Times of Stillness in Nineteenth-Century Narrative

by

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Abstract

Times of Stillness in Nineteenth-Century Narrative argues that the representation of stillness in works of narrative fiction functions as a distinct mode of formal experimentation, one that British writers across the long nineteenth century mobilized to theorize the living text. The living text is a narrative category that can refer to literary works across many different genres. For the writers examined in this project, this quality of aliveness indicates a text that does not rehearse established, received narrative modes and techniques if those approaches no longer have the capacity to render visible important aspects of lived experience. The experimentation undertaken through temporalities of stillness reveals an effort to isolate and examine the textual properties that create various life-like effects in narrative forms. In the effort to asymptotically approach the conditions of stillness in a medium traditionally associated with movement and progress, writers like Mary Russell Mitford, Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, and Virginia Woolf crack open narrative operation, bringing its formal contours, its relationship to structures of feeling, and its negotiation of lived experience to the fore. Across this project I examine how ideas about stillness were shaped at various points in the nineteenth century by changing transportation and technology ecologies, architectural thinking, and specific encounters with visual images. Through stillnesses activated within chronotopes strongly associated with narrative form itself—the road, the house, and the voyage—I attend to the way spatial structures become reconfigured to instead represent aberrant temporalities. These various stillnesses are often imagined and explored through references to the image, narrative writing's supposed

formal ‘other.’ Chapter 1 examines the chronotope of the road in the work of Mary Russell Mitford and Mary Shelley. I argue that these Romantic writers theorize narrative’s relationship to the experience of loss and a vanishing present through appeals to the aberrant temporalities of visual art (the landscape painting in Mitford, the infinite loop in Shelley). Moving from the Romantic road to the Victorian house, Chapter 2 explores the hushed, unoccupied gallery space in *Bleak House* to propose empty-house-time as a key realist chronotope, one that Charles Dickens uses to plumb the affective consequences of readers’ encounters with literary realism’s famously solid, seemingly self-sufficient fictional worlds. Chapter 3 turns to the relationship between the painted canvas and the ship’s canvas (or its mechanical heart), examining how stalled-out voyages facilitate investigations of action and event in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writing of Joseph Conrad. I move from an analysis of the horror of the steamship’s stillness in *Lord Jim* to the potential latent in the stillness of the wind-powered ship in *The Shadow-Line*. Chapter 4 returns to the chronotope of the empty house, this time through the Ramsays’ coastal home in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. In this novel, stillness, understood not as immobility but simply as the quality of something that exists over time (something, like the house in “Time Passes” or Lily Briscoe’s painting, that is ‘still there’), becomes the operative term through which Woolf dramatizes the temporal and living qualities of narrative form. This dissertation contributes to conversations in narrative theory, affect studies, and nineteenth-century studies.

Introduction

What would it look like for a character in a story to suddenly find themselves ‘stuck’ in an image? Two famous examples of this phenomenon occur in narratives that bracket the Victorian period, the first situated in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Essentially a compendium of different kinds of journey disruptions and arrests, from disorienting mists and icebergs to whirlpools and rotting, slimy seascapes, this narrative poem’s most stifling representation of stillness operates through an appeal to the static, flat surface of a painting. After the fateful shooting of the albatross, the mariner finds his ship becalmed in the doldrums of a mysterious sea, where “Day after day, day after day, / We stuck, nor breath nor motion; / As idle as a painted ship / Upon a painted ocean” (115-118). In this environment, the operative modes are intensification and absorption. The ship is surrounded on all sides, held in place from below by “water, water, everywhere,” the placid pressure of which causes “all the boards” to “shrink,” and from above by the “hot and copper sky” (119, 120, 111). The vessel’s mast transforms from an aid to movement into a pin that fixes the ship in place directly beneath the midday sun, while the surrounding environment becomes weirdly animated: the “very deep did rot,” and “slimy things did crawl with legs / upon the slimy sea” (123, 125-6). The motionlessness of the ship, the suggestion of encompassing pressure and overwhelming saturation, and the idea of a stillness exerting a pressure so complete that it precipitates decomposition develop out of and in relation to the mariner’s initial invocation of the painting, his implicit identification of its formal otherness in this narrative context. The same is true of the

silence that dilates on board the ship. At first, the sailors speak to one another just to disturb the hush of their environment, but dehydrated vocal cords eventually make speech impossible. To break the silence and cry out demands a sacrifice of blood.

Powerless to make the ship move, the mariner's stasis in this episode is emblematic of his helplessness in the face of the greater forces that control the whole doomed voyage. The question of what causes movement, or what provides motive force, is posed with increasing urgency over the course of the narrative. As the First Voice in the air wonders, "'But why drives on that ship so fast, Without or wave or wind?'" (422-3). Uncertainty about what motivates the ship within the world of the story becomes entangled with extradiegetic uncertainty about what motivates the mariner to shoot the bird in the first place, which is ultimately a question of what motivates this narrative as a whole. As the gap between recognizable causes and their effects widens and the mariner's absolute inability to change his fate becomes ever more evident, it is reasonable to ask to what extent he ever escapes the spatiotemporality of the image that takes hold in the silent sea. If the image precludes motion that corresponds to meaningful progress, then the fact that the mariner is compelled to rehearse his voyage over and over again suggests that he never really gets outside of the "painted ship" on its "painted ocean" (117-8).

On the other side of the long nineteenth century exists another ship and painting, this time an actual image of a seaside garden that emerges on the canvas before a swaying Lily Briscoe in the third section of *To the Lighthouse*. As Lily stares out to sea, where several members of the Ramsay family are sailing to visit the lighthouse at long last, she reflects that one goal of her artistic practice is to share in Mrs. Ramsay's power to still life and strike permanence into the flux of existence. "Life stand still here!" she imagines Mrs. Ramsay commanding and, just like that, real life complies: two brief paragraphs later, Cam, James, and Mr. Ramsay find themselves

stuck in a boat that "made no motion at all," that "drowsed motionless in the sun" (162). The power of the painter's immobilizing eye and imagistic memory is demonstrated again later in this section when Lily fixes her gaze on the boat, immediately driving it to a halt. For the sailors, "Everything in the whole world seemed to stand still. The Lighthouse became immovable, and the line of the distant shore became fixed" (183). Poised at the midpoint between the shore from which they departed and the lighthouse, the ship is locked in place as surely "as if they were anchored in the harbor" (183). Like the boards of the mariner's ship which shrink under the pressure of an engulfing stillness and its corresponding environmental plentitude, this wooden craft responds materially to its sudden immobility: "the world became full of little creaking and squeaking sounds" (183). This is an experience of compression and claustrophobia on the open water ("Everything became very close to one"), where the intensification of environmental factors around the boat ("the sun grew hotter") is met by a pronounced silence on board (183). The repeated toggling back and forth between Lily's painting and the sailboat in "The Lighthouse" has the curious effect of suggesting that the wind, waves, boat, and sailors intermittently fall under the spatial/temporal sway of the image Lily paints while straining her eyes to identify their craft in the bay. In this stillness, James, brooding over his father's tyranny, sits with his "hand on the tiller in the sun, staring at the Lighthouse, powerless to move" (187).

The transmedial imaginative leap that each narrative dramatizes—previously dynamic characters abruptly helpless, their limbs transfixed and speech restricted—is fanciful and relatively short lived. The wind will pick up, the ship will move, the story must go on. It is easy to let the significance of these invocations of the canvas of the painting slip away as soon as the first breath of wind makes the ship's canvas quiver, the former intensity of the temporary narrative arrest ("a weary time, a weary time!" in the mariner's opinion; a "horrid calm" in

James's) dissipating in retrospect (143, 183). But moments of stillness like these are important sites for narrative theorization, staging strangely literal examinations of what it is that makes a narrative "move." The aberrant temporalities activated when movement is disrupted and stillness takes hold are nexuses where theories of narrative, images, time and affect converge.

This dissertation attempts to tell a story about stillnesses that interact along the roadways, voyages, and empty houses of nineteenth-century British narrative. At once, subject and medium appear at odds. Stillness and storytelling have long been framed as adversaries, the forward flight of the latter impeded by the thickening amber of a phenomenon descriptive of petrified objects, unchanging, timeless arrangements, and paralyzed subjects. How can stillness have a story if it refers to that which does not move or change? Of course, it is possible to offer an account of how the concept of stillness evolves over time, how it is treated in art, reinscribed and re-evaluated under different historical conditions and evolving technology ecologies. One goal of this project is to contribute to this history. But in order to do so, I want to hold onto the way this question—how to tell a story about stillness, with stillness, or within stillness—remains a charged one in the context of narrative theory. This is a question seriously reckoned with by writers for whom stillness has historically functioned as an object of desire and a (seemingly) fundamental problem. As such, attempts to asymptotically approach conditions of stillness (often figured in narrative writing's theoretical 'other,' the image) crack open narrative operation, bringing its formal contours, its relationship to structures of feeling, and its negotiation of lived experience to the fore.

For the long nineteenth-century writers examined in this project, the idea of stillness is not stable. By observing its activity in very different genres of fiction, from Mary Shelley's gothic narrative to Woolf's modernist novel, we can observe its typically overlooked mutability

and variation. The period taken into consideration in this project, which extends from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, saw sweeping technological, institutional, and social changes in Britain, all of which contributed to evolving ideas about what it means to be still, to desire movement or stillness of one form or another, and to feel oneself out of step with the tempo of the surrounding world.[1] Nineteenth-century narrative is diversely and sensitively calibrated to represent and negotiate these lived experiences of time, whether familiar or novel. Identifying sites of stillness in narrative fiction involves being attentive to the oscillation between rates of movement, the contrasts between one speed and another, and the suggestion of the cessation of movement entirely. I argue that the formal experimentation involved in representing the aberrant temporalities of stillness in narrative writing in turn facilitates the analysis of embodied experiences of time and affect. They afford insights into historically specific interactions between nineteenth-century subjects and evolving material structures and temporal regimes.

Though these aberrant temporalities approach stillness in diverse ways, they resist the sense of totality that the term often carries, even as they draw on and engage with ideas of stillness as *absolute* immutability, fixity, reified inflexibility, and timeless arrangement. As the examples offered above testify, there is room for thinking and feeling in the spectrum of stillnesses opened up in nineteenth-century fiction. By referring to the episodes discussed across this study as aberrant temporalities, it is possible to draw together ideas about stillness that feed into one another but do not fully overlap. I refer to these temporalities as aberrant because stillness is often associated with figures that are traditionally associated with space rather than

[1] Making strong claims about the causal link between ideas about stillness, time consciousness, and specific technologies is beyond the scope of my readings, but I use the work of scholars like Wolfgang Schivelbusch and Sue Zemka to identify points of contact across this project.

time, or with interactions between wildly different timescales (human-biological time encountering deep time in the stillness of fossils, for example). Experimenting with the temporalities of stillness is an enduring yet flexible mode of narrative theorization, one that the writers across this project use to analyze aspects of world building, motivation, eventfulness, and character. At the heart of these inquires is a challengingly vague but important shared concern: what exactly is the element that causes certain narratives to spring to life? The 'living text' is a narrative category that can refer to literary works across many different genres. For the writers examined in this project, this quality of aliveness indicates a text that does not rehearse established, received narrative modes and techniques if those approaches no longer have the capacity to render visible important aspects of lived experience. The experimentation undertaken through temporalities of stillness reveals an effort to isolate and examine the textual properties that create various life-like effects in narrative forms at different historical moments.

Pausing in Narrative Theory

Two things about visual art that are 'unattainable' in narrative writing are fused together in the idea of the simultaneity of the image: first, the idea that the whole work of art can be encountered at once; second, the stillness of the visual field. In poetry, particularly lyric and elegy, the stillness of the plastic art object often serves as a conduit for reflection on the passage of time, mortality, and the privileged status of the art object as a sort of undead, transhistorical agent. John Keats's ekphrastic "Ode on a Grecian Urn," with its immediate emphasis on an encounter with antiquity made possible through the urn, the "foster-child of silence and slow time," is perhaps the most famous British example of this poetic mode (2).[2] In contrast, stillness

[2] Ekphrasis, which refers broadly to vivid or extended description or, more specifically, to the description of an art object like a painting or a sculpture in writing, stands out as the literary and rhetorical device most entangled in

in prose writing is more often framed as a narrative problem—the sense of temporal arrest is something like the debt incurred in creating a richly visual and sensory impression. For nineteenth-century writers and subsequent narrative theorists, stillness has frequently been aligned with boggy sinkholes of florid description, the enemies of the narrative flow achieved when description and action are fused together more successfully. Drawing together description and visual art in his critique of literary realism, György Lukács follows Lessing's lead in determining that "when description is the dominant technique…writers attempt a vain competition with the visual arts. When men are portrayed through the descriptive method, they become mere still lives" (138). He famously decries the devolution of literary realism with the turn toward description and self-contained, provincial portraits over more dynamic plots that follow the principles of epic poetry.

In the context of the Victorian novel, an orientation toward legible, dynamic developmental arcs is particularly visible in the genre of the bildungsroman, which follows the growth of an individual as they mature into adulthood and negotiate their place in society. In this tradition, pauses, arrests, and motionless episodes become particularly charged sites, a view that both Elisha Cohn and Jed Esty support in treatments of what I identify as two different kinds of narrative stillness. Cohn notes that critics of the novel "tend to understand narrative as structured by the temporal framework of plot, event, and closure—Peter Brooks calls the plot a forward movement propelled by 'narrative desire'—the wish for progress, revelatory knowledge, and textual mastery secured by readerly eros—while for D. A. Miller, narrative emerges from a sense

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debates about the fungability of art forms. Calls to reexamine this narrative mode, like Peter Wagner's in his introduction to *Icons, Texts, Iconotexts*, betray ekphrasis's somewhat stodgy reputation in the history of literary criticism. For my purposes, the significant thing about ekphrasis is that it separates the forward movement of eyes traversing the lines on the page from its traditional association with temporal progress in the diegesis and reinscribes it as a spatial, lateral movement through which the reader becomes acquainted with a host of sensory cues, visual, auditory, tactile, even gustatory.

of 'disequilibrium' that must be rebalanced" (18). The "lyrical moment" that Cohn explores in *Still Life* involves interludes when the novel loses its overt forward-trajectory and becomes "moody and implicit," often centering on characters in unselfconscious, absorbed, and semi-conscious states (drowsing over a book, daydreaming, lost in aesthetic trance). She argues that such interludes "ambivalently dilate and delay plots of self-culture" (5). Delay, not dismantle: she acknowledges that "For Victorian thinkers, the cognitive and cultural pressures of development remain ineluctable" (29).

Cohn's moments of lyrical suspension read as preambles to the larger-scale generic unspooling Esty identifies in *Unseasonable Youth*. Esty begins with the bildungsroman's soul-nation premise to argue that narratives of unending youth and arrested development that multiplied at the end of the Victorian period and in the early twentieth century—*Kim*, *Lord Jim*, *The Voyage Out, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, among others—correspond to a broadening cultural awareness of the practices and effects of global capitalism. The development of the nation-state is tied to the emergence of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman, in which national progress and the individual's maturation to adulthood fuse together: "The nation could contain and naturalize the problem of uneven development by appeal to a common culture, language, and destiny; their organicist claims underlie a reciprocal allegory of development with the representative soul" (26). The emergence of so many "metabildungsroman" at the end of the nineteenth century indicates that this system of containment has broken down under the strain of endless expansion, and this breakdown manifests in the novel as various stalled out developmental arcs: "The trope of unseasonable youth defines modernism's historical encounter with the problem of bad infinity at the existential and geopolitical levels, establishing the conditions for a provisional aesthetic solution—the metabildungsroman, which encodes the

impossibility of representing global capitalism's never-ending story via the offices of finite biographical form" (27). In the "bad infinity" of the protagonist who experiences a seemingly endless adolescence, the difference between unending, looping development and being frozen in place is attenuated.

On the one hand, then, we have the "static intensity" of contained episodes of suspension in the bildungsroman, and on the other, an endless unraveling that conduces to a stasis all its own. Cohn's readings are of limited, localized episodes, while Esty takes a more macroscopic vantage point. Both, however, position their version of narrative stasis outside of traditional biographical time and claim that these stalled-out narratives mark temporal disjuncture, a failure to connect the present to the future. For Esty, the life of the protagonist registers the architectonic forces of global systems, while for Cohn the 'lyricism' of these "neutral," nondevelopmental moments reveal "suspended structures of feeling," the "affective contours" that "suspend the futures of . . . characters and readers" (5). My account of stillnesses rendered and reckoned with in narrative draws together Cohn's static interludes and Esty's bad infinities within a tradition of theorizing narrative form and its relationship to individual lived affective experience and the larger, systemic forces that shape that experience. Like Cohn, I am interested in the way stillness allows us to feel out subtle affective configurations, and like Esty, I am invested in different kinds of stillness as formal developments that can reveal the novel's relationship to larger, external structures.

The critical approaches to stillness that I have discussed up to this point engage with texts in which stasis of one sort or another is thematically central, but in recent years stillness has also taken center stage as a key analytical category in theoretical accounts of narrative more broadly. In his reassessment of temporality and the realist novel, Fredric Jameson asserts that nineteenth-

century literary realism emerges out of a tension and oscillation between two specific kinds of time: that of the récit and of affect. The more familiar of the two in a narrative context is that of the récit, which refers to the tripartite, past-present-future temporality of the tale, in which events unfold in a storytelling mode that heightens our sense of their irrevocability—they seem sealed off from us. On the other side of the spectrum is the temporality of affect. "Is it possible," Jameson asks, "to imagine a temporality so different from this conventional one that the word 'time' ceases to seem altogether appropriate for it?" (28). Although not atemporal, affect is characterized as the weaker temporal pole. In her review of *The Antinomies of Realism*, Catherine Gallagher offers a clarifying articulation of this key feature of Jameson's formulation: "By using the label affect, Jameson thus creates an asymmetrical pair: récit retains its primarily temporal quality, but the opposite pole becomes a hybrid present-as-affect, implying temporality plus a 'bodily' state" (127). What initially "seems to be an awkward analytical move…turns out to be an efficient way of noting the contrast between a kind of time we recognize as such and a kind of time we often call timeless" (127).

Significantly, Jameson, like Cohn, turns to visual art in his account of the aberrant temporality of affect. In describing the chromaticism of these interludes, he observes that

> References to other, more material arts are unescapable in this context, not only because it is here a question of the body and its sensations, far more tangibly deployed in music and the visual arts; but also because such an account must necessarily remain external to the thing itself, a language of the outside, which must necessarily be called upon to characterize the structure of language effects, let alone the lived experiences of the body as such (42).

But although he goes on to align the surface of the painting with the surface of the skin through a dissection of the word "chroma," Jameson does not pursue the generative potential of thinking through narrative and affect in relation to visual art at any great length. Similarly, neither Esty nor Cohn make sustained use of critical frameworks taken from visual culture in their accounts of narrative stasis. One goal of my project is to offer more fine-grained readings of the ways the image is associated with distinct temporalities of stillness through the narrative imagination of writers invested in questions about the text's relation to life.

John Plotz's recent work on aesthetic experiences of semi-detachment offers an example of how engagement with visual art can inform narrative theorization in concrete, specific ways. Although his readings do not prioritize stillness over other analytic categories or terminology, his study of the reader or beholder's partial-absorption into a work of art is repeatedly framed through a powerful fascination with a particular kind of painted figure. Caravaggio's painting "The Musicians" bookends his analysis of the experience of feeling oneself in-between two different worlds (that of a work of art and that of the world one physically occupies). At the center of this image is a lute player who seems to gaze directly out of the canvas at the beholder. This image compounds the aesthetic experience of semi-detachment by making the experiences of the figures on either side of the canvas resonate: to Plotz, the musician seems at once to be "soliciting my gaze and gazing past me, as it were, staring at the invisible and inaudible music his fingers made," while the beholder replicates this experience by simultaneously perceiving the world represented on the canvas as both real and artificial (9). The impossibility of any actual contact between the figure depicted and the viewer who stares back ultimately produces a semblance of intimacy between the two. Building on Plotz's work, my own readings of how writers imagined the experience of being in an image focus less on direct representations of

partial-absorption in actual images and more on the way ideas about images shaped narrative experimentation and theorization.

My approach is also distinctive in its attention to the relationship between specific kinds of stillness and particular narrative chronotopes. Beginning at the register of the chronotope rather than of the genre makes it possible to unearth a tradition of aesthetic thinking that would otherwise be difficult to identify, emerging as it does from constellations of texts not often examined together. Adopted from the field of physics and transformed in its new literary environment, the chronotope as M.M. Bakhtin theorizes it refers to the unique combination of space and time in a given narrative. Not only do the different kinds of time and space of the novelistic chronotope vary qualitatively (adventure time and abstract space vs. biographical time and local and identifiable space, for example) but their mode of interrelation in the chronotopic whole does too (the precise, abstract correspondence of space and time in the novel of adventure vs. the blurred, more organic melding of time and space in the novel of transformation). In Bakhtin's view, the chronotope is the most important aspect of narrative form since it determines not only what kinds of action and events are representable but also (in a sort of feedback loop) "the image of man" presented in a given text. For example, in the castle-time of the gothic novel, with its twisting corridors, protracted intervals of uncertainty, and sudden revelations, certain kinds of characters can exist while others would be impossible to imagine.

Part of what makes the idea of the narrative chronotope valuable in this project is that it affords a sense of substantiality and physical form to hold onto when grappling with the intangibility of space and time in narrative. Bakhtin marvels at the way "Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible" in narrative: "the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins" (250). When contrasting the idea

of the chrontope to existing theories of narrative or genre, Bakhtin often combines appeals to material substance and shaping force: "The chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel" (250). In celebrating the power of the chronotope to manifest time in space and vice versa, Bakhtin is implicitly gesturing to the impulse, both in aesthetic thought since the eighteenth century and in the context of nineteenth-century industrialization, to conceptually separate the two. As art historian David Summers observes in *Real Spaces*, "At least since Henri Bergson, co-ordinate space has been characterized as static, opposed to a deeper, living temporal principle, in terms of which a more authentic intuition of local, non-universalizable spatiotemporality is possible" (21). Metric time and co-ordinate space are represented in the figure of the grid, characterized by "homogeneity, divisibility and infinity" in contrast to the "qualitative, continuous and unified" nature of pre-modern spatiotemporality (21). Bakhtin concedes that "Abstract thought can, of course, think time and space as separate entities, and conceive them as things apart from the emotions and values that attach to them," but emphasizes that "living artistic perception...makes no such divisions and permits no such segmentation" (244).

While Bakhtin argues that it is possible for different chronotopes to interact within the same narrative context, he maintains that they cannot fully intermingle. The chronotopes I return to throughout this project traverse genres—picturesque Romantic sketches, wind-swept gothic narratives, Victorian and modernist realist novels—while retaining core features that make the representation of certain kinds of stillness possible. In other words, the aberrant temporalities of stillness I explore in this project are shaped by the character of the broader chronotope that surrounds them, even as they independently activate distinct representations of time and space.

Othering Images

Acknowledging the incommensurability of different art forms is a longstanding critical stance, and my goal in examining stillness through its association with images at many points in this project is not to relitigated points of similarity or difference between them. Rather, I hope to offer insights into how these forms were imagined and deployed across the long nineteenth century. What conceptual baggage weighs on painted surfaces, and what traditions of thought are drawn into the current of written narrative? Already, conventional distinctions between images and written narrative inform the language I have used to ask these questions: images are static while narrative writing is dynamic; the dominant principle of the former is space, the latter's, time; images are silent, written narratives speak. Gotthold Lessing's insistence in *Laocoon* (1767) that the differences between plastic and temporal arts are greater than the sum of their similarities cast a long shadow in aesthetic thought, inflecting art criticism across the nineteenth century. Dismissing accounts that emphasize continuity between plastic and temporal arts as obfuscating equivocations, Lessing holds up the representation of the body in pain as a case study for the difference between representational modes. The violent cries Laocoon utters in Virgil's narrative account could not, he insists, emerge through the relatively uncontorted mouth of the be-sea-serpented man represented in the sculpture. Alleging that beauty, above all else, is the aim of Greek art, Lessing concludes that visual markers of abject pain or fear would mar the sculpted face, whereas cries of pain articulated in poetry could actually elevate and ennoble a story told in verse. The problem lies above all in the temporality of sculpture: a spasm of pain across a face caught and maintained in marble quickly becomes ridiculous and grotesque rather than moving. "Since the artist can use but a single moment of ever-changing nature," Lessing

explains, “and the painter must further confine his study of this one moment to a single point of view, while their works are made not simply to be looked at, but to be contemplated long and often, evidently the most fruitful moment and the most fruitful aspect of that moment must be chosen” (16). This moment might precede the ultimate crisis of the events depicted or follow it, but the climax itself should not be represented. Positioning the subjects of a painting ever so slightly before or after the point of crisis means that the beholder’s mind is given “free play” to imaginatively stretch forward or backward in time (16). “The rule is this,” he concludes: “succession in time is the province of the poet, co-existence in space that of the artist” (109).

A belief in the fundamental alterity of painting to writing recurs in different guises in writing about the arts throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth. In “Walter Sickert: A Conversation,” Woolf dramatizes the confrontation between language- and image-based cognition at a dinner party where a book of photographs separates attendees into two camps. The literary/linguistic minds at the table speak at length about the biographical and narrative qualities of Sickert’s paintings, the stories one can imagine his figures participating in, and the experience of visual art itself, but ultimately feel themselves excluded. There is a mystical terrain (a spatial metaphor inherited from Lessing), accessible to the other group, whose boundary they can only conversationally pace: “Now they are going into the silent land; soon they will be out of reach of the human voice . . . They are seeing things that we cannot see” (11). In this play between verbal storytelling and the silent realm of painting, we can hear something akin to Derrida’s reflection that “the fact that a spatial work of art doesn’t speak can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, there is the idea of absolute mutism, the idea that is completely foreign or heterogeneous to words” (12-13). The other way is to imagine pictures as redolent with “potential discourse. That is to say, these silent works are in fact already talkative,

full of virtual discourse" (13). The literary/linguistic camp in Woolf's story plays out these two approaches, oscillating between activating discourse latent in the image, fetishizing the visual and subordinating it as a primitive object of study in the process, and a belief in a final incommensurability. "Perhaps they were thinking that there is a vast distance between any poem and any picture," speculates the narrator as a silence falls over the talkative guests, "and that to compare them stretches words too far" (21).

The imagery we find in Woolf's short story—language stretching to a breaking point in the effort to convey the visual experience of color and the impression of spatial arrangement—and her association of language with modernity, mastery, and legibility in contrast to the primal but unspeakable power of images is familiar from twentieth-century criticism on image/text relationships. W.J.T. Mitchell opens *Picture Theory* by suggesting that we "do not yet have a satisfactory theory of [pictures]" because "the very notion of a theory of pictures suggests an attempt to master the field of visual representation with verbal discourse" (9). The image is imagined both as overwhelming and eluding language's attempts at containment, seeping through the gaps and perforations of the written word. This imagery carries over to Mitchell's account of the contemporary pictorial turn: while "the problem of pictorial representation has always been with us," he writes, "it presses inescapably now, and with unprecedented force, on every level of culture"; "Traditional strategies of containment no longer seem adequate" (16). Working more specifically in a literary context, Roland Barthes, ever fascinated by the fugitive qualities of images when they are put in relation to texts, writes in *S/Z* of the "spitefulness of language," discernable when the achievement of the literary blazon is measured against the experience of totality afforded by sculpture or painting: "Once reassembled, in order to utter itself, the total body must revert to the dust of words, to the listing of details, to a monotonous

inventory of parts, to crumbling" (113). This unachievable totality is "the promised lands" of the descriptive, additive blazon, "glimpsed at the end of enumeration, but once this enumeration has been completed no feature can reassemble it" (114). With Barthes in mind we might also think of the difficulty of describing one's experience of the punctum of the photograph—"a sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice"—in contrast with the relative straightforward effort to articulate the codes and conventions of the studium (27).

Given the abundance of nuanced historicist and materialist treatments of specific kinds of images and modes of visuality in the nineteenth century, my decision to speak abstractly of 'the image' in the narrative imagination of different writers may seem a precarious move. Since the publication of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, the scopic regimes of the Victorians have proven hugely generative subjects for literary scholars and cultural historians alike, and the emergence of the heterogeneous field of visual culture in the 1990s has led to an array of new approaches for studying visual artifacts and visuality. Visual culture scholars working in nineteenth-century contexts have produced pivotal examinations of photographic techniques and technologies, optical devices, and the material circulation of images. My goal is not to offer new insights into specific kinds of nineteenth-century images and visual artifacts, though I do hope that my readings of the image as it is imagined in narrative might cast reflected light into those conversations. Instead, I am drawing on specific discourses about images that foreground the particular experiences of time they make available to the beholder or the creator. And because the payoff of this analysis is primarily oriented toward narrative, and the site of analysis is narrative, the fact that I draw on fantasies about images rather than material visual artifacts themselves is a feature rather than a bug.

Critical accounts of literary ekphrasis often center on the position that the reader is made to occupy as virtual "beholder" of the work of visual art represented in the text. As they become absorbed in contemplation of the art object, the beholder is often imagined to temporarily take on its quality of stasis as the world within the image comes to life. But in fanciful cases like the ones I opened this introduction with, we find precedence given to the experience of those on the other side of the image, so to speak, and are given access to the feelings of characters who experience a transformation from one formal state to another. I prioritize embodied and affective dimensions of stillness throughout this project, and we can get at those aspects of the phenomenon of stillness in new ways when we look for evocations of the image in places that are less familiar than overtly ekphrastic passages. As we saw in both *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *To the Lighthouse*, the aberrant temporality of the image can involve an overwhelming sense of helplessness, but my readings explore a variety of affects divulged in still interludes. Nor is it the case that I exclusively investigate the affective dimensions of aberrant temporalities that include characters whose feelings we can dissect. Episodes that unfold in character-less environments have much to show us about the relationship between form and affect, and in the context of the nineteenth-century novel such sites are inherently informed by thinking about stillness. Unlike Jameson's take on affect and its temporality, my focus is not on the historically new awareness of bodily states that exist outside of the categorizable emotions, but rather on the way writers self-consciously dramatized and complicated the relationship between form and embodied, lived experience of feeling in narrative.

Across my readings I take the position that form and affect are not separate from each other—form is not simply a container for or a means of transmitting or representing affect. Narrative chronotopes and affects are co-constitutive and episodes of stillness, in all their

variety, bring this integration to the foreground. Instead of treating affect as though it is necessarily beyond representation, always a radical, imminent textual property that dissolves when you attempt to pin it down, I take a position closer to the "vital formalism" Eugenie Brinkema has advocated in film studies. Her approach "requires beginning with the premise that affective force works over form, that forms are auto-affectively charged, and that affects take shape in the details of specific visual forms and temporal structures" (37). How do we read the tear in the corner of Marion's dead, staring eye, Brinkema asks in an opening reading of *Psycho*, when it could just be a droplet of water from the shower? She claims that the form of the tear itself signifies even when untethered from its role as marker of an individual's internal, emotional state. Reorienting the study of affect away from the sensibility of the critic or the represented passions of the character and instead privileging its existence in aesthetic structures has the effect of reinvesting close reading with the potential to offer important insights into affectivity. Precisely because it demands a return to nuanced treatment of form, many of the insights *The Forms of the Affects* offers are specific to the study of film—Brinkema ties the analysis of grief, disgust, anxiety, and joy to light, the camera, the stable temporal duration of a filmic episode, mise-en-scène, and visual images. But following her work, literary studies has also seen a turn toward form-oriented accounts of feeling. In *How to Do Things with Affects*, a collection of essays by scholars of film and literature who are determined to give affect back its critical edge, editors Ernst van Alphen and Tomáš Jirsa suggest that seemingly conflicting accounts of affect and form accord when treated as different steps in a multi-stage triggering process that proceeds as follows: "1. Form as the trigger of affect; 2. Affect as the intensity, sensation, or resonance in which this triggering results; 3. Affect as the trigger of thought, emotions, and imagination" (4). Not only do the critics included in this collection understand

form as the trigger of affect, they emphasize the ways form is shaped by affect. One of my goals in this project is to add to this body of work that generatively draws together narrative theory and recent accounts of affect.[3] However, I am gingerly holding on to the possibility that my readings of long nineteenth-century narrative can inform, perhaps only tangentially, the forms of the affects that Brinkema identifies in twentieth- and twenty-first-century film. Treading water; the act of imagining one's own death; the curious idea that the body of a character has become a plastic object molded by an external force: these are figures and conceits that feature prominently in Brinkema's readings and my own.

Stillness and Evolving Time Consciousness

The aberrant temporalities of stillness in the nineteenth century do not come together under the umbrella of an especially stable or isolable temporal category like the moment or the workday. What they share, however, is a capacity for disruption/reorganization, and we can identify them in narrative interludes that break with a previously established temporality in the surrounding story, typically one that is more conventional. Formally, it resets the narrative mode of operation and introduces new markers for activity within the narrative world. Thematically, it often corresponds with the representation of surreal temporal experiences, the precise nature of which vary across a century that saw significant shifts in individuals' and community's relationships to time.

[3] One existing account is Patrick Colm Hogan's *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories*, in which he claims that "the structure of stories and even the definition of the constituents of stories are inseparable from passion" (1). In working to identify the "emotion systems" that organize all stories, his interest is in developing a totalizing theory of narrative forms; the impulse across his readings is away from narrative and cultural specificity and toward universal patterns. More recently, Claudia Berger has advocated for a more fine-grained approach to affect and narrative, one that centers on an understanding of worldmaking as a process that involves "multidimensional, 'multivectoral' assemblages" (242).

Though critics dispute how to characterize the evolution of social time-consciousness in the nineteenth century—some call it a revolution, others an extension of attitudes established in pre-industrial life—it seems fair to say, as Sue Zemka does in *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society*, that this period saw "intensifications" of "thoughts and habits" corresponding to an awareness of abstract, Newtonian time (7). At the outset of the nineteenth century, time is primarily understood through local markers, tracked by the movement of the sun and the ringing of church bells. The material conditions and structures that contributed to the widespread shift from an awareness of local time to abstract time by the mid-century include innovations in transportation technology, new methods of communication, widespread attention to chronometry in maritime and commercial contexts, and the evolution of the workday in the wake of industrialization. Wolfgang Schivelbusch influentially explored the way the train's 'annihilation of space and time' contributed to the industrialized consciousness of the nineteenth-century subject and synchronized the nation according to Greenwich Mean Time by 1847 (10). The reorganization of the day under a factory system that shaved away leisure time in increasingly tiny increments would also play a pivotal role in restructuring time-consciousness across the century. Ever-larger portions of the population needed to keep track of time down to the minute, which meant that watches became increasingly important pieces of portable property.

The increasing cultural concentration on small and smaller units of time, the cumulative result of the broad social developments briefly gestured to above, has important implications for the development of literary forms and the history of literary criticism. As Zemka observes, "moments become more precise, more punctualist, in societies that measure time with analog and digital clocks," and "the smaller the moment gets, the more its cultural significance seems to increase" (1). In this period the moment "loses some of its former immediacy as an embodied

event," and instead "gains importance as a window into esoteric structures of meaning," a revaluation that increases the weight given to instantaneous experience and event first in the Victorian novel and then, even more overwhelmingly, in modernist writing (8). There is a stillness associated with the temporal category of the moment as it becomes associated with flashes of truth and sudden, final revelation, and it will play a role in the readings that follow. However, it exists among a host of other kinds of stillness with temporalities all their own. Because the road, voyage, and empty house are the structures through which I explore this spectrum of stillness in narrative, developments in transportation technology and architectural thinking will inform my analysis at various points.

Chapters

Chapter 1, "Going Nowhere Fast: Interrupting Narrative along the Road in Early Nineteenth-Century Writing," sets off in search of narrative stillness along the road in the work of Mary Russell Mitford and Mary Shelley. In the visually charged stillness she stages along the country path in *Our Village*, Mary Russell Mitford contends with the challenge of evoking present experience in written narrative while simultaneously feeling that the very environment and community one is attempting to make present are actively vanishing. Working in a very different genre, Mary Shelley's gothic novella *Mathilda* imagines stillness along the road as an infinite loop, a character's experience of walking "on for ever and ever" without getting any closer to her goal (214). In this crystallizing episode of motion without movement, *Mathilda* comes into focus as Shelley's extended examination of narrative animation and, at the same time, an experimental act of self-representation. By following the narrative's promptings to layer its journey sequences on top of one another to form a composite image, we can see the ways in

which Shelley's interest and investment in narrative form derives in part from her lived experience of loss on the road.

Stepping from the Romantic road into the Victorian house, "Casting Shadows at Chesney Wold: Empty-House-Time and Realism in the British Novel" examines the hushed, unoccupied gallery space in *Bleak House* to propose empty-house-time as a key realist chronotope, one that Charles Dickens uses to plumb the affective consequences of readers' encounters with literary realism's famously solid, seemingly self-sustaining fictive worlds. While Chapter 1 examines supposedly active characters who become curiously still, this chapter examines the preternatural stillness of a character-less, unoccupied house and unlocks unusual kinds of movement in this environment. *Bleak House* is widely recognized as a novel overwhelmed with characters jostling both for physical space and character space, but in fact this narrative—particularly when conducted by the third-person omniscient narrator—directs our attention with remarkable persistence to unoccupied rooms and abandoned sites. I propose empty-house-time as a distinctive narrative chronotope, one in which inactivity at one narrative register gives way to pervasive activity at other levels, activity that can only be registered when more familiar, character-based action is taken out of the picture. The chromatic temporality of the empty house opens up continuums along which strategies of realist characterization and worldbuilding can be dramatized and interrogated. Perhaps most powerfully, empty-house-time reveals how affects associated with imagining the world going on without you shape encounters with fiction.

Chapter 3, "Treading Water: Stillness and/as Eventfulness in *Lord Jim* and *The Shadow-Line*" returns to the examination of confounded journeys begun in Chapter 1, but this time travel is over water rather than land. The ship and the voyage are longstanding figures for narrative form, but by the end of the nineteenth century a significant change in transportation technologies

meant that two distinct kinds of vessel informed this formal relationship. Joseph Conrad writes vehemently of the core differences between the steamship and the wind-powered ship across *The Mirror of the Sea*, *Lord Jim*, and *The Shadow-Line*, critiquing the relationship of each craft to the natural world through which it moves and the effect it has on the spirit of the mariners who operate it. In this chapter I argue that Conrad uses the distinct stillnesses that threaten these ships to open up an examination of the operation of the maritime bildungsroman and the status of the event at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth.

Drifting to shore after voyaging with Conrad, Chapter 4, "The Empty House and the Living Text: Stillness as Endurance in *To the Lighthouse*," returns to the house as its central figure, leaping forward in time from the echoing, solid rooms of Dickens's construction to the dynamic existence of the Ramsays' coastal home in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Stillness, understood not as immobility but simply as the quality of something that exists over time (something that is 'still there') becomes the operative term through which Woolf dramatizes the difficult to pin down (and thereby make available for analysis) temporal, 'living' qualities of narrative form. Like Dickens, Woolf also dramatizes the existence of the house in time when it is unoccupied by living characters, but her house is abandoned for a period of ten years rather than one night and undergoes a dramatic evolution in that period. Endurance in the context of this house—attributed a vitality that means its collapse is equivalent to a death—is distinct from the petrified endurance of the jewel, a figure for atemporal permanence throughout the novel. Counterintuitively, the existence of this character-less house in time becomes Woolf's means of theorizing both living character and narrative animation in the modernist novel.

Chapter 1

Going Nowhere Fast:
Interrupting Narrative along the Road in Early Nineteenth-Century Writing

Here I am still—and I have just received your letter of Monday by the pilot, who promised to bring it to me, if we were detained, as he expected, by the wind. –It is indeed wearisome to be tossed about without going forward (303).

Mary Wollstonecraft
Letter to Gilbert Imlay
Hull, Thursday, June 18th, 1795

Time, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming a road); this is the source of the rich metaphorical expansion on the image of the road as a course: "the course of life," "to set out on a new course," "the course of history" and so on; varied and multi-level are the ways in which road is turned into a metaphor, but its fundamental pivot is the flow of time (244).

M.M. Bakhtin
"Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel"

The year is 1795 and Mary Wollstonecraft is about to set off on a long journey. On a Tuesday morning, June 16th, she writes to apprise her partner Gilbert Imlay of her progress: "The captain has just sent to inform me, that I must be on board in the course of a few hours" (301). She is undertaking a tour of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark not for pleasure, specifically, but to negotiate the return of some of Imlay's property. She travels with her small child, Fanny Imlay, whose health and welfare is a frequent concern on the trip. Another concern for Wollstonecraft is that her separation from Imlay will unravel their already strained relationship, a possibility all the more depressing to her because this trip is undertaken on his behalf. As she travels, she crafts a

record of her experiences aboard ships, along the road, and in new cities in a series of letters destined for publication.

In one such letter, she contemplates the light, serene Norwegian night as she journeys from Fredericshall to Stomstad. Turning a painterly eye to the environment and atmosphere around her, she describes dawn through the shifting and intensification of color in the sky:

> A vague pleasurable sentiment absorbed me, as I opened my bosom to the embraces of nature and my soul rose to its author, with the chirping of the solitary birds, which began to feel, rather than see, advancing day. I had leisure to mark its progress. The grey morn, streaked with silvery rays, ushered in the orient beams—how beautifully varying into purple! (35).

Enamored as she is with the saturated purple shades that suffuse the sky as the sun rises higher, she nevertheless regrets the loss of the earlier color and quality of the clouds. She writes, "—yet, I was sorry to lose the soft watery clouds which preceded them, exciting a kind of expectation that made me almost afraid to breathe, lest I should break the charm. I saw the sun—and sighed" (35). A desire to stop the progress of time and to extend the experience of the present is articulated here as a desire to halt the movement of the sun. In attempting to forestall this progress by holding her breath, Wollstonecraft makes the effort to hold onto the moment an embodied experience. If she is breathless and still, perhaps she will not disturb the scene and recall the sun to its routine motion.

At first, this impulse to pause the progress of time appears to be in tension with the carriage's continued movement in space: Wollstonecraft may try to make her body as still as possible, but she is still moving along a road. What ultimately becomes clear, however, is that this dreamy interlude occurs when all her companions in the carriage are asleep and while she is

traveling in the wrong direction. As soon as the "charm" is broken and the sun has risen, she writes, one of her friends wakes up and, "perceiving the postillion had mistaken the road, began to swear at him" (35). The movement through which Wollstonecraft experienced this sunrise was in fact an unproductive one. The travelers have overshot the mark, and the seemingly purposeful movement of the carriage is revealed to have been motion in excess and contrary to their actual progress. To drive this point home, Wollstonecraft reports that this last leg of the journey must be undone directly: "We had immediately to measure back our steps, and did not reach Stromstad before five in the morning" (35).

Digression and reflection: the two go hand in hand in Wollstonecraft's sunset interlude and in *Letters Written in a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* generally. It is not coincidental that this intense expression of the desire to stop time happens on the road, or that it is contained in a segment of the journey that actually suspends the traveler's progress to her destination. The wish to halt the passage of time is met and matched (exactly, in the sense that these travelers must "measure back" their steps to undo the distance covered in error) by the threatening idea of going nowhere, wheels spinning to no result.

In this chapter, I argue that Romantic writers were particularly conscious of the tensions that inhere in thinking about narrative and time through the journey. Following in Wollstonecraft's footsteps, Mary Russell Mitford and Mary Shelley make the journey an analogue for aesthetic form and use various forms of stillness along the road to stage examinations of the relationship between form, time, and affect. However, by the late 1810s and early 1820s, the period when Mitford was writing the first collection of *Our Village* essays and Shelley was writing her gothic novella *Mathilda*, historically new ideas about and experiences of speed and motion were reshaping travel. In distinct ways, *Mathilda* and *Our Village* register the

nation's increasing preoccupation with speed in pivotal decades when transportation was being re-imagined along the lines of smoother, more efficient networks that would accommodate first the rushing stage coach and then the bullet-like motion of the train. This evolution in transportation technology in turn refashions the affordances of a longstanding figure for narrative fiction: the journey.

