

THE LIE OF THE LAND: LANDSCAPE AESTHETICS AND BRITISH REALISM

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation charts the relationship between British realism and landscape aesthetics in order to reframe the novel's established connection to the rise of capitalism. "The Lie of the Land" argues that passages of landscape description mediate and disguise the history of British land use. Land enclosure, the seizure and forcible privatization of common land, was a centuries-long process that reached a climax in the late eighteenth century and precipitated a number of aesthetic phenomena that became central to modern English national identity. Among these, the landscape garden, with its sweeping vistas, rolling hills, and lush vegetation, seemed to recover the loss of the unbounded English countryside. In fact, such gardens are icons of privatization and individualization. Unlike other accounts of the novel that focus on psychological individuation, spatiotemporal rationalization, or financial abstraction, my project emphasizes that land enclosure shaped the form of the English novel by developing aesthetic techniques that disguise both the historical and ongoing process of territorial expropriation and displacement. This analysis constitutes a widely applicable model for approaching figurations of land across various literary styles. Novels and landscape gardens are more than just parallel effects of England's transition to capitalism. Victorian realists such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy recognized landscape gardens as aesthetic objects with similar structural logics to those of the novel. Gardens and novels both use a variety of creative techniques to

disguise their inherent artificiality through illusions of verisimilitude. Descriptions of landscape can thus be understood as moments where realist authors theorize realism. In readings of Defoe, Austen, Eliot, Hardy, and Conrad, this project establishes the evolving connection between literary landscape and English nationalism—while also reaffirming the historical ties between British realism and British imperialism. Drawing from art history and aesthetics, these readings offer a framework for understanding the related histories of English industrialization, property law, and British imperialism. “The Lie of the Land” understands the aesthetic surface to be just one of many mediations that document material history. As such, it is possible to read the landscape itself much as one reads a novel—as a hybrid product of formal choices and of individual and collective histories of exploitation and loss.

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INTRODUCTION: The Aesthetic Legacy of Land Enclosure

“I have just returned from a visit to my landlord,” begins *Wuthering Heights*.

Though often obscured by the violence and strangeness of the text, property is really the primary subject of this novel. Much of the action is spent crossing and recrossing the four miles between Thrushcross Grange and the Heights. These crossings signify an equally elaborate series of exchanges of property back and forth between the owners of the different homes. As Lockwood, Nelly Dean, Heathcliff, Catherine one and two, Isabella, and occasionally a sickly Linton make the journey, the landscape morphs to accommodate the new social relations between the ever more imbricated homes.

Lockwood’s curiosity about Heathcliff is intensified because of the snowstorm that makes his return journey impossible. Catherine and Edgar are first introduced because of a nighttime journey and an injury at Thrushcross Grange that separates her and Heathcliff for weeks. Each new marriage instantiates a transfer from one house to the other, occasioning a reverse journey for the (usually immiserated) betrothed.

The novel is framed by the landscape between the houses. This landscape is the condition of possibility for the narrative content of the text itself. Rather than an atmospheric backdrop to the action, the landscape enables and disables certain plots, effectively sculpting the narrative form. Brontë emphasizes its framing function quite literally; in Nelly’s narration, this vista frames Heathcliff’s return to the countryside and to the plot, after his mysterious accumulation of capital, when he visits Thrushcross Grange where Edgar and Catherine await him in the parlor:

They sat together in a window whose lattice lay back against the wall, and displayed, beyond the garden trees, and the wild, green park, the valley of Gimmerton, with a long line of mist winding nearly to its top (for very soon after you pass the chapel, as you may have noticed, the sough that runs from the marshes joins a beck which follows the bend of the glen). Wuthering Heights rose above this silvery vapour: but our old house was invisible—it rather dips down on the other side. Both the room and its occupants, and the scene they gazed on, looked wondrously peaceful. (101)

The passage is characteristic of landscape nineteenth-century landscape description, which in turn draws from landscape painting and from what Ann Bermingham, John Dixon Hunt, and others have characterized as the “picturesque” aesthetic. In fact, Brontë’s tripartite division of the prospect conforms to what Hunt has termed the “three natures” of cultural landscape. Third nature, the closest to the viewer, is the cultivated private garden—the “garden trees, and the wild green park.” The second nature is the valley of Gimmerton, the farmland and trade routes that produce and support the wealth of the third. First nature is the most distant in the scene, the wild, mountainous heights that have been yet untamed. By framing the scene in this way, from the genteel parlor of the Linton estate, Brontë begins to make clear the relation between wilderness and cultivation that subtends many of the social relations of the novel. At the same time, this apparently neat relationship is always already complicated by the long history of Wuthering Heights itself, as well as Heathcliff’s new wealth.

The novel relies on the apparent stability of the landscape, and the three natures to which it refers, in order to dilute the story of otherwise radical change that it tells. Heathcliff, a “gypsy brat” discovered on the road to Liverpool, grows up to acquire a mysterious (and likely colonial) fortune. He then takes advantage of accumulating mortgaged debts at Wuthering Heights to buy the property after at least three hundred

years in the Earnshaw name. Finally, he consolidates this acquisition with the likely newer, but more genteel, estate of Thrushcross Grange by leveraging the relative nonexistence of available suitors in the desolate northern country. The younger Catherine acknowledges this late in the novel when defending her choice to plant flowers in the Wuthering Heights garden. “You shouldn’t grudge a few yard of earth for me to ornament, when you have taken all my land!” (351). Heathcliff scornfully invokes gendered property law responding “Your land, insolent slut! You never had any” (351). Though by the conclusion of the novel only Catherine Linton and Hareton Earnshaw are left alive, their capital as well as their lineage have been transformed by Heathcliff’s intrusion. The happy marriage of these cousins dilutes the violence of this intrusion, as does the stability of the landscape that witnesses it. But the twenty odd years that Nelly Dean and Lockwood recount in *Wuthering Heights* index a critical transition in the material wealth of the British countryside—as old feudal strongholds like Earnshaw’s became insolvent, and new wealth from agricultural capitalism and colonial extraction assumed a new role in the British economy.

The enclosure and improvement of rural England, as I will show, played an important role in the development of British realism. This project argues that the realist novel emerges from transformed social relations produced by English land enclosure, such that realism itself is concerned both representationally and formally with the spatialization of land. While realist fiction is generically capable of metabolizing and transforming various genres to fit its specific conventions (as with the residual elements of romance in *Wuthering Heights*), it relies on the imaginative production of social space to do so. Rather than a passive container within which action and character move, realist

space drives plot and conditions readerly experience. Certain spaces suggest certain possibilities, which are either met or disrupted to produce various narrative effects. The spatial imagination of the realist novel conditions its narrative capacity.

What space does in and for realist form, I argue, is historically linked to land enclosure. I make this claim in dialogue with criticism that has long understood the realist novel as the emergent aesthetic form of English capitalism. Its emphasis on individualism, association with bourgeois aesthetics, and reliance on technological innovations like the printing press all tether it to the developing commodity marketplace. Yet land enclosure too played a major role in England's transition to industrial capitalism. As common lands were fenced off and privatized, rural populations were forced into urban areas to work in newly built factories. This process, which Marx somewhat ironically called primitive accumulation, contributed to a new configuration of class and labor. The accumulating wealth of land enclosure also made possible newly lavish country houses and surrounding landscape gardens, which became—fittingly—a popular setting for the realist novel.

I argue that the English landscape thus became a synecdoche for English national identity alongside the emerging formal and aesthetic framework of “realism.” Landscape gardens shared many aesthetic qualities of the realist novel itself: they both offered complex, variegated, simulated worlds that labored to disguise their own artifice. Nineteenth century novelists, I suggest, recognized this relationship between the landscape and the novel as a potent mode of social critique and ideological imagination. The realist novel thus offers both a formal mediation of the history of land enclosure and a critical representation of this history's projection into the nineteenth century.

This dissertation traces the broad arc of landscape aesthetics across the nineteenth century, when industrialized agriculture on enclosed land was restructuring not only the English countryside but also the field of English literary production. I argue that the English novel has material and formal origins in the process of land enclosure: the seizure of common lands and segmentation of open fields over several centuries that reached its peak in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. This history of forced privatization dramatically impacted the countryside: as industrial farms grew larger and more homogenous, the interwoven patchwork of commons and strip farms that had previously characterized British landscape gradually disappeared. This centuries-long process was attended by the gradual reformulation of English landscape aesthetics, which abandoned geometric regularity for the organic looseness now associated with the English landscape garden. While this aesthetic development has an extremely complex history, as I will discuss, one way of understanding the change in style is by comparing the key features of the new landscape garden with the attributes of the receding British countryside—newly enclosed and industrialized by a transforming agricultural economy.

This economic transition to industrial capitalism made a profound impact on the appearance of British countryside. Advocates of “improvement,” the parallel action of land enclosure, fought for commons, wastes, and “unproductive” farms to be transformed into arable land or pasture—regularized to optimize productivity. This optimization reduced the overall demand for agricultural labor and—alongside advances in machine technology that lowered labor demand and widespread dispossession of small landholders and tenant farmers by landlords—precipitated a massive movement of people to urban

centers, where newly opened factories waited. This is the traditional story of the industrial revolution, and it is of course central to this project, as it is to many Marxist accounts of British literature. However, this dissertation is more keenly attuned to the British commoners who found themselves transformed into vagrants and trespassers as common land was made into property. Rather than a mass of agricultural laborers who emigrated to the factory to become the industrial proletariat, I want to dwell on the ideological modifications to the land that contributed to the production of the “laborer” as such. While this project is not concerned with the individuality of the laborer, nor the different descriptive strategies for representing the laborer in literature, the mechanisms that I investigate are entangled with the invention of the laborer as a subject. The process by which certain fictions made possible new kinds of personhood—including the industrial laborer, the trespasser, the vagrant—had less to do with a reconfiguration of imagined personhood, and more to do with the massive project of fantastical world building best described as “realism.”

In order to understand this process, I turn to the relationship between the English landscape and the realist novel. These two forms of world-building—both of which were developed across the century of Britain’s most rapid land enclosure—index new categories of spatial and communal possibility that underwrite the production of the laboring class. I suggest that the same forces that reshaped the English countryside also drove the formal innovations of the realist novel. Further, this force—more specifically, the expropriative energy of primitive accumulation—provided new wealth to fund the creation of landscape gardens, which were, in turn, newly popularized as England’s open natural countryside was enclosed. Aesthetically, landscape gardens and novels operate in

surprisingly similar ways. The garden and the novel both use a variety of creative techniques to disguise their inherent artificiality through illusions of verisimilitude. Both offer the subject a position of power and knowledge, tracking a carefully curated path through what seems to be a much larger world. Both, too, offer aesthetic compensation for historical losses: the landscape garden was designed to recall the lost commons even as they were in the process of being seized; the novel, as Nancy Armstrong and Fredric Jameson have shown, compensated for modes of collectivity that were vanishing under the conditions of industrialized labor. And both significantly frame and center country houses: the British realist novel relies on certain landscapes as conventional settings that enable certain types of action and thus, plot.

I argue that this relationship between the British landscape and British realism was no secret, but that Victorian realist novelists such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy recognized landscape gardens as aesthetic objects with similar structural logics to those of the novel. I further suggest that descriptions of landscape in realist novels can be understood as moments where realist authors theorize realism. When Eliot makes the sight of a family of commuting laborers from the window of Casaubon's manor-house into the occasion for Dorothea Brooke's flash of collective consciousness, or when Henry James narrates Isabel Archer's fragile bourgeois identity through her fantasy of herself as a cultivated garden, these descriptions articulate realism's own aesthetic specifications within the context of their material, historical, and political stakes.

Emphasizing the relationship between realist fiction and land enclosure foregrounds the centrality of both to the project of British imperialism. As I show in my first chapter, the strategies of containment and technologies of control developed to

execute the mass enclosures and subsequent improvements of the English countryside were also techniques of colonialism. Not only did these parallel modes of expropriation share material strategies of enforcement, but they also shared legal logic, including in their reference to the Lockean doctrine of *terra nullius* and the labor theory of property. I show that while early British colonialism found ideological expression in novels like *Robinson Crusoe*, these novels were also explicitly invested in authenticating the project of domestic enclosure and improvement—linking these two aspects of capitalist development through a set of descriptive practices that came to be known as literary realism. As the British Empire expanded and formalized, so did the institution of realism itself. This dissertation provides a kind of closure to this story by concluding with Conrad, whose modifications to the realist mode have come to be understood as proto-modernist. These stylistic adaptations, as I will show, were the result of a newly complex relation between imperial space and imperial control.

The relationship between realism and landscape did not conclude at the end of the nineteenth century. In the fetishized settings of *The Great British Baking Show* as well as *Downton Abbey* and the dependable output of Jane Austen adaptations, it is still possible to see the profound cultural impact of the British landscape garden. But beyond the grounds of the manor house, enclosure has moved into modern life in other ways: suburban neighborhoods, urban beautification, and cycles of housing development all deploy legal strategies and ideological discourses similar to those perfected during the eighteenth-century enclosure movement. Early advocates like Thomas Tusser (1524-1580) extolled the wealth enclosure could bring and highlighted the wastefulness of wasteland itself. Later figures like Robert Child (1613-1654) and Silvanus Taylor (1624-

1678) conducted largescale studies that provided empirical evidence for the good of improvement, as well as the cartographic resources for systematic enclosure. Arthur Young (1741-1820) fought for enclosure in the eighteenth century, arguing that commons promoted “mischief” while converting them to arable land was literally the “creation of fresh income” (496). Most famously, John Locke (1632-1704) argued that “the provisions serving to support human life, produced by one acre of inclosed and cultivated land... are ten times more than those which are yielded by an acre of land of equal richnesse lying waste in common” (294). Thus, Locke argued when “a Man tills, plants, improves, cultivates” land, it becomes his property (292). This discourse of improvement accompanied legal procedures of dispossession, similar to the way that modern rhetoric of urban beautification, economic revitalization, and the war on crime subtend the contemporary dispossession of rent hikes, eviction, and gentrification. Such a widespread project of dispossession is necessarily accompanied by a broader machinery of literary contextualization and representation. Realism, I argue, is thus attached to this rhetoric of enclosure: the novel is a literary form that has been improvised to attend to new technologies of expropriation and dispossession. While the forms of this dispossession across the globe and across the past three centuries are not continuous, they are impossible to disarticulate from one another. So too do the various permutations of realist form across various types of media continue to share a profound relationship to the defense of private property.

This project traces the deep symbolic and material linkages between narrative realism and the capitalist regime of control over land. My readings interrogate the ideological force of realism, which purports to describe a world that it is frequently in the

process of creating. If land enclosure and improvement recreated the British countryside in order to enable a newly potent process of extraction, realist fiction disguised this process by redescribing the physical world. This is not to say that the realist novel is purely an ideological tool of the new class of agricultural capitalists; rather, the same complex, competing, and frequently contradictory historical forces at work in the politics of land are also being formally negotiated in the novel. If ideological disguise emerged as a dominant effect of the realist novel, it is possible to detect the reverberations of resistance and revolt that also characterize the history of enclosure, improvement, and British empire.

Land enclosure was the process by which the majority of English land was privatized and converted into arable land and pasture. This process took place across many centuries, spanning from the medieval period into the present—but it reached unprecedented levels of legal and ideological cohesion in the eighteenth century. Land enclosure encompasses the legal process of identifying certain kinds of putatively unused land—including commons and wastes—and recategorizing them as private property. This type of enclosure is generally accompanied by “improvement,” wherein some type of investment is made into the land to make it more productive or valuable: draining swamps and clearing forests, introducing new irrigation systems, new fences, or other new technologies of industrial agriculture. Land enclosure also encompasses a set of much more informal procedures for apprehending and controlling land. These include non-legal seizures, neighborly quarrels, abuse of feudal power.

Both the informal and formal modes of enclosure evince a trend towards establishing legality *after* the property has been claimed. In fact, until the Inclosure Acts of 1773, the parliamentary process for enclosing common land was rarely used. This retroactive legalization, what Robert Nichols calls “recursive dispossession,” creates a misleading historical narrative around the transfer of “property” from one owner to another. Because the act of enclosure frequently transformed land *into* property, it created the illusion of a movement of ownership from one owner to another. More accurately, the process of enclosure created, or recreated out of various feudal modes, the category of property itself. This simultaneously created a whole set of new categories of people in relation to the land—such as trespassers, poachers, vagrants. In terms of historical narrative, this process is primarily characterized by obfuscation. On a more local level, the intimidation, extortion, and outright physical violence of land enclosure was increasingly recast across the eighteenth century as a narrative and legal, and nationally necessary, improvement. Advocates of improvement touted the nationalist benefits of enclosure and improvement, assembling an arsenal of data related to new agricultural technologies that would boost productivity and profit. From a broader vantage point, the so-called agricultural revolution has frequently been understood as an ecological response to these changing technologies, both in farming and in urban factories—removing and ethically absolving the main actors in English enclosure.

These narratives have been contested by various historians of British agriculture. JM Neeson provides the most robust account of the enclosure of the British commons in her book *Commoners*. Not only does she redescribe the process from the perspective from the commoners impacted by land enclosure, she also pays careful attention to the

many modes of resistance that these commoners enacted. According to Neeson, most commoning economies were extinguished by enclosure at some point between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the rate of change was quite uneven. In general, much of England was still open in 1700, but most of it was enclosed by 1840. This process dramatically changed the English landscape. As Neeson writes:

The description of open fields is entirely appropriate. Distances are shorter when fields are in strips. You can call from one to the next. You can plough them and talk across the backs of the horses at the same time. You can see at a glance whose bit of the hedges or mounds need fixing, what part of the common ditch is choked with weeds. Standing at the centre of the village feels like standing at the hub of the whole system. (2)

The visual transformation of the countryside accompanied an equally dramatic transformation in the rural labor force. Because, as Neeson argues, the eighteenth century was staffed by peasants rather than supplied by wage laborers, the massive surge in labor productivity across the eighteenth century seems to have been accomplished without enlarging this body of laborers. This is because many peasant laborers were turned into agricultural laborers at enclosure. Neeson rejects the narratives of some historians who suggest that “a benevolent enclosure movement generated employment for the underemployed” and insists, instead, that “commoners became utterly dependent on miserable wages” that forced them to work harder (13).

The changes in the landscape were integral to creating this dependency on wages. New technologies in farming gradually made the communal system useless or intentionally destroyed it. Advocates for improvement also vilified commoners as indigent dependents—and framed enclosure as a method of tough love. For these advocates, Neeson argues, “commons were the worst kind of charity” (37). Subsequently,

most improvers warned against incidental plantings that could potentially support commoners independent of wage. This included destroying hedgerows that offered twigs for fire, cutting down fruiting trees that could be picked for food, and reducing any areas that might support rabbits and other small animals that could be hunted. The physical process of land enclosure is thus specifically intended to produce a class of wage laborers and can be thought of as a calculated attack on the English peasantry.

Of course, there were also opponents to the process of enclosure outside of the peasantry. These opponents argued that enclosure impoverished small farmers and landless commoners and diminished the local supply of military and agricultural labor. More broadly, they suspected that land enclosure would catalyze depopulation and threaten Britain's fund of national wealth. Proponents of enclosure countered that these costs would be worth the price; as agricultural efficiency improved, they suggested, stable prices and massive production would ultimately support healthy agricultural and industrial laboring populations. Many historians of the agricultural revolution have adopted this line of thinking—sometimes obscuring the tangible, if muted, losses that accompanied enclosure.

One reason for this trend in the historiography of the British countryside is that the value produced by commons was so subtle as to be virtually invisible when compared with the massive profits made by improved open field farms. Additionally, commoning was a right of custom, rather than law, with heterodox application and enforcement. The subtlety of commoning economic value and variability of commoning practice makes it difficult to measure against the more readily quantifiable gains of agricultural industrialization. That said, there were several affordances to the commoning system. The

diffuseness of common right, for instance, made it dividable, shareable, and scalable—as the custom was tied to population (Neeson, 64). Similarly, common right was environmentally adaptable. Commoners enjoyed rights in fens, forests, heaths and other wastes *as well as* in villages with little waste where landholding was consolidated. Because most commoners could only afford to keep one or two animals, the right to graze managed to maximize efficiency in shared land use. Strip farming, frequently used on common land, afforded the nutrient enriching benefits of crop rotation, as farmers tended to rotate strips from season to season, and to grow a variety of produce on each strip. Many parishes managed drainage and irrigation at the local level, meaning that there was a great deal of control over shared infrastructure and a speedy, equitable system for managing disputes. Similarly, the closely shared land encouraged quick detection and treatment of infections in produce and livestock. In fact, Neeson argues that the fences of enclosure may have produced a false sense of secure separation among animals that could still easily transmit disease; further, Neeson notes, the capitalist marketplace is the “most serious source of epidemic infection” (130). For commoners, the produce of the common provided security in an uncertain labor market. Gleaning after a harvest, picking flowers on the way back from the fields, or gathering twigs during interstitial moments of the work-day could provide enough extra material to prevent commoners from being at the mercy of the more ruthless corners of the market for labor. The architects of agricultural improvement were careful to eliminate this insurance, in order to transform the peasantry into a population wholly dependent on wage labor.

Marx’s account of primitive accumulation, given near the end of *Capital Vol. 1*, departs from the method of the rest of the book. Rather than critiquing political economy

to insist on the exploitation inherent to capitalist logic, Marx turns to the history of the emergence of capitalism in order to locate one of its primary mechanisms. His description of the articulated and mutually imbricated components of dispossession, proletarianization, market formation, and disaggregation of agriculture and industrialism refutes the narrative of political economists who envision a largely peaceful transition from feudalism to capitalism, characterized by the newfound freedom of the laborer. In Marx's account, this illusion of freedom obscures the new imperative to choose between a limited set of exploitative labor conditions. In Marx's account, the serfs of European feudal societies relied on access to common land, which helped them to meet basic needs as well as the tithes demanded by feudal nobility—in exchange for protection from other lords as well as their own campaigns of coercive violence.¹ Gradually, the common lands were closed off, eliminating access to basic needs for the landless. The serfs consequently experienced proletarianization; dispossessed from the feudal tithe relation, they were compelled to contract themselves into waged employment. Marx shows that this moment, which liberal political economists understand as the liberation of the serfdom, was neither less compulsory nor less exploitative; instead, it was a new relationship of exploitation mediated by the wage and ultimately the money form. Because the commons were no longer available, and wage labor became increasingly specific and atomized, the market system emerged in order to provide commodities—including both basic needs and luxury items—to this newly formed proletariat. Finally, both the proletariat and the market

¹ Unlike other nineteenth-century thinkers, notably Ruskin, Marx is not at all nostalgic for premodern social relations. Commons, in his account, are not framed as utopian or egalitarian—but rather as evidence for the profound inequity of feudal relations, and the difficulty with which the peasantry worked to achieve bare necessity. This does not disqualify some utopian aspect to the commons, however, as a projection and model for future forms of social relations.

organized around particular geographic coordinates, as rural agriculture and urban industry each took on unique qualities.

Marx's account, broadly historical but nonetheless somewhat schematic, implies that this bloody process of "primitive accumulation" occurs during the era of societies' transition to capitalism, after which the newly naturalized and ideologically invisible forces of economic compulsion maintain the exploitative relationship. Subsequent revisions and supplements to Marx's history have challenged this stadial interpretation of primitive accumulation. Most famously, Rosa Luxemburg argued that primitive accumulation is an ongoing and constitutive feature of capitalism itself. She writes that "capitalism must... always and everywhere fight a battle of annihilation against every historical form of natural economy that it encounters." Postcolonial Marxists, notably Ranajit Guha in *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, elaborate on this observation by showing not only that the ongoing enclosure and dispossession of new territory is fundamental to capitalist growth, but also that a regime of bloody state violence—similar to that described in Marx's account of English primitive accumulation—is also ongoing in the imperial periphery. Feminist scholars of primitive accumulation have also modified Marx's original account. Most notably, Silvia Federici has argued that women's bodies were another "primary ground of exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor" (16). For Federici, primitive accumulation is always ongoing as the control over reproductive labor must be constantly renegotiated by the ruling class in order to maintain a stable reserve army of labor.

This project likewise maintains that primitive accumulation is an ongoing and constitutive element of capitalist reproduction. At the same time, I suggest that this “original sin” of political economy enables a powerful historical narrative of dispossession that threatens the naturalization of capitalist hegemony. Accompanying aesthetic forms like landscape and landscape description neutralize this historical narrative and obfuscate both prior and ongoing forms of violence and dispossession that are inherent to capitalist expansion itself. However, this process of mediation also amplifies the narrative of enclosure, embedding it in the language, style, and form of literary representations of the land. These aesthetic effects, I argue, are all traceable to the material transformations to the land itself.

As the English countryside transitioned from the strip system of open fields to the large-scale rent-maximizing farm, it took on now familiar aesthetic characteristics: regular geometric hedgerows, walls, and roads sectioned the countryside into its various severalties. While this visual effect is perhaps now more commonly associated with English rural quaintness, it would once have signified modernization, rationality, and maximization of profit. Landscape painters like John Constable registered these modifications in works like “The Valley of the Stour, with Stratford St. Mary in the distance” (fig. 1). The hedges and trees separate the open field into separate properties. Many of his paintings also invert the “three natures” described in the opening of this introduction, with the viewer occupying untouched nature, separated from civilization by agricultural fields. Compare this landscape to Constable’s representation of a common at East Bergholt: here, the uninterrupted field allows for continuous lines of sight across the prospect.



Figure 1: East Bergholt Common, View toward the Rectory, John Constable, 1813

Meanwhile, landscape gardens were emerging as a newly popular aesthetic form. As landowners began to invest in surveyors to create their estate maps, they also invested in landscape designers to recreate the gardens around the house itself. As I show in my first chapter, gathering nostalgia for the rustic look of the open fields system that vanished during large scale enclosures influenced a new style of English garden that became characteristic of the nation.



Figure 2: Bowood, Photograph: Rogers, Elizabeth Barlow

The most familiar figures in this aesthetic movement are William Kent, Capability Brown, and Humphry Repton. While the enclosure of the commons was certainly not the only factor in the development of the landscape garden, it plays a key role. The landscape garden grew out of the country house park. Estates like Overstone, Exton, Ashridge, Hatfield, and Knowsley from the twelfth century had parks that were essentially tracts of wooded land enclosed to protect game intended for the hunt (Hoskins, 130). Many of these parks were gradually enlarged across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as landowners acquired adjacent land. The consolidating wealth also allowed many estate owners to remodel or entirely rebuild the country houses themselves, often relocating them to the best suited prospect of the surrounding property. Enclosure not only funded

these expansions, it also occasioned a new taste for open countryside. The small, geometrically divided fields of the enclosed farm replaced commons that would have felt expansive. The landscape garden, then, was partially intended to reproduce the look of the pre-enclosed countryside. See, for instance, the garden at Bowood Estate, designed by Lancelot “Capability” Brown (1715-83) (*fig. 2*). This style of landscape garden was partially motivated by nostalgia for unenclosed countryside. It also avoided the costs of the smaller, formal Dutch and French-style formal gardens. Landscape gardens were cheaper to maintain, if quite expensive to create—especially as they came to include more elaborate topographical and aquatic modifications.

William Kent (1685-1748) is generally considered the founder of landscape gardening. His designs reacted against the geometric formality of the French style—and were instead erratic and surprising, with multiple oblique views offering various perspectives on the rambling, naturalistic plantings. Stowe is Kent’s most famous

garden, though Rousham is the only garden that has remained relatively untouched. Kent's successor, Capability Brown, expanded the influence and grandeur of the landscape garden. Huge gardens like those at Kew and Blenheim included infrastructural



Figure 3: *The Red Book of Ferney Hall*, Humphry Repton, 1789

feats like transported trees and massive lakes. Humphry Repton (1752-1818) further elaborated Brown's style—emphasizing his own capability to rearrange the landscape with his famous “red books,” which offered potential clients a before and after view of their estate (*fig. 3*). Repton's books featured physical flaps that revealed a preview of the prospect of his new design. These books emphasize the entanglement of the viewer with ownership and control, even over apparently “natural” scenes.

The style of the landscape garden attached to English national identity itself, such that the gardens came to be known as “English Gardens.” Earlier gardening trends, such as “follies” (artificial ruins and towers meant to spark interest), elaborate formal parterres, and “Chinese” architectural elements became increasingly gauche. As Ann Bermingham notes, “the indispensable condition for the true landscape garden was *land*” (13). As a rejection of the agricultural signifiers of the enclosed landscape, the landscape garden's aesthetic effect was premised on its rejection of functionality and productivity.

A core architectural element, accordingly, was the “ha-ha”—a deep trench that functioned as a fence and byway without marring the illusion of uninterrupted view. The ha-ha, designed to erase visible marks of labor and sustain the viewer’s fantasy of an untouched natural scene, is designed to disappear—but only when seen from the appropriate angles, such as from the house itself. Fittingly, ha-ha’s occasionally appear in nineteenth-century fiction when they trip or injure unsuspecting riders: Fanny Price, in *Mansfield Park*, nervously asks Maria Bertram to take care as she may “be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha” (310).

As features like the ha-ha show, landscape gardens marked a shift in the aesthetic signification of “nature.” Private property, meticulously designed and carefully maintained, looked like untouched natural scenery. The actual rural landscape, conversely, became gradually more artificial and cultivated. Of course, both landscapes were “property”—and much of it newly designated as such—but the landscape garden linked class, taste, and wealth with a spatial aesthetic that attempted to disguise its aesthetic techniques. This aesthetic trend soon moved to painting as well, with Thomas Gainsborough and John Constable highlighting both rural scenes and landscape gardens with an indiscriminate eye—strengthening the ideological illusion of the landscape garden as untouched nature. Landscape gardens also became important settings in novels. Further, the aesthetic preference for unadorned naturalness becomes a central value of English fiction. In fact, the English realist novel bears many aesthetic and formal similarities to the landscape garden itself.

Despite its name, realism's relation to reality is the subject of considerable debate. In Ian Watt's influential account, realism is tethered to the rise of the European bourgeoisie along with middle class leisure time and a new concern with private lives that all emerge from the Cartesian position that "truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses" (12). Thus, the novel encapsulates the "individualist and innovating reorientation" of modernity in such a way that "pre-established formal conventions" will "endanger its success"; for Watt "the poverty of the novel's formal conventions would seem to be the price it must pay for its realism" (13). What replaces formal convention, in Watt's account, is meticulous detail in its description of time, place, character, and a related shift towards "referential" language (30). For Auerbach, similarly, the "two distinguishing characteristics of modern realism" are that "real everyday occurrences in a low social stratum, the provincial petty bourgeoisie, are taken seriously" and that these occurrences are "accurately and profoundly set in a definite period of contemporary history" (485). Here again, a realism is a detailed, referential apparatus of representation, particularly oriented towards the (presumably more "real" lives) of the petty bourgeoisie. Lukács, who championed realism as a form capable of Marxist political transformations, defined realism as a method of discovery rather than a representation of pre-established realities—and thus resisted the association between realism and detail. Lukács argued that realism had the aesthetic potential to capture historical movement, but that to do so historical conditions must be volatile enough to be registered aesthetically—leading him to suggest that after the revolutions of 1848 failed to be fully actualized, realism also began to decline. Whether reflecting the mundane physical world of bourgeois reality, or imaginatively producing it, realism is tethered to reference (and, significantly, to space)

in all of these definitions. Following Lukács but deemphasizing the novel's attitude of reference, Fredric Jameson considered the *formal* relation of the novel to capitalist hegemony. He suggests in "The Realist Floorplan" that realism's worldbuilding task was to "virtually or symbolically" produce "what will come to be called 'daily life'" (375). He elaborates in *The Political Unconscious* that the mission of the novel is to produce, "as though for the first time that very life world, that very 'referent'—the newly quantifiable space of extension and market equivalence, the new secular and 'disenchanted' object world of the commodity system" (152). More recently in *Antinomies of Realism* he suggests that realism "requires a conviction as to the massive weight and persistence of the present as such, and an aesthetic need to avoid recognition of deep structural social change" (145). For Jameson, realism doesn't refer to the referent of reality; it produces the referent in its very form.

In recent work by Victorian scholars, realism has been similarly submitted to a formal reappraisal. Lauren Goodlad, Alex Woloch, Anna Kornbluh, and Carolyn Lesjak all figure realism as a formal/aesthetic practice and de-emphasize its supposed referentiality. Goodlad looks to the variety and materiality of realist aesthetics to find evidence of "actually-existing" transnationalisms in the nineteenth century. Woloch attends to what he terms the "character-space" and the "character-system" of the realist novel in order to interrogate its characteristic tension between psychological depth and broad social description. Kornbluh argues explicitly for a "formalist theory of realism" that extracts techniques for building social and political worlds from realist texts in order to do the same in our own political world. Lesjak also sees a utopian potential in the form of the realist novel—specifically in its recovery and maintenance of the ethics of the

“commons” after their destruction by eighteenth century enclosure. As Lesjak argues, “the commons can be realized only with a fundamental restructuring of everyday reality itself” (173). Common fields instantiated a certain kind of reality, an everyday experience of gleaning and gathering that provided the occasion for a particular social experience. In fact, the common fields themselves were simply physical reflections of a complex set of social agreements—from the level of the Magna Carta down to neighborly consensus—that became a rule of custom that could only be eradicated after centuries of strategic privatization. Lesjak shows that this social and ethical practice lingered and was renegotiated in the realist novel.

These theories all differently explicate the relation between form and history: while Goodlad sees the novel as a repository of the geopolitical social structures of the nineteenth century, Woloch sees its character spaces as a reflection of the atomization and reification of individuals under capitalism. Like Jameson, Kornbluh and Lesjak both understand realism to be ideological productive. Jameson suggests that realism participates in the ideological production of spatiotemporal coordinates of lived experience under capitalism, whereas Kornbluh and Lesjak suggest that in these same formal negotiations can be found utopian tools for moving beyond capitalist oppression. While the two are obviously dialectically entangled, I suggest that by tracing the history of land enclosure via its impact on the form of the novel, its specific capacity to obscure and rearrange historical reality comes into view. Rather than codifying the present or unlocking the future, the realist novel reconfigures the social relation to the past through its descriptive capacity to enact an imaginary spatial manipulation of the present.

Dickens' depiction of London, for instance, definitively altered both nineteenth-century and present-day experiences of the city.

Realism is an aesthetic mode that attempts to spatially consolidate and ideologically redistribute the political and social history of a particular political body. In the nineteenth century, this body is usually the nation. As Jed Esty notes in "Realism Wars," "realisms tend to be caught between two mandates: (1) to provide an authoritative version of reality within the finite and layered social space of the nation-state and (2) to provide an authoritative projection of reality along the transnational lines of epistemological privilege that Raymond Williams has called "metropolitan perception" (317). He argues that critical debate over realism names the "overt struggle to resolve this contradiction" between the need for cultural forms that can "(1) explain the national society, as it is, in convincing complete detail and (2) transform the world outside the national space into something better" (328). This demand echoes Lukács' call for a "critical realism" that does not "fix or freeze the current state of affairs" but instead to "capture the world system operationally as a series of interlocking processes, causes and effects, screens and mediations" (Esty, 337). The contradiction between "fixing" a state of affairs and "capturing" a process is only relevant, I suggest, because of realism's material emphasis on the spatial world, as evinced by realism's thoroughgoing visuality. Scholars have frequently focused on the visual aspect of this aesthetic mode—notably George Levine in *The Realistic Imagination*, Peter Brooks in *Realist Vision*, and Ruth Yeazell in *Art of the Everyday*. As Brooks writes, realism is "highly visual, concerned with registering what the world looks like" because there is a persistent belief that "sight is the most objective and impartial of our senses" (16). The term seems to have come in

the English circulation through painting, in references to Flemish art that migrated to English through an essay on Balzac in the Westminster Review in 1846 (Yeazell, 7). In the famous treatise on realism in chapter seventeen of *Adam Bede*, Eliot uses painterly metaphors to explicate her defense of realism as a genre concerned with the common and everyday: the narrator allows that literature can “paint us an angel” as long as it also includes “those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world” (Eliot). From Eliot onwards, scholars of realism have focused on character and objects, particularly domestic objects, as the privileged subject of realism. Realism’s visuality is also suggestive of a particular concern with space—including architecture, landscape, and the “social space” described by Henri Lefebvre.

This turn to space articulates with another pertinent historical referent of nineteenth-century realist fiction: the British empire. Most famously, Edward Said argued that the novel comprised a “structure of attitude and reference” to empire such that “the novel... and imperialism are unthinkable without each other” (71). According to Said, the novel not only consolidated a coherent national reality for English readers, it also produced the distant but observable tangibility of imperial and other peripheral territories. His interpretive schema demands an approach to imperialism that is “not temporal, but spatial” (81). Following Said, I argue that many of the same “interpretive consequences” of the imperial structure of attitude and reference in the novel, including the “organic continuity” between earlier texts that seem not to be about empire and later ones that address it explicitly, the complex questions of power that emerge in realist

materiality, and the metonymic relation between domestic and international drama, are also applicable to the material spaces of realism—in the case of this dissertation, the landscape.

The type of reading that I am describing, sensitive to historical change as well as the variously durable physical manifestations of that history across time, draws heavily from Raymond Williams' concept of "mediation." Advising a turn from the passive metaphor of reflection, which reifies the distinction between "reality" and "speaking about reality" as two distinct concepts, mediation emphasizes the active process of interrelation between "society" and "art." In mediation's negative sense, reality is distorted, suppressed, or disguised by art; in its positive sense, it suggests that all "active relations between different kinds of being and consciousness are inevitably mediated" (98). As Nathan Hensley writes in *Forms of Empire*, reflection's "commitment to the category of representation... guarantees that texts can only represent their moments in interested or bad ways, a fact that turns the work of reading into an injunction to discover just these (inevitable) distances between "reality" and its "representation" (17). Mediation, he argues, enables the critic to "take stock of productive reconfigurations and critical recoding operations—that is, acts of thinking—texts themselves perform" (17). Mediation, rather than reflection, is useful to my project not only because it more aptly metaphorizes the interchange between the social and textual world, but also because the "text" that I describe is not only the novel, but also the countryside itself. The modifications of eighteenth-century landscape architects, as well as the slow environmental impact of enclosure itself, were gradually incorporated into the built environment as the fresh marks of landscape design aged and plants matured. This active

process, in addition to its active relation to painting and novels, renders the metaphor of reflection even more inaccurate, and further recommends the concept of “mediation” as a way of understanding the historical relation between the various material manifestations of human productivity.

The spatialized metaphors of reflection and mediation have found new life in more recent discussions of depth and surface. The distance between the text and its supposed “real” social referent that reflection implies has led some critics, most notably Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, to advocate for a shallower or “surface” strategy of readings. Borrowing also from Eve Sedgwick’s paradigm of paranoid and reparative reading, surface reading and postcritique warn against invasive critical maneuvers that attempt to bridge the divide between object and representation. In my readings, the object, the representation of the object, and the history of the object can all be submitted to the same kinds of analytical attention. For instance, the landscape garden, Jane Austen’s description of the landscape garden, and the seventeenth-century commons to which the landscape garden refers, all command attention by their openness—an openness that, in different ways, signifies the losses of enclosure, as well as the enticement to enclose.

I am suggesting a certain degree of ontological horizontality between different kinds of texts, as well as the broadest possible definition of “text.” To this end, Elaine Freedgood’s preference for metonymy over metaphor is instructive. In the metaphoric mode of critique “things are reified as markers of a real in which they can participate only generically” such that they “must give up most of their own qualities in the service of a symbolic relation” (10). Whereas the object as a simple denotation of reality “loses its

potential as a material thing outside the conventions of representation,” the object as metaphor “loses most of its qualities in symbolic servitude” (11). Rather than be trapped in either a reflective or a purely literary mode, Freedgood suggests that a metonymic reading investigates an object “in terms of its own properties and history and then refigured alongside and athwart the novel’s manifest or dominant narrative” (12). Metonymy “tells us what we already know by habit and by convention” such that it goes “beyond the frame of reference of the novel” (13). Instead of the direct relation of metaphor, metonymy initiates slippery chains of association that evade narrative and temporal linearity. This mode of analysis is well suited to provide support for my claim that land enclosure, a historical process essentially complete before the advent of Victorian realism, is nonetheless deeply embedded in the very form of the novel.

While “form” has emerged as a critical term in both contemporary discussions of realism and debates over postcritique, I prefer the term “aesthetics” to describe the complex systems of convention and representation at work in the novel. While both “form” and “aesthetics” were active terms in nineteenth-century realists’ theorization of realism (see Eliot’s “Notes on Form in Art” and Lewes’s related “Realism in Art,” for example), aesthetics suggests a more robust negotiation of realism’s place in a broader literary canon. Despite boasting some of the most recognizable stylists of English fiction (most notably, Dickens), realism maintains a reputation for a self-effacing aesthetic, one that attempts to cover its traces rather than announce its presence. Though Victorian fiction is replete with devices that call attention to its own constructedness (think of Eliot’s famous asides or Dickens’ transcription of dialect, for instance), the realist

aesthetic is nonetheless one that suggests a degree of acquiescent circulation between the world of the novel and the world of the reader.

