

VICTORIAN GOTHIC MATERIALISM:  
REALIZING THE GOTHIC IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FICTION

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

September 2013

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: Victorian Gothic Materialism: Realizing the Gothic in Nineteenth-Century Fiction

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Degree awarded September 2013

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

September 2013

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This project begins by asking why so many realist novels of the Victorian period also exhibit tropes borrowed from the eighteenth-century gothic romance—its locales, characters, and thematics. While theorizations of realism and of the gothic are plentiful, most studies consider them to be essentially opposed, and so few attempts have been made to explain why they frequently coexist within the same work or what each figural mode might lend to the other. This dissertation addresses this deficit by arguing that gothic hauntings interpolated into realist fictions figure socio-economic traumas, the result of uneasy, uneven historical change.

Realism's disinterested, empiricist epistemology made it ideal for examining relationships between individuals and social processes, especially the marketplace and public institutions against and through which the modern subject is defined. The gothic's emphases on hidden forces and motives, therefore, became the ideal vehicle for novelists to express anxieties surrounding the operation of these social and economic processes, especially the fear that they are somehow rigged or malevolent.

The gothic mode is by definition historiographical, and its haunting returns stage conflicts between the values of a despotic past and those of an ostensibly enlightened present. Realism, often understood as the investigation of social reality, also develops

within its narrative a causal model of history. This is required for the sequence of events it narrates to be understandable in their proper contexts and indeed for whole meaning(s) to emerge out of the sum of disparate incidents depicted. Gothic materialist texts, therefore, are obsessed with time and its changes and especially how aspects of competing forms of bureaucracy and modes of capital and exchange determine and confront the modern subject.

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Psiropoulos, Brian. "Hortense Is No Esther: Dickens' Anagrams." *Notes and Queries*.  
60.2 (2013): 265-266. Print.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Dick Stein for his early encouragement, for the seminar that produced my first publication, and for suggesting the title of the Wilde chapter: perhaps its best feature. Thanks also to Tres Pyle, for always listening. And special thanks to Deborah Spillman, my tireless first reader, for her advice and support.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION: THE SCENE OF GOTHIC MATERIALISM .....	1
II. “EVERY MODERN INVENTION” – <i>NORTHANGER ABBEY</i> .....	19
Romance & Realism, Parody & Transformation.....	20
Learning & Laundry .....	32
Machines, Systems, Sublimity .....	47
III. “GENTEEL AS NEVER WAS” – <i>GREAT EXPECTATIONS</i> .....	59
Realities.....	62
Successive Forms, Successively Transcended.....	66
Gothic History: The House of Havisham.....	73
Castle Wemmick: Giftshop Gothic.....	86
Endings .....	96
IV. “THE ENORMOUS MACHINERY OF HELL” – SHERIDAN LE FANU.....	98
The Metaphysical & the Material .....	100
Ghostly Machines: “Mr Justice Harbottle” & “The Familiar” .....	108
Demons & Divisions: “Green Tea” .....	120
Tea Green.....	132
Returning.....	140
V. DORIAN’S DRAWERS .....	142
Wilde Realism.....	144
Wilde Gothic: Decadence & Degeneration.....	153
Written on the Skin.....	162

Chapter	Page
Consuming & Collecting .....	165
Containing Meaning.....	173
Eschatology.....	178
VI. CONCLUSION: LEGACIES .....	181
REFERENCES CITED.....	192

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. “A Lesson to John Chinaman.” <i>Punch</i> , 9 May, 1857 .....	136
2. “A Royal Beverage.” Advertisement, 1897 .....	139

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE SCENE OF GOTHIC MATERIALISM

In an early scene from *Mary Barton*, Gaskell's 1848 high-realist novel of class and crime, Mary's father and a former coworker go to visit a sick worker from Carsons' mill. Wending their way through the poverty and hopelessness of industrial Manchester they finally reach his family home, located in a cellar "about one foot below the level of the street" (60). As they descend, they find that "thick darkness" conceals "three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet brick floor; through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fire-place was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband's lair, and cried in the dark loneliness" (ibid). It is significant that Gaskell's narrator both lists and yet cannot even count all of the beings that live and die in this subterranean cell. She is soliciting our empathy and our outrage, and this is difficult to do if we do not see these strange basement dwellers as beings somewhat like ourselves. It is also possible that the status of these creatures must be made explicit so that readers do not suspect that they are something less than human, something as unpleasant as the squalor in which they live: perhaps even the kinds of things that one, having read enough gothic novels, may expect to find 'rolling' or roiling about in a dark, fetid dungeon. This use of 'lair,' archaic even in Gaskell's time, carries with it the possibility of misinterpretation: is this the final resting place of a human? Or the home of a monster? Both, it seems.

This journey into the underground is mirrored a few pages later, when Gaskell describes the departed's funeral procession:

When they arrived in the churchyard, they halted before a raised and handsome tombstone; in reality a wooden mockery of stone respectabilities which adorned the burial-ground. ...below was the grave in which pauper bodies were piled until

within a foot or two of the surface; when the soil was shovelled over, and stamped down. (73)

As before, the heads of bodies are to be found perilously close to the surface: in both locales only ‘a foot’ below ground. Both rooms are overcrowded, and both are resting places for the dead and the soon to be dead. This second example also provides the key to understanding the first: monstrousness is not an ontological category, but the result of a process of dehumanization, the kind that allows or requires people to sicken and die before consigning them to the eternal anonymity of the mass grave. We are also presented with the cause: another kind of division, one which reinforces—likely produces—the barrier between those who dwell above ground (the living and the solvent) and those who dwell below (the poorest and the dead). Gaskell’s insistence upon these two Manchesters is seen in the ‘pauper’ Davenport’s gravestone: no stone at all, but a cheap imitation. A few pages earlier, her narrator brought us from the “happy family enjoyments” of the mill-owner Carson to the other “side of the picture,” nearby homes over which “Carsons’ fire threw a deep, terrible gloom: the homes of those who would fain work, and no man gave unto them—the homes of those to whom leisure was a curse” (58). This section is suffused with its own gothic motif—poverty is a *curse* which is ancestral, hereditary, inescapable. The curse is thrown into blazing contrast with its opposite, the boon enjoyed by the Carsons and withheld from others. That it is the Carsons’ happy fire that casts its ‘gloom’ upon those either out of work or worked to death is quite explicit for a novel that generally attempts to express sympathy with the problems of both ‘sides’ of this surface and class divide.

The highly gothicized language that Gaskell uses in these three scenes—shadowy glooms that blot out joy, or crawling oozes that reach out from the earth to entrap—is

required to express miseries beyond the capacity of more straightforward, mimetic language: horrors brought about by the very real problems of social history and its uneasy, uneven development. These are concerns that typically belong to realism, the figural strategy developed to represent and comment upon the relationship between the individual and society. The realist novel functions as a model rather than as a mirror of social reality, a translation or mediation or transcoding of it, depending on which critics we consult.

What has received less attention, however, is the fact that the realist novel also develops a model of history. It must do this—despite its empiricist resistance to grander narratives or “systems of order”—if the events within its own narrative are to be understood in relation, and indeed have any meaning at all (Levine *Realistic* 18). Gaskell’s narrator proceeds from roaring fire to dingy resting place to communal tomb, and then provides a helpful gesture *back* to the homely ‘respectabilities’ of that fire in case we missed the significance of any of the steps. History modeled by the realist novel tends to be processional, as in the pauper’s progress. Gothic historiography, by contrast, is anachronistic or disruptive: hence, the present that Gaskell produces is still a world of lairs and dungeons. The implication is that mass starvation and graves should be left behind, too, equally medieval relics. Despite their differences in approach, both realist and gothic modes present history as *causal*, shaping if not determining the makeup of social institutions and personal psychologies. Since this is the case, the gothic aspects never detract from *Mary Barton*’s legibility, or from its power as a realistic document of the conditions that it aims to reproduce and help address. Its realism is, in fact, all the

more ‘real’ for its gothicization.<sup>1</sup> *Mary Barton* may have been conceived as a social progress novel, but it does its best work to that end when it reads as a horror story.

The novel revolves around a central mystery, and so requires its characters to act as amateur detectives to locate satisfactory meaning(s). It also, in scenes and moments including those above, presents a kind of mystery to its readers, a series of questions we must answer to uncover its operation and meanings. Why do elements—settings and characters, rhetoric and thematics—of the eighteenth-century gothic romance so frequently appear in realist fiction of the following century? How do they operate, and what do they signify or portend? Why are they so often associated with material matters—means of subsistence, public institutions, and systems of exchange? And why are many of these works so obsessed with time and its passing? This project is an attempt to clarify some of these questions, and to develop a theoretical basis for answering them by reading popular novels in conversation with the body of scholarship on Victorian gothic literature. It considers the novel alongside 250 years of socio-economic theory, especially that of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Thorstein Veblen, and their inheritors, as well as historical theorists and modelers including George W. F. Hegel and H. Butterfield. The result of this investigation will, I hope, deepen our understanding of the gothic’s frequent eruptions into realist fiction of the nineteenth century, and the meanings of this literature’s strongly social-historical character. Its analysis of a number of these ‘gothic materialist’ fictions—by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Sheridan Le Fanu, and Oscar Wilde—will offer a vigorous case for the gothic’s capacity to figure socio-

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<sup>1</sup>In *The Ideas in Things*, Elaine Freedgood states that famine “haunts” this novel, suggesting that one cannot even describe it without reliance upon the gothic (65). Her unpublished recent talk, “Ghostly Reference and the Play of Belief,” argues that these stories’ open-endedness and reliance upon dual realities (the narrative and the historical) and competing points of view make them prototypically realist.

economic trauma, as well as for the flexibility of a Victorian realism which frequently augments its own figurative powers by taking on aspects of traditionally non-realist forms.

Methodologically, *Victorian Gothic Materialism* is primarily informed by historical materialist criticism, which reads literature largely as social hieroglyphic. This criticism has traditionally been pro-realist, but apathetic towards the gothic. In Georg Lukács's still influential work, the subgenre itself and the work of early practitioners such as Radcliffe were flawed, unable to rise above the hopeless anachronism and petty moralizing indicative of 'bad' historical novels (30). Lukács saw their conception of history as not properly dialectical and progressive, and its characters anachronistically 'modern' in their psychologies. However, Lukács, does not recognize the gothic as a formal category past its late eighteenth century origins, and therefore ignores the heavily gothic elements which sometimes appear in realist texts, such as Gaskell's and Dickens's social problem fiction. Joe Cleary's recent book *Outrageous Fortune* is in many ways more representative of contemporary work: it questions the narrowness of Lukács's and others' definition of the novel and the high realism that for many are still effectively synonyms for each other. In it, he argues that the exclusion of subgenres including the gothic has led to a weaker understanding of the novel form itself and its own dialectical evolution (53). Other critics have begun to consider a 'Marxist gothic.' Gail Turley Houston's *From Dickens to Dracula* traces anxieties surrounding Victorian banking collapses, figured as the 'panic' in novels such as Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. Read alongside Marx, she hypothesizes that "the Gothic was invented, in part, as a prism through which to represent capitalism's ceaseless haunting of its subjects" (34). Franco Moretti sees



class conflict at the heart of the gothic, positing a “Dialectic of Fear” that reads the monsters of the nineteenth century’s most recognizable gothic novels, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, as “the two horrible faces of a single society, its *extremes*: the disfigured wretch and the ruthless proprietor [...] worker and capital” (83).

Conversely, Margaret Cohen’s conception of “gothic Marxism” describes not gothic literature read through Marxist analysis, but rather recognizes certain strains of Marxist thought, notably that of Benjamin and Breton, as being heavily gothicized; “a Marxist genealogy fascinated with the irrational aspects of social processes, a genealogy that both investigates how the irrational pervades existing society and dreams of using it to effect social change” (1-2). Similarly, Jacques Derrida’s post-structuralist analysis in *Specters of Marx* traces the rhetoric of ghosts, specters, and mystical transformation used by Marx himself. In so doing, he argues for the necessity of reading Marx despite (or perhaps because of) the fall of organized twentieth-century communism and the decline of Marxist criticism. Conceptions of “haunting,” to Derrida, “organize the *dominant* influence on discourse today” (37, emphasis in original). While Cohen’s reading of Benjamin and Breton, and Derrida’s reading of Marx both resist grand narratives as they are popularly understood, both argue for the foundational importance of a conception of gothic haunting—repressed trauma and its return—as a social-historical phenomenon.

If, for the writers of the eighteenth-century gothic romance, the past was a playground—an exotic, alternately charming and horrid oddity—it was also a straw figure to be knocked over by the present’s values and ideologies. Victorian realist novelists were more concerned with “social, economic, and political conditions and their effects,” a stance which required a believable because causal view of history (Kearns 66).

For them, the past was increasingly seen as the necessary precursor to the events depicted in their own work. It is perhaps an exaggeration to say that for them, all of the relevant events of British history could be thought of as earlier scenes from their own novels, cut for space, but a misconception they would happily encourage. Their novels, of course, were frequently polemical, and developed within the conscious and unconscious ideologies of their authors. The fiction of Gaskell and Dickens had very definite social aims. The difference between them and their forebears, however, was that the very realism needed to accurately represent societal conditions to be changed also dictated that authors could no longer stack the deck in the way that a Radcliffe or Lewis could. They were writing in a recognizable Britain of their own day (or occasionally, of the very recent past), and so would have to write their ideas out of history, rather than into it. Wilde evoked this stance when he chided those who “still” wrote the history of the previous centuries, who “think it necessary to apply moral judgements,” handing down “praise or blame with the solemn complacency of a successful schoolmaster” (“Pen, Pencil, and Poison” 121). His admonition is also representative of the shifting stance towards history between the eighteenth and the nineteenth-century novelists: for the former it was a setting, for the latter a context. Narrative is, literally, *procession*: a chain of events, one following necessarily from the one before. Narrative realism, then, is the approach towards fiction in which all effects have causes, and every cause could— theoretically, if not in practice—be traced back to an earlier one.

This means that realist novels, models of the reality they are meant to invoke and hopefully redress—must also model the historical process itself. The nature of the model used has artistic ramifications: does it more or less accurately account for investigations

of the real (as it is recorded, at least)? Are its plot and characters likely, when compared to events and people drawn from our own experience, or the experiences recorded by others? Realism necessarily depends upon causal history in order to construct a realistic, meaningful world: Gaskell, as we have seen, historicizes the sufferings of her dead worker, tracing it directly back to the roaring fireplace of Carson the mill-owner. Later in the novel, she will historicize the forces—costs of materials, foreign competition, and others—that drive and arguably justify his actions (171). Unsurprisingly, considering the example from Gaskell just noted, the historical model that the novel produces also has significant political ramifications.

The early twentieth-century historian H. Butterfield, theorized a model of history whose conception became the dominant one in the nineteenth century, and which still runs through and rules over novels and mindsets of our time. Calling it the ‘Whig’ interpretation, it saw progress as history’s *natural inclination*. Subscribing historians and novelists noticed that gradually—but, it seemed, unerringly—human institutions and societies had become increasingly tolerant, less repressive, and more democratic. For these historians and like-thinking novelists, our ancestors could be easily classed into heroes and villains, those “men who furthered progress and the men who tried to hinder it” (11). However, since Whig history tends to valorize the present as the recipient of the past’s gains, it is often perversely conservative, suspicious of people and social movements who have not already gained their rights and freedoms. That this view became the dominant one, according to Lukács, only after a series of *failed* revolutions in 1848, demonstrates this limitation (174). For the Whig, history’s results are self-justifying, albeit circular: what happened had to happen because it *did* happen, and hence

it all happened for the best. Castle Wemmick, discussed in the second chapter on *Great Expectations*, is—despite its faux-gothic trappings—actually a paean to the present, and strongly exhibits this view of history.

Whig history largely displaced its great competitor, the dialectical model of history developed by Hegel. His model—while also progressive—saw the world’s history not as a gift given to the present, but as an unending struggle between opposed forces for supremacy. Within each conflict, one of these forces is diminished, another victorious; but both lend something of themselves to the other in a process of synthesis (56-7). While the teleology of Whig history effectively ends in the present (or in something very much like it), Hegelian teleology sees the present only as the necessary, intermediary step towards a radically different future. Marx and his followers took up Hegel’s model, but replaced its Christian worldview and emphases with materialist ones, centered on the conflicts and subsequent changes governing means of production and subsistence over time. Economic transformations are mediated outwards into all areas of social life, affecting and probably dominating ideologies, institutions, and psychologies. In a novel like *Great Expectations*, the struggle for power and relevance between Miss Havisham and her proxy Estella—Dickens’s representatives of a socioeconomic recent past—and the Pips, Pockets, and Drummles of the present, enacts the conflict of the Marxist-Hegelian model.

Miss Havisham and her relic of a brewery are also the most gothic personages and settings of Dickens’s novel, and this is not a coincidence. The gothic, from its development in the eighteenth century by Walpole, Radcliffe, and Lewis, through its transformation via transplantation into the realist fictions of the nineteenth, has always

possessed a strongly historiography character. According to Robert Mighall, the gothic is “obsessed” with the past, its concerns rooted in “identifying and depicting the threatening reminders or scandalous vestiges of an age from which the present is relieved to have distanced itself” (26). One of the major contributions of *Victorian Gothic Materialism* to the study of Victorian fiction is to demonstrate how the old historical conflicts that the gothic once contested—between Catholicism and Protestantism, for instance—were replaced by more contemporary anxieties about rapidly changing economic conditions and public institutions. That history’s “terrors” had to some extent always taken the form of “inequities” allowed Gaskell, for instance, to use its signifying and affective power to realistically represent human suffering resulting from poverty (Mighall xiv). This project will argue that Mighall’s reading of the gothic’s deployment of history as ‘anachronistic’ conflict is remarkably similar to the Marxist-Hegelian understanding. Both tend towards social progress, but that progress for the gothic, for Hegel, and for Marx, only emerges as the result of dialectical conflict. History’s winners achieve their (typically, economic) ends, but are plagued by ancestral guilt and unease over what has been left behind. Losers—weakened but not vanquished—bide their time, and make preparations to strike against the current hegemony.<sup>2</sup>

The principal effect of the admixture of gothic anachronism and literary realism’s historical positivism was an overriding concern with the passing of time and its meanings. Pip’s retrospective narrative in *Great Expectations*—a man telling the story of

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<sup>2</sup> In *The Grundrisse*, Marx argues that the present, “bourgeois society is only a form resulting from the development of antagonistic elements, some relations belonging to earlier forms of society are frequently to be found in it, though in a crippled state or as a travesty of their former self” (39-40). Those ‘travestied’ forms and their representatives, ‘antagonistic’ to the dominant, still survive, and occasionally return to haunt it and its subjects. This is the very conflict played out in gothic-inflected realist novels such as *Great Expectations*.

his boyhood from afar—also frames narratives of Havisham and Magwitch, older than he but relaying their own youths from practically the same temporal distance. General Tilney wanders Northanger Abbey, not ruling over it with a sword, but managing it with a pocket watch. The hands of Miss Havisham’s clocks never turn, even if the years still do. Le Fanu and Wilde are obsessed with midnight, and the dangers—and, just maybe, the possibilities—which accrue as we reach the edge of that fated, fateful divide. The return of what we thought was passed/past, the gothic’s most salient motif—(dis)embodied, for example, in the ghost—is not alien matter for realism: rather, the quest for or sudden appearance of the hidden cause behind an observable effect is the lynchpin of myriad realist plots.<sup>3</sup> The personal is also political: just as these characters experience strange disjunctions of time, so too, does the nation, roiled by historically unprecedented industrial, economic, and social transformations. Little wonder that the world (re-)produced in these novels is so often frightening.

To locate and perhaps revive the spirit of gothic materialism, we must begin with its foundational text, Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*. Chapter one begins by arguing that Austen’s reception of her literary inheritance involves less liquidation of it through parody, as it is most frequently read, and more the redemption of it through realism. Her readers’ familiarity with earlier gothic novels and with specifics of recent material history—the age of local castles, brands of fireplaces—all work together to produce new meanings. The romance gothic’s elision of labor, with its functioning yet impossibly empty castles and estate houses, is transformed by Austen from oversight into problematic. Catherine Morland was not “born to be an heroine,” (37), but rather to be

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<sup>3</sup> Or, as Eleanor Salotto suggests, “the Victorian novel is obsessed with buried secrets, returns from the dead, and ghosts” (119).

mistress of a functioning household, one that carries with it rather specific and severe obligations. The hidden laundry list she discovers is not (only) the amusing if deflating invocation of hidden journals and wills in earlier gothic novels. It is rather a sigil, the physical sign of concealed labor, and intimately connected (both literally and figuratively) with General Tilney's conspicuous consumption, his obsession with domestic appliances, and his seemingly undead servants, which rise up all at once and then are banished from the text forever.

If the gothic mysteries Catherine pursues in General Tilney's Abbey turn out to be more mundane than murderous, this does not lessen their importance. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that the novel is "a gothic story as frightening as any told by Mrs. Radcliffe" (143), pointing out that the laundry list Catherine hopes is "a manuscript of many generations back" (Austen 174) is actually "the real threat to women's happiness" (Gilbert & Gubar 135). No simple receipt, it is rather the hidden document of invisible and repetitive, endless labor that, as the future Mrs. Tilney, Catherine will soon be responsible for overseeing and probably performing. Both facets of this labor, its invisibility and its regularity provide the frame for thinking about the novel's highlighting of this gothicized 'underground', domestic economy. While General Tilney does his best impersonation of a gothic villain, locking up his daughter and making off from Bath with Catherine for his son, it is his aggressive domesticity that is really terrifying. Whether he is rigidly ordering his domain with the precision of his ever-present pocket watch, comparing the state of his guest rooms and silver against that of his neighbors and rivals, or showing Catherine the fruits of his pinery, the general is obsessed with modifications, and especially with *improvement*. It is an ethic that—with the help of his eligible son

Henry—he hopes to instill in Catherine herself. Catherine’s distaste for the general’s remodeling, an aversion to the new replacing the old is not simply a desire for the nostalgic world of her novels, but also a real discomfort with the far less romantic underpinnings of regency material existence: a discomfort she will have to grow out of if she wishes to become Mrs. Tilney. Just as the events of the novel transform Catherine from a romantic, perhaps naïve young woman, the novel transforms the gothic itself, allowing it, too, to grow up—into a form which can satisfactorily depict and critique material history and processes.

The second chapter, focusing on Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, demonstrates the ways that the gothic return can signify the conflict between forces representing different stages in social-material history. This is a novel quite explicitly about returns and their consequences, all of which have strongly economic and historical implications. Magwitch returns from exile in Australia to unveil and unsettle Pip’s expectations. More importantly, Miss Havisham returns from self-imposed exile to revenge herself on those who have wronged her, using her ward Estella as proxy. This chapter will argue, first, that Havisham’s return explicitly enacts the conflicts predicted by the Marxist-Hegelian teleology, using the gothic mode to stage the return of an earlier form of economic development (Havisham’s kind of petty-bourgeois mercantilism) to haunt the newly ascendant capitalism embodied by young male speculators like Pip and Pocket. To do so, it will track how the governing economic realities—the result of the ascendance of capital and new methods and efficiencies brought on by the industrial revolution—demonstrate that Miss Havisham and the brewery which constitutes her livelihood were pre-destined to be relics. Compeyson, whose name is essentially



‘competition,’ may have been the catalyst for Havisham’s destruction, but this is mostly because he embodies the rising, speculative approach towards capital, business, and love that she will later attempt to revenge herself against. Competition/Compeyson leaves Miss Havisham at the altar and the old economic order barren, each unable to effectively reproduce itself.

Secondly, this chapter will illustrate the necessary relationship between these two different modes of material existence and the two very different conceptions of history operative within the novel’s two ‘castles.’ The first is Miss Havisham’s creaking mercantilist ruin with its gothic, Marxist-Hegelian assault on the ascendant economic reality. It stages a counterattack which is destined to fail, because, while both the gothic and materialist conceptions of history allow—in fact demand—this kind of unending, dialectical warfare, they both also posit a model of economic history which is ultimately teleological and progressive. In the other, Wemmick’s glittering, free-market amusement park, the victorious contemporary order is championed within its ‘Whig’ model of history, theorized by Butterfield. Castle Wemmick’s faux-gothic castle is everything that Havisham’s ruin is not: productive, recently remodeled, and most importantly, as a showroom for objects whose troubling and troublesome histories have been finally peeled away. Dickens’s novel is especially interested in and anxious about how the newly capitalized and industrialized British nation sees itself. *Great Expectations*, its title a kind of promise, is skeptical of this second conception of history, which views every battle of import as already won. Even if both models of history necessitate the same (present) winner, it is the former, properly gothic one, which encourages mourning for that which has passed away—and optimism for a better future to come. Dickens’s work is gothic

materialism in what could be considered its 'high' stage: dialectical, determined, and committed to social transformation.

This is less the case in Sheridan Le Fanu's work, including his well-known novel *Uncle Silas* and the ghost stories from *In a Glass Darkly*. These, too, take up socio-historical concerns: they are, for example, obsessed with bureaucracy and social institutions, and especially the power they wield over the individuals that are their agents and victims (often both). Le Fanu's worldview, however, is quite different than Austen's and Dickens's. Inspired by the more frightening writings of the Christian mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, and probably prompted by his own ancestral guilt as part of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, Le Fanu's gothic materialism is fundamentally pessimistic, and envisions cosmic forces that are barely understood, much less overcome. Using Adam Smith's conception of the division of labor and its effects, this chapter will investigate the meanings of Le Fanu's strange separations and balances: between the spirit and the body, and between producers and consumers. *Uncle Silas*, for example, with its new riff on the gothic tyrant, produces an oddly acquisitive ascetic, a personage who is all at once fleshly and lustful as well as saintly or spirit-like. Material forces and actions in the novel (clear-cutting, highway robbing) are spoken of alongside fairy rings and demons, all of which seem equally deterministic and undeterminable, part of some unknowable complex. Le Fanu's gothic still foregrounds social conflicts and dramas, but without a sense of history which is dialectical and progressive and, therefore, ameliorative. In stories like "Mr. Justice Harbottle" and "The Familiar," recorded history is revealed to be an unending litany of horrors. Time's changes only produce new forms of the same fatal institutions

and systems of (in-) justice and exchange, all working together to identify victims for their punishments.

The final sections of this chapter will consider one of Le Fanu's most famous and famously debased ghost stories, "Green Tea," about a vicar who becomes possessed by a small demonic monkey. Unlike previous critics, I will take the story's titular drink quite seriously, by delineating the meanings and associations of green tea for Le Fanu and his audience. Reading cultural histories including Julie Fromer's *A Necessary Luxury*, this chapter will show how tea provoked a strange ambivalence among its English consumers: they needed it as an alternative both to unclean water, and the productivity-sapping beer that was drunk before safe water became readily available. They enjoyed it as a beverage, and as an excuse to socialize. But they also feared and at times hated the Chinese growers and packagers of tea, who they accused of adulterating and even contaminating it. This dependence upon its physical properties, coupled with misgivings about its origins, led to fears of a kind of physical and psychical reverse colonization or *re-racialization*—one could go further and say 'possession'.

This section will consider examples of anti-Chinese propaganda from this period: *Punch* cartoons, for instance, which depict its Chinese subjects as crouching and diminutive, with clawed hands, downturned mouths—effectively simian. If, in its ordinariness, green tea works to conceal the material relations and traumatic history which constitute its origins, the excessive effect of its consumption (the conjuration of Jennings's demonic monkey) stages a return of them which cannot be ignored. The consequences of this English addiction hang upon the English subject's back, and eventually cause its destruction. While the demon-haunted Jennings is innocent of any

conscious wrong-doing, Le Fanu's story suggests that those who benefit from the division of labor on any scale are responsible for the suffering caused by it—and court an equally horrid recompense. Warnings about the excesses and terrors of social life and its history abound in Le Fanu, but there is little to suggest that we can alter or improve our fate and our institutions.

If for Le Fanu, history is indifferent, repackaging the same horrors for different eras, for Oscar Wilde, it is the long narrative of decay. The final chapter will read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as continuing and expanding upon the more pessimistic gothic materialism of the late nineteenth-century, positing the *fin-de-siècle* as the *fin-de-globe*. For Wilde, the gothic is not about the conflict with a past best left behind, but rather signifies a creeping sense of the present's fallen-ness, and the recognition that entropy and degeneracy are the principal engines of history. If the earlier gothic materialists saw history as a hard-fought, dialectical gradient, with ancient horrors usually beaten back, Wilde envisions the opposite: the high point of civilization is long past, belonging perhaps only to the classical world. All that is left for all of us who have come after are those small, failed attempts at a progress which is itself a kind of return... but to an earlier and—crucially—better state. Dorian Gray, then, is a kind of messianic figure, attempting to save the last valuables of civilization from being lost to time, and even to stop the wheel of history itself. He begins with his own body, protected by his portrait, but is more concerned with his collections and museum, the storehouse of the world's riches and values, including his priceless, unexchangeable supply of concealed and congealed labor. Unsurprisingly, then, much of what Dorian stockpiles are *containers* for further acquisitions and rescues, although what is hidden within these is always uncertain.

The boxes, chests, cabinets, and yes, even closets which constitute *Dorian Gray* are important, not so much for what they contain, but for what they lack; for the meanings and matter they continually refuse to provide. The upstream fight against the tidal pull of history will require these to be filled with new “sins” which the text can never name, which Dorian always fails to identify and even, it seems, understand. Wilde’s *fin-de-siècle* gothic materialism, therefore, reverses the typically progressive, dialectical understanding of history. It establishes the pattern for a strain of apocalyptic gothics which will appear in the twentieth century, ‘weird’ fictions which marry gross materiality with aggressive meaninglessness.

## CHAPTER II

### “EVERY MODERN INVENTION” – *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

*Northanger Abbey*, the earliest of Jane Austen’s mature novels, has been the subject of vigorous critical debate, much of which has attempted to identify specific points of departure between it and the eighteenth-century romances that *Northanger* playfully references and whose tropes it adopts. Many readings consider the novel a mostly parodic work, one that, it is claimed, seems to gleefully trample upon gothic novels by Radcliffe, Lewis, and others. To Gilbert and Gubar *Northanger*, like much of Austen’s juvenilia, is “a parody of novelistic clichés,” its own narrative and concerns “conventional” (132). To Alan D. McKillop and Birthe Tandrup, it is the *readers* of these conventional novels, little Catherines all, who are the real targets of Austen’s pen, their favorite novels the inkwells she blots from. Other critics read the novel in the context of Austen’s later works and her contributions to the development of the novel form itself. There is, for example, Austen’s adherence to the various strategies of formal realism: Ian Watt sees her as the beneficiary of techniques and themes developed earlier (by Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding) but which, perfected by Austen, would come to form the dominant approach to the novel throughout the next century. Materialist critics like Raymond Williams and Franco Moretti have investigated Austen’s attention to (and sometimes, curious avoidance of) the smallest details of material existence. On one hand, by listing the price of every consumable, she is constantly reminding readers of the monetary, productive, and status-giving value of land: on the other, her strange ambivalence about the labor that works that land and provides the income that her characters enjoy.

In this first chapter, I will provide a reading of the novel that addresses and attempts to reconcile much of the novel's criticism, while demonstrating why it is in many ways the progenitor of Victorian gothic materialism. My argument is that *Northanger Abbey* initiates the maneuver, common by the mid-nineteenth century, of appropriating the conventions and themes of the gothic romance, and relocating them within realist novels. Realist formalisms like free indirect style, and realist concerns—especially the insistence upon consistent, believable representations of social and material history—transform the gothic and its meanings. By setting her gothic tale in a recognizable England of her present day, within established historical contexts shared between author, reader, and character, Austen's gothic materialism displaces the haunting of the gothic romance. No longer confined to escapist thrills, *Northanger Abbey's* hauntings remind us how material forces—especially the return of repressed or elided labor and the systemization and industrialization of domestic space—underlie and belie the polished surfaces of actual stately manor houses and refurbished abbeys, if not fictional castles and convents.

### **Romance & Realism, Parody & Transformation**

Writing at the height of the gothic novel's first popular moment in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft advised the following correction for women "amused by the reveries of the stupid novelists [who worked to] corrupt the taste and draw the heart aside from its daily duties" (313): "ridicule them." She suggested that by clearly demonstrating how much their reading materials "foolishly and ridiculously [...] caricatured human nature" young women could be saved from the malicious effects of their pastime (316). This

might be accomplished through dramatic readings, in which the outlandishness of these works would be made apparent by doubtful intonation, supplemented by “apt comparisons” to ‘real’ and, therefore, ostensibly teachable and useful, incidents and personages from history. Wollstonecraft was not alone in her criticism of novels and their potential effects: Ian Watt’s summation of the available commentary suggests that novels “were said to have debauched the minds of schoolboys, ploughboys [and servant women]” among others (43). I enlist Wollstonecraft here less to weigh in on her condemnation of the late eighteenth-century popular novel than to suggest that her words expose a tension that authors of the period were beginning to feel, and to which critics writing later would frequently return. Arriving at the very moment in which novelistic romances such as the gothic and the novel of sensibility were about to cede cultural ascendancy to the realist novel, it is not difficult to see Wollstonecraft’s words as prophetic of, perhaps a partial catalyst for, a number of satires and parodies of the gothic which would be written in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and which would help make this transition from romance to realism possible, even desirable.

Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* is the work that is most readily cast in this role, and many critics still approach *Northanger* as a parody of the gothic, even if what that means has shifted over time. Much of the earlier criticism claimed it as direct rebuke, as in Leland May’s rather blunt assessment, representative of the tenor of this criticism in the 1960’s: “Although Jane Austen was unresponsive to the romance of the Gothic... novels, her reading of such books amused her, and she enjoyed a poor novel if only to laugh at it. From some of these mediocre works, she must have gained the inspiration and desire to write” (34). A few years earlier Ian Watt—whose seminal *Rise of the Novel* is ostensibly



about Richardson, Defoe, and Fielding but largely serves as a valorization of Austen—describes the late eighteenth-century novel as mostly meritless, with the gothic and sensibility novels as meager but ready sustenance for “the reading public’s uncritical demand for easy vicarious indulgence in sentiment and romance” (290). If Austen’s role was to redeem the novel from its baser cousins, then *Northanger Abbey* would seem to be a suitable vehicle: beginning with the gothic location and scenarios evident in its title, it referenced, often directly, gothic tales such as Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. In one memorable passage, a recitation by protagonist Catherine Morland’s new friend Isabella produces a paragraph whose very overabundance of über-gothic titles seems parodic, especially in light of the incongruence of these novels’ apparent subject matter with the nonchalance with which Isabella delivers them: “‘Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, Necromancer of the Black Forest, Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine, and Horrid Mysteries. Those will last us some time’” (62). Actually, these were very real titles that would have been recognizable to many of Austen’s readers. Rather than create satire through a delineation of exaggerations, Austen instead provides a helpful bibliography for those interested in tracking down the sources for Catherine and Isabella’s gothic worldview.

More recently, critics’ readings of the text have argued for a re-examination or, at least, expansion, of the meanings of those supposedly parodic elements within the novel. In his influential “Translating the Monstrous,” George Levine acknowledges that even if *Northanger* is “Austen’s most trivially entertaining novel” (335), there are some very nontrivial things transpiring. He suggests that parody, rather than weakening that which it ‘translates,’ actually authenticates it, arguing that “parodied literature reasserts itself in

the language and form of its rejection” (336). If it is true that any parody must accomplish at least two functions—the *mirroring* of a pre-existing work or form, and *commentary*, even if implicit, upon that work/form and its meanings—then we must also acknowledge the work that this commentary aims to perform, and its results. The recognition of parody must be the beginning of the analysis, not the end. To Levine, it is in the specific ways authors like Austen negotiate this tension between performance and commentary that forms the basis for the novelistic works that would come afterwards: “The parody in *Northanger Abbey* sets out for us starkly the contradictions latent in moving from parody to novel and, consequently, in the sort of realism latent in novels of disenchantment and the main stream of nineteenth-century fiction” (337). This ‘sort of realism’ is explicated further in Levine’s *The Realistic Imagination*, in which he suggests that realism is an “affable” middle-way, “focusing not on the dregs of society, not on the degradations and degenerations of humans in bondage to a social and cosmic determinism” but rather “defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literature” (5). In this way *Northanger Abbey* is able to retain the essence of earlier forms, restraining extremes rather than expanding or exploding them. Its parody is implied rather than totalizing, and of secondary concern. When, for example, Radcliffe’s rapacious and domineering ‘gothic’ Montoni becomes Austen’s acquisitive and controlling ‘realist’ General Tilney, the genealogy is evident. Austen’s villain—still recognizable but far more relatable—is much more suited to the novelistic and social work that she is actually interested in. By ‘translating’ or perhaps transplanting the gothic into another form (the realist novel),

Austen's gothic materialism can much more usefully explore issues of labor, class, and personal desire.