It would be possible to frame texts such as Wollstonecraft's, Mitford's, and Shelley's in the context of the study of women and travel in the Romantic period. In Wollstonecraft's writing, for example, travel is often a liberating experience, one that enables her to contribute to traditionally masculine fields of thought. But for Shelley, an international and lifelong traveler, travel became a frequently painful and confining endeavor associated with loss. Mitford's measured movements, on the other hand, form a map of the limited, local, and picturesque environment of the English village. The distinctive spaces that travel writing in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century provided for women to contribute to and revise the categories of the sublime, the picturesque, and the beautiful have been widely explored. While she rejects the idea that travel was a unilaterally liberating experience for women, Elizabeth Bohls has argued that the act of journeying away from the English landscape empowered female writers to produce a "counter-tradition of aesthetic thought" because it distanced them from the invariably masculine aesthetic subject (22).[4] Maria Frawley also reads the experience abroad as a means by which women could gain authority, arguing that different regions abroad were imagined as sites within which distinct professional identities could coalesce. However, I am not bringing Wollstonecraft, Shelley, and Mitford together to explore their relationship to travel itself, but rather to show how

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[4] For an analysis of Wollstonecraft's reformulation of the aesthetic subject in *Letter from a Short Residence*, see Karen Hust's "In Suspect Terrain: Mary Wollstonecraft Confronts Mother Nature in Letters" or Christine Chaney's "The Rhetorical Strategies of 'Tumultuous Emotions:' Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written in Sweden.*"

their efforts to write movement and stillness into their narratives have much to tell us about the nature of narration.

In Mitford and Shelley's writing, the image becomes the organizing figure for the theorization of its supposed opposite, narrative, in the confrontation between motion and stasis staged in the interrupted journey. The aberrant temporality of the image—traditionally understood to be at odds with narrative progress—mobilizes examinations of realist description and the struggle of writing a present that is already slipping away in *Our Village*, while in *Mathilda* it activates an intensely focused investigation of motivation, narrative action, and characterization in response to the question, what makes narrative come alive? Across *Our Village*, Mitford inscribes the feeling that the world is moving too fast. Her desire to slow down finds its most intense articulation in the narrator's effort to pause indefinitely in the dilating moment. Conversely, Shelley's *Mathilda* powerfully evokes the desperation and anxiety of not moving fast enough and not being able to catch up, as well as a related uneasiness about one's control over one's own movements.

While the affective experiences staged along the road in these texts are very different, each narrative invests the concept of stillness with great power. The impulse toward the temporal stillness of the image is not just represented by positioning characters in front of scenery or paintings as outside observers in these texts. Instead, these authors imagine the sometimes calming, sometimes bizarre experience of stepping into an image, making stillness an embodied and visually charged phenomenon. For Mitford, that means being absorbed into the serene landscape painting, while for Shelley the approach to the conditions of the image is staged in distinctly narrative terms—through motion itself. Both writers make the formal conditions of the image a prism that fractures narrative operation, allowing us to see it in new ways.

In the next section I will place these writers' road narratives in relation to both narrative theory, literary history, and history. Then I will turn to Mitford's *Our Village*, a text that, in its very slowness and seeming conventionality, highlights the way the physical act of traveling down a road stands in for narrative progress and facilitates an internal, formal analysis. The remainder of the chapter will be devoted to Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* and the multiple, interlocking ways in which she uses the road and the image to theorize the living text.

Plots, Roads, and Railway Tracks

I hurry over the miles, as our carriages were hurried along the railroad, which having an inclination down toward Linz, went very fast—I hurry on, and speak briefly of the ever-varying panorama of distant mountain, wood-clothed upland and fertile plain, all gay in sunshine, which we commanded as we were whirled along the brink of a chain of hills (19).

Mary Shelley, *Rambles*, 1840

Roads have a long and winding history both as the subject matter of narrative and as a figure for narrative itself. The origins of one of the key terms used to discuss narrative, "plot," indicates the formal resonances of the road in literary studies. In the sixteenth century, the word "plot" referred to something spatial rather than temporal or sequential: it was used to describe a small piece of land or a site that differs in some way from the surrounding terrain. The use of the word plot in reference to narrative events developed through its association with maps, and specifically the act of tracing a path or marking a route. According to the OED, by 1548 the word 'plot' referred to "A map, a plan, a scheme."

Bakhtin constructs a partial, elliptical history of the relationship between narrative and the road in "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," where he insists, "[t]he importance of the chronotope of the road in literature is immense: it is a rare work that does not contain a variation of this motif, and many works are directly constructed on the road chronotope, and on

road meetings and adventures" (98). As he traces the various chronotopes that characterize literary texts in different historical periods, references to the road are not uncommon. It is the "clarity" of the chronotope of the road that makes it so significant in Bakhtin's analysis; in it, "the unity of space and time markers is exhibited with exceptional precision" (98). The journey makes for compelling subject matter and a powerful figure for the formal representation of narrative because it is uniquely capable of making temporal progress imply a concomitant spatial progress. It foregrounds the spatial dimensions of the narrative world in which a sequence of events unfolds, a significant contribution given that narrative has conventionally been hailed as a primarily temporal form (Bakhtin himself repeatedly insists that time is the dominant principle of narrative).

A distinctive feature of the journey as it manifests within Romantic era writing is a focus on interruption, which on some level shifts emphasis from the temporality of narrative progress to spatiality in the narrative world. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, for example, is basically a compendium of different kinds of journey disruptions: first there are disorienting mists and icebergs, then a rotting, slimy seascape in which the ship gets stuck, and finally a whirlpool that sinks the ship and threatens to drown the rescuing pilot boat too. When the crew encounters the stifling doldrums after the albatross is shot, the stasis of the image is used to signal the surreal hush of the environment: "Day after day, day after day, / We stuck, nor breath nor motion; / As idle as a painted ship / Upon a painted ocean" (115-118). Perhaps most alarming of all, however, is the disconnection between cause and effect, motive force and motion, that manifests in the unpredictable movements of the ship. We are pointedly told that it sits still when the breeze blows and flies fast when there is no wind. The ship's progress is inconsistently motivated, a critique that Wordsworth would level at the narrative of the poem

itself, writing in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, "the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other" (qtd. in O'Neill and Mahoney 188). It is true that narrative movement is linked with the ship's movement, as this poem performs a familiar twisting together of the literal journey, the mariner's life as a journey, and the narrative's progress as a journey.

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth would himself draw on the uniquely charged imaginative space of the journey's interruption. Here he famously writes of "the renovating virtue" of "spots of time," episodes in which intense emotional and visual elements combine in a moment and scene that stay with the individual throughout their life, elevating present feeling. The immediate example he offers of a spot of time involves two disrupted journeys and an intense visual impression of motion.[5] The young poet loses his guide, dismounts his horse, and stumbles down a hill, at the bottom of which he sees the burial site of a long dead murderer. The sight of "visionary dreariness" that he then beholds from the top of the hill includes "A girl, who bore a pitcher on her head" (251). Her movement is resisted by the elements through which she walks: she "seemed with difficult steps to force her way against the blowing wind" (249-53). The poet claims that he would need "Colours and words unknown to man / To paint" this scene of the pool, the beacon, and the "female and her garments vexed and tossed / By the strong wind" (260). The foreclosed possibility of painting this sublime scene—he does not have a palette equal to it—nevertheless leaves an impression of surreal stillness, the wind tossed girl an image of motion in the poet's memory.[6]

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[5] Echoing the poem's language of interruption, Eugene Stelzig notes that the "spots of time" is "an oxymoron: an enigma designed to halt the reading process and challenge conventional categories of literary experience" (15).
[6] For an extended examination of the geographical and historical writing out of which Wordsworth's phrase "spots of time" took shape, see Michael Wiley's "Wordsworth's spots of time in space and time." Wiley argues that Wordsworth's figuration of placedness challenges the theory of absolute space: "In representing placedness as inseparable from the workings of time, Wordsworth shifts and shakes the ground…Wordsworth represents himself as determinedly located but—through time—disoriented and reoriented in his location. Wordsworth's space is relational—figured by place-to-place relations—and, within his combination of space-time, place (a spatial spot) is

This tendency to privilege the journey's interruption is in keeping with the Romantic fascination with fragments, gaps and dislocations, from the temporal to the spatial, linguistic, epistemological and affective. De Man asked what it means to treat the romantic poem—and romanticism itself—as a fragment in his reading of P. Shelley's "The Triumph of Life," calling the presence of Rousseau in this poem "the unearthed fragments of this fragment" (95). Speaking the language of interruption, de Man marks this poem as one "frozen into place by Shelley's accidental death" (97). A particular emphasis on the moment, or on a temporality that is outside of and discrete from a pedestrian, everyday time, is a hallmark of the poetry of this period. Quoting Blake's *Milton* as she gestures to Romantic poetry at large, Angela Esterhammer observes, "In most cases, when Romantic writers suggest that 'the Poets Work is Done…Within a Moment,' the accent is on the compression or elision of time itself. For a variety of reasons, Romantic poems present themselves as ex-temporaneous (i.e., 'outside of time') or im-pro-vised (i.e., 'unforeseen' according to the normal past-present-future progression). Such poems claim to be in and of the moment" (323).

It is just this compression and elision of time made possible in poetry "in and of the moment," Tilottoma Rajan argues in *Romantic Narrative*, that makes the representation of transcendent ideals possible. But when many moments and voices are laced together, these unities cannot hold. The seemingly unified whole is revealed to be formed by a dense network of distinct threads woven together. "On a structural level," she observes, narrative's "very length creates complications elided by the brevity of the lyric, which wants to submerge itself within a mood. For narratives contain characters and episodes that are linked to one another in relations of connection and difference, as the various characters provide more than one perspective from

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also relational, relating to itself over an extent of time. The places of his two 'spots of time' occur in narrative time and, more to the point, in the shifting temporal perspectives of the narrator himself."

which the reader can view the protagonist" (19). Additionally, she points to the difference between reading narrative events syntagmatically, in a progressive fashion, or paradigmatically, as an arrangement of incidents perceived retroactively. "The more elaborate the structure," she concludes, "the more our attention is riveted on the interrelation of its parts, and the more parts there are to generate interrelations" (25). Romantic narrativity, which works through intentionally constructed networks of difference, operates in "gaps and absences" within and between texts (23). Rajan is working to free Romantic prose fiction from its subordinate position in the teleology of the Novel, recasting it as distinctive mode of structuration and deconstruction through which writers negotiate their authorial identity in relation to literary tradition and social conditions.

The qualities of the journey and the interruption that Romantic writers take advantage of in their philosophical and literary reflections are shaped materially by significant shifts in travel in the early nineteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century, travel by stage coach became a faster and faster proposition due to the construction of a wider network of even, smooth roads. The development of the railroad, imagined in the 1810s and first put into practice in the 1820s, would unlock even faster routes across land. Although the railroad really came into its own in the 1840s, the first line in Britain, and the world, began operation in 1825. The Stockton and Darlington Railway was 25 miles long and was originally conceived as a track along which horses would draw carriages; subsequently, developers determined that locomotion would supply the motive power (Freeman 217).

Public debate that surrounded the emergence of local railway lines pointed to the stage coach as a foil, with proponents of locomotion stressing the importance of decreasing the nation's reliance upon horses for travel. Fears about violent railway accidents loomed, however,

and critics lamented the destruction of the traveler's traditional relationship to the landscape. Ruskin criticized the rise of this new mode of transportation, opining that "All traveling becomes dull in exact proportion to its rapidity" (qut. in Shivelbusch 67). Wolfgang Shivelbusch has shown that the developing railway system played an important role in constituting the modern subject's sensorium, arguing that no sense was more affected by this new transportation technology than vision. The velocity of the train meant that the foreground of the landscape visible from the compartment window becomes blurred. While the stage coach passenger could pick out individual wildflowers along the roadside, the traveler on the train could only perceive streaks of color. Trying to view the landscape from the train compartment's window in the same way one had viewed it from a stage coach could only lead to eye fatigue. Michael J. Freedman observes that the "Victorian imagination resorted to flight as the most credible way of representing railroad speed" (38). For early travelers, he points out, "the railroad locomotive defied all existing conventions of land speed, tied as these were to horse-power" (38). Unlike the horse-drawn stage coach, which had to work with the rising and falling terrain in order to 'conquer' space, the motion of the train "was no longer dependent on the conditions of natural space, but on a mechanical power that created its own spatiality" (Shivelbusch 28). Early artistic responses to the railroad emphasized the linearity to the tracks and the train's movement; as Freedman notes, "In the emerging iconography of railway art, one of the most striking themes was the railway as a straight line. It is often viewed in steeply recessional perspective, as if offering a lesson in drawing space" (221).

Both texts examined in this chapter were written before the first railway in England began operation. Mary Shelley wrote *Mathilda* in 1819 and Mary Russell Mitford wrote the sketches in the first volume of *Our Village* between 1819 and 1824. But there are several reasons

why development of train travel is significant for notions about motion and stillness imagined at a slightly earlier moment. Schivelbusch's main insight is that a new way of looking was required by the new mode of transportation, one that was integrated with the technology that made the landscape fly by. The traveler accustomed to train travel naturally directed their gaze toward the panorama rather than the foreground, and with a glance could catch and release scenes that the train roared past. Shivelbusch's argument models a particular way in which visual experience and travel can be thought about together. We can extrapolate his insights about the development of the railway to analyze how other kinds of travel shape not just perceptions of time and space, but visual experience as well.

Additionally, as Geoffrey Batchen has shown in the case of photography, people do not simply respond to new kinds of technology once they are available. It is precisely the general but increasingly strong desire in the early decades of the nineteenth century for something like photography—some method of fixing an exact image or catching the fleeting moment—that contributes to the development of photographic methods. Batchen's argument about photography prompts consideration of the ways in which the dream of the train might exist before the technology itself. Schivelbusch obliquely indicates the presence of something like this desire when he notes the increased speed at which stage coaches tried to cover distances in the decades immediately before the widespread availability of train travel (26-7). He also observes that the visual experiences made possible by the train were simulated in earlier decades through optical devices: "What the opening of major railroads provided in reality—the easy accessibility of distant places—was attempted in illusion, in the decades immediately preceding that opening, by the 'panoramic' and 'dioramic' shows and gadgets" (70).

In his more recent and Dickens-centric account of public transportation in the nineteenth century, Jonathan Grossman echoes this observation and puts the accent on the significance of the stage coach. "Today most people primarily associate nineteenth-century public transportation network with the birth of the railways," he writes, but "the railways were also continuing an acceleration and systematization notably brought together previously by stage coaching" (12). Through the sixteenth century, Grossman points out, a "'road' did not so much describe a built part of the landscape as a common legal right-of-way across it" (22). The innovations of Thomas Telford and John Louden McAdams in road design and construction at the end of the eighteenth century made the stage coach and mail coach faster forms of transportation. "What the steam-powered railways were conceptually to the 1830s and 1840s," Grossman concludes, "modernized stage coaching was to the 1810s and 1820s" (24).

In distinct ways, *Mathilda* and *Our Village* respond to new experiences of speed along roads and railways that these developments represented. The elevation of village life and its slow pace over the hustle and bustle of the metropolis in *Our Village* is symptomatic of anxiety about faster forms of transportation shrinking the nation. The train, especially, would contribute substantially to the loss of local particularity and 'traditional' village life that concerned Mitford.[7] Because of the speed of the train, time needed to be standardized across the nation, synchronized across stops in a realignment that, as Ruth Livesey reminds us, did not occur when stage coaches linked the nation. Heightened experience of velocity is thematized more overtly in *Mathilda*, where characters are always flying in one direction or another as quickly as they can.

[7] As Shivelbusch explains, "The regions lost their temporal identity in an entirely concrete sense: the railroads deprived them of their local time. As long as they remained isolated from each other, they had their individual times: London time ran four minutes ahead of time in Reading, seven minutes and thirty seconds ahead of Cirencester time…the temporal foreshortening of the differences really did not matter; but the temporal foreshortening of the distances that was effected by the trains forced the differing local times to confront each other" (70).

Mitford and Shelley certainly inherit the journey as a figure for narrative form from a western literary tradition extending back to Homer, but the revolution in travel in the decades leading up to 1820s throws into the air and reassembles the affordances of this figure in the context of literary analysis.

Our Village: Pausing in the Landscape

"With what ineffable pleasure have I not gazed—and gazed again, losing my breath through my eyes—my very soul diffused itself in the scene" (50).

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence*

Mary Russell Mitford opens the first sketch in *Our Village* with a clear statement about what her writing will and will not do. And what it will not do, she assures us, is dizzy the reader with disorienting and blurrily rendered journeys: "Nothing is so tiresome as to be whirled half over Europe at the chariot-wheels of a hero," she observes (3). The most engrossing, delightful reading experiences are the ones that simulate in their insulated, richly textured narrative environments the lived pleasures of deep familiarity with a local spot and its inhabitants. The first sketch opens with the claim that, "Of all situations for a constant residence, that which appears to me the most delightful is a little village far in the country" (3). Immediately making a characteristic swivel from lived experience to textual experience, she adds, "Even in books I like a confined locality, and so do the critics when they talk of the unities" (3). Mitford's remarkable ability to conjure before the reader a microcosm of the picturesque country life she loves and wants to protect made *Our Village* extremely popular in its day. Critics have increasingly recognized and studied how the innovative methods of description that made village life seem so immediate and appealing in these sketches contributed to the development of the emerging genre of literary realism. As Elizabeth Helsinger puts it, gesturing to literary realism and beyond, "The

characteristic forms of *Our Village*, particularized descriptions of specific places and people and narratives of private lives, are also, it must not be forgotten, the characteristic forms of Victorian literature and art" (132). And as many readers have noticed, Mitford's method of world building relies fundamentally on contained, measured movements through familiar landscapes and cherished neighborhoods.

"Will you walk with me through our village, courteous reader?" asks the narrator in the first sketch of the series, published in the *Lady's Magazine* in 1819. Her village stories, narrated in a personal, confiding voice, were written for a respectable middle and upper-class audience, a readership that craved the experience of local familiarity that an endearing cast of village characters and a vividly rendered landscape could simulate. One achievement of Mitford's writing, and something that will be significant in the development of literary realism in the nineteenth century, is the rich visual field that her sketches create. Conveying a particular view or scene to the reader is generally a multistep operation for Mitford, as she first transforms the surrounding environment into a picture before translating it into a literary sketch full of visual detail. For example, before filling in a scene of haymaking with details about the environment or populating it with the ladies, gentlemen, farmers, and children in attendance, she first comments, "One looks on it, pretty picture as it is, without the almost saddening sympathy produced by the slow and painful toil of the harvest-field" (200). She performs a similar descriptive two-step when, after noticing a little girl playing with a dog, the narrator exclaims, "What a pretty picture they would make; what a pretty foreground they do make in the real landscape! The road winding down the hill with a slight bend, like that in the High-street at Oxford; a wagon slowly ascending, and a horseman passing it at a full trot" (14). The delight she feels seems in large part

to do with the fact that, at this moment, the scenery harmonizes with rules of painterly composition.

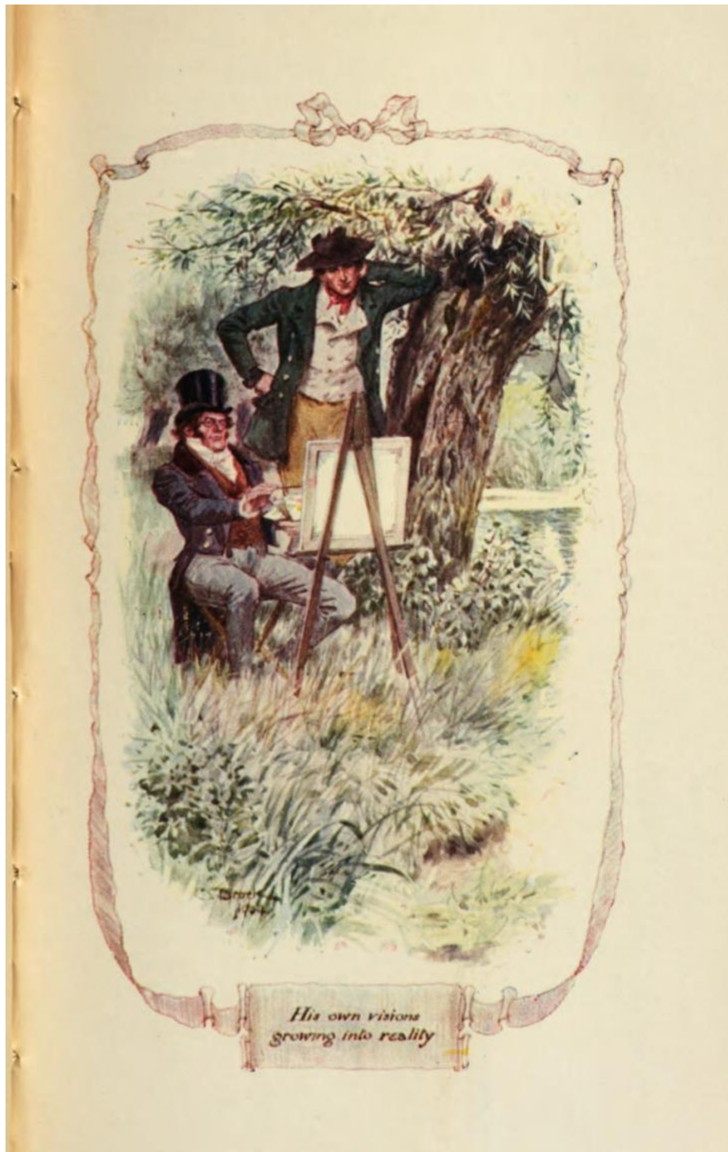

Figure 1. C.E. Brock, "His own visions growing into reality"

The 1843 edition of Our Village *includes illustrations by C. E. Brock. This image is situated alongside "The Haymakers" sketch and features a caption that reads, "His own visions growing into reality" (212). In the following sketch, "Hay-carrying," the artist depicted in this illustration creates a picture of the scene of haymaking described in the previous sketch.*

Roads, like the one with the "slight bend" that she refers to in the example above, are crucial spatial elements in the visual compositions Mitford observes and then works to relay to her readers. The narrator notes their shape, contours, and borders, observing "how pleasantly" one road "winds up the hill, with its broad green borders and hedge-rows so thickly timbered" (12). Formally, however, the road is associated from the start with lines of ink laced together on a piece of paper. After claiming that defined, limited locales make for more enjoyable narratives (she cites *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Tempest*, and Jane Austen's oeuvre as evidence) the narrator goes on to assert,

> a small neighborhood is as good in sober waking reality as in poetry or prose; a village neighborhood, such as this Berkshire hamlet in which I write, a long, straggling, winding street at the bottom of a fine eminence, with a road through it, always abounding in carts, horsemen and carriages, and lately enlivened by a stage-coach from B------ to S------- , which passed through about ten days ago, and will I suppose return some time or other" (3).

The ink on the page runs into the image of the "long, straggling, winding street" the reader is prompted to picture, and the street in turn seems to inspire the organization of the rest of this run-on sentence. One sentence later, the narrator asks the question that launches the whole collection of sketches: "Will you walk with me through our village, courteous reader? The journey is not long. We will begin at the lower end and proceed up to the hill" (3). Though this is a literary sketch, the narrator assures us that she is leading us through her village not as it would be dreamily romanticized in poetry or prose, but as it exists in the clear light of day. The immediacy of the act of writing suggested in this introduction—the conceit of simultaneous writing and walking, and the sense that the one stands in for the other—actually works to heighten the

realism of the text and to separate Mitford's writing project from the earlier literary traditions she cites.

Repeatedly emphasized in this literary mapping of village life is the sequential and temporal nature of narrative writing. From chains of words to succession of events, the sequentiality of narrative writing is signaled everywhere we walk with this narrator, in lines, roads, fences, ropes, and rows of plots. More often than not, as a survey of this introductory sketch illustrates, paragraphs open with words like "Next," or "Then": "Next to his house"; "The first house on the opposite side"; "Next to this official dwelling"; "Then comes the village shop"; "Divided from the shop"; "The next tenement"; "In a line with the bow-window room"; "Next door lives a carpenter" (4-9). This narratorial strategy highlights a synergy between form and content, as the progression of words on the page and paragraphs in the sketch dovetails with the narrator's practice of leading a visitor through the village.

The relentless attention to the picturesque and the kindly accounts of mundane, habitual village activity in *Our Village* heighten a sense of the conventional—this is a narrative progression welded together, with a predictable fusion of space and time. Mitford self-consciously dramatizes this fusion through the narrator's present-tense progression along the roads of the town. She claims to write "on the spot and at the moment," and the "rope-walk, shaded with limes and oaks" along which she occasionally walks seems an apt figure for this steady winding together of time and space in her writing.[8] But to buy into the consistency of this village chronotope across the text is to miss an aberrant temporality that works through the text's perpetual orientation toward the pictorial. For the narrator of *Our Village*, spatial stillness corresponds to a desire for temporal stillness, or a temporality that takes her outside the

[8] An operational rope-walk is a lane in which two pieces of material are laid out and then twisted together to form a rope.

narrative's standard temporality, the village chronotope. This correspondence works through references to and evocations of landscape painting. The narrator's impulse to view the natural environment that surrounds her as a landscape painting, which initially seems of a piece with her narrative's turn toward the picturesque, is better understood as a mode of resistance to historical change worked out on formal grounds. Interludes where the narrator resists movement altogether—even the gentle pace of the village walk—are symptomatic not just of the uneasiness of a homebody on the cusp of the transformation revolution, but also of an awareness that the very methods of narration and description employed to preserve village life on the page actually make visible its disappearance.

As Elizabeth Helsinger has shown in her compelling reading of *Our Village* in the context of constructions of national identity, Mitford is often concerned about the "politics of sight" (123). Not infrequently, Mitford self-consciously calls herself a spectator rather than a participant in the scenes she presents, and at one point she pauses her description of a woman of her acquaintance to wonder what this woman would think if she knew she was being recorded. Helsinger is primarily focused on observation as an act that is at once invasive and distancing in Mitford's writing, showing that Mitford ultimately defends the right of the artist to study her subject. At the same time, to depict a person in their rural environment is a way of keeping them in their place, geographically and socially. In Mitford's picturesque sketches and brief narrative arcs, Helsinger argues, "the realm of the personal, whether that is the rural scene or the family, [is put to] public use as a fantasy fundamental to class and national identity" (132).

But Mitford's general self-consciousness as an observer throws into relief specific instances when she inverts this arrangement, expressing a desire to step into the extreme foreground of the rural scene herself. In one such episode at the end of "Violeting," we follow

the narrator as she systematically moves away from hectic roads of the town and into the seclusion of the isolated natural space. Although other senses are referenced in her description of this "less lively spot," the narrator's experience is overwhelmingly one of visual plenitude: "Through this little gate, and along the green south bank of this green wheat-field, and they burst upon me, in tenfold loveliness" (36). Rhetoric of visual saturation dominates the description of this place. "The ground is covered with them, white and purple, enameling the short, dewy grass" she effuses, "looking but the more vividly coloured under the dull leaden sky. There they lie by hundreds, by thousands…They never came on me before in such a sudden and luxuriant glory of simple beauty" (36). Making hundreds of violets immediately expand into thousands, Mitford invites the reader to imagine a field of visual excess.

While space initially seems the dominant aspect of this interlude, it becomes increasingly clear that the most important attribute of the secluded spot in the natural world is the approximation it offers of a particular experience of time. "What happiness to sit on this turfy knoll, and fill my basket with the blossoms!" the narrator exclaims, "What a renewal of heart and mind!" (37). To be there is to "be fearless, gay and gentle as a child" (106). Floating, rather than walking onward, becomes the narrative's operative mode. Observing "a yellow butterfly hovering over them, like a flower floating on the air," the narrator extends this activity to herself: "Oh that my whole life could pass so, floating on blissful and innocent sensation" (37). Her desire for this eternal, weightless present merges with her desire to become an element in a landscape that is everywhere linked to forms of pictorial representation. Helsinger reads this episode as a characteristic instance of "deflection" on the part of the narrator, where "fears that cannot be resolved are replaced by stories for which she can imagine a happy ending" (129). The narrator has, after all, hurried past the workhouse and the "troops of stooping bean-setters" to get

to the violets, and she can take those violets home. But the violets are doing more here than deflecting the public and systemic for the personal. They are not entirely satisfactory. To this narrator's mind, to carry the violets home is to carry reminders that you are no longer picking violets.

Still sitting in this spot at the end of this sketch, the narrator asks, "Alas! who may dare expect a life of such happiness? But I can at least snatch and prolong the fleeting pleasure, can fill my basket with pure flowers, and my heart with pure thoughts…can see them when I shut my eyes; and dream of them when I fall asleep" (37). The temporality of this interlude is explicitly juxtaposed to the village chronotope, which will recommence when she gets up to walk home. Having already imagined herself as one of the purple flowers by way of the floating butterfly (she wants to hover like the butterfly, which hovers like a flower), she consoles herself by extending her experience of this moment by picking the flowers. The verb tense in the title of this sketch, "Violeting," and another like it, "Nutting," emphasizes ongoing activity, the narrator's desire to prolong the experience of the present by extending the motion through which she loses herself. The collected objects, whether flowers or nuts, seem important not just as mementos specifically tied to being around those natural objects, but of the heightened feeling of being-in-the-present itself.

Flowers again serve as the objects through which the narrator tries to prolong the present in "Nutting," when she observes a periwinkle winter blooming flower "peeping out from beneath the snow, looking at itself in the ice" (65). These starry blue flowers are dynamically enduring: she writes that they can be found "surviving the last lingering crane's-bell, forerunning the earliest primrose" (65). Stillness as endurance (this flower is "hardier even than the mountain daisy") is compounded by the stillness of the image in the frozen, perpetually cheerful reflection

of the flower in the ice. Once again, the narrator longs to "inhabit such a scene" by becoming the flower ("Oh, to be like that flower!"), signaling a desire to move from her usual position as the composer/beholder of the image of the landscape to that of an enduring, still element in the scene (106).

In such episodes, Mitford imagines a temporality that is not that of the familiar village chronotope, but which is related to it. The temporality of the image is symptomatic of the desire to maintain the village chronotope—to stop the world from moving too quickly—exaggerating its characteristic qualities of slow time and limited space. The narrator begins the sketch by saying she has just returned for London and that she needs to "plunge into the remotest labyrinths of the country" in order to "regain the repose of mind, the calmness of heart, which has been lost in that great Babel" (32). The antidote required is clear: "I must go violeting—it is a necessity—and I must go alone" (32). Her usual movement through the village will not suffice in this instance, and to avoid that movement is to avoid the road. "I shall get out of the highroad the moment I can," she writes, "I would not meet any one just now, even of those whom I best like to meet" (32). Violeting therefore intensifies the qualities Mitford loves about village life. For this reason, it is uniquely equipped to bring into focus the particular challenges of writing *Our Village*, which is primarily organized through the village chronotope, and Mitford uses it to this effect. Two specific aspects of Mitford's frequent practice of referencing the pictorial in *Our Village* are implicated in this interlude: first, the use fine-grained visual detail to heighten the reader's experience of the fictional world; second, the presentness of the narrative, cultivated to suggest immediacy of experience and produced by the verb tense of the narration and the structuring conceit of simultaneous walking/writing/reading. Here she disassembles and holds up for inspection the very affordances of the figure of the image in narrative writing that elsewhere

serve to intensify and naturalize her vision of the land and the nation. As P. D. Edwards puts it, Mitford "stands out from most, perhaps all other English writers both in the minute particularity of her 'pictures' and in the frequency with which she evokes painters and paintings in order to testify to the truth of her own observations and descriptions" (8). In this interlude Mitford makes formal difference testify to representational challenges in narrative. Pictures, while powerful in their capacity to suggest visual repleteness, spatiality, and the present, are also still. And when she imagines stepping into the landscape painting, this stillness becomes productively unnatural, generating a space for reflection on the challenges of writing a present that seems natural and true.

This is not to say that Mitford is intentionally and radically undermining the vision of the nation that she cultivates across *Our Village*. Rather, she is reflecting on the fact that to write the present is to simultaneously catch and lose it, much as the conscious effort to lose yourself in the present can end up reminding you that you will have to get up and go home with your violets. The feeling of transforming the present into the past in the very act of trying to sustain it, represented here in the doubled location and temporality of the violeting episode's conclusion, must have resonated in Mitford's mind with the large-scale challenge of writing a vanishing village life as though it were both present and accessible, transforming it in the process into an artifact designed, above all, to prompt vivid imagining. The effort to preserve a community and place in the stasis of an eternal present is figured thematically in this interlude in the individual's effort to hold onto the moment and the experience of being-in-the-present, which in turn is represented on the level of form by the writer's struggle to approach the conditions of the image in narrative writing. To write this 'present' is to be made conscious of loss in real time.

Poignant reminders of loss, the memento violets do offer some consolation: they are portable, visually enduring in the memory ("I can see them when I shut my eyes") and offer a quasi-return to the present of the violet episode in dreams ("and dream about them when I go to sleep"). To the reader, who can only ever access the violet interlude through Mitford's description, *Our Village* functions like a second-order natural memento, one that (if effective, and the collection's popularity suggests that it was) endures in the reader's mind and prompts vivid imagining. This mediated 'present' is experienced all the more intensely, Mitford suggests in this reflection, for the fact that it is charged with this sense of simultaneous acquisition and loss. Such interludes expose just how fundamentally Mitford's understanding of her own narrative techniques is intertwined with a historically specific feeling of moving too quickly and the related obsession with the representational dilemma of writing the feeling of being in the moment.

Mitford's village was, of course, already becoming urbanized in the period when she wrote the first volume of *Our Village*; it was only a five-hour carriage ride to London, and stage coaches were getting faster and faster in the 1820s. Her desire to slow down is written into *Our Village*, which ultimately indexes the forces that are already speeding things up, reshaping the contours of village life. Mitford will ultimately move away from her village, Three Mile Cross, after the deaths of her parents, living her last years in a cottage that the novelist James Payn described as "placed where three roads meet…with only a piece of green before it" (qtd. in Watson 296). Mitford's life, varyingly hemmed in, vitalized, and threatened by roads, would end as the result of injuries sustained in a carriage accident, when she was thrown onto the hard road of Swallowfield Park.

Mathilda's Infinite Loop

I gazed I know not how long, stunned with the noise; and growing giddy with only looking at the never-ceasing tumultuous motion, I listened, scarcely conscious where I was (96).

Mary Wollstonecraft, observing the cataracts of Gothenburg
A Short Residence

Likely of the order of writing that the narrator of Mitford's *Our Village* finds exhausting— "Nothing is so tiresome as to be whirled half over Europe at the chariot-wheels of a hero," she comments—Mary Shelley's novella *Mathilda* simultaneously has the breathlessness and rapid pulse of a feverish runner and the static, over-and-done-with frigidity of the truly breathless body (to borrow the imagery of the novella itself). With its tension between immobilized, dying narrator and frequently rushing characters, the story as a unit seems at once always in motion but never moving. At first glance, the frantic progress along a road found in *Mathilda* could not look more dissimilar to the measured movements of the narrator in *Our Village*. What makes them revealing interlocutors, however, is the fact that both texts dramatize a similar response to being out of step with a prevailing, external tempo. Just as a feeling that the world is moving too quickly prompts Mitford's representation of pause, the feeling of moving too slowly produces a site of stillness in *Mathilda*, and in both texts the formal otherness of the image is used to pause or disrupt narrative progress. *Our Village*'s narrator stalls time's movement by no longer moving spatially, getting off the road and pausing in the landscape. In *Mathilda*, pause is represented, as endless and unproductive motion, an eternal experience of being "on the road."

Mary Shelley's writing across her career has proven a rich resource for analyses of the relationship between narrative and travel. For instance, Jeanne Moskal examines the contemplation of paintings Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy* as a type of

autobiographical dream-work,[9] while Esther Schor has argued that Shelley models and advocates a particular vision of the sympathetic traveler in this text. In a reading that links the "transgressive science" of Victor Frankenstein to the polar exploration undertaken by Walton, Jessica Richard uses the context of polar expeditions in the 1790s to refine our understanding of Mary Shelley's "rejection of Romantic claims for a reign of the imagination" (307). She uses Stephen Greenblatt's term "discontinuous wonders" to explain how romance as a genre relies on deferral: "Although polar discourse, especially in its late phase at the start of the nineteenth century, appears to be about progress, it is stuck in one geographical spot, rehearsing the past, speculating about the future—telling tales" (303). George Levine discusses the geography of *Frankenstein* in his account of literary realism, drawing particular attention to this narrative world's counterintuitive quality of confinement despite its thematization of travel. Even as the narrative "wanders across the Alps, to the northern islands of Scotland, to the frozen wastes of the Arctic," Levine argues, "*Frankenstein* has something claustrophobic about it" (28). This effect is the result of the phenomenon of recurrence that folds the various lines of travel represented across the novel back in on themselves, "recurrence of images of ice and cold, the recurrence of patterns of family relations, the recurrence of the preoccupation with isolation and misunderstanding" (28).

If *Frankenstein* is claustrophobic, *Mathilda* is positively smothering. The quality of recurrence Levine identifies in Shelley's earlier novel is taken to the extreme in this story of

[9]Citing Freud's claim that the dream and the latent desire of the dreamer are "presented to us like two different versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages," Moskal argues that in autobiography and narrative writing paintings makes possible the change of language necessary for dream-work. "A written meditation on painting," she suggests, "can create the illusion of stopping narrative sequence" (191). It is in her art criticism that Shelley can complicate her self-representation as widow and mother "with a figural representation that speaks the unspeakable portions of her life in a different language" (191). Moskal uses a few specific paintings to trace the way this dream-work functions, discussing Mary Shelley's reflection on suicide in Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* and her guilt over the deaths of her children William and Clara and the suicide of Shelley's first wife, Harriet Westbrook, in Ghirlandaio's *Adoration of the Magi*.

isolation, incestuous love, and death, and one of the most pronounced of *Mathilda*'s frequently recurring narrative devices is the journey itself. When critics discuss the dense network of journeys in *Mathilda*, they usually approach it through a psychoanalytic framework in the context of readings focused on trauma and loss, and given that the admission of incestuous love is a key plot point in this text, this proliferation of psychoanalytic readings is not surprising. In one such reading, Diane Hoevler argues that *Mathilda* is a screen narrative, the literary manifestation of Freud's screen image. She suggests that Shelley is retelling the story of her life and Percy's in order to alleviate her feelings of guilt about the suicide of Percy's first wife, as well as to mitigate her disappointment about having been let down by the most important men in her life. In more or less compelling ways, the belief that we can somehow get inside Mary Shelley's head through her artistic output crops up frequently in the scholarship on her work. In the case of *Mathilda*, a fixated critical interest in matching characters to family members and analyzing Shelley's relationships through these fictional surrogates has obscured this text's self-conscious interest in form. Rather than treating the repeating journeys of *Mathilda* as a literary manifestation of trauma or fumbled plotting on the part of a young writer, I argue we should view them as the text itself directs us to in a crucial episode of stillness. The suspension of narrative progress in the stillness of Mathilda's infinite loop—walking without seeming to make any meaningful progress—recasts the series of journeys that make up the narrative whole as a theorization of narrative form and an experimental act of self-representation. Rather than treating the repeating journeys of *Mathilda* as a representation of trauma or as the flaws of an immature writer, I argue that they have much to show us when we view them according to the narrative's direction. Doing so reveals an exploratory literary portrait of narrative and an experimental act of self-representation.

In *Mathilda*, the particularity of event in a given pursuit/return sequence is worn away in repetition, as specific incidents and motivations overlap and their distinctive edges and distribution of pigment merge. In this respect, I suggest, *Mathilda* is something like an early nineteenth-century precursor to Kevin L. Ferguson's data visualizations of films, where hundreds of frames taken from across a film are made semi-transparent and layered on top of each other. The resulting image of the whole reads as an abstract, atmospheric painting. As Ferguson puts it, "these images show us patterns and colors: blobby shapes occupy the center frame, a shadowy vignette ringing the corners, and mottled concentrations of saturation bleeding into one another."

*Figure 2. Kevin L. Ferguson, "*The Wizard of Oz*, Victor Fleming, 1939."*

*Figure 3. Kevin L. Ferguson, "*Mad Max: Fury Road*, George Miller, 2015"*

Simultaneous presentation of an accumulated whole does not necessarily yield an obvious analytical payoff, as Ferguson himself acknowledges: "These shapes and colors are evocative in a way that tea leaves and tarot are: they don't actually tell you much about what you're looking at, but they allow you an emotional response confirmed or denied once you come to discover what the image 'really' is." This method of layering dissolves so many of the elements that are traditionally used to analyze films. These images "strip out virtually all narrative, characterization, plot, sound, dialogue, and action." Still, as Ferguson notes, these images give us an "otherwise impossible perspective," allowing the viewer to see a film along the "z-axis that compresses the film's time into a single frame of form and light."

I bring up Ferguson's layered images here because I think they can help us visualize Shelley's method of experimenting with and examining form through *Mathilda*'s claustrophobic and labyrinthine structure. Of course, Ferguson is working with a medium and program that literally allow him to collapse an entire film into one still image. Obviously, Shelley is working with a different medium and toolset. But in her unsettling and often opaque practice of repeating

characterizations, circumstances, and sequences of events, Shelley works to achieve a new perspective on narrative form. Because the sequences she "layers" on top of each other are primarily journeys, and because she treats journeys as figures for narrative form, her investigation is intent on answering fundamental questions about what narrative is and how it works. In the aberrant temporality and spatiality of the infinite loop, where motion becomes a kind of stillness, Shelly makes the repetitions that form the narrative whole simultaneously present. In a sense, she compresses narrative into an image.

The image of the infinite loop that Shelley uses to forestall narrative progress, a calm and clarifying eye at the center of a hurricane of heightened emotion and action in the surrounding narrative, also serves as the center of my reading of *Mathilda*. Before analyzing this key episode, however, I will first introduce the various ways Shelley associates narrative with journeys across this novella. Then I will narrow my focus to the story's central journey, which is Mathilda's pursuit of her father to the sea. Zooming in still further, I will then discuss the culminating episode in Mathilda's journey, the representation of perpetual movement without meaningful progress.

A Story Made Up of Journeys

The course of a life, figured as a winding path that makes unexpected twists and turns, is a central trope for the heartsick, world-weary Mathilda as she narrates the relentlessly depressing story of her life. In the letter she is writing on her deathbed for her absent friend Woodville, she often likens the unfolding of events in her life to a movement along a path (usually a calamitous toppling from a precipice) or a river (to describe the passing of two years in her self-exile, she writes, "I glided on towards death") (222). For example, to describe a momentous change in

circumstance when her father returns from his far-flung travels (he has been absent since she was a baby), she writes

> I was, as it were, transported since his arrival from a narrow spot of earth into a universe boundless to the imagination and the understanding. My life had been before as a pleasing country rill, never destined to leave its native fields…Now it seemed to me to be as a various river flowing through a fertile and lovely landscape, ever changing and ever beautiful (189).

"Transport" understood as ecstatic emotional experience and as movement across the landscape merge in this effort to convey a particularly delightful and unexpected turn of events. With her father's return she crosses the boundary of a "narrow spot of earth" descriptive both of the environmental and the interpersonal isolation of her childhood, and emerges into a wide world full of novelty and interest. Motion will serve as the litmus test for Mathilda's emotional state across this narrative as well as the marker of the boundary crossing from childhood innocence to adult disenchantment: the bounding ebullience of youth "my spirit often seemed to ride upon the winds"—becomes the slow and heavy tread of the devastated "adult" Mathilda ("now my walk was slow") (220).

Personal movement and the propulsive figures of the road and river serve as the narratorial devices and touchstones that Mathlida uses to explain central events in her life story, and pacing becomes a particularly sharp narrative concern. Mathilda insists that Woodville/the reader appreciates how the velocity of her narration corresponds to the velocity at which the sequence of events unfolded in actuality. For example, having reached a rare happy episode, she acknowledges but resists the temptation to take the storyteller's prerogative to linger longer over it because to do so would not be true to her lived experience. Of this brief window of time when

her father has returned to her and they are on honest and cheerful terms, she remarks, "I would pause for ever on the recollections of these happy weeks . . . But, no, my tale must not pause; it must be as rapid as was my fate" (190). When describing the uneasy period of time when she knew her father was unhappy but she did not know why, she confides: "I will not dwell longer than I need on these disastrous circumstances. I might waste days in describing how anxiously I watched every change of fleeting circumstance that promised better days" (193). Sad memories as well as happy ones, then, threaten to mire narrative progress.

In keeping with this conscientious commentary about matching the pace of the narrative to the pace of events, Mathilda often feels the need to justify how quickly her narrative is moving. In reference to her suddenly souring relationship with her father after the initial transport, she observes, "Thus did this change come about. I seem perhaps to have dashed too suddenly into the description, but thus suddenly did it happen. In one sentence I have passed from the idea of unspeakable happiness to that of unspeakable grief but they were thus closely linked together" (193). Here Mathilda makes the act of truthful narration of lived experience a regulation of velocity. She must move from one circumstance to the next with what might seem like too great a speed because that is precisely how "closely linked" they were in her lived experience. The subject of the narrative is the past, but this commentary on narration suggests an attempt to access the past in a distinctive way. The velocity of the narration seems to provide a trace of past emotions. It is a history of feeling in time and of feeling shaping the experience of time that could easily be swallowed up by her present desolate mood as a narrator who knows how this story ends. But as she puts it at the outset of her account, "I will…endeavor to lose the present obscure but heavy feeling of unhappiness in the more acute emotions of the past" (176). Regardless of how successful she is at putting this narrative strategy into practice, Mathilda's

recurring commentary on narration and motion forges an early and sustained link between the act of life-writing and the journeys that make up her life.