The passages of realist novels that are most obviously aestheticized, and thus often overlooked in accounts of realist prose, are descriptions of setting. While there is a great deal of recent work from scholars like Alex Woloch, Elisha Cohn, and Pearl Brilmyer on Victorian character and characterization, setting is comparably underdiscussed. George Levine's *Realistic Imagination* memorably emphasizes the moderate landscapes of realism, which he suggests respond to the excesses of romance and gothic fiction. "The realist's landscape," he writes, "like the community and traditions it embodies, and like the particularizing strategies of realism itself, affirms what may be the only intelligible reality—the humanly ordered world" (206). Suzanne Keen argues that realism's plots emerge in the precise locations that this order begins to break down. In "narrative annexes" such as the shady Mixen Lane in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the hedge lined path where Hetty Sorrel seeks to kill herself in *Adam Bede*, and the desolate American landscape in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, "unexpected characters, impermissible subjects, and plot-altering events" are allowed to appear "in an abounded way, within fictional worlds that might be expected to exclude them" (1). Keen's concept of the "narrative annex" indicates not only that novelistic narrative action is intimately related to narrative space, but also that generic convention tends to cohere around spatial coordinates. If, as I argue, realism consolidates social history by reconfiguring and reordering it spatially, then the descriptive tools used to establish the relationship between setting and genre must also offer clues to the relationship between literary convention and historical change. This argument harmonizes with Fredric Jameson's

claim, in “Realist Floor-Plan,” that the function of nineteenth century realists was “not merely to produce new mental and existential habits, but in a virtual or symbolic way to produce this whole new spatial and temporal configuration itself” (374). As Jameson notes, this project is coextensive with the Enlightenment imperative of desacralization, which instantiated the emergence of a “new space and a new temporality, a whole new realm of measurability and Cartesian extension... a realm of the infinite geometrical grid, of homogeneity and equivalence” (373). In addition to the ideological and symbolic transformations that realism enacted upon modern space, I also show how the realist novel grappled with the very real changes to the physical world that accompanied the ideological revolution that Jameson describes.

Although this project is primarily interested in the narrative function of place in the context of literary realism, it also necessarily engages ecocritical questions of literary environment. When the Marxist critics cited earlier in this introduction debated the relation between the “real” world and its representation, their concern with “reality” centered political and economic history. But the reality of the ecological world, as well as its susceptibility to human intervention, is also reflected in and enacted by nineteenth-century realism. Nineteenth-century steam power has been fixed by some as an early stage in what we now understand to be the Anthropocene: accordingly, Victorian thinkers were renegotiating their understanding of the human’s relation to a physical world that was both more fragile and more malleable than supposed. From Jesse Oak Taylor’s work on atmosphere in the novel to Elizabeth Miller’s work on fossil fuel and Victorian extraction ecologies, it is clear that nineteenth-century literature was a site for the ideological negotiation of changing perceptions of the natural world. In keeping with Rob

Nixon's concept of "slow violence," I argue that much of the ecological content of nineteenth-century fiction actually refers to human activity from the previous century. As industrial farms, factory pollution, and artificial irrigation slowly impacted the environment, their effects became available for nineteenth-century representation. This ecological delay is also an apt metaphor for the slow mediation of historical change into art: the violence of primitive accumulation, the nation-wide transformations of enclosure and improvement, and even the fraught encounters of early British colonialism, were realized and represented in the nineteenth century, despite eighteenth-century origins. Ecocriticism, then, is not only an ethical application of my readings in this project, but also an analytical mode immanent to its archive.

This archive, made up of British novels published from 1719 to 1907, is figured around the consolidation of the English nation and subsequent ascent of the British empire and the related rise of both the novel and realism. The political and literary history are related in fundamental ways. As Raymond Williams, Benedict Anderson, Franco Moretti, and others have argued, the novel helped to consolidate English national identity just as it underwent the demographic changes of industrialization. The specificity of the English novel is tied, I argue, to what Marx might call the "purity" of England's transition to capitalism. Of English land enclosure, Marx writes:

In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch-making that act as levers for the capital class in course of formation; but, above all, those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and "unattached" proletarians on the labour-market. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various

phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods. In England alone, which we take as our example, has it the classic form.

The “classic form” of English primitive accumulation is related to the transformative eighteenth century, when “great masses of men” were suddenly removed from the land and “hurled” as “free” proletarians onto a newly formed labor market. The Highland Clearances, the forced eviction of tenant farmers from 1750 to 1860, are perhaps the most famous example of Scottish land enclosure. Earlier agricultural modernization, a focus on sheep farming, and Scottish independence all differentiate the Highland Clearances from the English model. Ireland was also subject to land enclosure, but its status as an occupied colony positions it closer to overseas efforts at colonization than English land enclosure.² Accordingly, Scotland and Ireland both developed quite different novelistic traditions.

French realism was crucial to English writers, both as a point of inspiration and a foil of constant comparison. Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and later, Zola all innovated new realist techniques, often to great controversy. Was French realism also aesthetically linked to the history of land enclosure? Though land enclosure was also an important aspect of French national development, its size made the discourse around enclosure less urgent than in England. More importantly, the revolutions of 1789, 1830, 1848, 1851, and 1871 offered French novelists a more coherent view of national historical progress. As Peter Brooks suggests, French political volatility allowed Balzac to model Walter Scott’s historical novel while making “the historical gap a matter of a decade rather than some centuries” (21). Balzac “invented the nineteenth century by giving form to its urban

² For more on the complex relationship between the English and Irish realist novel, see Mary Mullen’s *Novel Institutions: Anachronism, Irish Novels, and Nineteenth-Century Realism*.

agglomerations, its nascent capitalist dynamics, its rampant cult of the individual personality” (22). The French novel is thus, at first, concerned more with society and aristocracy than the English. As the century progressed, relatively permissive French censorship gave the French novel its reputation for scandal as it treated adultery, sex, sex work, and queerness with relative frankness. Even as Zola turned towards the common characters that might populate the English novel, his representation included details of sex and violence that would embarrass even his English naturalist counterpart, Gissing. While the development of French realism is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is clear that land is still important to the French novel—the French proto-realist *La Princesse de Cleves* is centered around its titular character’s enclosed garden. While further inquiry into this history might clarify the exchanges between French and English realists, the English novel seems to have a particularly intimate connection to the history of English land.

This dissertation limits its geographic scope to English literature. Just as there are historical particularities that frame English literature’s relationship to land, the novel—as a form—also relates to space in a unique way. Formally, the novel sustains a unique relationship to the question of land. To be sure, English poetry is deeply marked by land enclosure in both form and content. The speaker of Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village” watches “rural virtues” leave the land as enclosure depopulates the countryside. By contrast, John Dyer, in *The Fleece*, advocates for improvement: “Inclose, inclose, ye swains! Why will you joy in common field... ?” John Clare, the best-known poet of English enclosure, catalogues the traits of the pre-enclosed countryside and the rural ways of life that it fostered. In poems like “The Mores” Clare offers an explicit account,

and critique, of enclosure: he details the “far spread moorey ground” that “never felt the rage of blundering plough” (167).

Still meeting plains that stretched them far away
In uncheckt shadows of green brown, and grey
Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
Nor fence of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect of the following eye
Its only bondage was the circling sky (167)

Remembering his youth, Clare compares the comings and goings of cows according to “common right” to his own nostalgic wandering. This openness, and the pleasure that attended it, “are vanished now with commons wild and gay.” Instead, “fence now meets fence in owners’ little bounds / of field and meadow large as garden grounds / in little parcels little minds to please.” Clare speaks for the collective loss of the commons in closing, “all sighed when lawless law’s enclosure came / and dreams of plunder in such rebel schemes / have found too truly that they were but dreams.” In this poem and others, Clare mourns enclosure, and celebrates the various joys of commoning. This poetic utility of the countryside, characterized by the loss of a childhood innocence and the political power of memory, is also an important feature of Coleridge and Wordsworth’s poetry. While this archive is crucial to understanding the history of enclosure and its relation to literature, their lyrical approach to nature is fundamentally distinct from realist landscape description, which even in its most lyrical mode is primarily interested in nature for the kinds of plot it enables. The lyrical, nostalgic mode of the Romantic poets figures historical loss as a kind of galvanizing moral fuel that compels the modern subject to navigate their adulthood with a greater ethical competency. The narrative mode that I describe offers a different theory of history: one in which the losses of the past do not

exist in pristine form in memory, but instead are transmuted into new incarnations across time.

It is this mediation across time that this dissertation hopes to capture. For that reason, its chapters span approximately two hundred years of literary history. The first begins in 1719, with the publication of *Robinson Crusoe*, during a time of intense debate about land enclosure and colonial expansion; the last ends with Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, published in 1907, another fraught moment for British empire and the politics of international extraction. While this timeline highlights the rise of the novel and the heyday of high realism, it also roughly maps onto the ascendance of industrial capitalism and British empire's rise to power. This dissertation suggests that all three are imbricated in their shared interests in land—the way it looks, the way it is managed, and especially the way that it is marked as property.

The first chapter, “In Common: Land Enclosure and the Idea of the Rise of the Novel,” reevaluates the way classic works of novel theory from Ian Watt to Georg Lukács define the novel's privileged relationship to capitalism. I argue that the techniques and politics of land enclosure underwrite the formal innovations that mark Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as the “first” English novel and make it retroactively recognizable as a realist work. I then turn to Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to show how Defoe's blatant ideological positions on the economic necessity of private property are neutralized in Austen's fiction and carefully incorporated into a more apparently natural aesthetic on which the courtship plot relies. The dialectic of disclosure and obfuscation described in my readings of Defoe and Austen persists across nineteenth-century realists' treatment of the land.

In chapter two, “Ruptures in Realism: Designing *The Mill on the Floss*,” I argue that George Eliot isolates the inevitable instability of capitalist development by vividly illustrating the modernization of land and water resources. *The Mill on the Floss* grapples with the symbolic location of English national identity, as well as the construction of historical development itself, not least in its narrative handling of infrastructure. I thus turn to two of Eliot’s contemporaries, the German architect Gottfried Semper and the British art critic John Ruskin, to place this novel in relation to a vibrant nineteenth-century debate on structural durability. I contrast Semper’s idiosyncratic writing about architecture and design with Ruskin’s early environmentalist thought in order to show that his contemporaries in architectural theory offer critical insights into the history of sustainability. Eliot’s pessimistic treatment of historical development introduces a new ambivalence into the realist convention of landscape description that is taken up further by Hardy and Conrad.

In the third chapter, “Bleak Prospects: Wasteland and National Identity,” I argue that Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* turns to the wasteland as a site of resistance to industrial capitalist expansion and the environmental destruction that attends it. Yet in doing so, as I demonstrate, Hardy invests Englishness with a native capacity to improve the productivity of *terra nullius* and economically transform putatively empty spaces both in England and on the colonial frontier. These stories offer insight into the balance between the capitalist construction of wasteland as empty and unusable, and literary representations such as Hardy’s that suggest that waste is intrinsically ecologically valuable.

In the final chapter, “The Artificial Landscape: *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent*,” I argue that Conrad indicts the novel’s role in narrating imperial history through global systems like finance and standardized time. Examining the history of Greenwich Park, the establishment of universal time, and the Prime Meridian Conference of 1884, I show the literary production of social space described in my dissertation was supplemented by turn-of-the-century augmentations of institutional power—not only in the form of police, as many have argued, but also in newly established international banks and standardized time. As imperial England transformed the balance of geopolitical power, the novel also reconfigured older conventions of landscape description to address the coexistence of international sites of extraction with cosmopolitan cities like London, thus remapping the tension between city and country inherited from the previous century. Taken together, the chapters of this dissertation establish the influence of land enclosure on the emergence and historical development of the British novel, detail its incorporation into the aesthetic techniques of realist authors, register the utility of landscape description in realism’s ideological treatment of English national identity, and further identify the applications of this utility in widening imperialist frameworks.

We can already observe the imperial frameworks composing English property and animating national continuity even at a distance from colonial contact zones. Glancing back, for instance, to the text with which this introduction began, we can see it in the function of Heathcliff, whose name refers to the windswept landscape around Wuthering Heights. When he returns from overseas with an unspecified amount of wealth, he invokes the mechanism of British colonization without an explicit colonial plot. As Jameson writes, his “mysterious fortune marks him as a proto-capitalist” and then

“recodes the new economic energies as sexual passion” (114). Heathcliff’s aging then constitutes “the narrative mechanism whereby the alien dynamism of capitalism is reconciled with the immemorial (and cyclical) time of the agricultural life,” transforming this “alien dynamism” into a “benign force which, eclipsing itself, permits the vision of some revitalization of the ever more marginalized countryside” (114). This “marginalized countryside” does not recede into the background of the novel. Rather, the “locus of history” disperses to saturate the realist text. The fraught final paragraph of *Wuthering Heights* ironically juxtaposes the bucolic natural scene above the graves with the reader’s knowledge of the violent history that lies just beneath the surface:

I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth (372).

This project contends that the unquiet slumber of centuries of violence tends to be expressed in the very quietness of the earth itself. As the bucolic, the pastoral, and the rural became avatars for the most ruthless executors of dispossession, were further disarticulated from the signification of ethical “goodness”—a historical-literary process underway from Virgil’s *Georgics*, if not earlier. In the realist novel, which relies on the production of imagined physical worlds, authors attempted to achieve an imaginary resolution of the very real contradictions of modern landscape. In doing so, they also provided a definitive record of those very contradictions. In the chapters that follow, this dynamic indicates the profound ideological power of the realist novel: a form that dialectically suppresses and at the same time registers a history of political struggle that continues to structure our collective relationship to the world.

CHAPTER ONE In Common: Land Enclosure and the Idea of the Rise of the Novel

This chapter attempts to reconcile British landscape aesthetics and nineteenth-century British literary realism with the amorphous and flexible ideology of imperialism that these two discourses afforded. The intimate relationship between these fields brings some undervalued details of the construction of nineteenth-century British political hegemony into relief. In the eighteenth century, there is an inchoate quality to nationalist and imperialist forms of domination that offers insight into the way that they rely on one another. The eighteenth-century landscape was a complex site of intersecting modes of thought: horticultural journals, aesthetic treatises and philosophical juvenilia, amateur enthusiasm, local knowledge, and elite taste convened around the garden. In part because of this disciplinary heteroglossia, realist authors were compelled to mobilize landscape architecture in the descriptive apparatuses of the novel—and to employ landscape as a metaphor for the aesthetic mode of realism itself. English gardens and realist novels alike attempt to build their own worlds and to design these worlds so that they generate opportunities for both isolation and sociality. More importantly, English gardens and realist novels both attempt to disguise their own artifice. A critical element of the aesthetic success of the landscape garden is its approximation of ecological reality, just as a crucial element of the nineteenth-century novel is its representation of social reality. The tension between the complex formal infrastructure and naturalistic verisimilitude of both the garden and the realist novel make them apt aesthetic siblings.

A condition of possibility for the kind of British landscape design that came into vogue in the eighteenth-century was the long process of informal and formal land

enclosure.³ Specifically, the British landscape garden was a response to the gradual eradication of commoning economies and the way that this loss began to physically structure the English landscape. The commons were (and continue to be) a rich site of historical nostalgia and national memory in the British literary imagination. These open fields, often situated amongst the cottages of the village, offered various forms of value for those who shared access to them. Commons provided opportunities for value that supplemented and partially disentangled rural workers from their attachments to the economic strictures of feudal social relations. These alternative modes of value were sometimes invisible to seventeenth- and eighteenth- century advocates of land enclosure, and are thus increasingly difficult to document across widening historical distance.⁴ Twigs, patches of sand, and scattered wildflowers were material useful, and sometimes a source of income. This modest income can be difficult to distinguish against the comparatively massive surge of wealth that agricultural reform allowed landowners to achieve.

Land enclosure, in its English context, was a process of gradual segmentation and privatization of common land that transformed the countryside. It was a varied and heterodox mode of expropriation that provoked varied and remarkably ingenious modes

³ There are different terms to describe the history of land enclosure, including legal, parliamentary, and piecemeal. I am using the terms “formal” and “informal” to echo the vocabulary employed by many historians of British imperialism. In that context “formal” connotes a direct governance over the people of a colonized area, while “informal” refers to the kinds of pressures that can be leveraged through economic monopoly and military presence. These seem to be apt terms for describing the two basic categories of enclosure: formal enclosure relies on a direct petition for an act of parliament, and informal enclosure can leverage bankruptcy, absentee landlords, bad neighbors, and insufficient documentation in order to control and consolidate ever larger parcels of land.

⁴ JM Neeson writes: “sauntering after a grazing cow, snaring rabbits and birds, fishing, looking for wood, watercress, nuts or spring flowers, gathering teasles, rushes, mushrooms or berries, and cutting peat and turf were all part of a commoning economy and a commoning way of life invisible to outsiders” (40).

of communal resistance. Some forms of enclosure were enacted simply through the construction of barriers, usually fences and hedges. By isolating a plot of land, property owners announced that commoners who were previously exercising their traditional right to the land were now trespassing. This informal consolidation was easier for landlords to perform and tended to elicit less resistance—partially because it relied on a bewildering audacity that was difficult to counter. With increasing frequency in the eighteenth century, landlords could submit petitions for a parliamentary act to legally extinguish common right to a parcel of land. This lengthier public process tended to incite more vigorous resistance and outrage. Different forms of resistance accompanied land enclosure at every moment of its deployment. Nevertheless, commoning economies began to decline between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries in England, with an increasing intensity across the eighteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, most of England was officially and “legally” enclosed. But during these years, nostalgia for the lost commons became a part of the English literary and political imaginary.⁵ It is unsurprising then that the common and the enclosed plot became central elements of English landscape aesthetic design. It is unsurprising, but certainly ironic, that the very country houses whose owners had capitalized on the violent expropriation of land would

⁵ While Raymond Williams memorably makes this point in *The Country and the City*, it has also been discussed with particular emphasis on the country house poem by Hugh Jenkins in *Feigned Commonwealths: The Country-House Poem and the Fashioning of the Ideal Community*, sexuality and gender by Jonathan Crewe in *Enclosure Acts: sexuality, property, and culture in early modern England*, and radical political discourse by Christopher Hill in *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*.

soon be surrounded by rolling fields that mimicked the nostalgic cultural construction of the lost common.

Historians have long debated the net effect of land enclosure and agricultural improvement. While the process of enclosure displaced masses of English peasants—essentially eradicating the “peasant” as a coherent class—some argue that the modernization catalyzed by the agricultural revolution compensated for this period of disruption and violence. Others, most notably JL and Barbara Hammonds in *The Village Labourer 1760-1832* and EP Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*, argue that the proletarianization of the rural laboring class had a cataclysmic effect on the agricultural laborer. Some, like J.D. Chambers and G.E Mingay, argue that land enclosure was a relatively smooth process that met little resistance: who could say no to the improvements to quality of life offered by increased agricultural productivity? Others, like JM Neeson and W.G. Hoskins, argue that there were not only various forms of resistance to formal and informal land enclosure but also that these enclosures did not necessarily develop a more efficient, organized, or manageable system of agricultural production. In fact, Neeson argues, many of the technologies of enclosure had deleterious effects on British agriculture. For instance, the fences and ditches of the enclosed system were less effective in controlling the spread of disease. Before long, the rapaciously reploughed and replanted land of the enclosed farm began to lose the benefits of nutrient cycling that had long been a part of the rotating strip system (128). Ann Bermingham provides an art historical analogue to Neeson’s economic history in *Landscape and Ideology*: she argues that the rustic landscape painting tradition that emerged in the eighteenth century was a reaction to the profound social change of land enclosure and the

radical physical change that it enacted on the English landscape. Ian Waites takes this argument even further in *Common Land in English Painting*. He attempts to construct a visual memory of the pre-enclosed English landscape using the recurring figure of the commons in eighteenth- and nineteenth- century landscape painting.⁶ Across all of these histories, the “loss” of the English commons figures as a significant moment in the development of British capitalism.

The general movement of the narrative that all of these histories give us is one from the “open field” to “enclosed plot.” The pre-enclosed English landscape was composed of several large arable fields worked by the landowner. These fields spread among wastes, which held many valuable resources for the underclasses of the village. The commons were interspersed among these larger arable portions of land and “unusable” wastes. The common fields were divided into long strips amongst those who owned property in town. The lack of hedges between these plots may have led to some neighborly tension that made it easier for landlords were ultimately able to convince their tenants to endorse the enclosed system. But the strip system also provided valuable benefits in nutrient management. The strips of the common arable field were generally organized into groups, or “furlongs,” that allowed those who shared ownership to rotate the use of a fallow portion. The furlongs abutted one another in right angles along which ran walkways of common right. The whole system, while organized, hardly acknowledged the relationship between one owner and one plot of land. Visually, these

⁶ The question “what did the commons look like” haunts the materialist histories of the commoner: aesthetic practices of the nineteenth century thus become incomplete archives for the historian of the eighteenth century.

fields would probably have seemed closer to an uncultivated landscape than what we now think of as farmland—especially the farmland of the English countryside. But this ragged, open network of land gave way to a regular patchwork of hedged, rectangular plots that has become the more familiar icon of the British countryside—largely because of the rustic landscape painting tradition of the late eighteenth century. The “openness” of the common field system finds itself approximately reproduced in the landscape gardening projects of the same century—so that paintings of country houses and large estates may have more visual relevance to the pre-enclosed English landscape than the rustic tradition that attempted to capture details of agricultural life.

The literary incorporation of land enclosure is particularly difficult to historicize because, just as there is a delay between the transformation of the land and its literary representation, so too are there delays between the architectural modifications that attended enclosure and the organic growth that followed.⁷ Fens were drained, forests cleared, and wastes flooded in order to produce arable land—but these modifications would take years to stabilize into the recognizable gridwork of the English countryside. Similarly, the loss of the commons and the presence of the barriers that enclosed them were slowly mediated into a set of anti-enclosure texts that relied on a nostalgia for an ideal relation to the land and its productive capacity.⁸ That utopic energy then found purchase in the aesthetic forms of the prospect poem, the landscape painting, and the

⁷ Humphrey Repton’s famous “Red Books,” which used moveable flaps to present a “before and after” look at his proposed designs are an apt example of the fantasy of immediate transformation that accompanies land improvement.

⁸ For more on anti-enclosure writing and the diggers movement, see Christopher Hill: *The World Turned Upside Down*.

redesigned landscape gardens themselves. The political outrage of the anti-enclosure movement found itself oddly reflected in the aesthetic debates around the most fashionable new features of the English garden. As time passed, the controversial dynamism of the eighteenth-century English landscape garden was put to work in symbolic service of English landed domesticity, nationalism, and rural beauty in the nineteenth-century realist novel. This final transformation is one of the oddest neutralizations of the tumultuous history of common land. The current chapter will account for the radical formal ingenuity that attended the multiple mediations of the rise of the novel. This process transformed the violence that displaced rural workers into an idyllic natural beauty that ultimately supplemented the apparent homogeneity of British national experience.⁹ I will recast the rise of the novel as a mediation of the common losses, and the illusions of common restoration, that gave the realist mode its astounding social power.

Visualizing Enclosure

The impact of land enclosure on visual art has been accounted for, but enclosure was equally influential on the development of the novel. Ann Bermingham argues that the English began to see “their landscape as a cultural and aesthetic object” in the eighteenth century, just as enclosure began to “radically alter the English countryside” (19). She writes:

⁹ The production of Benedict Anderson’s famous “homogeneous empty time” in *Imagined Communities*, 24.

This coincidence of a social transformation of the countryside with the rise of a cultural-aesthetic ideal of the countryside repeats a familiar pattern of actual loss and imaginative recovery. Precisely when the countryside—or at least large portions of it—was becoming unrecognizable, and dramatically marked by historical change, it was offered as the image of the homely, the stable, the ahistorical (9).

The ideological impact of the English landscape on visual art has been marked by art historians like Bermingham in the tradition of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century landscape painting, but the profound effect of that transformed landscape on the British novel has not received adequate attention. Bermingham claims that the countryside became ahistorical just as it became historically unrecognizable—producing a category of social life that distorted its own relationship to its actually existing referent. That is: the English rural scene was made to be timeless while referring neither to present realities of English agriculture nor to past versions of English countryside. As the landscape garden and the landscape painting tradition mutually stabilized one another, the similarly inchoate English novel found an opportunity for grounding its construction of place within an increasingly familiar national imaginary. To understand the British novel, then, and its place as an object of “novel theory” more broadly, it is crucial to consider the history of British landscape—which also demands a more thorough account of the relationship between the novel and space.

The past century of literary criticism has taught us to regard realist novels as social worlds that bear a precise, almost magical, relation to social reality.¹⁰ Despite the dense networks of causation and representation that constitute novelistic worldmaking,

¹⁰ Jameson’s *Political Unconscious* famously describes the “imaginary resolution of real social contradictions” using a range of examples from Greek mythology to cultural anthropology to evoke the magical quality of this literary capacity for resolution.

the relationship between the individual and the community has been framed as the primary mediating juncture between the novel and social reality. Bakhtin's heteroglossia is "another's speech in another's language;" ultimately a tool for the author to refract discourse so that the singular seems to take on the character of the multifocal (324). For Lukács, the power of the novel is to render a version of contradictorily fractured capitalist modernity with a sense of totality that registers the "organic indissoluble connection between man as a private individual and man as a social being, as a member of a community" (9).¹¹ Other theories of the novel are more sensitive to the function of space in determining communities available for representation under the realist mode. Franco Moretti memorably claims that novels contribute to the formation of nation-states by establishing boundaries of national identity and demarcating the social stratifications of this national identity *within* those boundaries. He goes so far as to claim that the novel is the *only* symbolic form that can represent the nation-state (*Atlas*, 17). Fredric Jameson's comparably ambitious "Realist Floorplan" describes a "spatio-temporal unity" of realism wherein one might encounter a "no-one in particular" who bears striking resemblances to the familiar countrymen of Benedict Anderson's "empty homogenous time" ("Realist Floorplan" 377, *Imagined Communities* 25). In "The Realist Floorplan" Jameson argues that the Enlightenment didn't simply desacralize a world of encoded meaning through the bourgeois cultural revolution, but also produced a "new space and a new temporality, a whole new realm of measurability and Cartesian extension" (373). For Jameson, the

¹¹ One could cite *Theory of the Novel*, which Lukács disavowed after his turn to Marxism, or *The Historical Novel*, perhaps his most influential work on the novel—but *Studies in European Realism* offers one of the most pointed and lucid accounts of his theory of novelistic form.

nineteenth-century novelist not only produced “new mental and existential habits” but in a “virtual or symbolic way” produced a “whole new spatial and temporal configuration” that will come to be known as “daily life” (374). His argument, however, is primarily organized around the urban aspects of industrialization: he suggests that the world became “one giant factory,” eliminating “the older kinds of communal experience which organized the life of the village or the peasant or aristocratic *Geimeinschaft* [community]” (375). With a greater sensitivity to rural life, Raymond Williams argues that the communal experience of daily life was not eliminated by industrialization, but rather mediated into new forms. This leads him to suggest that novels build different kinds of spatial containers that enable and disable certain kinds of activity: Charles Dickens’ dense cityscapes, Emily Brontë’s evacuated heaths, George Eliot’s precisely calibrated villages each correspond to different rubrics of social agency.¹² The social activities suggested by literary space, for Williams, constitute the most critical connection between the imaginary worlds of novels and the material realities that serve as their referents.¹³

¹² My understanding of realism is indebted to Raymond Williams, who helped to establish the crucial importance of both rural labor in the English novel in *The Country and the City* and *The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence*, but also the concept of “mediation” as a way of understanding the relationship between cultural production and the economic and social conditions of possibility that underwrite that product. As Carolyn Lesjak notes in *Working Fictions*, however, Williams’s valuation of immediacy and authentic feeling sometimes falls “prey to a reductive equation between representation and the real, in which labor is part of the picture only when it is directly represented” (10). Lesjak’s observation about labor and “lived experience” in Williams also corresponds to a problem with tracing landscape in the English novel: the accuracy, complexity, and frequency of actual representations of landscapes in realist novels are not the best metrics for evaluating the impact of landscape on the novel form. Similarly, the dichotomy between the “artificial” landscape garden and the “authentic” rural countryside does not necessarily get weighted in the ways that twenty-first century readers might expect—especially among authors for whom the ingenuity required to represent reality was a pressing philosophical and aesthetic concern.

¹³ I will use the term “social reality” to refer to the world that corresponds to the phenomenon of supposedly shared experience that structures many colloquial definitions of “reality.” The difficulties surrounding the definition and terminology of the “real” indicate the formal and philosophical complexity of the literary and aesthetic concepts of “realism.” While there are certainly many “realities” that depend on

As Jameson and Williams have shown, the novel marks a major shift in the social construction of space. Novelists produced new modes of representation and description as industrialization occasioned new orientations to the rhythms and temporalities of movement in the city, new structures of domestic life dependent on the working day, and new visual and affective orientations towards to countryside. For Jameson, the factory is the most salient metaphor for the spatialization of life under capitalism, while Williams focuses more frequently on how the exploitation of rural workers and finds its visual analogue in the increasingly significant figure of the country house. Somewhere between these two poles, I am suggesting, a major shift in the history of space was made possible by land enclosure. It follows, then, that visual forms that evoke the commons, most notably the landscape garden, also mark this historical shift. To read land enclosure as a condition of possibility for the novel form is to suggest that the kinds of social collectivity that inhere in the novel are renegotiations of residual modes of common life.¹⁴

As spaces, particularly the open fields of the early-modern English countryside, began to contort under the dramatic throes of agricultural reform, the kinds of imaginary representations that were aesthetically thinkable and politically useful underwent similarly violent convulsions. Instead of centering the world-historical individual, the modern subject, or the protagonist—what happens when a study of the rise of the novel

structuring causes like class, race, gender, nationality, and disability, the imagined distinction between the referent of the “real” and the representational objectivity of the “realist” work of art also misleadingly suggests that works of art are not constitutive elements in the construction of our various social realities. For the sake of any coherent discussion of the literary mode of realism we must suspend our disbelief and imagine that this distinction is possible.

¹⁴ See also: Carolyn Lesjak’s *Afterlives of Enclosure*, which argues for a utopian collectivity that is carried on from the commons in the realist tradition.

focuses on the spaces that enabled world-historical modernity to become thinkable? I am suggesting that this relationship between the long history of land enclosure in England and the long historical “rise” of the novel demands an analysis of the aesthetic terms that attend the incorporation of the commons into literary representation. If the rise of the novel does not merely reflect but ideologically facilitates the rise of modern capitalism, then the material conditions which contribute to that intensification and solidification find themselves metonymically, if not reflectively, represented in the form of the novel itself. While I take issue with what I understand to be sloppy equivalences between “enclosure” as a particular material process and other forms of separation that can be applied across all novelistic instances of structure and, especially, psychological interiority, I also hope to show how enclosed space provided the *conditions* for the representation of interiority. The aesthetics of enclosure are *not* expressed in the individuation of the self but rather in the imaginary development of shared spaces in which interior experiences can find communal expression. This counterintuitive claim introduces the possibility that the privatization of land may have *produced* new ontological possibilities for representing the “common” in a way that ultimately calcified the conditions for Britain’s late nineteenth-century imperial dominance.

At the broadest level, I am arguing that all British novels bear some relation to land enclosure—in their form, if not always in their content. I will focus on two English novels from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that figure as canonical landmarks on the timeline of literary history. By concentrating on *Robinson Crusoe*, frequently understood to be the “first” English novel, and *Pride and Prejudice*, which served as a rubric for many domestic novels of the nineteenth century, I emphasize the flexibility of

my claims about enclosure and the novel form. Defoe's novel describes the process of enclosing land, and Austen locates her critique of the financialization of courtship in landscape gardens that aesthetically imitate the enclosed commons that funded their design. Rather than an emergent form of psychological individualism, I suggest the novel is a fundamental reorientation of the social construction of space. Instead of focusing on a theory of the novel's capacity to mediate between individual and social scales of experience, I am suggesting that land enclosure is an integral condition of possibility for the novel as a literary form. To begin to describe this dynamic relationship it will be useful to begin with one of the most famous representations of the most crucial technology of land enclosure: the hedge.

Robinson Crusoe and the Artifice of Enclosure

In a striking passage from Daniel Defoe's 1724 text, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, he describes an unenclosed landscape in Surrey emphasizing the bareness of the unenclosed wasteland, while also registering the openness of the scene:

Those that despise Scotland, and the north part of England, for being full of waste and barren land, may take a view of this part of Surrey, and look upon it as a foil to the beauty of the rest of England... here is a vast tract of land, some of it within seventeen or eighteen miles of the capital city; which is not only poor, but even quite sterile, given up to barrenness, horrid and frightful to look on, not only good for little, but good for nothing. Much of it is a sandy desert, and one may frequently be put in mind here of *Arabia Deserta*, where the winds raise the sands... for in passing this heath, in a windy day, I was so far in danger of smothering with the clouds of sand, which were raised by the storm, that I could neither keep it out of my mouth, nose or eyes; and when the wind was over, the sand appeared spread over the adjacent fields of the forest some miles distant, so as that it ruins the very soil. This sand indeed is checked by the heath, or heather, which grows in it, and which is the common product of barren land, even in the very Highlands of Scotland; but the ground is otherwise so poor and barren, that

the product of it feeds no creatures, but some very small sheep, who feed chiefly on the said heather, and but very few of these, nor are there any villages worth remembering, and but few houses, or people for many miles far and wide; this desert lies extended so much, that some say, there is not less than a hundred thousand acres of this barren land that lies all together, reaching out every way in the three counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. (99)

In her history of wasteland, Vittoria Di Palma argues that the primary aesthetic and psychological orientation towards waste since the Enlightenment has been “disgust”—an affect she suggests is “at heart a fear of contamination, and it is this question of contamination that enables disgust—as a broader fear of pollution—to expand into the sociocultural domain” (7). It is easy to detect this disgust in Defoe’s description of the landscape in Surrey contaminating nearby forests, fields, wildlife, and livestock. The passage sustains three levels of threat that emanate from unenclosed land.

First, Defoe draws the north of England and Scotland into a comparison with the “rest” of England, signifying an implicit improving expansionism that migrates from the south of England, while using that southern landscape as a model. Then he invokes the dichotomy between city and country, noting that the land is “within seventeen or eighteen miles of the capital city,” which seems to suggest that the wasted land is especially inefficient because of the potential support it could give to the nearby urban center. Thus, northern England and Scotland are put into symbolic “rural” apposition to the “city” of southern England. Then, Defoe expands the scope of this relation by invoking “Arabia Deserta.” Conceivably, the project of enclosure and improvement could be extended to this desert—already an intense site of British mercantilist interest.¹⁵ Aside from the scalar

¹⁵ Here I am thinking of both Immanuel Wallerstein and Raymond Williams. Wallerstein’s familiar framework of “center, periphery, and semi-periphery” is described in *The Modern World System* as a mechanism of both nationalism and imperialism. He writes, “from the sixteenth century on, the nation-states of Western Europe sought to create relatively homogeneous national societies at the core of empires,

movement of the passage, the passage also sustains three levels of danger that emanate from unenclosed land. First, the “sterility” of the land stifles agricultural fertility: the land is “given up to bareness,” “poor,” and “feeds no creatures.” Second, the infertile land threatens the composition of the human body: its storms threaten to “smother” the speaker, who cannot keep the sand out of his “mouth, nose or eyes.” The ecological and medical threats bleed into one another, as the sand that chokes him goes on to “spread over the adjacent fields” and “ruin the very soil.” This leads to the final and most threatening aspect of unenclosed land: it has the capacity to extend into and disrupt more organized spaces. The nearby forests, fields, wildlife, and livestock are all pushed away by the turmoil between heath and sand. There are not even any “villages worth remembering,” Defoe writes, and seems to suggest that this is an effect of the “Desert” that extends “not less than a hundred thousand acres.” More important than the acreage of the waste is its shape, which “reaches out every way in the three counties.” This tentacular disruption of unenclosed land is imaginatively apposite to the order and control of the enclosed plot. While Defoe also registers the aesthetic displeasure of the unenclosed land (it is “horrid and frightful to look at”), this visual effect is secondary to the biological and ontological threats posed by this waste. Inefficiency, unhealthiness, and irrationality are all important catchwords in the movement for enclosure in

using the imperial venture as an aid, perhaps an indispensable one, to the creation of the national society” (33). Similarly, Williams writes in *The Country and the City*: “...a model of city and country, in economic and political relationships, has gone beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, and is seen but also challenged as a model of the world. It is very significant that in its modern forms this began in England. Much of the real history of city and country, within England itself, is from an early date a history of the extension of a dominant model of capitalist development to include other regions of the world” (279).

eighteenth-century England—and in Defoe’s writing the traces of imperialist ideology that this movement underwrites are already visible.

Elsewhere in the text, Defoe is more ambivalent about unenclosed land. He describes the common pastures of Sussex as “delicious” and notes that the heaths of Dorking were “singled out for the best Air in England” by some “learned Physicians” (106). Still, the majority of the writing in the *Tour* is reserved for farms and villages that Defoe considers well organized, productive, and fertile. Readers of *Robinson Crusoe* will recognize the descriptive distaste for the infertility of Surrey in Crusoe’s own initial impressions of the island. His first action on the island is to climb to the top of a hill to “view the country and seek a proper place for... habitation” (71). His survey generates similar language to Defoe’s reaction to unenclosed Surrey:

I had with great labour and difficulty got to the top, I saw my fate, to my great affliction—viz. that I was in an island environed every way with the sea: no land to be seen except some rocks, which lay a great way off; and two small islands, less than this, which lay about three leagues to the west. I found also that the island I was in was barren, and, as I saw good reason to believe, uninhabited except by wild beasts, of whom, however, I saw none (72).

The barrenness and openness of the scene present themselves as a great affliction—so Crusoe sets to work.¹⁶ Though the island turns out to boast a very remarkable ecology

¹⁶ Crusoe describes the freedom of enclosing land on an “uninhabited” island when he builds a paddock for his goats: “Those who understand such enclosures will think I had very little contrivance when I pitched upon a place very proper for all these (being a plain, open piece of meadow land, or savannah, as our people call it in the western colonies), which had two or three little drills of fresh water in it, and at one end was very woody—I say, they will smile at my forecast, when I shall tell them I began by enclosing this piece of ground in such a manner that, my hedge or pale must have been at least two miles about. Nor was the madness of it so great as to the compass, for if it was ten miles about, I was like to have time enough to do it in; but I did not consider that my goats would be as wild in so much compass as if they had had the whole island, and I should have so much room to chase them in that I should never catch them. My hedge was begun and carried on, I believe, about fifty yards when this thought occurred to me; so I presently stopped short, and, for the beginning, I resolved to enclose a piece of about one hundred and fifty yards in length, and one hundred yards in breadth, which, as it would maintain as many as I should have in any reasonable time, so, as my stock increased, I could add more ground to my enclosure.”

indeed, Crusoe doesn't waste a moment in applying the sense of order that Defoe misses in places like Surrey, Scotland, and northern England.

Defoe's sense of the necessity of enclosure as a technology of control that produces agricultural fertility drives the narrative engine of *Robinson Crusoe*. If Lukács, Jameson, Williams and others are correct in their conjecture that the development of capitalism and the development of the novel share social origins, then land enclosure is a point of convergence. Similarly, if the received status of *Robinson Crusoe* as an origin of the English novel and as an origin myth in political economy's history of capital has any foundation, its concern with land enclosure represents a significant analytical nexus.¹⁷ While some read the action of the novel as a parable of accumulation, an experiment in settler colonialism, or a manifesto of modern individualism, all three can be distilled down to the novel's actually existing concern with the mechanism of land enclosure.

Robinson Crusoe has often been read as a novel of capitalism in formation and a document of early British imperialism. The latency of both capitalism and imperialism is bound up in the Crusoe's nearly compulsive need to wall himself in, before there are ever clear suggestions that there is anything that he needs to keep out. Soon after Crusoe finds himself stranded on what he presumes to be an uninhabited island, he builds himself a wall. Working with soil, wreckage, and "the chests and boards and pieces of timber which made my rafts," he gradually constructs a wall around a "place I had marked out for my fortification" (88). As he often notes, he has nothing but time, so he resolves to make the wall "very thick and strong" as he is still "jealous of... being attacked by

¹⁷ Marx remarks on the political economist's habit of using Crusoe in their description of primitive accumulation in *Capital Vol. 1*.

somebody” (92). Throughout the twenty-eight years of his residency on the island, Crusoe continues to refashion, reinforce, and reimagine this original wall. This obsessive wall-building seems perpetually necessary. The narrative is structured so as to constantly refresh Crusoe’s need for protection with a sense of urgency. This urgency has been taken up by many scholars as part of the voracious drive of capitalism. Others frame the psychological individualism of this urgency as evidence of the text’s position as the origin of the English novel. These lenses sometimes obscure the connections between wall-building and land enclosure.

Robinson Crusoe is central to two discourses, both of which give the individual “Crusoe” himself analytical primacy. In political economy, Crusoe has been figured as a cipher of emergent capitalist modernity. His incessant drive to catalogue, stockpile, and appropriate material from the island resonates with narratives of primitive accumulation and frequently comprises an allegory for commodity production. *Robinson Crusoe* is also often posited as one of the first British novels: Ian Watt calls the book an “origin point” for the tradition of the novel. While it does not feature the emphasis on “personal relations” that will become so important to later novels, the book as Watt reads it “annihilated the relationships of the traditional social order” (92). That social order, the residual feudalist networks of fealty and medieval communalism, is supplanted by a demand for a new matrix of relationships more amendable to what Watt calls “the rising tide of individualism” (92). While some have argued that Crusoe’s impulse to build walls is a feature of this individualism, it can also be understood as an effect of his desire to continue participating in the imagined community of the British nation.

