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Idle Attentions: Modern Fiction and the Dismissal of Distraction

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Idle Attentions: Modern Fiction and the Dismissal of Distraction

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Abstract

Idle Attentions: Modern Fiction and the Dismissal of Distraction

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

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My dissertation challenges a long critical tradition that regards distraction as the default state of the modern subject. I argue that, far from leading inevitably to distraction, the culture of industrial capitalism trained individuals to treat their own attention as a scarce resource. Distraction, in this framework, was recast as a form of imprudent squandering. By bringing original analyses of the history of science and political theory to bear on four quintessentially distracted novels, I demonstrate that these texts' unfocused form constitutes itself in opposition to an ever more ubiquitous demand for productive attention. In these novels, I reveal, distraction appears not as the necessary outgrowth of modern life, but as an increasingly marginalized cognitive mode.

Contemporary discussions of distraction tend to follow a narrative first established by critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who saw it as a condition both endemic to and emblematic of their age. If reactionary writers like Max Nordau denounced distraction as a symptom of the modern individual's weak willpower, Marxists like Theodor Adorno saw it as a lamentable consequence of the proliferation of the commodity form. Even leftist theorists who found value in distraction—arguing, like Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, that it exposed the unsustainable tensions of modern life—understood it as the corollary of industrial modernity. *Idle Attentions* offers a different account. The novels I consider locate distraction not in the bustling centers of modern capitalism, but at its margins: for Charles Dickens, among abjected working-class subjects; for Bram Stoker and Joseph Conrad, at the colonial edges of the British Empire; for James Joyce, in private spaces set apart from civic life. By bringing to light distraction's status as a marginalized phenomenon, I am able to give a new account of the novel's evolution during this period, from the teleological narratives of serialized Victorian fiction to the associative forms of modernism. I argue that novelists develop radically experimental forms not in order to represent the new realities of modernity, but rather to reactivate a distractible, spontaneous mode of perception out of sync with the demands of the capitalist market. In historicizing the imperative to maintain control over one's own attention, my project also challenges the value of willful concentration assumed in disciplines from art history to philosophy. I propose that distraction, by accommodating spontaneous impressions and unforeseen realizations, offers a vital means to move outside reified structures of thought and perception.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction: Distraction in Decline

To judge by the scholarly and popular conversation of the past 100 years, distraction would seem even less in need of a defense than it is deserving of one. A long critical tradition, stretching from Walter Benjamin and Q.D. Leavis to the recent work of Jonathan Crary and Natalie Phillips, regards distraction as the default state of the modern subject.[1] Many of these critics describe what they see as the ever-increasing distraction of modern life so as to decry it: if reactionary writers like Max Nordau denounce distraction as a symptom of the modern individual's weak willpower, Marxists like Theodor Adorno understand it as a lamentable consequence of the proliferation of the commodity form.[2] Even those critics who find value in distraction—arguing, like Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, that it exposes the unsustainable tensions of modern life—treat it as the corollary of capitalist modernity.[3] And like their predecessors, contemporary accounts of distraction, whether denunciatory or celebratory, tend to find the phenomenon everywhere ascendant.

This dissertation charts an opposite trajectory. I make the case that the very period usually seen as the origin of our current age of distraction, the long nineteenth century, in fact played host to cultural and material developments that discouraged and even precluded distracted

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[1] For Benjamin, see "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 2007 [1935]): 217-251. For Leavis, see the chapter "Reading Capacity" in *Fiction and the Reading Public* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965 [1932]), especially 228-230. For Phillips, see *Distraction: Problems of Attention in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2016). For Crary, see *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999). Crary takes a different approach from most other scholarly texts on distraction, arguing that distraction is produced not by the technologies, urban landscapes, and mass cultural forms of capitalist modernity, nor by the modern subject's ostensible lack of self-discipline, but rather by the imperative for focused attention itself. Crary concurs with the other critics I discuss here, however, in seeing modernity as uniquely productive of distraction.

[2] For Nordau, see *Degeneration*, especially Chapter III: "Diagnosis," where Nordau argues that "with the incapacity for action there is connected the predilection for inane reverie. The degenerate is not in a condition to fix his attention long, or indeed at all, on any subject, and is equally incapable of correctly grasping, ordering, or elaborating into ideas and judgments the impressions of the external world conveyed to his distracted consciousness by his defectively operating senses. It is easier and more convenient for him to allow his brain-centres to produce semi-lucid, nebulously blurred ideas and inchoate embryonic thoughts, and to surrender himself to the perpetual obfuscation of a boundless, aimless, and shoreless stream of fugitive ideas; and he rarely rouses himself to the painful attempt to check or counteract the capricious, and, as a rule, purely mechanical associations of ideas and succession of images, and bring under discipline the disorderly tumult of his fluid presentations." Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, translated from the second edition of the German work (London: William Heinemann, 1920 [1895]), 21. For Adorno, see "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), which claims that the masses are "no longer capable of concentrated listening"—a state of affairs for which Adorno blames the commodification of aesthetic experience: "Deconcentration is the perceptual activity which prepares the way for the forgetting and sudden recognition of mass music. If the standardized products, hopelessly like one another except for conspicuous bits such as hit lines, do not permit concentrated listening without becoming unbearable to the listeners, the latter are in any case no longer capable of concentrated listening. They cannot stand the strain of concentrated listening and surrender themselves resignedly to what befalls them, with which they can come to terms only if they do not listen to it too closely. Benjamin's reference to the apperception of the cinema in a condition of distraction is just as valid for light music." Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," trans. Maurice Goldbloom, in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1985): 270-299, 288.

[3] For Kracauer, see "Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987 [1926]): 91-96. Chapter Four addresses the arguments of both Benjamin and Kracauer in depth.

perception. Over the century's course, I argue, attention attained new prominence as a crucial attribute of bourgeois subjectivity: a necessary tool for material success and a marker of ethical virtue, closely aligned with prudence, self-control, and thrift. At the same time that attention was invested with new significance, it was also defined in increasingly precise terms. Where earlier discussions in theology and philosophy had disputed whether attention consisted in passive reception or active concentration, whether proper attention could be attained through individual will or only by a gift of grace, and what relationship existed between attention and distraction, the nineteenth century saw the rise of a new consensus that understood attention as a mode of self-directed, instrumental effort. This model, which I call *rational attention*, defined attention as the work of channeling one's perception towards particular pre-determined ends. As the imperative for rational attention became increasingly ubiquitous, distractedness was recast as a moral shortcoming. Instances of distraction, previously understood at worst as inevitable lapses of concentration and at best as valuable openings onto new modes of thought, now appeared as symptoms of a subject's idleness and profligacy.

Idle Attentions reads a series of British and Irish novels—Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-1853), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904), and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922)—as responses to the nineteenth-century turn against distraction. In my view, the quintessentially distracted novels I consider do not simply reflect the distractedness endemic to modern experience, as they are usually understood to do, but reveal and in some cases contest the progressive marginalization of distraction. If *Ulysses* has generally been cast as an archetype of the absentminded receptivity that characterizes modernist narrative, the frenetic movement and fragmentation of *Bleak House*, *Dracula*, and *Nostromo* have often led critics to regard them as prior stages in the development of the modernist novel's associative form. Certainly, Dickens's chaotic representation of urban life, Stoker's discontinuous assemblage of multimedia cuttings, and Conrad's disorienting leaps between tenuously connected historical moments all encode modes of distracted perception, which frustrate the desire for teleological narrative progress. However, I demonstrate that these texts present their own distracted form as the exception, rather than the rule, of the modern capitalist culture they describe. All four novels identify distractedness with marginalized subjects and spaces: if Dickens associates distraction with abjected working-class subjects, opposing it to the problem-solving attention of middle-class Victorians, Stoker and Conrad align distraction with an even more marginal position, locating it at the colonial edges of the British Empire. Writing at the end of the long nineteenth century, Joyce represents distraction as largely excluded from urban public experience, confined instead to private, domestic space and the hidden reaches of Nighttown.

By reading these novels together with contemporaneous scientific treatises and popular media, as well as texts in sociology, political theory, and media studies, *Idle Attentions* thus challenges the familiar account of capitalist modernity as the age of distraction. In its place, I offer a narrative in which the modernizing attitudes and material transformations of the Victorian era made distracted perception an increasingly rare cognitive mode. By bringing to light distraction's status as a marginalized phenomenon, I am able to give a new account of the novel's evolution across the second half of the nineteenth century, from the teleological narratives of serialized Victorian fiction to the associative forms of modernism. I argue that novelists developed radically experimental forms not in order to represent the new realities of modernity, as is often understood, but rather to reactivate a distractible, spontaneous mode of perception out of sync with the demands of the capitalist market. In historicizing the imperative to maintain control over one's own attention, my project also challenges the value of willful

concentration assumed in disciplines across the humanities. I propose that distraction, by accommodating spontaneous impressions and unforeseen realizations, offers a vital means to move outside reified structures of thought and perception.

What distraction signifies in the context of each novel will become clearer over the course of the chapters. But given the oft-discussed ambiguity of the term (due to which, for example, attention to one thing is sometimes taken to mean distraction from everything else), I offer a preliminary definition here. I understand distraction as the interruption of the habitual mechanisms by which a subject imposes order on what she perceives, whether by an unexpected sensory impression or by the unforeseen and uncontrolled movement of her own thoughts. Among these habitual mechanisms of sense-making is the problem-solving attention we associate with formal education and professionalized work, two practices that become dramatically more widespread during the Victorian era, and which are still cited as the primary contexts that necessitate self-disciplined concentration. Distraction also arrests the more reflexive processes by which subjects filter impressions according to pre-existing interests, as when an individual ignores the faces and conversations of other city-dwellers or the physical appearance of streets in order to find a specific address, and thereby navigate through urban space. As I will discuss, these habits also constitute forms of rational attention, though they are more deeply internalized and therefore apparently less laborious than, for instance, the effort to find a bookkeeping error in a ledger.[4]

Two novelistic examples, one from slightly before and one from just after the period with which *Idle Attentions* concerns itself, may help to illustrate what I mean. "Those unforeseen stoppages" of *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), which the narrator proclaims he "was accidentally led into," both represent distractedness in their narrator and encode it for their reader. To take just one of these stoppages, Sterne's casual suspension of the plot to insert Mrs. Shandy's absurdly long-winded marriage settlement, of whose three pages the upshot is, the narrator declares afterwards, "three words,———'My mother was to lay in, (if she chose it) in *London*'" offers an example of the explicitly fruitless narrative distraction that, I will argue, so many nineteenth-century novels eliminate.[5] At the other end of my project's chronology, the two instances of public disruption at the beginning of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) arrest characters' urban routines as well as impeding the progress of the plot. In the first instance, the backfiring of a car apparently occupied by "a face of the very greatest importance" interrupts Mrs. Dalloway's flower-buying errand, resulting in her "coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas" to "loo[k] out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry. Everyone looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off."[6] In the second instance, the appearance of a low-flying, skywriting plane cuts off public speculation about who might be inside the car: "Suddenly Mrs. Coates looked up into the sky. The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which

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[4] I thus define distraction in exactly the terms Paul North sets aside by writing, in the prologue to *The Problem of Distraction*, that "this furtive and destructive force, a distraction not only equal to but possibly also stronger than attention, is not the subject of this book" (2); North defines distraction instead as "a parontological relationship of thought to non-being" (13). I find North's effort to theorize distraction outside its ostensible relationship to attention a valuable one; nonetheless, I am interested in distraction precisely as an interruption or frustration of the efficient, rationalized attention that becomes predominant with the expansion and consolidation of capitalist modernity. Paul North, *The Problem of Distraction* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012).

[5] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman,* ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (New York: Penguin, 2003), 35, 63, 38.

[6] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 14, 15.

curled and twisted, actually writing something! making letters in the sky! Every one looked up."[7] The examples from *Mrs. Dalloway* may seem to contradict my central claim: does Woolf not find the bustling, modern imperial center replete with distractions, just as most critical accounts of distraction would lead us to believe? What is salient here, however, is how dramatic these two distractions must be in order to cause dwellers in the modern city to notice something that does not clearly serve their individual ends: the car is introduced through the "violent explosion" of its backfiring, which Mrs. Dalloway at first mistakes for a pistol shot ;[8] the skywriting plane, which turns out to be an advertising stunt, is spectacular in every sense of the word. As I will argue in Chapters Three and Four, the need for such extreme measures to divert the attention testifies to subjects' increasing internalization of the routines of rational attention, according to which they neglect those impressions that do not serve their particular ends—a habit that rules out most potential distractions before subjects have even remarked on them.

How does rational attention attain such discursive and practical dominance? As I have already suggested, I find one explanation in the emerging scientific frameworks of the long nineteenth century, during which the discipline of psychiatry takes shape. Beginning with Johann Christian Reil's 1803 treatise *Rhapsodies on the Use of the Psychological Treatment Method for Mental Disorders*, scientists begin to regard attention as an object of study; indeed, the nineteenth century marks the first period in which attention is understood in the West as a capacity that scientists—rather than religious thinkers or philosophers—are able both to investigate and to improve. I argue that psychiatrists and physiologists redefine attention as a mode of willful self-direction, distancing the term from an earlier Christian conception that emphasized openness to revelation. By describing it as an outgrowth of productivity, thrift, and moderation, British and German scientists enshrine attention as a bourgeois virtue and frame their own work as essential to the creation of effective capitalist subjects.

I find another answer in the growth of free and eventually compulsory mass education, which provides a means for inculcating the practice of rational attention. Victorian pedagogical manuals not only emphasize the necessity of properly trained attention as the foundation for all future learning, but also align attention with self-directed problem-solving work, explicitly discouraging teaching methods that allow for passive listening. A chapter on object lessons in *The Cultivation of the Senses* (1879), distributed by the British National Educational Society, urges teachers to remember that "the intention of object lessons is not so much to communicate information as to put children in the way of collecting information for themselves; to sharpen and direct their senses; to teach them to see things, instead of merely looking at them, and to decompose the confused aggregate of impressions which things at first make upon the mind; to get them to classify and generalize and connect simple phenomena with their antecedents and consequents."[9] Similarly, James Laughlin Hughes's *How to Secure and Retain Attention* (1880) identifies "the most efficacious mode of teaching" as one that "does not simply give information; it arouses the minds of pupils to activity, guides the active minds in the acquisition of knowledge, and sets the stored minds upon the plan of using the information obtained. It develops not only *receptive*, but *productive activity*."[10]

As my terminology implies, I situate both these developments within the broader process Max Weber calls rationalization—in his account, the key mechanism by which capitalist

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[7] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 20.
[8] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 14.
[9] *The Cultivation of the Senses,* American reissue (Philadelphia: William J. Dornan, 1879), 67.
[10] James Laughlin Hughes, *How to Secure and Retain Attention* (London: W. Kent, 1880), 55 (italics in original).

modernity extends its reach. For Weber, rationalization describes the transformation by which an activity once carried out according to tradition or individual proclivity is reconfigured as a methodical effort to achieve a particular goal. Rationalization imposes specific ends on every practice, then redefines the practice itself as a means to achieve them most efficiently. Both nineteenth-century science and Victorian education have the effect of rationalizing attention: recasting attention as a determined, calculated effort to achieve definite ends.

I find a third explanation for the rise of rational attention in the nineteenth-century British novel, which, I reveal, does not simply reflect this development, but also perpetuates it. As I discuss in Chapter One, the teleological structure of nineteenth-century narrative trains its reader to see the text as a mystery to be solved: to treat every detail it offers as a potential means to anticipate the next stage of the plot, making predictions based on those details she takes to be clues while ignoring those that appear as mere distractions. In making this claim, I am building on Roland Barthes's assertion that nineteenth-century narrative cultivates an "avidity for knowledge" that "impels us to skim or to skip certain passages (anticipated as 'boring') in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts of the anecdote (which are always its articulations: whatever furthers the solution of the riddle, the revelation of fate)."[11] Although this compulsion is most explicit in detective fiction, it is produced by the teleological structure of other nineteenth-century narrative forms as well, notably the marriage plot. The ultimate demonstration of rational attention is also one of the greatest pleasures offered by such texts: to deduce the ending of the plot, the solution of the mystery, before the novel reveals it.

My project begins with Dickens's *Bleak House*, whose unique interweaving of two disparate narrative forms allows it to bring into relief the usually invisible constraints nineteenth-century novels impose on their readers' attention. *Bleak House* alternates not only between two narrators, but also between two practices of attention: the carefully disciplined, productive attention of first-person narrator Esther Summerson, in this regard as in all others an exemplar of bourgeois virtue, and the jarringly distracted account of an omniscient narrator, which moves frenetically between distant parts of England and apparently unconnected groups of characters with no apparent purpose. Esther's narrative both exemplifies the process of rational attention and rewards the reader's efforts to practice it; the omniscient narrative, by contrast, consistently impedes readerly efforts at rational attention. Reading this idiosyncratic narrative structure in light of nineteenth-century scientific treatises on attention, my first chapter charts the association of distraction with the class-coded "moral failings" of idleness and waste. I argue that the omniscient narrative, by forcing the reader to "straggle about in wrong places" and "look at wrong things," works to dissolve her sense of herself as a productive—and therefore virtuous—bourgeois subject.[12] Instead, the omniscient narrative's distracted form aligns the reader with the homeless crossing-sweeper Jo, who is "hustled, and jostled, and moved on" so often that his impressions of London never form a single narrative.[13]

If *Bleak House* brings into relief the opposition between distraction and the rationalizing transformations of the Victorian era, the three texts that anchor my later chapters offer varied perspectives on the triumph of rational attention over distraction. The second chapter, on Stoker's *Dracula*, further explores the association of distraction with marginalized subjects, whose exclusion from a middle-class Victorian order is ostensibly justified by their failure to meet its demands of productivity. A number of critical readings have noted Stoker's valorization

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[11] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 10-11.
[12] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Nicola Bradbury (New York: Penguin, 2011), 110.
[13] Dickens, *Bleak House*, 257.

of a "modern" way of life that is implicitly British, male, and professional, and which enshrines a relentless work ethic as its unimpeachable virtue. Much less attention has been paid, however, to the particularities of the work Stoker loudly celebrates: *Dracula*'s characters spend nearly all their time on the tedious, painstakingly chronicled labor of keeping and transcribing records. I explain Stoker's obsession with record production not only by drawing an analogy to the procedures of imperial bureaucracy, but also by examining both through the lens of attention. If *Dracula* enjoins constant vigilance as a necessary British defense against insidious, malevolent foreigners, the novel also problematizes the hypersensitivity that leaves individual characters prey to aberrant impressions, and thereby exposes them to the threat of losing touch with a socially constructed reality. I argue that the production of records provides both a means for *Dracula*'s protagonists to maintain conscious control over their own attention and a tool for reconciling unruly individual perception with an established social order. Against the distracted, disorganized receptivity that *Dracula* associates with both women and the East, the novel prescribes a mode of carefully structured attention that is literally productive. This form of attention not only yields records, but also transforms dangerous sensitivity into protective vigilance.

My third chapter moves from uneasy imperial center to occupied neocolonial periphery. Centering its argument around Conrad's *Nostromo*, this chapter makes concrete the opposition between distraction and the expansion of capitalist modernity that earlier chapters have conceptualized. In Conrad's novel, I trace a connection between the advent of industrialization in the fictional Latin American country of Costaguana and the sudden disappearance of distraction from both the novel's form and the daily life it represents. In addition to examining the political causes for the disappearance of distraction, the chapter considers its political consequences. Here, I contest Frederic Jameson's claim, in his reading of *Nostromo*, that distraction can only be understood as a repression of "the realistic representation of history" and a symptom of capitalism; I also challenge a broader tendency among leftist critics to stigmatize distraction as a mode of uncritical compliance, one that precludes political action.[14] Instead, I turn to Hannah Arendt's definition of the truly political realm as spontaneous and unpredictable, which I use to demonstrate that distraction itself affords a form of political possibility. I argue that distraction, by accommodating unforeseen impressions, allows its subjects to imagine radically different futures: futures not continuous with the present trajectory of development and not constrained by planning narratives that stereotype history in advance.

Idle Attentions concludes with an examination of Joyce's *Ulysses*, whose famously distracted aesthetic has often been understood to reflect the newly distracting sensorium of modern urban life. My final chapter concurs with readings that see Bloom's stream of consciousness as rehearsing a form of porous, absentminded receptivity. However, I argue that Joyce presents such non-instrumental receptivity as the exception, rather than the rule, of life under capitalist modernity. This chapter turns away from Bloom's particular mode of perception and towards the survey of urban attention offered by "Wandering Rocks," an episode devoted to following side characters on midday excursions around Dublin. In this way, I reveal that *Ulysses* finds distracted receptivity increasingly crowded out of the public sphere by the mechanisms of mass culture, which train urban subjects in highly streamlined, rigidly constrained, and rigorously instrumental forms of attention. Where the urban world of *Bleak House* confronts readers with an unintelligible jumble of stimuli, *Ulysses* reveals the extent to which its city space has been neatly domesticated by mass media. And if "Circe," the scrambled reflection of "Wandering Rocks,"

[14] Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 280.

restores the disjunctive unpredictability that I see as characterizing the truly public realm, so too is this later episode located far from the official centers of public life: either in the ostensible privacy of Bloom's psyche or the supposed secrecy of Nighttown. Against this trajectory of marginalization, I find in *Ulysses* an argument for the renewed political significance of distraction, which frustrates the well-worn mechanisms that organize perception according to individual self-interest, and which draws subjects back towards a world held—and perceived—in common.

Chapter 1. Looking at Wrong Things: Distraction and Virtue in *Bleak House*

"The diseases [of attention] are those that have already been noted with regard to prudence, namely distraction and preoccupation…They originate in a weakness of understanding, a lack of practice and a false estimation of the worth of things, which result in a foolish expenditure of our energies."
—*Johann Christian Reil,* Rhapsodies on the Use of the Psychological Treatment Method for Mental Disorders[1]

"They straggle about in wrong places, look at wrong things, don't care for the right things, gape when more rooms are opened, exhibit profound desperation of spirits, and are clearly knocked up."
—*Charles Dickens,* Bleak House[2]

During one of his many insouciant ramblings on the subject of money, *Bleak House* spendthrift Harold Skimpole announces he has been freed of one species of financial burden—though not by paying a debt. "You remember our friend Coavinses, Miss Summerson?" he asks, referring to a particularly tenacious debt collector (241). "Coavinses has been arrested by the great Bailiff…He will never do violence to the sunshine anymore" (242). For Skimpole, his antagonist's death is cause for celebration. For Dickens's famously virtuous narrator Esther Summerson and her equally unimpeachable guardian John Jarndyce, it becomes a spur to immediate action, since the debt collector has left three young children behind. Jarndyce and Esther set out to see the orphaned children of the late Coavinses, first visiting the collections agency where he worked. A chance meeting with a boy there becomes an opportunity not only to discover Coavinses's real name—Neckett—but also to appraise his moral character. "Was he—I don't know how to shape the question," says Jarndyce—"industrious?" (243). "Was Neckett?" replies the boy. "Yes, wery much so. He was never tired of watching" (243).

If Jarndyce initially struggles to "shape the question," it is not because the principle of industriousness is obscure, but rather because it is so familiar that it rarely requires explicit specification. In his attempt to rehabilitate the debt collector, Jarndyce relies on stereotypically Victorian assumptions about the inherent value of hard work: although Neckett's profession is reviled for its destructive effects, his work ethic might nonetheless prove his individual worthiness. More surprising is the boy's response. In taking Neckett's proclivity for watching as proof of industriousness, his young associate seems to make a category error.

Yet the boy is hardly alone in his mistake. Much of nineteenth-century British fiction transforms the apparent passivity of watching into potentially tiring—but also potentially profitable—work. The most obvious expression of this movement is the prominence given by nineteenth-century narrative to the detective, whose success in his profession depends on

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[1] "*Ihre Krankheiten sind denen gleich, die bey der Besonnenheit bereits angemerkt sind, nemlich Zerstreuung und Vertiefung…Sie entspringen von Schwäche des Verstandes, Mangel an Uebung und von einer falschen Schätzung des Werthes der Dinge, die uns zu einer thörigten Spende unserer Kräfte verleitet.*" Johann Christian Reil, *Rhapsodieen über die Anwendung der psychischen Kurmethode auf Geisteszerrüttungen,* zweite Ausgabe (Halle: Curtschen Buchhandlung, 1818), 111. The translations from German are my own.
[2] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Nicola Bradbury (New York: Penguin, 2011), 110. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

performing observation as skilled labor: assigning to the otherwise automatic capacity of attention a specific goal and a methodical process. If nineteenth-century fiction makes the detective into a hero, it is, I will argue, because he exemplifies the same tendencies the period encourages in its readers, above all the tendency to conceive of attention as skilled labor. For if the successful detective stands to earn a financial reward by finding the solution to a mystery, the successful reader—the one who anticipates the end of the plot before the narrative reveals it to her—enjoys an affective reward. This reward is encoded by the narrative itself as well as by bourgeois culture more generally. To spend the scarce resource of one's attention wisely, to avoid squandering it on distracting details while using it to produce meaning from those details that matter—to be, in short, the kind of reader who wastes nothing and on whom nothing is wasted—is to inhabit a position perfectly aligned with the bourgeois values of productivity and thrift. To anticipate correctly the solution of the narrative, then, is to reassure oneself of one's status as an effective bourgeois subject.

This chapter aims to elucidate the ways in which the structure of nineteenth-century narrative encourages the conception of attention as productive work, defined above all by the principles of instrumentality and calculation. As I will demonstrate, this model of attention as methodical, goal-oriented work, which persists today, only became predominant in the West with the rise of bourgeois capitalism: in its emphasis on willed effort towards a specific goal, it stands in particular contrast to an earlier Christian conception that saw true attention as a suspension of individual will. Yet this highly contingent model of attention is so naturalized by bourgeois capitalist culture as to seem self-evident: scientists of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries begin from the assumption that attention *simply is* directed, instrumental effort. Similarly, the nineteenth-century novel naturalizes the model of attention as problem-solving work, making the constraints it imposes on its reader's attention almost invisible. Tracing these constraints requires working against the form's own naturalizing work, and it is for this reason that Dickens's *Bleak House* is particularly relevant to my discussion.

The unique structure of *Bleak House*, which alternates between two very different modes of narration, allows the novel both to rehearse and to denaturalize the process by which nineteenth-century narrative, particularly the nineteenth-century novel, shapes its reader's attention. In one set of 33 chapters, the apparent orphan Esther Summerson tells the story of her early childhood, her development into an especially virtuous bourgeois subject, her discovery of her true parentage, and finally her marriage to the equally virtuous surgeon Allan Woodcourt. If Esther's orphanhood and virtue make her a typically Dickensian heroine, so too is the novel she narrates almost parodically typical not only of Dickens's work, but of the nineteenth-century novel more generally. Esther's narrative, which encompasses both the marriage plot and the *Bildungsroman* (complete, as in *Daniel Deronda* and *Great Expectations*, with the discovery of a secret hidden since birth), contains all the paradigmatic nineteenth-century plots except the detective story. Yet despite the absence of an explicit mystery, Esther's narrative encourages exactly the kind of productive, problem-solving attention exemplified by the detective. The other 34 chapters, by contrast, frustrate our attempts to direct our attention towards any particular end. These chapters, narrated in the third person, move frenetically between different parts of England, diverse groups of characters, and seemingly unrelated accounts that finally, vaguely converge into the mystery of who murdered the lawyer Tulkinghorn. Despite its ostensible classification as a detective story, this omniscient narrative hardly allows its reader to practice the "industrious" attention idealized by bourgeois culture: instead, it strains our attention, frustrating our attempts to assign

meaning to details and instead forcing us, like the pitiable junior lawyer Guppy, to "straggle about in wrong places" and "look at wrong things" (110).

Esther's narrative, then, seems to allow us to read and notice as we like, whereas the omniscient narrative, with its constant distractions and frustrations, seems to oppose our desires with arbitrary formal demands. Yet this chapter will offer a contrary interpretation, in which Esther's narrative subtly but uncompromisingly enforces a particular set of constraints on our attention—constraints so naturalized by bourgeois capitalist culture as to be almost invisible. By creating a space without these constraints—a space so exceptional in both bourgeois capitalist culture and the nineteenth-century novel that it initially feels alienating—the omniscient narrative brings them into relief. It allows us to imagine what attention might feel like untethered from the nineteenth-century model of productive work, and from the bourgeois subjectivity that validates itself by its successful employment of that model.

The distracted aesthetic of the omniscient narrative, with its constant movement between fragmentary impressions, is unique not only in Dickens's work—it does not reappear in any of the novels that follow *Bleak House*—but also in nineteenth-century British fiction more generally. Yet despite its exceptionality, the aesthetics of the omniscient narrative have either been ignored by critical accounts of the novel, or treated only negatively as so many "wrong things"—symptoms of a moral or political problem Dickens exhorts us to remedy. In this latter category, J. Hills Miller sees the atomization of the omniscient narrative as "the result of an absence of moral relationships"[3] and finds in its encyclopedic heterogeneity evidence of a "general return to the primal slime"[4] that makes all things commensurable; Bruce Robbins finds in its "telescopically," inhumanly broad gaze the indifference and impersonality of the law[5]; and Audrey Jaffe sees the diffuseness of the omniscient narrator's perspective, which seems to be in many places at once, as indicative of the problematic "impossibility of fixing responsibility for knowledge."[6] This chapter takes a different approach by treating the distraction of the omniscient narrative not as a symptom of a thematic problem, but as an aesthetic in its own right. And where Hillis Miller, Robbins, and Jaffe all find in the omniscient narration the sign of something lacking, whether order or responsibility or knowledge, I argue that this aesthetic actually restores a more complete model of attentiveness —one largely lost to Esther's narrative, nineteenth-century fiction, and bourgeois culture more generally.

Attention and the Protestant ethic

Attention is a particularly difficult term to define, not only because it tends to slip into its opposite—the oft-cited example of concentrating on a detail for so long we stop noticing it—but also because, in its current usage, it is descriptive and prescriptive at once. In its descriptive sense, attention denotes a cognitive faculty that is always in operation, though it may be directed in different ways: according to this definition, being distracted is not a failure of attention, but

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[3] J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 209.
[4] Hillis Miller, *World of His Novels*, 196.
[5] Bruce Robbins, "Telescopic Philanthropy: Professionalism and Responsibility in *Bleak House*," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990): 213-230, 225.
[6] Audrey Jaffe, "*David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*: On Dividing the Responsibility of Knowing," in *Bleak House: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (New York: St. Martin's, 1998): 163-182, 176.

simply a sign that our attention is directed elsewhere. In its prescriptive sense, attention describes the proper direction of that faculty; this conception of attention as a virtue necessarily characterizes distraction as an absence, failure, or weakness of attention. Both usages are common in our own period, a double meaning that leads to logical contradictions. We hear, for instance, that the various distractions of late capitalism are colonizing our attention at the same time as learning that a child who surrenders too often to such distractions has an "attention deficit": surely, according to the first model, it would be more correct to say he has a normal amount of attention that simply happens to be occupied with something other than the task at hand.[7] What we mean, then, is that he is deficient in the kind of attention we consider ideal. In my discussion of the cultural history of attention, I am most concerned with this second, prescriptive sense, since conceptions of "ideal" attention changed dramatically with the beginnings of bourgeois capitalism. I should also note, though, that while earlier thinkers generally keep the descriptive and prescriptive senses of attention separate, differentiating between an ordinary faculty always in operation and a far rarer ideal, the same scientists and social commentators who redefine ideal attention around 1800 also begin to conflate the two senses: they suggest that subjects unable to practice ideal attention might lack the capacity of attention altogether.

The phenomenology of attention is the subject of several basically secular inquiries before this point, including considerations by Augustine and Descartes, who seek to describe the processes by which attention attaches to particular objects and to qualify its relation to perception.[8] But to the extent that Western discourse prescribes particular models of attention, these models are defined almost exclusively by religious thinkers in their formulation of recommendations for contemplative practice. For these thinkers, divine truth—the only truly worthy object of attention—is attainable not through individual effort, but only by a spontaneous gift of grace. Thus, as David Marno has argued, their models of attention require the practitioner to suspend his own will so as to be more receptive to insights that might appear at any moment, according to the unpredictable action of grace. Marno offers Francis of Sales's *Treatise on the Love of God*, with its exhortation to an attention that "willeth nothing, but leaves God to will what he pleaseth…a mere disposition to receive whatsoever shall happen" as an emblematic example of the more general Christian consensus, from Augustine onward, that sees indifference and passivity as conditions of true attention.[9] Even a treatise as generally amenable to willful self-direction as Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* nonetheless prescribes the suspension of individual will—including the will to virtuous ends—during meditation.[10] Marno concludes

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[7] Jonathan Crary's Foucauldian critique of the diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) offers one solution to this problem. Noting that the "symptoms" of ADD are often simply examples of misbehavior, rather than evidence of cognitive impairment, Crary argues that the diagnosis refers less to any cognitive incapacity than to an individual's refusal to behave according to social norms. "The dubious classification," he concludes, is "a label for unmanageable schoolchildren and others," an imposition of "institutional power" on individuals who resist structures of discipline. Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 35.

[8] For a further discussion of the phenomenologies of attention proposed by Augustine and Descartes, see Deborah Brown's "Augustine and Descartes on the Function of Attention in Perceptual Awareness," in *Consciousness: From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy*, ed. S. Heinämaa, V. Lähteenmäki and P. Remes (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007): 153-175.

[9] Francis of Sales, *A Treatise on the Love of God*, trans. Miles Car (Doway, 1630), 168-169, qtd. in 54.

[10] David Marno, "Easy Attention: Ignatius of Loyola and Robert Boyle," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 44.1 (Winter 2014): 135-161, 144-145.

that "indifference as attentive waiting is the model of a devotional action that complies with the paradox of grace, because it prepares for divine grace without taking any action to solicit it."[11] As opposed to a will that directs attention to particular, individual ends, indifferent waiting allows the attention to be directed by grace.

Only in the late eighteenth century does a contrary ideal emerge, one that aligns virtuous attention with precisely the quality that had previously been seen as precluding it: willful self-direction.[12] Writing in 1803, the German physiologist Johann Christian Reil celebrates attention as a virtue, but not at all in the sense religious thinkers did. Where religious treatises prescribed the suspension of the will in attention, Reil sees virtuous attention as an exercise of individual will: properly controlled attention directs itself toward "the attainment of a moral end" rather than allowing "the indulgence of its inclinations."[13] And where the religious ideal of attention assumed its direction towards God, Reil's ideal attention might be directed towards any object so long as its working demonstrates the self-directing virtues of efficiency, moderation, and prudence. In fact, attention qualifies as a virtue precisely because of its close alignment with prudence: for Reil, it is prudence that allows an individual to concentrate on objects of worth, since "prudence lets the object go if it is without value."[14] Reil classifies as diseases those modes that, contrary to prudence, spent cognitive energy wastefully: these diseases, "distraction and preoccupation…originate in a weakness of the understanding, a lack of training and from an incorrect evaluation of the worth of things, which leads us to a foolish expenditure of our energies."[15] Reil was himself the son of a Protestant pastor who went against his family's wishes to become a scientist; like his biography, his reformulation of virtuous attention most obviously reflects a secularization of the concept.[16] But Reil's vocabulary of value and efficiency also points to another, related transformation of attention: its rationalization.

For Weber, rationalization refers to the process by which a mode of life once governed by tradition and individual habit is reorganized according to the key principles of bourgeois capitalism: instrumentality and calculation. In other words, an act that was once self-contained, performed more or less for its own sake, is now reconceived as a means to achieve an outside

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[11] Marno, "Easy Attention" 154.

[12] Michael Hagner's discussion of "attention as a virtue," by which Hagner means a secular virtue, notes that "this notion did not become relevant until the late eighteenth century." Hagner, "Toward a History of Attention in Culture and Science," *Modern Language Notes* 118 (2003): 670-687, 672.

[13] Reil notes that consciousness might attach itself to a particular point based on one of two motivations: "*Dies geschieht nach einem freien Entschluss, der sich entweder auf Genuss der Lust, oder auf die Erreichung eines moralischen Zwecks gründet"* ("This happens according to a free determination that bases itself either on the indulgence of one's inclinations, or on the attainment of a moral end"). Reil makes clear that he endorses this second, willfully directed model of attention later in the paragraph, where he notes that "*die Lust wirkt stärker, und am stärksten in der Jugend. Daher beherrschen wir unsere Aufmerksamkeit in den mittleren Jahren am freisten, wo die Vorsätze des Verstandes stark genug und dem Zuge der Lust überlegen sind*" ("the inclination acts more strongly, and most strongly in youth. Therefore we control our attention most freely in middle age, when the mind's resolution is strong enough and the force of the inclination has been conquered"). Reil, *Rhapsodieen,* 109-110.

[14] *"Die Besonnenheit lässt den Gegenstand wieder fahren, wenn er ohne Wert ist.*" Reil, *Rhapsodieen,* 111.

[15] *"Zerstreuung und Vertiefung…entspringen von Schwäche des Verstandes, Mangel an Übung und von einer falschen Schätzung des Werts der Dinge, die uns zu einer törichten Spende unserer Kräfte verleitet*." Reil, *Rhapsodieen*, 111.

[16] See Chapter 7 of Robert Richards's *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* for a further discussion of Reil's biography and his *Rhapsodieen*, which Richards calls "perhaps the most influential work in shaping of German psychiatry before Freud." Robert Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 263.

goal. With this designation of a goal comes the need for a set of steps that allow an individual to achieve it in a predictable, premeditated way: rationalization assigns to every act not only an end, but also a methodical process to reach it. The benefit of this reorganization, according to bourgeois capitalist discourse, is increased efficiency. Weber's immediate example is an economic one: the case of textile middlemen ("putters-out"), whose work practices were fundamentally transformed by rationalization. These middlemen once simply bought whatever fabrics were readily available at the conventional price; after rationalization, however, they began trying to learn which fabrics were most in demand and arranging to buy them at the lowest cost possible.[17] But *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism* also alludes to the rationalization of practices less obviously related to capitalism. Among these is the practice of attention.

Weber notes that the ability to concentrate is greatly valued by rationalized enterprises: for example, German employers favor female workers from Pietist backgrounds because "within this group, the ability to concentrate the mind, as well as the absolutely vital ability to feel a sense of *commitment* to the *work*, is commonly found. These qualities are very often combined with strict economy that is *mindful* of the level of earnings, and with a spirit of sober self-control and moderation that enhances performance enormously."[18] According to Weber, Pietist workers' "ability to concentrate the mind" and be "mindful of the level of earnings" stands in sharp contrast to the pre-capitalist attitudes of most female workers, who are "unwilling to learn, to concentrate, or to think for themselves" and with whom "attempts to discuss ways of rendering the work easier, above all more profitable, generally meet with complete incomprehension."[19] Concentration, then, becomes useful as problem-solving work: like all rationalized processes, it directs itself to particular ends—making the work easier or more profitable—in methodical ways. And Weber clearly draws a connection between religious contemplation, in which workers from Pietist backgrounds are practiced, and the capacity for productive concentration. Yet capitalist principles devalue religious contemplation in itself: Weber notes that the worldly Protestants with whom the "Spirit" of capitalism originates see "*wasting time* [as] the first and most serious of all sins and "inactive contemplation" as therefore "valueless and possibly quite reprehensible."[20] Contemplation is valueless because it is inactive and wasteful; concentration, on the other hand, is productive, efficient work. We might say, then, that concentration is contemplation that has been rationalized. In place of the contemplative attention that produces nothing and serves no particular ends, properly concentrated attention keeps its focus unwaveringly on the task of producing greater profit. And where contemplation encourages the suspension of individual will in favor of divine grace, concentration assumes an ability much more essential to bourgeois capitalist subjectivity: willful self-direction.