And to say that this life narrative is made up of journeys is not an overstatement. A brief list of the various flights, pursuits, and returns that comprise or surround the major events in the relatively confined space of this novella will convey a sense of the story's breathlessness and spinning wheels.

1. Mathilda's father travels abroad after the death of his wife in childbirth. After a period of "motionless and mute despair," he makes this journey because he cannot bear to be around his infant daughter (180).
2. Mathilda grows up imagining what it would be like to travel in disguise to find her father.
3. Sixteen years after his departure, Mathilda's father anxiously returns from his self-exile. The logistics of his return are discussed in some detail. Will Mathilda and her aunt travel to London to meet him? Her aunt says no. Very well, he will travel to them in Scotland.
4. Mathilda wanders lost in the woods and misses his arrival.
5. Mathilda runs to the lake and, seeing her father on the other side, rows as quickly as she can towards him.
6. Mathilda anxiously travels to Yorkshire to meet her father after he has gone ahead to the family estate.
7. After her father's admission of love for her, Mathilda dreams she is chasing him toward the sea. She is too late, and he throws himself off a cliff.
8. After waking up to news that her father has left the estate, Mathilda repeats the pursuit toward the sea that she dreamed about in reality. Once again she is too late, but this time she does not witness the death itself, but she sees his corpse.

9. After staging her own death, Mathilda travels by boat to the secluded region where she intends to pass her life alone.
10. Woodville's anxious return to his fiancé, Elinor, only to find her on her deathbed and past hope of recovery.
11. The spectral, suggested journey at the end of the novella when Mathilda imagines Woodville returning to her, only to find her grave.

Later on I will discuss specific points of overlap between these journeys in detail and will venture some thoughts about what they suggest collectively. But for right now, I primarily just want to draw attention to the number of key moments in this story that involve movement along a road or across a body of water. This narrative is always setting its characters in motion. It develops a breathless, whirling quality as it spins from one journey to the next and from one emotional extreme to another. To be fair, the long stagnant episodes in Mathilda's life get somewhat lost in my list-summary, but it is notable that the stillness of those intervals is characterized by unproductive movement (Mathilda walking, wandering lost in the forest, for example). A tension between stillness and motion is frequently fostered across this text, from Mathilda contending with the delay that precedes life-or-death action to her worry that, as a narrator, she might pause too long or move too quickly. The heightened, fretful experience of stillness in the delay or deferral of an important journey forms a pattern across the narrative, lacing the travels of various characters together. Mathilda must wait for the carriage to be prepared before she can pursue her father to the sea. Woodville is required to wait three days before he can travel back to his fiancé. Mathilda's reunion with her father is delayed and convoluted.

The repetition of the delay is not the only way the text encourages us to identify the relationship between the various journeys undertaken. Shelley also stages this kind of associative thinking thematically by situating two almost-but-not-quite-the-same journeys back-to-back. I am referring, of course, to Mathilda's doubled pursuit of her father to the sea. The first happens in a dream.

After his admission of incestuous love for Mathilda, her father faints and falls to the ground. Mathilda, dazed and horrified, is in "nearly as lifeless" a state until she sees that he is starting to revive, at which point she "sprung up and fled, with winged speed, along the paths of the wood and across the fields" (202). She reaches her room and locks the door. What follows is a long night of crying and speculation: she bewails her situation and imagines how, once again, she must live as an orphan in the world. At dawn, she is finally about to fall asleep, but her dream picks up right where she left off. She dreams she wakes up and searches for her father so that she can tell him that they must separate. But when she looks all over the house and the grounds, he is nowhere to be found. Finally, she sees him "at some distance, seated under a tree" and he waves, encouraging her to approach. His appearance is somewhat altered in the dream, as he is "deadlily pale, and clothed in flowing garments of white" (205). As Mathilda gets closer to him, "he stared up and fled from me; I pursued him" (205). What follows is a surreal and fast-paced chase: "We sped over the fields, and by the skirts of woods, and on the banks of rivers; he flew fast and I followed" (205). At last, they near a cliff overhanging the turbulent sea, but her father does not change course. Mathilda recalls hearing "the roar of the waters: he held his course right on towards the brink and I became breathless with fear lest he should plunge down the dreadful precipice" (205). Given Mathilda's narratorial tendency toward the language of falling and plummeting from one emotional state to another, it almost seems like the characters

are acting out the narrator's metaphorical flourishes. And just as the narrator is attentive to velocity, so is the character: "I tried to augment my speed," she recalls, "but my knees failed beneath me, yet I had just reached him" (205). Failure and success are positioned side by side as her body gives out at very moment when she reaches her goal. Ultimately, she was not fast enough: she "just caught a part of his flowing robe, when he leapt down and I awoke in a violent scream" (205).

There is relatively little narrative space between this dreamed pursuit of the father and Mathilda's actual pursuit later that morning. They are just separated by the letter that Mathilda's father leaves for her. Mathilda wakes up, reads the letter, and immediately springs—or tries to spring—into action. Reading between the lines, Mathilda discerns that her father is not, as he claims, leaving to travel so that she does not have to be near him. She is certain he is going to kill himself and her reaction is instantaneous: "The moment I finished this letter I ordered the carriage and prepared to follow my father" (211). The proximity of the dream journey and the actual journey in the real time of the story and in narrative time heightens the uncanniness of the second pursuit for Mathilda. Freud notes the correlation between the temporal proximity of recurring events and the experience of the uncanny. In "The Uncanny" he writes that in his own experience the phenomena of recurrence "does undoubtedly, subject to certain conditions and combined with certain circumstances, awaken an uncanny feeling, which recalls that sense of helplessness sometimes experienced in dreams" (10). One of the differences between what we perceive as innocent coincidence and uncanny recurrence is, in Freud's view, how closely one iteration follows another: "we attach no importance to the event when we give up a coat and get a cloakroom ticket with the number, say, 62; or when we find that our cabin on board ship is

numbered 62. But the impression is altered if two such events, each in itself indifferent, happen close together, if we come across the number 62 several times in a single day" (11).

Mathilda is, of course, acutely conscious that she is basically living out her dream. She recalls, "My dream was for ever in my thoughts, and with a kind of half insanity that often possesses the mind in despair, I said aloud; 'Courage! We are not near the sea'" (213). Her father's path is toward the sea, however, and she says this "heightened the confusion of my ideas" (213). This confusion could refer to her uncertainty about whether or not the dream has foretold the outcome of the real pursuit, but it also suggests a struggle to locate her experiences—is she in the dream again or is this real? Since her movement towards her father and the sea is synchronized with her motion in the dream, the experiences start to overlap and merge.

Toward the Sea

Although there is little breathing room between references to journeys, big or small, in *Mathilda*, Mathilda's actual pursuit of her father to the sea takes up much more narrative space than the others. In giving it this space, Shelley dovetails narrative progress with journey progress in a sustained and direct way. Although the reader moves at a much different speed than they did along the paths of *Our Village*, a similar attention to space and time markers along the road is evident in this journey. Narrative movement, even the movement of the reader's eyes across the page, is yoked to the movement of the traveling character through reminders of the ground we have covered and the time that has elapsed. Focusing briefly on the passages that describe the beginning of this journey reveals a fine-grained integration of the mechanics of the journey, the strategies of narration, and the embodied experience of motion. It also offers preliminary access

to the temporalities that the journey as organizing narrative device will make available and put under pressure (both in this specific iteration and when we take a wide view of the affective corridors these characters sprint through).

As I mentioned earlier, this pursuit begins only to stand still and a strong orientation toward immediate futurity is built into this initial, seemingly inevitable stasis. Mathilda cannot go after her father until the horses and the carriage are ready to go, which leaves her unable to swiftly channel her desire to influence future outcomes into productive action. Instead she can only take action in irrelevant, unproductive ways: “As I waited for the carriage I walked up and down with a quick pace” (211-2). Then she stops moving physically in order to take a different kind of action: “kneeling and passionately clasping my hands I tried to pray” (212). The motivating force is keenly felt—“He was about to die!”—but she cannot move productively toward her goal (211). Effectively heightening this juxtaposition of stillness/motion, Shelley offers no bridge between these images of delay and the representation of being on the road. The paragraph that follows this account of anxious pacing and prayer simply opens with “The motion of the carriage” (212).

From this opening phrase onward, Shelley makes motion and emotion swerve into each other until they ultimately seem to form a single current in the paragraph: “The motion of the carriage knowing that it carried me towards him and that I might perhaps find him alive somewhat revived my courage: yet I had a dreadful ride” (212). Mathilda claims that the reason she is revived is because she knows that the movement of the carriage is bringing her closer to her father, which immediately puts the focus on the outcome. However, by specifically citing “motion,” she emphasizes the attunement of her affective state to the sensory components of travel—she feels the motion of the carriage, and her courage is revived. A distinctive experience

of time in the journey is therefore suggested from the outset. On the one hand, the journey is oriented toward the future, the point where the intervening distance has been covered and the goal accomplished. In this sense, present action is all in aid of reaching that point. However, this adrenaline-spiking anticipation makes for a particularly prickly, intense experience of the present, of being in motion. Every passing moment counts! And every mile must be crossed as efficiently as possible. Physically, Mathilda is hyperaware of the environments that surround her and the beating of her pulse within her. This pulse marks a contrast to the way her "blood froze" during the delay at the outset of the journey (211). Now, the motion of the carriage activates her mind and body: her heart is "beating almost to madness," and "perspiration" takes the place of non-existent tears (212). The circulation of blood through her body is facilitated by the rotation of the wheels of the carriage.

Just as Mathlida's body is responsive to the conditions of the journey—first paralyzed, then frenzied—so too does the mode of narration, as one thought rolls into the next and the narrative's present becomes unmoored from the surrounding retrospective frame. In retrospective, first-person narratives, episodes where the outcome of events is meant to seem uncertain are sites of concentrated narratorial negotiation. The older narrator, looking back, already knows the outcomes of events and must therefore find strategies for recounting the situation as though these outcomes are as yet undetermined. In Shelley's hands, the voice of the past Mathilda bleeds into the frame narrative that usually contains it, overwhelming the retrospective narrating voice with the sheer force of emotion provoked by what is, in her view, the as yet undetermined outcome. The closure of the narrative frame is broken by the voice of a character for whom the story's closure (how these events will resolve) is perceived as uncertain and potentially alterable. The Mathilda who is writing this account of her life for her friend

Woodville knows that she was too late to save her father, but the uncertain, pleading voice of past-Mathilda seems to get louder in defiance of this certainty at the higher narrative register.

This bleeding of one voice into the other begins when Mathilda recalls the effort to "still" her brain and body, her "heart beating almost to madness" (212). In the next line, we are situated in past-Mathilda's point of view, as she exclaims, "Oh! I must not be mad when I see him; or perhaps it were as well that I should be, my distraction might calm his, and recall him to the endurance of life" (212). When past-Mathilda overwhelms the limits of her existence within the retrospective frame and takes control of the narrative, she speaks of the possibility that her actions could change the outcome; maybe he will still be alive, and maybe behaving in a particular way will calm him down. A rolling in and out of distinct narrative registers is clear in the next sentence: "Yet until I find him I must force reason to keep her seat, and I pressed my forehead hard with my hands—Oh do not leave me" (212). The progression of this sentence is from "past" Mathilda, seeking to control her own mind, to "present," narrating Mathilda, recounting her past experience, and then back to "past" Mathilda, crying out in desperation, not in control of her fears. "Past" Mathilda's voice wins out and commands the next several lines:

> Oh do not leave me; or I shall forget what I am about—instead of driving on as we ought with the speed of lightning they will attend to me, and we shall be too late. Oh! God help me! Let him be alive! It is all dark; in my abject misery I demand no more: no hope, no good: only passion, and guilt, and horror; but alive! Alive! (212).

In keeping with the destabilization of the retrospective narrative voice in the presentness suggested by this passage, the object referenced in "do not leave me" is ambiguous. It supposedly refers back to reason, whom Mathilda has implored "keep her seat" on this carriage

ride, but it also clearly reaches forward imploringly and ever more desperately toward the fleeing figure of the father**.**

The paragraph closes with one more rotation, returning to the point of view of the narrator-Mathilda, who keeps pace with and adds detail to the other voice, which has just been crying out "Alive!": "my sensations choked me—No tears fell yet I sobbed, and breathed short and hard…half screaming was perpetually on my lips: Alive!, Alive!—" (212). In the repeated cry "Alive!" we can again feel the humming dissonance of the fraught temporality of this narrative journey; an orientation toward the magnetic future and its promise of reunion or loss coexists with a hyperawareness of the present. "Alive!" is a cry directed toward the future, as Mathilda prays and pleads that she will find her father "Alive!" At the same time, paired with the close attention to her own vitality and embodiment in this passage and throughout this journey, it gestures even more compellingly to Mathilda's own state of being, her intense experience of being "Alive!" in the present, on the road.

Attention to the embodied experience of movement along the road coincides with increasing detail about the practicalities of travel, the different modes of transportation Mathilda will take and how she procures them. Unlike the fantastical pursuit on foot in the dream, the narrative of the actual pursuit gains a degree of realism from details about the horses, carriages, and guides she finds. Even the fact that Mathilda must endure a delay as the carriage is made ready for her suggests some level of commitment to the temporality and inconveniences of real travel. In the course of the journey, Mathilda plays the early-nineteenth century equivalent of planes, trains, and automobiles. When they stop at the first town, she gets post-horses to replace the ones tired out from the first leg and notes that "[a]t every inn where we changed horses we heard of him" (213). This is how she finds out that her father has changed his course: "at first he

had followed the London road; now he had changed it [his route], and upon enquiry I found that the one which he now pursued led *towards the sea*." This is also where mile-markers begin to pop up in her account; the sea is 50 miles away. Their next stop is at an inn where she finds out that her father has not taken fresh horses. Instead, he set off on foot, "had walked over the fields to the town of -----, a seacoast town eight miles off" (213). Mathilda repeats her father's movements, "following his steps" literally and figuratively (213). Because it is now night and the weather is stormy, she must bribe a local man to serve as her guide. She also notes the different types of terrain that she travels over, the many "lanes," "fields," and "wild downs" she traverses. When no longer traveling in a carriage, she takes care to describe her own movements, her "quick steps among the high, dank grass amid the rain and tempest" (213). In the next town, she learns that her father borrowed a horse and she follows in a chaise through the storm. At this point, as she rides along, she feels her "pulse is high with fever" (214). At the next town, she learns that her father left the horse behind and "walked on—*towards the sea*" (214). Temporal markers begin to mark her progress with greater specificity: it has taken Mathilda half an hour to travel the five miles from the last town to this one; her father arrived at the previous town around sunset. On this last leg of the journey there is "no road for a chaise" so she walks after her father, "dragging my weary steps across the desolate downs to meet my fate" (214).

As my recap hopefully makes visible, a substantial amount of narrative space is devoted to all the different steps in this journey and all the different emotional states Mathilda experiences along the way. Curiously, however, very little room is given to this pursuit's endpoint, the cottage where she finds her father's corpse. After so much lead-up, this scene is distinctly anticlimactic. Though she claims she did not feel "shocked or overcome," she is at least physically overcome: "I hardly know, but in a few moments I sank lifeless to the ground"

(214). The narration of this supposedly all-important scene is characterized by a brevity and hyperfocus on material detail that is often associated with the representation of shock. Mathilda records the facts: “we knocked at the door and it was opened: the bed within instantly caught my eye; something stiff and straight lay on it, covered by a sheet; the cottagers looked aghast. The first words uttered confirmed what I before knew” (214). This narrative climax is as drained of the drama and significance with which it was invested at the start of the journey as Mathilda has been physically drained of energy. Once again, her body and the narrative are treated as synchronized systems, and much has been lost on the road.

Having now established how thoroughly and insistently Shelley integrates the flow of the journey with that of the narrative, it is evident that the reason why a character undertakes a journey and the ways the character moves along the road take on special narratological weight. What kind of action counts as narrative action, and what kind of relationship must be established between events in a narrative? What animates narrative and under what circumstances must it stall out? The weirdest example of a character’s movement along a road in this novella suggests some answers to these questions.

Toward the end of her journey, Mathilda becomes trapped in what is best described as a kind of infinite loop. It is an interlude where persistent movement is subsumed within, or conduces to, a profound stillness. Changes in the weather offer the first clues to the nature of this repetitive pocket-universe that Mathilda unwittingly enters. Where once tumultuous and stormy weather had been drawn into the vortex of emotion that forms through Mathilda’s rapid pursuit, now the weather becomes oddly calm. “The rain had ceased,” Mathilda writes, “there was no more thunder and lightning; the wind had paused” (214). She proceeds directly into a description of her sensations, as though they are of a piece with the weather, subject to whatever force is

dictating its conditions: “My heart no longer beat wildly; I did not feel any fever: but I was chilled; my knees sunk under me—I almost slept as I walked with excess of weariness; every limb trembled” (214). No longer in control of her physical movement, Mathilda seems to be responding to a larger force that now controls the tempo. In these conditions, her movement along the road becomes strangely crystallized:

> I was silent: all was silent except the roaring of the sea which became louder and more dreadful. Yet we advanced slowly: sometimes I thought that we should never arrive; that the sound of waves would still allure us, and that we should walk on for ever and ever: field succeeding field, never would our weary journey cease, nor night nor day; but still we should hear the dashing of the sea, and to all this there would be no end (214).

In this endless revolution the landscape seems to regenerate and repeat and night and day cycle ceaselessly. Time and space extend infinitely and movement through them, though incessant, becomes meaningless. Though she walks on and on, she never moves forward toward her goal. Absorbing her activity is an all-encompassing auditory element, the sound of the sea. Strikingly, the figure and activity that have been associated with narrative progress from the outset (traveling along a road “*toward the sea*”; the sea as the destination, the symbol of the crisis or problem that motivates narrative action) have, in their intensification, been neutralized. They become the means by which the impossibility of progress—a variety of temporal and spatial stillness—manifests.

The disruption caused by this representation of process without meaningful progress, walking without getting closer to one’s object, works through an evocation of the formal conditions of the image imagined in contrast to narrative writing. Crucially, Shelley does not use

a reference to an actual painting or engraving to disrupt narrative progress, nor does she do it by offering a lingering, vividly visual description of Mathilda walking through a field. Instead, by making motion a kind of stillness, she makes the character experience the conditions of the image. The figure of the image allows a simultaneous representation of narrative failure and narrative operations. This narrative glitch, the infinite loop, functionally crystallizes narrative operation, in a sense producing a revealing image of narrative form.

One frame through which we might understand the evocation of the image in this moment of movement that becomes a kind of endless buffering is the ekphrastic tradition in poetry. In the ekphrastic poem, the poet responds to a work of visual or sculptural art, conjuring the image of the object in the reader's mind's eye and using it as a vehicle for reflection. Two famous examples of this genre were composed in 1819, the same year Mary Shelley wrote *Mathilda*. While in Florence, Percy Shelley wrote "On the Medusa of Leonardo Da Vinci," a poem that takes as its object a painting called "The Head of Medusa" in the Uffizi gallery. That same year, John Keats wrote his famous "Ode on a Grecian Urn." These ekphrastic poems are characteristically preoccupied with movement vs. stasis, questions about the endurance of the art object, and the tension between artistic forms.[10] Keats famously contemplates the designs on the "silent form" of the urn, in which a wild festival and a lover's "mad pursuit" can last forever (44, 9). As the choice of a painting of Medusa immediately suggests, Percy Shelley's poem explores stony stillness alongside vitality and motion. This poem recognizes and heightens all the movement that is so vividly captured in the still image. It is all twisting snakes and flickering

[10] In *Museum of Words: Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, James A. W. Hefferman compares the impermanence of the crumbling statue in P. Shelley's "Ozymandias" to the "petrifying impact of beauty on life itself" described in "Medusa" (124). He notes that "By perpetuating this moment of 'life in death,' the painting makes the face transcendent: 'a woman's countenance divine / With everlasting beauty breathing there.' But beauty is everlasting only because…it petrifies the spirit of the gazer, freezing her blood and turning her breath to (*spiritus*) to stone" (124).

flames, “vipers” that “curl and flow,” an “ever-shifting mirror,” and small creatures “hastening” with “mad surprise” (19, 37, 30, 28). A significant point of preoccupation for poets working in the ekphrastic tradition is the relationship between the living beholder and the still image, particularly a kind of energy transfer that occurs whereby the beholder, absorbed by the image, becomes immobilized while the image takes on strange new life. In his reading of Keats’s and P. Shelley’s poems, Grant F. Scott points out that they both imagine the beholder’s interaction with the image as a sort of spellbound gaze: “both poets are worried about the artwork’s innate capacity to make us suspend critical reflection, to lure the viewer into a half-conscious liaison he can neither control nor resist” (329).

What makes M. Shelley’s practice particularly curious against the backdrop of this ekphrastic tradition is that she is not preoccupied with the beholder. Instead, like Mitford who moves from the perspective of the composer or beholder of the image to that of an element within it, she imagines what it would be like for a character if the conditions of visual art were imposed onto the narrative environment and action. In other words, it is one thing to be the observer outside the image who experiences a brief simulation of its stillness and eternal present; it is quite another to be inside the image, so to speak. Without relying on a history of influence between these specific works, it is interesting to note that the infinite loop on the road in *Mathilda* reads as a disturbing double of the “mad pursuit” and the “struggle to escape” in Keats’s ode. The temporality that characterizes the revelers in Keats’s poem is the same one that we see in this passage, though here it takes on a much bleaker tone. Where there is some degree of consolation in the temporality offered by the formal otherness of the urn, the perpetual present that is experienced in *Mathilda* has no silver lining. From the character’s perspective, she is wearily moving forever and toward a predetermined outcome: she is already convinced her

father is dead—and in her epistemic certainty on this score she occupies the position of both present Mathilda in the story and future Mathilda narrating the story, already certain of how it unfolds.

In a figurative sense, then, narrative becomes the represented object rather than the organizing medium in the image that materializes out of Mathilda's perpetual motion, and the medium through which it is represented is resistant to its fundamental operation. Under what circumstances, Shelley asks, is narrative impossible? Because a character is (bizarrely) made to embody a narrotological experiment, her experience and the conditions that produce it offer direct answers to this question. There are two key traits of this episode that I will examine in the following paragraphs: first, the language of somnambulism; second, knowledge of outcomes. Mathilda is convinced that her father is dead, which means the motivating force behind her journey has been neutralized.

To start with the first condition, Mathilda's language of somnambulism indicates that she no longer feels in control of the action she is taking ("I almost slept as I walked with excess of weariness"). At the same time, she experiences a deadening of the physiological activity that animated her in the earlier portion of the journey. Her pulse slows ("My heart no longer beat wildly"), she feels "chilled" rather than feverish, and weariness threatens to sink her to the ground. The second condition, the loss of motive force, is clearly indicated in the timing of Mathilda's sudden certainty about the outcome of this journey. The pursuit began with a direct statement of the problem that motivates the journey/narrative: "He was about to die!" (211). As Mathilda travels, the uncertainty of the outcome of her pursuit is always in her thoughts: "I was possessed by alternate hope and fear" (212). When she goes so far as to ask for a sign indicating whether she will find her father alive or dead, she receives one. Running through the storm,

Mathilda reaches a field in which she sees a “magnificent oak” (213). Lightning is flashing all around, and Mathilda turns to her servant and says, “Mark, Gaspar, if the next flash of lightning rend not that oak my father will be alive” (213). The response is immediate: “I had scarcely uttered these words than a flash instantly followed by a tremendous peal of thunder descended on it; and when my eyes recovered their sight after the dazzling light, the oak no longer stood in the meadow” (213). But at this point in the journey, even this extraordinary circumstance does not convince Mathilda that her father will die. “I started up” she recalls, and, counter-intuitively, feels her “strength returned” (213). The outcome, she believes in this moment, is not out of her hands: “Oh, God! Is this thy decree? Yet perhaps I shall not be too late” (213). Crucially, in the line directly before she describes the experience of the infinite loop, she states that she no longer feels uncertain. Hearing the roar of the sea, she “whispers” to herself, “The sound is the same as that which I heard in my dream. It is the death knell of my father which I hear” (214). No amount of quick thinking, speed, or endurance on her part will make a difference now.

In this episode, Shelley is experimenting with narrative by making it go on when its driving force is lost. After setting these conditions, she throws Mathilda in and watches what happens. Obviously, by this I mean that Shelley stages a thought experiment and uses Mathilda to play it out and represent the results. And what happens, as we have seen, is motion without meaningful movement within a present that dilates into the eternal. On the level of Shelley’s meta-exploration of narrative through the journey, the uselessness the character’s movement is figured by the formal conditions of the image. On the level of the story world, when a character is no longer motivated, she feels she is not moving. Confirmation that her father is dead equals the (temporary) end of the narrative (the chapter ends) and the end of Mathilda’s movement (literally, since after she sees his body she “sank lifeless to the ground”) (214). Figuratively, she

cannot move on from this loss. The rest of the novella makes this immobility clear by holding out the hope of progress with Woodville only to reject it finally, and that is where *Mathilda* really ends.

Narrative, in Shelley's conception, cannot just involve a state change or the narration of two unrelated events. It requires a powerful motivating problem or issue; this is the journey's endpoint, which functions like a magnet. In the charged field that this problem creates, narrative takes a particular shape as characters are drawn into motion. This motivating problem at the end of the road is most important in the sense that it activates characters—it gives them something to respond to materially (making decisions, taking steps, trying to influence the outcome of events) and emotionally. Compelling, vital narrative—narrative that really moves—requires two interrelated things: the first is a convincing motivation for action, and the second is the possibility that outcomes can be changed, that actions matter in their context.

The mechanical quality Mathilda's motion takes on in this interlude is emblematic of the general effect of the journeys that recur throughout a novella notorious for repetition. The novella enacts this cyclicality on structural and thematic levels. As Elizabeth Nichie put it, "The finished draft, *Mathilda*, still shows Mary Shelley's faults as a writer: verbosity, loose plotting, somewhat stereotyped and extravagant characterization." The repetition of the same events in the life of the novella's three major characters probably falls under the purview of this "loose plotting" critique. Mathilda, her father, and Woodville all undertake journeys toward loved ones that they believe could be dead or dying.

When the same incidents and sequences unfold in a story, it brings narrative machinery to the foreground. The looping journey is not the only instance of this phenomenon, what could be called *Mathilda*'s 'extravagant repetition' in a reworking of Nichie's phrase. The

characterization of the idyllic relationship between Mathilda's parents, for example, repeats in the description of Woodville's relationship to his fiancé, and takes on a formulaic, scripted quality the second time around. It is like we are hearing the clicks of the internal mechanism as a music box is wound up again. Mathilda's parents' perfect partnership ended when her mother died, and so, right on cue, Woodville's fiancé Elinor dies. There are so many similarities, both in circumstance and in Mathilda's description of these relationships as the narrator, that the correspondence is impossible to miss.

In the case of the repeated journey, the power of the author to move characters about at will is, in a sense, literalized. As the journeys accumulate across the text, it starts to seem like a cyclical force is picking up whatever character is at hand and hurling them forward in a scripted arc. Repetition of the same circumstances, action, or decision across a narrative and between characters gives the reader the strange sense that characters are not acting of their own volition in their narrative world. It is something like the narrative equivalent of the helplessness Freud describes in "The Uncanny" when, wandering along the streets of an Italian town, he always returned to the same spot: after circling back twice, he recalls, "I hurried away once more, but only to arrive yet a third time by devious paths in the same place" (10). He claims at that point "A feeling overcame me," one of "helplessness and of something uncanny" (10). The uncanny nature of *Mathilda* is the result of the way the reader returns over and over again to the same spot, so to speak, through different characters and at different points in the novella.

To focus on a particular incident where character helplessness in the face of the external force of narrative is staged, I will return quickly to the set-up for Mathilda's pursuit of her father. Mathilda is a character who feels things very intensely, values this quality in herself, and devotes a great deal of time and thought to the description of her emotions. It is not inconceivable that

she would, upon learning her father was about to kill himself, immediately and powerfully feel that she must save him. The day before, after all, she moves very quickly from total disgust and loathing to regret and sadness when she sees her father unconscious on the ground. She is nothing if not capable of sustaining dramatic emotional shifts. The same is not necessarily true of the reader. There is a sort of narrative whiplash that results when Mathilda is rerouted so completely that she is no longer running away from her father but toward him. As soon as she sees he has recovering from his fainting fit and is not (as she hoped) dead following his pronouncement of incestuous love, she is so repulsed that she flees to her room and locks the door. That night, she resolves that she must never see him again; they will only meet in heaven. A few hours pass, and she has given a little ground: if he wanders in exile for another sixteen years, she will consider seeing him again. So, given these strong feelings, there is a perversity to the narrative contrivances that send her rushing toward her father with all the speed she can muster just hours later. It takes something as serious as suicide to make this change of mind and action seem somewhat believable, and still Mathilda seems buffeted about, not really in control of herself.

Shelley is juxtaposing two ways of thinking about narrative progress through the movement of characters in this text, and in the example discussed above Mathilda and the reader are teetering between the two. The first, as we saw in the individual case of Mathilda's experience of being in motion on the road, conceives of narrative progress as a matter of character movement in response to intense, emotionally charged motivation. The second, which becomes evident through the repetition of the journeys across the text, makes narrative progress a matter of external, irresistible forces. The motive power of the particular circumstances of a journey is drained away when they are repeated into predictability. In the first case, believable

motivation for character action is all-important. In the second, believable motivation is almost beside the point since the story will move them wherever it chooses. From the perspective of later nineteenth-century proponents of literary realism, this is one of the things that will divide good fiction from bad. The former includes fully rounded characters who move believably in the world they occupy and seem to be acting of their own volition because their behavior is convincingly motivated. The latter describes narratives with flat characters, threadbare conventions, and plots that are either cliché or reliant upon so many coincidences that the reader feels she can hear the gears turning.

By situating these two conceptions of narrative action side by side, Shelley is making an argument about how narrative springs to life, with blood flowing in its veins. As James Udon put it in a talk on the return of the classical past in *The Last Man*, *Frankenstein*, and "The Mortal Immortal," "reanimation is the signature trope in Mary Shelley's writing." The most obvious example of this trope is Victor Frankenstein's disastrous experiment to see whether he can "infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing" (97). Intentionally overburdened with allusions to mythological and literary figures, *Mathilda* is a text that asks and tries to answer the question, how can a literary work become something more than a bloodless repetition of past narratives or a lifeless construction? And as the interlude of motion without movement demonstrates, literary convention and familiar plots come alive when character action is convincingly motivated and when, at least at the lowest narrative register, the outcome of events seems undetermined.

Simultaneity and E/motion

Still however I am more alive, than you have seen me for a long, long time. I have a degree of vivacity, even in my grief, which is preferable to the benumbing stupor that, for the last year, has frozen up all my faculties…The rosy fingers of health already streak my cheeks—and I have

seen a physical life in my eyes, after I have been climbing the rocks, that resembles the fond, credulous hopes of youth.

Mary Wollstonecraft
Letter to Imlay, July 4th 1795

The infinite loop of Mathilda's pursuit is a miniaturization of the experimental narrative structure of *Mathilda* as a whole. To see how this works, recall Ferguson's data visualizations and the way he describes the "otherwise impossible perspective" on films that they offer from the "z-axis that compresses the film's time into a single frame of form and light." In the strange image we get of narrative in the infinite loop sequence, I have argued that we are able to see narrative in a way we would not be able to otherwise. As an image of motion, it suggests the simultaneous apprehension of the narrative whole that *Mathilda* encourages us to imagine, the compression of its narrative sequences into a single frame (to adapt Ferguson's language). If we layered all of the journeys in Mathilda on top of each other, what kind of image would result?

Intensified through the accumulation, at the center of this imaginary composite image is the figure of the journey toward a dying loved one. Strikingly, the significant journeys that unfold in *Mathilda* share the same animating endpoint. When Mathilda's father decides to return to her after abandoning her as an infant, he is suddenly and without provocation highly anxious that his daughter could be dying or is already dead. "As I returned," he recalls, "my fervent hopes were dashed by so many fears; my impatience became in the highest degree painful" (187). In his mind, it seems as though the act of traveling towards a loved one will, in itself, put the loved one in jeopardy. In this extreme case, the act of traveling, disconnected from any information about the absent party, prompts the traveler to think in terms of life and death and of arriving either just in time or too late. "I dared not think that the sun should shine and the moon rise not on your living form but on your grave," he tells Mathilda on his arrival (187). The fear

reverses direction and becomes Mathilda's when she races after her father later in the story. As we have seen, this life-or-death pursuit of the father is performed twice in quick succession. We get much more information about how painful the experience of alternating hope and fear is for Mathilda than we did her father, but the figure imagined at the end of the journey is the same: a dead or dying family member.

Woodville's life experience is also drawn into this external current. The defining event of Woodville's life before he meets Mathilda occurs when he is "obliged to make a journey into the country and was detained from day to day in irksome absence from his lovely bride" (226). Elinor writes to tell him that she is "slightly ill," and she encourages him to "hasten to her, that from his eyes she would receive health and that his company would be her surest medicine" (226). Three days pass before he can leave, and as he "hastened" toward her, "His heart, he knew not why, prognosticated misfortune" (226). His anxiety escalates rapidly en route:

> [H]e feared she might be worse and this fear made him impatient and restless for the moment of beholding her once more standing before him arrayed in health and beauty; for a sinister voice seemed always to whisper to him, 'You will never more behold her as she was' (226).

Moving from "slightly ill" to "Is she dead?" is a sizable leap, and again it seems as though the act of journeying toward a loved one sets the wheels in motion for their decline. "Is she dead" is literally the first question he asks when he arrives and sees a servant crying. She is not dead, not yet, but she will be in less than a day. He watches by her bedside for twelve hours before she dies. To this list of morbid journeys we might add Woodville's return to Mathilda after the narrative ends, only to find her life story in place of herself.

Viewed from this perspective, *Mathilda* appears not as a series of thin, somewhat mechanical repetitions but as a moving vision of loss. The most important and largest-scale journeys described in the text synchronize in the way I described above, but smaller-scale movements contribute to the emerging image too. Mathilda's flight toward her father across the lake overlaps with the bigger journeys described to intensify the optics of pursuit. The sequence where Mathilda wanders lost in the woods until she somehow arrives back at the lake adds saturation to the representation of helplessness and unproductive motion. When all the journeys are made simultaneously present, the shape we are left with reveals that Shelley's experimentation with narrative through the journey is simultaneously also an experiment in literary self-portraiture.

In September of 1818, the Shelleys were living and traveling in Italy. Percy, who went to Venice ahead of Mary, wrote her at Byron's invitation, telling her to pack at once and travel from Lucca to Este. Their daughter Clara was ill and Mary was concerned about traveling with her under the circumstances, but she agreed. When they arrived in Este, Mary writes that Clara was "dangerously ill," and that "Shelley is very unwell, from taking poison in Italian cakes" (224-5). Scholars who narrate the following events tend to describe Percy as somewhat blasé about his daughter's health. Anne K. Mellor writes that he set up a visit with a doctor in Padua for her, but "Clara arrived at the end of the five-hour journey from Este with diarrhea, dehydrated, and suffering from mild convulsions"(141). Percy would not leave the child in the care of this physician because, as Mellor puts it, he was "eager to continue his stimulating conversations with Byron" (141). He decides that they will travel back to Este and then to Venice where there will also be good medical care for Clara. Percy traveled ahead to Venice with Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, who was worried about her daughter Allegra in Lord

Byron's care, and Mary stayed in Este. In a letter to her friend Mrs. Gisborne, Mary writes, "the fatigue has given my poor Ca an attack of dysentery; and although she is now somewhat recovered from that disorder, she is still in a frightful state of weakness and fever" (Marshall 142). Clara is "reduced to be so thin in this short time that you would hardly know her again" (Marshall 142).

Nevertheless, Percy was eager for Mary to travel with Clara to Venice. In a letter, he asked her to join them immediately, "he had mapped out the trip for her and counted the days it would take her to arrive, allowing one day to pack and four days to travel" (Gordon 276). This trip would prove fatal for Clara. They set out at three in the morning and as they traveled, "Clara grew worse, twitching convulsively, but they could only press on, with Mary focused so desperately on the passing surroundings that when she returned a quarter-century later she would recognize every detail" (Sunstein 154). When they reached Venice, there was a problem with their passports, which caused a delay. When they reached their accommodations, Percy went to look for medical help, but as Florence Marshall described it, "It was too late. When he got back (without the medical man) he found Mary well-nigh beside herself with distress…little Clara was dying, and in an hour all was over" (226-7).

The idea that the miles traversed consume a loved one's life until it is spent and the journey ends is one that connects Shelley's life and fiction. The painful disconnect between present action and future outcomes reaches its most extreme manifestation in a scenario where the faster you move, the faster the loved one you want to save will die, since motion itself seems to set up the conditions for loss (in life and narrative). By using aspects of her lived experience of journeying with her dying daughter to theorize motivation and the temporalities of retrospective narration in *Mathilda*, Shelley makes psychological and affective structures the

primary mechanisms for understanding narrative structures. Her insistence that characters and readers must believe that a character's actions can affect the outcome of events for narrative fiction to really move is traceable in part to her experience of not being able to control the outcome of her own journey. It is a critical commonplace to say that the deaths of her children are responsible for the bleak, hopeless tone of this work. Usually the insight is that Mathilda's refusal to move on after her father's death is representative of Shelley's grief, and the novella as a whole is Shelley's reflection on unproductive negativity.[11] But the repeating journey as an act of self-representation and narrative theorization suggests a different dimension to the relationship between Shelley's life and her work.

I have been arguing that Shelley uses *Mathilda* to ask the question, what makes narrative come alive? Julie A. Carlson writes that Mathilda "displays the public effects of literary classics on a self's formation," observing that "guilt and incest have an illustrious literary history" (108). What Carlson takes as a story about literary conventions and characters shaping the living subject I argue is actually a story about the way characters come to seem like living, breathing selves.[12] Carlson claims "The text goes out of its way to portray Mathilda as virtually bodiless. She is characterized as a 'nymph,' a 'deity,' a ministering Angel of Paradise" (111). But Mathilda becomes intensely embodied in the accounts of motion and pursuit. Her movement on the road is a response to an enquiry about what animates what we might call the dead matter of literary convention and character archetypes.

[11] Tilottama Rajan calls this novella unreadable, an example of the "textual abject," a site of "melancholy" that "contests the Symbolic order with an unusable negativity" (44). Mary Jacobus describes the de-jection of the lyric voice across the narrative, specifically Shelley's "failure to own—to take credit for—the strained and overwrought 'poetry' of her lyrical prose" (45).

[12] Northrop Frye identified the main difference between the novel and the romance as one of characterization, observing, "The essential difference between novel and romance lies in the conception of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create 'real people' so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes" (6). In *Mathilda*, we see Shelley both contrasting and negotiating these two approaches to character.

Before she feels trapped in the infinite loop, Mathilda is made to embody and ventriloquize the novella's metacommentary on narrative in her cry, "Alive!" Charged with emotion and vitality and rhythmically woven into the passage at the start of her journey, the repetition of "Alive!" is a verbalization of the act of resuscitation—it is as though she is willing her father's pulse to recommence or continue. And as I noted many pages ago, the cry of "Alive!" is actually more descriptive of Mathilda's own heightened physical and mental state on the road. Her pulse beats fast, coordinating with the rotation of the wheels of the carriage, and it is her blood that is flowing through the narrative. In this way, Shelley makes narrative and character mutually constitutive. The character comes alive in the motivated journey, and the narrative is at its most vital when the character is activated in this way. The pulse that signals the "living" character is one with the movement of the plot as it is represented in the journey. And when this text literally shouts "Alive!" and has a degree of vivacity, detail, and force that it does not have elsewhere, it is in an episode that describes an experience of hope and dread on the road that synchronizes with Shelley's personal experience of loss. A version of Shelley's real, lived experience of being on the road with the dying Clara seems to manifest in the text when the urgent voice of past-Mathilda overwhelms the narrative register she exists within. By positioning this voice alongside the beats of the pulse, Shelley foregrounds the way the author's lived affective experience vivifies dead matter into a living fiction. Her blood is the narrative's.

Conclusion

What words can express—for indeed, for many ideas and emotions there are no words—the feelings excited by the tumult, the uproar and matchless beauty of a cataract, with its eternal, ever-changing veil of misty spray? The knowledge of its ceaseless flow… No! for as painting cannot picture forth motion, so words are incapable of expressing commotion in the soul (51).

Mary Shelley, *Rambles*, 1840

The association between narrative and the road in British fiction would continue to evolve across the nineteenth century. The transportation networks that forged new relationships between regions within the nation and beyond became key models for the infrastructure of the novel as it would develop in the realist and sensational fiction of writers like Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and George Eliot, their webs of incident and interaction. But processing new possibilities of speed and connection and new experiences of disorientation and dislocation does not always translate into writing stories set in the present of a new transportation technology (like the train). Many authors instead turned to the recent past and its outdated forms of transportation, not out of nostalgia, but as the means of processing the heightened mobility of the present. *Middlemarch,* for example, which Eliot published between 1871-2, is set in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* was written in 1836-7 but is set in the 1820s and relies fundamentally on the operation of the stage coach system. *Jane Eyre* is also set in the 1820s and, as Ruth Livesey argues, uses the operation of the stage coach to show that distant regions can retain their local identity while making their voices heard as part of the nation.

The 1820s therefore come into view as a period in the cultural imagination that shaped both the structure of the emerging mid-century novel and the experience of transportation in the present of the 1830s, '40s, and beyond. It is not surprising that later travelers' eyes, adjusting to the train's escalation of the transportation revolution by looking back at mobility in the late-Romantic period, would be drawn particularly to the shape of the network as it existed in narratives of this earlier historical moment. Criticism on narrative form and the journey in Victorian novels set in the recent Romantic past has been primarily oriented toward the

network.[13] Grossman, for example, makes visible the important role that the stage coach played in "reconfiguring narrative form" in Dickens's work, suggesting that "the novel as an art not only could enable his community, whose individuals were increasingly atomized, to come to know their manifold unseen connectedness, but also, more specifically, could not help but produce its self-comprehension in terms of a crisscrossing journeying of characters simultaneously circulating around" (14). The "capillary spread" of the stagecoach in Livesey's readings of Scott, Brontë, and Dickens also presents the road as a structure for connecting people, places, and times, with its "halts, stops, accidents, in its mingling of storytelling passengers and bags of written words" (30).[14]

Without diminishing the insights this macroscopic, synchronic view of movement and the journey in the transportation network provides into narratives set in the 1820s, I argue that authors composing narratives in the late romantic period thought about the relationship between the road and narrative in another, distinct way. It is not essentially a more embodied way, since the motion that the faster, more efficient network made possible in the mid-century is often represented in highly physical, sensorial ways (feelings of motion sickness and homesickness, for example). Nor does it entirely eschew the network as a model for movement (Mitford's movement through her village is all about meeting people, and Mathilda's pursuit of her father

[13] In this respect, Bakhtin's characterization of the chronotope of the road seems especially equipped to describe the structure of the mid-century novel. Bakhtin emphasizes that this chronotope sets up conditions for character movement that result in chance encounters and unusual interactions between various social groups.

[14] Livesey's analysis of the stage coach nation, although fundamentally concerned with the ways the transportation network connected the nation, relies upon a conception of the journey's interruption as a form of stepping into a distinct temporality. Time was not standardized across the nation until the development of the train, so when the stage coach moved from region to region, it entered and exited different times. As a Victorianist familiar with the afterlife of Walter Scott's fiction, Livesey writes that she "expected to find an all-enfolding intensity of pace and action" and "sustained drama" in his work (33). Instead, what she actually encountered were narratives with "long stretches as limpid and neutral as their famously 'mediocre' heroes" (33). But the flow of this more neutral narrative is interrupted, she observes, by moments that "have a durability in the memory," and "these are the moments where place is given a voice and dramatic action" (33). In its capacity to make these distant places accessible—places associated with an earlier time—the novel functions as a prosthetic memory for the nation.

essentially models movement through a regional transportation network). But it puts the accent on individual, motivated movement rather than on the network itself in its theorization of narrative through the journey. The narrators of *Our Village* and *Mathilda* are not narratologically interesting for embodying the network, as Grossman argues of Pickwick, "a hero emerging from, and in a sense standing in for, a revolutionarily public transport network" (38). The journey's interruption, as Mitford and Shelley fashion it, is not associated with the kind of accidents and intersections that form the "capillary spread" of the mid-century novel, so crucial both for making things happen in the story and for facilitating a macroscopic view of a society (Lady Dedlock interacting with Jo in the street, Bulstrode encountering Raffles in the lane— "I did not indeed expect to see you in this remote country place") (181).

