

## Reading for the Foreshadowing

THE RODNEY DANGERFIELD OF LITERARY devices, foreshadowing gets no respect. Despite—and maybe in part because of—foreshadowing’s enduring place in literary pedagogy, few critics and theorists find it worthy of sustained reflection, and those who do tend to view it with disdain. Dictionaries and encyclopedias of narratology treat it minimally if at all, its relationship to its classier cousin prolepsis has gone unexplored, and colleagues to whom I mention my interest smile uneasily.<sup>1</sup> In one typical and telling example of this dismissiveness, in an article on *A Tale of Two Cities* Frances Ferguson writes, “I have called attention to matters that we might *explain away* as Dickens’s effort to foreshadow the complications that he intends to unfold later.”<sup>2</sup> Why “explain away”? Why not “explain”?

As with an easily overlooked moment or detail whose full import only becomes clear in retrospect, there is more to foreshadowing than it seems at first glance. I will make this case by addressing existing theories of foreshadowing, looking more closely at the history of its role in the classroom, and excavating the genealogy of *foreshadowing* as a concept and term. The antiquity of the device itself notwithstanding, this genealogy will be seen to index large-scale historical phenomena central to the development of modern aesthetic thought in general and novel theory in particular, including the rise of secularization and artistic autonomy. The fact that these putative “rises” no longer seem as straightforward (let alone as worthy of celebration) as they once did, I will argue, only enhances the interest of foreshadowing, which emerges as a surprisingly fertile site for their continued interrogation. In particular, we shall see here, the project I am calling *reading for the foreshadowing* both demands and facilitates renewed reckoning with ostensibly settled questions in the history and theory of the novel regarding the ontological claims of the realist novel and the supposition of readerly agnosticism toward those claims.

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ABSTRACT The nineteenth-century emergence of foreshadowing as a critical term and pedagogical subject tracks and reinforces the classic understanding of modernity-as-disenchantment, as the domain of foreshadowing moves from providential and historical phenomena to textual practices. However, reading for the foreshadowing in nineteenth-century realist novels such as *Middlemarch* reveals a more porous boundary between ontological and formal foreshadowing and troubles established views regarding readerly belief and disbelief and the supposed rift between meaning and life. REPRESENTATIONS 165. © 2024 The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 37–62. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2024.165.2.37>.

1.

Foreshadowing makes a striking cameo in a June 2019 *New York Times* article called “How Elizabeth Warren Learned to Fight.” This profile includes an account of an email exchange between Senator Warren and her high school English teacher Judy Garrett, who contacted Warren early in her presidential campaign. In her response, the article reports, Warren wrote that the note “brought back memories of ‘A Tale of Two Cities,’ ‘Julius Caesar’ and the Beatles and of the December day that a boy had asked her to be his girlfriend in the custom of the day: by giving her a ‘drop,’ a kind of charm necklace.” Quoting directly from Warren’s email, the article continues, “Great teachers inspire students in so many ways. . . . I remember how you taught foreshadowing and how you said I didn’t have to go steady with a boy to be someone (a lesson I didn’t learn for about another 15 years).”<sup>3</sup>

If, in the reporter’s view, the detail of the charm necklace dates this anecdote, little else does (with the possible exception of the Beatles): not the Dickens or the Shakespeare, not the English teacher who inspires both by her example in the classroom and by serving outside of it as a confidante with a message of personal worth and in this case feminist empowerment—and not the presence of foreshadowing in the lesson plan. “The technique of introducing into a narrative material that prepares the reader or audience for future events, actions, or revelations,” as one standard critical glossary defines it, foreshadowing has long been and remains one of the first literary devices students are introduced to, in high school or even earlier.<sup>4</sup> In these settings foreshadowing is not an obstacle to understanding, as for Frances Ferguson, but rather the very form understanding takes. Ms. Garrett’s pedagogy reflects the approach advocated, for example, in an article published in *The English Journal* in 1962, just a year or two before Warren would have been a high school sophomore: that article lists “Detecting foreshadowing, plot unfolding, climax” among the skills to be introduced in “Grades 9 and 10.”<sup>5</sup> An article in the same journal (which is published by the National Council of Teachers of English) eight years earlier explains the value of this lesson, using one of Ms. Garrett’s texts as her example: “much of what [Dickens] has to say is expressed by means of symbolism and foreshadowing,” asserts the author, herself a high school teacher; therefore, she continues, teachers enable their students to arrive at a new level of understanding, indeed to undergo “a new experience,” by training them to ask and answer questions like “What did the writing of ‘blood’ upon the wall foreshadow?”<sup>6</sup> Referencing the same scene in *A Tale of Two Cities*, a 1928 article in the same journal argues that students must be taught that “the cask of wine is nothing in itself,” but instead matters

because “it vividly foreshadows action which is to come,” namely “the bloody revolution.”<sup>7</sup>

Even as these articles highlight foreshadowing, they make visible a key reason for its devaluation: its relationship to plot, itself an oft-maligned formal narrative feature. Foreshadowing foregrounds plot and elevates it, treating it as the text’s organizing principle and guarantor of meaning. In fact, foreshadowing might be seen to embody some of the qualities that those who dislike plot dislike most about plot, such as its supposed artificiality or unreality, blatant authorial manipulation, and privileging of form over life. Even for defenders of plot, foreshadowing can seem heavy-handed, too much of a good thing; foreshadowing threatens to short-circuit the “anticipation of retrospection” that Peter Brooks has identified as the essence of “reading for the plot.”<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps even inherently redundant: if, as Walter Benjamin famously tells us, “the essence of the character in the novel can hardly be better depicted” than with the sentence “A man . . . will appear *in recollection*, at every point of his life, as a man destined to die at thirty-five,” then authorial hinting at this death seems like overkill.<sup>9</sup> “Think now and then that there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside you!” Sydney Carton says to Lucie Manette.<sup>10</sup> Noted. Speaking of similar moments in *The Red and the Black*, D. A. Miller comments that “the reader is likely to be embarrassed by the use of so obvious a device on the part of so sophisticated a novelist,” and lists “Anna Karenina’s dream, Mrs. Tulliver’s fears that Maggie will ‘tumble in’ the Floss and ‘get drowned,’ [and] Tess Durbeyfield’s ‘prefigurative superstitions’” as comparable “embarrassments.” Avoiding the (embarrassing?) term “foreshadowing,” Miller characterizes these moments as “emphatic prolepses.”<sup>11</sup>

At best, then, foreshadowing might be seen to serve as a kind of gateway drug for formal analysis: by showing students how an earlier moment in a narrative hints at a later one, attention to foreshadowing encourages them to think about and read for the constructedness and design of texts. Like other gateway drugs, though, foreshadowing eventually gives way to the harder stuff: free indirect discourse, genre, irony, intertextuality, and the countless other formal categories and features that play a larger role in the postsecondary classroom and critical discourse. And the very fact that foreshadowing is or seems to be readily identified and comprehended by high school sophomores perhaps contributes to the widespread sense among literary scholars that it is not a terribly interesting or sophisticated technique. Indeed, if we return to the specific high school classroom with which we began, we see that even there foreshadowing is treated dismissively. That’s the implicit joke in Elizabeth Warren’s reminiscence: while of course Warren remembers how Ms. Garrett taught foreshadowing because young Liz was the smartest and most diligent of students, it’s clearly the life

lesson rather than—even in contrast with—the literary one that makes for the teacher’s “great[ness].” The specific literary works Warren names—*A Tale of Two Cities* and *Julius Caesar*—reinforce this implied literary lesson versus life lesson divide, insofar as they are superb texts for the teaching of foreshadowing (as we have begun to see with regard to Dickens) but terrible ones for teaching a girl that she doesn’t have to go steady with a boy to be someone. The teaching of textual interpretation, we might say, is just a pretext here for the teaching of how to live a meaningful life.

