caught up in moments of no uncertain suspense, it is easy for us to lose sight of the eminent framedness of framing shots and framing plots.

To give a few examples, Eve's two major betrayals are both engineered in enclosed spaces that are spatially doubled, tripled, and quadrupled to enact a spatial organization equivalent to the episodic, incremental progression of the "text" in question. In the first betrayal (or denial), she canoodles, nuzzles, and nibbles Thornhill in one train compartment, number 3901, while the musical murmur of treachery purrs inaudibly in the background. Unbeknownst to her present lover, she is actually Vandamm's mistress, and is passing messages to and conspiring with Vandamm and Leonard in another cabin just a little ways off. Coming in to Chicago's LaSalle Street Station and to the second deceit, Eve is phoning the ever-resourceful Leonard from one phone booth to another, also nearby. Cinematographically, the *mise-en-scène* is completely breathtaking; the camera moves silently from left to right in a tracking shot across all of the call boxes, with their callers visually on parade. We have a hatless, bespectacled man, another smoking a cigarette, a woman shaking her head, and then Leonard, with murder in his eyes and blood (soon to be) on his hands. Outlining each character in the same way, the wooden edges of the booths virtually designating the frame of the screen, this remarkable tracking shot—or "dolly shot," after the wheeled platform on which the camera is mounted—is irrepressibly haunted by the material, photographic stillness from which it originated and that same death-

[300] See Hall's discussion of the "geometric ballet" orchestrated by the opening credits.
[301] Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," p. 42.
[302] Ibid.

like immobility to which this narrative (and, one might argue, all narratives) is driving.[303] While Eve is dallying with Roger, the camera is dollying with her.

Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8: Slow pan across frames.

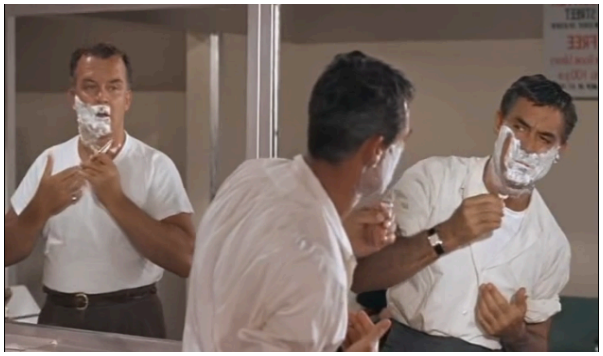
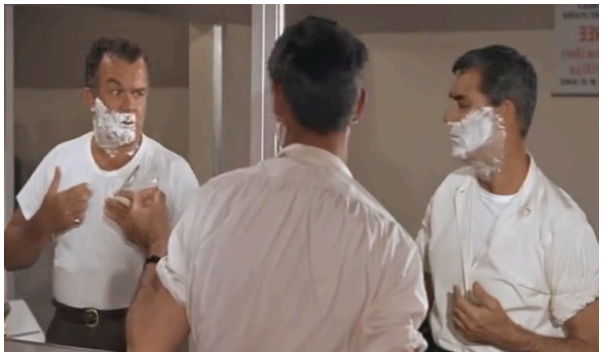
The (Mis-)Management of Montage

Thornhill is laughably easy prey for framing because he can never, it seems, *change* his frame. (As a tongue-in-cheek side note, I mean this physically as well as spatially—at the beginning of the film, Thornhill casually queries his assistant, "Say, do I look heavyish to you? I feel heavyish. Put a note on my desk in the morning: 'Think thin.'.") He does not possess the meta-cinematic awareness of that crucial relationship between framing (by criminals) and framing (by cameras). Arrested numerous times in the film, Grant is constantly trapped in either states of complete action or inaction; he can never seem to control the speed at which he is going.[304] Left to his own devices he is what we might call, if we were scientifically inclined, the

[303] See Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), and Laura Mulvey, "The Death Drive," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, Issue 10 (Autumn/Winter 2004), pp. 101-109. Mulvey writes: "Narrative and cinema have consistently celebrated their mutual drive forward, their energy and dynamism. However, stories lead inexorably to ends. Stillness is an essential element within the pattern of narrative, emerging out of an initial inertia to which it must finally return," p. 103.

[304] Thomas Elsaesser has claimed that Hitchcock's dandyism is premised on a sort of trademark lethargy or languidness manifest through his mastery of stillness, a refusal even to budge from his director's chair in order to look through the lens of the camera before a take: "It would be as though I distrusted the cameraman and he was a liar…I don't rush the same evening to see 'Has it come out?' That would be like going to the local camera shop to see the snaps and make sure that nobody had moved." As Elsaesser continues on to argue, movement conveys a process of coming-to-be that mars the dandy's veneer of unpracticed grace, a grace easily

human embodiment of the concept of inertia. Think, for instance, of the first kidnapping, in which Thornhill is locked into a moving car that is going to its destination without making any detours (his question, "Couldn't we stop off at a drugstore or something?" is casually ignored), the celebrated chase in the cornfields, where there is nowhere to go because he is nowhere to begin with, and finally to the drunk driving scene, in which he cannot step on the brakes and can only hurl himself, at breakneck speed, nearly off a cliff. Although the villains of the film employ cinematic metaphors glibly and easily, seeming to be aware that they are ultimately being framed in each shot from the camera's elevated perspective, Thornhill seems something of an incompetent hero because he cannot master the lingo. Vandamm, I am loathe to admit, is correct: "It seems to me [Roger] could stand a little less training from the FBI and more from the Actor's Studio." Indeed, during Eve and Leonard's breathtaking plotting sequence in the phone booths, Roger is in the men's room, changing out of his stolen porter's uniform and shaving his face. His reflection is framed in the large mirrors in front of him, and his neighbor (also shaving) suddenly catches sight of his face. The two make eye contact, and the other man looks at Thornhill flabbergasted, one brow lifted in mock suspicion. This is presumably an inside joke revolving around Cary Grant's own humorous "cameo" in the film; the man is stunned to spot the star in the adjoining bathroom mirror. However, notice the telling placement of the "frame line" (in the shape of a white wooden paneling) between the two mirrors—even in this comic little aside, the film contains Thornhill within a strip of sorts, and Thornhill can't help getting spotted, though fortunately in a none too fatal way.

Figures 9 and 10: Double-take at the sight of Cary Grant shaving with a women's razor.

For those film enthusiasts who have come to Hitchcock late, a momentary interlude: the MacGuffin is a plot device that the director himself popularized, describing it in his interview with Truffaut as 'anything' or 'nothing', an empty diversion that nevertheless allows the audience a suspension of disbelief. In *North by Northwest*'s terms, it is the blank that Eve Kendall fires, for almost no reason and at no one (for Kaplan, of course, does not really exist and Thornhill is not a spy). In Hitchcock's words, the MacGuffin is an ambiguous, possibly misleading element in the story which drives the narrative forward and is eventually done

---

adopted rather than laboriously acquired: "This immobility is another important clue: the true work of the dandy is to expend all his effort on creating about his person the impression of utter stasis. One recalls the sphinx-like profile he presented as his trademark, and in later life, his public appearance was designed to accentuate the statuesqueness of his massive body. Disarmingly, he turned himself into his own monument, aware of his own immortality. Of course, he carried it lightly, like the wax effigy with which he let himself be photographed and which, deep-frozen, appeared among his wife's groceries in the refrigerator." See "The Dandy in Hitchcock," *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, ed. Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), pp. 2-13, especially p. 6. Hitchcock's corpulence is often remarked upon, but Elsaesser's investigation into the art of cultivating a sedentary quality as quasi-stylistic ontology is unusual, and here enhances this chapter's interest in the merits of an assumed—indeed almost aestheticized—inertia, indolence, or immobility.

away with or tossed aside. Relating an anecdote as to the origins of the term, Hitchcock states that the MacGuffin "might be a Scottish name, taken from a story about two men in a train. One man says "What's that package up there in the baggage rack?," and the other answers "Oh, that's a MacGuffin." The first one asks "What's a MacGuffin?." "Well," the other man says, "It's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands." The first man says "But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands," and the other one answers "Well, then that's no MacGuffin!"[305] Simply put, a MacGuffin, "boiled down to its purest expression," is nothing at all (ibid.). As a lark, we could think of numerous examples in a game of "Find the MacGuffin": Mr. Memory's recitation, containing the designs for a silent aircraft in *The 39 Steps*, the coded folk tune that Dame May Whitty, perhaps the most unlikely of secret agents in Hitchcock's films, hums in *The Lady Vanishes*, the blood-stained dress in *Stage Fright*, the stolen, belt-less raincoat in *Young and Innocent*, etc. But, as Hitchcock boasts, "My best MacGuffin, and by that I mean the emptiest, the most nonexistent, and the most absurd, is the one we used in *North by Northwest*. The picture is about espionage, and the only question that's raised in the story is to find out what the spies are after. Well, during the scene at the Chicago airport, the Central Intelligence man explains the whole situation to Cary Grant, and Grant, referring to the James Mason character, asks, 'What does he do?' The counterintelligence man replies, 'Let's just say that he's an importer and exporter.' 'But what does he sell?' 'Oh, just government secrets!' is the answer. Here, you see, the MacGuffin has been boiled down to its purest expression: nothing at all!"[306]

Nonetheless, whatever Hitchcock might say, his 'best MacGuffin' is not, treated literally, as empty as it might seem. The pre-Columbian Tarascan statuette that Vandamm purchases at the auction at the Shaw & Oppenheim Galleries is unlike the jewel-encrusted Maltese falcon, an artifact which, if it existed, would be "the stuff that dreams are made of" and would possesses inherent value—rather, it is sought after because of what it holds and hides. In other words, it is an object worth killing, kidnapping, and blackmailing for, precisely because it isn't purposeless, because it is *full of* something. There is more to this little figurine than meets the eye. Its belly stuffed with microfilm, on whose celluloid frames are printed those "government secrets" at the heart of every good spy-film, the statue once more produces and comments on the nestling effect by which *North by Northwest* is so enthralled. "In these rolls of film that fall from the paradigm, as its remainder," Bellour comments, "analysis must recognize that the relation of reciprocal inclusion of system and symbol has no sense but to perform the endless back-and-forth between the film and the micro-film."[307] Just as the critic recognizes the statue's shattering revelation of its inner contents as another symbol that is unfurls and unreels itself, Grant's character comes to understand that, in a movie eminently self-conscious about its staging, play-acting, and theatrical effects, he must develop a sensitivity to and a fluency in the meta-cinematic language of this universe. His very next role is, of course, not to satisfy Vandamm and his men and play dead, but to learn how, in a phrase, to play along. And learn he does.

When Thornhill walks into the auction house, he sees Vandamm, Leonard, and Eve gathered in a group, remarking "The three of you together. Now that's a picture only Charles Adams could draw." Surrounded by priceless paintings, sculptures, and lavish, decorative furniture, much as he was in the library at the Townsend mansion, Thornhill once again acts out his role before a set piece that itself stands in as a visual framing device. When he is first mistaken for George Kaplan at the bar and then at the estate, the medium shots of Thornhill's "agitated protests as he stands positioned exactly before those closed curtains" situates him against an "appropriate backdrop for a piece of histrionics."[308] In this instance, it is Thornhill's relation to dramatic representation that has been reversed. Wilson continues, "deflected from his intended status as a spectator at a play, he winds up featured in a delirious production that he cannot comprehend."[309]

---

[305] Truffaut, *Hitchcock,* p. 139.