Unsurprisingly, then, Judith Wilt's analysis of Austen's relationship to her literary inheritance assumes that her approach to other works was not strictly satirical, arguing instead that she is "[n]ot quite a parodist, almost an imitator, Austen is in fact an heiress of Radcliffe" (130-1). Wilt's examination of *Northanger Abbey* and its relation to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* finds that "in the form of... *Udolpho*, the total machinery of the Gothic is 'interposited' into the given machine of *Northanger Abbey's* common life, not to be mocked but to raise that machine to its real importance... the result is not to make romance ridiculous but to make common anxiety 'serious' or 'high'" (126). This 'common anxiety' refers at the level of plot to the incidents of the novel—fraught coach rides, lover's misunderstandings, and all of the trappings of Austen's domestic fiction. But it also refers to those deeper, still common but less consciously articulated anxieties: those that surround the material realities underpinning the novel—that 'given machine' whose human and nonhuman cogs will be the focus of this chapter's second section.

To return briefly to Wollstonecraft, it is telling that the suggested counterexamples that make up her 'remedy' to novels are the "pathetic incidents and heroic characters *in history*" (316, emphasis added), and not those in pre-novelistic literatures, not even those well-thumbed handbooks of improvement from the renaissance stage or the classical epics. While it may be surprising that England's past should be held up as the treasure-house of heroism and pathos, her preference for it over the eighteenth-century novel illustrates two important facts: first, that the novel, especially in its gothic and sentimental modes, was too sensational, bloody, unlikely, melodramatic, and

divorced from life as it is lived to be any use in delineating or circumscribing how life *should* be lived. It serves to inflame the passions and instruct the sensibilities, not to stoke the reason.<sup>4</sup> Second, and for our purposes more importantly, that history itself is instructive even if many of its well-known actors were in fact neither heroic nor worthy of pathos.

In fiction, the attempt to recoup the past as viable, trusted, indeed ‘real’ became one of the more salient defining features of literary realism. Its approach to history as something given, shared between reader, author, and character authenticates the experiences of all three. I would like to suggest that, much more than their differences in subject matter, it is their opposed approaches to history that most differentiate romance from realism. Austen’s ‘transformation of the machinery’ was accomplished by retaining gothic scenarios and tropes and transplanting them from the eighteenth-century gothic romance and into to the nineteenth-century realist novel. This opened up new possibilities for the gothic mode. By making it suitable content for the realist novel, she opens the gothic elements to productive material criticism in ways that romance (whose niceties of creation and ideological contexts and meanings are, as in any other form, always available) does not. Austen’s gothic materialism creates a text in which the *content* itself is now also a mediated translation of her existing material reality, which too can be read, and examined alongside and against other existing accounts.

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<sup>4</sup> Surprisingly, this may be an area of agreement with Austen. In her novels, the most presumably emotional scenes such as wedding proposals tend to take place off stage, and are somewhat deflating. In *Northanger*, for example, the narrator informs us only that although “Henry was now sincerely attached to her, though he felt and delighted in all the excellencies of her character and truly loved her society [this was due to] nothing better than gratitude [for] her partiality for him. [A fact] dreadfully derogatory of an heroine’s dignity” Austen also signals the aims of her approach by distancing it from the more passionate vision that she is eclipsing. Her businesslike, practical love story is indeed therefore “a new circumstance in romance” (233).

The important result of Austen's innovation is to blunt the criticism of historical materialist critics such as Georg Lukács, who, writing about the realist historical novels of Scott, decries the latter's apparent admiration for romantics and gothicists like Ann Radcliffe. Their work, he argued, was flawed, unable to rise above the hopeless anachronism and petty moralizing indicative of 'bad' historical novels (30). His disdain for Radcliffe and her peers is derived from their inability to do what his exemplar novelists Scott and Balzac were able to do: portray history as contested, dialectical, the necessary prehistory of the present. Lukács, however, is ultimately unwilling or unable to identify some of the motifs, including gothic tropes, that Scott, Austen in *Northanger*, and others borrowed from the writers of romance, or why the gothic's teleology and affective motifs may in fact enhance materialist social criticism. This is a theme that will be discussed in more depth in chapter two.

It is certainly true that for Radcliffe and the romance novelists, history is conditional upon the needs of the story, and not—as Lukács would prefer—the reverse. A cursory perusal of a work of Radcliffe's for example, will turn up a plethora of casual errors and anachronisms small and large. In order to demonstrate how a gothic romance (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*) and its gothic-inflected but realist revision (*Northanger Abbey*) part ways, I would like to examine one subject which both consider, one that I hope will also function as a logical bridge to my analysis of the labor, machines, and machinations which prop up *Northanger Abbey*, the locale and novel. In a memorable scene from *Udolpho*, Montoni has Emily in his power. She attempts to resist, and he retorts: “[y]ou speak like a heroine... we shall see whether you can suffer like one” (398). Here Montoni's metafictional reference to the parallels between Emily's plight and

that of heroines in other works announces a connection to the gothic and sentimental novels (in which long-suffering heroines are definitional) of the author Radcliffe's time, *not* the character Emily St Aubert's. Later, Mademoiselle Bearn luxuriates while "her companion read aloud a sentimental novel" (495). Unfortunately, the sentimental novel appears around 1770, some two hundred years after the events of *Udolpho* (around 1584). Certainly, the niceties of actual history are less important to Radcliffe than the fictions she can build around them and the moral truths and lessons with which she can populate them. But for Austen this formulation is reversed. History is represented as 'real,' it is understandable, and her audience's understanding of it strongly inflects the reading of her fiction. An example would be the scene in which Catherine is 'abducted' by John Thorpe, and taken on a ride towards Blaize Castle. When she, not knowing her history, asks if it "is really a castle, an old castle?" Thorpe insists that it is "[t]he oldest in the kingdom" (101). Since they never arrive, she never discovers that he is either lying or inventing, that Blaize itself is an imposter, just a few decades old, and nothing like the sublime edifices that Catherine has read about (including the wonderful inventions of Radcliffe). But *readers* who know the area and its history have learned something important about both characters—that Thorpe is a liar or a braggart, that Catherine is poorly educated or naïve—as well as something about Austen's project: to situate her characters within the same contexts as the readers which constitute her audience. Austen and her readers therefore share a mutual trust. From her, they receive a reasonable facsimile of the world in which they live. From them, she is given license to craft a narrative in which disbelief is not suspended; it is in fact unnecessary.

This is not to say that we can trust the realist's history *too* far. To do so would be to ignore those embellishments, mistakes, and whole inventions which definitionally constitute fiction. As Katherine Kearns points out, “[o]ne is meant simultaneously to *trust* the material tautology of a given realism, its artifacts, its events, its influences, even as one recognizes the insufficiency and distortions of the data provided” (6, emphasis in original). If the difference between romance's and realism's relation to history are at times empirically reducible only to matters of degree, the delineation is more strongly felt in different texts' strategic approaches to history—romance's evocative backdrop, realism's causal force.

Austen's realism,<sup>5</sup> the likelihood of her characterizations and their motivations, is carried forth by her formal innovations, especially her reliance upon the narrative technique of free indirect discourse. To Michael McKeon, it is this narrative style that “provides the grammatical basis for the dialectical constitution of the public over against the private” (487). The ‘public’ references the social and political realms of human existence, including customs, institutions, geographies, and means of subsistence: all of those phenomena which must arise historically and which situate—tending in fact to dominate—those individuals whose own concerns constitute the ‘private.’ Austen's authorial voice can only speak for the public if it is able to accurately mimic its authentic, ‘real’ concerns and judgments, doling out approbation and censure in turn, and effectively welcoming readers to agree. But it is in this dialectical relationship and tension between the public and the private, between setting and character and—to suggest

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<sup>5</sup> Levine, in *The Realist Imagination*, argues that for nineteenth-century authors, realism, both method and object, was always “in process.” Authors like Austen (*Northanger* is cited extensively) were cognizant of “the difference between truth and the appearance of truth, [but nevertheless] did try to embrace the reality that stretched beyond the reach of language” (12).

one frequent Austenian conflict—between duty and desire, which make the realist novel attractive and suitable for consumption and criticism. Watt suggests that Austen is the first to use free indirect discourse consistently, and in so doing, solved a formal problem that had plagued earlier novelists:

Austen's novels, in short, must be seen as the most successful solutions of the two great narrative problems for which Richardson and Fielding had provided only partial answers. She was able to combine into a harmonious unity the advantages both of realism of presentation and realism of assessment, of the internal and of the external approaches to character; her novels have authenticity without diffuseness or trickery, wisdom of social comment without a garrulous essayist, and a sense of the social order which is not achieved at the expense of the individuality and autonomy of the characters. (297)

Watt's analysis is useful, I think, but should be extended and modified. Austen's approach, rather than choosing between oppositional strategies or emphases (privileging the rights of the social body *or* the individuality, representing their worldview *or* his/her dissent), instead provides a framework in which the very nature of these oppositions can be rightfully called a problematic. It is this schism, the dialectical see-saw between each half of the binary pair which produces the tension and interest that is the aim of her realism.

It is therefore not coincidental that free indirect discourse and the stance of push and pull that it promotes should be the operative one, not only in the representative framework of *Northanger Abbey* and in the development of its characters, but also in fact towards the very conventions of the subgenre (the gothic novel) which Austen is moving to supplant. Its tropes are borrowed, translated, and transformed; its excesses domesticated. The gothic, then, provides fertile ground for her formally realist approach, an approach which is most evident in the most gothic parts of the novel. Not



coincidentally, it is in these sections where Austen's materialist concerns are most prevalent. If the gothic impulse in *Northanger Abbey* was that of the romance (simply reproducing gothic tropes), or of the satire (simply parodying them), then we could assume that the most gothic portions of the novel, the sections that occur in the abbey, would be *less* suffused by Austen's realist formalism. In the Bath and Fullerton sections, for example, the expectations of the audience McKeon says is catered to by free indirect discourse would be altogether different, because the world depicted is assumed to be 'closer' to the one in which that audience inhabits, and Austen's presentation would likely be less 'parodic'. However, Narelle Shaw's analysis of the text has determined that the incidences of free indirect speech number only four in the Bath and Fullerton sections, but are "substantial" in the Abbey sections (592-4). The censoring force of the social is paradoxically more pronounced the further Catherine is removed from it—but, surprisingly, also increases in proportion to how gothic her narrative is.

Even though Shaw tends to agree with Birthe Tandrup's claim that free indirect discourse is often deployed by Austen for its comedic, parodic effect (90), I would complicate this claim by drawing on another of her observations, that "[f]ree indirect speech proliferates around the character of General Tilney, who serves also as the focus for a salient *improvements* motif" (599, emphasis added). This is not because the character is especially humorous, or a buffooned Montoni: indeed, General Tilney is the most serious character in the novel, and this seriousness is never portrayed satirically. Rather, Austen's formal method serves to real-ize the Montoni-esque villain of the gothic romance, allowing for many of his same characteristics including marital mercenarism, tyrannical control over children, and a zealous adherence to custom and structures of

power and orderliness, all at the expense of human feeling and comfort. Although he carries within him these recognizable germs of gothic villainy, if they were allowed to grow too far beyond what is typical, believable, ‘realistic,’ then the general would cease to be a realistic character, and *Northanger* would cease to be usefully realist. A productive example occurs towards the end of the tour of the abbey, when Catherine and her readers are about to learn the general’s horrible secret. He quickly shuts the door on Eleanor and Catherine and further discovery. The narrator translates his actions and speech for us in free indirect style: “...the General, coming forwards, called her hastily, and, as Catherine thought, rather angrily back, demanding whither she was going? – And what was there more to be seen? – Had not Miss Morland already seen all that could be worth her notice?” (185). These words are both the general’s and the narrator’s, demonstrating rather unequivocally that Catherine will not find what she is looking for. Or, perhaps, that when she does, it will take on a very different form.

It is within this tension, the uneasy back and forth between the general’s gothic villainy (keeping his secrets buried) and his rather more mundane officiousness and managerial banality (keeping the house clean) in which Austen’s gothic materialism could be said to be exemplarized. As it turns out, General Tilney did not murder his wife. But his obsession with *improvement*—certainly in regards to family stature and income, but more importantly in terms of a rigorousness and continual perfection of all matters of domestic economy—served to entrap and drain her, just as they threaten to ensnare Catherine. Once the general captures her and her ostensible capital for his son, he aims to transform her into a useful cog, a clockwork overseer of machinery and mechanized

drudges disguised as humans. In other words, to make her into a productive housewife. This is the horror of Austen's gothic materialist novel.

### **Learning & Laundry**

The attributes that Austen invests in Catherine in the novel's opening—a kind of rugged boyishness at odds with the gothic and sentimental visions of heroism—are not coincidentally rather ideal for the life she will, by the end of the novel, find herself living. By the age of fifteen, at the same moment when her romantic notions are taking hold, we learn that her “appearances were mending; she began to curl her hair and long for balls; her complexion improved... Her love of dirt gave way to an inclination for finery, and she grew clean as she grew smart; she had now the pleasure of sometimes hearing her father and mother remark on her personal improvement” (39). In just a few lines we see two references to ‘improvement,’ one to ‘mending,’ and one to her growing preference for cleanliness. While these may work alongside her fascination for finery, in service of meeting gentlemen at balls, they are also the foundation upon which her successful marriage will be built—especially if she wishes to marry into the Tilneys, a family very much concerned with cleanliness, mending, and improvement. Henry Tilney's correction of her mistaken ideas surrounding his father marks the beginning of her own self-improvement, necessary for her to become an improving force within the Tilney family and household. Once aligned with Henry's worldview, she will be ready to carry out her various functions. So while it may be true that “[n]o one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her to be an heroine,” (37) she is at least in

good company: the real and the realist fictive worlds do not contain heroes and heroines—only individuals with (paradoxically) collectively-assigned roles and responsibilities.

Catherine's longing for the life of romance described in her novels is not simply a personal idiosyncrasy. A number of critics have commented on the ways that domestic fiction especially posited social-historical conflicts as sexual encounters. Nancy Armstrong, building upon Watt's work in her own *Desire & Domestic Fiction*, notes how novels like *Pamela* tend to represent "the ideological conflict shaping the text as the difference between a man and a woman rather than between a person of station and a person of low rank" (30). *Northanger Abbey* performs the same maneuver, in much the same way, but with the more believable because less severe difference between Catherine's and Henry's position: she is middle, rather than servant class, and Henry's status as second son means that while he shall never want, he will nevertheless not inherit the family estate and so requires a profession. Neither Pamela's nor Catherine's amorous ambitions have overtly political dimensions: the former is won over by Mr. B's perseverance, the latter by Henry's kindness—he understands and forgives her for the most perverse aspects of her naively gothicized worldview. And neither protagonist is *consciously* mercenary, despite the many charges leveled at Pamela and, by extension, her supposed readers. But Austen's work, much more than Richardson's, tends to smooth out the audience's objections, undercutting doubt as to relative likelihood, but more importantly, towards concerns surrounding the suitability of the match. If, as Franco Moretti's reading of it suggests, Austen's novel "not only does not conceal the nation's internal divisions, [it] manages to turn them into a story" (*Atlas* 20, emphasis in

original), then this particular love story is also a story of class reconciliation. In Austen's novels, those on both sides of this divide can feel quite good about seeing their own motivations and values justified.<sup>6</sup> Although there might be good reasons to question Catherine's intentions—Levine calls her “an incipient monster” who gamely steps aside while Captain Tilney destroys the more forward Isabella for attempting what Catherine herself achieves—Austen's approach allows her ascendance to seem natural, virtuous, and—because hidden behind her desire for the life of her novels—practically accidental (“Translating” 349-50). It can therefore obtain personal and popular sanction, and perform its political work incognito.

If Catherine Morland's social climbing has social ramifications, it also has literary ones. In the gothic romance, the heroine moves from a simple, rustic yet fulfilling life of familial contentment—one in which household labor is glossed over, or falls under the purview of a single servant who is more ally or enemy than employee—to one of prosperity modeled on an idealized, aristocratic past. We are more likely to see the servant in these works acting in the role of confidant than cook—Annette from *Udolpho*, for example—if they are seen at all. The role of labor is a defining problematic of Austen's materialist gothic, as its appearance is continually highlighted and erased. Catherine must not only ingratiate herself with the family's betters, as her literary forebears did, but she must also demonstrate her own economic value to the family, and this value extends beyond the size of her dowry to include her mastery of domestic economy. The insistence on the necessity of the management and performance of household labor, a key subset of the underlying material basis of the gothic manse's

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<sup>6</sup> This break is perhaps even more pronounced in *Pride & Prejudice*, where the aristocratic Darcy's initially bad behavior becomes fully justified once the necessary backstory is filled in.

existence, is one of the most important and most overlooked contributions that Austen's real-izing of the gothic that *Northanger Abbey* performs. It establishes the blueprint that later material gothicists, including Gaskell and especially Dickens, will follow.

Austen's reputation and her significance within the canon are established primarily on a certain astuteness, an evaluative stance regarding people's affects and motivations which form the basis of her characterizations. A number of critics have argued that this evaluative sense is just as penetrating when cast towards details which are always 'seen' in terms of their value. This value might be in coin or in prestige, or both, but it is clear that these details are presented in such a way that that value is ready made, 'visible' for the reader's appreciation. To Robert Merrett, "Austen has an eye to bargains in materials, costume, and furniture. She champions contemporary modes, but always weighs their price" (234), while to Raymond Williams, "[h]er eye for a house, for timber, for the details of improvement, is quick, accurate, monetary" (*Country* 115).

Continuing this analysis, he suggests that

[t]he land is seen primarily as an index of revenue and position; its visible order and control are a valued product, while the process of working it is hardly seen at all. Jane Austen then reminds us, yet again, of the two meanings of improvement, which were historically linked but in practice so often contradictory. (ibid.)

The *products* of labor, the value(s) created are made manifest, indeed inescapably present, but the labor itself tends to remain invisible. In *Northanger Abbey* labor is mostly hidden until the key moment, late in the text, when it rises all at once to confront Catherine. It may seem strange that Austen would invoke labor to modernize the gothic, then elide that labor to legitimize the country genteel existence which Catherine and most of Austen's protagonists enjoy. But this is because, paradoxically, while the gothic

romance peddles a labor-less world of leisure in which horror exists inherently in people and their religions, superstitions, and avarices, Austen's gothic materialism represents a world in which leisure is haunted by the labor that it never sees, performed by people that are usually invisible, but with whom one's relationship is always more intimate than most of its characters recognize or wish to acknowledge.

Instead, the end values *produced* by that labor, what Marx would call exchange and use value are the only ones visible to most of Austen's genteel country denizens (*Capital* 126-9). Mrs. Allen, worried about the status of some muslin that costs "but nine shillings a yard" is suitably impressed when Henry Tilney, far more astute, suggests that was "exactly" what he thought it was worth (51). He points out that he buys all of his clothes, and is entrusted by his sister to secure the best bargains, using his instinctive sensitivity to advantageous ratios of use value (quality, fit) to exchange value (price, prestige) (*ibid.*). Upon Catherine's dress, however, he pronounces a more ominous judgment, suggesting that—its loveliness notwithstanding—he does "not think it will wash well [and fears] it will fray" (*ibid.*). Henry's appraising eye sees not only the dress's current use and exchange values, he is also cognizant of the labor it will cost to maintain, labor that will ultimately need to be performed by a tailor or servant or by Catherine herself. Alternatively, the dress is a resource or even capital which can be salvaged or developed: Henry cheerfully suggests that "Miss Morland will get enough out of it for a handkerchief, or a cap, or a cloak. – Muslin can never be said to be wasted" (*ibid.*). In this way, the muslin which makes up the dress is itself a commodity which can be repurposed: invested with that additional 'real' value which Marx suggests is aggregated labor, it can be transformed into another product to be worn and enjoyed, a wholly new

use-value (129). As consumers, Catherine and Mrs. Allen are aware only of the end products of labor: its use and exchange value. Henry, a budding manager like his father, sees further, quite literally beneath the surface of things, to the very fount from which real value springs.

Henry's practicality and probing, I would argue, is also something of a warning, or perhaps a test. Like his father and, in a perhaps uncomfortable way, as a proxy for him, Henry must evaluate his future mate for suitability, a suitability founded primarily on her proficiency with domestic economy. Thus, Catherine's story arc is not that of a burgeoning heroine but that of a nascent wife and, by extension, mistress of the house and housekeeper. Her mother is particularly aware of this, and is greatly concerned that "Catherine would make a sad, heedless young house-keeper to be sure,' [but she offers] the consolation of there being nothing like practice" (237). Thankfully, Henry is also a great believer in a young woman's ability to better herself through constant diligence, suggesting that

it is this delightful habit of journalizing which largely contributes to form the easy style of writing for which ladies are so generally celebrated. Every body allows that the talent of writing agreeable letters is peculiarly female. Nature may have done something, but I am sure it must be essentially assisted by *the practice* of keeping a journal. (50, emphasis added)

Practice makes perfect, and women's usual practice of writing in their journals, prepares them quite well for their future careers, whether consisting of husband hunting (Isabella's letter to Catherine requesting that she intervene with James to salvage their engagement) or in chronicling household work and goods (the hidden laundry lists that Catherine discovers at Northanger). In both cases, there is no question where this practice is to be



ultimately employed: in the home, in the service of men. Henry's witty flirtations with Catherine serve to charm, but also to not so subtly hint at the consequence of their intended result:

In marriage, the man is supposed to provide for the support of the woman; the woman is to make the home agreeable to the man; he is to purvey, and she is to smile. But in dancing, their duties are exactly changed; the agreeableness, the compliance are expected from him, while she furnishes the fan and the lavender water. (95-6).

In the first instance of Henry's analogy—marriage—the man performs the work: he 'purveys' while she, it is suggested, need only to 'make the home agreeable'—a phrase telling in its vagueness—but more specifically 'to smile.' Of course, the indistinctness surrounding what making the home agreeable really means, Henry's emphasis on 'agreeability' rather than, for example, 'cleanliness,' serves to highlight that which it actually conceals: that women's labor is paradoxically assumed, essential and invisible. Moreover, it is the product of that labor which is ultimately important: the performer's smile is simply the veneer that covers it up. In the second scenario, when dancing, he is to smile—and to flirt mercilessly, it seems—while she is required only to operate the air-cooling apparatus and fetch the water. In short, Henry is looking for a wife who will work to keep his house in proper order, and to serve the household faithfully while striving to conceal the very effort of that labor as much as possible, presenting her husband and the world only a welcoming grin.

Before this can occur, Catherine must confront Northanger and its inhabitants. The first of her many shocks—those hard lessons and necessary spurs towards an understanding of her role and responsibilities—occurs shortly after the commencement of

her visit to the abbey. She discovers that her room contains investigable furnishings, including a cabinet decorated in “black and yellow Japan of the handsomest kind” (170). Feeling that there must be something important in it, she searches it thoroughly, looking for false panels that conceal secret treasures or hidden missives. That she attaches any importance to this particular cabinet is strange, considering that Catherine professes a few pages later to care “for no furniture of a more modern date than the fifteenth century” (182). The popularity of japanned furniture in England was a far more recent development (first OED reference is 1688).<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, upon searching it, the drawer’s secrets are wholly deflating. Finding “a roll of paper pushed back into the further part of the cavity, apparently for concealment” (171), Catherine is unable to read its contents after too-enthusedly snuffing her candle. In the morning, its horrid meaning becomes legible:

Her greedy eye glanced rapidly over a page. She started at its import. Could it be possible, or did not her senses play her false—an inventory of linen, in coarse and modern characters, seemed all that was before her! If the evidence of sight might be trusted, she held a washing-bill in her hand. She seized another sheet, and saw the same articles with little variation; a third, a fourth, and a fifth presented nothing new. Shirts, stockings, cravats, and waist-coats faced her in each. (173)

To Gilbert and Gubar, this discovery is Austen’s way of suggesting that “financial dependency... is the authentic ancestral curse,” and the laundry list is a painful reminder of the “real threat to women’s happiness” (135). This seems borne out by its contents, in which the enumerated objects continue without end: ‘shirts, stockings, cravats, and waist-coats,’ the list of which goes on page after page (‘a third, a fourth, and a fifth’). Presented

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<sup>7</sup> In a moment reminiscent of the earlier reference to Blaize Castle, this apparent anachronism is no anachronism at all. The contradiction’s meaning is fully decipherable to astute readers who recognize the mistake as *Catherine’s*, not Austen’s. This very modern cabinet is in fact, a rather poor substitute for its gothic predecessors, but Catherine’s undernourished imagination does not realize this.

in this manner, the sense of repetition, of endlessness, in which differences even in type (coats and stockings) are collapsed back into measures of sameness, ‘the same articles with little variation.’ This bill is the record of now-vacant objects, but is more significant as the historical record of the now-vacated labor which collected, cleaned, folded, and stored all of the clothes that it names. This is labor that, as Gilbert and Gubar assert, was largely carried out by women. But it was also labor that was largely concealed, evident only by its disappearance into an unspotted product (clean clothes), and recorded in a document which itself is locked away and never seen: ‘pushed back into the further part of the cavity, apparently for concealment.’ The concealment of housework was an important part of establishing the respectability of the nineteenth century household.

Anne McClintock’s scholarship traces the bifurcated nature of housework for the nineteenth century housewife of the middle and upper middle classes—the latter being analogous to Catherine’s experience post-marriage, whose minister husband Henry is the second son of a land rich but cash poor English army officer. To McClintock, “[h]ousewifery became a career in vanishing acts,” predicated on the performance of regular, repetitive labor which itself must be concealed at all costs (162). Catherine’s wish, “to spend [her] whole life in reading” *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (and to make her own life into *The Mysteries of Northanger*) is not only an impractical adolescent daydream, it is one enabled by the illusion of a world in which women living in fine country houses (and in large abbeys) possess a leisured and labor-less existence in which novel reading is a more rather than less vocational occupation (Austen 61). To McClintock, this life of pure leisure was not the reality for all but a “tiny” subsection of the most wealthy. Instead:

idleness was less a regime of inertia imposed on wilting middle-class wives and daughters than a laborious and time-consuming *character role* performed by women who wanted membership in the “respectable” class. For most women whose husbands or fathers could not afford enough servants for genuine idleness, domestic work had to be accompanied by the historically unprecedented labor of rendering invisible every sign of that work. For most middling women, the cleaning and management of their large, inefficiently constructed houses took immense amounts of labor and energy. Yet a housewife’s vocation was precisely the concealment of this work. (161-2, emphasis in original)

If it is not the heroine ‘role’ that Catherine had initially chosen for herself, it is the one her stay in Northanger awakens her to, and that her time spent with the Tilneys teaches her is expected and even desirable. When Catherine is shown Henry’s smaller country house for the first time, the general finds himself making excuses for its relative modesty, aware that it is not as majestic as the “Fullerton and Northanger” he fears that she is used to and desires. It is, he says, “a mere Parsonage, small and confined, we allow, but decent perhaps, and habitable: altogether not inferior to the generality” (208). Catherine does not complain. Rather, after being humbled by Henry for the baselessness of her fantasy life, her “visions of romance” killed off just twenty pages earlier (196); she is quick to exclaim, if not altogether convincingly (perhaps heartbreakingly) that the drawing-room is “the prettiest room I ever saw; –it is the prettiest room in the world!” (208). Her role in making it achieve this promise is evident: the general suggests that the house “may admit of improvement” and then, with even less subtlety, that “it waits only for a lady’s taste!” (208, 209). And more, for there is in the whole tour not a servant to be seen. She has not, as of yet, moved in.

The role of housewife and mistress may not have been Catherine’s fantasy, but it is certainly to be her post-wedded reality. According to Pamela Horn, by the end of the nineteenth century, fewer ‘ladies of the manor’ were required to directly participate in

household labor than at its beginning. But her examination of personal and household records suggests that even those who were not actively scrubbing, cleaning, and cooking, were still required to perform a litany of tasks related to household care and management, a burden that many, like Catherine herself, were not fully prepared for. Horn enumerates a list of required duties including “supervision of the indoor servants, including the hiring and firing of senior staff, ...daily interviews with the housekeeper and the cook to arrange for the reception of guests and drawing up of menus [as well as tracking] the household accounts and the ordering of fresh supplies” (90-1). This organizational work alone was too much for many wives, even those managing very small households (92). Similarly, Patricia Branca’s work on the middle class woman’s life argues that, contrary to her depictions in novels, she was generally “not a pampered woman of leisure” but rather an active force whose “functions could easily outstrip her means” (11, 22). The amount of labor required to maintain a respectably middle class or greater existence was exhausting, and was one of the chief sources of tension within the family (56). This is why, perhaps, Henry and his father seem so interested in Catherine’s appraisal of their homes, and turn so many of their own attentions and efforts towards appraising, and, when necessary, correcting her.

One skill that Catherine is actively learning is the management of her money. Diligent book keeping and frugal spending was considered “the key” to successful household management:

The first rule of domestic economy was to plan one’s expenditures rationally. To do this properly it was recommended that the woman keep an account of all her daily expenditures, which should include every shilling and sixpence laid out. The keeping of the account book was guaranteed to take the mystery out of managing

of finances. The authorities on domestic economy generally believed that the reason women had such difficulty with their money affairs was that they did not properly organize them. (Branca 26)

It is not surprising that Catherine's parents attempt to instill proper money management before she accompanies the Allens to Bath's clothing and marriage markets. Indeed, the very last words her mother speaks to her are "...I wish you would try to keep account of the money you spend; -I will give you this little book on purpose'" (42). Her father's good-byes are simply glossed by the narrator, but again, his last concerns are not for her health and welfare, but are aimed towards inculcating the principles of self-management of family capital: "Her father, instead of giving her an unlimited order on his banker, or even putting an hundred pounds bank-bill into her hands, gave her only ten guineas, and promised her more when she wanted it" (43). We are invited to read Mr. Morland satirically, with his very unsentimental inability to bestow hundreds of pounds on his daughter at a time, to romantically rather than realistically believe that money is, in fact, 'no object.' But it is truer to say that in starting small and promising 'more when she wanted it' the limitation's purpose is as much or more instructive than practical. Catherine's father is performing the part that, while dancing, Henry suggests he will take on as her husband: 'purveying' (95). And while she may fulfill her part, exchanging a smile for coinage, homage, and home—that smile, as we have seen, is only the visible, public portion of her responsibility.

Catherine begins to sense the heaviness of her future responsibility the moment she arrives at Northanger. She is dismayed to find that the abbey itself is in good repair, that its forebuildings are "lodges of a modern appearance," and its drive "a smooth, level road of fine gravel" (164). What she expects is something untamed, an edifice not

adapted to the requirements of the age but rather a rebuke of it. Her worldview, tinged by the gothic novels she reads, has been formulated upon a rather clear if unconscious logic: 1) laborers are nonexistent, or occasionally, appear as furtive messengers or spies; and, 2) ancient castles and abbeys are run down, falling apart, and barely support continued human existence.

Although the obvious and necessary link between these two statements is never made, by Catherine or the gothic novelists, Austen unmasks it in *Northanger Abbey*. She does this largely through the character that represents the construction's opposite: the tireless General Tilney. The general is obsessed with improvement, with structure and timeliness, with modernization, and, most terrifying for Catherine, "mere domestic economy" (184). References to improvement abound, metaphors for it too: it is no accident that the general's professed sole "hobby-horse" is a garden. Requiring strict accounting and constant diligence, this project is mostly a test for his managerial skills: he talks about it in terms of its output ("the pinery had yielded only one hundred in the last year") rather than the pleasure it may—or may not, he hedges here—provide for himself and others (178-9). The *service* of food, however, is incredibly important to the general, even if its aims strive towards form and appearance rather than nourishment or enjoyment. In Bath, the first time Catherine has breakfast with the Tilneys, she is amazed by the outlay on lavish food and settings, all of which had been "the General's choice" (175). While he has no particular palate for tea, the general is well aware of the precise origin of his set, its make and date, and he laments that his is of a style a full two years old (175-6). His emphasis is, as always, on strict management of capital and the labor that

develops it. The means of production and channels of distribution—even for a cup of tea—are to be closely scrutinized.

Maggie Lane's work is useful here, as she explicates many of the niceties of the general's obsession with food, and its meanings within the domestic and economic systems circulating in Northanger and in the Midlands of England when Austen was writing. Noticing the strict division of function within the various rooms of his estate, she identifies a streak of "pretension and of conspicuous consumption of resources... highly consistent with the general's domestic law" evident, for example, in his heating of the supper room during non-meal times (*Food* 53). This conspicuousness extends to the kinds of food that the general grows and serves. Pineapple and french bread, for example, are the only two foodstuffs in the novel which are specifically named, and both items are extraordinary for their expense, rarity, and their foreignness: all of which serve to demonstrate his commitment to a specific social position and accompanying lifestyle ("French Bread" 139). Lane's inference of what the general's demands on Catherine might be are especially relevant, establishing his role as her prospective censorer as well as father-in-law: "Poor Catherine, with all she has yet to learn, will also have to face the ordeal of her father-in-law's scrutiny of her table. Her melted butter is sure to be oiled, or her menu inadequate, on the day General Tilney comes to dinner" (*Food* 7). What Catherine 'has yet to learn,' of course, is domestic economy. Lane locates Catherine's deficiency in these skills as the end result of her mother's inattention, too busy with child-rearing and too surprised at the suddenness of Catherine's engagement to remedy the oversight. Whatever the cause, the Tilneys themselves take it upon themselves to finish Catherine's education: the general by modeling a properly run modern house, his



son by destroying Catherine's more naïve, romantic illusions and by providing the impetus—channeling her desire for a life with him into the desire to make a home for him—to change and grow.

While the general provides a model and an education for Catherine, this is not to say that he is especially admirable. There are many reasons to detest him, and he is still a gothic villain, if an evolved one. But it is telling that even his most apparent excesses, his particularities and cruelties, have a strangely domestic bent. These serve not only to make Catherine and reader fear and detest him, but also to instruct in some of the finer points of proper household management. So prevalent is the domestic in the general's peculiar tyranny, even Catherine's fevered imaginings begin to move along these lines. She comes to believe that he has shut his wife in some disused wing or room, and worse, that she receives "from the pitiless hands of her husband a nightly supply of coarse food", as if this were the worst torment she could endure (187). A severe contrast to the general's circumspection regarding proper meal service, it probably is. Later, after Catherine's disillusioning by Henry, and her recognition that the general isn't quite as evil as she supposed, she opines to herself that in the Tilneys' modern Midlands, "[m]urder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions [were] to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist" (197). While this sentence is sufficiently suffused with Austenian archness to read too confidently, it is still easy to view this construction as equalizing, rather than hierarchical. Effectively, what she learns from the Tilneys is that the dispensing of poison for rhubarb—akin to murder—is no more unconscionable than treating one's servants incorrectly.

## Machines, Systems, Sublimity

General Tilney's attention to the finer points of table service is part of a larger obsession with domestic orderliness, most evident in the way that household activity is minutely structured to conform to the rhythmic ticking of the clock. Katherine Kickel has written on this obsession, arguing that the general "considers time's use as an improvement device for the domestic work of his home during an age when the economic feasibility of the estate was being challenged by new labor sites" (148). This "involve[s] far more than economic profitability; [it also suggests] a refashioning of patriarchal authority in the home in the name of practical efficiency" (154). While agreeing with parts of this argument, I do think that this relationship between efficiency and authority has been perhaps reversed: efficiency for the general is a tool to serve his status and authority, rather than an end in itself. As he himself concedes, his pinery is not profitable and likely never will be; and as Lane points out, he heats his house *inefficiently*. The general is certainly impressed with the future, but his power comes from the past, in the form of his title, land, and other advantages.