Crusoe's possessive individualism is not at odds with, or even an alternative to, English nationalism, despite his social atomization and geographic distance from England. The "individualism" that Watt identifies as a key feature of the novel is also an important aspect of the fantasy of English exceptionalism that the novel produces. Srinivas Aravamudan has argued that Defoe's later fictional writings compose thought-experiments with which to diagnose England's global position for national advantage within newly dynamic networks of exchange.¹⁸ While Defoe himself held complex and often heterodox theories of national and transnational economy, translations of his theories into a fictional narrative with a global scope consistently imply that the nation is best defined in a worldwide context. Crusoe's isolation on the island artificially imposes the metaphorical limits of a fully protected nation, while the latter two Crusoe books expand this isolation into East Indian and Chinese markets. This "denaturalizes and defamiliarizes" any "organic-cultural understanding" of England as a nation (*Defoe, Commerce, and Empire*, 60). Aravamudan argues that Englishness was still "unfixed" so that the early novel implicitly situates the nation in a worldwide context in which it is always already artificial and constructed; only later, he argues, do "national traditions" retroactively designate the nationalist origins of the realist mode (*Enlightenment Orientalism*, 62). This doesn't discount the nationalist strains of the early novel, but rather emphasizes that the novel is what John Richetti has called a "fantasy machine" (9).

In *Robinson Crusoe*, the fantasy of English dominance crystalizes around enclosure. Crusoe describes many types of enclosed spaces on his island: my cave, my house, my country seat, my plantation, my fortress, my castle, my enclosure. While his

¹⁸ See: *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 68.

small domestic compound is important, much of the novel's action centers around his production of different forms of agricultural spaces. The fencing in of this space has two functions. First, it deploys fuzzy conventions of an early English imperial legal discourse in order to proffer a proclamation of property ownership. Second, it produces narratability and novelistic form, which rely on the increasingly precise segmentation of land. The dynamic tension between these two functions also roughly maps onto readings of the novel as a parable of political economy and readings that emphasize the formal ingenuity of the narrative. The land "problems" that Crusoe encounters involve isolating himself and disguising his work as natural flora and fauna, domesticating local wildlife, and reproducing the luxuries of English modernity in the semi-mythic primitive state of Caribbean self-sufficiency. The narrative problems of the text involve convincingly describing a world with a tendentious relation to the "real" world of the Caribbean, developing networks of causation and suspense without familiar social structures (or, for much of the novel, other human characters), and constructing a legible arc in Crusoe's island tenure that moves generally towards civilization.¹⁹ The obstacles of survival facing Crusoe on the island and the narrative problems that the text sets out to resolve have an intimate relationship: castle making and world-building, rational farming and character formation, material invention and the ideology of civilization.

¹⁹ Peter Hulme notes that "those who take Defoe's 'realism' for granted do not often get as far as the Caribbean, so the relevant historical points need making firmly. The only uninhabited islands in the (extended) Caribbean were the unapproachable Bermudas—and they became an elaborate reference point for that very reason" (185). Noting that the "realism" of the novel is historically inaccurate is not to "indict" the novel for "not being realistic enough, or for not fulfilling its realist promise, but rather to suggest that the realistic detail of the text obscures elements of the narrative that, if the above description is accurate, would have to be called mythic, in the sense that they have demonstrably less to do with the historic world of the mid-seventeenth century Caribbean than they do with the primary stuff of colonialist ideology" (186).

Of course, Crusoe offers various rational explanations for his segmentation of the island into smaller and smaller enclosures, even when there is no competition for space. These range from his personal need for protection to the isolation and control of livestock. For instance, after he begins work on a paddock for his goats, he recounts his grand initial plans:

I say, they will smile at my forecast, when I shall tell them I began by enclosing this piece of ground in such a manner that, my hedge or pale must have been at least two miles about. Nor was the madness of it so great as to the compass, for if it was ten miles about, I was like to have time enough to do it in; but I did not consider that my goats would be as wild in so much compass as if they had had the whole island, and I should have so much room to chase them in that I should never catch them. My hedge was begun and carried on, I believe, about fifty yards when this thought occurred to me; so I presently stopped short, and, for the beginning, I resolved to enclose a piece of about one hundred and fifty yards in length, and one hundred yards in breadth, which, as it would maintain as many as I should have in any reasonable time, so, as my stock increased, I could add more ground to my enclosure. (124)

In this instance, Crusoe encloses land to make it easier to chase and catch his goats. The fence both marks his ownership and makes his ownership practical. While ownership is the primary intention for Crusoe's drive towards enclosure, ordering of the land is also an authorial method for managing narratability. Smaller parcels of land with key identifying features (for instance Crusoe's luxurious "country seat") afford three key narrative features. Assembling small, more easily recognizable places allows for scenes that occur in time and show evidence of the passage of time. Not only do these enclosures allow the novel to escape the claustrophobic psychological bottleneck of Crusoe's mind, but the rigidly defined spaces also begin to take on textured symbolic meaning that make certain kinds of activity possible, and others unthinkable. Or, more simply put, in some spaces the reader can expect certain things to happen. When these expectations are confirmed,

the narrator has capitalized on the semantic efficiency of the reader's expectation. When these expectations are not met, the narrator has generated a narrative surprise. The safety of the castle, the relaxation of the country seat, and the industriousness of the goat paddock draw from existing codes of social meaning in order to engage narrative logics that are readily at hand. At the same time, when the seeming stability of these meanings is put under threat, the fragility and constructedness of the social order are also brought into relief. The narrative experience of moving through the novel becomes one in which the physical world is established and made familiar, so that the vulnerability of social reality interacts with the tension and suspense of the narrative itself.²⁰

Enclosure enacts both a proclamation of ownership and an effect of communalization: the ownership of this place makes it legible to other potential owners, who can relate these spaces to places of their own. By producing this sense of readerly inclusion through the mechanisms of exclusion, the wall endorses a particularly English mode of ownership. To feel the need to put up a wall is to be familiar. To understand the limits and necessities of private property is to be rational. These audacious modes of claiming ownership tend to rely on their narrow legibility within English discursive circuits of philosophy and religion: class, gender, nationality, and, most significantly, race are all entangled in this legibility. Ultimately, the place-making imperative in *Robinson Crusoe* is complicit with the nationalist ideologies that structured British imperialism.

²⁰ See Benedict Anderson's reading of the exteriors in *Noli Me Tângere*. Anderson claims that the descriptions of exteriors are delivered "in a way that it may be recognized" to move the reader from the "interior" time of the novel to the "exterior" time of everyday life (27). As usual, Anderson immediately translates a spatial phenomenon into a temporal effect, but this homogeneous time relies on a continuity of space.

The mechanisms of imperialism share many features with the technology of land enclosure. Defense, farming, and invention fuse in the process marking out land, walling it off, and ‘improving’ its productivity. These activities take on a particular salience in a Caribbean context. Many of the terms that Crusoe uses to describe his enclosed spaces on the island correspond to what Patricia Seed has called “signs of possession” in the New World. She argues that early-modern English people had an idiosyncratic set of practices that constituted modes of establishing property ownership, many of which would have been illegible outside of England itself.²¹ Seed notes that the English “referred to their own activities in occupying the New World as planting a garden” (27) and argues that “no other country used the garden in the same way, because in no other European country was the garden a symbol of possession” (29). She describes three activities that would have been understood, by the English, as legal declarations of ownership. First, building a house on land would have established property ownership according to longstanding logics of the English village. Second, working a garden—especially with fertilizers and plows in order to “replenish” and “subdue” the land—would have been recognizable as a claim to ownership through Protestant understandings of the injunction in Genesis to “be fruitful and multiply” and Lockean conceptions of “natural” right to property established by mixing one’s labor with land.²² Most important, however, was the symbol of the fence or the hedge, which signified ownership within the longstanding but increasingly parliamentary process of English land enclosure.

²¹ Patricia Seed writes that the English “referred to their own activities in occupying the New World as planting a garden” (27) and notes that “no other country used the garden in the same way, because in no other European country was the garden a symbol of possession” (29).

²² See John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*.

Many common fields, especially those in the Midlands, were hedged with ash, elm, quicket, whitehorn, or hawthorn—which takes its name from the old English *haga*, or “enclosure” (Hoskins, 153). These quickly growing and dense plants, frequently planted alongside a shallow ditch, allowed for the demarcation of private property without annihilating the rural aspect of the scene—nor the potential usage of the fields for fox hunting. Hedges were maintained by cutting and laying thorn—precisely the same technique used by Crusoe. As Gary Young writes, “for [Arthur] Young and other improvement promoters, the beauty of the enclosed landscape lay in what was its most expressive visual and material symbol: the hedgerow... while the hedge—and its variants, the wall and the fence—was not new, what was novel in the eighteenth century was the speed with which the landscape became inscribed with these markers of landed property (88). Subsequently, “hedgebreaKng” became one of the best-known practices of resistance to enclosure. The hedge changed the way that individuals could navigate rural territory, while also marking this change on the surface of the land itself. While hedges, wall, and fences were thought of practically as mechanisms for protecting crops from marauding local animals, they also signified a specifically private—rather than common—ownership of the land. Land held in common in England would not have been fenced in, as continuous and unregulated access was one of its key features. In a striking parallel, many indigenous North American communities developed technologies for managing land use that did not rely on fences. Those invested in the project of agricultural improvement had similar interests in the production of “private property” in both rural English and North American contexts, while those who resisted these new

definitions of agricultural modernity were likely to have structural incentives to resist the concept of “private property” as well.

In other words, what gets coded as “modern” in *Robinson Crusoe* can be more accurately named “English,” but this kind of Englishness was still in formation in both American and European contexts. This is important, because a large part of the delight that the novel attempts to produce is the sense of marvel that attends the many kinds of modernization that Crusoe manages to enact on the island. This delight has been mined for metaphors by several political economists. In *Capital Vol. 1*, Marx writes scathingly of the political economist’s “fondness” for Robinson Crusoe stories, with particular contempt reserved for Ricardo (169). His disdain for the Robinsonade is echoed later when he describes primitive accumulation as something akin to the theologians’ fixation on “original sin” resituated into the discourse of political economy. His analysis emphasizes that the seeming “transparency” of Crusoe is misleading in any analysis of value because the “personal dependence” of the laborer in medieval Europe is nothing like that of Crusoe. The serf, the peasant, and the factory worker—all differently situated under different regimes of economic exploitation—function within structures of sociality from which Robinson is happily exempt. Marx takes a moment to ironize the “watch, ledger, ink, and pen” that Crusoe rescues from the shipwreck so that “like a good Englishman” he can begin to keep a “stock book” cataloguing all of the “useful objects he possesses” (170). While Marx is attempting to describe the categorical differences that mark the scalar slip between individual and social theories of value, he also underemphasizes the further significance of the “watch, ledger, and ink pen” that Crusoe rescues. The fantasy of Crusoe as a self-sufficient man, an experimental figure in a

system of resources, ignores the commodities that he manages to fish from the wreckage of his ship, as well as the value that his island plantation ultimately accrues after his return to England.²³ Although the ink and pen are resonant for their technological rarity, it ought to be remembered that the lumber that Crusoe pulls from the ship is the earliest functional object (besides some biscuits) that he finds valuable on his island. If commodities are inherently social, as Marx argues, then the isolation of Crusoe is paradoxically shattered the moment he begins to enclose himself in a wall built of lumber that has travelled across the globe. It is significant that Crusoe is not *cut off* from European social networks, but that these social networks become *reified* in the salvaged objects that Crusoe repurposes for life on the island.

European technology, seed stock, and a great deal of lumber complicate any reading of Crusoe that frames his story as an allegory of primitive accumulation. But while his European technology facilitates his success on the island, the true key to his life in the Caribbean is the wondrous fertility of the land itself. While crops and wildlife are crucial to his survival, the most marvelous natural resource on the island are the trees that Crusoe uses to build his enclosure. He discovers this plant by accident. He cuts “piles in the woods” which cost him “a great deal of time and labor,” and then drives rows of these stakes into the ground until the “fence was so strong that neither man nor beast could get into it or over it” (96). Three years later he reveals that these stakes have sprouted and formed a remarkable natural fortification:

²³ Peter Hulme calls this the “impurity” of Robinson Crusoe as a “simple,” which is “so graphically illustrated by the various trips to the wreck, but equally importantly represented by what Christopher Hill calls Crusoe’s ‘mental furniture’, the ideological and cultural presuppositions he inevitably carries with him to the island” (187).

The circle or double hedge that I had made was not only firm and entire, but the stakes which I had cut out of some trees that grew thereabouts were all shot out and grown with long branches, as much as a willow-tree usually shoots the first year after lopping its head. I could not tell what tree to call it that these stakes were cut from. I was surprised, and yet very well pleased, to see the young trees grow; and I pruned them, and led them up to grow as much alike as I could; and it is scarce credible how beautiful a figure they grew into in three years; so that though the hedge made a circle of about twenty-five yards in diameter, yet the trees, for such I might now call them, soon covered it, and it was a complete shade, sufficient to lodge under all the dry season. This made me resolve to cut some more stakes, and make me a hedge like this, in a semi-circle round my wall (I mean that of my first dwelling), which I did; and placing the trees or stakes in a double row, at about eight yards distance from my first fence, they grew presently, and were at first a fine cover to my habitation, and afterwards served for a defense also, as I shall observe in its order. (119)

This hedge ends up solving a key problem that Crusoe encounters throughout all of his different experiments with enclosure. Anything that Crusoe builds to protect himself will also signal to visitors that Crusoe is there, but the hedge offers a simple solution; it disguises itself as an indigenous forest. When he finds a footprint on the beach, his fragile sense of comfort collapses. The first thing he does is “throw down” his more conspicuous enclosures. He then reinforces the hedge around his cave with an even more convincing forest—constructed of the same quick-growing stakes:

When this was done I stuck all the ground without my wall, for a great length every way, as full with stakes or sticks of the osier-like wood, which I found so apt to grow, as they could well stand... Thus in two years' time I had a thick grove; and in five or six years' time I had a wood before my dwelling, growing so monstrously thick and strong that it was indeed perfectly impassable: and no men, of what kind soever, could ever imagine that there was anything beyond it, much less a habitation. (169)

Part of the defensive function of Crusoe's hedge is its own invisibility, even though the segmentation and organization of the land makes it intelligible to both Crusoe and the reader. As though he is covering his tracks, Crusoe disguises his own alterations to the landscape. The justification of self-defense is a narrative explanation—but it also seems

possible that Crusoe's desire for a particularly English mode of enclosure is aesthetic. The hedge was a memorable and highly visible icon of the process of land enclosure in England. While the hedge essentially performed a policing function, it soon became an important part of the beauty and pleasure of the English countryside—especially in the poetic imagination.²⁴ Crusoe describes the “country seat” and his “plantation” that he builds on his domain as spaces of pleasure as well as protection. Even the hedge is trimmed so that it “might spread and grow thick and wild, and make the more agreeable shade” (160). The “natural” aesthetic is increasingly tied to its own ability to disguise itself—even when it is marking the boundaries of private property.

Crusoe's hedge is functionally ideal because it is invisible as a wall. This invisibility is an effect of its natural growth. Though Crusoe adds concentric rings of hedge to the original, and then surrounds this with more sporadic planting to imitate a forest, transforming the plant itself into a wall requires no additional labor. It twists itself into a lattice of defense that also disguises the other kinds of work that Crusoe performs on the island. In *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property*, Wolfram Schmidgen registers an irony in the concealment of enclosing barriers.

The extent of his belongings... all announce someone who is in control of his insular environment. This control is made conspicuous by the exhibition of visible signs of cultivation. Fortification, walls, plantations, hedges, and enclosures: these elements present the visible marks that Crusoe's labor has left on the island's surface. To show such evidence of occupation is the inventory's basic possessive strategy... Such confidence notwithstanding, Crusoe's inventory also registers a radical anxiety over the possibility of turning the island into property. This anxiety is most strikingly evident in Crusoe's interest in concealment. The wall that marks the boundaries of his habitation, for instance, simultaneously renders

²⁴ John Clare is probably the most important poet to register this ambivalent relationship to the English hedge, a body of work that John Barrell has studied in *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place*.

Crusoe's dwelling invisible. Yet paradoxically, Crusoe's descriptive act makes both house and wall visible and declares as private property what, in actuality, is not immediately recognizable as such (38).

With Patricia Seed, Schmidgen notes that Crusoe's activity on the island is part of a "possessive strategy" representative of the "English way" of colonialism. But to hide the marks of cultivation would seem to negate the declaration of ownership. This paradox is dramatized by Crusoe's fixation on the figure of the cannibal. Crusoe's deep fear of the cannibal, who he presumes to be the only possible inhabitant of the island, compels him to disguise his wall even as he uses it to declare his presence. Despite Crusoe's specific motivations, the invisibility of his hedge is fundamentally continuous with British land enclosure. Both rely on a calculated expropriation that strategically redefines the terms of holding property—insisting on the legitimacy of a claim to ownership within a system that is not conceptually oriented to dispute that claim. The hedge, in both, is a way of insisting on this ownership while simultaneously suggesting that such ownership is natural, organic—even beautiful. At worst, the hedge seems to be local flora; at best, it will be seen for its technical and aesthetic ingenuity. In either case, the violence of the assertion of power that the hedge performs is difficult to discern.

Robinson Crusoe is, in more ways than one, about enclosure. While it has also been read as a dramatization of the production of the functional categories of the Self and Other, especially in a colonial context, I am suggesting that physical enclosure simply produces the occasion for this psychological divisibility. The novel dramatizes the expansive reach of mercantilist trade, before sharply and violently limiting its own scope to the island upon which Crusoe is marooned. Once on the island, Crusoe immediately begins to survey the land and partition it into discrete parcels intelligible as "owned,"

“ownable,” and “not worth owning.” This process, as many have noted, performs a reassuring psychological function. In a particularly evocative account, Joan DeJean notes that Crusoe’s “Great Wall provides the basis for the knowledge of the demarcation between inside and outside, Self and Other, civilized and cannibal that is in turn the foundation of his self-definition” (181). It is during this process of demarcation that Crusoe begins to fashion his own domestic space. As he builds his home, the narrative begins to transform from the flat reportage of adventure romance into something more psychologically intimate and texturally detailed. The reader learns about Crusoe’s stomach illnesses, his desire for a pipe, his love and then distaste for his many feline companions. Taking DeJean’s argument a step further, perhaps the process of enclosure on the island is not a *metaphor* for the enclosure and production of psychological interiority. Rather, the formal process of describing enclosure in transparently “fictional” prose instantiates the types of writing that we have come to associate with characterological “interiority.”²⁵

It is worth stressing that the concept of characterological “interiority” attempts to make personhood thinkable in spatial terms. The word itself is a spatial metaphor: some physical or psychic aspect of the person operates as a boundary that demarcates the self from everything else.²⁶ Thoughts, emotions, spiritual energy, moral fervor: all are contained within the boundaries of the self. This interior is a space of paradox: strangely vacuous but also overcrowded, ultimately far too cramped but also unthinkably

²⁵ See Catherine Gallagher, “Rise of Fictionality.”

²⁶ Importantly, the word is also linked with the concept of “truth,” as its earliest usages recorded by the OED are from John Norris’ 1701 essays on the nature of community and truth.

expansive. It is also from the interior, in protestant and Cartesian accounts of the self, that one might commune with God. As Crusoe experiences his epiphanic shocks of self-indictment on the island, for example, the reader is given access to a spiritual state that seems to transcend both the time and place of his isolation on the island. Indeed, the passages of spiritual reflection often serve as a hinge between the different formal methods that Defoe employs to account for the minute-to-minute activity of Crusoe's daily life.²⁷ This suggests that the interior opens up infinitely during an activity like prayer, but the exterior opens just as infinitely—whether in physical terms of intergalactic expansiveness or the spiritual realm of divine revelation. The curious element of the division between interiority and exteriority, then, is not the space included or excluded, but the infinitely flexible lines of demarcation that manage to encompass the characterological expanse.²⁸

²⁷ This relationship between spirituality and interiority is humorously echoed in Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*. This complex experiment in sensation and epistolary fiction pits several "interiorities" against one another in the panoptic reconstruction of a crime, and opens with Gabriel Betteredge, who turns for ethical and moral advice to two books: The Bible and *Robinson Crusoe*.

²⁸ Alex Woloch's *The One vs. the Many* has been influential for many scholars in rethinking the characterological networks of the realist novel, especially in terms of the nineteenth-century British novels peculiar density. His interpretative method relies on the bifurcation between the "character space," which he defines as "that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole" and the "character-system," which he defines as the "arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces—differentiated configurations and manipulations of the human figure—into a unified narrative structure" (21). Surprisingly, then, "interiority" remains crucial to Woloch's nested categories of characterological form. Indeed, it is the sense of interiority produced by realist description that generates the peculiar tension of the novel, which "has always been praised for two contradictory generic achievements: depth psychology and social expansiveness, depicting the interior life of a singular consciousness and casting a wide narrative gaze over a complex social universe" (25). Woloch ultimately argues that the formal instability of realism is an effect of "too many people" rather than too many details—and constructs an analytic that borrows terms from Marxist economic structuralism in order to unfold the dynamics of this tension. Emily Steinlight significantly advances his study of character density through her account of the biopolitics of population in *Populating the Novel*. She suggests that this sense of the "too many" develops a "systematic emplotment of superfluity" that undermines the very hierarchical distinction between the major and minor character (21). For Woloch, the distinction between protagonist and that flat minor character can be thought of in terms of

If Robinson Crusoe, in his productive solitude, has served many as a study of primitive accumulation, he can also offer some insight into the gradual construction of the character-space, and its insertion into the character network—especially when the novel is understood in relation to the agricultural revolution. British land enclosure and agricultural reform fundamentally change the way that nature is understood as an aesthetic object. As the unpleasant regularization of urban life finds itself resurfacing arable farmland, the landscape garden becomes the visual repository of the commons. This inversion of signification robs transparency and formal design of both moral coherence and aesthetic viability. Instead, the natural is always dissembling, hiding its own construction through elaborate tricks of perspective and disguise. The individual is privileged from almost every position in the landscape garden, just as Crusoe's interiority becomes more developed with every year he spends isolated on the island. Transposing this individuality into the character-networks of novels with more populous casts of characters requires a range of formal devices that must dissolve as quickly as they resituate the interior in relation to the social world. With the spatial dynamics of this network in mind, I now turn back to the idea of the rise of the novel.

different kinds of narratological labor; for Steinlight, this distinction is a subject of the realist novel itself, indicating the increasing instability of the self in an increasingly aggregate century.

In both of these thoughtful responses to the masses of humanity that crowd the pages of the realist novel, the capacity for the representation of human interiority is a faculty of the novel that is presumed to demand a majority of textual space. I wonder, though, if the demands of the many, especially in the nineteenth-century English literary imagination, might not also have a great deal to do with the character's access to, and use of, both common and private space. Is Jo from *Bleak House* so hard to read because he cannot read, or because he (unlike Esther Summerson) has no place to sit down and collect his thoughts? Is Mary Barton granted the fullness of an interior life against her aunt's flatness because of a moral judgement of prostitution, or because Mary still has the modest luxury of a small Manchester home? In order to think through the relationship between space and interiority, and its historical roots in the fractured politics of the land enclosure movement, it has been useful to pare down the many and focus on the one.

The Rise of The Novelistic Common

Most theories of the novel center on the development of the modern individual, while claiming to address class systems in which those modern individuals find themselves. This focus on subjectivity occasions significant exclusions of the spatial dynamics of historical development. The model for this type of novel theory, and the most famous account of the origin of the British novel, is Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel*.²⁹ Even though Watt claims to be offering a socio-historical account of the emergence of the form, he takes the individualism that he describes for granted in his method of analysis. His focus on the habits and attitudes of the middle-class subject limits the novel to an epistemological phenomenon without fully accounting for the broader historical changes that contributed to the formation of this middle-class subject.³⁰

²⁹ In *Institutions of the English Novel*, Homer Obed Brown argues that the "linear history of the novel as having an 'origin' and 'rise,' the history we have been brought up on, with its genealogies, lines of descent and influence, family resemblances, is itself a fictional narrative—a kind of novel about the novel" (177). This story about the rise of the novel suppresses the actual heterogeneity of the discourses and forms that "contribute" to the institution of the novel. For Obed Brown, the "rise" of the novel is a narrative that is granted institutional validity in the early-nineteenth century—in collections such as Walter Scott's *The Novels of Daniel Defoe* and *Ballantyne's Novelist's Libraries*. Many have commented on the inaptitude of aesthetic and historical adjudications of eighteenth-century novels which use the rubric of nineteenth century realism as a measure—but without this measure it is perhaps inaccurate to call these texts "novels" at all. In the mid-twentieth century, novel studies had another resurgence in Ernest Baker's *History of the English Novel* and F.R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition*. While it may be true that no study of the form has been as influential as Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, it is important to recognize the way that the genre itself has been repeatedly constructed and institutionalized across several periods of literary history. I would wager that each instance of literary history in which critical attitudes towards the form are renegotiated represents a historically situated transformation of social relations towards common right and property. For instance, the novel theory of the 1940's and 1950's centers on nation-formation and the construction of the middle class, crucial aspects of the increasingly intense discourse around decolonization and postcolonial space. While that is outside the scope of this project, I hope to emphasize that tendency for the novel to efface its own ideological history has been cyclically reproduced in the scholarship that attempts to chart this history.

³⁰ Scholars who foreground the newness of the novel, like Ian Watt, Barbara Hardy, Maximilian Novak, Lennard Davis, and Nancy Armstrong, tend to situate the rise of the novel in the eighteenth-century so as to

Watt argues that modern realism erupts from the philosophical position, originating in Descartes and Locke, that “truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses” (12). The novel, according to Watt, is a literary embodiment of this ontological individualism.³¹ Characters who seem to be “real” people with plausible names populate a world with both temporal and geographic markers of familiarity. Watt suggests that the detailed descriptions of Crusoe’s life on the island noted earlier in this chapter (his love of his pipe, his disgust with his cats) rely on a “closer view which shows the [historical] process being acted out against the most ephemeral thoughts and actions” (24). This “air of authenticity” is a convention that Watt calls “formal realism.” Formal realism is not *discovered* by writers like Defoe or Richardson, but rather consolidated from previous conventions and brought to the foreground of novelistic narratives. The

emphasize its privileged relationship to the rise of industrial capitalism. Some, like John Richetti, Wolfgang Iser, Barbara Hardy, and Erich Auerbach, look to previous narrative forms like romance and epic to dissociate prosaic “formal realism” from capitalist development. Others, most notably Michael McKeon, look to these previous forms in order to argue that capitalism is a substantial social force well before the eighteenth century. While the question of the relationship between the novel and capitalism is by no means settled, the tendency to bring together “modern individualism” and the novel can often be thought of as a set of bywords for this association. Lukács remains the most familiar theorist of the nexus of capitalism and the novel. Even in *Theory of the Novel*, which he later repudiated, Lukács’ sense of the novel as a form intimately tied to the social experience of individual life under conditions of capitalist alienation is palpable. In *The Historical Novel*, *History and Class Consciousness*, and *Studies in European Realism* he is even more explicit. The novel is not only the predominant art form of modern bourgeois culture but provides, at least in its most vibrant moments before the disillusionment of 1848, an opportunity to envision the sensitivity of historical formations to the activity of individual actors. In properly dialectical form, then, the novel takes shape around the bourgeoisie just as it offers imaginary modes of overcoming that class formation

³¹ Watt argues that England before the eighteenth century was a world in which Aristotelian universals prevailed. This world produced plots in which general types performed familiar kinds of activity against a general background of literary convention. In a Cartesian world in which individuality and originality become increasingly valued, plots are produced that are to be acted out by specific people with particular circumstances. While the concept of “realistic particularity” is too abstract to congeal into a recognizable generic form, it finds expression in the modified novelistic relation to characterization and “presentation of background” (17). The “habitual” tendency of the novel to accord attention to “both the individualization of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment” becomes a distinguishing feature of the novel from previous forms of fiction (18).

significant eighteenth-century innovation, for Watt, was the gradual elimination of conventions that detracted from formal realism, a process that he argues was in keeping with the increasing ontological precedence of philosophical realism. But in order for “philosophical realism” to become thinkable, England had to change in some significant ways. The big question, for Watt, is why eighteenth-century England provided the social conditions for the subsequent literary innovation of “formal realism.”

He locates these conditions in the economic transformations that helped to shape a unique class of English readers. Watt argues that, despite low literacy rates, an expanding middle-class began to transform the very concept of reading. His logic follows a process of elimination. Working-class people would not have had many incentives to read. Reading was understood as either a leisure activity for the aristocracy or a skill for middle-class positions like clerk and tradesman. At the opposite end of the class structure, the richest of English readers would have held some of the strictest opinions on the coarseness of the novel, opting instead for expensive new collections of classics. Middle-class readers, on the other hand, could not have afforded such luxurious sets, leaving them the option of inexpensive volumes like *Clarissa* or *Tom Jones*. The novel was thus significantly associated with the middle class.³² He argues that this transition from the high-priced model of literary patronage to a system organized around

³² The poorest literate people in England were probably purchasing cheap ballads and chapbooks that provided abridged accounts of chivalric romances. Watt argues that “for our particular purposes... this poorer public is not very important,” a claim dubious to some of his later interlocutors (42). Women are important, however, especially because lending libraries became more accessible in the 1740’s, which Watt claims “activated” the “potential readership” of middle-class British women.

booksellers precipitated the “technical innovations” of “copious particularity of description and explanation” (56).³³

Watt’s argument rests on the assumption that the formal realism of literary fiction was a result of the transformations in the English economy that led to the production of a distinct middle class. This economic transformation is, most broadly, the transition from semi-feudalism to capitalism. I rehearse Watt’s familiar argument here to emphasize the way that human individuality dominates his analysis of the entanglements between capitalist modes of production and literary form. His emphasis on the rise of “philosophical realism” is an abstraction of material changes to the English way of life. A more precise articulation of the historical period of transition that marks the rise of the novel, I would suggest, is the sweeping agricultural revolution that reorganized the English relationship to the city and the country.³⁴ Watt’s history of the English novel and the various responses that his history has elicited tend to situate the locus of “formal realism” in the individuals writing or being written into existence by English novels. The crucial aspect of spatial formation is submerged in this account.

As the most famous account of the English novel, *The Rise of the Novel* has been subject to a variety of contestation and modification. For instance, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar attempt to reorient Watt’s account so that it is more attentive to women

³³ As novelists began to rely on maintaining profitable relations with booksellers, they were rewarded for a tendency towards two kinds of prolixity: “first, to write very explicitly and even tautologically might help his less educated readers to understand him easily; and secondly since it was the bookseller, not the patron who rewarded him, speed and copiousness tended to become the supreme economic virtues” (56).

³⁴ This modification also better aligns the dates of the social stimulus (increasingly intense movements for land enclosure) and what he calls the first novel (*Robinson Crusoe*). The century between Descartes and Defoe, and the half century the Tenures Abolition Act of 1660 and Defoe, make some of Watt’s conjectures temporally unconvincing.

writers, while maintaining a focus on the dramatic expansion of the middle class. In a more thorough rebuttal Michael McKeon, dubious of Watt's historical claim that the eighteenth-century novel emerged alongside the formation of the English middle class, antagonistically claims that the middle class was in development as early as the thirteenth century. For the purposes of this chapter, the most important critiques of Watt's theories of the novel are raised by Nancy Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. She suggests that the most pressing questions about the English novel are: why did women suddenly begin to write respectable fiction in the eighteenth-century? What allowed them to then become prominent novelists in the nineteenth century? How is it that "on this basis" some women were able to "achieve the status of artists during the modern period" (7)?³⁵ In her answers to these questions, Armstrong argues that the novel *produced* a new understanding of the distinction between genders that allowed for it to seem like women were "better equipped" to handle the intricate particular details of social life that the novel form demanded. Even more importantly, Armstrong sets out to make it clear how this relationship between form and gender could come to seem so natural.

Attempting to denaturalize the figure of the possessive individual that structures Watt's analysis, Armstrong inverts his argument that the novel was a response to philosophical and economic changes that foregrounded the individual subject. For her,

³⁵ Although Watt revises Leavis' narrowly conceived "great tradition" to include previously undervalued eighteenth-century novelists, he offers totally inadequate answers to these questions of gender. He links the success of Defoe and Richardson to the philosophy of individualism that they shared with their rapidly expanding readership, but "when it comes time to account for Jane Austen, historical explanations elude him, and he falls back on a disappointing claim: 'the feminine sensibility was in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel'" (7). According to Armstrong, theories like Watt's fail because they try to explain the rise of the novel as the history of a "male institution."

the novel *produced* a new kind of modern subjectivity, rather than surfacing as a *product of* a new subjective formation.³⁶ Her argument performs a Foucauldian reorientation of the relationship between the subject and the historical force of the novel. However, she still frames the linked rise of the novel and transition towards capitalism as a product of subjectivity, ignoring some of the material processes that contributed to the formation of domestic space. According to Armstrong, novels encourage readers to believe that sexual desire always existed in something like its modern form, and that this desire must be domesticated, or it would threaten to destabilize society. The novel thus participates in sequestering women within a sphere of domesticity, both by *representing* women as domestic subjects and by *interpellating* women as private subjects.³⁷ Men are represented as the agents of the political and public world, while women negotiate a domestic and private space that becomes increasingly coded as apolitical. The most surprising aspect of Armstrong's argument is her claim that this reformatory new mode of representation ultimately encloses and polices residual structures of collectivity. This transition upends the associative matrix between morality and certain kinds of leisure: the privacy of novel reading becomes respectable, while the public-facing festival becomes suspect. Early in the eighteenth-century, Armstrong claims, reading a novel was considered "tantamount to seduction" but towards the end of the century certain novels become acceptable for women, children, and servants to read instead of being idle—recommended by and

³⁶ She is even more explicit about this link between the novel and subjecthood in her more recent book, *How Novels Think*, where she claims that "the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same" (3).

³⁷ Women are not merely subjected to male domination in Armstrong's argument. By making the domestic sphere the site where the process that form the modern subject takes place, Armstrong shows that women also exercise, and are complicit with, new forms of power.

supplementing feminine conduct books (18). “At that point,” Armstrong argues, “the novel provided a means of displacing and containing longstanding symbolic practices—especially those games, festivities, and other material practices of the body that maintained a sense of collective identity” (18). By enclosing the figure of the woman within a domestic space of apolitical desire, the symbolic methods for the formation of collective social identity were restricted to a masculinist political space.

Armstrong repeatedly emphasizes that the social identity of the woman was “self-enclosed” through novel reading, not only marking her off from the political world of men but also providing a site through which politics could be disguised, mediated, and naturalized.³⁸ While I agree with her argument about the twin productive and disciplinary functions of the novel, it seems to me that her emphasis on individual subjectivity occludes the spatial mechanism by which this novelistic domestication operates. She argues that as “the marketplace driven by male labor came to be imagined as a centrifugal force that broke up the vertical chains organizing an earlier notion of society and that scattered individuals willy-nilly across the English landscape” that the household’s dynamic was then reconceived as a “centripetal” one (95). According to Armstrong, the household “simultaneously reentered the scattered community at myriad points to form the nuclear family, a social organization with a mother rather than a father as its center.” (95) The language of landscape and community in Armstrong’s argument is significant.

The family home indeed becomes a “magical space” where the atavistic public sphere

³⁸ Armstrong’s definition of “enclosure” seems to be neither spatial nor psychological, but textual. In her reading of *Pamela*, she writes “Richardson stages a scene of rape that transforms an erotic and permeable body into a self-enclosed body of words” (116). Linguistic and semantic closure are ratified by the apparent ability for closure that the physical form of the novel allows, marked by its very boundedness as a genre with a beginning, middle, and end.

attains moral significance. But if the masculine marketplace is a centrifuge of social relations, and the feminine household a countervailing mechanism of centripetal conglomeration, then we might think of the function of the novel as analogous to the enclosing function of the hedge: it delimits and isolates specific places for specific purposes. On the other hand, the unregulated growth of the marketplace can be compared to both the contaminating influence of the pre-enclosed commons and the endless expandability of capitalist accumulation. Troubling this paradox even further, the household can be understood as both the repository of communal social value *and* a demarcation of property by which capitalist ownership becomes legible. What Armstrong helps make clear is that the novel *seems* to sustain a strict separation between openness and enclosure, but that this dichotomy is an alibi for the dialectical entanglement of segmentation and expansion. Taking her argument further, however, this paradox can be shown to ultimately *destabilize* the distinction between private and public space itself, extending the domestic logic that Armstrong describes beyond the walls of the country house.

Essential to the conduct books on which Armstrong's analysis of the modern subject draws, the country house is the icon of middle-class moral value. Resisting the ostentatious decadence of the aristocratic household, the model of the country house was supposed to value productivity, economy, and frugality as ends in themselves. This household differed even from the frugal Puritan households of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries because it refused identification with mode of income. The "modern household" she argues "did not identify the source of one's income with a certain craft, trade, region, or family; its economy depended on money earned on

investments. Echoing Raymond Williams' description of the centrality of 'money from elsewhere' to the country house novel, Armstrong notes that money made the household into a self-enclosed world whose means of support were elsewhere, invisible, removed from the scene" (73). This country house participated in the bourgeois project of eliminating class difference in favor of valuing people by what seemed to be "intrinsic personal qualities" (74). The seemingly democratic model opens the possibility of the "good life" of the country house to many more people. In the process, however, this reorientation of social object relations creates a newly legible code of meanings within the home.

To make this argument, Armstrong traces the way that conduct books provided inventories of the kinds and quantities of household objects (as well as domestic servants) that corresponded to specific incomes. These lists manage to advance a masculine system of value while inscribing these values into feminine discursive fields—subsequently imbuing objects with tremendous symbolic resonance. She argues that "the vertical system of relationships based on the quantity of the man's income" is preserved while "this quantitative standard is also inverted as it is enclosed within a female field of information where qualitative values ideally dominate" (86). In other words, the conduct book reified social relations through the process of describing the objects of an iconic domestic space. The descriptive language of a domestic object world is thus practically readymade for Richardson and Austen to take up in the novel. The "world of objects invested with meaning" are put to use by novelists who proceed from the assumption that "a similar interpretive mechanism could be put in motion merely by representing these objects in language" (86). The feminized household was a "familiar field of information"

that had already solidified its social meaning and could easily then be “written as fiction” (87). By the beginning of the nineteenth century, “the sophisticated grammar organizing that field evidently had so passed into common knowledge that it could simply be taken for granted” (87). How does this transference between the “enclosure” of a field of information into the grammarian logic of a certain kind of household operate within the spatial coordinates of the novel’s physical descriptions? How does this process of enclosure manage to launch its grammar into “common knowledge” in a way that naturalizes the politics of those meanings? The answers become clearer when attention is given to those discursive fields that settle onto objects outside of the household itself.

Armstrong specifically focuses on novels like *Pamela*, *Emma*, and *Jane Eyre* that she calls “domestic fiction.” Even in those novels, “domestic” space is situated within a wider natural environment: think of the sunflower garden in *Pamela*, the picnic on Box Hill in *Emma*, and the hilly paths surrounding Thornfield Hall. Rather than illuminating the stability of the domestic space through a juxtaposition with the wildness of a natural exterior, these novels extend the enclosing logic of domesticity that Armstrong outlines into the semi-public space of the landscape garden or park.³⁹ While the garden may offer different opportunities for narrating courtship and conversation, it adheres to the same conventions of discourse produced by the domestic centers that it surrounds. To escape these narrative conventions, characters often need to literally escape the recognizable landscapes that order domesticity: think here of Pamela’s receipt of Mr. B’s most

³⁹ The garden around Thornfield might seem “wild,” but I think that the combative and uncomfortable walks that Jane takes around the garden are no less violent than the activities that take place *inside* the hall. Brontë may have a peculiarly brutal description of domestic space, but this description can still be extended beyond the interior of the home.

important letter on her journey home, Harriet's plot-shifting run-in with gypsies in a country lane, or Jane's grueling journey across the moors to arrive at Moor House. While the garden is perhaps somewhat more relaxed and amenable to clandestine entanglements than the house itself, it still carries the associations and expectations of domestic space. The limits of this domesticity are most clearly visible when characters cross boundaries *out* of the garden: how far does the influence of the house extend?

In her book on what she calls "narrative annexes," Suzanne Keen argues that the narrative techniques of Victorian novelists encoded the natural world with social meaning—much like the domestic world that Armstrong describes. Keen writes that "boundaries, borders, and lines of demarcation evoke not only the long tradition of traversing an ever-altering imaginary terrain, but also the censorious language of the Victorian cultural watchdog... they become a vital element of novelists' manipulation of spatial difference and dramatic generic admixture to challenge representational norms" (3).⁴⁰ She suggests that there are conventions that enforce a "proper 'realm' of the novel" so that the "narrative annexes" of border regions and boundary crossings ultimately reinforce the "commitment of Victorian novelists to the representation of spatially coherent fictional worlds" (2). George Levine makes a similar point in *The Realistic Imagination*: "the realist's landscape, like the community and traditions it embodies, and like the particularizing strategies of realism itself, affirms what may be the only intelligible reality—the humanly ordered world" (205). Victorian realism, specifically, tends to "exclude extremes" not only in "heroism, psychic intensity, or violent behavior, but to geography as well" (204). Because it sticks to a "human scope," Levine argues, the

⁴⁰ The hedge, unsurprisingly, is Keen's first example of the spatio-narrative novelistic device.

realist landscape becomes intelligible. The “human scope” of the realist landscape is not a purely “human” space, but rather a set of “mixed conditions, bringing together nature’s mysterious energies and the human capacity for using and ordering those energies in farms, and gardens, and parks” (205). In both Keen’s and Levine’s accounts of the landscape of the realist novel, there is a pronounced element of social consensus governing the types of spaces that tend to be represented. In large part, the novel is not amenable to the wastes and wilds outside of enclosed English farmland. Even the occasional crossings into narrative annexes of wastes, lanes, and ditches are moderate in comparison to the sublime rockfaces that might be found in a painterly representation by Gainsborough or Turner. This sense of order domesticates the countryside England itself, which effectively neutralizes the political meanings of these enclosed landscapes. Armstrong’s argument about the enclosure of domestic space and subsequent ascription of symbolic meaning to domestic objects can be augmented to address the enclosure and domestication of the English countryside, which not only extends the enclosing logic of gender into nature itself but also destabilizes the division between desire and politics that the private/public binary is supposed to instantiate.