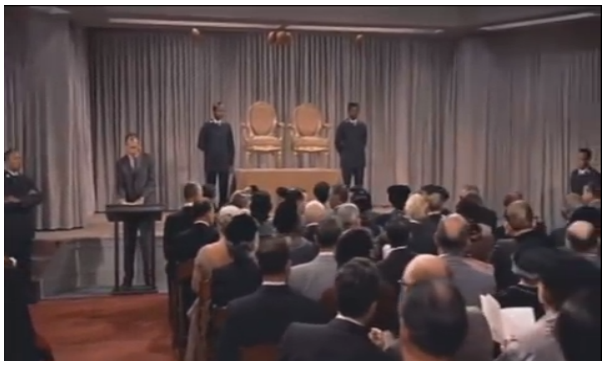
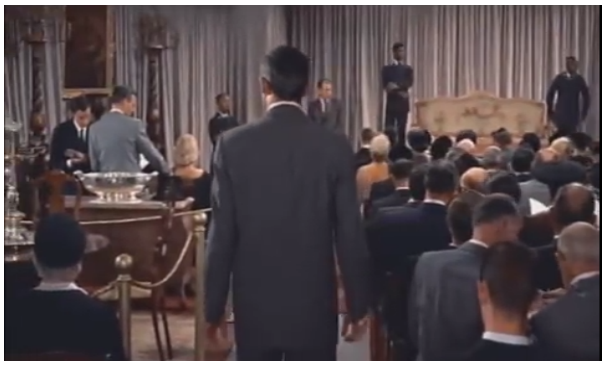
[306] Ibid.

[307] Bellour, "Symbolic Blockage," p. 192.

[308] George M. Wilson, "The Maddest McGuffin: Some Notes on *North by Northwest," MLN*, Vol. 94, No. 5 Comparative Literature (Dec., 1979). pp. 1159-72. See especially pp. 1159-60.

[309] Wilson, "The Maddest McGuffin," pp. 1159-60.

Making the transition from getting framed (by criminals and directors alike) to knowing a little something himself about the underlying framing mechanism that cinema tries to mask, Thornhill seems to realize that the fundamental weakness of the film lies in slowing the action, thereby exposing the flaws and ruptures in successive shots or scenes or frames. That break then offers an opportunity for breaching the established order, cinematographic, narrative, social, or otherwise. Hence, in order to get himself arrested and escape certain danger, Thornhill must first arrest the movement upon which his stasis is contingent.[310] A scene in which pictures are set in motion, then, leads us right back to the film's conception of itself as first and foremost a *motion* picture.

Figures 11 and 12: Lots at the auction rolled in from right to left.

This is doubly significant if we notice that the stage at the auction is, yet again, arranged much like a snippet of processed film. The art objects to be sold are each, one after another, wheeled onto the platform at the front of the room from right to left, appearing much like the individual frames that make up a portion of a motion picture reel to be viewed in a slide projector.[311] Thornhill must interrupt and *dis*rupt the auction (or action), demystifying the enchantment cast by the illusory, fleeting filmic framing device. He watches Vandamm lead Eve out by the arm and then, understanding that his chances of escape are slim, makes a

[310] Jameson argues that the film's depictions of a Cary Grant in "arrested motion" has more to do with the actor's style of performance than with the auteur's development of a symbolic structure: "But this image-possibility probably has more to do with Grant's acting style than with Hitchcock's aesthetic: one hesitates, indeed, to describe Grant's acting as Brechtian, yet it involves a shorthand use of the body to sketch in gestures which are never the fully realized 'expressive' thing itself, but merely designate this last—as, paradigmatically, when the hands in the pockets in the field sequence half-withdraw, to convey the anticipatory feeling that the vehicle now arriving may be the one he's waiting for." See Jameson, "Spatial Systems in *North by Northwest*," p. 49. Nevertheless, this claim similarly rests on a reading of interrupted, frozen, or delayed motion as an instrumentalized version of whole or complete gestures—in other words, here Jameson's articulation of a fragmented form that works, and often works more powerfully, than it would have in a perfect instantiation is absolutely apropos for the logics of a fraudulent seamlessness that I am exploring in this chapter. Just as Grant approximates an affective or epistemic state by "half-withdraw[ing]" his hands from his pockets in *North by Northwest*'s famous field sequence and thus intimating his reaction via a sort of "shorthand" (almost a literal shortening of the hands that should appear in full length but remain partially hidden in his trouser pockets), Thornhill acknowledges then harnesses that which is piecemeal, curtailed, and interfered with in order to gain the upper hand in what he recognizes to be a "game of survival." See Figure 16.

[311] Of course film strips are generally played vertically, though here I am more interested in the abstract concept of sequencing and series (especially in micro-film and film strips) than in the literal orientation of a physical movie reel in a motion picture projector.

desperate bid, as it were, for survival. The endless montage of exhibits on sale presents a phantasmagoric spectacle (catalogue number 109, a "superb example of this early 17th century master" which would "enhance any collection of fine art" is sold and clears the way for catalogue number 110, a *Louis Quinze* carved and gilded *lit de repose*). Thornhill is able to control the movement of those frames, and keep himself alive in the process, by interrupting and regulating the progress of pictures across the stage at the gallery. A reversal of Hitchcock's cameo as a possible star in the film, throwing off our sense of mimetic balance, here Grant poses just as disconcertingly as the *director* in this mini-film within a film. Offering Thornhill a "libation" in the early library scene, Leonard asks "Scotch, rye, bourbon, vodka?"—in layman's term, the question is clear: "What's your poison?" The auctioneer, in calling for bids with the inquiry, "What is your pleasure?" constructs something of a parallel universe with this congruent phrasing, effectually giving Thornhill license to displease, to disrupt, and, critically, to make a mess of the *mise-en-scène*—forcing his way into the trim and tidy rows of buyers and practically sitting on top of a woman in a white pillbox hat. Thornhill disturbs and reconfigures the spatial construct of the room as the film is, likewise, turned on its head. With that single gesture, the slight lift of the finger upwards which in the auction world signals a bid, Grant seems to be simultaneously rendering a crowning touch on a state of pandemonium, as well as making his first, decisive, suspense-inducing botch.

Thornhill is, from the film's opening, well-versed in the rules of the social game. Who better to play him than the master-player himself, Cary Grant? Grant's perfect casting as Roger Thornhill provides an instance of what Murray Smith calls "representational transparency," a "normative ideal" of character-embodiment that enables a flawless fusion of character to actor. Smith writes of this film in particular, reflecting: "Watching Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959), I come to recognize Roger Thornhill as a middle-aged advertising executive in a fix, but I also see how Thornhill is 'configured' through Cary Grant, and I apprehend both of these aspects of the film at once. This is the twofoldness of character."[312] Yet this "twofoldness of character" might more correctly assume a *threefoldness*—as was commonly known in the Golden Age of Hollywood filmmaking, Grant plays Thornhill, but Leach first played Grant. Cary Grant was born Archibald Leach, and in his own words "I pretended to be somebody I wanted to be and I finally became that person. Or he became me. Or we met at some point."[313] His self-possessed, unfazeable urbanity conceals an always-pressing because always-present anxiety of sublimating the Leach that might leap out of his skin at any moment, a barely concealed spectre of the working-class subject that was. But, in truth, Thornhill's remarkable vulgarity is just what he accommodates as a form of badly Jameson sheds particular insight on the weird offness of the scene: "The key to the auction scene seems to me rather to lie in the psychological disintegration of the auctioneer, who proves literally unable to handle antisocial conduct and provocation of the Grant type: it is a beautiful comic detail…"[314] What we see is a necessary wedding of antisocial behavior (the flustered auctioneer) with a disruption of cinematic form (the foiled montage): Thornhill's raised finger to place a bid directly reproduces his previous snapping gesture toward the waiter in the Oak Bar ("Boy! I've got to get off a wire immediately") that instigated the entire film-length drama of Grant-as-"The Wrong Man."[315] Whereas then the character conformed to a form of basic social etiquette, now Thornhill's characterological evolution manifests as an equal-but-opposite social deterioration, some strange understanding of the formal or cinematographic substructure of the film not so much against as alongside the archaic behavioral rubric that dictates the "going, going, gone!" etiquette of auction-going itself. The laws of the social game find confirmation in their timely subversion. Having known all along how to play

---

[312] Murray Smith, "On the Twofoldness of Character," *New Literary History,* Vol. 42, No. 2 (Spring 2011), p. 280.

[313] Quoted in Benjamin Schwarz, "Becoming Cary Grant," *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1, 2007), online. Accessed April 24, 2014. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/01/becoming-carygrant/305548/

[314] Jameson, "Spatial Systems in *North by Northwest*," p. 52.

[315] See figures 7, 8, and 9 especially.

by the rules, it seems far more impressive for Thornhill to recreate those rules from without, in the shape of the negative space that emerges after their upheaval.

Of Frames and Photograms (and Nothing in Between)

A motion picture's shots are placed in sequence and projected at a set speed, producing a regular rhythm of protean fluctuations that we perceive as unbroken organic movement. This is, as Tom Gunning writes, "an implicit technology rather than an aesthetic tool, shared by all makers of cinema, the basis of its representation of motion."[316] In a similar vein, Garrett Stewart has confessed that there is something "implicit" about an interest in the interstices between photograms, calling frame rate a "mere technicality," a lingering trace of film's parentage in photography proper.[317] It is the implicit quality of film's stillness that I am interested in examining. Though its illusion of motion is deeply embedded within the materiality of its form, its status as either inherent or obvious has precluded further discussion of this open secret of cinematic technology. Such reticence about the material basis of film form has only confirmed the success of its securing a perfect record of time, on the one hand, and perfectly rendered movement, on the other.

Photons of light are recorded as photos, which are then transformed into photograms and run rapidly in sequence to generate a steady stream of glimpses that "overlap rather than follow" one another. Such a technology guarantees motion but exhibits its reliance on "a mental afterimage of the photographic trace and its continually—hence continuously—masked stasis."[318] In the film production world, this misconception is more commonly known as "critical flicker fusion" or the "flicker fusion threshold." What is, in reality, a continuous but intermittent visual stimulus achieves (or exceeds) the minimum threshold of perceptible frequency. This results in a just-regular-enough rate of fluctuation that then manifests as fluid motion: "Cinematic continuity synthesizes difference by distending the optical trace…In the hairbreadth space between images, between staccato data, there flickers a gap, a join, a seam. Here is the deepest logic of film in its geared and meshed procession"—indeed, cinema can be said to exist "in the interval between two absences."[319] Like most psychophysical visual calculations, the flicker fusion rate cannot be quantified as a defined threshold or range but as a statistical approximation of 50% detection in a given set of trials. Anywhere below the threshold, photograms no longer appear as steady motion but rendered "jerky" or "sluggish," as if represented actions are lagging in space and through time. On a fast-enough track, film's cracks, once unseemly, are now simply unseen.

The rapid, consistent collapse of frames into more frames can never quite be captured on film even though it inexorably persists within the filmstrip itself. This supplied the basis for early cinema's power of

---

[316] Relying on Stephen Heath's influential essay on "Narrative Space," Tom Gunning has claimed that Hitchcock orchestrates gazes elicited by modernist paintings. The space of the artwork opens up, if but briefly, "another scene, another story, another space." Though Gunning has written beautifully on the casings and contents of portraits in Hitchcock's oeuvre—tackling issues of depth perception as the eye moves *into* frames within (film) frames—the subject of framings (i.e. ploys, ruses, or entrapments) seems to achieve a similar formal effect, with fragments of film fastened together side-by-side and "projected in the sound era 24 times a second." See Tom Gunning, "In and Out of the Frame: Paintings in Hitchcock," *Casting a Shadow: Creating the Alfred Hitchcock Film*, ed. Will Schmenner and Corinne Granof (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 29-47. See p. 41 and 47 specifically. Also Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 19-75.