Timeliness, however, and its usefulness as a method of control, *is* one of the general's preeminent concerns. In Bath, when the Tilneys host Catherine for breakfast, he is incensed by the lateness of his eldest son, who he loudly chides for being lazy. Although he uses Catherine's visit as a club, the son's lack of decorum is dwarfed by the father's "disproportionate" response, which, far from placating Catherine—presumably in his attempt to win her for his other son—actually embarrasses her (158). Leaving the table, the general is irritated that 10 o'clock arrives while trunks are still on their way

downstairs, as he had planned to be travelling by then. Stopping to refresh the horses and eat, he expresses his displeasure with the inn's offerings, and demonstrates an "angry impatience at the waiters" (159). His first action upon arrival at the abbey is to look at his watch, and to "pronounce it with surprize within twenty minutes of five!" –sending the girls and servants scurrying (165). The general is frequently seen checking this timepiece, a more faithful companion than his flawed because less constant living ones. When Catherine and Eleanor come downstairs, they find "General Tilney... pacing the drawing-room, his watch in his hand" and "the very instant of their entering [he] pulled the bell with violence [and] ordered 'Dinner to be on table *directly!*'" (168, emphasis in original). This insistence on timeliness, on well-ordered order, is one of the defining features of the general's tyranny, and an ever-present check on the autonomy of his dependents and underlings.

General Tilney's attempt to strictly manage every minute allows for the dominion that aligns him with the gothic villains from which he descends, but within a symbolic structure more compatible with Austen's realism. Time is the nexus through which the general's law pervades the household, and the channel through which his family is forced not only to abide by this law, but also to reproduce it. The general walks the halls with his pocket-watch issuing orders, but it is his daughter Eleanor whose tugging convinces Catherine "that the strictest punctuality to the family hours would be expected at Northanger" (165). Upstairs, Eleanor enters Catherine's room to ensure that she is ready, then hurries her by expressing "her fear of being late" (167-8). She is not only compliant to the general's domestic regime, she also serves as his proxy, acting even if unwillingly to enforce compliance upon Catherine. The most notable instance of this is when

Catherine is finally expelled from Northanger. Eleanor must deliver the edict and parrot the excuse the general has invented as the reason for it. Not surprisingly, the hour of departure is precisely stipulated (7a.m. sharp), and the question of who *owns* time itself is made explicit: Catherine is informed that “not even the hour is left to your choice” (217). Should Catherine again come under the general’s power, there is little doubt she, too, would learn first to follow and later to reproduce the clockwork existence which structures Northanger.

In many ways, the general’s dedication to timeliness is itself somewhat *un*-timely, or more accurately precocious, prescient of the worldview that would come to dominate by midcentury. Cecilia Wadso Lecaros argues that the following decades were marked by an increasing sensitivity to the clock, and that punctuality became one of the more widely praised virtues of the Victorian period (with its antithesis, tardiness, among its most pernicious vices). The explosion of discourse which surrounded this shift reached its apex in the mid-nineteenth century, but a number of factors contributed to it. These included the move from a primarily barter-based to a capitalist economy, and concomitant improvements in time-keeping technology which made timepieces more dependable as well as more affordable to larger portions of society. The consequence was that all the business of public and social life, everything from work hours to dinner party times—as well as matters of private life, such as the general’s breakfast, transportation, and dinner times—became tightly scheduled. Discourse on timeliness in tracts and novels exhorted punctuality as the key to self-improvement for the individual, as well as the motor of the modern state (862-3).<sup>8</sup> In his position as family head, timekeeper, and ultimately

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<sup>8</sup> Not for nothing is Richard Burlingame’s history of timekeeping titled *Dictator Clock*.

instructor to his children and later Catherine, General Tilney strives to create, indeed perhaps invents, the paradigm that Anne McClintock has called the Victorian “cult of domesticity.” Founded upon rigid systemization, it was defined by the very principles and actors he champions: “The domestic day itself was measured into mechanical units, marked by the chiming of clocks and the meticulous ringing of bells. The clock presided magisterially over the life of the household, perfectly encapsulating the Victorian fetish for measurement, order and boundary” (168-9).

To some extent we have seen other examples of this systemization occurring at Northanger. The rigorously documented laundry bills, for instance, could be seen as part of the larger trend towards domestic classification that achieves dominance in the mid-nineteenth century, and permeated everything:

in the labeling of bottles, the careful marking of sheets and clothes, the scrupulous keeping of visitors’ books, the regular accounting of stocks, the meticulous measuring of food, the strict keeping of account books. Specialized utensils, technologies and timetables were developed for different stages of cooking and eating. The fetish for rational measurement led to an increase in the use of weights and measures. Food was served in obedience to rigid timetables, announced by the ringing of bells. Unlike the medley of sweet and savory, hot and cold courses served all at once in earlier times, meals now followed strict sequential rules, one course following the other with the proper decorum of rational, linear progress. (McClintock 168)

The general is making a number of gestures in this direction. Let us move, by way of example, out of the general’s public rooms, his dining hall and supper room and the drawing-room in which he is so often checking his watch, and into his private rooms. Here, anticipating what McClintock says will be required of his descendants, he is in fact working on developing ‘specialized utensils and technologies.’ Modernization is explicitly one of his passions, and Catherine discovers to her horror that, in all parts of

the abbey, older furnishings and décor have been replaced by the new: her room's japan chest, a new Rumford fireplace<sup>9</sup> (165), and especially the kitchen, in which “[a]ll that was venerable ceased... [this] building was not only new, but declared itself to be so” (184).

Decrying these changes, effected “for the purposes of mere domestic economy,” Catherine clings to the idea that there must have been something magical here before, “beyond the value of all the rest” (ibid.). The differences in worldview between pre-disillusioned and instructed Catherine extend beyond the literary generalizations ensconced under terms like ‘romantic’ vs. ‘realist’ (or ‘practical,’ perhaps). They also demonstrate divergent points of historical interest: Catherine for the supposed past, General Tilney for the promising future. This stratification seems to reverse the alliances that the gothic novel typically constructs—the villain with the autocratic and superstitious past, the heroine with the democratic and enlightened present (Mighall 11). But this novel nuance is illusory: the general still represents conventional, aristocratic authority, and Catherine’s alliance with this past is partly naiveté (as the Blaize castle incident implies), and not much more than a nostalgia for a world that *wasn’t*, one built upon historical fictions rather than factual histories.<sup>10</sup>

The general may be unwilling to relinquish the traditional, ancestral source of his power and all of its privileges, but he also supports England’s promising industrial future,

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<sup>9</sup> Available in 1796, just a couple of years before work began on the novel.

<sup>10</sup> This conflict, between the past and the present, the reactionary villain and the progressive hero, will be taken up again in chapter two.

financially and politically.<sup>11</sup> More, he appears to be building it in his own home: “The General's improving hand had not loitered here: every modern invention to facilitate the labour of the cooks, had been adopted within this, their spacious theatre; and, when the genius of others had failed, his own had often produced the perfection wanted” (183). Catherine’s much wished-for gothic tour ends with the villain confronting her not with the instruments of torture, but of food-preparation. The ‘General’s improving hand’ wields a pocket-watch rather than a dagger, and performs far different functions. It holds the timepiece and bell rope that orders the day for his family and household staff. It directs the improvements to the abbey, remodeling it into an efficient modern structure, in many of the same ways that, over the next few decades, England will be remodeled into an efficient modern state. It designs and builds the machines which astound Catherine with “their multiplicity and their convenience” (184). Finally, it is the hand which summons, directs, and dismisses that more difficult to quantify, often invisible labor force that furtively lurks beneath the Abbey’s living quarters, waiting to frighten Catherine upon discovery.

Until the abbey tour, the presence of labor at Northanger very much resembles that of the novel’s gothic forebears. Catherine is familiar with but a single servant, Eleanor’s lady’s maid, the “ill-timed intruder” whose real purpose, Catherine feels, is to hurry her to meal times and to delay her from reading secreted manuscripts (167, 173). While she is seen as an impediment, almost an enemy, this servant maid’s true function is, of course, to make Catherine comfortable. And even though she enjoys the results of this labor, Catherine never associates it with its performer. Returning to her room after

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<sup>11</sup> “[he] thought it right to encourage the manufacture of his country” (175).

the first night's dinner, she is very happy to find the "cheerful blaze of a wood fire" to greet her, and quite content that Northanger is not the humble cottage that the protagonists of so many *Udolphos* are forced to endure; herself not one of the poor girls who lack fires, or worse, are frightened awake by the venerable servant bringing in wood (169). Unable to connect the comforts she enjoys with those who facilitate them, her tendency is instead to be resentful. Servants to Catherine are a necessary evil: meddling when present, bungling while performing their duties, and treacherously absent when needed—Henry, laying a trap for Catherine's gothic sensibilities before reaching Northanger, suggestively predicts that she "will not have a single domestic within call" (162). Fortunately, her novel education has taught her that they are rarely encountered.

*Northanger Abbey's* transformation of the gothic machinery, therefore, is most striking when Catherine descends with the General into the kitchens, and sees the hidden army of laborers rise up all at once to confront her:

The number of servants continually appearing did not strike her less than the number of their offices. Wherever they went, some pattered girl stopped to curtsy, or some footman in dishabille sneaked off. Yet this was an Abbey! –How inexpressibly different in these domestic arrangements from such as she had read about—from abbeys and castles, in which, though certainly larger than Northanger, all the dirty work of the house was to be done by two pair of female hands at the utmost. How they could get through it all, had often amazed Mrs Allen; and, when Catherine saw what was necessary here, she began to be amazed herself. (184)

Residing in the remodeled part of the abbey, in the same physical space as the old monastery cells, the general's servants have replaced the buried evils of the gothic romance. The 'amazement' that Catherine experiences at their unveiling is, it seems, the revised equivalent of those shudders produced by the veiled corpses and hidden passages



of Udolpho. The number of servants she encounters, and the variety of tasks these servants perform are uncountable, for Catherine unaccountable. They extend seemingly without end, just as the items and operations recorded on the laundry list she found in her room's jappaned desk. This is an explicit rewriting of the gothic script, in which 'abbeys and castles,' even those much larger than Northanger, are kept functional with only a servant or two. Channeling Catherine's inner voice, and using free indirect style to invoke the reminder of Mrs. Allen's doubtfulness regarding servant-less gothic castles, both the impossibility of those fictional castles and the workings of the world as it is are demonstrated unequivocally. The reader is reminded of this truth, too, and shares Mrs. Allen's position as a member of the censoring public.<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Allen's cluelessness in all other arenas ably highlights the enormity of Catherine's folly by comparison.

The nonexistence of domestic laborers in the earlier gothics is exposed by Austen, who stages their dramatic return before she, too, whisks them off of the stage. The shock, 'amazement,' and horror that Catherine experiences upon encountering the general's buried labor army reorganizes the meanings of the affective and sublime elements of the gothic, re-establishing it as a fundamentally material phenomenon. All at once, the general's clockwork—almost undead—army of laborers appear (only) at this one moment in the novel, rising up from nowhere, forcing Catherine into recognition of their status and the true nature of hers, and engendering the uncomfortable thrill we might guardedly call the *domestic sublime*.<sup>13</sup> The sudden appearance of this repressed cohort

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<sup>12</sup> The work that Levine suggests free indirect style enacts.

<sup>13</sup> Wendland's use of this same term has not caught on, and is altogether different. He argues that 1950's science fiction, especially comics and films, limit the power of the sublime, alien landscape by encapsulating it, generally with a frame of some kind, such as a space ship's porthole or viewscreen. Thus,

operates in much the same way that the early gothicists, borrowing from Burke, deployed supernatural characters, situations, and effects in order to represent how “the mind's normal emotional and cognitive state is violated by some overwhelming or traumatic experience, producing a moment of arrest or suspension that is immediately followed by recovery, a return to the pre-sublime state” (Voller ix-x). ‘Recovery’ ends the experiential phenomena, but it also accompanies a fundamental change to the perceiving subject. Voller characterizes one “conservative” response, in which the encounter with the supernatural event facilitates “received wisdom” (x). This is in fact what happens for Catherine: the domestics, having appeared out of nowhere, just as suddenly fall away and are never mentioned again, becoming again nonexistent, dead. They have their desired effect: Catherine was only “impressed” by the general’s labor saving machines, but she is awed, ‘strike[n]’ and ‘amazed’ by the labor itself. In showing her his secret labor force, the general rightly assumes that “to a mind like Miss Morland's, a view of the accommodations and comforts, by which the labours of her inferiors were softened, must always be gratifying” (184).<sup>14</sup> He also aims for it to be edifying: once she marries Henry, Catherine will be unable to afford her previous ignorance of household management. Some of the dirty work the general and his servants perform will undoubtedly be hers, to participate in or oversee.

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the sublime itself is domesticated. In *Northanger Abbey*, the encounter with all of the machinations of domestic labor creates a painful disruption of worldview, when the sublime leaves the forest and moves into the refurbished, functioning castle.

<sup>14</sup> This line, especially in connection to Catherine’s ambivalence towards servants, almost suggests that the general is more sympathetic than she is. Since his behavior towards his family members indicates that this is not the case, we must assume that his conscientiousness extends solely to all of the particulars involved with keeping his household running efficiently, if not happily.

Catherine's journey towards matrimony, the reader's journey towards a fulfilling conclusion, cannot be made without her encounter with the mechanized instruments and beings that make up the underworld of the Tilney household. Coupled with Henry's dashing of her more romantic suspicions regarding the general some ten pages later, she is sufficiently humbled, but more importantly, she is made ready to accept the responsibilities of her future role. These responsibilities include both the putting away of childish notions and the acceptance of Henry as her preceptor and the very master of her happiness:

Her mind made up on these several points, and her resolution formed, of always judging and acting in future with the greatest good sense, she had nothing to do but to forgive herself and be happier than ever... Henry's astonishing generosity and nobleness of conduct [rendered her distressed spirits susceptible to] continual improvement by any thing he said. There were still some subjects, indeed, under which she believed they must always tremble; – the mention of a chest or a cabinet, for instance – and she did not love the sight of japan in any shape; but even *she* could allow, that an occasional memento of past folly, however painful, might not be without use. (198, emphasis in original)

'Improvement' again is the watchword for the personal, in order to effect it within the domestic and then in the social. Noble Henry will not be her only guide: her past follies are also 'of use,' serving to remind Catherine of how much she erred in mistaking the secreted inner workings of the abbey as consisting of intrigue, murder and magic, rather than systemization and drudgery. Catherine's own history is instructive, improving not only to herself, but also to her younger readers, and therefore Austen both subverts and accomplishes Wollstonecraft's mandate. Subverts, because her creation is a novel, her improving history actually fictive, and, because personal, ultimately insignificant. However, Austen *is* able to 'ridicule,' if gently, at least one reader of outlandish novels, and the lesson Catherine learns can be generally accepted, propagated and universalized.

While Catherine's new knowledge eventually leads to her happy ending, she must first endure some precipitate heartbreak. She learns, for example, that the general's management, however conscientious, ultimately serves only himself. Catherine is abruptly banished from Northanger, "guilty only of being less rich than he had supposed" (234). Henry, incensed that his honor has been betrayed, proposes to her anyway, and, as the couple awaits the general's consent, he returns home to "extend the improvements for her sake, *to whose share in them he looked anxiously forward*" (238, emphasis added). When Catherine's father and Eleanor's new husband provide the capital to set up both households, the general finally relents, the marriages take place, and the novel ends.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's realism and emphasis on personal and social history shifts the concerns of the gothic to a more material matters, allowing the gothic to survive and propagate in various ways throughout the nineteenth-century. While she could not have known that following authors would benefit from her gothic materialist approach, the end of the novel does seem to betray a kind of awareness about the work it is performing. Austen's new gothic plot occurs simultaneously with—in fact displaces—the more traditionally gothic one represented by the Eleanor subplot. The business surrounding the pending marriages reveals the details of this mostly repressed novel, which operates as an alternate, shadow *Northanger Abbey*. In this version, Eleanor Tilney is our traditional gothic heroine, locked up by her avaricious and controlling father and prevented from marrying her fairy tale prince, the man Austen calls "the most charming young man in the world" (239). After much lamentation and grief, and just when the situation seems hopeless, this gallant is the beneficiary of an "unexpected accession to title and fortune," which allows Eleanor to marry him and so solves all of the problems

for her brother, his somewhat poor fiancé, and both Tilneys' mercenary father (ibid.). This 'accession' is never explained, its occurrence seemingly a plot contrivance to provide a happy ending, in what Alistair Duckworth has called "the most hackneyed of devices" (102). It is the very kind of unbelievable and convenient plotting which Catherine's own plot, more representative of Austen's realism, generally eschews. And yet *this* plot, too, ultimately rests upon the miraculous events of the Eleanor subplot for its resolution.

How do we reconcile this? Austen's authorial voice, taking the defensive, admits that she is cheating by introducing the charming young man so late, and claims that he was in fact "the very gentleman whose negligent servant left behind him that collection of washing-bills [involved in one of Catherine's] most alarming adventures" (239). The metafictional joke employed here, the claim that her convenient plotting can be made explicable, *realistic*—by an even more convenient association with the established text, does not disqualify the fact that it accomplishes its goal, however smirkingly. More importantly, the point of connection between Austen's two plots, the more traditionally gothic one featuring Eleanor, and the real-ized gothic plot featuring Catherine, is the very scene which most explicitly replaces the moral concerns of the former with the material concerns of the latter. The secreted manuscript of hidden, unvarying and endless suffering disappears, and Catherine discovers instead the itemized record of hidden, unvarying and endless labor. Both have their horrors, and their legacy: as Catherine laments, "[t]he visions of romance were over" (196), replaced by "[t]he anxieties of common life" (198).

## CHAPTER III

### “GENTEEL AS NEVER WAS” – *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

“The lower middle classes, the small manufacturers, the shopkeepers, the artisans, the peasants, all these fight against the bourgeoisie in order to save from extinction their existence as parts of the middle class... they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history.” –Marx & Engels, “The Revolutions of 1848.”

In the previous chapter I argued that the currents and corridors running throughout and underneath Northanger Abbey—with its secreted records of hidden toil and its sublime eruption of buried laborers—relocate the gothic from the romance to the realist novel in order to figure its protagonist’s awakening to the necessary burdens of domestic economy. This chapter, on Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, expands my analyses into novelistic economies on a somewhat larger scale. Like Pip, it will need to leave the domestic scene, with its enclosed dramas and networks of production, transfer, and consumption. Travelling to London and beyond, it will explore a number of the later novel’s economies—connected, national entities in whose arteries cash and beer and the cants of criminality circulate. More importantly, it will attempt to demonstrate the means by which the gothic elements of the novel figure the ways that these economies—these relationships between people, characters and materials—change over time. This process of dramatic transformation is embodied by the novel’s two manses, Miss Havisham’s Satis House and Wemmick’s Walworth castle, in which two very different models of social historical progress are identifiable. These sites of local and historical interest require—also in very different ways—the gothic to represent them.

While the gothic was at one time considered unfit for material analyses, more recent critics have applied these lenses to gothic-inflected novels including *Great Expectations*. In two different works, Gail Turley Houston draws parallels between

Dickens's use of gothic tropes in his novels to highlight economic uncertainty and Marx's similar tendencies (*From Dickens to Dracula* 34). Houston cites the Clennam banking house in *Little Dorrit* as an example of her analysis: it 'collapses' "under the weight of the requirement of circulation", just as so many others will collapse in the financial panic which drives the novel's conclusion (80). These gothic manifestations within Clennam House—strange whisperings and eerie creakings—all presage ruin. In *Consuming Fictions*, Houston notes that Dickens "seem[s] to suggest that any kind of market relations between human beings is robbery, or, worse, cannibalism" (164). Susan Walsh, writing about *Great Expectations* more specifically in her essay "Bodies of Capital," argues that "Miss Havisham and her derelict brewery present stunning images of insolvency," indicative of anxieties surrounding a future of economic barrenness and sterility (73).

While these readings are fundamental to my own analysis, what they lack is a productive definition of the gothic that foregrounds its emphasis on the present's inability to do away with legacies of the past. As a result, analyzed phenomena are seen primarily as portents: creakings warn of bankruptcy, dark clouds of speculator panics to come. Gothic anxiety is generally centered around *future* events. This is insufficient, largely because the very reason that haunted houses are haunted is because they belong to the past. Clennam House in *Little Dorrit* and Satis in *Great Expectations* are crumbling, both ruled over by ancient women still consumed by decades-old betrayals, their respective businesses failed or failing. They typify the gothic's project as articulated by Mighall, which locates "the threatening reminders or scandalous vestiges of an age from which the present is relieved to have distanced itself" (26). Gothic conflict, then, is

historical and deals with the unsettling reappearance of that which has become anachronistic. My project here is to attempt a synthesis of this definition with Marxist teleology, itself an historical drama concerned with progression through dueling antitheses. Read this way, we gain new insight into the nature of the gothic as deployed by Dickens: Satis is not only a haunted house, it is also a family brewery, a petty-bourgeois concern which is obsolete in the high capitalist mid-nineteenth century when Dickens and Marx are both writing. Additionally, there have been few productive attempts to read the very gothic Miss Havisham and her house and brewery alongside or against the faux-gothic castle inhabited by John Wemmick. This latter dwelling, its inhabitants and accoutrements, considered by most to be quintessentially ‘modern,’ represents a counternarrative: an alternative historical epistemology produced by a *subsequent* formation and deployment of capital: high capitalism.

My argument is that *Great Expectations*, Dickens’s thoroughly economic fairy tale, provides us with two competing materialist histories. In the first, properly gothic narrative, Miss Havisham and her brewery home at Satis House reproduce key aspects of the Marxist-Hegelian teleology, their material objects and foundation(s) built upon temporally-previous moments and stages. They illuminate a contested and conquered past that, while waning, throw up their last resistance and revenge in the form of Havisham’s protégé Estella. In the second, *faux*-gothic history, Castle Wemmick conversely performs the erasure of memory and the validation of the present in ways similar to Butterfield’s theorization of Whig history. Here, the ‘portable property’ that marks its material foundation is eminently consumable, its exchange values eating away at its own histories,



material and personal, and ultimately deliver novelty and nostalgia in lieu of crystallized, 'objectified' trauma.

## **Realities**

The present analysis is possible because of the way that Dickens presents his characters and situations. Many have criticized the lack of 'depth' of these characters, especially compared to their twentieth and twenty-first century counterparts, considering, for example, their tendency to remain mostly unchanging throughout his novels. Donald Fanger, for instance, suggests that Dickens's 'romantic' realism tends to heighten the strange or even grotesque aspects of his characters in order to get at more fundamental truths (16-7). The resulting two-dimensionality is, however, less dichotomizing than typifying. These characters are clearly individuals—even if this superficial individualization is indicated by any number of personal tics or repeated vocalizations or phrases—*as well as* socio-historical types. Alan Robinson's analysis of Dickens's descriptions suggest that they "[focus] less on the person than on his or her material attributes that are also presumed signs of character" (83). This indivisibility between social-historical role and characterization—Herbert Pocket's habit of 'looking about him' for example, is both emblematic of a kind of rootlessness resulting from a denied inheritance *as well as* his position as nascent capital speculator—forces us into the realization that the incidents of Dickens's plots contain multiple, layered, personal and socio-historical inflections. Other notable examples are abundant: Compeyson, the gentleman heartbreaker is also Compeyson the gentleman capitalist speculator. Miss

Havisham is bride to be, and owner of a petty-bourgeois brewery. These distinctions are not divisions within their persons (a phenomena we *will* recognize in Wemmick, below), but rather necessarily co-constituting factors: Compeyson breaks his engagement with Miss Havisham because he has successfully ripped her off; her feelings of betrayal are the result of her being stood up and being conned. If the novel as a form is about character, then it is also about professions and livelihoods and inheritances, and character interactions necessarily take on economic as well as personal dimensions. The representative nature of Dickens's perhaps less psychologically developed characters actually make them perfectly suitable to narratives that, like *Great Expectations*, track those uneven and frightening historical shifts which both unsettle and stultify particularities of personality and professionalism.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Austen was able to translate gothic tropes into the realist novel, a strategy employed also by Dickens. Realism, far from being static or staid, is actually quite flexible. While it often seeks to expel evidence of competing modes, forms, and subject matter, it is just as often able to recoup them. It is a mistake, therefore, to think of realism *only* in terms of that which it rejects, lest our understanding of it be reduced to a series of negations rather than the set of aims and practices which, as Marshall Brown says, are its "constructive aspects [and] what it contributes in itself" (225). What realism contributes, indeed demands, is the establishment of a believable and cohesive sense of history, in which each incident or effect is the necessary result of a (often, traceable) causative factor. It is not unfair to say that *haunting* is realism's most salient feature: witness the frequent observation that so many of Dickens's characters are presented with a childhood, some details of which are

so implicitly or explicitly revealed. This feature doesn't belie the critique of contemporary readers that many of his characters are under-drawn ('flat' to E.M. Forster). Their lack of complication is too often the result of Dickens's characters' personal histories and contexts being *too* determinant of their patterns of speech and behavior. Essentially, their effects and affects are too traceable, their meanings too plain: characters become caricatures exactly when that which haunts them is rendered so visible that it cannot be mistaken, and readers are inclined to blush from over familiarity, a slight embarrassment for knowing them too well. These characters become related, rather than relatable.

The "high realism" of the Victorian novel, to Eleanor Salotto, is "obsessed with buried secrets, returns from the dead, and ghosts," all of which are very 'real' even if they are not always literal (119). Pip's story begins in the graveyard where the bodies of his parents and most of his siblings are laid to rest. This broken connection between Pip and his family is the cause of his most defining character trait, his conflictedness, a kind of noncommittal but anguished retreat from those who raised him (Joe), taught him (Bidly), and raised him up (Magwitch). Peter Brooks suggests that "all the clues to Pip's future, the forward momentum of his plot, in fact lie in the past" (101). Certainly. And while the connecting threads between these earliest scenes and events and what transpires later in Pip's life are quite determined and direct (especially considered in retrospect, as Pip narrates them), the strictly human, 'psychological' causes and ramifications are only one aspect of his narrative's unwinding. Included within it are a high number of material causes and effects, shadowing Pip's personal development. His maturation process, in fact, quite closely mirrors the 'growing up' of capital: raised in the petty-bourgeois

institution of apprenticeship indenture, with its whiff of bygone serfdom, he grows into adolescence among the late petty bourgeois Miss Havisham, and by adulthood matures into an international capitalist. Pip's expectations, then, are also those of a nation, which, to the historians of the mid-nineteenth century when the novel was written, had itself finally grown up.

The characters of the realist novel, then, are haunted by 'ghosts,' pasts real and imagined. In Dickens this is especially so, and his novels deploy the haunting influence of gothic tropes and themes to augment or modify the meanings of his realism. To see how, let us examine a brief enumeration of different subgenres' typical relationship to and deployment of personal and social history:

- As we have seen, the *realist novel* uses (a model of) the past to authenticate its vision of the present, which is the principal site of interest.
- The *historical novel* narrates the revolution, the moment where the past gave way to the present. Its realism is less about how the past haunts the present, than about how it produced it. This is generally done by the recounting of political, martial and economic conflict(s), often with different characters representing different, opposed forces.
- The *gothic novel* narrates the attempt of the once vanquished to rise up against a present (or its representatives) that has overthrown or forgotten it.

Combining elements of all three subgenres, the gothic materialism of Dickens is concerned with the advances and retreats in the material conditions of people, across a

staggering breadth of social classes.<sup>15</sup> It looks both forward and backward, but unlike the high realist novel and the historical novel, its interest is curiously ‘stuck’ within a past that the novel can only (albeit frequently) allude to, and one which it never narrates. In this way, its formal consciousness mostly resembles what we would colloquially call *a guilty conscience*. While the high realist tendencies in *Great Expectations* narrate the coming of age story of a young man and young capital, the gothic tendencies continually remind the reader of the precedent era, and forces them to relive and reconcile those very violations and traumas which have produced the modernity (of mind, of money-making) which would rather we all forget.

### **Successive Forms, Successively Transcended**

The gothic, both as literary form and vehicle for social commentary, possesses a strongly historiographic character. From its first appearance, its defining feature has been the identification and enactment of those schisms separating modes of lived experience and their resulting ideologies throughout the generations of human history. The central conflict is between the ‘enlightened’ present and the ‘backwards’ past with all of its supposed evils and superstitions. Horace Walpole’s preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* elucidated this in a passage which could be understood as the gothic’s mission statement. Paraphrasing Exodus, Walpole’s fictional translator expresses his wish that the ‘author’ “had grounded his plan on a more useful moral than this: that *‘the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation’*” (61, emphasis in original). The punishment for ancestral sin, too “remote” to “curb [the] appetite of dominion,” is not sufficient to forestall it, in his view (61). Tyranny, the most

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<sup>15</sup> And, in differing ways, so do the other authors that this study considers.

coercive but certainly not the only form of barbarism, never really dies; it is always ready to reappear, and to strike at future generations.

While the early gothic novels inscribed Tyrannies in capital letters, the later, realist gothics present them in smaller cases: the unseen, everyday abuses of cruel family members, the limitations upon self-determination represented by formal apprenticeships. Children, as Alison Milbank points out, “naturally view the world through Gothic spectacles” (9). The sins of Pip’s sister, his surrogate mother, are visited upon him daily, and so produce more shame and guilt from his betrayal of her law than his assistance to an unknown criminal ever could (124). It is therefore not surprising that, when offered the opportunity, Pip attempts to escape. But he leaves not only his sister behind, he also avoids both Joe and even Magwitch, themselves guilty only of trying to love and counsel him. The final inability to completely deny or fully abandon them, whatever his desires, is a social as well as interpersonal reality. Raised and then apprenticed at Joe’s forge, the stain of Pip’s working-class identity are easily seen by those, like Estella and Drummle, trained to look for social difference. Joe and Magwitch must be hidden, not just because they are uncouth and embarrassing, but because they naturally embody Pip’s lower-class upbringing with all its barbarisms, as well as the criminality of his attempt to file away those holdfasts which maintain class and social borders.

The sudden return of the strange half-forgotten therefore poses a challenge to the present and its bannermen. Returning characters and the forces they represent—in *Great Expectations* primarily Miss Havisham (to a lesser extent Magwitch)—seek to overthrow those laws, economic (and penal) which have marginalized them, consigning them to near irrelevance. Following Frederic Jameson’s reading of Husserl, in which “genre is

essentially a socio-economic message...immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right" (141), I am arguing that the form of the gothic itself is a strong indicator of economic tumult, expressing various realities of historical transition, realities that in this novel are centered upon reversals of dominant and dominated resultant upon market competition. In this way, the gothic and its tropes can be more usefully understood as the literary manifestation of the historical materialist teleology of formal economic development, the transformation in the uses and deployment of capital through time. While both are ultimately progressive, their disruptive, dialectical nature makes this progression difficult to recognize—and suggests that it is by no means assured.

Marx's understanding of history was strongly influenced by Hegel, who described it as a "rational process" (9), which progresses dialectically, a series of antitheses in conflict, a drama that is largely "self-determined—[and] assumes successive forms which it successively transcends" (63). The end result of history to Hegel is the 'ideal' of freedom and perfection, and the seeds of this happy state are and were always present, even if only a careful study can locate them within the dialectical gradients of its own becoming. Marx and his followers embraced Hegel's model, with the crucial difference that Marx abandoned Hegel's Christian eschatology, refiguring the ideal as "nothing but the *material* world reflected in the mind of man and translated into forms of thought" (*Capital* 102, my emphasis). The material stages of the Marxist teleology encapsulate changes in the forms of production, and may extend, for example, from anarchy and tribalism in the beginning and end with socialism replacing capitalism as the final step of Marx's liberation. Marxism, then, is a temporal as well as political and economic discipline, and figures the past and its 'dead generations' as the prehistory which haunts

the present: hence, ‘historical materialism.’ Importantly, when one economic form overthrows another and achieves dominance, it does not obliterate its predecessor(s): “bourgeois society is only a form resulting from the development of antagonistic elements, some relations belonging to earlier forms of society are frequently to be found in it, though in a crippled state or as a travesty of their former self, as for example communal property” (*The Grundrisse* 39-40). These ‘travestied’ forms, whose constitutive elements Raymond Williams might call ‘residual,’ will replicate themselves as far as they are able, and may attempt to return to prominence, or even to roll back aspects of the current historical progression so that they can return to ascendancy.<sup>16</sup> As each “grade... involves within *itself* a process of formation—constituting the links in a dialectic of transition” (Hegel 56-7), using this model to theorize the gothic, while in many respects similar to Mighall’s model of it, *does not* fall into the either/or trap of mistaking historical categories and eras as absolutes. That is, so long as the novel is sufficiently realist in its methodology and aims, its gothic motifs will reproduce aesthetically those phenomenological effects produced by the uneven progressions of history: ‘bumps’ in the night as well as in the road.

I have already argued that what primarily distinguishes narrative realism from romance is their approaches to history; in the former, a recognizable historical context is presented, one that the audience identifies and largely accepts, and which importantly establishes constraints upon characters and incidents. Subjects are verily ‘subjected’ to the world in which they live. In the latter, history is the backdrop afore which the novel is set, and serves the narrative rather than determines it. Romance is therefore ‘escapist’

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<sup>16</sup> One need only look at the various movements in our own time to bring back the gold standard for currency—an attempt to reverse capitalism’s purification of money as exchange value, and to return to a mercantilist, hoardable, ‘hard’ money—as a ready example.



precisely because the audience is invited to disregard their knowledge of how the world's people, customs, and institutions interact and behave; the romance's protagonists escape the constraints of material reality just as its readers do. While romance was the birthplace of the gothic, beginning in the early nineteenth century, novels like *Northanger Abbey* translated its concerns into realism. Some of its more lurid and less believable characters and incidents were muted in this translocation, but it allowed the gothic's themes and affective qualities to act as the medium for more mundane but no less troubling actions and societal phenomena. The realist novel's penchant for presenting the experience of the individual within the constraints of dynamic socio-economic history has made the novel a—perhaps *the*—important subject of historical materialist criticism. Indeed, class and other historical conflicts are so often presented dialectically in an art form which establishes itself as a model of reality, however imperfectly, because those somewhat disconcerting complexities which are difficult to totalize can be smoothed out into antitheses, each side of which can be fruitfully set against the other. In this way the realist novel, as Marshall Brown's reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic* suggests, is always an “exploratory investigation into the nature of reality” and should not be considered the faultless index of it (228). What we think of as reality is to Hegel never absolute, since notions of it change over time. At best reality is a network, “a particular structure of relationships” as they exist at a given time and place; realism's attempt to understand these relationships could be considered therefore “a structure of consciousness” (233-4). While the idea of a conditional real seems to trouble our understanding of history as ‘a reality,’ this is only if we forget that history is also a process/procession. As process, history tracks those changing structures of relationships—relationships between people,

but also between men and women and their work, with the market, their faith(s), officials and institutions—over time, noting and accounting for specific changes (in individual nodes and relational nexuses). The occasional unpleasantnesses and equivocalities experienced by those who live through these changing structures is, of course, the rightful domain of the gothic, which continually revives battles thought won and schisms believed to be healed.

Such is the case for *Great Expectations*, a historical novel which is *actually about* the hard progressions and regressions of social economic history. The novel does not attempt to solve those tricky problems of teleological history, nor it does it actively raise them. It never, of course, mentions Marx or Hegel. Rather, it posits a rapidly changing Midlands England in the early nineteenth century, one in which advances in technology and changes in the forms of production were multiplying ceaselessly. Dickens examines key differences between his own time, the time that the novel is primarily set a few decades earlier, and the era of Miss Havisham's downfall (along with her petty bourgeois form of life) a few decades before that. In so doing, *Great Expectations* emphasizes the importance, even rightness of those advancements, while also mourning that which has been left behind—in some cases obliterated. The gothic becomes the instrument through which anxieties of change, the guilts and second-guesses inherent when moving on, and especially fears of the consequences of doing so, become signified.

To understand how *Great Expectations* participates in this discussion, we will need to examine how the gothic realist narrative uses materialism (and representations of materiality) to stage its uneasy return of earlier structures of thought and modes and

means of existence. That novels play in these fields at all is taken for granted by any number of theorists. Williams, writing on England at the turn of the nineteenth century claimed that:

this is no single, settled society, it is an active, complicated, sharply speculative process. It is indeed that most difficult world to describe, in English social history: an acquisitive, high bourgeois society at the point of its most evident interlocking with an agrarian capitalism that is itself mediated by inherited titles and by the making of family names... An openly acquisitive society, which is concerned also with the transmission of wealth, is trying to judge itself at once by an inherited code and by the morality of improvement. (*Country and City* 115)

Williams is writing about Austen here, but this historical timeframe is also the setting of *Great Expectations*, which begins on or around 1800. Similarly, questions about ‘improvement’ and its ethicality and effects, so recognizable in *Northanger Abbey*, frame not only Pip’s progress, but also the economic and social progress of England itself. The novel therefore narrates two concurrent, parallel plots. In the first (the personal), Pip becomes disillusioned with his meager background and its representatives (Joe, Biddy, his tyrannical sister), and—with help from a mysterious benefactor—leaves them behind for the freedom and opportunity of London. In the second (the socio-historical), England outgrows its rural post-feudalism (characterized by institutions like Pip’s formal apprenticeship to Joe, and petty-bourgeois concerns like the Havisham brewery) and—with the aid of some questionably obtained foreign capital—becomes a largely urban, modern, ‘free enterprise’ state. This teleology is generally explicable as the historiography narrativized by the realist novel. But in *Great Expectations*, the inability of the surpassed (not quite deceased) to rest easily—its continual haunting of its conquerors—suggests another mode of codification. Just as the ‘personal’ plot crystallizes the social one, so too does the gothic realize the troubling reminders and

remainders produced by the disjointed, uneven development of dialectical material history.