In referring to this later model of attention as "rational attention," I mean to suggest its alignment with the principles of rationalization—instrumentality and calculation—as well as to oppose it to the earlier religious ideal of attention.[21] For the influence of rationalization on

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[17] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002), 20-22.
[18] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 18.
[19] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 18.
[20] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 106-7. The italics are Weber's.
[21] The term is also used by at least one nineteenth-century advocate of this model of attention: in an 1890 article entitled "The Relation of Attention to Hypnotic Phenomena," American psychiatrist Charles W. Page writes that "when attention acts spontaneously without restraint or guidance from the will power—we class it as organic

attention extends far beyond issues of workplace concentration: rational attention becomes the secular model of attention more generally. As Reil's frequent use of terms like "value" and "waste" suggests, the principles of rationalization might inflect discussions of attention even where no literal profit is concerned. Moderate, prudent attention is commendable because it is efficient: it achieves a particular end with a minimum of wasted effort. Above all, this new, rationalized model of attention permeates non-economic discourse through the association of virtuous attention with willful self-direction. As Weber's analysis would suggest, this association appears first in those Protestant regions where the development of capitalism is most advanced: Germany and Britain. Writing in 1865, the Scottish scientist and philosopher Alexander Bain explicitly identifies attention with "volitional energy" and an "active search."[22] Bain also aligns attention with instrumental, calculating modes of thinking, noting that when an inventor applies his attention to solving a problem, "the end alone is the thing that is clear to the view, and with that there is a perception of the fitness of every passing suggestion."[23] He leaves no doubt that this willful, self-directed attention is desirable not only for inventors, but for bourgeois subjects more generally: "The custom of coercing the flow of ideas and the attitude of attention, is an extremely valuable one, both for purposes purely intellectual and for the general government of the temper and the feelings. We may consider it as belonging to the highest branch of self-discipline."[24]

If, as D.A. Miller has argued, the Victorian novel functions as an instrument of discipline, training its readers to practice self-restraint, might it not also impose this "highest branch of self-discipline" by bringing their attention into accord with the virtues of prudence and industriousness?[25] Although I will argue that rational attention is also encoded by the structure of nineteenth-century British narrative, I want to begin by considering one instance in which it is thematized: not, in this case, by the professional observation of the detective or the industrious watching of the debt collector, but by the seemingly effortless yet carefully disciplined attention of that ultimate exemplar of bourgeois virtue, Esther Summerson.

Noticing right things: rational attention and narrative progress

The first pages of Esther's narration subtly distinguish her from the kind of narrator who watches and records by default: like Neckett, she seems to have deliberately "undertaken to do it." She opens her narration by declaring, with the trademark self-effacement that never fails to emphasize just how very self-effacing she is, that "I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever" (27). Esther's determination to begin, even against her natural inclinations, suggests that some particular purpose is compelling her to write and, by extension, driving her narration forward. She returns to this impetus to move on at various intervals; in discussing the projects Caddy undertakes on behalf of her child, for instance, Esther notes that "I should be tempted to recall some of them, but for the timely

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attention; but when it acts in obedience to the superior mental faculties of the intelligent will, we regard it as rational attention." Charles W. Page, "The Relation of Attention to Hypnotic Phenomena," *The American Journal of Insanity, Edited by the Medical Officers of the Utica State Hospital* Vol. 47 (1890-1891): 27-42, 33.

[22] Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will,* 3rd ed. (New York: Appleton, 1876), 377.

[23] Bain, *The Emotions and the Will,* 377.

[24] Bain, *The Emotions and the Will,* 378-379.

[25] See D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 20-32.

remembrance that I am getting on irregularly as it is" (769). Some outside purpose seems to compel Esther to move forward even when "tempted" to linger over details she likes to recall.

Given novelistic conventions in general, and the events of *Bleak House* in particular, it would not be surprising if such a compulsion ended up being defined within the plot. Many first-person narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth century offer a diegetic motivation for their existence, an explanation of how and why they came to be written; *Bleak House*, so concerned with the accumulation of papers and the drafting of documents, could easily find one for Esther. Perhaps she is submitting a declaration to Chancery, or perhaps Mr. Bucket has asked for evidence to guide an investigation. But despite leaving this possibility open throughout Esther's many chapters, the novel never ultimately realizes it. The final chapter famously breaks off in the middle of a sentence, leaving her narration not just without an ending, but without any clear instrumental end: we never find out what all this writing was for.

Yet the novel's final failure to reveal any concrete purpose behind Esther's narration may not matter given its success in maintaining a more general *sense* of purpose throughout her 33 chapters. In fact, the most remarkable feature of Esther's narration is how rarely its constraints make themselves visible: that is, the middle-distance, productive orientation of Esther's attention is so naturalized as hardly to seem like a constraint at all. The kind of discipline that reveals itself in its opposition to her own tendencies, as in the discussion of Caddy and her child, is hardly ever necessary. Esther's refusal to get lost in details or lapse into reverie seems instinctive rather than forced, as does her avoidance of those extreme states that Reil pathologizes. Her progress through the narrative is analogous to her path down the Dedlocks' Ghost Walk shortly after the revelation that Lady Dedlock is her mother: even at a moment when all the assumptions that govern her behavior have been unsettled, Esther avoids either preoccupation or distraction, "stopping to look at nothing, but seeing all I did see as I went" (586). Like the ideal detective imagined by Poe's Dupin, and embodied by Conan Doyle's Holmes, Esther integrates seemingly irreconcilable demands on her attention.[26] Without ever becoming preoccupied to the point of "stopping to look," she is nonetheless able to register a range of meaningful impressions.

The object of this effortless yet purposeful attention is rarely the novel's detective story; instead, it tends, without any apparent discipline or even intent, towards the marriage plot. The very night she arrives at Bleak House with Richard and Ada, Esther is already jumping ahead to predict their marriage:

> Ada sat at the piano; Richard stood beside her, bending down. Upon the wall, their shadows blended together, surrounded by strange forms, not without a ghostly motion caught from the unsteady fire, though reflected from motionless objects. Ada touched the notes so softly, and sang so low, that the wind, sighing away to the distant hills, was as audible as the music. The mystery of the future, and the little clue afforded to it by the voice of the present, seemed expressed in the whole picture. (93)

In one sense, Esther's voice here is remarkably lyrical: her description of the "wind, sighing away to the distant hills…as audible as the music" is certainly closer to the reverie of a Romantic

[26] In Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin suggests that the most effective problem-solving attention is characterized less by the acuity of its focus than by its moderation between acute focus and broader receptivity. Dupin argues that intense focus can lead a detective astray just as surely as distraction: the lesser investigator Vidocq, he notes, "erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole." Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in *The Collected Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 152-153.

poet than the strictly empirical account of a detective. What could be more useless, more excessive, more poetic than describing the ghostliness of the evening, the flickering of the fire, and the sighing of the wind? Each of these details seems significant in itself, as a detail and nothing more. Yet the final sentence insinuates, beneath this apparently poetic noticing, a detective episteme. The bleakness and uncertainty of the evening are no longer impressions to be described, but "the mystery of the future" to be solved: each detail accordingly becomes a "little clue." And by introducing the conceit of the mystery, of course, Esther has all but solved it: in her description of the evening, the diverse impressions resolve into the singularly significant prediction that Ada and Richard will marry.[27]

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Esther's problem-solving work, however, is its framing. For Esther does not consider the scene alone: rather, her description is framed by her interactions with another observer, Jarndyce. Before turning to Ada and Richard, Esther first notices Jarndyce, who, "stopping a moment, glanced at the young cousins. His look was thoughtful, but had a benignant expression in it…The room in which they were, communicating with that in which he stood, was only lighted by the fire" (93). Her attention to Ada and Richard, then, does not arise entirely of itself, but rather as an effort to discern what Jarndyce has in mind. That she has correctly understood his meaning is confirmed by the exchange of glances that follows her description: "though Mr Jarndyce's glance, as he withdrew it, rested for but a moment on me, I felt as if, in that moment, he confided to me—and knew that he confided to me, and that I received the confidence—his hope that Ada and Richard might one day enter on a dearer relationship" (93). Despite having just met the couple (who have themselves only met that day) Jarndyce has already engineered an outcome for them. Though his designs may be, as Esther insists, "benignant," they draw attention to his godlike control over the characters' lives.

If Jarndyce appears, in the chapters to come, as an authority so benignant and subtle that his control is almost invisible, so too does he become an author of sorts, deciding the fates of Ada, Richard, and Esther. This correspondence between Jarndyce's authority as master of Bleak House and Dickens's as master of *Bleak House* is, I want to suggest, more meaningful than a simple play on words. It gives an additional valence of significance to the scene of Ada and Richard's first evening together: if Jarndyce is a kind of author who signals, by the subtlest of cues, the outcome he has in mind, Esther becomes a figure for the properly attentive reader, always alert to clues that might help her to anticipate the outcome of the novel. As the writer of her chapters, Esther creates a narrative that moves relentlessly forward, leaving herself no time for "getting on irregularly"; as a reader, she imposes the same progress-oriented perspective on the details that surround her, transforming them into means to more accurately discern Jarndyce's plans and predict the fates of Ada and Richard.

Through my alignment of Esther's work as writer of narrative with her work as reader of events, I want to suggest that rational attention isn't only present in the most obviously plot-oriented narratives, which either eliminate all "irregular" details or give them narrative

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[27] Woodcourt, in whom Esther finds a counterpart to her own exemplary virtue, proves similarly proficient in the practice of rational attention. Upon meeting a bruised woman in the street, observing her appearance, and hearing that she has just moved lodgings, Woodcourt arrives at a set of conclusions with a speed and accuracy that rival Sherlock Holmes's:

" 'And so your husband is a brickmaker?'"

'How do you know that, sir?' asks the woman, astonished.

'Why, I suppose so, from the colour of the clay upon your bag and on your dress. And I know brickmakers go about working at piecework in different places. And I am sorry to say I have known them cruel to their wives too.'" (712)

significance as clues. Rather, the nineteenth-century novel incorporates rational attention primarily through the kind of training it offers its reader, who learns—as Esther does in noting Jarndyce's meaningful glance and only then turning to the scene it is directed at—to search for cues from the author that might help her to arrive more quickly at the resolution of the plot. If the narrators of many nineteenth-century novels are not quite so focused as Esther, happy with sometimes digressing, frequently noticing details for their own sake, and generally "getting on irregularly," their readers constrain their attention much more strictly. Roland Barthes similarly argues that the nineteenth-century novel compels its readers to eschew distractions in favor of narrative progress:

> The most classical narrative (a novel by Zola or Balzac or Dickens or Tolstoy) bears within it a sort of diluted tmesis: we do not read everything with the same intensity of reading; a rhythm is established, casual, unconcerned with the *integrity* of the text; our very avidity for knowledge impels us to skim or to skip certain passages (anticipated as "boring") in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts of the anecdote (which are always its articulations: whatever furthers the solution of the riddle, the revelation of fate): we boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations.[28]

As accurate a description of nineteenth-century reading as Barthes offers, he nonetheless elides a critical paradox. How can the progress-oriented reader know in advance what "furthers the solution of the riddle, the revelation of fate" and what does not? As Esther's example demonstrates, clues are often hidden beneath the apparently non-narrative elements of "descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations." It is not that the progress-oriented reader can neglect these elements completely, but rather that she learns to treat them as potential raw material: to be transmuted into clues if possible, and to be discarded if not. Rational attention consists not in neglecting everything but obvious events, but rather in a transformative vision that finds, in every moment of the text, the potential to solve the riddle. Esther, then, exemplifies the reader who wastes no time on idle details, but on whom no detail is wasted, who moves through the narrative "stopping to look at nothing, but seeing all I did see as I went."

Reading against Esther

The suggestion that Esther offers a model for the properly attentive reader, always alert to predict new turns in the plot, may seem counterintuitive to the many readers for whom Esther exemplifies the frustrating tendency to "look at wrong things." Like the letters of Richardson's Pamela, Esther's narration frequently emphasizes her apparent blindness to the very details we know are most likely to produce meaning: her resemblance to Lady Dedlock, which promises a solution to the mystery of her origins, and her attraction to Woodcourt, which points towards the ending of a marriage plot. It is in the latter case that these moments of seeming obliviousness are most pronounced. Although Esther acknowledges, after her first meeting with Woodcourt, that she "thought him very sensible and agreeable," she seems not to recognize him when she sees him in the very next chapter:

> [Caddy and I] had walked slowly, while we were talking; and my guardian and Ada were here before us. We found them in Miss Flite's garret. They were looking at the birds, while a

[28] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 10-11.

> medical gentleman who was so good as to attend Miss Flite with much solicitude and compassion, spoke with her cheerfully by the fire.
>
> "I have finished my professional visit," he said, coming forward. "Miss Flite is much better, and may appear in court (as her mind is set upon it) to-morrow. She has been greatly missed there, I understand…"
>
> "Has she been very ill?" asked Mr Jarndyce of the gentleman whom we had found in attendance on her. (232)

Esther refers to him not by name, but as "a medical gentleman" and "the gentleman whom we had found in attendance"; only after Miss Flite's emphatic introduction of "My physician, Mr Woodcourt!" does Esther begin to use his name—an apparent sign that this is their first introduction and she had not known it until then. All these circumstances make it even more jarring when Esther finally acknowledges, at the very end of the chapter, that she should have recognized him all along:

> I have forgotten to mention—at least I have not mentioned—that Mr Woodcourt was the same dark young surgeon whom we had met at Mr Badger's. Or, that Mr Jarndyce invited him to dinner that day. Or, that he came. Or, that when they were all gone, and I said to Ada, "Now, my darling, let us have a little talk about Richard!" Ada laughed and said—
>
> But, I don't think it matters what my darling said. She was always merry. (238)

In a situation like this, Esther's attention doesn't seem instrumental at all: it obscures the very clue—Woodcourt's identity—most likely to help us anticipate the end of the plot, where she marries him.

But if Esther is like Pamela in her occasional tendency to skip over key details, her narrative is also like Pamela's in its capacity to draw *our* attention even more markedly to those moments its narrator's attention seems to miss. The very fact that Esther censors Ada's remark, cutting herself off in the middle of her sentence, lets us know that this subject is exactly the one we should be paying attention to. In defiance of Esther's best efforts to cover her tracks (or at least to distract from them) we conclude that the apparently trivial mentions of Woodcourt are in fact precisely the details that could lead us forward. These moments of seeming inattention thus allow us a delicious sense of transgression—so pleasurable in Esther's narrative because so rare. Most of our impulses to disagree with Esther are eventually curtailed by the plot: if we are tempted to sympathize with Mrs. Jellyby's political consciousness, we are proven wrong by her thoughtless cruelty towards Caddy; if we appreciate Skimpole's carefree attitude, we are forced to see our error in his betrayal of Jarndyce. The non-accounts Esther gives of Woodcourt are some of the few moments in which her own pronouncements and the direction of her narrative actually diverge. Like Pamela's marked omissions, they offer us the liberating sense that we might read against a narrator too irreproachable for our own tastes.

If Woodcourt's appearance produces most of the few divergences between Esther's will and her narrative's drive, the tension of course corresponds to an ambivalence in her will itself. For her omissions never remain pure omissions: she comes closest in her description of the conversation with Miss Flite, where she seems able to ignore Woodcourt's presence altogether, yet she cannot leave it at that. The end of the chapter finds her returning to the subject to protest, a bit too markedly, that "I don't think it matters" what Ada said—almost certainly a comment on Woodcourt's suitedness for Esther. Later, after giving a paragraph-length biography of Woodcourt that ends with the note that "He was seven years older than I," Esther quickly disavows any relation to herself by adding, "Not that I need mention it, for it hardly belongs to anything" (277). The next page finds her both omitting an apparently charged detail and then

underscoring her own omission: Woodcourt's mother, Esther says, "talked so much about birth that, for a moment, I half fancied, and with pain—but, what an idle fancy to suppose that she could think or care what *mine* was" (278). The omission of Woodcourt is less the result of inattention than the enactment of a kind of Freudian denegation. To insist that she does not need to attend to such a detail reveals that she already *has*—and that we should as well. Rather than failing to see details of narrative significance, Esther has noticed them all too quickly.

And for all that these moments allow us to read around Esther, or at least around the narrative mask she creates, they keep us on the track of the most conventional narrative imperative of all: the marriage plot. Her moments of seeming inattention thus allow us the deceptive pleasure of feeling like we're transgressing—reading precisely as we're not supposed to—even when we're in fact submitting and reading exactly as nineteenth-century readers *are* supposed to. The tantalizing opportunity to cheat is itself a cheat.

More importantly, these seeming divergences point to a much more frequent alignment, not only between Esther's declared aims and the direction of her narrative, but also between the Victorian principles she professes and the kind of attention her narrative encourages. In her discussions of Woodcourt and Lady Dedlock, Esther cannot reconcile the Victorian virtue of modesty with her own rational attention: the solution to the riddle necessarily involves herself, and herself is the subject modesty enjoins most stridently against. Yet these exceptions prove the rule. Esther's directed, problem-solving attention nearly always aligns with more the more explicit Victorian principles of efficiency and industriousness. And her middle-distance focus—"stopping to look at nothing, but seeing all I did see as I went"—corresponds to a broader Victorian emphasis on moderation. In response to Mrs. Jellyby's "telescopic philanthropy," parodied through a metaphor of overly distant focus, Esther proposes the ethical model of a "circle of duty" (128). This model emphasizes service to those around her, and by necessity excludes what is too close—herself, whose desires she must disavow—as well as what is impossibly, telescopically distant. Victorian charity, which forbids both indulgent preoccupation with the self and misguided concern for those too far to exert an ethical pull, is itself a mode of attention: the circle of duty is also a circle of focus. To keep one's gaze firmly fixed in the middle distance, refusing the temptations of telescope and looking-glass, is good as well as healthy: to "care for the right things" and avoid "looking at wrong things" is not only a narrative imperative, but also an ethical one.

Idle noticing

If Esther follows the writerly maxim of showing rather than telling, prompting us to deduce the meaning of the impressions she offers, the omniscient narrative presents a different puzzle altogether. Like the chatterbox Mrs Piper, who frustrates the officials at Nemo's inquest with her frequent digressions from the topic at hand, the omniscient narrative "has a good deal to say, chiefly in parenthesis and without punctuation, but not much to tell" (176). With Mrs. Piper's account, at least, the narrator does us the kind service of clearly marking off the digressions:

> Anastasia Piper, gentlemen. Married woman…Mrs Piper lives in the court (which her husband is a cabinet-maker) and it has long been well beknown among the neighbours (counting from the day next but one before the half-baptising of Alexander James Piper aged eighteen months and four days old on accounts of not being expected to live such was the sufferings gentlemen of that child is his gums) as the Plaintive—so Mrs Piper insists on calling the deceased—was reported to have sold himself. Thinks it was the Plaintive's air in which that report originatinin. See the Plaintive often, and considered as his air was

> feariocious, and not to be allowed to go about some children being timid (and if doubted hoping Mrs Perkins may be brought forard for she is here and will do credit to her husband and herself and family). Has seen the Plaintive wexed and worrited by the children (for children they will ever be and you cannot expect them specially if of playful dispositions to be Methoozellers which you was not yourself). (176)

Almost everything about Mrs. Piper's narrative, from her village wisdom about child-rearing to her habit of keeping time by life events rather than dates, seems to belong to a period before industrial capitalism. So, too, does her approach to narrative, which is unconcerned with any kind of progress or fulfillment: Mrs. Piper's attention seems simply to seize on details and follow them for as long as they hold her interest before abruptly breaking back to the main thread of her account.[29] The result is that, where her narrative is literally too slow—it takes forever to get to its main point—it feels somehow too quick, saturated as it is with fragmentary side stories. This sense of being at once too quick and too slow perhaps explains the narrator's paradoxical claim that, while Mrs. Piper's speech is "without punctuation," a great many of her remarks are "in parenthesis": her narrative seems to run on so frenetically that we feel left behind, even as we wish she would hurry up and get to the point.

Mrs. Piper's vertiginous pace could not stand in greater contrast to Esther's measured narrative rhythm, which allows our own attention to feel at once productive and effortless. The difference between the two modes of narration—and the corresponding modes of attention they evince in their narrators—is most obviously attributable to class difference. Like her frequent malapropisms and mispronunciations, Mrs. Piper's investment in language production rather than deductive reasoning testifies to her lower-middle-class status. Not one of the "active and intelligent"—whose conspicuous absence, with the exception of Tulkinghorn, the narrator notes in the next paragraph—Mrs. Piper cannot keep her attention from wandering off, even in the clearly instrumental context of the inquest.

But for all that the omniscient narrator might explicitly and stylistically distance himself from Mrs. Piper, he nonetheless shares her digressive yet frenetic pace. Like Mrs. Piper's straightforward recital of facts at the beginning of her testimony, the omniscient narrator's opening words—"LONDON. Michelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall"—suggest a practical desire to establish basic facts and get on with the story. But the narrator soon gets lost in so many levels of digression that it is hard to imagine where the parentheses would go:

> Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if the day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest. (13)

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[29] Walter Benjamin attributes modern listeners' decreased patience for elliptical stories to the advent of industrial capitalism and the corresponding disappearance of the slow rhythms of pre-capitalist labor. While it would certainly be going too far to compare Mrs. Piper to the master storytellers Benjamin's discussion invokes, her account nonetheless bears a formal resemblance to the kind of story that, according to Benjamin, was once told over work: a story that "does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report" but rather "sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller." Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007): 83-109, 91.

In one sense, this entire passage belongs in parentheses, unconnected as it is to the narrative we've just left—"the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall"—and to which we will, at some length, return. And yet I want to suggest that the sense of distraction here originates not just in the tangential relationship of the passage to the larger narrative, but also in the aesthetics of the passage itself, which frustrate our attempts at rational attention.

The most obvious source of this frustration is the vast scope of the omniscient narrative: compared to Esther's circle of duty, which keeps her attention confined to those immediately around her, the omniscient narrator directs his attention everywhere at once. This encyclopedic tendency contravenes the nineteenth-century assumption that attention must be selective to be functional—an assumption grounded in the capitalist prohibition against wasting time or energy. Reil argues that properly trained attention almost instinctively fixates on objects "of a high value"; William James similarly suggests that by differentiating between objects with value for the subject and those without, selective interest creates "accent and emphasis, light and shade, background and foreground—intelligible perspective, in a word…without it the consciousness of every creature would be a gray chaotic indiscriminateness."[30] For Reil and James, then, selective attention makes the world intelligible to us: it allows us to produce meaning from the particular set of impressions to which we attend. The omniscient narrative realizes an opposite trajectory, in which encyclopedic receptivity effaces the distinction between those impressions we would normally consider valuable and those to which we would never otherwise attend. This tendency to conflate the valuable and the valueless is emphasized by the opening paragraph's final metaphor of mud "accumulating at compound interest." While the metaphor is formally apt (mud inexplicably produces more mud, like money magically producing more money), the sentence's humor originates elsewhere, in the ironic juxtaposition of something obviously valuable—something worthy of financial and cognitive interest—with something both completely valueless and proverbially uninteresting, "dull as mud." The omniscient narrative thus refuses to enact conventional distinctions between what is valuable and interesting—and therefore worth attending to—and what should be ignored as valueless or boring.

The erasure of "intelligible perspective" that results from this flattening effect is compounded by the narrator's vertiginous pace—like Mrs. Piper's, simultaneously too fast and too slow to give us a comprehensible narrative. For if the omniscient narrative, bogged down in the background details of setting and seemingly unable to move on to the more interesting matters of plot and character, gets going far more slowly than Esther's, the movement from one background detail to the next is nonetheless too quick to constitute a unified, "intelligible perspective." Where Esther's narrative allows us time to consider the relevance of a detail to the narrative as a whole, and thereby produce meaning from it, here we are not even able to consider the detail itself: we receive only a grammatical and visual fragment of one impression before moving on to the next. This frenetic movement from impression to impression in the opening paragraph is duplicated in the structure of the omniscient narrative itself, which skips, without apparent motivation, between distant parts of England, disparate groups of characters, and seemingly unrelated plots. Often, multiple events recounted by the narrator turn out to have happened simultaneously, though in different places: the total impression, then, is less of a single narrative progressing through time than a kaleidoscopic set of fragments spread out across space, all apparently competing for our attention at a single moment.

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[30] William James, *Principles of Psychology,* vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1950), 402-403.

It is true that the same narrator who creates this distracted aesthetic seems to inveigh against surrendering to it: he addresses us directly to insist that, rather than giving up bourgeois desires for progress and order, we must redouble our efforts at rational attention and deduce some narrative structure that will give these fragments meaning, thereby assuring ourselves that our noticing has not been for nothing."What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabout of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step?" he asks, having recently drawn our attention to each item on the list (256). But the narrator's demand is so far beyond our resources that it serves to emphasize the impossibility of rational attention, rather than facilitating its practice. In another novel, the question would prompt us to consider the facts and give a provisional answer, but in *Bleak House*, it's purely rhetorical: it serves only to emphasize our inability to make the appropriate connections. Rather than allowing us the satisfaction of moving forward and anticipating the solution, Dickens more often confronts us with our failure to make any progress at all.

D.A. Miller finds in this frustrating refusal of progress an analogue for the equally frustrating—and certainly more consequential—inefficiency of Chancery Court: even as Jarndyce and Jarndyce produces page after page of documents, it never seems to become any more comprehensible, let alone to come any closer to a conclusion. Miller argues that Dickens thus finds himself called upon to differentiate his own narrative practice from the institution he condemns; although the omniscient narrative "baffles us in the first few hundred pages by featuring a profusion of characters who seem to have nothing to do with each other" and "a miscellany of events whose bearing on a possible plot is undecipherable," it creates this inscrutability only to foster an intensified desire for interpretation, which it then satisfies.[31] This satisfaction comes in the form of Inspector Bucket and the generic apparatus he brings with him, for "if the Chancery system includes everything but settles nothing, then one way in which it differs from the detective story is that the latter is, precisely, a *story*: sufficiently selective to allow for the emergence of a narrative and properly committed, once one has emerged, to bringing it to completion."[32]

Yet if Bucket manages, with great skill and no small satisfaction, to bring the omniscient narrative's "mysteries to solution," we do not share in this satisfaction, since we have not shared in his skill. While Bucket answers admirably to the demands placed on the detective, proving an exceptional practitioner of rational attention, the omniscient narrative never quite fulfills the demands placed on the detective *story*: namely, that it allow us to practice rational attention as well. It therefore differs from the stories of Poe that precede it and the stories of Conan Doyle that follow it. In these narratives, the reader's observation of the methods of Dupin and Holmes, who reliably and painstakingly rehearse the series of connections that led them to the solution, trains her to make such connections on her own: if the detective narrative allows the reader to observe the processes of rational attention, it also offers her a place to practice them herself.[33] In

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[31] D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, 89.
[32] D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, 69.
[33] David Grossvogel likewise notes that the typical detective story gives its reader a particularly active role, encouraging her "to participate in that unfolding, to play the game actively rather than through the passivity of a demonstration. Since the hero of the detective fiction is a void created by his functional dependency on the 'mystery,' the reader is offered that same dependency so as to become, through his own ratiocination, the character that fictional ratiocination is unable to create." Grossvogel, *Mystery and Its Fictions: From Oedipus to Agatha Christie* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 16.

general, the detective narrative makes available to its reader at least some of the evidence it gives to its detective, so that the reader may work alongside and even outpace the detective. The tantalizing possibility it holds out is that we may arrive at the solution before Dupin or Holmes gets around to explaining it. Yet *Bleak House* locates such a reward for our labors well out of our reach, since it places Bucket's processes of deduction entirely beyond us. Bucket, who paradoxically receives notice from the narrator most often for his near invisibility, is as inscrutable as he is inconspicuous. "He's in all manner of places, all at wunst," says Jo of Bucket, yet the narrator almost never reveals his presence until he's already been there awhile (717). Unlike Poe or Conan Doyle, who allow us to follow at least some of their detectives' movements, Dickens places Bucket's movements, like his deductions, beyond the omniscient narrative itself. The detective here is less a model for the deductive processes the novel encodes than a *deus ex machina* who appears in the absence of such implicit encoding.

Barry McCrea similarly describes Bucket's relatively late entrance into the plot as an attempted corrective: a device that only becomes necessary once it's clear that things will not organically work themselves out. As McCrea suggests, Bucket's appearance does as much to emphasize the unworkability of the novel's structure as it does to remedy it:

> The key difference between *Oliver Twist* and *Bleak House* is that in the later novel the web of illegitimate connections generated by "London" has become so complex and unwieldy that the genealogical plot is unable to disentangle it of its own accord and outside help has to be brought in to unravel the mysteries, to pick out the genealogical threads that are hidden in the web of city connections. This help takes the form of a detective…[whose] late arrival onstage affects the very ideas of structure and plot as they were understood in *Oliver Twist*. The whole point of Dickens's genealogical plot, after all, and the whole point of its trademark device of coincidence, is that it is natural and unforced, that it happens automatically.[34]

McCrea sees Bucket not as an exception to the rule of detective plots, but a figure for the artificial, self-aware attention they always require. For McCrea, this forced quality of the detective plot fundamentally differentiates it from the "aloof passivity of the family plot" whose "sense of narrative entitlement…sets it apart from the effort, activity, and stratagems required of its criminal rivals."[35] Yet, as my reading of Esther's narrative demonstrates, the attention demanded by the family plot is hardly passive: identifying and interpreting those clues that will allow us to predict who will marry whom, or who is related to whom, requires a mode of attention as unrelenting in its demand for productivity as it is constrained in its scope.

I agree, however, with McCrea's larger point that Bucket's arrival represents a kind of stopgap measure, a markedly artificial device that emphasizes the failure of naturalized narrative mechanisms even as it supposedly remedies that failure. For more than modeling a mode of attention the reader might also practice, Bucket's appearance reinforces the sense of distance between the reader's powers of deduction and his own. Answering the omniscient narrator's question—"What connexion can there be?"—is no longer a simple matter of attending to clues and producing meaning from them. Rather, it requires Bucket's seemingly superhuman ability not only to be "in all manner of places, all at wunst," but also to assemble the impressions collected from these various places into a meaningful whole. In *Bleak House*, unlike in the

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[34] Barry McCrea, *In the Company of Strangers: Family and Narrative in Dickens, Conan Doyle, Joyce, and Proust,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 47.
[35] McCrea, *In the Company of Strangers*, 47.

detective stories of Poe or Conan Doyle, this latter process is almost never made accessible to the reader: neither Bucket himself nor the omniscient narrator explains how he moves from clue to clue. Like Benjamin's flaneur-turned-detective,[36] Bucket conceals his purposefulness beneath an appearance of distracted passivity:

> Otherwise mildly studious in his observation of human nature, on the whole a benignant philosopher not disposed to be severe upon the follies of mankind, Mr Bucket pervades a vast number of houses, and strolls about an infinity of streets: to outward appearances rather languishing for want of an object. He is in the friendliest condition towards his species, and will drink with most of them. He is free with his money, affable in his manners, innocent in his conversation—but, through the placid stream of his life, there glides an undercurrent of forefinger. (803)

The contrast between the methodical forward progress of Bucket's "undercurrent of forefinger" and the scattered, undirected movement of the omniscient narrative is made explicit later on the same page, in the narrator's note that "a few hours later, [Bucket] and the Roman will be together comparing forefingers" (803). Like the Roman figure of Allegory on Tulkinghorn's ceiling, the omniscient narrator is "always pointing": so incessantly flagging details for our attention that it is impossible for us to differentiate foreground from background, clues from trivia (259). Bucket, on the other hand, practices wholly selective and therefore productive attention: his forefinger points exactly at those details that produce the solution. Yet the objects he points out are inaccessible to us: we cannot inhabit his consciousness nor share his selectivity. Bucket appears less as a model of rational attention than a reminder that the structures that would allow us to direct our attention in rational ways lie wholly beyond our reach.

Revelation and the failure of rational attention

Perhaps the greatest proof that *Bleak House* does not function as a typical detective plot is that many of the novel's mysteries are not solved by Bucket's methodical, instrumental attention—or by Bucket at all. For the first character to draw together the disparate strands of the plot—in a process that occurs almost entirely offstage—is the lawyer Guppy, hardly a model of carefully directed attention. The omniscient narrator goes so far as to emphasize Guppy's tendency toward unproductive distraction when he and a friend, traveling through Lancashire, stop at the Dedlock estate as tourists. In their endeavor to give the house its proper appreciation, "Mr. Guppy and his friend are dead beat before they have well begun. They straggle about in wrong places, look at wrong things, don't care for the right things, gape when more rooms are opened, exhibit profound desperation of spirits, and are clearly knocked up" (110). Like the diseased patients Reil describes, Guppy and his friend are misled by "a false estimation of the worth of things," which leads them to "a foolish expenditure of their energies": looking at "wrong things" while not caring for those that are worthwhile.[37] Putting Dickens in conversation with Reil brings into

[36] "In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in the position of having to play detective. If the flâneur is thus turned into an unwilling detective, it does him a lot of good socially, for it legitimates his idleness. His indolence is only apparent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off the miscreant." Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," trans. Harry Zohn, in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006), 72.

[37] Reil, *Rhapsodieen*, 111.

relief the double meaning of looking "at wrong things": Guppy's distracted attention is not only mistaken, ostensibly leading him away from the correct answers someone like Bucket invariably discovers, but also morally problematic. In contravention of Victorian prudence, he is squandering his energies, wasting his attention by jumping haphazardly from one new detail to another —"gap[ing] when more rooms are opened"—rather than following a methodical scheme to reach a predetermined end.

And yet one of the many "wrong things" Guppy happens to notice turns out to lead him, completely unpredictably, towards his own desired end and the end of the novel's plot. As his eyes wander over a seemingly endless series of nearly identical family portraits—the narrator notes that "it appears to the afflicted Mr. Guppy and his inconsolable friend that there is no end to the Dedlocks, whose family greatness seems to consist in their never having done anything to distinguish themselves for seven hundred years"—his attention happens to alight on a single one (110). This particular portrait "acts upon him like a charm…He stares at it with uncommon interest; he seems to be fixed and fascinated by it" (110). Later it turns out that the portrait—of Lady Dedlock—stunned Guppy by its resemblance to Esther, a realization that led him to work out the mystery of Esther's birth before Esther, Lady Dedlock, or Tulkinghorn. And yet the solution first emerges not as the predictable result of an intentional, methodical process of investigation, but rather as a sudden, unexpected insight: an answer that unfolds not gradually, through reasoning, but all at once in an image. Even Bucket's solution of the murder appears in a similarly imagistic fashion, suggesting spontaneous revelation rather than logical deduction: "By the living Lord it flashed upon me, as I sat opposite to her at the table and saw her with a knife in her hand, that she had done it!" (833) Solving the mystery rests less on the determined, methodical attention that Bucket usually models and more on the constant openness to an insight that might arrive at any moment. For the reader, too, the connections between the parts of the omniscient narrative arise not predictably, but spontaneously: we have less of a sense of deciphering a set of carefully positioned clues than of making our own way, bringing things together as we see fit and as they happen to strike us.

In fact, our position in the novel does not so much resemble that of the detective, Inspector Bucket, as it corresponds to that of another, seemingly far less perceptive character: the illiterate crossing-sweeper Jo, who dies of smallpox, but not before passing it on to Esther. Noticing signs and letters and people carrying books, Jo finds himself transfixed by the indecipherability of printed text and wonders "what does it all mean, and if it means anything to anybody, how comes it that it means nothing to me?" (257). Although we can read, the narrator's frustrating question—"What connexion can there be?"—reminds us that we, like Jo, are in "darkness as to the meaning, of those mysterious symbols" with which *Bleak House* surrounds us (257). Jo's uncertainty about what it all means similarly resonates with the question the narrator emphasizes as he prepares to reveal Tulkinghorn's murder: "What does it mean?" (750). Like Jo, who is constantly "hustled, and jostled, and moved on," we never stand still long enough to arrive at a stable understanding of the world, much less to impose our own ends on it (257). Before his death, Jo dictates a letter to Esther to apologize for giving her smallpox: he explains that he "never went fur to do it" and "didn't know nothink at all" (731). We similarly arrive at the end of the novel having moved through diffuse plots, just as Jo has done, but with little knowledge and even less instrumentality. The appearance of characters like Bucket and Tulkinghorn, who somehow know how to produce meaning from seemingly unconnected details, does little to train us in the same skill, since their thought processes are so rarely revealed to us. Rather, their presence brings our own cluelessness into relief. Witnessing their apparent ability to put together

the omniscient narrative's scattered pieces, we are forced to wonder whether we are aberrant in experiencing nothing but a frustrating sense of distraction: "If it means anything to anybody, how comes it that it means nothing to me?"

"Of no order and no place": distraction and the collapse of bourgeois subjectivity

The alignment between the hapless, undirected attention *Bleak House* forces on its reader and the confused meanderings of Jo—a character with no address, no last name, no family, and no life narrative—suggests the extent to which distraction carries its subject outside the bourgeois order. As Hagner suggests, if prudent attention is the mark of a healthy, effective bourgeois subject, any sort of attention that falls outside its constraints must be somehow diseased: Reil refers to the extreme states of attention—preoccupation and distraction—as "*Krankheiten*." Writing of a period seventy-five years after Reil's, Jonathan Crary offers a sample of the many treatises pathologizing insufficiently productive attention in the second half of the nineteenth century. Max Nordau's polemical 1892 book *Degeneration*, for example, finds the root cause of antisocial behavior in insufficiently regulated attention: "Untended and unrestrained by attention, the brain activity of the degenerate and hysterical is capricious and without aim or purpose. Through the unrestricted play of association representations are called into consciousness and are free to run riot there…Culture and command over the powers of nature are solely the result of attention; all errors, all superstition, the consequence of defective attention."[38] Based on Nordau's account and others that read uncontrolled attention as either a cause or a form of antisocial behavior, Crary concludes that "attentiveness was a critical feature of a productive and socially adaptive subject."[39] The importance given to properly focused attention in turn produced a need to distinguish between "a socially useful attentiveness" and "a dangerously absorbed or diverted attention."[40]

To share in Jo's distraction and cluelessness, then, necessarily distances the reader from a sense of herself as a productive, virtuous bourgeois subject. Audrey Jaffe notes that the favorite Victorian affect of sympathy is double-edged: it has the potential either to affirm bourgeois subjectivity or to destabilize it. One sort of sympathy sets its object apart as a miserable other and therefore affirms both the subject's essential difference from the sufferer and her laudable ability to sympathize across that difference. The other, however, carries a risk of collapsing the distinction:

> The figures Victorian society defined as objects of sympathy were, of course, its outcasts; situated outside respectable identity, they were essential to its definition. Such characters as beggars and fallen women circulate in these texts as projections of a fear of falling embedded within the structure of Victorian middle-class identity…Identification with such figures, accompanied by incessant concern about the authenticity of their identities, registers an identification with fallenness and guilt that threatens the desired stability and presumed naturalness of middle-class identity.[41]

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[38] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1892; New York: Appleton, 1895), 56; qtd. in Crary, 16.
[39] Crary, *Suspensions of Perception,* 47.
[40] Crary, *Suspensions of Perception,* 47.
[41] Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 18-19.

Jaffe applies her analysis to the subjects of sympathy within novels as well as to the ultimate addressee of the demand for sympathy: the Victorian novel-reader. And while Jaffe is primarily concerned with identification as a chain of representational projections that collapse the distinctions between the reader, the fictional subject of sympathy, and its fictional object, I want to suggest that her conclusions about the political relevance of identification might also apply to the alignment between the reader and Jo. Jo usually appears in an objectified, aestheticized form, one that invites us to sympathize with an obvious other across the comfortable distance of class difference.[42] But by making us share in Jo's unproductive, undirected noticing, *Bleak House* almost literally puts us in his place and prompts us to see the world as he does: as a succession of incomprehensible signs over which we have no power, not even the power of interpretation.

To identify with Jo is not simply to lose a middle-class self and gain a lower-class one, for Jo, even as he represents an excess of miserable qualities, is also the site of a lacuna. When Jo appears before Woodcourt and George, the narrator at first defines him by his opposition to such middle-class characters, saying that "he is not of the same order of things, not of the same place in creation" (724). But if the sentence leads us to expect that we will now learn what Jo *is*, the narrator doesn't deliver on his promise: rather than defining Jo by any positive characteristics, he concludes that "He is of no order and no place, neither of the beasts nor of humanity" (724). If the distraction the omniscient narrative enjoins carries us outside the comfortable position of the knowing, middle-class spectator, it leads us to identify not only with an uncomprehending figure like Jo, but also with the lack of a definite self altogether.[43]

The link between undirected, unproductive attention and loss of self is perhaps most explicit not in the omniscient narrative, but in one of the rare representations of distraction in Esther's narrative. In bed after a long day at Mrs. Jellyby's house, Esther finally allows her attention to wander:

> At first I was painfully awake, and vainly tried to lose myself, with my eyes closed, among the scenes of the day. At length, by slow degrees, they became indistinct and mingled. I began to lose the identity of the sleeper resting on me. Now, it was Ada; now, one of my old Reading friends from whom I could not believe I had so recently parted. Now, it was the little mad woman worn out with curtseying and smiling; now, some one in authority at Bleak House. Lastly, it was no one, and I was no one. (63)

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[42] This tendency to present Jo as an aesthetic object, a picture of misery and degradation, is perhaps clearest in the narrator's directive to him to "Stand forth, Jo! in uncompromising colors" after describing him as "Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him; native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish" (724).

[43] In a chapter on Thackeray, Nicholas Dames makes the opposite claim, arguing that distraction fosters, rather than opposing, liberal models of self-determining subjectivity. Yet Dames defines distraction in extremely broad terms, as anything other than rapt absorption; since rapt absorption requires passive submission, only distraction allows for the formulation and execution of one's own desires. Although Dames discusses Alexander Bain at length, his identification of attention with submissive absorption ignores arguments—by Bain and others—defining attention as an operation of the will and a means to arrive at desired ends. This model of attention obviously furthers liberal conceptions of subjectivity; the distraction that prevents its functioning likewise opposes them. See Nicholas Dames, *"*Distraction's Negative Liberty: Thackeray and Attention (Intermittent Form)" in *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 73-122.