[317] Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. xi. See also Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[318] Ibid., p. 8.

[319] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

inspiring wonder. The tension between stillness and motion served as a conscious trope in 1895 when the Lumière *cinematographe* displayed a photograph on-screen that "[sprung] into life with the cranking of the projector."[320] Gunning has famously called this a "cinema of attractions," a term he reserves for films made prior to 1906 whose unique powers originated in a "matter of *making images seen*" and known especially for its "harnessing of visibility" in a particularly spectacular, showy, and "exhibitionist" manner.[321] Unsettling the audience's expectation that photographs were condemned to stasis, early cinema consciously defined itself against its predecessor by showing, in one frame, a single unmoving photograph and then subsequently accelerating the strip until it metamorphosed into an unremitting motion that masked the discontinuities between shots. The Lumière *cinematographe* is worth mentioning because it at once acknowledged and renounced its affiliation with photography proper, an association between two forms that would grow increasingly complex. As Karen Beckman and Jean Ma have put it, "The vexed relationship of the static image and its animated counterpart, each differentiates from the other yet coexisting simultaneously as they are interwoven by the machinery of projection and the physiology of human perception, inheres within the cinematic medium as both a material attribute and a founding myth."[322] As the medium continued to develop in the twentieth century and gradually became the dominant form of high narrativity, cinema's sense of indebtedness to photography exacerbated its ambition not only to no longer acknowledge its relationship to this forerunner, but to abandon it altogether as if it never existed.

Film's frame-based overlapping resembles the many discrete plots in this film, especially insofar as they are similarly melded and mixed, the mental afterimage of the one blending into the retinal vision of the next. The "intermittence [film] masks in action" permits its alchemical ability to turn static snapshots into a *motion* picture.[323] From the countless cascading, contingent snapshots comprising film emerges the single unified narrative, the picture out of which manifold pictures are made. What Gunning describes as a "slow, constant, and invisible series of eclipses triggered by the revolving shutter hiding and revealing the individual frames that make the illusion of cinema possible" is enacted diegetically in *North by Northwest* as we travel from one location to another, each the site of its own discrete design.[324] Rather than transitions, the diegesis itself performs a kind of narrative whip pan or wipe to get from one scene, story, and space to the next, one source of suspense to another. Underpinned by a hyper-awareness of framing, both diegetic and cinematographic, the composition and position of unique shots alongside one another in a series—and finally assembled in the pre-process editing stage to generate uninterrupted, illuminated moving images—inform and intensify the gears at work in *North by Northwest*'s narrative machine.

Discussing spatial systems in Hitchcock's films, Jameson once observed that "anyone who has leafed through Hitchcock stills…in the attempt to illustrate—or at least to peg for memory's sake—this or that significant moment in his films learns, with a certain salutary astonishment, that the isolated frame in Hitchcock conveys very little of what we then rapidly come to identify as the crucial matter: namely,

---

[320] See Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, "Introduction," *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*. Ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 6. In fact, cinema could be accused of harboring two illusions, that of producing an accurate record of time, as well as a record experienced physiologically as an unbroken visual stimulus: "In concealing the division between frames, [cinema] refuses to acknowledge the loss of time on which it is based. From [Etienne-Jules] Marey's point of view there is a double deception at work here: the lie that truth resides in visibility, in what the eye can see, and the pretense that the cinema replicates time perfectly, without loss."

[321] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded,* ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), p. 229. See also Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 24.

[322] Ibid.

[323] Stewart, *Between Film and Screen*, p. 8.

[324] Ibid., p. xi.

movement itself."[325] Certainly, Hitchcock once asserted that it was not his task to tell us anything, but rather to show it to us. The genius of this showing lies in the sophisticated style of a visual presentation grounded in optical illusion, ensuring a potent seamlessness demonstrated by all motion pictures when they are "in motion" and not simply pictures "pinned together" in a row. It is obvious that motion bubbles forth effervescently as a sort of movie magic, churned out by the Hollywood dream factory. However, the sheer inordinate pleasure we derive from live-action and animation is unobserved, and unobservable, in the mute, unmoving stillness of photographic stills. A curious example of film's simultaneous reliance on and sublation of imagery crops up in Hitchcock's meditation on conveyance of brutality and violence:

> The term "imagery" is particularly appropriate, because what we're saying is that it isn't necessary to photograph something violent in order to convey the feeling of violence, but rather to film that which gives the impression of violence. This is demonstrated in one of the opening scenes in *North by Northwest*, in which the villains in a drawing room begin to manhandle Cary Grant. If you examine that scene in slow motion, on the small screen of the cutting room, you will see that the villains aren't doing anything at all to Cary Grant. But when projected on theater screens, that succession of quick frames and the little bobbling movements of the camera create an impression of brutality and violence.[326]

This procedure stunningly takes what was a "mere technicality" endemic to film's shameful materiality, the stasis that it masks in action, and gives it narrative value, obscuring cinema's depictions of violence within the small bobbing and hopping of the camera from one frame to the next. Nothing if not recursive and self-referential, Hitchcock's films recognized and exploited a latent potentiality in motion that is fundamentally indistinguishable in stillness, a difference between the photographic image and the motion picture cannily hidden in the breaks between seemingly equivalent photograms. There is also, interestingly, an emphasis on the "impression" or "feeling" of violence as opposed what we might expect to see, a commitment to the presentation of violence or brutality in the heat of the moment. *North by Northwest* systematically borrows from the language of material film form—those "succession of quick frames" and the "little bobbling movements of the camera"—to generate both the feeling and form of plot's perfect unity. Laura Mulvey has famously noted that the "voyeuristic-scopophilic look" at the nexus of filmic pleasure is made up of three different types of gazes: "There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third."[327] Instead of subordination or sublimation, the film's transference of successive serialization into the narrative framework convinces us to never look too closely where we shouldn't, at the workings of the camera itself. In *Rope*, Phillip says to Brandon, "You'll ruin everything with your neat little touches." Here in this film, as opposed to in his others, Hitchcock seems to be using one of cinema's characteristic stains (that sense of not-quite-rightness at the heart of the filmic medium, its deceptions of time fully captured and motion made visible) to achieve narrative unity. As Jonathan Crary has pointed out, "Cinema is the dream of the fusion, of the functional integrity of a world where time and space were being uncoiled into a manifold of proliferating itineraries, durations, and velocities…film became a validation of the authenticity of the perceptual disorientations that increasingly constituted social and subjective experience."[328]

---

[325] Jameson, "Spatial Systems in *North by Northwest*," p. 49.
[326] Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 265.
[327] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penly (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 68.
[328] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 344-5. See also Crary's earlier volume, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

As such, film could never resist, even if the desire were there, dabbling in "proliferating itineraries, durations, and velocities," because its own experience of being "is revealed in the fragmented sequence of splendid sense impressions."[329]

In the blogosphere, the "1000 Frames of Hitchcock" project is attempting to distill fifty-two of Hitchcock's readily available feature-length films into one thousand frames each. Its purported mission is to supply users with a database, a "library of images" to illustrate websites, blogs, articles, reviews, etc.[330] Of course, what are the numerous remakes out there (for instance, Gus Van Sant's 1998 shot-by-shot recreation of the original *Psycho*) but a testament to the unwieldy burden not only of being able to watch Hitchcock on repeat, but being able to watch so closely and slowly we could replicate it? Wielding an exhilarating power to slow down and speed up at will is a luxury that industrial advances of the digital age have afforded us, a luxury of playing with fire. But still, we find this power almost too irresistible, as the power to fast forward and rewind allows the spectator to almost catch the cinematographic apparatus's illusion of continuity in its very act of vanishing. Film's material base in still photography has been so well suppressed that its conversion into 1000 inert screenshots has become an independent source of marvel; denaturalized, the melded frames out of which a motion picture springs is solidified once more into individual composite frames, performing a feat of their very own. Musing on the eternal dialectic of pre- and post-cinematic technologies, Laura Mulvey observes "Now, cinema's stillness, a projected film's best kept secret, can be easily revealed at the simple touch of a button, carrying with it not only the suggestion of the still frame, but also of the stillness of photography…the post-cinematic medium has conjured up the pre-cinematic."[331] Instead of marking a return to the original filmstrip, the catalogue of frames in "1000 Frames of Hitchcock" provides a fitting example of how a new archival resource has leapt out of the stop-motion photography that film has generally sought to keep hidden. What is actually a historical excavation of film's photographic predecessor presents itself as digital innovation, as material recovery subtly assumes the heading of technical novelty.

All of this is to say that the technology of the digital age renders film an object that can be paused, rewound, and replayed, rather than an experience or record of "real-time" that can only be viewed once, linearly, in a theatre. When a given film is slowed down and scrutinized, the stillness and immobility of each frame can be apprehended, allowing for a simple, unmediated process of perception—it's easy to see those gaping spaces between each individual composite shot. Accelerated, however, film's presentation of steady but ceaseless movement leads to both an animated realism and a blurring effect, whereby all those slim little fractures are no longer detectable. Continuity is purchased with the velocity of frame-based projection, just as reality is guaranteed by film's illusion of unity. Such representative authenticity hinges on a rate of projection offering unity even while it "obliterates" its constitutive frames—the thin lines separating composite photograms are still present but in all but name erased, since they persist unperceived. Both the effects of continuity and reality thus depend on the apparatus's ability to simultaneously employ and destroy its foundational but artificial portrait of unbroken, uninterrupted time recorded and thus regained. Though Hitchcock isn't one to deal in "plot holes," *North by Northwest*'s unwieldy design nevertheless consists of myriad parts that seem to bear no concrete relation to the whole. Sliced and diced into an unmanageable array of fragments, the lines where separate stories are fused together are as imperceptible as the adjacent frames of film's material base. Unlike the strategic cuts that one might find in the carefully executed *Rope* or the famous shower sequence in *Psycho*, this fragmentation exposes not order but chaos.

Suspense in *North by Northwest* is slowed down and fetishized, casting a spell of dreamy bewilderment over the audience. But it is often so protracted that it winds up "painting itself into corners," to

---

[329] See Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, p. 345, note 143, in reference to Siegfried Kracauer's "The Cult of Distraction," *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays,* trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 326.

[330] "1000 Frames of *North by Northwest.*" http://www.hitchcockwiki.com/wiki/1000_Frames_of_North_by_Northwest_(1959), Accessed 9 November 2011, Online.

[331] Quoted in Beckman and Ma, *Still Moving,* p. 12.