### **Gothic History: The House of Havisham**

*Great Expectations*' gothic materialism adjoins the dialectical historical model of Marxist-Hegelian history with those gothic tropes and locations that signal conflict between opposed or incompatible cultural and material norms. The result is a sense of history that is both determinative and fraught with danger, as the present and its representatives must always guard against the diminished but lurking past.

That past takes the form of Miss Havisham and her estate and brewery at Satis House. Both are first encountered as ruins: living wrecks that have suffered the passing of time, while also serving as rebukes to time. Pip's first look at Havisham herself indicates that her attempts to feign stasis and 'Satis' are unconvincing:

She was dressed in rich materials—satins, and lace, and silks—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing for she had but one shoe on—the other was on the table near her hand—her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on. (92-3)

While the contrasts are emphasized in a scene filtered through the younger, poorer Pip's perceptions, we are provided with much useful data. He first remarks upon her indicators of wealth: Miss Havisham is 'dressed in rich materials', including 'satins, and lace, and silks.' She is adorned with 'bright jewels,' and more 'lay sparkling on the table.' The emphasis on all of these rich materials indicates her status, certainly, one purchased with

the fruits of her family's economic power and prowess. However, she is now in a state of some disarray with but one shoe on, her veil askew, and much of her shoulder lace laid nearby. While we are told that this is because 'she had not quite finished dressing,' I would like to suggest that Havisham's partially dressed form is also a partially *undressed* one. The white she is part-covered in is, after all, actually a wedding dress, procured for a hoped-for union that has been abruptly canceled. This marriage/merger was to join her and her brewery with Compeyson, her suitor and erstwhile co-administrator, whose proposal was marked by the sentiment "that when he was her husband he must hold and manage it all" (212). Once white, her dress "had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow," as the symbol of fertility and increase has turned to sterility and sickliness (93). Finally, Havisham's 'watch and chain,' the administrator's primary tool, as we have seen, are no longer worn, indicating that she has put the affairs of the brewery and the maintenance of her household aside, and is yet to take them up again.

Havisham's desire is to rebuke time and its changes, even if she cannot by force of that same desire stop time from yellowing her dress, mouldering her flowers and wedding cake, and loosening her skin. But she can and has stopped all of her clocks, and reset them all to that fateful moment when she received the letter from Compeyson. This radically reconfigures their meaning of her time pieces, changing them from objects which 'tell' a constant present to ones which monumentalize one specific past. It is a past with multiple resonances for Miss Havisham, the moment of her greatest personal disappointment—but it is also, I am arguing, her greatest professional disappointment, borne from the loss of a prospective co-manager. Significantly, the hands of Havisham's stopped clocks also continually point to the moment when the whole economic landscape

under which her business operated became untenable, as increased corporatization and technological advancements produced by the industrial revolution and the ascendance of capital conspired to destroy family and estate brewing.

The stopped clocks, Havisham's unchanged clothing and the mildewing cake are all meant as personal reminders, but they are unnerving to those who live outside of Satis, and experience the changes of time as they occur. The effect is to render Havisham not simply strange, but illegible, even alien. When Pip finds himself unable to explain Miss Havisham's dilapidated house and brewery to Joe and Mrs. Joe, "convinced that Miss Havisham too would not be understood," this is largely because, as a child unused to time's alterations—the small town-apprentice of a small family blacksmith—their wrongness is "perfectly incomprehensible" to him, too (100). Only an older Pip—the beneficiary of Magwitch's success as a colonial capitalist, and already preparing for a career in international commerce and speculation with Herbert—recognizes her as "the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed" (422). Unfit, because the world has passed her by, and she cannot compete with those who have surpassed her. She is a living anachronism, as is her brewery, already a ruin by the time Pip first sees it:

it was a deserted place, down to the pigeon-house<sup>17</sup> in the brewery-yard... no malt in the storehouse, no smells of grains and beer in the copper or the vat. All the uses and scents of the brewery might have evaporated with its last reek of smoke. In a by-yard, there was a wilderness of empty casks, which had a certain sour remembrance of better days lingering about them. (98)

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<sup>17</sup> The existence of a pigeon-house or dovecote on an estate was a source of food and status in medieval Europe, but had mostly disappeared by the seventeenth century. Its presence here further serves to associate the Havishams with earlier forms of production.

It wasn't always thus. In 'better days,' Miss Havisham was quite invested in her inheritance, and she thought enough of its importance to bring all of it back under the Havisham name. Buying out her half-brother Arthur, she makes it wholly hers and unmakes him: shortly after his betrayal, Arthur dies from "the horrors," a state brought on, fittingly, by alcohol withdrawal. First, however, he is haunted by the avenging spirit of Miss Havisham, whom he sees coming to cover him in funereal shrouds (373-4).

Miss Havisham's only active role has been reduced to these hauntings, as her dream—of being the happy petty bourgeois, co-running the traditional family business with her new husband—is over. It is difficult to overstate what she loses. According to Herbert, brewing is the only thoroughly respectable trade: "her father was a country gentleman [and] it is indisputable that while you cannot possibly be genteel and bake, you may be as genteel as never was and brew. You see it every day" (210). When Miss Havisham closes her brewery, she loses not only her livelihood, but one that provides her with a specific and privileged place in society, a social position with significant status within earlier means of production: if the genteel can brew and remain thus, then the (petty-) bourgeois can brew and appear thus. This explains, perhaps, why unlike most jilted brides, Havisham cannot put her loss behind her, why she still lives among its creepy remembrances, and more satisfactorily explains the dedication to her vengeance.

As Miss Havisham would not have given up this position lightly, it seems likely that there were reasons for her inaction other than simple disappointment or heartbreak. As it turns out, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, encompassing the

novel's setting, saw a number of upheavals in brewing and other industries as an increasingly dominant capitalism forever altered them. According to Christoph Lindner

[b]eginning in earnest in the 1760's and tapering off by the 1840's, the industrial revolution saw a wide range of scientific, technological, agricultural, political, economic and legislative developments that... wrought major and lasting changes in the fabric of British society... At the center of those changes, what both supported and spurred industry's accelerating expansion, was the emergence of a free and competitive market economy – the gradual substitution of a realized capitalist economic system for the quasi-feudal mercantile practices dating back to medieval times. (3-4)

These changes facing Havisham's industry of commercial beer production served one overriding trend: the end of private and small scale commercial brewing, with its ethos of craftsmanship and prestige, and the rise of larger, less personal but more efficient concerns, more aligned with evolving means of production. To briefly illustrate, records indicate that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, private and country house brewing accounted for some 21% of the total output of English beer, but by 1850, that number had been reduced to about 2.5% (Sambrook 249). Competition put smaller brewers out of business in favor of larger firms. Taxrolls for Havisham's ostensible competitors in London show that by 1748, the 12 largest brewers were already responsible for over 42% of the beer brewed in the capital. By 1815, when the Havisham brewery had been closed for a dozen years, they produced nearly 78% of it. By 1830, a little before the novel ends, this had increased to 85% (Mathias 26-7). While this trend began in the major cities, it was soon followed in the counties, as the availability of railways to ship fragile beer became more widespread and affordable. By the 1840's, the larger brewers were shipping cheap, consistent product nationwide (Gourvish and Wilson 15). Those who could not compete either sold out to larger firms or vanished.



The changing economic landscape altered the industry in other ways. Whereas in previous centuries, small country house brewers might have grown their own raw materials, or acquired them in neighborly trade, by the time of the novel, they were fully at the mercy of independent growers and worse, commodity speculators. In the same year that Pip is admiring the little lozenges that mark his dead family members, a series of bad barley harvests were burying a number of small brewers, sparing only the ones large enough to wait it out (Mathias 234-5). Kent, where Miss Havisham's brewery is located, was notorious for its hop growers, who speculated heavily on their own harvests, creating a side market which was riddled with conflicts of interest, and was the consternation of brewers who relied upon them (503-9). 'Beggars-My-Neighbors,' indeed.

Miss Havisham's onetime fiancé, Compeyson, is a conman, certainly, but he is also a shrewd businessman. His relationships with Magwitch and Miss Havisham are described primarily in economic terms, and he gets the better of both. Magwitch tells Pip and Herbert how he came to know him:

Compeyson took me on to be his man and partner. And wot was Compeyson's business which we was to go partners? Compeyson's business was the swindling, handwriting forging, stolen bank-note passing, and such-like. All sorts of traps as Compeyson could set with his head, and keep his own legs out of and get the profits from and let another man in for, was Compeyson's business. (372)

These 'business' practices are of course all crimes, but Compeyson has a certain nose for 'profits,' and his diligence where they are concerned extend even to such niceties as his employees' and partner's expenses. With Arthur, for example, "Compeyson kept a careful account agen him for board and lodging" (373), indicative of his shrewdness, but also of a carefulness towards incomes and outlays. His relationship with Miss Havisham

is also recalled mostly for its economic features. Herbert Pocket, retelling their story, says that “he got great sums of money from her, and he induced her to buy her brother out of a share in the brewery... on the plea that when he was her husband he must hold and manage it all” (212). Compeyson’s actions disguised an elaborate con, a speculation on his fiancé’s willingness to give a large amount of ready cash to that same brother with whom Compeyson conspired and would “[share] the profits” (213). Interestingly, Herbert and Pip’s affinity to this villain—strongly suggested by their roles within Miss Havisham’s preparations for her revenge—are made clear to us when Pocket locates (on the same page) the profession that he in fact shares with Compeyson and later, with Pip: Herbert proclaims himself “[a] capitalist,” without, it seems, any intended irony (214).<sup>18</sup> Pip and Herbert are roommates and informal business partners, just as, in the previous generation, Compeyson and Magwitch were: and all four spent their time in London “looking about” them for a choice opportunity to “swoop upon” (214, 215). Cutthroat accountant and gentlemen speculator—Compeyson’s name is practically *competition*.

Compeyson’s scheme for obtaining much of the value of the Havisham brewery, it turns out, was a better investment than the marriage. The brewery’s only hope of further solvency would have been for it to be sold to an acquisition-minded larger firm, a possibility perhaps hinted at in Havisham’s tenant Pumblechook’s suggestion that Pip invest in his own scheme, one aimed at “amalgamation and monopoly.”<sup>19</sup> This was only possible for those with “More Capital. Those were the two little words, more capital” (186-7). And it is a lack of ‘more capital,’ finally, that dooms the Havisham brewery,

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<sup>18</sup> On Herbert’s part. There is, presumably, plenty on Dickens’s.

<sup>19</sup> Of corn and seed, in this case.

which languishes when its owner cannot or will not expand it or sell it to someone else. Denied external nourishment and stimulus, its fate becomes Miss Havisham's fate, as she too slowly fades. When Pip experiences his vision of Miss Havisham "hanging there by the neck," he sees her in the abandoned brewery, the life choked out of her in the same place her livelihood was (99). The only question is whether, calling out, her corpse is asking her ostensible ally, the young blacksmith's apprentice and petty bourgeois Pip to help her—or blaming her ostensible enemy, the adult, fully bourgeois Pip for killing her. She will soon receive her answer.

The economic life and death of Miss Havisham has been read by other critics. In *Consuming Fictions*, Turley Houston argues that "[t]he home of Satis... is infiltrated by the market because it is also the house of Satis, a brewery where her father produced the family's wealth" (166). Susan Walsh, in "Bodies of Capital," suggests that Havisham's climactic body encodes anxieties of economic sterility, "her history as a swindled investor enact[ing] the rash speculation and reckless over trading which...had led to the stock frauds, bankruptcies, and bank crashes of the middle decades" (74). Both contentions are essentially correct, with the caveat that is not actually necessary to read Miss Havisham and her brewery as a metaphor for nineteenth-century economic turbulence. Rather, we can read her quite literally when we remember that the Havisham brewery predates the cyclical crashes occurring when Dickens was writing the novel. Instead, the destruction of that brewery was in many ways the result of those still nascent forces first finding their strength, and elbowing out their competition. Only some decades later, once those too-optimistic bubbles began regularly bursting, would they become

generally terrifying. The Havishams and the already crushed need not figure a stagnant future, they already embody a ruined past.

After she is betrayed by Compeyson, the novel's antagonist and the truest representative of the young capitalism, Havisham removed herself from the market altogether, and refused to participate in all forms of consumption and exchange: a rebuke as much or more to capitalism itself as to her own interests. Her brewery no longer operates, and the house sells nothing and buys next to nothing. Miss Havisham's physical body echoes the stasis of her economic one. Jaggers, the London attorney who feeds, cannibal-like, on the cash and property that he squeezes from his convicted clients, asks Pip whether he has ever seen Miss Havisham eat or drink. Answered in the negative, Jaggers retorts, "[a]nd never will" (271). The only cash sustenance Havisham does allow herself is provided by small renters like Pumblechook, signaling a reliance on an increasingly outdated method of obtaining cash from large inherited estates. This provides the little crumbs that sustain her, but even this is difficult to account for: late in the novel, for example, she tells Pip that she keeps "no money" at home (420).

The remaining Havisham capital is actually hoarded, removed from exchange, and spent sparingly on her pet project and test subjects. This is most evident in the scene in which Miss Havisham's relatives, all gathered in hopes of obtaining her fortune, are shown their spaces at the table where her bride cake sits, and where her corpse will thereafter. Marx's analysis of hoarding is useful here: he associates it with earlier forms of production (*Capital* 228) and calls it a "sacrifice," in which capital "must be prevented from circulating, or from dissolving into the means of purchasing enjoyment" (231). For others as well as for one's self, as it is only the *circulation* of available capital that

enriches one's neighbors and relations. When Miss Havisham tells her family "[n]ow you all know where to take your stations when you come to feast upon me," she clearly implies that nothing short of death will allow them a slice (122). Like her cake, this capital slowly molders away—"gnawed at" by mice (118), any of which might resemble young Pip, the bane of Havisham's greedy relations. Some of it is carried off by "speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies" (118), in the same way that Miss Havisham's only valued possession, her ward Estella, is carried off by Pip's rival Drummle, whom Jagger (knowingly, it seems) always refers to as 'the spider.'

It is this marriage that finally puts an end to Miss Havisham's revenge against the market and its managers, a revenge that Estella was raised specifically to carry forth. Havisham tells Pip that she "'developed her into what she is, that she might be loved'" but also therefore desired and pursued (269). 'Development' in its passive sense might be what children experience as they learn and grow. In its active sense, 'development' is more accurately applied to commodity production, as the process in which a raw material is invested with sufficient capital to become market-ready. Havisham's admonition to Pip, that he must "'love her, love her, love her!'" indicates her wish that Pip's level of desire for Estella escalate ever upwards, to the point at which it becomes utterly unsustainable, causing his heart to collapse as Estella's mentor's did after her betrayal by Compeyson (269). This desire is not meant to be Pip's alone; it is cultivated in a number of eligible young men, such as the younger Herbert Pocket and Pip's great rival Drummle (among many others, it seems), all of whom are nascent capitalists and speculators.

Estella's worth and the quality and quantity of her love are continually expressed in terms that indicate her market value. Doll-like, she is seemingly built from the precious

materials which adorn her. Pip remarks that “Miss Havisham, in a fantastic way, had put some of the most beautiful jewels from her dressing-table into Estella’s hair, and about her bosom and arms,” making her loveliness irresistible “with those rich flushes of glitter and colour in it” (272). Even Pip’s stolid guardian is drawn to these riches, conspicuous for a man who so often seems to be without appetites of his own. Alison Milbank has suggested that Estella’s very “presence in the novel is experienced by the reader and the narrator more in terms of an absence” (137). If so, then Estella embodies what Joe Cleary has called the “perpetually dissatisfied sense of want” necessary to sustain a consumer market economy (11). As a figure for desire without satisfaction, Estella’s curse seems to be that satisfaction is denied even to herself: she must hoard her limited supply of affection just as her mentor hoards her limited capital, both inviting outsiders to pine for it without actually purveying it.

In line with her training, Estella takes this (ever-elusive) promise of delayed gratification to its furthest limits. While she allows Pip to kiss her on the cheek once he has, according to her plan, vanquished poor Herbert, this gesture is less consummation than condescension, an acceptance of tribute, not a bestowal of favor. Indeed, as she says later, “I have not bestowed my tenderness anywhere” (267), and Pip laments that his own love could not “have wrung any tenderness in her” (298). ‘Tenderness,’ of course, is derived from *tender*, which originally meant the formal request to repay a debt, but which, since the mid-eighteenth century had come to mean simply *money* (OED). So while the promise of an abundance of riches awaits suitors like Pip, Pocket, and Drummle, ultimately Pip learns that “all who staked upon that cast were secured to lose” (329). Because Estella is the “cold-blooded anti-monoress who seems to atomize rather

than harmonize the competing interests of covetous men” (Walsh 89-90), increased speculation in her simply drives the market unsustainably higher, tending eventually to collapse, and breaking the banks and hearts of young gentlemen capitalists everywhere. Unrequited love as trade imbalance: tribute is always proffered, without the realization of return.

Tellingly, the discourses of gaming, evidenced in the previous example (‘all who staked upon that cast were secured to lose’) frequently surround Estella, and these references further make parallel the relationship between Estella and her suitors to the one between a particularly attractive stock and peculiarly greedy investors. When Pip first meets her, her own valuation is high: although she is about his same age, “[s]he seemed much older...and was as scornful...as if she had been one-and-twenty and a queen” (93). A ‘queen,’ royalty in life, is also one of the most valuable cards in games like “Twenty-One” (‘one-and-twenty’), popular in Europe since at least the seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup> With its elusive jackpots, quick payouts, and heartrending ‘busts,’ the game is an apt metaphor for the relationship established: the Pips, Pockets, and Drummles are the players, Miss Havisham the house, and Estella a particularly rich pot. Unsurprisingly, then, Pip and Estella play cards together as children. On his first visit, and many times afterwards, they play “Beggar-My-Neighbor,” the goal of which is to take all of the cards from one’s opponent. Miss Havisham’s instructions to Estella before their first game are simple (““Beggar him””), but neatly identify the nature of the ‘development’ Estella is undergoing, as well as Pip’s position as a test subject and future mark (95).

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<sup>20</sup> “Blackjack,” originally the name of an American variant, has largely assumed the game’s title, but the variant rule (in which black jacks obtain special significance in payouts) has disappeared.

This, then, is Miss Havisham's plan; to raise Estella up in the estimation of everyone, to obtain all number of bidders in the form of young speculator/swindlers (she makes no distinction here), and to beggar them all. In so doing, she hopes to exploit those contradictions in capitalism, deriving from what Engels called the "war of all against all," which will lead inevitably to crisis and collapse, and send the new paradigm crashing down ("Speeches"). She fails, of course. Mostly because Estella, a child of Magwitch--common criminal and great imperial sheep magnate—is quite literally a child of the new order, and so cannot commit fully to her training. She quickly tires of the life planned for her, and does exactly what Miss Havisham needs her not to do: take herself off the market by marrying. She becomes her own dowry.

Her revenge effectively over, her return for naught, Miss Havisham has no choice but to give in. Her conversion scene, in which she begs Pip's forgiveness and agrees to "lay out" some of her withering capital for her nephew, is important, and not only because it signals Miss Havisham's final surrender (420). Once her protégé and instrument Estella has married Drummle, over her objections, her small rebellion against capital goes up in smoke, just as Havisham herself is consumed in the flames of her—now final—obsolescence. But this late scene, one of the more striking instances of the gothicization of temporal-economic conflict, is most notable for the way in which it seems necessary, even preordained. There have already been at least three different visions of Havisham as corpse, ghost or avenging spirit by the time she is engulfed, and this "great flaming light" therefore acts as nothing less than the Judgment of history. Pip's attempt to rescue her is figured as a struggle, as he throws her down, covers and pins her small shrieking form (424-5). This battle, between the old petty-bourgeois



Havisham and the young gentleman capitalist Pip, ends in victory for speculation and capital. It can be understood in the terms established by Lukács, who argued that historical novels after Scott “bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel, whose clash expresses artistically a great crisis in society, into contact... with one another” (36). The novel form both humanizes and intensifies this conflict.

Havisham and Pip’s roles in their own tempo-historical battle are resolved when Havisham and what she represents are finally wrestled down by Pip and consumed. This result is confirmed years later by Havisham’s now divorced protégé Estella, as she makes ready to finally dispose of Miss Havisham’s long latent capital. Satis House is to be “pulled down” and “sold as old building materials” (502). Meeting at the ruins after many years apart, Pip’s very first question for Estella is whether the property is “to be built on” and she replies, “[a]t last it is” (ibid.). No longer haunted, Estella has made it ready to be put to productive use once more. There to oversee the changes that Satis House—like the old and inefficient capital it represents—will undergo, Estella’s fore-shadowed union with Pip illustrates finally that her own condescension has undergone its own change, into concession: perhaps, it seems, into consent.

### **Castle Wemmick: Giftshop Gothic**

“‘a Englishman's ouse is his Castle’” –Joe Gargery (486).

Pip is a frequent visitor at another home in the novel. It is everything that the Havisham manor is not: modern, productive, and memorializing a past with which it has little in common, and from which it cannot trace clear descent. John Wemmick’s house in Walworth “was the smallest house [Pip] ever saw” but had been remade into something fantastic: a faux medieval castle with “the queerest gothic windows (by far the greater

part of them sham), and a gothic door, almost too small to get in at” (237). It is in many ways a skewed reflection of the Havisham house: both are the residences of active, dynamic individuals (Wemmick, Estella) who wait upon and serve a reclusive, aged (P)arent. Both of them are occasionally visited by their affianced partners, with whom Pip must compete for time and attention (Ms. Skiffins, Drummle).

These similarities serve to highlight greater contrasts. Satis House is something of a relic, authentically gothic rather than ‘sham’: left to rot, it is increasingly feeling the strains of time. Castle Wemmick, however, is altogether new, and is constantly undergoing construction and alterations which serve to make it appear ancient. The improvements Wemmick has brought about include, for example, a gun battery and a working drawbridge and moat (actually a plank of wood crossing a small ditch). The relationship to time exhibited by both estates is therefore quite different. While Satis primarily expresses a dissatisfaction with the present, one borne out of a loss (the ‘Satis’ that is no more), Castle Wemmick instead expresses a playful relationship to the past, one which mythologizes and produces nostalgia for it. It is, I think, telling that the period romanticized by Wemmick is not the *recent* past; not, for example, the previous half-century, when the battle for supremacy between landed aristocrats and upstart bourgeoisie was still being contested (the period during which petty-bourgeois concerns like the Havishams were dominant). It is rather an amorphous generality, one that is decidedly premarket, and in which ceaseless competition between a host of individuals and companies was not the governing reality. Wemmick’s house, his ‘castle,’ is therefore a kind of haven, bulwark against all of the unpleasantness of cutthroat economic strife that he wishes to escape: he tells Pip, for example, that “[anyone] may get cheated,

robbed, and murdered, in London... if there's anything to be got by it," (202). Built from the monies and property Wemmick obtains in his daily bustle and grind, it is also a monument to how much he benefits from that he wishes to hide from. The substantial income and 'portable property' he receives at and off the hands of his firm's clients confers the ability to wall himself off from the very crimes which effectively pay for this privilege to do so.

The mortar that builds this wall exists also within the psyche. Wemmick the character is a congenially if completely divided individual, one seemingly without sentiment or regret or even a family when at the office, and without employment or any external care when at home. This is established again and again in his speech:

the office is one thing, and private life is another. When I go into the office, I leave the Castle behind me, and when I come into the Castle, I leave the office behind me. If it's not in any way disagreeable to you, you'll oblige me by doing the same. I don't wish it professionally spoken about. (239)

When Pip forgets about Wemmick's divided self, he is quickly reminded that "Walworth sentiments must be taken at Walworth; none but [Wemmick's] official sentiments can be taken in [the] office" (319). If Wemmick doth protest too much, it is perhaps because the division between the personal and the professional is, ultimately, a nominal one. As his professional life pays for his personal one, and as his personal life (his desire to take care of his father, to woo Ms. Skiffins, and not to starve) provides the impetus for the professional, any attempt to separate them totally is, like the gothic edifices he constructs at Walworth, a fraud. Or a reassuring fiction: the gothic edifice that pretends to predate the mercenarism of Jaggers' law office attempts to erect an impenetrable barrier between

London and Wemmick's suburban home. The supposed distance between them is temporal as well as physical.

There is one thing other than himself and Pip that easily trespasses the barrier Wemmick has erected between his castle and his office. This is 'portable property,' the accumulation and display of which is Wemmick's greatest passion. His mantra, that "[e]very man's business... is portable property," is a universalization of affairs that demonstrates a profound distrust of motives or sentiments that are not driven by gain (432). His attempt to comfort Pip on the loss of Magwitch quickly becomes more a lament about the loss of so much capital rather than the loss of a man (472). Wemmick's own capital, his portable property, is stored in the form of various knick-knacks: rings and brooches, necklaces and other personal effects that he has received as payment or as gifts from clients while alive, or to resolve their debts after they are hung or transported. The 'portability' of this property registers its ability to cross the barrier that Wemmick has erected between his home and professional life: acquired in his role as Jaggers' proxy and bill collector, much of Wemmick's share is worn by himself or gifted to Ms. Skiffins, or else kept on a display table in his castle. Portable property is also *liquid*, easily exchangeable or transferrable, and therefore rightly counted amongst those newer formations of free-market capital. This is suggested by one of the more important differences between Satis House and Castle Wemmick. The capital of the former is unproductive, static, and 'barren.' Laid up, hoarded, and slowly going to waste, just as the house in which it resides, the body and dress of its owner, and the wreck of the business. We are told early on that "[n]o brewing was going on in it, and none seemed to have gone on for a long long time... no malt in the storehouse, no smells of grains and

beer in the copper or the vat” (90, 98). Castle Wemmick, however, is fecund, productive, its capital efficiently deployed and bearing fruit. During Pip’s first visit, Wemmick informs him that “there’s a pig, and there are fowls and rabbits; then, I knock together my own little frame, you see, and grow cucumbers; and you’ll judge at supper what sort of a salad I can raise” (237). During a subsequent visit Pip actually dines on sausage made from the pig, and on “greens grown on the estate” (396).

This productivity, the growth of Wemmick’s capital is fertilized by the remains of his dead and decaying clients. Indeed, for an establishment in such high demand and regard, a remarkable number of Jaggers’ clients end up executed, and most of these it seems are still very much in debt to Jaggers the barrister and his associate. Wemmick shows “no diffidence” regarding the seamliness of these transferred possessions: ““all gifts of that kind,”” he takes, whether meant to settle bills, curry favor, or avoid forfeiture (232). Pip’s initial impressions of both men and their offices in Little Britain detail the extent of these re-appropriations: Wemmick himself “appeared to have sustained a good many bereavements; for, he wore at least four mourning rings, besides a brooch representing a lady and a weeping willow with an urn on it... several rings and seals hung at his watch chain, as if he were quite laden with remembrances of departed friends” (202). The office of his superior “was a most dismal place,” with a number of curiosities and conversation pieces, including “two dreadful casts on a shelf, of faces peculiarly swollen,” and a “high-backed chair [of] deadly black horsehair, with rows of brass nails round it, like a coffin” (195). Vampire-like, Jaggers and Wemmick feed on their clients’ misfortunes while they still live, suck them dry, and add their belongings to their own stockpiles of portable property upon their deaths. But despite the objects and imagery that

Dickens surrounds them with, and the metaphor I have impaled them with, we should not mistake Jaggers and Wemmick for *gothic* villains. They are rather aggressively modern, performing their peculiar strain of legal alchemy to spin not straw into gold (or beer into bullion, as Miss Havisham's traditional business practice might have done) but to rejuvenate latent capital itself, to resurrect it,<sup>21</sup> refreshing their own stores, and put it all to productive use. Franco Moretti, in "Dialectic of Fear," establishes the precedent for this reading in his analysis of Stoker's *Dracula*, when he calls the vampire the "rational entrepreneur" (84), whose story is "none other" than this: "money that had been buried comes back to life, becomes capital and embarks on the conquest of the world" (91). These particular vampires act not as the surpassed returning for revenge, but harvesters of the past for their own ends in the novel's present.

*Great Expectations*, then, proffers two opposed visions of history, and each of these histories is necessarily tied to one of two different dominant forms of capital, modeled by each of the novel's two castles. This is illustrated in part by how time itself is marked within each complex. At Satis House, all of the clocks have been stopped, and reset to "twenty minutes to nine" (93). What is striking about them, then, is that as instruments that ostensibly tell the present, her clocks instead 'tell the past,' as I have already claimed. But importantly, they do not fill in the intervening minutes, months, or years—rather they create a disruption, in which a separate and specific past continually 'erupts' into the present, just as Miss Havisham's time bomb Estella is meant to. This is the novel's gothic plot, the narration of which is what could be called 'gothic history,'

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<sup>21</sup> Hence, 'resurrection men': those who stole the bodies which were the dead's last sovereign possessions, and, by selling them to medical professionals, put even this meager capital back to use for the benefit of the living.

indicated by the sudden re-appearance of historical forces thought to be finished off or diminished. Using Williams' Marxist terminology to rewrite the classic Freudian phenomenology, we could call this the 'return of the residual.' Similarly, using Mighall's scheme, we could say that this confrontation opposes the ideologies, customs, and other norms of the present with those that are "anachronistic" or "vestigial" (21). This gothic plot, this gothic history, is in fact also the Marxist-Hegelian narrativization of history, indicating that gothic hauntings are material hauntings, in which the 'travestied' past anachronistically appears to challenge the present.

The temporal is measured and marked very differently at Castle Wemmick, suggesting a much different historiography. While at Satis House, we are continually stuck at and struck by "twenty minutes to nine"; at Castle Wemmick guests and residents socialize and drink their punch until "it was almost nine o'clock" as they await "the performance of [the] great nightly ceremony," which proceeds thusly:

Wemmick stood with his watch in his hand, until the moment was come for him to take the red hot-poker from the Aged, and repair to the battery. He took it, and went out, and presently the Stinger went off with a Bang that shook the crazy little box of a cottage as if it must fall to pieces, and made every glass and teacup in it ring. Upon this, the Aged... cried out exultingly, "he's fired! I heard him!" (239)

Wemmick's pocket watch (his portable property) continually ticks, its hands continually move, each second part of a sequence whose tock not only 'tells' the present, but also is counting down to the 'moment' that matters, signaled by the firing of a cannon: the explosive report which is also the marker—and celebration—of *the present itself*. This

then is the meaning of the Aged's deafness.<sup>22</sup> Unable to hear the tickings of clocks, the talkings of guests and neighbors, this defect places him outside of time until the gun's nightly firing shakes him, awakening him from this timelessness.

This continual counting down, this punctuation of the present (always repeated, repeatable) is a hallmark of the understanding of history H. Butterfield described as *Whig*. Whig history, he claimed “impose[s] a certain form upon the whole historical story [producing] a scheme of general history which is bound to converge beautifully upon the present” (12). This history is teleological, progressive, and posits all of precedent time as leading up to... this very moment. Followers of this model tend to divide their subjects and predecessors into those who moved history ‘forward,’ and those who stood in their way: the former are heroes, the latter villains. Distressingly, this forward momentum of history, this gradual but insurmountable liberalization of edicts and laws, institutions and bureaucracies is not extended to the future. Indeed, many of the largest proponents of Whig history were often highly critical of the struggles of their own time. Henry Hallam, for instance, “bitterly opposed the Great Reform Bill and trembled to think of the revolutionary ways into which the country was moving” (4), while, in turn, many of the later critics of Hallam “opposed votes for women until the vote could be withheld no longer.” This even though these very critics, chastising “opponents of the Great Reform Bill [as nothing more than] the corrupt defenders of profitable abuses” were quite unable to see the Hallams in themselves (30). Whig history distorts or even elides the past, making each conflict not a site of possibility, but the inevitable—even necessary—step

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<sup>22</sup> The character's naming with the text, as either the ‘Aged’ or ‘Aged P’ also serves to create a kind of timelessness which must always be forcibly bent back to the present, engaged with explosions, or, at least, vigorous nods.



towards the all-important now. Wemmick's souvenirs, for example, *had* histories—but they have been divorced from their dead owners. Recycled into 'portable property,' the objects on display in Wemmick's castle have been elevated or reduced to capital or keepsakes to be shown to visitors or given to friends. The stories that Wemmick tells about them are not about their own creation, or the lives and struggles of previous owners, but about how they came to be transferred from them to Wemmick to be rejuvenated.<sup>23</sup>

While some 'historians of history' have made the case that the Marxist-Hegelian model is effectively Whiggish because within it, too, "history has supposedly an anticipated terminus from which it derives its moral and political point" (Burrow 444), this view misses much of the meaning of Butterfield's critique of Whig history. History, Butterfield argues, *does not* progress in straight lines, but rather in jigs and jags, with advances, retreats, and unhappy compromises between people who are neither heroes nor villains:

[The Whig historian] is apt to imagine the British constitution as coming down to us by virtue of the work of long generations of whigs and in spite of the obstructions of a long line of tyrants and tories. In reality it is the result of the continual interplay and perpetual collision of the two... The whig historian is apt to imagine the British constitution as coming down to us safely at last, in spite of so many vicissitudes; when in reality it is the result of those very vicissitudes of which he seems to complain. (41)

In a word, it progresses *dialectically*. Unsurprisingly, the Whiggish view of history Butterfield described is the very kind of history that Marx and many of his followers decried. In *The Grundrisse*, Marx argues that such historicism mistakes the true nature of

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<sup>23</sup> Even the objects which are explicitly narratives, such as the confession manuscripts, are voided of their history: Wemmick insists to Pip that "every one of 'em Lies, sir" (239).

development, because “the last form considers its predecessors as stages leading up to itself and always perceives them from a single point of view,”—the very one that cannot escape the tunnel of its own vision (40). To Lukács, the failure of the 1848 European revolutions led to the “fall of Hegelian philosophy in Germany [and therefore] the disappearance of the idea of the contradictory character of progress. [Afterwards] history is conceived as a smooth and straightforward evolution” (174). In their view—which differs from Butterfield’s own understanding of history only in that they too insist on a teleology—progress is carried forth uncertainly, without straight lines, and is only the produced result of the conflicts (of class, religion, etc.) among men and women, most of whom do not identify themselves as ‘whigs’ or ‘tories,’ as agents of progress or reaction.

In both the Whig and the Marxist-Hegelian epistemologies the past is the prehistory of the present, but for the Whig historian the major conflicts have been settled, progress is complete, and time reaches its effective terminus in the now. This inevitable present is always aligned with the dominant paradigm, especially the prevailing mode of capital. For the historical materialist, the present is fraught with possibility—and with danger—for the result of today’s conflicts will shape the future and its (promised, promising) state. This view, I would like to insist, is the more properly gothic one: while the past is always ready to stage its return—haunting us in the present—gothic history is disruptive, dialectical, and reminds us that the advances of the present and hopes for the future are both under threat of receding.

## Endings

How, then, do we approach a novel which narrates two conflicting models of history? And which does Dickens or his narrator seem to endorse? To William J. Palmer, Dickens's own 'philosophy of history' is dialogical, suspicious of "master texts" which subject people to models and systems. The startling breadth of voices he records force us into confront and revisit social conflicts ongoing and resurfacing (15). Dialogical, but also—and somewhat paradoxically if we accept his resistance to the idea of a master text—almost dialectical:

He was a social realist who clearly saw the dangers that were the byproducts of the Industrial Revolution—dehumanization, rampant materialism, interior marginalization within the middle and working classes—and moved to protect his society against those dangers not only by exposing them, but also by offering a new agenda of personal humanism as an alternative to those dangerous ways of conceiving history. Dickens's philosophy of history saw the Victorian Age (including his own works of social realist history) as a fulcrum, a balance point between the past and the future. (170)

The balancing point that is the present is weighed upon by the past, and provides ballast for the future. This does not suggest strict linearity: with its disruptive and dialectical underpinnings, Dickens's gothic materialism troubles concepts of historical progress in its resurrection of a past that attempts to leap the fulcrum and (once again) become future.