Far more isolating, going nowhere fast along the romantic road is precisely a matter of not making things happen and of not meeting other people, either because you are trying to avoid them or because you cannot catch up to them, however hard you try. The format is adaptable, the nature of the introspection particular to the qualities of the narrative in which it is situated. Reflection on realist description is prioritized in Mitford's still interludes, while motivation and characterization are the focus of Shelley's laser-like examination of motion-as-stasis. Writing this history of feeling in time and space, these authors make personal introspection the fundamental mechanism for narrative theorization.

Chapter 2

Casting Shadows at Chesney Wold:
Empty-House-Time and Realism in the British Novel

"In some descriptions of Chesney Wold I have taken many bits, chiefly about trees and shadows, from observations made at Rockingham. I wonder whether you have ever thought so!"

Charles Dickens
Letter to Lavinia Watson
August 27, 1853

Then finally, while I sat one evening with my book in my hand, looking straight across the street, not distracted by anything, I saw a little movement within. It was not any one visible—but everybody must know what it is to see the stir in the air, the little disturbance—you cannot tell what it is, but that it indicates some one there, even though you can see no one. Perhaps it is a shadow making just one flicker in the still place. You may look at an empty room and the furniture in it for hours, and then suddenly there will be the flicker, and you know that something has come into it. It might only be a dog or a cat; it might be, if that were possible, a bird flying across; but it is some one, something living, which is so different, so completely different, in a moment from the things that are not living (267).

Margaret Oliphant, "The Library Window"

The room of fiction has many houses, and these houses are often surprisingly empty. Virginia Woolf's lyrical, elliptical story "A Haunted House" opens up one such structure, a "house all empty, the doors all open" (122). These rooms are ambiguously inhabited, ostensibly occupied by a narrator who tracks the little noises and movements that signal the presence of the house's primary occupants: "From room to room they went, hand in hand, lifting here, opening there, making sure—a ghostly couple" (122). From the first, this compact, startlingly vivid fictional world materializes around the reader as spectral hands glide over and confirm its

surfaces. The rooms, windows, stairways, and loft take on substance and shape as a result of the sensory cues provided by the insubstantial beings' occupation and continuous activity. But if the narrative takes such great pains to construct a solid environment that we imagine could support the existence of 'flesh and blood' characters, where are they?

In the following chapter I will argue that the empty room in a work of literature is a site uniquely capable of provoking and facilitating analyses of fictionality, particularly its affective dimensions. In imagining such spaces, the reader is prompted not only to configure a richly rendered built environment, but also to put into relation two specific imaginative acts, one most meaningful in lived experience, the other particular to the experience of fiction. Lingering in Woolf's haunted house, we become increasingly aware that to inhabit this ambiguously occupied house is to inhabit the narrative itself. The narrator of this story operates less like an embodied character and more like an avatar for the reader. Early on, the act of reading is fused with the observation of the ghosts' activity: "'They're looking for it; they're drawing the curtain,' one might say, and so read on a page or two" (122). The reader's eventual absorption in the text is dramatized as the relinquishment of the written word and a coming-into-being in the world of the narrative as a presence that can move through the space as a character would—indeed, as the ghostly couple does: "And then, tired of reading, one might rise and see for oneself, the house all empty, the doors standing open" (122). Leonard Woolf would later reflect on this very feeling of access that the story offers to its real-world inspiration, Asheham house in Sussex. To read the first line of this text is, as Leonard suggests, to step across the threshold into the now nonexistent house, to access on some level both the physical and the psychic space that Asheham provided:

> Asham[15] was a strange house. The country people on the farm were convinced that it was haunted, that there was treasure buried in the cellar, and no one would spend the night in it. It is true that at night one often heard extraordinary noises both in the cellars and in the attic. It sounded as if two people were walking from room to room, opening and shutting doors, sighing, whispering…I have never known a house which had such a strong character, personality of its own – romantic, gentle, melancholy, lovely. It was Asham and its ghostly footsteps and whisperings which gave Virginia the idea for A Haunted House and I can immediately see, hear, and smell the house when I read the opening words.

The loss of Asheham house invests this story retroactively with the power to fashion a particularly immersive experience of a specific and now inaccessible built environment. Asheham became derelict after the Woolfs were forced to give it up in 1919 when the surrounding area became a quarry, and it was finally demolished in 1994. Both Virginia and Leonard write of Asheham with a certain amount of reverence, as though it was a beautiful found object, all the more extraordinary for being unanticipated. "The loveliness of Asheham," Virginia wrote in 1919, "once again brimmed the cup and overflowed" (qtd. in Hansen 278). In his commentary on the short story, Leonard emphasizes both the sensory cues that build out the structure in the reader's mind and the way the opening lines function as a doorway that the reader crosses into a space that flickers back and forth from letters on the page to three-dimensional world.

This text does not just create a particularly habitable-seeming built environment, it self-reflexively theorizes its own processes of construction. The empty rooms of fictional worlds

[15] Leonard Woolf uses "Asham" and "Asheham" interchangeably to refer to this house.

make themselves particularly available for readerly occupation. The first sound we hear as we cross the narrative threshold is a door shutting, and throughout the story the sound of doors "gently knocking like the pulse of a heart," forms a baseline rhythm: "Safe, safe, safe,' the pulse of the house beats gladly. 'The treasure yours'" (123). Synchronized in the pulse of this living house are the activity of the ghosts and the vital presence of the reader, and the structure is responsive to their/our occupation. This is ultimately less a story about the ghosts and the haunting experienced by a diegetic, living occupant of the house than a dreamlike dramatization of the way readers activate and interact with the fictional worlds they are prompted to imagine. Or, more accurately, it is about the way the former impinges upon the latter, the way lived experiences of particularly powerful affects shape readers' engagements with fictional worlds.

The temporality of the reader's occupation of this house is the present, and in Woolf's hands this temporality manifests in a characteristic representation of ebb and flow. The empty house is a space of pronounced chromatic flux, where light and shadow continually morph across the walls and pool on the floors. Present participle verb forms proliferate. The narrative begins with a door "shutting" and closes with the narrator "waking." In a story barely two pages long, we find "lifting," "opening," "making sure," "'looking," "drawing,'" "standing," "bubbling," "reading," "sounding," "coming," "leaving," "sealing," "wandering," "knocking," "stooping, holding," "pondering," "waking" (122-3). This evocation of ongoing activity is of a piece with Woolf's enduring fascination with the representation of present experience. Her dynamic, affectively-charged houses—even if they gesture back to the nineteenth century architecturally—seem to evince a distinctly modernist narrative technique and inquiry into the relationship between form and life. It is with considerable surprise, then, that when reading Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* we find ourselves in a remarkably similar room. It is even more

surprising that this living room is situated in that famously deadest-of-all-deadened, sodden, hushed ancestral estates, Chesney Wold.

Strikingly, some of the most famously experimental passages in Woolf's fiction map onto houses of Dickens's construction. Indeed, Woolf's own estimation of Dickens's specific brilliance as a writer makes a correspondence between their empty houses seem especially unlikely. "Great geniuses," she observes in her review of *David Copperfield*, "make us see the world any shape they choose," and while reading Dickens, "we forget that we have ever felt the delights of solitude" (620). His terrain is not the cool, quiet interior but the lively, grimy street where one finds the "smell and savour and soot of London" (620). Ultimately, her defense is of Dickens at his most maximalist, a celebration of the episodes in which his powerful, almost indiscriminate visual imagination renders the excesses of life in London at an astonishing pace. What she calls the "derelict" regions of his fictions result, Woolf contends, "whenever it is no longer possible to keep moving and creating, but it is necessary to stand still and search into things and penetrate to the depths of what is there" (620). Her critique, which succinctly juxtaposes two contrary modes of literary realism, is expressed through pointed architectural, geographic, and kinetic terms. The regions surrounding sites of breathless vitality are "deserts where not a blade of grass grows" and "swamps where the foot sinks deep in mud" (620). The fictional expanses that are "derelict" in this figurative, diagnostic sense are necessarily those that are literally "derelict" in the world of the story, since Dickens's powers of narrative animation rest squarely on the shoulders of his characters. "Dickens made his books blaze up," she concludes, "not by tightening the plot or sharpening the wit, but by throwing another handful of people upon the fire" (621). And for Woolf, Dickens's characters are like the impressions of

people one forms in childhood: “they were very simple; they were immensely alive” (“A Sketch of the Past” 73).

Leaving aside Woolf’s reading of Dickens for the moment, when taken on its own terms *Bleak House* still may not appear the most promising place to turn in an investigation of empty spaces in fiction. Simply put, underpopulation has never seemed like a problem in this novel. Much more familiar are readings of overcrowding, of extraneous bodies made to fit into a limited amount of space, bobbing suddenly into view out of the fog and disappearing just as quickly. The novel begins with an image of roiling, superabundant life, dogs, horses, and pedestrians muddling their way through the opening paragraph. And the crowd the narrator refers to in the present only points outward to yet more people, the “tens of thousands of other foot passengers” that have been “slipping and sliding since the day broke” (13). As Elaine Auyoung has observed, “the world of *Bleak House* always contains more that one is not in a position to know,” since even the seemingly “empty surface” is revealed to be an “an opaque barrier” behind which any number of people or objects might be hidden (“Standing” 182).[16] In a novel seemingly filled beyond capacity, characters repeatedly find themselves occupying spaces that they either feel or are told they should not. Here is Peepy with his head stuck in the railing, there Jo constantly directed to “Move on.” One of Esther’s earliest and most formative sensations is of “filling a place in her [aunt’s] house which ought to have been empty” (31).

And yet the fact remains that for a novel famously overrun with characters competing both for narrative space and physical space, *Bleak House* has a somewhat perverse preoccupation with unoccupied, abandoned, or ‘derelict’ environments. Think, for example, of the way we are directed to contemplate Tulkinghorn’s chamber after his murder, a room occupied solely by a

[16] See also Benjamin Joseph Bishop’s “Metonymy and the Dense Cosmos of *Bleak House*” for an analysis of the narrative strategies Dickens uses to produce a “proliferation of objects and characters” (796).

dead body and two-dimensional, foreshortened Allegory, who points balefully downward from the ceiling; or, Tulkinghorn's empty room at Chesney Wold, always prepared and waiting for his arrival. One of the primary ways in which death is represented in this narrative is through its effect on spaces: the narration of rooms dispossessed of their usual occupants follows the loss of each of Esther's parents. Everywhere, in the written narrative and in H.K. Browne's atmospheric dark plate illustrations, we are confronted by empty rooms (Figures 4 and 5). In the following chapter I will argue that the representation of the existence of the empty built environment in time and not just in space is crucial for understanding how British writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries conceptualized their narrative practices, the relationship between art and lived experience, and evolving visions of the domestic. In their unstable, unfolding fictional houses, both Dickens, writing in the aftermath of the tumultuous 1840s, and Woolf, writing in the interwar period, tie the conceptual upheaval required for imagining new forms of everyday life to the destabilization and examination of realist narrative form. In the following section, I situate empty-house-time within critical accounts of nineteenth-century narrative (realist and otherwise) that foreground the relationship between time and processes of worldbuilding.

Figure 4. H.K. Browne, "A New Meaning to the Old Roman"

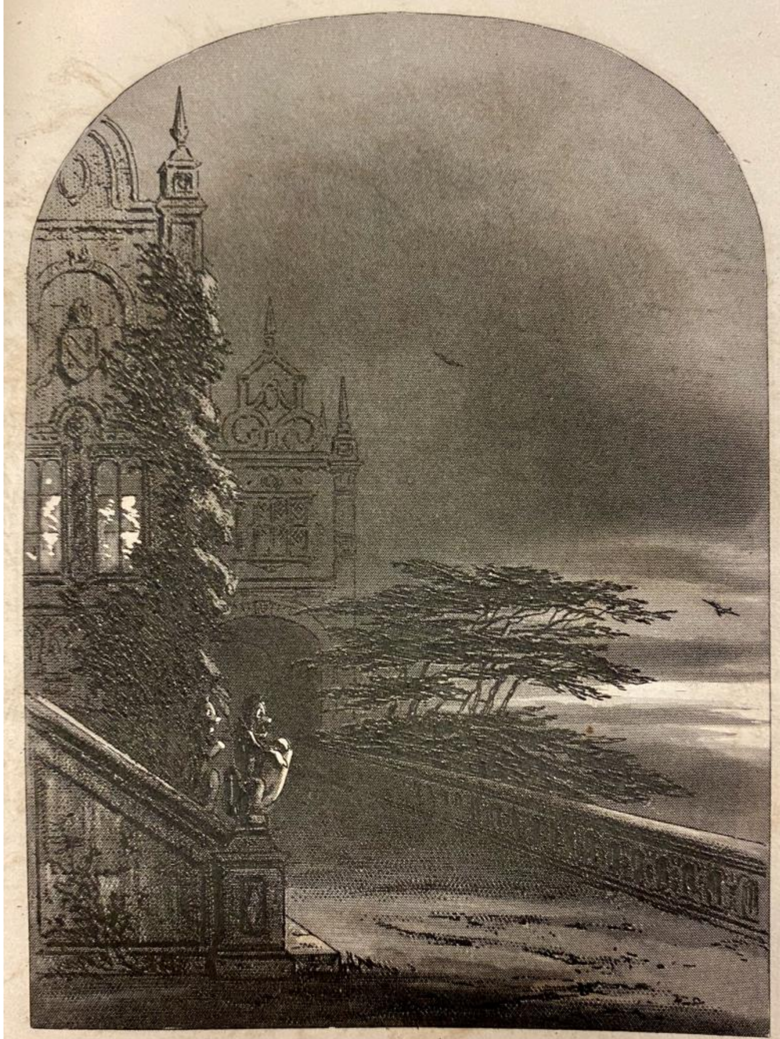

Figure 5. H.K. Browne, "The Ghost's Walk"

Time Passes

The narration of empty spaces, spaces where no characters can be found, is a strange thing in a work of fiction. To make an obvious point, most of what we would describe as narrative action occurs through, or as a result of, the operations of conventionally bounded characters. As Elaine Scarry has noted, "It is impossible to create imaginary persons if one has not created a space for them. Speaking of the perceptible world, Locke says that 'space itself seems to be nothing but a capacity or possibility for extended beings, or bodies, to exist'" (14). Following this line of thinking, the space of a fictional world could be designated a precondition

for the coming-into-being of corporeal characters. The eeriness of the character-less fictional space, then, with its tension between character absence and environmental presence, becomes newly legible as a distinctly formal unease. Compounding our sense that the spaces created by narrative writing should be filled by characters is the reader's frequent dependence upon characters to learn about the environment and other characters in a work. So often our experience of "being alone" in literary works is relayed through the feelings of a lone character who experiences isolation. We feel the weight of the profound quiet of Bly through the carefully tracked sensations and concerns of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw,* for example. But in such cases, of course, what we observe is not the narration of an empty space but the lived experience of one character in that space, occupying that world.[17]

In recent years, study of representations of the unoccupied, character-less space in nineteenth-century fictions has seen an uptick with the posthumanist turn in literary criticism. Increasingly, critics are attentive to the unpopulated regions of fictional worlds and have explored these spaces in reassessments of the perceived boundaries between the human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, and material and immaterial.[18] Ecocriticism on nineteenth-century texts has particularly focused on representations of the natural world—wilderness spaces—unoccupied by humans.[19] What has received less critical attention is the representation of uninhabited manmade environments like empty houses or city streets, rooms and corridors that feel all the more deserted for the fact that they were originally designed and laboriously

[17] Various critics have troubled the distinction between first-person and omniscient narration in ways that make the representation of truly empty, character-less spaces in fiction seem impossible. But for now I do want to hold on to this distinction between "omniscient" narration that describes an area in the world of the text devoid of conventional bounded characters and a narrative mode that focalizes through a character.

[18] See William A. Cohen's "Arborealities: The Tactile Ecology of Hardy's *Woodlanders*" or Barri J. Gold's "Energy, Ecology, and Victorian Fiction."

[19] Both Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* and Alison Byerly's "The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System" discuss the construction of the wilderness ideal as a pure, uncontaminated space in nineteenth-century British and American contexts.

constructed to accommodate beings that are now absent. For writers working in the realist literary tradition, the powerful atmospheric charge of characterlessness in these spaces activates a distinctive temporality. We might even designate the fusion of time and space in such narrative episodes a unique chronotope: empty-house-time. It is this quality of emptiness that I will suggest lends this combination of space and time in narrative its destabilizing potential. The concept of the chronotope as Bakhtin develops it is largely oriented toward character presence, since "the chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is intrinsically chronotopic" (85).[20] The defamiliarization of narrative techniques and effects that results from the unsettling emptiness of this chronotope is compounded by the effects of a historical consciousness encouraged by the house that goes on temporally without its intended, original occupants: it defamiliarizes a given vision of the household, revealing it as a formal arrangement that evolves in time. In empty-house-time, the house is no longer understood primarily as a spatial structure through which temporally charged characters move. Instead, priority is given to the house's own existence/endurance in time.

The temporality that characterizes the empty house bears suggestive similarities to what Fredric Jameson has described as the temporality of affect in *The Antinomies of Realism*. Writing about narrative generally, H. Porter Abbott notes that "narrative is the principle way in which our species organizes its understanding of time" (3). Most theorists of the novel, and the realist novel

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[20] Castle-time, salon-time, and carnival-time each have their own set of distinctive characteristics. For example, because "adventure time" is characterized predominantly by events that happen by chance, "in this type of time, an individual can be nothing other than completely passive, completely unchanging" (105). In Bakhtin's explanation, each chronotrope is particularly capable of representing certain aspects of lived experience and is associated with certain narrative tropes. There's "road-time," for example, which privileges the representation of sudden encounters, wandering and fate. Writing of castle-time, for example, Bakhtin observes, "legends and traditions animate every corner of the castle and its environs through their constant reminders of past events" (246). Salon-time, on the other hand, is all about "the weaving of historical and socio-public events together with the personal and even deeply private side of life, with the secrets of the boudoir" (247).

especially, assert that this form's defining attribute is its historically new relationship to time. In his reassessment of temporality and the realist novel, Jameson asserts that nineteenth-century literary realism emerges out of a tension and oscillation between two specific kinds of temporality: that of the récit and affect. The temporality of the récit (a term whose history Jameson chronicles from Roman Fernandez onward and ultimately refashions in the course of his argument) is the more familiar of the two. This is the tripartite, past-present-future temporality of the tale, in which events unfold in a storytelling mode that heightens our sense of their irrevocability—they seem sealed off from us.

On the other side of the spectrum is the temporality of affect. "Is it possible," Jameson asks, "to imagine a temporality so different from this conventional one that the word 'time' ceases to seem altogether appropriate for it?" (28). Although not atemporal, affect is characterized as the weaker temporal pole. In her review of *The Antinomies of Realism*, Catherine Gallagher offers a clarifying articulation of this key feature of Jameson's formulation: "By using the label affect, Jameson thus creates an asymmetrical pair: récit retains its primarily temporal quality, but the opposite pole becomes a hybrid present-as-affect, implying temporality plus a 'bodily' state" (127). What initially "seems to be an awkward analytical move…turns out to be an efficient way of noting the contrast between a kind of time we recognize as such and a kind of time we often call timeless" (127). Jameson intentionally recruits non-verbal media to describe this peculiar temporality, noting that

> references to other, more material arts is unescapable in this context, not only because it is here a question of the body and its sensations, far more tangibly deployed in music and the visual arts; but also because such an account must necessarily remain external to the thing itself, a language of the outside, which

> must necessarily be called upon to characterize the structure of language effects, let alone the lived experiences of the body as such (42).

The way Jameson uses “external” arts to describe the operations of written narrative (especially his discussion of visual art) is important to mark before moving from Woolf’s haunted house to the aberrant temporality in *Bleak House*’s empty houses. It is through music and visual art that the defining attributes of affect—incremental shift, transition, intensification and diminution, continuum—are developed across his account. Chromaticism is the term Jameson uses to describe this “waxing and waning of the scale, a slippage up and down the tones which dismisses all respect for their individual implications” (39). Wagner’s “endless melody” and “art of transitions” evokes the ongoing, lived experience of the present that Jameson wants to convey through the term “affect.” Of course, music is not the only medium through which the chromaticism of affect is understood in this analysis. After observing that the Greek word “chroma” means “skin” or “skin color,” Jameson draws a line from the skin of the body to the surface of the canvas and to the surfaces through which time is made visible within an impressionist painting. The incremental shift in tone, light and shade in the work of visual art is evocative of the phenomenology of affect in lived experience and the temporality of affect in narrative writing. Referring both to music and impressionist painting, Jameson finally observes that

> At any rate, in all these contemporary symptoms, a certain sensory heterogeneity is disguised as that absolute homogeneity we call style, and a new phenomenological continuum begins to emerge, which is that of the play and variations, the expansion and contraction, the intensification and diminution, of

> that nameless new life of the body which is affect. Affect becomes the very chromaticism of the body itself" (42).

While affect fundamentally arises from the lived experience of the body, Jameson goes on to insist that we perceive it to be autonomous and impersonal. He points out that while affect is undeniably connected to specific factors informing our lived experience, "its essence is to remain free-floating and independent of these factors (which only exist for other people), and this is obviously a function of its temporality as an eternal present, as an element which is somehow self-sufficient, feeding on itself, and perpetuating its own existence (all joy wants eternity!)" (36). The features that define the temporality of affect, then, include this impersonality alongside a vital connection with the chromatic experience of the body living in the present.

The ebb and flow of shadow and light that manifests the chromaticism Jameson associates with the temporality of affect in realist fiction is also significant in Elaine Scarry's account of how the insubstantial worlds of literary worlds take on density and vivacity in the reader's mind. "By what miracle," she asks, "is a writer able to incite us to bring forth mental images that resemble in their quality not our own daydreaming but our own (much more freely practiced) perceptual acts?" (7). One answer she proposes is that the movement of the transparent, translucent, filmy, or ghostly across a "solid" surface powerfully prompts the reader to mentally construct fictional worlds that seem dense and tactile. The passage of the transparent over the solid, the two-dimensional over the three-dimensional, is remarkable in fiction because it instructs the reader to first imagine the preconditions of perception. In so doing, and without fully realizing it, we have created the solid walls across which shadows glide and the glass windows upon which images of the sea are reflected. One example of this phenomenon that Scarry examines is the "slow progress" of Golo projected by the magic lantern across Marcel's

bedroom walls in *Swann's Way*: "If the lantern were moved I could still distinguish Golo's horse advancing across the window-curtains, swelling out with their curves and diving into their folds. The body of Golo himself, being of the same supernatural substance as his steeds, overcame every material obstacle…by taking it as an ossature and embodying it in himself" (11). As Scarry observes, by describing the movement of Golo over Marcel's walls and curtains, Proust instructs the reader to imagine both "kinetic occlusion" (where one solid surface passes over another, background surface and causes a "wiping-out" effect) and the partial occlusion of the shadow, which in J.J. Gibson's words, "does not occlude the texture of the background as the object does, nor wipe it out when it moves" (13). "Drapes and walls, even the doorknob, are visibly ingested into Golo's body," Scarry notes, and their "ongoing recoverability certifies that Golo is only a shadow, as in turn and more important his shadowiness continually confirms the solidity, the grabability, of the doorknob beneath" (13).

As many readers of *Bleak House* have observed, a particular triumph of this novel is its ability to situate the reader within a narrative space that seems physically dense and richly articulated, comprised of a network of streets, houses, cupboards and boxes that appear limitlessly explorable. For this reason, it is an ideal text in which to investigate the role and operation of episodes I have been referring to through the term empty house-time. The perceived three-dimensionality of the fictional world and the reader's resulting sense that they are able to enter it, walk around, observe and explore it is a fundamental aspiration of realist fiction. As Auyoung notes in "Standing Outside *Bleak House*," "In order to work toward a more intricate understanding of the nature and limits of this 'access' [the reader's to fictional worlds], we need to commit to the idea that one of fiction's central phenomenological effects is to bring readers into relation with what they conceive to be a 'world'" (181).

Taking a narratological approach to this wealth of world-building information in *Bleak House*, Robyn Warhol has shed light on the way fictional spaces are constructed through "visceral apperception." Visceral apperception refers to the way olfactory, auditory, gustatory, and tactile cues shape a reader's experience of spaces in the text. Distinctively, her focus is not on visual information: discussing Chesney Wold, she observes, "Dampness is the dominant sensation in all the descriptions of Chesney Wold…The next sentence piles smell, taste, and tactile sensation onto one subset of the space of Chesney Wold: 'On Sundays the little church in the park is mouldy; the oaken pulpit breaks out into a cold sweat; and there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves.'"[21] Elana Gomel also claims that our experience of the "urban chronotrope" in *Bleak House* is, in the Esther sections, grounded in the experience of the body: "Since Esther's is a street-level view, her perception of the city is structured by its maze-like horizontal topology. And this horizontal axis, as opposed to the extradiegetic narrator's vertical axis of social stratification, becomes aligned with the body" (304).

Auyoung has also worked to account for the remarkable profusion of objects, catalogues, and lists in *Bleak House*. As she observes, Dickens repeatedly stages "acts of apprehending something where there at first seems to be nothing" (182). We see this play out when Esther watches the fog over the sea rise "like a curtain" and "numbers of ships, that we had had no idea were near, appeared" (182). Or, when a closet in the Jellyby household is opened, the "doors…give way to a landslide of domestic detritus" that had previously been out of sight (183). Remarking upon the epistemological implications of this pattern of revelation, Auyoung claims that the novel "calls attention to the underacknowledged constraints upon the reader's own access to the fictional world" (184). She is simultaneously invested in showing the way

[21] Significantly, Warhol's reading takes us beyond the visual when discussing the perception of spaces in texts. This reoriented focus, especially on smell, is reminiscent of the way Jameson talks about bodily experience and affect.

"Readers comprehend narratives by constructing a mental model that does not resemble the text itself, which accounts for the common conception that readers creatively 'fill in' novels for themselves," while also exploring the limits of such imaginative projection (186).[22]

Dickens's *Bleak House* stages and reflects upon the reader's mitigated access to the fictional world. In the same review of *David Copperfield* previously discussed, Woolf celebrates his creation of the spaces of London. She comments that "No one probably has ever known his London so intimately as Dickens did, or has painted the life of the streets with such first-hand knowledge" (Woolf qtd. in Orestano 8). This remark is offered up within a larger critique of the kinds of criticism Dickens's work attracts. Specifically, she is reviewing F.G. Kitton's *The Dickens Country*, "a book which offers a scientific examination of 'the country where a great novelist lived in order to see to what extent he was influenced by his surroundings'" (Orestano 7). According to Woolf, Kitton exhaustively details the places where Dickens lived, where he walked, and the specific objects that surrounded him. She is ultimately unconvinced by Kitton's approach, noting that "a writer's country is a territory within his own brain; and we run the risk of disillusionment if we try to turn such phantom cities into tangible brick and mortar" (Orestano 8). Curiously, the disillusionment that the confrontation between real and "phantom" city occasions does not arise from our dismissal of the fictional city as all the more phantasmal in contrast with the "tangible brick and mortar." Quite the opposite is true, Woolf claims, when it comes to what feels real: "No city indeed is so real as this that we make for ourselves and people to our liking; and to insist that it has a counterpart in the cities of the earth is to rob it of half its charm" (Woolf qtd. in Orestano 8). By closely watching the seemingly static and uninhabited

[22] Dickens, Auyoung suggests, is self-consciously playing with the boundaries between the reader and the fictional world, giving us a remarkable amount of information about it while also leaving so much indeterminate. She concludes, "The more that readers find themselves drawn into the fictional world, the more likely they are to find themselves kept out" (200).

spaces of *Bleak House*, we witness Dickens's own commentary on how this effect is pulled off—how the "territory in his own brain" is made to feel tangible and vivid when recreated in the minds of his readers—as well as a reflection upon a certain imaginative act and correlating affect that underpin experiences of realist texts. An interlude just two pages long in *Bleak House* will serve as our primary point of entry into the narrative rhythms, conditions, and affordances of this uniquely destabilizing, deserted space-time.

Although the chapter "National and Domestic" is perhaps most memorable for featuring Mr. Tulkinghorn's revelation to Lady Dedlock that he knows her secret, we arrive at Chesney Wold with the omniscient narrator a day in advance of the Dedlock retinue, before any of this character-based drama can unfold. This is an episode where, to borrow Woolf's terminology, the narrative self-consciously stands still. The stasis that seems to result in a structure (house and novel) temporarily without characters is in keeping with the characteristic stillness of Chesney Wold across the novel. This estate is generally painted as a hushed landscape, bathed in golden light and almost preternaturally serene. While things happen within the estate itself and characters move through the grounds, there lingers about it an air of unreality, particularly when it is left in the hands of the omniscient narrator. Now, as the sun sets in the long drawing-room, the omniscient narrator describes the largely uninhabited great house as "a body without life," hollow, and aligned with its two-dimensional occupants: the figures in the painted portraits in the gallery (641). Though the narration choreographs a series of movements around the house, this motion is always at least one step removed from the presence of characters, real people in the world of the fiction that could activate and revivify the environment, turning it into something other than a shell-like remainder.

But in this interlude and others like it, the Dedlock establishment, oppressively static even when inhabited, is in fact teeming with activity that is, in a sense, both above and below our radar. Recalibrating our approach to this seemingly most static of spaces in order to pick up on signs of life beyond the activity of conventionally bounded characters, we become newly aware of the ways this novel reflects self-consciously on its techniques of world building, its processes of characterization, and the reader's equivocal 'occupation' of this world. Such interludes in the narrative do not so much place us in an alternate reality (a gothic or romantic one, for example) in contrast to an established realist mode so much as they activate the processes of literary realism in unexpected ways. The chromaticism that characterizes the temporality of the empty house destabilizes various established boundaries, opening up spaces in which new correspondences between the literary and the real can be imagined.

Substance and Shadow

With its contrast between a first person and retrospective narrative on the one hand and a third person 'omniscient' narrative voice speaking in the present tense on the other, *Bleak House* repeatedly stages the tension and oscillation between progress and stasis in written narrative. Esther's narrative opens with a chapter titled "A Progress," and ends with a dash, suggesting that Esther's existence is not bounded by the words of her own narrative. Conversely, while a lot of action in the story happens in the omniscient narration, it dwells at great length on systems and structures that do not change: Jarndyce and Jarndyce may end, but no thanks to Chancery, and even the narration of this resolution (which reads more like combustion) is left to Esther in "Beginning the World." That the omniscient narrative mode begins "In Chancery," and ends

"Down in Lincolnshire" indicates its alignment both with the spatial and the unalterable rather than with movement or progress.

Seemingly all-encompassing natural elements, allied with the present tense of this third person narration, emphasize simultaneity in the narrative action—water saturates the countryside, or the fog (smog, ash, paper, shadow) overwhelms London. The novel's famous opening description of London and the "[i]mplacable November weather" is far less concerned with the living beings that populate this world than with the overwhelming and raw natural elements through which these beings (and the narrative) slosh forward (13). Intermingling atmospheric and environmental layers are introduced one after the other (mud, soot, fog, and gas), and this narrative preoccupation with precipitation and atmosphere extends the reader's view of this fictional world spatially, beyond the city and into the country. As the narrator observes, we may pass "on this same miry afternoon" from on district to another "as the crow flies," and the "soft black drizzle" of soot in Chancery soon melts into the "drip, drip, drip" of the constant rainfall at Chesney Wold (20, 13, 21). Consistency of environmental factors and spatiality in this narrator's approach to the fictional world augments the weightiness of structures and systems that are presented as immutable across the novel (Chancery, for example).

Chesney Wold, perhaps more than any other location in *Bleak House*, is constantly described as awash in various natural elements or absorbed by a certain kind of light. In the first description of the Dedlock establishment in Lincolnshire, the house and grounds are brought into stony, high relief as raindrops strike against, trickle down, and pool upon their surfaces. This description is preceded by the narrator's grim remark that this is a "deadened world," "sometimes unhealthy for want of air" (20). The world of fashion, though a roving one made up of the coterie surrounding Lady Dedlock, is for the moment localized in this sodden house and

grounds. This dreary environment is made up of deadened sounds and surfaces: rifle shots and the sounds of the woodman's axe lose their "sharpness in the moist air" (21). Much of the permanency and solidity of this world is suggested in the persistent play of water and light over its surfaces—in the way highly mutable elements change course or distort themselves according to its petrified contours. On the "stone terrace" vases "catch the rain all day," and the "broad flagged pavement, called from old time the Ghost's Walk" seems increasingly solid as raindrops dash against it.

The Dedlock establishments in Lincolnshire and London are spaces where the static, petrifying energies of the third-person narrative palpably pool, and what seems to signal and amplify this stillness is an absence of all characters, or of an all-important character. There are a remarkable number of interludes at Chesney Wold where the house is largely empty. If human presence is required to produce meaningful narrative action, movement within a solid, static special field, then character absence seems to produce a suitably death-like hush.

But these spaces are hardly unchanging. The fixed hush of death may be powerfully suggested in their stillness, but what become pronounced in this relative quiet are different kinds of movement. To begin to see this, one need only look at a particular view of Chesney Wold described in our first encounter with the place: "The waters are out in Lincolnshire. An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low-lying ground for half a mile in breadth is a stagnant river with melancholy trees for islands in it" (20). A "stagnant river," one that has absorbed much of the landscape and no longer can be said to flow as a river should, vividly evokes the stultifying and inefficient old regime associated with Sir Leicester and his Doodles and Coodles. This defunct bridge, surrounded by water and isolated, islanded trees, is a soggy echo of the bridges overwhelmed by the all-encompassing fog in the novel's opening

pages: “Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds” (13). In both instances, people and objects appear marooned. Forward movement across these bridges is, or is made to appear, impossible or pointless.

And yet in this scene at Chesney Wold the droplets of water that cumulatively expand the river and deaden the atmosphere of this world necessarily also make it a fundamentally active space when viewed on a smaller scale. Even though this river does not properly flow or progress laterally, zooming in on the surface of the water with the omniscient narrator makes visible movement that is transverse to the flow of the river (if it did flow): the vertical motion of water plummeting and then rising. Though flow may be nonexistent, the river has a “surface punctured all over, all day long, with falling rain” (20). The pinpricks that perpetually alter the surface of this river “all over,” and “all day long” make it a figure of constant, if low-level, activity.

Bleak House is a novel that trains the reader to reallocate attention in various ways, and this early encounter with the swamped bridge is, I suggest, an early instance of one way it directs the reader to make observations about environments. When given access to the space as a character would move through it, the arch of the flooded, isolated bridge powerfully signifies stasis—stasis understood as the firm impossibility or pointlessness of movement. Bridges, like roads, are figures of motion and connection. Both the swamped bridge, which cannot be accessed and only leads to more water anyway, and the fog-encompassed bridge, which figuratively and visually isolates and limits the forward progress of its travelers (they appear to be carried upward, not forward, in a balloon “hanging in the misty clouds”), mark from the first that this novel’s commentary on inefficient or exploitative social systems will be worked out through various images of progress and stasis (what are the conditions that allow for meaningful

movement in this environment/context?). The kind of action it calls to mind (only to forestall) is of a linear, forward-moving variety, and so the swamped bridge prompts the reader to imagine conventionally understood narrative progress and, almost simultaneously, its failure or absence. At the same time, however, the flooded bridge performs important work by directing attention to the affordances of stillness in a medium more often understood to represent certain kinds of progress and motion. Within a scene that has already been marked as signifying the failure of movement and progress, the reader is asked to observe a second kind of activity, one that takes place on a much smaller scale, and which does not figure activity in this world as the movement of a character (as the bridge does). As we imagine the perpetually mutating surface of this river as raindrops strike it "all over," and "all day long," and, indeed, as we come to know the whole region of Lincolnshire through the collective pinpricks of rain that fall upon it, we are encouraged to conceive of the temporality of this space and of such narrative episodes as distinct from the one through which Esther will move in the following chapter and beyond. The next chapter, after all, is Esther's first appearance as a narrator in this novel, and it is called "A Progress." To see absolute stillness in environments where characters are not present to drive traditional narrative action is a limiting view, and stepping into empty halls of Chesney Wold will reveal just how dynamic these environments can be.

"This present summer evening, as the sun goes down, the preparations are complete" (639). Everything is in place, the omniscient narrator observes, for the arrival of the absent characters, the Dedlocks. They are expected, but in this present, one that dilates to include the steady progress of the sun, we can only wait, and a suitably death-like hush settles over the estate. "Dreary and solemn the old house looks," the narrator continues, "with so many appliances of habitation and with no inhabitants except the pictured forms upon the walls" (639).

As we might expect, these carefully prepared appliances of habitation make the absence of the family from the rooms all the more obvious. But what is less anticipated and equally as pronounced is the corresponding environmental plenitude, the almost palpable presence the house acquires not in spite of character-absence but seemingly because of it. Chesney Wold has never seemed so solid and vivid, with such a richness of color and detail. Even the light takes on a magical and tactile quality, becoming a flowing, molten substance that transforms the estate from without into "a glorious house of gold" (639). Spilling into the room "through some of the fiery windows beautiful from without…the light excluded at other windows pours in rich, lavish, overflowing like the summer plenty in the land" (639-40).

In this unusually substantial, character-less built environment, "Time" begins to act erratically. Personified as a truant servant, he must be coerced to keep to schedule by Mrs. Rouncewell, who leads him around the house "to witness before he grows any older that everything is ready" (639). In his absence, a new temporality takes hold of the rooms, marked by a particularly intense evocation of the present and by the flux of light and shadows cast by the setting sun and the rising moon. This is a chromatic temporality similar to the one Jameson associates with affect. Although the omniscient narrator of *Bleak House* always speaks in the present tense, present experience is represented in an especially heightened way in the dying light of the sun at Chesney Wold. The word "now" recurs rhythmically throughout this interlude, creating a series of intermingling presents: "Now the fire is out," "now the moon is high," "Now it is even awful," "Now is the time for shadow" (641). This is a space of ebb and flow, "where shadow slowly mounts the walls, bringing the Dedlocks down like age and death," "Light mists arise, and the dew falls," and "the woods settle into great masses" before "the moon rises to separate them" (641). Such a pairing of corresponding verbs (mount and bring down, arise and

fall, settle and separate) heightens the quality of chromatic shift that characterizes so many aspects of this episode.

In addition to instructing the reader to imagine partial kinetic occlusion through the movement of light and shadow, the omniscient narrator provides a wealth of sensory cues through which the reader can extrapolate a three-dimensional environment. Leading into this episode of characterlessness, we gain a sense of the layout of the house through Mrs. Rouncewell's inspection, as she moves "up and down staircases, and along the galleries and passages and through the rooms" (639). After these rooms and corridors spring up around us, their surfaces and contents are brought sharply into focus through the suggestion of tactile interaction: "floors rubbed bright, carpets spread, curtains shaken out, beds puffed and patted, still-room and kitchen cleared for action, all things prepared" (639). A few paragraphs on and a breathable atmosphere suffuses the rooms and the surrounding environment, as "light mists arise," "dew falls," and "all the sweet scents of the garden are heavy in the air" (641). We feel the warmth by which the pictured Dedlocks "thaw" in the late afternoon sunlight. The indignation expressed in these passages at the emptiness of an environment so meticulously cultivated for habitation heightens the reader's feeling of somehow making reparation by stepping into this gallery, with its shifting light and crowding of shadows.

Categories and Continuums

A crowding of shadows is actually a useful term for describing the occupation of Chesney Wold at sunset. Never has this house been so empty and yet so full. We are simultaneously 'alone' with the narrator in this cavernous space and surrounded by an array of phantasmal, allegorical, and figurative beings. Leading into this sunset interlude is a discussion

of Coodle and Doodle, composite and emblematic figures standing in for a particular type, the political elite. Then we encounter “Britannia,” a personification of the nation who is “much occupied in pocketing Doodle in the form of sovereigns, and swallowing Doodle in the form of beer” (639). Moving directly into the sunset interlude itself, we have already seen the way the narrator allegorizes Time as a servant who must be coerced to keep to schedule. Soon after, the portraits are brought to life and revert back to a deathly stillness when the light on the walls catches and releases them. And then, still within the space of about two pages, we enter the mind of a hypothetical, ancestral Dedlock, imagined by the narrator.

While each of the figures listed above could be seen as a bounded entity whose referentiality can be worked out, what is striking here is the spectrum of intermediacy that this rapid-fire assortment affords. Emptying Chesney Wold of fully formed realist characters creates a vacuum into which a variety of shadowy, less fully realized entities are drawn out of the woodwork. Although it might seem that these intermediate figures serve to reinforce the conventional characters in the text, in fact they actually make visible, in their spectral translucency, the remarkable nature of their more fully rendered counterparts. They denaturalize the realist character by bringing to the foreground the various techniques writers use to animate characters, reminding the reader of the almost alchemical transformation that occurs when a character like Esther takes on a density and complexity approaching that of a real person in the reader’s mind. As personifications of an array of abstract types (national, economic, social, political), these intermediary figures in the fictional world highlight the processes whereby the realist character begins to exceed their limited existence on the page.

Perhaps the portraits tie these intermediate figures to the processes of realist characterization most visibly. Each portrait, as it catches the light (which, tellingly, corresponds

with the narrator's attention) takes on life. "Strange movements come upon their features," as one by one the Dedlock ancestors "thaw": "A dense justice in a corner is beguiled into a wink. A staring baronet, with a truncheon, gets a dimple in his chin. Down into the bosom of a stony shepherdess there steals a fleck of light and warmth that would have done it good a hundred years ago" (641). A wink, a dimple, a fleck of light and warmth—small details, marks of personality that distinguish each figure from the category of person they represent in their unanimated state (a "dense justice," who winks, a truncheon holding "staring baronet," who smiles, a "stony shepherdess," who is warm and alive). The process of character building is performed visually in this play between type and individuating, unexpected detail. Significantly, to get the detail is to come alive.

Chesney Wold is the location where this play between living, embodied realist character in the diegetic world and the strange life of figures in portraits repeatedly plays out. An earlier account of the house, when it is "on the watch" for the arrival of its occupants, prefigures the way this space reorders our perception of the boundaries between the "real" person and the two-dimensional un-real figure. In this episode Chesney Wold and the surrounding countryside are made visible through a particular, cold light, one that "looks in at the windows, and touches the ancestral portraits with bars and patches of brightness, never contemplated by the painters" (182). Chesney Wold is occupied year-round by shadowy figures who seem to observe present activity while remaining staunchly positioned in their past eras. When they arrive at the house, Lady Dedlock steps to the foot of the stairs, where Sir Leicester meets her; he, in turn, "pauses for her as her knightly escort" (186). It is as though Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock have assumed their staged positions in a tableau of aristocratic courtesy. The old-fashioned etiquette of Sir Leicester as he escorts Lady Dedlock up the stairs, stiff and genteel, seems of a piece with

the frozen form on the panel beside them. But even as the living figures here tend toward the condition of art, an unreal figure approaches the state of the living: positioned beside them at the stair is a "A staring old Dedlock," who is "as large as life and as dull," and "looks as if he didn't know what to make of it—which was probably his general state of mind in the days of Queen Elizabeth" (186). This house, where real people are observed alongside, and by, figures in 'large as life' portraits, opens a representational dimension and discursive register in which borders between full and flat, "real" and representative are made permeable, and people walk with shadows.[23]

Before joining Sir Leicester at the stairs to be observed by this "staring old Dedlock," Lady Dedlock touches Rosa's "dimpled cheek," a gesture that throws into relief the dissimilarity between the real and unreal figures in the scene just before making them converge. The staring eyes of a figure in a painting mark its conditions of existence—however real or vivid a painted portrait may seem, its inhabitant cannot help but stare. The painted figure is largely defined by its immobility. A dimple, on the other hand, results from movement and therefore can serve as a marker of a living body. This pairing of physical features, which draws our attention to formal differences between visual art and written narrative, is reprised when we return to portraits in the gallery at sunset.