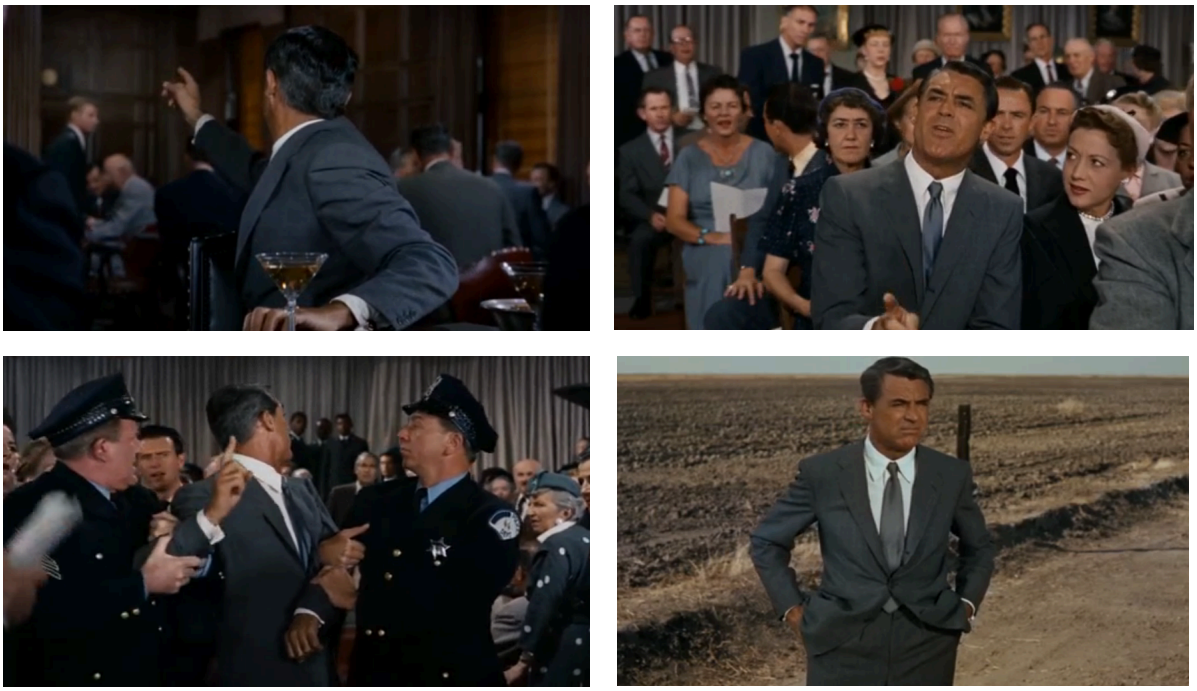
echo Lehman's experience of penning the screenplay. On hindsight (and repeated viewings), we realize that in this film the so-called 'perversity' that is visually spotted and apprehended, the stain upon which we fix our gaze, is never fully resolved, never completely wiped away. It is instead replaced by increasingly weird turns, as if the stains themselves were to be melded together into one film-length smudge in a winner-take-all game of escalation and one-upmanship. Akin to the game of dominoes, wherein tile after porcelain tile topple over one another in response to an impetus and the meta-stable standing position of the one falling pushes the next into a similar descent, narrative energy and viewerly tension are passed along between successive suspense-inducing episodes in order to create the illusion of continuous narrative movement. Unlike the bourbon stains on the sofa cushions in the Townsend library, which have been "cleaned off," this chain of self-sustained stains and destabilizations are palimpsestic, overlayed onto one another, continually displaced, and intentionally *preserved*. Similarly, it is difficult to remember the origins of the initial stain. With suspense passing from one discrete episode to the next, the overarching "plot" of *North by Northwest* resists easy summary. Concealing its fractures with the rapidity that animates it, both criminal plotting and the medium of projected film itself benefit from a spectator's inability to discern its foundational illusion of unruptured form. In lieu of perceiving such artifices at all, the audience attempts to follow the story without adequately interrogating the mechanisms that allow them their legibility and continuity. My argument, indeed, is that film's transposition of its material deceptions as an algorithm for sustained suspense acts as a way to exorcise, by way of its own narration. In telling its own story, Hitchcock's films in particular dare to transcend the material limits of its medium, a sort of first-person narration from the point of view of the filmstrip itself.

In addition to film's definitional reliance on a certain speed of projection so that our eyes are no longer attuned to the fissures of discrete frames, the various coincidences, mistaken identities, betrayals, and staged murders occur in a brisk and seamless progression that our previous suspense is constantly suspended, renewed, "unreeled" (to use Bellour's formulation) onto the latest scheme, because even thirty minutes into the film we can tell that the unexpected surprises will keep on emerging every so often and that they will eventually be dropped just as abruptly.[332] Trained to behold the suave spectacle of Grant's over-playing, we are reminded of Vandamm's criticism: "Has anyone ever told you that you overplay your various roles rather severely, Mr. Kaplan? First you're the outraged Madison Avenue man who claims he's been mistaken for someone else. Then you play the fugitive from justice supposedly trying to clear his name of a crime he knows he didn't commit. Now you play the peevish lover, stunned by jealousy and betrayal." Caught up in the intrigue and betrayals, we might not immediately appreciate the empty suspense that had strung us along for the duration of the film. For the special effect that Hitch is playing with here is precisely the mismatch between our ocular and the film's technical apparatuses. Its fissures are imperceptible, just as its separate framings flow together without a glitch. The failure of discrete suspense moments to achieve a satisfying narrative resolution is occluded by the success of their stitching together. All told, the silver screen learns to hide its secrets between slivers of images and slices of celluloid frames. Not blinking, we still could not catch the invisible blinking of the cinema's projections.

Hitchcock's "interest in and comments upon the manipulative possibilities of film are quite well-known," Wilson pronounced.[333] "He has largely confined his remarks to the topic of how to elicit suspense in an audience, but it is clear that the relevant concerns run much deeper." The thing about the ostentatious fictionality that this film practices and performs lies in its fragility, its tendency to withering under our unrelenting gaze. Like the dark Persol shades that Grant wears as a fugitive from justice on the Twentieth Century Limited, they occlude us from facing the full truth of the matter: they conceal eyes which are, as Grant puts it, "sensitive to questions." Cinematography, and criminality, joined in their mutual "sensitivity to light," become analogous modes of registering vulnerability. For film, gradations of darkness and brightness leave photochemical traces that can then be perceived as images. For the criminal, striations of style create an illusion of seamless sociability. Despite his sensitivity, Grant's polish comes out of the messes that he learn to

[332] Bellour, "Symbolic Blockage," p. 190.
[333] Wilson, "The Maddest McGuffin," p. 1170.

create, a legacy of careful, deliberate CIA planning—it is only because the nonexistent Kaplan is exceedingly rough around the edges (he is short, he has dandruff, he has an itinerary which is all to easy to get a hold of, etc.) that he is able to appear so very much like a real, live secret agent. Hitchcock's neat little touches are always effectively invisible precisely because they can be somewhat clumsy, because that dash of narrative ungainliness draws us in and monopolizes our attention. Rolling with the punches, so to speak, we are kept in a perpetual state of agitation, and at the end marvel at its effects. As the illusion of movement is carried from technological form into content, so camera framings carry into diegetic criminal framings, and Hitchcock's antics into Grant's own play-acting in this "ten act film." Inculcated in the pedagogical maneuvers of the plot's formal formlessness, its meta-cinematic fixation on itself and its own plots, Grant is finally better able to play the game than anyone else. He proves his Oak Bar associates right: "[Roger] may be slow in starting, but there's no one faster coming down the home stretch!"



Figures 13, 14, 15, and 16 (right to left, top down): Thornhill's echoing gestures and half-gestures.

If twenty-four single celluloid frames are needed to give the impression of mobility rather than of stasis, then the marvel of Hitchcockian suspense as enacted in *North by Northwest* is the radical, repeated suspension of suspense in the flicker of an instant. The film's virtuosic knack for displacing stain onto new stain in a cinematic system of absolute efficiency is so brilliant that it becomes blinding. Though the stain is never wiped clean and removed, preceding plotlines simply woven into rather than cut off from the overarching narrative, we are no longer able to see the film in all its incredible repetitions, dubious coincidences, improbabilities, and indeterminacies. For the new stories superimposed onto the old reduce rather than induce the flicker effect that film is necessarily always defined against and eternally seeking to obscure.[334] Framings replace one another rapidly and the momentary suspension of suspense between each is

[334] Crucially, this subtle and gradual progression should never be distinguishable by the naked eye; to catch the apparatus of suspense in motion would be to weaken its effects. Hitchcock says as much in an earlier portion of his interview with Truffaut regarding *Rebecca*: "Mrs. Danvers was almost never seen walking and was rarely shown in motion. If she entered a room in which the heroine was, what happened is that the girl suddenly heard a sound and there was the ever-present Mrs. Danvers, standing perfectly still by her side. In this way the

too tiny to be visible once the film reel is projected, sped up, and seemingly *lived* as reality. Pascal Bonitzer contests that, in the Hitchcockian world, the more familiar or conventional something seems, the more likely it is that the film will move it, as if mesmerized, toward the disturbing or uncanny.[335] Like the sails of the windmill in *Foreign Correspondent* which are tell-tale indicators that something has gone awry, the constituent elements of the narrative will also begin, stealthily, to "turn against the wind."[336] Suspense, then, in contradistinction to the surprise (of an unforeseeable incident) and the thrill (of races and chases), depends upon "the emphasis which the staging places upon the progressive contamination, the progressive or sudden perversion of the original landscape."[337] The stain's "subjective stretching" and "viscosity of time" engender, in Bonitzer's scheme, a strain of mechanical eroticism that is premised, paradoxically, on the "prolonged, necessarily disturbing ambiguity of an event," which is reliant on "slow motion and is sustained by the gaze, itself evoked by a third element, a perverse object or a stain."[338] What Thornhill achieves is not a life without the small messes, the inadvertent but unavoidable conflicts that confirm our reality, but an awareness of how engineering skirmishes might allow him to occupy the space of the stain in the picture and thereby manufacture suspense itself. The only way to strategically position oneself within a frame is to stand behind, rather than in front of, the camera.

Kaplan's Dandruff

North by Northwest is driven by a central absence, the presence of George Kaplan, a fictional CIA agent invented as a ruse to keep Vandamm chasing after the wrong man. When Roger investigates Kaplan's Chicago hotel room, he finds a line of perfectly pressed suits hanging in the closet. Kaplan's jackets, Thornhill soon discovers, are picked up for cleaning every evening at six, almost as if by clockwork. The valet, who has understandably never laid eyes on the nonexistent agent, seems awe-struck when he reports on Kaplan's cleaning regiment: "[Did I give them to you personally?] Personally? No, Mr. Kaplan. Uh, you called down on the phone, and described the suit to me and said it would be hanging in your closet. Like you always do." Despite the punctiliousness of his sartorial regimen, Kaplan's hairbrushes seem to toe the line of the hygienic: "Bulletin: Kaplan has dandruff," says Grant after he inspects the comb and hairbrush lying below a mirror in the bathroom, shaking his fingers off with no uncertain distaste. Full of those white flakes and flecks that conceivably mar the otherwise perfectly groomed nature of his (imaginary) existence, it is an odd detail. A little gross, surely, but a grossness that seemingly works to little narrative advantage.

Specks rather than stains, this generous sprinkling of dandruff balances on the precipice of the inconsequential and the indispensable. Most critics of the film have intentionally glossed over the incongruent fact that the spy has a dandruff problem. This oversight at first seems a matter of course—why mention something so insignificant? Indeed, what significance could it pose? On the one hand, this particular feature convinces us, and Vandamm's goons, of Kaplan's humanity, so mimetic that it is not just the person himself who appears in our minds' eyes but a claustrophobically close view of his dry, peeling, shedding skin. The incongruous detail thus lends an air of verisimilitude to the images we conjure in our mind's eye. At the same time, however, they paradoxically undermine our confidence in a master-spy whose dazzling Bond-like evasions of detection nevertheless interfere with his maintenance of a spotless scalp. Though one minute we find ourselves marveling at Kaplan's stealthy excursions from one hotel to another several hundred miles

---

whole situation was projected form the heroine's point of view; she never knew when Mrs. Danvers might turn up, and this, in itself, was terrifying. To have shown Mrs. Danvers walking about would have been to humanize her." Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, pp. 129-30.

[335] Bonitzer, "Hitchcockian Suspense," p. 23.

[336] Ibid.

[337] Ibid.

[338] Ibid., p. 28.

away, in just the next we feel more compelled to recommend him any number of effective deep-cleaning shampoos, so bothered are we by an imagined vision of these snowy traces on the newly laundered suits. Already shuddering visibly at even the faintest thought of this profusion of dandruff, the obsessive compulsive in all of us might well faint at its sight. If this is to be one of Barthes' reality effects, the dandruff only confirms the literal reality of a spy whose dependable dodging of the films' criminals should conform to anything but what is real, expected, or of the ordinary.