Esther's account seems to anticipate the reveries of modernism: states of distraction opening on to a loss of self that is desirable as well as threatening. The loss of a definite object of attention—Esther's beginning to "lose the identity of the sleeper resting on me"—is introjected as a loss of self: once "it was no one," "I was no one."

The sense that undirected, unproductive attention might lead to the loss of a clear sense of self is invoked as a danger by Reil and Nordau, who find the cause of pathological extremes of attention, especially distraction and reverie, in a "lack of or the wrong culture of mental virtues," and its consequence in antisocial behavior.[44] I want to conclude, however, by returning to a set of treatises that, while connecting unproductive forms of attention to a loss of self, see this relationship as a reason to recommend such forms. For if the wandering attention of the omniscient narrative most often creates frustration, the wandering attention of Esther's reverie carries a very different affective resonance: in the latter case, the dissolution of the self, the possibility of becoming "no one," seems liberating.

Here we might return to Weber, who finds the counterpart of productive capitalist concentration not in distraction, but in the pre-capitalist practice of contemplation. For if religious attentiveness can be rationalized into productive concentration, unrationalized contemplative practices—those that strive for an attention that, as Simone Weil writes, is "empty, waiting, not seeking anything"—remain excessive and even hostile to the productive imperatives of bourgeois capitalism.[45] So too do their accounts of losing oneself in rapture, or finding oneself transformed by grace, threaten the bourgeois desire for a stable identity, legible to others and intelligible to oneself. Still, contemplation might seem like an odd concept to introduce into an analysis of the omniscient narrative. In the broadest sense, *Bleak House* is a thoroughly secular novel: its occasional mentions of God can only appear perfunctory in a framework where the promise of Chancery judgment has replaced any anticipation of divine judgment. Thus the religious motivations for contemplation, in which the subject hopes to attain transcendent insight, can hardly apply here. Moreover, if contemplative practices belong to a pre-capitalist era, the constant distraction of the omniscient narrative, which depends for its heterogeneity on the vitality of urban life, seems thoroughly modern. But even in the more strictly circumscribed, more purely formal context of attention, contemplation seems wholly opposed to the practice of distraction the omniscient narrative enjoins. Descriptions of contemplation tend to focus on maintaining a state of mental emptiness; the omniscient narrative, by contrast, seems crowded with stimulation.

Yet contemplation and distraction are analogous in their frustration of the bourgeois demand that attention be productive. Contemplative practices generally prescribe the repetition of a set of formulas with no expectation of programmatic progress; the Christian contemplative tradition, with its emphasis on grace, suggests that true insight must be unexpected and unplanned. Even if they seem to lie at opposite ends of a continuum, contemplation and distraction—in the context of bourgeois capitalism—are more similar than different, since both contravene the imperatives of instrumentality and calculation, and both threaten the loss of a stable bourgeois identity. Like the distraction of *Bleak House*, contemplative practice, which requires endless repetition and indefinite waiting, destabilizes our sense of self-determination: on the one hand, we are made to look at what we do not care to see; on the other, we are forced to think of nothing. We might

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[44] Reil, *Rhapsodieen*, 111.

[45] Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," in *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper, 2009), 62.

recall here that Reil situates healthy bourgeois attention in the middle of a continuum, and sees both extremes—in his case, preoccupation and distraction—as equally pathological. My intention in noting this parallel is not to imply that the distraction of *Bleak House* constructs for its reader a contemplative practice, but rather to emphasize the particularity of the understanding of attention as problem-solving work—an understanding that, as Crary points out, we share with the Victorians. If nineteenth-century narratives like Esther's naturalize the constraints that capitalism places on attention, the distraction of the omniscient narrative, by decoupling attention from productivity, begins to bring those constraints into relief. And as it exposes the imperatives of instrumentality and calculation as constraints, it also gestures towards a space, still largely negative, beyond them: it allows us to begin to consider what attention might look like without the forms of seeking and reward.

Conclusion

In the thirteenth chapter of *Sense and Sensibility*, the narrator matter-of-factly notes an apparently trivial detail of nineteenth-century domestic life: "While they were at breakfast the letters were brought. Among the rest there was one for Colonel Brandon."[46] As a daily event, the arrival of the letters seems to indicate the maintenance rather than the disruption of routine, continuity rather than change. Even so, as readers trained by Austen, we seize upon the letter as a possible means of narrative progress—a clue, though we hardly know to what. Like Mrs. Jennings, we immediately begin to entertain guesses about the letter's mysterious content; when it reappears eighteen chapters later, we rejoice to learn that neither our attention nor Austen's has been in vain. Colonel Brandon begins to unfold the story of his connection to Willoughby with a passing reminder of the letter and of a seemingly idle conversation he had with Elinor many months ago. "You have probably entirely forgotten" the conversation in question, he tells Elinor; in a remark that could just as easily apply to the letter, he notes that "it is not to be supposed that it could make any impression on you."[47] As readers, we are happy and proud to be able to answer, with Elinor, "Indeed…I have *not* forgotten it."[48] The delivery of a reward we had long anticipated does more than affirm our sense of ourselves as clever, properly attentive readers: it also proclaims our continuity with that earlier version of ourselves who formed a desire and never forgot about it.

According to Weber, "it is, of course, one of the fundamental characteristics of the private capitalist economy that, rationalized on the basis of strict *arithmetical* calculation—or as Sombart puts it: shaped 'by calculation'—it aims at the economic success desired and planned for, in contrast to the hand-to-mouth existence of the peasant or the privileged routine of the guild craft worker."[49] In its emphasis on "success desired and planned for," capitalist rationalization creates a particular narrative of subjectivity, in which the apparent change represented by the attainment of a desire only affirms the more fundamental continuity of the subject herself. To achieve a success we had long ago planned for is to recognize our essential

[46] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. James Kinsley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48.
[47] Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 153.
[48] Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 153.
[49] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 26-27.

consistency with a past self. Any material reward for our efforts is doubled, since we also receive the immaterial reward of seeing our subjectivity persist across time.

This sense of our own stable persistence is affirmed not only by bourgeois narratives of life and work, but also by the practice of reading narrative in a more literal sense. Some of the details to which Esther directs our attention produce meaning immediately, like her observations of Richard and Ada's glances at the piano. With others, like her hints at her attraction to Woodcourt, we must wait a long time for our reward: many chapters or, for readers of the novel in its serialized form, many months. The instrumental model of attention, which assumes we will someday make sense of what we notice now, extends the perceiving self indefinitely into the future. Unlike the "hand-to-mouth" consumption demanded by the omniscient narrative, which forces us to discard one object of attention as soon as another appears, nineteenth-century narratives like Esther's reward our attentive work with "success desired and planned for." In other words, bourgeois attention is itself narrative in its tendency toward diachrony: its implication that delayed fulfillment is preferable to instant gratification, since only the former offers the double reward of extending our subjectivity across time.

Weber's analysis of calculation suggests that the bourgeois self is not just productive in the obvious sense, but also reproductive in a more subtle way: by setting goals and anticipating rewards, it projects copies of itself into every point in the future. Such a subject necessarily resists those spontaneous insights—neither desired nor planned for—furnished by both contemplation and distraction. In its frustration of our instrumental processes of perception, in its offering of unexpected revelations rather than methodically deduced solutions, the distraction of *Bleak House* brings into relief bourgeois assumptions about attention and subjectivity—assumptions so deeply embedded in the reading of nineteenth-century narrative as to be otherwise invisible. If the omniscient narrative frustrates our attempts to apply the conservative values of prudence and industriousness to attention, it is anti-conservative in a more fundamental sense as well. In resisting narrativity, the distraction of *Bleak House* refuses also the reward we demand from all the narratives of bourgeois culture: that they reinscribe the contours by which we define our subjectivity and reassure us of a future that, in its perfect continuity with our present desires, preserves that inscription indefinitely.

Chapter 2. *Dracula,* Imperial Vigilance, and the Administration of Attention

"If I invite a person to tell me what occurs to him in relation to some certain element of his dream I am asking him to abandon himself to free association, controlled by a given premise*. This demands a special delimitation of the attention, quite different from cogitation, in fact, exclusive of cogitation. Many persons put themselves into such a state easily; others show an extraordinarily high degree of clumsiness. There is a higher level of free association again, where I omit this original premise and designate only the manner of the association, e.g., rule that the subject freely give a proper name or a number...The associations to freely appearing numbers are perhaps the most significant. They follow one another so quickly and approach a hidden goal with such inconceivable certainty, that it is really startling."*
—Sigmund Freud, "Sixth Lecture: The Dream"[1]

"Then you want me not to let some previous conviction injure the receptivity of my mind with regard to some strange matter. Do I read your lesson aright?"
—Dracula[2]

Attention presents a problem in Gothic narratives. On the one hand, the Gothic protagonist is often an especially sensitive observer, so as to notice the strange signs and inexplicable occurrences missed by the obtusely pragmatic characters who surround her. On the other, the suspense of the Gothic plot frequently hangs on the question of whether what presents itself as alertness is, in fact, delusion: if what appears as attunement to a sensible world might actually constitute a break from it. Edgar Allan Poe's Usher describes his condition as the possession of unnaturally heightened senses, but it remains ambiguous whether what's heightened is his sense of the world or of his own turbulent psychic life.[3] If Usher's hypersensitivity is presented from the beginning as antisocial and "disordered,"[4] *The Turn of the Screw* stages the transformation of an apparently upstanding, rational member of the English social order into a violent threat to the sanctity of the family, and with it the corresponding transformation of careful observation into probable hysteria. Almost a century earlier, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* already suggests the Gothic genre's tendency to present the border between hyperacuity and self-delusion as a

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[1] Sigmund Freud, *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. G. Stanley Hall, 7th ed. (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), 84-85.
[2] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal (New York: Norton, 1997), 173. Hereafter cited parenthetically.
[3] "He entered, at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady. It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy—a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly pass off. It displayed itself in a host of unnatural sensations. Some of these, as he detailed them, interested and bewildered me; although, perhaps, the terms and the general manner of their narration had their weight. He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odours of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured even by a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror." Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," in *Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Edward H. Davidson (Cambridge, MA: Riverside, 1956), 100.
[4] Poe, "Fall of the House of Usher," 104.

porous one. Austen's parody derives its humor from making this demarcation clear to the reader even as it remains hazy for her protagonist: we can see that what Catherine Morland takes as receptivity to the world is actually projection onto it.

In all these cases, hypersensitivity originally appears to its subject as a singularly valuable means of defense. Yet the progress of each narrative reveals that it might in fact pose a double threat to her: a "morbid acuteness of the senses" inaugurates the possibility not just of losing touch with empirical reality, but also of moving outside the social order, most obviously in the violent ending of *The Turn of the Screw*. Indeed, the ambiguity of the term "hypersensitive"—whether it denotes especially acute receptivity to present stimuli, or the perception of stimuli where there are none—is only resolved in scientific discourse by an appeal to the social construction of reality. The medical definition of hypersensitivity, as listed in the Oxford English Dictionary, classifies it as a condition "characterized by the fact that a marked adverse bodily response may be evoked by some specific substance or agent which (in similar amounts) has no such effect on most individuals." The common definition has similar, if implicit, recourse to social consensus: a hypersensitive individual is simply one who is "sensitive to an abnormal or excessive degree." The question raised by the Gothic novel is whether such socially aberrant perception might constitute attunement to an actually existing yet collectively denied reality. What if, as in the case of *The Turn of the Screw*, a rigid class structure forced servants and townspeople to deny an aristocratic scandal? Or, more generally, what if Enlightenment common sense prompted a collective denial of impressions that do not conform to its rational order?

Both these possibilities are realized by Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in which the titular character's monstrosity is occluded first by Transylvanian peasants unwilling to expose their aristocratic master's true nature, then by middle-class Englishmen unable to believe in it. The novel's first intimations of Dracula's supernatural capabilities are easily dismissible as madness. Their subject, the uncompromising empiricist Jonathan Harker, explains them first as the result of self-deception and sleep deprivation. Later, after he comes to accept the reality of these impressions himself, Jonathan stages a miraculous escape from Dracula's castle to a nearby town, where he is sent to a hospital whose staff take his account as evidence of insanity—an authoritative judgment that prompts Jonathan to deny its reality once again. Yet unlike the other Gothic narratives I've listed, *Dracula* not only affirms the empirical reality of Jonathan's aberrant observations, but also works tirelessly to assimilate them to the social order. Stoker's novel defends hyperacuity not just as true, but also as necessary: Jonathan's apparently deranged impressions in Transylvania prove indispensable to protecting Britain from a dangerous foreign invader. Where the impressionability of the governess in *Turn of the Screw* arguably leads to one of the starkest possible violations of the Victorian social order—the murder of a child—Jonathan's hypersensitivity is validated as a means of maintaining the existing structures of both family and empire.

This assimilation does not happen easily, however. *Dracula* focuses obsessively on the production and translation of records, which, according to its introductory note, ultimately comprise the text we are reading. But beyond offering an origin story for the novel itself, the emphasis on record-production also indexes a disciplinary imperative that attains particular significance in *Dracula*: the need to maintain control over one's own attention, lest one lapse into madness or yield to desire. Despite several characters' professed interest in the "new" possibilities opened up by "unconscious cerebration," the novel's events imply the danger of any mode of thought not brought under conscious control (69). Vampire attacks are preceded by trances and reveries, which seem to invite as well as allow them. And the middle-class English

characters' exposure to an overwhelming array of new impressions—whether of supernatural events or just foreign countries—prompt them to worry incessantly that they are losing their sanity. Scrupulous record-keeping offers a defense against both threats, forcing the characters to impose structure on their own attention while granting aberrant impressions a socially legible form. This emphasis on productive, disciplined attention allows *Dracula* to make heroes of a solicitor and a secretary, and to translate an exotic adventure narrative into a familiar account of information-economy work. It is both absurdly comic and entirely appropriate that the salvation of the British Empire lies, for Stoker, in those tediously routinized and wholly unromantic processes of colonial administration: producing, maintaining, and assembling records.

Unconscious cerebration and the problem of desire

One of the emblematic contradictions of Victorian culture is that the same conditions that generated remarkable scientific and technological breakthroughs also gave rise to the emergence of innumerable occult practices and esoteric beliefs. Often, the same people devoted themselves to the advancement of both, eagerly following new developments in, for instance, electromagnetic research while also taking part in séances and conducting research into telepathy. Most famously, Arthur Conan Doyle, practicing physician and grand architect of empiricist triumph in his Sherlock Holmes stories, was an ardent exponent of spiritism; in his later career, Doyle increasingly leveraged his celebrity status to make the case that communication with the dead was possible.[5]

Like a number of late Victorian texts, *Dracula* operates at the confluence of empiricism and superstition, combining terms from recent scientific research and watchwords of esoteric circles into an undifferentiated mass of arcana. At the nexus of both approaches sits the Dutch physician Abraham Van Helsing. Later adaptations of *Dracula* often portray Van Helsing as a flatly fanatical vampire hunter, guided by a trademark mix of folk belief, Catholic ritual, and a Manichean devotion to destroying evil at all costs. Yet Stoker himself takes pains to remind us that Van Helsing is a consummate academic, beginning with his first appearance in the text as "Abraham Van Helsing, M.D., D.PH., D.LIT., Etc., Etc." (106). If the chain of honorifics verges on parody, no similar irony is evident in the esteem with which Van Helsing is regarded by Dr. John Seward, already established by this point as a learned scientist and staunch empiricist. Seward, the director of a psychiatric hospital, remembers Van Helsing as "my old friend and master...who knows as much about obscure diseases as any one in the world...a philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day" (105-106). For much of the novel, Stoker plays Seward and Van Helsing off against one another, with Van Helsing struggling to convince Seward of progressively more absurd propositions: that an immortal race of bloodsucking monsters, human in appearance, has roamed the earth since the beginning of time; that this race procreates by transforming ordinary, mortal human beings into replicas of themselves; that, despite their superhuman abilities, such vampires are rendered helpless by garlic, crucifixes, and sunlight. Yet Seward and Van Helsing agree from the beginning on another arcane-sounding doctrine: the idea of "unconscious cerebration," which Seward speaks of as a powerful yet unpredictable force.

Late Victorian discourse situated "unconscious cerebration" at the intersection of empiricism and occultism. Coined by physician William Carpenter in 1842, the term described the capacity

[5] For more on Doyle and spiritism, see Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 250-253.

of new ideas to emerge in the mind without any conscious application of the will.[6] Unconscious cerebration became a matter of particular interest to scientists of the 1890s, who offered it as a rational explanation for phenomena that might otherwise be credited to occult influences. In an 1893 edition of *Science*, American neurologist S. V. Clevenger argues that unconscious cerebration can "account for recollections of what had apparently never been seen before," noting that the mind might receive impressions without an individual's conscious effort or even acknowledgment; later, when the subject willfully concentrates on a particular object, he is shocked by his sense of his familiarity and can only account for it through "far-fetched" explanations, by which Clevenger likely means popular Victorian theories of telepathy and metempsychosis.[7] But if the concept of unconscious cerebration could offer a rational account of apparently supernatural phenomena, so too did it create new openings for occultist doctrines. The assertion that "one could be in possession of knowledge unavailable to the conscious self," Jill Matus notes, prompted Victorians to ask "who or what was doing the thinking? Was such knowledge relevant to the study of interiority or was it evidence of other worlds?"[8]

Even as Seward and Van Helsing celebrate the possibilities of unconscious cerebration, *Dracula* also emphasizes the dangerous instability introduced by unstructured processes of mind. Seward's notes on the asylum inmate Renfield create an unsettling alignment between the unconscious cerebration of the doctor and the psychological disorder of the patient. Seward writes of Renfield that "there is a method in his madness, and the rudimentary idea in my mind is growing. It will be a whole idea soon, and then, oh, unconscious cerebration! you will have to give the wall to your conscious brother" (69-70). The parallel structure of the first sentence implies an affinity between "his [that is, Renfield's] madness" and "my mind"; moreover, if there is a method in Renfield's madness, so too does Seward's embrace of unconscious cerebration introduce an unknown and unpredictable other into his reasoning. In fact, Seward returns to the concept of unconscious cerebration as an ability shared by Renfield, even as the latter lacks the capacity for what Seward considers rational thought: "It was evident then that my surmise had been correct. Unconscious cerebration was doing its work, even with the lunatic" (237). Following the mention of "my surmise," unconscious cerebration at first seems to refer, as it did before, to Seward's thinking; only the final clause unexpectedly replaces Seward with Renfield as the subject of the process. This elision of the distinction between doctor and patient is particularly significant, as Seward often worries that his efforts to understand psychic disturbances are compromising his own sanity: "I am beginning to wonder if my long habit of life amongst the insane is beginning to tell upon my own brain," one diary entry concludes (124). Accessing the insights of unconscious cerebration requires relaxing control over one's own thought process, and accommodating instead a disordered and irrational other.

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[6] In his 1874 *Principles of Mental Physiology*, Carpenter defines unconscious cerebration as "the idea that Cerebral changes may take place *unconsciously*, if the Sensorium be either in a state of absolute torpor, or be for a time non-receptive as regards those changes, its activity being exerted in some other direction; or, to express the same fact Psychologically, that mental changes, of whose *results we subsequently* become conscious, may go on *below the plane* of consciousness, either during profound sleep, or while the attention is wholly engaged by some entirely different train of thought." William Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology: With their Applications to the Training and Discipline of the Mind, and the Study of its Morbid Conditions*, 2nd ed. (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1875), 516.

[7] S. V. Clevenger, "Unconscious Cerebration," *Science* 21.523 (10 February 1893), 81.

[8] Jill Matus, "Victorian Framings of the Mind: Recent Work on Mid-Nineteenth Century Theories of the Unconscious, Memory, and Emotion," *Literature Compass* 4.4 (2007): 1257-1276, 1263.

The association between insanity and unstructured attention is reinforced by a later conversation between Seward and Van Helsing. Despite his reverence for Van Helsing, Seward finds that he cannot abide the inductive approach his former teacher takes towards Lucy's case:

> Here I interrupted him. I was getting bewildered; he so crowded on my mind his list of nature's eccentricities and possible impossibilities that my imagination was getting fired. I had a dim idea he was teaching me some lesson, as long ago he used to do in his study in Amsterdam; but he used then to tell me the thing, so that I could have the object of thought in mind all the time. But now I was without this help, yet I wanted to follow him, so I said:—
>
> "Professor, let me be your pet student again. Tell me the thesis, so that I may apply your knowledge as you go on. At present I am going in my mind from point to point as a mad man, and not a sane one, follows an idea. I feel like a novice blundering through a bog in a mist, jumping from one tussock to another in the mere blind effort to move on without knowing where I am going."
>
> "That is a good image," he said. "Well, I shall tell you. My thesis is this: I want you to believe…we shall have an open mind, and not let a little bit of truth check the rush of a big truth…"
>
> "Then you want me not to let some previous conviction injure the receptivity of my mind with regard to some strange matter. Do I read your lesson aright?"
>
> (172-173)

Even as he triumphantly apprehends Van Helsing's lesson on the need for receptivity without prejudice, Seward demands confirmation that he has achieved the proper object: open-mindedness reverts to the demand for authoritative closure within the space of a sentence. And for all Van Helsing insists that thought not be governed by predetermined conclusions, he readily accedes to his old pupil's demand to know the lesson in advance, so that he can have "the object of thought in mind all the time." He also accepts without question Seward's distinction between a mad man and a sane one, in which the latter is defined by the linear course of his thought and by "knowing where I am going." If unconscious cerebration entails surrendering one's thought to an irrational other, Seward suggests that even a more moderate form of receptivity verges on madness.

Indeed, any relaxation of consciously directed attention appears in *Dracula* as a potentially dangerous lapse. The solicitor Jonathan Harker, whose diary opens the novel, is confronted upon arrival in Transylvania with a disorienting array of jumbled stimuli. The region's "whirlpool of European races" and variety of languages frustrates the practical Englishman's usual frameworks for giving order to perception, so that Jonathan is confounded by the evidence of his senses long before his first glimpses of Dracula's supernatural capabilities (33). Jonathan's figuration of his new surroundings as an "imaginative whirlpool" (10) is soon literalized by his loss of clear markers of time and space, with the result that any linear understanding of experience is replaced by a sense of endless, confused circling: "It seemed to me that we were simply going over and over the same ground again; and so I took note of some salient point, and found that this was so...I think I must have fallen asleep and kept dreaming of the incident, for it all seemed to be repeated endlessly, and now looking back, it is like a sort of awful nightmare" (19). If Jonathan loses his grip on time and space, so too does the coach ride efface an even more significant framework for organizing impressions: the distinction between the "salient point" of sensory experience and the confusing inner world of dreams. Against this onslaught, he determines to "be prosaic so far as facts can be" (30); "to "watch for proof" (44); and to "put down every detail in order" (49).

Ever the Victorian professional, Jonathan relaxes his discipline on only two occasions. In the first case, he wanders into an unoccupied wing of the castle and begins to daydream: "after trying a little to school my nerves, I felt a soft quietude come over me. Here I am, sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter" (40). Musing on this vision, Jonathan soon falls asleep, only to find three female vampires leaning over him and preparing to pierce his neck with their fangs. Later, despite his "dogged" determination to watch for Dracula's return, Jonathan finds himself distracted by "some quaint little specks floating in the rays of the moonlight. They were like the tiniest grains of dust, and they whirled round and gathered in clusters in a nebulous sort of way. I watched them with a sense of soothing, and a sort of calm stole over me. I leaned back in the embrasure in a more comfortable position, so that I could enjoy more fully the aerial gambolling" (48). Jonathan is startled to see the vampire women take shape from the motes of dust. Again, a moment of wandering, undisciplined attention becomes an invitation to attack.

Lucy Westenra, the first victim Dracula takes in England, is both a daydreamer and a sleepwalker, and is initially attacked on one of the many nights that she leaves her room in a sleepwalking trance. She later describes the encounter as a moment of reverie in which she is mesmerized by intense, disorganized sensory experience: "I have a vague memory of something long and dark with red eyes, just as we saw in the sunset, and something very sweet and very bitter all around me at once; and then I seemed sinking into deep green water, and there was a singing in my ears, as I have heard there is to drowning men; and then everything seemed passing away from me; my soul seemed to go out from my body and float about the air" (94). The oblique allusion to the Sirens ("a singing in my ears, as I have heard there is to drowning men") and the sense of sudden release both suggest a sexual, even orgasmic dimension to the encounter, and the passage reveals a deep affinity between distraction and desire. Dracula, who moves about as a mist or fog, seems to create the states of confusion he exploits. Yet neither Jonathan nor Lucy is stripped of agency; on the contrary, they describe themselves as seeking out the encounters. Lucy walks determinedly to the clifftop site of her meetings with Dracula, and Jonathan even more explicitly reflects upon first seeing the female vampires that "there was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" (42). Even saintly Mina, attacked by Dracula as she sleeps, finds that "I was bewildered, and, strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him" (251). Indeed, a long critical tradition reads *Dracula* as primarily concerned with socially aberrant desire, whether the desire in question is Lucy's unfeminine sexual appetite or Jonathan's homoerotic fascination with Dracula.[9] What I want to add to these readings is an analysis of the particular circumstances that lead such impulses to assert themselves: states of relaxed concentration, in which the attention is free to wander aimlessly. If lapses in vigilance leave Lucy and Jonathan unprotected from external attack, so too does the surrender of control over attention allow their own repressed desires to emerge.

Perhaps predictably, Victorian writers on unconscious cerebration have very little to say about its relationship to sexual desire. But the connection between distraction and the repressed has been made familiar to us by a foreign near-contemporary of theirs, Sigmund Freud. In fact,

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[9] See, for example, Phyllis Roth's "Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's Dracula" (*Literature and Psychology* 27 (1977): 113-21); Christopher Craft's " 'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" (*Representations* 8 (Fall 1984): 107-33); Talia Schaffer's " 'A Wilde Desire Took Me': The Homoerotic History of *Dracula*" (*ELH* 61.2 (1994): 381-425); and J. Halberstam's "Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" (*Victorian Studies* 36.3 (Spring 1993): 333-352).

Freud's primary claim for his psychoanalytic method of free association is built on this link. In the set of lectures given between 1915 and 1917, which would be published as *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Freud argues that the aimless, associative movement of the attention bypasses the patient's resistance to revealing socially unacceptable impulses. Direct questioning by the analyst would only lead this resistance to assert itself more strongly; the associative method prompts the patient to suspend conscious control over his thought processes, and with it conscious resistance to revealing shameful desires. As Freud notes in this chapter's first epigraph, the more irrelevant the starting-point of the associative process, the more quickly the associations proceed to the "withheld actuality" at the heart of the matter. For Freud, the associative method does lead without exception to a result: the revelation of what has been repressed. However, neither the patient nor the analyst can foresee the particular content of this revelation, nor the course the associations will take to get there:

> If I invite a person to tell me what occurs to him in relation to some certain element of his dream I am asking him to abandon himself to free association, controlled by a given premise. This demands a special delimitation of the attention, quite different from cogitation, in fact, exclusive of cogitation. Many persons put themselves into such a state easily; others show an extraordinarily high degree of clumsiness. There is a higher level of free association again, where I omit this original premise and designate only the manner of the association, e.g., rule that the subject freely give a proper name or a number...The associations to freely appearing numbers are perhaps the most significant. They follow one another so quickly and approach a hidden goal with such inconceivable certainty, that it is really startling.[10]

In other words, the more apparently random and circuitous the thought process, the more surely it leads to the revelation of withheld material. By prompting the relaxation of conscious control over the attention, free association clears away the strictures that ordinarily govern thought and opens a space in which repressed desires can be recognized.

For Freud, the capacity to work around socially enjoined repression is a particular merit of the associative method. In *Dracula*, by contrast, Stoker presents distracted reverie—and the transgressive desire it brings to light—as a figurative and literal danger to the survival of the subject, a threat that is simply too great to be borne. If not for Dracula's last-minute intervention, Jonathan's fascination with dust motes would have been the end of his human life. And the distracted gravitation of his gaze to the female vampires' lips already spells the end of his existence as a staid, upstanding Victorian, committed only to his saintly English fiancée. Many critics have noted that Lucy's victimization by Dracula and subsequent death at the hands of her former fiancé function as punishments for subtly coded sexual transgressions: Lucy's reception of three proposals in one day and her implied wish to accept all three evince an outsize sexual appetite. Her tendency to transgress Victorian standards of female modesty only becomes more apparent during her sleepwalking spells, when the loss of conscious control leads her to deliver herself to Dracula.

The danger of "unconscious cerebration" is most evident, however, in the case of Mina. The novel's later chapters find the vampire-fighters preoccupied with the possibility that Mina might sabotage their quest by, for instance, revealing their plans to Dracula. This possibility is figured not as a transgressive impulse of Mina's own, but as the manifestation of a force literally outside herself: Van Helsing explains that since Dracula's attack on Mina, the two are connected by a psychic link. Mina accordingly describes herself as haunted by "a fear lest in some trance or dream he may have used my knowledge for his ends" (297). The situation offers a literal

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[10] Freud, *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, 84-85.

response to one of the primary Victorian preoccupations in thinking about unconscious cerebration: if, in Matus's words, "subjects in a state of altered consciousness seemed to possess knowledge of which they were not ordinarily conscious and to behave in ways that their conscious selves might not sanction...how was it possible to speak of an integrated or authoritative self?...Who or what was doing the thinking?"[11] In Mina's case, the answer to the final question is an emphatic "someone else." The absence of conscious control over the attention, which defines both trances and dreams, opens space for the emergence of desires so contrary to Mina's subjectivity that they appear as manipulations of a completely distinct, utterly hostile will, foreign to Mina in multiple senses.

Yet Stoker arranges matters so that Mina cannot simply determine to guard against trances and dreams, those states of undirected attention in which Dracula uses her knowledge for his ends. The psychic link between the two turns out to work both ways, so that Mina's reveries give her access to Dracula's knowledge—knowledge that may prove essential to her husband and his allies—even as they expose her to his machinations. The solution the vampire-fighters devise is to bring in a third party, Van Helsing, who directs Mina's unconscious cerebration so that Dracula may not. Whether through his psychiatric training or his expertise in all matters occult, Van Helsing proves highly capable not only in hypnotizing Mina, but in giving a highly instrumental structure to the free, associative attention hypnosis allows. Van Helsing reassures Mina about the hypnosis sessions that "at such times you go by my volition and not by his"—that is, Dracula's (297). Notably absent is the possibility that Mina might go by her own volition; the omission at once reproduces Victorian patriarchal assumptions and reflects Victorian understandings of the hypnotic state. Mina's attention cannot simply remain associative and undirected. If her course of thought is not to be subject to Dracula's will, it must be governed by someone else's.[12]

The scenes of Mina's hypnosis lay bare the novel's conception of associative attention more broadly. For if Van Helsing is not present to dictate the course of every character's reveries, the danger attributed to such porous states of consciousness necessitates some form of externalized control. The need to impose formal structure over associative or distracted impressions helps justify one of *Dracula*'s most idiosyncratic yet least analyzed preoccupations: the novel's consistent emphasis on the tedious procedures of keeping and transcribing records.[13]

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[11] Matus, "Victorian Framings of the Mind," 1263.

[12] As Jennifer Wicke points out, the scene has multiple parallels to Freud's examination of Dora, conducted three years after the publication of *Dracula*. See Jennifer Wicke, "Vampiric Typewriting," *ELH* 59.2 (Summer 1992): 467-493, 485.

[13] Even critics who discuss *Dracula*'s interest in recording rarely give an account of it beyond noting its significance as the fictional origin story of the novel. Two exceptions are Wicke's "Vampiric Typewriting," which finds in the novel's obsession with media a prescient account of late capitalist mass culture, and Halberstam's "Technologies of Monstrosity," which aligns both writing and reading in *Dracula* with an emerging "expert" discourse that produces sexuality as its object. Both interpretations are thoroughly convincing. Yet Wicke, in her insightful alignment of *Dracula* with a post-industrial culture of consumption, neglects the novel's pronounced emphasis on the productive work more readily identifiable as a driving force of the Victorian economy. Halberstam, meanwhile, treats the "production" of sexuality as a sociological fact, and does not explore the material labors of discursive production with which *Dracula* so markedly concerns itself.

The recording angel and the Gospel of Work

The novel's obsessive concern with record production calls for explanation not only given its irrelevance to the novel's plot, but also because it threatens to undermine one of *Dracula*'s guiding moral principles: the Victorian work ethic. The characters' frequently repeated proclamations about the sacredness of work appear ridiculous in light of the work Stoker most often represents them doing: updating diaries, organizing files, reconciling tallies. The outsize space given to such routine administrative labor seems to mock, rather than reinforce, the high-minded ideal of work as the noble end of human life. Yet as we shall see, the imperative to govern one's own attention transforms bureaucratic work into an honorable and necessary calling.

A steadfast belief in the inherent value of work holds the British characters together from the novel's beginning to its end; indeed, the gospel of work is the only Victorian virtue that survives *Dracula* entirely intact. The novel undermines the guiding Victorian ethics of rational skepticism and British chauvinism: Stoker requires his characters to admit the veracity of Eastern folk belief, take direction from a foreigner who barely speaks English, and, perhaps worst of all, embrace the rituals of a stigmatized Catholic Church whose supposed primitivism offered British Protestants a guarantee of their own modern superiority. Even the Victorian cult of the family endures only in a severely weakened form. The novel showily affirms the nineteenth-century ideal of marriage through its sentimentalization of the self-sacrificing partnership between Jonathan and Mina. Yet the very events that confer social legitimacy on their bond also subtly cast doubt on its strength. Mina and Jonathan are married while the latter recuperates at a hospital near Budapest too weakened by the harrowing weeks spent in Transylvania to rise from bed or, presumably, to consummate the marriage.

Moreover, theirs is the only example of successful heterosexual coupling between living people that the novel offers. Van Helsing's wife is long dead and Lucy, Arthur Holmwood's intended, is turned into a vampire before they can be married; having failed in their own proposals to Lucy, Quincey Morris and Dr. Seward are apparently unable to find anyone else. All these failures to create healthy marriages are, of course, set against the perverse and highly sexualized couplings between Dracula and his victims, between Jonathan and the female vampires, and between Dracula and Jonathan. And if the novel's opening chapters find marriage literally on its sickbed, its ending suggests that the reproductive promises of the family are compromised as well. As far as the epilogue indicates, Jonathan and Mina produce only one child, and only many years after the events of the novel have concluded. Moreover, as Stephen Arata points out, the invocation of Morris, Seward, Holmwood, and Van Helsing as symbolic "fathers" to the young Harker at once affirms the five men's friendship and casts doubt on their virility: "How secure is any racial line when five fathers are needed to produce one son?"[14] Although the family ideal endures in sentimental pronouncements, *Dracula* drastically curtails both its narrative dominance and its literal size.

In contrast to the enervated (if loudly proclaimed) Victorian principles of rationalism, Britishness, and the family, *Dracula* finds the gospel of work alive and kicking. Where marriage is too restricted in its scope to structure the novel's social order, work offers a form of healthy and stable sociality. Not only the singletons Seward and Morris or the prematurely widowed Godalming and Van Helsing use work to bind themselves to the social order: Jonathan and Mina

[14] Stephen Arata, "The Occidental Tourist: 'Dracula' and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," *Victorian Studies 33.4* (Summer 1990): 621-645, 632.

do as well, to an almost parodic extent. The only family tie for the young couple, both orphans, is their relationship with Jonathan's boss, who adopts the two as surrogate children and leaves them his property. Moreover, Stoker opposes a modern, Western economy of work to the primitive economy of blood he associates with Dracula. In an obvious allegory of feudal serfdom, Dracula, marked throughout the text as an aristocrat, reproduces himself by draining the life-force of the peasants on his estate.[15]

Even in cases where the economy of blood is not portrayed as immoral, it is uniquely associated with the aristocracy, and therefore implicitly outdated in a novel that revolves around middle-class upstarts and the dream of social mobility. When Lucy falls ill after her initial encounters with Dracula, Van Helsing calls for a transfusion and chooses Godalming as the preferred donor not only because of his close relationship to Lucy, nor because he is "so young and strong," but also for his "blood so pure" (114). Van Helsing seems to make reference to Godalming's aristocratic status, shared by none of the novel's other major characters except Dracula. Here, too, the exchange of blood is represented as a straightforward economy, in which the life-force lost to one equals the vitality gained by another: Seward comments that "after a bit I began to grow anxious, for the loss of blood was telling on Arthur, strong man as he was. It gave me an idea of what terrible strain Lucy's system must have undergone that what weakened Arthur only partially restored her" (114).

If *Dracula* tends to exclude its middle-class characters from the order of consanguinity, it offers them an alternative in the economy of work. Having refused Seward as a donor once, Van Helsing is forced to accept him when Lucy grows weak again and Godalming is away. Yet he draws the smallest possible amount of Seward's blood necessary to restore Lucy, a restriction Seward himself protests:

> It was with a feeling of personal pride that I could see a faint tinge of colour steal back into the pallid cheeks and lips. No man knows till he experiences it, what it is to feel his own life-blood drawn away into the veins of the woman he loves.
>
> The Professor watched me critically. "That will do," he said. "Already?" I remonstrated. "You took a great deal more from Art." To which he smiled a sad sort of smile as he replied:—
>
> "He is her lover, her *fiancé*. You have work, much work, to do for her and for others; and the present will suffice." (119)

Even as Van Helsing aggressively limits Seward's donation of blood, he comforts Seward by assuring him that he may contribute in another way, by working on Lucy's behalf. Class seems to determine who furnishes which type of aid: Seward, Jonathan, Mina, and Van Helsing obsessively produce and analyze documents to solve the mysteries of Lucy's weakness and Dracula's whereabouts; Godalming's contributions are limited to his blood and his title, which he uses to command the obedience of clerks and customs agents. And if the aristocratic economy of blood is a zero-sum game, where one's gain directly equals another's loss, the middle-class economy of work inspiringly promises not only to bind people together in common effort, but to allow them to produce something greater than the sum of its parts. Having noted Dracula's

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[15] Franco Moretti similarly notes the alignment between the Count and an ostensibly outdated economic order, even as he complicates a straightforward reading of Dracula as aristocrat. Noting that Dracula "is a saver, an ascetic, an upholder of the Protestant ethic," Moretti reads the vampire as figure for capital rather than an aristocrat (91). Yet the Count, he notes, is set at odds with Britishness and the "healthy" capitalism celebrated by Victorian ideology; Dracula, Moretti argues, represents monopoly capitalism, stigmatized as "the *past* of competition, the middle ages" (93). Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, revised ed., trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, and David Miller (New York: Verso, 1988).

superior capacities in almost every arena, Van Helsing attempts to fortify his fellow vampire fighters by reminding them of the value of teamwork: "This vampire which is amongst us is of himself so strong in person as twenty men; he is of more cunning than mortal, for his cunning be the growth of ages; he have still all the aids of necromancy…Well, you know what we have to contend against; but we, too, are not without strength. We have on our side the power of combination—a power denied to the vampire kind" (209-210). The primitive economies Dracula represents—whether the literal economy of aristocratic exploitation or the figurative economy of blood and life-force—have clear winners and losers. By contrast, work, as Van Helsing envisions it, benefits all involved.

Work is wholesome not only because it creates a productive social order, which binds its participants together through the promise of universal benefit. Van Helsing's exchange with Seward also suggests work as the safe alternative to a more eroticized—and therefore more dangerous—form of relation. Van Helsing's disapproving gaze ("the Professor watched me critically") seems to respond to Seward's undue excitement as the transfusion takes place. Here, as in Dracula's exploits, the transfer of blood is not simply a matter of bodily necessity, but an occasion for desire and pleasure. Seward's "feeling of personal pride" as he watches Lucy's lips and cheeks redden, like his designation of the act as one whose nature "no man knows…till he experiences it," suggest that he experiences the transfusion less as a medical procedure and more as a sexual consummation. Van Helsing prematurely interrupts the process and enjoins Seward to work on Lucy's behalf instead. In doing so, he both anticipates the Freudian account of sublimation, in which antisocial impulses are redirected towards socially acceptable ends, and recapitulates middle-class Victorian pronouncements that cast work as the remedy for all evils.

Work is a cure that Seward has already prescribed for himself. Earlier in the novel, smarting from Lucy's rejection of his own proposal, the lovesick physician proposes to heal himself by working harder:

> To me it seems only yesterday that my whole life ended with my new hope, and that truly I began a new record. So it will be until the Great Recorder sums me up and closes my ledger account with a balance to profit or loss. Oh, Lucy, Lucy, I cannot be angry with you, nor can I be angry with my friend whose happiness is yours; but I must only wait on hopeless and work. Work! work! (71)

Seward's work is the running of a lunatic asylum: if his daily tasks are oriented towards managing the unruly impulses of others, his final injunction suggests that work might also offer a structure for managing his own. As we will see, this conjunction of self-command and power over marginalized others connects Seward's work in the asylum to discourses of colonial administration across the British Empire. For now, though, I want to focus on a second conjunction, at once more particular and more vital to the novel: the elision of work and recording.