But what if the difference between literature and life, and between finding meaning in the former versus in the latter, is precisely the lesson foreshadowing teaches? Or, better, the issue it raises? That is the view I want to elaborate and defend. In doing so, I depart (in both senses) from the two theorists who have had the most to say about this literary device. Coming to bury foreshadowing, not to praise it, both Michael André Bernstein and Gary Saul Morson see foreshadowing as making a claim about reality that is both false and dangerous. They also see it as shaping the reader’s experience of the text in a way that diminishes its literary value.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Bernstein begins his book *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* with a chapter called “Against Foreshadowing.” He argues that “the logic of foreshadowing must always value the present, not for itself, but as the harbinger of an already determined future,” and that this is bad, mainly because “at its extreme, foreshadowing implies a closed universe in which all choices have already been made, in which human free will can exist only in the paradoxical sense of choosing to accept or willfully—and vainly—rebell[ing] against what is inevitable.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, Morson sees foreshadowing as relying on, implying, and reinforcing a particular understanding of reality, one in which the future is predetermined—in which, as he puts it, “time is closed.”<sup>14</sup> For Morson, as for Bernstein, this not only falsifies the nature of real life, from which, he argues, foreshadowing is absent because of “the asymmetry of time, which we experience as having a direction.” It also aligns foreshadowing with various belief systems that view history as moving “toward a fated end,” a view he treats as at best antiquated and at worst totalitarian.<sup>15</sup>

Both Bernstein and Morson also denigrate foreshadowing for what they see as its baleful aesthetic effects. For example, while Bernstein’s foremost target is an understanding of the Holocaust as inevitable, a view he (rightly) finds both false and offensive, foreshadowing also serves as a stalking horse for what he calls “the too strictly plotted, the too seamlessly coherent story”: “Our instinctive gratitude to what frees us from [this kind of story],” he claims, “undoubtedly accounts for much of our pleasure in experimental fiction.”<sup>16</sup> For his part, Morson argues that foreshadowing creates “a radical divergence . . . between the perspective of the character and the shape of the

work,” which he finds troubling because it calls attention to “the merely illusory nature of what the character experiences as open temporality.”<sup>17</sup> Morson prefers novels that “palpably represent a world in which choice matters and creativity is real. Reading George Eliot, Jane Austen, and Turgenev,” he claims, “we sense, as we do in life, the presentness of the present and the multiplicity of possible futures.”<sup>18</sup>

Although there has been little sustained work on foreshadowing since Bernstein and Morson, echoes of Morson’s argument in particular are worth noting in one important recent book, *The Art of Being: Poetics of the Novel and Existentialist Philosophy*, by Yi-Ping Ong. While not discussing foreshadowing as such, Ong pays sustained attention to the competing perspectives with which Morson associates it, as she traces what she calls existentialism’s “recognition of the dialectical tension between characterological self-knowledge and the totalizing form-giving agency of the author.”<sup>19</sup> For Ong as for Morson, this proves less a dialectic than an opposition, and she too sees this form-giving agency as threatening what she also values most, characterological freedom: thus, she criticizes “the human-all-too-human urge toward a totalizing representation” for “inevitably falsif[ying] the situatedness and freedom of the very human existence it seeks to portray.”<sup>20</sup> Just as Morson regrets the way “novels that use foreshadowing call our attention to the already written nature of narrative time,” Ong criticizes moments when “the reader is jolted back to an awareness of the artifice of the author.”<sup>21</sup>

These arguments rely on highly contestable value judgments and assumptions—and it is in questioning them that the real value and interest of foreshadowing emerges. To begin with, how can foreshadowing or any other reminder of “the totalizing form-giving agency of the author” violate characters’ existential freedom when that freedom is either always already illusory, insofar as these characters are fictional, or is not actually threatened by readerly awareness of this fictionality, insofar as their freedom is understood as existing within the diegesis, the world of the story? If it is the being made aware of, or being made to confront, these seemingly obvious facts that is objectionable, one might ask: are novel-readers genuinely as naive—so unaware or forgetful of a work’s scriptedness—as these theorists want them to be?

There is a related, intriguing contradiction between objections: is the problem with foreshadowing its contribution to “the too seamlessly coherent story” or rather its calling attention to the story’s seams? This is Bernstein’s phrase, but the same tension is also visible in the D. A. Miller discussion cited above: according to Miller, “emphatic prolepses are only the most conspicuous aspect of what [Roland] Barthes has generally called the ‘completeness’ (‘la complétude’) of the traditional text,” but it is hard to see how this very conspicuousness does not puncture the “illusion of continuity” it supposedly helps create.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, given the fictionality of fiction, why should we see foreshadowing as necessarily making a claim about reality in the first place? Foreshadowing can only falsify the openness of time, can only falsify anything, if it is making a truth-claim. As we have just seen Morson himself observe, “novels that use foreshadowing call our attention to the already written nature of narrative time”: in doing so, they might just as easily be taken to call our attention to the difference between narrative time and real time, understood as contingent, rather than promote an understanding of real time as teleological.

But what if, rather than condemn foreshadowing for foregrounding fictionality and/or falsifying reality, and rather than defend it from these charges by reasserting the fundamental difference between fiction and reality, we viewed foreshadowing as a technique for troubling and exploring this difference? What if we viewed it as an invitation, even a provocation, to compare our understandings of fiction and of reality, of literature and of life, with regard to temporality, causality, and meaning? At its most compelling, I would suggest, foreshadowing highlights and puts pressure on the question of whether the approach we take to determining the meaning or sheer meaningfulness of an occurrence or detail in a literary text aligns with our approach to understanding events in our own lives. In other words, insofar as foreshadowing calls attention to the formal order or design or cohesiveness of a text, it raises the question of whether life itself is similarly structured or meaningful. The device of foreshadowing invites us to ask: what are the similarities and differences between the beliefs underlying our conjectures about whether a real-life occurrence or experience—say, meeting someone new, or noticing one’s physical resemblance to someone else, or reading a particular book—will turn out to be consequential or otherwise meaningful, on the one hand, and whether and how an event or passage in a novel—say, when a new character appears, or the physical resemblance of two characters is noted, or a character is shown reading a particular book—will turn out to matter to the novel as a whole, on the other?

To read for the foreshadowing is to register and accept foreshadowing’s invitation to ask such questions. We can see both a recognition of this potential role for foreshadowing and a revealing resistance to it in the chapter on “The Novel and Other Discourses of Suspended Disbelief,” in Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt’s *Practicing New Historicism*. Building on Gallagher’s previous work on fictionality, Gallagher and Greenblatt suggest that novels “limber us up to cross ontological levels with ease, to poise ourselves on provisional ground, to assent for the moment while keeping our readiness to depart from the fictional world,” and assert that “nineteenth-century fiction is the most highly developed genre of the

probable, an explicitly fictional form that does not ask its readers to believe its characters actually existed or the events really took place, but instead invites us to appreciate the *believable* as such.”<sup>23</sup>

In developing their argument, Gallagher and Greenblatt offer an extended analysis of a passage in the pivotal scene in *Great Expectations* where the convict Magwitch returns to London and reveals himself as Pip’s benefactor. As Pip recounts,

I began either to imagine or recal that I had had mysterious warnings of this man’s approach. That for weeks gone by, I had passed faces in the streets which I thought like his. That, these likenesses had grown more numerous, as he, coming over the sea, had drawn near. That, his wicked spirit had somehow sent these messengers to mine, and that now on this stormy night he was as good as his word, and with me.<sup>24</sup>

Gallagher and Greenblatt focus on a striking equivocation on Pip’s part: “I began either to imagine or recal.” Arguing that the passage “indicates a distinction between imagining and recalling only to render the difference irrelevant,” they propose that such a move *almost* typifies the skeptical-yet-tolerant stance promoted by this novel in particular and the novel genre more generally but instead pushes it to an extreme:

Each report of an “apparition” in *Great Expectations* contains reservations about its “objective” reality, for the novel, as we’ve said repeatedly, is generically a skeptical discourse. But those reservations are used, in this passage and elsewhere, to create the understanding that it doesn’t matter whether or not events are imagined or recalled, whether one sees or merely thinks one sees. Partly it doesn’t matter because one is, after all, reading a novel, so the truth value of any statement is suspended. But here one detects a further use of the toleration that always, to some extent, attends fictionality: skepticism in these passages modulates into a *positive indifference* to ontological levels, signaling the special susceptibility of the novelistic sensibility.