At first triggering our admiration, Kaplan now begins to offend the more persnickety spectators amongst us. These incurable germophobes might wish that, like *Psycho*'s Norman Bates meticulously mopping up a mess of blood in the bathroom after murdering Marion Crane, Kaplan took as much care to wipe away not only all traces of his body, but all evidence that he might possess a body in the first place. Suffering from dandruff makes Kaplan just like everyone else, where the premise of his character is that he could be anyone but. Though his clothing must be resplendent, shining garments repeatedly washed but never worn, his bespeckled hairbrush gestures to a crucial paradox that operates as an antithesis to his perfect, immaculate vanishings, bespeaking both an almost divine method of apparition simultaneous with an all-too-human susceptibility to a sort of contrasting concreteness. The one thing that Kaplan cannot seem to make disappear is the dandruff that confirms the concrete "reality" of his existence. The introduction of dandruff thus performs a double duty that might at first seem to negate itself: it makes the man real but renders the spy sloppy. If we should never "trust neatness," which is always "the result of deliberate planning", then messiness, or fleckiness, too, might be just as effectively mobilized to lead us astray with its false trail of forwarding addresses and dandruff falling like a trail of bread crumbs pointing down a garden path. The flakiness endemic to Kaplan's head exemplifies the botches that allow *North by Northwest* to demonstrate a precision of form in precisely those moments it seems to be going off the rails. The apparent mistake requires a small sacrifice that, lending clarity through contrast, offsets the brilliance of everything that isn't.

A look at two quotations about Hitchcock reveals a strange contradiction in critical attitudes surrounding his filmmaking. On the one hand, the director himself professed: "I try to achieve a quality of imperfection."[339] On the other hand, no less than Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol have conceded the occasional failings of the Hitchcockian touch: "It is by studying a film like *Stage Fright* shot by shot that one may be able to grasp the secrets of Hitchcock's form. Because it is less unified, less perfect, than the great films of our cineaste, it dazzles us more." "Less unified, less perfect, than the great films of our cineaste"—though even the director's imperfections manifest his characteristic brilliance, his imperfection is an exception to the career of one whose watchword is, still, a "dazzling" perfectionism. If Hitchcock strives for an impression of willful wrongness rather than flawlessness, it was a sure-fire strategy: even those films considered his personal worst, either critical or box-office failures at the time, are now regarded as all the more "dazzling" because of, rather than despite, their mistakes. This suggests that the so-called "secrets of Hitchcock's form" are embedded not within a sort of varnished control of elements like suspense but an achievement of virtuosity through a clunkier, clumsier aesthetics. Such an aesthetic system is wrought through the very blemishes and blunders that could conceivably mar another. These are deliberate accidents elevated to the level of art, as if their very air of orchestrated disastrousness reflects the famous Mae West line: "When I'm good, I'm great. When I'm bad, I'm better!" Notorious for the system of blots, stains, and MacGuffins which allow him to imprint his films with the Hitchcock brand, Hitchcock himself manages to solidify his style through a dogged devotion to its sullying. As he has declared and I will again repeat, "I try to achieve the quality of imperfection."

In other words, the mastery of certain formal mechanisms (montage, most prominently among these) works against the tidiness of social organization, such that the way to demonstrate sophistication in Hitchcock's world is to embrace all those tiny *faux pas* that would, in any other, make you something of an "idiot." So sneers the haughty lady in the auction scene who, when Cary Grant bids $13 (instead of thirteen *hundred* dollars) for a Louis Quinz chaise and asks "How do we know it's not a fake? It looks like a fake!",

[339] "Hitchcock contre Hitchcock," *Cahiers du cinéma*, Vol. 7, No. 39 (October 1954), p. 25.

responds in kind: "Well, one thing we know, you're no fake. You're a genuine idiot!" Breaching the accepted etiquette of the auction (where everything is treated as a priceless treasure and skepticism should best be kept to oneself), Thornhill prompts a noticeable break in the order of interrupted but invisible suspense that's been plaguing him through the film. This is metalepsis at its finest, an awareness of montage in front of a stop-action montage, a fusion of characterological canniness with film form itself.

North by Northwest offers compelling insights into the productive repercussions of sophistication deliberately tainted and readerly mastery of cinematic language tampered with defied by a counterintuitive narrative tactic of pristinely managed imperfection. In *North by Northwest*, Thronhill's ability to play by the rules of the social game leave him struggling to survive the criminal one, and the film depicts his gradual mastery of a cinematic language founded on framing shots and montage. And *Stage Fright*, for instance, by beginning with a flashback that is eventually shown to be false, undermines the accepted epistemological value of the flashback as a formal device, thus upsetting readers' hubris that they might have mastered the unspoken codes of filmic discourse itself. Fluent in the language of sophistication but refusing to speak it as such, both the nineteenth century novel and Hitchcock's pictures often engage in an initially baffling strain of messy inarticulation that is made all the more eloquent or exquisite because of its sublimated resistance to prettiness or poise as such. In casting off not only erudition itself but also the desire to put it on display, these narratives contribute to an entirely different economy of labor and pleasure that harnesses those deficiencies that lesser pictures might just as soon as discard altogether. Why else is the "touch" always associated with some productive or timely mistake, such as the stain, the blot, or the MacGuffin? Deliberately resisting the impossible totality of a completely mastered system, Hitchcock's elegance, his confident handling of diegetic framings as if they were as supple as celluloid frames, allow him to create *touches* out of (what could have been, in another's hands) *botches*. Put another way, his mastery lies in the deft manipulation, conservation, suspension, and transmission of that sensation through a never-ending sequence of tenuously related micro-plots. The technological achievements of the cinema consists of its so often forgotten but still thrilling ability to breathe life and mobility into still frames, turning light-filled photography into light-fueled cinematography. As if consciously divulging the mechanics of its constitutive material technology on screen, *North by Northwest* slyly purges itself of cinema's duplicitous illusion of movement by making its ineffable seriality the ostensible subject of its diegesis.

We are strung along by strings of frames—technical, narrative, and visual—which are unfurled and unraveled before us so quickly that the yielding seems effortless, and we linger on under a veil of doubt and an anticipation which we would fear, if we gave it any thought at all, will never be lifted. For Jean Epstein, the "underlying discontinuity of static images which 'functions as a material foundation for the continuity which man is capable of imagining in the projected film' is itself a phantom of a machine that interprets the 'perpetually moving spectacle of the world', in other words, 'the intransigent continuity of life'."[340] Ending at the very beginning, Hitchcock's cameo is so astonishing, disturbing, and entrancing (even when we know when to look out for it and, having found it, know exactly where it is going to happen) because it upsets and unsettles the typically strict divide between the film strip's shots and its borders, a celluloid frame's inside and its outside, the diegetic framing's engineers and victims. In so doing, it meditates on the spoiling of aesthetic perfection as exactly that which guarantees a display of its ultimate mastery. Like the critic whose ironic attachments mask the insecurity or anxiety of being thought intellectually or culturally wanting, Hitchcock's paradoxically unstable and unswerving, rigidly flexible systems indulge the gratification of the "fake" even while it remains earnestly attached to its secret perfectionist—perhaps even compulsive—project. The magic of watching this film is that, when suspense plot upon suspense plot seems to burst out from their carefully stitched seams, exposing the wizard behind the machine, we can be nonchalant—*North by Northwest* has taught us to delight in the torn curtain, in the lasting stain, and in the frenzy of these neat little botches. At

[340] Quoted in Maria Walsh, "Against Fetishism: The Moving Quiescence of Life 24 Frames a Second," *Film Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 2.

any rate (even at twenty-four frames a second), we are learning to distinguish in them Hitchcock's lingering, illuminating botches, which have been waiting there, suspended, all the while.

Coda: Why We Love to Love Hitchcock; or, Ironic Attachment

There is no disputing that *Cahiers du cinéma*'s dreams of catapulting Hitchcock's corpus into the annals of cinematic history have been realized: his name alone is near-universally synonymous with "The Master of Suspense" and he is the example *par excellence* of film criticism's celebrated idea of the *auteur*. Even the director's shapely profile is immediately legible as such, as if his face alone, comprised of a few simple lines, stands in as the lexical synecdoche of an entire filmic discourse. And while everyone knows something about the Hitchcock "touch"—how casually titles like *Psycho* and *Vertigo* roll off one's tongue yielding a higher reading on a barometer of cultural literacy—Hitchcock himself has remained untouched by the widespread commodification of his works as that marker of intellectual prestige so freely available for our having. He has come to represent an exclusive club of *haute*-auteurs, household names bolstered by their mass appeal rather than contaminated by it. This is, as Fredric Jameson has by now famously contended, a symptom of late capitalism, wherein the conventional boundaries of "high" and "low" have collapsed, leaving only the pale remnants of a broken binary. Indeed, postmodernism finds itself enthralled by a "whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery, and the science fiction or fantasy novel: materials they no long simply 'quote,' as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance."[341] It is to Jameson's magisterial theory of the logic of postmodernism that Slavoj Žižek refers when he calls Hitchcock a "'postmodernist' *avant la letter*," whose very aim to "estrange" the object's "initial homeliness" renders an ordinary object thoroughly remarkable.[342] Ventriloquizing the would-be critic watching Hitchcock, Žižek imagines him responding to the viewer who naively assumes the name "Hitchcock" means, only, "thriller": "'You think what you see is a simple melodrama even your senile granny would have no difficulties in following? Yet without taking into account…/the difference between symptom and *sinthom*; the structure of the Borromean knot; the fact that Woman is one of the Names-of-the-Father; etc., etc./you've totally missed the point!'"[343]

Forming the basis of a smug little club whereby some knowledge of Hitchcock's canon is the only precondition of membership, such fluency nevertheless maintains an individuating power that exposes the "true" film connoisseur in all his exceptional glory. One could never mistake him for a "senile granny" at all. In this odd inversion of the most simplistic precepts of supply and demand, where abundance breeds devaluation, our culturally mandated—and thus widely shared—familiarity with him only leaves us with the desire to develop the acquaintance even further, and to display it all the more prominently as an index of our singular good taste. Thus, far from cementing the cliché of our being "just another" Hitchcock-lover, it is precisely due to the ubiquity of Hitchcock-as-cultural-darling that the boast of *really* knowing him performs a subtly recursive superiority: in liking the thing that everyone does, what rises to the surface is a critical power to authorize a special fascination with the object of pleasure, a self-conscious interest experienced as guilty and too-obvious but stubbornly embraced as if it wasn't. "Exclusive," "elite," "narrow," "aristocratic," "prestigious" are sophistication's very watchwords. As such, sophistication has generally been said to guard against the perceived threat of generalized (and thus false) "hipness" threatens to put the arbiters of taste—in

[341] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 3.
[342] Žižek, "Alfred Hitchcock, or, The Form and its Historical Mediation," *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*," ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1992), p. 2.
[343] Ibid.

Joseph Litvak's examples, *Time* magazine and Thackeray—out of business. Yet Litvak also admits "some of the most powerful sophistications derive their power precisely from their having adopted the unfashionable garb of *anti*sophistication."[344] What is it, then, about Hitchcock that escapes this ceaseless dialectic of sophistication and antisophistication, true art and false replica, the "real thing" and the "fake"?