According to Armstrong, novels like *Robinson Crusoe* were lauded by eighteenth-century educational theorists for their capacity to teach women that they could achieve what Crusoe accomplished on the island: “a totally self-enclosed and functional domain where money did not really matter” (16). The novel came to play an “indispensable role in directing desire at certain objects in the world,” but not because novels like *Robinson Crusoe* “administered a particularly useful dose of didacticism” (16). Rather than coercing its readers with coherent and convincing lessons, the novel shaped the

hegemony of desire through consent (16). The production of a middle-class readership quite literally relocated women and children from the supposedly unregulated spaces of pleasure associated with the rural carnival and instantiated a regimented procedure of indoor curricula, effectively enclosing the collective experience of social life. The functional hinge of consent, however, suggests that there was something that the novel gave back to readers that supplied compensation for the loss of the “games, festivities, and other material practices of the body that maintained a sense of collective identity” (18). Novels produce a sense of common experience with certain characters, as well as a (usually implied) sense of communion with other readers. In early British novels like *Robinson Crusoe* it is easier to chart the relocation of social communities from the actually existing countryside into imaginary landscapes of literature. As the novel gathers an arsenal of self-effacing formal strategies, increasingly familiar as a “realist aesthetic,” it becomes more difficult to distinguish the residual marks of land enclosure on the textually domesticated world.

The history of the novel is fraught with erasures. Armstrong’s focus on the erasure of women from this history uncovers the dramatic disciplinary function that the novel fulfilled in capitalist reorientations of social life. As a technology of social alienation, the novel had to imaginatively produce a sense of community. One aspect of this productive function was a symbolic reconfiguration of the British landscape into an extension of the country home. The history of land enclosure was also erased in this massive project of ideological production—lending its structures of order and containment to the communal function of realist description. To make some of these claims about enclosure and the rise of the novel more concrete, and to link them more

directly to explicit representations of landscape gardens, I will now turn to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

The Landscape Garden and the Marriage Plot

Jane Austen's novels have a famous sensitivity to financial detail. Raymond Williams writes that "she sees land in a way that she does not see 'other sources' of income. Her eye for a house, for timber, for the details of improvement is quick, accurate, monetary" (*The Country and the City* 115). Because her methods of financial description are so localized, the intimacy between land enclosure and the marriage plot in her novels is difficult to discern. While Williams emphasizes Austen's monetary eye, he also notes that Austen's eye for *land* is different from other kinds of wealth. Land is the form of property by which colonial wealth can best be laundered of its unsavory character. The "quick, accurate, monetary" account of houses, timber and details of improvement are precise—but colonial spoils and the wealth of newly booming financial speculation have to be mediated into a more concrete form in order to find themselves within the visual scope of Austen's narration. Williams writes:

...money of other kinds, from the trading houses, from the colonial plantations, has no visual equivalent; it has to be converted to these signs of order to be recognized at all. This way of seeing is especially representative. The land is seen primarily as an index of revenue and position; its visible order and control are a valued product, while the process of working it is hardly seen at all. (115)

Williams suggests that the "improvement of houses, parks, artificial landscape" absorbed the actually increasing wealth accumulated through the improvement of "soil, stock, yields, in working agriculture" (115). These dual improvements, the latter with an

ambivalent freight of unseemly avarice and the former enjoying a beneficial association with cultivation, participate in the transactions of the marriage economy. While both marriage and landscape are underwritten by what Williams calls a “greedy and calculating” materialism, Austen manages to convert “good income” into “good conduct” (116). The power of this conversion relies on its disarticulation of land from the history of enclosure and a simultaneous aesthetic integration of marriage and landscape.

Austen first obscures the relation between landscape and the history of enclosure. Although *Pride and Prejudice* takes place across a range of homes in the southern English countryside, there is only one reference to the working-class community that could have lived on this land, had they not been forced off by centuries of enclosure. During Elizabeth Bennett’s stay with Charlotte Collins, she takes note of Lady Catherine de Bourgh’s active position within the community:

Elizabeth soon perceived that though this great lady was not in the commission of the peace for the county, she was a most active magistrate in her own parish, the minutest concerns of which were carried to her by Mr. Collins; and whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented or too poor, she sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty. (165)

Though these lines primarily ironize Catherine’s self-importance, there is a legitimate managerial energy to the activity described. This passage is one of the only in the novel that recognizes, through caustic satire, the forms of work that provide some of the material basis for the comparably luxurious lives of the characters in the novel. While the kinds of people who perform that labor do not actually appear diegetically as characters, Catherine’s delusional relation to the complaining, impoverished, argumentative cottagers faintly records a trace of actually existing labor relations. It makes sense that

Catherine de Bourgh, who is shown to be over-reaching, ostentatious, and self-obsessed, uncouthly reveals these traces of exploitation at the root of country wealth.⁴¹ De Bourgh, who is so socially vulgar as to make explicit references to Elizabeth's unfortunate family circumstances, also inadvertently makes the link between the "cottager" and the gentry faintly visible. Her overbearing involvement with the Bennett plotline is offset by her role as a "magistrate" in her own county. The narrator's biting tone, ironizing her unpaid labor, suggests that her activity in the village crosses both the boundaries of good taste and the physical boundaries that the novel's narrative scope otherwise obeys. Williams writes that Austen cannot see what William Cobbett records in *Rural Rides*: "what he [Cobbett] names, riding past on the road, are classes. Jane Austen, from inside the houses, can never see that, for all the intricacy of her social description" (117).

Elizabeth's observation about Lady Catherine reframes what is, perhaps, implicit in Williams: that Austen *erases* class, rather than being blind to it. But even from inside the house, and especially from inside the garden, it is impossible to totally ignore the traces of enclosure that have made their mark on the English landscape.

The garden is perhaps the most important kind of place in *Pride and Prejudice*: the value of the garden to the middle-class woman as she negotiates the marriage plot inscribes this negative image of land enclosure into the heart of the narrative form of the novel. In *Bloom: Botanical Vernacular and the English Novel*, Amy King notes that "key scenes of courtship" take place "either in the gardens of private estates or on long walks

⁴¹ Darcy's relation to his land, on the other hand, naturalizes labor as part of the picture—his groundskeeper and housekeeper are deferent to his kindness as an employer—which signals the work relation—but Darcy seems to manage his property through a luxurious kind of dis-attachment.

in the vicinity of one's home" (52). When courtship moves from the drawing room to the picturesque garden, King argues, the reader understands that the conjugal stakes have been heightened. The formal features of the garden contribute to this readerly sense of escalation: King notes that "the garden provides an enabling privacy, which suggests erotic potential within the reassuring context of the garden's innocent symbolics" (52). The garden signals to the reader that a courtship "climaxing before the dialogue or even sometimes the interior monologue registers that fact, precisely because of the situation of the characters in the garden" (52). While King argues that this symbolic function is a result of contemporaneous botanical discourse of sexual coupling, I understand the erotics of the garden to be a product of another important aspect of courtship: land appraisal. The novel frames Elizabeth's maturation across the novel as one from hasty judgment to practical consideration and uses her relationship to the land as evidence for this development. The scenes of Elizabeth in landscape harness the rich symbolic lexicon of nature to mirror Elizabeth's lack of affection, at the opening of the novel, and her increasing cultivation, as the novel progresses. Early in the story, when she journeys across the countryside to visit her convalescent sister, she is naively inconsiderate of her proximity to the land; by the end, she has become an expert both in appraising its value and in recognizing the aesthetic and social conventions governing its proper use.

Land enclosure hides in the interstices of Austen's descriptions, barely resisting erasure. The integration of the marriage plot and the landscape garden is more easily visible, although it also hinges on key terms like disguise and concealment, which pepper the text in reference to both mannerism and design. Darcy "owns" his lack of defect "with no disguise," and finds "disguise of every sort" to be an "abhorrence." Later, he

disgusts himself by keeping Jane's visit to London a secret from Mr. Bingley, explaining to Elizabeth that "perhaps this concealment, this disguise was beneath me." After Elizabeth learns of his true affection, she tells him that though he took trouble to "disguise" himself, the nobility and justness of his feelings were still apparent. Mrs. Bennett and her daughters are frequently recommending the prudence of concealment, just as the garden later "conceals" Darcy from her view.

The presence of the garden as a setting is hidden at first, only emerging as Elizabeth ventures away from the landscape of her childhood. It is as though there is no need to describe the physical world before she ventures to new terrains. When she journeys across the countryside to visit her convalescent sister early in the plot, the country is presented as rugged, dirty, and healthy. This narrative annex shortcuts the process of flirtation and courtship between Elizabeth and Darcy—but it leaves physical marks of her transgression. She crosses the field "at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within a view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise" (33). The "stiles" that Elizabeth jumps are markers of the enclosed properties across which she travels, but the infraction is registered in the discourse of etiquette rather than property law. The Bingley sisters frown upon her behavior—"that she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst and Miss. Bingley" (33). Darcy, however, is divided "between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion and doubt as to the occasion's justifying her coming so far alone" (33). Elizabeth is noticed for her daring, but remains oblivious to the social expectations that her journey failed to

meet. The rules of engagement are disguised, just like the lines of property—disguised as hedges and picturesque stiles—that she hopped on her walk.

Walking is the mechanism by which Elizabeth learns to discern the social meaning of land. Walking reveals that landscape is a text. Several characters explicitly compare walking to reading—and many scenes in the novel show how walks provide characters with the opportunity to read one another. In this extended conceit, the landscape takes the place of the narrative, and the walker provides a proxy for the reader. Austen carefully shows how the land choreographs the movements of characters who traverse it. Elizabeth and Darcy talk while “walking together in the shrubbery” and are interrupted by the Bingley sisters coming “from another walk” (51). As the two groups attempt to converge, the garden refuses to support the formation of the party: because “the path just admitted three” Darcy decides, “this walk is not wide enough for our party. We had better go into the avenue” (52). Elizabeth’s answer uses the language of landscape to recognize that the courtship is not yet developed enough for such a grouping: “No, no; stay where you are—You are charmingly group’d, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth” (52). The landscape here functions primarily as a narrative structure of organization, disguised by the language of picturesque aesthetics.

The *bildung* of the novel charts Elizabeth’s competency at decoding the social messages embedded in landscape. At the beginning, Elizabeth enjoys a naïve intimacy with the land; as she matures, she begins to recognize the discursive functions embedded in natural scenery. Her own rhapsodic excitement about her invitation to take a tour of the

Lake District with her aunt and uncle is structured around their own social exceptionalism. She exclaims:

What are men to rocks and mountains? Oh! What hours of transport we shall spend! And when we do return, we shall not be like other travelers, without being able to give one accurate idea of any thing. We will know where we have gone—we will recollect what we have seen. Lakes, mountains, and rivers, shall not be jumbled together in our imaginations; nor, when we attempt to describe any particular scene, will we begin quarreling about its relative situation. Let our first effusions be less insupportable than those of the generality of travelers! (152).

The conversation that prompts this outburst is an argument about the mercenary quality of courtship and the financial indelicacy of matrimonial affairs. Elizabeth recoils from the calculation of romance and attempts to distinguish herself by asserting the exceptionality of a relation to nature. These linked realizations—that the marriage market is fundamentally economic, and that understanding land can distinguish a person from unremarkable “generality”—prepare Elizabeth to recognize the social gracelessness of Mr. Collins. His blunders offer a lesson in the importance of disguising land ownership that teaches Elizabeth the importance of a passive relationship to land in which spectatorship is the position of power.

The epiphanic turn to geography reorients Elizabeth as a figure situated *by* the landscape and by the broader communal consensus it represents. To obey the prompts of aesthetic taste is to conform to national standards of courtship and etiquette. Upon her arrival, Elizabeth is a figure situated *by* the landscape: her arrival is “declared” by the garden. “The garden sloping to the road, the house standing in it, the green pales and the laurel hedge, everything declared they were arriving” (153). This passive orientation towards the land contrasts sharply with the social tactlessness Mr. Collins’ exhibits towards his garden; he overexplains the constructedness of the design so that its effect of

verisimilitude to nature is compromised, while also placing him in an ingratiating relation to overt financial wealth:

To work in his garden was one of his most respectable pleasures; and Elizabeth admired the command of countenance with which Charlotte talked of the healthfulness of the exercise, and owned she encouraged it as much as possible. Here, leading the way through every walk and cross walk, and scarcely allowing them an interval to utter the praises he asked for, every view was pointed out with a minuteness which left beauty entirely behind. He could number the fields in every direction, and could tell how many trees there were in the most distant clump. But of all the views which his garden, or which the country or kingdom could boast, none were to be compared with the prospect of Rosings, afforded by an opening in the trees that bordered the park nearly opposite the front of his house. (154)

This tour through the garden provides a contrast to the later tour of Pemberley that Darcy offers Elizabeth. While Collins' tour helps Elizabeth to understand how Charlotte could have accepted the compromise of such an unpleasant husband, it also further establishes Collins' inability to comfortably inhabit the role of landed gentleman: he vulgarly enumerates the subtly aesthetic features of his own estate in a manner approximate to quantification, pacing his speech so that the delicate art of conversation is foreclosed to his visitors. Collins' ineptitude takes on greater intensity when one considers that he is an actual interloper into the Bennett family's continued ownership of their estate due to the much-maligned entailment. His persistent deference to Catherine de Bourgh is also sustained in his landscape design, which privileges the prospect of Rosings above all else.

Elizabeth's maturing "monetary eye" for the details of land assists her on her visit to Pemberley. The scene brings together courtship narrative and landscape aesthetics, both formally haunted by the history of land enclosure. The opening passage warrants a lengthy quotation:

Elizabeth, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of Pemberley Woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, her spirits were in a high flutter.

The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground. They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some time through a beautiful wood stretching over a wide extent.

Elizabeth's mind was too full for conversation, but she saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half-a-mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!

They descended the hill, crossed the bridge, and drove to the door; and, while examining the nearer aspect of the house, all her apprehension of meeting its owner returned. She dreaded lest the chambermaid had been mistaken. On applying to see the place, they were admitted into the hall; and Elizabeth, as they waited for the housekeeper, had leisure to wonder at her being where she was. (235)

Elizabeth's critical attitude towards Darcy doesn't begin to soften while observing the riches of Pemberley hall itself, but while looking at grounds leading up to the house.

It is in viewing the landscape that she is prompted to consider that "to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" What is it about the grounds that prompts this reaction?

The ekphrastic paragraph signals many of the key features of the picturesque aesthetic, with an emphasis on the lack of visible interference in the design. The "great variety of ground" stretches across different topographical levels with different kinds of flora; they enter from a "low point" with a "beautiful wood" that stretches over a "wide extent."

Besides sheer acreage, the variety of the landscape indicates a tasteful design, and the beauty and extent of the wood suggests that it has been growing for years—an indication

that Darcy is indeed from an “old” family. The variety of ground overwhelms Elizabeth—reducing her capacity for conversation and making her a pure spectator, seeing and admiring “every remarkable spot and point of view.” As they reach the top of “a considerable eminence,” the visitors enjoy a view laid out like a landscape painting. The subject, Pemberley house, sits before a background of “high woody hills” and is foregrounded by “a stream of some natural importance” to provide the characteristic picturesque visual interest. Despite the intense conventionality of this prospect, the most striking aspect is its “naturalness.” The “natural” stream appears to be “without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned.”⁴² The grounds take on a superlative quality for Elizabeth—“she had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by awkward taste.” Here is the first rebuttal of Collins’ bad theory of garden design. Here, there is no guide to point out improvements, so the landscape seems perfectly natural. All the same, the lines of sight frame and highlight Pemberley House itself as the central place from which the landscape derives its exceptional quality. Later, however, when they approach the house itself, Elizabeth’s apprehensions return. The seductive quality of wealth seems to be free of its social barriers in the prospect, but the house and housekeeper declare again that “to be mistress of Pemberley” is outside the scope of Elizabeth’s matrimonial speculation.

⁴² While there has been some debate about the specific movement of English garden design to best align with Austen’s descriptions, all follow the general rejection of French and Italian movements which privileged symmetry, architectural intervention, regular planting, and well-manicured flora. The English garden rejected these “formal” elements in favor of more “natural” seeming vistas, shaggy growth, curving paths, and waterside trees that broke up the smooth line of the decorative pond.

Just as the courtship seems to be natural, unaffected, and “without design,” the space through which they move seems to serendipitously coerce the actors into advantageous positions. To use the garden with this degree of tact and poise is to already to have learned to follow social conventions illegible to those outside a particular class of English elite. Throughout this scene the picturesque landscape offers various affordances, to use Caroline Levine’s term, for the flirtation between Darcy and Elizabeth.⁴³ Earlier in the novel, the narrow path excluded her from a picturesque view—but now the design encourages the conversation and proximity of the two marriageable subjects. Turning to look back at the house again, Elizabeth sees the “owner of it himself” suddenly come forward, only “twenty yards” away. The limited lines of sights that characteristic of the picturesque garden make this moment of surprise possible. They separate from one another, and Elizabeth’s party reenters the beautiful walk of the garden, soon finding themselves in some “woods” which offer “charming views of the valley, the opposite hills, with the long range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the stream” (242). The extent of the Park is overwhelming, and because her aunt is “not a great walker” (and thus a bad reader of the social drama going on in front of her), the group is required to return to their carriage. The path back is “less sheltered,” allowing Darcy to spot them and approach them yet again.

For a few moments, indeed, she felt that he would probably strike into some other path. This idea lasted while a turning in the walk concealed him from their view; the turning past, he was immediately before them. With a glance she saw, that he

⁴³ Here I am thinking, partially, of Caroline Levine’s concept of the “affordance,” borrowed from design terminology. The “affordance” is the use to which a form can be put, regardless of the intention of the design (like hanging a coat from a doorknob). The garden has many explicit designs intended to effect walking and sociability, but the specific instances of their use by characters is always specific and, in some ways, unanticipated.

had lost none of his recent civility; and, to imitate his politeness, she began, as they met, to admire the beauty of the place; but she had not got beyond the words “delightful,” and “charming,” when some unlucky recollections obtruded, and she fancied that praise of Pemberley from her, might be mischievously construed (243).

Here the description of the garden, the choreography of the action of the scene, and the feints of flirtatious courtship intermingle with one another. The physical space offers views, opportunities, and expectations just as attempts to appear natural and polite find themselves open at one moment and suddenly closed in the next. Finally, the activity of walking exerts a parting stroke of influence. Mrs. Gardiner is “fatigued by the exercise of the morning” and finds “Elizabeth’s arm inadequate to her support, and consequently preferred her husband’s” (245). This leaves Elizabeth and Darcy to walk on together, afforded the relative privacy of their pairing. This moment of intimacy sets the more explicit portion of the courtship into motion. The path to courtship winds through his garden.

By substituting marriage as the social referent of the landscape garden, rather than the history of land enclosure, Austen ideologically neutralizes the history of expropriation that brought such gardens into existence. At the same time, the erasure brings the marriage plot and land enclosure into curious proximity. The domesticity that waits in the unwritten pages following the weddings that conclude the traditional marriage plot exist inside the home, but the social meanings of spaces outside the home are crucial to situating the intimate relationship between domesticity and land. Both the rules of conduct by which courtship takes place and the markers of enclosure both disguise themselves; they function best when they are only visible to those who already know how to follow the rules. The act of trespass and the social blunder tend to be unanticipated by

those who commit them, and visible primarily to the community that has built the well-disguised rules of engagement.

Austen's novels exercised a significant influence on the social practices of the nineteenth century. Nancy Armstrong suggests that, by 1847, the "inside of the house" had "already been colonized by the conduct books as well as by novels like those Austen wrote" (205). Austen's heroines learn that the era of "libertine" control over women's bodies had come to an end, and that the social world is regulated by the surveillance systems of a well-managed home. Armstrong argues that the resolution of the marriage plot in *Pride and Prejudice* "creates personal fulfillment where there had been internal conflict and social unity where there had been competing class-interests" (51). For her, this internal conflict attributes "political and emotional authority to the male and female respectively" while the resolution ultimately "inscribes the political within the male character and then contains both within heart and home" (51). This order of domestic relations thus "colonizes" the home, instantiating a stable set of meanings against which the disruption of expanding industrial centers, working class conflict, and imperial violence can be registered in novels later in the century. But if, as I have suggested, the home is not the primary site of the resolution of Austen's marriage plot, then domesticity and interiority have been unduly weighted in many analyses of the novel of marriage. If the landscape garden is the engine of this resolution, then it becomes the "stable" icon of social meaning against which the shadow of future disruptions will be cast. Like the country home, the landscape garden produces its apparent stability by way of a dramatic erasure of conflict. But instead of the supposedly private, personal tensions of inter-

subjective relationality, an analytic that focuses on the garden registers the public, nationalist framework in which these resolutions were negotiated.

Much as the walls that Crusoe builds on his island do not necessarily signify “land ownership” to anyone but Crusoe and other English men, the set of social codes linking landscape and marriage are not necessarily legible outside of a narrow community. This capacity to see and understand codes of social convention without revealing their existence *as* units of knowledge is fundamental to the production of national ideology that Benedict Anderson and others have linked to the novel. But Austen goes further than Defoe, not only deploying the coded systems of ownership as narrative elements but camouflaging these systems in the physical architecture of her realist description. In doing so, Austen extends the nationalist logic of courtship to a more universal frame, laying the groundwork for the extension of British cultural codes across the physical boundaries of the British imagined community.

These readings of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pride and Prejudice* highlight the ideological effects of a century of novelistic innovation. *Robinson Crusoe* churns with the anxiety of establishing the boundaries of property without revealing the violence that attends the process of colonization, conveniently establishing protection against an hypothetical other rather than an actually existing group who might contest the claim. The anxieties of *Pride and Prejudice* also center around the desire to acquire property without revealing that desire.⁴⁴ Both refer to the enclosure of the commons without

⁴⁴ The acquisition is complicated by legal barriers that restricted most married women from owning their own property. These barriers were gradually weakened across the nineteenth century, as white English

explicitly naming that history. Spatial analysis helps to uncover connections to land enclosure that rest at the heart of the formal mechanics of the English novel. Both of these canonical novels seek to resolve the untidy fissures of a century of brutal capitalist development both in England and in the Atlantic world. In the century that follows, novelists will use these conventions of resolution and repair to probe the contours of life under an increasingly consolidated capitalist mode of production. *Robinson Crusoe* prefigures the way that the realist novel will be used to extend logics of English possession across a global scale of formalized empire. *Pride and Prejudice* anticipates the functions of nationalism that will accompany intensifying portraits of psychological complexity. The rise of the novel may include the invention of the modern subject, but this invention is facilitated by broader social practices of violence and expropriation including the land enclosure that made that rise possible.

women earned the right to pass property through a will in 1848, to legally own and inherit property in 1870, and to retain rights to their property in marriage in 1882.

CHAPTER TWO Ruptures in Realism: Designing *The Mill on the Floss*

“Nature has the deep cunning which hides itself under the appearance of openness, so that simple people think they can see through her quite well, and all the while she is secretly preparing a refutation of their confident prophecies” (29).

In his biography of George Eliot, Gordon S. Haight claims that “the flood that ends *The Mill on the Floss* was not an afterthought designed to extricate the author from an impossible situation, but in fact the element of plot that George Eliot planned first.” His evidence for this claim is taken from a few entries copied from the *Annual Register* into her commonplace book in January 1856. A passage on “Inundations” details the “greatest landflood ever remembered in the memory of man” during which several “ships and cranes” were unmoored; bridges, houses, and shops were destroyed and “many thousands of deals and baulks of large timber, with household furniture, horses, cows, staiths, came floating down and almost covered the river for some hours.” There is an account of the ‘breaking’ of Solway Moss, a peat bog in Cumbria, that surprisingly overflowed into the surrounding villages, as well as the details of a “calamity” in Boston that “came so rapidly and unexpectedly that the farmers had no time to save their cattle.” After a list of “places where inundations have happened,” Eliot copied a section from Mary Somerville’s *Physical Geography* that explains the “hydrostatic pressure” that can potentially build up in massive underground aquifers and invisible springs. The evidence amassed seems almost like a premeditated response to Henry James’s later complaint that the conclusion to the *Mill on the Floss* was distastefully outside the realm of “ordinary probabilities.” While her notebook provides evidence that the surprising final moments of

Tom and Maggie were indeed destined by their author, the entry that follows the research on floods seems—at first—to have less to do with the plotting of the novel. After the section on floods Eliot copied a collection of excerpts from Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*. These reflections on the genealogy of design provide a blueprint for the architectural logic that structures Eliot's vision of historical development.

Nineteenth-century theories of architecture provide a mode of analysis that helps to consolidate some of the striking paradoxes set into motion by the frustrating formal questions that attend many readings of *The Mill on the Floss*. Eliot's second novel is ostensibly a *bildungsroman*. Unlike most *bildungsromane*, however, it features dual protagonists. Rather than continually developing, these protagonists die in their young adulthood. The book is in some ways a historical novel, set approximately forty years before its publication date. But Eliot skirts convention by situating the action of the novel in the decidedly un-historical St. Ogg's, a fictional Lincolnshire village that would have been lost to the annals of time. Maggie's ambiguously romantic progress continually defies expectation and refuses resolution. The curious hybridity of both convention and form have puzzled many scholars and readers. Because, as I have argued earlier in this dissertation, the history of realism is tethered to the rich representational capability of both historically remembered and extant English landscapes, Eliot's literary hybridity indexes the complex, new built environments of a countryside transformed by industrialism.

I therefore also argue that the generic restlessness of this novel is a result of a materially determined paradox emerging in British realism. How can the English landscape ground a coherent sense of national identity, as it did in Austen's courtship

plots, if this landscape is increasingly threatened by the expanding physical transformations of industrial capitalism—itsself understood to be a national phenomenon? The historical progress that Eliot narrates in the novel is from this standpoint a move from bad to worse, from narrow provincialism to systemic exploitation. By reading the novel's passages of landscape description in the light of nineteenth-century architectural thought, I argue that *The Mill on the Floss* frames human life as activity that primarily *destabilizes* the environment, leaving traces only through destruction. This framework indicates a crisis in the ethics of realism. To faithfully record the history of human activity, even in its most humble forms, is to create an archive of destruction. The formal experiments of *The Mill on the Floss* mark an attempt to give aesthetic and narrative coherence to this record of environmental violence.

This chapter explicates the unique theory of historical development suggested by Eliot's novel—grounded in the famous comparison between the cultural ruins along the Rhone and the Rhine. These ruins, I suggest, inform a theory of contemporary landscape that is sensitive to the history of human development. My readings of two of Eliot's contemporaries—Gottfried Semper and John Ruskin—situate Eliot's theory of history within an importantly related discourse of architectural thought. My readings position Eliot between Semper, who understood architecture as an evolving language organically entangled with its surrounding ecosystem, and Ruskin, who lauded the profound disciplinary power of state architecture. The interplay between landscape, architecture, and environment, I suggest, ultimately underwrites a sentimental nationalism familiar to scholars of the novel. Under Eliot's exacting analysis, however, the developmental arc of this nationalism ultimately bends towards disaster.

The Form of History

In *The Mill on the Floss*, more than in any of her other novels, George Eliot grapples with the entanglement between environment and cultural development. This close narrative attention to both place and history generates some formal surprises. George Levine writes that in this novel “Eliot reaches a point that we might take, symbolically, as a crisis in the process of realism” (45). For him, a “satisfactory resolution is unattainable in the terms her adopted realistic mode would allow” (45). Henry James complained that this novel’s “chief defect” was its conclusion, which he thought lacked significant “relation to the preceding part of the story” (32). Jed Esty argues the exact opposite, claiming that the flood is formally justified in its confirmation of “Eliot’s investment in a rich figurative system build around images of land and water” and the historical effect of disrupting the traditional order of the yeoman by opening a “conduit for economic modernity” (63).⁴⁵ Nathan Hensley offers a similar reading, although he suggests that in hindsight (and especially upon rereading), the plotting of the novel is tuned to other forms of historical change besides capitalist development. What Levine reads as a crisis in the formal development of realism, and James reads as an inconsistency of form, Hensley reads as a “transcoded revolutionary event” (65). Hensley draws heavily from Sally Shuttleworth’s suggestion that the “two endings” of the novel correspond to the geological theories of catastrophism and uniformitarianism: the residents of St. Ogg’s understand history as largely static, punctuated by occasional cataclysmic events that elicit change, but are confronted by the more modern view of

⁴⁵ Esty argues that application of the bildungsroman to narratives of national development operates with an inherent contradiction: the two metanarratives of modernity oppose one another: capitalization is unbounded, and nationalization is bounded (Esty, 40).

history as a perpetual, if subperceptual, process of change. The catastrophic “supreme moment” of Maggie and Tom’s death—a vestige of old world historical development—is compared to the merciless linearity of modern time. Deanna Kreisel approaches the flood from a different angle, arguing that “the real reason criticism of the novel has had such a difficult time answering the question of Maggie’s ‘failure,’ the reason she must die at the end, is that it is the wrong question” (131). The flood is not an eruption set off by Maggie’s repression of demonic desire, Kreisel suggests, but rather a censoring of Maggie’s confrontation the “demands” of the ruling ideology of Victorian thought (131). The problem with Maggie is that she confronts the hypocrisy of two simultaneous bourgeois imperatives: the commercial demand for consumption and the domestic code of self-restraint. Maggie refuses the narrative imperative of accumulation, but her renunciations cannot be rewarded.

Especially when rereading the novel, it is hard not to come to recognize the narrator’s attempts to prepare the reader for the catastrophic conclusion. From Mrs. Tulliver’s certainty that her children will die in a flood, to the choric premonitions of locals who recall previous diluvial catastrophes, to the anticipatory mawkishness of the narrator’s proclamation that he is “in love with moistness,” the flood is inextricably woven into the descriptive fabric of the novel. Nonetheless, the conclusion of the novel is undeniably odd in its suddenness—even if a perceptive reader might be able to see it coming. While the oddness of the ending frustrates the formal expectations of the *bildungsroman* and many narrative conventions of the realist novel, the final ten pages overshadow the novel’s many other formal and narrative surprises.

The depiction of development that the novel offers is disjunctive—filled with gaps, pauses, and interruptions. According to Jed Esty, this formal irregularity challenges “the organicist logic of the *bildungsroman*... as the soul-nation allegory” (56). In Esty’s framework, this is a result of Eliot’s historical position at the juncture between a more cohesive national time in which a chronotopic space that is “local” and “bounded” is possible—and the “unbounded space-time of empire and globalization (glimpsed at the horizon by Eliot, in which capitalism is constantly transforming the social world, and in which collective and individual identities are dissolved into endless revolution)...” (56). According to Esty, Eliot “does not simply cast doubt on the idea that societies or individuals *improve* over time” but also asks if “societies or individuals can be said to possess any kind of continuous identity over time” (56). Esty argues that Eliot disrupts the telos of the *bildungsroman* in order to reach beyond it for a different metaphor of maturity—because in her vision of English national time, maturity is still on the horizon. While I agree that the disruption to the *bildungsroman* suggests a different vision of historical development, I suggest that the Eliot does not look forward to a mature national future—but instead emphasizes the emerging symptoms of infrastructural instability and foreshadows the inevitability of social collapse.

Development as Ruin: The Valley of Humiliation

The structural experiments of *The Mill on the Floss* disrupt the ideological narrative about the nation that novels typically tell. These disruptions call into question the internal coherence of national identity and the progressive telos of liberal ideology. Using a digressive comparison between ruined civilizations along the Rhone and the

Rhine, Eliot theorizes on the relation between historical development and social organization, while also embedding this theory within a discussion of realist aesthetics. In doing so, Eliot registers the entanglement of landscape, history, and narrative fiction. At the same time, the section is integral to the strange structure of the novel as a whole—linking Tom and Maggie’s childhood and adolescence through a zoomed out reflection on the social structure of St. Ogg’s, and the aesthetic validity of the lives within it. Here, and elsewhere in the novel, landscapes provide the opportunity to reflect on the nature of realist fiction and the structure of novels themselves.

The descriptive, narrative, and structural oddities of the “Valley of Humiliation” section provide clues to the broader architecture of the novel. Much has been made of the “middleness” of *Middlemarch*, but this thematic concern extends across Eliot’s writing. Hilary Schor writes that “the middle is something we find in the end, when we have rearranged the plot into a story” and that “no novelist makes this more evident than George Eliot” (48). In the middle of *Adam Bede*, Eliot inserts a chapter called “In Which the Story Pauses a Little,” that makes a case for the aesthetic value those middling, irritating people who populate the unpleasant world of “truth.” The narrator champions Dutch paintings, “which lofty-minded people despise” because of the “delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence” (166).⁴⁶ The architectural aspect of Eliot’s novels derives from her fascination with form: it is thus

⁴⁶ Ruth Yeazell, in her work on the role of Dutch genre painting in nineteenth-century British thought, argues that it is “precisely because the preindustrial Midlands of the early fiction have so much in common with the Netherlands of Golden Age art” that Eliot chooses to punctuate the visual description of places like Hayslope with references to paintings like Gerri Dous “Das Tischgebet der Spinnerin” (1645).

unsurprising to find digressions that do a great deal of theoretical work near the center of a formally unconventional novel like *The Mill on the Floss*.

The first chapter of “The Valley of Humiliation” shares many features with the famous treatise on realism in chapter seventeen of *Adam Bede*. Both are unexpected, lengthy digressions that use extended metaphors to animate the difficulties of realist narration. But the perspective of the respective narrators on their “low” subjects are dramatically different. The narrator of *Adam Bede* touts a “rare, precious quality of truthfulness,” and “delicious sympathy” in common details that an idealistic friend might label “homely” and “ugly” (166). That narrator exhorts the reader to appreciate “that other beauty too, which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy” (166). The representation of ugly, middling subjects counters the tendency for idealism in art, exposing readers to details of human life that develop “human feeling.” This humanity “is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth: it does not wait for beauty—it flows with resistless force and brings beauty with it” (167). Beauty, in this metaphor, transforms the category of beauty itself through exposure over time, relentlessly carving out new spaces for itself. In *Mill on the Floss*, this delighted playfulness is replaced with a sense of resigned duty. This narrator speaks of the “oppressive feeling” that likely weighs upon the reader as they are forced to watch the “old-fashioned” sorrow of a family that hardly seems to “lift above the level of the tragi-comic” (222). This “sordid life” also infects the narrator with a sense of “oppressive narrowness.” As in *Adam Bede*, the narrator turns to the sublime to justify the aesthetics of the novel. But whereas *Adam Bede*’s narrator presages the aesthetic ecstasy that the sublime onslaught of realist detail

will afford, the narrator of *Mill on the Floss* underscores the awful weight of historical consciousness and the aesthetic burden of sympathetic understanding.⁴⁷

I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie,—how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented in this way in every town, and by hundreds of obscure hearths; and we need not shrink from this comparison of small things with great; for does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unity which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest? In natural science, I have understood, there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of human life. (223)

Again, understanding is the reward for those who engage the common in art. These sordid lives, seemingly insignificant, bear relation to the “historical advance of mankind.” Not only are the low subjects related to historical movement; it is by uncovering the mechanisms that unify the “smallest” things with the “greatest” that the history of human life can be understood. In other words, the key to understanding historical structure is developing a theory of the middle.

In Eliot’s theory of sympathetic realism, the novel operates as surrogate for embodied encounters with those in “low” social positions: “you are irritated with these dull men and women” (222). In one of the many anticipations of the culminating flood of the novel, the narrator turns from this “stifled” condition to the landscape upon which it might find release, the “rich plain where the great river flows forever onward, and links

⁴⁷ This tension between beauty/burden, pleasure/understanding, idealism/truth determine many of Maggie’s decisions to renunciate experience throughout the novel.

the small pulse of the old English town with the beatings of the world's might heart" (222). The key to understanding the development of human history is to ascertain the mechanics of the middle, and the object that best metaphorizes this middleness, for Eliot, is a river.

Employing a complex extended metaphor of two historical rivers, Eliot brings together social class, historical development, and realist aesthetics. "Journeying down the Rhone on a summers day," the narrator opens, "you have perhaps felt the sunshine made dreary those ruined villages which stud the banks in certain part of its course..." (221). The binary opposition between the Rhone and the Rhine serves as a reflection on the relationship between realism and romance. The Rhone features depressing ruins of commonplace villages, which hauntingly convey the sordid details of the vulgar everyday life of a previous era. While oppressive and unpleasant, these ruined villages effectively convey the "feeling of human life." The Rhine, on the other hand, features crumbling castles that have mellowed with a "natural fitness" as though they were trees comfortably aging in an appropriate habitat. These ruins evoke a "time of colour" in which adventure, art, and religious feeling were at their apex. The villages along the Rhone were destroyed by a flood, the obscurity of their inhabitants reinforced by the vagueness of their destruction. The Rhine was abandoned by "great emperors" who left their palaces to "die before infidel strongholds in the sacred East." Eliot contrasts anonymous casualties of a flood with the grandeur of the crusades. The Rhine has a historical narrative; it is situated in a chain of great events and imbued with aesthetic coherence. The Rhone, on the other hand, offers traces of human life that barely add up to a "gross sum" of "obscure vitality" (222). The Rhone is haunted by "hollow eyed" skeletons of incoherence, oblivion, and

anonymity. The oppressive obscurity of the Rhone, the narrator explains, is the affective domain of the Tullivers and the Dodsons.

Except for one curious inversion, the Rhonic region of realism would seem to be wholly without merit. Describing the Rhine, the narrator writes that the “demonic” former masters of the castles, “demonic robber-barons” and “drunken ogres,” were “forever in collision with beauty, virtue, and the gentle uses of life” (221). Although the narrator goes on to explain that this contrast was between lords and the “wandering minstrel, the soft-lipped princess, the pious recluse, and the timid Israelite,” for a moment the possibility opens that the domain of beauty, virtue, and gentleness is in fact the Rhone. The violent grandeur of castled feudal power certainly seems in aesthetic opposition to the humble serfdom of the ruined village, but beauty is not the keyword of Rhonic realism. For a moment, however, there is a glimpse of the same kind of aesthetic pleasure in the development of human sympathy that the narrator of *Adam Bede* describes. The narrator ultimately remains suspicious that the “lives these ruins are the traces of” will be “swept into the same oblivion with the generations of ants and beavers” (222). This kind of animal obscurity seems to be precisely the fate that the novel hopes to spare Maggie Tulliver. In some ways the novel is successful: Maggie is memorialized in the text itself, the details of her life recorded and given a more legible form. On the other hand, Maggie, along with all her historical potential, is washed away by the same kind of catastrophic flood that wiped out the villages on the Rhone.

The comparison of the Rhone and the Rhine opens up a chain of metonymic meanings that lead to both architecture and ecology. Following that chain exposes key theoretical linkages that bring together architecture, landscape, and Eliot’s theory of

realism. First, the passage acknowledges that human activity impacts natural landscape, and that this impact is variably determined by the integration of design and ecosystem. Second, the metaphor relies on two kinds of architectural durability: the cheaper, more functional building practices that leave detailed archives of the relationship between human labor and environment, and the ostentatious, grand design that records the excesses of human aesthetic and cultural development. Finally, the comparison between the Rhone and Rhine recognizes a theory of cultural development that moves from east to west, while acknowledging the relatively swift cultural decline that follows in the wake of this ascent: further, the metaphor naturalizes this kind of *translatio imperii* in the geological dynamism of the river.