Continuing, Gallagher and Greenblatt argue that “the above passage . . . seems to want us to notice that an everyday narrative technique—foreshadowing—is being morphed into a mystical accomplishment, as if to hint that novels generally are open to profound and hidden layers of reality.”<sup>25</sup>

To read for the foreshadowing, I am suggesting, means taking seriously and lingering with the kind of metaphysical implications Gallagher and Greenblatt identify here. But to do so involves following a lead Gallagher and Greenblatt themselves refuse to follow: they immediately go on to assert that “the novel, however, has no interest in promulgating such an openness as a new belief system”; when they conclude their discussion of this passage by stating that “in passages like [this one], the novel’s usual encouragement of fluid movement among ontological levels becomes momentary

permission to ignore them,” the emphasis is definitely on “momentary.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, while foreshadowing at first seemed here to open onto this kind of metaphysical inquisitiveness or assertiveness, it is invoked a second time to defuse this possibility and reinforce the reader’s supposed agnosticism: “in the novel, competing truth claims cease to compete; one entertains the possibilities both that Pip’s imagination is overwrought and that it is accurately receiving a message projected from afar, *for either is compatible with the foreshadowing technique*, without trying to decide between them.”<sup>27</sup> A potential mystical accomplishment is morphed here into an everyday narrative technique.

I dwell on this passage for two reasons. First, as suggested above, I want to salvage and build upon the insight it shies away from: an openness to the provocation of foreshadowing—to seeing foreshadowing as a provocation—promotes a reading practice that is aware of the fictionality of fiction but willing nonetheless to consider its ontological implications and the applicability of its logic to real-life experience. Such a practice does not automatically lead to the acceptance of particular beliefs, but it does promote a reckoning with, rather than a suspension of, one’s own beliefs.

I will return to this point below but note here—as encouragement for pursuing this route and as a caution against deciding too quickly whether doing so involves reading with or against the grain of novels in general or nineteenth-century realism more specifically—that even Gallagher and Greenblatt’s chosen passage is less agnostic than they suggest. Pace Gallagher and Greenblatt, that is, the reader of *Great Expectations* is called upon to see that Pip’s imagination is indeed overwrought, that in this instance he is certainly imagining rather than recalling, and that this difference matters enormously. That is the very lesson Pip himself begins to learn in this scene, as the revelation that Magwitch is his benefactor leads to the realization that “Miss Havisham’s intentions towards me [were] all a mere dream.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the other crucial lesson Pip goes on to learn is that Magwitch is a good man, a development that retrospectively undermines the conjectured mechanism of this foreshadowing: “his wicked spirit had somehow sent these messengers.”<sup>29</sup>

The second reason I have dwelled on Gallagher and Greenblatt’s discussion is that its own trajectory—that is, its movement from foreshadowing as ontological phenomenon to foreshadowing as formal technique—uncannily recapitulates the history of foreshadowing itself, at least insofar as this is captured by the history of the term *foreshadowing*. This history, to which I turn next, supports and clarifies the understanding I am proposing of foreshadowing’s entanglements and (therefore) affordances. As we shall see, the term’s genealogy, which has gone largely unexcavated, also explains why this understanding of foreshadowing has been obscured.



## 2.

If we look up “foreshadowing” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (subjecting this high school device to a freshman college assignment), we find something that I for one was not prepared for: the entries for “foreshadow” as a verb and “foreshadowing” as a noun—which as of this writing have not been updated since 1897—make no reference to foreshadowing as a literary device. The verb “foreshadow” is defined as “to serve as the shadow thrown before (an object); hence, to represent imperfectly beforehand, prefigure,” and the earliest cited uses, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, occur in the context of Biblical typology, as in: “Our Saviour’s death . . . was by manifold Types foreshadowed.”<sup>30</sup> Eventually, although based on the *OED*’s example not until the nineteenth century, the term is also used in secular historiography, to describe how one historical event can in retrospect be seen to have anticipated another, as in “the surrender of Ghent foreshadowed the fate of Flanders.”

The *OED*’s earliest example of “foreshadowing” as a noun is from 1847, and comes from an earlier novel by the author of *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*: at one point in *Dombey and Son*, Mr. Dombey is said to experience a “foreshadowing” of a feeling that later emerges “full-formed.” Elsewhere in the same novel, Walter Gay feels that the childhood bedroom he is about to leave “had already a foreshadowing upon it of its coming strangeness,” Florence Dombey avoids thoughts that would encourage “any faint foreshadowings of the truth as it concerned her father,” and Edith Dombey views shadows on the wall as “black foreshadowings of things that might happen.”<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, Dickens is drawn to the word “foreshadowing” and its variations. He is also, as Elizabeth Warren’s Ms. Garrett knew, a prolific user of the literary device. Yet as far as the *OED* is aware, neither he nor anyone else calls this device by that name. The term names a phenomenon that a novelist might describe, but not yet something he or she uses or does. But the psychologization of this phenomenon on display in *Dombey and Son* suggests that foreshadowing’s purchase on or grounding in external reality has loosened, and, instead of (or in addition to) naming a divinely established or historically objective relationship, it names the subjective process of finding meaning in or projecting meaning onto the world.<sup>32</sup>

Suggestive as this history is, we know that dictionaries are a lagging indicator of usage. And in fact, the same year in which that *OED* entry was published, a professor at the University of Indiana offered as an example of a routine question “given to our elementary [undergraduate] classes in literature,” “Tell what is meant by the following and illustrate from Scott: Foreshadowing, local color, dramatic suspense.” Not only, then, was the

term already in circulation by the end of the nineteenth century, but it had also already taken hold in the pedagogic context with which we are familiar.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, it turns out that while (as we have just seen) Dickens used “foreshadowing” in *Dombey and Son* to describe a psychological phenomenon, he also used the verb “foreshadow” to denote his own use of a literary device in the writing of that very novel. Summarizing a scene in an upcoming monthly part in an 1847 letter to his illustrator H. K. Browne, the novelist writes, “In the Library, the Major introduces Mr. Dombey to a certain lady, whom, as I wish to foreshadow dimly, said Dombey may come to marry in due season.”<sup>34</sup> Pace the *OED*, then, the relevant sense of *foreshadowing* is in use by the mid-nineteenth century.

But perhaps not much earlier. As best I can determine, *foreshadowing* does not emerge as the name of a formal device or effect—as a feature of a text, and as something an author might do—until the nineteenth century, and does not gain much currency until the second half of the century.<sup>35</sup> In fact, while Dickens’s use of “foreshadow” in this letter seems unremarkable insofar as it accords with modern-day usage, it is the earliest use of the term as a verb with this meaning that I have been able to locate. The earliest appearance I have found of the noun “foreshadowing” in the relevant sense comes just a few years earlier, in 1836—not from Dickens, but in a review of one of the monthly numbers of his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. Quoting a speech by Mr. Weller, the reviewer comments, “We see in this the foreshadowing of some deep and pathetic interest or other, and wait impatiently for the ninth number of the Papers of the Pickwick.”<sup>36</sup>

Whatever further instances are unearthed by future research, it seems unlikely that they will radically alter the basic trajectory taking shape here, from typology to history to psychology to art, with this final stage occurring (or at least truly taking hold) in the nineteenth century. The evolution of *foreshadowing* as a term thus indexes one of the grandest of historical narratives: the migration of meaning, order, and design from the external world to the mind and, eventually, to the work of art understood first and foremost as a product of a mind. This is the classic story of Western modernity as the rise of secularization and what Max Weber famously called the disenchantment of the world.<sup>37</sup> When the world no longer seems “story-shaped,” as Terry Eagleton puts it, art steps in to fill the void.<sup>38</sup> If we credit this account, we can surmise that while foreshadowing as a literary technique may be ancient, the conditions that underwrite the passage of the term’s discursive locus from typology to historiography to aesthetic form are, in essence, the decline of a providential worldview and concomitant rise of the author-as-creator.