Seward's invocation of the "Great Recorder" who will someday "close my ledger account with a balance to profit or loss" may well be more ironic than the exhortation to work that follows it, especially given Seward's secular outlook. But the metonymic movement between recording and work expresses an earnest conviction, shared by all the novel's middle-class characters, that record-keeping is not a burdensome bureaucratic requirement, nor even a necessary afterthought to meaningful professional tasks, but socially useful, personally validating work in itself. The novel's own representation of work supports this view. So much of the labor *Dracula* describes its characters doing consists of producing records, copying them, or translating them from one form to another that to trivialize record-keeping would be to

undermine the pragmatic selflessness for which Stoker idealizes Seward, Harker, and especially Harker's saintly yet hard-headed wife Mina. Seward opens his entry on Lucy's demise by emphasizing his willful determination to keep his records current, no matter his emotional state:

> *20 September*.—Only resolution and habit can let me make an entry tonight. I am too miserable, too low-spirited, too sick of the world and all in it, including life itself, that I would not care if I heard this moment the flapping wings of the angels of death. And he has been flapping those grim wings to some purpose of late—Lucy's mother and Arthur's father, and now...Let me get on with my work." (144, ellipsis in original)

The "work" in question turns out to be a detailed account of the entire evening; why such a record is materially necessary, within the fictional framework of the novel, is never clear, as Lucy is not one of Seward's patients. Of course, the conceit by which the novel itself is composed of a number of found documents requires that one such document narrate this critical event. But to attribute Seward's zeal for recording to the novel's format is to beg the question. Why would Stoker, best known for his work in the theatre, place such emphasis on textuality? Why create fictional structures of mediation that distance the reader from the novel's spectacular events? And even if we take the novel's multimedia format as a given, why do Stoker's characters so frequently remark on the difficulty of producing these media?

To begin to answer, we might recall the proximity of unconscious cerebration to madness in *Dracula*. "I am all in a sea of wonders," writes Jonathan upon his arrival at Castle Dracula. "I doubt; I fear; I think strange things which I dare not confess to my own soul" (24). Only three days later, he notes with alarm that "I am beginning to feel this nocturnal existence tell on me. It is destroying my nerve. I start at my own shadow, and am full of all sorts of horrible imaginings" (38). Unconstrained attention holds forth the thrilling and dangerous possibility of transgressing the Victorian social order. At its most extreme, as in Lucy's sleepwalking, this transgression takes the form of indulging impulses, especially sexual impulses, deemed socially unacceptable. But movement beyond the social order can consist in deviant perception as well as deviant action: Jonathan's repeated concern that "this strange night-existence is telling on me" neatly couples the two since, as Nina Auerbach notes, "the word *strange* was often suffused with homoerotic undercurrents in late Victorian England."[16] The "strange things" and "horrible imaginings" Jonathan fears confessing to himself might be erotic fantasies of Dracula or actual impressions of the castle—the latter written off as nightmarish delusions due to their departure from Victorian understandings of the material world.

The divergence between his own sense impressions and a socially recognized reality proves as alarming to Jonathan as any material or erotic threat Dracula might pose. Fresh from his encounter with the female vampires, impossible according to his own Protestant cosmology, Jonathan writes that "Whilst I live here there is but one thing to hope for: that I may not go mad, if, indeed, I be not mad already...Feeling as though my own brain were unhinged or as if the shock had come which must end in its undoing, I turn to my diary for repose. The habit of entering accurately must help to soothe me" (41). More than a soothing ritual, Jonathan's diary-writing has already appeared as a mechanism of internalized discipline over unruly attention: earlier, Jonathan affirms the usefulness of the practice in helping him to "be prosaic so far as facts can be; it will help me to bear up, and imagination must not run riot with me. If it does I am lost" (30). In a similar moment of anxious, wild imagining, Mina observes that "it soothes me to express myself here; it is like whispering to one's self and listening at the same time. And there is also something about the shorthand symbols that makes it different from writing" (72). If the

[16] *Dracula*, ed. Auerbach, 30 n.4.

image of simultaneous whispering and listening suggests a superego who maintains control over one's impressions even as they unfold, the shorthand marks this as a specifically professional form of discipline. Indeed, the first thing we learn about Jonathan is that his diary is kept in shorthand—a note that seems unnecessary and even obtrusive, given that the words we see are rendered in ordinary language. The characters' marked use of shorthand aligns with their determined adherence to a professionalized mode of attention: one that is prosaic and methodical, and thereby prevents imagination from "run[ning] riot."

If the process of record-keeping reimposes conscious control over unruly movements of thought, so too does the record itself promote the reconciliation of aberrant impressions with a commonly shared sense of reality. Having just observed Dracula descend his castle wall headfirst, clinging to the stones like a lizard, Jonathan proclaims that he must "begin with facts—bare, meager facts, *verified by books and figures*, and of which there can be no doubt. I must not confuse them with experiences which will have to rest on my own observation or my memory of them" (35-6, my emphasis). Faced with the divergence of his own experience from officially consecrated knowledge, Jonathan resolves to defer to the former. And yet this determination to bracket the evidence of his senses is anything but steadying: having succeeded in a daring escape from the castle, Jonathan arrives in Budapest "suffering from a violent brain fever," so unable to give order to his own thoughts that a hospital nurse must write on his behalf of his "ravings...of wolves and poison and blood" (95). He resolves never to think of Transylvania again, but the repression proves psychically unsustainable, and Jonathan falls into a hysterical fit upon seeing a man who resembles Dracula in London.

Only the diary restores his sanity by reconciling the evidence of his senses with a collective understanding of reality—if not the reality "verified by books and figures," at least a reality confidently proclaimed by an authority whose book-learning, evinced by the trail of letters that follow his name, far exceeds Jonathan's own. Having read Jonathan's journal, an understandable response to his sudden outburst, Mina immediately forms the less explicable resolution to "get my typewriter this very hour and begin transcribing. Then we shall be ready for other eyes if required" (161). As Stoker's narrative synchronicity would have it, Mina meets Van Helsing only two days later to discuss the apparently unrelated matter of Lucy's death, whereupon she gathers her courage to ask for his opinion about Jonathan's journal. "Strange and terrible as it is, it is *true*!" he writes the same evening (167), a confirmation Jonathan describes as having "cured me already": "I was in doubt, and then everything took a hue of unreality, and I did not know what to trust, even the evidence of my own senses. Not knowing what to trust, I did not know what to do; and so only had to keep on working in what had hitherto been the groove of my life. The groove ceased to avail me, and I mistrusted myself" (168). "That terrible record" provides the means for reconciling his deviant sensory impressions with a shared reality (161), for bringing his "strange night-existence" in Transylvania back into alignment with the familiar, domestic groove of his life. In translating Jonathan's "foreign journal" from shorthand into typewritten pages, Mina does indeed take part in the process of making Jonathan's experiences not just ready for but legible to "other eyes" (161).

Of course, the "other eyes" in question hardly represent a standard Victorian conception of reality. But Jonathan and his eventual allies maintain a surprising faith in documentation alone to legitimate their apparently cultish delusions to the appropriate British authorities, should it ever be required. Preparing for a battle to the death with Dracula, Jonathan writes in his diary that "in case any suspicion of murder were aroused...this very script may be evidence to come between us and a rope" (290). Indeed, the group relies on the power of records so unthinkingly that they

are "struck" to realize, upon reopening the safe and reexamining the papers seven years later, "that in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of type-writing, except the later notebooks of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing's memorandum. We could hardly ask anyone, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story" (327). Even this final admission does not contradict the group's belief in the capacity of records to legitimate niche perceptions of reality. Jonathan finds fault with the record primarily because it consists mostly of type-written copies; such a fixation on the lack of authentic documents implies that the originals would, in fact, constitute acceptable proof even "of so wild a story."

Jonathan's diary does more than render his aberrant impressions legible: it also makes them socially useful. The Transylvania diary proves crucial in allowing the group to discern Dracula's motives, chase him from Britain, and eventually vanquish him altogether. For Stoker, the work of record-keeping is reproductive in the most abstract as well as the most immediate sense. The "horrible imaginings" of Jonathan's Transylvanian life do not carry him outside the Victorian social order, but rather put him at its service, so that the key to the salvation of the Empire turns out to lie in the "strange night-existence" of a lonely clerk on the verge of madness.

Distraction and the threat of the East

Stoker's opening image of the isolated, desperate, and possibly delusional clerk far from home would have been familiar to his late Victorian readers. Popular representations of the British Raj expressed both pity and alarm over the character flaws said to beset English arrivals in India—often, especially after 1857, bureaucrats in the civil service. All Europeans who traveled East were seen as subject to a "mysterious transformation" that distinguished them from compatriots at home. But the English were regarded as especially susceptible to nervous disorders while abroad, as Waltraud Ernst notes in her history of colonial psychiatry in South Asia:

> The melancholic traits to which "inhabitants of England were doomed by geographic accident" were said to have made it difficult for them to endure solitude or "the ordinary misfortunes of existence"—let alone unfamiliar circumstances "in a clime so remote from their own." The upshot was the exaggeration of those character traits which in the British Isles were looked upon merely as signs of eccentricity or a sensitive or nervous disposition.[17]

Ranajit Guha connects British transplants' anxiety to a persistent inability to organize their perception of an overwhelming foreign landscape, suffused with jumbled and disorienting stimuli. Commenting on British army officer Francis Yeats-Brown's memoir *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, Guha argues that "the customary coding by color is mediated here by a sentiment which could easily have passed as fear were it not for the fact that he identifies no particular object as frightening. What comes through is rather an acknowledgment of being overwhelmed by the scale of things."[18] Yeats-Brown himself recalls that "riding through the densely packed bazarres of Bareilly City...passing village temples, cantering across the magical plains that stretched all the way to the Himalayas, I shivered at the millions and intensities and secrecies of India...I liked to end my day at the club, a world whose limits were known...Outside, people prayed and plotted

[17] Waltraud Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: Colonial Psychiatry in South Asia, 1800-58* (New York: Anthem, 2010), 2.
[18] Ranajit Guha, "Not at Home in Empire," *Critical Inquiry* 23.3 (Spring 1997): 482-493, 483.

and mated and died on a scale unimaginable and uncomfortable."[19] Yeats-Brown's shiver might at first appear as a reaction of delight to the "magical" landscapes he has just described. But the sentences that follow prompt us to reevaluate the shiver, understanding it on second reading as a marker of sublimity or even terror. The romance of the travelogue, with its punctuated list of familiarly picturesque sights, yields suddenly to anguish as Yeats-Brown confronts a mass of objects and events he can barely distinguish, let alone categorize.

Arriving in Transylvania, Jonathan Harker is similarly overwhelmed by stimuli he cannot organize. He begins his account in the register of the travelogue, exalting at "a country which was full of beauty of every kind" (11): "little towns or castles on the top of steep hills such as we see in old missals" (11) and "crowd[s] of picturesque figures" (14). Yet he quickly finds himself vexed by the region's mixture of languages and diversity of ethnic groups—what Dracula later refers to as Transylvania's "whirlpool of European races" (33). Indeed, Jonathan's lament the night he meets Dracula that "I am all in a sea of wonders" (24) is prefigured by his earlier description of Transylvania as an "imaginative whirlpool" (10): his head spins at his own inability to impose order on what he sees and hears. Even the Transylvanian landscape resists categorization and interpretation: looking towards the horizon during his journey to Dracula's castle, Jonathan writes that "the sun is high over the distant horizon, which seems jagged, whether with trees or hills I know not, for it is so far off that big things and little are mixed" (13).

Transylvania is, of course, in Europe—albeit "one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe" (10), which Jonathan reaches only upon "leaving the West and entering the East" (9). Yet beyond the novel's own markers of Dracula's homeland as foreign and Eastern (of which more to come), the particular situation of Transylvania in 1897 made it an especially suitable figure for British colonial space. As Stephen Arata points out, Stoker's decision to locate Dracula's castle in Transylvania is particularly marked, since a previous draft had situated it in the Austrian region of Styria—a detail Stoker adopted from the earlier vampire novels of Sheridan le Fanu. Arata notes that the new setting "resonated in ways that Styria did not," adding that "Transylvania was known primarily as part of the vexed 'Eastern Question' that so obsessed British foreign policy in the 1880s and '90s."[20] Like the rest of the Balkans, Transylvania was a site of intense interest for political and military leaders looking to maintain Britain's sphere of influence. Predictions of the Ottoman Empire's imminent collapse led Victorian political strategists to worry that the resulting power vacuum would be filled by the Russian Empire, Britain's antagonist in the "Great Game" of accumulating territory in Central and South Asia. By building its strength in Southeastern Europe and the Near East, Russia would thus consolidate its control over Central Asia and position itself to threaten British authority in Afghanistan and India.

The Balkans were thus metonymically linked to India for many late Victorian readers. *Dracula* also emphasizes the metaphorical resonances between Transylvania and British colonial space. An independent principality from 1765 to 1867, Transylvania lost its autonomy in the compromise between the Habsburg Monarchy and Hungarian political leaders that created the Austro-Hungarian Empire; from 1867 it was administered from Budapest, and officially ruled by the Habsburg Emperor Franz Joseph I. The compromise was opposed by Transylvania's Romanian majority, who found themselves governed by two sets of ethnic, linguistic, and

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[19] Francis Yeats-Brown, *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (New York: Viking, 1930), 5, qtd. Guha, "Not at Home in Empire," 483.
[20] Arata, "The Occidental Tourist," 627.

religious others, as well as by much of the Empire's ethnically Hungarian population, who saw it as ceding too much power to the Habsburgs. Before any of Dracula's supernatural qualities are clearly defined, Stoker introduces the Count as a man fiercely proud of his bloodline, and particularly of his family's legacy of fighting back against foreign rulers. "Fools, fools!" Dracula decries would-be invaders. "What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?...Is it any wonder that we were a conquering race; that we were proud; that when the Magyar, the Lombard, the Avar, the Bulgar, or the Turk poured his thousands on our frontiers, we drove them back?" (34).

Dracula is himself not a member of the Romanian majority, whom he refers to as "Wallachs," but of the Szekelys, a minority group of the Hungarian people, themselves a minority within Transylvania. Stoker represents this complicated set of identifications as leading less to a particular national or even ethnic allegiance than to a determination to thwart the aims of multinational empires in general. In Dracula's telling, the Szekelys fights together with the Magyars against the Turks before (more unexpectedly) taking sides with the Turks against the Magyars. The conclusion of his speech suggests that Dracula sees the Szekelys' fluctuating alliances less as a question of disloyalty than of a general distaste for whichever empires currently dominate: "Our spirit would not brook that we were not free. Ah, young sir, the Szekelys—and the Dracula as their heart's blood, their brains, and their swords—can boast a record that mushroom growths like the Hapsburgs and the Romanoffs can never reach" (35). In its call to arms against the "mushroom growths" of empire, Dracula's speech evokes the specter that haunted British popular culture of the late nineteenth century: the colonized subject who rises up in a bid for power and revenge.

Anxieties about this possibility often manifested themselves in the reverse colonization plot, which Arata sees as a hallmark of late Victorian popular literature. Reverse colonization narratives imagine Britain besieged by a non-Western other, usually stereotyped as primitive and often associated with a region of British colonization, who is bent on infiltrating the imperial capital. Once there, the invader plans to turn imperial domination on its head, becoming the agent of violence rather than its object. If Guha identifies anxiety as a governing affect for Englishmen in India and other colonial spaces, Arata argues that, by the late nineteenth century, the anxieties of empire had also come home to the ordinary citizens of metropolitan Britain.

Dracula evokes both modes of imperial anxiety. Against this background of persistent unease, the practice of rational attention attains particular significance. Like many Gothic novelists, Stoker initially leaves open the possibility that Jonathan's "horrible imaginings" are, in fact, imaginings: the products of a stereotypically nervous English disposition exacerbated by the isolation and confusion of life abroad. Such scenes of untrustworthy perception reveal that heightened attention is not necessarily more accurate in its apprehension of the external world. If Dracula is one of many anti-colonial insurgents whose real or imagined presence requires the empire to marshal its defenses, *Dracula* suggests that this is easier said than done. The novel's opening chapters reveal that marshaling one's defenses creates a state of alarm that is itself a form of vulnerability, as it weakens one's confidence in one's own senses.[21]

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[21] Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855) offers a parallel representation of the process by which the anxieties of empire lead a dominant group to distrust their own senses. Floating off the coast of Chile, Captain Amasa Delano and his crew encounter a Spanish slave ship in need of assistance. Initial encounters with the crew suggest that something is amiss. But the desolate frontier setting combines with the sight of the slave ship—a physical reminder of the precarious structure of American racial dictatorship—to create an atmosphere of anxiety so heightened Delano can no longer distinguish between objective indicators of danger and delusions of his anguished imagination. Shortly after boarding the slave ship, Delano thinks he sees a Spanish officer quickly conceal something under his

As I've argued, the practice of record-keeping imposes valuable constraints on an otherwise unruly imagination, substituting methodical, moderated attention for the delusions of hypersensitivity, and giving order to the otherwise overwhelming sensory impressions of colonial space. Stoker also finds in administrative labor a more material remedy for the anxieties of empire. Where Arata and others attribute the novel's victorious resolution to the reassertion of masculinist heroism, *Dracula* actually offers a far more mundane yet no less ideological account of Britain's triumph over an Eastern menace: the empire is saved by paperwork.

Paper travails

Dracula resembles other late-Victorian adventure narratives—from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* to Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*—in its staging of an expedition to an exoticized non-Western region and its glorification of a homosocial band of British explorers. But it departs from adventure conventions in its replacement of glamorous heroics with ordinary administrative tasks. At times, this substitution is so abrupt as to be almost comedic. As his crew prepares to depart for Transylvania in pursuit of Dracula, Van Helsing gives a series of rousing speeches. In his characteristic rhetoric, which makes up in pomposity what it lacks in idiomaticity, Van Helsing compares the group's effort to that of the Crusaders, telling his allies that they are "ministers of God's own wish: that the world, and men for who His Son died, will not be given over to monsters, whose very existence would defame Him. He have allowed us to redeem one soul already, and we go out to redeem more. Like them we shall travel towards the sunrise; and like them, if we fall, we fall in good cause" (278). Perhaps the most explicitly racist moment of the entire novel, Van Helsing's pronouncement not only idealizes the Crusades as a quest to redeem souls, but also aligns his enemy with theirs, conflating Dracula and other inhuman "monsters, whose very existence would defame [God]," with the Muslim inhabitants of the Near East.[22] In this battle between civilization and barbarism, Van Helsing reminds his listeners the next day, they must be absolutely resolute, knowing that they may fail, but trusting

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shirt. "Has he been robbing the trunks of the dead cabin passengers? But if so, he would hardly wear one of the stolen articles on board ship here," Delano reflects. "Ah, ah—if now that was, indeed, a secret sign I saw passing between this suspicious fellow and his captain awhile since; if I could only be certain that in my uneasiness my senses did not deceive me, then—" He does not finish the thought, and his ambivalence about his own senses remains unresolved for nearly all of the novel. Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, in *Melville's Short Novels*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: Norton, 2002), 55.

[22] For readers of the 1890s, Van Helsing's association would have been underwritten by xenophobic caricatures of far more recent provenance than the Crusades: the abuses of Ottoman soldiers were graphically chronicled in the British popular press as a result of the Eastern Question. In response to pragmatists like Benjamin Disraeli, who argued for the necessity of defending the precarious Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against Russia, self-proclaimed "humanitarians" like William Ewart Gladstone issued lengthy screeds condemning Ottoman "barbarism." In an extremely popular 1876 pamphlet entitled *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, Gladstone enjoined readers to "let the Turks carry away their abuses in the only possible way, namely by carrying off themselves…This thorough riddance, this most blessed deliverance, is the only reparation we can make to the memory of those heaps on heaps of dead; to the violated purity alike of matron, of maiden and of child; to the civislisation which has been affronted and shamed; to the laws of God, or if you like, of Allah; to the moral sense of mankind at large. There is not a criminal in any European gaol, there is not a cannibal in the South Sea Islands whose indignation would not arise and overboil at the recital of that which has been done." R. W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question: A Study in Diplomacy and Party Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1971), 75. Also relevant are the extensive correspondences between Dracula and the anti-Semitic representations of Jews that circulated in nineteenth-century Europe; these form the primary subject of Halberstam's "Technologies of Monstrosity."

that God will aid those who do His work: “None of us shall lag behind or pause from any fear. I do but say what we may do—what we must do. But, indeed, indeed we cannot say what we shall do. There are so many things which may happen and their ways and their ends are so various that until the moment we may not say. We shall all be armed, in all ways; and when the time for the end has come, our effort shall not be lack.” His grandiloquence comes to an unexpectedly mundane end, however, with his exhortation to the others to put their affairs in order and his final declaration that “as for me, my own affairs are regulate; and as I have nothing else to do, I shall go and make arrangement for the travel. I shall have all tickets and so forth for our journey.” The drama of who will buy the train tickets appears as the natural culmination of the crisis of Western civilization. (285)

In a parallel juxtaposition of the operatic and the mundane, the characters learn through a telegram that Dracula's ship has entered the Romanian port of Galatz. Finally poised for their long-awaited meeting with the enemy, the characters find themselves overcome with the gravity of the moment: "Van Helsing raised his hands over his head for a moment, as though in remonstrance with the Almighty, but he said not a word...Lord Godalming grew very pale, and sat breathing heavily. I was myself half stunned and looked in wonder at one after another...Quincey Morris tightened his belt with that quick movement which I knew so well; in our old wandering days it meant 'action.'" The characters' reactions suggest a progression from awe and fear to determined heroism—a trajectory reinforced by the final description of Jonathan Harker smiling "the dark bitter smile of one who is without hope; but at the same time his action belied his words, for his hands instinctively sought the hilt of the great Kukri knife and rested there." Seward, who records the scene in his diary, explicitly invokes the register of imperial adventure through his reminder of the "old wandering days," when he, Morris, and Harker traveled together through the Americas and Asia. Jonathan's gesture towards the Nepalese Kukri knife suggests he still puts his faith in the trappings of frontier romance and the assumption they reinforce: that the heroic, masculine action of Westerners can subdue even the most mysterious and threatening lands.

Despite this evocation of dramatic conquest, however, the heroic demonstration that follows is far more banal. Van Helsing interrupts the group's reverie by asking what time the next train starts for Galatz. The answer points to a new mode of heroism and an unexpected hero:

> “At 6.30 tomorrow morning!" We all stared, for the answer came from Mrs Harker.
>
> “How on earth do you know?” said Art.
>
> “You forget—or perhaps you do not know, though Jonathan does and so does Dr Van Helsing—that I am the train fiend. At home in Exeter I always used to make up the timetables, so as to be helpful to my husband. I found it so useful sometimes, that I always make a study of the timetables now. I knew that if anything were to take us to Castle Dracula we should go by Galatz, or at any rate through Bucharest, so I learned the times very carefully. Unhappily there are not many to learn, as the only train tomorrow leaves as I say.”
>
> “Wonderful woman!” murmured the Professor. (293)

In his narration of the scene, Seward, like Van Helsing, understands Mina’s mastery of the timetables as a genuinely remarkable feat. The character most recognized for making a virtuosic intervention at a critical moment isn’t the man who impulsively wields a Kukri knife, but the woman who’s patiently studied the train schedule. Mina’s almost superhuman aptitude for remembering such details also carries a sinister connotation: the truly superhuman Dracula benefits from an uncanny knowledge of British train timetables, gleaned from a Bradshaw railway guide. Yet even this negative image reinforces the esteem Stoker grants tedious

administrative labor: both the empire's foreign invaders and domestic defenders consolidate their power less by physical might than through mundane secretarial work.

Today, such rote, unglamorous labor might be stereotyped as women's work. In *Dracula*, however, Mina is in fact lauded for what Van Helsing dubs her "man-brain," and male characters like Jonathan and Seward are equally likely to subsume themselves in it. Jonathan, for instance, devotes a lengthy diary entry to chronicling his efforts to verify a single number, complete with such unexpected twists as "Their tally was exact with the list," "I saw that their tally was correct with the original invoice," and "Here again I found the tally agreeing exactly" (201). That he would spend multiple days on such a mundane task, or devote multiple pages to describing its every development, is hardly surprising: for the middle-class orphan Jonathan, profession is identity, and his profession is that of solicitor. What *is* remarkable is the fact that Stoker includes such a detailed account of such an unglamorous exploit in an ostensibly plot-driven, mass-market novel, from which an introductory note promises that "all needless matters have been eliminated."

At times, even characters devoted to bureaucratic work seem to question its outsize importance in the novel. After Dracula attacks Mina, forcing her to drink his blood and thereby beginning her transformation into a vampire, Van Helsing unfolds a complicated plan for vanquishing him, beginning by accounting for all the boxes of earth he has brought from Transylvania. Fearful for his wife, Jonathan pleads with Van Helsing for more immediate action:

> Here I started up for I could not contain myself at the thought that the minutes and seconds so preciously laden with Mina's life and happiness were flying from us, since whilst we talked action was possible. But Van Helsing held up his hand warningly... "We shall act, and act with desperate quick, when the time has come. But think, in all probable the key of the situation is in that house in Piccadilly. The Count may have many houses which he has bought. Of them he will have deeds of purchase, keys and other things. He will have paper that he write on; he will have his book of cheques. (255)

Mina concurs with Van Helsing, stressing that Jonathan's skills in information-economy work are more crucial to her survival than any physical protection he might offer. Jonathan reports Mina's insistence that he join the crew searching Dracula's house, rather than staying to defend her, because "there might be some law matter in which I could be useful; that amongst the Count's papers might be some clue which I could understand out of my experience in Transylvania" (257). Mina reminds Jonathan that his capabilities as a solicitor—his ability to make sense of administrative records—are more vital means of defense than any obviously heroic feats he might perform for her sake.

Stoker had ample personal motivation for affirming the heroic character of bureaucratic work. Although he was best known during his lifetime for his work managing the Lyceum Theatre in London, Stoker began his career well outside the London arts world, as an officer in the Anglo-Irish civil service. Indeed, his first published book was not a literary work at all, but an 1879 manual entitled *The Duties of Clerks of the Petty Sessions of Ireland*, based on his experience as Inspector of the Irish magistrates' courts. Though Stoker himself would later refer to the manual as a "dry-as-dust book," its introduction espouses an earnest conviction in the importance of bureaucratic procedure:

> Experience has shown me that with several hundred men performing daily a multitude of acts of greater or lesser importance, a certain uniformity of method is necessary to lighten their own labour and the labour of those to whom is entrusted the auditing of their accounts and

> returns. Such subjects as the advisability of uniform filing of papers or folding of returns, of using dots instead of 0's in money columns, or of forwarding returns at the earliest instead of the latest date allowable, may seem too trivial to treat of; yet every Clerk would do well to remember that a rigid adherence to the advice on such matters which I have given would facilitate the audit of the returns almost in the measure of the services of a Clerk in the Registrar's office.
>
> Amongst the multitude of matters, great and small, treated of, many things may have been forgotten or passed over in ignorance, but the difficulty of collating the accumulated facts and theories resulting from the operations of the last twenty-seven years, and from the founding and development of a great and effective system of procedure which must sooner or later be adopted for the whole British Empire, must be my excuse for sins of commission or of omission.
>
> Each Clerk can give valuable aid for the future by calling the attention of the Department to any fact requiring alteration or to any blot or weakness in the system, and by suggesting amendments. My part has been to formulate a Code by the collecting and the collating of an immense mass of materials, the major part of which, having been once carefully examined, need never be referred to again. The perfecting of the work will be aided by those who systematize and record their experience, and must rest with other hands than mine.[23]

If Jonathan's early diaries recall popular images of nervous and homesick civil servants in the far reaches of the Empire, much of his work with Mina recalls Stoker's description of his own administrative labor here, particularly in the "collecting and collating of an immense mass of materials." If Stoker carries out this charge for his manual, it is Jonathan and especially Mina who complete it in his novel: according to *Dracula*'s fictional conceit, the "mass of typewriting" that they compile and transcribe becomes the novel itself. The two heroic bureaucrats not only conquer Dracula, but also recapitulate the far less glamorous efforts of Stoker's early life.

Stoker's decision to make administrative work the most consistently recurring concern of his novel touches matters beyond his own career, however. In extolling his work to develop "a great and effective system of procedure which must sooner or later be adopted for the whole British Empire," Stoker articulates a central point of late Victorian imperialist ideology: a belief that both the practical endurance and the moral virtue of British colonial rule lay in the Empire's administrative capabilities. If the British Raj largely failed either to understand its Indian subjects or to develop a stable structure of order, Jon Wilson argues, "the British used paper as a surrogate for authority…asserting power in census reports and judicial decisions, regulations and surveys. By 1940 more than 400 different ledgers were being maintained in each district office in the province of Bengal, and that number does not include the register of things like birth, death and company directorships held by other departments…Once official writing could be reproduced by printing and typewriters, the British civil service in India became a massive publishing house. Asserting power in reams of writing was a way to mitigate the chaos that British policies and interests had created by creating order in a small realm that was closest to hand" (11). The idea that the order created within census reports extended to the world beyond them had little correspondence with material reality: Wilson's main argument is that the British Raj was always more chaotic, more violent, and more driven by individual impulse and desire than its administrators wanted to admit. All that is to say that the vision of the empire's power as

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[23] Bram Stoker, introduction to *The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions in Ireland* (Dublin: Office of the Registrar of Petty Sessions Clerks, 1879).

resting in its orderly paperwork was ideological: it mystified the realities of violent domination and installed, in its place, an image of efficient and methodical management.

This ideological substitution is reproduced in *Dracula*. The novel inverts the usual hierarchies of adventure literature, giving strikingly little space to moments of heroic action. Yes, *Dracula* ends with a dramatic slash of the Kukri knife amidst desolate mountains—an event and a geography emblematic of the frontier adventure narrative. But the recounting of the overland chase after Dracula, which culminates in the swordfight, occupies only the last 18 of the novel's 309 pages. The bulk of the pursuit consists, as we have already seen, in minor administrative tasks: finding and killing the undead Lucy by compiling relevant articles from various newspapers; tracking the boxes from the port in Yorkshire to Dracula's buildings in London using invoices; keeping apprised on Dracula's whereabouts at sea through telegrams and shipping reports.

Indeed, even the Crew's final martial victory is explicitly predicated on an earlier display of administrative prowess. The crew arrive in Galatz too late to catch Dracula, and are unsure what route he will take from there to his castle. While the men, finding themselves at a loss, rest from their travels, Mina compiles all the available documents and determines "to go over all carefully, and perhaps I may arrive at some conclusion." An ellipsis later, she announces excitedly that "I do believe that under God's providence I have made a discovery," but rather than recording it at once or even announcing it to her companions, Mina proceeds to compose an intricately structured memorandum, complete with subheadings and bullet points, which she presents for the group to read and which Stoker includes in its complete form. I will not be quite so generous here, as even the first subheading is sufficient to demonstrate how starkly this moment of triumph contrasts with the dramatic victories of conventional adventure stories:

> *Mina Harker's Memorandum*
> (ENTERED IN HER JOURNAL)
>
> *Ground of inquiry.*—Count Dracula's problem is to get back to his own place.
> *(a)* He must be *brought back* by someone. This is evident; for had he power to move himself as he wished he could go either as man, or wolf, or bat, or in some other way. He evidently fears discovery or interference, in the state of helplessness in which he must be—confined as he is between dawn and sunset in his wooden box.
> *(b) How is he to be taken?*—Here a process of exclusions may help us. By road, by rail, by water?
> 1. *By Road.*—There are endless difficulties, especially in leaving a city.
> *(x)* There are people; and people are curious, and investigate. A hint, a surmise, a doubt as to what might be in the box, would destroy him.
> *(y)* There are, or there might be, customs and octroi officers to pass.
> *(z)* His pursuers might follow. This is his greatest fear; and in order to prevent his being betrayed he has repelled, so far as he can, even his victim—me!

Mina's careful deductive reasoning replicates the techniques of a detective like Sherlock Holmes. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, however, such techniques often appear as acrobatics, both because Holmes presents the conclusion in all its startling glory *before* unfolding the chain of reasoning that led him to it, and because Holmes reveals his results in a face-to-face dialogue, which gives as much attention to Watson's desire for a satisfying answer is as it does to the answer itself. Here, by contrast, the conclusion—Dracula will likely return to his castle by water—appears wholly mundane by the time it arrives: so thoroughly and dispassionately has it

been explicated. Stoker not only neglects to deliver the surprise and satisfaction of revelation, but replaces dialogue or narrative—the most obvious and potentially lively methods of conveying new information—with a dry, bloodless memorandum. (304)

And yet it is on such memoranda, Stoker's novel suggests, that the fate of the empire depends. Though Van Helsing's crew is scraped together from acquaintances, they present themselves not as individualist frontiersmen or renegade private eyes, but as an alternative bureaucracy. "“What is to be done is not for police or of the customs. It must be done by us alone and in our own way,” says Van Helsing, yet the characters make every effort to constitute themselves as a police force or customs office with the simple addition of a belief in vampire lore (277). Whether in “unconsciously form[ing] a sort of board or committee,” taking meeting minutes, or issuing bullet-pointed memoranda, *Dracula*'s characters reveal themselves obsessed with the procedures of administration (208). This bureaucratic habitus is perhaps most pronounced in the curious fact that, though the crew generally occupies the same house and consists of only six people, the characters spend hours writing lengthy descriptions of their daily tasks and reading the notes prepared by other characters, rather than simply telling one another what they've done. Sensing Seward’s distrust upon their first meeting, Mina does not give a verbal account of herself, but rather “light[s] on the great batch of typewriting on the table”: “’You do not know me,’ I said. ‘When you have read those papers—my own diary and my husband’s also, which I have typed—you will know me better’” (196). Similarly, Van Helsing exhorts Jonathan after a particularly eventful day to “be scribe and write him [*sic*] all down, so that when the others return from their work you can give it to them; then they shall know as we do” (297).

The characters’ odd preference for writing and reading over conversation might be explained partly by the work texts allow them to do: the work of collating information and cross-checking accounts. Competence in such tasks depends primarily not on physical prowess or even intellectual ability, but rather on the determined application of a particular mode of attention, one which I have earlier referred to as rational attention. Few modes of perception could be as teleological or methodical as the attention that Jonathan uses to verify the tallies of Dracula’s boxes, that Mina applies to deduce the Count’s destination—or, indeed, that Stoker practices in assembling his manual for petty-session clerks. And few could be more distant from the unconscious cerebration of reverie, the perceptual confusion created by unfamiliar landscapes, or the deceptive imaginings produced by hypervigilance. In *Dracula*, all three of these distracted modes open onto antisocial possibilities. Rational attention, by contrast, proves not just socially acceptable but socially useful, safeguarding the boundaries according to which Victorian society is ordered: between acceptable and deviant desire, between collective reality and individual delusion, and between upstanding Britons and the dangerous others, beyond or within the empire’s borders, who would do them harm.

Conclusion

Dracula ends amidst swirling flakes of Transylvanian snow. The crew has divided: Jonathan joins the erstwhile adventurers Seward, Morris, and Goldaming to pursue Dracula overland from Galatz, while Mina and Van Helsing go straight to his castle to destroy his lairs and watch for his arrival. Mina narrates the moment when they first catch sight of Dracula’s party racing towards home:

> "Look! Madam Mina, look! look!" I sprang up and stood beside him on the rock; he handed me his glasses and pointed. The snow was now falling more heavily, and swirled about fiercely, for a high wind was beginning to blow. However there were times when there were pauses between the snow flurries and I could see a long way round. From the height where we were it was possible to see a great distance; and far off, beyond the white waste of snow, I could see the river lying like a black ribbon in kinks and curls as it wound its way. Straight in front of us and not far off—in fact so near that I wondered we had not noticed before—came a group of mounted men hurrying along. (322)

Mina, so often celebrated as the novel's most perceptive character, here proves oddly incapable of noticing and apprehending the scene's key feature. Though Van Helsing points her in the right direction, her description lingers on the river in the distance before arriving at her primary object of interest—a sequence made stranger by the fact that this object, which she notices last, is in fact the one "straight in front" of her. This could be nothing more significant than an attempt on Stoker's part to build suspense, but for the fact that Mina remarks on the failure of her own attention in pointing out the mounted men are "so near that I wondered we had not noticed it before." Like the swirling snow, the circuitous movement of her vision suggests that the Transylvanian topography confounds Mina's usual methods of giving order to what she perceives, as it did in Jonathan's case.

No matter how well as it serves the group in Britain, rational attention never quite domesticates the disorienting foreign landscape. It does, however, prove successful in managing another disjunctive and confusing terrain: the multimedia landscape whose diverse forms give *Dracula* its counterintuitive timeliness. Seward's phonograph records and Mina and Jonathan's shorthand journals are conveniently transcribed into ordinary language and typewritten (a process Stoker does not neglect to explain within the novel's fictional framework). Yet the novel's unevenness of texture is preserved in its inclusion of other material beyond the records themselves: newspaper cuttings about an escaped zoo animal, telegrams between various characters, entries from the ship's log of a Russian merchant vessel. These documents are interspersed among the various diary fragments, which, moreover, are sometimes presented out of chronological sequence. Simply putting together *Dracula*'s narrative—deducing, for instance, that the escaped "animal" is actually the vampirized Lucy—requires the same work of cross-checking accounts that Mina and Jonathan so often perform. Indeed, Mina and Jonathan's work of compiling the various records to make a "whole connected narrative" is implicitly aligned, on multiple occasions, with the work of reading the novel (199).

Similarly, making sense of the story requires remembering and applying a long and intricate set of rules that circumscribe Dracula's movements, for no reason apparent within the novel's plot. To understand why certain courses of action are intuitive and why particular revelations provoke despair, a reader must recall that Dracula is powerless during the day; cannot enter a home unless invited in the first instance (though afterwards he is free to come and go as he pleases); can only cross running water at high or low tide; and can change himself into a mist, dust, or tiny particle (but only during the night, or exactly at sunrise, noon, and sunset). All these rules notwithstanding, Dracula may do as he pleases at unhallowed graves and within his earth-filled coffins—a cumbersome cargo he must transport with himself, since he can only make his lair from earth in which his human ancestors were buried. In "go[ing] over all carefully" and drawing up her memorandum to deduce the rationale behind Dracula's recent movements, Mina only gives concrete form to work the reader has been doing, more or less consciously, for most of the novel.

Dracula's narrative marks as professional the same instrumental, methodical form of attention its structure cultivates. Jonathan is equipped to verify the boxes' whereabouts and draw clues from the Count's papers not just because he is careful or perceptive, but also because he is trained as a solicitor. Mina similarly identifies her mode of attention with a professional practice—though the profession in question is not her own. An assistant schoolmistress before her marriage, Mina tells Lucy that her diary "is really an exercise book. I shall try to do what I see lady journalists do: interviewing and writing descriptions and trying to remember conversations" (56). Later, preparing to record a conversation with Van Helsing, Mina reflects that "I used to think I would like to practise interviewing; Jonathan's friend on the *Exeter News* told him that memory was everything in such work…Here was a rare interview; I shall try to record it *verbatim*" (163). Despite her resolution to become a domestically oriented middle-class Victorian wife, Mina cannot seem to structure her perception of the world except through the framework of a professional career.

Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of all the novel's middle-class characters is what Herbert Marcuse calls one-dimensionality. Marcuse argues that in advanced industrial society, individuals become completely identified with the roles made available to them by capitalism. They introject both the constraints and the satisfactions of capitalism, believing them to be their own incapacities and desires, and therefore cease to recognize the alienation inherent in any capitalist system. "However," Marcuse writes, "the reality constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation. The latter has become entirely objective; the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence. There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere and in all forms."[24] Because he writes from the perspective of the postwar West, most of Marcuse's examples of this all-pervading alienation pertain to the sphere of consumer capitalism: he finds the "flattening out of the contrast (or conflict) between the given and the possible" in individuals' tendency to "recognize themselves in their commodities," to "find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment."[25] (8-9). *Dracula* identifies a similar phenomenon of flattening already at work in an earlier moment of capitalism. The novel's characters find their souls in their careers as solicitors, psychiatrists, professors. Thus Nicholas Daly finds something markedly modern in *Dracula*'s glorification of alienated professional labor—Daly argues that the novel reflects "the remarkable rise of occupations that designated themselves professions in the late nineteenth century"[26] (192)—while Eric Kwan-Wai Yu notes the apparently antiquated character of the heroes' "disavowal of the darker side of labor under capitalism," especially of "solitary or alienated labor."[27] While both these accounts are accurate, neither is complete. What *Dracula*'s representation of labor actually reveals is an alienation that no longer recognizes itself as such, and thus is free to "disavow" its own darker side. But where Yu sees this disavowal as a hopeless fantasy of turning back the clock on capitalism, it actually constitutes a movement towards a one-dimensional future: anticipating twenty-first century post-industrial ideology, *Dracula*'s professionals claim to do what they love, to see no conflict between how they long to spend their time and what they must do, in a capitalist context, to provide for their material needs.