The passage is broadly about “history”—but it is about the kind of historical life that Eliot champions across her writing: the common, the everyday, and the quotidian. In this historical analysis, the traces of human life transform the experience of a landscape. The ruined villages of the Rhone make the “sunshine” feel “dreary.” This semi-ecological effect is primarily aesthetic. But the ruined cottages also mark “how the swift river once rose.” Their destruction is a marker of ecological violence, an archive of both the people who once lived and the way that the physical residue of their lives has impacted the riverbanks. The “castled Rhine,” on the other hand, features buildings which have “crumbled and mellowed into such harmony with the green and rocky steeps, that they seem to have a natural fitness, like the mountain-pine” (221). The ruins on the Rhone are unfit for their environment, which is implied to be part of the reason that they were destroyed: the very placement of the town betrays a disregard for the rhythms of the river. In contrast, the castles of the Rhine were not destroyed by ecological violence but left

empty to decay. Their gradual decomposition enhances the “rocky steeps” upon which they are perched. The narrator goes so far as to speculate that these castles may have had “this fitness” even in “the day when they were built.” The narrator invents a fantastic category of humanity to explain this fitness. Those who built these castles were likely an “earth-born” race, who had “inherited from their mighty parent a sublime instinct of form” (221). This “sublime instinct” is not only to create beautiful or even *durable* buildings, but instead to follow tenets of design that collaborate with the structures of the natural world. Ecologically successful architecture, then, is not marked by its longevity, but rather by its integration into the aesthetic form of its environment.⁴⁸

While human life inevitably transforms its surrounding environment, architectural design represents more intentional orientations to the land, and thus enacts different aesthetic effects. Eliot’s narrator describes some aesthetic affordances of cheaper, more lightweight design and more monumental constructions: but the ultimate effect of the passage is one of ambivalence. The gaunt, “hollow-eyed” buildings of the Rhone are described as “angular skeletons.” The reader can assume, because these houses belonged to “vulgar” and “commonplace” people, that the primary considerations in these buildings were related to expense. If the villages were positioned in a location prone to flooding, it is unlikely that the village had a long history. The Rhone was populated by new settlers, then, in cheap, quickly built houses: simple frames with thin walls. On the other hand, the castles of the Rhine are endowed with the benefits of both wealth and history. Stories accompany this architecture, instead of the “obscure vitality” of the

⁴⁸ Think also of Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous *Falling Water*.

Rhone. These ruins (rather than “ruined villages”) are difficult to distinguish from the rocky cliffs on which they were built. They are associated with both military defense and the religious sublime: the “glancing steel and floating banners” and “cathedrals” of the time. The ephemerality of the villages on the Rhone denote an historical adolescence despite being likely more recent, whereas the durable mass of the castled Rhone is freighted with historical maturity. Both, however, leave a trace.

These traces are significantly plotted on timeline of cultural development that follows a spatial logic of global hierarchization. The nineteenth century witnessed an efflorescence of philosophies of history that theorized a general movement from the east to the west. Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* is probably the most famous to modern readers, but Eliot was also drawing from Goethe, Edward Gibbon, Anna Jameson, and Adolf Stahr. She transcribes a passage from Stahr’s *Torso: Kunst, Künstler und Kunstwerke der Alten* (or *Art, Artists, and Artworks of the Ancient*) where he claims that “the progress of organic nature, say the naturalists, is from East to West.” Stahr reaches for justification through natural causes, on a planetary scale. He writes (as translated by Eliot):

Almost everything necessary, useful & pleasant in the vegetable world has gradually proceeded from Asia toward the West. So with human development & culture. Was it that in the first revolution of our globe on its axis, the East was first towards the Sun—that it started on its course with its Eastern cheek on the sunny side--& so this priority, like the first move in chess, gave the East precedence in all things.? [sic] (11)

This movement from east to west leaves the Rhine in the past and situates the Rhone closer to the future. While not necessarily endorsing the Rhone, Eliot’s narrator sees these more miserable, modest ruins as a better reflection of the experience of modernity.

It is easy to forget the canny inversion at the heart of Eliot's extended metaphor. Ultimately, the narrator does not endorse the environmentally durable, epic castles of the Rhone. Instead, it is the fragile, obscure village of the Rhine that corresponds to the aesthetic framework of Eliot's theory of the realist novel. The narrow obscurity of realism, oppressive and in some ways irredeemable, is to be endured in order to achieve understanding. But the metaphorical visit to the Rhine is temporary, just as the novel itself is ultimately temporally bounded. "You could not live among such people," the narrator writes—projecting a particular identity onto the reader. "You are stifled for want of an outlet toward something beautiful, great, or noble" (222). The outlet, the river, is the same feature that provides your glimpse of the village. You have drifted by a "population out of keeping with the earth on which they live," but the "great river flows for ever onward, and links the small pulse of the old English town with the beatings of the world's mighty heart" (222).

The figure of the river ultimately serves as a hinge between the abstraction of cultural development and the quotidian realities of the passage of time, including the creeping subtle details of industrialization. The narrator's return to the "reality" of the river provides a transition back from metaphorical language to more concrete narration of the Dodson/Tulliver plotlines. The description of the alluvial plain of the Rhine refers back of the opening of the novel:

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships—laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal—are borne along to the town of St. Ogg's, which shows its aged, fluted red roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the

river-brink, tingeing the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun. (1)

This descriptive tableau, like the Rhone/Rhine passage, gives a view of the land from the rivers that run past it. The narrator observes the “wide plain” from a bridge, although this scene is only a dream, the reader soon learns. The narrator wakes with arms “benumbed,” the same sensation felt on the bridge from leaning heavily on the “cold stone” railing. Both figures of viewership distance the reader from the subject of the novel. Whether on a passing ship, leaning on a bridge, or drowsily reminiscing in a chair forty years in the future—the fabula of the novel is decidedly *not* an account of the world of the reader or its author. This distance is undercut with language of surprising proximity. Just as the Rhone/Rhine passage ends with the circulatory figure of the “small pulse” linked to the larger “beatings of the world’s mighty heart,” the opening passage figures the intersection of river and terrain as an “impetuous embrace.” Rendering the landscape in terms of bodily intimacy obscures what is an otherwise cold historical view: the narrator describes a series of ships rounded with commodities like linseed, lumber, and coal. These commodities are “borne along” towards the charming scene of St. Ogg’s, which literally “shows its age” through its architecture—though the narrator oscillates back to a tenderly descriptive mode, noting the “purple hue” that tinges the water is marked as “transient.” The sense of imminent transition is clearly attached to the modernizing freighters full of industrial materials. Industrialization will become a driving force in the narrative action of the novel—but at this point Eliot takes care to show industrialization as a phenomenon that is readily incorporated into the natural scene, even rendered beautiful by the hazy retrospection of memory. This dynamic interrelation between river, land, and viewer

suggest that it is possible for cyclical rhythms of destruction, rather than development, to give history an aesthetic coherence. The durability of the system comes to be exploited by forces of accumulation. But the dialectic between the two is not balanced. As the novel continues, Eliot stages the destabilization of load-bearing fulcrums of developmental continuity, presaging the eventuality of systemic collapse. Part of the ambivalence that attends this account of destruction, however, emerges from the language of architectural theory.

Architecture and History

Throughout this chapter thus far I have used “architecture” as a rough synonym for “structure.” In the discourse of literary realism, architecture is a particularly loaded term. As Anna Kornbluh has recently pointed out, Henry James and Fredric Jameson both use the term “architecture” in order to specify the mathematical and formal modelling of realist imagination (16). Kornbluh constructs her own theory of realist architecture, drawing from James and Jameson—as well as Henri Lefebvre, who conceived of it “not as the building of a particular structure, palace, or monument, but rather as a project embedded in a spatial context and a texture which call for ‘representations’ that will not vanish into symbolic or imaginary realms” (Kornbluh, 11). Kornbluh uses the term as “a metaphor for the modelling of social space, the production of realist aesthetics, and the building up of social forms” (16). Under this definition, both the landscape garden and its novelistic description qualify as “architecture.” In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot seems to be more concerned both with buildings (ruined, newly built,

and yet to be destroyed) and landscapes that have been intentionally shaped by human design, and inadvertently shaped by human activity.

The theories of Gottfried Semper and John Ruskin afford a rich vocabulary for nineteenth-century architectural thought. Between the two writers, durability emerges as a pressing question of architectural design. Both figure the problem of longevity in architecture as a question of cultural development. Close reading, meanwhile, reveals that many of the concerns of Ruskin and Semper are also resonant with contemporary discussions of environmentalism. While Semper privileges the flexibility, fitness, and utility of an economical design, Ruskin tends to consider cheap buildings wasteful, temporary, and ultimately an embarrassment to the legacy of civilized communities. Meanwhile, the strength, cultural memory, and evolving impact that Ruskin prizes in a durable building are framed by Semper as over-constructed, exorbitantly ornamented, and clunky. In this comparison between durability and economy emerge the competing ecological claims of these two thinkers. For Ruskin, building something that will last is to refuse to be wasteful. For Semper, buildings that are sensitive to their environment carry the inevitability of their own destructions. The tension between these positions is at work, as I have suggested, in the architectural logic of Eliot's argument for realism and in the landscape descriptions of *The Mill on the Floss*.

Both *The Stones of Venice* and *Die Vier Elemente der Baukunst* were part of a mid-century trend of architectural theory that took up the newly popular study of ethnography as a way to narrate cultural development. The bulk of this body of knowledge was indebted to German romanticism—particularly the concepts of history and culture developed by Goethe, Herder, Schelling, and Hegel. The most significant and

influential architectural application of this line of thought is Gottfried Semper's *Die vier Elemente der Baukunst (The Four Elements of Architecture)*.⁴⁹ While Semper and Eliot were contemporaries, and Eliot probably attended the Great Exhibition while Semper was tending several stands in 1851, it is unclear whether or not she was familiar with his writing. Regardless, his theories sparked debate that led to a total reevaluation of classical assumptions about the cultural history of architecture.

George Eliot, if not Ruskin (who wrote a scathing review of *The Mill on the Floss*), seems to have respected Ruskin. In 1858, Eliot wrote of Ruskin to her friend Sara Hennell:

I venerate him [Ruskin] as one of the great Teachers of the day [...] the grand doctrines of truth and sincerity in art, and the nobleness and solemnity of our human life, which he teaches with the inspiration of a Hebrew prophet, must be stirring up young minds in a promising way ... He is strongly akin to the sublimest part of Wordsworth. (422-23)

While Eliot certainly admired the persuasiveness and intensity of Ruskin's writing, she also suggested in some of her reviews that he was somewhat "absurd" in his eclecticism. In that eclecticism they can be seen as kindred spirits, however: both wrote on nationalism, political economy, realism, aesthetics, and architecture.⁵⁰ His aesthetic and architectural theory grows from many of the same concerns and holds just as much relevance in an analysis of Eliot's realism. In fact, Eliot's review of *Modern Painters III*

⁴⁹ From her notes and translations, it is clear that Eliot had devoted serious thought to Goethe, Herder, Schelling, and Hegel, but it is not clear if she was familiar with Semper. Ruskin knew Semper's work, and while he significantly disagreed with some of his theories of craftsmanship he also seems to be indebted to *Die vier Elemente der Baukunst* for some of his theories of the dynamic between "barbaric" and "civilized" architectural history.

⁵⁰ Scholars like Kei Nikibayashi and Emily Coit have focused on the influence of Ruskin's thought on Eliot's vision of ethical consumerism and political economy.

in the Westminster Review stands as one of her most concise definitions of realism. In it, she writes that Ruskin's third volume has the "infinite value" of "realism—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality." For both writers, attention to aesthetic detail necessitates an account of labor. The ethics of production, for both, ultimately inform the ethics of consumption. But for Ruskin, part of the compensation of aesthetic labor is inclusion in the important business of cultural production.

Gottfried Semper and Eliotian Tectonics

Semper took part in a significant mid-nineteenth century rethinking of the basics of architectural thought.⁵¹ His major works, *Die vier Elemente der Baukunst* (*The Four Elements of Architecture*) and *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder Praktische Ästhetik* (*Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts, or A Practical Aesthetics*) challenged prevailing theories of neoclassical design. Until Semper, most eighteenth and nineteenth-century European architectural theorists relied on Abbe Laugier's analysis of the "primitive hut" in *L'Essai sur L'Architecture* (1753). Laugier focused on six "Articles" of design: the column, the entablature, the pediment, the stories, the windows, and the doors. The combination of these articles could produce different faults, which

⁵¹ Another canonical and likeminded theorist, Owen Jones, also espoused the so called "carpet myth," the thesis that a primary motive and historical origin of architectural creation was expressed through the pliable, woven space divider, with origins in what they thought of as "Oriental" design. Later in their careers, both theorists turned to ornamentation—Eliot appears to have read Owen Jones' *The Grammar of Ornament* in 1865 (Fleishman, 47).

Laugier derived through their relation to the conceptual purity of the “primitive hut.” Semper developed a different architectural theory through similar attention to what he thought of as “primitive” architectural design. After working in France until he was forced to flee due to his participation in the revolutions of 1848, Semper traveled to London, where he admired the Samí, Amerindian, Tibetan, Indian, and African products. Against Luagier’s thesis, Semper hypothesized that architectural designed emerged from prehistoric ornamental arts (Hermann, 86). He further elaborated this theory through his analysis of the Caribbean hut also displayed in the Great Exhibition of 1851 (fig. 4). While the Crystal Palace was, itself, a significant example of the use of modern cast iron in architectural design that prompted many heated debates about aesthetics, Semper was instead compelled by the framework and layout of the wooden hut to rethink the basic categories of architecture as ornamental motifs.

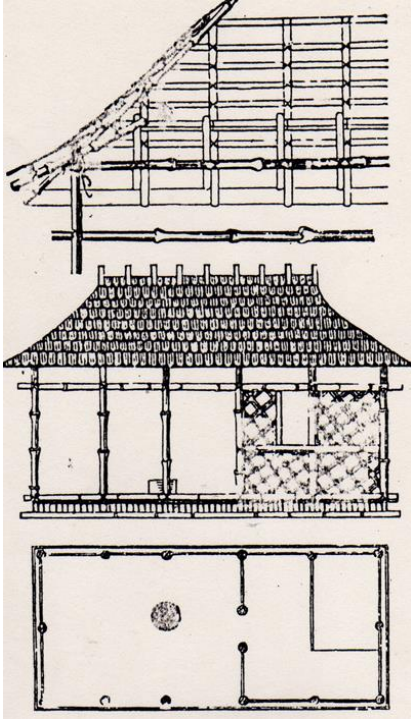


Figure 4: Caribbean Hut, *Der Stil*, Gottfried Semper, 1879

Semper argued that there were four elements, or “motifs,” to any building. The first, and most important, is the “hearth,” or what Semper calls “the moral element” (Semper, 102). The hearth was the “first sign of human settlement and rest after the hunt,” around which “the first groups assembled; around it the first alliances formed; around it the first rude religious concepts were put into the customs of a cult. Throughout all the phases of society the hearth formed that sacred focus around which the whole took order and shape” (Semper, 102). The other three elements organize themselves around the hearth: the roof, the enclosure, and the mound. Each of these elements is originally developed to protect the hearth from rain, sun, wind, attack, and water—but they come to have significant social meanings of their own. While the hearth was the symbolic center of

architectural design, the flexible dividing wall (*Bekleidung* or “cloth”) was its fundamental unit—division and enclosure being the original activity of architecture.⁵²

For modern theorists of architecture, Semper’s emphasis on the infrastructure and variability of the wall is the most revolutionary aspect of his system of thought. For Semper, a building could be separated into two basic procedural modes. The “tectonics” of a building refer to the framework, in which linear, lightweight components are arranged into a matrix of support. The “stereotomics” of a building refers to the massy, volumetric elements that fill in this matrix, usually through the repeated application of heavy material. In Western architecture, the stereotomic mass of the enclosure is often overly developed, while some of the “non-Western” buildings that Semper had encountered at the Great Exhibition seemed to emphasize the tectonic structure of the skeletal form. The ethnographic logic of Semper’s work suggested that Western architecture emphasized stereotomic mass, while “primitive” cultures had a richly developed tradition of tectonic process. Though this summary is reductive, it is clear that Semper tethers tectonic style and primitivity in order to offer a corrective to Western emphases on architectural mass.

In some ways, the tectonic seems to be more universal to all design, while stereotomic process attends the necessity of fortification and protection; at the same time, however, the distinction between tectonic framework and stereotomic mass is often

⁵² In her article on the paired theories of Owen Jones and Gottfried Semper, Aneka Lenssen writes: “[Semper’s] theory of the origins of architecture is based on the act of enclosing space with a woven surface” (Lenssen, 2).

impossible to establish. Rather than associating tectonic process with simplicity, then, Semper links it to the fundamental rhythms of artistic production. Semper writes that the

Artistic enjoyment of nature's beauty is by no means to most native or earliest manifestation of the artistic instinct. On the contrary, the former is undeveloped in simple, primitive man, whereas he does already take delight in nature's creative law as it gleams through reality in the rhythmical sequence of space and time movements, is found once more in the wreath, the bead necklace, the scroll, the circular dance, and the rhythmic tone that attends it, the beat of an oar, and so on. These are the beginnings out of which music and architecture grew; they are the highest purely cosmic nonimitative arts, whose legislative support no other art can forego (196)

The tectonic is the basis of design not because it is the basic form, but because it is the result of the basic activity of building.⁵³ Semper organized the questions of adornment and design into an equation, in which style was equal to design multiplied by coefficients like location, era, population, and climate. While he admired classical Greek architecture, it would not be fit to repeat in a new time, in a new place, with new people. Rather, a fit architecture must emerge for each age. When there were anomalies in social conditions, Semper postulated, there was bound to be architectural confusion. The question of style, then, was an aesthetic problem with various ethical and political applications.

This approach to aesthetics is fundamentally anthropocentric. In his later essay "On Architectural Styles" Semper asks, "in the most general way, what is the material and subject matter of all artistic endeavor?" and answers himself, "I believe it is *man* in all his relations and connections to the world" (269). While Semper takes a broad approach in his designation of "all" the relations and connections of "man" and the "world," his coefficient of climate is less ecological than it is practical. Thick heavy walls

⁵³ For Semper, the knot is the formal base of design, and thus the textile has a preeminent place in his theory of architecture—especially the textiles building up thin screens and dividers.

and small windows will not serve humans well in a hot climate, just as wicker screens will be insufficient in a snowy climate. But Semper's theory nonetheless disrupts neo-classical conceptions of architectural aesthetics as a repository of cultural power. Because of the complex formula that produces a fit design, the process of comparison becomes an exploration of affordances rather than an establishment of hierarchies.

To decenter a narrative of historical progress that extends from classical Greek architecture to a modern European style is to invite forms of comparison that do not presume European superiority. Semper's theory shares a logical spirit with Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, which claims that fitness emerges as an effect of environment and thus is not necessarily portable across environments. To rethink the aesthetic infrastructure of cultural development in the 1850's is to destabilize the fundamental logic of English expansion that underwrites British imperialism. This is not to say that Semper's architecture was anti-imperialist, but rather to suggest that there are alternatives to the vision of progressive history in his theory that become especially apparent when contrasted with the work of John Ruskin.

Unlike Ruskin, who argued that "all European architecture, bad and good, old and new, is derived from Greece through Rome," (xxvii), Semper focused on the mechanics of form as the origin of cultural development—eliminating the possibility of an origin from which design derives. Nonetheless, there are tendencies that emerge in the history of Western architecture. The relative dependence of European design on stereotomic mass privileged temporal longevity and endurance over the comparable ephemerality of tectonic form. In his later writing, Semper complicates this theory by introducing a visual synecdoche between architectural and biological form—but in *Die vier Elemente der*

Baukunst his goal is to recalibrate the aesthetics of the enclosing wall (*Wand*) so that it is better suited to the climate and customs of a country.⁵⁴

Semper's climatological theories of cultural development rely on concepts of historical development advanced by Hegel in both *The Phenomenology of History* and the *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, but his theory of stereotomic and tectonic form subtly complicates the relatively simple dialectical movement that Hegel proposed. Semper's history of design is not strictly progressive. Rather, designs are well suited for certain environments. Similarly, there is no dialectical opposition between stereotomic and tectonic methods. There could be no mass without the framework to support it, but also the distinction between mass and frame becomes indistinguishable in some kinds of design, and in others (like battlements) there is very little need for a tectonic structure. Semper's theory of architecture is thus environmentally and historically contingent; design cannot be perfected in a world subject to movement and change. In our current state of climate crisis, a theory of architecture that emphasizes the value of impermanence and ecological fit is more resonant than ever. The related kinds of environmental change enacted upon the landscape by industrialization in the first half of the nineteenth century also drew many thinkers to the work of Semper.

Semper's theory of architecture bears some striking similarities to Eliot's description of aesthetic form in her later essay "Notes on Form in Art." Published soon

⁵⁴ The distinction between the German *wand* and *Mauer* form an important aspect of Semper's theory. Frampton writes, "he would distinguish the massiveness of the fortified wall, as indicated by the word *die Mauer*, from the light, screen like enclosure signified by the term *die Wand*. Both terms imply enclosure, but the latter is related to the German word for dress, *Gewand*, and the verb *winded*, which means to embroider. Semper maintained that the earliest basic structural artifact was the knot, from which follows the primary nomadic building culture of the tent and its textile fabric" (86).

after Eliot's experiment with drama and poetry, "The Spanish Gypsy," which was born out of many of the questions posed in her writers notebook during the composition of *Mill on the Floss*, "Notes on Form of Art" details a Romantic adherence to the organicism of form.⁵⁵ Eliot uses the metaphor of a mollusk to suggest that poetic form responds to the pressures of lived experience:

Poetic Form was not begotten by thinking it out or framing it as a shell which should hold emotional expression, any more than the shell of an animal arises before the living creature; but emotion, by its tendency to repetition, i.e., rhythmic persistence in proportion as diversifying thought is absent, creates a form by the recurrence of its elements in adjustment with certain given conditions of sound, language, action, or environment. Just as the beautiful expanding curves of a bivalve shell are not first made for the reception of the unstable inhabitant, but grow and are limited by the simple rhythmic conditions of its growing life (235).

Eliot's comparison of poetic form to a bivalve shell not only foregrounds the indivisibility of the lived conditions of human experience and artistic production, but also the inevitable memorial function of the forms that artistic production takes.⁵⁶ Like the castles of the Rhine and the ruined villages of the Rhone, the shell is only a reference to its living inhabitant. While life provides the condition for the development of form, it also restricts it. The shell is "limited" in its referential capabilities by the "simple rhythmic conditions" of life. The "form" of realism suddenly becomes difficult to conceptualize: if life gives shape to its own calcified aesthetic forms, then from where does a genre that

⁵⁵ For more on Eliot's peculiar conceptualization of form and literary genre, see David Kurnick "George Eliot's Lot" and Daniel Wright "George Eliot's Vagueness."

⁵⁶ Eliot makes a similar reference to the shell of a bivalve in her 1856 journal entry "Recollections of Ilfracombe, which casts the form of the shell in an explicitly architectural context: "In the background rises old Hillsborough jutting out far into the sea, rugged and rocky as it fronts the waves, green and accessible landward; in front of this stands Lantern Hill, a picturesque mass of green and grey surmounted by an old bit of building that looks as if it were the habitation of some mollusk that had secreted its shell from the material of the rock; and quite in the foreground, contrasting finely in colour with the rest are some lower perpendicular rocks, of dark brown tints patched here and there with vivid green (265)."

purports to render this life with a faithful paucity of idealization spring from? Or, framed another way, are aesthetic evaluations of the castles and villages of the Rhone and Rhine (and the literary genres to which they refer) indictments of the calcified ruins themselves, or the people whose lives formed them through their absent-minded but persistent daily rhythms? The latent sense of mechanization and social control that lurks beneath Eliot's notes on form is made explicit in John Ruskin's writing on architecture.

John Ruskin and Cultural Memory

Though "The Nature of the Gothic" is perhaps Ruskin's most famous excerpt of writing on architectural design, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* gives a persuasive account of his idiosyncratic conception of the social use of architecture. Ruskin frames the project as an attempt to "extricate [architecture] from the confused mass of partial traditions and dogmata with which it has become encumbered during imperfect or restricted practice, those large principles of right which are applicable to every stage and style of it" (11). While he admits that there may be no "unchangeable" laws particular to a form of art, he uses the term "lamp" as a way to highlight the "innumerable hindrances" by which the "light" of these laws has been "too often distorted or overpowered" (11).

The lamp of memory, the sixth out of seven, is the most significant for the purposes of this chapter. In defining it, Ruskin advocates for the architectural capacity to record history and to inspire future generations to remember. While poetry also has this power, he suggests that architecture is more effective because it gives people to experience "not only what men have thought and felt, but what their hands have handled, and their strength wrought, and their eyes beheld, all the days of their life" (170). We can

live without architecture, Ruskin concedes, and “worship without her, but we cannot remember without her” (170). Ruskin despises cheap modern buildings, calling them “pitiful concretions of lime and clay” that sit on “thin tottering, foundationless shells of splintered wood and imitated stone” (171). While Eliot attempts to elevate the Rhone’s cottages and Semper hopes to historicize the foundational elements of the Caribbean hut, Ruskin explicitly links flimsy modern buildings with negatively coded premodernity of the “tents” of the “Arab and the Gypsy” (171). So, Ruskin argues, it is the duty of every citizen to build their “own houses on a scale commensurate rather with their condition at the commencement, than their attainments at the termination, of their worldly career” and to build them “to stand as long as human work at its strongest can be hoped to stand” (172). Ruskin suggests the lamp of memory is crucial to educate future generations on the value of respect and thoughtfulness, and to consolidate the values of a nation. The threat of overpopulation and the increasingly intense exploitation of natural resources guide him towards an almost psychedelic vision of national vitality, flowing into cities from the countryside through the channels of domestic architecture.

The very quietness of nature is gradually withdrawn from us; thousands who once in their necessarily prolonged travel were subjected to an influence, from the silent sky and slumbering fields, more effectual than known or confessed, now bear with them even there the ceaseless fever of their life; and along the iron veins that traverse the frame of our country, beat and flow the fiery pulses of its exertions, hotter and faster every hour. All vitality is concentrated through those throbbing arteries into the central cities; the country is passed over like a green sea by narrow bridges, and we are thrown back in continually closer crowds upon the city gates. The only influence which can in any wise *there* take the place of that of the woods and fields, is the power of ancient Architecture. Do not part with it for the sake of the formal square, or of the fenced and planted walk, nor of the goodly street nor opened quay. (187)

This passage anticipates Eliot's circulatory description of the Floss and the Ripple.

Unlike Eliot, who shows the creeping industrialization of the rural scene, Ruskin suggests that urban architecture (rather than a city park) is the best way to incorporate nature into the city. This is because, for Ruskin, both nature and architecture serve the function of archiving and expressing national memory.

Anticipating (albeit affirmatively) the Althusserian ideological state apparatus, Ruskin suggests that the church, school, art, and architecture all function to produce "obedience" in English subjects. He equates the power of architecture with the power of law—specifically the disciplinary function of English law. Architecture has a special power over people because it has "a continual influence over the emotions of daily life" and a "realism" that do not seem to assert themselves upon the individual like the more explicitly disciplinary English "law" (198). He claims that "all the horror, distress, and tumult which oppress the foreign nations, are traceable... to the simple one of them not having to do" (199). The chief thing they need, he suggests, is occupation. So, buildings not only impose discipline through their material participation in a subject's everyday life, but can also encourage order as the masses are employed to construct new, and even more powerful, bastions of English power. While Ruskin imagines that obedience to architecture can only be accompanied by happiness, it is difficult not to imagine more dystopian forms of enforced labor in his paean to the joy of occupation.

In the lamp of memory and the lamp of obedience, Ruskin betrays the disciplinary aspect of architectural design. His argument suggests that, whether or not designers explicitly take it into account, buildings will *always* consolidate and transmit elements of national history. Because of their physical participation in the daily experience of a

population, buildings will also condition the politics and ethics of an individual subject. Like Eliot's mollusk shell, architecture is evidence of life; but Ruskin is explicitly interested in the productive capacity of *mass* life. By grounding his rapidly escalating assumptions about the nationalist utility of design in ethnocentric presumptions of a shared sense of Englishness, Ruskin rearticulates architecture as a powerful tool of imperial ideology. For him, the identity of place is one of the most powerful modes of delimiting national identity. To codify a kind of building, a sort of landscape, and sense of place as "English," however, is to develop a structure of imperial control that uses the robust forces of labor, habit, emotion, and memory to reconfigure cultural experience and rewrite cultural history.

This idea of nationhood is thus enacted through space—and "Englishness," as Ian Baucom demonstrates, "has consistently been defined through appeals to the identity-endowing properties of place" (4). Place "serves a disciplinary and nostalgic discourse on English national identity by making the past visible, by rendering it present" but it also "serves as the site in which the present re-creates the past" as living subjects "visit, inhabit, or pass through it, leave their estranging marks upon it" (5). For Baucom, the spatial production of Englishness has primacy during the nineteenth century, sandwiched in time between linguistic and racial discourses of Englishness that come to supplant the localist narrative. Rather than defending English bloodlines, the spatial dynamic of Englishness insists on the protection of the essential and continuous identity of place. This continuity could be secured "not only in England but in the colonies where, if England's authentic and auratic architecture of belonging could be reconstructed, these

sites could secure the cultural identity of the colonists and Anglicize, reform, and civilize the colonized” (17).

For good reason, Ruskin is Baucom’s primary example of the localist ideologue. Ruskin’s “theory of corporate identity,” outlined in both *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*, suggests that public spaces had a crucial role in the production of national identity. Baucom argues that architecture in particular operated for Ruskin as “more than a felicitous, or unfortunate, ornamenting of landscape. It also manifests itself as a visible expression of a people’s cultural identity and, even more important, as the curator of national memory” (36). In the final section of this chapter, I want to suggest that *The Mill on the Floss* is similarly concerned with the construction of national identity and the aesthetic forms by which this place-bound sense of belonging can become portable. The novel embraces the communally accessible qualities of the landscape as fundamental elements of the production of the sympathetic liberal subject, while consistently revealing the way that these landscapes are products of and archives of particular histories of human activity.

Catastrophe and the Commons

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I argued that the nineteenth-century realist novel participated in constructing a history of victimless enclosure through the aesthetic dissemblance of verisimilitude in descriptions of natural scenery. This formal quality was inaugurated in *Robinson Crusoe* and fully realized in the dehistoricized landscape garden of *Pride and Prejudice*. The marriage plot, I suggested, follows a similar formal and aesthetic logic to the landscape garden. Like a happy marriage, the landscape garden

seems to be natural despite its belabored constructedness. Like a good match, a walk through a garden seems to be determined by individual choices when it is fact socially and structurally conditioned. The landscape garden, I suggest, holds a privileged position as a catalyst for the ideological strategies of the marriage plot, and remains one of its most resonant settings (enabling, for instance, the proposal scene in *Jane Eyre*). If Austen's novels, as I have argued, digested and polished unrulier representations of enclosure in earlier novels, Eliot can then take up this somewhat stable formal and symbolic convention of the landscape garden and rework it to recast realist aesthetics as self-consciously designed. The episode of Maggie's adventure with the gypsies stages the loss of the commons as a formal disenchantment. Instead of finding the "Common" of the English cultural imagination, she finds a beleaguered group of unfriendly people on the side of a road. New geographical formations attempt to replace the common but cannot resolve the contradictions of her social condition—pointing to the lived experience of an intensifying pace of change during this transition to industrial modernity.

Maggie's disenchantment begins with a satire of the rural bourgeoisie. The Pulletts' house is a fortress of aggressive sanitation and mindless consumption. Behind an intimidating front door are sparkling floors that require the children to endure a humiliating foot scraping, polished oak stairs that terrify the timid Mrs. Tulliver, and a darkened room full of shrouded furniture in which bonnets are stored in rose-leaves and silver paper until they go out of fashion, and are thus rendered decent to wear in public. Once the children escape the house, they are enjoined "not to go off the paved walks in the garden, and if they wanted to see the poultry fed, to view them from a distance on the horse-block" (80). The slow deterioration of control as the children move away from the

house reaches its first climax when Maggie pushes Lucy Pullet into the muddy pond. Their spatial transgression is marked visually by the “spoiling of [Lucy’s] pretty best clothes, and the discomfort of being wet and dirty” (86). This initial disaster occasions Maggie’s decision to run away to join the gypsies, a decision that allows Eliot to widen the scope and complicate the division between domestic order and rural disorder.

The narrator describes Maggie’s journey from the Pullet estate to Dunlow Common by providing a surprisingly robust account of the spatial stratification of the countryside. First, Maggie travels the distance of “three long fields” to reach the intersection of the country lane with the high-road. She stops for a moment there, “reflecting that running away was not a pleasant thing until one had got quite to the common where the gypsies were” (89). The agricultural land makes her feel “safe” because she can be sure that her parents will not meet her there, but this sense of safety is quickly undercut by the uncomfortable presence of “shabby looking” traveling men. The dichotomy between the bourgeois home and the countryside spatializes class difference, but Maggie feels unwelcome in both. To avoid meeting more travelers, she enters a lane between fields; the privacy of the enclosing hedges gives Maggie a thrill of pleasure that anticipates her future delight in the privacy of the Red Deeps:

She turned through the first gate that was not locked, and felt a delightful sense of privacy in creeping along by the hedgerows, after her recent humiliating encounter. She was used to wandering about the fields by herself, and was less timid there than on the highroad. Sometimes she had to climb over high gates, but that was a small evil; she was getting out of reach very fast, and she should probably soon come within sight of Dunlow Common, or at least of some other common, for she had heard her father say that you couldn't go very far without coming to a common. She hoped so, for she was getting rather tired and hungry, and until she reached the gypsies there was no definite prospect of bread and butter (89).

The narrator ironically reveals, throughout the journey, Maggie's ill-informed expectations of the commons. Because she knows that people live on commons, she presumes those people enjoy the domestic pleasures that she expects from a home. These false expectations are also conditioned by the perspectival foreshortening of the rustic landscape painting.⁵⁷ In a painting, the manicured green lines of an enclosed field in the foreground run directly into the shadowy tangle. She finds it "very surprising" that she has been walking for "such a great distance" and that "the common did not come within sight" (90). Dusk falls as she walks through "pasture-land" of Garum, spotting only one laborer in the distance. Finally, she reaches the end of the fields, where a closed gate frames the transition between enclosed land and something unregulated:

At last, however, the green fields came to an end, and Maggie found herself looking through the bars of a gate into a lane with a wide margin of grass on each side of it. She had never seen such a wide lane before, and, without her knowing why, it gave her the impression that the common could not be far off... (90).

Though she has grown weary with her travel through the empty fields, crossing the border brings to mind terrifying images, the monsters and thieves that have been regularly banished from the conventions of the enclosed plots of the realist novel.⁵⁸

She crept through the bars of the gate and walked on with new spirit, though not without haunting images of Apollyon, and a highwayman with a pistol, and a blinking dwarf in yellow with a mouth from ear to ear, and other miscellaneous dangers. For poor little Maggie had at once the timidity of an active imagination

⁵⁷ The narrator also uses some recognizable tropes of the English rustic landscape painting tradition. These figures are discussed in detail by Ann Bermingham in *Landscape and Ideology*. The relationship between painting and realism are also usefully described by Peter Brooks in *Realist Vision* and Ruth Yeazel in *Art of the Everyday*.

⁵⁸ As I suggest in the first chapter, the formal structure of the realist novel in *Robinson Crusoe* takes shape around the domestic rhythms of island life, while the episodic structure of romance and adventure are pushed to the margins at the opening and conclusion of the novel. Note also that Apollyon is the "foul fiend" from *Pilgrims Progress*, one of the romances that Michael McKeon identifies as an import precursor to the development of the novel.

and the daring that comes from overmastering impulse. She had rushed into the adventure of seeking her unknown kindred, the gypsies; and now she was in this strange lane, she hardly dared look on one side of her, lest she should see the diabolical blacksmith in his leathern apron grinning at her with arms akimbo. (90)

Rather than banishing the fantastical beasts and pirates of the romance, the narrator transforms the monsters of Maggie's imagination into a monstrous description of the, presumably Roma, boy. She first mistakes the "gypsy" child as a "diabolical kind of fungus" with "ragged clothes," a "dark shaggy head" (90). The encampment, when Maggie finally reaches it, yet again frustrates her expectations:

...at the next bend in the lane Maggie actually saw the little semicircular black tent with the blue smoke rising before it, which was to be her refuge from all the blighting obloquy that had pursued her in civilized life. She even saw a tall female figure by the column of smoke, doubtless the gypsy-mother, who provided the tea and other groceries; it was astonishing to herself that she did not feel more delighted. But it was startling to find the gypsies in a lane, after all, and not on a common; indeed, it was rather disappointing; for a mysterious illimitable common, where there were sand-pits to hide in, and one was out of everybody's reach, had always made part of Maggie's picture of gypsy life. (91)

The "semicircular tent" could be pulled from John Constable's "Vale of Dedham" (1828), just as the "tall figure by the column of smoke" calls to mind Thomas Gainsborough's "Gypsy Encampment, Sunset" (1778). These recognizable figures confirm Maggie's identification, though she is startled to find that the community has camped on a lane rather than a common, without such idealized aspects of the "picture of gypsy life" as sand pits and "illimitable" open space.⁵⁹

If *The Mill on the Floss* is a *bildungsroman*, then this episode ought to serve as a lesson to both Maggie and the reader about the dangers of artistic misrepresentation. The

⁵⁹ The irony of Maggie's vision of common life being sand-pits to hide in and unlimited open spaces suggests that the fantasy of agrarian communities at the core of English identity is always already distorted by the centuries of policing and expropriation that contributed to its erasure.

episode does prefigure her later infatuation and subsequent disenchantment with romances and marriage novels, which in turn prefigures her own botched elopement. In the process of maturation, Maggie's experience with the gypsies reinforces her attachments to her family—as well as the restrictive comforts of the mode of bourgeois “Englishness” with which she had so strongly disidentified. As I argued in the first chapter, the commons hold a privileged ideological position in English representations of the country. Although the destruction and enclosure of the commons was in fact an effect of the rise of industrial capitalism, facilitated by the state at multiple levels, these eradicated spaces ironically became the icon of English national identity. Their reincorporation into the aesthetics of the landscape garden and the realist novel neutralized the fraught history of enclosure, while ensuring that a trace of communal modes of life glimmered behind the increasing social atomization of the industrial state. But in Eliot's version of the realist novel, the community who turns out to be at the heart of Englishness is actually a multiply disenfranchised and displaced group of non-white and ostensibly non-English people. Eliot's gypsies still refer to the defunct communalism of lost agrarian ways of life, but with the same kind of weary realism that she endorses in the metaphor of the Rhone and Rhine.

Maggie's disenchantment with the gypsies dislocates the fantasy of the common from its place in the aesthetic convention of the novel. Instead, the Red Deeps—a space I have been calling a narrative annex—assumes a primary structural position in Maggie's romance plot. Eliot acknowledges the historical reality of the destroyed commons—indeed, the common that Maggie searches for never actually appears. The “gypsies” are camped on the side of the road, the generosity of their communal meal cramped by

poverty and discomfort. Without erasing the aesthetic centrality of the English common, Eliot disfigures it as a conventional site of resolution. Instead of the picturesque scene of Austen's resolved courtship in the artfully constructed landscape garden, Maggie leaves the landscape garden to find what it refers to—and finds that that referent isn't there. In its place Eliot inserts the recovering scar of a former quarry. The narrative of personal development is similarly displaced: Maggie's intelligence and desire seem to give her the capacity for success outside of the provincial expectations of St. Ogg's—but just like the absent common, the fantastical version of herself that she tries to transform into never actually appears. But instead of creating a “modern” position for her to step into, Eliot refuses to imagine away her limited social options. As Nancy Armstrong writes in *How Novels Think*, “Eliot endows her heroine with the rationality and will to move out of a provincial town and into the mainstream of modern life. But Eliot puts that rationality and will in a sexually attractive body that compels men to compete for it” (91). Despite her efforts to remain loyal to her increasingly obsolete kinship formations with her family, Armstrong suggests, “Maggie Tulliver is inexorably drawn into a sexual relationship with their competitors, historically later versions of ruling-class men” (91).⁶⁰

The volatility of her social position is doubled: she straddles the nexus of historical

⁶⁰ Again, Armstrong tends to focus on the subject, in this case the subjects desire, rather the spaces that allow and disallow that desire to find expression. She continues, in *How Novels Think*, to claim that *Mill on the Floss* rethinks “the displacement that relocates masculine aggression in a female body where the threat it poses can be localized and contained” (93). But the chain of metonym that link violent actions in this novel follow a “sequence of hydraulic metaphors” that not only direct “sexual energy in the novel but determines the flow of money, information, and modernization as well...” (93). Here, I am in complete accord with Armstrong. As she writes, “the confrontation between” the older metonymic chain of individualism and a more contemporary sense of the inevitability of progress “not only wipes out an earlier generation along with its basis for interpersonal relations but also dissolves the link between sexual precocity and individuality, locating desire outside the individual in a nature heedless of both personal wishes and social conventions” (93).

change, but there are no acceptable modes of being in either of the eras in which she exists. This social negation echoes the effect of enclosure on rural populations that relied on commons—becoming trespassers and poachers without ever changing their way of life.

These echoes of the social cost of the lost commons reinforce the novel's suggestion that modernity is fatally unstable. Between the gypsy episode and the romance plot that concludes the novel, instability replaces stability. The figure of the common is jettisoned for the byways and trade routes of the new English countryside. The fantasy of resolution in marriage never even becomes an option in this novel: Maggie's brother, a young man she pities, and her cousin's fiancé all supplant one another as unfit options for a union that will only cause conflict. There is a vague sense that Maggie's life is drifting towards ruin—but without any discrete event of ruination to narrate.⁶¹ According to the Semperian logic described earlier in this chapter, a need for flexible structure asserts itself, but the durable formations of convention have not yet been eroded. As Ruskin might have argued, architectural consistency must be reinforced in order to maintain continuity in a new era of social formations. The climax of the novel, fittingly, stages the violent effects of the struggle between instability and stability. Although the narrator carefully prefigures the coming flood by citing a chorus of local chatter that refers to floods of the past, there is an implied likelihood that profit-driven human construction caused the flood.

⁶¹ See also, Nathan Hensley's reading of the multiple deferrals of the moment of violence in *Poetics of Empire*.