Amanda Anderson gets at something close to this in her powerful study of Victorians' striving for a critical distance or objectivity rooted in "complex ambivalence," a labor that exhibits their *"aspiration* to a distanced view."[345] Many of the writers that she reads conceived their ideals, especially with regards to moral character, in terms of "a dialectic between detachment and engagement, between a cultivated distance and a newly informed partiality."[346] Rather than the cultivation of distance as a productive ethical stance within an art historical, geopolitical, or scientific framework, however, I am interested in thinking through the turn away from, or disavowal of, a primarily popular or personal sort of pleasure in order to later magnify its sophistication as such. The sublimation of this sort of pleasure manifests temporarily as a mocking, sheepish, or apologetic dispassion before it transforms into a committed regard swathed in pretend-embarrassment, all the more endearing because it is so badly masked. Such shame seems like a polite concession to critical decorum that looks a lot like the insecurity that lines an exhibit of overconfident swagger. Rita Felski has recently asked, in an article about the language of suspicious reading, "Why—even as we extol multiplicity, difference, hybridity—is the affective range of criticism so limited? What are we so hyper-articulate about our adversaries and so excruciatingly tongue-tied about our loves?"[347]

Indeed, if the adoption of an ironic attachment at first reproduces the very "uncritical" earnestness that had previously been the tacit in-joke of "loving" Hitchcock in the first place, what if anything, does this complex dialectic between rueful engagement and unabashed love allow us to accomplish? Like the veteran film critic who proudly flaunts his enjoyment of unscripted reality television, there is something about Hitchcock's popular acclaim that informs an even more potent strain of exclusive discernment and value-attribution: "I have seen it all, and I have still come back to loving Hitchcock." Or, in a different key, "Everyone might like Hitchcock, but only I know why." Even though it is exactly the "thing to do"—so faddish and trendy it's almost predictable—nursing a weak spot for "The Master of Suspense" translates into a sort of heightened tastefulness refined, rather than ruined, by the ready obtainability of this love by anyone who might wish to possess it. Joining the multitudes that dote on Hitchcock, then, is less about productive similarity, communality, or even sympathy, and instead a matter of asserting, however faintly, a superior discernment by way of an attachment filtered through the very assumption or incorporation of its opposite. It is only by entertaining the possibility of not loving Hitchcock that our return to him lays bare the emptiness of an existence without him.

---

[344] Joseph Litvak, *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 5.

[345] Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 6.

[346] Ibid.

[347] Rita Felski, "Digging Down and Standing Back," *English Language Notes,* Vol. 51, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013), p. 22. She continues: "It is now the espousal of ironic distance itself, rather than any specific account of how things really are, that constitutes the normative component of criticism. Critique, in other words, is translated into critical style, into a distinctive idiom of scholarly self-fashioning. In the act of standing back, the critic displays an exemplary detachment and a knowing insouciance vis-à-vis identities, norms, and values. The manner of saying establishes a particular relationship to what is said, inflecting an anti-normative discourse with its own aura of charisma and authority. Argument is translated into ethos, into a distinctive persona and characterological stance. In Ian Hunter's words, such a critical person is 'distrustful of natural knowledge, practicing abstention from positive categories and norms, and attuned to the imminent and immanent appearance of an 'other' whose unscripted presence promised liquefaction and renewal of the stale old self'" (21).

Cynics might find themselves compelled to dismiss this rhetorical or affective move as an antisocial criticality, contemptuous elitism or even, perhaps, a base philistinism. Yet what ironic attachment achieves is distinct insofar as it combines a knowing sophistication with a genuine and almost altruistic (because possibly reprehensible) dedication to its object. Born out of the fear of being judged frivolous or low-brow, the defensiveness of the critic is his badge of honor, rather than any wish to "look smart." Nevertheless, ironic attachment is, at its heart, optimistic and child-like in its sincerity, resisting the "darker side of Cool" whose "oppositional attitude" escalates into defiance and then violence.[348] Such affection is roused by a yearning to conform via a conversion of the object into a serious art-form rather than any urge to subvert the system itself, and thus constitutes a category adjacent to Susan Sontag's conception of "camp," "the good taste of bad taste" that primarily manifests a "mode of enjoyment, of appreciation—not judgment."[349] "The ultimate camp statement: it's good *because* it's awful," however, does not apply here, such that to love Hitchcock is not tantamount to espousing the values of camp. Sharing camp's "tender," "sweet," or loving nature, more inclined to celebrate the "little triumphs and awkward intensities" of character than to engage in evaluation, criticism on Hitchcock involves a significant twist: no one would dare suggest that Hitchcock's mainstream, box-office successes translate into "awful" films. Indeed, in the introduction of his anthology on the director, Žižek sets out a foundational, though unabashedly tongue-in-cheek, dogma of Hitchcockian criticism: "one plays seriously the game whose ground rule is acceptance that Hitchcock is a 'serious artist'"; critics indulging in the "madness" of this form of scholarship elevate the director into a "God-like demiurge who masters even the smallest details of his work," lording benevolently over a realm wherein "*everything has meaning*."[350] Crucially, Žižek posits this attitude as a reaction against those who would "lay stress on Hitchcock's fallibility, inconsistencies, etc."

My argument in this chapter concludes with this meta-critical meditation on how a reconciliation of Hitchcock's almost divine "mastery" with an all-too human tendency toward "fallibility" occurs precisely within the meaningful interstices of framing plots and framed shots in *North by Northwest*. Though we are more likely to invest gods with grace rather than with gaffes, the director's enduring appeal—thrilling to the masses and critically sophisticated, at once flawed and perfect—promotes and theorizes a logics of formal sophistication (rather than one that is initially social in nature) that finds its firmest grounding in its moments of disruption. If indeed Hitchcock purposefully sullies his style in order to guarantee its success, the critic's abashed, apologetic attachment to the director he loves might sustain that obligatory stain within both Hitchcock's world and the world of Hitchcock criticism. Like the model we find in the symbolic stain, the detail that "sticks out" as wrong, a jarring "remainder of the real," only paradoxically confirms the rightness of the encompassing system.[351] And if we concede that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we can see that Roger Thornhill's disruption of form extends beyond a way to control the plot of *North by Northwest.* Nor is it merely another bout of metalepsis, the character's desire to play the director in his own little film and have that desire played out in a particularly performance-conscious film. It also suggests, in the doting language of a Hitchcock devotee, an homage paid to a director whose masterful touch elevates, because it emerges from, his messiest botches.

---

[348] Dave Pountain and David Robins, *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude* (New York: Reaktion Books, 2000).
[349] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), p. 65.
[350] Žižek, "Alfred Hitchcock, or, The Form and its Historical Mediation," p. 10.
[351] See Žižek, "The Hitchcockian Blot," *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, ed. Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), p. 127.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, M. H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *The Glossary to Literary Terms*. Boston: Wadsworth, 2012.

Abrams, Philip. *The Origins of British Sociology: 1834-1914.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Adorno, Theodor W. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. New York: Verso, 2006.

Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Anderson. Amanda. "Character and Ideology: The Case of Cold War Liberalism." *New Literary History*, Vol. 42. No. 2 (Spring 2011): 209-229.

_____. *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Anderson, Joseph and Barbara Anderson. "The Myth of Persistence of Vision Revisited." *Journal of Film and Video.* Vol. 45. No. 1 (1991): 3-12.

Arendt, Hannah. *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Aristotle. *Ethics.* Ed. John Burnet. London: Methuen & Co, 1990.

_____. *Treatise on Poetry*. Trans. Thomas Twinning. London: W. McDowall, 1815.

Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

_____. "The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism." *The Novel, Volume 2: Forms and Themes*. Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

_____. *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy.* Ed. J. Dover Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Auerbach, Jonathan and Lisa Gittelman. "Microfilm, Containment, and the Cold War." *American Literary History.* Vol. 19. No. 3 (Fall 2007): 745-68.

Auerbach, Nina. *Private Theatricals: The Lives of the Victorians*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Austen, Jane. *Emma.* Ed. James Kinsley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

_____. *Mansfield Park*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2012.

_____. *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon.* Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008.

_____. *Persuasion.* Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008.

_____. *Pride and Prejudice*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993.

_____. *Sense and Sensibility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Austen-Leigh, James Edward. *A Memoir of Jane Austen: And Other Family Recollections*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Baer, Bill. "*North by Northwest*: Interview with Ernest Lehman." *Creative Screenwriting Journal*. Vol. 34 (Nov./Dec. 2000).

Bailin, Miriam. "'Dismal Pleasure': Victorian Sentimentality and the Pathos of the Parvenu." *ELH*. Vol. 66. No. 4 The Nineteenth Century (Winter, 1999).

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination.* Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Banfield, Ann. "Narrative Style and the Grammar of Direct and Indirect Speech." *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Ed. Mieke Bal, Vol. 1: Major Issues in Narrative Theory. London: Routledge, 2004.

Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.
_____. "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative." *New Literary History*. Vol. 6. No. 2. "On Narrative and Narratives" (Winter 1975).
_____. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1980.
_____. "Fashion, a Strategy of Desire: Round-table Discussion with Roland Barthes, Jean Duvignaud, and Henri Lefebvre," *The Language of Fashion*. Ed. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter. Oxford: Berg Press, 2006.
_____. "Le discours de l'histoire." *Social Science Information*. Vol. 6. No. 4 (1967): 65-75.
_____. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1974.
_____. *The Pleasure of the Text.* Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975.
_____. *The Rustle of Language.* Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Macmillan, 1987.
Baudry, Jean-Louis. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader.* Trans. Alan Williams. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.
Bazin, André. "Hitchcock contre Hitchcock." *Cahiers du cinema*. Vol. 7. No. 39 (October 1954).
_____. *What Is Cinema?* Trans. and Ed. Hugh Gray. Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.
Beckman, Karen and Jean Ma. "Introduction." *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*. Ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
Bellour, Raymond. *The Analysis of Film*. Ed. Constance Penley. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
_____. "Hitchcock, The Enunciator." *Camera Obscura*. Vol. 1. No. 22. 1977: 67-92.
Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections.* Trans. by Harry Zohn. Ed. by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.
Bentley, Nancy. *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics.* Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971.
Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.
_____. "Cruel Optimism." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. Vol. 17. No. 5 (2006): 20-36.
_____. "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)." *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 33. No. 4. (Summer 2007): 754-780.
Bloch, Ernst, Roswitha Mueller, and Stephen Thaman. "A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel." *Discourse*. Vol. 2. Mass Culture Issue (Summer, 1980): 32-52.
Bodenheimer, Rosemarie. *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
Bonati-Martinez, Félix. *Fictive Discourse and the Structure of Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.
Bonitzer, Pascal. "Hitchcockian Suspense." *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock).* Ed. Slavoj Žižek. New York: Verso, 1992.
Booth, Wayne. "Point of View and the Control of Distance in *Emma*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Vol. 16. No. 2 (Sept., 1961).
_____. *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983.
Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Trans. by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
_____. In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.
_____. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
Boyd, William. "*North by Northwest,*" *Le Figaro* (July 2007). Online. Accessed April 27, 2014. http://www.williamboyd.co.uk/film-north-by-northwest.
Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
Brantlinger, Patrick. "What Is 'Sensational' About the 'Sensation Novel'?." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Vol. 37. No. 1 (June 1982).