Corresponding with the continuum of characterization in the written narrative's account of pictures coming to life in the sunset interlude is a visually inscribed metamorphosis in the illustration of this environment, "Sunset in the Long Drawing-room" (Figure 6). The room represented in the image is devoid of characters but crowded with figures. Lady Dedlock's

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[23] The field that is created here is represented visually in the illustration, "Sunset in the Long Drawing-room." Here a portrait of Lady Dedlock has the same presence in the image as the statue of the mother and child. And, as we are repeatedly reminded, our vision of Lady Dedlock, the real character, can never quite be dissevered from our perception of her through the formal stillness of her painted likeness.

presence and absence in this image is reminiscent of the way she is made both spectral and alarmingly “flesh and blood” later in the chapter, during Tulkinghorn’s thinly veiled account of her past. Her portrait, which appears to depict her as large as life, is positioned above the fireplace. In the illustration, the difference between the actual Lady Dedlock and painted image of Lady Dedlock is attenuated (leaving aside for the moment contextual cues like the frame that surrounds the portrait and the fact that, if it were the character herself, she would inexplicably be hovering several feet in the air). Complicating the play of signification in this image is the fact that the actual Lady Dedlock is so frequently described as tending toward the condition of visual art. She is still, poised, and not easily provoked into visible reaction. The statue of a mother and child to which our eye is drawn at the center of the illustration affords yet another manifestation of Lady Dedlock, one that is less indexically connected with the character than the portrait but no less obvious in its association. The statue contributes to our sense of the spectrum that exists between individual and type, the complex and the flat. We can imagine Lady Dedlock metamorphosing from a two-dimensional painted image into a three-dimensional but marble statue, and then into an actual living, breathing, though unnervingly still, woman. She flickers between these states as we inspect the illustration, intermittently recalling and forgetting the differences that the formal conditions of the image put under erasure.

Figure 6. H.K. Browne, "Sunset in the Long Drawing-room at Chesney Wold"

This blurring of the lines between real and unreal, alive and dead, emblematic and actual figures is in keeping with the pulsation of articulation and disintegration of detail created by the movement of the light within the gallery and across the landscape—one moment all the trees in the woods "settle into great masses as if they were one profound tree," and in the next, "the moon, rises to separate them" (641). Keeping our eyes fixed on the portrait of Lady Dedlock, we can see another continuum that the chromaticism of empty-house-time opens up, a continuum between literal and figurative language use that works primarily through the word "shadow." The narrator notes the presence of shadows on the walls cast by the trees outside, the most remarked upon of which is "the shadow in the long drawing-room upon my Lady's picture" (641). In the world of the story, this is a literal reference to a shadow. But this literal shadow is freighted with great symbolic weight, since "at this hour and by this light it changes into

threatening hands raised up and menacing the handsome face with every breath that stirs" (641). The literal shadow is first made meaningful in conjunction with the portrait, but then it becomes even more meaningful as it takes the shape of menacing hands. This passage creates a tangle of literal and figurative signification from which it is difficult to extricate oneself. To whom or what are we to attribute the "breath that stirs?" Is "breath" a figurative reference to the wind, which in the world of the narrative could literally cause the shadow to move? Or is it a reference to breath coming from the handsome face, which, of course, is actually made of canvas and paint? By attributing the breath to the figure in the painting, the use of the word seems literal but ultimately becomes part of a figurative conceit.

Beyond the literal and symbolic significance of this particular patch of darkness on the wall, the use of the word 'shadow' is complicated through the discourse of characters and the narrator in this interlude and in a corresponding one that appears hundreds of pages later. Here it is used figuratively by the narrator to refer to resemblance within the Dedlock family line, as an ancestor of Volumina is said to cast "the shadow of that virgin event before her full two centuries" (641). Later, when George describes the awfulness of unoccupied rooms when a "person is away under any shadow," he uses "shadow" figuratively. In the next line the narrator has picked up George's language of shadows, intoning, "all partings foreshadow the great final one," while actual shadows in Lady Dedlock's rooms deepen, strangely unfazed by the light. In this reading, a state of flux does more than heighten the immutability of the physical house by contrast. It makes visible categories and fictions through which knowledge about particularly abstract or diffuse concepts and relationships is made possible. This extended play with the word shadow, which the narrator and characters use in a variety of ways almost in the same breath,

breaks down distinctions between different kinds of language use, literal and figurative, and in so doing, tacitly challenges assumptions about the kind of knowledge each can produce.[24]

Up to this point, I have outlined how the characteristics of empty-house-time facilitate a dissection of realist techniques and effects by focusing on one specific interlude at Chesney Wold. As we have seen, the distinctive chromaticism of this chronotope not only brings to the foreground the strategies of world building that prompt the reader to imagine vivid, almost substantial fictional spaces, it also opens up continuums along which the processes of realist characterization are explored and the distinctions between the fictional and the real are thrown into flux. But this hyper-focused approach cannot fully account for the global preponderance of empty rooms across the novel. The omniscient narrator's attention to Chesney Wold in the instance I have discussed so far is part of a much broader pattern of house-keeping, an insistent toggling back and forth between the spaces characters have left behind and those they currently occupy ("The house in town…is rarely in the same mind as Chesney Wold at the same time, seldom rejoicing when it rejoices or mourning when it mourns"; "While Esther sleeps, and while Esther wakes, it is still wet weather down at the place in Lincolnshire") (458, 103). Sometimes, in doing this due diligence, the narrator offers only a brief reference to the empty rooms, without pausing long enough for the chromatic empty-house-time we have been exploring to kick in. Nor does this targeted approach fully explain the particular emotional charge of these narrative spaces.

[24] Nelson Goodman's work on aesthetics, reference, and the structure of perception helps clarify the significance of this continuum. For Goodman, the norms that become the categories through which we know the world are options among an infinite number of other categories that might be used to structure our perception of reality. As he puts it in *Problems and Projects*, "We know what we see is no truer than that we see what we know. Perception depends heavily on conceptual schemata" (142).

What role does this residual affect, which at the outset we might characterize as a melancholy, contemplative wistfulness, play in Dickens's theorization of literary realism? A tour through *Bleak House*'s empty rooms and a brief excursion to the stately homes of England as they are represented in the print culture of the 1840s and '50s will offer answers.

Feeling Spaces

When unoccupied by the 'living' realist character, the rooms of *Bleak House* are not just empty, they feel abandoned (perhaps an unsurprising state of affairs, given the title of the novel). Although their physical contours may remain stable, the emotional lives of these structures are anything but. The estates, houses, and boarding-rooms of this novel have hearts, and their feelings are contingent upon the presence or absence of their inhabitants. "Chesney Wold has taken heart," reports the narrator when observing that the arrival of the Dedlock family and their coterie is imminent in the chapter "On the Watch" (181). In the long periods of emptiness while the family is away, this house is at times quietly resigned to its fate, at others positively desperate for habitation. The whole sequence of arrival for this visit chronicled in "On the Watch" tangles up the way characters watch one another (Lady Dedlock watching Rosa, Hortense watching Lady Dedlock interact with Rosa, Lady Dedlock waiting and watching for Tulkinghorn's arrival) and the way the estate itself appears to be anxiously on the lookout for the return of its occupants. Swinging from one extreme to the other, the house suddenly finds itself overcrowded when the Dedlocks finally arrive, "so full, that a burning sense of injury arises in the breasts of ill-lodged ladies' maids, and is not to be extinguished" (191). A product of the material constraints of the house (its limited space and the sudden, overwhelming influx of occupants), the "burning" dissatisfaction in the hearts the of ladies' maids merges into a collective feeling

that seeps into the walls and floorboards, becoming the affect of the house itself. Clearly, with the arrival of the "brilliant circle," "The place in Lincolnshire is all alive" (188).

The transformation of the Lincolnshire estate is a miraculous revivication, even as the desolation of inoccupation hovers in the wings. The Dedlocks and their guests "enliven the park-roads" with their shooting and activity. When the group goes to church on Sunday, "the chill little church is almost warmed by so much gallant company" (188). Stepping back further, we can observe a return to the reflection on character presence and the perception of narrative progress and stasis that was initiated at the beginning of the novel. With the return of the Dedlocks and co., the "broken arch of the bridge in the park is mended; and the water, now retired within its proper limits and again spanned gracefully, makes a figure in the prospect from the house" (181). The repaired arch and the river that is returned to its "proper limits" signal a shift from one narrative temporality to another. The return of characters marks a reorientation of our perception of the space and scenery of Chesney Wold so that it aligns with and is scaled with respect to a character's position, gaze, and taste. But the family can only ward off the hush and darkness of inevitable emptiness so far and for so long. The narrator's tendency to position the reader outside of the house, looking in as though to confirm or deny its appearance of habitation, betrays the specter of emptiness that lingers even when the house is full: "Seen by night, from distant openings in trees, the row of windows in the long drawing-room, where my Lady's picture hangs over the great chimney-piece, is like a row of jewels set in a black frame" (188). Significantly, the only figure that we specifically see through the windows of the long-drawing room from without is the painted image of Lady Dedlock. Even when the house is full to bursting, our attention is still directed to a two-dimensional, painted figure, as well as to an unoccupied space: Tulkinghorn's room.

“Only one room is empty…It is Mr. Tulkinghorn’s room, and is never bestowed on anybody else, for he may come at any time” (191). Emblematic of the larger structure of the house, this empty room is “on the watch,” hovering on the edge of occupation, always prepared for its specific, designated inhabitant. It is Tulkinghorn’s absence that throws into relief the physical attributes of his “turret,” like the “complaining flag-staff” that flies overhead and the “leads outside” upon which, if he were present, he might be seen walking (191). “It is a turret chamber of the third order of merit,” the narrator elaborates, “plainly but comfortably furnished, and having an old-fashioned business air…. He is not come yet” (191). [25] Of course, to think of rooms without living inhabitants in conjunction with Tulkinghorn is to call forth the circumstances of his death, the account of which is much more focused on the murder’s effect upon the ceiling, floorboards, and atmosphere of the room than on the act itself or the body. On the floor there is a stain “so easy to be covered, so hard to be got out,” and on the ceiling, unfortunate Allegory, driven “stark mad” by this close encounter with the limitations of the flesh and blood body (750, 752). The narrator follows Allegory’s direction first to the objects that fill the room, noting with remarkable specificity not just the presence of a table, chair, glass, wine bottle, and candles, but the fact that the wine bottle is “nearly full of wine” and that the candles appear to have been “blown out suddenly soon after being lighted” (750). Any student of Agatha Christie’s would immediately take these details for clues, but for our purposes they are chiefly significant simply as details. Once again, we find ourselves in an unoccupied but vividly realized room. When the narrator does finally turn, with a dramatic flourish, to the body, it is to ask us to imagine the “night to morning” during which the room is inhabited only by the painted figure

[25] The reader is repeatedly made to observe the spaces of this house with an eye for the fact that they are missing their appropriate occupant. Hortense’s devious expression, for example, is reflected “in my Lady’s mirrors, when my Lady is not among them” (188).

Allegory and Tulkinghorn's corpse (752). Forever marked by this event, the space nevertheless will go on without Tulkinghorn. The narrator asks us to cast our minds into the future, into the minds of people who will try to imagine the past: "So it shall happen surely, through many years to come, that ghostly stories shall be told of the stain upon the floor…and that the Roman, pointing from the ceiling shall point, so long as dust and damp and spiders spare him" (752).

As Tulkinghorn's chambers attest, then, the way spaces go on forlornly without their usual occupant is not just a feature of ancestral estates like Chesney Wold. And even in the most impersonal of rooms, like the ones available at Krook's establishment, this phenomenon plays out. Guppy's friend Jobling senses that he is entering a space that is continuing on without its familiar inhabitant when he scrambles to assert ownership of Nemo's old room. When Guppy asks whether he minds that the previous lodger died there, Jobling petulantly insists he doesn't, but "It's devilish odd that he need go and die at my place!" (326). His efforts to make this room his own are not particularly effective, described as the acts of "a shipwrecked sailor making the best of it" (330). The room is literally marked by the former tenant's occupation (in both senses of the word) since Jobling has "inherited the deal wilderness of desk, bespattered with a rain of ink" (331). When he sleeps, "two eyes in the shutters stare at him," the cat's gaze standing in for that of the deceased former lodger, Nemo.

Moving from Chesney Wold, to Tulkinghorn's rooms, to Krook's boarding house, we can see that the conceit of the built environment that feels for and holds onto the memory of its former occupant is consistent across *Bleak House*'s vast matrix of upper-, middle-, and lower-class rooms. The particular affect that surrounds these structures undulates in intensity across the narrative whole, but on two occasions it becomes so highly charged that it produces the equivalent of a lightning strike in the omniscient narration: the appearance of a speaking "I."

Aside from the many occasions where this narrator refers to Lady Dedlock as “My Lady,” there are relatively few examples of the intrusion of a first person voice into the omniscient narrator’s account. But in two episodes where the novel’s commentary on empty spaces becomes most overt—the sunset episode already discussed and the account of Lady Dedlock’s rooms after her flight—the omniscient narrator adopts a momentarily more personal mode of address. The vacuum of the empty room that drew in all the intermediate figures previously discussed also pulls the omniscient narrator into the world of the characters, registering as a speaking “I” that, however mediated, is still a marked departure from the prevailing omniscient voice. Without diminishing readings that approach the omniscient narration in this novel as a representation of distinct discourses developed by particular communities and institutions, we can still ask why the narrative encourages us to imagine the narrator as a bounded individual in two strikingly similar interludes positioned hundreds of pages apart.

To understand the narratological significance of the reflections articulated by the omniscient narrator in these episodes, a preliminary detour into the stately homes of England as they are represented in the print culture of the 1840s and ’50s is illuminating. Dickens is invoking and extending an existing discourse of historical imagining that takes as its point of departure the ancestral estate. In 1839, Joseph Nash published the first volume of *The Mansions of England in the Olden Time*, a collection of detailed lithographs representing the baronial halls of England. Trained as an architect, Nash traveled extensively to study and render, “on the spot,” intricate depictions of stately houses with architectural features of historical interest (17). The new level of virtual access to remote houses that these images offered viewers made Nash’s series extremely popular, and, in addition to the publication of three more volumes of *Mansions* by 1849, individual images from the series circulated widely in publications like *The Saturday*

Magazine (Mandler 42). These images not only invited viewers into private and geographically-distant residences, they also functioned as thresholds to the domestic life of a distant past (see "The Cartoon Gallery, Knowle, Kent," Figure 7). Rather than austerely rendering the physical features of surviving Elizabethan and Jacobean structures, Nash populated his images with figures from bygone eras—lords and ladies in elaborate dress, revelers celebrating around bonfires, and many, many dogs. "In attempting this," Nash writes, "the artist has endeavoured to place himself in the position of a visitor to these ancient edifices, whose fancy peoples the deserted halls" (qtd. in *The Monthly Review* 453). In his introduction to the second volume, Nash insists that "The object of their introduction has been not merely an eye for pictorial effect, but a desire to identify the edifices they are intended to illustrate with the characters and habits of a people that have now passed away, and to represent, in its various peculiarities, 'the very age and body of the time'" (18).

Figure 7. Joseph Nash, "The Cartoon Gallery, Knowle, Kent"

This desire to animate the rooms of the past with the occupants for whom they were designed and built was often expressed in written accounts that offered readers virtual tours of these houses. As a writer for *The Penny Magazine* evocatively puts it, stepping across the threshold of one of the baronial halls of England can have a magical effect: "At once [it] makes us centuries older: we not only think of, but feel with, the past" (58). The narrative present cultivated through the conceit of the tour in this 1839 account of Knowle House leads the reader into the distant past, which in turn is experienced as a vividly sensory present. "The loneliness seems suddenly to be broken," continues our guide, "the bustle of countless attendants going in and out begins, the tables groan with the profusion of the feast, bright jewels and still brighter eyes begin to sparkle…it is some high festival!" (58-9). "Alas," this exuberant intrusion of the

life of the past into the "domestic" present is "of imagination only," and the phantasmal figures vanish all too soon (59). But as Peter Mandler observes, however short-lived this experience of feeling with the past was for an individual visitor in such a space, the notion that the long-lost inhabitants of the old houses of England could, in a flash, materialize before the visitor's eyes proved a lasting one.[26] William Howitt's virtual excursion through the old English House in *The Rural Life of England* (1838) marks out "the armoury and the great gallery" as "the places in which a flood of historic light pours in upon you, and the spirit of the past is made so palpable, that you forget your real existence in this utilitarian century" (325). In 1874, a writer for *The Leisure Hour* claims that when visiting Haddon Hall, "with a little effort of the imagination [we] may re-people the mouldering solitude and recall the daily life of the generations that have passed away" (qtd. in Mandler 63). At once a means of enchanting the ancestral estate and a narrative technique that prompts the reader to vividly picture not just the phantom inhabitants, displaced in time, but the existing house, displaced in space, such dramatizations of historical imagining pin the act of imagination itself to the stony walls that diegetically stimulate and extradiegetically materialize-through this mental projection. From the 1840s onward, the baronial houses of England were associated with experiences of fictional spaces not only because images like Nash's were, as Mandler puts it, "the successor…to purely literary realizations of the Olden Time" (like the fiction of Sir Walter Scott), but also because they forged and reaffirmed correspondences between "effort[s] of imagination," historical and fictional (45).

Rockingham Castle, which Dickens acknowledged as a source of inspiration for Chesney Wold in a letter to Lavinia Watson, received a similar treatment in an account published in *The*

[26] With respect to Knowle in particular, Mandler notes that "so persuasive and enduring was this fantasy that it was plagiarized by a highly respectable antiquarian writer introducing Knole to the readers of *The Leisure Hour* fifty years later" (56).

Archaeological Journal in 1844. In the oldest sections of the castle, the hall and gallery, the author observes, “there are always some unerring marks to be met with, which…carry us back to an earlier date” (377). Continuing in this familiar mode, the writer reports that when visiting Rockingham, “the imagination strives to recal (sic) the glittering array of visor’d bowmen and feudal state” of the castle’s past (377). According to this writer, the endurance of the house over the centuries is literally inscribed “in letters of gold on the beams of the castle hall”: “THE : HOWSE : SHAL : BE : PRESERVED : AND : NEVER : WIL : DECAYE : WHEARE : THE : ALMIGHTIE : GOD : IS : HONORED : AND : SERVED : DAYE : BY : DAYE : 1579” (378). The fanciful conceits that spring up around these enduring baronial houses in the print culture of the period, and the powerful historicity of Rockingham in particular, suffuses Dickens’s fictional structure, lending the light that pours into the great gallery of Chesney Wold at sunset its peculiar hue and underwriting the first-person reflection on transience and timelessness staged within this space. In my discussion of realist characterization, I closed the litany of intermediate figures in the sunset interlude with a reference to the hypothetical Dedlock that the narrator imagines wandering and wondering in the gallery. About this hypothetical figure, the narrator indulges in a multivalent act of speculation:

> So did these come and go, a Dedlock in possession might have ruminated passing along; so did they see this gallery hushed and quiet, as I see it now; so think, as I think, of the gap that they would make in this domain when they were gone; so find it, as I find it, difficult to believe that it could be without them; so pass from my world, as I pass from theirs, now closing the reverberating door; so leave no blank to miss them, and so die (639).

That the reflecting figure the omniscient narrator imagines is a Dedlock and not just a visitor to the estate adds a degree of poignancy to this particular train of thought in this particular gallery. But in this passage the speaking "I" is readily detached from this rather flimsy hypothetical figure and becomes almost indistinguishable from what we understand to be the narrator's own reflection. The relay of reflection we are asked to imagine in these lines makes this realignment of the first-person voice with the narrator almost unavoidable: the narrator is imagining a Dedlock who is imagining the experience of past Dedlocks through the similarity of their experiences walking these halls. The echoing that structures the whole passage— "so think, as I think….so find it, as I find it"—amplifies this effect. In the baronial hall, a space that is primed to stimulate this sort of thoughtfulness, the narrator steps into the world of the narrative and speaks as an entity whose subjectivity we glimpse in this mediated mode. Crystallizing briefly in the flux of this environment as a speaking subject, the narrator's presence begins to dissipate when the first-person voice is left behind, and it rapidly evaporates when characters step onto the scene. So the narrator passes from "their world" (that of the characters), "closing the reverberating door," leaving no blank by which to be missed.

The thought process described in the passage quoted above is framed as transhistorical, imagined to occur both to the present hypothetical Dedlock and to ancestors at various historical moments. The mirroring of experience and consciousness that is verbalized by the narrator through the hypothetical Dedlock is anticipated by the description of physical likeness, resemblances made visible in the ancestral portraits. Thinking about one's own death and the continuation of the world beyond that point is framed as a uniquely universal rumination, even as the hush, stillness, and isolation of this space makes it feel intensely personal. This combination of the universal and the personal is so powerful that even the reader begins to feel implicated in

the speaking "I." To read this train of thought is in some sense to enact it, or to be compelled to experience it—to dwell on the strangeness of the world going on after you are no longer there to experience it and give it reality through your perception. "Think, as I think," the narrator/hypothetical Dedlock says, and we do.

This overlapping of the thoughts of the reader, narrator, hypothetical Dedlock, and collective ancestral Dedlocks compounds the presentness of the passage; collectively, they span and mediate narrative registers as beings situated along a continuum between the real, the seemingly real but fictional, and the flatly symbolic. In the absence of a conventional character wandering through this space and focalizing this reflection, the narrative seems to embrace a more capacious and, in fact, active sense of the word 'being.' It is a verb here, as in "being-in-the-present," as this remarkable passage opens up simultaneous presents at disparate historical moments in the narrative and within and without the world of the story. Both the reader and the narrator, then, are drawn into the fictional world through the conspicuous absence of characters (the entities this environment was designed to accommodate).

The affect hovering around the empty drawing-room intensifies and diminishes at various moments across the sunset interlude, but its quality is consistent. Once the sun has fully set, it reaches a particularly high pitch: "now," the narrator seems to whisper, "the great house, needing habitation more than ever, is like a body without life" (641). The somewhat abstract and fatalistic reflection on transience and death that we saw through the ancestral and hypothetical Dedlocks before the sun fully set has given way to a more immediate, visceral fear. "Now it is even awful, stealing through it," continues the narrator, "to think of the live people who have slept in the solitary bedrooms, to say nothing of the dead" (641). Here the "awfulness" of the empty space has less to do with the perception of the space itself and more to do with the chronology of

occupation and absence one cannot help but imagine when “stealing through it.” The emptiness of the built-environment points backwards to the inescapable fact that there once were people where there are no longer. This is what separates the significance of the unoccupied wilderness space from that of the unoccupied built environment. While Esther is a body uniquely sensitive to the feeling of occupying a space that should be empty, the omniscient narrator can construct spaces that make us keenly aware of the absence of a body in a space that should be occupied.

The uneasy atmosphere of Lady Dedlock’s empty rooms in the London house after her flight is just the same as the one we experience in Chesney Wold hundreds of pages earlier, right down to the narrator’s phrasing and use of first person address. Looking into these rooms with her son George, Mrs. Rouncewell remarks, “These are My Lady’s rooms, just as she left them” (890). The disappearance and death of Esther’s mother, like the death of her father, is narrated in large part through the dynamic ongoing existence of the rooms that hold on to her memory. Up until this moment, George has encouraged his mother not to jump to the conclusion that Lady Dedlock will not return alive. However, under the influence of these desolate, empty rooms, his position changes. Peering over the threshold, George echoes the echoing phrasing of the omniscient narrator, essentially telling his mother that he has started to ‘think, as she thinks’: “I begin to understand how you come to think as you do think, mother. Rooms get an awful look about them when they are fitted up, like these, for one person you are used to see in them, and that person is away under any shadow: let alone being God knows where” (890). As in the sunset interlude, the emptiness of a space that should be inhabited is pronounced “awful,” and the degree to which it seems awful is articulated in exactly the same way. To experience rooms that are missing their living occupant is bad enough, the thinking goes, but it is exponentially worse when the irrecoverability of that person is imagined. In both cases, imagining this worst possible

outcome (“to say nothing of the dead”; “let alone being God knows where”) seems impossible to avoid under the conditions of the empty room.

George’s talk of shadows also echoes the narrator’s description of the cavernous, cadaverous Chesney Wold during the “time for shadows” hundreds of pages earlier. We can see the precision through which these episodes dovetail in George’s play on the literal and figurative uses of the word ‘shadow’ that began in the earlier episode: before, the painted figure of Lady Dedlock was under a real shadow and now, as George puts it, the real Lady Dedlock is under a figurative shadow. But most crucially, it is in this moment that the omniscient narrator again speaks in the first person, addressing the reader directly and extending George’s reflection: “He is not far out. As all partings foreshadow the great final one, so, empty rooms, bereft of a familiar presence, mournfully whisper what your room and what mine must one day be” (890).

A particular imaginative act characterizes the empty house episodes I have explored, and it is one that corresponds with the historical mode of imagination and the mediated presence of a first-person voice in the omniscient narrative in intricate ways. It is the effort to imagine the world as it goes on without you. This act of imagination could be called a kind of shadowing casting, making you a shadow in the space you actually occupy and a presence within a space you could never occupy. The reflection of the narrator/hypothetical Deadlock that I discussed earlier will be useful one more time: “so think, as I think, of the gap that they would make in this domain when they were gone; so find it, as I find it, difficult to believe that it could be without them; so pass from my world, as I pass from theirs, now closing the reverberating door; so leave no blank to miss them, and so die” (639). The self-sufficiency of the world, perhaps always taken for granted as a baseline assumption, becomes a strange and unsettling idea when death is imagined. This act of imagining first requires that you come to terms with the unconscious way

in which you conflate your existence in and active perception of the world with the reality of the world. With this realization, one's own inconsequentiality becomes sharply felt. To imagine in this way is to become newly conscious of the objects and environments that will likely survive you.

What is most real and what feels most real, this interlude finally suggests, is a reality that continues on without you. The omniscient narrator's rendering of Chesney Wold at sunset, in all of its heaviness and fullness of detail, is a vision of the world made all the more solid and sharply focused for the poignancy of one's inability to occupy it. In an analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* that reconceives literary realism as an affective structure, Adela Pinch argues that "what feels most real is what is most felt: remorse and the reality effect are tethered tightly together" (18). Pinch is particularly attentive to the relationship between retrospective negative emotions, like remorse and regret, and acts of narration that conjure up fictional worlds that are simultaneously "fuzzily full and incomplete" (823). I argue that in *Bleak House* a retrospective sense of loss also contributes to the realism of the space rendered, but here it is, strangely, the loss of oneself experienced through the imaginative act of looking forward, casting one's shadow into a space the very density of which results from your own shadowiness—from the impossibility of your actual presence. In this way, literary realism seems particularly equipped to make accessible the experience of one's own absence.

The realist novel makes this experience of absence from an ongoing, objectively existing world *actually* and *virtually* possible. On the one hand, omniscient narration stages a virtual access to a diegetic space that, ontologically, cannot be observed by a living character. Its special status comes from the fact that no-body/character is present to perceive it; necessarily, Esther cannot narrate this space in the present tense of the omniscient narrator since she is both a

character and narrator. As we have seen, the ongoing, objective existence of spaces, regardless of whether they're inhabited or have the narrator's attention, is a crucial aspect of Dickens's realism. The actual experience of one's own absence from the world as it exists without you works through the initial success of this virtual encounter but gains its affective charge from inaccessibility rather than accessibility. Of course the reader cannot occupy this world. The more vivid and sensory our virtual experience of a scene that characters fundamentally cannot occupy, the more powerful the rebound when we recall the extradiegetic status that makes this occupation of the impossible space possible in the first place. The cycle of imaginative, diegetic projection and extradiegetic recollection ultimately works to heighten the realism of the world the reader imagines. The awareness that you cannot access this world doesn't seem to diminish the investment we feel in it.[27] Borrowing from but ultimately reversing the trajectory of the historical mode of imagining discussed above by finally catapulting the reader into spaces as they will exist in the future, the richly rendered yet empty fictional spaces where we are left alone with the omniscient narrator crystalize a particularly powerful way in which our engagement with realist fiction is underpinned by, and in turn can inform, lived affective experiences.

[27] It is possible to connect Dickens's theorization of literary realism through the empty house to architectural discourses about narrative form in the writing of Willa Cather as well as Woolf. John Plotz has examined Cather's tendency to write about aesthetic experience and fiction in terms of built environments. As he points out, Cather wonders, "How wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window…and leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre…leave the scene bare for the play of emotions, great and little" in in her essay "The Novel Démeublé." The "play of emotions" for which the novel provides a "physical substrate" manifests in the particular pathos of the reader's perception of the "misfit between characters' *experience* of an event and the event's objective reality." By starting us in the diegetic 'objective reality' of spaces that exist without characters, Dickens makes the pathos of the gap between subjective experience and the actual event all the more visceral for the reader by cutting out the middleman. As Elaine Auyoung points out, "the particular mental world that an individual reader constructs is inaccessible to anyone else;" it's a subjective projection based on the limited information included in the text ("Phantoms" 407). By overlapping the affect surrounding the act of thinking of the world as it will go on after your death and the affect surrounding the reader's ultimate experience of exclusion from the fictional world, Dickens's empty houses make the reader feel the gap between subjective experience and objective reality with particular intensity.

The lost occupant of the empty room is, in a sense, the reader by the end of the novel. Both Chesney Wold and Esther are given endings that don't really read as endings. They continue on without the reader, Esther "supposing—", Chesney Wold echoing. At the end of the novel, the great house retains many of the features that made it seem real when we experienced the sunset there hundreds of pages ago. It is still a "labyrinth of grandeur," still home to "ghostly likenesses" (985). Movement through the house is still staged figuratively; to drop a comb "is to send a stealthy footfall on an errand through the house" (985). Much of the strangeness of literary realism, these empty rooms suggest, derives from our simultaneous recognition of the role we play as readers in creating the vivid, seemingly solid and self-sustaining fictional world based on the limited information on the page (light moving across walls, individuating details that make characters come alive), and our feeling that this densely real world can continue on without us—both in the sense of extending temporally beyond the last narrative point and in the sense that the world of the narrative and the events we do have access to do not seem to rely on the reader for their existence. It is the feeling that prompts the question, what happens to this world when we close the book?

Chapter 3

Treading Water:
Stillness and/as Eventfulness in *Lord Jim* and *The Shadow-Line*

"A sailor without rudder or compass, tossed on a stormy sea--a traveler lost on a wide-spread heath, without landmark or star to him--such have I been."
Mary Shelley, "The Mortal Immortal"

"'I didn't think a spot on earth could be so still.'"
Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

I.

Let's begin with two specters haunting stories of voyages, one welling up out of the natural phenomenon of the storm, the other, the calm. The first is the ghost ship, harbinger of hurricanes: stories of a Dutch captain, a phantom vessel, and a missing crew, shared between sailors, spun out in the periodical press, and woven into works of fiction form the filaments that, net-like, flexibly formed a community of imagination among the seafaring and the broader public. Accounts of ghost ships, the most notorious vessel among them the Flying Dutchmen, flourished in the nineteenth century, from firsthand sightings reported in logbooks to narrative versions of such encounters published in journals and expanded into short stories and novels.[28] In the case of the Flying Dutchman, sailors operating around the Cape of Good Hope from the

[28] Literary and dramatic treatments of the tale include Edward Fitzball's *The Flying Dutchman* (1826) and Frederick Marryat's *The Phantom Ship* (1839). The legend is cited as a source of inspiration for Washington Irving's "The Storm-Ship" (1822) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's ghost ship in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798).

eighteenth century onward recount observing a frigate on the horizon, which appeared to be a Dutch man-of-war. Such a sighting was taken as a portent of an oncoming storm or hurricane, the frenzy of which, in imperiling the ship and threatening sailors with a tumultuous and watery grave, is of a piece with the fate of the doomed crew. According to legend, the Dutchman can never land at port, however much its crew may wish it—they must sail on forever in search of a harbor that will accept them, carrying the threat of storms in their wake.

Time is elastic for the doomed mariners aboard the Dutchman. In a fictional treatment of the legend published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1821, "Vanderdecken's Message Home; or, The Tenacity of Natural Affection," the sailors aboard a passenger ship speak with an envoy from the Dutchman, who responds to the question "'How long have you been at sea,'" by lamenting, "'We have lost our count; for our almanack was blown overboard. Our ship, you see, is there still; so why should you ask how long we have been at sea" (129). This early version of the tale includes the detail that, if contact is made with the Dutchman's crew while at sea, the cursed mariners beg sailors to deliver letters to loved ones, now long dead. Despite the evident emotional distress of the cursed sailors who have "been long here beating about" in the storm, the crew of the passenger ship refuses their request, on the account that "there is sometimes a sinking weight in your paper" (129). The confusion of the Dutch sailors when asked "how long" indicates a disorientation that is not just a product of eternal liminality in wind-tossed and wave-lashed space, but an unmooring in time as well. A long view of their punishment seems denied them, unaware as they are that a century or more has intervened since they left home. They are endlessly, repeatedly bewildered at not being able to make landfall.

If we let the surf and spray of the ghost ship's hurricanes and relentless movement subside and allow a hush to fall that is so heavy it flattens out even the faintest ripple, we

encounter the second specter on the mariner's map. This nightmare at sea, associated with the natural phenomenon of the calm and counterpart to the frenzy of the hurricane, is superficially more benign, perhaps more rightly described as a daydream that turns sinister. An example of this dangerous stillness appears in *The Odyssey*. Given how Odysseus's crew fares on so many of the islands where they land, on the island of the Lotos eaters the toll of human life is miraculously low. The ravenous, then furious Cyclops encountered when next they make landfall strikes a far more threatening figure than the islanders and their flowers. Of course, the seeming benignity of the lotos eaters makes it all the more effective as a means of arresting the voyager's journey, working from the inside-out to stall their progress home by altering their desires. It is this aspect of the lotus eater episode that Alfred Lord Tennyson responds to in his treatment of the tale, a poem that works through the deft interlocking of formal and thematic stillnesses that immobilize members of the crew and, eventually, the poem itself.

Stillness is first given a strong temporal charge, as the sailors find themselves in "A land where all things always seem'd the same!", an island perpetually poised in the glow of golden hour (24). The first lines of the poem heighten the uneventfulness of the island environment to come and signal that this evocation of stillness is meaningful within a tradition of narrative action. Not only is motion the first sensation described—"'This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon'"—but this assurance comes from the figure of the dynamic hero Odysseus, whose cry of "Courage!" opens the poem (1-2). As soon as they reach the shore, there is an immediate exchange of one temporality for another: they land "in the afternoon," an afternoon that was likely preceded by a morning and would be followed by an evening should they have sailed around this island; once ashore, however, "it seemed always afternoon" (4). To those who consume the lotos flower, all endeavor at sea (and endeavor itself) is recast as the fruitless

wandering reminiscent of the fate of the cursed Dutchman: finding "Weary the wandering fields of barren foam" and observing the perfect peace of the natural world around them, the mariners ask, "why should we toil alone, / We only toil, who are the first of things, and make perpetual moan, / Still from one sorrow to another thrown" (44, 60-63). The self-containment of the island environment and the self-containment of its drugged inhabitants (for each of whom, "music in his ears his beating heart did make") becomes characteristic of the seafaring existence as well: "Hateful is the dark-blue sky, / Vaulted o'er the dark-blue sea" (36, 84-5). This monochromatic vista replaces the dynamism of the voyage with a sense of closure and saturation, the ship and the sailor encompassed in a globe of blue. The sea becomes an all-absorbing entity, capable of eliciting maximum struggle while giving nothing back in the way of meaningful, controllable outcomes (the gods above "smile in secret," "careless of mankind") (158, 155). In the end, stillness is revealed to be inescapable, and the synergy between this motionless existence of the lotos eaters and the pointless motion-without-meaning of life at sea is brought home in the poem's concluding image. This fatalistic final vision is of terrible "labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar"—of being suspended but, in this case, in water—exhausted, defeated, and ultimately drowned (172).

With an "Oh, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more," Tennyson's "Lotos Eaters" ends, and so the inertia that grinds the voyage to a halt is implicated in the cessation of the poem itself. These mariners have removed themselves from the epic trajectory literally gestured to in its opening lines and, having once articulated their new and henceforth unchanging philosophy, are consequently resolved beyond the point of poetic representation. What is made clear in the poem's final image and the comparison it invites between dreamy suspension in amber on shore and suspension in the mid-deep sea is that the purposeless movement of the

ghost ship and the internalized doldrums of the Lotos eaters are two sides of the same coin, a threatening stillness that necessarily surrounds the chronotope of the ship. They are the negative image of the progress implied by the journey at sea so often taken as a paradigmatic model for narrative form and identity formation by literary theorists looking back to Homer.[29]

Having now wandered widely, if briefly, in time and space to encounter these two specters at sea, this chapter returns to the shapes stillness takes in the interrupted journey in the long nineteenth century. Perhaps no writer of the nineteenth century was more preoccupied by these nightmares at sea or more equipped to parse the warping narrative energies of stillness and motion without meaningful movement than Joseph Conrad. His work is shaped on all sides by these negative images of progress, often producing undulating, layered impressions of stillness at sea as complex as Tennyson's and featuring hauntings that are spiritually akin to the fate of the Flying Dutchman. In this chapter I will show that two distinct yet related conceptions of stillness are activated through two different vessels (and narrative apparatuses) in Conrad's work, the steamship and the wind-powered ship. In *Lord Jim* the steamship is the vessel upon which the genre of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman and the figure of the modern subject unravels in contorted, scrolling patterns, a choice of decommissioned vessel that informs the representation of stasis and event throughout the text. "I could imagine no worse eternal punishment for evil seamen," Conrad wrote with reference to steamships in his memoir *The Mirror of the Sea*, "than that their souls should be condemned to man the ghosts of disabled ships, drifting for ever across

[29] To cite a recent example, the first section of a collection on narrative form and diverse kinds of weak narrativity called *Narrative Interrupted: The Plotless, the Disturbing and the Trivial in Literature* is titled "The Still Waters of Narrative: The Boring and the Plotless." Textual episodes of thick description, non-event, recursion, and temporal disorder are the subjects tackled within, all of the scholars responding in one way or another to Pekka Tammi's provocative critique of the 'narrative turn' in "Against Narrative (A Boring Story)." Tammi argues that *literary* narratology (separating literary narrative from sociological or cultural constructions of narrative is a central contention in his argument) must prioritize "the subversive and strange, previously untheorized or insufficiently theorized, cases: the glorious exceptions to the rules that classical definitions have been altogether too sweeping to recognize" ("Against Narrative" 29).

a ghostly and tempestuous ocean" (77). In contrast, the novella-length exploration of stillness that is *The Shadow-Line* casts a retrospective gaze back to a time when wind-powered ships dominated the seas. Here I argue that the stillness of the craft works doubly to signify both the point at which narrative fails and the forces that can send it flying across the waves. In the following section I offer both an overview of the significance of the voyage in theories of narrative form and an introduction to Conrad's perspective on the gulf that exists between the structure, motion, and spirit of the steamship and the sailing ship in *The Mirror of the Sea*. The subsequent sections will examine the different almost-sinking, variously "still" ships through which the narratives of *Lord Jim* and *The Shadow-Line* operate.

II.

Water metaphors abound in discussions of narrative form—a story sequence may be said to flow, may have twists and turns like a serpentine river, may for a time tread water or ultimately become waterlogged. And yet discussions of the transportation metaphor for narrative are often removed to a vantage point where the commonalities between travel over land and by water overwhelm their differences, and so they tend to be explored as somewhat interchangeable figures for form. As Kai Mikkonen puts it, "In narrative and literary studies, it is a kind of commonplace to suggest, with Michel de Certeau, that 'every story is a travel story—a spatial practice'" (287). What then is at stake in the points of disjuncture between the journey by road and the path over water, marked only temporarily by the wake of the ship, for theories of narrative? For one thing, the precise tracking of space and time markers that Bakhtin identifies as the special characteristic of the chronotope of the road are dysregulated on water.[30] In "The

[30] The precision of the road metaphor in Bakhtin's discussion of ancient Greek romance does rely on an abstraction of the landscape, but beyond the genre of Greek romance and in the context of nineteenth-century writing, this remains a meaningful distinction.

Chronotopes of the Sea," Margaret Cohen notes that "Sea spaces have an intriguing affinity with Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope because of the multiple aspects of seafaring where space is experienced as movement, as a vector conjoining spatial and temporal coordinates" (648).[31] Patricia Ann Carlson makes a similar point when she suggests that "our sense of time and space merge at sea more than they do elsewhere in human experience" (5). [32] And yet it is also true that, on some basic level, the predictability of movement and the ability to control and engender specific motion is generally less stable on water than on land. Ships are subject to tides and currents that, though foreseeable when viewed at a distance, are nevertheless active environmental agents capable of impacting a ship's trajectory in myriad and unpredictable ways. They dictate the time of departure for the open sea or of landing at port.[33] Storms may impact travel along the road, but not as intensely and usually without the same dire outcomes as travel by ship. The linearity associated with roads and later, more vividly still, with arrow-like movement along railroad tracks in the nineteenth century is undercut when your mode of transport rests on water rather than earth. A carriage may break down on the road and so disrupt a journey, but even dropping an anchor is not a surefire way to hold a fixed location. Rousseau,

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[31] Cohen's "The Chronotopes of the Sea" provides a valuable breakdown of six different water-related chronotopes: "(1) *blue water*, the open sea; (2) *brown water*, the murky depths of the river; (3) *white water*, when bodies of water are riled up into extreme natural danger; (4) *the island*, land entirely surrounded by water; (5) *the shore*, a zone of contact between land and sea; (6) *the ship*, an unstable piece of terra firma that propels humans across the sea's inhospitable territory" (649). Noting the relative stability of these chronotopes across literary fiction and nonfiction travel narrative, Cohen concludes that "Such continuity suggests that they are structured by intrinsic aspects of the spaces they represent. It also points to the power of preexisting rhetorical patterns to organize the perception and representation of fact as well as fiction" (649).

[32] Carlson continues, "Think for a moment of the function of a chronometer in celestial navigation: to know where you are in space on an east/west axis, to find longitude, you must have a precise reading of the time at another place, Greenwich, England….What wonder is it that mariners tend to be reflective when they must deal with abstract time and celestial space to find out where they are?" (5).

[33] Canon Schmidt's recent analysis of *Heart of Darkness* draws out the crucial role tides play in/as the narrative frame, as the "occasion for narrative": "To go further: although much has been said about Conrad's deployment of frame narrators, including the nameless one who begins and ends *Heart of Darkness*, no one seems to have noticed that the indispensable frame for this novella is provided not by a character but by water moving irresistibly contrary to its characters' desires" (22).

for example, uses the conceit of the drifting anchor to illustrate the subtle influences that can cause a child to wander outside of the ideal garden environment for cultivation:

> To form this rare man, what do we have to do? A lot, undoubtedly; it is a matter of preventing anything from happening…if the sea is strong and you wish to stay in place, you need to cast anchor. Watch out, young helmsman, that your cable doesn't pay out or that your anchor doesn't drag along the bottom, and that the ship doesn't drift before you notice it (94).

On water, stillness must be actively created and carefully maintained.

Rousseau's use of a seafaring metaphor to describe what it takes to "form this rare man" can be situated within a tradition of associating identity formation (particularly masculine) with narratives of journeys at sea. As Robert Foulke remarks in *The Sea Voyage Narrative*, "The multitude of examples [of sea Bildungsromane] is not surprising, since life at sea removes the inexperienced youngster from the familiarity of shoreside places and provides a full range of potential tests—storm, fire, stranding, collision, falling from aloft or overboard, disease, starvation, sinking—all threatening injury or death" (9). Although he is working with the term voyage in its broader sense to refer to journeys more generally, Georges Van Den Abbeele observes that "The dearest notions of the West nearly all appeal to the motif of the voyage: progress, the quest for knowledge, freedom as freedom to move, self-awareness as an Odyssean enterprise, salvation as a destination to be attained by following a prescribed pathway (typically straight and narrow)" (xv). The "Odyssean enterprise" is of course the fundamental touchstone for accounts of narrative and seafaring in the Western tradition and, as Van Den Abbeele indicates, it informs accounts of the formation of the modern subject. Mircea Eliade makes a similar assertion when he reflects that "Ulysses is for me the prototype of man, not only modern

man, but the man of the future as well…His voyage was a voyage toward the center, toward Ithaca, which is to say, toward himself" (95). For Marianne Hirsch, "The temporal return of Odysseus to himself is supported by the geographical return to his birthplace, Ithaca" (342). She observes that in the Odyssey, "retardation now means growth" (344). Significantly, this is retardation of movement, not cessation—on the island of Lotos, for example, growth would be cut off at the same moment as the desire to return.