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[24] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 11.
[25] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 8-9.
[26] Nicholas Daly, "Incorporated Bodies: Dracula and the Rise of Professionalism," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 39.2 (Summer 1997): 181-203, 192.
[27] Eric Kwan-Wai Yu, "Productive Fear: Labor, Sexuality, and Mimicry in Bram Stoker's Dracula," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 48.2 (Summer 2006): 145-170, 157.

Characters subsume their lives wholly in professional roles—usually those they occupy but, as Mina's pretense of being a lady journalist demonstrates, sometimes those they only dream about. It hardly matters whether the profession in question is real or imagined, though; in fact, Mina's conception of her own record-keeping as a professional function demonstrates one-dimensionality raised to a higher degree, as it suggests that even her fantasy life has been wholly organized by the constraints of late Victorian capitalism. (Why not write simply as a form of pleasure?) Even by the standards of the twenty-first century, the middle-class characters have absurdly few interests or involvements beyond their work. Jonathan and Mina's marriage seems largely centered on collating and transcribing side by side; their only semblance of family, besides one another, is Jonathan's childless boss, who takes them into his home and leaves them his estate. Seward, meanwhile, passes his evenings "posting up my books" (129); even Quincey Morris identifies so thoroughly with his work as a frontiersman that he can only propose marriage to Lucy by asking if she won't "just hitch up alongside of me and let us go down the long road together, driving in double harness" (59).

As these examples demonstrate, the professionalization of life manifests itself in various ways: in the social bonds one forms, in the figures of speech one uses, in the leisure activities one seeks out. But *Dracula* gives particular emphasis to its effects on the practice of attention. The tendency of professional habits to circumscribe one's gaze is most pronounced in the figure of the solicitor who comes to settle Lucy's estate, a Dickensian caricature who proclaims himself "rejoiced at the result, perfectly rejoiced" that Lucy died before her mother, "for by [Mrs. Westenra] predeceasing her daughter the latter would have come into possession of the property, and, even had she only survived her mother by five minutes, her property would, in case there were no will—and a will was a practical impossibility in such a case—have been treated at her decease as under intestacy." Reflecting upon the man's inability to feel or even perform any grief at a young woman's unexpected death, Seward writes that "he was a good fellow, but his rejoicing at the one little part—in which he was officially interested—of so great a tragedy, was an object-lesson in the limitations of sympathetic understanding." (151)

Neither the reproach Seward issues Mr. Marquand nor the caricaturish monologue Stoker writes for him can conceal his similarity to the novel's heroes. Like Marquand, they rarely notice what lies beyond the bounds of "official interest." The narrative is only made possible by the fact that Jonathan ignores every warning issued by Transylvanian villagers and persists heedlessly into the mountains for the sole purpose of double-checking real-estate paperwork with Dracula—that is, for the purpose of doing his job. Moreover, even when characters are off the clock, observing the world with no defined "official interest," they nonetheless organize their impressions according to the frameworks of professional life. Lucy writes of Seward's romantic interest in her that "he says I offer him a curious psychological study" (57). Fundamental to all these professional structures of observing and recording is the practice of rational attention: the imposition of a particular end and a calculated process upon one's own noticing. And true to *Dracula*'s subsumption of life in work, the novel identifies rational attention with healthy attention, and every other form of perception as dangerous or deranged. If, in *Dracula*'s information-economy context, work consists largely in properly directed attention, so too does the novel imply that any attention worthy of the name is necessarily organized like work.

How do the principles of this highly constrained mode of attention come to structure even the observation we undertake in leisure time? How does rational attention crowd out idle noticing and unstructured reverie? *Dracula* finds one answer in the form of the novel itself. Having been asked by Van Helsing for more details of Dracula's affairs, Jonathan characteristically refrains

from giving any response in speech. Instead, he hands Van Helsing a sheaf of documents, telling him that "you can take them with you and read them in the train" (169). *Dracula* often portrays the correspondence between the novel that we are reading and the documents with which the characters occupy themselves as a literal one: the pages in front of us are ostensibly those that the characters have prepared, reproduced, and organized. Here, however, the correspondence between their documents and our novel is metaphorical, founded not on the identity of texts, but on the similarity of contexts. In the late nineteenth century, the train famously provided an ideal setting for novel-reading.

Though they share the same space, Van Helsing and the Victorian novel-reader ostensibly approach their texts with different motivations: information versus entertainment, pragmatic necessity versus escapist desire, work versus leisure. But for all the Victorian distinctions *Dracula* reifies, the novel dissolves the separation between work and leisure supposedly so crucial to the structure of Victorian life. If the novel's villain is strictly governed by the pre-industrial rhythms of sunrise and sunset, its information-economy heroes are not. *Dracula* both imagines a world in which no one is ever truly off the clock and, in the very structure of its narrative, creates one: cross-referencing *Dracula*'s rules and cross-checking its accounts, Victorian readers find an apparently idle pursuit structured by the objectives and methods of work. Far from offering a straightforward escape route, the novel provides a vehicle for bringing individuals' spare-time pursuits into closer alignment with their official interests, and for translating into the world of leisure the work of rational attention. Forget the specter of an endless vampire existence: *Dracula* anticipates the late-capitalist order in which life, a span of work unbroken by idleness or rebellion, has already all the dispiriting continuity of an eternity undead.

Chapter 3. Unfocusing History: *Nostromo* and the Politics of Inattention

"I write myself as a subject at present out of place, arriving too soon or too late (this too designating neither regret, fault, nor bad luck, but merely calling for a non-site): anachronic subject, adrift."
—Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text[1]

To be "adrift," for Barthes, carries a double meaning. The drifting subject, whose attention moves carelessly from one impression to the next, is also adrift in time, unmoored from historical specificity. Barthes suggests that drifting may in fact be a form of heightened consciousness: that it might enable a more critical reflection on the cultural and ideological narratives that the subject is ordinarily too caught up in to notice.

For other critics, however, the specter of the "anachronic subject"—and the possibility of envisioning oneself out of place and time—has decidedly more negative implications. Georg Lukács celebrates the "classical form" of the historical novel for its capacity to locate both past characters and the present reader at definite points in a historical narrative. By bringing the past it describes "to life as the prehistory of the present," this ideal novel raises the reader's historical consciousness, allowing her to realize that she, like the characters, participates in a single progressive project.[2] Lukács accordingly criticizes more recent iterations, at the boundary between realism and modernism, for their tendency to detach subjects from history. Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô*, Lukács writes, anachronistically "modernizes" the psychology of its heroine while treating its historical period as "an external, decorative, picturesque" backdrop.[3] This anachronism unsettles the alignment between the novel's own narrative and the narrative of history, so that to focus on one is to lose sight of the other. Such a novel, which sets its characters adrift in time, produces a second drifting subject in its reader, who finds herself perpetually distracted: losing focus on the novel's own plot as she attends to "social-historical events," and from history as she becomes caught up in the plot.

Frederic Jameson more explicitly links distraction with the loss of historical consciousness in his discussion of Joseph Conrad—a writer whose closest antecedent he finds in Flaubert. *Nostromo*, Jameson notes, can never seem to focus properly on the historical events it describes. For although the novel gives every indication that its central concern is the Monterist revolution in the fictional Latin American country of Costaguana, the reader catches the revolution only out of the corner of her eye.[4] The novel's tendency to focus the reader's attention away from political events, like its "associational, aleatory movement from detail to detail,"[5] makes

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[1] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 62-3.
[2] Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 53.
[3] Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 188-189.
[4] Jameson offers the example of the deposed Blanco dictator's flight from the country, writing that "a classic textualizing displacement first offers [this event] as a mere secondary detail, 'told' rather than 'shown,' and evoked in conversation as a passing example of some quite unrelated topic…only some hundreds of pages later as an absent sense-datum, the implied cause of a crowd of spectators blocking off from view some object of curiosity in the distance…in that sense it never really happens at all." Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 271-272.
[5] Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 271.

impossible "the realistic representation of history."[6] The distracted form of *Nostromo* instead effaces historical consciousness, pointing the way towards the ever-more aleatory, distracted form of high modernism, which will so fully repress history as to make it "at last…a genuine Unconscious."[7] Jameson is only able to redeem *Nostromo* by reading the novel's distraction from history symptomatically, as a product of capitalist mystification. In this way, Conrad's apparent unwillingness to focus on history felicitously becomes a representation of his own historical situation, with "the resonance of his book spring[ing] from a kind of unplanned harmony between this textual dynamic and its specific historical content: the emergence of capitalism as just such an always-already-begun dynamic…which, once in place, discredits the attempts of 'linear' history or the habits of the diachronic mind to conceive of its beginnings."[8]

This chapter challenges Jameson's claims that the distraction of *Nostromo* can only be understood as a repression of "realistic history" and a symptom of capitalism. Instead, I argue, distraction denaturalizes a wholly rationalized understanding of history, which renders the past as a linear narrative of progress towards modernity. The historical novel finds its forward-looking but equally conservative counterpart in another prominent rhetorical form of the nineteenth century: the progress narrative. Both the historical novel and the progress narrative put us in the position of looking forward to a future whose shape is already known to us. By projecting our gaze backward, the historical novel allows us to see our own present through the eyes of its characters as a longed-for future; the progress narrative encourages us to work towards a future that is wholly comprehensible from our current perspective, and thus is nothing more than the present reproduced. And both forms, I will argue, are underwritten by a rationalized structure of attention, which necessarily filters out unpredictability. Against these highly constrained forms, the distraction of *Nostromo* reintroduces a spontaneous mode of thought whose course cannot be anticipated. In doing so, the novel reopens the possibility of imagining a future that is radically different—and therefore necessarily unforeseeable—from our present standpoint.

Rationalizing politics

For *Nostromo*'s technocrats, who incessantly pledge their allegiance to the "progressive and patriotic undertaking" of modernization, the novel's events represent the inception of history in Costaguana.[9] "Has anything ever happened here for a hundred years before today?" asks the English head of the railway company, rhetorically, on the day of his apparently momentous arrival in the isolated city of Sulaco. Even if the question is meant ironically, his dismissal of Sulaco's past is absolute. When his interlocutor, Emilia Gould, politely reproaches him by describing Sulaco's importance in the colonial era, Sir John is unfazed: surely no past can have any significance compared to the shining future that awaits! "We can't give you your ecclesiastical court back again," he tells her, "but you shall have steamers, a railway, a telegraph-cable—a future in the great world which is worth infinitely more than any ecclesiastical past.

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[6] Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 280.
[7] Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 280.
[8] Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 280.
[9] "In this way only was the power of the local authorities vindicated amongst the great body of strong-limbed foreigners who dug the earth, blasted the rocks, drove the engines for the 'progressive and patriotic undertaking.'" Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, ed. Jacques Berthoud and Mara Kalnins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *N*.

You shall be brought in touch with something greater than two viceroyalties" (*N* 29). Sir John's immediate sense is practical: the technological innovations he names will literally bring Sulaco into communication with the global modernity beyond it. But the context of his remarks—the European characters' repeated promise to bring Costaguana a modernity that rivals Europe's—also suggests a more figurative interpretation. The construction of railways and telegraph cables gives Costaguana a narrative of development that aligns with those of Europe and North America. These modern improvements bring Costaguana "in touch" with the countries of "the great world" by tracing a historical narrative to parallel theirs.

Of course, the narratives can never quite be parallel. The development of a country like Costaguana not only comes after the development of a country like Great Britain, but also, according to the technocrats of *Nostromo*, takes the latter as its model. These technocrats' vision for the modernization of Costaguana thus intensifies a teleological, instrumental sensibility already present in modernization itself. If modernity, in the accounts of Max Weber and others, treats every process as a means to some external end, the modernizing efforts of *Nostromo* go further in explicitly and insistently defining the particular end towards which they work: to make Costaguana a country of "the great world," not only with railroads and telegraph-cables and profitable capitalist enterprises, but also, as we will see, with political liberalism and bourgeois democracy. The novel's technocrats regard these political conditions in much the same way they regard the railway: as the predictable result of determined planning and careful calculation.

This highly rationalized view of political transformation is articulated most clearly by Charles Gould, the owner of the silver mine at the center of the novel's plot. Despite his practical training as a mining engineer and his unwavering focus on making the San Tomé mine profitable, Gould's politics give him a reputation as an "idealist": he believes in a liberal, democratic future for Costaguana. This ideal, however, occasions a set of surprisingly practical calculations. What is necessary, Gould reasons, is a means to bring about his liberal vision; he finds that means in the mine itself. In response to Emilia Gould's distaste for the vulgar North American capitalist Holroyd, who provides the initial loan for the San Tomé mine, Gould reminds his wife that even Holroyd serves his purpose in the chain of means and ends that will bring political stability:

> What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Any one can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. (*N* 63)

Of course, Gould's attribution of agency to inanimate and abstracted "material interests" allows him to elide a critical step of his plan, and thus make it more palatable to Emilia. In the context of Holroyd's visit, Gould seems to suggest that once foreign investors have committed capital to Costaguana, they will ensure the continuance of their investment by imposing political stability from without—only in this way can "material interests" appear to ensure their own survival. Despite this elision, the practicality of Charles's plan convinces Emilia, who concludes that "he was competent; he had given a vast shape to the vagueness of her unselfish ambitions" (*N* 63). Charles channels his wife's otherwise formless desire for progress into a predictable structure, transforming it into a series of discrete means and ends.

This division of labor is stereotypically gendered: it is for Charles to think while Emilia simply feels, for him to plan while she only desires. And it is, of course, typically masculine, typically European, and typically modern to suggest that a process as complex as political

transformation could be brought under the conscious control of a small group of men. Even among modern European men, however, characters like Charles and Sir John are striking for their unwavering belief in the power of planning. For Hegel, Marx, and Lukács, history may be teleological, but its telos lies at the end of a series of contradictions. Here, the series of contradictions is reduced to a chain of intentional maneuvers. "Law, good faith, order, security" are achieved not just as an after-effect of profitable enterprise, but also according to its instrumental logic. In this scheme, the ultimate political principle is efficacy. Midway through the plot, when Sulaco appears all but surrendered to the rival party, Gould laments "the cruel futility of things…the cruel futility of lives and deaths thrown away in the vain endeavor to attain an enduring solution of the problem" (*N* 261). Political change, for him, is a matter of problems and solutions, and the most horrifying specter is not injustice or corruption but futility.

This technocratic logic may now be so naturalized that it is difficult to imagine political discourse without it. And yet *Nostromo* invites us to look askance at the straight path towards a better future that Gould envisions. Near its end, Emilia reflects on her husband's final triumph: he has managed to make the San Tomé mine profitable, and through it to create the new, self-sufficient, highly ordered Occidental Republic, with a modernized Sulaco as its capital. Thinking in the terms of her husband's ideology, Mrs. Gould notes that his apparently far-fetched plan had become "a colossal and lasting success." And yet, she concludes from her own perspective, "there was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea. She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Campo over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy, more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government, ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness. He did not see it. He could not see it. It was not his fault" (*N* 373).

Even in her private reflection, Emilia makes some effort towards excusing her husband's behavior. It is not that he always wanted the mine to rule over Sulaco, or even that he pragmatically accepts the tyranny of capital now. Rather, he simply "could not see" the pernicious effects of his plan. I want to suggest that Emilia's allusion to a kind of blindness—if hardly a justification for Charles's actions—is more than a hollow excuse. Rather, I will demonstrate, progress narratives like his both rely upon and encourage a narrowly focused, highly instrumental form of attention. This form necessarily excludes all those impressions that fall outside its utilitarian constraints. If Charles cannot see the destructive effects of his success, it is because he has been trained to regard them only as distractions.

My first chapter defines *rational attention* as a detective mode, one that automatically filters out idle impressions so as to focus on those details most likely to produce a result. This mode treats cognitive energy as a scarce resource, to be allocated carefully rather than squandered. In its alignment with the typically bourgeois values of prudence and thrift—an association explicitly articulated by early advocates of this model—rational attention appears as a conservative virtue. And yet rational attention, like technocratic planning, validates itself by its capacity to make progress. Unlike earlier, religiously inflected accounts that define attention as a kind of timeless, motionless suspension, modern definitions prescribe continuous work towards a particular goal: we know we are paying attention because we are moving from an impression to a conclusion.

To resolve this seeming paradox, we might turn to Lee Edelman, who exposes the inherent conservatism of progress narratives.[10] Such narratives exclude the possibility of radical change:

[10] Edelman argues that "politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate*

they assume a future that we can already envision, and as such turn the future into nothing more than an extension of the present. So too does the utilitarian framework of rational attention preclude the possibility of cognitive transformation. This model of attention prompts its practitioner to focus on those impressions that confirm her initial hypothesis, or at the very least respond to her original concern. In its demand to produce a result as quickly and efficiently as possible, rational attention necessarily excludes details that might prompt her to rethink the question she first set out to answer; rather than allowing the development of new structures of thought, this model tends to reify existing ones. With the would-be dictator Montero driven away, the mine appears as a new kind of tyrant, but it is too late for Charles to perceive this emergent reality. His attention is too narrowly focused through the lens of a former problem to see anything in the present but its long-desired, carefully engineered resolution.

Lord Jim and the refusal of discovery

Ultimately, I will argue, the progress narratives of *Nostromo* preclude genuinely political thought, which requires an apprehension of the future as open-ended. But before turning to the ways in which rational attention forecloses political vision, I want to consider a case in which it occludes vision more generally. *Lord Jim*, published serially four years before the appearance of *Nostromo*, offers a clear example of the failure of rational attention. As in *Nostromo*, the key events of *Lord Jim* unfold in a non-linear fashion. But unlike *Nostromo*, which moves associatively and distractedly from one impression to the next, *Lord Jim* structures our attention according to a rigid teleology.

The object of this teleology is what Marlow calls "the true horror behind the appalling face of things": the truth of the mysterious *Patna* affair, in which Jim and the other European crewmembers deserted a sinking ship full of Muslim pilgrims.[11] Of course, the events that took place aboard the *Patna* are known to Marlow from the beginning, and become clear to readers within the first third of the novel. But *Lord Jim* aligns its reader with Marlow in the pursuit of a different kind of revelation: the ultimate cause behind Jim's desertion, what Marlow calls "some essential disclosure as to the strength, the power, the horror of human emotions" (*LJ* 45). As in *Heart of Darkness*, we discover facts alongside Marlow, learning them through our reading as he learns them through interviews and investigations. By identifying our process of discovery with Marlow's, the novels imply that the goal of his investigations—the quest for a final, definitive truth about Kurtz or Jim—is also the goal of our reading. We attend to the novel, then, in much the same way as Marlow attends to his interlocutors: with a definite aim in mind.

Thus, although neither novel unfolds in a linear way, both hold out the promise of a different kind of narrative development: the epistemological progress of coming ever nearer to the final discovery that we, and Marlow, hope to make. This emphasis on epistemological progress, in

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social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child." While I am not as willing as Edelman to give up both "politics" and "futurity" as hopelessly conservative constructs, I am very much indebted to his critique of the "reproductive futurism" inherent in progress narratives, whose cheerleading for the future rests on an assurance that the future is nothing more than an improved version of the present—much as the celebrated figure of the biological child promises to be an improved version of its parents. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004), 2-3.

[11] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, ed. Allan H. Simmons (New York: Penguin, 2007), 25. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *LJ*.

which the quest for a solution becomes the central plot, is of course already familiar by the time of Conrad's writing. It is the trademark structure of the nineteenth-century detective narrative—the most obvious example of modern fiction's training its reader in rational attention. If Marlow criticizes the official court inquiry for its stubborn empiricism, "futilely…tapping with a hammer on an iron box, were the object to find out what's inside," he nonetheless employs a similar method in his own private investigation into the *Patna* incident: relentlessly sounding the accounts of Jim and others in an effort to reach a definitive conclusion seemingly buried beneath them. As Ian Watt points out, Marlow's criticism of the inquiry is hardly a rejection of the goal of discovery, nor of the detective methods the court employs to pursue it. Very much to the contrary, Watt argues, it represents a call to the reader to pursue them on her own, beyond the official proceedings—just as Marlow himself does. Watt writes that "Marlow directs *us* to look for 'what's inside' Jim's case, for its 'fundamental why. In promoting this search Marlow uses a procedure which takes that employed in *Heart of Darkness* somewhat further. In both works the continuity of the narrative is based, not on the chronological sequence of actions as they occurred, but on the particular stage which Marlow has reached in his understanding of 'the fundamental why' of the moral puzzles presented by his tale."[12] As Watt suggests, Marlow understands Jim's case as a moral rather than a material puzzle: for this reason, he dismisses the value of the inquiry, since it aims at discovering "not the fundamental why, but the superficial how, of this affair" (*LJ* 45). Yet despite this difference, Marlow shares with the court an understanding of the case as a puzzle to be solved, and solved through active, deliberate probing.

It is true that the course of Marlow's investigation is not as carefully pre-meditated as the court's. While his observation is always instrumental, it is less consistently calculated: for example, a number of his interviews only come about through chance. Yet even if Marlow's investigations may proceed haphazardly in their own time, his retrospective narration arranges them in a fashion perfectly suited to rational attention. As an investigator, Marlow may endure long breaks between an interview and the following one, drifting between ports unsure when he'll next hear of Jim. As a storyteller, however, Marlow ensures that every episode he narrates has a clear relation to the "moral puzzles" he presents to his audience. In other words, the structure of his narrative makes our attention even more rational than Marlow's own. Everything Marlow allows us to observe in the first half of the novel seems to lead, clearly, to the ultimate solution of the "moral puzzle," to the definitive discovery of "what's inside" Jim's case. Once the novel has framed the problem (the "essential disclosure" of the motivations behind Jim's desertion) and suggested the means of solving it (Marlow's interviews with Jim and people who know him), we expect it will only be a matter of time before we arrive at the solution.

And yet the detective mode in *Lord Jim* ultimately fails. More than a hundred pages and countless interviews after embarking on his investigation, Marlow parts for the last time with Jim, unable to conclude anything more than he had at its outset: "I was going home, and he had come to me from there, with his miserable trouble and his shadowy claim, like a man panting under a burden in a mist. I cannot say I had ever seen him distinctly—not even to this day, after I had my last view of him" (*LJ* 169-170). After so many apparent movements towards the "essential disclosure," the revelation of the definitive truth "behind the appalling face of things," we end up only with shadows and mist. The same detective lens that had promised clarity only brings into sharper focus those obstacles to clear vision.

This failure is, in one sense, a problem of insufficient attention. As Jameson points out, the moment of Jim's desertion, like many of the key events in *Nostromo*, is always slightly out of

[12] Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 280.

focus.[13] Jim's first revelation of his action splits our gaze between the moment before and the moment after, leaving us unable to attend to the event itself:

> "The ship began a slow plunge; the rain swept over her like a broken sea; my cap flew off my head; my breath was driven back into my throat. I heard as if I had been on the top of a tower another wild screech, 'Geo-o-o-orge! Oh, jump!' She was going down, down, head first under me…"
>
> He raised his hand deliberately to his face, and made picking motions with his fingers as though he had been bothered with cobwebs, and afterwards he looked into the open palm for quite half a second before he blurted out—
>
> "I had jumped…" He checked himself, averted his gaze…."It seems," he added. (*LJ* 86)

The jump seems to happen, for Jim and for us, in a moment of distraction. It is as though, while watching a film, we suddenly became aware we had let our minds wander and missed the key scene we had been waiting for all along. And yet no matter how many times we rewind and replay, we can never see the event as it occurs: we always skip from the moment before, when Jim looks down at the lifeboat, to the moment after, when he realizes with a shock that he "had jumped." Despite Jim's best efforts to see the moment clearly—even picking away imaginary cobwebs from in front of his face, as though to remove obstructions to vision—he can never quite attend to his thoughts at the moment of the jump.

This irreparable lapse in attention, shared by Jim, Marlow, and the reader, is significantly different from the moments of distraction Jameson notes in *Nostromo*. In both cases, key events appear out of focus. In *Nostromo*, however, the narrator never tries to bring them into focus. The novel moves in a casual, aleatory manner from one impression to the next; if the reader wants to look closely at the dictator's escape, this desire puts her at odds with a narrator who seems just as happy to see it out of the corner of his eye. In *Lord Jim*, the reader's own effort to scrutinize the jump is reinforced by Marlow, Jim, and the structure of the novel, all of which place the event squarely at the center of their focus. Here, it seems, we will find the solution we've been working towards, the "essential disclosure" of "what's inside" Jim's account. Yet we arrive at an aporia.

Rational attention leads us to a dead end. The narrative can only continue by abandoning the detective mode entirely and moving instead to the register of the romance, an abrupt generic shift that many critics have noted. Rather than ending where it began, in the cosmopolitan, rapidly modernizing world of global capitalism, *Lord Jim* retreats to the essentially pre-modern idyll of Patusan, a fictional country in Southeast Asia. Here, amidst a second cadre of cynical Europeans and a second Asian population who depends on him, Jim is finally able to repair his error, taking the side of the Patusan natives—even at the price of his life—rather than yielding to the entreaties of Cornelius and Gentleman Brown. The move to Patusan represents a stylistic shift as well as a moral one. Conrad replaces the highly mediated account of the novel's first half—in which most events are filtered through at least two perspectives, Marlow's own and that of his interlocutor—with a far more direct mode of narration, in which the narrator seems to have been present for the events of Jim's stay in Patusan. What has been left out of critical accounts, however, is that the fissure halfway through *Lord Jim* is more than a question of setting or even

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[13] Jameson argues that "*Nostromo* is, like *Lord Jim*, the interrogation of a hole in time, an act whose innermost instant falls away—proving thus at once irrecoverable and impossible, a source of scandal and an aporia for contemplation." Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 264. And yet the very different narrative form of *Nostromo*—at least initially unstructured by any demand for discovery—make it impossible to align it with *Lord Jim* as an "interrogation." As I will argue, the holes in time there perform a very different function, denaturalizing stereotyped narratives of history.

style. Rather, the shift also forces both Marlow and the reader to reevaluate their expectations of what would constitute a conclusion for the novel. For as long as *Lord Jim* inhabited the detective mode, our attention was rigidly focused on discovery: only by pronouncing a final, definitive truth about Jim and the *Patna* affair could the novel reach a satisfactory conclusion. But the solution that *Lord Jim* ultimately offers—for Jim to be allowed to work through the same situation a second time, and to be courageous rather than cowardly—is not a detective solution at all. It offers no "essential disclosure" as to the truth of the past; instead of a definitive conclusion, we get an indistinct, apparently accidental reenactment, a retelling whose value lies in its open-endedness.

Not for nothing is this second solution the work of Marlow's friend Stein, whose open-ended mode of attention places him at odds with the teleological, detective form that has structured the novel up to this point.[14] As the merchant who gives Jim his position in Patusan, Stein facilitates the movement from the detective register to the romantic one, and from the modern, capitalist world to the undisturbed idyll. And if Stein as narrative mechanism moves *Lord Jim* away from the rationalized world of modernity and the rational attention of the detective mode, Stein as character also exemplifies a number of as yet unrationalized practices—among them his practice of attention.

A veteran of the 1848 revolution in his native Bavaria, Stein has become, by the time of *Lord Jim*, a paradoxically backward-looking radical. Both his practice of business and his practice of science suggest his affinity with an earlier age. Although he works as a merchant, trading in island produce, Stein's professional life is leisurely; unlike Weber's modern businessman, who sees the quest for ever-greater profit as his ultimate vocation, Stein does business mostly for the sake of supporting his hobby.[15] And like his leisurely business routines, his pastime of choice marks him as a relic of an earlier age. Stein pursues entomology not as an experimental scientist but as a natural historian—a distinction that might be related, once again, to the break between pre-rational and rational modes. Where experimental science regards observation and description as means to an outside end—the substantiation or refutation of a hypothesis—natural history treats observation and description as ends in themselves. Historian of science Bruno Strasser, for example, defines natural history as a set of practices including "collecting, describing, naming, comparing, and organizing natural objects, practices usually associated not with the laboratory but with the wonder cabinet, the botanical garden, or the natural history museum."[16] As Strasser points out, these practices often led to the production of new knowledge. Yet this production was spontaneous and unpredictable, neither the necessary result nor the stated goal of collecting and describing.

By contrast, experimental science requires defining both an external end and a series of steps to reach it before the experiment even begins. By assigning to observation both a definite end

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[14] I am not claiming that Stein could anticipate the machinations of Cornelius and Gentleman Brown, which give Jim occasion to prove his courage at last. Nonetheless, his insistence to Marlow that "there is only one way…in the destructive element immerse" suggests that his plan involves returning Jim to the situation of his failure (*LJ* 164).

[15] Economic rationalization, Weber argues, begins with the enterprising activities of a certain kind of businessmen: "men who had grown up in the hard school of life, calculating and daring at the same time, above all temperate and reliable, shrewd and completely devoted to their business" (31-32). Where mercantile life was previously "comfortable and leisurely," concerned primarily with the maintenance of routines, these rationalizing businessmen introduce an imperative for constant reorganization in pursuit of ever-greater profit (29). Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[16] Bruno Strasser, "The Experimenter's Museum: GenBank, Natural History, and the Moral Economies of Bioethics," *Isis* 102.1 (March 2011): 60-96, 62.

and a methodical process, experimental science, as codified by the modern scientific method, renders observation both instrumental and predictable. It is these same two qualities, of course, that Weber uses to differentiate rational practices from pre-rational ones. The crystallization of the scientific method in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries overlaps with the inception of economic rationalization, which Weber dates to this period. And although observational natural history persists through the nineteenth century—most famously in the practice of Charles Darwin—its stature in scientific communities had sharply declined by 1900, as the "modern" practice of biology as experimental science supplanted natural history.[17]

This sense of outdatedness is very much on display in the novel's first depiction of Stein, which presents him amidst his insect collection as a Dickensian eccentric in a typically nineteenth-century cabinet of curiosities:

> Stein turned round with the chair, and in the same movement his spectacles seemed to get pushed up on his forehead. He welcomed me in his quiet and humorous voice. Only one corner of the vast room, the corner in which stood his writing-desk, was strongly lighted by a shaded reading-lamp, and the rest of the spacious apartment melted into shapeless gloom like a cavern. Narrow shelves filled with dark boxes of uniform shape and color ran round the walls, not from floor to ceiling, but in a somber belt about four feet broad. Catacombs of beetles. Wooden tablets were hung above them at irregular intervals. The light reached one of them, and the word *Coleoptera* written in gold letters glittered mysteriously upon a vast dimness. (*LJ* 156)

The "vast dimness" of the study stands in sharp (or perhaps fuzzy) contrast to the twentieth-century image of the laboratory: a brightly lit space whose starkness bespeaks scientific clarity. Stein's science, on the other hand, literally occupies a space of indeterminacy: where experimental biology is concerned with giving concrete form to the otherwise unfathomable processes of life, Stein is content to dwell in "shapeless gloom." If the promise of experimental science is to shed a kind of artificial light—disrupting the normal workings of nature so as to make usually concealed facts visible— the dimness of Stein's study suggests a mode of science less concerned with dispelling mystery than describing it. And if description can also be a means of reducing complexity to simplicity, and obscurity to clarity, this is not the case in Stein's study, where "the word *Coleoptera*…glittered mysteriously." Even the assignment of a scientific name, normally a method of giving order and clarity to nature, creates more mystery than it dispels.

Scientific attention, normally directed towards a definite end, here becomes an apparently endless process of observation and description. "Marvellous!" Stein exclaims, staring at a specimen. "Look! The beauty—but that is nothing—look at the accuracy, the harmony. And so fragile! And so strong! And so exact! This is Nature—the balance of colossal forces. Every star is so—and every blade of grass stands *so*—and the mighty Kosmos in perfect equilibrium produces—this. This wonder; this masterpiece of Nature—the great artist" (*LJ* 158-159). For Stein, scientific observation appears as a process of attending to the world that will never be complete. "Nature" consistently exceeds his attempts to describe it: rather than arriving at a definitive principle, he slips from one inadequate conceptualization to another. Eventually, he gives up principles in favor of tautologies: "Every star is so—and every blade of grass stands *so.*" Here, scientific attention neither deduces general laws nor arrives at concrete conclusions.

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[17] For more on the displacement of natural history by experimental approaches to the life sciences, see William R. Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth Century: Problems of Form, Function, and Transformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971) and Garland E. Allen, *Life Science in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

Even Stein's attempts at description prove fruitless, as they culminate in "so" and "this"—words completely dependent on context for their meaning. If experimental science aims to reduce nature to language by articulating the principles by which it operates, Stein is content for nature to remain ineffable.

Through his representation of Stein, Conrad preserves a specimen of a nearly extinct mode of attention, putting it under glass—as Stein himself does with his butterflies—for future study and display. For *Lord Jim* finds not only natural history, but also the contemplative tendency it requires, on the brink of disappearance. "Do you notice," Marlow asks his reader, "how, three hundred miles beyond the end of the telegraph cables and mail-boat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilisation wither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination, that have the futility, often the charm, and sometimes the deep hidden truthfulness, of works of art?" (*LJ* 215). Marlow's tone is hopeful: he holds out the promise of a utopian space, at the margins of "our civilisation," where reverie and contemplation are still possible. Yet his question is also an ominous prediction. By locating the space for idle thought "beyond the end of the telegraph cables and mail-boat lines," Marlow implies that "pure exercises of imagination" can only exist outside modern networks of communication. Once the telegraph cables and mail-boat lines inevitably extend across the entire globe—a vision realized in the telegraph-building motif of *Nostromo*—such "futility" will be impossible.[18]

Yet if Conrad sees Western progress as eroding the geographic space for such wandering, futile, contemplative attention as Stein's, he also suggests the possibility of relocating it to another kind of space. This space is that of the novel, whose reader, Conrad argues, must practice a wholly non-instrumental form of attention. Stein's understanding of perception as an end in itself could hardly offer a better model for the practice Conrad recommends to his reader in the famous preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus*.' To those who ask that novel-reading achieve a predetermined end—"who, in the fullness of a wisdom which looks for immediate profit, demand specifically to be edified, consoled, amused; who demand to be promptly improved, or encouraged, or frightened, or shocked, or charmed"—Conrad insists that the aim of his prose is, "before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything."[19] By aligning Stein's practice of natural history with Conrad's model of reading, we can understand Conrad's impressionism as an effort to preserve a non-instrumental mode of attention, in which seeing and

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[18] Conrad's rueful portrayal of the telegraph construction in *Nostromo* resonates strikingly with Marlow's reflections in *Lord Jim*. At the outset of Part II, the incompleteness of the telegraph line—whose "poles, like slender beacons on the plain, penetrated into the forest fringe of the foot-hills cut by the deep avenue of the track" yet whose "wire ended abruptly in the construction camp"—suggests a space still beyond European modernity (99). A few chapters later, however, the telegraph line has become more aggressive, and the narrator already anticipates its total assimilation of Costaguana: "The sparse row of telegraph poles strode obliquely clear of the town, bearing a single, almost invisible wire far into the great campo—like a slender vibrating feeler of that progress waiting outside for a moment of peace to enter and twine itself about the weary heart of the land" (121). The narrator's retrospective evocation of a telegraph line that "did not cross the mountains *yet*" implies that, by the time of his narration, the project is complete (99, my emphasis). The space for "pure exercises of the imagination" must accordingly have vanished.

Janice Ho similarly argues that Conrad's fiction responds to the loss of a space outside European modernity, although for her this vanished utopia is not the space of reverie or contemplation but that of romance. Thus, where Ho sees Conrad as lamenting the loss of any more world for Europeans to discover and develop, I argue that Conrad in fact mourns the disappearance of spaces not governed by such instrumental conventions, where attention need not produce discovery and thought need not facilitate development. See Janice Ho, "The Spatial Imagination and Literary Form of Conrad's Colonial Fictions," *Journal of Modern Literature* 30.4 (2007): 1-19.

[19] Joseph Conrad, preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,' Conrad's Prefaces* (London: Dent, 1937), 51-2.

noticing once more serve as ends in themselves. As embodied by Stein, this mode remains firmly fixed in the past, an object of basically apolitical nostalgia. The structure of *Nostromo*, however, lends political significance to the open-ended practice of attention, suggesting that it allows its subject to imagine meaningfully different futures, beyond the reified form of the progress narrative.

Modernity and the end of action

Nostromo and Jim occupy analogous positions in their respective plots. This may seem like a bizarre assertion given that Nostromo is famous for his courage, while Jim is defined by his cowardice. Yet both protagonists are uniquely identified with an apparently pivotal action that turns out to be inconsequential. Regardless of Jim's cowardice in deserting the *Patna* and leaving its passengers to their deaths, the ship never actually sinks, and everyone on board is miraculously saved. Similarly, despite Nostromo's heroism in shepherding Gould's precious silver away from the mine and out to sea, it never reaches San Francisco, where it is supposed to earn Holroyd's support for the Ribierist cause.

And yet these two instances of inconsequentiality generate vastly different reactions. In *Lord Jim*, it hardly seems to matter that the passengers of the *Patna* survived. The incident is framed instead as an individual moral test. The pilgrims are already exploited, in a diegetic sense, for the profit of European crews and companies. If that wasn't enough, though, they are also transformed by the novel into a kind of moral currency, valuable and noteworthy only insofar as they show us something about the inner life of a middle-class Englishman. The ultimate inconsequentiality of Jim's desertion is itself inconsequential.

The inconsequentiality of Nostromo's heroic act, by contrast, becomes a key motif of the novel's second half. For the silver whose charge he bravely assumes ends up having no effect on the development of history, despite the dramatic historical backdrop against which the act takes place. Declaring the "national honour sold to foreigners" under the bourgeois, modernizing dictatorship of President Ribiera, the War Minister Montero leads a revolt against his former boss, beginning in the capital city of Santa Marta (106). For some time, the novel's characters observe Montero's populist revolution at a safe distance: separated from Santa Marta by mountains, Sulaco's mostly European governing class hears news of the revolution mostly from sources abroad. But Sulaco's "fortunate isolation" is also predicated on its more literal fortune (*N* 107). Characters like Gould and Sir John have already set in motion a rigid, calculated scheme for the modernization of the region, founded on the wealth of the silver mine: surely no spontaneous historical development could disturb such a carefully premeditated plan. Before setting off across the mountains to fight the revolutionaries in Cayta, the Ribierist General Barrios reassures the Europeans of Sulaco they have nothing to worry about: "Go on quietly making your Ferro Carril—your railways, your telegraphs. Your—— There's enough wealth in Costaguana to pay for everything—or else you would not be here. Ha! Ha! Don't mind this little picardía of my friend Montero…Fear nothing, develop the country, work, work!" (*N* 120). The predictable work of building railways and telegraphs appears as a bulwark against the unpredictability of revolution.

Even when that calculation fails—a fifth column forms within the town, determined to overthrow Ribiera and install Montero in his place—the bourgeois citizens of Sulaco never lose their faith in planning. Gould's Plan B is to send a large shipment of silver from the San Tomé

mine, through Sulaco, and out to sea, where it will rendezvous with a steamer bound for San Francisco; Nostromo and the journalist Decoud are given responsibility over the precious cargo. The execution of the plan is one of the novel's most tightly focused sequences. In contrast to our fleeting glimpse of the fleeing dictator, here the reader's attention, as well as the characters', is unwaveringly trained on the events at hand. The transport of the silver through the town is portrayed as an object of collective focus, a spectacle that constitutes a community: "Most of the Europeans in Sulaco were there, rallied round Charles Gould, as if the silver of the mine had been the emblem of a common cause, the symbol of the supreme importance of material interests" (*N* 188). But if Gould's plan is spectacular, it is also spectacularly practical. Like his other political maneuvers, the silver effort is rigorously instrumental: the shipment is a means to guarantee Holroyd's continued support and encourage foreign intervention in Costaguanero affairs.[20]

Ultimately, the plan neither succeeds nor fails to achieve this end. What befalls the silver instead is that fate planners like Gould disdain as worse than failure, the condition Gould himself bemoans in his moment of despair: futility. Struck by a Monterist ship just off the coast of Sulaco, Nostromo and Decoud are left with no choice but to navigate their own small, sinking boat to the uninhabited islands called the Isabels. The cargo of silver will never make it out of the harbor, let alone to San Francisco; it cannot bring foreign intervention to Costaguana. Having swum back to shore, where the Monterists are preparing to occupy Sulaco, Nostromo reflects on the uselessness of his errand:

> The Europeans had given up; the Caballeros had given up. Don Martin had indeed explained it was only temporary—that he was going to bring Barrios to the rescue. Where was that now—with Don Martin (whose ironic manner of talk had always made the Capataz feel vaguely uneasy) stranded on the Great Isabel? Everybody had given up. Even Don Carlos had given up. The hurried removal of the treasure out to sea meant nothing else than that. The Capataz de Cargadores, in a revulsion of subjectiveness, exasperated almost to insanity, beheld all his world without faith and courage. He had been betrayed! (*N* 301)

Like Jim's desertion, Nostromo's heroism turns out to have "meant nothing else than that": a spectacle in itself, outside instrumental logic. For Nostromo, this manifest purposelessness appears so outrageous as to catalyze the formation of a new political consciousness. Reflecting repeatedly throughout the novel's second half that "the rich lived on wealth stolen from the people" (*N* 387), Nostromo becomes "a republican like old Giorgio, and a revolutionist at heart," even joining the local socialist meetings (*N* 377).[21]

Nostromo's political conversion is surprising on multiple levels: it contradicts a broader tendency in Conrad's novels as well as our particular understanding of Nostromo's character. As

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[20] In a long letter to his sister, Decoud explains the Europeans' assurance that "as long as the treasure flowed north, without a break, that utter sentimentalist, Holroyd, would not drop his idea of introducing, not only justice, industry, peace to the benighted continents, but also that pet dream of his of a purer form of Christianity" (*N* 174). If Gould and Decoud can barely muster ironic indifference to Holroyd's Protestant evangelism, they are nonetheless devoted to him for his promise to impose on Costaguana a Protestant ethic of "justice, industry, peace."