Always unsuccessfully. Examining the final positions of the novel's characters, we see that all representatives of the old order have been finally swept away: Miss Havisham dead; Drummle—that aristocrat who wanted to play in the money fields and marriage beds of the newly ascendant bourgeois—also dead, the victim of his own 'genteel' tyranny visited back upon him. The world at the end of the novel is even more

firmly in the clutches of the Pips and Pockets and Estellas and—to Dickens’s chagrin, it seems, the Wemmicks and Jaggerses.

If it is always twenty to nine at Satis House, it is the striking *of* nine that is every day marked at Castle Wemmick: twenty minutes for the twenty years in which one way of life, one form of capital, has largely given way to the next. What has changed during these few minutes and years? If it is true that, as Julian Moynahan has noted, “Pip learns that the world is not a vast mammary gland from which he can draw rich nourishment with moral impunity” (80), it is just as true that the milk of inherited and landed wealth has also finally dried up, desiccating the petty-bourgeois Havishams and the genteel Drummles alike. Pip, as the thoroughly modern Englishman, must ultimately look for his bread himself, elsewhere. This is the governing reality, but, being so, it takes on the weight of moral imperative. If contemporary capitalism is, as Dickens’s portrayal of Wemmick and Jaggers suggests, a form of “cannibalism” (Turley Houston, *Consuming* 164), then the only truly moral method for obtaining sustenance is to look about for one’s vittles and profits outside of the system(s) of circulation within which one lives. This, perhaps, is why Magwitch is made saintly<sup>24</sup> by novel’s end: the reformed embodiment of ‘personal humanism’ is also the bringer of milk and manna from afar, who dies knowing only that he has provided... and that his gifts and offspring continue to multiply.

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<sup>24</sup> Despite the elisions this entails, see Freedgood (91).

## CHAPTER IV

### “THE ENORMOUS MACHINERY OF HELL” – SHERIDAN LE FANU

English gothic-materialist novels like *Great Expectations* demonstrate how in realism—especially in its social reform modes—problems are endemic and structural, and are necessarily historically contextualized. For their authors, this allowed for causes and features to be analyzed, and therefore for solutions to be called for and occasionally even proposed.<sup>25</sup> Across the channel, the Anglo-Irish ascendancy’s partiality to a purer, more sustained use of the gothic likely results from the difficulty of writing directly about their ancestral complicity in that very stark historical conflict which was the colonization of Ireland, which continually threatened to rise from its slumber to consume the country.<sup>26</sup> Sheridan Le Fanu wrote within this ambiguous position, caught between the England his Huguenot ancestors allied with and the Irish they settled among to rule. It is therefore unsurprising that persecution and paranoia—those most gothic of motifs—are central to much of his fiction. Likely the result of this positioning, Le Fanu’s significant contribution to the gothic story is its reconfiguration of the relationship between the paranoid and their persecutors: for Le Fanu, the former’s guilt is often accidental or incidental, while the latter’s vengeance is extreme and often needlessly cruel. There is in much of his work an uneasy, less direct relationship between cause and effect and between guilt and retribution. Even setting is sometimes nebulous: *Uncle Silas*, originally conceived to transpire in Ireland, was reset into the strangely dehistoricized English elsewhere indicated by its serialized subtitle, *A Story of Bartram-Haugh*. This move is

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<sup>25</sup> *Mary Barton*, for example, is a gothic-tinged social progress novel which includes an implied, if somewhat problematic ‘solution’ (170-3).

<sup>26</sup> Le Fanu himself lived through the Tithe War, the Famine, The Young Irelander rebellion, and numerous assaults upon various family members, among other difficulties.

only the most evident example of something his fiction frequently did: remove historical traumas from their proper contexts, and deploy them within narratives set seemingly outside of time. Paradoxically, therefore, the primary difference between Le Fanu's fiction and that of earlier gothic materialists is that while they used the gothic mode to identify the circumstance or development that produces real human horror as the first step to proscribing its remedy, Le Fanu—who also recognized trauma as institutional and material—de-emphasizes or even destroys its historicity. The result is that there can be no remedy: unlike Austen or even Dickens, Le Fanu's gothic is explicitly pessimistic.

Without the softening impact of a sense of progressive history in which their exploitation is identified, contextualized and therefore ameliorable, Le Fanu's haunted face especially bewildering, horrific persecution. They are beset by ailments simultaneously material and metaphysical; their haunting demons are representatives of decontextualized and so abstract and unknowable cosmic forces. But they are also simultaneously exceedingly familiar, even personal. This is the great benefit of the supernatural spirit, which Le Fanu is unafraid to suggest or even deploy. Spirits can possess or echo the self; they can originate from a specific action or moment but also manifest complex, abstract ideas. For Le Fanu, they are therefore the crucial conduit between the self and the social, and form the connective threads tying a fiction's specific setting to the displaced or hazy historicals that inflect it. Never harmoniously: the systems that Le Fanu's ghosts and demons serve—systems meant, we believe, to serve us—instead persecute. In novels like *Uncle Silas* and story cycles like *In a Glass Darkly*, Le Fanu's gothic features tyrants, ghosts, and demons that are, I am arguing, the exiled or

outsourced fragments of a divided self. Ultimately, they are the result of an elaborate and systemized division of labor whose invisibility masks its enormous scale.

### **The Metaphysical & the Material**

“There is indeed an unspeakable horror at the heart of things, but its names—fraud, coercion, financial dispossession—are as wearily familiar as our own, which is why we thought it imaginary” –Terry Eagleton (198).

Le Fanu’s fiction has gone in and out of popular and critical favor over the past century, and while attention within the academy seems to be growing, there is no critical consensus regarding the meaning(s) of his work, or even which of his stories and novels are worthy of that critical attention. David Punter’s important study, referenced earlier, established the blueprint for modern psychoanalytic readings of the gothic. He notes that there is very little of the world in Le Fanu’s supernatural stories, which read like medieval fairy tales (237). Le Fanu’s protagonists, in stories like “Green Tea” and “Mr Justice Harbottle”, are therefore haunted by entities that are “unmistakably” projections of the psyche (232). The schisms and doubles that Punter diagnoses operate within frameworks established by Freud. In “The Uncanny,” he delineated a number of types of returns which resemble gothic situations, and claimed that these uncanny effects arise from one of two distinct, if related, causes.<sup>27</sup> In the first, “some impression” reactivates “repressed childhood complexes”; in the second, “primitive beliefs that have been *surmounted* appear to be once again confirmed” (155, emphasis in original). Both are about ‘infantile’ traumas and ideation, but whereas the former occurs within the development of an *individual*, the latter concerns the resurfacing of content lost to

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<sup>27</sup> Many of Freud’s examples come from literary texts, including works of German romanticism by Hoffmann, Schiller, and others. German romanticism also heavily influenced British romanticists and gothicists.

evolutionary time, and which is ostensibly universal. This second factor necessitates a conception of shared history, even if its meanings are murky and remote, and insists that the human psyche is subject to forces which—while certainly not external—are not wholly self-originating. My own reading of the gothic insists upon its disruptive historicity: in the previous chapter, for example, it is the return of economic structures from the fading or forgotten past, whose proxies rise to confront the realities of *Great Expectations*' present. While traditional psychoanalytic readings of the gothic tend to favor Freud's first type of uncanny encounter—with its emphasis on traumas experienced during the development of the individual psyche and sexuality—my gothic materialist reading resembles an altered version of the second. Both stress human development, but I am arguing that the divided self in these stories originates from structures of evolution within the *social* body, primarily within its bureaucratic and economic systems.

My reading also departs from many of the early materialist critics, who, as I have also suggested, were similarly uninterested in the gothic's socio-historical content or meanings, often assuming (like Punter) that these stories were essentially escapist and could not be usefully read. The prevalence of gothic tales in Irish and Anglo-Irish literature, however, has necessitated that materialist critics working within that tradition account for them in some fashion. Cleary's recent work has noted the local conditions which led to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy's preference for darker, gothic-influenced novels at the same moment the more optimistic English wrote and read under the rubric of high realism, a result of the former's increasingly precarious position. He suggests that novelistic sub-genres (including, explicitly, the gothic novel) are too often left out of histories of the novel when the latter is too strictly defined: "our sense of the dynamics of



evolution within the form are considerably weakened” when the high realist novel is seen as separate from the novelistic tradition, or elevated above its predecessors and influencers within it (53). The development of what we call the realist novel is itself a historical and dialectical process, and we should not be surprised to find antecedents such as the gothic novel playing a pivotal—and as I have argued throughout this work, *essential*—role within it.

In the previous chapters, the gothic’s tropes were re-set into the ‘realistic’ worlds of realist novels in order to mark and emphasize historical economic disruptions and traumas. While the gothic served to heighten the affectual responses of characters and readers confronting sociohistorical change, it remained subject to an early or mid-nineteenth-century worldview, one which conflated aesthetic realism with intelligibility. Motivations are of the average type, actions beget reactions, and all proceeds rationally. Displacements and disappointments resulting from the progression of history, while sometimes brutal, are therefore understandable, necessary, and ultimately even (as both Catherine and Pip discover) beneficial. While the gothic serves to remind us of those losses and the pains suffered by those who are left behind, it is—if not necessarily enthusiastic in its support of progress—always anti-reactionary in its aims, as we have seen. In these last two chapters, concentrating on works from the second half of the nineteenth century, the interpolations of realism and the gothic proceed somewhat differently. These later, Irish authors were not afraid of suggesting and even representing the supernatural: ghosts, demons, magical pictures and other forces which, while common in the gothic romance of the previous century, were roundly exorcised from the

novels of Austen and Dickens, for example.<sup>28</sup> The supernatural (re)turn indicates, I think, a less optimistic understanding of progress as a historical phenomenon, and a cynical attitude towards the promises of the rational and the scientific, at least as demonstrated within human institutions of justice, trade, and consumption. In Le Fanu, the more that these institutions and endeavors evolve, the more they stay the same, and they are therefore just as devastating to the modern individual as to her ancestor.

A critical influencer of the present work, Terry Eagleton's *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, takes up issues of culture, capital, and Irishness and in these contexts briefly examines Le Fanu and the relation between the gothic and realism and between the supernatural and the material. Eagleton argues that underneath their lurid trappings, Le Fanu's works are fundamentally about money. Novels such as *Madame Crowl's Ghost* and *Chronicles of Golden Friars* "briskly lay bare the Gothic device, showing us how the form's typical subjective ingredients of guilt, fantasy, paranoia and preternatural intimation are engendered by the brutal rapacity of an economically failing class," while *Wylder's Hand* exposes the "inhuman violence [endemic to] the family feud over property" (195). Ultimately, for Eagleton it is *Uncle Silas*, Le Fanu's "masterpiece," which most elucidates these gothic economics and where "a truly realistic anatomizing of [them] must inevitably press beyond the phenomenally observable... beyond realism itself, into that realm of psychopathology to which Gothic can lend a tongue" (196). It is quite true that the novel's exterior settings, with its damp hallways and dark forests, produces and reproduces its heroine's internal landscapes and worldview, both of which are dominated by material concerns, metaphorized by otherworldly forces. An

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<sup>28</sup> Dickens wrote shorter fiction which ostensibly include ghosts, including "The Signal-man" and, of course, *A Christmas Carol*. Austen's *Love and Friendship*, while devoid of spirits, is essentially a fairytale whose plot is constructed upon deus ex machina(l) or magical principles.

examination of the text reveals that Silas Ruthyn's forbidden forest, for example, hides neither demons nor fairies, but rather "waste," a decidedly unromantic scheme to cut and sell Maud's timber (*Uncle Silas* 300). Later, when her uncle informs her that "within three weeks an execution will be in this house" neither Maud nor reader can be blamed for thinking that the debt will be paid with something more dear than furniture (340). Maud's retrospective narrative voice often mistakes and perhaps conflates the mundane with the magical, as when she recalls the tales old Miss Wintletop tells of the lands in which the Ruthyns reside, including "illustrative snatches from old election squibs, and lines from epitaphs, ...exactly where all the old-world highway robberies had been committed: how it fared with the chief delinquents after the assizes; and, above all, where, and of what sort, the goblins and elves of the country had made themselves seen" (268). In *Uncle Silas* dealings of all sorts—verdicts of court, thefts and frauds, and encounters with the supernatural—have equal weight, none privileged as any more 'true' than another. This folk history is, however, distinctly ahistorical: all of the details are vague, imperfect records of an unspecified time.

Punter's claim was that Le Fanu's stories are little more than fairy tales, and it is not hard to recognize their affinity with their more recent equivalent: the earlier gothic romances of Radcliffe. Those, too (as I have previously argued) take place within invented, fantastical versions of actual locales: recently enough to be half-remembered in people's memories, the product of inherited cultural products like travel guides, but also long enough ago to be ultimately unknowable. As in Radcliffe's works, *Uncle Silas* suggests the possibility of supernatural occurrences without delivering on this promise. But while Radcliffe teases us with the occasional rattling chain or fleeting glimpse of a

waxen corpse, Le Fanu's book is almost grossly overpopulated with the supposed denizens of other realms. In a novel of only 400 pages, *Uncle Silas* contains at least twenty references to ghosts and specters, eight to other spirits, fifteen to wizards or witches, two to ghouls, nine to fairies, five to goblins, five to pagan deities or other beings, two haunted houses, and seventeen demons or devils. This menagerie of folkloric beings—so commonly invoked but never seen—suggests a universe which is permeated by forces that dominate our destinies while paradoxically operating beyond the reach of our senses. Beneath our world, it seems, lies a domain of secret sigils and rules which are at best arcane, possibly wholly arbitrary.

Even Christianity for Le Fanu is heavily suffused with occult processes: the three important male characters (Austin and Silas Ruthyn, Dr. Byerly) are all, like Le Fanu himself, dedicated readers of Emanuel Swedenborg. A central tenet of Swedenborg's theological works is the reworking of the platonic body/spirit binary: instead of a strict division, each references and is active upon the other through a series of 'correspondences.' The spirit inhabits and operates the body; but the body's processes can also affect the spirit(ual) realms. Hence, a character like Silas Ruthyn can be so often described as a spirit or necromancer, while also being so thoroughly materialistic. His is a ghostly body with very real, tactile lusts and appetites: Maud is frequently unsettled by a nature she describes as that of the "martyr—angel—demon" (145), but which also possesses "the sensualities of the gourmet" (336). The indivisibility of these seeming opposites, indeed their codependence—is suggested by Maud's term for life's originating force: "electro-biology" (336). While his strangeness compels Maud to see Silas as

something more or less than human, his appetite for delicacies, heirs, and logging receipts all argue against a self-enclosed, internally or spiritually-driven personality.

Maud attempts to make meaning from her experience with Silas in the novel's last lines: "The world is a parable—the habitation of symbols—the phantoms of spiritual things immortal shown in material shape. May the blessed second-sight be mine—to recognise under these beautiful forms of earth the ANGELS who wear them; for I am sure we may walk with them if we will, and hear them speak" (424). Silas is a highly physical presence, one that Maud finds "beautiful" and probably desires.<sup>29</sup> He is a respiring, ingesting, and intercouring being of multiple hungers and lusts, even if his evasiveness and inscrutability serve to mystify him. Unsure whom to trust, surrounded by intrigue and possibly demons, Maud endeavors therefore to look beneath things, to find and understand the hidden motives and spark that govern—and are perhaps indivisible from—the mundane materials and materialists that surround her. Le Fanu's "angels," his ghosts in the machine, are the very forces and processes that animate matter and drive its transformation and exchange. In this way, they are quintessentially economic. While there is a deliberately archaic bent to Le Fanu's fiction, this particular idea is startlingly modern.<sup>30</sup>

The novel form itself, even or perhaps especially in its realist modes, *is* a kind of 'parable,' its 'symbols' referencing that truer reality or 'world' which it struggles to represent. The world that Le Fanu creates is eminently material in its concerns, but even

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<sup>29</sup> When seeing Silas' painting for the first time, Maud "stood gazing on him with a girlish interest and admiration" (59). She later wonders whom "with his lithe and gorgeous beauty...he might not have captivated" and we suspect that she answers her own question in asking it (175). And upon crawling into bed, "Uncle Silas was always before [her]; the voice so silvery for an old man--so preternaturally soft; the manners so sweet, so gentle; the aspect, smiling" (193-4).

<sup>30</sup> Perhaps its most famous elucidation is Einstein's 1905 discovery of mass-energy equivalence. Hardly distinct, small amounts of matter, we are told, contain enormous amounts of energy.

this materiality is the '[phantom] of spiritual things;' effectively, the physical realm is the ghost of the ghostly realms. His own gothic-materialism might in this way be seen as operating in a similar way to Robert Heilman's influential formulation in "Charlotte Brontë's 'New' Gothic." Brontë used gothic tropes and scenarios not to evoke terror or wonder in the mode of romance, but rather to evoke "new patterns of feeling, the intensification of feeling" (121): "in *Jane Eyre* and in the other novels... that discovery of passion, that rehabilitation of the extra-rational, which is the historical office of Gothic, is no longer oriented in marvelous circumstances but moves deeply into the lesser known realities of human life" (123). Le Fanu's own 'new' gothic represents those material demi-urges that are felt affectively, that cannot be easily explained or even described by those who experience them. It is psychological, insofar as it describes the contact and (usually) conflict between individuals and the social system in which they are implicated; however, these are not internally originating, as in Punter and Freud's first definition of the uncanny.

Similarly, Eagleton's short reading of Le Fanu indicates that the gothic *can* illuminate material structures and concerns, but always within certain limits: human economic behavior can be metaphorized, but not economic forces themselves. This curtails the scope and thoroughness of our investigations, resulting in the unfortunate tendency among materialist critics to exorcise literary ghosts wherever they appear. It is assumed, perhaps, that if we were to pay them any notice, this would somehow deny that life is largely lived on solid ground. Eagleton, championing Le Fanu's use of the gothic as a way to metaphorize social conditions in *Uncle Silas* and some of the other novels, has no use for his "inferior ghost stories, like the gratuitous 'Green Tea' [in which]

mystery and sensation are present for their own sake” (195). Certainly, the general ahistoricity of Le Fanu’s fiction can make it difficult to read along traditional historical-materialist lines. Works like *Uncle Silas* let supernatural folklore stand in for unsettling material realities by refiguring the former as possessing or animating spirit. The animators, however, are always suggested but never seen, and are thus unable to rise above the status of convenient metaphor. The material realities they figure are themselves mostly missing from Le Fanu’s ahistorical texts.

Le Fanu’s ghost stories, however, especially the stories from the linked cycle *In a Glass Darkly*, allow the ‘spirit’ to reach its full development, to pierce “the veil of the flesh” and the reductionist abstraction of metaphor (“Green Tea” 32). If Le Fanu’s bodies are ethereal, it is also true that his spirits are made of—or at least, subject to—matter. Indeed, these ghosts are generally “more solid and three-dimensional (square-built)” than his spiritualized, “wispy” protagonists (Sage 24). In Le Fanu’s supernatural stories, we find that social forces, economic and bureaucratic, are realized within his ghosts and demons, which become their terrifying agents.

### **Ghostly Machines: “Mr Justice Harbottle” & “The Familiar”**

The first three stories from *In a Glass Darkly* feature educated, rational, upper middle-class protagonists who believe themselves under the power of an uncannily familiar and sinister entity. Ultimately all of these men die, two driven to suicide, while the other suffers a fright-inspired heart attack. “The Familiar” and “Mr Justice Harbottle” feature a ghost that enacts vengeance on the doer of misdeeds. Their plots recall the traditional gothic arc, as old as *The Castle of Otranto*, in which ancestral wrongs are

visited upon the young and innocent. Here, however, the protagonists are neither. Rather than weakly confronting the last vestiges of a long-established power, as Pip and Maud must, Captain Barton and Justice Harbottle *are* the established power within their particular realms. These stories are about injustices repaid, but they are not overly concerned about fairness or the vindication of the victimized. Rather, Le Fanu's portrayal of various systems—in this case, systems of justice—as they exist, coupled with the arbitrary cruelty with which their 'familiar' spirits work to destroy both Captain Barton and Justice Harbottle, both serve to destabilize the concept of justice itself. Together, they suggest that if this world and its conjoining planes are governed by unseen and powerful forces, these forces are essentially malicious, satanic, no better than the corrupt administrators they punish. Each requires the other: systems need agents to enact their will, actors need structures to sanction their actions. However, the operative division of labor which produces these doubled figures (system/demon and agent/individual) also produces an unfortunate consequence: if systems of justice exist to dole out punishment, then individuals *exist to be punished*. Even those, like Captain Barton and Justice Harbottle, who are those systems' authorized agents. What we might call heavenly or cosmic justice is *not* separate from our ostensibly rational, earthly incarnations.<sup>31</sup> Rather, their co-constitutive relationship seems to indicate that while we may historicize effectual phenomena (numbers of hangings, for example), origins and first causes remain always out of reach. Le Fanu's vision of history sees it not as linear and progressive, but rather as an unchanging litany of catastrophes, in which persecuted and persecutor alike are, eventually, doomed.

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<sup>31</sup> This is further suggested by the earthly forms (Harbottle's ghostly courtroom, Barton's familiar owl), which Le Fanu's demons assume.



“Mr Justice Harbottle,” the third story in the Hesselius cycle, concerns a hanging judge who, after a life of lechery and fraud, is found to have hung himself at last. Having wrongly convicted and sentenced his lover’s husband to death, the judge is given a mysterious summons to appear before ‘The High Court of Appeal.’ Although unnerved, he assumes that he is only the victim of some hoax, the revenge of someone close to one of his victims. Falling asleep in a cab one evening, he finds himself transported to the court, where he is prosecuted by his accuser (his lover’s hanged husband) and persecuted by the enormous, demonic judge Twofold, a twisted caricature of Harbottle himself.

Twofold runs his court in much the way that Harbottle does:

The Chief-Justice seemed to feel his power over the jury, and to exult and riot in the display of it. He glared at them, he nodded to them; he seemed to have established an understanding with them. The jurors were mere shadows, sitting in rows; the prisoner could see a dozen pair of white eyes shining, coldly ...and whenever the judge in his charge, which was contemptuously brief, nodded and grinned and gibed, the prisoner could see... by the dip of all these rows of eyes together, that the jury nodded in acquiescence. (109)

Judge Harbottle is quickly found guilty, sentenced to death, and upon waking begins to decline, eventually killing himself on the same date that Twofold has decreed. Jack Sullivan’s excellent reading of this story suggests Le Fanu’s cosmology is best described as an “eternal death machine,” metaphorized by the enormous gallows which Harbottle sees in his vision. In his view, Le Fanu “conjures up an inexplicably horrible world whose inhabitants follow their own mysterious rules. The only principle of consistency seems to be a self-referential system of cruelty, capable of constantly regenerating itself as it seeps into the natural order of things” (49). The ‘self-referentiality’ of Le Fanu’s system of injustice seems to indicate its ignorance or perhaps mockery of the principles and values the English court system is supposed to uphold in favor of an adherence to its

own, inscrutable designs. This does not mean, however, that we cannot compare Le Fanu's nightmare court and daemonic judge to the actual English equivalents: indeed, there are several points at which we can identify correlative relevance, if not always explicit reference.

Justices Harbottle and Twofold are both 'hanging judges,' and these monsters have their models. The first justice known to have received that appellation, George Jeffreys, sentenced several hundred people to death during the "Bloody Assizes" of 1685, including 144 during a particularly busy two-day stretch. Another model might be Sir Francis Page, who—along with being notoriously ruthless in life—also appears (as himself, presumably) in *Tom Jones*. John Allen Stevenson, comparing the historical records with his depiction in that novel, finds that in both

Page's sarcasm, his playing to the audience, his tolerance of the prosecutor's long-windedness and his refusal to allow the defense its short word all speak of a mind made up, and made up years before... [W]e can hardly escape the conclusion that the old judge believes that *everyone* who appears before him is guilty of something, and as such is deserving of some measure of his wrath. [...] He was known as the hanging judge because, by all accounts, his resort to that sentence was so automatic. (117)

Stevenson's reading of the court overseen by the actual and literary Page is markedly consistent with those belonging to Le Fanu's doubled character of Harbottle/Two-fold. The horrors which are on display in Le Fanu's work—judicial prejudice, swayable juries, private prosecution, death sentences for minor crimes—were not imagined by Le Fanu, but rather embodied by him within figures which are monstrous gestalts of all of these. But Harbottle/Two-fold are horrible not because they abuse a system vulnerable to corruption, but because they refuse to ameliorate the excesses of a system which seems

built specifically to destroy those unfortunate enough to enter its domain. Indeed, the vast numbers of people executed by these judges, historical and fictional, are practically reasonable when one examines the code itself, which for a century prescribed the death penalty for dozens of offenses including most—even petty—thefts. That most convicted of thievery during this time were *not* executed was due to the fact that most judges, prosecutors, and juries simply ignored the law (104-5). As Le Fanu's narrator suggests, Harbottle himself was only the "sarcastic and ferocious administrator" of a body of legal practices and rules which made up this "rather pharisaical, bloody, and heinous system of justice" (95). Ultimately, the hanging judge's lack of compassion, while seemingly aberrant, actually only allows the system to operate as designed.

Le Fanu's 'eternal death machine' posits a very real systemic evil, whose rules are both arbitrary and ironclad. The people who work within it lack the discretion and compassion which made their historical equivalents functional in practice: private prosecutors who would purposefully miss court dates to free those they themselves had accused, for example. In Le Fanu, these systems are always fatal, which means that at times his own more explicit critiques seem extravagant, bombastic, themselves 'sarcastic' in their very ferocity. It is difficult to take overwrought phrases like 'pharisaical, bloody, and heinous' too seriously, or perhaps we are invited to assume that—like the Pharisees themselves—bad legal practice is a thing of the past. The gothic trappings seem to support this interpretation: is there any image more indicative of the terror of the past than the Terror's instrument of death? Or this story's analogue, the "gigantic gallows" outside the High Court of Appeal, which hang "eight or ten" at a time, with "a new rope" always ready (106)? The fact that rapid, multiple executions were both a thing of the past,

*and* had happened in recent memory allows for some forgiveness of and sympathy with Le Fanu's grandstanding. It helps that, outside of the judgments handed down by his authorial voice, there are subtleties: contrary to Eagleton, the very form of the ghost story actually encourages nuance, since readers fascinated or horrified by these (always slippery) spirits and demons may not notice critiques which are almost ephemeral. While, for example, Harbottle is arraigned and harangued by his doppelgänger, with "[n]othing [he] could argue, cite, or state... permitted to retard for a moment the march of the case towards its catastrophe" (108), he complains that the entire proceedings were "contemptuously brief," considering the ramifications (109). It is a small detail, read as proof that the trial is a sham. It's not: entire criminal trials of this period, including jury deliberation, averaged less than half an hour (Stevenson 106). In this context, the body counts of a Jeffries or a Twofold look less like an excess of barbarity and more like a surplus of efficiency. Hanging judges of the mortal realms might possess that crucial deficit of mercy, of course, but to Le Fanu, individuals are largely irrelevant. In any case, they, too, are still people, and as such exist primarily to experience cruelty. Systems (judicial, economic) exist to *dispense* it; the people administering them are their instruments, not the operators, and—like justice Harbottle—they too, will finally be found out and destroyed.

In this way, Judge Harbottle can easily become a figure for the Anglo-Irish ascendancy itself, assuming its eventual fate. Similarly guilty of administering (in)justice in another's name over people who resented them, they also had to live among those same Irish whose lands they now owned. After a few generations, many Anglo-Irish found their loyalties divided between their former homes and their current ones. To

ensure London's continued dominance of Dublin, and Dublin's over Ireland, England moved to erode local governance, the same local governance that they had instituted. They did this through reforms in the judicial system, principally by deploying paid bureaucrats as 'resident' magistrates to assume many of the local lord's traditional duties, including the power to issue summons, press for prosecutions, etc. (Bridgeman 106). The national police force, already the most visible symbol of Dublin's power, now had more reliable allies at the assizes (108). Anglo-Irish gentry were forced to step aside or submit themselves wholly to Dublin's control, further antagonizing their tenants and neighbors. Like Le Fanu's High Court of Appeals—the hidden but ever-present power behind the bench—English policy-makers effectively turned on their instruments, hastening their destruction.

In "The Familiar" Le Fanu takes this theme and extends it beyond the criminal justice system and into the civil and military courts. It is the story of Captain Barton, a recently retired officer of the royal navy who settles in Dublin and quickly becomes affianced to the young Miss Montague. Before they are to be wed, however, Barton begins to see, while taking his exercise or driving about town, a former crewman whom he knows to be dead. The sight of this man causes Barton enormous shock and dread, so much so that he frequently swoons and eventually becomes agoraphobic and then bedridden. Sheltered within the Montague compound, Barton sees his tormentor peering through the gates, and a servant sees him in the hedges along the borders of the property. The spirit is reluctant to come into the house, but it warns the servant that if Barton does not leave the estate, it will visit him at last within his own bedroom. Meanwhile, Miss Montague takes in a new pet, an old owl found in the stables. This "accursed bird" is

anathema to the Captain, who “seemed to hate and dread it with a vehemence absolutely laughable” (77-8). Accidentally left alone for a few moments one night, the Captain dies, apparently from fright. Entering Barton’s room, General Montague and a servant find the old owl “uttering its spectral warning, [start] suddenly from the far side of the bed, and [fly] through the door-way” and out of the house, its task apparently completed (79).

Ostensibly, “The Familiar” is about the judgment visited upon the Captain for his misdeeds, and carried out by the man he has wronged and for whom the owl is, presumably, a ‘familiar’ or alternate form. That other systems of exchange, judgment and punishment figure so prominently in this story is therefore not surprising; that they make their appearances at the same point Barton’s visitant does, however, is doubly telling. The first time Barton sees the dead man who is to hound him, he explains his subsequent near-incapacitation as the result of anxiousness surrounding a case he has before Chancery (52). Earlier, he was able to ignore strange footsteps and threatening letters by turning his mind towards “some business of an engrossing kind connected with the adjustment of a large and long-litigated claim upon certain properties,” presumably the same action (50). The machinations of the Chancery court become both an escape from Barton’s increasing horror, and the explanation he gives for them. William Holdsworth, writing about Dickens’s use of the court in *Bleak House* argues that it was, prior to mid-nineteenth-century reforms, a still-mediæval institution. New rules and procedures and fees had slowly accumulated upon it—so that always its opaqueness, its density increased—but without any corresponding increase in ability to perform its functions. Rather, the opposite occurred, and the court’s inefficiencies and intractability mounted, more or less proportionally with its size (85-7). Importantly, its power to compel

individuals to appear and participate as claimants, to pay fees which often amounted to graft, and to imprison those who didn't was enormous. Its ability to produce judgments—not to mention justice—was limited both by an antiquated and cumbersome bureaucracy and by the self-interest of court officers and clerks. In many ways Chancery is nicely representative of Le Fanu's vision of the cosmos itself: arcane, inexplicable, operating by hidden or obscure laws, but ones always tending towards the destruction of those unlucky enough to be noticed by its officers and proxies. The Chancery case in "The Familiar" is dropped from the story once Barton recognizes who has been following him, but functions as an analogue to what follows.

Captain Barton's actual crime, revealed at the story's close, originates in his own complicity in a still different form of justice: administration of the naval uniform and regulatory codes. Some years before he had formed a "guilty attachment" with the daughter of one of the men under his command, and subsequently her "father had visited the frailty of his unhappy child with extreme harshness, and even brutality, and it was said that she had died heart-broken" (81). Afterwards, this crewman,

[p]resuming upon Barton's implication in her guilt... had conducted himself toward him with marked insolence, and Barton retaliated this, and what he resented with still more exasperated bitterness—his treatment of the unfortunate girl—by a systematic exercise of those terrible and arbitrary severities which the regulations of the navy placed at the command of those who are responsible for its discipline. (81-2)

In a hospital in Naples, this crewman dies as a consequence of "one of the recent and sanguinary punishments" that Barton administered (82). The severity of the punishments described in the story would have been uncommon but certainly not unheard of: naval regulations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries afforded wide latitude to commanders in matters of discipline, leading to harsh exercises of power. The allowances

made for the “personal eccentricities” of those trusted with the governance of sailors created a phenomenon wherein the “very systems which were intended to create this mechanical harmony among individual communities afloat spawned tremendous disorder within the fleet as a whole [as] what was tolerated on one vessel could be criminal on another” (Byrn, Jr., 90, 93).

Captain Barton’s punishments—while perfectly allowable within the context of the rules he is enforcing—are both overzealous and are motivated by personal rather than professional concern. ‘Those terrible and arbitrary severities’ he carries out, we are told in the same sentence, are much more the response to a specific, possibly true insinuation (the deflowering of his crewman’s daughter) rather than the violation to naval order that the crewman actually exhibited, his ‘marked insolence’ to his commanding officer. If the crewman’s accusation is valid, then the captain himself perpetuated his own marked violation of the gentleman’s code that commanders were at all times supposed to uphold. Given enormous power over their crewmen, men like Barton were charged with a “paternal” responsibility for their morale and wellbeing (102). For men who spent months at a time away from their families, the thought of having a daughter seduced by the man they had to take orders from every day (and who kept them away from that family in the first place) would have been unimaginably awful. That this particular crewman would angrily confront his captain about this seems reasonable; being killed at his wronger’s hands seems as good a justification as any to return from the grave for revenge.



Le Fanu has little interest in such a straightforward morality tale, however. “The Familiar” is interested in justice only insofar as to highlight its nonexistence. The true victim—of both Barton and his crewman—is the daughter, who is ruined, beaten, dies, and is never invited to participate in the vengeance of either earthly or spiritual realms. To say that her father’s spirit is acting on her behalf implies that ‘his’ loss of her purity is more deserving of justice than her loss of the love of Barton and her life by her father. This is perhaps suggested by the manner in which her death is announced within the text. Le Fanu writes that she was treated with ‘extreme harshness, and even brutality, and it was said that she had died heart-broken.’ But we are given only equivocalities. Did she die for want of love? Or was her heart more literally ‘broken’ by the beatings she received from her father? If so, was his subsequent beating, at the hands of his tormentor fair reprisal for that transgression? Seemingly not, if he is allowed to rise from the grave to avenge it. Finally, of course, the additional layering of the narrative adds another level of fogginess to the affair: who ‘said’ that was how she died? This particular phrase indicates that whoever made this judgment is beyond the realms of the story and our ability to interrogate them.

For a system or administration of justice to be considered just, the wrong, wronged, and wrongers must be clearly identified, and each provided for in relation to their desserts. In Le Fanu’s story, of course, there are two levels of justice operating: that of man (Chancery, naval discipline) and that of the supernatural realms (the dispatchers of shambling corpses and shrieking owls). The justice of the latter, readers assume, will act as a correlative for the injustices of the former. And while to a small extent it does—punishment for earthly sins are meted out by unearthly visitors—there is no real sense

that justice is provided the story's real victim: rather, one of her victimizers is this cosmic justice's designated representative. If excessive vengeance is Barton's crime, then he is paid back in kind: but this is less a righting of the Captain's crooked ship than the procurement of another body to throw overboard. The violations of the daughter are forgotten.

That societal and even cosmic justice is a cruel joke is, I think, indicated by its avatar: the old owl that breaks Barton's own heart with its cry at the story's end. The owl carries a long history of signifying weight. It was the familiar of Pallas Athena, whose portfolio contains wisdom, law and justice, and while the bird itself was never explicitly given those virtues by the Greeks, it seems to have inherited them metonymically. Within this context, the owl appears quite amenable to the position of righteous avenger. However, it has also carried other meanings: as creature of darkness and hunter of the night, the Romans thought that the screech of an owl presaged death, including those of both Caesars. More immediately, the Celtic folk and British literary tradition have also generally preferred this metaphor, and owls were harbingers of death in the medieval Irish cycle the *Mabinogion* as well as for more contemporary poets including Blair and Wordsworth. In Le Fanu's "Familiar," elements of both meanings are quite evident: the "fine old owl" is both an avenger of injustice and a "grim and ill-favoured bird" presaging death (77). But if Athena<sup>32</sup> carries an owl as her 'familiar' pet, uplifted and empowered to carry out her mercy and divine will, Le Fanu's can only bring ruin. His owls—like his demons and other supernatural creatures—are, too, 'familiar' with their hosts, but they certainly do not serve them. Rather, they perform the function suggested

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<sup>32</sup> And Merlin and, more recently, Harry Potter.

by the alternate (nominative) meaning of ‘familiar,’ still in use during Le Fanu’s time: “[a]n officer of the Inquisition, chiefly employed in arresting and imprisoning the accused.”<sup>33</sup> No helpful friend or messenger, they are instead always someone’s persecutor, one of many in Le Fanu’s earthy and heavenly courts.