Working within this tradition, Conrad often uses the voyage as the framework through which accounts of individual and national progress are invoked, tested, and held up for scrutiny. By the end of this chapter I will return to the significance of stillness in the context of subject formation, but for now it is necessary to set the individual mariner aside in favor of the apparatus they function within. The ship is the vehicle for a sustained examination of narrative animation, motive force, and the status of event/non-event that in turn exerts formative pressure on conceptions of character and identity. But a vital question arises: which kind of ship? When it comes to questions of what makes a narrative "move," so to speak, this is a crucial consideration. Conrad's views on the differences between steamships and wind-powered ships are so deeply felt that he addresses them directly in each of the texts under discussion in this chapter, and motive force is the key differentiating factor. "Living by red fire and fed with black coal," the steamship is fundamentally a figure of consumption (*The Mirror of the Sea* 74). Its motive power is produced internally, and in its mechanical defiance of nature Conrad finds very little to celebrate. The skillset required to operate the steamship is radically different from what came before, which means a lamentable loss of traditional sailing knowledge and techniques.[34] Skill is

[34] The loss of a skill is the same, in the case of traditional seafaring, as the loss of a particular art. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad warns that "History repeats itself, but the special call of an art which has passed away is never reproduced. It is as utterly gone out of the world as the song of a destroyed wild bird. Nothing will awaken the same

involved, Conrad admits, in operating a steamship, but it is a knowledge that ultimately leaves the sailor dependent on the mechanical. At best, this dependence is numbing, and at worst, soul crushing. If the mechanism fails and cannot be repaired, then controlling the motion of the ship is a nonstarter: “Of all ships disabled at sea,” he reflects, “a steamer who has lost her propeller is the most helpless” (75). Punctuality and precision are the defining characteristics of this industrial transportation technology whose “effects are measured in time and space as no effect of art can be” (35). The steamship’s ultimate offense is that it alienates the sailor both from the labor they perform and the natural world through which they move. No ingeniousness, effort, or courage on the part of the sailor can motivate this ship to move when the mechanism fails. There is a final, technological disconnect between the work the crew performs and the ship’s capacity to move. It offends by alienating the sailor from the natural world since “its life is not so much a contest as the disdainful ignoring of the sea” (76).

The wind-powered ship, on the other hand, is an object of devotion and romance for Conrad, as it is for many of the characters in his work. Motivated by external forces, it is nevertheless a far more vital entity than its smoke-breathing counterpart. Where the steamship numbs its crew, the sailing ship awakens and enlivens the crew. Their encounter with the sea is understood as a partnership, and while this relationship is a complex affair (a lovesickness thoroughly shot through with abiding fear and dread), Conrad claims that the feeling all sailors have for the ship is one of true love, expressed through the deceptively measured phrase “the ship is all right” (157). The connection between the sailor and the sea is understood as a far closer one than that of the steamship crew. Conrad conveys this through an appeal to art,

response of pleasurable emotion or conscientious endeavour. And the sailing of any vessel afloat is an art whose fine form seems already receding from us on its way to the overshadowed Valley of Oblivion” (74).

claiming that in operating a steamship there is a "lack of close communion between the artist and the medium of his art" (74).

Curiously then, despite the focus on the mechanical nature of the steamship, it is likened to the human body with far greater frequency in Conrad's work than the sailing ship. The steamship moves "as if she had an iron heart in her iron body," pushing her way through "a still and overshadowed sea with a pulsating tremor of her frame" (76). As a figure for animation that gets at a quality of spirit rather than material operation, the organic heartbeat is drained of its vitality through its curious alignment with this mechanical apparatus, chugging away, somewhat grotesquely living and dead with the "thudding rhythm in her progress and the regular beat of her propeller" (76). The spectral ship on which Life-in-Death tosses dice as she approaches Coleridge's ancient mariner is transformed at the end of the century into this craft with a burning, beating, unanimated heart, an alarmingly mindless, nerveless, metallic organism.

In contrast, the sailing ship is still where the steamship is throbbing. Its machinery does its work "in perfect silence and with a motionless grace, that seems to hide a capricious and not always governable power, taking nothing away from the material stores of the earth" (76). Where the steamship consumes, the wind-powered ship expertly catches the wind's motive power for a time and then releases it. Real vitality is not contained within the self-propelling and discreet organic entity—the human body and its beating heart, for example. Instead, it can be found through the stasis of the ingeniously designed structure that interfaces with the elemental and extrahuman forces of the world in ways no discreet organism, so construed, could. Real vital force comes from this interface between still structure and the otherwise invisible or unbiddable forces in the world: "in a gale, the silent machinery of a sailing-ship would catch not only the power, but the wild and exulting voice of the world's soul" (78). This is a calibrated stillness, the

charged immobility of the apparatus that catches the spirit of the world. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the forces that matter are outside the individual in Conrad's view.[35]

III.

Episodes where ships and crews are pushed to their extreme limits are necessarily spaces of heightened imagination in Conrad's writing. In lived experience there is no way of knowing what the final moments of a crew aboard a ship that goes "missing" are like. Within this blank space of nautical experience, narrative imagining ripples into action, offering wavering visions of what these last doomed days, hours, moments are like for the crew and ship. There are tales of ghost ships, visions of rising water, etc. Within the realm of lived experience, there can only be encounters with ships teetering on the brink of sinking or vanishing. Timing is the factor that lends these episodes their special character—the closer the rescue, the closer one can draw to this inaccessible experience, and Conrad's own brush with the only imaginable, described in *The Mirror of the Sea,* is a very near thing indeed. There he recalls the experience of seeing a derelict vessel on the horizon while serving aboard a ship as a young man. Awash in veils of gauzy metaphor and finely shaded descriptive language, the "black speck" of the ship in the distance is absorbed within a romantic seascape, already removed from living human experience and into a realm of imagination and abstraction. So it seems, that is, until an impossible cry, one that seems to come from "the amazing voice of a stranger," rends the serenity of this scene, transforming the "black speck" in the distance from a mark in a dreamy painting into a point, a destination that they must race toward with all speed: "'There's people on board of her, sir! I see them!'" (170).

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[35] There are parallels between Conrad's critique of steam-powered ships and the discourse surrounding the unfamiliar motion of the train in the early days of railway travel. The smoothness of the motion, the linearity of the path, the precision of time and space markers, the defiance of the natural landscape where once there had been an ebb and flow traveling over it—all of these points of contention align resistance to the train and Conrad's repugnance for the steamship.

Newly brought into focus within the field of life and action—there is something the sailors can *do* to help—the sinking ship has a curiously opposite effect on the ship and crew. Paralysis proceeds action. "All at once" their famously quick, responsive ship "seemed to us to have lost the power of motion, as if the sea, becoming viscous, had clung to her sides (170). The encounter with "her mutilated and wounded sister," makes Conrad's own ship ghostly, and as is the way with ghosts, severs the link between perceived motion (the ship seems to stand still) and actual motion ("And yet she moved") (170). Likewise, the horrified crew members lose themselves in "a staring immobility" until summoned to heroic action by their captain (171). Immobility gives way to a pure kind of action, with sailors bent over oars as they race Death to the sinking ship. Words are not even exchanged once they arrive, and the rescued sailors hurl themselves silently and inelegantly into the rescue boats. The takeaway for young Conrad, and the realization that functions as an initiation into the community of seafarers, is the difference between the love a person can have for a ship and the feelings one can have for the unfeeling ocean. What is most striking in this episode are the various stillnesses scaffolding this encounter—the stillness that takes hold of the ship and crew when they realize there are people on board the derelict, and the stillness that surrounds the ship's final sinking, the hush of the crew as they row. This rescue was a very near thing. The sailors have not even made it back to their own vessel in the rescue boats when the captain of the sinking ship startles Conrad with "the amazing energy of his immobilized gesture" back toward the sinking ship. In this moment of immobilization, "the stillness around us became crushing" (177). The ship sinks in a motion that is "startling, mysterious, hastily confused," like "some deed of violence done in the dark" (178). The gentle swell that previously enchanted the young sailor has sunk the captain's loyal brig. Reckoning with this duplicity, Conrad recollects that "the great stillness after this initiation into the sea's

implacable hate seemed full of dread thoughts and shadows of disaster" (179). The sinking ship is both the stuff of narrative and the antithesis of narrative, driving action but countering this action with thoughts of the ultimate cessation of action (a rush that springs from the looming, final stillness).

Neither *Lord Jim* or *The Shadow-Line* feature ships that actually sink or go missing, even though Conrad is working in a fictive mode through which he could explore these inky, inherently unsharable spaces of experience. His fascination is the ship and crew that *almost* sink or go missing, with different accents placed on this *almost* in each story. This is because, I suggest, Conrad is interested in the extreme approach to the limits of the voyage and narrative form, not the act of toppling over the edge into oblivion. This interest necessarily keeps him in an identifiable narrative register, since on its face a ship that *almost* sinks or *almost* goes missing is a powerful narrative organizer and force. However, the ways in which these almost-lost ships evade that ominous fate, trading the stillness of a watery grave for the stillness of continued existence (the ship is, in Jim's words, "still there") open up opportunities for examining the significance of event and nonevent in works of fiction.

Lord Jim and *The Shadow-Line* are both narratives of non-incident, existing far to one side of the storytelling spectrum. They take the question of the status of the event in literature and position it over still waters, undoing eventfulness in various ways. However—and after the previous section, the weight of this difference should be clear—*Lord Jim* floats this investigation aboard a steamship, while *The Shadow-Line* poses it aboard a sailing ship. Therefore, starting with different baseline formulations of movement's association with narrativity and eventfulness, they undertake divergent investigations. Published fifteen years apart and separated by World War I, they are invested in different questions.

As a defining component of narrativity, eventfulness is less widely discussed than tellability. Those critics and narratologists who do foreground the significance of event in accounts of narrative's special qualities and features (distinct from those of other kinds of writing like argument or description) typically emphasize tellability as the result of eventfulness. The impulse to tell a story arises from the fact that there has been some kind of change or meaningful movement from the beginning of the account to the end. From here, as Peter Hühn observes, it is possible to distinguish between two basic kinds of narration: that which recounts type 1 events, "a type of narration that can be described linguistically and manifest itself in predicates that express change," and that which recounts type 2 events, "an interpretation- and context-dependent type of narration that implies changes of a special kind" ("Event and Eventfulness"). Elsewhere he describes this as the difference between "process narration," which "is defined by a reference to mere change of state or a succession of such changes," from "eventful narration," "which requires something more crucial in addition to mere succession and change: an unexpected, exceptional or new turn in the sequential dimension, some surprising 'point', some significant departure from the established course of incidents" (1, 2). Wolf Schmid argues that for something to be an event rather than simply a happening, it must be characterized by factivity (they actually happen rather than just being imagined or desired) and resultivity (they must not simply be started or in process but must reach a point of completion). From here he stipulates five additional qualifications: (1) relevance, (2) unpredictability, (3) persistence, (4) irreversibility, and (5) non-iterativity. The degree to which an event is charged by these different qualities determines its degree of eventfulness. As Schmid puts it, "eventfulness is a scalable property of events."

Although factivity and resultivity get pride of place in Schmid's assessment of the event, the event component that rises to prominence in discussions of literary texts is unpredictability. It is the quality of the event that bears upon issues of genre and literary and cultural norms most directly. If a narrative follows a generic script to the letter or rehearses a society's expectations too formulaically, that narrative would be said to have a low degree of eventfulness (and, consequently, tellability). Hühn goes on to specify that "a narrative text that conforms closely to a schema is, however, not noteworthy and therefore not eventful, since such a text only reproduces what is already known and expected. Eventfulness thus involves a departure from a schematic pattern or script activated by the text" (6).[36] Critics like Hühn and Schmid who separate state change or happening (event 1) from an event (event 2) follow in the footsteps of Jurij Lotman, who articulated the event in spatial and characterological terms as a form of boundary crossing. The text, in Lotman's view, is a "semantic field" that is sub-divided by a border between two different states or schemas. The character's movement from one sub-field to another constitutes a narrative event and the difficulty involved in crossing this boundary determines the degree of eventfulness. As Jerome Bruner puts it with respect to boundary crossing in literary texts, eventfulness depends upon an understanding of "canonicity and breach" (11).

Event as meaningful movement and event as rupture to an existing framework are our entry points into Conrad's examination of narrative at the end of the nineteenth century in *Lord Jim*. Despite the undeniable emphasis placed on narrative tellability in this text (after all, even

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[36] Hühn advocates for the importance of context specificity when determining a narrative's eventfulness, cautioning that "The context-sensitivity of eventfulness is a complex phenomenon that comprises the following aspects and must be specified with that in mind when analyzed with reference to actual narratives: the relevance—to the event—of the social and cultural setting depicted in the text; the relation of the event to social and cultural or literary phenomena outside the text; and the status of such an event within the contemporary world (whether common, rare or new). One particularly important type of contexts consists of other literary texts, which may serve as a frame of reference for the constitution of eventfulness in a narrative" (3).

though Marlow's listeners keep falling asleep, the epigraph of the novel is "It is certain my Conviction gains infinitely, / the moment another soul will believe in it"), I propose the event as the still more central, and yet under-discussed, component of narrativitity put under exploratory pressure in this novel. What qualifies as an event in this fin-de-siecle tale? How do you know when an event is happening? What to make of the event that is simultaneously and in some crucial way (here, on a material level) not an event? What are the qualities of the nonevent in narrative fiction? The incredibly rich tapestry of stillnesses in this novel—composed of splotches of congealed, panic-seized immobility and broad swathes of humming consistencies—testifies to the centrality of questions of eventfulness and offers up the most generative sites of exploration.

Upon its completion, Conrad wrote that *Lord Jim* was "the development of *one* situation, only *one* really, from beginning to end" (282). And at the heart of this "one situation"—a young first mate's decision, in a moment of crisis, to abandon a steamship carrying 800 passengers on a religious pilgrimage—there is a "great stillness" (77). The ship runs over a submerged obstacle and Jim, stunned by the immensity of the looming fatalities and the contracted window of time he has in which to take action, finds himself frozen and silent. He ultimately jumps into the rescue ship with the captain and engineer, leaving the pilgrims to what he believes is certain death. The narration of this crisis is organized through the oscillation between the interlocking temporalities of the sudden and the unending. As I will go on to show, the crisis on board the vessel and the looming rupture of its hull dramatizes the "canonicity and breach" model of narrative event discussed above.

Conrad appeals directly to canonicity while efficiently assembling the character Jim before the reader's eyes in the first sections of the novel. Jim is initially built out of references to other stories and established character types, and these gestures are broad, directed toward genre

rather than specific works.[37] His career at sea is launched by "a course of light holiday literature," seafaring adventure narratives, after which he "was sent at once to a 'training-ship for officers in the mercantile marine'" (5). As is typical of protagonists in bildungsroman narratives, Jim's future is shaped in significant ways by his reading material, although here it happens so swiftly and directly that it verges on parody of that generic convention. Once ensconced in a comfortable position aboard a steamship, Jim still imagines his life and his future through stories of seafaring adventure. There is of course a substantial amount of ironic space between Jim and the literary heroes he uses to ameliorate his present enervating existence and paint his future in more vibrant and daring shades, but this sort of disconnect between 'real' character and their romanticized and literary surrogates is itself a hallmark of novels of development in the nineteenth century. The negotiation of this disconnect forms the central narrative thrust (is the central event) in many novels of this genre. J.H. Stape identifies *Lord Jim* as Conrad's "most sustained attempt to write a Bildungsroman," though he goes on to observe the significant ways in which Conrad revises this literary form: "He grafts on to it features of adventure fantasy…. More importantly, the novel's essentially tragic vision, pervasive reliance on intricate and multi-layered symbols, and various narrative strategies subvert the fundamentally realist texture of this kind of fiction" (64). His most self-conscious engagement with the tradition of the bildungsroman—against which the bulk of the novel takes shape—is found both in the occurrences and narrative mode of the opening chapters.

Lord Jim features a unique narrative structure: it opens with the omniscient narration of Jim's early years, often focalized through the mind of young Jim; then, at his trial, a powerful

[37] Many critics have noticed pointed references to *Hamlet* and Coleridge's ancient mariner in *Lord Jim*. In the opening sections of the novel, however, the more overt mentions of literary texts prioritize genre and the typical over these more specific references.

gaze expressive of the desire to understand (to see and make others see) jostles the narrative out of the omniscient third-person narrative mode and into a homodiegetic, first-person perspective; finally, the very last episodes of the novel take the form of a letter. Because it is necessary for a distance to always be maintained between the character Jim and those who seek to understand him (including the reader), the narrative mode that emphasizes conventionality and this novel's relationship to the Bildungsroman is third-person omniscient rather than a first-person narration from Jim's perspective. In the opening chapters, an omniscient narrator trots out a number of Bildungsroman milestones in rapid succession: Jim is born into a middleclass family, "one of five sons," and his father is a parson. The bucolic village setting of Jim's childhood eventually serves as a counterpoint to the alienating fluidity and mobility of his life in distant colonized spaces and at sea. Above all, his existence in England is deeply rooted: his father's church "had stood there for centuries, but the trees around probably remembered the laying of the first stone" (3). After his youthful reading leads him to a seafaring career, he undergoes a supposedly revealing incident of nascent psychological character—Jim balks amidst a rescue attempt during a storm—after which he sets off on a life at sea "strangely barren of adventure" (8).

If canonicity understood as uneventful script were a vessel, it would be a steamship. It is motion without a sensorially inflected (or even perceptible) experience of movement. Jim's uninterrupted progress converges with the smooth, monotonous movement of the Patna, as does his strong impulse toward narratives of adventure. The smooth workings of worn-out genres that form the tracks along which Jim's fantasies of his future glide ultimately merge with the movement of the steamship he is traveling on. The progress of the Patna, "as old as the hills," is simultaneously un-sensible and overwhelming, lulling away any sense of activity on board and draining any semblance of dynamism from the experience of the voyage undertaken. On the

night of the crisis, “A marvelous stillness pervaded the world,” a phenomenon of stillness co-constituted by the environment and the mode of transportation designed to operate within it: the inescapable wholeness of the surrounding Arabian Sea (“smooth and cool to the eye like a sheet of ice, extended its perfect level to the perfect circle of a dark horizon”) is matched to the functioning of the steamship (13). Its “propeller turned without check, as though its beat had been part of the scheme of a safe universe; and on each side of the Patna two deep folds of water, permanent and sombre on the unwrinkled shimmer” (13). The effect produced is one of inescapable absorption—any agitation of the water’s surface is made “permanent” and immobile or is reabsorbed by the sea, leaving no trace of its occurrence. Water that splashes returns to its inert state after only an “instant,” “calmed down at last into the circular stillness of water and sky with the black speck of the moving hull remaining everlastingly in its centre” (13). The Patna makes movement an entirely abstract affair. In Jim’s lived experience, he is absorbed by the static environment, “everlastingly” positioned at the center of a “perfect circle” (13). The steady, reliable progress of time and space markers produce this feeling of motionlessness. Movement on such a vessel and within such an environment can only be tracked; it is utterly detached from the embodied experience of travel. Precision and predictability lead to detachment and this, in Conrad’s view, is one of the most venal results of a shift to more mechanical modes of seafaring.

The detached encounter with time and space is represented in the piece of paper on which the ship’s progress is marked, which presents “a shiny surface as level and smooth as the glimmering surface of the waters” (15). On this chart the “ship’s position at last noon was marked with a small black cross,” while the pencil that made the mark that symbolizes the position of the ship at sea on the glossy, sea-like surface of the paper “lay round and still like a naked ship’s spar floating in the pool of a sheltered dock” (15). Ocean surface and glossy paper

merge not only as a result of the symbolic marks that designate the ship's location, but through a material likeness. The pencil that symbolically marks the ship becomes itself a ship-like object in a smooth relay between the particular and the abstract. The "straight pencil-line drawn firmly as far as Perim" makes arrival a foregone conclusion and all movement toward that point predictable and therefore uneventful (15). Jim, allegedly on watch, lost in thoughts of future glory and his own sense of valor, barely makes note of the "white streak of wake drawn as straight by the ship's keel upon the sea as the black line drawn by the pencil upon the chart" (15). After all, what's there to see?

And it is in this stillness, this motion within uneventfulness, that Jim almost flickers out of existence. This is a crisis in its own right, right before the collision. This is what happens when you try to set off a narrative of development onboard a vessel that fundamentally resists development with every beat of its iron heart. The marvelous stillness of the environment within the world of the story is symptomatic of the foundering of a narrative mode that developed under the conditions of an earlier tradition of seafaring under the new industrial order. I would also suggest that it is telling that Jim is at his most moribund as a narrative center when he is imagining himself through the exploits of fictional characters. Across these opening chapters, he is at risk of losing the individuality and particularity of the realist character who can compel a bildungsroman arc; he is perpetually on the brink of being absorbed into a type. The "firm" pencil line that marks the steamship's inevitable progress is comparable to the "heroic tread" of "valorous deeds" that Jim daydreams of in this lulling stillness. "How steady she goes," is Jim's reported thought before he begins imagining these deeds which have "a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness…they carried his soul away with them" (15). Correspondingly, his role aboard this vessel involves him in the operation of a global capitalist system that threatens

another kind of absorption and abstraction. Canon Schmidt points out, “As [Margaret] Cohen has argued in connection with novelistic representations of life under sail, the necessity for creative struggle against wind, waves, and tide allows this sort of shipboard labor to be imagined as non-alienated, the opposite of industrialism’s mindless repetition” (25). In *Lord Jim*, we see this mindless repetition allied with the abstraction of movement represented by the steamship in contrast with the more lively, embodied, and unpredictable motion of the wind-powered ship (the ship associated with the adventure narratives Jim treasures).

Ultimately, what I have been characterizing as the “canonical” mode of nineteenth-century Bildungsroman in the opening chapters is arrested and transformed, and this checking unfolds in two ways. First, it works through an appeal to a kind of realism: while it is true that a story could be told of anyone’s maturation to adulthood, the results are not guaranteed to be interesting! It is the difference, to put it in Conrad’s nautical terms, between believing that you have set out on a high seas adventure on a dynamic sailing ship only to realize belatedly that yours is the moderated, uninterrupted progress of the steamship. The constant movement of the Patna, disorienting in the very steadiness of its approach to its destination, emblematizes both the unremarkable nature of Jim’s maturation and the frictionless workings of a well-worn literary form. However, while the Bildungsroman appears to have goodhumoredly and ironically run aground when it encounters conventional or unexceptional lives and a new and monotonous tradition of seafaring, it truly flounders—or, more accurately, is put under transformative pressure—with the breach that is not a breach.

The collision of the Patna with the underwater obstacle is an event that, in spatial terms, fits nicely into Lotman’s framework. It is a boundary crossing, a movement across a “narrow belt of vibrating water and humming air” that is ultimately the threshold between youth and age,

innocence and disenchantment, honor and dishonor, gentleman and coward. It has a high projected degree of eventfulness in its impact on the characters on board, since the ship could sink, drowning the 800 passengers below. But the ship does not sink. Undeniably, even though it loses the eventfulness it would achieve if the ship actually did go under, it retains narrative eventfulness by changing the course of the central character's life so profoundly. However, the fact that the ship does not sink intensifies the ineffable quality of this collision—the steel of the ship does not give way, so on a material level this event is hardly one at all, reabsorbed almost immediately into that powerfully static seascape, simply a matter of "vibrating water and humming air." In retrospect (a perspective this narrative quickly affords the reader by shifting from this moment of collision directly to the trial), what becomes newly inflected as the action that bears the real weight of eventfulness in this episode is Jim's jump over the side of the ship into the escape boat below. And although this event is grounded in a subject's decision to act, it is remarkably similar to the initial event of unthinking collision in the perspective it offers on action and external force. On the one hand, there is the paralyzing and totalizing stillness associated with very short periods of time. Jim is completely overwhelmed by the weight of the decisions he should make, in which stillness manifests physiologically and psychologically. Against the intensity of this temporally compressed, black-and-white, eternal-stakes stillness Conrad invokes another, quieter notion of stillness—as Jim and Marlow repeatedly put it, the ship is "still here" (99). While in the lifeboat, Jim reports that when he turned back to look at the Patna, "'It terrified me to see it still there'" (82). First I will examine the way that this climactic stillness seeps between narrative registers, its relationship to visual art, and its interaction with the Bildungsroman conventions in play. At the end of this section I will return to this question of action, intention, and event.

With the same experimental energy with which he stages a "collision" of nonevents in this novel (script vs. non-occurrence of anticipated event), Conrad choreographs the invasion of one kind of stillness by another, and then another. The "marvelous stillness" discussed above, tranquil, endless, and secure, is reconstituted by an investment with a new temporality: "Suddenly the calm sea, the sky without cloud, appeared formidably insecure in their immobility, as if poised on the brow of yawning destruction" (19). This is the temporality of pause before the precipice—a stillness with a different relationship to eventfulness than the one that came before, since here it is the looming event and not endless non-eventfulness that gives character to this immobility. It is the difference between the languid 'no time' of the calm and the crystalline "No time. No time! No time!" of crisis (62). One way to understand the power that builds through the breathtakingly longwinded, spiraling episode in which Marlow recounts Jim's confession/defense is to feel in it the simultaneous push-pull of the too late and the too early. Jim strives to communicate the helpless too-lateness he experienced in that brief window of time where the crew scrambles to escape the ship through a vivid description of paralysis and panic. From the perspective of the narrators sharing this story (Jim to Marlow, Marlow to his drowsy audience on the veranda), its true poignancy actually comes from the fact that Jim acted too early, that he should had stayed still on a ship that would still be floating when it was spotted and rescued by another vessel. Both being too late and being too early prompt counterfactual imagining in retrospect, but acting too early painfully reinscribes the helplessness of the former as miscalculated, volitional inaction. The immense weight of potential and possibility for meaningful action in the immediate future presses in retrospectively on the moment of paralysis and panic before preemptive action like the water against the ship's iron hull.

The stillness of impending crisis is represented both on environmental and embodied fronts. For all the discursive emphasis on stillness in this episode, it is worth noting that the Patna does not stop moving. In its great consistency, it continues on its monotonous way in the great serenity discussed above. Conrad's favorite figure for a stillness that consumes another stillness is the darkening of the sky and the breathlessness that comes before a squall, and as if it were waiting for the ship to be injured before attack, the gloaming of a squall materializes within the existing stillness of a serene waveless night: “All was still. No thunder, no wind, no sound”; “nothing in the world moved before his eyes” (75). The approach of the dark squall across the sky is narrated not as a kind of movement within the scene, but rather as the absorption of the whole scene itself by a different kind of stillness. The ship dips slightly in this moment, but, as Jim puts it, “There was no life in that stir” (77). As Jim blinks in the expanding present, expected each time he closes his eyes that the ship will suddenly be pulled under into the deep, “each time he noted the darkening of the great stillness” (77).

Opening and shutting his eyes is all the action that Jim can muster for much of this horrific window of time, since his body is the vessel through which the great stillness without becomes tied to the paralysis of the individual. Immediately after he realizes that the bulkhead has been compromised and that there is “no help” for the eight hundred passengers, Jim “went through it all motionlessly by the hatchway with the lamp in his hand” (62). The knowledge that no helpful action can be taken has the effect of making any action impossible: “I saw as clearly as I see you now that there was nothing I could do. It seemed to take all life out of my limbs. I thought I might just as well stand where I was and wait. I did not think I had many seconds” (62). Page after page of reflection and speculation spiral around a character who cannot move, cannot even raise his arm to wake up the crew sleeping in the nearest hatch. When he finally

does move, it is because he has realized there is one thing he can do to help, which is to cut loose the limited number of rescue boats attached to the ship. After accomplishing this, he again becomes immobilized, his "feet…glued to the planks" of the bridge (78). The present dilates in the narrative as Jim, expecting every moment will be the last, mechanically opens and closes his eyes. The belief in meaningful outcomes is the only force that can shift Jim from the position of patient to agent in this scenario.

Marlow intensifies this representation of extended motionlessness by reflecting, "How long he stood stock-still by the hatch expecting every moment to feel the ship dip under his feet and the rush of water take him at the back and toss him like a ship, I cannot say" (65). Although this statement concludes with an acknowledgement of his epistemological limitations as a first-person homodiegetic narrator, the majority of this sentence is designed to conjure the frozen figure of Jim vividly before the reader's mind's eye (we can see him "as clearly as I can see you," as Jim says to Marlow). Marlow hovers over Jim, lingering over what he imagines Jim would have felt and imagined, an extension into Jim's mind that has the side effect of implicitly answering the technically undecidable question of "how long." It emphasizes that time is, indeed, passing. Hovering over the stock-still Jim, Marlow's narratorial perspective creates the impression that we are watching someone who is existing in an alternate temporality. Jim's experience of the cataclysmic moment of revelation exists within/beside the ongoing elapsing of a more conventional metric time aboard the ship, experienced through the imaginative projection of narrator/observer.

When Jim is able to move, his movement is characterized as that of a puppet being manipulated by external forces. After observing that in Jim's last minute on board the Patna, "events and sensations…beat about him like the sea upon a rock," Marlow immediately

comments, “I use the simile advisedly, because from his relation I am forced to believed he had preserved through it all a strange illusion of passiveness, as though he had not acted but had suffered himself to be handled by the infernal powers who had selected him from for the victim of their practical joke” (79). When, in all of his description of this final moment on board, his impressions and sensations, Jim finally makes reference to movement (“‘I tripped over his legs’”), Marlow grunts in surprise: “This was the first I had heard of his moving at all” (79). Once again a comparison to the natural world is used to highlight the break between actions and their causes: “of the cause that tore him out of his immobility, he knew no more than the uprooted tree knows of the wind that laid it low” (79).

Jim’s paralysis and criminal loss of control over his movement is legible in the context of two phenomena that were being defined in the nineteenth century, each challenging the belief that a subject’s action is intelligible as the result of will or intention. Positioned at the intersection between jurisprudence and medical debates in the nineteenth century, cases of somnambulism put unique pressure on the relationship between action and intention. Instances of violence enacted while sleepwalking in particular were studied under new frameworks of mind that developed around the mid-century, and their sensation-value meant that accounts of ‘unconscious killing’ were often widely disseminated and discussed in the periodical press. One such case is that of Sarah Minchin, a nursemaid who climbed out of her bed one night and almost killed the son of her employer by slashing his throat. The child survived and Minchin was given three months in the Old Bailey for a crime she did not consciously perpetrate. Joel Eigen notes that at her trial, her defense attorney cited a well-known story of somnambulism from Alfred Swaine Taylor’s *Medical Jurisprudence*, one that jurors and the public would likely have recognized: “Two persons had been hunting during the day, and slept together at night; one of

them was renewing the chase in his dream, and, imagining himself to be present at the death of the stag, cried out, ‘I’ll kill him! I’ll kill him!’ [T]he other one, awakened by the noise, got out of bed, and by the light of the moon beheld the sleeper give several deadly stabs with a knife on the part of the bed which his companion had just quitted” (qtd. in Eigen, 129). In other sensational cases, outcomes were fatal.

In an early study of sleep violence (1823), the physician Etienne Jean Georget wrote, “A crime committed by an individual in a state of somnambulism should not be regarded as a voluntary act” (qtd. in Ekirch and Shneerson, 489). He insists that sleepwalkers are not culpable for the actions they perform while in this state, though he acknowledges the difficulty in determining whether or not the perpetrator was actually sleepwalking at the time of the crime. In England and America, similar attitudes can be observed, even if juries were not always inclined to pay attention to this kind of medical testimony. In the trial of Albert Tirrell of Boston, who cut the throat of his mistress while in a somnambulistic state, several doctors were brought in to testify about the nature of sleepwalking. One expert describes the phenomenon in terms of action and an absent or overridden executive power in the brain, calling sleepwalking a “waking dream with the regulating power absent” (qtd in Ekirch and Shneerson, 490).

The second phenomenon that gives context for the representation of paralysis aboard the Patna is the developing study of panic disorders at the end of the nineteenth century. Neurasthenia was a malady first diagnosed by George M. Beard, an American physician who observed its effects in men living and working in urban environments. Symptoms include lethargy, insomnia, headaches, and sexual disfunction. By the turn of the 20th century, a variant of the disorder, “tropical neurasthenia,” was increasingly diagnosed, a condition of fatigue and anxiety that some doctors attributed to a surplus of actinic radiation in the sunlight of tropical

zones. Tropical neurasthenia threatened more than just the productivity of men stationed in these colonial spaces, it destabilized the notion of self-discipline and control that imperialist projects rely upon. As Dane Kennedy observes, “While most of tropical neurasthenia’s bewildering array of symptoms may seem relatively trivial…what made these symptoms such causes for concern was that they seemed to signal a breakdown in moral discipline, a failure of the governance of the self” (33). Although Jim’s sudden paralysis is a distinct phenomenon from the chronic condition described as tropical neurasthenia, it arguably represents an acute expression of this anxiety about self-governance and the disconnection between will and action.

Hauled into a “police court in an Eastern port,” Jim’s actions/inaction aboard the Patna are underwritten by these contemporaneous debates about the panic, imperial anxiety, and the criminality of non-volitional action (21). The court proceedings are a social mechanism designed to process and reject this failing from the body of the seafaring community: a necessary function because, like the letters the cursed sailors of the Flying Dutchman want to pass on, Jim’s story has something of “a sinking weight” (169). Jim’s failure of self-command, most vividly represented by his inability to make himself move, is especially threatening because it is contagious, a seeping, osmotic quality of movement powerful enough to permeate even different levels of the diegesis. While Jim recounts how the Captain, the other mate, and the engineer cry out for the dead George to jump into the boat, Marlow observes

> I beheld him rise slowly as if a steady hand from above had been pulling him out of the chair by his hair. Up slowly—to his full height, and when his knees had locked stiff the hand let him go, and he swayed a little on his feet. There was a suggestion of awful stillness in his face, in his movements, in his very voice when

> he said 'They shouted'—and involuntarily I pricked up my ears for the ghost of that shout (80).

Like an incantation, the oration of this story invokes the overwhelming forces at work in this moment aboard the ship, "awful stillness" absorbing one narrative register from another and transforming an agent into a patient. The curious permeability of narrative registers is extended in the listener, Marlow, who "involuntarily" listens for sounds that should be perceptible only at the lower narrative register. This weird effect of somnambulism in Jim's performance of his narrative to his audience of one anticipates his infamous rhetorical evasion of responsibility for the decision to leave the Patna: still standing and swaying there, "he blurted out—"'I had jumped . . .' He checked himself, averted his gaze. . . . 'It seems,' he added" (81). As the audience for this profession of non-agential action, Marlow too find himself powerless to move. Marlow's incapacitation in this instance and others coincides with moments when the circles Jim turns in his efforts to make others "see" cuts off the air supply. Two chapters later, when they have looped back to the fact that he had "jumped," Jim's outburst of "'What do *you* believe?'" is met with a "pause" that will grow across narrative registers and spaces, absorbing the whole as "the great stillness" engulfs the ship before the storm. Marlow finds himself "overcome by a profound and hopeless fatigue, as though his voice had startled me out of a dream of wandering through empty spaces whose immensity had harassed my soul and exhausted my body" (96). This hopeless and pointless movement through "immensity" recalls the harried, endless voyage of the ghost ship with which this chapter opened. It aligns the attempt to see Jim clearly with the nightmare figure of the cursed, vampiric wreck. Such ships, Marlow explains at an earlier point in the narrative, can "capsize in a squall and float bottom up for months—a kind of maritime ghoul on the prowl to kill ships in the dark" (115). In Marlow's mind, such ships possess a

fearful, undead agency: "Such wandering corpses are common enough in the North Atlantic, which is haunted by all the terrors of the sea,--fogs, icebergs, dead ships bent on mischief, and long sinister gales that fasten upon one like a vampire till all the strength and the spirit and even hope are gone, and one feels like an empty shell of a man" (115). The image of a "shell of a man," one who is utterly depleted by his efforts to move through vast, ungovernable spaces, reappears in Marlow's spatially charged nightmare of endlessly wandering through Jim's contorted narrative seeking a final insight. However, it characterizes no one in this story so much as Jim, who Marlow describes as "absolutely running with nowhere to go" and who feels as though he has "'jumped into a well—into an everlasting dark hole. . .'" (81). The "empty spaces whose immensity" racks Marlow to the point of exhausted immobility is the distance from the deck of the Patna to the interior of the lifeboat, an unfathomable distance for Jim and one that becomes so for Marlow.

The force of stillness that absorbs the Patna, that strikes Jim-aboard-the-Patna to his core, that immobilizes storytelling-Jim, and that turns Marlow's limbs to lead seeps into a still further removed narrative register when Marlow addresses his subdued audience on the veranda. We can see this happening particularly vividly in the sequence that follows Jim narration of his experience on the lifeboat. They float in "A silence of the sea, of the sky, merged into one indefinite immensity still as death around those saved, palpating lives" (83). Narrating-Jim reflects that "'I didn't think a spot on earth could be so still…You couldn't distinguish the sea from the sky; there was nothing to see and nothing to hear. Not a glimmer, not a shape, not a sound. You could have believed that every bit of dry land had gone to the bottom; that every man on earth but I and these beggars in the boat had got drowned" (83). At his most tragic and wistful, Jim explains that it was at this moment that "'all was over . . . with me'" (83). Here,

narrating-Marlow, instead of sinking into the stillness that often overcomes listening-Marlow, takes sudden and dramatic action, trying to rile a response out of his audience. He sits up "abruptly," hurls his pipe "with force," and demands, "Hey, what do you think of it?" (84). This movement is in stark contrast to the calm of his listeners, who seem themselves overtaken by the stillness of the lifeboat: "Nobody stirred" (84). Surrounded as they are by a "drapery of creepers," the stasis of these listeners is all the more intense for how briefly it registers. Marlow moves indefatigably onward, his compulsion to tell this tale matching that of Jim.

What is emphasized and reemphasized through this immobilizing force unbound by any particular diegetic level in the narrative is the experience of helplessness. These compounding and interlocking stillnesses signal the relationship between the sudden and overwhelming inability to move and the more specific phenomenon of not being able to take meaningful action in a particular context. As he listens to Jim, Marlow finds that he feels like "an old man, helpless before a childish disaster" (81). In the next moments he reports that "all around everything was still as far as the ear could reach" and Jim once again becomes "pregnant with vague appeal like a symbolic figure in a picture" (97). The stasis of the image becomes emblematic not only of the way characters are fixed in place in this narrative and by this narrative, not in control of their bodies, but also the way Conrad finally disrupts and reroutes the bildungsroman energy at work earlier in the text.

Jim's account of the ship's collision with the underwater obstacle and Marlow's account of Jim's account both operate through repeated references to visual art and acts of vivid mental "picturing." "I can easily picture him to myself in the peopled gloom of the cavernous place," insists Marlow, "I can see him glaring at the iron, startled by the falling rust, overburdened by the knowledge of an imminent death" (61). Later in this episode, Marlow calls Jim "a finished

artist…he was a gifted poor devil with the faculty of swift and forestalling vision" (70). "Forestalling vision" is an apt characterization of Jim's embodied response to the crisis (picturing the rush of water to come, the deaths of the passenger's below) as well as Marlow's mode of narration and approach to seeking the "truth" about Jim. He is repeatedly caught off guard by the intensity of the visual impressions that form around Jim (e.g. "I had a rapid vision of Jim perched on a shadowless rock, up to his knees in guano, with the screams of sea-birds in his ears, the incandescent ball of the sun above his head, the empty sky and the empty ocean all a-quiver, simmering together in the heat as far as the eye could reach") (120). In *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Culture*, Sue Zemka shows how the temporality of the moment becomes allied with intense but fleeting visual experience in *Lord Jim*, working together to stand in for "a hidden meaning that eludes Marlow's understanding" (185). Sudden insights into character are inevitably expressed by Marlow as "glimpses" of Jim's true face through a fog or mist. As Zemka puts it, "Marlow tries but cannot sustain a coherent image of Jim over time" (184).

In the episode of crisis I have focused on, the formal otherness of the image, evoked through surreal stillness, works to suggest an encounter with a truth that cannot be articulated verbally. Marlow's lamentation about the impossibility of ever fully understanding Jim works in a similar way: "Try as I may for the success of this yarn, I am missing innumerable shades—they were so fine, so difficult to render in colourless words" (68). The image, with its chromaticism (suggested by Marlow's appeal to "innumerable shades") and its alignment both with permanence and the simultaneity of revelation, signifies through formal difference a unified truth that the written narrative can endlessly work toward but never completely achieve (again, the figure of a wander exhausted in the effort to traverse immense distances comes to mind). This is

a familiar theoretical juxtaposition of images and texts, but I think attending to the temporality of the image in this episode can offer more specific insights into Conrad's narrative practice.

Bakhtin described the bildungsroman as an "image of man in the process of becoming," defining this genre against the travel novel, the novel of ordeal, and the biographical novel. In those literary forms, the "image of man" is fixed. New sides of such a character may be revealed as the narrative goes on, but none of those revealed traits fundamentally contradict the original characterization. In contrast, in the bildungsroman, and particularly in what he calls the realist novel of emergence, "changes to the character acquire plot significance, and thus the entire plot of the novel is reinterpreted and reconstructed. Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his destiny and life" (24). In *Lord Jim*, what I argue we find is no longer the "image of man in the process of becoming" but rather a surreal dramatization of a man in the process of becoming an image, and unlike Bakhtin I am referring specifically to a visual image (19). Unlike the traditional development of the bildungsroman protagonist, this process of becoming does not unfold over a span of years or through a complex but ultimately intelligible chain of circumstances; rather, it happens in an instant and through a chance event. As Ian Watt observes, "Conrad stands outside the main tradition of the novel of character; or at least his primary interest is not the detailed psychology of the nature, development, and relationships of individual personalities" (269). Conrad's distinctive techniques of characterization and narration produce figures who are "not the centers of a largely autonomous world of personal relationships, but beings whose actions are inextricably connected with the mysterious and yet determining forces of social and natural reality" (269). In Jim, we do not find a progressive negotiation of one's place in a society but instead a sudden transformation of the self that comes out of the blue, the result of

unintentionally crossing "a narrow belt of vibrating water and of humming air" (20). With his feet "glued to the plank," Jim acts out his own transformation from an evolving person in the diegetic world (though perhaps a somewhat boring, self-indulgent one) into an image to be glimpsed and deciphered from without by everyone who hears the story of the Patna, including the reader. The powerful affective charge of helplessness that overwhelms this narrative and its characters (echoed from Jim's physical loss of control over himself to Marlow's and the reader's inability to intervene) results from this disturbingly sudden, irreversible model of character and identity formation. It makes the event of transformation the result of forces that are external to the individual and incredibly unpredictable. Chance factors heavily into this kind of identity formation.

To return to the series of questions of eventfulness I posed at the outset of this section, the narrative-defining/making concept of event in *Lord Jim* is a breach that is not a breach, a phenomenon that arrives unexpectedly and goes away in such a way that it seems to have never occurred at all. Its impact on the observable world is simultaneously imperceptible (the ship continues to float) and tremendous (Jim's life is fundamentally rerouted). It is a structuration of the event that is made possible by the technologically enabled motionless movement of the steamship and an idea of stasis-as-timelessness associated with the environments through which it moves. As we have also seen, the non-event exerts enormous narrative weight, formidably pressing in on the moment of action in the diegetic present from the future perspective of narration. The character Jim is pinned to the deck of this ship by the force of being too late (he cannot take meaningful action to change the course of events, the crisis will happen inevitably, his narrative agency is symbolically drained away), on the one hand, and by the force of being too early on the other (this event is not the event he understood it to be, nothing happens, he is

actually invested with an agency that he cannot recognize). As the scraping of the bottom of the Patna moves down the spectrum of eventfulness (it does not have the diegetic impact it might have had), Jim's inaction and action move correspondingly upward. His paralysis and uncontrolled movement take on the status of the primary narrative event and, like the collision of the Patna and the unwater obstacle, these actions are characterized as the result of external forces. Will and intention are severed from action and event through the apparatus of the steamship in a reimagining of the novel of development that challenges earlier narrative models.

Indeed, Marlow's sudden and overwhelming turns of frustration with Jim occur because of Jim's association with beginnings and, consequently, with narratives of development and maturation held dear within the community of seafarers to which Marlow belongs. Turning his signature two-step narration/commentary on himself, Marlow marvels, "I was aggrieved against him, as though he had cheated me—me!—of a splendid opportunity to keep up the illusion of my beginnings" (95). Continuing the list of Jim's offenses: "he had robbed our common life of the last spark of its glamour" (95). Jim's story of development is identified here both as a story and a loss. But what is most threatening to Marlow is not Jim's failure within an existing and familiar systems of seafarer identity or generic character formation, but rather his implication within a new and less governable one. How to make sense of their "common life" now?

IV.

If the steamship is the vehicle for senseless mechanical motion without meaningful movement and of larger systems that have been rewriting the "event" understood to shape individual lives by the end of the nineteenth century, the sailing ship offers a different model. In Conrad's conception, the human heartbeat that served as such a powerful symbol for narrative force and motive in the early nineteenth century is drained of its vitality by the time he composes

The Shadow-Line: A Confession in 1915. The biological body of the individual is no longer the site of exploration for the mysterious animating force that separates the truly vital from various forms of dead clay. The new site of exploration is neither human nor living in a physiological sense. Like their static figureheads that nonetheless "inclined forward under the slant of mighty bowsprits as if eager to begin another run of 11,000 miles in their leaning attitude," the stillness of the sailing ship is charged with ever-present potential energy (159). In *The Mirror of the Sea* Conrad ties a question of descriptive fidelity to this concentrated energy-within-stillness of the wind-powered ship by asking "But why, unless for love of the life those effigies shared with us in their wandering impassivity, should one try to reproduce in words an impression of whose fidelity there can be no critic an no judge?" (159). "Wandering impassivity" is a turn of phrase that nicely captures the significance of sailing ships as figures of animation, motionless apparatuses that interact with and register forces that are inaccessible or invisible to the individual body.