Bremond, Claude. "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities," *New Literary History*. Vol. 11 (1980): 387-411.
Brewer, David. *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
Brinkema, Eugenie. *The Forms of the Affects*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
_____. *The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
_____. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
_____. *Realist Vision.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
Brownlow, Kevin. "Silent Films: What Was the Right Speed?". *Sight and Sound* (Summer 1980).
Brummell & Beau. *Deportment for Dukes & Tips for Toffs: A Compendium of Useful Information for Guests at the Mansions of the Nobility, Gentry, and Clergy.* London: The British Library, 2013.
Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
Burrow, J. W. *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
Butler, Judith P. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
_____. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
Calvino, Italo. *Six Memos for the Next Millennium.* New York: Penguin Classics, 1994.
Carens, Timothy L. "Outandish English Subjects in *The Moonstone*." *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins*. Ed. Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003.
Carlyle, Thomas. *The French Revolution: A History.* New York: Modern Library Classics, 2002.
_____. *Sartor Resartus and Selected Prose.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.
Caruth, Cathy. "Introduction." "Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Trauma." Ed. Cathy Caruth. Special Issue *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture*. Vol. 48 (Spring 1991).
_____. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
Case, Alison. "Introduction." *Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure.* Ed. Alison Booth. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1993.
_____. *Plotting Women: Gender and Narration in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.
Caserio, Robert. *Plot, Story, and the Novel: From Dickens and Poe to the Modern Period*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
Cavell, Stanley. "Knowing and Acknowledging," *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
_____. *"North by Northwest*." *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 7. No. 4 (Summer, 1981): 761-76.
_____. *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
_____. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
Chase, Cynthia. "The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-Reading *Daniel Deronda*." *PMLA*. Vol. 93. No. 2 (March 1978).
Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.
Cheng, Anne. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
Chesterton, G. K. *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1911.
Cixous, Hélène and Keith Cohen. "The Character of 'Character'." *New Literary History*. Vol. 5. No. 2. Changing Views of Character (Winter, 1974): 383-402.

Clarke, William M. *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins*. London: Allison & Busby, 1988.
Cohn, Dorrit. "Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme." Trans. Lewis S. Gleich. *Narrative*. Vol. 20. No. 1 (January 2012).
_____. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
Collins, Wilkie. *The Moonstone*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
_____. *The Woman in White*. Ed. Matthew Sweet. New York: Penguin, 1999.
Cook, David A. *A History of Narrative Film*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004.
Cottom, Daniel. *Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History, and Literary Representation.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
Crary, Jonathan. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999.
_____. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.
Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.
_____. "Omniscience." *Narrative*. Vol. 12. No. 1 (Jan., 2004).
_____. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.
Currie, Mark. *About Time: Narrative, Fiction, and the Philosophy of Time*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
Dames, Nicholas. *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
_____. "Trollope's Chapters." *Literature Compass*. Vol. 7. No. 9 (2010): 855-60.
Dannenberg, Hilary P. *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.
Danto, Arthur C. *Analytical Philosophy of Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.
Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
Derrida, Jacques. *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
_____. *Speech and Phenomena And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Trans. David B. Allison and Newton Garver. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.
Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. New York: Penguin, 2003.
_____. *David Copperfield*. New York: Penguin, 1985.
_____. *Great Expectations*. New York: Penguin, 2002.
_____. *Our Mutual Friend.* Oxford: Oxford World's Classics: 1998.
Doane, Mary Ann. *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film in the 1940s*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
_____. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
_____. *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
Docherty, Thomas. *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.
Duncan, Ian. *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
_____. "*The Moonstone*, the Victorian Novel, and Imperialist Panic." *Modern Language Quarterly*. Vol. 55. No. 3. (September 1994): 297-319.
_____. *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
Durkheim, Emile. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Ed. Steven Lukes. Trans. W. D. Halls. New York: Free

Press, 1982.
Eagleton, Terry. "Foreword." In *Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History, and Literary Representation*, by Daniel Cottom. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
_____. *The Idea of Culture.* Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
Eisenstein, Sergei. *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*. Ed. and Trans. Jay Leyda. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1949.
Elias, Norbert. *The Court Society*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.
_____. *The Society of Individuals.* Ed. Michael Schröter. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Continuum, 2001.
Elias, Norbert and John L. Scotson. *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Inquiry into Community Problems.* London: Sage, 1994.
Eliot, George. *Daniel Deronda.* New York: Penguin, 1996.
_____. *Essays of George Eliot.* Ed. Thomas Pinney. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.
_____. *Middlemarch.* New York: Penguin, 2003.
Elsaesser, Thomas. *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*. Ed. Thomas Elsaesser. London: British Film Institute and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
_____. "The Dandy in Hitchcock." *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*. Ed. Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès. London: BFI Publishing, 1999.
Elster, Jon. *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
_____. *Ulysses Unbound: Studies in Rationality, Precommittment, and Constraints.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
Eng, David L. and David Kazanjian. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning.* Ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2003.
Ermarth, Elizabeth Deeds. *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
Esty, Jed. *A Shrinking Island: Modernsim and National Culture in England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
Favret, Mary A. *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
Felluga, Dino. "Modules on Lacan: On the Gaze." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. January 31, 2011. Purdue University. Accessed June 13, 2015. <http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/lacangaze.html>.
Felski, Rita. "Digging Down and Standing Back." *English Language Notes*. Vol. 51. No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013).
_____. "Introduction." Character Issue. *New Literary History.*
Ferguson, Frances. "Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form." *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly*. Vol. 61. No. 1 (March 2000).
_____. *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation.* New York: Routledge, 1992.
Finch, Casey and Peter Bowen. "'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury': Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma*." *Representations*. No. 31. Special Issue: The Margins of Identity in Nineteenth-Century England (Summer 1990): 1-19.
Flaubert, Gustave. *Œuvres completes*. Ed. Claudine Gothot-Mersch and Guy Sagnes. Paris: Gallimard, 2001.
_____. "A Simple Heart." *Three Tales*. New York: Penguin, 1961.
Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel.* New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1955.
Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1979.
_____. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage, 1994.

François, Anne-Lise. *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
Frank, Joseph. "Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Two Parts." *The Sewanee Review*. Vol. 53. No. 2 (Spring, 1945): 221-40.
Frazee, John P. "The Character of Esther and the Narrative Structure of *Bleak House*." *Studies in the Novel* (1985).
Freedgood, Elaine. "Fictional Settlements: Footnotes, Metalepsis, the Colonial Effect." *New Literary History*. Vol. 41. No. 2 (Spring 2010).
_____. *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.
Freed-Thall, Hannah. "'Prestige of a Momentary Diamond': Economies of Distinction in Proust." *New Literary History.* Vol. 43. No. 1. (Winter 2012): 159-78.
Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* Trans. James Strachey. Vol. XIV. "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement Papers on Metapsychology and Other Words. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74.
_____. *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text.* Trans. and Ed. by James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 2010.
Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
Frow, John. "Spectacle Binding: On Character." *Poetics Today*. Vol. 7. No. 2 (1986): 227-250.
Frye, Northrop. *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
_____. "Dickens and the Comedy of Humours." *Northrop Frye's Writings on the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* Vol. 17. Ed. Imre Salusinszky. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
Fuchs, Elinor. *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre after Modernism.* Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1996.
Gagnier, Regenia. *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
Galef, David. *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters.* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.
Gallagher, Catherine. "Formalism and Time." *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly*. Vol. 61. No. 1 (March 2000): 229-251.
_____. *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832–1876.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.
_____. *Nobody's Story: Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
_____. "The Rise of Fictionality." *The Novel, Volume I: History, Geography, and Culture.* Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
Gallagher, Catherine and Stephen Greenblatt. *Practicing New Historicism.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
Garis, Robert. *The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
Garrett, Peter. *The Victorian Multiplot Novel.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.
Ginsburg, Michal Peled. *Economies of Change: Form and Transformation in the Nineteenth-Century Novel.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
Ginzburg, Carlo. "Clues: Rules of an Evidential Paradigm." *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method.* Trans. John and Anne Tedeschi. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
Girard, René. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure.* Trans. Yvonne Freccero.

Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961.
Gissing, George. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study.* New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1924.
Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience.* Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986.
_____. *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior*. Chicago: Aldine, 1967.
_____. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Center, 1956.
_____. "Symbols of Class Status." *The British Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 2. No. 4 (Dec., 1951).
GoGwilt, Christopher. *The Fiction of Geopolitics: Afterimages of Culture, from Wilkie Collins to Alfred Hitchcock.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
Goldman, A. I. *A Theory of Human Action.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970.
Goodman, Kevis. *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Meditation of History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
Gunning, Tom. "In and Out of the Frame: Paintings in Hitchcock." *Casting a Shadow: Creating the Alfred Hitchcock Film*. Ed. Will Schmenner and Corinne Granof. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007. pp. 29-47.
_____. "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded.* Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.
Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
Hack, Daniel. "Revenge Stories of Modern Life." *Victorian Studies*. Vol. 48. No. 2. Papers and Responses from the Third Annual Conference of the North American Victorian Studies Association (Winter 2006).
Hägglund, Martin. *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.
Hall, Peter. "Opening Ceremonies: Typography and the Movies, 1955-1969." *Architecture and Film*. Ed. Mark Lamster. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000: 128-39.
Halliwell, Stephen. *Aristotle's Poetics.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
Hayward, Susan. *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts.* London: Routledge, 2002.
Harvey, William J. "Chance and Design in *Bleak House*." *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*. Eds. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962.
_____. *Character and the Novel.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1965.
Heath, Stephen. "Narrative Space." *Questions of Cinema.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
Heise, Ursula K. *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
Hernstein-Smith, Barbara and Meir Sternberg. Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.
Hitchcock, Alfred. "Interview." *Cahiers du Cinéma*. No. 102 (Dec. 1959).
Hirsh, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*. Vol. 29. No. 1 (Spring 2008).
Hochman, Baruch. *Character in Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
Hughes, Winifred. *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
Jacobs, Steven. *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2007.
Jagodzinski, Jan. *Psychoanalyzing Cinema: A Productive Encounter with Lacan, Deleuze, and Žižek*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
Jaffe, Audrey. "Realism in Retrospect." *Journal of Narrative Theory*. Vol. 36. No. 3 (Fall 2006).
_____. *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
James, Henry. "In the Cage." London: Duckworth and Co., 1898.
_____. "Preface to the New York Edition, 1907." *Wings of the Dove.* London: Penguin, 1986.