Drawing attention to the danger of cheap industrial development, Mr. Pivart's dam upstream can be identified as the unnamed cause of the flood. Many readings of the novel, from Henry James to Sally Shuttleworth, provide comprehensive and convincing allegorical frameworks for understanding the flood. Because the flood is positioned by the text itself as a kind of allegorical finale, these readings do seem to capture the fundamental signifying impulses of the final few pages of the novel. But what these readings often miss are the literal causes that the novel also makes transparent. When irrigation is centered as the literal "cause" of the flood, then Shuttleworth's readings of catastrophism and gradualism, Hensley's distillation of the fundamental mechanism of liberal violence, and Esty's framework of modernization and national time, can all be applied, with all of their interpretative weight, to the history of water use in nineteenth-century England. Just like the matrix of symbols and literary devices that prefigure the conclusion of the novel, Eliot is careful to provide adequate but muted logical explanations for its inevitability. Mr. Tulliver complains that Dorlcote Mill has been running for "a hundred years and better, and nobody ever heard of a Pivart meddling with the river" (130). "I'll *Pivart*" him!" Tulliver adds, drawing out the name's homophony with both "divert" and "prevent"—just what Pivart intends to accomplish. The novel makes it clear that Pivart's dam is an unprecedented structure in St. Ogg's, although its technological novelty is obscured through Mr. Tulliver's own foggy notion of the legal "raskillry" of Pivart, Dix, and Wakem.

The particular embodiment of the evil principle now exciting Mr. Tulliver's determined resistance was Mr. Pivart, who, having lands higher up the Ripple, was taking measures for their irrigation, which either were, or would be, or were bound to be (on the principle that water was water), an infringement on Mr. Tulliver's legitimate share of water-power. (129)

He complains that “it’s common sense, as Pivart’s dikes must do me injury!” (130). He is frustrated by the decreasing flow of the Ripple, which impacts the output of his own mill—but the “common sense” that predicts injury also looks ahead to the destructive flood that Pivart’s dam ultimately provokes. The wordplay around the diverting Pivart and his slippery accomplice Wakem—who Tulliver claims is “thick as mud” with his enemies—all draw out the tension between flow and stoppage. Like many of the catastrophes in the novel, the scene of Tulliver’s ruin seems to be the climax of the irrigation plot. But this family tragedy is escalated when Tulliver flogs Wakem and reaches a newly epic register after the bursting of the dam. Though the flood may seem like a resolution contrived to solve the problems of a novel that can have no resolutions, it flows directly from the original conflict of the irrigation plot. The logical continuity of the flood is disguised as vengeance to the reader, and fate to those who survive it. Just as the dam itself is never fully understood by her father, Maggie and the reader have no time to understand the nature of the flood. In the final paragraphs of the novel, the narrator again diverts affective attention from the historical/developmental meaning of the flood towards the emotional wake of its aftermath.

The final paragraphs of the novel betray the secret of realist aesthetics—the constructedness of its own form—through the proxy of landscape description. This forbidden disclosure destabilizes the realist novel at multiple levels. The apparently authentic natural world in which readers live their lives and activities of English novels take place are both shown to be imagined. The events of the realist novel and the memories of those who live outside of it are both shown to be constructions. Finally, the

fundamental violence of the capitalist system that produces the environments represented by the novel is shown to be effect of the same historical conditions in which realist representation might emerge.

Nature repairs her ravages—repairs them with her sunshine, and with human labour. The desolation wrought by that flood, had left little visible trace on the face of the earth, five years after. The fifth autumn was rich in golden corn-stacks, rising in thick clusters among the distant hedgerows; the wharves and warehouses on the Floss were busy again, with echoes of eager voices, with hopeful lading and unlading.

And every man and woman mentioned in this history was still living—except those whose end we know.

Nature repairs her ravages—but not all. The uptorn trees are not rooted again; the parted hills are left scarred: if there is a new growth the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of part rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair. (422)

Here, the narrator (speaking from a fictional present contemporaneous with the writing of the novel), thinks back to the future that Tom and Maggie did not experience.

Immediately the distinction between natural growth and human development is collapsed: “nature” repairs the destruction of the flood with both “her sunshine” and “human labour.” The landscape that is described is wholly commercial: corn-stacks and hedgerows signify the regularized fields of a post-enclosure countryside. The “wharves and warehouses”—the weaponized debris that dragged Tom and Maggie to the bottom of the Floss—have also been “repaired” by nature. If this was a pastoral novel, it is now decidedly a novel of industrialization. If this was ever a bildungsroman, it has ceased to be so: the two protagonists have been killed by the violence caused by the exploitation of natural resources. Other, more impersonal causalities of industrial development are also visible. Uprooted trees and broken hillsides mark the intensity of the violence. But, with a subtle attention to detail, the narrator recognizes that even where regrowth occurs, new

life is also a kind of tombstone: “there is no thorough repair” (422). To “eyes that dwelt on the past,” in this case, to the realist author and their readers, the discontinuity of historical development is all too apparent.

Despite this reckoning with the social rather than purely natural or inevitable forces that compose this landscape, the conclusion to *The Mill on the Floss* Eliot makes it clear that the power of design is not ultimately bound by human agency. Both natural growth and the dispersed structural causation of capitalist development move outside of the control of individual human actors. By frustrating the realist assumption that the world of the novel bears a close, if not exact, relation to the world of the reader, *and* by framing memory itself as a kind of realist narration of selfhood, Eliot replots the progress of the realist novel. Realist novels and landscape architecture share two qualities: they are both imagined and designed. These systems of imaginative design, the novel suggests, also have a shared future. The realist novel and industrial development both contribute to their own inevitable collapse. But, as Eliot’s engagement with the architecture of landscape shows, the nihilism of the *Mill on the Floss* is not a general pessimism: it is specific to the nineteenth-century rhythms of ecological and infrastructural anxiety that emerged in an era of unprecedented spatial change.

CHAPTER THREE Bleak Prospects: Wasteland and National Identity in Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native*

Plunging and labouring on in a tide of visions,
Dolorous and dear,
Forward I pushed my way as amid waste waters
Stretching around,
Through whose eddies there glimmered the customed landscape
Yonder and near.

“In Front of Landscape” (1913)

Midway through *The Return of the Native* (1878) Damon Wildeve and Diggory Venn sit in a clearing in the gorse, playing dice. As the light fades, Venn enlists a number of glowworms to illuminate the stump that serves as their table. Curious ponies are drawn to the noise, populating an uncanny audience for the pair of antagonistic gamblers. With understated humor, the narrator notes: “the incongruity between the men’s deeds and their environment was great” (198). Such incongruity between the activity of humans and the environments in which they live is a central concern of Hardy’s novels. His writing attends to the fluctuating intimacy between spaces and people, and the profound alienation that this dynamic relationship can incur. His skilled transcription of the experience of a dramatically changing world draws from the affordances of the novel form itself, which addresses individual and communal forms of experience with particular attention to the representative problem of scale.

Novels from *Jane Eyre* to *Bleak House* to *Middlemarch* navigate the spaces between the personal and the political, the national and the global, the domestic and the public. Hardy’s Wessex novels operate at the limits of this dialectic. His novels meticulously index the traditions of a particular region of rural England while also, as Gillian Beer puts it, embarking on the task of “finding a scale for the human” (223). Hardy’s fiction offers some of literature’s most imaginative attempts to reconcile individual experiences with the political, economic, and environmental structures that so often determine them.

How is it that Hardy's novels, which seem so carefully attuned to the local, always seem to be scaling up? This chapter seeks to reconcile the environmentalism and transnationalism of Hardy's work with the rural tradition from which they both developed in order to theorize the relationship between land use and the history of the novel. Hardy's descriptive sensitivity to landscape advances an admiration for the parsimonious modes of use that characterize common right. This admiration is motivated by a rejection of cosmopolitan modernity and capitalist extraction. However, as the novel seeks to make the history of this kind of use coherent, a logic of traditional English community emerges. This logic—specifically, the premise that frugal respect for the land allows one to extract enough value to live without destroying the environment—then becomes a moral abstraction of English ruralism that subtends multiple formations of English nationalism.

The environmentalist register of Hardy's novels emerges from a more traditionally Marxist concern with the conversion of land into property.⁶² While the relationship between capitalist development and rural life is frequently characterized through the opposition of the city and the country, Hardy's novels take care to show that the process of agricultural development had local characteristics independent from the influence of nearby urban centers. This historical dynamic is most comprehensively described by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. Williams charts the diverse and sometimes contradictory narratives of the "English countryside" as it was put to different cultural uses across the advent of British modernity. While country house poems praised the paternal custodianship of ancestral landowners newly acclimating to an

⁶² Many scholars have noted the role of the environment in Hardy's scalar maneuvers. These accounts draw from Gillian Beer's now classic analysis of the impact of Darwinian thought on Hardy's representations of sexuality and gender, as well as on his conception of scale in narrative. Benjamin Morgan, Jesse Oak Taylor, and Elizabeth Carolyn Miller have related Hardy's ecological thought to his concern with scale. Others, like Anna Feuerstein and Elisha Cohn, attend to the environmental ethics that underwrite Hardy's attention to non-human animals. Anna Burton, William Cohen, Megan Ward, and John Heaney all focus on the different ways that plant life informs Hardy's writing.

early capitalist market, others recorded the details of destruction and dislocation that this market occasioned. At the same time, the concept of “untouched” nature emerged as a moral standard against which urban development and industrial agriculture might be judged. Although this figuration of nature was sometimes a relatively superficial icon of purity, it also enabled romantics like John Clare to levy a materially sensitive critique of the effects of enclosure and improvement on the former English peasantry—transformed suddenly into vagrants, trespassers, and poachers. As the realist novel rose to ascendancy, writers from Austen to Eliot struggled to find an aesthetic perspective capable of registering the contradictory realities of country life. By Williams’ account, Hardy’s fiction best captures the complex temporal and aesthetic realities of rural England. Hardy, as both “the educated observer and the passionate participant, in a period of general and radical change,” manages to represent the entangled dynamics of education, class, lineage, labor, and technology in his Wessex novels (206).

Although Williams is more focused on the gathering sense of opposition between civilization and nature, waste is also key to the ideological exchange between country and city. The history of development that Williams describes had two major components: the enclosure of open arable fields, which accounted for “some four million acres,” and the enclosure of the “wastes,” which accounted for “some two million acres” (101). The two forms had different techniques of implementation and affected different communities. The enclosure of arable fields, Williams wagers, would have destroyed close-knit, nucleated village economies that subsisted on limited systems of exchange within an otherwise feudal world. The enclosure of the wastes, by contrast, would have suppressed the “marginal independence” of “cottagers, squatters, isolated settlers in mainly uncultivated land” (101)—a broader and more diverse population including former peasants, itinerant laborers, vagrants, and others with less clearly defined roles in the changing social landscape of the countryside. This is the world that Hardy describes in *Return of the Native*—a world in which the many versions of nature that Williams recounts, and the

material histories to which they correspond, are being actively navigated within the context of a new kind of English modernity. In this world, to live on a “waste” is to be newly relegated to the past, as the major activities of English enclosure had drawn to a close. Egdon Heath is neatly captured by Williams’ distinction between the “residual” and the “archaic:” a society that “has been effectively formed in the past, but... is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present” (121). Residual cultural formations are thus capable of carrying multiple meanings, those assigned by dominant culture in the context of the past and those newly formed and reformed in the present.

Hardy’s use of “waste” in the novel is similarly amorphous: the term adapts to describe the heath, the losses and failures of personal life, and the refuse and detritus that accompanies human existence. However, in this chapter I am focused particularly on the historical category of “wasteland” described by Williams, JM Neeson, Vittoria Di Palma, Ann Bermingham, E.P. Thompson and other historians of the English countryside. While this “waste” is historically specific, it also draws strength from the structures of feeling that Williams so elegantly describes. The idea of unused, unproductive, unpeopled lands authorized the violence and theft orchestrated by the rising class of landowners. This kind of imagination connects Egdon Heath with other territories threatened by various institutions of accumulation, from the Highland Clearances in Scotland and British imperialism in America and Australia to the Israeli apartheid state and Robert Moses’ urban planning commission.

Marx provides the rubric of this historical narrative in the eighth part of *Capital*. His ironic description of the “secret” of primitive accumulation discloses the routine process of expropriation obfuscated by economic accounts of the gradual ascendance of a “diligent, intelligent, and above all frugal elite” above a group of “lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living” (874). Marx corrects this “theological” fantasy, arguing that “so-called primitive accumulation... is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the

producer from the means of production” (875). He takes the English history of land enclosure as its “classic form” (876). Marx describes how the gradual theft of common land from peasants in the sixteenth century became institutionalized in the eighteenth century’s “Bills for Inclosure of Commons” (855). In concert with this institutionalization, those living on the land were gradually cleared away by force, precipitating the migration of the rural proletariat into cities. While this “bloody legislation against the expropriated” effectively destroyed the English peasantry, it also produced the conditions for proletarian solidarity that led to the revolutionary movements of the early nineteenth century. This dialectical relation between the peasantry and the proletariat, in which inchoate freedom emerges from the transition of the laboring class from one form of bondage to another, shapes Hardy’s nostalgic account of rural pre-capitalist communities. Further, Marx’s argument that “primitive accumulation has more or less been accomplished in Western Europe” establishes demand for related modes of exploitation that were being refined in the colonies (935). Pre-capitalist nostalgia and colonial speculation, then, are linked together through this material history of territorial expropriation.

Marx frames primitive accumulation as the original sin of capitalist development; subsequent scholars have elaborated on this claim by tracing the various effects and transformations of British enclosure. Feminist and postcolonial scholars have contested the priorness of primitive accumulation by showing that the enclosure and privatization territories, bodies, and forms of life are integral to the continued operation of capitalism. In her classic refusal of Foucault’s discursive history of sexuality, for example, Silvia Federici shows that much of what constitutes modern gender and sexuality emerged from the forms of control that accompanied the transition to a capitalist system predicated on the ownership of land as property. Defamiliarizing both property and the gendered body, Federici describes primitive accumulation as a contentious process of resistance and repression centered around both land and biological reproduction. Women’s bodies thus effectively became a substitute for the commons in the early

modern era. Reproductive capacity was redefined as a natural resource available to capitalist consumption. Simultaneously, reproductive labor was coded as nonlabor. In this way, Federici and other feminists contest primitive accumulation as a pre-capitalist phenomenon. In doing so they also reaffirm that the illusion of geographical “pastness” upon which the narrative of primitive accumulation relies obscures a much more contemporaneous and entangled nineteenth-century global economy. More recently, Robert Nichols has written about the history of land theft in the American colonies, which he describes using the concept of “recursive dispossession”: European colonizers generated property by stealing something that had not previously been “owned.” Only after taking control of land was it recognizable as property, leaving indigenous Americans with the fraught task of retrofitting non-possessive modes of relating to the land in order to claim prior ownership. In all of its permutations, capitalist primitive accumulation disguises itself in legality by producing new legal codes that permit new techniques of expropriation. This makes community efforts at resistance and residual forms of communal existence more difficult to register. In addition, the perpetual self-erasure of primitive accumulation contributes to its apparent pre-capitalist position on the timeline of human civilization. This further absolves the executors of capitalism by banishing their crimes to a pre-civilized world. Hardy’s novels can be understood as fracturing this timeline. Part of his project in *The Return of the Native*—a project harmonious with much of Marx’s theoretical work in *Capital*—is to depict the ongoingness of primitive accumulation despite the onset of modernity. Just as Federici shows the relation of English land enclosure to contemporary debates over access to abortion, or Nichols marks the homophony between seventeenth-century English peasant revolts and recent protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline, Hardy uses the novel form to highlight the temporal slipperiness of lived experience on the unenclosed heathland of Egdon.

As a mediation of these ongoing historical processes of accumulation both in England and on the scale of empire, Hardy’s descriptions of Egdon Heath assume a special importance.

While passages describing wasteland may seem secondary to character description and supplemental to narrative development, landscape description—in fact, landscape itself—is a key site for the elaboration of British discourse on enclosure, improvement, and the history of the commons. The rustic landscapes described in British fiction reflect the aesthetic principles of the landscape garden, which emerged as a material and aesthetic response to British land enclosure. Ann Bermingham has convincingly argued that the cultural idea of the rustic landscape developed across the eighteenth century as intensifying land enclosure made the English landscape unrecognizable.⁶³ Landscape gardens, and then landscape paintings, and finally landscape description in novels developed to provide an aesthetic supplement to the material deficiency in natural British countryside. The privatization of common land precipitated a number of historical phenomena that became central to national identity: English industrialism was imagined as a collective result of civilization, ingenuity, and modernization; the expropriation of land and labor that supported this economic transition was also martialled into the narrative of national identity. Elegized and nostalgically simulated even as it was being seized and privatized, the “lost” commons served as a kind of mythical origin for English social values, and a test against which the corruption of urban development could be measured.

The realist novel is another product of the privatization, individualization, and mechanization that attended English enclosure. But the novel and the landscape garden are more than just parallel effects of England’s transition to capitalism. Nineteenth-century British writers recognized landscape gardens as rich symbolic repositories of national culture and as aesthetic objects with similar structural logics to realist novels. Both the English landscape garden and the novel, as we have seen from Defoe to Austen to Eliot, build worlds that attempt to disguise their

⁶³ See Ann Bermingham *Landscape and Ideology*: “In the landscape garden art took up the very same raw material as the economic and social process of enclosure. Moreover, because the landscape garden was contiguous with the enclosure landscape, the antithesis between the instrumental and non-instrumental (aesthetic) use of land was pronounced, finally coming to shape the aesthetics of garden composition itself” (11).

own artifice. A critical element of the aesthetic success of the landscape garden is its approximation of ecological reality, just as a crucial element of the novel is its representation of social reality. The tension between the complex formal infrastructure and naturalistic verisimilitude of both the landscape garden and the realist novel make them aesthetic siblings. Descriptions of landscape gardens in realist novels, then, can be understood as a kind of auto-theory: that is, they articulate the aesthetic project of realism and contextualize this project in terms of a specific political history. These descriptions offer evidence of how the violent aspects of the novel's history, from land enclosure to colonialism, can be mediated into a more "natural" form. Just as the landscape garden neutralizes the perceived loss of the commons, the realist novel neutralizes some of the losses of previous forms of collective lived experience.

If the landscape garden is a particularly resonant site for the analysis of the history of enclosure in English literature, the wasteland operates in an adjacent position. The aesthetic of the landscape garden nostalgically refers to the lost commons. The wasteland, by contrast, is an actually unenclosed landscape that has persisted because of the difficulty and expense it would require to enclose and improve it. Vittoria Di Palma describes wasteland as a "landscape that resists notions of proper or appropriate use" (3). Some wastelands can be thought of as commons that have survived, yet they bear little aesthetic resemblance to the idealized features of the commons as simulated in the form of the landscape garden. Whereas the landscape garden participates in a nostalgic and nationalistic record of English country life, the wasteland is a relic of that past that remains potentially enclosable. Wastelands may have changed little since the thirteenth century, but perhaps only wait for the right technology to "improve" them for modern usage. In sum, the wasteland and the landscape garden both refer to the history of the commons, but the wasteland preserves some of the actual practices of common land use.

This resistance to enclosure is part of what impels Hardy to find in Egdon Heath an authentic repository of Englishness, and to situate this waste land at the symbolic and narrative

center of *The Return of the Native*. This reorientation from pasture to wasteland, I want to suggest, distills the activity of a certain kind of rural labor as a fundamental feature of English social life. Landscapes, both actually existing and novelistic, index the presence of this kind of labor and situate it within the larger ideological project of English national culture. By resituating authentic English life on the heath, Hardy fuses the aesthetic affordances of wasteland with English identity—generating a powerful tool for the extension of nationalist ideology. This article traces the surprising continuity between that nationalism and the wastelands of the English countryside.

The Chastened Sublime

The opening chapter of *The Return of the Native* speculates that humankind may be entering a new era of aesthetics. “Orthodox beauty,” the narrator suggests, might be “approaching its last quarter” (9). The aesthetic category for the modern subject is a “chastened sublimity” that can be found in such unappealing spots as the barren landscape of Thule and the chilly seaside of Scheveningen. Instead of invoking the more familiar telos of a classical preoccupation with beauty that progresses towards a mature modern taste for sublimity, the narrator suggests that modernity is characterized by moderate displeasure. The landscapes that satisfy the modern subject are more like the “façade of a prison” than the “façade of a palace.” The narrator explains that a place that is “too smiling” risks causing its spectators to experience a sense of “mockery,” while an “oversadly tinged” environment doesn’t highlight the inevitable misery of the person who moves through it. The narrator describes this historical transition in terms of human development: this “oversad” aesthetic was “distasteful to our race when it was young.” But the maturity of humankind helps the modern subject, apparently so browbeaten by life that beauty seems to mock him, to appreciate the subdued and subtle pleasures of a place like Egdon Heath.

While the aesthetic effects of Egdon Heath can be intense, these intensities are reached “by way of the solemn” rather than “by way of the brilliant” (10). This muted intensity is “perfectly accordant with man’s nature—neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony” (10). Modernity is a bleak prospect, and Egdon Heath is the prospect of modernity.

Many Victorian novelists embraced the concept of moderation; George Eliot’s validation of the “middling” and Charlotte Brontë’s valorization of Jane Eyre’s physical “plainness” come to mind. But Hardy idiosyncratically links aesthetic moderation to deep time. The opening chapter goes on to describe the Heath as one of the oldest things in England: “ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress” (10). It is matched only by the “stars overhead” in consistency across time. Neither the sea, nor the fields, nor the rivers, nor the villages, nor the people around Egdon can claim such “ancient permanence.” The heath features only two alterations, an “aged highway and a still more aged barrow,” and even these are “almost crystalized to natural products by long continuance” (11). How can Egdon Heath be at once the icon of modern aesthetic sensibility and a rare artefact of “prehistoric times”? What does this resilient landscape of the past have to offer the exhausted sensibilities of the nineteenth-century British viewer?

By way of an answer, Hardy points the reader towards life on the heath to indicate that resistance to civilization, rather than improvement, is a fundamental characteristic of modernity. If the “orthodox beauty” of more civilized landscapes, as the opening pages suggest, is reaching its “last quarter” (9), the novel illustrates this hypothesis by staging several conflicts between traditional rural ways of life and failed attempts to improve those traditions. Eustacia’s longing for city existence destroys her lonely but powerful country status; Clym’s dreams of education cannot satisfy him like the labor of furze gathering. In contrast, Diggory Venn, who retreats from

farm life to the even more quaint activity of redden sale, finds success. The opening passages of the novel offer an aesthetic lesson that is then dramatized in the plot: to be modern is to celebrate the meager pleasures of the past.

This way of seeing asks viewers to slow down, expect less, and make more of the little that is offered. The narrator wants to convince the reader that Egdon Heath is worth looking at, even if learning to look is difficult. The marks of historical change scarcely register on the face of the heath. “Civilization is [the] enemy” of this untamable landscape (11). The “trifling irregularities” that can be found are not “caused by pickaxe, plough, or spade” but the “finger touches” of the “last geological change” (11). Egdon Heath is not just remarkable for having been preserved, but also because its presence in the present is newly valuable for aesthetic consumption both to readers and the citizens who live on its face. History has not made a mark on the land, but the narrator notes that the perpetual “condition” of the landscape has been recorded in the primary document of English property ownership, the Domesday Book. The land is described there as “heathy, furzy, briary wilderness” (10). From the time of William I in 1086, then, Egdon Heath has not changed much: the record of the “length and breadth” of the area is slightly uncertain but “it appears from the figures that the area of Egdon down to the present day has but little diminished” (10). The Domesday Book also notes that the landscape holds the common right of “turbaria,” or cutting turf.⁶⁴ Commoning and modernity are brought into an unlikely relation here: just like the ancient barrows mottling the surface of the heath, the traditions of common right seem out of joint with the modernity that Hardy ascribes to Egdon.

It is precisely the parsimony of commoning, however, that has preserved the material condition of the heath across centuries—and it is because the heath is thought of as a “waste” that

⁶⁴ Vittoria Di Palma offers a useful outline of the primary variants of right of common in *Wasteland: A History*. The six forms of common right are Pasture (right to graze animals), Mast (right to turn out pigs to forage), Estovers (right to cut and take wood), Turbary (right to dig soil and peat for fuel), Soil (right to take sand, gravel, stone and other minerals), and Piscary (the right to fish) (31).

it has survived land enclosure. The unique qualities of the wasteland are thus refracted through the legal restrictions governing its use. The heath continues to exist because the rights of turbary and estovers have allowed for minimal impact on the sturdy fields of gorse; the common right continues to exist because the heath is so difficult to convert into an arable field or grassy pasture. While commons in more welcoming environments were vulnerable to improvement, the unique relation between waste and common right preserves the spatial and social formations of the past. The wasteland is unique as a temporally consistent space.⁶⁵ Hardy delineates some of the aesthetic and social affordances of spatial consistency across time, and then shows that this consistency is an effect of common right. The description proffers a recommendation of the past, rather than a simple record of it. In fact, the record can only survive by virtue of historical common right's persistence across time. In a world increasingly beleaguered by the alienating effects of cosmopolitan urbanization, Hardy offers waste as a therapeutic prospect.

The aesthetic experience of the heath is tethered to ownership: because no one seems to own it, everyone can enjoy it. Divorced from the exclusionary marks of property, it seems that "nature" can be more authentically experienced on the heath. Comfortingly, Egdon Heath produces a feeling of "natural right" in those who wander it. Hardy situates aesthetic pleasure as a compensatory site of ownership: "colours and beauties so far subdued were, at least, the birthright of all" (10). The muted nature of the heath makes it available to everyone, as its range of intensities (its "mood touch[ing] the level of gaiety" only on summer days, its "intensity ... more usually reached by way of the solemn than by way of the brilliant") are detached from human taste and situated on a climatological scale. Traditional British landscape aesthetics from the eighteenth and nineteenth century emphasized the individual position of the viewer in order to

⁶⁵ Because of this, perhaps, it is difficult to tell time on the Heath—as those who live on it use different local techniques to deduce the time of day: "On Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day. The time at any moment was a number of varying doctrines professed by the different hamlets..." (113).

indicate the importance of ownership, but the heath affectively distributes aesthetic experience across various scales—rearticulating “natural right” at the level of perception.

The scale of the wasteland, meanwhile, dislocates humans as the primary focus of narrative description. The novel’s first three chapters position the heath at the intersection of various scales of experience: geological, national, biological, and communal. The first chapter describes Egdon Heath, the “face on which time makes but little impression.” The second introduces a number of anonymous humans, who appear on the scene “hand in hand with trouble.” The third welcomes the reader into the close-knit circle of villagers clustered around a bonfire on a barrow. The series of chapters enacts a persistent feature of Hardy’s fiction: the articulated scales of human experience, the natural world, historical time, and community life. Instead of scaling “up” or “down” to find the protagonist, Hardy casts a descriptive gaze across a scene, introducing some secondary characters and leaving main characters unnamed, offering the “face” of the Heath as much attention as the men who walk upon it. While the narrative ultimately settles on a primary cast of human actors, the destabilizing scalar gestures of these opening chapters remain active as the heath itself is imbricated in the more human-sized plots of romantic intrigue and personal failures.⁶⁶

By jumping between scales that alternately correspond to such varied subjects as human love, national history, climate patterns, and geological movement, the novel manages to isolate that which has been consistent across time. The slow growth and imperceptible change of fields of gorse enable this visualization of stasis. The relative infertility of wasteland greases the gears of historical time. The narrator notes that the barrow upon which people have gathered is still a

⁶⁶ Benjamin Morgan, in “Scale in Tess in Scale” argues that Hardy’s fiction demonstrates the relative, and multiple, intersections of scale in a way that provides special applications in imagining planetary crises like climate change. While Morgan suggests that this scalar multiplicity is largely imperceptible to human experience, one aspect of the effects of Hardy’s description of the heath is to entangle human scales with others so that, while individual human plots are too “small,” to concerted force of human activity across time is relatively “large.”

perfect globe, untouched by plough in the centuries since it was “thrown up.” Land can exist in this state of preservation when it offers no significant value for exploitation. “In the heath’s barrenness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian. There had been no obliteration, because there had been no tending” (17). The technologies and practices of agriculture are linked to “obliteration.” The barrenness of the heath is both what has remained consistent across time, and why it has remained consistent across time.

The aesthetic, spatial, and affective dynamism of waste demands a movement away from the center. Much as the novel’s setting avoids the metropolitan center of industrial British society and keeps a distance even from provincial town life, its descriptions of that remote and austere setting keep their distance from familiar accounts of human subjects’ sensory and emotional responses to environments. To be at the periphery is to find the greatest level of connection between different scales. On Egdon Heath, at what seems to be the edge of the civilized world, Hardy locates the outliers of modern moral, spiritual, and aesthetic experience, but suggests that these outliers are central to Englishness: “The instincts of merry England lingered on here with exceptional vitality,” the narrator remarks of the extant pagan elements of seasonal rites such as May Day (376). Why is it that the wasteland convenes such a scene? Because, as Hardy suggests, it connects different economic, environmental, and social histories as it equalizes their divergent sizes. His use of the wasteland as a mediator of scale demands an analytic that centers the fringes of marginality. Archaic and residual structures become the sites of the most intimacy between seemingly divergent scales of experience. But the critique of the “dominant” nestled in Hardy’s care for the unacknowledged carries its own implicit endorsement of “Englishness” as a mediator of social experience. In fact, the role of the wasteland in the text is to imagine Englishness as a historical abstraction that can be visualized on a global scale. To understand the development of this iteration of nationalist ideology, it is necessary to define the concept of waste.

Waste and the Novel

Waste is a constitutive part of the history of rural space, and it determines much of the language of rural description. The differentiation between areas like wilderness, waste, pasture, and garden hinge on the degree of cultivation and utility offered by the land. This aspect of landscape description is latent in most nineteenth-century novels. Occasionally, though, it is more explicit. The moors of *Wuthering Heights* situate the stagnant lineages of the Lintons and the Earnshaws on similarly barren land. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot transforms the unused Red Deeps into a spatial expression of socially repressed sexual desire. Exploring a different kind of waste in *Hard Times*, Dickens integrates the industrial waste of the previously rural land around Coketown into the sensational plot: the upright Stephen Blackpool is literally swallowed up by an abandoned mineshaft in the devastated English countryside. *The Return of the Native* offers a more comprehensive and explicit engagement with wasteland, providing insight into the articulation between waste, nineteenth-century capitalism, and the novel form. These connections allow the concept of waste to be scaled up and abstracted. As an abstraction, waste takes on an important role in both novelistic form and economic theory.

In *The Return of the Native*, characters and things as well as land are used or underused in ways that seem to the community on Egdon Heath, and often the narrator, to be a waste. Wasted time, wasted expectations, and wasted potential are amplified by the novel's frequent comparison of human beings to elements of landscape. The reciprocal anthropomorphization of the heath and "landscape-ification" of humans draws attention to the material histories of land use that contribute to the existential crises that the characters experience. Much as the opening of the novel strategically anthropomorphizes the "face" of the heath, rendering it legible as a living form, the human characters are reciprocally often realized with the language of landscape

description.⁶⁷ Diggory Venn has eyes as “blue as an autumn mist” (12), Mrs. Yeobright’s face “concentrated” the “solitude exhaled from the heath” (32), the “groundwork” of Thomasin’s “country face” reposes in a “nest of wavy country hair” (37).⁶⁸ The lengthy introduction of Eustacia Vye makes her nearly indistinguishable from the heath, until a burning ember is brought near enough to illuminate her face (52). Later, when after the misunderstanding between Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright during Wildeve’s visit he runs to the window where, “instead of there being before him the pale face of Eustacia, and a masculine shape unknown: “there was only the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which, having defied the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man” (268). The impassive face of the land stands in for Eustacia, intimating the final placidity of her corpse.

The wasted human life, the wasted human body, and the wasteland crystalize in Eustacia’s death. In a passage that characterizes the landscape as a field covered with rotting bodies, Eustacia runs across the heath to meet Wildeve and stumbles “over twisted-furze-roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps of fleshy fungi, which at this season lay scattered about the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal” (293). Her corpse will soon join this grotesque field of rotten body parts, but the narrator suggests that in death, her body has achieved a comfortable complacency that she could never achieve in life: her “stateliness” had been “almost too marked for a dweller in a country domicile” and in death finally finds “an artistically happy background” (313). The biological capacities and aesthetic form of the human body operate like land: it rejects improvement.

⁶⁷ Also see J. Hillis Miller in *Topographies*, who suggests that the relation between face and landscape in this comparison signifies a fundamental disjuncture between the two objects.

⁶⁸ See Daniel Wright’s “Thomas Hardy’s Groundwork” for more on the frequent use of “groundwork” in Hardy’s fiction. Wright reads the opening chapters of *Return of the Native* as an example of Hardy’s metaphysical conception of realism, which he argues is a problem of form and totality.

The relationship between the capacities of the human body and the availability of land for use draw together a close but not coextensive relationship between the exploitation of people as a labor force and the exploitation of land. While Hardy frames waste as a form of resistance to the coercive directives of improvement and productivity, the wasted lives of the novel make it clear that wasteland, too, is an integral part of the dynamic of capitalist expansion. Indeed, waste features prominently in Marx's breakdown of surplus value. In the fifth part of *Capital* Marx argues that the appropriation and reinvestment of surplus value is the fulcrum of the process of capitalist production (651). "In a capitalist society," he writes, "free time is produced for one class by the conversion of the whole lifetime of the masses into labour-time" (667). Surplus value is generated through the exploitation of time and the careful elimination of waste. This capacity to compel workers to sell their labor power relies on the reserve armies of labor composed of relative surplus population. The capitalist strategically eliminates the "waste" of leisure time and the "wasted" energy of inefficient production. What the capitalist sees as "waste" the worker might see as "life." If the exploitation of surplus value in workers relies on the elimination of wasted time, it would seem as though the spatial analogue to the process must rely on the elimination of wasted space. But, like the workforce, the exploitation of the land actually relies on a carefully maintained reserve land.

Surplus value, an abstract and fundamentally social form, cannot truly be spatialized, but mapping absolute and relative surplus value onto spatial concepts allows the relationship between waste and profit to emerge more clearly.⁶⁹ Surplus value is best known in the familiar terms of the

⁶⁹ In his description of differential rent in *Capital Vol. III*, Marx suggests that relative surplus value can be produced not just through the technological advance of machinery, but also the competition between machinery and natural resources. For example, a capitalist will continue to rent land where there is a waterfall as long as the waterfall is a more efficient method of generating power than a steam engine. Rent is still socially constructed by the relation of labor power, not some other mode of valuation. While it may seem like rent is excluded from the surplus value model of generating profit, it is still primarily determined by the relation between paid and unpaid labor time.

equation between labor hours worked and the relative increase of productivity and intensity of work *during* those hours. As Marx shows in volume one, the apparent “surplus” from which profit is derived relies on this material exploitation. In terms of territory, the capitalist generates absolute surplus value by owning as much land as possible, and relative surplus value by exploiting the land as efficiently as possible. Enclosure seems to expand absolute surplus value, and improvement seems to expand relative surplus value. If the exploitation of surplus value in workers relies on the elimination of wasted time, the spatial analogue to the process relies on the elimination of wasted space. In general, wasteland costs too much to improve to generate any surplus value. Draining the fens or clearing the heaths is too expensive to generate a profit. Eventually, as enclosure consumes more and more land, and as technologies of improvement develop, the wasteland will become profitable. Until that moment it waits, like the floating reserve army of labor, to be “employed.” This metaphor has its limits: while the reserve army of labor drives down wages by ensuring that workers can always be replaced, wasteland can devalue surrounding property, and can obstruct its potential improvement. However, wasteland is also subject to changing technologies of production—as shown by the history of the “real” Egdon Heath—which was cleared and planted for lumber in the 1920’s before a nuclear power plant was built in the 1950’s, now in the process of being dismantled. Parts of it might be incorporated into some aspects of capitalist production, like the latent reserve army of labor, as small portions are converted to farmland. Other portions of waste may be used only temporarily and infrequently, like the stagnant reserve army. Waste is an integral part of the exploitation of the land and bears a functional resemblance to the group of people who are most vulnerable to capitalist immiseration, but perhaps most resistant to capitalist exploitation.

These reserves of space and of people provide an opportunity for the most efficient exploitation of wage labor, and the most profitable recirculation of surplus value. While *The Return of the Native* does not suggest that the unemployed are concentrated on the waste, its

focus on wasted lives emphasizes that the heath, with its great capacity for resistance, is still incorporated into the mechanism of English capitalism. Emily Steinlight's work on population in the novel suggests that surplus, especially surplus population, is the "enabling condition" of Hardy's fiction.⁷⁰ This is true of *Return of the Native*: those who do not give up their vocations willingly, like Clym and Diggory, give up their lives unwillingly. *Return of the Native* is a novel built around the lives of people who see themselves and each other as cast-off remainders, either left out of the center of society or retreating from it. Steinlight shows that surplus is not a "quantitative problem to be remedied by population control nor a symptom of bourgeois ideology but an indispensable literary condition" (227). Writing about *Jude the Obscure*, she argues that Hardy's novel "stakes the very meaning of literature on the surplus it creates" (227). If surplus is at the heart of the general form of capital and the literary form of the novel itself, then "waste" names the places and people the novel is not meant to include. Most novels, Steinlight suggests, are about exceptional characters who escape the general tendency to become part of the surplus mass. Against this trend, Hardy tends to narrate the wasted life while refusing to redeem it. Hardy's fiction attempts to penetrate the ideological obfuscations of waste and situate it at the heart of the system that produces it as a thinkable category.

Wasteland is not a byproduct of the interrelated systems of land enclosure, improvement, and agricultural capitalism; it is an engine of the dynamic process that fuels all three. The aesthetic features of the wasteland can thus be thought of as fundamental qualities of the experience of nineteenth-century English capitalism. Hardy both describes the "chastened sublime," with its experiential moderation and disorienting scalar form, and models its lessons in

⁷⁰ She observes that "surplus population, though structurally necessary to the novel, denotes what the protagonist by definition must refuse to be" (228). Hardy's fiction is especially dense with second wives, unexpected and illegitimate children, and redundant lovers. But the detail that really separates Hardy's characters from earlier redundant lives in nineteenth-century fiction, is "that they recognize themselves as disposable" (229).

the formal scope of the novel. The rich detail and symbolic economy afforded by Egdon Heath suggest that it has not been wasted at all, but instead highly valued through Hardy's narrative prose. Like the furze cutters who make something from what at first seems to be nothing, Hardy distills value from what, at the opening of the novel, seems to be a deserted and desolate place. The ability to derive this value from waste is marked as historically English; because it is not merely a feature of the land but a product of character and labor, one aspect of this value is that it is portable. Because the origin of the English novel is closely tied to the process of enclosure, it follows that many of its key features—its attention to detail, its celebration of the moderate, and its refusal of classical idealism—reflect the developing tropes of a particularly English relationship to the land. Despite Hardy's commitment to communal forms of life that exceed the atomization of capitalist modernity, the conventions of the novel form nonetheless enlist this communalism in a fantasy of English national identity.

Conserving Nationalism

It is in fact the centripetal force of nation formation that grounds the unruly representational scales of *Return of the Native*. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator notes:

The instincts of merry England lingered on here with exceptional vitality, and the symbolic customs which tradition has attached to each season of the year were yet a reality on Egdon. Indeed, the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets are pagan still—in these spots homage to nature, self-adoration, frantic gaieties, fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, seem in some way or other to have survived mediaeval doctrine (318).

The fractured and hybrid traditions of the past have been consolidated at the rural outskirts of English space and have, the passage implies, been lost in urban centers. At the same time, these rural places are “outlandish”—a word for foreign habitually invoked in English descriptions of non-English commodities, people, and ideas. Englishness is

thrust away from the center of England into the periphery. The “symbolic customs have an “exceptional vitality” despite being fundamentally fragmented: the traditions are built from “homage to nature, self-adoration, frantic gaieties, [and] fragments of Teutonic rites” (318). The fragments have endured across time, surviving “medieval doctrine,” to become coherent only at the outskirts of English national space. This passage proffers an affectionate respect for the traditions of rural society, especially in opposition to the alienating and historically alienated social life of the city. Often, the anthropological impulse of Hardy’s novels seems to yearn for something beyond both national culture and capitalist structure. But by reaching into the complex past in order to validate the rural culture of the nineteenth-century, Hardy endorses the kinds of imagined communities that are best understood as nations. These pre-national and pre-capitalist pasts are to be understood as nations on their own terms, but the fact of their survival provides a contextual ground against which the nation is formed. A version of history is preserved on the wasteland that resists full incorporation into the nation formation.