Much like *Lord Jim*, *The Shadow-Line* is a coming-of-age story and a confession. There is an implicit dialogue with the earlier text in this novella, which transmutes Jim's catastrophic initiation into adulthood under the crushing stillness of immanent disaster into the unnamed narrator's more successful test and initiation into the community of seafarers through the protracted stillness of dead air at sea. As I have previously discussed, a difference in craft contributes to the kind of testing and initiation these characters experience, with the trials of the narrator of *The Shadow-Line* paced out according to the wind-powered ship's motion. But before the narrator sets sail on this high-spirited and more traditional vessel, he serves aboard a steamship, and it is in reference to this steamship and the sailors who serve on board it that Conrad begins to connect the human body and the mechanical body of the vessel. The Chief

Engineer of this steam-powered ship walks “hastily up and down the after-deck, wearing an intense, spiritually rapt expression, which was caused by a perpetual consciousness of unpleasant physical sensations in his internal economy” (8). The engineer’s expert mechanical eye turns inward from the workings of the mechanical ship to the biomechanical operation of organs and fluids within his own body. “Internal economy” and “internal propulsion” are phrases that unwholesomely conflate the operation of human body and the ever-maligned steam-powered vessel, lending the operation of the human body some of the dull, unsensing activity of the machine, as well as its precarity (8, 6). The steamship can fail suddenly and absolutely. In turn, this comparison lends the steamship a sort of fleshy monstrosity.

This comparison of organic and mechanical systems is extended in the more dignified person of Ransome, the cook aboard the narrator’s first command. There is a potential internal equipment failure that moderates Ransome’s locomotion. Described by the first mate, Mr. Burns, as “the best seaman in the ship,” Ransome serves as a cook because of a heart condition: “He mustn’t exert himself too much or he may drop dead suddenly” (98). A counterpart to Jim, Ransome presents the figure of the perfect sailor, immediately notable for “his well-proportioned figure, something thoroughly sailor-like in his poise,” who is compromised by a fatal internal flaw (98). But Ransome’s flaw is entirely physiological where Jim’s is moral or psychological. Ransome must carefully calibrate his activity while monitoring his internal machinery. Unlike Jim, Ransome’s carefully considered and measured movements and internal assessment mean that he emerges as the quiet hero of this story, even though the fear of overstretching himself prompts his resignation. This is how the story ends, with the sound of Ransome “cautiously” climbing the stairs “step by step” to leave the ship (197). “‘I—I am in a blue funk about my heart, sir,’” Ransome says worriedly before his departure (196). What we are left with in this

final moment is the misalignment between the frailty of the individual mechanical body and some greater seafaring spirit that Ransome symbolizes (he is the "best seaman in the ship").

There is a lesson about moderation in this ending, certainly—Captain Giles essentially says as much on the young narrator's return when he reflects, "the truth is that one must not make too much of anything in life, good or bad" (194). The narrator rephrases this as a directive to "live at half-speed" (194). But if we look at the velocity of the narrative whole, "half-speed" does not seem like the most meaningful descriptor, nor is the *decision* to move at one speed or another given much emphasis—quite the reverse.[38] Spilling over and drowning out the significance of isolated moments of rash action is the far more overwhelming representation of the inability to act (at half-speed or otherwise) to bring about meaningful movement. Movement is severed from individual choice, intention, and effort consistently across this voyage of nonevent. The question posed through the various stillnesses of this narrative is what motivates movement if not internal propulsion or individual decision?

The Shadow-Line begins with an extended wait for the voyage narrative to get underway. Before the drama of the sea can begin (itself a painful drama of anticlimaxes), the reader must wind their way through a tangle of low-tier port politics and intrigue. The point of this introductory episode is to develop an understanding of the mentality of the narrator before he is put to the test of leadership, a psychological workup that puts emphasis on type rather than idiosyncrasy. The subtitle of this novella is "A Confession" and what seems to be confessed in this part of the story is the narrator's youthful arrogance. Repeatedly he is placed in conversation with a retired captain and navigation expert, Captain Giles, for whom he articulates an equivocal

[38] It is true that the somewhat hasty decision to depart Bangkok before ensuring that the crew was fully past the disease fits into a moral about moderation, but my point is that practically speaking, this one impetuous action is overwhelmed by the representation of the inability to act throughout the majority of the voyage itself.

respect. His attempts to display youthful deference are undercut at every turn by impatience, self-interest, and humorous stupidity. The paternalistic Giles tries to guide the young narrator to a series of realizations that the reader sees from much further out, only for the narrator to blithely and repeatedly misunderstand him. The flavor of divine insight that characterizes the narrator's moment of realization—"And then my eyes became opened to the inwardness of things and speeches the triviality of which had been so baffling and tiresome"—is overwrought and misaligned with the obviousness of the conclusion (37). This slowly unfolding revelation does not fully devalue the flash of insight as a phenomenon, but it does put the accent on the meaningfulness of experiencing a revelation and less on the celestial realignment of understanding that is the revelation itself.

This is the standard reading of the opening chapters of *The Shadow-Line*. The narrator is a psychological agent whom the reader is introduced to in a moment of youthful crisis. We will assess his progress at the end of the novel, where he asserts to the benevolent judge Captain Giles, "I feel old….I am no longer a youngster" (195). The shadow-line for which the novella is titled is the boundary line between youth to maturity. The narrator preserves, at the end, a belief in and desire for personal agency and dynamism—an inner propulsion. After a harrowing first voyage as captain, he eagerly informs Giles that he "shall be off at daylight to-morrow" (196). I argue that the opening chapters of this novella reframe the adventure that follows as a repudiation of any easy conception of personal agency and action. Instead, Conrad repeatedly encourages the reader to consider all the ways in which an intention or desire to act can be disconnected from an event or outcome.

The novella opens with a question about causes: "Why did you throw up your berth?" (20). Why did the young narrator abandon the position he held for some time aboard a

steamship? In a curious emptying out of psychological depths as the key to understanding motivation, the reader is made to feel that their guess is as good as the narrator's: "And suddenly I left all this. I left it in that, to us, inconsequential manner in which a bird flies away from a comfortable branch. It was as though all unknowing I had heard a whisper or seen something" (6). "Well—perhaps!" is all the narrator can say to this, taking a curiously external position relative to his own subjectivity. The question of why he left his berth is an invitation to dive beneath the surface of action and outcome in search for hidden motivations that arcs the diver immediately back upward, as though unable to break through a strangely powerful surface tension.[39] Conrad models the application of various explanatory frameworks to the same action through the voices of the narrator's former shipmates, who try to make sense of an action that is opaque on the surface. The captain views the rationale as primarily psychological, an esoteric yearning of the mind and soul expressed through the captain's belief that the narrator is "anxious to go and look for" something (7). The second engineer offers a social rationale, bitterly concluding that his friend is going to "run away home and get married to some silly girl" (7). Finally, a physiological impetus is given voice by the chief engineer, whose attention to his "internal economy" I have already discussed. As the narrator puts it, "His view of my case was very simple. He said it was nothing but deranged liver. Of course!" (8). Of course, the narrator has his own sweeping temporal explanation for his youthful action, claiming that everyone experiences a time of life in adolescence when the desire to try something new leads to rash, otherwise inexplicable action. Still, this is such a sweeping, unspecific view of the action taken

[39] This quality of unbreakable surface tension is reaffirmed in the material metaphors used to describe the sea across the novella (and widely in Conrad's writing). The water's surface is compared to marble (making a dive to investigate hidden depths a neck-breaking endeavor) and paper (making it a futile one, since discovery works through the surface of paper, not through tearing through it).

that it ultimately loops back around to the surface again. The young man takes this action at this time because it is the appointed time at which a young man would take this action.

This explanation of action still takes us away from a theory of motivation that is subjective and internal and makes it external to the person who performed it. In fact, what I would call the narrator's temporal or life-script-based rationale for his departure is specifically envisioned as an external force working on the passive body of the narrator's younger self: "The green sickness of late youth descended on me and carried me off. Carried me off that ship, I mean" (6). Indeed, the baseline propulsion for the young man's narrative arc in these opening chapters is external dynamism. He is buffeted about and finally catapulted into the coveted role of captain by forces outside of himself. And force is a key term for Conrad across this text. As the young man is being carried off his ship as though by a bird of prey, his captain remarks that "he couldn't keep me by mainforce" (7). This focus on force returns when another moment of inexplicable action is put under the microscope by the narrator. After pages and pages of Captain Giles patiently leading the narrator to the idea that he should ask the steward of the Officer's House about a letter that was not delivered, the narrator still frames the act of speaking to the steward as something ungovernable and unprompted: "To this day I don't know what made me call after him. 'I say! Wait a minute'" (35). Throwing up his hands, so to speak, he finally concludes, "Well it was an impulse of some sort; an effect of that force somewhere within our lives which shapes them this way or that" (35). Notably this force is positioned "within our lives" rather than within the subconscious or conscious mind of the individual. As he reflects on the significance of this pivot-point in his life, he gives his mouth a mind of its own: "For if these words had not escaped from my lips (my will had nothing to do with that) my existence would, to be sure, have been still a seaman's existence, but directed on now to me utterly inconceivable

lines" (36). He immediately widens the gap between will and action by insisting, "No. My will had nothing to do with it" (36). Having at long last discovered that there is a command to be had, and subsequently (and with a ridiculous delay and further coaxing from Giles) having reached the realization that this command could be his own, the young narrator exhibits a by now characteristic lack of command over his movement. He is drawn to the harbor office to make enquiries as though it were a powerful magnet placed in his vicinity and he a man made of metal. The quay where the office is located "seemed to glide toward me swiftly. The whole great roadstead to the right was just a mere flicker of blue, and the dim cool hall swallowed me up out of the heat and glare" (41). Utterly helpless, he is both pinned down and hurtling through space.

From the first moments of this story, then, the young narrator is an apparatus acted upon by forces he encounters while coasting along a given life path. The pivot point from one life/career trajectory to another is articulated as being "put out of gear mentally," and the result is that he stalls out (40). Then, as the promise of a command and all it would mean for him trembles into magnetic existence along the event horizon of his life's path, the narrator recalls that he "recovered my powers of locomotion" (41). The language of "a command" as something to be "seized" may suggest agency and decisive personal choice and action, but as we have seen this is not how the young narrator's locomotion is predominantly described (40, 41). To say that he has "recovered" the power of locomotion ultimately implies a surprising lack of control over his movement. The motive force is at work externally. He meets his match in this respect, then, in the ship he feels so passionately connected to as captain. The way he "trembled" when he first lays his eyes on it harmonizes with the high-spirited way the ship "shuddered" as cargo is loaded on board (71, 73). Compared to the other ships docking alongside it, his is like some "rare women," "an Arab steed in a string of cart-horses"—anything but an unfeeling assemblage of

wood, metal, and rope (72). Curiously though, the very attribute that separates this craft from the dead bulk of the steamship is the fact that the ghost is with-out this machine. The sailing ship is a figure of romance because it is a vessel through which one can grapple directly with the external elements of wind and wave.[40]

I have called *The Shadow-Line* a narrative of nonevent like *Lord Jim*, a story made up of stillnesses and the failure to move. But here the failure of movement rests on the titanic shoulders of the Four Winds. To sum up the problems that beset this young captain's first voyage as commanding officer, the wind won't blow, the ship can't move, and neither can the men. The calm sets in immediately, although it is initially overlooked because of the business of the crew's preparation for the voyage as they anchor "a mile outside the bar" (105). The ship hums with activity as shared labor begins to knit together the community of seamen onboard. And yet, as the captain steps out after dark, it is "again to meet only a still void" as far as the wind is concerned (106). He reports this "Dead calm" to the physically immobilized first mate, Mr. Burns, who is bedridden following a disease that affected many of the men before they could set sail (108). Responsive to the slightest breeze, the captain and crew take all the action they can to get underway. And yet the event does not occur: "With her anchor at the bow and clothed in canvas to her very trucks, my command seemed to stand as motionless as a model ship set on the gleams and shadows of polished marble" (113). All the preparations have been made, and so the failure of the wind to activate the ship as it should is especially painful. Abstraction becomes the narrator's means of conveying motionlessness: it is as though he is trapped in a model ship rather than a real one; the "great over-heated stillness" that "enveloped the ship" one afternoon "seemed to hold her motionless in a flaming ambience composed in two shades of blue" (120).

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[40] In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad explains that it is this "closeness" between sailor and natural element that makes the sailing of a ship an art rather than a dry mechanical exercise (like the operation of a steamship).

As days trickle by, the ship's only movement is an "imperceptible" drift that does not necessarily carry it in the right direction (114). Recalling the strange forces that act on the ancient mariner's cursed vessel, the captain observes that this "evil spell" did not keep them "always motionless. Mysterious currents drifted us here and there, with a stealthy power made manifest only by the changing vistas" (124). Fitful winds offer "promises of advance ending in lost ground, expiring in sighs, dying into dumb stillness" (124).

Intensifying this elemental stillness is the immobilization of the crew due to the contagious disease that the captain thought they had seen the last of at port prior to departure. Mr. Burns is the figure in whom this immobilizing infectious agent, a "fever devil" as Ransome calls it, becomes most clearly connected to the stillness of the surrounding environment (153). The captain repeatedly informs Burns of the stillness without, and Burns lies exhausted, a testament to the oncoming stillness within. The power to move seeps from crewmembers' limbs as the disease again wastes the crew one sailor at a time. Just as no meaningful action is possible when they are faced with a windless day (they can ready the sails, but that does not mean they will move), no meaningful action is possible with respect to this disease. What sharpens the pain of this helplessness is the fact that there should be something the captain can do to influence the outcome. But here he again finds himself stymied, unable to act. In a horrifying moment of revelation, he discovers that the remaining bottles of quinine on board have been tampered with by the previous captain, their contents likely sold for his profit. The supply of medicine that should have helped the crew move past this illness is in fact some worthless, gritty substance of unknown origin. To face this discovery, he runs up to the deck where his inability to respond to the disease fuses with his inability to make the ship move: "The sails hung motionless and slack, the very folds of their sagging surfaces moved no more than carved granite" (134). The draining

of energy and life force from the bodies of the crew members sets the conditions for the "perfect" stillness—a crisis at the center of this narrative—that will befall the ship and bears upon Conrad's examination of the force that animates narrative.

As in *Lord Jim*, crisis point in the narrative arc of *The Shadow-Line* involves an invasion of one kind of stillness by another. The looming squall is an inkier stillness that suffuses the sky, a crushing immobility activated within another kind of stillness and heightens the apprehension of changelessness, helplessness, and paralysis to an unbearable degree: "There was something going on in the sky like a decomposition; like a corruption of the air, which remained as still as ever" (156). In this decomposition of stillness within stillness, or of stillness by a different kind of stillness, the narrator encounters an oncoming apocalypse ushered in by neither a cry nor a whimper:

> The immobility of all things was perfect…. It was no good looking in any direction, watching for a sign, speculating upon the nearness of the moment. When the time came the blackness would overwhelm silently the bit of starlight falling upon the ship, and the end of all things would come without a sigh, stir, or murmur of any kind, and all our hearts would cease to beat like run-down clocks (160).

The "nearness of the moment" refers at once to the looming end of all things, which suggests an orientation toward the immediate future, and to the stifling pressure of the present moment. It is a present that threatens to suffocate all life, an ending that is less an event in a sequence and more the like the ending of the possibility of any event at all in the unending, changeless present, or a kind of timeless existence. The image of the heart as a run-down clock contributes to this sense that the end of the world is not an event in itself but rather the elimination of the possibility for

event: “such must have been the darkness before creation” (167). The narrator, experiencing this “foretaste of annihilation,” feels “suddenly reconciled to an eternity of blind stillness” (160).

This incident is an illustrative example of Conrad’s practice of drawing close to one of the only unsharable events within a community of seafarers woven together by narrativizing experience at sea. Annihilation, the end of all things, absolute darkness—the lost ship and the missing ship loom large as the apocalyptic stillness blossoms within the surrounding environmental and narrative hush. But this ship does not sink, nor is it (and the possibility of narrative progress) wiped out of existence in an intractable, palpable final stillness. This almost-lost ship will move, but notably not at the behest of this captain or crew. This is a narrative of nonevent if eventfulness is tied to human agency, which it arguably is more so in the Bildungsroman tradition that this novella self-consciously engages with than in other narrative modes. The hinge connecting a choice to certain consequences is integral to the myths of development and progress that this genre gives narrative form to (and often problematizes). If this hinge is broken, then the only events possible are enacted by external forces.

The incapacitation of the crew, exhausted from illness, results in a simulation of the ghost ship. From the first, the ship’s movement is framed as self-actualizing: the captain feels the “abrupt sensation of the ship moving forward as if of herself under my feet” (173). The depletion of energy among the crew is at its worst at this point in the voyage, with only around three crew members capable of taking any action at all on board. The image is one of prostrate bodies clinging to life below deck and exhausted, overly taxed, and isolated figures positioned at vital points on deck, draped at grotesque angles. Impossible not to think of the corpses that drop and fester around Coleridge’s ancient mariner (and Gustave Doré’s illustrations in particular) or of other haunting accounts of the ghost ships wandering the waves. As the captain puts it, “to steer

a wildly rushing ship full of dying men was a rather dreadful prospect" (183). With their limited and rapidly dwindling stores of energy they can only take limited action to prepare the ship to capture the wind. After doing so, "'All we can do is steer her,'" the captain remarks to Ransome. "She's a ship without a crew" (182).

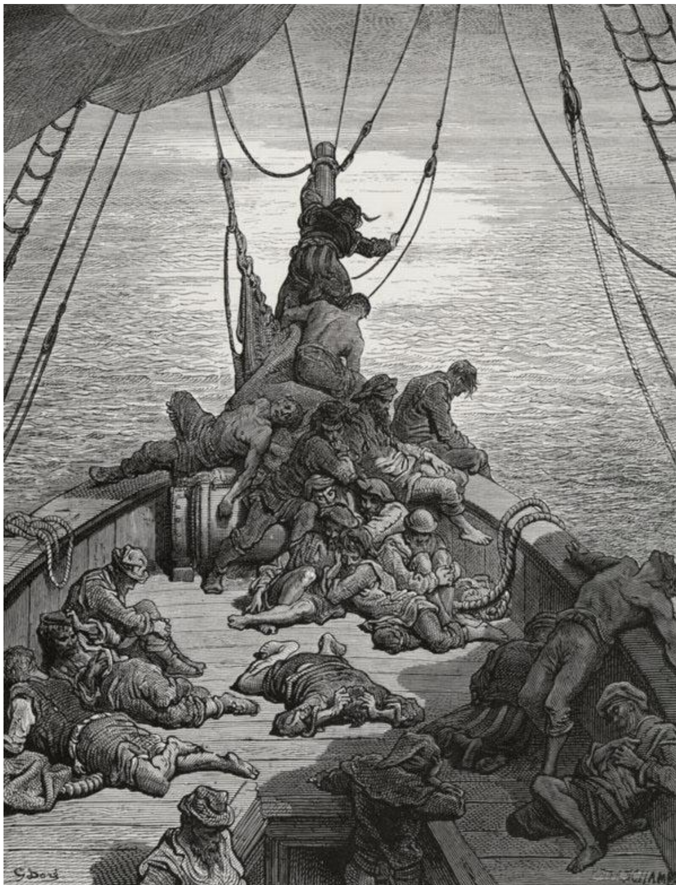

Figure 8. Gustave Doré, illustration for The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

The stillness of the individual's body changes its relationship to the wooden vessel that now flies forward with "dizzy speed" (184). Utterly depleted of energy, the captain wants "new limbs. My arms and legs seemed utterly useless" (180). Having been drained of internally generated energy to take action, the individual's body becomes a still component of the ship, propping up the wheel so that the external forces with which the apparatus as a whole engages

will be channeled in the right direction. The mad rush of the ship therefore definitively results from the interaction between external forces and the carefully calibrated structure of the ship, of which the mariners have become still, structural components rather than commanding agents. While it is not correct to say that there is no intervention on the part of the crew, the emphasis is always on how limited this action is, how fully unequipped they are to get the ship to shore. Rallying his skeleton crew, the captain cries, "Now men, we'll go aft and square the mainyard. That's about all we can do for the ship; and for the rest she must take her chance" (162). And the ship, with minimal but careful preparation, does get them to port. This is helplessness reimagined: the nearly lifeless body of the sailor aboard a rushing ship is the one that is able to interface with vital forces that supersede the individual—the elemental power of the wind and the communal bond of the crew that become accessible through the wooden ship's "wandering immobility."

What is it exactly that breaks the spell of stillness cast over this ship? This question is positioned irresistibly at the center of this novella. Is it Mr. Burn's flagrant laughter in the face of the ship's dead former captain, said to have cursed the ship in the first place? Is it a psychological change on the part of the captain—some event of boundary crossing from youth to maturity that precipitates the squall? My contention is that there is no action that could be taken at this diegetic narrative register to bring about a change in circumstance, and that this absence or impossibility of meaningful action is the point. In *The Shadow-Line*, Conrad undertakes the experiment of writing a narrative of nonevent, where the event is connected to character intervention, motivation, or intention. He dramatizes the interaction between stillnesses at sea, the chronotope of apocalyptic stillness, heavy and final, decomposing into existence within the languid, lingering chronotope of the becalmed ship, which in turn interacts with the still

apparatus of the ship. The "still ship" is a figure that encompasses both this suffocating fixedness in space (pinned to the spot, as Woolf will soon say of a smaller craft) and time (clocks winding down) and the headlong rush forward. In its quality of stillness, it is a conduit for external forces that the individual cannot access otherwise. As a figure for narrative movement and animation, the still ship depersonalizes narrative forms by making vitality a matter of the interaction between the structure (a particular narrative) and external forces. It is the form through which the individual writer or reader can interface with external forces and superstructures that are otherwise imperceptible in their most vital, true form, or that the individual body is not calibrated to register—a sweeping, evolving narrative tradition, the sprawl and network of a community, or the "soul of the world."

V.

In many of his works, Conrad signals a resistance to the kind of comparison that allows a frictionless movement between crafts. A defender of specialized knowledge, technical terminology, and practical experience, he forcefully derides landlubbers' attempts to describe life at sea, the components of a ship, and the operations performed by sailors. In the *Mirror of the Sea*, for example, he takes issue with journalists' use of the phrase "cast anchor," when the correct term—the one that fits most closely the action of dropping the anchor—is "let go" (14). "To take a liberty with technical language," he protests, "is a crime against the clearness, precision, and beauty of perfected speech" (14). Both journalists and literary writers are the targets of this critique. Discussing the complexity of the love and fear sailors have for the sea, Conrad brushes aside "the protestations and tributes of writers who, one is safe in saying, care for little else in the world than the rhythm of their lines and the cadence of their phrase" (167).

And yet in the swells and eddies of *The Mirror of the Sea* there is a pervasive turn toward overt fictionality. By overt fictionality I mean elements of fantasy, allegory, or anything that is sensational or invites comparison to generic scripts. Rather than contradicting his defense of technical seafaring language, this fictionality is the result of a consistent awareness of and desire for a closeness between experience and artistic representation. This is an emphasis on proximity that E.M. Forster puts in terms of a bird and its shadow. Writing about the problem of distance between a literary text and its critical interpretation (rather than the distance between art and life), he reflects that

> Perhaps our subject, namely the books we have read, has stolen away from us while we theorize, like a shadow from an ascending bird. The bird is all right—it climbs, it is consistent and eminent. The shadow is all right—it has flickered across roads and gardens. But the two things resemble one another less and less, they do not touch as they did when the bird rested its toes on the ground (156).

In the vehemence of his critique of landlubberly accounts of seafaring, it is evident that proximity of a related sort is a core concern for Conrad. If the work of fiction is the albatross's shadow (why not), then Conrad wants that bird (which signifies lived seafaring experience) to be skimming over a mirror-like sea. My purpose in speaking of reflection and shadows with respect to Conrad's particular fixation with fictional fidelity to real experience is not to open up a discussion of literary realism—at least, realism is not my primary target. The point here is that for Conrad the overtly fictional ultimately allows a certain kind of drawing close, a caress of the sea's glittering face. The defense of technical speech at the beginning of this text is not at odds with the poetic treatment of the West and East Winds as ancient kings waging perpetual war

against one another later on, since each kind of speech results from and returns to this close interface with the water's surface.

To say that heightened kinds of fictionality actually allow a text to dip down closer to the water's surface, offering deeper insights into real experience than traditional realist forms of representation can, is a familiar insight. But Conrad makes special use of this drawing close through the fantastical, drawing forth an almost mystical meeting of the sea and sky. The line of the horizon perceived in the distance and the plane of the water's surface perceived from above are figures for this convergence, what he refers to as "that infinite mystery born from the conjunction of water and sky" (*The Mirror of the Sea* 169). This interstitial space involves the drawing close of the titanic/elemental and the human/quotidian. For Conrad, this is the privileged hazy space of almost-contact in which the sailor aboard a ship exists. He uses the processes of narrativization activated in the overlapping chronotopes of stillness at sea to mediate the privileged knowledge that sailors have of this space of interstitiality, an intersection that allows him to get at the more fantastical, invisible aspects of lived experience—the elemental forces that surround the individual, the indivisible bonds between seafarers. This interstitial zone, in turn, allows lived experience at sea to channel and contour his theory of the techniques and effects of narrative fiction.

Chapter 4

The Empty House and The Living Text:
Stillness as Endurance in *To the Lighthouse*

> *Yesterday I finished the first part of* To the Lighthouse*, and today began the second. I cannot make it out—here is the most difficult abstract piece of writing—I have to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless and featureless with nothing to cling to: well, I rush at it, and at once scatter out two pages. (87)*
>
> Virginia Woolf
> Diary Entry, April 30, 1926

In 1926, Woolf undertook a narrative experiment. At this point in her career, telling the story of an increasingly derelict, unoccupied house over the span of a decade would be the extension of a longstanding preoccupation with the secret lives of empty rooms, from the haunted house with which we began to the hushed yet active interior of Isabella Tyson's home in "The Lady in the Looking-glass: A Reflection." As the narrator of this story remarks, to "see things that never happen, so it seems, if someone is looking," one must go undercover: "The house was empty, and one felt…like one of those naturalists who, covered with grass and leaves, lie watching the shyest animals—badgers, otters, kingfishers—moving about freely, themselves unseen" (221). Just as Isabella Tyson's house is animated by "pirouetting" creatures of light and shadow, "flushes and darkenings," and a "a perpetual sighing and ceasing sound" (221), the Ramsays' coastal home in "Time Passes" is a living entity in which little winds "all ceased together, gathered together, all sighed together" (127).

As a literary representation of a domestic environment whose existence dramatically unfolds in time and in the absence of characters, the narrative of the Ramsays' house in *To the Lighthouse* is exemplary. The construction of fictional houses that are not static spaces for dynamic characters to occupy but rather living, breathing environments is a model of house-making familiar in studies of modernist fiction (and particularly of Woolf's work). Critics have argued that modernist writers' fixation with the ongoing making, unmaking, and remaking of houses is in part the result of frustrating encounters with structures that felt all too solid and unchanging—buildings that stubbornly outlasted their appropriate historical moment and occupants. The Victorian house looms large in the modernist literary imagination, a disorienting behemoth that constrains the modern subject within an increasingly obsolete spatial schema. These seemingly inescapable built environments, as well as the codes of conduct and programs for daily life they help instantiate and perpetuate, were things to be lamented and, if you were unfortunate enough to occupy one, resisted. As many scholars of Woolf have observed, it is difficult to overstate the importance of the Victorian house in her writing. In Hermione Lee's words, "Woolf's lifelong argument with the past took its central images from the leaving, and the memory, of the Victorian house" (46). In the context of Woolf's assessment of literary history, Emily Blair explains that "The physical solidity of the house becomes her representation for the English literary tradition—'the great mansion of literature'—and an emblem for the success of the nineteenth-century male novelist" (24). Victoria Rosner's account of the modernist reckoning with and transformation of Victorian architecture tracks a movement away from floorplans that carefully categorized activities and people and toward a domestic environment that is perpetually reinvented. She argues that for modernist writers, and Woolf especially, "more than a backdrop

or a symbol for family, the home departs from its Victorian identity as a repository of tradition to become a kind of workshop for interior design and social change" (13).

A break with this Victorian past is seen by many readers to structure the narrative whole of *To the Lighthouse*: the shattered post-War present of "The Lighthouse" is separated from the ordered but oppressive Victorian past of the novel's opening section by the upheaval of "Time Passes." If the Victorian house is a figure for a past that needed to be dismantled as a condition of possibility for imagining new ways of living in the future, then the requisite turmoil of "Time Passes" presents a corresponding formal challenge. "I cannot make it out," Woolf writes in her diary at the outset of this endeavor, describing her uncertainty in visual terms that will be echoed by the characters themselves as they peer out toward the dismembering flood of darkness at the beginning of the section. "If my feeling is correct," she writes upon finishing "Time Passes," "this is the greatest stretch I've put my method to, and I think it holds" (99).

To understand the innovations of this "greatest stretch," it is necessary to attend to the ways Woolf's house takes shape in relation to equally experimental nineteenth-century precursors. By peering from the empty steps of Chesney Wold's ghost walk to the crumbling walls of the Ramsays' summer home, it is possible to discern a new continuum along which to study narrative theorization in nineteenth- and twentieth-century realist novels. Like Dickens, Woolf recognized that the temporality of the empty house has a unique potential to unsettle narrative techniques and facilitate theorization of the living text. Recognizing the vital temporal component of a structure traditionally imagined primarily in spatial and static terms (the house) is a means of identifying the evolving and historically-constituted nature of domestic arrangements that had come to seem natural or given. Just when Woolf's narrative seems to be most radically and materially taking apart the Victorian past, its formal return is most complete.

One of Woolf's particular goals is to reach analytic insights about the temporal duration and extension of the realist novel as a literary form—an aspect of narrative that is everywhere obvious and yet, as many critics have observed, challenging to pin down. The moment is perhaps the temporal category that has been most thoroughly explored with respect to Woolf's realism, and by her own admission she was fascinated by the possibility of a story so self-sufficient and coherent that it could be encapsulated in an isolated moment and discreet event. "I am now and then haunted by some semi-mystic very profound life of a woman," she reflected in her diary, "which shall all be told on one occasion; and time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. One incident—say the fall of a flower—might contain it. My theory being that the actual event practically does not exist—nor time either. But I don't want to force this" (101). A lifetime in a moment, a story not forced, but organically folded inward so that it is contained in a temporality not unlike the one traditionally ascribed to works of visual art—this a concept of access to what Auerbach calls the "wealth of reality" through the compressed temporal frame of the moment that characterizes so much of Woolf's work, her "moments of being." Auerbach treats the account of Mrs. Ramsay measuring a stocking against her son's leg as a microcosm of the novel's (and Literary Modernism's) predilection for microcosms, moments which hold within themselves the whole of experience: "What takes place here in Virginia Woolf's novel is precisely what was attempted everywhere in works of this kind (although not everywhere with the same insight and mastery)—that is, to put the emphasis on the random occurrence" (552). Auerbach stresses the novelty of this development, insisting that "In the process something new and elemental appeared: nothing less that the wealth of reality and depth of life in every moment to which we surrender ourselves without prejudice" (552). This is the scalar shift that has been understood as a fundamental technique of Modernist realism,

Neville's vision of a dewdrop as "a globe…hanging down in a drop against the enormous flank of some hill" (*The Waves* 9).

Despite the fact that Woolf resisted calling *To the Lighthouse* a "novel," this text consistently exhibits both a curiosity about the nature of the novel's temporal extension (in contrast to the brevity of the moment) and a skepticism about the correlation between brevity/ephemerality and truth that other literary forms cultivate. By undertaking the challenge of narrating the existence of a house without a living character over the course of a decade, Woolf is tackling one of the more difficult aspects of literary form to analyze. As Catherine Gallagher observes in "Formalism and Time," if a novel is, to put it simply, "'a lengthy fictional prose narrative,'" then 'lengthy' is "the most thoroughly neglected word in the definition'" (229). The challenge is to understand form over time, in terms of length, without envisioning it in terms of outline, arranging it into diagram (as a narratologist would), or studying it solely through verb tense or within the confines of the brief, crystalizing "formalist moment" that is well suited to the hyper-focused examination of discourse analysis. With this challenge Gallagher's essay begins and ends. Her history of the role of ephemerality in the formalist imagination, which traces the moth as the representative figure for form from Percy Shelley to Woolf, concludes with the charge that "If we are ever to develop a concept of length that includes analytic insights into the temporal nature of narrative, we will have to be a little less mothlike ourselves, a little less enamored of the end" (251). Woolf's "The Death of the Moth" serves as Gallagher's final example of the way form has traditionally been allied with the temporality of the moment, which in turn is privileged as our only point of access to the eternal.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf's skepticism of the association between the compressed temporality of certain literary forms and special access to truth is addressed directly.

Immediately before "Time Passes," in which a house will be converted from a primarily spatial structure to a primarily temporal one, we find Mrs. Ramsay reading a sonnet, and a sonnet about stillness no less. While reading Shakespeare's Sonnet 98, "From you I have been absent in the spring," Mrs. Ramsay "ascend[s]" through the poem until she breaks through the canopy to find the treasured, harmonious whole: "And there it was, suddenly entire; she held it in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here—the sonnet" (121). The "sudden[ness]" of this encounter with the essence of life fits within what Sue Zemka has characterized as the modernist inclination to use the moment and other very brief spans of time as access points for epiphanic encounters with a transcendent truth. The pleasing, pearl-like physical form that this truth is shaped into by the sonnet form is reassuring and manageable—it fits in her hands. The final couplet of the sonnet, dreamily repeated twice by Mrs. Ramsay as she reads, seems to highlight the association between the sonnet and its power to impose stillness within the detritus-scattered field of everyday life: "Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away, / As with your shadow I with these did play" (123).

But it is revealing that the truth Mrs. Ramsay encounters through the sonnet form must be "sucked out of life," and Woolf's emphasis of the act of extraction denaturalizes the reassurance promised in its glowing pearl-like revelation. In the novel's next section, "Time Passes," Woolf takes the compact, harmonious revelation of the sonnet and fans it out like a deck of cards. There are few lines that could as richly indicate the phenomena dramatized in the novel's middle section as those Mrs. Ramsay drifts through in the final moments of "The Window": here we will find echoed the romantic personification of the seasons, the lamented figure of the irrevocably lost beloved, and the reflection on the capacity of the natural world to respond to or signal human events and experiences. Platonic idealism informs this sonnet's examination of

absence in ways that Woolf will draw on across “Time Passes”: the beloved is substance rather than shadow, the template for all the beauties of spring and summer that are “but figures of delight,” sketches that reference but cannot replace the real and ideal (11). They are “Drawn after you, you pattern of all these” (12). In interacting with the beauty of spring and summer, the narrator can only “play” with shadows that ultimately only mark the absence of the beloved. In “Time Passes,” Mrs. Ramsay becomes the lost pattern who can only be accessed through shadows and copies in the remainder of the novel (Lily will find her shadows and echoes everywhere in the house and surrounding landscape in “The Lighthouse”). This language of playing with shadows also describes the operations of the narrator in the characterless environment of the empty house.

From the vantage point of “Time Passes,” the stillness referenced in the sonnet’s final couplet describes a lateral extension in time, not a vertical step outside of it, and this is an extension that the novel is formally equipped to explore. “Time Passes” is an experiment in stretching out the formal stillness of the sonnet form into the distinct stillness of the realist novel. Expanding the stillness of the final couplet reveals incremental change, unfolds processes of evolution, and loosens energies that had held the perfect whole of the sonnet together—forces vital to the magical way the sonnet transforms, for a time, the flotsam and jetsam of the day into a pearl that not only soothes, but seems natural and true. If the sonnet offers the experience of discovering a pearl of revelation above quotidian experience, then “Time Passes” returns the extracted pearl to its formative shell, reinvesting it with an environment, history, and existence as an organic entity created incrementally over time, equally the product of the grit of the shells Mrs. McNab grinds under her heels as she approaches the house and the layers of beauty and stillness that fall in soft folds over empty structure in its ‘dormant’ state.

The Drama of the House:

The Disintegrating House and the Dissolving Narrator

What will happen next? “Well, we must wait for the future to show,” observes Mr. Bankes, turning away from the darkening vista (125). The reader, like the characters, is poised at the edge of a precipice at the opening of “Time Passes.” A sense of oncoming disaster hovers over these characters as they peer into the oncoming darkness, about to enter a ten-year period that will include the events of World War I and the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew. As though counting down to a moment of crisis and potential oblivion, the opening subsection closes as “One by one the lamps were all extinguished” (125).

The challenge of “Time Passes” is to tell the story of the existence of an empty house over the course of a decade (87). During its ten-year abandonment, the house’s sole occupant is Mrs. McNab, the caretaker who occasionally stops by to clean it but who does not care to linger longer than necessary in the eerie, ever-more-derelict structure. Rising to the baleful tone of the omniscient narrator who crept through the empty Chesney Wold at night, the narrator of “Time Passes” reports that after Mrs. McNab leaves, “The house was left; the house was deserted. It was left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it. The long night seemed to have set in” (137). By comparing the fictional challenge of “Time Passes” to an experiential one, Woolf explicitly singles out the significance of the unoccupied environment in fictional worlds, as the narrator tries to imagine how one might achieve this kind of access in lived experience. She transforms the train into a technology for (almost) encountering the fictional, the table as it exists after you have left the room: when devoid of life, the Ramsay coastal home is “solitary like a pool at evening, far distant, seen from a train window, vanishing

so quickly that the pool, pale in the evening, is scarcely robbed of its solitude, though once seen" (129). It is as though we are trying to catch the unoccupied scene unawares; its quality of solitude is something to be lost.

Intensifying the emptiness of this unoccupied house early on is the fact that it is fully equipped for occupation. The narrator might well echo George when, after Lady Dedlock's flight, he observes, "Rooms get an awful look about them when they are fitted up, like these, for one person you are used to see in them, and that person is away under any shadow" (890). Similarly, the "long night" of emptiness in Woolf's narrative is ushered in by the death of the lady of the house. Mrs. Ramsay dies in London, an event narrated in the space of a single line, and the remainder of this section of the novel sees the permanent removal of both Prue (who dies in childbirth) and Andrew (who dies in France). As the empty rooms of *Jacob's Room* and *The Waves* attest, Woolf's fascination with the narration of unoccupied spaces (Neville imagining the phone ringing in a room his lover has left) and spaces filled with the articles of their missing inhabitants (Jacob's shoes) was enduring. The Ramsay house is full of reminders of these absent figures, littered with mementoes like "a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes" (129). These objects "keep the human shape," marking it "in the emptiness," gesturing to "how they once were filled and animated" (129). Mrs. Ramsay's gray cloak, the article of clothing most associated with her throughout the novel, has been left behind. Here the collection ("'Do we leave that light burning?' said Lily…'No,' said Prue, 'not if every one's in") and dispersal of characters from the narrative and from the fictional world ("One by one the lamps were all extinguished") is vocalized at the outset by the lamenting little winds that "desisting, all ceased together, gathered together, all sighed together" (125, 127).

The apocalyptic tenor of the oncoming darkness in “Time Passes” and the upheaval of the familiar structures of the house and the family throughout this section have led many critics to treat this section as a self-conscious commentary on form and the process of artistic creation. Maud Ellmann, for example, explores the “theoretical dimension” of this novel through a psychoanalytic framework, arguing that *To the Lighthouse*, as Woolf’s künstlerroman, “contains its own implicit psychoanalysis of creativity” (107). Ellmann’s approach to the novel is centered on the processes of artistic creation writ large; her interest is the life of the artist’s mind, and it seems that this artist could be a painter or composer, novelist or poet. Since Woolf’s narrative includes a painter struggling to make an image, this capacious approach to artistic creation seems justified. Finding in “Time Passes” the “primeval chaos” of the womb (Ellmann) or the madness of the disintegration of the copula (Spivak, who also imagines this section as a womb) is compelling considering the section’s flood of darkness and its uncontrollable natural world (the “gigantic chaos streaked with lightning [that] could have been heard tumbling and tossing”) (134). However, the level of abstraction to which these discussions of form and the relationship between Art and Life are removed can lead readers to miss the more nuanced insights it offers into the creation of and interaction with longer narrative forms in particular.

One of the defining attributes of this empty house temporality is generally lost in the psychoanalytic and deconstructive readings mentioned above, and this is the quality of ordered progression in time that characterizes the section**.** The prevailing logic of “Time Passes” is one of cause and effect—events happen “now” and “at last” because baseline conditions have shifted. Additionally, in prioritizing the most lyrical aspects of this section, they overlook the fact that, above all else, “Time Passes” enacts a narrative within the seasonal, limited duration of ten years and twenty pages. How do we make sense of the suspense of the house’s collapse, or the drama

its eleventh-hour rescue? In this section I work to answer this question both by positioning Woolf's empty-house-time alongside that which we explored in Chesney Wold and by examining how an organic rhetoric of survival and death informs Woolf's use of the dramatically evolving empty house as a model for narrative form.

The accordion-like pleating of time in in this section means that certain hours or days are stretched out to reveal activity in higher resolution while in other sections longer periods flicker by more quickly. These shifts in the scale do not break the organizing narrative temporality that characterizes "Time Passes," however. The rhythms of the chromatic temporality of the empty house are equally equipped to dramatize the flickering light that moves across a wall on a given afternoon and the flight of sunny summer days into contemplative moonlit autumnal nights. The flexibility of this temporality sometimes spotlights a heightened experience of "now," while at others times the drama of the house which works through event/consequence modality of this house ("now, so then") is foregrounded. The co-operation of the "now" and "now, so then" modalities of empty-house-time in the present-oriented past tense narration of "Time Passes" facilitates Woolf's examination of the animation of narrative form.

After each character extinguishes their light, the focus of this narrative is the environment of the house and a wealth of sensory cues that bring it into solid existence in the reader's mind. Rather than obliterating the structure that it progressively absorbs, the mobility and thick fluidity of the "immense darkness" as it progressively absorbs the environment actually makes the details of this structure all the more tactilely present in the reader's mind. This "flood…creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin…there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers" (126). In function, this absorbing darkness seems similar to the technique of partial kinetic occlusion that Elaine Scarry

argues prompts the reader to perform the difficult task of imaging a fictional space that seems dense and three-dimensional. This fluid, dynamic darkness produces a fictional environment of surprising three-dimensionality, full of objects with "sharp edges and firm bulk." Eventually, this darkness will indeed give way to the semi-transparent play of light and shadow more in line with the phenomenon Scarry describes and with the empty houses we explored in *Bleak House*. The defining activity of the lighthouse will work to produce this effect: "the stroke of the Lighthouse, which laid itself with such authority upon the carpet in the darkness, tracing its pattern, came now in softer lights of spring mixed with moonlight" (132). In the morning, "darkness dims" and "a faint green quickens" in the surrounding environment and the shifting seasons will merge with and amplify the chromatic flux of shifting light[41] (128).

Diaphanous veils of light that create designs across the walls and floorboards foreshadow the movement of other hazy, transparent forms through the house. Its sole and very occasional occupant, Mrs. McNab, thinks of Mrs. Ramsay and then becomes accompanied by her phantom afterimage as she cleans: "faint and flickering, like the yellow beam or the circle at the end of a telescope, a lady in a grey cloak, stooping over her flowers, went wandering over the bedroom wall, up the dressing-table, across the washing stand" (136). In the long-term absence of living occupants, the phantasmal shades are drawn into these hushed rooms, moving in concert with the ebbing light and shadow activated in the chromatic temporality of the empty house.

The focus on sensorial description that persists across "Time Passes" powerfully conveys present experience in the fictional environment, and yet the narration unfolds primarily in the past tense. The vivid evocation of the present in past-tense narrative corresponds with the various

[41] The unrelenting creep of darkness across the floors and walls of the Ramsay house is itself a formal technique with a history. As Isobel Armstrong recently argued in in her analysis of the nineteenth-century novel as *Inquiry*, "The mobile doubling of shadow holds out the possibility of the repetition, reinterpretation, the renewal of experience" (230).

ways the word “now” is used across this section of the novel. Here, as in Chesney Wold at sunset, the word “now” is used with a fluidity and frequency that contributes to the interlude’s characteristic ebb and flow, and across “Time Passes” it serves as an indicator of both the immediacy of sensory details in the present and ongoing activity and gradual change over time. Early in this section, for example, it functions as a discursive marker signaling that we have moved into a new season, referring flexibly to various segments of time in the house’s time series, the edges of which overlap.[42] It also becomes a marker of things that have existed over many years and show signs of age, like the song Mrs. McNab sings tunelessly to herself while gingerly moving around this unsettling environment: this song is “Something that had been gay twenty years before on the stage perhaps…but now, coming from the toothless, bonneted, caretaking woman, was robbed of meaning” (130). Here and there, the repetition of the word “now” or a permutation of the phrase “now and then” suggests extension and ongoingess through intermittence.[43] For example, in the unoccupied house “now and again some glass tinkled” (133). Either the event, phenomenon, or action described occurs occasionally or the observer only intermittently becomes conscious of a constant, background feature of this environment. Finally, the word “now” takes on a colloquial and conversational quality in Mrs. McNab’s acts of recollection, where it operates in the buffering space of a phrase like ‘let me see now.’[44]

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[42] “Now” is frequently used to indicate that a shift from one season to another has occurred, perhaps while the reader was unaware: “The nights are now full of wind” (128); “And now in the heat of summer the wind sent its spies about the house” (132); “came now in the softer light of spring” (132).