[21] The narrator specifies parenthetically that Nostromo is a revolutionist "of another sort" from Old Giorgio—one of many indications that his newfound political consciousness is Marxist rather than liberal. Despite (or because of) his fanatical devotion to Garibaldi's nationalist revolution, Old Giorgio has only contempt for the more explicitly Marxist revolutions of the novel's time, with their focus on material wealth rather than nationalist ideals. The Costaguana revolutionaries, he reflects, "were not a people striving for justice, but thieves. Even to defend his life against them was a sort of degradation for a man who had been one of Garibaldi's immortal thousand in the conquest of Sicily He had an immense scorn for this outbreak of scoundrels and léperos, who did not know the meaning of the word 'liberty'" (*N* 17).

Jameson points out, Conrad's leftist figures can often be readily dismissed—and their politics easily rejected—as products of *ressentiment*.[22] Spiritually as well as materially poor, lacking in courage and determination, such men turn to revolution only in a cynical attempt to make life easier for themselves. Yet Nostromo could hardly fit Jameson's mold. In addition to his much-celebrated daring, he also becomes fabulously wealthy in the novel's second half by hiding the "lost" silver on the Isabels and gradually transferring it into his personal funds. Surely his newfound revolutionary sympathy cannot be explained away as the only possible means for Nostromo to enrich himself. Yet to read his political development naively, according to Nostromo's psychology, creates its own problems. Throughout the first half of the novel, Nostromo is exclusively, almost parodically focused on spectacle: the only reason for him to do anything, as he and all the other characters agree, is that it draws attention and thereby serves his vanity.[23] But in that sense Nostromo has already reaped the reward of the silver affair. The furious ride down the mountain, the nighttime flight out to sea on a tiny craft, and especially the attention of the crowd in Sulaco have all made the event the spectacular, "most desperate affair of his life," as Nostromo himself proclaims it (230). Why then does he demand it be not only spectacular, but also consequential?

We can only conclude that, in addition to Nostromo's "revolutionist" turn, the novel also encodes an earlier ideological transformation. This earlier transformation, while less visible than his later break, may be more significant: more significant because it isn't merely a movement from one political position to another, but from one political *practice* to another. Hannah Arendt describes the Ancient Greek valorization of action in terms that recall Nostromo's proclivity for showiness—his "particular talent," as Decoud writes, "for being on the spot whenever there is something picturesque to be done" (*N* 163). Decoud, like the narrator and the novel's other characters, regards this "vanity" as a personal trait of Nostromo's; depending on the occasion, it is either a simple character weakness in need of correction or an idiosyncrasy inviting exploitation. For Arendt, however, the urge to appear to other men is far more significant and universal. This drive to show oneself forth is the essence of the political, and the processes through which it is expressed—speech and action—define political life. To free oneself from vanity is to embrace social death. Arendt writes that "a life without speech and without action—and this is the only way of life that in earnest has renounced all appearance and all vanity in the biblical sense of the word—is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men."[24] In a world still governed by the standards of action, public recognition is a matter of life or death. Nostromo is similarly horrified to realize, upon his secret return to Sulaco from the Isabels, that he can no longer appear in town: "This sailor led a public life in his sphere. It became necessary to him. It was the very breath of his nostrils" (*N* 297). Like

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[22] Jameson names "the ideological myth of *ressentiment*" as one of two major strategies by which Conrad displaces any awareness of labor; the other is existentialism. By invoking the construct of *ressentiment*, Conrad undertakes a "recoding of the human pole of the labor process. Indeed the narrative of The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,' with its driving power and ideological passion, may in this respect be characterized as one long tirade against *ressentiment*; the work concludes with the transformation of its villain, Donkin, the epitome of the *homme de ressentiment*, into a labor organizer." Jameson, *Political Unconscious,* 215-216.

[23] Giorgio Viola's wife Teresa is the first to offer the assessment of Nostromo that will become commonplace among the other characters, noting during an earlier uprising that Nostromo, in charge of defending the town's property, "has not stopped very long with us. There is no praise from strangers to be got here…Yes! That is all he cares for. To be first somewhere—somehow—to be first with these English. They will be showing him to everybody" (*N* 19).

[24] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 176.

Arendt's now antiquated man of action, Nostromo lives not so much *for* public self-disclosure as *by* it. Action is not something Nostromo chooses in order to give his life purpose, as Gould's work is for him; it is not, as young people considering their choice of career are accustomed to say, what he does *with* his life. Rather, as Arendt suggests, action is the condition of life itself, "the very breath of his nostrils."

However vital this mode of self-disclosure might be, *Nostromo* finds it breathing its last. The possibilities for action appear almost totally foreclosed—and not just in the moment on the shore, when Nostromo realizes he can no longer show himself around town for fear of revealing the treasure's secret location. As I've already argued, the "progressive" development whose inception more or less coincides with the beginning of the novel's plot values planning above all. By contrast, the defining characteristic of Arendtian action is its unpredictability. Action is self-disclosure, and because an individual does not know his own essence, his particular *daimon*, he cannot determine in advance which qualities he will disclose. Action is therefore characterized by "spontaneity and practical purposelessness"[25]—exactly those qualities the technocrats of Sulaco bemoan as hindrances to progress.

It is paradoxical enough to propose, as Arendt does, that the apparently individualistic urge to self-disclosure might be the foundation of truly public life. Yet more paradoxical to a modern reader, however, is the resulting claim that the unpredictability of action is in fact a defining characteristic of political practice.[26] For modern political life has come to be closely identified with the technocratic art of governance—an art promising to abolish the "futility, uncertainty, and boundlessness of outcome" that Arendt sees as characterizing the political.[27] Indeed, could any three qualities be more objectionable to a character like Charles Gould, who identifies progress above all with efficacy, predictability, and moderation? For him, political practice corresponds not to the Arendtian sphere of action, but to the world of work, with its demand for a "definite, predictable end."[28] Of course, this pragmatic vision of political life is hardly surprising coming from a character like Gould. Though *Nostromo* gestures towards a prior era in which a more romantic Charles Gould aestheticized the desolation of abandoned mines in Europe, he has thoroughly conformed to the practical stereotype of the English mining engineer by the novel's beginning.[29]

More surprising is the adoption of this utilitarian set of standards by Nostromo, who begins the novel uninterested in practicality of any sort. In fact, I would argue that Nostromo's much-discussed "vanity" carries a double meaning: not only a narcissistic obsession with how he is perceived, but also an affinity for futile endeavors. Like the naturalist Stein, and like the novelist Conrad, Nostromo is both unusually fascinated with surface appearances and notably

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[25] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 177.

[26] "Yet while the various limitations and boundaries we find in every body politic may offer some protection against the inherent boundlessness of action, they are altogether helpless to offset its second outstanding character: its inherent unpredictability." Arendt, *Human Condition*, 191.

[27] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 195.

[28] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 143.

[29] Even this brief allusion to a less strictly utilitarian Gould already anticipates his transformation into the pragmatic man of enterprise we meet at the outset of *Nostromo*: "He visited mines in Germany, in Spain, in Cornwall. Abandoned workings had for him strong fascination. Their desolation appealed to him like the sight of human misery, whose causes are varied and profound. They might have been worthless, but also they might have been misunderstood" (*N* 45). The final sentence here suggests that worthlessness—previously an aestheticized and inexorable aspect of Romantic "desolation"—is merely a problem of misunderstanding, to be rectified by more knowledge and greater perspicacity. Understanding, then, becomes a means to generate worth—certainly the older Gould's approach to knowledge.

unconcerned with definite results.[30] In pronouncing the silver affair, before the fact, "the most famous and desperate affair of my life," Nostromo implies that the spectacular character of the adventure is an end in itself (*N* 191). Only after the effort is over does he deplore its futility, declaring to the English doctor Monygham that "you are all alike, you fine men of intelligence. All you are fit for is to betray men of the people into undertaking deadly risks for objects that you are not even sure about. If it comes off you get the benefit. If not, then it does not matter" (*N* 330). For all Nostromo's vociferous distinction of himself, one of the "men of the people," from "fine men of intelligence" like Monygham, his pronouncement also reveals what he has come to share with the latter group. Before this, Nostromo barely attended to objects and benefits. Now, his knowledge of the silver affair's ultimate futility crowds out any apprehension of its marvelous, desperate brilliance.

With Nostromo's transformation into *homo faber*, we see the closure of the realm of action he previously represented. That is to say that the rationalization thematized by *Nostromo* as novel is recapitulated in the consciousness of Nostromo as character. And if Nostromo's personal evolution is a synecdoche for the rationalization of Costaguanero society, both movements also align with a generic shift in the novel itself. For *Nostromo* begins in the register most closely aligned with Arendtian action: the oral legend. After a brief description of the Sulaco coast, including the otherwise-unmentioned Azuera peninsula, the narrator devotes most of the first chapter to retelling the various legends that surround Azuera:

> Utterly waterless, for the rainfall runs off at once on all sides into the sea, it has not soil enough—it is said—to grow a single blade of grass, as if it were blighted by a curse. The poor, associating by an obscure instinct of consolation the ideas of evil and wealth, will tell you that it is deadly because of its forbidden treasures. The common folk of the neighbourhood, peons of the estancias, vaqueros of the seaboard plains, tame Indians coming miles to market with a bundle of sugar-cane or a basket of maize worth about three-pence, are well aware that heaps of shining gold lie in the gloom of the deep precipices cleaving the stony levels of Azuera. (*N* 5-6)

Of the several accounts mentioned—what "is said," what "the poor…will tell you," what "the common folk…are well aware"—none is either narratively structured or historically specific. Rather, they all seem to inhabit a register of double timelessness: not only unmoored from any historical referent, but also unconcerned with any sequence of causes and effects. The aridity of the land and the presence of hidden treasure both appear as static conditions, with no definite beginning and no possible end. This sense of timelessness, of course, coincides with and reinforces a typically Orientalist portrayal of the world outside Europe, figured as a statically primitive place beyond time and change. Certainly, with its patronizing description of "tame Indians" and predictable aestheticization of sugarcane and maize, the opening chapter seems like a cheap pastiche of Latin American stereotypes, an attempt to entice readers of the worst kind of travel literature. And yet it is also more than this. The sense of timelessness, like the multiple references to oral legend, place the opening chapter more in the register of the epic than that of the novel.

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[30] We might recall here Stein's literally superficial absorption in "the bronze sheen of these frail [butterfly] wings" (*LJ* 158), which, though intense, is not directed towards the production of any scientific conclusion, as well as Conrad's reminder that the only end of prose is "an approach to plasticity, to colour" so that "the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words." Conrad, preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus*,' 224-225.

Nostromo does not linger long among epic conventions. The very next chapter finds "the names of all mythology" repurposed as watchwords for the novel's first icons of historical progress: the O.S.N. Company's steamships (*N* 9). Among these, "the *Juno* was known only for her comfortable cabins amidships, the *Saturn* for the geniality of her captain and the painted and gilt luxuriousness of her saloon, whereas the *Ganymede* was fitted out mainly for cattle transport, and to be avoided by coastwise passengers" (*N* 9). In a thematization of the novel's shift from timeless legend to historical narrative, the names themselves are transformed from figures of eternal myth to markers of modern development. Yet despite this apparent move away from oral legend, *Nostromo* retains one characteristic of its opening throughout the eight chapters of Part I: a tendency towards associative drift. Just as the first chapter's touristic gaze wanders aimlessly from one feature of the coast to the next, often digressing into secondhand narration, so too does the novel's first part drift between a number of different historical moments and a variety of narrative perspectives, carried along only by the most tenuous of connections. These frequent breaks defy us to follow any single narrative thread. In the most extreme example, the third-person account of Sir John and his railway work is interrupted by a remark on the amazing resourcefulness of Nostromo, which leads into Captain Mitchell's description of his own relationship to Nostromo, in which Dr. Monygham is mentioned in passing only as a negative example of the "bitter, eccentric character" who alone would doubt such a sincere bond (*N* 35). From there, we hear briefly of Dr. Monygham's fondness for Emilia Gould before moving into a long history—itself beset with digressions—of the Gould family and the Costaguana government. We are told of the cynical dictator who bequeathed the useless mine to Charles's father for the sole purpose of taxing him on it, of Charles's education in Europe and his engagement to Emilia, and finally of his long effort to make the mine profitable for the first time in its existence. After an abrupt shift to the narrator's own present, apparently characterized by "quite serious, organised labour troubles," we return to an earlier moment of Costaguanero development through the remark that "nobody had ever heard of labour troubles then," and from there to Nostromo and his relationship with the longshoremen (72); through another mention of the changing times, we arrive at a description of the modern outfits of the San Tomé miners, which protect them from forceful conscription into the military, and then at the previously peripheral Don Pepe's justification for such a practice ("What would you! Poor people! Pobrecitos. Pobrecitos! But the State must have its soldiers" [73]). The narrator proceeds to describe Don Pepe and the Aristocratic Club of Sulaco—where, we are then informed, he was speaking when he made this statement. Don Pepe, it turns out, is "temporal pastor" of the mine and once held the first lump of silver it produced, joking that "the muchachos" of the bandit Hernández would "like to get a hold of this insignificant object"; his remark recesses the narrative further into the past with a description of Hernández's exploits and his relation to Costaguana politics (80). We go back once more to the account of the first San Tomé silver before finally, through the celebrity of Charles Gould, returning to pick up the story of poor Sir John, who has heard Gould mentioned many times—and whose adventures with the railway we left off, without any apparent rationale, more than 50 pages before.

Needless to say, Part I is not structured according to a model of narrative progress, in which events develop in a basically linear fashion and our attention is largely focused on predicting the outcome of the plot. Nor is it governed by the conceit of *epistemological* progress that underlies both the detective story and *Lord Jim*. There too our attention is focused by the desire to solve a particular problem, though the problem is situated in the characters' past rather than their future. Here, no consistent goal presents itself as a rationale for the narrator's wandering attention—or a

structure for the reader's. Had we something in mind to search for, we might nonetheless maintain a sense of productive focus amidst all the distractions. But instead of this totalizing framework, *Nostromo* offers us only an assortment of obviously weak links which, though they may connect one impression to the next, are unrelated among themselves and constitute no complete whole. In other words, although each shift has its own ostensible motivation, nothing like a consistent purpose ever emerges.

There are, however, some formal generalizations we can draw about these links. First, they function associatively, with a particular impression carrying our attention across a break, from one context to another. In this sense, Part I constitutes a prototype of the sort of wandering reminiscence we know from works like Marcel Proust's *À la récherche du temps perdu*—though even this now-familiar High Modernist form is already preemptively defamiliarized, in *Nostromo*, by being split among so many characters' consciousness.

Most of the impressions that form such links are auditory—a surprising trend given Conrad's reputation as a visual impressionist. "The growling mutter of the mountain pouring its stream of treasure," for instance, carries us from a description of long-established routine at the San Tomé mine to a moment long before the mine's construction: "He had heard this very sound in his imagination on that far-off evening when his wife and himself, after a tortuous ride through a strip of forest, had reined in their horses near the stream, and had gazed for the first time upon the jungle-grown solitude of the gorge" (*N* 79). More often, though, the impression is not just sound but speech. The narrator's mention of the "progressive and patriotic undertaking" of railway-building prompts him to note that "in these very words eighteen months before the Excelentísimo Señor don Vincente Ribiera, the Dictator of Costaguana, had described the National Central Railway in his great speech at the turning of the first sod," and thereby to jump to the moment of Ribiera's address (*N* 28). Often, these associations carry us from general routine to particular event, from a phrase now apparently familiar as cliché to time when it was first spoken. "Don José Avellanos, their neighbour across the street…used to declare in Doña Emilia's drawing-room that Carlos had all the English qualities of character with a truly patriotic heart," the narrator reflects, apparently noting a long-held and often-repeated conviction. The next sentence, though, abruptly locates us in a specific context for Don José's pronouncement: "Mrs. Gould, raising her eyes to her husband's thin, red and tan face, could not detect the slightest quiver of a feature at what he must have heard said of his patriotism" (*N* 39). Similarly, a mention of Don Pepe's unofficial title as "El Señor Gobernador" of the San Tomé mine shifts the narrative immediately to the moment when "Basilio, Mr. Gould's own mozo and the head servant of the Casa…in all good faith and from a sense of propriety announced him once in the solemn words, 'El Señor Gobernador has arrived.' Don José Avellanos, then in the drawing-room, was delighted beyond measure at the aptness of the title" (*N* 75). Through both of these associative movements, Conrad returns a stereotyped phrase to the particular context in which it originated. In doing so, he undoes the reificiation of speech into cliché and restores a sense of the unpredictability inherent in speaking. I would argue that this attempt to rescue a kind of spontaneity from stereotyped forms is, in fact, one way to think about the associativeness of Part I as a whole. In a strict sense, unpredictability here is always a pretense: we are reading a text that has been written in advance, so it would be wrong to say that we move from one impression to the next spontaneously. Nonetheless, Conrad replaces the easy predictability of the nineteenth-century narrative form, where we know to what end we should direct our attention, with a kind of factitious free association. Even if we are not free to move from impression to impression

based on our own associations, we are nonetheless offered a vision of what such non-instrumental, unstructured attention might feel like.

Looking askance

Given the novel's title, Nostromo himself might be expected to provide a stable point of focus, around which the otherwise disparate impressions of Part I could cohere. Yet this is not the case. For although we see Nostromo repeatedly throughout the first part, he almost always appears tangentially, as a distraction from a story that hardly concerns him. As a rule, the narrator only seems to notice Nostromo at the very end of an account. Our own recognition arrives even later, since the narrator doesn't identify him immediately. In one instance, the narrator's attention lingers on a conversation between two members of the railroad surveying team, Sir John and the chief engineer, who are struggling to find a route neither blocked by mountains nor contested by influential Costaguanero landowners. Sir John suggests that Gould might intercede on their behalf with the landowners; only at this moment, when the conversation that had occupied us is concluding, does the narrator notice "the figure of a man wrapped in a poncho up to the neck…The man who, perhaps disturbed by the proximity of the voices, had arisen from the ground, struck a match to light a cigarette. The flame showed a bronzed, black-whiskered face, a pair of eyes gazing straight; then, rearranging his wrappings, he sank full length and laid his head again on the saddle" (*N* 34). With this description, which lacks any identifying features, the narrator suggests he is content to leave the man as a peripheral set-piece. If anything, the man's presence seems like an excuse for a demonstration of Conrad's impressionistic virtuosity. The momentary flare of the match suddenly shows a face where, a second before, there was none. The abruptness of the image effaces our sense of distinction between direct and represented perception. We no longer perceive things belatedly, only after the narrator sees and describes them; rather, we seem to see along with him, simultaneously, at the striking of the match.

A moment later, Sir John identifies the man as "our camp-master," but even this title gives little indication that he is more than a picturesque object. Only after Sir John's long account of the still-anonymous camp-master's resourcefulness does the narrator finally own the man's identity: "This camp-master was the Italian sailor whom all the Europeans in Sulaco, following Captain Mitchell's mispronunciation, were in the habit of calling Nostromo" (*N* 34). Most readers will have discerned that this is Nostromo by the beginning of the sentence; it's still noteworthy, however, that the narrator carries on the defamiliarization as long as possible, holding out on the name we know him by until the very end. In a later scene at the Violas' inn, Nostromo similarly appears as an afterthought, and is identified only belatedly. Here, the main event is a conversation between Emilia Gould and Giorgio Viola: even though the railway company has seized the land upon which the inn stands, Emilia joyfully informs Viola that she has secured a permanent exemption for him. Only after the sentimental scene is over does the narrator attend to the crowd at the edge of its frame: "People were passing in twos and threes, in whole parties of men and women attended by trotting children. A horseman mounted on a silver gray mare drew rein quietly in the shade of the house after taking off his hat to the party in the carriage, who returned smiles and familiar nods" (*N* 93). The narrator does not share in their immediate recognition. Even after Giorgio, "evidently very pleased," tells the man about Emilia's promise, the narrator refers to him only as "the other" who "listened attentively, but made no response" (*N* 93). We are given a long description of his outfit, a Mexican sombrero

and serape, before finally hearing that all the details of his dress "proclaimed the unapproachable style of the famous Capataz de Cargadores"—after which point he is named as Nostromo.

Far from training our attention on Nostromo, the first part makes us see our ostensible hero only out of the corner of our eye, as something we had at first neglected. Of course this defamiliarization is a gimmick that only lasts so long: eventually, readers realize that any shadowy, unidentified figure lurking at the periphery of our vision is in fact none other than our man himself. Nonetheless, the possibility that we might not immediately recognize Nostromo demonstrates how little coherence he provides. If we cannot even reliably identify our hero, how are we to make sense of the disparate narratives he's supposed to bring together?

In the two scenes I discuss above, Nostromo appears as a distraction: a vague presence at the margins of our attention, upon whom our gaze falls only accidentally. What is more, the narratives from which Nostromo distracts us—the building of the railway in the first scene, and the sentimental relationship between Emilia and Giorgio in the second—are more stereotypically novelistic than anything we read of our hero himself. An account of industrial development or a hagiography of a generous well-to-do woman would both be familiar subjects for a nineteenth-century novel. If Nostromo appears as a distraction from such stories, the book that bears his name similarly figures as a kind of negative novel—a compilation of the distracting sequences that lie on the cutting-room floor after a vast array of images has been reduced to a tightly focused narrative core. We hear from Mitchell that "the history" of Nostromo's ride to Cayta, critical to the Occidental Republic's victory, "would make a most exciting book," and yet this proverbially novelistic event is exactly what's left out of the novel we ourselves are reading (*N* 346). What receives our attention is what the characters themselves neglect: we move to the Viola inn, for example, only after hearing that the revolutionary mob has passed over it, "not by a miracle, but because with the safes in view they had neglected it at first, and afterwards found no leisure to stop" (*N* 13). Understandably focused on the more politically consequential and more materially promising railway yards, O.S.N. Company offices, and Custom House, the mob sees the Viola inn only in their peripheral vision. Yet it becomes the center of our gaze.

Of course, the misdirection by which an apparent distraction turns out to be the central point of focus appears often in nineteenth-century novels as an *opening* gambit. We might think of Tolstoy's beginning *Anna Karenina* with the story of Stiva's infidelity rather than Anna's; in this initial narrative, our heroine figures only as the helpful sister who might help Stiva repair his marriage. Similarly, *Madame Bovary*'s opening scene suggests that the novel will be a Bildungsroman about young Charles, a misdirection intensified by his marriage to a woman who is not Emma. Both Anna and Emma appear first as side stories, almost as distractions. But after an initial redirection, our focus becomes much more stable. *Nostromo*, however, recenters our gaze so often throughout the first part that, by its end, we can hardly distinguish between central and peripheral storylines at all.

"The stereotyped relation of the historical events"

With the beginning of Part Two, a more focused, linear historical narrative emerges. The populist Montero has launched an uprising in Santa Marta, and Gould is accordingly determined to get the latest shipment of silver to Holroyd, thereby ensuring his continuing support for the Sulaco capitalists and their threatened Blanco government. Meanwhile, the recently arrived journalist Martin Decoud proposes to the Sulaco elites that their Occidental Province of

Costaguana should declare its independence and form its own country, thereby putting itself—legally, at least—beyond Montero's control. These three plots, introduced in the opening chapters of Part Two, set our expectations and guide our attention for the rest of the novel: finally, it seems, we have an consistent set of filters to sort relevant impressions from distractions.

The movement from associative, distracted storytelling to ordered historical narrative coincides with the arrival of Decoud, whose recent personal transformation mirrors the novel's own. Born to a Criollo Costaguana family, Decoud studied in Paris as a young man and remained there to pursue life as "an idle boulevardier, in touch with some smart journalists, made free of a few newspaper offices, and welcomed in the pleasure haunts of pressmen" (*N* 111). He returns to Costaguana determined to set aside his passive flânerie and take an active part in shaping his homeland's future—in his case, by taking charge of a newspaper literally called *The Future* (*El Porvenir*). Of course, Decoud's productive work in Sulaco is not entirely unrelated to his idle pursuits in Paris: in both cases, he spends much of his time observing, writing, and talking. What has changed is how he frames these activities: previously pursued for their own sake, they now serve an end no less progressive than the future itself. Like Benjamin's flâneur, whose historical conditions transform his idle observation into the watchfulness of the detective, Decoud finds his attention instrumentalized.[31] With his arrival, the novel similarly moves away from the wandering distraction of Part I, content to drift forward or backward in time, towards a mode of narrative that focuses our attention squarely on Sulaco's future. It is Decoud who provides the novel's first fully legible historical narrative, in the form of a letter to his sister that the narrator reproduces in full. Rigidly linear and tightly focused, Decoud's account draws the disparate impressions we have heard so far into a single coherent sequence: the deposed Ribiera arrives in Sulaco on a lame mule and is saved from the crowd by Nostromo, Decoud presents his plan of secession to Emilia and Charles Gould, and the three of them make the plan to send the silver to Holroyd. Shockingly, the events which have been so often repeated and so confusingly fragmented as to stretch over hundreds of pages turn out to have taken place over only forty hours.

This transformation is literally progressive: finally we have the sense that the narrative is going somewhere, rather than wandering aimlessly among outdated legends and idle reminiscences. And if Decoud is able to keep his narrative and himself rigorously focused—so immune is he to distractions that he continues writing despite hunger and fatigue—it is because his attention is wholly trained on the future. He begins his letter by instructing his sister to "prepare our little circle in Paris for the birth of another South American republic" (*N* 162). The history that follows, then, is wholly directed toward this development: a conclusion that gives narrative shape to everything that comes before. Even after Decoud's letter ends, its linear, focused, forward-looking form remains until an abrupt break nearly 200 pages later.

Despite its apparent progressivism, the historical narrative as represented in *Nostromo* turns out to be a thoroughly conservative structure, serving only to reproduce an already reified understanding of how history unfolds. The first true historical narrator to appear in *Nostromo* is

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[31] "In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in the position of having to play detective. If the flâneur is thus turned into an unwilling detective, it does him a lot of good socially, for it legitimates his idleness. His indolence is only apparent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off the miscreant." Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," trans. Harry Zohn, in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006), 72.

also the most obvious exemplar of this conservative tendency. For long before the historical narrative takes over the novel, it finds expression in the character of Captain Mitchell, the superintendent of the O.S.N. Company, who prides himself on his "profound knowledge of men and things in the country" (*N* 10). Mitchell, "really very communicative under his air of pompous reserve," offers his own account of former President-Dictator Ribiera's escape long before the novel ever gets around to representing this key event of its historical plot firsthand. Not only does Mitchell's narrative appear prior to the novel's own; like Decoud's letter, it is also squarely focused on the events of obvious historical importance in a way that the novel itself rarely is. Mitchell also gives the final account of Costaguana history that the novel offers, more than 300 pages later.

But Mitchell's historical narration is also a parody, not least because of his megalomaniacal insertion of himself into every chain of causes and effects that he recounts. His perspective simplifies the complex circumstances of the revolution into the linear, easily comprehensible adventures of Captain Mitchell: "Ultimately, Captain Mitchell succeeded in taking everybody off in his own gig…He had to lower these gentlemen at the end of a rope out of a hole in the wall at the back…He had to hurry them then the whole length of the jetty" (*N* 11). Through all the turbulent events that lead to the formation of the Occidental Republic, Mitchell preserves his paramount sense of self-importance. The novel's final historical narrative finds Mitchell as concerned with his own significance as he was in its first. "The rest you know," Mitchell tells his interlocutor, concluding his account. "You've only got to look round you. There are people on this Alameda that ride in their carriages, or even are alive at all today, because years ago I engaged a runaway Italian sailor for a foreman of our wharf simply on the strength of his looks. And that's a fact. You can't get over it, sir" (*N* 347).

If we can't get over it, we are nonetheless tempted to tell Mitchell to get over himself. And yet Mitchell's self-importance, like Nostromo's vanity, is less a moral shortcoming of his own than an expression of a collective structure of feeling. Nostromo's vanity, wholly focused on the ephemeral spectacle of a particular act, corresponds to a world of action, in which the showing-forth of virtue is an end in itself. Mitchell's self-importance, by contrast, emphasizes the significance of his acts as means to other ends. He roots his self-regard less in a narcissistic admiration for his own courage or brilliance than in the conviction of his own efficacy. In this sense, Mitchell is the more historically oriented actor—even if he openly admits to understanding little of the history in which he so efficaciously participates. If the implicit demand of the historical novel is that its apparently ordinary characters end up facilitating world-historical progress, Mitchell makes this formal imperative into a personal desire. Like a man who's read too many historical novels and learned too well that ordinary people might shape the course of world events, Mitchell somehow makes himself the catalyst of Sulaco's progress. Nostromo, having newly adopted a rationalized perspective, sees it stain his great act with utter triviality; Mitchell, long adapted to this perspective, lets it transform his trivial deeds into critical contributions to the "progressive, patriotic undertaking."

Progressive and patriotic, certainly—but hardly political or historical. In place of history, Mitchell's narration offers "the more or less stereotyped relation of the 'historical events'" (*N* 340). With this phrase *Nostromo* breaks off its own firsthand account of events as they unfold and introduces the multiply mediated narration of an older Captain Mitchell, who tells the rest of the story from a distance of several years. This abrupt break is not only temporal but also epistemological: it substitutes the predictability of "stereotyped relation" for the apparent unpredictability of the revolution as it happens. Appearing at a climactic moment in the account

of the revolution, the phrase evokes an anachronistic sense that history has always already been mediated—written by a stereotyped narrative of progressive development and constrained by a reified definition of "historical events." Mitchell's sense of consequentiality relies upon his subordination to an accepted historical narrative, into which he can then insert his own otherwise trivial actions, making them indispensable catalysts. His is a "stereotyped relation" in a double sense: if his narrative relation of events relies on tired, predetermined clichés, so too is his own claim of a relationship to history dependent on the acceptance of such clichés. Even as he ostensibly acts on history, he is already fitting himself into a stereotyped narrative of "historical events," and thus ensuring that this stereotype persists unchanged. This paradox, by which present action is already stereotyped as historical narrative, is elegantly duplicated in the novel's abrupt transition from an apparently open-ended present to the already reified account of several years later.[32]

Of course Mitchell is a grandiose clown: in itself, his approach to history is not necessarily representative of anything more than his own laughably egoistic tendencies. But *Nostromo* offers two indicators that this closed-off understanding of history, always already a "stereotyped relation," is generalizable. First, Mitchell's narrow focus on his own consequentiality replicates the attitude of more estimable, less comic characters, including Gould, Decoud, Sir John, and Holroyd. Like Mitchell, these men all pledge their allegiance to a mode of progress that they see as wholly under their control, one whose ends and means can be defined beforehand, and whose shape is thus known from the beginning. Second, Mitchell's narration begins and ends the novel's historical account. Conrad thus invites us to consider the alignment between Mitchell's perspective and the attention demanded by the historical novel. Like the technocratic progress narrative, the historical novel assumes an end already known in advance and directs all our attention towards this end.

Significantly, however, *Nostromo* also denaturalizes this "classical" mode of the historical novel: in presenting it as Captain Mitchell's narration, the novel transmutes the classical mode from implicit form into explicit theme. By making this mode visible, *Nostromo* also renders it questionable. What might we see were our attention not constrained by a narrow focus on causes

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[32] Edward Said's reading of *Nostromo* similarly comments on the tension between experience as unpredictable, present reality and experience as fossilized narrative. This tension, he claims, is a product of "Conrad's habit of viewing his life as an uneasy compromise between two conflicting modes of existence…The first mode is to experience reality as an unfolding process, as action-being-made, as always 'becoming.' To experience all of this is to feel oneself in the midst of reality. The second mode is to feel reality as a hard quantity, very much 'there' and definable. To experience this is to view reality retrospectively, since only in looking back upon what has already occurred can one master the unceasing movement of action-being-made. In other words, the first mode is that of the actor, the second that of the author. Yet because mastery inevitably means control, the retrospective view modifies, and even contradicts, the richly complex dynamics of a specific action" (106). But Said ends up collapsing the problem of mastering reality into a more easily soluble question of personal bias and point-of-view, arguing that, with the exception of Emilia Gould, "the characters who carry out the retrospection distort reality almost beyond recognition…No one wants to see the whole of what is really happening. Instead everyone sees what he likes to *believe* happened" (107). By turning Conrad's ambivalence about recorded history into a problem of Jamesian point-of-view, Said is able to conclude that Nostromo's tensions are ultimately psychological rather than political, and even to argue that "readings of *Nostromo* that overemphasize its political dimension detract from the novel's overall effect" (134). Said's conclusion neglects the fact that the effort to "master the unceasing movement of action-being-made" is very much a *collective* one in *Nostromo*. The stereotypes through which characters narrate history, as well as the plans they project onto the future, are constituted by a multiplicity of figures. The constant effort to control the course of reality is therefore less a function of individual egotism and more an expression of the political drive to render progress predictable. Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

and effects, means and ends, all leading to the present situation from which we apprehend them? The distraction of *Nostromo*, which interrupts this teleological structure, suggests some possibilities.

The revelation that leads Nostromo to question the industrialists of Sulaco occurs to him in a moment of distraction. Having hidden the silver on the Isabels, left Decoud, swum back to shore, and slept for twelve hours, Nostromo finds his attention strangely untethered from the linear constraints that usually give structure to his perception. He takes "some time in regaining his hold on the world. It had slipped from him completely…It had been like a break of continuity in the chain of experience; he had to find himself in time and space, to think of the hour and the place of his return. It was a novelty" (*N* 296). In Barthes's words, Nostromo finds himself an "anachronic subject, adrift." The impression of awakening, distracted, and having to gain traction—to bring perception into contact with a comprehensible structure of experience—will become a central concern of high modernists, most obviously Proust. Here, in the first years of the twentieth century, it is indeed "a novelty." More surprising still is to extend this impression across a book and render it the reader's own, to make of it not just a momentary novelty, but a complete novel.

Decoud's letter first introduces historical narration through an abrupt break with an apparently firsthand representation; the "stereotyped relation of the historical events" Mitchell offers his visitors similarly cuts in at a moment when we had expected to see the historical events as they happened. What are these two sudden shifts but "break[s] of continuity in the chain of experience"—not a character's experience, but the reader's? They remove us from an increasingly suspenseful sequence of events only to deliver a conclusion that—arriving too soon, and appearing too mediated—destabilizes the linear structure that had guided our attention. These breaks are the temporal counterpart of the distraction Jameson describes in spatial terms, where a key historical event (the Ribiera dictator's flight) never occupies the center of our gaze. Instead, we see the event only out of the corner of our eye: as a peripheral detail to a separate story, or as an obstruction blocking our view of an unrelated scene. History, understood as a sequence of consequential developments leading to a present political reality, never appears in sharp focus. Either it is placed at the periphery of our vision, and thus only attended to in passing, or it is displaced prematurely by mediated retrospective narration, and therefore never fully attended to at all.

This loss of focus might seem apolitical or even antipolitical. It might also be read as a trivialization of Third World politics: for how might they appear to English and North American audiences except as peripheral developments, already over before such audiences quite knew they were underway? And yet I want to offer a different reading, one that turns on the highly restricted version of history that is marginalized in *Nostromo*. What Conrad defocuses is history understood as a linear narrative of progress, composed only of those events that lead to the realization of a predetermined future. By sidelining such events, Conrad opens up the space for us to see this version of history askance—decentered and denaturalized.

What new understanding does this perspective allow? I've spoken already of the continuity breaks in *Nostromo* as a problem of binocular vision, the impossibility of bringing two perspectives together into a single, focused picture. Thus the sudden insertion of "the stereotyped relation of the historical events" brings us prematurely to the end of the narrative, but also suggests, in its own phrasing, that this end was formed and even stereotyped before the events began. What is lost, we see, is a present horizon of possibility—which is also necessarily a horizon of unpredictability.

Given the generally (though idiosyncratically) conservative politics of Conrad and Arendt, both writers' valorization of unpredictability might seem like nothing more than a melancholic lament for a bygone mode of life. In this reading, spontaneity would be a "drifting relic" of an earlier age, like Stein or Giorgio Viola, whose radicalism could only point backwards.[33] Arendtian action might serve to denaturalize a reflexive modern reliance on principles of planning and efficiency, but its political potential would end there.

Put another way, the critique of technocratic planning I've articulated here is perhaps even more easily applied to the socialist modernization projects of the early Soviet Union than to their capitalist counterparts. Similarly, the greatest narrative exemplification of the principle of rational attention might be found not in the historical novels of the nineteenth century, but in the socialist realist novels of the mid-twentieth. For these novels invariably open with a definite goal, ambitious yet achievable, before relating the various steps our heroes take to reach them. Such novels allow little distraction either from the heroes' industrious work or from our ideological formation. They focus our attention, and the characters', almost exclusively on the rational processes of planning and execution, leaving no room for spontaneity. As any reader of these novels can attest, the principle of predictability governs their form as much as it does their characters' work: the pleasure of a socialist realist novel consists entirely of expecting a particular ending and gradually working towards it. The Soviet eschewal of unpredictability seems to fit neatly with Arendt and Conrad's largely backward-looking celebration of it.

Yet no less a revolutionist than Rosa Luxemburg insists on the necessity of spontaneity to genuine political life. Against Lenin's emphasis on planning, Luxemburg argues that an overly definite vision of the socialist future will preclude truly radical development. Revolutionaries must give up the idea that they can anticipate the course of history:

> Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realisation of socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future… The socialist system of society should only be, and can only be, an historical product, born out of the school of its own experiences, born in the course of its realisation, as a result of the developments of living history, which—just like organic nature of which, in the last analysis, it forms a part—has the fine habit of always producing along with any real social need the means to its satisfaction, along with the task simultaneously the solution…Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative new force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts.[34]

And although the days of Soviet central planning are long gone, Luxemburg's defense of spontaneity maintains its relevance in the face of contemporary paradigms that make the acceptance of utter predictability the entrance ticket to "serious" political participation. These paradigms, now issued by the right, proudly declare that "there is no alternative" to a neoliberal order in which policy is dictated by technocrats from organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. To believe otherwise is to marginalize oneself as an impractical dreamer, and thus to invite exclusion from political life altogether. "There is no alternative" is not just an assertion of present power, the voice of an authority too total to oppose, as it might seem when applied to demands for economic austerity and privatization. The phrase is also an

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[33] *Nostromo* refers to Garibaldi's unification effort as "that very cause of which old Giorgio Viola was a drifting relic"; as in Stein's case, Viola's once-radical allegiances now appear as fossils of an irrecoverable past (*N* 46).

[34] Luxemburg, Rosa. "The Russian Revolution." Trans. Bertram Wolfe. *Socialism or Barbarism: The Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Paul LeBlanc and Helen Scott (New York: Pluto, 2010), 232-233.

assertion of control over the future, a promise—or a threat—that there will never be a future that looks meaningfully different from the present, that neoliberalism is truly the end of history. Any attempt to venture down another path would simply be an aberration: as for Captain Mitchell, every event is "classed either as 'history' or as 'a mistake'" (*N* 97). An event that qualifies as "history" is one that works towards the realization of a predetermined plan; a deviation is necessarily a "mistake."