While both Captain Barton and Justice Harbottle are accosted and accused by the spirits of those they have wronged and, therefore, receive the awful deaths that dramatic irony demands, still greater ironies abound. Each is punished not for breaking rules, but for *enforcing* them, within systems which authorize and even encourage subjective interpretation and self-serving implementation of policy and penalty. Their punishers (Twofold, the crewman/owl) are as cruel as their prey, and are probably worse. So, while it may be a relief that these two men are served in their turn, there is still always the feeling that that the line leading up to Twofold’s enormous gallows stretches on to eternity, and that everyone will eventually get theirs, too.

### **Demons & Divisions: “Green Tea”**

“The Familiar” is a demon, the representative of a vast but ultimately unknowable complex, deployed to crush a specific individual. What is most remarkable about Le Fanu’s tales of demons and ghosts is this friction, the paradoxical correlation between how ‘familiar’ and intimate the haunting spirit is, relative to its host, and how *impersonal* the demonic bureaucracy or systemization which it belongs to seems to be. While the causes of possession or ruin are largely the same, they impact every individual in wholly different ways: some are hounded by spectral monkeys, others by bailiffs. The personal

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<sup>33</sup> OED, B. *n.*, 1. b.

demon and the unfeeling cosmic bureaucracy is an idea largely adapted from Swedenborg, who developed it as one of the more important tenets of his Christian mysticism. In *Heaven and Hell* he claimed that with “every individual there are good spirits and evil spirits,” and that each of these “belongs to some society, and continues to exist by influx from it, thus acting as one with it” (163, 165). While these spirits are dedicated members of their own orders and fraternities, they also are part of a complex, dialectical relationship with individuals they inhabit, and are both reflections and influencers of them. The haunting spirit or demon from “Green Tea,” the first story from *In a Glass Darkly*, is—despite Eagleton’s remonstrance—Le Fanu’s most economic creation. The medium through which it enacts its haunting—imported tea—suggests that dividing one’s labor in order to participate in vast systems of international and intercultural exchange only returns the fruits of that labor in an equally adulterated, even contaminating form. This is the gothic logic of the product ‘scare.’

Sullivan, noting that the ‘atrocious plan’ of Le Fanu’s demons is always a mystery, wonders whether Le Fanu saw the world “as a conspiracy” (67-8). It seems likely that he did, although for most people, this is not such a bad deal. We can enjoy our tea, whatever its color or cost, in currency or blood, and never experience “an uncomfortable symptom” (“Green Tea” 22). Only an unlucky few get singled out for persecution by the systems in which others thrive. “The Familiar” and “Mr Justice Harbottle” can, at first glance, be dismissed as morality tales in which evildoers are made to pay for their transgressions. As I have shown, however, it is a punishment that operates irrespective of notions of justice. The moral failings of both men certainly initiate the events that allow for their future victimization, but they can not themselves carry it out.

Spirits or ghosts or demons, proxies of the forces these men are implicated in and by, perform this work. These demons may be overzealous, but this does not mean, as Sullivan argues, “that there is no point at all” to Le Fanu’s persecutions (67). Rather, the ‘unfairness’ of these possessions and attacks is the by-product of a perceptual disjuncture. Le Fanu’s victims are the perpetrators of violations which they—due to their position with the bureaucracy or system of exchange—have been fully authorized to commit. In these contexts, their comeuppance seems bizarre, converse, or arbitrary: one gets the very real sense that more vicious men are probably every day left alone, perhaps even rewarded. Harbottle and Barton are, in their own way, simply performing their duties: severely, but within the limits granted them. Compare this to Reverend Jennings in “Green Tea,” who is guilty, it seems, only of being a good consumer. Unlike most of us, he is severely punished for exploitations and injustices that the rest of his countrymen daily participate in, without apparent consequence.

“Green Tea,” then, is the most extreme example of the somewhat equivocal nature of Le Fanu’s conceptualization of justice. The first and most horrible tale from the *Glass Darkly* sequence, its protagonist Jennings is guilty, we are told, primarily of drinking too much or perhaps the wrong kind of tea. Barbara Gates has noted that Jennings is “the only one of Le Fanu’s suicides who is a good man with no apparent guilt [but is also] the most relentlessly haunted of all the suicides” (20). A consistent hermeneutic loop of cause and effect, shaken in the other stories, is here, we are told, simply missing. Its depiction of a universe which is seemingly random in its cruelty may have led to Eagleton’s specific condemnation of this “gratuitous” story as the one most emblematic of how Le Fanu’s “inferior” shorter fiction seems to be about nothing but producing

chills (195). “The Familiar” and “Mr Justice Harbottle” at least contain implicit social critique, if clumsy or contradictory. Here all pretenses to moralism are missing: Jennings is stricken seemingly at random, for actions that any of us may perform at any time. There are no social injustices for the narrator to bemoan, and no easily recognizable symbols or metaphors: no all-seeing owls or larger than life judges, gallows, and courtrooms. If we trust that drinking too much tea is not equivalent to beating a sailor to death or having innocent men hanged because they are married to one’s mistress, then we must closely examine Jennings, his demon, and their relationship to see how Le Fanu’s spirits both animate and are agitated by matter.

Although “Green Tea” is in some ways quite different from the other two stories, it too is about the crushing power of systems that people are swept up in but do not fully understand. While Jennings is an altogether upstanding and unassuming individual, without the vices of his fellow Le Fanu protagonists, there are other areas in which he is not precisely typical. Before he became haunted or possessed by the demonic black monkey which eventually does him in, he kept strange hours, drank green tea to excess, and was obsessed with his research. The project he was working on, an investigation into the “the actual religion of educated and thinking paganism, quite apart from the symbolic worship” suggests the continuity between Jennings’s story and Barton’s and Harbottle’s, as well as the differences (21). While all three tales are obsessed with hidden structures, only Jennings purposefully *seeks out* these ‘actual’ realms of arcane knowledge and occult rule sets. Barton and Harbottle are mostly subjected *to* them, their symbolic relevance for the men themselves is mostly apparent. In his first conversation with Hesselius, the doctor who will attempt to treat him, Jennings recognizes that his

pursuit of this secret knowledge was a mistake. He tells Hesselius that the older, pagan faith ““is all bound together in essential unity, and, with evil sympathy, [the pagans’] religion involves their art, and both their manners, and the subject is a degrading fascination and the nemesis sure”” (21). While these studies are mostly banished from the text after this short moment, the pagans and their gods forgotten, Jennings’s statement suggests that ‘unity’ is itself destructive; it is opposed presumably to a separateness which is itself freedom. The invocation of nemesis suggests what I have argued throughout: that the impersonal cruelty of systems both earthly and cosmically manifests within surprisingly personal, custom-tailored demons.

In Jennings’s case, the demon takes the form of a small, black monkey. Jennings’s persecutor is ‘for’ him in that it is his counterpart, being everything that Jennings is not: blasphemous where he is religious, feral where he is civilized, and paradoxically, embodied where he is spiritualized. These oppositions serve to make the monkey Jennings’s nemesis, certainly, but in a peculiar way: the monkey and Jennings are opposites because they complete each other. The demon is that which has been split off, divided, or to use a more suggestive term, *outsourced*. ‘Unity’ is to be feared precisely because it reunites that which we have sloughed off: as Freud’s theorization of the uncanny suggests, the return of the superannuated may be familiar but it is largely unwelcome (154).

The monkey’s form may have been suggested by Swedenborg, whose writings are extensively referenced and quoted within “Green Tea.” One of Jennings’s annotations is of a passage from *Arcana Caelestia*, which, in the original, includes a list of which beasts correspond to particular human lusts and vices. Swedenborg’s text does not contain a

monkey, which suggests that Le Fanu chose it to carry other meanings. But as a creature that walks on two legs, can use tools, and possesses rudimentary intelligence and communication, a monkey is a ready-made doppelgänger for a person. It is therefore tempting to see it only as an easy way for Le Fanu to create a figure which is human enough to be the reflection of a man—something appearing within a glass, darkly—but feral enough to be effectively alien. Monkeys are intuited to be excessively flesh-ly, creatures of appetites and lusts and messy processes of digestion, making them the ideal Le Fanuian spirit. For Nelson Browne, it is the very “objectivity” of his ghosts which renders them most “appalling” (121).

Jennings’s little black monkey is physical in ways that even Le Fanu’s other spirits are not: Doctor Hesselius, examining Jennings from afar, correctly intuits two risk factors which are decidedly outside of the realm of the spirit: that he drank large quantities of green tea, and that one of his parents saw a ghost (10). The former would likely be considered environmental, gestational; the latter genetic, hereditary. Both suggest that spiritual phenomena have materialistic underpinnings. Later, when Hesselius gives Jennings his diagnosis, this is confirmed: ““access to your senses depends mainly upon your physical condition—this is, under God, your comfort and reliance: we are all alike envired. It is only that in your case, the *paries*, the veil of the flesh, the screen, is a little out of repair, and sights and sounds are transmitted”” (32, emphasis in original). Hesselius’ treatment regimen, never administered because he leaves town just as the monkey is driving his patient to suicide, is glossed by his student (our frame narrator), who refers to a “a careful note of Dr Hesselius’ opinion upon the case and of the habits, dietary, and medicines which he prescribed. It is curious—some persons would say



mystical” (34). But what is most curious about the proposed course of treatment is actually how *mundane* it is: nary a spell, exorcism, or prayer to be found. The regimen mostly amounts to taking medicine, getting exercise, and eating right. Essentially, Jennings must take mastery of his exertions and of the digestive and circulative processes which he has allowed to be countermanded. Gates’ admonishment of his “absurd material assumptions” is one aspect of her criticism of Dr. Hesselius, whom she and practically every other critic blames for Jennings’s death.<sup>34</sup>

What critics have missed, however, what Jennings himself mentions but never clarifies, is that the demonic monkey is actually susceptible to these very bodily processes. From the moment Jennings and the monkey become aware of each other, they necessarily begin to interact. Jennings assumes that this interaction is only one-way, and that it is occurring at the level of the sensory and conceptual. But just as physical causes opened the path for his ghostly invader, they can also affect it in its coexistence with Jennings. He tells Hesselius that on the night of its first appearance that “I drank no tea... I got cigars and some brandy-and-water. My idea was that I should act upon my material system, and by living for a while in sensation apart from thought, send myself forcibly, as it were, into a new groove. [T]he monkey then... looked dazed and languid” (26). Too much of the stimulant (tea) has deepened the awareness of both of them—indeed, made them aware of each other—but the depressant (alcohol) allows the host to relax while making his visitant invader slow and unfocused. In essence, Jennings gets the monkey drunk.

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<sup>34</sup> Including this one. I am increasingly convinced, however, that the doctor’s treatment *would* have worked, had Hesselius not fled when, of course, he was actually needed.

“Green Tea,” the nasty little gothic story about a man’s shadow self—the contaminating demon which plagues him—is named after a drink, technically an infusion: W. J. McCormack’s useful analysis of Le Fanu’s fiction describes the latter’s strange interpenetrations and contaminations as “a process of osmosis” in which seeming opposites lend something of themselves to their others (247). Consumed at home, tea is picked, dried and packaged in a strange, foreign land operating under inscrutable laws. Procured through international trade, it is the product of a division of labor on an immense scale, and so still carries the cultural and economic history of that production with it. Ultimately, Jennings’s demon is *daemonic*, the personal nemesis, because—reading the story within the rubric of Adam Smith’s theorization of the division of labor—all of one’s ‘parts,’ returned, become enemies. It is uncanny because it is both familiar and the product of the opposite or other, but also because the vicious little monkey, the divided Jennings’s excised labor, is that rare symbol which has “take[n] on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes” (Freud 150). It represents the labor that supports Jennings, his lifestyle and his tea habit, but also revisits the effects of that division on untold others back onto Jennings himself. Reading Le Fanu through Freud and Smith, we find that outsourced labor always carries within it the threat of its return in the form of possession, or, to use the terminology of the consumable product: *contamination*.

Jennings consumes green tea hoping to benefit from its physiological effects in the form of improved concentration and ultimately, productivity. It “‘cleared and intensified the power of thought,’” and he found it an indispensable aid to his research, allowing him to concentrate and to stay awake later (22). Jennings tells Hesselius that this

is not uncommon among writers, all of whom perform their work ““on something”” (22, emphasis in original). The reason, he theorizes, is that ““there is a material waste that must be hourly supplied in such occupations, or... we should grow too abstracted, and the mind, as it were, pass out of the body, unless it were reminded often of the connection by actual sensation”” (ibid). Ivan Melada has read statements like this to argue that “Green Tea” is about the creative process and its dangers, the most obvious, of course, being addiction (96). Certainly, Jennings’s explanation for his tea drinking reconfirms the connection between the processes of the body and the work of the mind/spirit; the plaintive, almost apologetic tone of his statement may signify the lament of an addict. His reliance, however, is not solely upon caffeine. Rather, Jennings’s commentary on the individual, bodied nature of his work is easily transplanted to the work of the social corpus. Just as Jennings’s physiological processes must perform their housekeeping labor to keep his mind attendant upon his theological work, so too does unmarked physical labor performed by others allow for the specialized work that Jennings and his fellow authors enjoy. Indeed, his profession as the vicar of a levied parish makes this relationship quite literal, as he trades his sermons for his parishioners’ labor in tax.

The first three chapters of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* describe the division of labor, why it arises, and how the benefits of specialization it enables are enjoyed by disparate people, regions, and even nations. The principal advantage is increases in the efficiency of labor, and this efficiency is evident from the smallest scale (as few as two people) to the largest (enormous, international networks of production and trade) (13). In all cases, the more technologically and culturally advanced a community or nation is, the more specialized its productive laborers will necessarily be (15). It follows then, that

these cultures will be the most stratified as well, since some tasks—like the production and delivery of Jennings’s sermons—are less needed than food production, for example. The vicar’s other work, the unfinished research on the ancients’ ‘true’ religion, would only be useful to a very small number of highly trained individuals and possibly to no one at all.<sup>35</sup> As I have already discussed, Jennings himself believes that his most specialized work may in fact be actively harmful (“Green Tea” 21). That the “unity” that this arcane knowledge promises could be anathema to “the Christian mind,” seems to suggest that the latter relies upon the labor of a divided, dualistic or tripartite godhead (ibid). Jennings’s quest for the ancients’ wholeness necessarily suggests this schism within the modern subject, just as his actions (re-) admit that excised portion of his divided psyche and divided labor.

While Smith doesn’t venture into the theological ramifications of terrestrial economics, the claim that too much specialization is harmful to an individual would seem to contradict his theorization, that the division of labor is necessarily “advantageous to all the different persons employed in the various occupations into which it is subdivided” (376). Highly specialized and stratified societies would seem to support even the most esoteric individual pursuits. However, those advantages, benefits, and efficiencies that a complex, stratified system of exchange can provide only develop within the contexts of a given market’s particularities, considering the wants (demand) and materials (supply) that the people functioning within it have or have access to. If highly specialized training or labor is the surest way to fulfilling more wants, then the system of exchange developed to fulfill those wants will always privilege them, assuming it can. Many people will attempt

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<sup>35</sup> A distressing thought to anyone engaging in research.

to obtain that specialized training and perform that labor, even if it means that someone else will inevitably be forced into the less specialized, lower-paying, and possibly degrading work that is not privileged in pay or prestige. Essentially, subdividing one's labor may be very good for a person's stomach, but may very well be actively harmful to one's soul, a concern for Jennings personally as well as professionally.

As a figure of this division of labor, Le Fanu's demonic monkey is unsurprisingly obsessed with the reverend's work and actively tries to prevent it, blocking Jennings's view of his texts, and distracting or perhaps 'abstracting' him with his vulgarities and blasphemies. It breaks its occasionally long disappearances specifically to do this, re-appearing after his longest absence while Jennings is riding the train to his rectory (29). Jennings finds himself unable to complete his book or any of his intellectual labor: he tells Hesselius that "[t]here is in its motion an indefinable power to dissipate thought, and to contract one's attention to that monotony, till the ideas shrink, as it were, to a point, and at last to nothing" (30). To Smith, prolonged attention to the monotonous, and the attending dissipation of all other thought, are requirements for some portion of a labor force, especially those charged with menial work. This may in fact be advantageous to the enormous treadmill of capital, but is fatal to the individuals caught up within its eddies. In a much less frequently quoted section of *Wealth of Nations*,<sup>36</sup> Smith details some of these less beneficial effects of the division of labor on the man divided by it:

He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of [intellectual] exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender

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<sup>36</sup> Smith's ideas on this were probably influenced by Adam Ferguson. Unsurprisingly, Marx quotes this section at length and comments on it in and its reception in *Capital* (483-4).

sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life. (782)

These symptoms are all experienced by Jennings as he is mesmerized by the monotonously swaying monkey. Smith is specifically referring to manual factory and mill work here, and so this would seem to be an imperfect analogue for the work that Jennings himself performs. But this can easily be accounted for by remembering that the monkey is Jennings's shadow self, his other 'half,' and the returned manifestation of that outsourced labor performed on his behalf and which allows him to enjoy his own specialized labor. The horror, of course, is that he is now faced with a returned and particularly vengeful form of what those who work to support him must experience in order to provide it.

Jennings is the most singular of Le Fanu's crushed protagonists because he is, paradoxically, the most relatable. His crimes, if we can even call them that, are frivolous, the little acts of daily life that everyone must engage in. He benefits from and so is implicated within a system which leads to the moral and mental degeneration of his neighbors—as well as those living thousands of miles away, as we shall see. But it is difficult to argue that he is really to *blame*. Le Fanu's gothic is not about the righting of wrongs, ancestral or otherwise. Instead, it haunts us with the knowledge that simply participating in the system of exchange implicates us in all of the horrors that underwrite its many benefits. At any moment the fragile balance can shift, and they will be revisited upon us. Le Fanu's gothic vengeance is systemic, rather than ancestral.

## Tea Green

The division of labor, as Smith illustrates, extends internationally, with some nations more adept and efficient at producing one good, while others produce another. This is due to differences in technology and culture allowing or requiring greater degrees of specialized labor, and partly due to variable distribution of needful resources. One of the resources that the British of Le Fanu's time required was tea. Previous critics have largely scoffed at the story's title, calling it a misdirection or even a bad joke. I would like to suggest that it is not a red herring or a MacGuffin—or at least, not entirely. Rather, green tea itself perfectly captures so many of Le Fanu's general themes: it is central to the story that he tells, and not a distraction from it. In tea, Le Fanu can explore how the return of the divided, 'outsourced' self becomes contamination when the individual is invaded by an inscrutable foreign other.

Over two centuries, tea had taken a primary role in English life. Importation from China began in the mid-seventeenth century, and while the first shipment was modest, a century later, Britain was importing 15 million pounds annually, and twice that by the 1830's. Tea became so popular that taxes on it accounted for as much as 10% of the British treasury's income; it was deemed so necessary to the state and its people that the East India Company, responsible for its trade, was by the early nineteenth century required by law to keep at least a year's surplus on hand, enough to ensure continued availability in case of shortage or other calamity (Gelber 33). According to Marty Roth, tea, "England's drug of choice" served a critical role for an increasingly modernized and

mechanized state, not least because it allowed its workforce to forego morning ale in favor of a substance more felicitous to long, productive hours (89).

In “Green Tea”, Reverend Jennings begins drinking tea to aid him in his late night studies. Believing that it would help his academic pursuits, he began to favor green tea, recalling that he “found the effect pleasanter, it cleared and intensified the power of thought so” (22). Jennings begins drinking it constantly as an aid to his intellectual and creative endeavors, relying on its productivity-increasing effects. It may have provided additional benefits: according to testimonials, tea was valorized as remedy to a variety of ills, both social and corporeal. It aided in digestion, enhanced concentration, provided energy and wiped away weariness, and was a ready excuse and accoutrement for social occasion or a light meal. Social processes, too, require physiological stimulation to operate smoothly.

There were, however, aspects to the new national obsession that were less than panacean. Julie Fromer suggests that this “necessary luxury” provoked a series of anxieties originating from the consumption of an exotic, foreign product. These fears were centered around “ingestion, the threat of pollution, and frighteningly permeable cultural boundaries” (27), making them fertile ground for Le Fanu’s paranoiac vision. Grown, picked, and packaged in China, tea drained English coffers and filled English teacups, and had profound effects on English bodies and minds. That the Chinese—a little understood racial and cultural other that most English knew only through sensational travel and barter narratives—provided the drink that effectively powered both the brutish and creative engines of the homeland was inimical to ideas of English



ingenuity, superiority and purity. It suggested a dependence on China and the Chinese that was at least equivocal and expensive, possibly dangerous.

This was the case not only because tea was a foreign product, strongly associated with the Chinese through monopoly as well as their own tradition of heavy use, but also because they handled it. A willingness to distrust the laborers who grew, dried, and packed it gave rise to a number of urban legends and minor product scares associated with bad tea. Some claimed that tea was cut with other herbs in order to make a greater profit, which led to fearful speculation of what it was being cut with. To combat this problem, perhaps to profit from it, Horniman's began selling "Horniman's Pure Tea" in 1878. Advertisements by Samuel Day, who was quick to accuse Chinese merchants of attempting even to poison people, suggested that green teas sold to the English were artificially colored. Horniman's innovation, pre-packaged tea, not only assured consumers of consistent, fixed weights of 'pure' tea, packaged by Englishmen after bulk purchase, but they also, according to Fromer, "functioned as a reaffirmation of a physical barrier between Chinese tea and English tea drinkers" (35-6, 39). Most importantly, it provided relief to those concerned about who their own labor was being comingled with: better the neighbor than the foreigner. If Chinese laborers and sellers were mixing in foreign vectors or unknown ingredients, then the tea they produced would, in turn, infect or adulterate its drinker. And the adulteration of one's self through the division of one's labor is what ultimately leads to the adulteration of products like the tea one drinks—which therefore functions as a sigil for wholesale contamination. Only by removing the Chinese as much as possible from the process of tea production could product safety—as well as a stable, whole English identity for its drinkers—be maintained.

Conflicts over how Britain would pay for its tea—the Chinese preferred payment in silver, the British to use receipts from the opium trade China had outlawed—led to two wars. While these opium wars were initiated by the empire to force this preference upon China, the discourse surrounding these conflicts portrayed them as necessary to protect a weak and feminized homeland from an unscrupulous Chinese aggressor (Schmitt 77). The reversal that these moves enact allowed for the gradual demonization of Britain's largest trading partner, and the characterization of its people (the producers of British tea and consumers of its opium) as addicts, blasphemers, con-artists, lecherous adulterers and greedy adulterators. These characterizations frequently included a highly racialized dimension. Entitled "Lesson to John Chinaman," and appearing in an 1857 issue of *Punch*, figure 1 depicts Mr. Punch egging on Lord Palmerston, who is pulling the top-knot of a Chinese figure on the left. The victim's sign reads, "THE DESTROYER of WOMEN & CHILDREN." The figure is quite small, with nailed fingers giving his hands the appearance of claws. His posture is animalistic, and he is crouching slightly as if in pain, or perhaps in readiness to spring. 'John Chinaman's' facial features are the most telling, complete with beady eyes, small ears, and an overlarge, down-turned mouth. The impression created is of someone more simian than human, a feral and lascivious corrupter of England's most vulnerable citizens. This dehumanization of the Chinese, and the equation of them with primates, is particularly relevant to our discussion of "Green Tea." The spirit that has come to haunt Jennings after his continual indulgence in the titular Chinese beverage is described as "a small black monkey" (23) with "a stooping gait" (24). It, too, is hateful and profane, possessing a "character of intense malice and vigilance... always underlying that surly languor" (27). While Jennings is neither woman

nor child, he is—like England in the discourse and like many of Le Fanu’s feminized protagonists—just as surely being destroyed. Infested by his demonic primate, Jennings feels his own willpower shrink: it whispers in his brain, urging him “to crimes, to injure others, or [himself]” (32). This contamination by a foreign spirit seems irreversible, and he is unable to throw off the influence of the little black monkey, which is unimpressed by his subsequent abstinence from tea.<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 1.** “A Lesson to John Chinaman.” *Punch*, 9 May, 1857.

<sup>37</sup> If we can even believe in it: like many addicts, there may be some dissembling about Jennings’s tea drinking. Although Hesselius intuits that he has given up green tea, the only verification comes from Lady Mary, who is a rather clueless observer of Jennings and everything else (11). Upon first seeing the devilish monkey, Jennings hurries home, where he “drank no tea that night,” resorting instead to cigars and brandy, in a moment I have already alluded to (26). Earlier in the story, but later in its chronology, when meeting Dr Hesselius, Jennings suggests that he “come to dinner, or to luncheon, or even to tea” (19). While it is true that he could have someone over for tea time without drinking or even serving it, the ambiguous “even” seems telling in this context: it might be all right, Jennings wagers, to ‘even’ have just a spot of his beloved drink. The monkey on Jennings’s back is possibly, therefore, both figural and literal.

In this context, it is no accident that Le Fanu's titular drink is *green* tea. Cultivated in several varieties, tea was imported solely from China until the mid to late nineteenth century, with the Opium Wars fought to ensure its cheap availability. However, the discovery in the 1820's of tea in British India allowed for 'domestic' competition for the British market, and by 1870, large quantities of tea were arriving in England from India, Ceylon, and Java (Scott 178-9). In only twenty years, Indian tea imports had outpaced the Chinese (Fromer 55). This had several consequences for England's relationship to their national drink. First, the availability of tea from the colonies allowed the dependence upon China, its troublesome government, and sinister cultivators, to wane. Secondly, Indian tea propped up both the economic value of a colonial holding and British ideas of its imperial self-sufficiency and independence. It allowed the British to fully control the division and deployment of labor, and to monitor it and its product(s) against further adulteration. The gradual shift from Chinese to Indian tea was welcomed by commentators, who spoke of the Indian tea itself as superior to its Chinese counterparts, often using racialized terms to do so. Fromer analyzes texts which "[describe] Indian tea plants—nurtured by British tea planters—as standing up straight and tall next to their stunted, miniature, dried-up Chinese neighbors" (58). The figure of the less evolved, simian Chinese returns, translated into a new medium: horticulture.

The principal difference between Indian and Chinese tea is significant: India's climate and landscape was more amenable to the cultivation of *black* tea, and those black teas had stronger, more popular flavors than their Chinese counterparts. Consequently, black tea became more and more common, and green tea increasingly rare (55). Once

Indian black tea became predominant, there was no longer the need for a distinction between the two common varieties, since one was ever-present, and the other nearly invisible. Hence, the ‘black’ descriptor was often dropped, and Indian ‘black tea’ became simply ‘tea’: a drink that was finally as English as the crumpets it was served with and the colonies in which it was grown. The corollary to this was that green tea, rare but still available, still needed to be ‘green’ in order to be set apart from its now colorless counterpart. Le Fanu’s story, published in 1871 at the fulcrum point of this shift, splits the difference: Jennings tells Hesselius, “[t]ea was my companion—at first the *ordinary* black tea, made in the *usual way*” (22, my emphasis). He uses ‘tea’ interchangeably, in a way that would largely fall out of favor later, but also specifies that black tea is ‘ordinary’ tea, the ‘usual’ preparation of which serves to make green tea, and its preparation, *unusual*, extraordinary, and suspect. Green tea, therefore, retained its metonymic association as Asian, while Indian tea forgot its origin, becoming English and therefore wholesome. The relationship between the English and the peoples of these two tea-producing nations could not have been more different.

While the Chinese were considered to be inscrutable, malicious, almost feral, Indians were seen as friendly, docile, and most importantly, subservient to their English colonizers. In figure 2, an illustrative advertisement from 1897, Queen Victoria and President McKinley sit for tea service. Behind them, a smiling Indian servant presents the tray, with two teacups and accoutrements. The original caption reads, “A Royal Beverage. ‘Mr President, may I offer you a cup of pure tea from Ceylon and India?’” The implications are apparent: Indians providing English tea are happily under English dominion, their labor is monitored and controlled. The tea they produce is as English as

the queen, who can now properly vouch for its purity and lack of foreign (Chinese) contamination. Indian (black) tea is *pure* tea, grown, picked, and packaged by subjects of the British Empire, and suitable for the occasions of state or for casual drinking.



**Figure 2.** “A Royal Beverage.” Advertisement, 1897.

Liberated from its origination point in China, by the twentieth century it was finally *purely* English, a colonial and subcontinental firewall built between it and its unpleasant former producers: the dark, inscrutable, possibly demonic Chinese, with all of their opium and other corruptions and corrupters. Not surprisingly, Jennings suggests that he may have been spared his fate if he had only continued to drink English tea, properly prepared, instead of trying that pernicious alien draught. What was Jennings’s experience with (black) tea? He tells Hesselius that he “drank a good deal, and increased its strength

as [he] went on. [But he] never experienced an uncomfortable symptom from it” (22).<sup>38</sup>

Only domesticated tea—the product of domesticated labor—is safe. Foreign, alien influences are always corrupting.

## **Returning**

Le Fanu’s invaders are dark reflections of the protagonists they haunt: both antitheses, and yet startlingly ‘familiar.’ They are the merciless representatives of complex systems, which fatally trap his characters within “the enormous machinery of hell” (31). Punter’s reading of Le Fanu argues that the typical “protagonist, whether deliberately or otherwise, opens his mind in such a way as to become subject to haunting by a figure which is unmistakably part of his own self” (232). Traditional psychoanalytic readings of ghosts and similar gothic phenomena posit that the shadow self represents troubled aspects of the subject’s psyche—generally repressed memories—which are staging their painful return. But Freud’s theorization of the uncanny also suggests that some repressed content originates from *outside* the individuated self, and the uncanny appearance may in fact reactivate memories lost to evolutionary time. Shared memories are pre-existing conditions: if we think of the individual body as belonging to a social corpus, then evolutionary memory becomes social history. If Le Fanu perversely represses the specifics of history far more than his gothic materialist predecessors, then it is to insist that ghosts—and the systemic horrors they carry with them—cannot be as easily or comfortably excised, however familiar.

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<sup>38</sup>Le Fanu’s character was in this way not unlike the author himself. His son Brinsley Le Fanu told critic S. M. Ellis that while writing in the middle of the night, his father “[imbibed] much strong tea—which apparently was not of the Green variety!” (175).

This, perhaps, is why there are in Le Fanu's gothic returns—regardless of how terrifying—a sense of homecoming. Richard Dowling, in the title from his mostly forgotten 1887 essay, called Le Fanu's demonic monkey "The Only Real Ghost in Fiction." He approaches the divided nature of the haunted individual in a much different way, by suggesting that the haunters are themselves always haunted: "who can say that our insubstantial midnight visitors may not know wraiths finer and subtler than we... In physical life parasites have parasites. Why in phantom life should not ghosts have ghosts?" (4). While this at first seems to be a rather stunning hypothesis, it is supported by Le Fanu's stories themselves, albeit, I think, somewhat differently than how Dowling probably meant it. Le Fanu's spirits are strangely dependent upon and materially affected by the people they inhabit; their relationship involves a dialectical give and take that makes for strangely codependent competitors. In "Justice Harbottle" and "The Familiar," representatives of systems of justice discover that they are only the cogs in much greater machines, each uneasily supporting the other. In "Green Tea," Jennings's divided self is haunted by the returned aspect of his outsourced labor. Read alongside Dowling's suggestive take, Le Fanu's most interesting tale takes on a troubling cast. If those suspicious, inscrutable beings who labor to produce our tea and other pleasures haunt us, threaten to contaminate us in some way, then we must remember that they too, are haunted by us. Invisible, ever separate from the comforts they produce and those who enjoy them, our own personal laborers are subjected to a toil which brings only "torpor of [the] mind" and "corrupts even the activity of [the] body," and which, therefore, makes them little more than ghosts of ghosts (Smith 782).



## CHAPTER V

### DORIAN'S DRAWERS

The name of the protagonist of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is, of course, suggestive. The Doric column is not only one of the more recognizable features of Greek architecture; it metonymically figures the Greek ideal championed by Wilde after his mentor Walter Pater. The column's shape, and its concomitant phallic virility is often read as a somewhat overdetermined indicator of the homoerotic connotations of this Greek ideal.<sup>39</sup> Dorian's Christian name, we are told, practically reads itself, easily giving up its ostensible secrets. Gray's last name, however, is somewhat more difficult. Does it refer to the shade halfway between black and white, darkness and light, and therefore reference an increasingly amoral existence? Or might it signal indistinctness, an *inability* to be sized up or pinned down? And if so, should we then be suspicious of the ready legibility of Dorian's first name? One could argue that the full name—one definitive, the other anti-definitiveness—perfectly captures the essence of Wilde's paradoxical epigrams. But in many ways, Dorian Gray's name and what it might represent is constructed in much the same way that *Dorian Gray* is. Doric columns run along edges, fully surrounding structures—usually temples—in which mysteries are ostensibly kept. Formally, they are structure, but they present themselves to us as ornament, and this ornamentation tends to conceal—blocking out with their massive, if refined, materiality—what their structure is designed to support and help sanctify. Empty space, mostly. Viewed from without, the richness of this wrapper tantalizes its perceiver with the promise of more riches within—a promise it cannot confidently keep since what is

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<sup>39</sup> And probably girth: the proportions of the Doric pillar were derived from the ratio of a man's foot length to height; whereas the Ionic pillar was figured from the ratio of a woman's foot length to height. In the Parthenon, for example, Doric pillars surround the structure, while Ionic pillars dominate its interior.

inside is not only a mystery, but is rather a kind of transient, unknowable thing. What we actually find when we open the book or approach the altar is mystery itself—its processes and rituals—*mystifications* that we must sort through and make meaning of for ourselves.

I raise up the model of the temple—the holy box with unknowable contents—as a modification of the surfaces and accompanying superficiality that Wilde glorifies in his preface and epigrams. The critical literature frequently centers on this superficiality, and not just aesthetic criticism: Paul Fortunato, Rachel Bowlby and others see the Wildean surface as emblematic of Victorian consumer culture and Wilde’s location within it.<sup>40</sup> Literal-material surfaces do exist in *Dorian Gray*: the picture, most notably. The realities and meanings that we find in it, however, are more mimetic than figurative. Like peering through a window or at a mirror, nothing is contained or concealed. Dorian’s picture is unmistakably legible, and its meanings and implications offer themselves up even to other characters, like Basil Hallward.

There is, however, another type of textual object in the novel, many of them, actually, which function as literal and figural *containers*: surfaces which surround, encapsulate, and conceal what lie within: blue china jars, latten matchboxes, and a Florentine cabinet which itself contains a gold-lacquered box. These items, like Doric pillars, both pique our interest and distract it. Their sensual ornamentation is of more interest than what they ostensibly contain—if they contain anything at all (many do not). In this chapter, I will be arguing that Wilde’s gothic materialism functions analogously to Dorian Gray’s many material containers—tempting critics and readers with meanings and answers it means to withhold, or perhaps does not even contain.

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<sup>40</sup> See “Wildean Philosophy with a Needle and Thread” (38 and 50) and *Shopping with Freud* (17).

That (empty) containers are Wilde's apparatus of choice is the necessary result of a realism whose model of history is eschatological rather than teleological; whose entropic tendencies overwhelm its progressive ones. Wilde's *fin-de-siècle* gothic, therefore, posits not a haunting return which must be confronted and finally set aside: rather, it elucidates a coming end of time, and an end to meaning, that weak agents of progress like Dorian himself fight, unsuccessfully, to overcome.

### **Wilde Realism**

Wilde's frequently vocal resistance to realism, coupled with his own, heavily stylized and ornamental prose, has fostered the impression that Wilde is against realism itself. His actual stance is rather nuanced, and tends to see realism as a perfectly acceptable formal means through which an artist can achieve his end—but an inartistic, even unseemly end unto itself. This is suggested by the preface to the novel, which claims that the “nineteenth century dislike of Realism” originates in its use as a reminder of ugliness. There is no explicit criticism of the realist stance itself—just its typical subject matter—and as it is followed by a similar formulation about the distaste for romanticism, it is impossible to say that one is being valorized, or one criticized (3). The implication is that both have their place, so long as would-be purveyors of them know the proper uses for each. *This* novel, he seems to claim, will demonstrate the kind of realism that Wilde himself is calling for, an ‘imaginative’ realism inspired by and inflected with a gothic romanticism. Wilde separates his own approach from the inartistic ugliness that for him defines ‘vulgar’ realisms including literary naturalism, in which “the sun always

risers in the East End” and whose creators “find life crude, and leave it raw” (“Decay of Lying” 219).