Later I will want to acknowledge some of the ways the grand historical narrative I am invoking here has been nuanced and challenged; indeed, I

will want to argue for an approach to foreshadowing that is particularly attentive to its registration of and participation in such countercurrents. My claim here, though, is that this is the terrain on which the modern sense of foreshadowing took shape. Moreover, the extent to which foreshadowing needs to be *restored* to this context—that is, the extent to which contemporary practices of identifying and analyzing foreshadowing leave behind the term’s earlier meanings and overtones—is itself a function of its history. In other words, the aestheticization of foreshadowing is the product of a secularizing process that obscures its historical—and ongoing—connection to and suggestion of alternative cosmologies and strategies for finding meaning.

Before pursuing this claim, I should acknowledge that the prominent role we are seeing Charles Dickens play in the developments I am tracing suggests a less grandiose explanation for the emergence of foreshadowing so-labeled (less grandiose, that is, than the death of God): the very seriality of Dickens’s novels, we might reasonably conjecture, not only promotes his use of suspense and practice of hinting at future developments but also promotes in turn attention to these formal features, attention that leads to their being isolated as a definable practice and named as such. This might well be true, I would argue, but only constitutes a partial explanation of what is surely an overdetermined phenomenon: it does not explain the historical trajectory of the term *foreshadowing* itself—that is, why that term in particular became the name for this (perhaps) newly noticeable and noteworthy device; it overstates the association of foreshadowing with suspense; and it misses the extent to which Dickens’s techniques themselves are at least partly reflective of these larger historical shifts.

We can see foreshadowing’s imbrication in this historical transition from providence to the author play out in real time in a series of mid-nineteenth-century statements by Dickens, Walter Bagehot, and Wilkie Collins. Turning first to another letter from Dickens, we see quite clearly that for him the device of foreshadowing had a meaning and significance that made the term *foreshadowing* appropriate—indeed, that made appropriate that term’s appropriation from a religious context. This 1859 letter provides the only record we have of Dickens’s own thoughts regarding the concept of literary foreshadowing (even though, as we shall see, unlike in his earlier letter he does not—*not quite*—use that term itself here, preferring instead a circumlocution). Writing to his close friend and fellow novelist Collins regarding *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens seems to be responding to a suggestion by Collins that he should have revealed the nature of Dr. Manette’s connection with his son-in-law, Charles Darnay, earlier than he does. (We only have Dickens’s side of the correspondence.) As it happens, this is the very aspect of the novel we saw Ferguson intent on rescuing from being

“explain[ed] away” as foreshadowing. For Dickens himself, however, the foreshadowing is the point, and this is so precisely because of the concept’s theological overtones: “I think the business of Art,” he writes, “is to lay all that ground carefully, but with the care that conceals itself—to *shew, by a backward light*, what everything has been working to—but only to SUGGEST, until the fulfilment comes. These are the ways of Providence—of which ways, all Art is but a little imitation.”<sup>39</sup>

One way to understand fictional foreshadowing, Dickens suggests here, is as an extension of real foreshadowing: just as the world has an immanent design, so too does the text. It is not hard, though, to see this ostensible “imitation” of providential reality as a potential supplement to or substitute for it. After all, *A Tale of Two Cities* reads as a desperate, rearguard attempt to impose a providential plot (one hinging on a close physical resemblance between two characters that the novel doesn’t even try to account for) on the history of increasingly mindless bloodlust and arbitrary violence that is for Dickens the French Revolution—itsself as good an emblem as any for the advent of secular modernity. Indeed, from a Hegelian perspective the Revolution—or, more precisely and most relevantly, the Terror and the guillotine—is the best possible emblem of this world-historical development.

Previous critics have of course studied the providential nature of Dickensian plotting and argued over whether this plotting reflects Dickens’s faith or his doubts.<sup>40</sup> In highlighting the way foreshadowing in particular participates in this dynamic, I want to emphasize two points: first, although questions of providence might seem to return us to the broader question of predetermination with which Bernstein and Morson associate foreshadowing, *A Tale of Two Cities* not only engages this question of historical inevitability but also shows forcefully the way doubts about providential logic can foreground the distinct question of meaning.<sup>41</sup> Here again the context of the French Revolution is particularly apposite, as Kent Puckett’s reading of G. W. F. Hegel as a narrative theorist makes especially clear: “This is what the mechanical, rote nature of the guillotine seemed to do; it made it impossible to see an individual’s death as giving an individual’s life its own idiosyncratic structure. The failure of revolution and its fall into terror emerged, in that case, as an *anti-narrative* force, as a denial of meaning in and of itself.”<sup>42</sup> The project of the foreshadowing-saturated plot of *A Tale of Two Cities* is to reverse this trajectory, precisely on the terrain of meaning.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in various ways, from the early scene in which Sydney Carton’s fortuitous resemblance to Charles Darnay leads to the former’s acquittal in a trial to Carton’s avowal to Lucie that “for you, and for any dear to you, I would do anything. . . . I would embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to you,” that “there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside

you,” the novel foreshadows its ending. But the point of this ending, the meaning it retrospectively assigns to or confirms in these earlier moments, is to affirm meaningfulness itself, in the form of Carton’s achievement of a meaningful life: “It is a far far better thing that I do, than I have ever done,” etc.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the new meaning these earlier moments take on is to foreshadow the meaningful conclusion of Carton’s life, its conclusion as meaningful.<sup>45</sup>

But also striking (and this is my second point) is the fact that when Dickens refers to “fulfilment” in his letter to Collins, he is not referring to the novel’s ending. The providence-imitating aspect of the novel under discussion between these fellow craftsmen is not its plotting per se or its conclusion but rather the artistry with which Dickens manages information: at what point in the novel some characters, and the reader along with them, are to learn something that other characters already know. It may be the business of Art to imitate the ways of Providence, but insofar as these ways have to do more with the careful manipulation of readerly knowledge and expectations than with the nature of that which is revealed, they sound a lot like the techniques of a novelist.

Two contemporaneous discussions of foreshadowing—named as such in both cases—underscore the extent to which the emergent aesthetic meaning of foreshadowing in the mid-nineteenth century both derives and starts to pull away from, and perhaps even displace, the term’s theological or more broadly cosmological sense. The earlier of these examples comes in an 1855 review of several new novels by the critic Walter Bagehot. “A great artist,” Bagehot writes,

must imbue his tale with the feeling of that secret relation between the characters which suggests the reason why their destinies are interwoven. . . . He must, in a certain sense, be the providence to the conceptions he has created, and colour his narrative with the feeling which has prompted him to group them in the same picture. From the beginning there should be a foreshadowing of the coming knot of destiny, though not of its solution; so as to give a unity of meaning to the whole, as well as individual life to the parts.<sup>46</sup>

Like Dickens four years later, Bagehot explicitly models the work of the author on the workings of providence. Even more clearly than for Dickens, the rationale for foreshadowing here is formal—“a unity of meaning”—and its ultimate referent is the author himself. The “certain sense” in which an author “must . . . be the providence to the conceptions he has created” is as the guarantor of “a certain sense,” a meaningfulness that depends on and reflects not a divinely ordered cosmos but rather the author’s own subjectivity—“the feeling which has prompted him to group [his characters] in the same picture.”