_____. "Preface." *Roderick Hudson*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917.
_____. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.
_____. *The Sacred Fount*. London: Methuen & Co, 1901.
Jameson, Fredric. *The Antimonies of Realism.* New York: Verso, 2014.
_____. "Experiments of Time: Providence and Realism." *The Novel, Volume 2: Forms and Themes*. Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
_____. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
_____. *The Political Unconscious*: *Narrative as a socially symbolic act.* London: Routledge, 2002.
_____. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
_____. "Spatial Systems in *North by Northwest*." *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock).* Ed. Slavoj Žižek. New York: Verso, 1992.
Jordan, John. "The Social Sub-Text of *David Copperfield*." *Dickens Studies Annual* 14 (1985): 61–92.
Kendrick, Walter M. "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Vol. 32. No. 1 (Jun., 1977).
Kermode, Frank. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
_____. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
Kracauer, Siegfried. "The Cult of Distraction," *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays.* Trans. Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
Kucich, John. *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
Kurnick, David. "An Erotics of Detachment: *Middlemarch* and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice." *ELH*. Vol. 74. No. 3. (Fall 2007): 583-608.
Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock Publications, 1977.
_____. *The Seminar: Book III, The Psychoses, 1955-56.* Trans. Russell Grigg. London: Routledge, 1993.
The Lady Vanishes. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Perf. Margaret Lockwood, Michael Redgrave, Paul Lukas, and Dame May Whitty. Gainsborough Pictures, 1938.
Lanser, Susan Sniader. *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
Laplanche, Jean. *Essays on Otherness*. London: Routledge, 2005.
_____. *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.
Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
Levine, Caroline. "An Anatomy of Suspense: The Pleasurable, Critical, and Erotic Middle of *The Woman in White*." *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Ed. Caroline Levine and Mario-Ortiz-Robles. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011.
_____. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
_____. *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003.
Levine, Caroline and Mario Ortiz-Robles. "Introduction." *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Ed. Caroline Levine and Mario-Ortiz-Robles. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011.
Levine, George. *Realism, Ethics, and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
Litvak, Joseph. *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
_____. *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
Liu, Alan. *Wordsworth: The Sense of History.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

_____. *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
Loesberg, Jonathan. "The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction." *Representations* 13 (Winter 1986).
Love, Heather. *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
Lubbock, Percy. *The Craft of Fiction*. New York: Viking, 1957.
Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
Lukács, Georg. Narrate or Describe?" *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays.* Ed. and Trans. Arthur Kahn. London: Merlin Press, 2005.
_____. *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature.* Trans. by Anna Bostock. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971.
Lynch, Deirdre Shauna. *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning.* Chicago: The University of California, 1998.
Macherey, Pierre. *A Theory of Literary Production*. Trans. Geoffrey Wall. London: Routledge, 2006.
Malina, Debra. *Breaking the Frame: Metalepsis and the Construction of the Subject.* Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002.
Mannoni, Octave. "*Je sais bien, mais quand-même…*" *Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou l'autre scène*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969: 9-33.
Mansel, H. L. [anon.]. "Sensation Novels." *Quarterly Review*. Vol. 113 (April 1862).
Margetson, Stella. *Victorian High Society*. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980.
Markovits, Stefanie. "Form Things: Looking at Genre through Victorian Diamonds." *Victorian Studies*. Vol. 52. No. 4 (Summer 2010): 591-619.
Marshall, David. *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
Maxwell, Richard. "Dickens's Omniscience." *ELH*. Vol. 46 (1979).
McKeon, Michael. *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.
Meisel, Martin. *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1983.
Metz, Christina. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Trans. Michael Taylor. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
Miller, Andrew H. *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.
_____. "'A Case of Metaphysics': Counterfactuals, Realism, *Great Expectations*." *ELH*. Vol. 79 (2012).
Miller, D. A. "Balzac's Illusions Lost and Found." *Yale French Studies*. No. 67. Concepts of Closure (1984).
_____. "Hitchcock's Hidden Pictures." *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 37 (Autumn 2010).
_____. *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
_____. *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
_____. *The Novel and the Police*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
_____. *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
Miller, J. Hillis. *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
_____. *The Form of Victorian Fiction: Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968.
_____. "Narrative and History." *ELH*. Vol. 41. No. 3 (Autumn 1974).
Miller, Nancy K. "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction." *PMLA*. Vol. 96. No. 1. (Jan., 1981).
Mitchell, W. J. T. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation.* Chicago: The University of

Chicago Press, 1994.
Moretti, Franco. *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature.* New York: Verso, 2013.
_____. *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture.* New York: Verso, 2000.
_____. *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms.* New York: Verso, 2005.
Morris, Christopher D. "The Direction of *North by Northwest."* *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 36. No. 4 (Summer, 1997).
_____. *The Hanging Figure: On Suspense and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock*. Westport: Praeger, 2002.
Mulvey, Laura. *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion Books, 2006.
_____. "The Death Drive." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*. Issue 10 (Autumn/Winter 2004).
_____. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penly. New York: Routledge, 1988.
Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity.* New York: New York University Press, 2009.
Nelles, William. *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative.* New York: Peter Lang, 1997.
Nabokov, Vladimir. *The Gift.* Trans. Michael Scammell. New York: Vintage International, 1991.
Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
_____. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality.* Ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
_____. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future.* Ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
_____. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix in Songs.* Ed. Bernard Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
_____. *The Will to Power.* Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. Ed. Walter Kaufman. New York: Vintage, 1968.
North by Northwest (1959). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Written by Ernest Lehman. With Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint, and James Mason. (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1959).
O'Farrell, Mary Ann. *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
Ofek, Galia. Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009.
Ortiz-Robles, Mario. *The Novel as Event*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010.
Pavel, Thomas G. "Literary Narratives." *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Ed. Mieke Bal. Vol. 1: Major Issues in Narrative Theory. London: Routledge, 2004.
_____. *The Lives of the Novel: A History.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
_____. *The Poetics of Plot: The Case of English Renaissance Literature.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
Perrot, Philippe, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century.* Trans. Richard Bienvenu. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
Peters, Catherine. *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
Phelan, James. *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
Pier, John and Jean-Marie Schaeffer, eds. *Métalepses: Entorses au pacte de la representation*. Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2005.
Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans. Laurence Scott. Ed. Louis A. Wagner. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.
Poirier, Richard, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
Potamianou, Anna. *Hope: A Shield in the Economy of Borderline States.* London: Routledge, 1997.
Pountain, Dave and David Robins. *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude*. New York: Reaktion Books, 2000.

Price, Martin. *Forms of Life: Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.
Puckett, Kent. *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
_____. "Before and Afterwardsness in Henry James." *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Ed. Caroline Levine and Mario-Ortiz-Robles. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011.
Rae, W. F. [anon.]."Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon." *North British Review*. No. 4 (1865).
Rancière, Jacques. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.
_____. "Is History a Form of Fiction?" *The Politics of Aesthetics.* Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Bloomsbury, 2006.
_____. *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge.* Trans. Hassan Melehy. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.
_____. "Why Emma Bovary Had To Be Killed." *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 34 (Winter 2008).
Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
_____. *Time and Narrative, Volume I*. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.
_____. *Time and Narrative*, *Volume 2*. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.
Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics.* London: Routledge, 1983.
Robbins, Bruce. *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
_____. *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
Rohmer, Éric and Claude Chabrol. *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*. New York: Roundhouse Publishing Ltd., 1992.
Said, Edward. *Beginnings: Intention and Method.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
_____. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
_____. "Molestation and Authority in Narrative Fiction." *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute*. Ed. with forward by J. Hillis Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.
Sanchez, Maria and Linda Schlossberg. "Introduction: Rites of Passing," *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.
Sasson, Sarah Juliette. *Longing to Belong: The Parvenu in Nineteenth-Century French and German Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
Scheler, Max. *Ressentiment*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007.
Schor, Naomi. *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine.* New York: Methuen, 1987.
Schwarz, Benjamin. "Becoming Cary Grant." *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1, 2007). Online. Accessed April 24, 2014. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/01/becoming-cary-grant/305548/
Searle, John R. "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse." *New Literary History*. Vol. 6. No. 2. On Narrative and Narratives (Winter, 1975): 319-332.
Shaw, W. David. *Victorians and Mystery: Crises of Representation.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
Shklovsky, Victor. *Theory of Prose.* Trans. Benjamin Sher. Normal, I.L.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998.
Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
Siddiqi, Yumna. *Anxieties of Empire and the Fiction of Intrigue.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
Silver, Alain. "Fragments of the Mirror: Hitchcock's *Noir* Landscapes." Ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini. *Film Noir Reader 2*. Second Limelight Editions, 2003.
Simmel, Georg. *Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms.* Trans. and Ed. Anthony J. Blasi, Anton K. Jacobs, and Matthew Kanjirathinkal. Leiden, The Netherlands, Koninklijke Brill NV, 2009.
_____. *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings.* Ed. Donald. N. Levine. Chicago: The

University of Chicago Press, 1971.
Simpson, David. *Fetishism and Imagination: Perception and Representation in the Novels of Dickens*, *Melville, and Conrad*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.
Skilton, David. "Introduction." *Lady Audley's Secret*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
Smith, Murray. "On the Twofoldness of Character." *New Literary History*. Vol. 42. No. 2 (Spring 2011).
Somers, Margaret R. "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach." *Theory and Society*. Vol. 23. No. 5 (Oct., 1994).
Sontag, Susan. "Notes on 'Camp'." *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966.
Spacks, Patricia Meyers. *Desire and Truth*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.
_____. *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.
Spencer, Herbert. *The Principles of Sociology.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1975.
Spilka, Mark. "*David Copperfield* as Psychological Fiction." *Dickens: Modern Judgments*. Ed. A. E. Dyson. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
Spoto, Donald. *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures.* New York: Anchor Books, 1991.
Stamelman, Richard Howard. *Lost Beyond Telling: Representations of Death and Absence in Modern French Poetry.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
Stewart, Garrett. *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
_____. *Dickens and the Trials of Imagination.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.
_____. *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.
_____. *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.
Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
Stoehr, Taylor. *Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965.
Sucksmith, H. P. *The Narrative Art of Charles Dickens*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.
Sweet, Matthew. "Introduction." *The Woman in White*. Ed. Matthew Sweet. New York: Penguin, 1999.
Tanner, Tony. *The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.
Taylor, Jenny Bourne. *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
Taylor, M. E. M. *The Arriviste: The Origins and Evolution of the 'Arriviste' in the 19th Century French Novel with Particular Reference to Stendhal and Balzac*. Bala, N. Wales: Dragon Books, 1972.
Terada, Rei. *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
Thackeray, William Makepeace. *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
The 39 Steps. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Perf. Robert Donat, Madeleine Carroll, and Lucie Mannheim. Gaumont British Picture Corporation, 1935.
Thoms, Peter. *The Windows of the Labyrinth: Quest and Structure in the Major Novels of Wilkie Collins*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992.
Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.
_____. *Introduction to Poetics.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981.
_____. *The Poetics of Prose.* Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.
Trilling, Lionel. "Manners, Morals, and the Novel." *The Kenyon Review*. Vol. 10. No. 1 (Winter, 1948).
_____. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.
Trollope, Anthony. *An Autobiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.
Truffaut, François. *Hitchcock*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

Vermuele, Blakey. *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.
Veyne, Paul. *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*. Trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984.
Walsh, Maria. "Against Fetishism: The Moving Quiescence of Life 24 Frames a Second." *Film Philosophy*. Vol. 10. No. 2. pp. 1-11.
Warhol, Robyn. *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989.
Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.
White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.
Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
Williams, Bernard. *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-1972*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
Williams, Dick. "Hitchcock Returns to Spy Chase Formula." *Los Angeles Mirror-News*. 29 July 1959.
Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
Wilson, George M. "The Maddest McGuffin: Some Notes on *North by Northwest." MLN*. Vol. 94. No. 5. Comparative Literature (Dec., 1979): 1159-72.
Wilt, Judith. *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot, and Lawrence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
Winnett, Susan. *Terrible Sociability: The Text of Manners in Laclos, Goethe, and James*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
Winnicott, D. W. *Playing and Reality.* London: Routledge, 2002.
Woloch, Alex. "Character Insecurity in *Sense and Sensibility*." *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Ed. Caroline Levine and Mario-Ortiz-Robles. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011.
_____. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
Wood, Robin. *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
Wolff, Robert L. Letter of 17 January 1864. "Devoted Disciple: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1862-1873." *Harvard Library Bulletin*. Vol. 12 (1974).
Woolf, Virginia. "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. Ed. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.
Wolfson, Susan. *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
_____. "Introduction." *Reading for Form.* Ed. Susan Wolfson and Marshall Brown. University of Washington Press, 2007.
_____. *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action.* Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.
York, R. A. *Strangers and Secrets: Communication in the Nineteenth-Century Novel.* Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994.
Žižek, Slavoj. "Alfred Hitchcock, or, The Form and its Historical Mediation." *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*." Ed. Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso, 1992.
_____. "The Hitchcockian Blot." *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*. Ed. Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès. London: BFI Publishing, 1999.
_____. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 2008.
"1000 Frames of *North by Northwest."* http://www.hitchcockwiki.com/wiki/1000_Frames_of_North_by_Northwest_(1959). Accessed 5 December 2013. Online.