Mitchell makes one exception to this binary system. If the act by which Nostromo saves Ribiera from the revolutionary mob is undoubtedly, "absolutely making history," it is tarnished in retrospect by having led "immediately to another, which could not be classed either as 'history' or as 'a mistake' in Captain Mitchell's phraseology. He had another word for it. 'Sir,' he used to say afterwards, 'that was no mistake. It was a fatality. A misfortune, pure and simple, sir'" (*N* 97). This event is presumably Nostromo's futile endeavor to get the silver to San Francisco, after which, even Mitchell notices, "he has never been the same man" (*N* 97). The emergence of chance, even in its negative guise of "misfortune," destabilizes the binary of history and mistake. It falls wholly outside the rational framework of planning, in which a good plan, successfully realized, becomes history, and a futile one is remembered as mistake. To recognize the role of chance requires seeing outside the strictly constrained attention of planning, which assures us that progress is a simple matter of formulating a vision and calculating the necessary steps to get there.

Chance has had a role in the development of Sulaco all along—a fact that indicates history could easily have taken a different direction. This reality is difficult to notice since our attention is so thoroughly structured by the plans of men like Gould and Decoud: we are trained to look for signs of their realization everywhere, with the inverse result that every "progressive" development that happens appears as a manifestation of a successful plan. And yet the historical trajectory of the novel is highly contingent. "I have inspired confidence in a man of wealth and position," Charles tells Emilia, referring to Holroyd. "You seem to think this perfectly natural—do you? Well, I don't know. I don't know why I have; but it is a fact. This fact makes everything possible" (*N* 55). The contingency—even irrationality—of this fact is reinforced by the narrator's subsequent explanation that "men of affairs venture sometimes on acts that the common judgment of the world would pronounce absurd; they take their decisions on apparently impulsive and human grounds" (*N* 57). And if Holroyd's support for Gould is based on personal caprice, so too is the fact of their meeting in the first place revealed as cosmic chance: Holroyd receives Gould in San Francisco only because "my brother-in-law met him in one of these one-horse old German towns" (*N* 60). The associative format of Part I, itself a series of aleatory movements, allows us to appreciate the chance sequence of events that leads to Gould's resurrection of the mine, and from there to the secession of the Occidental Republic. Only later is this contingency mystified by narratives of planned, linear progress.

To recognize the contingencies that brought us to the present might also allow us to notice the contingencies that could get us out of it. Unclassifiable "either as 'history' or as 'a mistake,'" such moments of chance exceed the rational framework not just of stereotyped, linear history, but also of the planning narrative: they cannot be considered mistakes because they were never part of any calculated undertaking. They lead us outside the empty utilitarianism of technocratic modernity, whose only operative principles are the binaries of efficacy and futility, calculation and mistake.

By training us to attend to chance impressions—details we haven't planned for, information we cannot accommodate into any preexisting framework—*Nostromo* also allows us to attend to

impressions *of* chance. These impressions appear as fissures: "breaks in the continuity of experience," as the narrator says of Nostromo's disorientation on the shore, in which the contingency of a single apprehension is temporarily unmoored from a demand for seamless continuity. Such moments not only prompt us to question reified narratives of history, which smooth contingency into continuity. They also suggest possibilities for futures not continuous with the present trajectory of development, not governed by planning narratives that stereotype history in advance. These possibilities—arriving unexpectedly and pointing uncertainly towards a future whose shape we cannot fully imagine—can only appear as distractions to the technocratic perspective, which finds nothing worth seeing beyond its own delimited vision.

Chapter 4. Attention with Interest: The Privatization of Distraction in *Ulysses*

The distracted aesthetic that distinguishes James Joyce's *Ulysses* has often been read as a response to the distracting sensorium said to define modern urban life. Describing what he calls "an extraordinary complicity between social phenomenon and literary form," Franco Moretti argues that the famously capacious stream of consciousness Joyce attributes to Leopold Bloom reflects the oversaturated urban environment that provides the backdrop for much of Bloom's thinking.[1] In Moretti's account, the vertiginous, apparently accidental movement of Bloom's attention—which pauses only momentarily to consider a particular object before being diverted by an often unexpected and unrelated impression—is enjoined, above all else, by the profusion of advertisements and other mass media forms, which present themselves to an individual in such quick succession that each can only be attended to for an instant. Advertising, Moretti claims, "is a bombardment that no one expects, and that nineteenth-century grammar is incapable of withstanding."[2] Stream of consciousness, by contrast, gives literary form to a mode of perception porous and furtive enough to welcome this bombardment:

> Attention, clarity, concentration: the old virtues are useless. Instead of harmonizing with advertising, they perceive it as an irritating noise. A different style is required, in order to find one's way in the city of words; a weaker grammar than that of consciousness; an edgy, discontinuous syntax: a cubism of language, as it were. And the stream of consciousness offers precisely that: simple, fragmented sentences, where the subject withdraws to make room for the invasion of things; paratactical paragraphs, with the doors flung wide, and always enough room for one more sentence, and one more stimulus.[3]

Moretti's discussion of the relationship between advertising and stream of consciousness, which "pursue and implicate one another throughout *Ulysses*," offers an instantiation of the more general understanding that connects the newly distracted forms of modernist narration to the emerging technologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[4] In this account, modernism is distracted because modernity is distracting. The associative movement and encyclopedic scope of modernist novels reflect the proliferation of machines that allow individuals to witness a broader range of experiences at a greater speed than ever before, while also responding to the emergence of a consumer culture that demands its audience's focus be sufficiently dynamic and broad to accommodate its ever-more-diverse and unexpected stimuli.

This chapter proposes a contrary understanding of the relationship between distractibility and modern urban life. If Bloom's stream of consciousness represents a remarkable capacity for absentminded, non-instrumental receptivity, I argue that Joyce presents such receptivity as anything but a universal response to the transformations of capitalist modernity. Turning away from Bloom's particular mode of perception and towards the survey of urban modes of attention offered by "Wandering Rocks," I argue that Joyce brings to light the ongoing processes by which mass media forms instrumentalize their subjects' attention, imposing on previously idle noticing a direction and an endpoint. Like "Nausicaa," "Wandering Rocks" points towards a late-nineteenth-century print culture that has trained its readers to see the city as a legible index of social types and thus leads them to ignore the less readily assimilable impressions that make

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[1] Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. Quintin Hoare (New York: Verso, 1996), 135.
[2] Moretti, *Modern Epic*, 135.
[3] Moretti, *Modern Epic*, 135.
[4] Moretti, *Modern Epic*, 135.

urban experience distracting: the representations of city life offered by newspapers, popular auto-ethnographies, and mass-market novels all replace confusion and curiosity with systematic classification. Meanwhile, what remains of stray attention is quickly being captured by the modern visual culture of the city itself, which channels open receptivity towards definite ends. Even as *Ulysses* evokes the aesthetic and intellectual possibilities afforded by distractibility, the novel also suggests the speed with which mass culture is foreclosing these possibilities through the twin processes of domesticating and privatizing distraction. In my account, *Ulysses* represents the absentminded receptivity it celebrates as the exception, rather than the rule, of life under capitalist modernity.

Treating the privatization of distraction as noteworthy requires making a case that distraction once was—and could be—a publicly oriented mode. This claim seems particularly implausible in a contemporary context, where our conception of distraction is invariably tied to cell phone apps and Internet culture. For us, to be distracted is to turn away from a shared conversation or a common sensory experience towards a private realm of highly personalized delights. Distraction, as encapsulated by images of subway riders or dinner companions each looking at their own phone, is utterly inimical to social—let alone civic—awareness. And this sense of distraction as necessarily isolating is only heightened by an analysis of how these personalized media experiences are produced: through algorithms that cater to our previously expressed tastes and proclivities, showing us a private world ever more carefully curated to satisfy our desires, while insulating us from too much contact with the shared world that threatens to resist them.

This chapter finds in the early twentieth century the remnants of a different model of distraction: distraction as the interruption of predictable, habitual processes of sense-making by unexpected impressions. Rather than a retreat from common experience to a private, curated realm, this form of distraction effects the opposite movement: from the tunnel vision of private interests, which accommodates only impressions that serve those interests, to a broader public world. And where contemporary, technologically mediated distraction is commonly understood as a form of effortless consumption, this earlier, public mode of distraction is characterized by friction, as the smooth, well-worn mechanisms of instrumental attention bump up against a world whose unpredictability resists the imposition of private ends.

In its association of unpredictability with publicness, my argument draws on Hannah Arendt's account of the public sphere as defined by spontaneity. The better-known part of this argument describes the public realm as the configuration that makes unplanned, self-disclosing action possible. Because an individual cannot know his own essence—the *daimon* on his shoulder he can never turn far enough to see—he cannot know in advance what he will disclose. As opposed to a calculated performance, action is defined by its lack of intentionality and instrumentality: it arises outside conscious control and serves no defined end. The spontaneous, unexpected quality of political action means that the public sphere is distinguished by its capacity to surprise, which differentiates it from the thoroughly predictable, uniquely modern sphere of the social.[5] As I argued in my previous chapter, distraction, though never discussed by

[5] "It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to 'normalize' its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement. With Rousseau, we find these demands in the salons of high society, whose conventions always equate the individual with his rank within the social framework. What matters is this equation with social status, and it is immaterial whether the framework happens to be actual rank in the half-feudal society of the eighteenth century, title in the class society of the nineteenth, or mere function in the mass society of today." The tendency of the social to reduce individuals to types, predicting and policing their behavior based on their

Arendt, offers a vital means of apprehending this unpredictability. Where modern, teleological modes of attention tend to exclude what they do not expect and thus cannot readily make use of, the distractible subject remains open to unforeseen impressions and spontaneous thoughts.

A reading of Arendt, however, can only connect distraction and the public realm through the shared term of unpredictability. A more direct link is apparent in the work of Siegfried Kracauer, who conceives of distraction as a collective, potentially revolutionary encounter with the tensions of the modern city, otherwise smoothed over by ideology, culture, and habitus. The disjointed sequences of early cinema, which Kracauer considers the exemplary "art of distraction," prime audiences to notice the fissures of bourgeois modernity in the world outside the theatre: "Here, in pure externality, the audience encounters itself: its own reality is revealed in the fragmented sequence of splendid sense impressions. Were this reality to remain hidden from the audience, they could neither attack nor change it; its disclosure in distraction is therefore of *moral* significance."[6] For Kracauer, then, distraction is a stopgap measure: a vital but perhaps contingent way out of an overly streamlined yet wholly irrational mode of existence. Walter Benjamin suggests a similar association between distraction and public life, but posits it as an enduring feature of our relationship to a common world. Film, for Benjamin as for Kracauer, exemplifies the artistic invitation to "reception in a state of distraction."[7] Yet Benjamin finds a longstanding precedent for such a mode of reception in architecture, whose "history is more ancient than that of any other art."[8] The products of architecture, a form that "has significance in every attempt to comprehend the relationship of the masses to art" are apprehended "less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion": for Benjamin, the common objects that constitute a shared world are perceived most fully only out of the corner of our eye.[9]

Benjamin, of course, finds distraction ever more ubiquitous in interwar Europe, arguing that "reception in a state of distraction…is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception"[10]; in *Ulysses*, I trace an opposite trajectory, revealing a culture in the process of privatizing distraction. By privatization, I indicate several distinct but related transformations. First, privatization as domestication: *Ulysses* represents the growing influence of cultural imperatives that discourage distraction in the public worlds of work, politics, and commerce, allowing it only in the private spaces of home life. And even as distraction is relocated to the private sphere, the jumbled urban life that causes such consternation in a novel like *Bleak House* is rendered manageable—domesticated in a figurative sense. Finally, *Ulysses* reveals the monetization of distraction, particularly through advertising. The urban world Joyce represents is no longer one in which attention floats freely by default; rather, it is readily captured and instrumentalized by the technologies of consumer capitalism.

"function," will become significant in my reading of "Wandering Rocks." Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 40-41.

[6] Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987), 91-96, 94.

[7] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 2007), 240.

[8] Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 240.

[9] Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 240.

[10] Benjamin, "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 240..

Urban legibility in "Wandering Rocks"

In a narrative sense, "Wandering Rocks" is a chapter of pure distraction. Set in the middle of the afternoon, after the heaviness of the morning funeral and before the arguments of the evening and the revelations of the night, the tenth episode turns away from the major characters and developing plots to look around for a bit. Indeed, main characters and minor ones are transvalued. We see Bloom and Molly almost literally out of the corner of our eye, glimpsing only parts of their bodies at the edges of other interactions. Neither is ever called by name: Bloom is a "darkbacked figure scan[ing] books on the hawker's car" who appears for a moment during a conversation between Blazes Boylan and a fruitseller;[11] Molly "a generous white arm" that "from a window in Eccles street flung forth a coin" while the undertaker Corny Kelleher talks to a passing policeman (10:222). And if what were the main attractions have now been reduced to mere distractions, the reverse has happened as well: characters like Kelleher, who appeared only in passing at the funeral, assume the role of primary actors in "Wandering Rocks." The chapter first encounters him "clos[ing] his long daybook" (10:207) and "looking idly out" at the city (10:212); so too does "Wandering Rocks" seem momentarily to close the novel we've been reading, setting aside any imperative for forward movement in its plots, and look out, idly, onto Joyce's world.

Yet if the chapter presents itself as a set of sideshows among which we wander idly, its characters are hardly flâneurs. Although they walk the city, very few ever lose themselves in its distractions. The most prominent character in "Wandering Rocks" is not the idly looking Corny Kelleher, but the tunnel-visioned Father Conmee, whose values constrain his attention so rigidly that he misapprehends most of the impressions the chapter offers. Encountering a shamefaced couple in the midst of Clongowes field, Conmee seems comically unaware of the reason for their embarrassment:

> Father Conmee read in secret *Pater* and *Ave* and crossed his breast. *Deus in auditorium*.
>
> He walked calmly and read mutely the nones, walking and reading till he came to *Res* in *Beati immaculati: Principium verborum tuorum veritas: in eternum omnia iudicia iustitiae tuæ.*
>
> A flushed young man came from a gap of a hedge and after him came a young woman with wild nodding daisies in her hand. The young man raised his cap abruptly: the young woman abruptly bent and with slow care detached from her light skirt a clinging twig.
>
> Father Conmee blessed both gravely and turned a thin page of his breviary. *Sin: Principes persecuti sunt me gratis: et a verbis tuis formidavit cor meum*. (10:193-205)

"Sin," in the context of Father Conmee's breviary, is the vocalization of the Hebrew letter that begins a verse of the Psalms. But by placing it after the description of the couple, Joyce prompts us to read it as an English word: a description of their covert liaison in the hedge. The juxtaposition not only prompts us to attend to their possible transgression, but also to notice that Conmee has not noticed it, or cannot admit to himself that he has.

More often, though, Conmee does not so much neglect what he perceives as attend to it in a wholly programmatic way. Observing "a turfbarge, a towhorse with pendent head, a bargeman with a hat of dirt straw seated amidships," Father Conmee can only think that "it was idyllic" and "refle[ct] on the providence of the Creator who had made turf to be in bogs where men might dig

[11] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986), 10:315. Hereafter cited parenthetically by episode and line numbers.

it out and bring it to town and hamlet to make fires in the houses of poor people" (10:101-06). Conmee exemplifies the Jesuit imperative to find God in all things, but only in the most parodic sense: his apprehensions of divine grace appear not as revelations but as formulas, often tired and ill-suited to the situations onto which he projects them. A woman who rushes to get off the tram as it pulls away from the stop becomes an emblem of mundane piety as soon as she is noticed: "She passed out with her basket and a market net: and Father Conmee saw the conductor help her and net and basket down: and Father Conmee thought that, as she had nearly passed the end of the penny fare, she was one of those good souls who had always to be told twice *bless* you, my child, that they have been absolved, *pray for me*" (10:135-40). Joyce's colons emphasize a mechanical movement from chance impression to conscious perception to appropriately pious, wholly unsurprising conclusion. It is not that Conmee lacks perspicacity—his deduction that the woman got off in an effort to take only what she paid for is clever detective work—but rather that he fits everything he perceives into a rigid pre-existing framework. Indeed, if the episode's opening image of Conmee as he "reset his smooth watch" has traditionally been regarded as signaling its interest in simultaneity, the double meaning of "watch" also suggests a comment on the kind of gaze Conmee casts over Dublin (10:1-2). His attention converts every impression into a predetermined conclusion so fluidly that it not only avoids getting caught on any particular object, but also fails to achieve any kind of traction in its encounter with the world. Instead, Conmee's "smooth watch" simply continues its machine-like functioning.

Thus if the content of Conmee's attention is often religious, its form is hardly mystical: to Conmee, nothing appears as ineffable or sublime. The quickness with which he processes chance impressions into apprehensions of divine grace stands in particular contrast to the dilatory practice of attention associated with Jesuit formation in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. There, religious attention is figured as a structure that suspends forward movement, slowing the progress of the narrative so dramatically that the novel's middle episode largely unfolds in real time. The Jesuit retreat Stephen attends has at its center an effort to imagine eternity—an impossible goal that is nonetheless approximated through a rhetoric that suggests progress only to reveal that nothing has changed. The familiar Brothers Grimm formula of a bird pecking away at an enormous mass with painstaking slowness becomes even more absurdly static in the preacher's telling:

> How many millions upon millions of centuries would pass before that bird had carried away even a square foot of that mountain, how many eons upon eons of ages before it had carried away all. Yet at the end of that immense stretch of time not even one instant of eternity could be said to have ended. At the end of all those billions and trillions of years eternity would have scarcely begun. And if that mountain rose again after it had been all carried away and if the bird came again and carried it all away grain by grain: and if it so rose and sank as many times as there are stars in the sky, atoms in the air, drops of water in the sea, leaves on the trees, feathers upon birds, scales upon fish, hairs upon animals, at the end of all those innumerable risings and sinkings of that immeasurably vast mountain not one single instant of eternity could be said to have ended; even then, at the end of such a period, after that eon of time the mere thought of which makes our very brain reel dizzily, eternity would have scarcely begun.[12]

Elsewhere, the preacher insists that we cannot begin to envision eternity, instead repeating purely symbolic formulas like "ever, never; ever, never" (112) and "Time is, time was, but time shall be

[12] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 111. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

no more" (95; repeated on 104). Here, however, he suggests a structure of attention in which the incomprehensible can at least be conceived. This structure relies on constant defamiliarization to "mak[e] our very brain reel dizzily": as soon as one scale of time comes into focus, our attention is abruptly shifted to another, vastly larger one. The sequence of images repeatedly pulls the rug out from under us as it reveals that the outer limits of our gaze in fact constitute, in the words of *Ulysses*, "a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity" (17:1055-56). What we end up experiencing is a kind of cognitive vertigo, in which our imagination is caught between two incommensurable conceptual orders. Here, religious attention is defined by the effort to sustain this state of incomprehension for as long as possible. By contrast, Conmee's attention is never arrested by anything: neither sensory impressions nor imaginative constructions can interrupt its machine-like processing of the world into practical maxims. If he lacks any sort of deep wisdom, Conmee reliably performs surface understanding: the closest he comes to incomprehension is his reflection upon remembering the vast number of non-Christians in the world that "it seemed…a pity that they should all be lost, a waste, if one might say" (10:151-52). Here, even fundamental theological problems arrive in a mundane, easily digestible form, as considerations of waste and efficiency.

Of course, Conmee's comically efficient attention, which processes without truly apprehending, is only one aspect of a more pervasive Jesuit worldliness that Joyce parodies in "Wandering Rocks." Conmee's perception of the world is often not just practical but mercenary—a distinction elided in the final sentence of the first paragraph, when he reflects that he should do everything possible to satisfy Martin Cunningham's request since Cunningham himself is a "good practical catholic: useful at mission time" (10:5-6). Such "practical catholic" considerations seem to guide Conmee's focus on social distinctions: seeing someone he knows in the street, he recognizes her not by her name nor by his relation to her, but rather as "the wife of Mr David Sheehy M.P." (10:17). The appellation is comically repeated throughout their exchange: "Father Conmee was very glad to see the wife of Mr David Sheehy M.P. looking so well and he begged to be remembered to Mr David Sheehy M.P. Yes, he would certainly call" (10:26-28). Our first introduction to Conmee similarly defines him by social rank rather than any other characteristic, offering no description except his title as "The superior, the very reverend John Conmee S.J." (10:1).

This label may well represent how the status-conscious Conmee thinks of himself. Yet it is also consistent with the chapter's more general tendency to represent its characters as specimens of particular social roles. In the literal final analysis offered by its last section, "Wandering Rocks" resolves its apparently disparate impressions into a tightly focused, easily legible typology, which identifies characters by their formal titles and brings their hitherto divergent paths together around the unifying spectacle of an aristocratic cavalcade. The section even opens in the register of a society-page account in a conservative newspaper: "William Humble, earl of Dudley, and Lady Dudley, accompanied by lieutenantcolonel Hesseltine, drove out after luncheon from the viceregal lodge. In the following carriage were the honourable Mrs. Paget, Miss de Courcy and the honourable Gerald Ward, A. D. C. in attendance" (10:1176-79). The various characters whose divergent paths the chapter has followed are now reorganized in relation to the cavalcade, as, for instance, "at Bloody Bridge Mr Thomas Kernan beyond the river greeted [the earl] vainly from afar" (10:1183-84) and "on Ormond quay Mr Simon Dedalus, steering his way from the greenhouse for the sub-sheriff's office, stood still in midstreet and brought his hat low. His excellency graciously returned Mr Dedalus's greeting" (10:1199-1202). If the chapter as a whole is a play of interpellations, the final section literalizes Louis Althusser's

famous figure of interpellation, in which an ideologically constituted authority hails individuals and thereby makes them subjects. The appearance of the cavalcade gives social as well as spatial order to the previously kaleidoscopic fragments.

Of course, even as Joyce makes this order perceptible, he unsettles it through the inclusion of details that would never appear in society-page writing. Sometimes these details are explicitly parodic, as in the episode's memorable last sentence:

> On Northumberland and Landsdowne roads His Excellency acknowledged punctually salutes from rare male walkers, the salute of two small schoolboys at the garden gate of the house said to have been admired by the late queen when visiting the Irish capital with her husband, the prince consort, in 1849, and the salute of Almidano Artifoni's sturdy trousers swallowed by a closing door. (10:1277-82)

This final asinine "salute," bringing up the rear of the section, makes us look askance at all the apparently sincere and proper salutes that come before. It also destabilizes the deferential register evoked throughout the section and exemplified by the rest of this sentence, in which Dublin is refocused through the gaze of English authority. More often, though, Joyce's destabilizing details lack such obviously anti-authoritarian content: they are unsettling formally rather than politically. The note that "the reverend Hugh C. Love, M. A., made obeisance unperceived, mindful of lords deputies whose hands benignant had held of yore rich advowsons" (10:1202-04) or that "Gerty MacDowell, carrying the Catesby's cork lino letters for her father who was laid up, knew by the style it was the lord and lady lieutenant but she couldn't see what Her Excellency had on" (10:1206-09) don't suggest any kind of political subversion: Love is respectful and Gerty admiring. Yet these fragments in free indirect break the society-page register. Rather than representing individual responses as a series of barely distinguishable salutes, such fragments offer the characters' reactions in their own idioms. Moreover, the characters' responses reveal their own particular interests in the cavalcade—whether Love's mercenary desire to curry favor or Gerty's more innocent curiosity about Lady Dudley's outfit—behind the impersonal, repeated form of the salute.

As Gerty and Love's reflections suggest, the royal cavalcade can hardly be read as either revealing or imposing a unified sense of purpose. Far from a fervent pledging of collective allegiance, the final assembly of "Wandering Rocks" exposes its own contingency: the crowd is composed simply of those individuals who happen to be there, and they in turn are brought into proximity of the cavalcade by their own interests and intentions rather than by any shared ideological drive. The society pages whose style Joyce imitates would paint the cavalcade as conferring national unity, yet this is hardly the case: the most that can be said is that the aristocrats' appearance grants a *semblance* of unity and purpose to an otherwise random confluence of people. Such a reading is consistent with Benjamin's emphasis on the essentially accidental character of the modern assembly, in which the sense of a collective purpose can only ever appear after the fact:

> A street, a conflagration, or a traffic accident assembles people who are not defined along class lines. They present themselves as concrete gatherings, but socially they remain abstract—namely, in their isolated private concerns. Their models are the customers who, each acting in his private interest, gather at the market around their "common cause." In many cases, such gatherings have only a statistical existence. This existence conceals the really monstrous thing about them: that the concentration of private persons as such is an accident resulting from their private concerns. But if these concentrations become evident—and totalitarian states see to this by making the concentration of their citizens permanent and

> obligatory for all purposes—their hybrid character is clearly manifest, particularly to those who are involved. They rationalize this accident of the market economy which brings them together in this way as "fate" in which "the race" is reunited.[13]

The totalitarian context Benjamin describes necessarily gives rise to an ideological screen that conceals the crowd's own contingency. In order for individuals not to be alarmed at the disordered amalgamation of the crowd, they must see it as representing a greater ethnic or national unity. Joyce's assembly, however, puts forth this fiction only to expose it. No ethnic unity of the Irish people is suggested here; the only possible "rationalization" for the random assembly that Joyce presents must follow imperialist lines that the novel has already revealed as contrived, oppressive, and contested by the majority of its characters. Not only the satirical tail that ends "Wandering Rocks" but also the earlier, divergent paths of the characters it represents subvert any imposition of ideological unity. If the final section offers a satisfying sense of coherence, making of disparate individuals a social whole, so too does it reveal this wholeness as temporary and accidental.

Many critics have accordingly read "Wandering Rocks" as a neat refusal of ideology, bookended by the opening Conmee section, which satirizes the all-encompassing worldview of the Church, and the final account of the cavalcade, which subverts the authoritative gaze of the British colonial state.[14] In this interpretation, the chapter rejects the "two masters…the imperial British state…and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church" whose control over his life Stephen bemoans in the novel's first episode (1:638-44). To this reading I would add that both sections particularly subvert the attitude of knowingness assumed by the Catholic Church and the British State, whose representatives take everything in Dublin as immediately legible. And yet even as "Wandering Rocks" opposes the knowing presumptions of church and state, it mimics the knowingness of a different cultural authority, one whose influence is growing even as the fortunes of the Catholic Church and the British State seem more uncertain. This third institution, mass media, lacks the obvious ideological commitments of the church and the state. But the media vision of public space as wholly transparent and readily legible is ideologically significant nonetheless.

Earlier in the same essay, Benjamin describes the rise of a new genre in the French print culture of the mid-nineteenth century: what he refers to as the physiology, and which might more generally be described as a typology or auto-ethnography. This genre, one instantiation of the broader phenomenon Benjamin calls "panoramic literature," describes, depicts, and organizes the social types its reader might find in the city, explaining, for instance, how to tell the difference between a *grisette* ("a young working woman such as a shopgirl or seamstress who lives

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[13] Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," trans. Harry Zohn, in *The Writer of Modern Life*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006), 92-93.

[14] See, for example, Trevor Williams's " 'Conmeeism' and the Universe of Discourse in 'Wandering Rocks': Williams claims that in "here, more than anywhere else in *Ulysses*, Joyce lays bare, makes transparent, the source, in British colonialism and in Roman Catholicism, of the oppression his characters everywhere suffer from." Williams, " 'Conmeeism and the Universe of Discourse in 'Wandering Rocks,'" *James Joyce Quarterly* 29.2 (Winter 1992): 267-279, 268. See also Shan-Yun Huang's more recent reading, which argues that the episode's fragmentation exposes the false sense of unity imposed by totalizing ideologies: "The sections are like small episodes joined together not by the narrative but by the routes of Conmee and the viceregal cavalcade. These are unifying devices external to the narrative, since what the church and the state each represents is external to colonial Ireland…The lack of an organic unifying device from within the narrative mirrors the lack of unifying power in the society it depicts, its sense of discontinuity amplified by the divergent and often contradictory actions of its denizens, mostly as a result of Ireland's colonial history." Huang, " 'Wandering Temporalities': Rethinking *Imagined Communities* through 'Wandering Rocks,'" *James Joyce Quarterly* 49.3-4 (Spring-Summer 2012): 589-610, 597.

frugally, independently and for the most part virtuously") and a *lorette* ("a kept woman, living comfortably and showily at the expense of her wealthy lovers").[15] These various physiologies thus come together to create a single physiology of urban public life. Whether or not the entries confer actual knowledge about the vast number of individuals a reader encounters, they offer a sense of knowingness with which to confront the otherwise jarring urban world, so rich in stimuli as to seem hopelessly jumbled and constantly distracting. (As we shall see, the physiology and its promise to render the crowd legible will reappear, only to be problematized, in "Circe.") Such typologies construct a framework in which urban experience is no longer overwhelming, confusing, and illegible, but comfortingly predictable. This sense of safety, Benjamin suggests, seeps into the content of the individual entries: he notes that "the long series of eccentric or appealingly simple or severe figures which the physiologies presented to the public in character sketches had one thing in common: they were harmless and perfectly affable."[16] The effect of the physiologies is to domesticate public space, both in the sense of taming its wildness and in the sense of making a reader feel at home in it. In Benjamin's words, "if one can say that the physiologies employ an artistic device, it is the proven device of the feuilleton—namely, the transformation of the boulevard into an *intérieur*."[17]

Two points in Benjamin's account of the physiologies are particularly relevant in connection with "Wandering Rocks." The first is the association between the physiology and other forms of mass-market print culture, most notably the newspaper. For although the physiologies were generally published in book form, Benjamin repeatedly draws both stylistic parallels and historical connections between the panoramic physiology and the newspaper feuilleton. If feuilleton and physiology have a domesticating effect, turning "the boulevard into an *intérieur*," both forms themselves are also wholly domesticated varieties of print, engineered to avoid causing offense by resisting any political ascriptions. Feuilletons began publishing serialized novels because "it was necessary to have a lure which was directed at all regardless of their private opinion and which replaced politics with curiosity"[18]; similarly, the rise of the physiologies followed the tightening of French censorship laws in 1836 and the emergence of a political climate in which "innocuousness was of the essence."[19] The second relevant point, then, is the absence of any clear political agenda and the resulting capacity of the physiologies to position themselves outside politics.

As Benjamin points out, this stance outside politics is only ever apparent. Benjamin argues that the physiologies do perform multiple politically significant functions: not only do they assist

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[15] Gillian Taylor Lerner, "The French Profiled by Themselves: Social Typologies, Advertising Posters, and the Illustration of Consumer Lifestyles," *Grey Room* 27 (Spring 2007): 6-35, 33, note 39. Lerner notes that Paul Garvarni's advertising poster for one of the most widely read French physiologies, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, features a teasingly ambiguous depiction of social types. The illustrations and explanations of the volume itself, of course, promise to resolve this ambiguity for whoever is willing to purchase them: "Gavarni's French types leave much room for misreading. Are the couple on the left decidedly Parisian or could they be tourists from the country? Might they be an artist, journalist, or medical student with a *grisette*? A wealthy stockholder strolling with his wife? Or is it his mistress: an adulterous woman or perhaps a *lorette*? This lack of clarity is partly a solicitous ruse of the title motif, holding out the promise that the portraits within *Les Français* and *Les animaux* will help the studious reader to parse out the differences between the carp and the parrot, the provincial and the Parisian, the *grisette* and the *lorette*." (20)

[16] Benjamin, "Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 69.

[17] Benjamin, "Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 68.

[18] Alfred Nettement, *Histoire de la literature française sous le Gouvernement de Juillet* (Paris, 1859), vol. 1, pp. 51ff., qtd. in Benjamin, "Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 66.

[19] Benjamin, "Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 67.

readers in accommodating themselves to the shocks of modern life, thus helping ensure that subjects do not revolt against the new demands placed on them, but they also begin the turn of print culture towards a universal audience. Like the feuilletons, the physiologies aim to capture the greatest possible market share by refusing to alienate any sector of society. Yet I would argue that the genre is also political in a third sense that Benjamin does not directly discuss. By promising to demystify the city, the physiology actually does train its readers' attention on those impressions that are readily legible, leading them to filter out those that are disjunctive or surprising. In other words, by offering a vision of urban life stripped of unpredictability and illegibility, the genre prompts its readers to attend only to those aspects of the city for which it prepares them. The readily legible representation of city life it offers is, of course, factitious. And yet by training readers to attend to certain aspects of urban experience and not others, mass media forms like the physiology shape their perception of the city itself. In this way, the genre effaces the unpredictability of public space. Like Father Conmee's "practical catholic" worldview, the physiology replaces distraction or surprise with a smooth, never-failing mechanism for processing potentially unsettling impressions into reified conclusions.

Of course, Joyce satirizes both Conmee and the newspaper whose style the episode's final section channels. But as I will argue, "Wandering Rocks" itself imitates the media operation that transforms distracted impressions into legible typologies, spontaneous observations into predetermined conclusions, and public experience into private interest. In doing so, the episode draws our attention to the tendency of mass culture to streamline and inculcate the processes of rational attention, so that a subject, while hardly remarking on the work she does to make sense of urban experience, nonetheless finds everything she notices already familiar, useful, and understood.

Flat characters and movable types

"Too much mystery business in it," the secretary Miss Dunne reflects on Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, which "Wandering Rocks" finds her hiding at the back of her desk drawer. "Is he in love with that one, Marion? Change it and get another by Mary Cecil Haye" (10:368-72). Her assessment may be surprising to readers of *The Woman in White*, who know the novel is most celebrated for "that mystery business" Miss Dunne thinks too prominent. Yet her reaction is not unfamiliar to readers of *Ulysses*, as it follows the pattern of Molly's remarks on the book she asks Bloom to return in "Calypso": "There's nothing smutty in it. Is she in love with the first fellow all the time?...Get another of Paul deKock's" (4:355-58). Both the structure of the responses and the questions they pose are nearly identical, as though the two women were completing a form that only required them to fill in the blanks. Dunne's reaction, it seems, has already been done.

This correspondence could be interpreted as a misogynistic leveling of women—a reduction of feminine conversation to a predictable formula—were it not for the fact that most of the characters in "Wandering Rocks," regardless of gender, appear as types. Miss Dunne and Molly are further aligned through their association with Blazes Boylan, Molly's lover and Miss Dunne's boss, who is also one of the most famously flat characters of the entire novel: even his name is easily decodable as an index of his flamboyant Don Juan charm. It makes sense, then, that "Wandering Rocks" is the only episode in which he appears both in the flesh (rather than in other characters' memory or imagination) and in a central role. And if the too-perfect

correspondence between Boylan's name and his character seems Dickensian, there are other Dickensian types to be found here as well. While Katey and Boody Dedalus lament their poverty at the hands of "our father who art not in heaven" (10:291), Master Patrick Aloysius Dignam, whose father has recently died, rejoices at having found an excuse to have left the house of mourning, reflecting that "it was too blooming dull sitting in the parlour with Mrs Stoer and Mrs Quigley and Mrs MacDowell and the blind down and they all at their sniffles and sipping sups of the superior tawny sherry uncle Barney brought from Tunney's. And they eating crumbs of the cottage fruit cake jawing the whole blooming time and sighing" (10:1124-29). One vignette gives us neglected children in all their pitiable desperation; the other offers an admirably plucky orphan. Other readily legible types paraded forth in "Wandering Rocks" include the irreverent wits Lenehan and M'Coy, the deadbeat dad Simon Dedalus, and, of course, the sanctimonious priest Conmee.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the poster of "Marie Kendall, charming soubrette" attains the status of a character by the episode's end: though Kendall is literally flat and fixed in place, the episode's human characters are barely more three-dimensional. After appearing in the background of multiple scenes—always as "Marie Kendall, charming soubrette"—the actress becomes an active onlooker in the final section. As the cavalcade passes, "a charming *soubrette*, great Marie Kendall, with dauby cheeks and lifted skirt, smiled daubily from her poster upon William Humble, earl of Dudley, and upon lieutenantcolonel H. G. Hesseltine and also upon the honourable Gerald Ward A. D. C." (10:1220-23). Kendall's constant, frozen smile is represented here as a reaction to a particular event; what is more, it is situated in a series of actual responses given by characters like Boylan and young Dignam, as though the gestures of posters and living people were commensurable. This apparently absurd confusion may not be too far off the mark. If Kendall is fixed in place, so too do Boylan, Dignam, Conmee, and an array of other characters seem frozen in the social positions they occupy in this episode. And where Kendall is accompanied at every appearance by her typological tag ("charming soubrette"), many of the figures in "Wandering Rocks" are similarly reducible to epithets—the only difference is that their profiles invite us to do the work of reduction ourselves. If the episode's final section turns the media object of the Kendall poster into an apparently living, responsive being, not just the final section but the episode as a whole performs the corresponding transformation of living city into media object. Like the physiology or the society pages, "Wandering Rocks" presents a city rendered thoroughly legible through the rubric of social types, one in which the smooth working of attention is never impeded by what's unexpected or disjunctive.

Some readers will object that Joyce is in fact satirizing the pretensions of social typologies or physiologies to render the world legible, just as he parodies the society-page style: surely any reading of the city in the terms of the physiology will be a misreading. This is of course true, and it would be a mistake to attribute the episode's factitious legibility to Joyce himself; rather, "Wandering Rocks" highlights extent to which mass media forms can shape and constrain a population's perception of their environment, just as "Oxen of the Sun" exposes the capacity of narrative styles to shape a reader's understanding of a story. Indeed, *Ulysses* remarks on the capacity of popular media to confer apparent legibility on unfamiliar objects long before it realizes this potential in "Wandering Rocks." Entertaining a fantasy of traveling east to "steal a day's march" on the sun and "never grow a day older technically," Bloom envisions what he might encounter before realizing that his impressions are the product of Orientalist literature:

> Walk along a strand, strange land, come to a city gate, sentry there, old ranker too, old Tweedy's big moustaches, leaning on a long kind of a spear. Wander through awned streets.

> Turbaned faces going by. Dark caves of carpet shops, big man, Turko the terrible, seated crosslegged, smoking a coiled pipe. Cries of sellers in the streets. Drink water scented with fennel, sherbet. Dander along all day. Might meet a robber or two. Well, meet him. Getting on to sundown. The shadows of the mosques among the pillars: priest with a scroll rolled up. A shiver of the trees, signal, the evening wind. I pass on. Fading gold sky. A mother watches me from her doorway. She calls her children home in their dark language. High wall: beyond strings twanged. Night sky, moon, violet, colour of Molly's new garters. Strings. Listen. A girl playing one of those what do you call them: dulcimers. I pass.
>
> Probably not a bit like it really. Kind of stuff you read: in the track of the sun. Sunburst on the title page. (4.84-100)

The tendency of mass media lenses to distort one's view of the world is also on prominent display—though this time in ways invisible to its object—three episodes after "Wandering Rocks," in "Nausicaa," to which Joyce's Linati schema assigns the meaning of "the projected mirage." Having read too many romance novels, Gerty MacDowell sees Bloom as an exotic, mysterious figure, reflecting that "she could see at once by his dark eyes and his pale intellectual face that he was a foreigner, the image of the photo she had of Martin Harvey, the matiné idol…He was in deep mourning, she could see that, and the story of a haunting sorrow was written on his face. She would have given worlds to know what it was…Here was that of which she had so often dreamed" (13.415-28). Gerty accordingly overlooks the fact that Bloom is an awkward, middle-aged man whose gaze is not romantic but fetishistic ("Mr Bloom watched her as she limped away…I wouldn't mind. Curiosity like a nun or a negress or a girl with glasses" [13.772-77]). Bloom, of course, ends the scene in the least romantic way possible, at least so far as the romance novels Gerty reads are concerned: he masturbates on the beach while looking at her. But even as this episode reveals the misalignment between reality and media representation, "Nausicaa" also demonstrates the very real effect of media representation on perception, emphasizing the extent to which Gerty's experience of reality is formed by the media she consumes.

Even as "Wandering Rocks" satirizes the forms it invokes, then, it also suggests that mass media have fundamentally transformed the experience of public life: from an unintelligible jumble of stimuli into a neat assortment of easily categorizable impressions. This is a public sphere in which distraction is difficult, not necessarily because any educational or scientific authority has prohibited it, but simply because mass culture has trained individuals against it. As "Wandering Rocks" demonstrates, the physiologies and the newspapers replace the aimlessness and idleness of distraction with a mode of attention that smoothly decodes the world, allowing its practitioner to turn her impressions of the public sphere to her own private ends. This transformation of public distraction into private instrumentality is even more pronounced in the case of a third media form, prominent in *Ulysses*, which I have not yet discussed: advertising.

"All kinds of places are good for ads"

Advertising represents the privatization of distraction in its most immediate sense. Even Bloom, himself acutely aware of the workings of mass media, finds his own roving distraction often turned towards private ends by the ads he encounters, as during a reverie in "Lestrygonians":

> If you cram a turkey, say, on chestnut meal it tastes like that. Eat pig like pug. But then why is it that saltwater fish are not salty? How is that?

His eyes sought answer from the river and saw a rowboat rock at anchor on the treacly swells lazily its plastered board.

Kino's

11/-

Trousers.