This emphasis on foreshadowing's connection to an exalted sense of authorial agency and artistry is on full display in what is possibly the very next published reference to the technique of foreshadowing as such in a discussion of literary form. In the preface to his 1862 novel *No Name*, Collins writes:

it will be seen that the narrative related in these pages has been constructed on a plan, which differs from the plan followed in my last novel [his career-making sensation novel *The Woman in White*], and in some other of my works published at an earlier date. The only Secret contained in this book, is revealed midway in the first volume. From that point, all the main events of the story are purposely foreshadowed, before they take place—my present design being to rouse the reader's interest in following the train of circumstances by which these foreseen events are brought about.<sup>47</sup>

In this introduction to the book-publication of a novel serialized in Dickens's own journal, *All the Year Round*, Collins is evidently continuing the argument he was engaged in with Dickens three years earlier. Only now, instead of proffering unheeded advice, Collins is justifying his own practice. Here, as in his (lost) letter to Dickens, Collins comes out in favor of disclosing a novel's capital-S "Secret" sooner rather than later; nonetheless, like Dickens he advocates the practice he himself calls "foreshadow[ing]." Yet in two notable ways Collins departs from Dickens, as well as from Bagehot. First, in his letters to both Browne and Collins, Dickens emphasizes the "dim[ness]" and "suggest[iveness]" of foreshadowing: what is being foreshadowed, and perhaps even the status of a particular passage or event as foreshadowing, is only fully visible in retrospect. Bagehot's position resembles Dickens's, as he too uses the language of "suggest[ion]" and rejects the premature revelation of the ultimate "solution" to the foreshadowed "knot of destiny"; indeed, Bagehot views foreshadowing more as a diffuse effect—a "feeling" "colour[ing]" the narrative—than a localizable phenomenon. For Collins, by contrast, foreshadowing calls attention to itself and reveals the future: events "foreshadowed" by the author are events thereby "foreseen" by the reader.

To this day, there seems to be no consensus regarding this question of the shadowiness of foreshadowing: whether, for something to count as foreshadowing, it should be—or, alternatively, should not be—in some way marked or recognizable as such on a first reading, without the benefit of retrospection; and whether, if one accepts the category of recognizable-on-a-first-reading foreshadowing, a certain vagueness or openness is still required—if, that is, foreshadowing can hint but cannot explicitly disclose without becoming something else (presumably prolepsis, specifically a Genettian "advance notice"). The stakes of such boundary disputes are not

entirely clear to me, and I won't pursue the issue here, except to note, first, that at its very emergence the label or category of foreshadowing can be seen to accommodate the more inclusive definition; and, second, that this broad definition need not blur the differences between versions or flavors but instead can facilitate consideration of both their shared and distinct uses and implications.

For example, Collins's difference from both Dickens and Bagehot with regard to suggestiveness versus explicitness is linked to his second notable departure from his predecessors: he abandons the explicit rhetoric of providence. For Dickens, at least, a particular understanding of providence underwrites foreshadowing's reliance on hinting and its eschewal of explicitness; no longer tethered to that (or any other) understanding of providence, Collins's rationale for foreshadowing requires no such reticence. On the contrary, for Collins this heightened explicitness accords with his rationale, which is grounded in and invites attention to his craftsmanship. "My one object in following a new course," he explains, "is to enlarge the range of my studies in the art of writing fiction, and to vary the form in which I make my appeal to the reader, as attractively as I can."<sup>48</sup> Foreshadowing here is a fully secular event and activity.

The mid-nineteenth-century emergence of this understanding of foreshadowing as a formal feature and practice is not restricted to discussions of the novel, or even to literature. Both the separation of foreshadowing as term and concept from its typological and providential antecedents and the aggrandizing attention to the author present in Collins's preface appear as well in contemporaneous Anglo-American music criticism. In fact, that discourse may even be where the use of "foreshadowing" to name a formal artistic device first takes hold. An 1852 article on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* by prominent US music critic John Sullivan Dwight, for example, argues that the story that Mozart composed the overture the night before the opera's first public performance is misleading: "He may have *written* it that night, that is to say, have copied it out of his head," but "his musical conceptions shaped themselves whole in his brain," and there in his brain "the opera existed as a perfect whole." It is in this context that the author describes a passage in the overture as "a synopsis and foreshadowing of the last scene in the opera."<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, the concert notes to an 1869 performance of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, in the course of a detailed analysis of how the composer "compress[es] the matter of this marvellous entirety into the concisest nucleus," argue that an early portion of the first movement "so completely foreshadows all the leading ideas, that we are ready, at its conclusion, to follow the commentary of the solo instrument upon this fundamental text, to perceive its elucidations of meanings which might else lie hidden, and

hence to comprehend the argument which it unravels.”<sup>50</sup> To cite one last example, an 1876 dictionary of musical terms, in its entry on “form,” says that the slow tempo of a section of the first movement “in its design may foreshadow what is to appear in the succeeding allegro,” and comments, “if this is so written, it would give a coherence to the entire first movement; and, on account of the frequently mysterious nature of this kind of instrumental music, coherence and intelligibility is a thing much to be aimed at.”<sup>51</sup>

As these examples make clear, references to foreshadowing in nineteenth-century writing about music reflect an emergent emphasis on the formal unity of individual musical compositions and the means by which that unity is achieved. Moments in the composition take on meaning by virtue of their anticipation of later moments and their place in the whole; indeed, on an understanding of music as fundamentally nonsemantic, this anticipation of later moments *is* their meaning.<sup>52</sup> Foreshadowing here is fully secularized, a sign and component of the autonomy and coherence of the artwork and a reflection of the concomitant genius of its creator. To be sure, as others have argued, these values themselves can be understood at least in part as responses to, perhaps even compensation for, a contemporaneous decline of belief in providence. What I find striking, though, is how quickly this historical association fades or is obscured, and the meaning foreshadowing generates in literary as much as musical works is seen as fundamentally formal.

These developments are fully in place in the next major site where “foreshadowing” takes up residence—and where, I have suggested, it still resides: the literature classroom. In the 1891 *The Study Class: A Guide for the Student of English Literature*, published in Chicago, Anna Benneson McMahan informs the reader that “Shakespeare’s dramas commonly follow two rules,” the first of which is “They foreshadow in the first scene of the first act, the main idea of the plot.”<sup>53</sup> It is striking that McMahan does not feel the need to define her term; by this point, clearly, foreshadowing has already become a standard element of literary pedagogy. This step seems to complete the arc we have seen taking shape in mid-century references to foreshadowing, as the device is shorn of any providential overtones or metaphysical pretensions. Moments take on meaning by pointing to later developments and the shape of the work as a whole. Their doing so speaks to the nature of the text—not the nature of the world depicted in the text, nor the nature of the world the reader inhabits—and to register these moments as foreshadowing is to register the artistry of the author.

A flurry of additional student guides to Shakespeare at the turn of the century reflect the rapid entrenchment of this version of foreshadowing. Examples drawn from guides to the play used decades later to teach



Elizabeth Warren foreshadowing are typical of this trend—and also, I will suggest in a moment, telling for an omission they make. William H. Fleming's 1898 *How to Study Shakespeare*, intended for reading clubs as well as teachers and students, includes questions on each play that, he explains, pay "particular attention to the subject of dramatic construction," because "it is impossible to study and appreciate a play unless its construction is perceived and comprehended." Thus, question 23 for Act I of *Julius Caesar* is "Why does Shakespeare here make thrice-repeated reference to *the ides of March?*," and the answer Fleming provides is "To foreshadow the event that was to take place on that day."<sup>54</sup> Another 1898 study guide follows up the question "What attitude do the tribunes hold toward Caesar?" with "How does this foreshadow the motive of the drama?" and asks students to "Point out the things [in Act IV] that foreshadow the tragic ending of the play."<sup>55</sup> A 1904 study guide written by a high school teacher asks, "What speeches in this scene [V.1] foreshadow the end of the play?"; and a synopsis of Act IV in the 1911 Riverside edition explains that "the death of Portia and the apparition of Caesar seem to foreshadow the doom of Brutus."<sup>56</sup>

These guides consistently treat foreshadowing as a formal rather than ontological concept. We might even say they do so insistently, given not only the history of the term but also the fact that the play in question contains one of the most famous, and famously accurate, prophecies in all of English literature. It is evidently not the soothsayer's warning that makes *Julius Caesar* a good play for the teaching of foreshadowing. The reasons the characters have for anticipating (or realizing in retrospect that they should have anticipated) that something bad will happen to Caesar on one particular day are—pointedly?—distinct from the reader's reason, which is not that the soothsayer says "Beware the ides of March" but rather that "Shakespeare . . . make[s] thrice-repeated reference" to that date.