If the waste, as I have suggested, sustains some of the labor practices of a commoning community and the social structures that accompany them, the nation form recontextualizes this commoning practice as a prehistory of the frugality and technical expertise of capitalist improvement. The fantasies of historical development that Roman and Anglo-Saxon history provide are literalized in the movement from the cosmopolitan city to the pre-historic country. Significantly, Hardy’s location of pre-capitalist England frequently seems to be figured through Teutonic, Celtic, and Roman lineages. This extends to the residual physical elements of previous eras: from Stonehenge in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* to the ring of the Roman amphitheater and graves of Roman soldiers

littering *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Williams writes that even though these apparently “timeless” aspects of rural England— “the barrows, the Roman ruins... the tablets and monuments in the churches”—only convey “history” after Hardy’s characters have been exposed to education (206). The self-conscious narrator or the upwardly mobile protagonist—like Tess or Clym—is tasked with interpreting these monuments as evidence of national history. However, Hardy also offers many vivid accounts of the deep historical memory and self-conscious experience of history that agrarian communities develop in relation to rural space. The opening chapters of *The Return of the Native*, especially the account of the bonfire on Rainbarrow, offer just such an account. As Alicia Cristoff argues, Hardy’s description of this scene “adds to the history” of English rural life: “Pagan ritual, dominant religion, and conservative and radical political commitments alike shine out from Hardy’s fires” (131). Hardy’s image of the scattered bonfires on the heath as so many figures on an enormous clockface suggests that both in terms of historical time and the map of empire, Egdon is located at the center. The heath operates as a stable physical site for the fundamentally mobile nation to locate itself across both feudal and capitalist modes of production. A distinctly racial logic emerges in this autochthonous linkage between land and population. Whether passed from person to person or preserved in the landscape itself, the waste will always mold the present into a form related to the traditions of past inhabitants. In this way, the centrifugal force of contemporary culture produces a teleology of the outlandish, wherein deviation and exoticism are consolidated in a national type. This racial way of thinking collapses the labor practices that a certain kind of landscape demands with the kind of person who lives on that land. This dynamic is a fundamental characteristic of British imperialism.

The nation form incorporates precapitalist modes of life into a narrative of development and deploys a racial logic to tether this temporal narrative to the relation between city and country. This relation can then be abstracted to broader networks of social formation, notably including empire. Towards the end of *The Country and the City*, Williams writes about the analogic relationship between city/country and metropolis/world. The “metropolitan” societies of Western Europe and North America, he writes, seem to be the industrialized centers of economic, political, and cultural power, existing in sharp distinction from the rest of the world. This relationship is temporalized through industrialization: the metropolis appears developed and the rest of the world underdeveloped or developing. “Thus a model of city and country,” writes Williams, “in economic in political relationships, has gone beyond the boundaries of the nation state, and is seen but also challenged as a model of the world” (279). But this is a model used to produce descriptions of the world. Williams explains that the “real history of city and country” is not a case of successful development in some places and failure to develop in others; rather, “what was happening in the ‘city’, the ‘metropolitan’ economy, determined and was determined by what was made to happen in the ‘country’ (279). The country is developed, just as the city, but to support the city rather than itself; the colony is developed in a similar way. This symbiotic model, which Williams claims began in England as the earliest form of the now dominant model of capitalist development, has expanded outwards from England: “thus one of the last models of ‘city and country’ is the system we now know as imperialism” (279).

Nation-based analyses collapse time and space. The city becomes the present, and the country becomes the past. But in many ways, agricultural development signals the

developmental future. Creating other units of analysis can rectify some of the warped perspectives that attend a focus on the nation. Wallerstein argues against modes of historical analysis, like Williams', that take the nation as their primary unit. This unit produces false concepts that coalesce in the "non-problem" of national economies that seem to "skip" presumed stages of production (4). Wallerstein describes two alternative units of totality: the mini-system and the world system. As mini-systems seem to be extinguished by global capitalism he proceeds to describe the characteristics of the world system.

Wallerstein's concept of "mini-systems," self-contained economic societies that are gradually incorporated into the larger networks of world capitalism, could frame a certain strain of Hardy scholarship that focuses on the isolated and declining agrarian lifestyle as emblematic of pre-capitalist modes of production succumbing to industrialization. Against this understanding of Hardy's Wessex as a remainder of past economic systems, I want to emphasize the ways that Hardy embeds the English countryside in global systems. Indeed, for Wallerstein it is agricultural capitalism that is first articulated on a global scale, rather than industrial modes of production (16). As Robert Nichols and Patricia Seed have noted, many of the same legal and bureaucratic strategies deployed by agricultural capitalists in the acquisition of arable British land were being used simultaneously by British colonists in the Americas.⁷¹ In Wallerstein's account of world historical development, it is the "geographic expansion of the European world-economy" that leads to the "elimination of other world-systems as well as the

⁷¹ See: Robert Nichols *Theft is Property!* and Patricia Seed *Ceremonies of Possession*.

absorption of the remaining mini-systems” (27). The countryside of the early nineteenth century that Hardy describes was deeply entangled in this world system of agricultural exchange.

The traces of global systems that Hardy embeds in the text are visible in the relationship between his characters and the land itself.⁷² These traces take various, and sometimes contradictory forms. While Wessex sometimes figures as land under threat of colonization, at other times the heath seems to convert English figures into foreigners. There are some explicit moments of anti-imperialist rhetoric woven into the working of the heath. The narrator explains that “Wildevve’s patch” was:

...a plot of land redeemed from the heath, and after long and laborious years brought into cultivation. The man who had discovered that it could be tilled died of the labour: the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself in fertilizing it. Wildevve came like Amerigo Vespucci, and received the honours due to those who had gone before. (36)

This description, which ironizes Wildevve’s lazy acquisition of the fertile plot, also suggests that the heath resists the kinds of colonization initiated by Vespucci and those who came before him.

The metaphor of the heath as *terra nullius* activates one vision of global space. Working the land is coded as English, but the land itself has no nation. Elsewhere, the modes of working the land seem to belong to other places and other times. Descriptions of Diggory Venn and his career are riddled with this kind of contradiction and exceptionality. Not only are reddlemen “old school” and “seldom seen,” they have been nearly wiped out by the “introduction of railways” (71). Even though the reddleman is a

⁷² Genevieve Abравanel has written about the Atlantic traces in *Mayor of Casterbridge* in “Hardy’s Transatlantic Wessex: Constructing the Local in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.”

traditional figure who had comprised the “threat of Wessex mothers for generations,” he also lives an “Arab existence” whose respectability is only “insured by the never-failing production of a well-lined purse” (71). The reddleman is compared to a range of “anti-English” figures, from the devil to Napoleon Bonaparte. He lives “like a gipsy; but gipsies he scorned” (71). The “stock” of the reddleman is “more valuable than that of pedlars,” but the residue of their product “spreads its lively hues over everything it lights on, and stamps unmistakably, as with the mark of Cain, any person who has handled it” (71). The forms of nationalism that cluster around Venn concede that the modes of life dictated by waste have transnational siblings. Rather than producing a sense of transnational solidarity, however, the conventions of the novel—to make the individual stand in for the whole, and to make the local a figure for the global—enlist moments like these to imagine Englishness on a global scale.

Like the heath itself, Venn seems to have an almost supernatural attachment to the environment of Egdon. He epitomizes the peculiar kind of nationalism at the core of Hardy’s endorsement of wasteland. This version of Englishness is idiosyncratic, quaint, and threatened by modernity. Diggory’s lifestyle may seem “Arab” and he may seem to be a “Gipsy,” just like Egdon is said to be like both Egypt (293) and Tempe (9). The novel is filled with these kinds of pseudo-racialization: from Eustacia Vye’s Turkish disguise to the “wild Ishmaelitish” heath itself, English figures frequently take on non-English characteristics. Alicia Christoff borrows the term “colonial object relations” from David Eng to describe these overlaid and entangled racial and imperial histories that are ultimately washed white (in the case of Diggory Venn) in the “conventional domestic order” of the novel’s conclusion. By the ending, “gone is Eustacia’s outsized desire, gone

are bright colors, gone are now-outmoded ways of life"... replaced by an "order marked by loss, by exclusion, by violence, and by a 'blanching process' that renders life safe but artificial" (145). Hardy indicates the entanglement of the spatial and temporal processes by which this "blanching" occurs. The numerous pseudo-racializations that take place in the novel can thus be understood as a set of departures and returns. If the imperial model of the country and the city is one of periphery and the center, then the relationship between wasteland and the city ratifies the endurance of English identity. The wasteland provides a sense of what Englishness is in its barest forms. It foregrounds two major characteristics: resiliency and particularity. This Englishness survives across time and can be tested against other world cultures that Venn's "gypsy, Arab, Bonaparte" aspect cannot fully disguise. From this standpoint, the arabesques of scale described in the opening of this article can be thought of as ideological exercises for the imagination of Englishness on a global scale. It is this exercise that Hardy indeed performs in the opening chapters, as he produces an account of the aesthetic utility of chastened sublimity and attaches this aesthetic to a landscape routinely ignored in traditional novelistic description.

The Return of the Native substitutes the more familiar conventions of the landscape garden, which imitate the commons in an attempt to obscure the history of enclosure, with the waste, which bluntly signifies the history of expropriated land. Rather than decentering Englishness from the novel, therefore, this substitution bestows a new flexibility onto the idea of Englishness—both for readers of the novel and for characters within it. If novels set in country houses offer intoxicating fantasies of material wealth and romantic partnership, they also tend to bind their protagonists to the houses that

represent that wealth. In contrast, wasteland engenders a fantasy of mobility fitting its history of vagrancy and trespass. Infatuated with Clym because he represents all that she desires about a glamorous metropolitan life, she asks him to “speak of Paris” (169). Clym reluctantly describes the ostentatious display of wealth in the Galerie D’Appolon, “a fitting place” for Eustacia to live. Rather than “gorgeous rooms” Clym would rather talk about Little Trianon, which “would suit us beautifully to live in, and you might walk in the gardens in the moonlight and think you were in some English shrubbery” (169). Eustacia hates to think of herself in the “English” part of Paris, preferring to imagine spending her time in spots like Fontainebleau, St. Cloud, and the Bois, wasting her “English Sundays” in the French manner. Eustacia is so enamored with Clym’s description of Paris that she feels confident he will “never adhere to [his] education plan” and so she promises to be his “for ever and ever” (169).

This dialogue reworks some of the conventions of the marriage plot, which often uses the landscape garden as a site of resolution and a metaphor for the harmonious compromise of an engagement. Clym uses his knowledge of Paris, which Eustacia desires, to allure her—but he attempts, even while describing the glamour of the Louvre, to situate Eustacia within the familiar frame of the English garden. At the same time, he claims that he has to refuse this life to follow his vocation in Egdon. The tantalizing interplay between Paris and Egdon seems to intensify his desire for her: as the narrator quips earlier, “the only way to look queenly without realms or hearts to queen over is to look as if you had lost them; and Eustacia did that to a triumph” (64). Damon Wildeve uses a similar tactic of national comparison to tantalize Eustacia:

‘God how lonely it is!’ resumed Wildev. ‘What are picturesque ravines and mists to us who see nothing else? Why should we stay here? Will you go with me to America? I have kindred in Wisconsin.’

‘That wants consideration.’

‘It seems impossible to do well here, unless one were a wild bird or a landscape painter.’ (78).

For Damon as for Clym, the only way to imagine Eustacia as his wife is to imagine her elsewhere. Here, though, the heath is disqualified for scenes of courtship by its very outlandishness: a wild landscape painting devoid of human life.

These oscillations are not just imaginary attempts to escape the oppressive atmosphere of Egdon. Such moments emerge from the gathering force of a global British consciousness and authenticate cosmopolitan visions of British identity. Christoff describes this effect as “colonial object relations” in order to foreground the material histories of psychoanalytic concepts. In addition to her assessment that the “wide ranging figurations of space in this novel... begin and end with empire,” I am suggesting that the historically particular relationship to English wasteland that I have described is responsible for this imperialist state of mind (110). The waste itself becomes a tool for the incredible scope of Hardy’s characters cosmopolitan imaginations. In the moments before Clym and Eustacia meet for their scene of engagement, this mental tourism is displayed in an even grander capacity:

The sky was clear from verge to verge, and the moon flung her rays over the whole heath, but without sensibly lighting it, except where paths and water-courses had laid bare the white flints and glistening quartz sand, which made streaks upon the general shade. After standing awhile he stooped and felt the heather. It was dry, and he flung himself down upon the barrow, his face towards the moon, which depicted a small image of herself in each of his eyes... More than ever he longed to be in some world where personal ambition was not the only recognized form of progress—such, perhaps, as might have been the case at some time or other in the silvery globe then shining upon him. His eye travelled over the length and breadth of that distant country—over the Bay of Rainbows,

the somber Sea of Crises, the Ocean of Storms, the Lake of Dreams, the vast Walled Plains, and the wondrous Ring Mountains—till he almost felt himself to be voyaging bodily through its wild scenes, standing on its hollow hills, traversing its deserts, descending its vales and old sea bottoms, or mounting to the edges of its craters. (167)

The spot on the barrow gives Clym an astral opportunity to travel the landscapes of the moon itself, “til he almost felt himself to be voyaging bodily.” Egdon Heath yokes together the distant and the local without sacrificing the particularity of the English subjective experience. By inserting a wasteland where a garden typically figures, Hardy indicates the ideological function served by landscape in the novel. In his attempt to dislodge the fantasies of national continuity promised by the landscape garden, however, he endorses an abstraction that all too easily cedes to the pressures that English nationalism exerts on the novel form.

The description of landscape is a crucial aspect of the British novel. Hardy’s focus on the wasteland in *Return of the Native* is an attempt to critique the industrial development of capitalism, champion the cultural value of rural labor, and problematize the expansion of English cosmopolitanism. At the same time, this focus on wasteland in the novel produces an abstract version of Englishness that can be imagined on a global scale. Hardy issues a challenging corrective to the obfuscating techniques of the English novel: a form indebted to the gradual eradication of common land by enclosure, and the reproduction of the common in a carefully aestheticized garden. Hardy upends this tradition of misdirection by directing readers to a site of surviving common life in the wasteland. In doing so, he conceives of an aesthetic strategy for understanding the layered scalar relationships between land and environment, nation and empire, and the

individual and world system. Despite the explicit anti-Imperialism and trenchant sympathy for the destitute figures in his novels, the novel's relation to enclosure nevertheless reproduces the ideological work of English capitalism. By abstracting a space with a particular history of exploitation in order to produce an aesthetic mode suited to modernity, Hardy provides a form for national identity to inhabit. In Hardy's *Egdon*, the waste is not only quintessentially English; it is also a tool for imagining Englishness elsewhere—from Wisconsin to the moon.

CHAPTER FOUR The Artificial Landscape: Imperial Realities in *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent*

Joseph Conrad primarily wrote about the British empire. Because of his position in literary history as a transitional figure in nascent modernism, critics have sometimes framed his treatment of imperialism as a literary method for accessing a set of more existentially universal themes that cluster around human depravity. F.R. Leavis included Conrad in the “great tradition” with Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Henry James because of the genius of his writerly construction, but argued that Conrad did not “as a writer, have a philosophy” (200). Critics like Leavis, Ian Watt, and even Conrad’s friend and collaborator, Ford Madox Ford, are partially responsible for what Fredric Jameson describes as the “commonly held stereotypes” of the “apolitical character” of modernism: “its turn inward and away from the social materials associated with realism, its increased subjectification and introspective psychologization, and, not least, its aestheticism and its ideological commitment to the supreme value of a now autonomous Art as such” (153). Critics like Benita Parry and Edward Said largely dispelled this myth of apolitical detachment and reminded readers that the “great tradition” to which Conrad belongs was always structured in reference to British empire. Though Conrad’s writing seems to mark a break in continuity with the style of nineteenth-century fiction, as well as the nineteenth-century British attitude towards empire, Said argues that it is “prepared for” by the major British writers whose work seems to ignore the fact of empire while casually presupposing and affirming it (*Culture and Imperialism*, 75). That is not to say that Conrad’s writing does not mark a change in the novel. But this change is not a

departure from novelistic tradition so much as an attempt to reconcile the relation between literary narrative and national development with the transforming status of the English economic and political presence on a global scale of representation. As Jameson has argued, the style of literary modernism indexes a struggle to apprehend the “daily life and existential experience” of the metropolis when the totality of its meaning cannot be “grasped immediately” (157). Conrad’s oeuvre is motivated by the articulation of this absence. His novels reach toward the colonial sites that structure it without quite managing to step outside of the limited perspective of imperial ideology.

Taken together, *Nostramo* (1904) and *The Secret Agent* (1907) offer an opportunity to observe the dynamic between colonial periphery and metropolitan center. Moving from the extreme fringe of the British Empire in South America to the core of its orchestration in London, the two novels stage a fraught critique of both the undeveloped world and the society that has chosen to develop it. These novels go farther than envisioning the expansion of English society across the world; they interrogate the ethics of English progress. While other nineteenth-century novels may question empire and the telos of industrialization, Conrad’s familiarity with maritime labor helped him to fuse the adventure novel with high realism. Unlike earlier realists, he sets many of his novels in the developmental zones themselves. *Nostramo* describes a fictional South American nation wracked by political and economic instability. Charles Gould, an Englishman, following the received logic of imperial progress, surmises that industrial capitalism—referred to in the novel by the heavily freighted phrase “material interests”—will stabilize this backwards nation. He plans to revitalize the San Tome silver mine by introducing Costaguana to the international market. By the end of the novel, however, it is clear that

capitalism is just another agent in the violent unrest of Costaguanan development. Instead of retreating back to a main plot back in England, however, the characters in *Nostramo* experience the destabilizing effect of imperial development in their own lives. Back in England, *The Secret Agent* also describes a society plagued by internal fissures and political disruption: its densely layered depiction of the Greenwich Bomb Outrage of 1894 suggests that the global expansion of capitalist hegemony destabilizes the center just as much as the periphery. The expansion of industrial capitalism requires the identification and enclosure of new spaces for the extraction of resources; the instability in both novels emerges from the resulting struggle to control land. *Nostramo* narrates an attempt at indirect annexation of “unused” land. *The Secret Agent* features a city with no space left—where urban land is now being mined for symbolic power over the international property that fuels its wealth. Conrad’s ambivalence towards capitalist expansion extends to a suspicion of the British novel. This ambivalence subtends Conrad’s tendency to deconstruct realist techniques like linear chronology, historical reference, and especially landscape description.

Conrad emphasizes that creating a novel begins with inventing a physical world. The way he narrates this process foregrounds the hybridity of novelistic worldbuilding. The setting of a novel exceeds historical reference; it also deploys a symbolic economy, elements of theatrical staging and, for Conrad, personal emotional investments. In the note included in the 1920 edition of *The Secret Agent*, Conrad describes writing *Nostramo* as a period of “intense absorption... and effort on what I suppose will always remain my largest canvas” (8). After this period of “intense imaginative and emotional readiness” Conrad speculates that he subconsciously wanted a change of subject when a

friend mentioned the anecdote of the Greenwich Bomb outrage. Disquieted in particular by the detail of the suicide of the “half-idiot” bomber, Conrad claims to have experienced an episode of creative illumination. He describes the story crystalizing in his mind as a transition between a South American landscape to a view of London:

...strange forms, sharp in outline but imperfectly apprehended, appeared and claimed attention as crystals will do by their bizarre and unexpected shapes. One fell to musing before the phenomenon—even of the past: of South America, a continent of crude sunshine and brutal revolutions, of the sea, the vast expanse of slate waters, the mirror of heaven’s frowns and smiles, the reflector of the world’s light. Then the vision of an enormous town presented itself, of a monstrous town more populous than some continents and in its man-made might as if indifferent to heaven’s frowns and smiles; a cruel devourer of the world’s light. There was room enough there to place any story, depth enough for any passion, variety enough here for any setting, darkness enough to bury five millions of lives. (9)

In this telling, London emerged as the setting for this story because of its massive capacity: all types of people, and all types of activity, are thinkable there. More importantly, though, London is opaque enough to conceal these actions. The anecdote of his inspiration returns to an opposition from *Heart of Darkness*. In that novella, the darkness refers not only to the dense Congolese jungle, but also to London. As critics like Said, Parry, and Patrick Brantlinger have noted, whiteness and light—not darkness—are the most threatening aspects of the African landscape, because they threaten to disclose the atrocities that accompany European “progress.” Much of his early writing seems to be inspired not only by the adventurous anecdotes he picked up at work, but also from the sense of ethical crisis he experienced while doing this work. Unlike his fiction set in Africa or the South Pacific, Conrad had not visited South America before he wrote *Nostromo*. His description apparently combined details from several different locations

(Hampson 132).⁷³ But the London of *The Secret Agent* is, in many ways, just as imaginary and disorienting. Reading the two novels together emphasizes their shared interest in the constructedness of narrative space.

This interest in spatial construction is not simply a reflection on the increasing artificiality of modern life but an intervention into the ideological role of novels in the imaginary extension of nationalist ideology across the world. While few would recommend *Nostramo* for its clarity, a great deal of its force is tied to the ruthlessness of economic speculation that takes place in full view of its many amateur historians.⁷⁴ *The Secret Agent*, meanwhile, shocks the reader with details of lurid schemes hidden just out of sight in Soho. Conrad's comparison of the landscapes of the two novels emphasizes that the peripheral colonies are fundamentally different narrative and social spaces from London. In the note to *Nostramo* Conrad also describes the first step of creative inspiration as a vision of landscape: he has "the first vision of a twilight country which was to become the province of Sulaco, with its high shadowy Sierra and its misty Campo for mute witnesses of events flowing from the passions of men short-sighted in good and evil" (408). The story of the inspiration for *The Secret Agent* seems designed to distance Conrad from the controversial politics of the revolutionaries he describes in both novels.⁷⁵ The note to *Nostramo* justifies, to a potentially skeptical reader, his ambivalent

⁷³ Hampson goes on to argue that Sulaco is a composite city that stands in for a much larger geographical space, but also an "unstable space in which we can never confidently orientate ourselves" (132).

⁷⁴ Nasser Mufti notes: "National -historical telos is further complicated by the proliferation of historians and histories within the novel... The proliferation of historians and histories represents *Nostramo*'s most significant departure from the conventions of the historical novel" (119).

⁷⁵ For a more detailed treatment of Conrad's management of his image in relation to radical politics, see "False Flag at Greenwich: "Bourdin's Folly," the Nicoll pamphlet, and *The Secret Agent*" p. 3-5

treatment of British empire as an attempt to present the reality of the experience, as reported by a writer with unique proximity to daily imperial life. But just as importantly, these notes also point readers towards landscape as the most fundamental element of novel writing. The fictitious South American town of Sulaco and London both appear to Conrad as imaginary spaces to be occupied by the characters and stories that he chooses to invent. While Conrad's work is almost always intensely concerned with the politics of space and its representation, these two novels offer a particularly intense reflection on the turn-of-the-century dialectic between British center and colonial periphery—a fraught relation that Jameson and others have characterized as the historical condition for the emergence of modernist style.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the ubiquity of imperialism as an explicit topic and context across Conrad's fiction, neither of these novels is really about the British empire as such. Instead, both focus on the globalization of informal British power. *Nostramo* tells the story of an international alliance of American and English financiers with material interest in a South American silver mine. Costaguana is not an English colony, and the majority of its occupants are either indigenous or Spanish-American colonists. Nevertheless, Conrad shows how British aesthetics shape the available narratives of progress—even when that progress is proven to be illusory. *The Secret Agent* describes concentric layers of deception and corruption in London. At its core is a story of domestic betrayal and revenge, which is nested in an urban crime plot, which is nested in an international espionage thriller. These elements are contextualized by Greenwich Mean Time, which newly oriented much of the world—both the British empire and elsewhere—towards London. Like *Nostramo*, *The Secret Agent* ironizes Britain's dubious

position as the global engine of development. Of course, as Chinua Achebe and Edward Said have argued, Conrad is not anti-imperialist. His critique does not have the imaginative or ethical scope to include colonized subjects as historical agents, nor does he imagine a future in which anticolonial revolution is possible as anything other than a nightmare. But it is precisely the ambivalence of Conrad's critique that offers insight into the force of imperial ideology. This force, I will argue, is enacted most powerfully in his description of land.

This chapter argues that *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent* are both novels about the narrative process by which real geographies cohere into imperial social space. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argues that novels consolidate an authoritative perspective on social space, which overwrites the "territories, lands, geographical domains, the actual geographical underpinnings of the imperial" (78). Empire is ultimately about the "actual geographical possession of land," but the coincidence between an "idea of what a given place was (could be, might become)" and an "actual place" marks the "moment the struggle for empire is launched" (78). Said uses the phrase "structure of attitude and reference" to describe the complicated relationship between the novel and empire. He suggests that there is an "organic continuity" between early nineteenth-century and later-century British novels, and that the change that seems evident in these authors relationship towards colonialism is not in the British attitude towards empire, but in the availability of real geographical domains for representation. The "spatial differentiations" easily visible in late-nineteenth century novels are not new; they are derived from earlier novels. The "hereness" of English space is made so concrete in realist novels that it is then conceptually exportable to other places in the world (79). For Said, narrative fiction

is premised on the “recording, ordering, observing powers of the central authorizing subject, or ego” (79). In other words, those who dominate society also control the shape and limits of spatial description.

Earlier in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said describes the “two visions” in *Heart of Darkness* that will shape my argument about spatial description and geopolitical reality. The first is a vision of British empire extending across the twentieth century. The second is a vision arrested by the “self-conscious narrative forms” that draw “attention to themselves as artificial constructions” and “encourage us to sense the potential of a reality that seemed inaccessible to imperialism” (29). One aspect of the “darkness” that the title names—the impenetrability and incomprehensibility of the Congolese landscape to European observers—portends African resistance and sovereignty. *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent* share these two visions, but the relocation to South America and London alters the orientation of their predictions. According to the first vision, the novels both visualize English dominance as an inevitable, if not necessarily optimistic, future. But both novels also draw attention to the role of the novel in narrating imperial history, suggesting that the first vision might be supported by an inadequate set of data. Further, both novels observe how the literary production of social space—though totalizing in its scope—can be disrupted by actually existing topographies. This sense of ill fit between literary representation and embodied experience, which I will be calling “artificiality,” is a fundamental aspect of the “structure of attitude and reference” between the English novel and British empire. While earlier novels work to disguise that artificiality, the intensifying contradictions of the international division of labor throw the details of Conrad’s “second vision” into even greater relief.

Nostramo: Peripheral Development

Although Costaguana is not a formal part of the British empire, *Nostramo* acknowledges the centuries of imperial activity that made space for late-nineteenth-century British financial interest. Most of South America was dominated by the Spanish and Portuguese empires during the eighteenth century, followed by a century of revolutions and revitalized imperial efforts from Britain, France, and the Netherlands. Instead of direct rule, Conrad tracks the forms of control that are enabled by international financial networks. The future of Sulaco is shaped by the financial backing of the American investor Holyrod, the managerial expertise of the American mine owner Charles Gould, and various remainders of European military experience. These group of self-interested entrepreneurs not only provide support to the favored Ribeira government but also operate a kind of para-governmental system of their own.

Many members of this shadow government are motivated by a desire to support the San Tome mine, which they presume will bring social stability to Sulaco. These assumptions about social stability follow the narrative logic of capitalist development established by industrialized European nations like England. Jed Esty characterizes this narrative logic as *bildung* and argues that Conrad and other modernists illustrate the changing meanings of development in the age of empire. Nasser Mufti focuses on the relationship between civil unrest and capitalist development and argues that the Goulds expect the arrival of capitalism to “save Costaguana from the endlessness of civil war” (129). Both Esty and Mufti show that Conrad inverts the expectations of these

developmental narratives. *Nostromo* stages this inversion ironically, and it dramatizes the growing realization that narratives of imperial and economic progress inadequately describe the enclosure and extraction of resources in peripheral territories of the globe.

Nostromo does not only narrativize colonial development or civilizing progress, it also tells the story of the disillusionment and melancholia that accompany their failure. The capitalist extraction that drives the narrative is ultimately ambivalent: the mine remains open and successful, but the personal costs to Charles Gould—as well as the deaths of eleven other major characters—suggest that a systemic increase in wealth is not necessarily enriching to those who facilitate it. This ambivalence around the wealth of the mine is figured as a curse that weaves together the personal fates of the Gould family and the longer history of Costaguanan violence. The history of the mine itself is one of violence:

Mrs. Gould knew the history of the San Tome mine. Worked in the early days mostly by means of lashes on the backs of slaves, its yield had been paid for in its own weight of human bones. Whole tribes of Indians had perished in the exploitation; and then the mine was abandoned, since with this primitive method it had ceased to make a profitable return, no matter how many corpses were thrown into its maw. Then it became forgotten. It was rediscovered after the War of Independence. An English company obtained the right to work it, and found so rich a vein that neither the exactions of successive governments, nor the periodical raids of recruiting officers upon the population of paid miners they had created, could discourage their perseverance. But in the end, during the long turmoil of pronunciamientos that followed the death of the famous Guzman Bento, the native miners, incited to revolt by the emissaries sent out from the capital, had risen upon their English chiefs and murdered them to a man. (40)

According to Mrs. Gould's history, the mine's narrative begins with violence, and continues to create violence until the present moment. In the figure of the mine itself, the impartiality of international financial interest is reified. Both personal and national tragedy are secondary to the yield of the mine, paid for "in human bones." But for

Charles Gould and many of the other administrators and entrepreneurs of Sulaco, the mine becomes a “rallying point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live” (82). The violence of the mine occasions a need for security that benefits other residents of Sulaco:

In fact, the mine, with its organization, its population growing fiercely attached to their position of privileged safety, with its armoury, with its Don Pepe, with its armed body of serenos (where, it was said, many an outlaw and deserter—and even some members of Hernandez’s band—had found a place), the mine was a power in the land. (82)

At local and international scales, Conrad emphasizes the ambivalent effects of the extraction of wealth, as well as its uneven distribution. The value of the mine, though, is shown to exceed commodity value—and encompass structural changes to local policing that improve the lives of some citizens. Informal imperial control, then, truly operates systemically, without the need for organized bureaucracies. The mine itself, rather than England, is “power in the land.”

The mine is not simply treated as an abstraction, however; it is also a major feature of the landscape. Conrad often highlights the connection between the social stability that the mine represents and its physical properties. Before the Gould Concession, the landscape around the mine had returned to tropical disorder.

...the mine as a working concern did not exist. The buildings had been burnt down, the mining plant had been destroyed, the mining population had disappeared from the neighborhood years and years ago; the very road had vanished under a flood of tropical vegetation as effectually as if swallowed by the sea... It was no longer a mine; it was a wild, inaccessible and rocky gorge of the Sierra (42).

After Gould Jr. regains control of operations at the mine, it develops a more picturesque aesthetic. The “territory of the mine” extends from “the head of the gorge to where the

cart track from the foot of the mountain enters the plain, crossing a stream over a little wooden bridge painted green—green, the colour of hope, being also the colour of the mine” (73). This “hope” has a “steadying effect” that is also registered visually. A sense of “security seemed to flow upon this land from the mountain gorge” (82). This effect picturesquely alters the appearance of the entire town:

The material apparatus of perfected civilization which obliterates the individuality of old towns under the stereotyped conveniences of modern life had not intruded as yet; but over the worn-out antiquity of Sulaco, so characteristic with its stuccoed houses and barred windows, with the great yellowy-white walls of abandoned convents behind the rows of sombre green cypresses, that fact—very modern in its spirit—the San Tome mine had already thrown its subtle influence. It had altered, too, the outward character of the crowds on feast days on the plaza before the open portal of the cathedral, by the number of white ponchos with a green stripe affected as holiday wear by the San Tome miners. (73)

The narrator doesn’t simply claim that there is an ambiguous “change in spirit” in the atmosphere of the town—but points to one shift in physical appearance as miners wear the green uniform of San Tome. Again, this more local dynamic between a natural resource and the landscape is reflected in the wider representational apparatus of the novel.

This preoccupation with color might seem to illustrate Jameson’s argument that Conrad and modernism more broadly mystify the actual conditions of the colonial world system into innovative stylistic techniques. But in these descriptions of landscape, Conrad in fact harnesses the descriptive capacities of the novel to generate a realist description of massive systems. In “Modernism and Imperialism,” Jameson argues that the relocation of significant portions of the economic system outside of England put it outside of the purview of “daily life and experience,” such that the “very content of national literature” could no longer be “immanently grasped” (157). This new

international division of labor introduced a fractured experience of the everyday into metropolitan life, which Jameson argues accounts for the existential void, or “abyss,” characteristic of British modernism. This void is not an apolitical construction of style, but an effect of the incomplete cognitive mapping of the imperial world system. I argue that, while Conrad’s novels do evince a significant change in style, this style retains a remarkable capability to describe the world system. One important feature of this stylistic capability is the construction of isolated narrative spaces in which larger social contradictions can be described and, sometimes, imaginatively resolved.

Narrative Space

As I argued in the first chapter of this dissertation, the history of the novel is tied to the enclosure and privatization of land. Not only does the novel track the history of industrialization that these enclosures facilitated, but many narrative techniques of the novel, including omniscient perspective, spatiotemporal unity, and geographical verisimilitude, emerge from the practices that attended enclosure and improvement. When Daniel Defoe broke down Robinson Crusoe’s island into a domestic space, a fortress, farming areas, and a luxurious “country seat,” he created many sets of narrative possibilities. In *The Realist Imagination*, George Levine has argued that the realist novel had to domesticate nature in order for it to be understood. The geography of the realist novel, he argues, topographically corresponds to the intensity of the condition of life it claims to represent. That is to say, craggy mountains and storm-tossed oceans are either pushed to the boundaries of the realist novel or “translated” in various ways into more quotidian forms. “The realist’s landscape,” he writes, “like the community and traditions

it embodies, and like the particularizing strategies of realism itself, affirms what may be the only intelligible reality—the humanly ordered world” (206). The mechanisms and intensities of myth are still active in realism, but they are translated into a “language of the ordinary” developed by realists in their “quest for plausibility” (206). In a similar argument, Suzanne Keen uses the term “narrative annex” for the spaces in the nineteenth century realist novel that exceed the ordinary. In these places—like bars, alleyways, and country lanes—activities that break convention and expectation can occur. These nineteenth-century realist conventions helped to establish the imaginary and existential experience of a nation of English novel readers.

Despite these annexations, the worldbuilding capacity of realist fiction is generally deployed in the figuration of domestic space—with empire testing the representational capacities of the novel itself. Jameson’s influential perspective on the social function of modernist literature ties it explicitly to imperial expansion. In “Modernism and Imperialism,” Jameson argues that “the structures of imperialism” make a mark on the “inner forms and structures” of the literary form we now name “modernism” (152). Jameson’s argument emphasizes the discontinuity between nineteenth-century realist and modernist style, using the Berlin Conference as a watershed moment in that stylistic break. Turning to a different marker of perspectival adjustment in world systems, I want instead to emphasize the continuity between realist narrative technique and Conrad’s modernist style, particularly his use of what Jameson calls “strategies of containment.”

Novel plots demand a degree of geographical isolation in order to limit their narrative scope. Literary strategies of containment use geographical barriers to restrict the

plot so that it can work out a limited set of contradictions. In Conrad, particularly, these strategies of containment allow for what Jameson calls a unique “aestheticizing strategy” that is to be “taken literally, as the designation of a strategy which for whatever reason seeks to recode or rewrite the world and its own data in terms of perception as a semi-autonomous activity” (217). Jameson claims that “at its most intense... what we will call Conrad’s sensorium virtually remakes its objects, refracting them through the totalized medium of a single sense” (217). These focused transcriptions of the process of perception work to reconstruct events that, often, are never fully narrated. This style reorients the representation of temporality towards absent events—in Jameson’s reading, the absence of modern historical experience is the “arrival” of capitalism. The novel “narrates” the arrival of capitalism, but it can’t because this “event” never happened.⁷⁶ What the novel can narrate, however, are the institutional dynamics that attend the management of resource extraction.

This managerial emphasis emerges in the extended landscape description that opens *Nostromo*. At the outset, Conrad takes care to show that the peculiar political and economic situation of Sulaco is an extension of its peculiar environmental situation. The town “had never been commercially anything more important than a coasting port” because the trading ships, which require a “brisk gale to move at all,” are prevented from entering the harbor by the “prevailing calms of its vast gulfs.” The Punta Mala, or “bad point,” blocks the wind and gives the Golfo Placido its name. Already, there is a developmental tension in Conrad’s prose. Sulaco “had never been” commercially

⁷⁶ See also: Michael Sayeau *Against the Event: The Everyday and the Evolution of Modernist Narrative*, which focuses on the narrative forms of stasis that emerge in modernist literature despite the purported “acceleration” of the modern experience of life.

viable—the negative past perfect tense implying the imminence of some kind of change. “In the time of Spanish rule, and for many years afterwards” the town “had found an inviolable sanctuary”—but from the fictional present of the writing of the paragraph, the reader is led to assume, a violation must have occurred. This violation is the subject of the novel:

But in Sulaco—the Occidental Province for whose very development the railway was intended—there had been trouble. It had been lying for ages ensconced behind its natural barriers, repelling modern enterprise by the precipices of its mountain range, by its shallow harbour opening into the everlasting calms of a gulf full of clouds, by the benighted state of mind of the owners of its fertile territory—all these aristocratic old Spanish families, all those Don Ambrosios this and Don Fernandos that, who seemed actually to dislike and distrust the coming of the railway over their lands. It had happened that some of the surveying parties scattered all over the province had been warned off with threats of violence (31).

The barriers that contain the story also have kept out the forces of economic development that have come to Costaguana to exploit the rich new vein of silver in the San Tome mine. Ironically, the rich wealth of Sulaco is buried beneath the very mountains that have protected it from outside influence.

If the mountains form one half of the novel’s strategy of containment, the ocean forms the other. After the descriptive eye that opens the novel moves across the coastline, it floats out into the bay, attempting to identify discrete objects in the blue mass of cloud, sky, and rain that swirls over the water. The sea, as Jameson puts it in *The Political Unconscious*, is both a “strategy of containment and a place of real business” for Conrad:

...it is a border and also a decorative limit, but it is also a highway, out of the world and in it at once, the repression of work—on the order of the classic English novel of the country-house weekend, in which human relations can be presented in all their ideal formal purity precisely because concrete content is relegated to the rest of the week—as well as the absent work-place itself (210).

The sea serves just this purpose in *Nostramo*—a limit to the action of Sulaco and Costaguana, but also the field of action itself. It is the escape hatch from the novel's complex web of plots and counterplots, but also the site of these plots' climax. Jameson's comparison of Conrad's sea to the country-house of classic realism deftly illuminates the parallel obfuscating maneuver in both iterations of the novel, which step out of the world in order to distill its most crucial components. Such maneuvers, in which the narrative action relocates to an apparently neutral site in order to work through both the conflicts of the novel and the problems of society, are characteristic of landscape as a site of resolution in nineteenth-century novels. Drawing attention to this formal convention intensifies the misdirection that is enacts: the "apparently neutral" site of resolution is, in fact, not separate from the social conflicts it mediates and resolves. Instead, these sites lie at the heart of the histories of exploitation and inequality that tend to drive the conflict of realist novels.

The descriptive techniques that Jameson names strategies of containment are not much different than the realist geographies that George Levine describes in *The Realist Imagination*. That is not to say that there isn't a demonstrable difference between the styles of Joseph Conrad and, say, Henry James. This difference, however, is not a result of the novel form's inability to account for the dramatic shifts in the international division of labor and the ascendancy of New Imperialism. Rather, the changes in style effectively accommodate the strange new contradictions of late British imperialism. The sense of strangeness in modernist style reflects the strangeness of empire itself. Yet again, this stylistic correspondence to empire is not discontinuous with earlier forms of British

realism. In fact, the relationship between the novel and empire is one of its most enduring conventions.

Empire and Social Space

An ideological proximity to empire has long been considered an important feature of the history of the novel. The novel rose to a position of cultural prominence alongside the British empire, helped to consolidate national identity on a newly global stage, and—as Gauri Viswanathan has argued—was instrumental in supplementing imperial rule and discipline in the colonies.⁷⁷ In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argues that the “facts of empire” form a pervasive “structure of attitude and reference” in the British novel. The empire is a source of wealth, a set of reference points, a place to travel, a place to work, and it fills novels with things. Said argues that narrative space accompanies the ideology of the British imperial project—such that “the novel... and imperialism are unthinkable without each other” (71). If the novel consolidated a coherent national reality for English readers, it also produced the distant but detailed tangibility to imperial and other peripheral territories. Because of this, Said finds an “organic continuity” between earlier texts that seem not to be about empire, and later ones that address it specifically: “Kipling and Conrad are prepared for by Austen and Thackeray” (75). This continuity extends to the more visible “spatial differentiations” of late nineteenth-century novels like *Kim* and *Heart of Darkness* (79). To account for this differentiation, the “hereness” of English space is made so concrete in realist novels that it is then conceptually exportable to other places in the world (79). English narrative fiction is subsequently

⁷⁷ See: *Masks of Conquest: Literary study and British rule in India*.

premised on the “recording, ordering, observing powers of the central authorizing subject, or ego” (79). In other words, those who dominate society also control the shape and limits of descriptive representation—and the novel is a powerful tool in this representational hegemony. The continuity of empire as a point of reference for the novel is crucial to understanding its forms and conventions—but Conrad and other modernists *do* modify the *attitude* of the English novel towards empire. Part of this shift, it seems, is a result of the difficult descriptive task of exporting the “hereness” of English space to non-English places. In Conrad, this difficulty frequently emerges in the form of dystopias and nightmares.