[43] “Now, day after day, light turned…its sharp image on the wall” (129); “upstairs now, now down in the cellars”—repetition, commonplace ongoingness, movement; “they contemplated now the magnificent conquest over the taps and bath; now the more arduous, more partial triumph over long rows of books”—incremental progess; “And now as if the cleaning and the scrubbing and the scything and the mowing had drowned it there rose that half-heard melody”—ongoingness of something that is always there but only occasionally recognized, at a time marked ‘now’ (127, 128, 129).

[44] “She could see her now”—reminiscence, recollection; “the cook’s name now?” question, recollection (136); “There was the cook now, Mildred, Marian”—colloquial ‘now’ of reminiscence, when one is actually referring to a ‘then’ (140).

Developing between these uses is a connotation of change over time, since to say that something is one way "now" is to imply that it has been and can be different.[45] Woolf often uses now's capacity to register both continuity and change over time to signal causal relationships. Once underlying conditions have changed, 'now' a certain event will take place as a natural consequence. Connected to now's quality of ongoingness in "Time Passes" is its indication of belatedness, particularly the inability to reverse course in the face of some propulsive process that has gained momentum—the quality it takes on when one says, 'what can be done now?'

'What can be done now?' is not an idle question in the drama of this house, and it is worth pausing here to acknowledge the difference between the built environments that activate empty-house-time in Dickens's fictive worlds and those of Woolf. Specifically, there seems to be a real threat that this house may not survive its encounter with emptiness—"nothingness" and "nobody." Like the environments of Dickens's construction, the Ramsays' house has a life that is connected to the living beings that inhabit it. However, while the houses in *Bleak House* are emotionally impacted by occupation or inoccupation, occupation is a matter of life and death for Woolf's house. Where Chesney Wold is presented as a structure that will last into the heat death of the universe—and last in just the same physical state with or without flesh and blood inhabitants—this coastal house is ready and willing to decompose into the vibrant natural world if given half a chance. Indeed, signs of this process are evident even when it is inhabited ("the

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[45] "The books, all of which were now open to them"—'now' as in at this point, finally, at last, conditions have shifted (126); "It seemed now"—present perception, pause, and totalizing stillness, but a marker of a present that gestures to other "nows", saying something is this way now implies that there are other ways it has been and will be again (127); "It was beyond one person's strength to get it straight now"—ongoingness, with an added quality of belatedness (137); "Things were better then than now"—belatedness, reminiscence, nostalgia; "the garden was a pitiful sight now, all run to riot"—at this point, at this late hour, belatedness (137); "now that life had left it"—at this point, causal link, under these conditions (137); "What power could now prevent the fertility"—belatedness, at this point (138); "Nothing now withstood them"—under these conditions, causal link (138); "For now had come that moment"—the momentary, the crucial point (138); "now white-stained" reference to a previous state, recollection (140).

bill for the greenhouse would be fifty pounds") (60). Driving home this distinction is the question posed by the narrator of "Time Passes" at the outset of this section: "What after all is one night?" (127). Tellingly, in Chesney Wold one night is all we need. We might imagine Dickens's narrator responding to Woolf's narrator by pointing out that to see one night in Chesney Wold is to see them all. The immutability of the structure means that we can extrapolate to any point in the distant past or the future: the house will be the same. This quality of endurance is essential to the commentary Dickens develops through empty built environments. But Woolf's own project turns on the fact that her house, a structure shaped by evolving historical conditions and used to represent and interrogate the formal features of narrative after World War I, does not endure—at least, not in the sense that Chesney Wold does.

It makes sense then that the flood of darkness rolling in at the beginning of "Time Passes" has teeth: the inky occlusion of walls, furniture, and people by this devouring darkness threatens oblivion for the structure, which the host of shadows in Chesney Wold never did. The snuffing out of the characters that occupy this environment is an initial crisis point. I have suggested that the narration of unoccupied built environments in fictional worlds is an unsettling phenomenon in nineteenth century realist narrative, but the consequences of character absence seem particularly significant given the role character focalization plays in Woolf's realist practice. The simultaneous uncertainty and fatalism conveyed by the dialogue with which "Time Passes" opens ("we must wait for the future to show"; "it's almost too dark to see"), clearly legible through the novel's interwar context, is also immediately translated into a formal predicament. Up to this point, the narration has consistently operated through character focalization: Mrs. Ramsay's mind has been our primary access point, but Lily, Mr. Ramsay, most of the Ramsay children, Mr. Bankes, and Charles Tansley have all shared this function at

various moments. In *Bleak House*, there is an uneasiness and desperation attendant to the narrator's occupation of a space without characters, in that novel the reader is specifically trained to appreciate the simultaneous co-existence of spaces—and this training works through a huge array of built environments. A historically new sense of encounter with the enduring reality of spaces you no longer occupy, have never occupied, or would never occupy is written into the operations of *Bleak House*'s remarkable third-person narrator, who can cut between events and spaces in a shared present with no time lost. But the characteristic movement of the narrative in *To the Lighthouse* up to the start of "Time Passes" has been to whisk the reader not from location to location but from perspective to perspective and from the present to the past via characters' memories. How, then, can the narrative continue without characters? "Nothing it seemed could survive the flood" (125-6).

And then, "Nothing stirred" [46] (126). There is not a moth at the window, the creature that Woolf describes elsewhere as "nothing but life" (although later we will find tortoise-shell butterflies that "patter their life out on the window-pane")[47] (137). The play on "nothing" in "Time Passes" is similar discursively to the one in "The Death of the Moth," but the effect here is to emphasize temporal extension rather than brevity. Woolf repeatedly animates "nothing" in

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[46] A repeated association between "stirring" and the life of the mind is established through Lily's efforts to project herself imaginatively into Mrs. Ramsay's mind across this novel. Lily imagines Mrs. Ramsay's mind as one primarily "stirred by pity" (84). By the novel's final section Lily is even more desperate to understand Mrs. Ramsay's mental life ("what did the garden mean to her? what did it mean to her when a wave broke?"), and wonders, "And then what stirred and trembled in her mind when the children cried, "How's that? How's that?" cricketing?" (198). The sharpest pang of Mrs. Ramsay's presence after death that Lily experiences while painting in the final section occurs when "Some wave of white went over the window pane. The air must have stirred some flounce in the room" (202).

[47] The relentless tide of darkness in "Time Passes" is very like the implacable and invisible force described in "The Death of Moth," the "oncoming doom which could, had it chosen, have submerged an entire city, not merely a city, but masses of human beings; nothing, I knew, had any chance against death." Gallaher reads Woolf's vision of formalism itself through the moth, observing the play on the word "nothing" between the phrase "nothing but life" (a description of the moth) and the line, "nothing, I knew, had any chance against death": "Of course, it is literally nothing that has a chance against death: the nothingness of the interval in the trope of suddenness, the nothingness of the figurative moth, the nothingness of allegorical figuration generally ('nothing but life'), and, by extension, the nothingness of the formal, epiphanic moment, with its self-consciousness about ciphering" (250).

the passages that immediately follow the dismissal of characters at the start of this section. After "nothing stirred," there is the sound of someone who seems to be "sharing a joke with nothingness" (126); at the end of the section, a door "swung wide; admitted nothing; and slammed to" (127). As in *Bleak House*, the opening and closing of a door in this empty room signals the unusual vivacity, solidity, and degree of access of the space. It is a metaleptic shift, a stepping into the space that represents the trespass of both the reader and the narrator into the fictive world. The 'nothingness' of the third-person narrator, hovering inside and outside of this environment simultaneously, is precisely what can endure beyond death and the loss of characters, but only at the risk of transforming the text into something new.

But this space initially appears inhospitable even for this newly constituted, disembodied narrator, who immediately seems at risk of disintegration. Only 'present' through the act of narration, this narrator is, like the objects described, "confounded" by the darkness that is character absence: "Not only was the furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one might say, 'This is he' or 'This is she'" (126). The furniture is confounded in the sense of being consumed or destroyed, and the characters that currently occupy the house receive a similar treatment. They are shattered into a collection of body parts and sounds: "Sometimes a hand was raised as if to clutch something or ward off something, or somebody groaned, or somebody laughed aloud" (126). But in this environment, the narrator is confounded in a third sense of the word: "To throw into confusion of mind or feelings; so to surprise and confuse (a person) that he loses for the moment his presence of mind" (OED). If a narrator is in a sense a 'presence of mind,' the mind we imagine organizes and presents narrative information, then to be confounded is to tremble on the edge of oblivion (a fate that threatens the house itself, as we will see later on). The disintegration of "body and mind" refers at once to a

step in the process of character removal—fragmentation—and the narrator's potential dissolution at the outset of this section. "One" needs the character's "body and mind" to maintain one's own "body and mind." It is through character that any narration can happen—even narration that is ostensibly in the third person, since "there was scarcely anything left of body or mind *by which one could say*, 'This is he,' or 'This is she'" [emphasis mine]. The act of narration (paradigmatically performed in a statement like "This is she") is constitutive of the narrator's presence, and without characters the narrator is not long for this world.

Ultimately "Time Passes" does not lose its newly formed narrator. But like the narrator of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, this narrator is so highly attuned to the conditions of the form of which they are a part that the distinction between narrator and narrative is worn away. In *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze described Proust's narrator as a spider, his figure for "a body without organs" (182). This body cannot control its responses, but is totally dependent on signals from the web, and in fact functions as an extension of that web: "the web and the spider, the web and the body are one and the same machine" (182). This narrator, "Though endowed with an extreme sensibility and a prodigious memory," nevertheless "has no organs insofar as he is deprived of any voluntary and organized use of such faculties" (182). The "strange plasticity" of this narrator's spider-body derives from the way he attaches threads to specific characters like Albertine and Charlus, co-oping them into his madness, making them "marionettes of his own delirium" (182). In this first-person narrative, the character (who represents a particular kind of madness) is vital, whereas in "Time Passes" it is the absence of character that opens an examination of third-person narrator "presence." This narrator is in and of the house, which here is a model for the narrative whole. In light of debates in narratology and narrative theory in the second half of the twentieth century, the possible evaporation of a narrator whose existence had

not really come to the foreground until the space is emptied of characters comes newly into focus as a flashpoint for examination of third-person narration. Communicational or enunciative narratology asserts that a narrative always involves a narrator who addresses an interlocutor (Genette, Rivara), while proponents of a non-communicational approach posit the existence of fictions without narrators (Benveniste, Hamburger, Banfield). As Gérard Genette put it in response to Ann Banfield's work, "Narrative without a narrator, the utterance without an uttering, seem to me pure illusion…if I were ever to meet such a narrative, I would flee as quickly as my legs could carry me" (Genette qtd. in Patron). In "Time Passes," an inquiry into the possibility of a narrative without characters prompts us also to imagine the possibility of narratives existing without narrators. In keeping with "Time Passes"'s characteristic blurring of boundaries, Woolf plays with the established boundaries between narrative registers. She makes the line between narrative and story hazy by making the causal relationship between the disintegration of the story world (darkness disassembling objects and bodies) and the disintegration of the narrative (here dramatized through the precarious presence of a narrator) unclear.

What then keeps this narrator from being confounded, this narrator who, like the "little airs" that have become "detached from the body of the wind" (126), exists without corporeal human forms? This loss of mind is staved off by investing seasons, objects, and natural elements with human traits. Much as a litany of intermediary figures—not fully rendered realist characters but not wholly inanimate outlines either—are made to occupy the empty Chesney Wold (Time, Britannia, the portraits, and a hypothetical, ancestral Dedlock), so too is a medley of anthropomorphized entities generated by the narrator of "Time Passes." Here spring, summer, fall, and winter, household objects, the wind, the light from the lighthouse, and the hypothetical

wanderer on the beach are brought to life by the activating endurance of the empty house in time. The "little airs" that move through the house are its first lifeline: "Almost one might imagine them, as they entered the drawing-room questioning and wondering, toying with the flap of hanging wall-paper, asking, would it hang much longer, when would it fall?" (126). As Erich Auerbach argued through *To the Lighthouse* in *Mimesis*, the development that primarily distinguishes Victorian and Modernist realist narrative is that in the latter the narrator does not have complete access to the minds of the characters. The character seems to exist independently of the narrator, who must describe by circling speculatively around them. This dynamic is exaggerated in the narrator's relationship with the little winds, entities granted sentience to then allow for speculation/narration. They are already understood to be "questioning and wondering," and the narrator's work is to imagine what, specifically, it is they are "wondering" about. In the absence of characters, the narrator shifts to attributing mental states to the winds, taking a distinctly descriptive rather than prescriptive stance relative to their activity. As they pause near the bedroom door, the narrator seems powerless, only able to offer anxious commentary: "But here surely, they must cease" (127).

In the quiet duration of these ten unoccupied years and twenty almost character-less pages, hypothetical figures and consciousnesses begin to proliferate in the house and its surrounding environment, their shadowy existence in the text discursively marked by phrases like "should anyone" or "had there been." These entities, not fully formed realist characters of the sort with which the novel began, are nevertheless crucial points of access to the otherwise unobservable environment. For example, before carefully positioning the reader within the "upper rooms of the empty house" to hear a "tumbling and tossing, as the winds and waves disported themselves like the amorphous bulks of leviathans," the narrator must first

speculatively invest the house with an occupant: “(had there been any one to listen)” (134). Similarly, hypothetical wanderer on the shore is repeatedly made to channel both visual experience of the environment and a seesawing reflection on nature’s possible indifference to human affairs. “Should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude, throw off his bedclothes and go down by himself to walk on the sand,” the narrator offers, “no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand” (128). In this way, the narrator translates a necessity of the structure (in empty-house-time, no one could ever really be there to hear those waves or to see that vista; the reader can never really occupy the world created through these sensory cues, however vivid they may be) into an accident of timing (no one happened to be there to witness this).

In the absence of living characters, it is possible to imagine an endless, dreamy occupation of this house by translucent shades and inquiring winds. But this house’s existence is a drama, and the time has come to address the fate that threatens it. Fixed at the center of the novel’s central section is a point of crisis: the house, left alone for almost ten years, could be totally absorbed by the natural world. As we are repeatedly reminded, the Ramsay coastal home it is not a structure that stays physically constant irrespective of occupation. It is actively and materially held together by money spent on new greenhouse windows and by hands that pull doors shut and push windows open. It is, of course, a physical manifestation of Mrs. Ramsay’s exhausting, perpetual project of arranging relationships and assessing emotions, establishing and maintaining the interpersonal ties of the family and its offshoots. Unsurprisingly then, when those hands disappear and the influx of money slows to a trickle, the house does not remain unchanged. The winds that the narrator swiftly personifies are nevertheless characterized as unfriendly forces, the “advance guards of great armies” sent to bring this house back into the

domain of nature (126). They “blustered,” “brushed,” “nibbled,” “fanned” (126). Season by season, different natural forces exert their accretive pressures on the house. In summer, “flies wove a web in the sunny rooms; weeds that had grown close to the glass in the night tapped methodically at the window pane” (132). “Night after night,” in both winter and summer, the house is threatened by “the torment of storms.” This decay does not develop at a consistent rate but rather accelerates as “the long night” sets in:

> the trifling airs, nibbling, the clammy breathes, fumbling, seemed to have triumphed. The saucepan had rusted and the mat had decayed. Toads had nosed their way in…A thistle thrust itself between the tiles in the larder. The swallows nested in the drawing-room; the floor was strewn with straw; the plaster fell in shovelfuls; rafters were laid bare; rats carried off this and that to gnaw behind the wainscots. Tortoise-shell butterflies burst from the chrysalis and pattered their life out on the windowpane. Poppies sowed themselves among the dalias; the lawn waved with long grass; giant artichokes towered among roses; a fringed carnation flowered among the cabbages (138).

The weed tapping on the window carries us from summer to winter to summer again in the rapid surge of natural growth. With the passage of time, this gentle tapping “had become, on winters’ nights, a drumming from sturdy trees and thorned briars which made the whole room green in summer” (137-8).

In Woolf’s hands, the house is made closer in kind to an organism than an edifice. Its existence in an unaltered state over time cannot be taken for granted because, as with a living being, time takes a noticeable toll. Vines creep over its walls as the natural world’s hostile takeover leads, like any good story, to the point of crisis: “For now had come that moment, that

hesitation when dawn trembles and night pauses, when if a feather alight in the scale it will be weighed down" (138). Here the use of the word "now" coupled with this language of hesitation and time almost stopping creates a sense of suspense, as though this structure and environment are holding their breath, waiting to see what will happen next. But why is this particular moment the crucial one, the point in its long existence when its fate will be determined? Notably, the individual components that make up the house have not really been lost at this point in time—the narrator's speculation about what the future will hold for the house if nature continues unchecked reveals that this moment of reckoning precedes any truly momentous physical collapse. The house still has a roof in this future, and there are still "ruined" rooms in which "picnickers would have lit their kettles" (138). Many of the raw material components of the house would still exist in this counterfactual future

The ineffability of the force that has held the house together right up to this final moment of crisis indicates that Woolf's examination of form through the figure of the house is informed by an organic inquiry into animating force that has a long history. "Life, what art thou?" wonders Mary Wollstonecraft after having encountered embalmed bodies at an exhibit in Sweden: "Where goes this breath?—this *I*, so much alive? In what element will it mix, giving or receiving fresh energy? What will break the enchantment of animation?" (*A Short Residence*, Letter VII). These are the very questions on the mind of the hypothetical wanderer/wonderer in "Time Passes," who, "walking the beach, stirring the pool," is overcome by "imaginations of the strangest kind—of flesh turned to atoms which drove before the wind" (132). Woolf often made use of the problem of animation and a rhetoric of survival when theorizing how fictions function. Summarizing Arnold Bennett's philosophy of literature in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, for example, she writes, "He says that it is only if the characters are real that the novel has any

chance of surviving. Otherwise, die it must" (10). This assessment does not resolve the problem of narrative animation, of course, it just displaces it onto characterological debates, which become the focus of the rest of Woolf's essay. Though she challenges Bennett's view of what the vivifying element of the novel really is, Woolf retains his language of form as a thing that lives and dies given certain conditions. Citing Bennett's estimation of fiction's dependence on character, Woolf writes, "If the characters are real the novel will have a chance; if they are not, oblivion will be its portion" (3). In *To the Lighthouse*, we find a house teetering on the brink of a fate put in exactly those terms: "If the feather had fallen, if it had tipped the scale downwards, the whole house would have plunged to the depths to lie upon the sands of oblivion" (136).

The problem Woolf is addressing in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* is the absence of the conventions that would offer the necessary bulwark for communicating a real character to the reader. In order to innovate new ways of representing the illusive Mrs. Brown in her railway car, writers need a foundational set of conventions, inherited from the previous generation of creators, that will form a familiar, intelligible baseline for the readers trying to see her: "Both in life and literature," she explains, "it is necessary to have some means of bridging the gulf between the hostess and her unknown guest on the one hand, the writer and his unknown reader on the other" (17). None of the Edwardian writers who precede her have offered adequate tools with respect to realist narrative. H.G. Wells, for example, projects a Utopian alternative, imagining Mrs. Brown as she "ought to be" rather than performing the distinct and formidable task of fitting words to life, negotiating between observation and expression, balancing convention and innovation in communicating Mrs. Brown as she really is, sitting there on the train (13). Bennett's offense is that he directs all his attention to external details of the world Mrs. Brown moves through, endlessly pivoting outward. In Woolf's estimation, Bennett is a

builder of houses, not an animator of characters: “he is trying to make us imagine for him; he is trying to hypnotise us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there” (16). Across this piece Woolf repeatedly acknowledges the “vagueness of my language,” acknowledging that the specific characters that seem most “real” can vary from reader to reader (16). Nevertheless, she names the “real, true, and convincing” character as the single most important aspect of the kind of narrative that performs the difficult task of negotiating fit between literary forms and real experiences (4). In contrast to Bennett, in “Time Passes” Woolf is making a house in which a character is not living, but which nevertheless is always directing our attention to the all-importance of “Mrs. Brown in her corner” (16). Three years after *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, this organic account of form reemerges in *To the Lighthouse* in the “now, so then” temporality of this empty house. Like the novel, the house’s existence as a formally whole, living entity is fragile; also like the novel, the continuation of the house’s existence is determined by the presence of the living character.

The incremental devolution of the house, its gradual return to nature, corresponds to a shift in the built environment’s relation to character. The embodied, physical relationship between house and occupant increasingly gives way to a primarily figurative association as the existence of the house builds up toward this point of crisis. In the silence of the house, “night after night, and sometimes in plain mid-day when the roses were bright and light turned on the wall its shape clearly there seemed to drop into this silence, this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling” (133). Immediately afterward, in brackets, the narrator reports “[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]” (133). In the natural world surrounding the house, spring is lachrymose: she “threw her cloak about her, veiled her eyes, averted her head, and

among passing shadows and flights of small rain seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind" (132). Immediately afterward, we are informed that "[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with childbirth, which was a tragedy, people said…]" (132). Without occupation by fully formed realist characters, the house becomes an enchanted entity, an apparatus that signals both the fates of individual characters and world historical events.

"What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?" (138). Into this increasingly symbolic space, with its gathering of profound, ponderous, and disembodied minds, lumbers one of the most mysterious figures in the text. She "lurche[s]"; she "rolle[s]." She is Mrs. McNab, a character whose mind supposedly offers very little for existential reflect. In a paradoxical assertion of self-awareness, the narrator observes, "she was witless—she knew it" (130). When she sings, it is the "voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself" (130). And it makes sense that the endurance of the house will be ensured by "persistency itself." A hyper-embodied figure who must "haul herself upstairs" by "clutch[ing] the banisters," Mrs. McNab is the antithesis of and antidote to the disembodied "mystic, the visionary, walking the beach on a fine night, stirring a puddle, looking at a stone, asking themselves 'What am I, 'What is this?'" (131). Much as Dickens's experiment of emptying rooms/narrative of characters produced a spectrum of intermediary figures representative of differing kinds of characterization, Woolf's experiment has brought forward the conventions of characterization through this juxtaposition. Woolf's concern about the habits of and expectations for characterization that make the communication of an idea of a character between writer and reader possible is made explicit in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," where she uses nationality to develop a typology of characterization. The English writer will position their reader very close to Mrs. Brown by

making much of her "buttons and wrinkles; her ribbons and warts" (7). The French writer will pull the reader back to a level of abstraction that would make Mrs. Brown representative of human nature broadly construed, while the Russian novelist will do away with any external detail at all and will instead "reveal the soul—the soul alone, wandering out into the Waterloo Road, asking of life some tremendous question which would sound on and on in our ears after the book was finished" (7-8). According to this breakdown, the wanderer on the beach asking "what, and why, and wherefore" accords with a Russian concept of character, while Mrs. McNab appears the overdrawn figment of a distinctly English mode of construction (128). One thing that Woolf's empty house draws to the foreground, then, are the habits of mind and of writing that make a certain kind of knowledge of character possible. The harsh disparity between these two extreme and opposing forms of characterization are worked out in terms of class in this story**.**

Mrs. McNab is definitively working-class, and it is precisely in her 'occupation' (her job and her presence) in the house that the novel's commentary on form ultimately inheres. She literally performs "the work!" of maintaining the house and (in her figurative capacity as the embodied character who course-corrects the narrator's focus on shadowy entities) the novel. Mrs. McNab cleans the house. She moves across and interacts tactilely with its surfaces. She is old and this movement is painful, and the relayed sensation of pain sharpens the edges of the stairs and hardens the floorboards. Mrs. McNab cannot single-handedly stop the house from decomposing, but her intermittent presence serves as its lifeline until help arrives in the form of Mrs. Bast. As Maud Ellmann puts it, Mrs. McNab is "an ark in the storm, albeit a dilapidated vessel" (119). Fittingly, given her role as antidote to the overly symbolic register that came before, her first act is to pulverize the airy figments woven by the narrator. She "tear[s]" the gorgeously rendered "veil of silence" that surrounds the house with "hands that had stood in the

wash-tub," presumably surrounded by literal pieces of fabric (130). She "grind[s] it with boots that had crunched the shingle" (130). We are back in the gritty, tangible world of the embodied character, and for the house, it's not a moment too soon. The "force working" to pull the house back from the brink of oblivion is the combined efforts of Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, who have been instructed to ready the house for the family's return. Thanks to the efforts of these women, figured both as saviors and midwives in the house's drama, the built structure is gradually "rescued from the pool of Time" (139). The sounds they make while cleaning are of a piece with the sounds of the house itself as they perform the labor of "birth": "Attended with the creaking of hinges and the screeching of bolts, the slamming and banging of damp-swollen doors woodwork some rusty laborious birth seemed to take place, as the women, stooping, rising, goraning, singing, slapped and slammed, upstairs now, now down in the cellars. Oh, they said, the work!" (139).

The terms I have used to refer to the house's progress toward "oblivion" over the course of this chapter—calling it decay, a decline, devolution, collapse—all have fairly negative connotations. But it is also possible to view this progression more neutrally, as a trending toward metamorphosis: the thematic materials that made up this novel could reassemble into a new form. After all, we have been moving away from the quotidian and domestic (a traditional province of the realist novel) and toward the terrible sublimity of the untamed natural world (the terrain of the lyric, for example). But Woolf pulls us back from the brink with a flourish, reestablishing the occupied-house/novel as the operative chronotope in advance of the third section, "The Lighthouse." There are things the realist novel can do that other forms cannot.

One thing that clues us in to the importance of acknowledging the drama of the house, its experience in time, is the annoyance provoked by Mr. Carmichael when he offers the following

summation at the very end of “Time Passes”: “And it all looked, Mr. Carmichael thought, shutting his book, falling asleep, much as it used to look” (142). Over the course of “Time Passes,” Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast repeatedly predict that the family and their visitors would “find it changed,” but this does turn out to be true (140, 141). Lily too seems oblivious to the trials the house has endured in its journey through the years, falling asleep in what is simply described as a “clean still room” where she can hear the sea (142). For Lily and Carmichael, to view the house as absolutely still, as though it is untouched by the passing years, is to feel they are experiencing a space that froze in time while they were gone. If making characters feel the house is the same is simply meant to sharpen expressions of loss articulated by characters in “The Lighthouse” by throwing into relief the missing elements (Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew, Prue), then the same effect could be produced without the account of the intervening years in “Time Passes.” To the reader, this sense of absolute stillness, as though no time has passed, reads as a total fabrication, one that obscures the very labor that makes the illusion possible. We feel for and with Mrs. McNab: “It was too much for one woman, too much, too much. She creaked, she moaned” (137). The family “just sent money; but never wrote, never came, and expected to find things as they had left them, ah, dear!” (136). This expectation is realized in the painfully nonchalant message that requests what amounts to a miraculous rescue: “All of a sudden, would Mrs. McNab see that the house was ready…They might be coming for the summer; had left everything to the last; expected to find things as they left them” (136). But we have been made witness both to the natural forces that worked to bring the house down and the slow, physically exacting work required to resuscitate it. In the movement from “Time Passes” to “The Lighthouse,” what we see being hidden behind the illusion of permanence is a change over time that, nevertheless, is part of the structure.

This emphasis on the unfolding of a form in time is opposite to the formalism associated with the gemstone or the moth. In "The Death of the Moth," the brevity of the essay form corresponds to the lifespan of the moth which, in its simplicity, becomes "nothing but" a conduit for the life of the universe: "it seemed as if a fiber, very thin but pure, of the enormous energy of the world had been thrust into his frail and diminutive body" (3). In the body of the moth the narrator imagines she can see, "a thread of vital light" (3). The pathos of the moth, of course, is that it can partake in such a minute portion of a vast, complex world. The moth is inherently a being that cannot go off and have an adventure—it simply does not have a physical frame that will permit it to explore "the size of the downs, the width of the sky, the far-off smoke of houses, and the romantic voice, now and then, of a steamer" (3). In its purity, this vitaleme (to take Gallagher's term) cannot last, and in its brevity it is representative of the stillness and atemporality of the aesthetic object. The essay begins and ends with stillness—the flash of the moth's brief existence and then the immobility of its corpse. This immobility is reflected in the surrounding environment, as "stillness and quiet had replaced the previous animation…the horses stood still" (4).

The question of what lasts is articulated is articulated by each of the central characters in this novel in different ways, but I suggest that Woolf is particularly invested in the dimensions afforded by the word "endure." An archaic meaning of the word, but one that holds particular weight in a novel so concerned, in Lily's words, with "the problem of space" (171) a novel in which "so much depends…upon distance" (191) and that concludes with the drawing of a line between disconnected masses, is "to be continued through space; to extend from one point to another" (OED). To ask what endures, then, is to ask the question we are left with at the end of

the text: what does the line Lily paints in a final stroke on her canvas signify? In its more active form, "to endure" is synonymous with "to petrify." It means to 'indurate' or to harden something, "to make callous or indifferent…to make sturdy or robust, to strengthen"; water, animal skins, fruit and meat can be indured, as too, in a moral sense, can the heart (a frequently cited example in the OED is "induratum est cor Pharaonis" or "Pharoh's heart was hardened"). It is clear here that the quality of hardness, imbued into an object by the craftsperson, is the condition that makes longevity possible. But more simply, "endure" can also mean "To last, continue in existence" (OED "dure"). Lingering over the initial seeming synergy between these two usages of the word actually serves to widen the space between the ideas they signify, and it is this in this separation that we can see how Woolf's persistent staging of the question of endurance tells on her formal experiment in "Time Passes."

Regardless of how insistently different characters fixate on endurance of the hard, unchanging object, Woolf is not primarily interested in the qualities of the thing that endures, the gem-like object that lasts eternally. A thing that is eternal because it is universal can only be described qualitatively. It *is* but, as Ann Banfield would put it, it cannot be said to *exist*. And existence in time is what Woolf ultimately prioritizes. The question is not what lasts forever, or what is outside of time itself, but what does it look like to last? What shape does an entity take in time, and what does it mean to say that time is a dimension in which a form exists? It does not matter that that time is bounded.

Stillness, understood not as immobility but simply as the quality of something that exists over time (something that is 'still there') is the operative term through which Woolf foregrounds the temporal duration of form by dramatizing the existence of the house in time. Not interested in the category of object that lasts but in the lasting, she runs an experiment aimed at representing

and interrogating the length/endurance of form and the significance of acknowledging or prioritizing this dimension of narrative form. The response of "loveliness and stillness" to the incessant questioning of the winds in "Time Passes" dramatizes what this shift in intonation, from stillness to still-ness, involves. These "clammy sea airs," are "rubbing, snuffling, iterating, and reiterating their questions—'Will you fade? Will you perish?'" (129). They ask this question of "loveliness and stillness," but "scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain" (129). Loveliness and stillness's dismissal of the question of what endures in some final, atemporal sense indicates that this is not really the question that matters. Their response, true in the moment of expression, signals a re-investment in the still-ness of form as flexible continuation in time. As they say they remain, they do.

If the house, a form that is primarily imagined in terms of its spatial dimension, is refitted to instead suggest existence in time, then so too is the painting. The drama of the house in "Time Passes" may be submerged in the following section, "The Lighthouse," but this duration-oriented view of form nevertheless manifests in the figure of the painting. Woolf flips the traditional significance of the image in efforts to conceive of narrative form-- the painting is the formal 'other' to narrative, 'still' while narrative is 'dynamic', silent while narrative speaks—so that instead of serving as an emblem of essence, of the shape of the whole in a flash, it puts the accent on a continuation in time.[48] *In To the Lighthouse*, the painting is a form that unfolds temporally and is defined by a drama. The third section of the novel is devoted not just to Lily's remembering of Mrs. Ramsay, but to her construction of the painting. There have been many

[48] This is not to say that the alterity of the image is wholly lost, but rather that the idea of the painting serves this particular function in *TL.* Woolf is always testing possible points of congruence and disjunction between the experiences of painting and writing, but is fairly consistent in acknowledging difference.

discussions of the way the process of painting both works to unearth a wealth of inchoate thoughts, memories and figures and to then represent the imposition of order onto life. Deleuzian concepts of rhythm, the diagram, and the fold are frequent points of reference in readings of this section. For my purposes, it is most helpful to extract a remark Deleuze makes in *Francis Bacon,* where he claims that "Of all the arts, painting is undoubtedly the only one that necessarily, 'hysterically,' integrates its own catastrophe, and consequently is constituted as a flight in advance. In the other arts, the catastrophe is only associated. But painters pass through the catastrophe themselves, embrace the chaos, and attempt to emerge from it" (72). I take this to mean that in painting the final object created carries with it its history of composition in a particularly material way. The physical paint that is spread over the canvas in the first strokes of the composition will be pushed around, combined with the paint added at all the other steps, and will ultimately still be there in the final work. The first watery stroke, "a running mark" on the canvas, is as much a part of the painting as the endlessly debated final line Lily draws "in the center." The way the brushstrokes are narrated even emphasizes their commensurability: first and final mark happen suddenly, decisively. I would suggest that the final line Lily makes on the canvas is less important as a representation of something in the landscape of the narrative or as a trace of action in and of itself than as an action that throws us back onto the first line, sending us oscillating along the plane of endurance, the span of time in which the painting is "the thing attempted" (179). The final lines of the novel throw us back to the first in a similar feat. These lines indicate the boundedness of the time in which form develops, but it is a temporality altogether distinct from that of the almost atemporal event of the moment or the fixity of the eternal.

Woolf's resistance to the moment/eternal temporality when conceptualizing form is also a resistance to the antagonism that is often imagined to exist between art and the processes of life. According to Banfield, this relationship is above all an oppositional one: "The opposition between life and form worked out in Lily Briscoe's painting is a response then to a succession of events a generation was powerless to prevent and even more powerless to reverse" ("Tragic Time" 62). Banfield points out that this tragic view of time (a non-diectic view of history as the B-series, apprehended from the position of eternity—Lily and Mr. Carmichael standing back at the end of the novel, watching the progression of past-present-future, unable to intervene) would have been associated with enduring artifacts from ancient Greece. Time acquires the "rigid immobility of Greek architecture or sculpture, 'statuesque, noble, and eyeless' (JR, 170), what Paul Ricoeur calls 'monumental time'" (60). This is language of the flowers we find in "Time Passes," "eyeless and so terrible" in the "stillness and the brightness of the day" (135). Banfield foregrounds spatiality and immobility in her analysis of the "stark stillness of time with a relational, nondirectional, spatial geometry" in *To the Lighthouse* (65). But this "stark stillness," associated with the hardened object that is made emblematic of atemporal existence is quite different from the stillness I have been exploring. Early in "Time Passes" the narrator observes that "Loveliness reigned and stillness, and together made the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted; solitary like a pool at evening" (129). Although there is an association between death, stillness, and form here, the language of life having departed does not necessarily suggest that form annihilates life. Rather, it suggests that loveliness itself takes a particular shape in time given the conditions of lifelessness in the empty house. In this way, Woolf redefines the relationship between form and death—death is not a necessary byproduct of the imposition of form on life, but simply a condition of particular forms' emergence.

Specifically, what emerges is a "swaying mantle of silence" that forms within stillness: "week after week, in the empty room, [the mantle] wove into itself the falling cries of birds, ships hooting, the drone and hum of the fields, a dog's bark, a man's shout, and folded them round the house in silence" (129-30). The weaving of this form will be cut off by the arrival of Mrs. McNab. The cognizance of finitude is usually something we associate with the retrospective, elegiac posture of past-tense narration or perhaps with an anxious present tense mode of narration. Banfield refers to the cut as a "rejection of duration" without which "there is no change": "Papa's beard and Mama's knitting, like Mrs. Ramsay's brown stocking, symbols of endless becoming, meet a Greek fate that gives them the form of physical time" (61). I read the cut not so much as a rejection of duration but as a more neutral boundary of a duration. The cut does not necessarily undermine the "pure integrity," flexibility, and vitality of the stillness Woolf imagines throughout "Time Passes."

The Endurance and Evolution of Realist Forms

In proposing the empty-house-time as a distinctive realist mode in Chapters 2 and 4, I have highlighted synergy between Dickens and Woolf's work rather than difference. It is possible to contextualize Dickens and Woolf's destabilizations of the house through empty-house-time within a broader history of narrative reimaginings of the home, what Nancy Armstrong calls "domestic remodeling" with respect to the fiction of the "Hungry Forties" (130). Dickens and Woolf both take up the country house as a symbol of the domestic arrangements and order of life of the recent past.[49] In each case, the representation of the house-in-flux

[49] Armstrong identifies a pattern of household reconfiguration at work in British fiction of the 1840s: "Out of the debris of a household that once invited readers to imagine the government of town and shire acting in a similarly benevolent manner on behalf of the entire community, the novels of the 1840s crafted highly individuated and self-contained households limited to and reconfigured for the income-earning man, the caretaking woman, and their

corresponds with a period when rapidly changing social and economic conditions exerted transformative pressure on existing models of domestic life. The formal correspondence I have charting between these house- novels stretches all the way to how they end, each with an overt pivot from one house to another. In the final section of omniscient narration in *Bleak House*, the narrator offers an extended description of the forlorn old house before solemnly gesturing, "Thus Chesney Wold" (985). But the section that actually ends the novel belongs to Esther, and she opens it by firmly redirecting our attention to an altogether livelier household: "Full seven happy years I have been the mistress of Bleak House" (985). In the final subsection of "The Lighthouse," Lily and Mr. Carmichael gaze intently across the water to the lighthouse with their backs turned to the coastal home that occupied so much narrative space up to this point. In the former, it is a turning away from the pre-industrialization country estate—("the great old Dedlock family is breaking up"); in the latter, from a family retreat in the country (less grand but still firmly anchored to the traditions of an irrecoverable past) to the symbolic structure of the lighthouse, in relation to which the protean sense of self that Lily explores in "The Lighthouse" takes shape (889).

But even though the mode of narrative theorization that this space-time facilitates in each text is notably similar, the radical energies unleashed when the bonds holding these built structures together are weakened produce distinct critiques. Of course, Woolf's reimagining of domestic life is not the same as Dickens's. A relay of the female characters who are positioned at

immediate offspring" (130). She sites Thornfield Hall and Chesney Wold as examples of the "hereditary haunt" that, across the novels of the period, will be subjected to a "ruthless process of modernization" (130). In this new domestic arrangement, a historically new weight is put upon the "labor of a woman's love," since it is imagined "to compensate for fluctuations in the family income" (128). I connect this destabilization and refashioning of the ideologically-freighted household to that registered in modernist fiction's obsession with the decline of the country estate, particularly following the first World War. As Rosner puts it "Time and again in the modernist novel, the home undergoes a mysterious transformation that is material as well as spiritual and which yields new codes for behavior among families and intimate friends" (12).

the center of the house and/or the novel—a relay that the formal correspondence between these novels invites us to trace—throws Woolf's revision into relief: Esther Summerson, who replaces Lady Dedlock, is in turn replaced by Lily Briscoe. Given her imposed position at/as the heart of the home, ultimately it is not surprising that the removal or expulsion of the lady of the house is the event that throws its very walls and floorboards into flux in both narrative universes. She is the lost central object in Chesney Wold and in the Ramsays' coastal home (situated at the vanishing point in Browne's sunset illustration and resolved into abstraction in Lily's painting), whose organizing, justifying presence, once removed, causes the upheaval that creates the conditions of possibility for reimagining the house.[50] By tearing out the heart of the house, Dickens and Woolf perform remarkably precise dissections of historically specific visions of the home—particularly the sustained-but-evolving central role of the women who occupy it. Aristocratically cold and formal to the point of immobility, Lady Dedlock gives an appropriately lifeless performance in the increasingly outmoded role of the lady of the estate as it existed before industrialization. She is finally replaced by the next generation, Esther, who, with her powerful forcefield of care, calmly and competently shoulders the augmented responsibilities of household management. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay's mantle is passed to Lily following the tumult of "Time Passes." Significantly, this is an exchange of narrative functions but not of social or familial ones: Lily is now the central focalizing character in the novel, but she resists the logic of a correlation between this organizing narrative role and that of family matriarch who must endlessly manage the feelings of the house's inhabitants. In renouncing this formerly sacred charge, Lily replaces the Mrs. Ramsay/Esther-figure of care who replaced the pre-industrialization lady of the estate, Lady Dedlock.

[50] In both cases, there is a double removal from the country house, as both Lady Dedlock and Mrs. Ramsay travel away from their country houses before their off-screen deaths foreclose the possibility of a return.

Not only do Dickens and Woolf's house-stories share a central lost entity (the woman around whom a given vision of the domestic is organized) they also share a central question: what endures? In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay's somewhat manic insistence on biological reproduction and the perpetuation of a specific family structure— "people must marry, people must have children"—gives way to Lily's anxious but tenacious belief in the enduring nature of her artistic endeavor (76). These different responses to the question voiced at the center of the novel underscore how fraught the work of art's claim to endurance is for women artists. In this context, the monumentality of creations by a canonical nineteenth-century, male writer like Dickens (pronounced "an institution, a monument" in Woolf's critique of *David Copperfield* [620]) is suspect, their endurance implicated in a literary tradition given blunt voice in Peter Tansley's "Women can't paint, women can't write" (159). In this light, the question Woolf poses at the outset of "Time Passes"—"What, after all, is one night?"—becomes newly legible as a challenge of sorts to the immortality and immutability attributed to the work of nineteenth-century male authors. Her narrative of the empty house will be of a decade instead of a night, and the rough similarity between the house as it exists at the beginning and end of this interlude will belie an intense structural evolution.

But Woolf was keenly alive to the dynamism of empty houses, even the monumental ones of Dickens's construction, and her own abandoned environments, with their inquiring winds, rise to meet questions posed in the "derelict" regions of his fiction. With respect to characters in *David Copperfield* in particular, she asks the very question with which Chapter 2 concluded: what happens to the world of the novel after we close the final page?

> [As they] once more come to life with all their appurtenances and peculiarities, are they still possessed of the old fascination, or have they in the interval been

> attacked by that parching wind which blows about books and, without our reading them, remodels them and changes their features while we sleep? (620)

In her nonfiction and criticism, Woolf repeatedly attributes Dickens's "astonishing power to make characters alive to the fact that he saw them as a child sees them," ("A Sketch of the Past" 73) an association meant to emphasize the forceful simplicity of his characters but which also casts childhood as a time when "fact and fiction merge" ("*David Copperfield*" 620). It is telling that Dickens is often associated with a kind of reading that blurs boundaries between lived experiences and fictional ones, even if Woolf repeatedly frames this capacity in terms of caricature and uncritical reading practices.

But the chronotope of the empty house, vividly rendered and experimented with in his fiction, is a subterranean resource for the treatment of the very "mature emotions" Woolf claims are beyond the limits of his realism, those moments when "it is necessary to stand still and search into things and penetrate to the depths of what is there" (whether those things searched into are the affects that shape encounters with fictional worlds or familiar structures of domestic life that buckle and reform over time) ("*David Copperfield*" 620). I read this influence back into Woolf's effort to narrativize her own life in "A Sketch of the Past." Here, roughly four pages after she aligns Dickens's bold characters with childhood impressions and just before a passage where she ponders the mechanics of an emotional exchange that took place when she wrote *To the Lighthouse* (the expression of "some long felt and deeply felt emotion"), she offers a "visual description of childhood" as a collection of people, colors, sounds, and moments of being, "all surrounded by a vast space" (79). "A great hall I could liken it to," she continues, "with windows letting in strange lights; and murmurs and spaces of deep silence" (79). The defining attribute of this great hall is a "sense of movement and change," a "feeling of everything approaching and

then disappearing" (79). This is where, Woolf insists, a picture would fall short, as any image of this hall would be "too static" (79). But if we were to cast about for such an image within the literary tradition with which Woolf was deeply familiar, we might alight on the pulsating, crowded-yet-empty space of Dickens and Phiz's long drawing room, our eyes drawn ineluctably to its central object. "Certainly there she was, in the very centre of that great Cathedral space which was childhood; there she was from the very first. My first memory is of her lap" ("A Sketch of the Past" 81).

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