The final example above comes closest to treating seemingly supernatural knowledge of the future as foreshadowing and thus crediting its truth claim within the diegesis. Even here, though, the author treats this possibility with a certain caution: the Ghost of Caesar's actual claim about the future ("thou shalt see me at Philippi") is not referenced, the use of the term "apparition" instead of the text's "Ghost" introduces a hint of distancing and psychologization (this is a vision that appears to Brutus), and this event only "*seem[s]* to foreshadow" (emphasis added). These are a limited number of examples, but recall that the pedagogically oriented references to *A Tale of Two Cities* took the same tack: the novel is filled with characters having premonitions, but these are not the moments singled out as examples of foreshadowing. Severing foreshadowing as a device from the history of foreshadowing as a concept, these choices not only reflect but also enact its disenchantment.

### 3.

Aesthetic foreshadowing, I have shown, is named as such when it becomes a formal means for creating and insuring meaning as, precisely, a formal phenomenon, as opposed to a feature of the real world. The history of *foreshadowing* as a term thus tracks a broad-brush historical narrative of modernity-as-disenchantment. Reading for the foreshadowing in the manner I have proposed, however, constitutes a refusal to view this narrative teleologically and participates in the broader challenge to disenchantment's supposed dominion. I have in mind the kind of challenge posed by Johannes Fabian, whose critique of anthropology's historical investment in a model of cultural evolution is especially resonant in the present context. According to Fabian, cultural evolutionism treats "certain other cultures, or certain traits in our own culture," as "a past for narratives to build on"—which is to say, as "omens."<sup>57</sup> The omen, Fabian explains, is an event that "takes its meaning . . . from being experienced later as fulfilled, as giving to the ending of the story a quality we call meaningfulness," and stories of cultural evolution incorporate (ostensibly) alien "ways of life, modes of thought, [and] methods of survival . . . as omens into our stories of fulfillment." Yet rather than call for respect for the otherness of the Other and the pastness of the past, as a more familiar critique might do, Fabian demands that we "acknowledge otherness as present," which means "confronting other ways here and now as challenges" to our own practices and belief systems.<sup>58</sup>

I propose that we do the same with foreshadowing, by acknowledging the persistence of modes of thought and understandings of reality more closely aligned with the older meanings of "foreshadowing" and the continuities, however partial, between these modes and more ostensibly disenchanted forms of meaning-making. This includes a belief in omens—the folk belief or "superstition" that, according to Fabian, structures anthropologists' very efforts to distance themselves from such beliefs and is also, as we have seen, perhaps the most embarrassing of foreshadowing's forms.

To read for the foreshadowing, then, demands both a renewed openness to the many ways an author signals the future meaningfulness of events and special attention to how this formal device becomes content, as characters read their world for foreshadowing-like signs of the future and wonder how meaningful, if at all, an event or experience will turn out to be in hindsight. These efforts often involve forms of thought supposedly or officially skeptical, disenchanted readers are inclined to dismiss or distance themselves from, but to read for the foreshadowing means suspending one's disbelief in belief itself. And then suspending, as it were, this suspension of disbelief—now in the sense not of bracketing it but rather of holding up for

scrutiny and comparison one's own beliefs in relation to the meaning-making logic employed by characters within the fiction and by the fiction itself, on the level of form.

The attention to foreshadowing I am advocating can pay dividends in the study of narrative and dramatic forms in many of their manifestations. There is much to be learned at different scales—text, author, genre, period—from a focus on foreshadowing. This extends to subgenres such as contemporary autofiction, which tend to keep their distance from or even define themselves against the narrative conventions typically associated with foreshadowing, such as plottedness and closure. I want to conclude, however, by emphasizing the particular relevance of this reconsideration of foreshadowing for our understanding of the nineteenth-century realist novel. Not only, as we have seen, does foreshadowing emerge as the name for a literary device in this period, often with reference to contemporaneous fiction; in addition, the realist novel is the literary genre whose origins and very essence are most closely tied to the understanding of modernity-as-disenchantment with which, as we have also seen, the history of foreshadowing is bound up. In Fredric Jameson's sweeping formulation, "all the great realists have thought of their narrative operations as an intervention in the 'superstitious' or religious, universalizing conceptions of life, and as the striking of a blow for truth ('reader, this is not a fiction') which is still part and parcel of the whole Enlightenment secularization of the world."<sup>59</sup> We saw a finer-grained version of this argument in Gallagher and Greenblatt's discussion of disbelief and skepticism above, while its most influential articulation is undoubtedly Georg Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, which famously proclaims that "the novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" and "forsaken by providence," and in which "meaning is [thus] separated from life."<sup>60</sup>

A spotlight on foreshadowing can help us revisit these claims. The approach I am advocating does not mean reading the realist novel against the grain so much as recognizing foreshadowing as a knot in that grain—that is, as a revealing challenge or problem. We might begin by noting that we would expect a realism understood along these conventional lines—a realism more fully committed to this Enlightenment project (which is to say, in Jamesonian terms, more realist tout court) than is, say, the realism of *A Tale of Two Cities*—to promote the emergent, disenchanted version of foreshadowing. The most unambiguous way to do so, as suggested by the formalizing operation we have seen occurring most explicitly in the pedagogical context, is to make foreshadowing a matter of formal structure or narrative commentary rather than a sign of a future event perceptible as such to the characters themselves—which is to say, in narratological terms, to locate foreshadowing on the level of discourse rather than story.<sup>61</sup>

This is exactly what occurs, in a remarkably self-reflective way, in the universally acknowledged masterpiece of realism in the English literary tradition, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. In Lukácsian fashion, the novel's "Prelude" contrasts the "epic life" available to seventeenth-century Saint Theresa of Avila with "later-born Therasas" who "found for themselves no epic life" because their epoch lacked a "coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul."<sup>62</sup> The novel is thus framed by the historical transition to a secularized world, and this very framing serves to foreshadow the trajectory of the protagonist's life: "Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances" (4). Foreshadowing is at once canceled (as a feature of the real world) and preserved (as a textual device), with its very success (as a textual device) dependent upon its (real-world) obsolescence.

The one appearance of the word "foreshadowing" in *Middlemarch* reinforces this logic. In the letter in which he proposes marriage to future-failed Theresa Dorothea Brooke, the Reverend Edward Casaubon references "the event of my introduction to you" and comments: "which, let me again say, I trust not to be superficially coincident with foreshadowing needs, but providentially related thereto as stages towards the completion of a life's plan" (44). As the novel makes abundantly clear, Casaubon is wrong, his belief in providential "foreshadowing" a grievous error. At the same time, the very discrediting of such foreshadowing through its heavily ironized treatment here foreshadows the failure of the ensuing marriage to fulfill either spouse's needs and desires.

Neat as the logic of this treatment of foreshadowing is, the example of *Middlemarch* ends up suggesting that even realism at its most disenchanting has a difficult time fully taming foreshadowing—that is, making it purely a formal tool and not an ontological problem or provocation. For despite the historicizing Prelude and the novel's sustained critique of providential thinking, *Middlemarch* has trouble maintaining the distinction between ontological and formal foreshadowing that it seems to promote. In fact, this critique itself becomes the site of that breakdown: the text's very saturation in meaning and intention has a tendency to backhandedly confirm the ostensibly misguided belief of certain characters in a world similarly saturated. Thus, the narrator may be harshly critical of Rosamond Vincy's narcissistic conviction that she has "a Providence of her own," but Rosamond is correct that events are being arranged to bring her into contact with the newly arrived doctor Tertius Lydgate (264). The reader's awareness that this "Providence of her own" is in fact Eliot does not pack as much of a demystifying punch as it might seem; on the contrary, call that power what

you will, Rosamond is right to view her early encounters with Lydgate the same way the reader does, through the lens of their retrospectively confirmed meaningfulness, “gather[ing] value from the foreseen development and climax” (166).