A number of critics have charted the kinds of causal relationships indicative of narrative realism’s reliance upon and production of legible, processional history in *Dorian Gray*. Psychoanalytically-inclined readers like Esther Rashkin trace networks of trauma and its memory throughout the text. For her, the novel contains “a complex saga of child abuse... inscribed cryptically within the narrative,” that leads inescapably to “ramifications for the narrative life of the main character” (158). In this reading, Dorian’s upstairs room, in which he houses the portrait, is also the location of sexual abuse suffered at the hands of his guardian—abuse which determines many of Dorian’s actions and his relationship to the portrait (159). For Rashkin, the narrative proceeds along an identifiable, rational path—on such solid ground, it seems, that the secret of her preferred container (Dorian’s upstairs room) is easily discovered. Similarly, Nancy Jane Tyson finds a plethora of psychological ailments operating within the little room that is Dorian’s skull, as his “increasing social estrangement and conflicting attitudes of self-love and self-revulsion induce recognizable signs of mental disorder, including paranoia, pathological self-love, erratic and violent behavior, dissociative identity (multiple personality), and the phenomenon clinically termed *autoscopia*” (103, emphasis in original). Tyson reads the autoscopic effect of the portrait—a Dorian that he sees outside of himself—as evidence of the preface’s claim that the dismissal of realism is mostly about the perceiver’s hatred of his own, Caliban-like face. In other words, Wilde’s preface is itself a vindication of the realism of the novel... a novel which seems to detest the ugliness that the work itself produces.

Much of the criticism of the text's realism focuses upon its multiformity, the hodge-podge of modes including the gothic, the melodrama, and the society satire that it channels and perhaps discordantly jumps between. For others, it is missing the requisite linearity. John Paul Riquelme, holding the first view, argues that *Dorian Gray* fails to exert the "ultimately controlling perspective based on a geometry of narrative relations," necessary to establish the closure between representation and meaning required for a text to be considered "realistic" (615). Rachel Bowlby, taking the second, suggests that the text foregoes the "conventional linear narrative" indicative of realism (21). While it seems to me that the novel's plot does proceed linearly, its pacing *is* uneven, and this is to some extent due to its shifts in mode and mood, both the result of the protagonist's agelessness and restlessness. I would argue that the very timelessness of Gray necessarily inflects and perhaps infects the narrative enveloping him, causing disjunctions that are, I think, often read as chaos. This is most noticeable in and around chapter XI, which begins a nonspecific number of years after its predecessor ends. The experiments that Dorian performs within it, the experiences he pursues, happen over another stretch of time that—as described, at least—could last a single year or a hundred, if not for the exceedingly specific reference which abruptly begins the following chapter, important enough to merit its own one sentence paragraph: "It was on the ninth of November, the eve of his own thirty-eighth birthday, as he often remembered afterwards" (124).<sup>41</sup> The text's timely transition from precise, fixed time to indistinct, unfixable time and back again creates a kind of temporal bubble (a kind of container) in which history—heretofore and thereafter processional and certain—no longer narrates a chain of events but instead approaches a

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Ellmann suggests that this date is itself an attempt to divert understanding by eliminating an autobiographical reference. For Wilde, that defining life change occurred during his 32<sup>nd</sup> year (70).

superstate. Everything seems to happen at once, or in any, or all, or no particular order(s). The chapter itself is bookended by references to the poisonous yellow book and its influence upon “Dorian’s own life, written before he had lived it,” which almost gives the impression that this section is not happening at all, that Dorian is simply reading himself into the protagonist of the book (105). Assuming this is not the case, the implication persists that the mostly-unknown reveries at the center of that yellow book analogize the timeless reveries of Gray’s own experimentations. We will return to this section of the text again with more on why this is, but for now it is sufficient to say that time in *Dorian Gray* mostly proceeds linearly if not always at the same pace, and the narrative transpires causally, making its claims to realism not dismissible on these grounds, at least.

We are on less stable ground in relation to how Wilde actually represents the world inside (and outside) his novel, a question very much at stake in a novel about a magical, soul-reflecting portrait. That Wilde’s art is not invested in reproducing material reality is for good reason largely taken for granted, although even here there is room for dissent. Pater’s original review of the novel emphasized the accuracy of Wilde’s dinner table scenes, noting that “[all] that pleasant accessory detail, taken straight from the culture, the intellectual and social interests, the conventionalities, of the moment, have, in fact, after all, the effect of the better sort of realism” (36). Pater’s commentary on realism and Wilde’s use of it are intriguing because they require this qualifier: ‘better sort’ implies a worse sort, and we see this kind of adjectival adjunction continually used by Wilde whenever his characters discuss realism and its failings.<sup>42</sup> Basil Hallward,

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<sup>42</sup> The case could, of course, be made that Wilde’s characters cannot be trusted as their author’s mouthpieces. I am reasonably comfortable doing so when these characters mimic—sometimes word for word—phrases and ideas that their author repeats elsewhere. Whether the performer and character known

speaking about painting in *Dorian Gray*, says that ““we have invented a realism that is *vulgar*,”” (13, my emphasis). Lord Wotton hates ““*vulgar* realism in literature,”” suggesting that anyone who would ““call a spade a spade should be compelled to use one”” (161, my emphasis). Wilde himself made similar claims outside of the pages of the novel. Responding to criticism of it in a letter to the *Daily Chronicle*, Wilde argues that his novel “reacts against the crude brutality of plain realism,” suggesting by this series of adjectives that there are multiple avenues through which realism can go wrong. (365). And in “The Truth of Masks,” Wilde defends realist drama’s use of historically accurate dramatic costuming, as an effective—even necessary—aspect to staging historical drama. His agreement with its detractors is limited to the occasional instance when attention to accuracy becomes overwhelming, and leads to an “*excessive* realism,” (218, my emphasis). The suggestion—most evident in this final example—is that realism and the historical method are acceptable, even beneficial, so long as they serve the aims of the artist and cultivate the correct meanings. A work is ‘excessively’ real when mimesis or historical accuracy becomes so important that the artist allows it to undermine the artist’s autonomy, Wilde’s highest aesthetic and probably ethical good.

The artists in *Dorian Gray* operate in mediums—portrait painting and play-acting—in which unadorned, authentic representation is prized and artificiality and affectedness are ridiculed. The picture of *Dorian Gray* as well as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* must be representational to be effective. Hallward tells Dorian that it was only when Basil painted him *as he was*, in his own clothes and “without mist or veil,” that it became activated or possessed with Hallward’s “secret” feelings (95). It is, in fact, “[t]he

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as Oscar Wilde can be assumed to hold consistent and therefore ‘trustworthy’ views is much more difficult to answer.

Realism of the method”—one of the few times in the novel that the word ‘realism’ is not negatively modified—that captures Dorian’s youthful visage exactly, in a wholly mimetic way (ibid). As he ages, it becomes less and less a mirror, and more and more the record of his misdeeds and corruptions, now translated into paints. But the relationship between Dorian and his picture is still not exactly metaphoric; the quite visible and literal sin that “writes itself across a man’s face” is simply displaced from Dorian’s to its image (126).

The stage actress Sibyl Vane’s great crime is that once she falls in love with Dorian, her art turns towards artifice rather than concealing it. Watching her with Wotton and Basil, Dorian is horrified to discover that “the staginess of her acting was unbearable, and grew worse as she went on. Her gestures became absurdly artificial. She over-emphasized everything that she had to say” (71). After the performance, Sibyl tells Dorian that she can no longer act because love is that to which “all art is but a reflection” (73). In Sibyl’s view, art cannot successfully imitate life because life is filled with passion that may be beautifully forged but not authentically reproduced. To attempt to reproduce love is, it seems, its own kind of vulgarization, although it is unclear what is being vulgarized: ‘real’ love that durst not have its name spoken, or the art that reaches too high (perhaps both). Dorian rejects Sibyl because, unable to act realistically, she has become a flawed vessel, no longer a sphinx because she can no longer even pretend to have secrets. As the artificiality of Sibyl becomes too plain, the illusion of the role she plays becomes flimsier, and her real shallowness—we could say hollowness—becomes apparent.

It is not, therefore, clear, consistent representation that Wilde disdains in realism, but rather the ‘excessiveness’ and ‘vulgarity’ of many of his contemporaries’ versions of



it. Realism is vulgar when the artwork in which it operates exists primarily to catalogue suffering or ugliness, sometimes in a sincere if facile attempt to bring it to an end. The literary naturalism popular in Wilde's time, with its emphasis on the "sordid realities of life in the East End," therefore became a favorite target of his criticism (Joyce 188). Surprisingly, Wilde's critique of naturalism in many ways prefigures that of twentieth-century materialist critics. In "The Decay of Lying," he makes an argument for the superiority of Balzac to Zola, which—although it takes quite a different route<sup>43</sup>—reaches the same essential conclusion as Lukács did many years later (220). Of special interest for delineating differences between Wilde's novelistic art and the one he criticizes is the fact that large parts of Wilde's novel take place in these same East End locales. Rather than textualizing the actual squalor through naturalistic representation, Wilde's gothic materialism heightens the class differences between East and West End inhabitants by making the former preternaturally horrifying. The effect might seem to be a justification of class difference and their necessary separation, if it weren't for the fact that the 'fallen' nature of the East End is shown to be the fault of the West. The prostitute that Dorian avoids and that accosts Jim Vane tells him he should have killed Prince Charming because, "he has lots of money, and he's as bad as bad," linking those two properties rather explicitly (159). As if to make the connection between herself and Dorian, East and West, more clear, she says that "it's nigh on eighteen years since Prince Charming made me what I am" (160). The denizens of docks and opium dens may be frightening—but

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<sup>43</sup>For Wilde, Zola's fiction is not only wrong in the form of its representation, but also in its content, because "[we] don't want to be harrowed and disgusted by an account of the doings of the lower orders" (220). If Wilde's contemporaries dislike realism for holding a glass to their own face (revealing it to be Caliban's), Wilde dislikes those novelists who refuse to point their glass anywhere else.

they are so because the Prince Charmings of the world have made them that way and keep them so for the ready fulfillment of their pleasures.

Wilde's mode of realism shares other similarities with the preferred modes of historical materialist critics. Although he was a champion of individuality as a political and social good, his claims paradoxically were not based on an a priori idea of fundamental individuality or even difference. Impugning what he saw as the tedious psychologism of many of the novels of his time, Wilde argued that Zola and the other

master[s] of the roman psychologique... [commit] the error of imagining that the men and women of modern life are capable of being infinitely analysed for an innumerable series of chapters. [...] It is a humiliating confession, but we are all of us made out of the same stuff. [...] Where we differ from each other is purely in accidentals: in dress, manner, tone of voice, religious opinions, personal appearance, tricks of habit, and the like. [...] Sooner or later one comes to the dreadful universal thing called human nature. ("Decay of Lying" 220)

In an attempt to reproduce detail, the specific facts which make up each human's existence, the naturalists and other 'vulgar' realists forget that most of these incidentals are incidental. In this way, Wilde's ideas are aligned with the anti-individualistic typology of character favored by many of the next century's historical materialist critics.<sup>44</sup>

Although it may be fair to say that Wilde might not recognize these types as evolving through time, they do demonstrate a very specific social, class-based physiognomy. The Vanes, for instance, are identifiable largely through their occupations and position, and their actions bear out these positions in much the ways that we would expect: the mother as fallen woman and possible precursor of the daughter, the son as gruff avenger, and all three attracted to or spiteful of upper-crust gentlemen. I have already discussed Pater's comments about the lifelikeness of Wilde's gentle-society

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<sup>44</sup> See Lukács (35).

characters, but it bears mentioning that the members of it we encounter in the novel are not especially dissimilar. Wilde used himself as their model, as he indicated in an oft-quoted letter, in which he writes that the narrative “contains much of [himself] in it” because, Wilde says, he considers himself a Basil, “the world” thinks him a Henry, and Dorian is who he “would like to be” (“Ralph Payne” 585). These characters attend the same parties, go to the same plays, and are members of the same clubs. They are differentiated primarily by a moral sense that—for the dissenter Wotton and his protégé—may be opposed to Hallward’s, which seems to represent the general view. Lord Wotton’s rebellion against his cultural values, however, requires not only the standard view to sustain it and give his small, never-acted upon rebellions meaning, but Henry’s and Dorian’s very contrariness is another manifestation of the privileges associated with their class. The elucidation of contrary opinions is simply the way these occupation-less men occupy themselves during their ample leisure time. Wilde’s characters, then, are less filled-in or fleshed-out than those of the naturalists and other vulgar or excessive realists, but, being less singular, they are also more identifiable and arguably more relatable. No one cares what happens to a Zola character, Wilde suggests, perhaps because they exist largely to be ground down (“Decay of Lying” 220).<sup>45</sup> Wilde’s approach to character—indeed to the art of the novel itself—is not to abandon realism, but to heighten and refine it. What he is calling for is *not*—to summon up two more of his adjectival descriptors—“unimaginative realism” but rather “imaginative reality” (222). The gothic mode with its romantic origins and its historicist inflections is one of the principal vehicles through which Wilde ‘reimagines’ realism in his attempt to save it from naturalism and other supposed vulgarizations and excesses.

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<sup>45</sup>Not unlike Le Fanu’s characters, actually.

## Wilde Gothic: Decadence & Degeneration

For Austen and Dickens, the admixture of gothic tropes to realist presentations foregrounds the historical underpinnings of material existence, both for the world of the novel and the ‘real’ world which functions as its own model and governing analogue. Anachronism functioned productively, as the past’s more harmful or repressive legacies temporarily rise only to be put down again—it reminds characters and readers that elements of the past had value, even while stressing that we are ultimately the better for its disappearance or diminishment. For Le Fanu, history exists not as a force of progressive (if uneven) change, but as the long record of human suffering, brought about by self-reinforcing systems of material exchange and bureaucratic administrations whose outward appearances change, but whose own arcane laws and overarching cruelty are eternal. The gothic materialism of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* demonstrates elements of both approaches, put to new ends. Wildean gothic seems to posit a dialectical, teleological view of history, in which periods of anachronism occasionally bubble up ‘into the narrative,’ disrupting time’s flow. But these anachronistic disturbances—rather than re-contesting old conflicts in order to commemorate what has past and congratulate what is present—serve instead as a *withdrawal* from time and its passage. This can be understood once we recognize that the anti-teleology that Wilde develops in *Dorian Gray* is degenerative rather than progressive: it looks much the same, but operates in reverse, and ends in entropic dissipation.

This distinction is not immediately apparent when looking at Wilde’s own commentary elsewhere. In “The Soul of Man” and briefly here in “The Critic as Artist,” Wilde recapitulates elements of the Marxist-Hegelian, materialist teleology evidenced by

his predecessors: “[men] rage against Materialism, as they call it, forgetting that there has been no material improvement that has not spiritualized the world” (257). As in Le Fanu, there is a conscious undermining of the distinction between matter and spirit, form and energy; as in Austen and Dickens there is the acknowledgement that the way to men’s souls is through their stomachs. In the next part of this same formulation, however, Wilde deploys his gift for paradox to unravel it all, writing that “there have been few, if any, spiritual awakenings that have not wasted the world’s faculties in barren hopes, and fruitless aspirations, and empty or trammelling creeds. What is termed Sin is an essential element of progress” (ibid.). The idea of the coming era of pure spirit after Hegel or of socialist utopia after Marx becomes for Wilde just another sham, destined to tantalize but not fulfill we holders of ‘barren’ hope. It is less improvements in conditions of labor and reductions in want and scarcity, and more the action of what others call ‘Sin’ which motivates progress, as Wilde says, “[without which] the world would stagnate, or grow old, or become colourless” (ibid.).

Wilde’s novel, character, and ostensible sins were labeled ‘degenerate’ by some contemporary commentators, including Max Nordau, but Wilde himself sees degeneration somewhat differently: as the slow collapse of culture under the weight of repression and its loss of the sense of beauty which brings renewal and vitality. This is ultimately why Dorian Gray is the titular, tragic hero of Wilde’s gothic materialist novel. His self-seeking in ‘sin’ is an attempt—what is and can only be a failed attempt—to save the world. To give it back the spark and ‘colour’ it formerly possessed, before the world ‘stagnates’ from repression or dies of heat death. We are now very far removed from the rebirth promised by Pater’s *Renaissance*, which concluded by calling upon his readers to

make “as much as possible of the interval that remain[s]” so that all may wring the last drop out of their lives (251). His pupil’s *Dorian Gray* “responds to Pater by projecting the dark implications of Pater’s attitudes and formulations in a mythic Gothic narrative of destruction and self-destruction” (Riquelme 610). The first is a stirring *carpe diem* for each life that will, someday, run its due course; the second is a desperate, doomed struggle for an age that already has.

The messianic aspect of Dorian’s position emerges out of the ways that the novel’s gothic historiography works to equate lineage with loss. This is a reversal of the earlier novels discussed in this work, in which descendants—burdened with the frauds and sins of their ancestors—finally overcome them. Progress in those novels is challenged, but is triumphant. The lament for the lost—what Pip (especially) experiences, is a necessary precondition for regeneration. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* descendants are burdened with some of the same frauds and sins, but attempts to overcome them are inseparable from attempts to escape them. For Dorian, the avoidance of loss and decay becomes his primary (pre-)occupation—remember the picture that he hopes will keep him eternally beautiful—and he finds there is little he can preserve except his own visage and his acquired treasures.

The story of Dorian’s own parentage, for example, is fairly typical, gothic-romance fare, and one that indicates the strongly material character of the gothic. His mother was a beautiful lady, his father a soldier. Both are dead within a year of his birth, but within all of the violence and melodrama is the strong indication that their affair was star-crossed because class-crossing. Dorian’s mother, we are told, “[ran] away with a penniless young fellow, a mere nobody sir, a subaltern in a foot regiment” (32). It is not

enough that Dorian's father be low-born, he must be at once 'penniless,' a 'mere nobody,' a 'subaltern' and in a *'foot regiment'*—all in the same utterance. He is killed in a duel by another ““rascally”” lower-class type, a ““Beligan brute”” hired by Lady Devereux's father, Lord Kelso (ibid.). She dies shortly after giving birth, and Kelso—paying the position-appropriate price for his cruelty—“ate his chop alone at the club for some time afterwards” (ibid.). Curious about these events many years later, Dorian examines the paintings of his mother and his other ancestors. The theory of personality and personhood he develops from these investigations is a rebuke of modern psychology, with its emphasis on development resulting from one's own experiences, and instead is largely driven by inheritance:

To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. He loved to stroll through the gaunt cold picture gallery of his country house and look at the various portraits of those whose blood flowed in his veins. (119)

This section's rhetoric makes it perhaps the most recognizably gothic in the text: we have all of our requisite references to inheritance and monstrousness and blood and death. But the actual content of these 'strange legacies' is unclear.

They are alarming not because they are necessarily unusual, but because they cannot be fully known. While Dorian believes that he “had got from [Lady Beckenham] his beauty, and his passion for the beauty of others,” there is no real validation of this other than his own interpretation—and this very interpretation is thrown into some doubt when the very next line indicates that the woman in the picture is laughing “*at him*” (121, my emphasis). Similarly, Dorian's mother left “strange stories... about her lovers,” stories that he assumes may be true of his own, in time, but what those stories are and

what they might mean are never provided. Editors and critics have traced references to actual historical figures that Wilde's narrator provides, and a number of connections can and have been drawn from these. Most concentrate on the instances of sexual profligacy and same-sex desire, generally seen as coded references to these same qualities in Dorian and/or Wilde. While these paintings are allusive, and while what they depict is often symbolic—we see in different paintings the “star of the Garter,” and wine-stained lips, and the cups which were once full, vine leaves in hair, and so forth—the meanings of those allusions and symbols are far less legible than their ostensible markers (120-1). They tantalize with meanings that they can rarely sate us with. Even the room containing the portraits is described as ‘gaunt,’ ostensibly narrow but—working within the gothic discourse and thematics surrounding it—might well mean “[a]bnormally lean” or “[h]ungry, greedy, ravenous.”<sup>46</sup> Hollow, in other words. The gothic legacies of Dorian's ancestral portraits seem to indicate that while history is determinative, the meanings of that history are not always clear.

It is not only genealogical history that Dorian studies. Indeed, chapter XI's timeless reveries are also a meditation on time itself. Wilde creates in Dorian both an observer and participant in the passage of time, and an archaeologist of its meanings. In this chapter Dorian becomes above all else an historian: the narrator, recounting his studies, rattles off page after page of sometimes quite detailed narratives of forebears and objects and disciplines which he takes up for a season or more. Dorian's collections of antiquities, for example, are not simply fanciful, reality-effecting details, but rely upon his author's extensive research: Sheton Waldrep provides sources for Dorian's commentary on his jewels, for example, while suggesting that the “encyclopedic”

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<sup>46</sup>OED., Adj, 2a and b.



classification of these objects resembles both Huysmans and even naturalists such as Zola (109). While it is certainly true that both assemble, collect, and classify in order to effectively narrate the materials of their present, I disagree with Waldrep's suggestion that for Dorian—as for Zola—that history itself is irrelevant, since “one can confront only the present” (ibid.). Rather, it seems more likely that Dorian is hollowing out his own moment within a drama that he is very much aware of, both its beginning(s) and coming end. History is a determining, processional force, and so it must be destroyed, if possible, or hidden from, if not.

Dorian endeavors to forget a past and avoid a passage that he more than anyone else—even and perhaps especially Henry Wotton—fully understands. There are a large number of scenes in which Dorian seeks this purposeful annihilation of history, and a number of strategies through which he attempts to carry it out. After killing Basil Hallward, the artist who painted the record of Dorian's personal history, he longs to recede from it, “to be driven out of the mind, to be drugged with poppies, to be strangled” (135). When he awakes from sleep, his first thought is to reimagine it, to have his eyes open “upon a world that had been refashioned anew in the darkness for our pleasure, a world in which things would have fresh shapes and colours, and be changed, or have other secrets, a world in which the past would have little or no place, or survive, at any rate, in no conscious form of obligation or regret” (109). In other words, a world in which time's legacies were no longer passed down, history has no meaning, and where Dorian can finally be free of both. Later, he attempts to rub out history's spots through ritual and repetition: the knife that killed Hallward Dorian cleaned “many times, till there was no stain left upon it,” in an attempt to make it effectively past-less (183). He recognizes that

even this is fruitless, that the knife still carries its bloody history, when he purposefully uses the same knife that had “killed the painter [to] kill the painter's work, and all that that meant. It would kill the past, and when that was dead he would be set free” (183). The past, of course, cannot be cleaned away or killed or actually destroyed: the knife is still the material agent of Dorian’s murderous action and his will, just as the painting is the material reflection—though he believes it the agent—of his corruption.

Dorian’s studies, then, are an attempt to understand the legacies of history and the present’s continuing decline; his sins and experiments are an attempt to escape or even reverse it, following Wilde’s own admonition that the sin is the ‘essential’ spur towards progress. Towards the end of the novel, he comes to realize that even this is not really possible, and to long for the end. A seemingly innocuous conversation about flirtations with Wotton and Lady Narborough takes on a rather apocalyptic cast:

‘*Fin de siècle,*’ murmured Lord Henry.

‘*Fin de globe,*’ answered his hostess.

‘I wish it were *fin du globe,*’ said Dorian, with a sigh. ‘Life is such a great disappointment.’ (149)

Dorian’s disappointment and his resignation are in stark contrast to his attitude in chapter XI, in which he comes to recognize the truth of our fallen and still-falling state, and against which he explicitly positions himself and his explorations:

As he looked back upon man moving through History, he was haunted by a feeling of loss. So much had been surrendered! and to such little purpose! There had been mad wilful rejections, monstrous forms of self-torture and self-denial, whose origin was fear, and whose result was a degradation infinitely more terrible than that fancied degradation which, in their ignorance, they had sought to escape. (108)

Dorian's experiments—his collections and sins and reveries—occur within the context of an ongoing historical drama, a drama that he is hoping to overthrow or at least avoid. This section of the novel, so often studied and picked over for its hidden allusions and meanings,<sup>47</sup> is perhaps most significant for its development of Dorian himself as historian and critic, searching for the meanings of the various knowledges and rituals and objects he collects. The fear that he claims leads to 'monstrous' repressions and rejections is, of course, the fear of social sanction... but it is one that comes out of a lack of interrogation, the inability to historicize, understand, and therefore undermine or deconstruct that sanction. Instead, Dorian, in fully heroic, messianic mode, learns history in order to reverse its course, forestalling the degeneration that comes from the 'degradation of ignorance.' The hoped-for result is a renewal and rebirth, "a new Hedonism that was to recreate life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely puritanism," the dominant sanction of Dorian's own time (ibid.).

The world is eternal, but its riches are used up or ignored and pass away. Dorian's studies find him increasingly "saddened by the reflection of the ruin that Time brought on beautiful and wonderful things" (115). While—through the portrait—Dorian's corporeal self has eluded decay, this is not the case for "material things" (ibid.). One of the reasons that time is an enemy—the greatest legacy, which consumes everything and will only become hungrier as it marches on—is the cumulative effect it has on treasures and valuables that slowly wear out and decay. His collection of these objects then, the transference of them to his own possession, is at least partially an attempt to control this

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<sup>47</sup> Patrick R. O'Malley, for example, traces the homosexual meanings of Dorian's priestly vestments (180), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that the chapter's frequent orientalisms, along with some of the descriptors Wilde applies to his objects (including 'subtle' and 'curious') have similar connotations (174-5).

process, to save them from being lost or falling away. To Walter Benjamin, the collector's actions reveal his "feeling of responsibility toward his property," one in which we could say that our typical attitude toward possession and possessor are reversed (66). If "the most distinguished trait of a collection will always be its transmissibility," then Dorian's belongings are not only being protected from the passing of the age, but he is also building, he thinks, a new age to pass them *to* (ibid.).

A contrasting view of Wildean time is presented by Eagleton, who describes Wilde's approach to history as "more Darwinian than teleological," conceived in "nature [as] an inexorable force," and which therefore destroys its "rationality" (329). This "chapter of senseless accidents," models a history which proceeds but does not progress, and which, presumably, therefore, is of little value (ibid.). The endpoint of the novel indicates that this is true, as far as it goes—but only if we are understanding Darwinian, evolutionary time as red in tooth and claw, i.e., primarily destructive. The evolution of human and social time which Wilde models does have a direction, and it seems to have a coming endpoint—we see it proceed in one retort from *fin de siècle* to *fin du globe*. Dorian's position as failed messiah is indicative of the text's dialectical understanding of history, but one that is perversely eschatological rather than teleological. Because its entire procession is one of *regress* rather than progress, history in the novel is hopelessly rather than productively gothicized. Unfortunately, Dorian's small explorations and innovations—the "Sin [that is the] essential element of progress"—is not enough to overcome the downstream current, perhaps because he is not sufficiently committed; Dorian hates and hides from his unknown sins, too ("Critic as Artist" 257).

## Written on the Skin

One of the more striking features of *Dorian Gray's* historiography rests in the way that causal history is recorded: frequently on the skin, that malleable surface which both presents an enveloping surface and mediates interior subjectivity. Wilde's humans can even be 'read' in some of the ways that the novel's preface suggests we read art. Added in part as a response to critics who wrongly or perhaps aggressively criticized the serialized version, it famously warns that "[a]ll art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril" (3). It is a strange formulation, one that seems straightforward but becomes more difficult the more it is considered. If art is always acting as both surface and symbol (even if these properties are somehow independent of the other) each suggests that there is something else present, a depth to give meaning to the surface, a referent for every symbol. If neither are present, then we are left without a reliable, grounded center: its surfaces attract attention but deflect understanding, its symbols refer to essences and tenors outside of itself. That Wilde's art is actually *about* surfaces, about inauthenticity, or a "decentered identity and desire," has been noted by a number of critics, including Jonathan Dollimore, for example (14). But if phenomena such as 'human nature' are relatively fixed, then it is, after all, rather unimportant: only outward actions and visible ornaments take on meaning, and each reinforce the other.

The skin is the ultimate outward sign, the barrier that both gives up its secrets and hides something quite important beneath its surface. The novel makes great use of contemporary medical and psychological literature—tracts on the dangers of masturbation, for example—to argue that the markers of vice, instability, and

degeneration manifest themselves externally, on the skin (Mighall 196). Unsurprisingly then, this concept is most clearly elucidated by that great creator of surfaces, Basil Hallward, who claims that sin “is a thing that writes itself across a man’s face. It cannot be concealed. People talk sometimes of secret vices. There are no such things. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hands even” (126). These signs, so prejudicial, are also rather unspecific. Basil does not indicate whether certain vices lead to predetermined marks and defects, on definite parts of the body, or whether they are generalized and simply indicate deviance. Rather, it seems as if ‘a [single] vice’ can be indicated on three different regions of the body. This interpretation is also supported by the example that Hallward provides for his theory, about a man he would not paint because of his revulsion at the sight of ““*something* in the shape of his fingers that [he] hated”” (ibid., my emphasis). But when Basil later received confirmation of what that ‘something’ indicates, he can only orbit the symptom’s cause(s), never revealing what it was he ““fancied”” nor why the man’s life is ““dreadful”” (ibid.). If the signs of sin are shifting, murky, it is only because the sins they express are themselves missing, exiled, beyond the domain of what can be known.

We could say that uncertain sins leave indefinite marks, but specified sins leave explicit ones. Dorian’s picture reacts to his actions in real time, signaling the effects even of actions whose results Dorian is quite ignorant. Sybil Vane’s death, for example, is marked by a cruel turn of the mouth (88), and Dorian’s murder of Hallward produces the effect of “sweated blood” upon his likeness’ hand (145). These effects have a definitiveness to them, a literalness, even. The portrait, taking upon itself the role of the

skin it has displaced, becomes a surface which mirrors rather than conceals. Its meanings are plain, and its painted surface need not be penetrated, its symbols so literal they need not be read. Contrast the flat painting to the living, skin-shrouded, less-decipherable bodies that Hallward describes, for instance, and we find the latter to be far more impenetrable containers.

One fruitful avenue of our investigations is the too-legible skin belonging to the Dorian-like protagonist of Wilde's earlier story, "Lord Arthur Saville's Crime." In it, Saville meets a palm-reader who, he is terrified to learn, can read the secret content in the marks on his body, the "blood-red sign of crime [...] written on his hand" (7). Told he is to be a murderer, Saville attempts to save his fiancé pain by fulfilling this destiny in a manner which will leave him both unsuspected and hopefully richer, by killing off a relative. Frustrated because neither of his attempts succeeds, he comes across the palm-reader while walking through London after midnight. Saville proceeds to push him into the river, drowning him, and thereby fulfills the prophecy. The palm of the hand as a determining and compelling force presents as another highly structured system: a complex network of lines and wrinkles lay out the contexts which determine one's worldview or character or even actions. Podgers the cheiromantist—another kind of critic, or perhaps an historian of the future—searches for the meanings written upon Saville's skin, and can correctly diagnose those visible signs. But he is ultimately unable to penetrate any further, to discover what lies beneath the surface skin, a failure which for him actually is fatal. Podgers rightly assumes Saville will be horrified by this knowledge, but wrongly assumes he will bootlessly attempt to avoid it: instead, Saville decides to just get it over with. It could be argued that the "unseen power" which determines Arthur's

action is criticism itself—excellent at broad strokes, always finding its own concerns first (ibid.).

Read alongside *Dorian Gray*, both stories demonstrate that while most meanings are to be found on the surface, this is because there is no interiority. At least, none that we have access to. Not for art, and not for the people and objects produced by it, all of which are only the “*vessels* the potter fashions,” containing nothing (ibid., emphasis added). Arthur’s impatience to fulfill his prophecy, Dorian’s insistence on finding—or, failing that—instilling within things values that last, suggest that hermeneutic uncertainty ceaselessly haunts whomever encounters it. That people and things are essentially empty, devoid of meaning, suggests that they can—perhaps must—be ‘filled up’ by erstwhile murderers, messiahs, and literary critics.

### **Consuming & Collecting**

In order to save or perhaps produce meaning, the novel’s eleventh chapter is filled with things that Dorian gathers to himself, and these things seem to solicit us, waiting to be filled up and/or read. Bowlby sees them through Wilde’s frequent interpolations with *fin-de-siècle* advertising, commodity, and consumption culture (17). Advertising, whose function she equates to the Wildean epigram, produces desire rather than pleasure (7-8). Both are ‘skin deep,’ the latter promises wisdom but produces only the temporary frustration of that desire; the former is only the smiling face of commerce, as divorced from the materiality of the product it sells as that product is from the hands that produced it. In Bowlby’s view, Dorian Gray is “a walking advertisement, living proof that youth and beauty can, after all, be eternal” (13). The logic of the advertisement, as she points



out, is built upon a superficial promise: its ‘proof’ more important than the underlying reality, and is ultimately—even for Gray, it seems—hollow. It must be noted, however, that while the ideology and discourses of the advertisement run through much of the text, the novel provides practically no concrete examples. Reading *Dorian Gray* alongside “The Canterville Ghost,” for example, it quickly becomes evident just how much more thoughtful and sustained Wilde’s treatment of advertising and consumption is in the latter text.<sup>48</sup>

Dorian Gray’s aestheticism and its inseparability from the kinds of conspicuous consumption portrayed in the novel has been the focus of a number of materialist critics. For Theodor Adorno, the novel’s depiction of “the interiors of a chic aestheticism resemble smart antique shops and auction halls and thus the commercial world Wilde ostensibly disdained” (16). Here, ‘interiority,’ the study of the interiors of parlors and sitting rooms, is the investigation of confusion, as Adorno accuses Wilde’s explicit ideology of concealing another, truer one. A similar stance of unmasking is carried on by Moyra Haslett, who argues that “for all its dilettantish settings and characters” the novel is really a representation of “the commodity culture of late Victorian Britain” (244). Returning again to Bowlby, the extremities of dress and behavior indicative of the aesthete make him not a protest against commercialization, but rather the prototypical new consumer (7). These analyses are helpful, but perhaps incomplete. More useful, I think, is the work of Thorstein Veblen, whose *Theory of the Leisure Class*, published

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<sup>48</sup> In the story, an American family moving into an English haunted house is utterly unperturbed by its ghostly occupant, and uses a variety of products (Pinkerton’s Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent, Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator, Dr. Dobell’s tincture, etc.) to clean up its ectoplasmic messes and residues. Even the message on the sign that the children hang to taunt the ghost takes the form of a jingle, complete with pseudo-archaic misspellings: “*Ye Onlie True and Originale Spook. Beware of Ye Imitationes. All Others are Counterfeite*” (218).

during Wilde's lifetime, analyzed the economic lifecycle of the idle gentlemen that Wilde wrote about. For Veblen, an integral aspect of "conspicuous consumption," a term coined in this work, is *waste*: the tendency of the leisured individual to cast off or throw away productive resources and capital in order to establish and maintain his social position (85). Veblen's conspicuous consumption, a form of 'luxury' expenditure, is meant to impress rivals by performing market virility, but ultimately constitutes a form of economic entropy. Capital expended in this way is no longer able to reproduce itself or sustain anything other than one person's vanity. While there is little doubt that Dorian Gray is quite vain, there is nothing conspicuous about his consumption, nothing diffusive about his outlays. If anything, the strongly entropic force of the material world is what his messianic mission explicitly sets itself against. He attempts to un-scatter the world's resources and treasures, to bring them safely back together again so that they can be preserved—or at least, eternally and productively consumed.

Similarly, to Georges Bataille, *expenditure* is the name given to nonproductive, wasteful consumption of currency and resources, including outlays for "luxury, mourning, war, cults, ...sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity" and more (118). To be a 'consumer' is literally to be a destroyer, to use up and discard, although we often forget this when we are discussing people's buying habits. Much of our own consumption is 'irrational' or unnecessary and therefore unproductive, as Bataille theorizes (117). It paradoxically begins with the *accumulation* of objects. It is unproductive, wasteful expenditure to the extent that the use value sought is social prestige, or the satisfaction of a particularized fetish or other temporary attachment.