Good idea that. Wonder if he pays rent to the corporation. How can you own water really? It's always flowing in a stream, never the same, which in the stream of life we trace. Because life is a stream. All kinds of places are good for ads. (8:85-96)

Bloom puts two questions to himself: why don't saltwater fish taste salty, and how can you own water if the molecules that constitute your property are always changing. Neither finds a concrete answer in the passage. In a broader sense, though, the sequence of Bloom's impressions suggests an environment in which idle curiosity is inevitably answered by advertising. Bloom's eyes "s[eek] answer from the river"; what they find there is the trousers ad. And Bloom's circular existential reflections about life as a stream abruptly and comically come to an end with the banal, apparently unrelated conclusion that "all kinds of places are good for ads." For Bloom, owning a plot of river is absurd, since it would require fixing the water in place; public advertisements, however, perform this apparently impossible task. If the scene finds Bloom's consciousness prototypically "flowing in a stream," it is momentarily frozen by the trousers ad: advertising fixes attention so as to lay claim to it.

Bloom imagines engineering a similar transformation himself just a few paragraphs later, in a hypothetical advertising campaign for a stationer. "I suggested to him about a transparent show cart with two smart girls sitting inside writing letters, copybooks, envelopes, blotting paper," Bloom remembers, reflecting on an idea he was never able to realize (8:131-33). "I bet that would have caught on. Smart girls writing something catch the eye at once. Everyone dying to know what she's writing. Get twenty of them round you if you stare at nothing. Have a finger in the pie. Women too. Curiosity" (8:134-36). If the setup illustrates Arendt's definition of the social—"private activities displayed in the open"[20]—so too does it perform the reverse operation, turning a publically oriented gaze towards private ends. Bloom's ad masquerades as a naturally occurring phenomenon of urban life, to which passers-by are drawn by spontaneous curiosity—a willingness to be distracted by public space. As in the case of Bloom's earlier reflections, the question itself—what the girls are writing—is never answered directly, but rather replaced by a conclusion whose definitiveness and clarity make it feel like an answer: an imperative to buy a particular product. And just as the trousers ad arrested Bloom's own idly wandering attention, the ad he imagines fixes the expansive, distractible gaze of passers-by in order to privatize and monetize it.

It is no surprise, then, that Bloom sees the ideal ad as performing two distinct operations on a viewer's attention: first, arresting a wandering, open-ended gaze; second, channeling previously idle curiosity towards a definite end. The trousers poster reappears 500 pages later, alongside Bloom's own "House of Keyes" ad, as an example of advertising that has reached its full potential. Such ads, Bloom reflects, realize "the infinite possibilities hitherto unexploited by the modern art of advertisement if condensed in triliteral monoideal symbols, vertically of maximum visibility (divined), horizontally of maximum legibility (deciphered) and of magnetizing efficacy to arrest involuntary attention, to interest, to convince, to decide" (17:580-84). If the vertical "visibility" of the ad first arrests a viewer's attention, the emphasis on horizontal legibility suggests a second phase, in which this attention is moved in a particular direction. Taking

[20] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 134.

account of both these characteristics—visibility and legibility—complicates the received idea of advertising as inherently distracting. With its aggressive visibility, advertising forms an essential part of the overstimulation we associate with modern urban experience, in which the attention is pulled in many directions at once. Yet Bloom's reflections pair this overstimulation not with disjunctiveness or confusion, as we might expect, but with "legibility."

If advertising forms part of a dizzying panoply of urban stimuli, so too does it create a space of remarkable clarity within its own constraints. Indeed, the chapter offers as a non-example of such qualities an ad that asks its viewer to "look at this long candle. Calculate when it burns out and you receive gratis 1 pair of our special non-compo boots, guaranteed 1 candle power" (17:589-90). The ad presumably fails Bloom's test because it allows curiosity to remain curiosity, rather than transforming it into a clear, already "deciphered" directive. Bloom's ideal ads allow none of the confusion or wandering of distraction. Rather than confronting their viewer with dissonance or disjunctivness, they offer a ready-made path from impression (visibility) to conclusion (legibility). Bloom's vision of advertising is less a species of distraction than a mechanism for turning distraction into tightly focused, streamlined attention, which moves smoothly towards a particular end.

The construction of a visual mechanism that will seamlessly capture, channel, and monetize the public's attention remains a dream for Bloom. Yet the same episode suggests that he's already made strides towards perfecting its rhetorical equivalent in conversation with his wife:

> With what success had he attempted direct instruction?
>
> She followed not all, a part of the whole, gave attention with interest, comprehended with surprise, with care repeated, with greater difficulty remembered, forgot with ease, with misgiving reremembered, rerepeated with error.
>
> What system had proved more effective?
>
> Indirect suggestion implicating self-interest.
>
> Example?
>
> She disliked umbrella with rain, he liked woman with umbrella, she disliked new hat with rain, he liked woman with new hat, he bought new hat with rain, she carried umbrella with new hat. (17:698-708)

"Attention with interest" initially appears as an entirely positive token of Molly's investment, a counterbalance to what Bloom considers her lack of intellectual talent. Even if she comprehends slowly and remembers poorly, she is nonetheless an eager, interested student. Yet the second answer undermines these positive associations by reintroducing interest in its more sinister guise of "self-interest." And where the "with" of "attention with interest" describes a generous addition—interest given over and above the attention requested—the final answer suggests a more restrictive understanding of the preposition. Molly, it seems, will carry an umbrella *only* with the new hat Bloom has bought her: "with" is no longer "in addition to," but "on the condition of." Together with the transformation of interest into self-interest, the shift in the usage of "with" suggests an atomized social framework in which subjects give attention only to objects that clearly serve their particular interests.[21] In the case of the umbrella, as in the case of so many

[21] Arendt, like Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour, reminds us that "interest" derives from inter-est: literally what lies between. Arendt reads this idea of betweenness as referring to a shared world of objects, action, and speech, and thus as fundamentally multidirectional and public, as in the phrase "the common interest." By contrast, Stengers and Latour, speaking of the role of interest in the practice of experimental science, construe interest as predicated on the

consumer products, those interests consist primarily in the desire to identify oneself with a particular type: in Bloom's account, Molly carries the umbrella because she wears the new hat, and she wears the new hat to be like the other woman—the one Bloom likes—who also wears it. "Penelope" suggests that we shouldn't take this account as an authoritative interpretation of Molly's behavior. The later chapter reveals that Molly is less tractable a consumer than Bloom might like to believe: "that black closed breeches he made me buy takes you half an hour to let them down wetting all myself always with some brandnew fad every other week" (18:251-53). Nonetheless, Bloom's narrative of his process of "indirect suggestion" aligns remarkably well with the fundamental principles of modern advertising: it begins by elevating a particular model, then assures its consumer that she too could be like that model if only she possessed a certain product, thus appealing to her interest in identifying with a type. Bloom's procedure also transforms apparently disinterested distraction ("look at that beautiful woman wearing that hat") into the sort of attention that serves his unexpressed yet predetermined ends. Marketing, like charity, begins at home.

Domesticating distraction: advertising vs. "the uncontrolled anarchy of our world"

Like the urban typology and the newspaper society pages, the advertising to which Bloom aspires renders the world not distracting but decipherable—indeed, in the case of his imaginary ad, already "deciphered." Insofar as they pertain more to leisure than to work, these mass media forms do constitute distractions in the commonly understood modern sense: diversions from serious or profitable business. But their form bears little resemblance to the jarring, disjunctive phenomenon Kracauer describes in his 1926 essay on cinema, entitled "The Cult of Distraction." For Kracauer, distraction is what intrudes into otherwise smooth and streamlined modes of perception, pulling the subject back towards an outer world that is riven with tension:

> Indeed the very fact that the shows which aim at distraction are composed of the same mixture of externalities as the world of the urban masses; the fact that these shows lack any authentic and materially motivated coherence, except possibly the glue of sentimentality which covers up this lack but only in order to make it all the more visible; the fact that these shows convey in a precise and undisguised manner to thousands of eyes and ears the *disorder* of society—that is precisely what allows such shows to expose and maintain that tension which must precede the inevitable and radical change. In the streets of Berlin one is not

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anticipation of personal benefit: Stengers writes that "To interest someone in something means, first and above all, to act in such a way that this thing—apparatus, argument, or hypothesis in the case of scientists—can concern the person…An interested scientist will ask the question: can I incorporate this 'thing' into my research?" Stengers, *Power and Invention: Situating Science*, trans. Paul Bains (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 85, qtd. in Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 113. Stengers and Latour invest inter-esse with a directionality that Arendt does not. Their definition is thus already closer to a conception of interest as self-interest, as the particular concerns that prompt an individual to take stock of something outside herself, rather than Arendt's vision of a world of objects and discourse always held in common. At the far end of this spectrum is the self-involved, world-negating understanding of interest implied by the Kantian requirement of aesthetic distinterestedness, which suggests that no common aesthetic discourse is possible in the presence of individual interests. In my discussion of the changing relation of distraction to the public sphere, I am aligning distraction with Arendt's conception of inter-esse. I understand distractibility as a readiness to turn away from one's particular interests, which ordinarily direct the focus of one's attention, and towards a common world that does not obviously serve those interests. See also Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* and Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

> seldom struck by the momentary insight that one day all this will suddenly burst apart. The entertainment to which the general public throngs ought to produce the same effect.[22]

The revolutionary potential of distraction lies in its ability to create friction between an individual and what he perceives. In doing so, distraction also restores his sense of the friction, tensions, and contradictions that underlie modern experience. These are the tensions that must, according to Marxist dialectical analysis, eventually produce revolution. Yet as Kracauer notes, the false unity imposed by most mass media prevents the public from noticing them: "even as they summon to distraction" these forms "rob distraction of its meaning by amalgamating the multiplicity of effects—which by their nature demand to be isolated from each other—into an 'artistic' unity…Distraction—which is meaningful only as improvisation, as a reflection of the uncontrolled anarchy of our world, is festooned with drapes and forced back into a unity that no longer exists."[23]

Kracauer refers here particularly to films that, rather than embracing the disjunctiveness of cinema itself, aim instead at a kind of theatricality: such films encourage the viewer to perceive their disparate stimuli as a single, legible sequence. But we might also think of advertising and the newspaper physiology as media that "rob distraction of its meaning" by seeming to make legible "the uncontrolled anarchy of our world." If the physiology of urban types works exactly as Kracauer suggests, transforming disjunctive pieces into a unified whole, so too does advertising domesticate distraction, replacing the apprehension of an anarchic world with its own easy legibility. As I have suggested, "Wandering Rocks" itself performs a similar operation in producing from apparently random, scattered impressions a unified whole. Indeed, despite the episode's anti-authoritarian satire of Church and Crown, one is seldom struck by the momentary insight that one day all this will suddenly burst apart: "Wandering Rocks'" careful organization of the city leaves little room for such explosive disorder. To say this is only to offer a more particular version of the charge that so many of *Ulysses'* critics have leveled against it: the novel, they allege, seems to represent the randomness of experience only to falsely and even tyrannically impose wholeness upon it.[24] Yet I want to complicate this much broader claim by turning to an episode which—despite its pretense of theatricality—offers exactly the "meaningful" distraction Kracauer associates with non-theatrical cinema. "Circe" locates itself within the "momentary insight that one day all this will suddenly burst apart," not only in staging the apocalypse, but also in shattering the now-familiar events and clichés of *Ulysses* into disjunctive fragments. In doing so, "Circe" makes us feel again the sharp edges of public life, "the disorder of society," "the uncontrolled anarchy of our world."

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[22] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987), 91-96, 94-95.

[23] Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," 95.

[24] See, for example, Leo Bersani's chapter "Against *Ulysses*" in *The Culture of Redemption*: "Not only does *Ulysses* keep its conservative ideology of the self distinct from its increasing emphasis on the finality of language's productiveness; not only does it display a perspectival technique that brings to psychological realism the prestige of a Thomistic confidence in art's ability to radiate with the essence of things; Joyce's novel also refers us to a mind purified of 'impossible ordeals' or 'struggles' and elevated to the serene and redemptive management of its cultural acquisitions. Where *Ulysses* really leads us to is Joyce's mind; it illuminates his cultural consciousness. At the end of the reader's exegetical travails lies the promise of an Assumption, of being raised up and identified with the idea of culture made man." Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 175-76.

"Circe" and the resurrection of the public world

"If the second advent came to Coney Island are we ready?" asks the prophet Elijah, much anticipated elsewhere in *Ulysses* and now finally arrived in "Circe" (15:2194-95). Although it seems to channel the familiar trope of apocalypse interrupting everyday life—no one knows the day and the hour—the remark also distorts this trope. For Coney Island is *already* a heterotopia; though it may be more welcome an interruption than the rapture, it ruptures everyday life all the same. Besides, Elijah's "if" is wholly superfluous, as "The End of the World"—written into the playscript of "Circe" like any other character—has just appeared, a line before, to ask a question of his own: "(*With a Scotch accent.*) Wha'll dance the keel row, the keel row, the keel row?"(15:2180-82). The second advent has already come to Coney Island: the episode is at once apocalypse and amusement park, Kracauer's shattering distraction and Eisenstein's montage of attractions. But where both Coney Island and the Second Coming promise an escape from a familiar common world, the distractions of "Circe" force us to attend once more to the contours of that world, to see a background that our long training in self-interested attention prompts us to overlook.

A defining aspect of this montage is the resurrection of inanimate objects from Bloom's day as living, speaking characters, with lines and stage directions. Equal parts Judgment Day and Coney Island, Joyce's prosopopoeia defamiliarizes the set-pieces of everyday life even as it recollects them. If "Wandering Rocks" turns living people into static set-pieces, "Circe" performs the reverse operation, imbuing background details—Lynch's cap, the soap in Bloom's pocket, the quoits from Molly's bed—with energy and life. Through this animation, "Circe" restores unpredictability to the world, making common objects perceptible and remarkable once more. Indeed, in a chapter beset with temptations to metafictional reading, one line seems to describe the episode's workings in terms particularly suited to literary criticism: "My methods are new and are causing surprise. / To make the blind see I throw dust in their eyes" (15:4478-79). This dictum is delivered in the register of high camp: proclaimed by a levitating Edward VII as his final statement to the assembled street crowd, with meter and stage directions that allude to Buck Mulligan's recurring performance of the satirical "Ballad of Joking Jesus." But the claim that obstructing vision might actually restore sight begs to be taken more seriously. Precisely by interfering with and interrupting ordinary habits of perception—habits that assume kings will not levitate, caps will not speak, and other people will continue to occupy more-or-less predictable roles—"Circe" forces us to see the world familiarity has long allowed us to short-circuit.

The operation I've just outlined is, in one sense, the now-familiar modernist technique of defamiliarization, famously defined by Viktor Shklovsky as a device that works "to return sensation to our limbs…to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony…to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition."[25] Defamiliarization, which Shklovsky describes as the fundamental mechanism of all art, works against an "automatization" of perception that economizes cognitive energy by merely recognizing familiar objects, especially through association with their common uses, rather than truly seeing them. But Shklovsky's defamiliarization ends in a process of anamnesis: the final, satisfying recognition of the object one knows after a "long and 'laborious'" process of perception.[26] By contrast, the diversions of "Circe" do not prefigure return—not even by a longer way around. Instead, the chapter places its ever-changing objects beyond our permanent grasp, as in the city-

[25] Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 6.
[26] Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, 6.

dwellers' frequent oscillation between despising, admiring, and ignoring Bloom. The background refuses to settle down and be filtered out—a metaphor literalized by a scene in which wallpaper of a fox-hunt suddenly comes alive as a real-time event. Having interrupted our usual streamlined pathways for processing the world, the distractions of "Circe" refuse to bring us back to them.

The common objects reanimated in "Circe" include not only the now-familiar props of Bloom's walking tour, but also the once-novel expressions that have, by this point, hardened into clichés. The song "My Girl's a Yorkshire Girl," first heard in "Wandering Rocks" and repeated at various points in the earlier episodes of *Ulysses*, now appears as reality rather than mere refrain. "But though she's a factory lass / And wears no fancy clothes. / Baraabum" (10:1251-53) becomes, in the stage directions for a war scene in "Circe," "Factory lasses with fancy clothes toss redhot Yorkshire baraabombs" (15:4676-77). "Baraabum," an onomatopoeia long gone cold, reappears "redhot": in "Circe," even a static rhythmic placeholder can suddenly become a live bomb. [27]

The rewriting also (less explosively) unsettles the reified frameworks that make urban life navigable. The song as it originally appears reaffirms class distinctions, even as—or precisely because—its speakers fetishize a working-class woman. In the rewriting, however, the factory lasses and the women who wear fancy clothes are one and the same: the legible social typology that "Wandering Rocks" imposed upon Dublin has collapsed. If verbal commonplaces can no longer be relied upon as static and safe—baraabum becomes red-hot bomb—so too has the literal common place the characters inhabit become unsettlingly, even dangerously, unpredictable. The crowd scenes of "Circe" form photographic negatives of "Wandering Rocks," in which whatever was lucidly legible becomes obscure and scrambled:

> *(Bang fresh barang bang of lacquey's bell, horse, nag, steer, piglings, Conmee on Christass lame crutch and leg sailor in cockboat armfolded ropepulling hitching stamp hornpipe through and through, Baraabum! On nags, hogs, bellhorses, Gadarene swine, Corny in coffin. Steel shark stone one-handled Nelson, two trickies Frauenzimmer plumstained from pram falling bawling. Gum, he's a champion. Fuseblue peer from barrel rev. evensong Love on hackney jaunt Blazes blind coddoubled bicyclers Dilly with snowcake no fancy clothes. Then in last wiswitchback lumbering up and down bump mashtub sort of viceroy and reine relish for tublumber bumpshire rose. Baraabum!)* (15:4140-50)

Where "Wandering Rocks" neatly divides its characters into their own discrete vignettes, here opposite types are placed in such proximity as to be barely distinguishable: "Conmee on Christass lame crutch and leg sailor in cockboat"; ""rev. evensong Love on hackney jaunt Blazes blind."

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[27] Paul Saint-Amour's recent, highly compelling account of "Circe" similarly focuses on the episode's anarchic overturning of the codes of daily life, but reads its disorder as symptomatic of the decimation of Irish civil society by the apparatuses of British imperial power. Saint-Amour points out that total war—the destruction of civilian populations as well as military targets—was first staged by imperialist powers in colonial spaces, like Ireland and South Africa, as a means of consolidating their rule; only in a later phase did the anarchic violence of total war come home to the imperial centers of Western Europe. *Ulysses* and especially "Circe" thus offer "a forward look at an emergent condition of incommensurable violence, a condition emerging first in colonial space." While I agree with many aspects of Saint-Amour's account, I would argue that to read "Circe" primarily as symptomatic of the exercise of imperial power is to miss the opportunities for new and potentially revolutionary modes of structuring society that emerge from its disruptions: it is not for nothing that the violent altercation that stands at the center of Saint-Amour's reading is precipitated not only by British Privates Compton and Carr, but also by the working-class "factory lasses," who strike out at the reigning order from below (15:4680). Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 227.

Stephen, who has apparently called this frenzied conglomeration into being, has also proleptically given it its name: "Dance of death" (15:4139). But even processions cast in a less sinister light evoke the jarring illegibility of the urban crowd. Soon after the episode begins, Bloom—having just gone on trial for indecency—finds himself proclaimed "future chief magistrate" in recognition of his barnstorming speech against tobacco and his polite suggestion to build a new tramline (15:1372). Bloom is then greeted by a celebratory parade so comprehensive its attendees take more than a page of stage directions to list. Yet the parade, while impressive, is never overwhelming, as participants are neatly divided into comprehensible categories: "lord mayor of Dublin, the lord mayor of Cork, their worships the mayors of Limerick, Galway, Sligo and Waterford" (15:1414-16); "His Eminence Micheal cardinal Logue archbishop of Armagh, primate of all Ireland, His Grace, the most reverend Dr William Alexander, archbishop or Armagh, primate of all Ireland, the chief rabbi, the presbyterian moderator, the heads of the Baptist, Anabaptist, Methodist and Moravian chapels and the honorary secretary of the society of friends" (15:1420-26). Here, the fantastic lens "Circe" trains on the world exaggerates social legibility rather than effacing it. The scene that follows carries the assumptions of the urban physiology to their absurd extreme:

(*All uncover their heads. Women whisper eagerly.)*

A MILLIONAIRESS

(*Richly.*) Isn't he simply wonderful?

A NOBLEWOMAN

(*Nobly.*) All that man has seen!

A FEMINIST

(*Masculinely.*) And done!

A BELLHANGER

A classic face! He has the forehead of a thinker. (15:1461-68)

Joyce's stage directions parody the representativeness demanded of peripheral figures in crowd scenes: each must strictly play her type, even and especially when (as in the case of the masculine feminist) it verges on stereotype. The final speaker accordingly reads Bloom according to his own transparent physiognomy, assuming—as does the scene—the immediate legibility of one's fellow citizens.

Both this authoritative perspective and Bloom's own authoritative position are overturned by the reappearance of perhaps the least legible figure in *Ulysses*. As Bloom dilates on the utopia soon to arise, "the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future" (15:1544-45), "a man in a brown macintosh springs up through a trapdoor," pointing at Bloom and telling the crowd, "Don't you believe a word he says. That man is Leopold M'Intosh, the notorious fireraiser. His real name is Higgins" (15:1561-62). Bloom, in response, suspends his preaching on peace and love to command his soldiers to "shoot him! Dog of a christian! So much for M'Intosh!" (15:1564). The man in question first appears—in the flesh and in his trademark macintosh—during "Hades," as an unknown attendee at Patrick Dignam's funeral. Bloom's sudden, obsessive fixation on him contrasts markedly with the leisurely musings on life and death it interrupts: "Now who is that lankylooking galoot over there in the macintosh? Now who is he I'd like to know? Now, I'd give a trifle to know who he is" (6:805-06). Later the journalist Hynes

consults with Bloom to fill in the blanks of his newspaper write-up, but only ends up exaggerating the gaps in Bloom's own knowledge:

> —And tell us, Hynes said, do you know that fellow in the, fellow was over there in the…
> He looked around.
> —Macintosh. Yes, I saw him, Mr Bloom said. Where is he now.
> —M'Intosh, Hynes said, scribbling, I don't know who he is. Is that his name?
> He moved away, looking about him.
> —No, Mr Bloom began, turning and stopping. I say, Hynes!
> Didn't hear. What? Where has he disappeared to? (6:891-99)

The man in the macintosh not only eludes Bloom's recognition. His first appearance also exposes as factitious the legible vision of Dublin the newspapers present: "M'Intosh" becomes a cipher for the gap between the world of *Ulysses* and the neat media maps that claim to render it transparent. (As "Eumaeus" will verify, Hynes's newspaper does indeed go on to list "M'Intosh" as a mourner at the funeral.) And in taking the man's outfit for his name, Hynes recapitulates the foundational promise of the urban physiology, which assumes that properly trained attention can infallibly process a person's outward appearance into his social identity.

It is fitting, then, that the mystery man's reappearance in "Circe" overturns the rigid social order according to which each must play her fixed type—in the process shattering the utopian façade of easy, seamless harmony. Violence is not Bloom's last but his first resort ("Shoot him!...So much for M'Intosh!"), a suggestion that the apparent peace of civil society is sustained by the threat of immediate force against anyone seen as disturbing it. M'Intosh's warning to the crowd ultimately rests on the same assumption as Bloom's command to silence him: the assumption that someone insufficiently known ("That man is Leopold M'Intosh…His real name is Higgins") is necessarily threatening. Indeed, the "meaning" Joyce's Linati schema attributes to "Wandering Rocks"—"the hostile milieu"—seems more appropriate to "Circe," in which the public sphere cannot be rendered legible and, as a result, is never wholly manageable.

If "Circe" turns M'Intosh into an antisocial villain or *agent-provocateur*, the originary man in the macintosh is something much more modest: a distraction, a glitch in the systems according to which Bloom and the media render the world comprehensible. In both cases, however, he interrupts reified processes of thought, pulling Bloom off the beaten track of well-worn reflection and well-rehearsed oration. Even when the man in the macintosh isn't loudly disrupting Bloom's autocratic program, he nonetheless reminds us of the unpredictability of the public realm: the possibility of encountering something that doesn't accord with our expectations or conform to our systems for imposing order on the world. If this unpredictability is dispelled by mass media frameworks, it is restored by the distractions of "Circe," which suggest that the common world we regard as fixed and therefore negligible might spring into motion at any moment.

The containment of surprise

Yet if "Circe" recalls the unpredictability of public life, its sense of public space is idiosyncratic indeed. The man in the macintosh springs up through a trapdoor—one of the many indications that "Circe" takes place not in the city itself, but in an enclosed space. David Kurnick has recently suggested that this enclosed space is, in fact, that of the theatre. Arguing against the tendency to overlook the episode's lines and stage directions as an obviously absurd conceit, Kurnick reveals the ways in which "Circe" maps itself onto the space of the playhouse. His

account challenges a long-held critical perspective that regards "Circe" as interior in a deeper sense, seeing its true setting as the unconscious. Yet it is striking that even Kurnick's compelling refutation of the chapter's interiority rests on his mapping of an architecture of enclosure. The trapdoors that allow unforeseen complications to spring up also testify to the theatre walls that, in his reading, contain the chapter.

Even if we do not see "Circe" as psychically contained (in Bloom's unconscious) or structurally contained (in the theatre), the chapter's opening line explicitly denotes its geographic confinement. "Circe" takes place in Nighttown, an indication that whatever public affects it allows have been pushed out of the daily life of the city. The unpredictability "Circe" evokes exists not in the public sphere, but at its hidden and unacknowledged margins. In an inversion of Arendt's description of the social as "private activities displayed in the open," Nighttown features public activities performed in private.

Perhaps the ultimate evidence that "Circe" is somehow fenced off or set apart is that, while some of its events are remembered in the chapters that follow, the most absurd and surprising occurrences pass on without trace. In the following episode, "Eumaeus," a passing maintenance vehicle prompts Bloom to "[recount] to his companion *à propos* of the incident his own truly miraculous escape of some little while back" (16:44-45); his comment recalls the scene of "Circe" in which Bloom, having stopped in the middle of the street to catch his breath, looks up to see "through rising fog a dragon sandstrewer, travelling at caution" as it "slews heavily down upon him, its huge red headlight winking, its trolley hissing on the wire" (15:184-86). This second appearance finds the sandstrewer significantly less threatening: the nightmarish specter of a willful, violent machine is reduced to the familiar form of "a Dublin United Tramways Company's sandstrewer" which "happened to be returning" (16:42-43). In this case, the affect of "Circe" is annulled even as its objects and events persist. If the sandstrewer returns, "Eumaeus" also returns to it the appearance of a familiar background object. More often, though, the later episodes erase "Circe's" effects as well as its affects. For Bloom shows no indication of having served as Lord Mayor, or given birth to "eight male yellow and white children," or spoken to his dead father and his stillborn son.

"Circe," then, is contained in every sense: theatrically enclosed, psychically repressed, geographically marginalized, narratively erased. Each of these forms of containment testifies to the chapter's location in an essentially private space, one whose effects, as Arendt says of private virtues "must be forgotten instantly, can never become part of the world; they come and go, leaving no trace."[28] Paradoxically, the truly spontaneous public realm the episode restores cannot

[28] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 75. Arendt is writing specifically about good works and the Judeo-Christian idea that goodness loses its particular virtue when it is made visible to the public. She mentions also the corresponding impossibility of any person *being* good in a fixed and legible way, noting "the talmudic story of the thirty-six righteous men, for the sake of whom God saves the world and who are also known to nobody, least of all themselves" (75). This may seem like an odd argument to bring into conversation with "Circe," given that most of the forgotten acts of that chapter are associated with secret vice rather than hidden virtue. Yet Arendt's account of goodness as an inherently private virtue illustrates her understanding of the public, private, and social realms not merely as separate spaces, but as structures that make possible certain modes of being while precluding others. In emphasizing the ephemerality of goodness, Arendt also suggests a counterintuitive correspondence between the private and the public realms: the acceptance of a kind of fluidity that the social, with its demand for fixed and legible identities, cannot accommodate. Just as public action is defined by its "character of startling unexpectedness," so too private virtue cannot be predicted: the moment at which goodness becomes expected is the moment it ceases to be goodness. This correspondence, to which Arendt herself does not draw our attention, brings into relief the uniqueness of the social understanding of identity, which construes it as fixed, readily legible, and reliably predictive of behavior.

exist in public at all: the unpredictability of public life, the distractions that testify to a world held in common and thus not perfectly attuned to individual interests, can now be experienced only in isolated and marginal enclosures. If "Eumaeus" bids a final farewell to an urban sphere now figured as utterly banal, the novel's two final episodes suggest that the unpredictability of this world—its capacity to surprise and distract us—is now perceptible primarily in private.

Both "Ithaca" and "Penelope" enact a remarkable willingness to follow the unpredictable, non-instrumental, associative movement of distraction, and with it to accommodate all those impressions of "startling unexpectedness" that characterize the public world. As the expansiveness of both chapters has been extensively (and expansively) discussed, I will mention just two examples of particular interest to my argument here. In the first, from the end of "Penelope," Molly recalls her own distraction at the moment of Bloom's proposal:

> I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes and I wouldnt answer first only looked out over the sea and the sky I was thinking of so many things he didnt know of Mulvey and Mr Stanhope and Hester and father and old captain Groves and the sailors playing all birds fly and I say stoop and washing up dishes they called it on the pier and the sentry in front of the governors house with the thing round his white helmet poor devil half roasted and the Spanish girls laughing in their shawls and their tall combs and the auctions in the morning the Greeks and the jews and the Arabs and the devil knows who else from all the ends of Europe… (18:1580-89)

Molly situates her memories of Gibraltar in a paratactic relationship to the proposal. Contrary to the conventions of the nineteenth-century marriage plot, she refuses to retell her life story through the lens of the proposal, to portray all her past experiences as leading inevitably toward and being fully realized through her marriage. Yet she doesn't represent her distraction as purposeful defiance of Bloom either: rather, her impressions simply arise of their own accord, rendering irrelevant any effort to direct them.

Bloom's romantic cliché, remembered a few lines earlier, brings the entire world into focus through the prism of his affection: "the sun shines for you," he tells Molly (18:1571-72). Molly's distraction performs the opposite transformation: even at a moment that should reify the couple form, her wandering thoughts instead reopen it to a broader world of impressions, extending beyond Bloom and Howth Head to "all the ends of Europe." The double significance of "so many things he didnt know" marries a familiar trope of feminine inscrutability with Molly's less conventionally feminine assertion of her own sophistication: if Bloom doesn't know that she is thinking of other things, neither does he know the things themselves, having never been to Gibraltar. Yet Molly's admission that "the devil knows who else" might live there places the territory not only outside Bloom's full comprehension, but also beyond her own.

If Molly's distracted reminiscences lie outside her conscious control, so too does the world they evoke exceed her ability to map it.

In the second case, in "Ithaca," Bloom opens a kitchen cupboard to prepare cocoa for himself and Stephen, but finds his attention diverted by a glimpse of "four polygonal fragments of two lacerated scarlet betting tickets, numbered 8 87, 8 86," which prompt him to "reminiscences of coincidences, truth stranger than fiction, preindicative of the result of the Gold Cup flat handicap" (17:320-23). The horse race in question has unexpectedly been won by a longshot named Throwaway; in retrospect, the chapter notes, several stray events of the day seem to have hinted at such an outcome, especially the moment in which Bloom responds to Bantam Lyons's request for a glance at the racing statistics by giving him the entire newspaper with the reassurance that "I was just going to throw it away" (5:534). Lyons takes Bloom's offhand

comment for a tip but, as "Ithaca" reaffirms, it was anything but intentional for Bloom, who did not even place a bet, who "had not risked" and "did not expect" (17:349). The outcome itself, like the unlikely confluence of events that seem to have foretold it, affirms Bloom's sense of a world that lies beyond his capacity to schematize it. To comfort himself, Bloom reflects on "the difficulties of interpretation since the significance of any event followed its occurrence as variably as the acoustic report followed the electrical discharge and of counterestimating against an actual loss by failure to interpret the total sum of possible losses proceeding originally from a successful interpretation" (17:343-47). The tickets are introduced as objects that "attracted Bloom's attention" out of the corner of his eye: a willingness to yield to distraction reminds Bloom of the unpredictability of the world he inhabits.

Both instances of distraction offer glimpses of a public realm that remains stubbornly beyond the full comprehension of an individual subject, beyond the narratives that render it predictable ("truth stranger than fiction") and the calculations that make it manageable ("the difficulties of…counterestimating against an actual loss"). Instead, they point towards a common world that both exceeds individual expectations and frustrates individual desires.[29] But these insights into the unpredictability of the public world are nested within two essentially private forms. If Molly's moment of distraction originally takes place in the already intimate sphere of her conversation with Bloom, it is incorporated into the narrative through the yet more private form of her interior monologue, one uninterrupted by any real-time spoken exchanges. This lack of interruption distinguishes the interior monologue in "Penelope" from the stream of consciousness in earlier chapters, which mix dialogue and thought.

The case of "Ithaca" is more complicated, developing as it does in a series of questions and answers. Many commentaries have noted the questioner's apparent foreknowledge of the answers, a dynamic that contravenes the startling unexpectedness of the chapter's expansive responses.[30] (Why, for example, would the questioner ask "for what creature was the door of egress a door of ingress?" if he didn't already know the answer, "for a cat?" [17:10:34-35]) Yet we need not ask who this questioner and answerer are—or what they seem to know—to find an indication of the episode's boundedness. The very assumption of a questioner and an answerer situates the chapter in the closed sphere of intimate conversation, with the abstracted and anonymous dyad reproducing the more literal intimate conversation between Stephen and Bloom. Moreover, the two forms that the chapter's knowing questions and dilatory answers most obviously evoke both assume separation from the public sphere.

The catechism of the Catholic Church, to which "Ithaca" is often compared, already evokes a space of rigid ritual distinct, even in a Catholic society, from the dynamism of modern life. Yet several references align the episode's question-and-answer format with a ritual far more arcane than the catechism. Opening a drawer in his sitting room, Bloom finds "an ancient hagadah book in which a pair of hornrimmed convex spectacles inserted marked the passage of thanksgiving in the ritual prayers for Pessach (Passover)" (17:1877-80). The "attendant ceremony" with which he has just taken leave of Stephen is represented as a reenactment of the Passover story, "the

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[29] This becomes doubly true in the case of the betting tickets when we consider Molly's later revelation that it is Boylan who left them behind: the tickets not only point toward Bloom's failure to claim a prize he could have won, but also index his loss of Molly's affections to Boylan. If there is any consolation for Bloom, it is that Boylan's desires have been frustrated as well: Molly recalls that Boylan "was like a perfect devil for a few minutes after he came back with the stoppress tearing up the tickets and swearing blazes because he lost 20 quid he said he lost over that outsider that won and half he put for me on account of Lenehans tip cursing him to the lowest pits" (18:423-25).

[30] Saint-Amour, for instance, describes "Ithaca" as "a catechism whose questions do not so much elicit answers as knowingly anticipate them." Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 242.

exodus from the house of bondage to the wilderness of inhabitation," accompanied by the appropriate Biblical recitation:

> With what intonation *secreto* of what commemorative psalm?
> The 113th, *modus peregrinus: In exitu Israël de Egypto: domus Jacob de populo barbaro*. (17:1021-31)

In this context, we might also read the apparently programmatic exchanges that make up "Ithaca" as imitating the ritualized dialogue of the Passover seder, in which the flight from Egypt is retold through a series of scripted questions and answers. A three-thousand-year-old ceremony conducted by a religious minority in the privacy of the home, rather than the communal space of the synagogue, the form of the seder could hardly be more separate from the everyday life of modern Dublin. To the extent that the episode takes the shape of the Passover ceremony, "Ithaca," like "Circe," occupies a marginalized realm, unperceived, ignored, or derided by the broader public: "intonation *secreto*."

Whether seder or catechism, the ritualistic resonances of "Ithaca" imply that its distracted expansiveness is somehow unsuited to the modern public sphere. Against the received conception of modernity as the age of distraction, the episode reveals that wandering attention is perhaps better accommodated by rigid ritualistic modes than by the apparently more dynamic forms of mass culture. Together with "Penelope," "Ithaca" suggests that the "startling unexpectedness" of the public world is now most easily accessed in private: in secret remembrance and intimate recollection.

In a more formal sense, the model of private access to public affects also describes *Ulysses* itself. The very genre of the novel, at least after the eighteenth century, assumes silent reading as its default mode of consumption. This psychic privacy is compounded by the material context of novel-reading, an activity strongly associated with domestic leisure and thus with a retreat from work and public life. It is from this position of remove that *Ulysses'* form often replicates the unpredictability and indecipherability of a world that frustrates ready-made frameworks of order; it is also from this position that the text rehearses the mode of open receptivity required to attend to such a world. Of course, *Ulysses* is among the least private of twentieth-century novels, continuing to inspire public readings and dedicated conferences and, most obviously, the annual reenactment that returns the novel to the Dublin streets from whence it ostensibly came. In my view, *Ulysses'* capacity to generate public gatherings stems, at least in part, from the public affects it evokes for its readers, who in turn wish that the surprise, fluidity, and even confusion they find in their reading of the text might be returned to their experience of the world. Even in its most disjunctive and multitextured moments, *Ulysses* does not restore an unpredictable public sphere. But it shows us what it might have felt like—and perhaps still could feel like—to live there.

Conclusion

What is lost when distraction is eliminated from the public sphere? To formulate a response, we might look to one of the novel's many cast-offs, a throwaway that, unlike the eponymous horse, is never redeemed or recovered. In "Lestrygonians," Bloom throws an unwanted evangelical flyer ("Elijah is coming!") into the canal in an attempt to catch the attention of hungry ducks. Two episodes later, the flyer reappears, unheeded by ducks or men: "Elijah, skiff, light crumpled throwaway, sailed eastward by flanks of ships and trawlers, amid an archipelago of corks,

beyond new Wapping street past Benson's ferry, and by the three-masted schooner *Rosevean* from Bridgwater with bricks" (10:1096-99). "Wandering Rocks" finds the flyer a sailor, now adrift on a mock Odyssey that may nonetheless carry it further from Dublin than any of *Ulysses'* characters. In addition to affording an opening of indeterminacy in an otherwise exhaustively choreographed episode, the voyage of the throwaway creates a kind of community between the episode's disparate actors. The crumpled flyer provides one of several "interpolations" whose appearances across multiple vignettes link the otherwise unconnected fragments. And yet this connection, like the throwaway's undirected drifting, is perceived only by an anonymous narrator and an abstracted reader: none of the characters attends to it. Too immersed are they in their own instrumental frameworks to find this inter-esse interesting.

I have argued that distraction both directs us to a public world and reminds us of the unpredictability of that world. In its humble way, the improvised skiff fulfills both functions: to notice it is to realize that the characters inhabit a common sphere and that this sphere, by virtue of being common, cannot be fully mapped by any of them. And yet none of them *does* notice it, an indication that distraction—along with the sense of commonality and unpredictability it allows—has been written out of their experience of public life. In its place is a rigidly instrumental form of attention that navigates a complex urban world with the infallible compass of self-interest.

"If the second advent came to Coney Island are we ready?" demands the drifting skiff's namesake Elijah, who takes a significantly more exigent, bodily form in "Circe."[31] The practicality of his final question nearly erases the novelty and richness of the image that precedes it: pay no heed to the marvelous vision, for the readiness is all. Granted, the preparation Elijah urges is presumably more metaphysical than material, an imperative to repent of our sins, not to stock up on bottled water or iodine pills. Nonetheless, lost in his eager demand for readiness is the pause in which to imagine what the second advent on Coney Island might actually look like, what new modes of sensory experience and forms of human community the superimposition of these two heterotopias could inaugurate. So totalizing is the imperative always to be prepared, never to be caught off guard, that it is impossible to be touched by unexpected impressions: what cannot be prepared for must be filtered out. Lost in the rush to be ready is the capacity to be distracted by the discordant, "startling unexpectedness" that characterizes not just Coney Island or the second coming, but any world experienced as common. To experience the world as common is not to write it off as ordinary; on the contrary, it is to attend to precisely those distractions that, by frustrating the order we impose upon the world, place it beyond our individual ends.

[31] Though he does not discuss either of the scenes in question, Jacques Derrida's reading of *Ulysses* makes a related point about the dual role of Elijah in Jewish tradition. Elijah is both a cipher for unpredictability—the unexpected guest for whom a place is set and the door opened at the Passover seder—and a figure of totalizing knowledge, tasked as he is with witnessing and recording every circumcision. For Derrida, Elijah is "the unpredictable other for whom a place must be kept," for whose sake one must "introduce the necessary breach for the coming of the other," but also "Elijah the grand operator of the central, Elijah the head of the megaprogramotelephonic network…But this is a homonym, Elijah can always be either one at the same time, one cannot call on one without risking getting the other. And one must always run the risk." Derrida, "*Ulysses* Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," trans. François Raffoul, in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 70.

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