For Morson or Ong, an awareness of the author’s guiding hand here constitutes a disappointing puncturing of readerly illusion; for Collins, the cultivation of such an awareness of authorial design is the point. One might also view this ironic convergence of authorial and characterological perspectives as an intractable dead end, an aporia. However, I propose we treat it as a challenge, both to our understanding of the novel’s project and to the background assumptions each reader brings to the novel. Eliot herself seems to have treated it this way, judging by her next novel, *Daniel Deronda*. There she responds to the provocation of this convergence of perspectives by doubling down on it, turning this formal tension—or, rather, this tension between meaningful form (as epitomized by foreshadowing) and postprovidential reality—into content. In the process, she also renews ontological possibilities supposedly consigned to the past by modernity and the realist novel alike. Thus, the novel shows its protagonist pushing back against English society’s understanding of reality for its ideologically blinkered foreclosure of individual and historical possibilities and insists that the reader join him in taking seriously the seemingly mystical beliefs of the Zionist prophet Mordecai (who says that he has foreseen his meeting with Deronda and looks forward to the merger of their souls through metempsychosis). At one point this insistence on the narrator’s part even recalls Casaubon’s proposal letter: “‘Second-sight’ is a flag over disputed ground. But it is matter of knowledge that there are persons whose yearnings, conceptions—nay, travelled conclusions—continually take the form of images which have a foreshadowing power.”<sup>63</sup> This passage may not retrospectively redeem Casaubon’s own belief in retrospective redemption, but it does call into question the grounds for its dismissal.

An adequate account of Eliot’s career-spanning interest in foreshadowing would obviously require much fuller treatment than I can give it here. But even this brief discussion is enough, I hope, to adumbrate two key reasons why such a project, and what I am calling reading for the foreshadowing more generally, is worthwhile: first, as *Middlemarch* suggests, attention to foreshadowing helps us see how realism even at its most disenchanting can work to raise rather than settle questions about readerly belief and the relationship between ontology and literary form; and, second, as *Daniel Deronda* can serve to remind us, realism is rarely at its most disenchanting. This may reflect not only the dialectical working out of realism’s internal tensions but also the extent to which modern Western society itself is not fully disenchanting—the extent, that is, to which the secular, disenchanting

cosmology associated with modernity is inconsistently held in even the most “advanced” societies. In such circumstances the ontological ambiguity of foreshadowing and its promise of meaning are all the more provocative. By reading for the foreshadowing we can gain a better understanding of the realist novel’s meaning-making practices, and of our own as well.

## Notes

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1. I should note at the outset that my project is not taxonomic: defining the category of foreshadowing precisely risks preempting exploration of many of the most interesting issues it raises, not least by way of its multiple forms and fuzzy boundaries, and I am especially interested in the shifting historical meanings of the term *foreshadowing* itself. Even so, it is worth noting that Gérard Genette’s category of prolepsis does not unambiguously cover all forms of what is generally recognized as foreshadowing. Genette defines “prolepsis” as “any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later”; Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, 1980), 40. Much depends on what “evoking” means, but Genette is not entirely clear on this. He distinguishes “advance notices” (*annonces*) of later events, which “by [his] definition are explicit” (as when a narrator says of a character, “we shall meet him again, . . . much later in the course of our story”) (74–75), from “mere *advance mentions*” (*amorces*) (75): “Unlike the advance notice, the advance mention is thus in general, at its place in the text, only an ‘insignificant seed,’ and even an imperceptible one, whose importance as a seed will not be recognized until later, and retrospectively” (76). Genette has little interest in the advance mention—a category that would seem to cover one of the main forms of foreshadowing; he dismisses it as “belong[ing] to the completely classic art of ‘preparation’” (75). It is unclear whether he even considers it a form of prolepsis, and Gerald Prince asserts unequivocally in his *Dictionary of Narratology* that the advance mention “does not constitute an example of prolepsis”; Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, rev. ed. (Lincoln, 2003), 14. Genette’s analysis of prolepsis also does not extend to the way a scene or event may be understood to foreshadow, in the sense of “prefigure,” a later one. The French terms (*annonces* and *amorces*) are from Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris, 1972), 112.
2. Frances Ferguson, “On Terrorism and Morals: Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*,” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 3, no. 2 (2005): 65, emphasis added.
3. Sabrina Tavernise, “How Elizabeth Warren Learned to Fight,” *New York Times*, 24 June 2019.
4. Ross C. Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Bedford, 2017), 162.
5. Gladys Veidemanis, “Drama in the English Classroom,” *The English Journal* 51, no. 8 (November 1962): 548.
6. Louise Bennett, “Experiences with Literature,” *The English Journal* 43, no. 9 (December 1954): 502. The endurance of this lesson plan is suggested by the virtual repetition of this passage in a 1989 teacher’s guide to *A Tale of Two Cities*, where the authors encourage their fellow high school teachers to ask their

- students: “What purpose does the scene of the overturned wine cask serve? How does it foreshadow the French Revolution?” See “*A Tale of Two Cities*: A Masterpiece Teacher’s Guide (Boston, 2011), 9.
7. Norma D. Solve, “The Teaching of Literature, A Dramatic Art,” *The English Journal* 17, no. 7 (September 1928): 540.
  8. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York, 1984), 23.
  9. Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov,” in *The Storyteller Essays*, ed. Samuel Titan, trans. Tess Lewis (New York, 2019), 65.
  10. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (New York, 2003 [1859]), 159.
  11. D. A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton, 1981), 220.
  12. Michael Bernstein and Gary Morson began as collaborators but ended up writing separate books.
  13. Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley, 1994), 2.
  14. Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven, 1994), 7.
  15. *Ibid.*, 45, 50.
  16. Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions*, 9.
  17. Morson, *Narrative and Freedom*, 40, 47.
  18. *Ibid.*, 42. One might query the accuracy of this claim with regard to each of these authors; I return to George Eliot at the end of the article.
  19. Yi-Ping Ong, *The Art of Being: Poetics of the Novel and Existentialist Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 37.
  20. *Ibid.*, 47.
  21. Morson, *Narrative and Freedom*, 49; Ong, *Art of Being*, 22. Dorothy Hale provides an illuminating historical account of this commitment to characterological autonomy. According to Hale, “the ethical task of representing characters as autonomous individuals, defined by an identity distinct and different from their author’s,” becomes “indistinguishable” from “the art of the novel” *per se* for modernist novelists, beginning with Henry James, and is again the case in contemporary fiction. Hale tends to take at face value novelists’ testimony concerning their “felt experience of [their] characters’ freedom,” but does at times acknowledge that this autonomy is an illusion—or, more neutrally, an effect, as when she references “the novelistic effect that characters exist prior to and beyond their creator’s control or knowledge.” See Dorothy J. Hale, *The Novel and the New Ethics* (Stanford, 2020), 2, 48, 51.
  22. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents*, 220–21.
  23. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago, 2000), 170, 169.
  24. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, quoted in *ibid.*, 194.
  25. Gallagher and Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*, 195.
  26. *Ibid.*, 195, 196.
  27. *Ibid.*, 196, emphasis added.
  28. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (Oxford, 2008 [1861]), 295. Whether or not the chastening of Pip’s imagination is ever complete is the crux presented by the novel’s ending. The final hint that it is not complete comes in the novel’s last sentence, which reveals that Pip is still on the lookout for signs of real-life foreshadowing: leaving the ruins of Satis House with Estella, he reports that “I saw the shadow of no parting from her” (442).

29. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 295.
30. This earliest English-language meaning is closely linked to the Christian concept of *figura*, as Erich Auerbach's philological analysis of that term makes clear. According to Auerbach, "figura is something real and historical that represents and proclaims in advance something else that is also real and historical"; the later person or event is understood as the "fulfillment" or "veritas [the truth]" of the figure, which is "often designated . . . as umbra [shadow]"; Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach*, ed. James I. Porter, trans. Jane O. Newman (Princeton, 2021), 79, 82. As Auerbach emphasizes elsewhere, the figure anticipates and prefigures its fulfillment, but the two "are linked neither temporally nor causally"; Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), 73.
31. Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (New York, 1985 [1848]), 356, 330, 593, 693.
32. A similar dynamic is visible in what is probably the most famous appearance of the word "foreshadowing" in American literature, which comes at the same historical moment as the British examples I am focusing on, in the opening paragraphs of Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855): "Flights of troubled gray fowl, kith and kin with flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadowing deeper shadows to come"; Herman Melville, *Billy Budd and Other Stories* (New York, 1986), 161. "Foreshadowing" here seems poised uneasily or indeterminately between objective and subjective meanings. This accords with the timeline I am establishing while also foreshadowing Melville's sustained play with just such ambiguities.
33. "College-Entrance English," *University of the State of New York Examination Bulletin* 13 (June 1897): 638.
34. Charles Dickens to H. K. Browne, 10 March 1847, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 5, 1847–1849, ed. Graham Storey and Kenneth Fielding (New York, 1981), 34.
35. This new meaning of foreshadowing may owe something to what John Hollander describes as "the archaic use of the verb [*to shadow*], . . . by which *to shadow*=*to depict*=*to trope poetically*," which appears most famously (as Hollander discusses) in Edmund Spenser's letter to Sir Walter Raleigh prefacing *The Faerie Queene*, where he writes of Elizabeth I that "in some places els, I do otherwise shadow her"; John Hollander, *The Substance of Shadow: A Darkening Trope in Poetic History*, ed. Kenneth Gross (Chicago, 2016), 21.
36. "The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club," *Examiner*, 6 November 1836, 710.
37. Max Weber, *Charisma and Disenchantment: The Vocation Lectures*, ed. Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, trans. Damion Searls (New York, 2020). The key text here, best known as "Science as a Vocation" (but translated in the edition cited as "The Scholar's Work"), is from 1917. For a more recent, extended elaboration of this theory with a particular focus on the category of meaning, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).
38. Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Malden, MA, 2003), 194. Eagleton uses this phrase when describing Georg Lukács's version of this modernization narrative. For a recent reinvigoration and refinement of the Weberian narrative that places particular emphasis on "thoroughly secular strateg[ies] for re-enchantment [that] cheerfully emerged to fill the void," see Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular*



- Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford, 2021). The quotation is from Landy and Saler's introduction, "The Varieties of Modern Enchantment," 1.
39. Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins, 6 October 1859, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 9, 1859–1861, ed. Graham Storey (Oxford, 1998), 128–29, italics added, original caps. William Chapman Sharpe also situates the use of foreshadowing by nineteenth-century writers in general and Dickens in particular in relation to the concept's typological origins (and quotes this letter in the course of doing so). Sharpe, however, sees straightforward continuity where I see profound destabilization: "For over a thousand years the concept of foreshadowing played a central role in how Christians understood narrative structure. So it was inevitable that the rise of secular narrative would include shadowy elements as well"; William Chapman Sharpe, *Grasping Shadows: The Dark Side of Literature, Painting, Photography, and Film* (New York, 2017), 163.
  40. For a recent contribution that provides a good overview of this body of criticism, see Jennifer Gribble, *Dickens and the Bible: "What Providence Meant"* (New York, 2021).
  41. For a subtle account of the novel's treatment of historical inevitability, see Clare Pettitt, "Dickens and the Form of the Historical Present," in *Dickens's Style*, ed. Daniel Tyler (Cambridge, 2013), 110–36.
  42. Kent Puckett, *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, 2016), 61. Puckett's sweeping history-cum-interpretation of narrative theory treats it as one of "a whole set of intellectual projects that turn on the relation between events as they occur and what meaning those events might have when seen as part of one or another larger system" (56) and argues that narrative becomes especially salient as a problem (or a solution) at particular historical moments. Focusing on the relationship between story and discourse—events and their representation or ordering—as narrative theory's central topic, Puckett (largely in keeping with the theorists he studies) never mentions foreshadowing. As the present article seeks to show, however, foreshadowing's emergence as the name for a literary device and the vernacular theorizing that accompanies this emergence prove amenable to analysis along Puckett's lines—even as deployments of the device itself, we will see, destabilize the opposition between meaning and experience (or even form and life) that Puckett's theorists tend to rely on and reinforce.
  43. In his sustained reading of Sydney Carton's death scene, and in particular Carton's prophetic vision of the future made possible by his sacrifice, Garrett Stewart remarks that "no novel could fasten more surely the always tacit bond between mortality and communicable narration" (93). My suggestion is that it is precisely because this bond can no longer be taken for granted that so much effort needs to go into the work of fastening. See Garrett Stewart, *Death Sentences: Styles of Dying in British Fiction* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 83–97.
  44. Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 159, 390.
  45. The complexity of Carton's motives for his sacrifice of his life notwithstanding, we might still read his story as a challenge to Charles Taylor's claim that "there is something absurd about the idea that our lives could be focussed on meaning as such, rather than on some specific good or value. One might die for God, or the Revolution, or the classless society, but not for meaning"; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 679. For a reading of Carton's death similar to mine, see J. M. Rignall, "Dickens and the Catastrophic Continuum of History in *A Tale of Two Cities*," *ELH* 51, no. 3 (1984): "[Carton] gives himself a goal and a purpose, and in so doing gives shape and meaning to his life. What has been aimless and indefinite

- becomes purposive and defined, and continuity is established between beginning and end, between promising youth and exemplary death” (583).
46. Walter Bagehot, “A Novel or Two,” *National Review* 2 (October 1855): n.p.
  47. Wilkie Collins, *No Name* (New York, 1994 [1862]), xxi–xxii.
  48. *Ibid.*, xxii.
  49. John S. Dwight, “Mozart’s Don Giovanni,” *Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* 40, no. 2 (February 1852): 150. For more on Dwight’s music criticism, see Mark McKnight, “Music Criticism in the United States and Canada up to the Second World War,” in *The Cambridge History of Music Criticism*, ed. Christopher Dingle (Cambridge, 2019), 302–4.
  50. Philharmonic Society (London), Fifty-Seventh Season, Analytical and Historical Programme of the First Concert, Wednesday, 10 March 1869, 10, Archive of the Royal Philharmonic Society, British Library, London.
  51. John Stainer and William Alexander Barrett, eds., *A Dictionary of Musical Terms* (London, 1876), 176.
  52. Here we might distinguish between foreshadowing and the concept of the leitmotif, which also emerges in this period as a marker or instrument of formal unity but typically has a more semantic or referential component (through its association with a particular character, for example).
  53. Anna Benneson McMahan, *The Study Class: A Guide for the Student of English Literature* (Chicago, 1891), 51. The second rule is: “They introduce all the principal characters before the close of the first act.”
  54. William Hansell Fleming, *How to Study Shakespeare* (New York, 1898), xiv, 126.
  55. Franklin T. Baker, *Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar”* (New York, 1898), 118, 124.
  56. William Shakespeare and C. Lauron Hooper, *Julius Caesar* (Chicago, 1904), 134; Richard Grant White, introduction to *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare (Boston, 1911), viii.
  57. Johannes Fabian, “Of Dogs Alive, Birds Dead, and Time to Tell a Story,” in *Chronotypes: The Construction of Time*, ed. John B. Bender and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, 1991), 192. I am grateful to Deidre Lynch for calling my attention to this essay.
  58. Fabian, “Of Dogs Alive,” 192, 200.
  59. Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (New York, 2013), 143.
  60. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, 1971 [1920]), 88, 103, 122.
  61. We might see twentieth-century narratology as doubling down on this secularizing strategy by moving away entirely from foreshadowing, both the word and the device. In place of this metaphysically problematic, potentially atavistic temporal phenomenon, we find prolepsis, a spatialized, structural trope more securely restricted to the level of discourse as opposed to story.
  62. George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London, 1994 [1872]), 3. Further citations will be parenthetical in the text.
  63. George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (London, 1995 [1876]), 471. It is also striking that the return of ontological foreshadowing here associates it with heightened individual agency (“persons whose yearnings . . . have a foreshadowing power”), despite foreshadowing’s more characteristic use to invoke a determinism (fate, History, etc.), which limits such agency.