For Jean Baudrillard, the subject's stance towards their objects frequently takes the form of a passion or love affair, rather than one that sees them as the instruments that mediate encounters with the world. This is, unsurprisingly, more true the less an object is used for its 'intended' purpose (85-6). One may, for example, fashion an identity for himself through his purchases, and situate himself in relation to others by his choice of cufflink, for example—its maker, materials, and design—even if their practical function can be accomplished at a fraction of the price, or even foregone.

Returning to advertising, Raymond Williams has argued that western culture's frequent hand-wringing over its own 'materialism' is largely predicated upon the faulty assumption that our advertising-driven purchase-mania is actually about the objects themselves, their physicality and usefulness as tools and implements:

If we were sensibly materialist, in that part of our living in which we use things, we should find most advertising to be of an insane irrelevance. Beer would be enough for us, without the additional promise that in drinking it we show ourselves to be manly, young in heart, or neighborly. A washing-machine would be a useful machine to wash clothes, rather than in indication that we are forward-looking or an object of envy to our neighbors. ("The Magic System" 185)

Within consumer and advertising culture, therefore, it is "social and personal" meanings that are sold and purchased, and the products which contain or encompass them are a means rather than an end in themselves: we pay for alcohol but buy 'manliness' (ibid.). The values lent to products by advertisements must be consumed along with the product they possess in order to make room for future purchases. It is not that destruction or loss can not or should not occur: that Williams uses beer as his first example indicates only that the proper (and properly materialist) relationship to goods of all kinds comes from experiencing them through their first, best use. A coat purchased to meet the demands of the weather may well wear out, but will probably last longer than the same coat

purchased to meet the demands of style or even the demands of even one's own shifting tastes. This is, in fact, what Bataille would call 'productive' consumption. Consumerism, however, the mania for consumption—especially unproductive expenditure—is the quest for the *temporary* accumulation of meaning(s), an acquired immanence. It is the relationship to goods that cheerily admits they have an expiration date, are only good for a season, perhaps an evening. My contention is that Dorian Gray, fighting against the passage of time, is actually looking for *permanence*: for meanings that last.

In this sense, I would like to complicate some of the traditional materialist readings of material goods in *Dorian Gray*, especially in regards to the treasures which fill up his storerooms and the bulk of chapter XI. Haslett, for example, suggests that these antiques, while “seemingly removed from the tawdriness of the market” are nevertheless “defined by their expensiveness, labeled in terms which express their price, or exchange value” and are described as if they were objects in “a sales catalogue” (240). This would seem to support Veblen's claim, that the appreciator of goods judged to be worth-while on the basis of their aesthetics actually experiences “gratification [derived from a recognition] of costliness masquerading under the name of beauty” (128). Both analyses require some understanding on the part of Dorian (or perhaps, vicariously, on the part of the reader<sup>49</sup>) of what his treasures actually cost, an exchange value that can be assigned to them in order for them to be properly appreciated, even vicariously. But what is increasingly evident about Dorian's goods when reading through the extensive lists of them—unending numbers of books and religious vestments and perfumes and musical instruments and jewels and embroideries and more—is that these items are *priceless*.

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<sup>49</sup> In much the same way that Austen predicates many of her meanings on the assumed product knowledge of her readers, see chapter II.

Both without cost—none are listed or suggested—and beyond any conception of cost. The list of instruments, for example, strongly intimates that many of them are unique, the last of their kind, obtained from the “few savage tribes that have survived contact with Western civilizations” or raided from “the tombs of dead nations” (111). His list of precious stones is equally impressive, and includes what appears to be the world’s finest turquoise *de la vieille roche* (113). These objects are lushly described, and they are certainly admired, not as commodities but as *artifacts*; Dorian’s home is not a market but a museum.

A sacred, private museum. Secreted away and investigated by Dorian in private, most of his collections are never seen by others,<sup>50</sup> making for a rather *in-conspicuous* form of consumption... if we can even call it this when the acquisition and preservation of these objects so often takes the form of a rescue. That preservation is a significant—perhaps primary—aspect of Dorian’s experiential encounters with his objects is signaled by his frequent ruminations on “the ruin that Time brought on beautiful and wonderful things” (115). Time’s meaning here is highlighted by the word’s capitalization, its purpose revealed to be that of the destroyer. Dorian laments what he has been unable to save, what Time has consumed before he was born and so could not acquire. We are provided with an extensive catalogue of these lost objects and their histories, running more than a page (115-6). Their not-quite appearance, signaling the host of objects that Dorian will always lack, is itself an imagined collection, which the text’s narrative files neatly between wall tapestries and other embroidered goods (114, 116).

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<sup>50</sup> There are exceptions, including the time Dorian attended a masquerade “as Anne de Joyeuse... in a dress covered with five hundred and sixty pearls” (112-3).

Dorian Gray's many objects are properly collections, and not consumables. The collection, as theorized by Benjamin and Susan Stewart, is an arena of both permanence and forgetting. For Dorian, to whom "everything that he collected in his lovely house, were to be to him means of forgetfulness" it is the only remedy for the cosmos' prevailing entropy. It is, in fact, the way that he will save at least a semblance of the past's value and beauty, hiding it from the ignorance of the present and the ravages of the future (117). To Benjamin, the collector can be identified by their

very mysterious relationship to ownership... a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—that is, their usefulness—but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate. The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. ("Unpacking" 60)

Benjamin's 'magic circle' is the membrane that marks possession, of course, but also the focus of our interest. On one side of it, a world of miscellaneous objects and things, of disorder and decay. Safely inside, these can be classified and examined and adored—and so it is the penetration of this membrane that is the goal of the collector's lust. However, divorcing the object from the world outside—from its natural contexts and origins—also deprives it of its history.<sup>51</sup> This is much the point. For Stewart, "the point of the collection is forgetting—starting again in such a way that a finite number of elements create, by virtue of their combination, an infinite reverie" (*On Longing* 152). Forgetting is itself a kind of hollowing out, the removal of accumulated meanings when physical objects are spatially and chronologically arranged to fit the desires of their owner. This

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<sup>51</sup> A similar argument is made by Eliza Glick, who also sees Dorian's collections as an attempt to find an alternative system of value outside of commoditization. For Glick, the forgetfulness of the collection is a way to "salvage wholeness from the ruins of history" rather than to head off apocalypse; both allow him to "disappear inside" bubbles of timelessness, but with differing motivations. See "The Dialectics of Dandyism" (140-6).

forgetting serves to elide the material history of each object's creation in favor of a new matrix of relationships. Stewart further suggests that "[w]hose labor made the ark is not the question: the question is what is inside," and certainly Marx's alienated laborers are here alienated for the final time, when the labor that 'creates' the collection becomes the work of its acquisition, arrangement, and display (152). Paradoxically, however, this dehistoricization serves a productive purpose: if the history of the object as distinct artifact is compromised or even sacrificed when it crosses the membrane into the collection, the balancing factor seems to be that—within this 'magic circle' of reverie, or held fast in a box in a trunk in a room in a house—its fate is also eliminated. No longer circulating individually, removed from the world of exchange, it achieves a kind of stasis. Since for Dorian the passage of time is always a passing away, in his messianic mode Dorian's collection sacrifices each object in order to redeem it. This small sin, then, is the necessary innovation that may (too briefly) halt history's slow decline.

These theorizations are useful, but perhaps incomplete. Even if the history of the ark is lost, if its creator is forgotten or irrelevant, the ark itself still belongs to a strange class of object, one worthy of study in its own right. It has a mythical resonance and a physical presence far outstripping what we are told is important, that is, 'what lies inside.' The ark, then, is still worthy of study in its status *as container*.<sup>52</sup> And similar objects—desks, chests, boxes, drawers, cigarette cases and jars—everywhere surround and interpenetrate *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. They are collected, and they house collections. They are often nested: containers inside containers (inside containers). These

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<sup>52</sup> Stewart writes very briefly about containers in *On Longing*, noting that the immense popularity of collecting "cruets, pitchers, salt-and-pepper shakers, vases, teapots, and boxes" reinforces the idea that collection itself is an attempt to establish "control" over the world and its matter by demarcating boundaries (159).

are material objects whose own beauty and lushness seem to attract us to—but finally divert us from—the meanings they supposedly contain. They function as sigils for how the text itself promises meanings it cannot produce, either because they are unspeakable or because they are placeholders for meanings and modes as of yet undiscovered. It is the ark's 'secret'—even in Stewart's rhetorical formulation—that is truly alienated, forever foreclosed to us.

### **Containing Meaning**

Theorizations of the collection account for networks of objects; they establish the boundaries across which they pass, and what crossing them entails and means. This final section will look at a specific genus of collected object, one which appears practically everywhere in the world of the novel, but especially in Dorian's house. This is the *container*: the boxes, chests, cabinets and yes, even closets which constitute *Dorian Gray* are significant, not so much for what they contain but for what they lack; for the meaningful content(s) they continually refuse to provide. Unlike those belonging to his gothic-materialist predecessors, Wilde's *fin-de-siècle* gothic object is less a harbinger for hidden social relations than a new class of object which is a cipher rather than sigil; it haunts us not with the sudden return of repressed history, not by the secret it (does not) conceal, but rather by materializing mystery.

In this way, it is closely related to the tradition of the 'terrifying object' which frequently recurs in narratives of gothic and supernatural horror. In "The Epistemology of the Horror Story," Stewart suggests that these objects disrupt

our assumed patterns of significance [since] the sign appears only as form. The sign's referent is clouded in an ambiguity which we cannot decipher [...] the



referent of the apparent part is cloaked in an amorphousness which is terrifying: the shadow on the wall, the hand appearing from behind a curtain, the footsteps on the stair, the broken lock. The part has become monstrous and suppressed the whole to which it should belong. (37, 42)

In the typical story of gothic horror, then, a metonymy is produced, but the necessarily associated counterpart or meaning is divorced from it. The terrifying object is the harbinger of a reality, entity, or force as-yet revealed, so most of its affective power is lent to the signifier that is its herald but that simultaneously serves to ‘suppress’ that to which it belongs.

Somewhat similar objects appear in the texts which we have already covered: in *Great Expectations*, the ‘two one-pound notes’ that Pip receives from the stranger at the public house, for example, signal just such an association, one whose referent is missing or misunderstood. These bills represent—actually are quite literally a part of—an existing, if nascent, social relation between giver and receiver, benefactor and beneficiary. But the truth of this relationship is as unclear to Pip as it is to the reader, and is in any case quite thoroughly swallowed up by the gross physicality which overwhelms and represses the notes’ status as money. Described as “fat” and “sweltering,” they are always *two one-pound notes*, and never ‘two pounds,’ because to become so would mean they had re-entered the world of exchange as currency, and could perform their intended function as the first, small attempt at the repayment of a debt (113). Instead, “they remained, a nightmare” (ibid).

Wilde’s objects, however, are somewhat different than Dickens’s, and the equally different stance towards the procession of history that separates Wilde from his gothic-materialist predecessors also reconfigures his ‘terrifying’ object. For Dickens, the especially flesh-like object signaled a/and repressed personal and social history, the real

horrors that must be identified, confronted, and eventually surpassed. It is terrifying because the past is horrid, if not fully understood. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, however, the terrifying object is reconfigured as the beautiful or sacred one—not so surprising, considering Wilde’s aesthetic sensibility. His signature object is the especially ornate vessel, which both points to and also conceals a meaning as-yet revealed (but which we as readers and critics desperately try to fill in). The container itself, however, remains—not a nightmare, but instead, the beautified relic of the past’s fading majesty.

The ornateness of the text’s boxes and chests forces us into recognition. Our attentions are attracted to these vessels while also distracted from what they ostensibly contain. Wilde’s textual container is so striking, that we may never arrive at opening it, or—if we do—find that what is inside to be far less interesting. Of course, the container first of all contains itself: the materials and labor hours that went into its own production and, importantly, its ornamentation. Adolf Loos, writing about the social ramifications of the ornamental object and its production, claimed that the ornament itself was “no longer a natural product of our culture, but a symptom of backwardness or degeneracy,” little more than “wasted” labor, material, and capital (170, 171). He envisions a time, perhaps “after thousands of years,” when one would pay as much for “a plain box” as an ornamented one, and so the craftsman would need only work “four hours instead of eight” (171).<sup>53</sup> Loos’ progressive historicism sees the ornate box as something that should rightly be left behind, and will ultimately be lost to history—even if his glorious future will require a transformation of the social psyche, resulting in an eagerness to exchange the same amount of cash for half the work. Wilde’s opposite historical view

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<sup>53</sup> Forty years later, Baudrillard suggested that the décor of his time was notable chiefly for its “absence of style,” designed for living spaces and people that demanded “maximum functionality” (17).

might be pessimistic, but it requires only that Dorian treasure the excess labor that makes his boxes ornate rather than ‘plain.’ We could argue that, contrary to Veblen’s theorization of a transformed fixation upon exchange value, or the similar process behind Marx’s commodity fetish, Wilde’s hoarding of objects is really the stockpiling, perhaps even *beautification* of labor value—the only way to preserve the art ‘work’ from being lost to a future in which it will be destroyed, or, after Loos, deemed unnecessary.

There are many, many of these ornate containers in the novel. In the very room, for example, where Dorian hangs his portrait—that flat, reflective surface which too easily gives up its meanings—there is also a “huge Italian *cassone*, with its fantastically-painted panels and its tarnished gilt mouldings, in which he had so often hidden himself as a boy” (101). In one respect, the connection between the objects is apparent: he is now hiding his current self, the one revealed in the painting, next to the chest where he once hid his childhood self. In a very real sense, however, the chest now sits (presumably) empty, and we never gain access to or an understanding of the Dorian that once hid inside it. The dissonance springs from the surfeit of information we receive about the appearance of the chest, its level of fine detail, and the dearth of information about the boy who once hid inside, and why he felt the need to.<sup>54</sup> If we peel back a layer, however, the same pattern repeats. This “large, well-proportioned” room that contains both painting and chest was, we are told, Dorian’s former play-room and study. His guardian built it for the little boy for “whom, for his strange likeness to his mother, and also for other reasons, he had always hated” (ibid.). What those ‘other reasons’ are we can never know, despite the importance that their mysteriousness suggests. Like Dorian’s *cassone*

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<sup>54</sup> Critical intervention, such as Rashkin’s sexual-abuse theorization, is needed to fill up the boy who once filled up the chest.

without a child, and Stewart's shadow without a hand, we have a highly physicalized signifier with only the murkiest of referents.

Perhaps the greatest example of this phenomenon appears late in the novel, not coincidentally, right after Gray tells Wotton and Lady Narborough that he is finally ready for the *fin de globe*. Feeling an overpowering desire to avoid both the memory of all of his actions, and their future consequences, he searches for something he has secreted away:

Between two of the windows stood a large Florentine cabinet, made out of ebony, and inlaid with ivory and blue lapis. He watched it as though it were a thing that could fascinate and make afraid, as though it held something that he longed for and yet almost loathed. His breath quickened. A mad craving came over him. He lit a cigarette and then threw it away. His eyelids drooped till the long fringed lashes almost touched his cheek. But he still watched the cabinet. At last he got up from the sofa on which he had been lying, went over to it, and, having unlocked it, touched some hidden spring. A triangular drawer passed slowly out. His fingers moved instinctively towards it, dipped in, and closed on something. It was a small Chinese box of black and gold-dust lacquer, elaborately wrought, the sides patterned with curved waves, and the silken cords hung with round crystals and tasselled in plaited metal threads. He opened it. Inside was a green paste waxy in lustre, the odour heavy and persistent.<sup>55</sup> (152-3)

In this scene, we have two equally ornate boxes, one nested inside the other. Clearly whatever is inside is very important to Dorian. It is not only secured within two objects, each surrounding it as doric pillars their shrine, but whatever it is he desires must not be shared: the lacquer box can be found only through the activation of a secret mechanism. This 'mad craving' is described in much the same way that prolonged absence from some necessary chemical or agent would be: he desires, needs, and hates what he will find inside. 'Withdrawal' here is quite literal: he is removing from its sanctum what he cannot bear to be separated from. However, once both membranes have been pierced, and he has

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<sup>55</sup> Many critical editions identify this concealed sin/substance as opium, although his subsequent trip to an opium den would seem to be unnecessary if this were the case.

reached the center of his protective circles, he “drew himself up, and glanced at the clock. It was twenty minutes to twelve. He put the box back, shutting the cabinet doors as he did so, and went into his bedroom” (153). The best explanation for this inconsistency is that—in some way like the painting which he keeps hidden and must always check up on—that he means to *protect* whatever exotic pleasure or sin he keeps so closely guarded, not to consume it.

Let us assume that the beautified container is Dorian’s time capsule, or ark, to use Stewart’s term. In a somewhat perverse adaptation of the story of Noah, Dorian hopes to store within it those—to us only guessed or half-unknown—new sins through which the world that he is increasingly sick of, the one coming to end, can be reborn. The sins that he treasures up and acts out, the little rebellions which are the ‘essential element of progress’ are the small antitheses on a dialectical gradient that runs ever towards an approaching midnight when everything will fall apart. That this time consciousness is always with him is explicitly indicated in the scene: he puts the lacquered box with its indistinguishable cargo away only *after* checking the clock, and realizes it is already ‘twenty minutes to twelve.’ Finding that it is getting very late, and the flood fast approaching, Dorian must constantly check upon the work he is charged to save, all the while uncertain about what he should or even can personally commit or contribute.

### **Eschatology**

Dorian Gray’s mission is not so different from our own: his stance is derived from his epistemology, one determined by a very specific interpretation of history. He believes he knows how to fill up the holes, crevices and lacks that he encounters as absences: he

will simply fill them up with golden, glittering sins: “sins whose fascination was more in the memory than in the doing of them, strange triumphs that gratified the pride more than the passions”—in other words, *sins that would live on*, well past their commission, and possibly into a new age, should they and we survive to see it (135). He fails, of course. It is quite likely that he could never have succeeded. Wilde could not imagine a way out of the boxes constructed of historical circumstance and its accompanying social censure, for his protagonist or himself.

The realist novel models rather than mimetically reproduces reality. It does this largely through the operative model of history it adopts. This should meet the standards of observable reality, and fit the facts as much as is reasonable without becoming excessive or vulgar. The presentation of history is necessarily connected to—is perhaps the driving force behind—a work’s social message and political force. If the high-realist novel of the nineteenth century too often presented readers with the gradual incline of Whig history, the history presented by the realist formations of the gothic-materialist novel is contested, disruptive. Importantly, the gothic aspects in the early gothic materialist novels were always contained within specific locales and characters: autocratic officers or mercantilists in old abbeys or breweries. These could embody those now-reactionary relics through which the gothic could stage its historical struggle, by opposing them to the present and the now-dominant material existence. The deployment of the gothic in this way is ultimately a progressive maneuver, because through it, elder forces are themselves historicized and ultimately defeated, for the good of all. Their final exorcism paradoxically allows for characters and readers to properly mourn what has

passed away—all the time reminded that there are abuses of the present that can be overthrown in future struggles.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a somewhat similar process occurs, but with opposite results. The gothic sections of the novel also present an ongoing historical conflict, but one in which the agents of decay and regress seem triumphant. Progressive or utopian potentialities are themselves further contained within that nigh-impermeable magic circle of the collection, or within nested series of beautifully ornate/opaque boxes. In Wilde's model of history, these can only be sins or heresies: they are unnamed or unknown, and are themselves doomed to be overcome by history's gothic, entropic swell.

What is most intriguing to this reader is Dorian's own investigations, his own criticism. Perhaps he fails because the meaning he gives to history is just wrong. This would be an enormous miscalculation when the truth of time's passing and its suggestion of history's fallen endpoint is always staring back at him, wearing his face. I think it much more likely that he simply doesn't know *what* to put into his ark, what to preserve and pass onwards. He collects the world's treasures: the solidier things keep best. But inside the magic circle of reverie he creates, the space where he stores up his little sins and rebellions, there is... not much of anything. Most of Dorian's sins go undescribed, most of his objects containers for meanings that are nonexistent, or at least, not easily surrendered. This is excellent for the critic, who can fill up any gap, but rather unfortunate for Dorian, the poor savior who knows not what he does, and must paper over one sin with another in the desperate search for one that will last.

One cannot liberate what cannot be said.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: LEGACIES

Dorian's perhaps accidental suicide is preceded by a long period in which he has divested himself of all of his friends and relationships. Some of these separations are sudden and violent—the deaths of Basil, Sibyl, and Alan Campbell, for example; others are the result of a conscious separation (Hetty) or growing disagreement (Henry). Already living outside of and even against time, Dorian finds little to keep him anchored to a present he is increasingly unfit for. He dies quite alone, found by servants who do not recognize him and whom he always viewed with suspicion and loathing. If society is, at the beginning of the novel, a useful entertainment, by the end it is completely stifling, of little value to either Dorian or, it seems, his rather passive, permissive narrator.

How far we have come from Austen and Dickens. For the former, polite society was—if occasionally obtuse or overly concerned with appearances—ultimately a positive force. Austen's formal approach to character and narration allowed her narrator to disappear into the reservoir of public knowledge and morality shared with her readers. Her plot's slow whittling of Catherine's overly-exuberant individuality, coupled with a renaissance comedy happy ending all suggest a social wisdom that is not only superior to the individual's, but also its corrector and teacher.

Austen's inheritor Charles Dickens may not have been quite as optimistic as his forerunner, but this is because his concerns, the people his novel touches, are far more wide-ranging, touching the work house as well as the country house, and tracing how institutions like these seeming opposites serve to maintain each other. If the social sphere for Dickens is sometimes peopled with charlatans and abusers, then one must only work



that much harder to locate one's family if it has been lost, or to create a new one with those who share similar values. If all we Wemmicks must daily retreat from a world which is sometimes hard, then we must also engage with it in order to earn that refuge. The systems and institutions one regularly encounters may be cruel, but they are necessary, too, and can be—perhaps—improved by those with the proper humility and sympathy.

Le Fanu's suspicion of all forms of public exchange, in opinions and institutions, begins with Dickens at his most paranoid, and then goes much, much further. People in his work always fail each other, whether through outright persecution, or, when well-intentioned, through insensitivity. On-call doctors take inconvenient sabbaticals, in-laws tell their febrile wards they are only imagining their terrors, and in practically all cases those charged with protecting the vulnerable allow them to be victimized. His protagonists may crave the hearth and people to share it with, but they are denied it.

And in Wilde we have the final retreat from time, from people, and from existence as the only response to a life unlivable. This diminishment, and even disappearance of the social, a development evident by the late nineteenth-century gothic story, will become increasingly pronounced in the twentieth-century. This transition, from the—sometimes cautious—valorization of the public with its community and institutions, to the abandonment of the social as a sphere of concern or value is important in itself, of course. I invoke it here to suggest that a work's investment in its characters' interaction with and position within the social sphere is a reasonable indication of a work's own engagement with social history. For Jürgen Habermas, letters and literature became politically viable the moment that people moved beyond expressions of

subjectivity and began to write (and read) of themselves as economic beings and actors (56). Overly isolated beings, however, are neither products of history or makers of it: systems of exchange that they do not participate in can not significantly affect their narratives, and so fail to produce or encourage critique.

Le Fanu's innovation, his "synthesis of psychology and supernaturalism" served to produce doubt in his readers, who in turn distrust his protagonists and narrators (Sullivan 51). This maneuver, a reversal of Austen's more solicitous attempt at building a genial rapport, transfers the role of analyst from the narrator to the reader, who must decipher what is actually happening from the faulty and incomplete fragments they have access to. Le Fanu's spirits are abstracted social forces, and the psychological divisions he creates are the result of schisms in the social body, as we have seen. Future gothicists would retain Le Fanu's innovation, but transfigure its object: locating the fracture solely within an individual psyche allowed for a new method of doing what gothic and ghost stories have always done: unsettling the settled to produce anxiety. Authors and readers quickly found that the formerly-settled human subject, with its supposed agency and sovereignty, was an ideal target to haunt with murky underpinnings and the return of frightful traumas.

Hence, we see a declining interest in the gothic as social hieroglyphic, and an increasing interest in the purely psychological dimension.<sup>56</sup> Conflicts or schisms which inhabit and subdivide individuals, such as in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, become the most common gothic stories. 'External' phenomena—winding

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<sup>56</sup>This is especially the case after Freud and others developed the requisite language and symbolic systems to model the psyche's underlying mechanisms.

passages, grotesque wax figures—are reduced by many critics and authors to metaphors, figuring aspects of the consciousness of their perceiver, rather than things in themselves with their own histories and meanings. These works, narrated by characters with repressed personal traumas or unspeakable predilections, establish interesting epistemological and psychological breaks, in which both narrator and reader can no longer determine what is ‘real.’ Ontological uncertainty has made the haunted house and ghost story—the gothic’s most recognizable contemporary manifestation—among the more popular subgenres of the last century. Typically set far away from social processes and the community that accompanies them, once-common depictions of returned social relationships and consequences were easily replaced by purely psychological traumas, or by localized family affairs in which Freudian psychosexual dramas predominate.

This formula has proven infinitely repeatable: inaugurated by Henry James’ 1898 novella *The Turn of the Screw*,<sup>57</sup> hitting its apotheosis perhaps with Shirley Jackson’s mid-twentieth century *The Haunting of Hill House*, and still relevant in our time with any number of examples—Susan Hill’s *The Woman in Black*, for instance. The settings for all three of these works are distant and rural, and in the last two, denizens of the local towns refuse to even approach Hill House and Eel Marsh House. This actively foreshadows the hauntedness of these locales, but it also signifies that these places—these hauntings—can only exist far away from society and outside of history. Hill House’s spirit is the result of the house’s own tenuous relationship with and grasp on reality, as the novel’s first and last lines indicate (1, 182). It requires a specific individual whose psyche can register, or

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<sup>57</sup> In an 1899 letter to Robert Ross, Wilde wrote that he was “greatly impressed” with James’ story, calling it “a most wonderful, lurid, poisonous little tale, like an Elizabethan tragedy” (1118). As in *Dorian Gray*, if there are wonderful or lurid or poisonous sins or traumas in *Turn*, they go unnamed by James. Unlike Wilde’s novel, they appear to be psychosexual or psychosomatic (or both), and their reach is limited to the principal characters.

activate, or imagine it. In Jackson's work, we see not the consciousness of material forces and their effects on the human, but rather materials obtaining the consciousness *of* a human. In *The Woman in Black*, the ghost haunting Eel Marsh house wishes to revenge the loss of her child—stolen, she believes, by her sister—on the other village children. It could be read as a critique of child custody law and courts, as in Le Fanu, but the novel's highly individuated and psychologized antagonist preempts this. Jennet Humfrye's personal narrative, uncovered in old letters and documents, is the only history which haunts the manor. Le Fanu's spirits are far more abstract, and even when ostensibly personal (as in Twofold's resemblance to Harbottle) still appear quite explicitly as the agents of vast systems ("The High Court of Appeals"). They do not—can not—have personal backstories. They exhibit only their function, never their feelings. The ghosts residing at Bly or Hill House or Eel Marsh and similar modern haunted houses might be old or even ancient, but—much like the homes they inhabit—they are removed, parochial, their concerns exceedingly narrow.

Only occasionally do contemporary gothic stories reference systemized traumas and horrors of institutions and exchange. Today's haunted house, while still the relic from a previous era, stands for more contemporary concerns. It might be—rarely—built on an Indian burial ground, or on the ruins of a workhouse or a slave plantation. It is much more likely to be a former insane asylum, suggesting that gothic horror is a thing of the mind, a product of its instability and penetrability, and not a thing of history. The asylum as an institution can be historicized, of course, as the paradoxically modern bastion of a "primitive morality" that identifies and "reduces differences, represses vice, eliminates irregularities" (Foucault 258). But the panoptic fiction of the haunted asylum

turns its lens not upon its own physical or symbolic structures, but rather on its individuated cells, offering up the spectacle of individualized perversions and debaucheries. In this way, the gothic-tinged haunted asylum or hospital shares much more in common with the contemporary horror genre, than with the gothic in either its romance or realist modes.

Horror, the descendant of gothic and sensation fiction, still contains aspects of each within its many subgenres and strains, including the Freudian and asylum stories. The setting of most contemporary horror is a curiously unchanging present. In these stories, violence and terror suddenly erupts in pristine shopping malls and skating rinks and suburbs, places that “apparently have no history” (Murphy 10). If the gothic historiography of *Dorian Gray* features a narrative in which the world’s beauty and value is fragile and falling away, and must therefore be protected within a bubble of timelessness, the contemporary horror story simply exists there. It does away with continuity and historical progression altogether: what existed before the strip mall? No one knows. Nothing, it seems. While these stories—Romero’s zombie films come to mind—occasionally critique the stifling conformity of social attitudes towards class or race (for instance), most horror stories actually punish those who step out of their culturally assigned roles. The sexually assertive young woman is, as is well known, the very first victim of every slasher film. Horror-meister and occasional critic Stephen King admits that the writer of horror is “an agent of the status quo,” that his or her work is “innately conservative, even reactionary,” and that it operates much like the urban legend, “showing us what awful things happen to people who venture into taboo lands” (39, 175, 395). Much of its pleasure derives from affective, physical and emotional

responses to fear. But the more troubling, “peculiar sort of fun” it trades in is utterly vicious and vicarious, inviting us to enjoy the spectacle of mutants and monsters—some of these all too human—being punished for expressing difference, or stepping out of line (175). The new ‘sin,’ which for Dorian Gray is to save the world, is in contemporary horror sought and stamped out. Wilde may not have been an optimist, but in the dialectic he establishes between forces of entropy and of rebirth, he at least identifies possibility, if a fleeting one. Le Fanu’s textual fingerprints are evident in modern horror, too, but here we no longer even need a bureaucracy. The cosmic division of labor he establishes between systems which punish and individuals who are punished is collapsed into a singularity, or perhaps a circle: everyone scrutinizing the person on their left, looking for the demon.

Le Fanu and Wilde are also important progenitors of gothic materialism’s most enduring legacy: the cosmic horror of H.P. Lovecraft, M. R. James and others. Its most direct source was probably Arthur Machen, an acquaintance of Wilde’s who travelled in decadent circles. *The Great God Pan*, his most well-known work, was published the same year *Dorian Gray* first appeared, and provoked more outrage. They share important similarities. Machen’s novella is also about a morally questionable experimenter, but his process results in a kind of metaphysical rape when his subject’s mind is ‘opened’ to some kind of prototypical elder god or demon (the titular Pan). Her offspring, Helen Vaughan, takes on terrifying powers as she reaches adulthood. Like Dorian Gray, her influence, too, is disastrous to all young men of her acquaintance, some of whom end up as barely-sane vagabonds, others as suicides. That some of her sins and debasements are

sexual is implied much more heavily than in Wilde's work, but are still ultimately left up to the reader that "brought them" (*Scots Observer* 367).

Like the gothic works that inspired it, the cosmic horror of *Pan* and its descendants is about returns, the sudden reappearance of modes of existence and knowledge that were once hegemonic but have long since receded. Gothic fiction frequently represents the return of older, reactionary forces only to defeat them again. In so doing, they allow both the space to mourn for modes of life passing away, as well as to suggest revolutionary possibility in the future. In gothic materialism, these forces are material, economic and institutional, demonstrating a worse-off world in anticipation of a better-off one. Cosmic horror, however, is anti-progress, even anti-human. It suggests that all of our achievements—technologies, institutions, and culture—are irrelevant, and will be swept away at any moment by forces beyond our ken or control. While this strain of the gothic is about things lost to time, it paradoxically elides rather than materializes that history. Cosmic horrors are not anachronistic, as per Mighall; they predate written history and sometimes even humanity, returning across vast, unbridgeable chasms of time. Material history and forces do not constrict them, and they cannot rhetorically figure those processes. Instead, they combine excesses of materiality,<sup>58</sup> ornate or gross, with an aggressive meaninglessness. They heavily invoke Le Fanu's hidden, inscrutable beings and powers, but these forces are never organized. Humans have a very specialized role in Le Fanu's fiction, even if a debased one. While the beings in *The Great God Pan* or Bram Stoker's *Lair of the White Worm* or their followers may eat or enslave or destroy us, this is only a side effect of their real motives, whatever they may be. Cosmic horror

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<sup>58</sup> Tentacles, unidentifiable residues, amorphous or asymmetric forms, geometrically impossible architecture, etc.

continues the suicidal urge of *Dorian Gray*, but in a new, more nihilistic form. The gothic here does not figure the desperate struggle against humanity's growing fallenness, but rather the return of an older order that will finally sweep humanity's irrelevance away.

Gothic materialism's diminished use (or perhaps ability) to produce productive, progressivist critiques leads to an increasingly psychological or apocalyptic rather than material gothic. As it began to disappear from the realist novel, the great artistic documents of social history turned increasingly to the gothic's close relative, sensation fiction, in order to represent social trauma. The horror of the slaughterhouse is even now reproduced quite vividly, in the lurid manner of the crime scene. 'Shock value' as spur to social change may be effective at chronicling abuses and spurring social change. However, sensation fiction is 'sensational' because it is novel: without the gothic, the causal historical sense is also lost. Corporate or factory crime, therefore, is not seen as the result of anything but itself: an historical aberration rather than a necessity. It will, therefore, be fixed (or not) and forgotten—without any sense that some *greater* cause might be traced and transcended.

A more closely aligned inheritor to gothic materialism might be magical or 'marvelous' realism, which also uses non-realistic figurations to present socio-historical causes and effects in otherwise realist narratives. Kumkum Sangari, analyzing the work of Márquez and other practitioners, argues that these narratives present a kind of telos, or at least, a nexus in which the present is the fulcrum between a determining past and "the possible" of the future (900, 903). If the past contains horrors and repressions that must be dealt with or overcome, it may also contain the germs of future progress and potentialities, utopian content which can benefit the people and politics of the present and



the future. In this sense, it operates similarly to the historical dialectic of Hegel, or even the less certain, redemptive model of Benjamin's "Theses." In all of these senses it tends to be quite gothic in its historiography, if not in its rhetorical strategies and effects.

Magical realism's interpolations and encounters with realism itself, however, are less subtle than the gothic mode's visitations. Its metaphors are always "treated literally" and so become too legible to be 'realistic' (904). It is, therefore, more successful at reproducing history and its legacies at the level of content than of form. The nineteenth-century gothic materialist heightening of the realist narrative figured disjuncture and alien-ness without calling attention to itself, breaking the fourth wall, or otherwise interrupting the history that it modeled. The unsettling, unsettled histories and forces which drive human behavior are disturbing *because* their determining power goes largely unnoticed, gently foreshadowed until their full import is revealed, as when Catherine Morland is confronted by the General's buried labor army. Every bump in the night is preceded by a hundred slow creakings.

Mostly, the gothic itself has largely passed back into the fields from which it first grew, now residing mostly within what Lukács would derogatively call 'entertainment fiction.' It can be found sometimes as a strain of the horror genre, of course: in haunted house and ghost stories, especially. Or—ironically, perhaps—within subgenres of the contemporary romance novel. The 'paranormal romance' features love stories between humans and gothic-staple supernatural beings like vampires and werewolves, as in Stephanie Meyers' hugely popular *Twilight* series. These contain the slightest hint of figural possibilities no longer operative in practice. Class in these stories, for example, is abstracted into choirs of angels and demons or clans of vampires; a sense of history is

narrativized, but it is the domain of the inhuman rather than the human. Frequently utilized flashbacks and backstories reveal alien societies removed from human history, or conflicts based on—now, fittingly, eternal—interpersonal and psychological conflicts.

Lukács, lamenting that the classical form of the historical novel was dead, replaced by pretty but pointless historically set but ahistorical fictions, paraphrased Hegel when he called for a new form in the spirit of Scott and Balzac, one that would usher in “a renewal in the form of a negation of a negation” (350). If the era of the classic historical novel had passed, he still hoped that a new synthesis might be produced in the modern one, a form which could avoid the bad historicism of modern fiction, while also producing some of the same meanings and serving the same purposes as his preferred literature. Conversely, Wilde lamented that the “modern fiction” of his own time had been rendered passionless, its realism vulgarized. He hoped that “some day...Facts will be regarded as discreditable, Truth will be found mourning over her fetters, and romance, with her temper of wonder, will return to the land” (“Decay of Lying” 238). Other forms including magical realism have absorbed much of the gothic’s role as the channel for historical social critique. The gothic mode itself has increasingly returned/retreated to a more psychological, fanciful form. To some extent both men’s calls have been answered. If Dorian Gray was a failed messiah, Wilde was a successful prophet. What seems most worth lamenting, however, is that—a few beautiful sins notwithstanding<sup>59</sup>—the gothic’s viability as avenue for socio-historical analysis and progress has followed his own work’s model of history, and continues to wane.

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<sup>59</sup> Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is a notable example.

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