Throughout *Nostramo*, characters make use of the European landscape to make sense of the Costaguanan terrain. But the discrepancies between European and Costaguanan geographies frequently disturb and disrupt that attempt at aesthetic ordering. Mrs. Gould’s perspective offers an image of the Costaguanan interior:

Men ploughed with wooden ploughs and yoked oxen, small on a boundless expanse, as if attacking immensity itself. The mounted figures of vaqueros galloped in the distance, and the great herds fed with all their horned heads one way, in one single wavering line as far as eye could reach across the broad potreros. A spreading cotton-wool tree shaded a thatched ranch by the road; the trudging files of burdened Indians taking off their hats, would lift sad, mute eyes to the cavalcade raising the dust of the crumbling camino real made by the hands of their enslaved forefathers. And Mrs. Gould, with each day’s journey, seemed to come nearer to the soul of the land in the tremendous disclosure of this interior unaffected by the slight European veneer of the coast towns, a great land of plain and mountain and people, suffering and mute, waiting for the future in a pathetic immobility of patience (66).

In this passage, the “European veneer” of the coastal towns has been lifted—leaving an apparently authentic vision of Latin American landscape. The description is characterized by misery and stasis, intensified by the “boundlessness” of the scene. The *vaqueros*

register the monotony of this scenic openness, and the crumbling road signifies not a noble past but a history of enslavement. From Mrs. Gould's perspective, this scene is "waiting for the future"—the "slight European veneer" of the coastal town, then, is ultimately a softening influence on the harsh reality of Costaguanan life. This veneer becomes more apparent by the end of the novel, when Captain Mitchell gives his tour of the newly "picturesque" Sulaco—complete with a "harbor gate," dignified "Spanish houses," and Italian sculptures (341). The effect is not one of beauty, however, but rather of irony and ill fit.

This ironic mode of description supplements a fatalist political perspective: the comparisons to Europe are not jingoistic, but rather register the tragic absurdity of capitalist development. Mrs. Gould, the novel's most emotionally perceptive character, best expresses this tragic aspect. In conversation with Martin Decoud, she notes that even though her "husband wanted the railway," which would "bring nearer the sort of future we desire for the country," she nonetheless mourns the Costaguanan landscape.

But I will confess that the other day, during my afternoon drive when I suddenly saw an Indian boy ride out of a wood with the red flag of a surveying party in his hand, I felt something of a shock. The future means change—an utter change. And yet even here there are simple and picturesque things that one would like to preserve. (89)

Mrs. Gould's tender observation brings together the various material changes of the international—the prospective transformation to the land, the exploitation of local people as laborers for the firm, and her own ambivalent proximity to the primary agent of change, her husband Charles.⁷⁸ One of the factors that sets *Nostramo* apart from other

⁷⁸ When Mrs. Gould learns that she will be travelling with Charles to Sulaco, she experiences a defamiliarization of the European landscape, and a temporary loss of reality—she literally loses touch with

novels that treat the subject of British imperialism is that the Goulds actually *live* in the place from which their wealth is extracted. This disrupts the typical logic of imperial largesse—the Goulds (and, thus, the reader) behold not only the violence of empire but also the more melancholic losses of familiar landscapes and customs. Across many of the novels that evince the structure of attitude and reference towards empire that Said describes, the “domestic drama” always takes precedence over the international action (76). In *Vanity Fair*, he notes, the allusions to India are nothing “more than incidental to the changes in Becky’s fortunes, or in Dobbin’s, Joseph’s, and Amelia’s positions” (76). While English novelists “accepted a globalized world view,” their vision “aligned the holding of power and privilege abroad with comparable activities at home” (76). In many nineteenth-century novels, this tacit acceptance of a “globalized” world is subordinated to a set of abstract ethics that obscure the historical specificity of subjects like plantation wealth, or opium money. This tendency, which Lauren Goodlad calls the “Victorian geopolitical aesthetic,” relies on the fractured spatial play between “heirloom ‘rootedness’ and capitalist ‘cosmopolitanism’” (12)⁷⁹. Conrad disrupts this tendency when he takes the drama of the Gould inheritance out of England, however, and makes Charles the manager of the actual mine that could influence his fortune. This relocation allows the

the ground itself: “Everywhere there were long shadows lying on the hills, on the roads, on the enclosed fields of olive trees; the shadows of poplars, of wide chestnuts, of farm buildings, of stone walls; and in mid-air the sound of a bell, thin and alert, was like the throbbing pulse of the sunset glow... She did. She would. And immediately the future hostess of all the Europeans in Sulaco had the physical experience of the earth falling away from under her. It vanished completely, even to the very sound of the bell. When her feet touched the ground again, the bell was still ringing in the valley; she put her hands up to her hair, breathing quickly, and glanced up and down the stony lane. It was reassuringly empty. Meantime, Charles, stepping with one foot into a dry and dusty ditch, picked up the open parasol, which had bounded away from them with a martial sound of drum taps. He handed it to her soberly, a little crestfallen” (48).

⁷⁹ For more on the cosmopolitanism of Conrad, see: Tanya Agathocleous. *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*.

violence and instability of empire to intrude in the domestic aspect of the narrative. In so doing, it destabilizes the novelistic alignment between the “globalized view” of English world power and the moral or political endorsement of that power.

Conrad’s dissolution of the conventional separation between imperial frame of reference and domestic plot doesn’t achieve his aim of revealing the violence of empire without a cost: this modification to the conventions of the British novel has repercussions on the narrative structure itself. According to the Jamesonian concept of containment, novels like *Vanity Fair* and *Mansfield Park* manage to work out and resolve the international contradictions of imperial violence through the resolution of the domestic drama. *Nostramo* disrupts this method of resolution, and shows that the financial resolution of imperial wealth does not necessarily afford a narrative resolution for the characters adjacent to it. This novel, as Nasser Mufti observes, “ends where it begins”: while “history has transformed Costaguana... the symbolic kernel of civil war that was at the heart of the country’s history, a kernel that defined its backwardness and incivility—has remained unchanged” (121). For Mufti, this lack of essential change ironically shows that Sulaco can be integrated into the world system while remaining “as far off from Europe’s modernity as it had always been” (121). Conrad not only shows that English capitalism’s promise of progress has always been made in bad faith; he also shows that landscape disguises the history of that bad faith. The novel, in its diegetic geography, indeed quite literally ends where it begins, opening and closing on the Isabel Islands. But by the end, the reader knows that the strange landscape of the Isabels hides evidence of the failure and corruptibility of European progress. What Conrad shows the reader, through this simulated loop, is that even the “simple and picturesque things” that Mrs.

Gould would like to preserve might harbor evidence of violent extraction and exploited labor. There is no pristine landscape prior to the arrival of capitalism, because they too have been conscripted into the service of disguise.

Cycles and repetitions are evident in Conrad's writing at every scale—from his sentence structure, to his transcription of free indirect discourse, to the plotting and narrative form of his novels. This technique, named “chronological looping” by Ian Watt in his study of *Nostramo*, is Conrad's “solution to the characteristic difficulty of all historical fictions, which arises from their having so large a variety of scenes and persons and therefore, of course, narrative times, to handle” (36). Essentially, the scene told in the present moves backwards from perspective to perspective, to gradually fill in the meaning of the present scene. The whole of *Nostramo* forms one such chronological loop. Moving from the timeless view of landscape forward through scenes of mercenary violence and political upheaval, the novel stops again on the view, now entangled with plot. The reader is returned to the beginning, where the landscape now cannot be described without eliciting the reader's knowledge of events in the future. The action that takes place on the three islands that border the Placido gradually transforms their description in the opening chapter.

The Great Isabel, Little Isabel, and Hermosa are amorphous spaces with miniature landscapes that mediate various narrative moments in the chronological structure of the novel. The opening description of these islands arranges them as a frame for nearby Sulaco, implied site of actual plot. The ironically named Hermosa is hardly more than a platform on the ocean: “no more than a foot high, and about seven paces across, a mere flat top of a grey rock which smokes like a hot cinder after a shower, and where no man

would care to venture a naked sole before sunset” (20). Little Isabel, nearby, houses an “old ragged palm with a thick bulging trunk rough with spines, a very witch amongst palm trees” (20). Together these islands suggest inhospitality and exposure—but by the end of the novel the Isabels will have come to signify shelter and secrecy. The Great Isabel, the largest of the three islands, features more landmarks: a “spring of fresh water issuing from the overgrown side of a ravine, two forest trees standing close together,” and “a ravine extending the whole length of the island” (20). This ravine focuses the final perspective of the chapter, pointing the reader back towards Sulaco: “from that low end of the Great Isabel the eye plunges through an opening two miles away, as abrupt as if chopped with an axe out of the regular sweep of the coast, right into the harbor of Sulaco” (20). The ravine stands out as this island’s characteristic feature, but its purpose seems to be to direct the reader back to the setting where the action of the novel will take place—a city which has yet to be described and explored by the end. The present continuous tense again suspends the physical space in a kind of timeless infinity: the spring always issuing, the trees always standing, the ravine always extending, the flat top of Hermosa always smoking. This timelessness is a feature of the landscape itself—perhaps because of its isolation from the shipping routes which have begun to develop other parts of South America.

The uncanny temporal stasis of the Isabels ultimately produces an ironic narrative effect. By the conclusion of the novel the reader knows that Nostromo hides the cursed silver of the San Tomé mine in the ravine of the Great Isabel, and uses his romance with the lighthouse keeper’s daughter, Linda, to cover his gradual pilfering of the stash. Conrad emphasizes the hidden secret of the silver by shifting perspectives at the end of

the novel when Nostromo is shot on one such a nighttime mission, mistaken by Linda's father for another kind of trespasser. As he is dying, the close third-person omniscient narration shifts to Dr. Monygham. As he arrives by boat, he observes "the glitter of the moon upon the gulf and the high black shape of the Great Isabel sending a shaft of light afar, from under the canopy of clouds" (460). The glitter of the moonlight and the "shaft" of light splitting the shadow of the Great Isabel indirectly invoke the glittering silver, tucked secretly into the ravine. What could have been taken as neutral description is now registered as deeply ironic.

This irony is made more explicit in the novel's final pages. As Nostromo slowly dies, Monygham takes pensive nighttime walks around the Great Isabel, looking at the scenery. He returns to the house and falls asleep. The narrator then summarizes the scene:

The light of the Great Isabel burned unfailing above the lost treasure of the San Tomé mine. Into the bluish sheen of a night without stars the lantern sent out a yellow beam towards the far horizon. Like a black speck upon the shining panes, Linda, crouching in the outer gallery, rested her head on the rail. The moon, dropping in the western board, looked at her radiantly (462).

The opening and closing of *Nostromo* enact a performance of obfuscation and disclosure that centers landscape as the nexus between the social imaginary and material reality in the process of novelistic resolution. Jameson describes the magical spaces that Conrad manages to construct in his novel by hybridizing discontinuous generic styles, and argues that this is only possible because of the physical limits that demarcate this space of stylistic exploration from the reader and the real world. The generic and stylistic ingenuity of the novel offers resolution not only through plot but also by constructing imaginary worlds that survive those social contradictions. In *Nostromo*, Conrad indicts landscape itself in the narrative obfuscation of historical violence.

Set on the fringe of British imperial control, *Nostramo* disrupts the organizing authority of a British imperial perspective. Instead of offering a resistant perspective or emphasizing the kinds of agency that predated European colonization of South America, Conrad's descriptions disclose their own artificiality. The instability of Sulaco destabilizes the narrative itself, not because the novel is ill suited to describing the geopolitical dynamics of late-nineteenth-century empire, but because it is an ideological tool of the empire itself. Just as the landscape—which seems to be a neutral container in which a story takes place—is ultimately an agent in the story of violence, the novel, too, actively participates in determining the kinds of stories that are available to tell. But Conrad does not only indict English institutions when they are exported to non-English places; he also shows how the conjoined power of material imperial force and ideological novelistic description threaten the existential stability of life in the English metropolis. In *The Secret Agent*, this instability extends to the structure of time itself.

The Secret Agent: Internal Disruption

Nostramo shows that the narrative strategies and formal conventions of the novel are flexible and capacious enough to describe the geopolitical dynamics of new imperialist finance. It acknowledges that technologies of communication and travel, like the telegraph and the railway, have fundamentally changed the balance of international economics and politics, but it accounts for these changes with a descriptive system that is still fundamentally realist. Though it is replete with stylistic innovation, *Nostramo* retains the realist impulse towards a totalizing perspective of social reality, and successfully maps this reality even as it expands beyond the limits of most nineteenth-century visions

of civil structure. *The Secret Agent* offers an opposing view of both literary tradition and advancing globalization. In this novel, the embodied experience of metropolitan life exceeds the newly approved standardization of global time zones according to the international date line at the Greenwich meridian. This excess produces a series of disruptions to the conventions of narrative time. These disruptions point to the link between global standardization and novelistic narration. The kind of progressive, linear, uniform time adopted at the Prime Meridian Conference of 1884 drew from the version of narrative time solidified through the institution of the novel. The disjuncture between global standardization and individual experience, which manifests in the plot and form of *The Secret Agent*, figures a broader anxiety about the destabilization and impending collapse of British society.

In “Time-Reckoning for the Twentieth Century” (1886), Sandford Fleming—a major architect of universal standard time, or what he called “Cosmic Time”—grounds the necessity for standardization in globalization. He observes that “new continents have been opened to civilization and immense regions then whole unknown to Europe have been peopled by races busied in commerce and skilled in the arts and characterized by unwearied energy and determination” (345). He argues that while the science of “intercourse between men and nations” has “given an extraordinary impulse to general progress,” new “imperfections” have developed in the “system of time notation that were previously unknown” (345). Fleming’s recommendation of a series of twenty-four longitudinal meridians with which to determine a universal standard time was gradually adopted in the twenty years after the Prime Meridian Conference. The idea was originally met with significant resistance. As Adam Barrows has shown in *Times of Empire*, the

diversity of local times was understood to be an important quality of modernity itself, as well as part of the hybridity and heterogeneity of place. Fleming's primary argument for standardization was the regularity it would bring to train schedules, and the disorder it would prevent for the relatively new technology of the telegraph. Fleming's major cause at the Prime Meridian Conference, the cosmic or universal day, was ultimately defeated. Delegates voted to make Greenwich a standard longitude, but not to adopt the universal day. Following the Conference, Fleming and a group of international financiers worked to have the universal day attached to the zero longitude. Fleming, in particular, had investments in a South American railway that would benefit from the synchronization of a universal day. The universal standardization of time was, in many ways, a product of global financial interest rather than British imperial policy or scientific progress. But the Greenwich Observatory soon came to represent both empirical order and imperial control.

Given how dramatically both events would shape British hegemony, it is striking that the Prime Meridian Conference was held only a month before the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 began. Jameson names this conference as the decisive moment in the literary shift towards modernism. He argues that modernist style emerges as colonialism displaces the structural majority of economic production from everyday metropolitan experience in Europe. The "daily life and existential experience" of life in the metropolis, which Jameson claims is "necessarily the very content of the national literature itself" and which new imperial paradigms put at a conceptual and physical distance from England, deprive national literature of "its meaning, its deeper reason for being, within itself" (157). Modernist literature, then, features a cartographic impulse that is ultimately

frustrated by some absence or unknowability—“infinity” in Jameson’s example from *Howards End*, and the general abstraction of “space” in *To the Lighthouse*. The Prime Meridian Conference marked an analogous shift in global conceptions of time and space. Locations were gradually disarticulated from a method of time notation that primarily relied on their specific relation to the sun, and the new institution of notation referred these locations to Greenwich, England. This constituted an existential and material literalization of the global network of British imperial power.

A fitting icon for Britain, Greenwich Park itself has a metonymic relation to the history of English power. The history of Greenwich park follows a pattern of successive segmentation and improvement characteristic of the palimpsestic segmentation of British land enclosure. This history resonates ironically with its eventual symbolic position as the reference point for the generation of the global grid of standardized world time. For centuries, the land on which Greenwich Park now sits was the site of Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlements. The location was prized for its views of the Thames in several directions. Remains of a Roman road and temple as well as Anglo-Saxon barrows can still be seen on the land. Henry VI granted Duke Humphrey the right to enclose the land in 1433. Humphrey populated it with deer, and after his death the park was established as an official hunting ground for the Tudors. In the 1660’s, Charles II initiated a plan to redesign the park in the style of European palatial gardens under the direction of well-regarded French landscape architect André Le Nôtre. The most significant addition to the park during this redesign were the giant terraced steps leading down from the Queen’s house towards the river. More elaborate plans for fountains, parterres, and ornamental basins were never completed. During the seventeenth century the park begin to attract

new attention as an elegant escape from the plague-ridden and dirty city. The park was extended to incorporate wasteland surrounding it, and new homes were built both on and around the park itself. In 1675, John Flamsteed was appointed the Astronomer Royal, and chose Greenwich as the site of the royal observatory. The park was chosen for its symbolic proximity to the center of London and relative distance from the obfuscating smoke of the city.

During the eighteenth century, the monarchy seems to have lost interest in Greenwich Park, and the area fell into relative disrepair. But it was in this period that public interest in the park grew. Pensioned sailors had been granted access to the park in the 1660s, and across the next century other members of the public were gradually granted access to select areas. By the nineteenth century, middle-class Londoners had begun to demand access to the park. Their interest in Greenwich again focused on the green space as a healthy retreat from the polluted city. Curiously, it is the proximity to London that made Greenwich park such a desirable location for both pleasure seekers hoping to escape London fog and astrologers working in the observatory. The park was close enough to London to be accessible, but far enough away to maintain some qualities of the country. The fifteenth-century royals enjoyed the park for similar reasons to bureaucrats like Fleming—it offered a vision of British country life within proximity to the hub of British cosmopolitan power.

The relatively recent history of the Meridian is thus grafted onto the longer history of British enclosure and privatization that parks like Greenwich represent. The global grid of longitude that standardization employed not only tethered temporal organization to England but also to the aesthetic history of parks like Greenwich, which

had gradually come to represent rationality and order. *The Secret Agent* stages the disorder of this symbolic system at the level of plot and form. Conrad based its plot on the Greenwich Bomb Outrage of 1894: on February 15th, 1894, two schoolboys discovered Martial Bourdin soaked in blood near the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park. He had apparently fallen onto a homemade explosive device. Though he died soon after, police found a membership card to the “Autonomie Club,” a French anarchist organization, and thirteen pounds in his pocket. These details sparked speculation about the intent of the apparent terrorist scheme. Some suspected Bourdin was on his way to or from a handoff, while others presumed he was searching for a secluded spot to test his device. In Conrad’s fictionalization of this event, the attack is explicitly directed at the Royal Observatory. Mr. Verloc, the titular secret agent, is assigned the task by one of his bosses in the Russian Embassy, Mr. Vladimir. Vladimir wants to “administer a tonic to the Conference in Milan” with the terrorist attack; the plan is intended to encourage England to crack down on the “suppression of political crime” (23). Too many political refugees escape to England to enjoy what Vladimir considers a “sentimental regard for individual liberty” (24). His plan requires an apparently international terrorist plot, executed on English soil, against what he calls the “sacrosanct fetish” of modern times: science. Vladimir’s pointed critique of the “intellectual idiots” who fetishize science could easily be directed at Sandford Fleming and other advocates of time standardization; Vladimir sneers, “any imbecile that has got an income” believes “in some mysterious ways science is at the source of their material prosperity” (27). He uncovers the bourgeois, material interests that subtend liberal rationalism. To attack these interests, Vladimir wants to attack the abstraction of science itself—“it would be really telling if

one could throw a bomb into pure mathematics”—but he settles for “having a go at astronomy” (27). Though he says astronomy, he notes that “the whole civilised world has heard of Greenwich” and that “blowing up the first meridian is bound to raise a howl of execration” (28). The attack is directed at the scientific discipline of astronomy, but the choice is guided by the fame of the first meridian and the Royal Observatory following the implementation of universal standard time. Though Verloc’s attack is meant to highlight the blunt, almost idiotic idealism of a group of imaginary international agents, the optics that govern Vladimir’s scheme are sensitive to the nuances of international finance and new forms of liberal cosmopolitanism.

While *The Secret Agent* is narratively about an attack on the modern concept of time, it also stages confrontations with time on a formal level. Rather than a continuous linear diegesis with explanations of time gaps, reversals, or simultaneities, *The Secret Agent* is full of disorienting analepses and prolepses. Scenes are alternatively stretched or abbreviated, while other moments repeat or are re-narrated from a new perspective.⁸⁰ These shifts in narrated time sometimes seem related to the emotional state of certain characters—horror and shock slow time down, boredom and distraction allow it to slip

⁸⁰ Doubled perspectives and repetitions are not absent from nineteenth-century fiction. Sensation fiction from Wilkie Collins and Bram Stoker, detective fiction from Arthur Conan Doyle, use these techniques to build suspense and uncover new clues. Dickens split narration in *Bleak House* allows him to show develop new perspectives on the same event. In these texts, the fragmentation of narrative time is carefully marked—whereas Conrad experiments greater degrees of narratorial disorientation. One of the most famous accounts of nineteenth century, Lukács’ “Narrate or Describe,” focuses on the re-narration of the horse race in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. In Lukács’ words: “Tolstoy is not describing a “thing,” a horse-race. He is recounting the vicissitudes of human beings. That is why the action is narrated twice, in true epic fashion, and not simply picturesquely described.” Does Conrad “narrate” or “describe”? While it might seem that Conrad’s dedication to exhaustively detailing the experience of perception itself indicates a process of description, perhaps—precisely in implementing the kinds of redescription that Lukács values in Tolstoy—manages to convey the “general social significance” of human experience—putting him alongside those, like Dickens, Goethe, Balzac, Stendhal, who craft “epic” narratives.

by. In other cases, the redundancies and reversals seem to be a condition of the city itself—sometimes an effect of the ridiculous overcompensation of the political bureaucracy, the invasive panopticon of the newly empowered but still ineffective police force, or the simple overcrowding of too many personal timelines. The inconsistencies of time carry a threat of violence. The narrator observes that despite the “close-woven stuff of relations between conspirator and police” there still occur “unexpected solutions of continuity, sudden holes in space and time” (68). Even though “a given anarchist may be watched inch by inch and minute by minute, ... a moment always comes when somehow all sight and touch of him are lost for a few hours, during which something (generally an explosion) more or less deplorable does happen” (34). The disruptions of time in the novel are not so much an attack on the coherence of an established temporal order as a set of intrusions into and diversions from a newly implemented standardized time that does not synchronize with the embodied experience of life.

The standardization that the novel disrupts is explicitly linked to the uniformity of the Greenwich meridian—but the stylistic techniques that Conrad uses to stage these disruptions are also disruptions of the narrative conventions of the realist novel. While the uniformity and linearity of the realist novel might seem to approximate the temporality of real life, Conrad and other modernists offer a set of aesthetic techniques that are more sensitive to the granularity of individual perception. This aesthetic modification reconfigures the hierarchy of power in the novel—redistributing some agency from the socially organizing force of the narrator to the “subject” of the character. At the same time, the attack on the Royal Observatory exposes the shallow materialism at the heart of the mission of international liberal progress. Although Conrad tries to

distance himself from the group of revolutionaries that *The Secret Agent* depicts, this text stages a powerful critique of two of the most important institutions of the nineteenth century British world: the realist novel and empire.

Delayed Decoding

Standardized time just doesn't seem to map onto the experience of London in *The Secret Agent*. Bureaucracy, police surveillance, historical progress, public transit, and journalism all diverge from standardization, though the most consistently incompatible temporal framework is psychological experience. Adopting the convention of free indirect discourse, Conrad's prose takes on the pacing of lived experience. While this style has been called "impressionism," it can also be understood as a fealty to the exact transcription of embodied experience—especially when set against the homogenizing universalism of standardized time.⁸¹ When Winnie and Stevie take a journey across town the experience is reduced to "a great rattle and jingling of glass" as "all evidences of motion became imperceptible" and "time itself seemed to stand still" (124). In an even more wry instance, the Assistant Commissioner spends almost half of the novel following Verloc home, after which he looks at his watch and thinks "It was only half-past ten. He had had a very full evening" (181).

Time, in *The Secret Agent*, fails to adequately index durational experience. The disruptions and aporias that emerge, per Jameson's description of modernist style, result from the widening gap between metropolitan life and the imperial reserves of exploited labor that support it. Ian Watt's influential account of Conrad's style, on the other hand,

⁸¹ For more on Conrad's impressionism, see Rebecca Walkowitz, "Conrad's Naturalness" and Michael Fried, "A blankness to run and dash your head against": On Conrad's *The Secret Agent*."

focuses on the strategies that produce a different kind of realism. Taken together, these techniques support a style that privileges psychological detail. The technique that Watt calls delayed decoding is perhaps the most well-known aspect of Conrad's style. This technique puts the "reader in the position of being an immediate witness of each step in the process whereby the semantic gap between sensations aroused in the individual by an object or event, and their actual cause or meaning, was slowly closed in his consciousness (270). Both techniques emphasize the gap between experience and meaning—

transcribing the differential temporalities that attend the process of making meaning. For Watt, they are simply an effect of Conrad's psychological realism—rather than what Jameson would identify as a symptom of the geographical dislocation of colonial labor. These two claims are more consonant than they appear. The fractured details and jumbled observations that accompany slow realizations or distracted reveries are realistic descriptions of the encoding of ideological information over the raw data of perception itself. These scenes dramatize the process of assimilating a picture of what has happened, what is happening, and *where* the event is taking place. That process relies on funds of symbolic meaning that are socially produced and distributed through cultural institutions like the novel itself. If psychological experience, as Watt understands it, and as he argues that Conrad understands it, formulates itself through language after accumulating raw sensory data, then the everyday experience of metropolitan life must be mediated through linguistic forms like the novel. This kind of symbolic deciphering is vividly illustrated in the scene where the Assistant Commissioner struggles to decide on the moral character of the Chief Inspector—darting from his physical size to his color to his eyes and lips. He calls to mind a "famous book on the Malay Archipelago" that discovered an "old and

naked savage” with a “peculiar resemblance to a dear friend at home” (94). The train of thought shows the Inspector attempting to decipher his competing impressions of his superior through textual forms that offer a colonial metaphor for his sense of unease.

The most memorable scenes of delayed decoding in *The Secret Agent* cluster around the traumatic subject of Stevie’s gruesome death. As the Chief Inspector observes Stevie’s mutilated corpse, he slowly works through the pain and violence that produced it. His process of decoding the body emphasizes the temporal lags experienced by both Stevie and the Inspector:

The Chief Inspector, stooping guardedly over the table, fought down the unpleasant sensation in his throat. That shattering violence of destruction which had made of that body a heap of nameless fragments affected his feelings with a sense of ruthless cruelty, though his reason told him the effect must have been as swift as a flash of lightning. The man, whoever he was, had died instantaneously; and yet it seemed impossible to believe that a human body could have reached that state of disintegration without passing through the pangs of inconceivable agony. No physiologist, and still less of a metaphysician, Chief Inspector Heat rose by the force of sympathy, which is a form of fear, about the vulgar conception of time. Instantaneous! He remembered all he had ever read in popular publications of long and terrifying dreams dreamed in the instant of waking; of the whole past life lived with frightful intensity by a drowning man as his doomed head bobs up, streaming, for the last time. The inexplicable mysteries of conscious existence beset Chief Inspector Heat till he evolved a horrible notion that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye. And meantime the Chief Inspector went on peering at the table with a calm face and the slightly anxious attention of an indigent customer bending over what may be called the by-products of a butcher’s shop with a view to an inexpensive Sunday dinner. All the time his trained faculties of an excellent investigator, who scorns no chance of information, followed the self-satisfied, disjointed loquacity of the constable. (70)

The dueling impulses of this passage hover between reason and feeling. Heat understands the instantaneity of Stevie’s death but cannot empathetically conceive of that velocity of decomposition. The explanations offered by “physiologists” and “metaphysicians” are insufficient to the instantaneity of the tremendous violence enacted on Stevie’s body.

Heat struggles to reconcile what he knows and what he feels. The fact that “ages of atrocious pain and mental torture” or a “whole past life” of a dream could be contained “between two successive winks of an eye” or in the moment of waking up disturbs him as he looks at Stevie’s body and imagines the intense pain that must have accompanied such a violent death. At the same time, Heat retains the impassive face of an “excellent investigator”—the narration offering the reader insight into the Inspector’s expansive inner world. Intruding into the “mystery of conscious existence” is positioned in relation to the detonation of the human body, as if the incompatibility between rational time and cognitive experience dematerializes physicality itself. As the inspector continues to look at the body, he finds the “echo of the words ‘person unknown’ echoing in his inner consciousness” (71). He “would have liked to vindicate the efficiency of his department by establishing the identity of that man,” but this seems impossible because the “first term”—aka “person”—was unreadable. Stevie no longer seems to have been a person at all.

The climax of the book applies this process of delayed decoding to a reconstruction of Greenwich Park itself, bringing together the symbolic power of Greenwich and the violence of England’s imperial modernity through a precisely narrated account of Mrs. Verloc’s experience of distended time. Winnie experiences a significant cognitive delay when thinking about Stevie’s death, but her sense of unreality fixates on the location of the concept of a “park” rather than the concept of instantaneous violence. The problem of a universally established experience of time and the problem of Greenwich Park are, in a symbolic framework, interchangeable. The symbolic decoding

in both scenes highlights the incompatibility between social order and subjective experience.

Greenwich Park. A park! That's where the boy was killed. A park—smashed branches, torn leaves, gravel, bits of brotherly flesh and bone, all spouting up together in the manner of a firework. She remembered now what she had heard, and she remembered it pictorially. They had to gather him up with a shovel. Trembling all over with irrepressible shudders, she saw before her the very implement with its ghastly load scraped up from the ground. Mrs. Verloc closed her eyes desperately, throwing upon that vision the night of her eyelids, where after a rain-like fall of mangled limbs the decapitated head of Stevie lingered suspended alone, and fading out slowly like the last star of a pyrotechnic display. Mrs. Verloc opened her eyes. (206)

The narrator emphasizes the mediation of information about Stevie's death. First it is something that Mrs. Verloc has "heard," and here she "remembered now what she had heard, and she remembered it pictorially." She uses her own body, her eyelids, to alter the image of body parts and landscape that intertwine in her mind. Conrad marks the cinematic final image of Stevie's suspended head with temporal verbs: it "lingered" before "fading out slowly." Like the internal crisis that Inspector Heat experiences while looking at Stevie's corpse, Mrs. Verloc extends the moment of Stevie's death—stretching the explosion into a hovering slow motion "firework" of landscape and body that she later lingers over in her manic repetition of the phrase "blood and dirt." (229). The image of Greenwich Park is crucial to the effect of this scene. Instead of the picturesquely composed lawn, spaced trees, and sinuous avenues—all aesthetic figures of English stability and order—Greenwich Park is a jumble of dismembered body parts and shattered landscape. Mrs. Verloc struggles to reconcile the concept of "Greenwich Park" with the violence that she slowly realizes occurred there. This struggle then extends outward to her own marriage, which she gradually reevaluates from a newly displaced

perspective. This displacement is not just a gruesome dramatization of a morbid news item; it is a careful indictment of the calibrated equipoise between the novel and British empire. The anxious efforts at decoding violence in *The Secret Agent* struggle to restore ideological order in the face of the destabilization of England's global power.

Imperial Collapse

Empire is not an explicit subject of *The Secret Agent*. Its international context is the creeping cosmopolitanism of London itself and the fraught network of European politics. At the same time, *The Secret Agent* is clearly a novel about the overextended bureaucracy of the state, and the failure of the ideological and material apparatuses of control necessary to maintain an empire. The novel's famous ending quite obviously presages the impact of this failure. The "incorruptible" Professor walks into the crowded streets of London with his finger on the detonator of his homemade explosive, visions of "ruin and destruction" in the service of the "regeneration of the world" in his head.⁸² Neither the novel nor the police have control over this kind of character; because he has "no future" he remains "unsuspected and deadly" (246). Such an ominous conclusion suggests that Verloc's botched explosion is just one of many plots being constructed across London.

By collapsing the distinction between progressive narrative time and stalled, erratic, and disruptive psychological time, Conrad indicates the notational limitations of universal standard time. This is not simply a cynical dissatisfaction with the mechanized rigidity of modernity. Universal standard time is primarily an apparatus of global

⁸² Note that the Professor, like Nostromo, is described as "incorruptible"—but unlike Nostromo, the Professor remains untouched by material interests by the conclusion of the novel.

finance—increasingly the vanguard of British new imperialism. The failures of temporal standardization are the failures of imperial control at the local level. Whereas *Nostramo* charts the complex but ultimately legible dynamics of the international forces of investment capital, the temporal anarchism of *The Secret Agent* legitimately evades the novel’s organizing frame. That is not to say that the revolutionaries are laudable; the crew of anarchists and communists in the book are jaded, self-satisfied, and corrupt. Nonetheless, the novel fails to account for the movements and actions of its cast of characters. Scenes are recounted or remembered, investigated and pieced together, and some are left open. In the case of its primary event, the bombing at Greenwich, the repetitions and reevaluations and recollections all return to this symbolically overdetermined English landscape. While Vladimir endows the Royal Observatory with the full significance of “Science” itself, the most pertinent contemporary referent of Greenwich Park would have been British control over global time.⁸³

But collapse is evident not only in the Greenwich bombing. If, as I have suggested, the plotted linearity of the realist novel is a metonym for the kind of universal order demanded by a liberal empire, then Conrad’s disruptive style signals the conceptual failure of that order. This is not to say, as Jameson does, that modernist style marks a failure to account for the geographical dislocation of exploited labor and capitalist accumulation. In fact, Conrad accurately charts the experience of metropolitan life—a form of life that is increasingly incompatible with the methods of description and control

⁸³ Though the bombing is a failure, the mystification of the event—legible only to the narrator and his readers—indicates a failure in the police state, particularly the Metropolitan Police Special Branch formed in 1884. The Special Branch was formed specifically in response to IRA bombings and was intended to surveil and control terrorist activity.

that came before it. In *Nostramo*, Costaguana's persistent instability makes an ethical claim about the bad faith of liberal progress: capitalism does not bring order to the periphery; it exploits and intensifies economic and political disorder. In the metropole of London, this cursed surplus sows the same disorder in a different environment, thus bringing imperial center and periphery together conceptually even in the absence of explicit representation of empire.

If novels offer imaginary resolutions to real social contradiction, *The Secret Agent* delivers a grim forecast. The "domestic plot" (if it can be called that) is cynical from the start: Winnie passes over a real love interest for the financial security that Mr. Verloc can offer. When Winnie murders Verloc, she doesn't achieve the satisfaction of revenge, but is led into a state of anxiety that makes her vulnerable to exploitation by Ossipon. The remaining revolutionaries offer no hope of political revolution; the only agent with integrity is the Professor, and his dogma of random violence does not conform to any positive vision of social change. Although the final scene features the Professor walking through the crowd, his threat to the established order is ultimately insignificant. The true antagonists of the novel are simply different branches of the state itself. These different antagonists converge in the figure of the secret agent himself. Mr. Verloc juggles the directives of several different institutions: the police, the embassy, and the largely insignificant revolutionary movement. Social collapse, in Conrad's vision, will not arrive from the margins of the imperial world or the undercommons of the metropolis but from bureaucratic failure: the inept secretary, the corrupt politician, and the incompetent cop.

The Secret Agent speculates on the representational failure of high realist forms that offer the nation as the adequate scale for the description of social experience. Though

these forms have helped to make concepts like universal standard time thinkable, Conrad's emphasis on the amorphous temporality of psychological experience produces a new hierarchy of novelistic description. This is not to say that Conrad, or modernism more broadly, offers a solution to the novel's complicity with capitalism. *The Secret Agent* is sympathetic to the police force it critiques. Despite Conrad's apparent allegiances, *The Secret Agent* suggests that a universal humanist dream of global harmony (in the form of imperial standardization) cannot account for the heterogeneous experience of modern life.

The Right to the City

Conrad's indictment of capitalist exploitation in *Nostramo*, and his exercise in political nihilism in *The Secret Agent*, respond to different manifestations of the same social problem. The extraction of wealth from peripheral regions destabilizes their political structure. The concentrated investment of that wealth in the city also destabilizes political control. There are two false premises about the "arrival" of capitalism in *Nostramo*: first, that capitalism has not been in Costaguana across the entire nineteenth century, and second, that the introduction of capital will stabilize the rebellious energy of the purportedly backwards nation. The bombing in *The Secret Agent* also has two false premises: first, that it is an attack on "the sacrosanct fetish" of rational science, and not the international financial implementation of standardization, and second, that this international standard is not coextensive with British imperial control. Together, the two novels explicate the movement of capital towards London, and the effects of that movement on both central and peripheral economic spaces. *Nostramo* describes the extraction of resources in the periphery and its subsequent destabilization, and *The Secret*

Agent describes the corruption of a city overburdened with the management of that surplus.

The tendency of capital to concentrate in cities is distinctive at all stages of modern economic development. At its inception, the acceleration of ingenuity and resources in agricultural technology drove workers who were previously tied to the land to find new work in the city, where factories soon flourished. Across the twentieth century surplus capital has increasingly been reinvested in urban development. Urbanization and military expenditure, as David Harvey has argued, have both played crucial roles in absorbing the surplus product of capitalist overproduction. Both wars and cities, however, eventually overextend credit and produce new instability—generating a cycle of crisis and stasis that nevertheless fuels profit. These moments of crisis are not the only violence built into the cycle. Urban transformation entails “repeated bouts of urban restructuring through ‘creative destruction,’ which nearly always has a class dimension since it is the poor, the underprivileged, and those marginalized from political power that suffer first and foremost from this process. Violence is required to build the new urban world from the old.” (Harvey, 33). For Harvey, then, the city represents a critical site for reclaiming social control over exploited wealth. Just as villages once centered around a shared common, could cities represent a newly configured site of common access to wealth and resources?

The Secret Agent poses a negative version of that question: does anyone have access to the city? Can anyone control it? Does it offer wealth or resources to anyone, or is it simply a spatial manifestation of the alienated surplus of capitalist accumulation?

While the nihilism of this text has been duly noted, there is a moment in which Conrad

seems to grant a kind of subaltern urban agency. After Ossipon abandons Winnie, stealing her cash and leaving her to arrest or death, he decides to walk home; even though he is “flush of banknotes as never before in his life” he tells a cab driver “I can walk.” This statement of agency introduces a passage that stands out from the rest of the novel, precisely because of the way it juggles agency back and forth from subject (Ossipon) to object (London).

He could walk. He walked. He crossed the bridge. Later on the towers of the Abbey saw in their massive immobility the yellow bush of his hair passing under the lamps. The lights of Victoria saw him too, and Sloane Square, and the railings of the park. And Comrade Ossipon once more found himself on a bridge. The river, a sinister marvel of still shadows and flowing gleams mingling below in a black silence, arrested his attention. He stood looking over the parapet for a long time. The clock tower boomed a brazen blast above his drooping head. He looked up at the dial. . . . Half-past twelve of a wild night in the Channel. (238)

In this passage, London has a comprehensible stasis absent elsewhere in the novel. While the street numbers in Knightsbridge jump from nine to thirty-seven (12), and the facades of Whitehall seem impossibly disorienting (124), Ossipon’s London is laid out with cartographic clarity. The optical energy of the passage emphasizes this spatial intelligibility. The towers of Westminster, the lights of Victoria, and the railing of the park all “see” him as he passes by. Time and space here achieve a balance, and each landmark is isolated as a discrete form, marked by Ossipon’s own pace of walking. After gazing into the river—dramatically foreshadowing Winnie’s own suicide—Ossipon is confronted with the power standardized time. The booming clock tower intervenes into a scene otherwise measured by embodied experience. But Ossipon seems to evade the control of this time by walking.

And again Comrade Ossipon walked. His robust form was seen that night in distant parts of the enormous town slumbering monstrously on a carpet of mud

under a veil of raw mist. It was seen crossing the streets without life and sound, or diminishing in the interminable straight perspectives of shadowy houses bordering empty roadways lined by strings of gas lamps. He walked through Squares, Places, Ovals, Commons, through monotonous streets with unknown names where the dust of humanity settles inert and hopeless out of the stream of life. He walked. And suddenly turning into a strip of a front garden with a mangy grass plot, he let himself into a small grimy house with a latch-key he took out of his pocket. (238)

How long did Ossipon walk? The passage gives a sense of timelessness, Ossipon's wide range of motion across the "enormous town" echoed by Conrad's longer historical view of London's erection on a "carpet of mud." The cartographic specificity is replaced by nameless urban features—houses, roadways, and gas lamps, Squares, Places, Ovals, and Commons. The anonymity of these sites at this point give shape to the urban concentration of human population—figured as the deposition of alluvial silt. Ossipon arrives home, which the reader has been told is located in an outer ring of the city, paid for by his rich patroness. His walk home opens up the city for a more totalizing view than has seemed possible. When the city comes into view, the entire "stream of life" appears as well, as does the forms of spatial control organizing the "dust of humanity." As he gets into bed, the sun rises, and Ossipon falls asleep "in the sunlight." The final sentence of the passage seems to suggest that this inversion of temporal expectations offers insight into and some agency over the watchful city. A nighttime walk asserts, to some degree, one's right to the city.

Ossipon moves from the center of the city to its periphery, and in doing so achieves a sense of control over disorienting urban space. As Raymond Williams has argued, the relationship of the country and the city is a frequent and apt metaphor for the

relationship of the colony and the metropole (279).⁸⁴ When Ossipon walks from the center of London to the suburban outskirts, he traces the continuity of urban space—in the imperial metaphor of the country and the city, the divide between colony and metropolis has been transverse. Though the parasitic Ossipon is anything but an admirable character, his moment of urban clarity—a chronotopic revelation that can stand apart from his character—nonetheless represents the potential for the democratization of surplus capital.

In the language of Said's "two visions," Conrad cannot critique the accumulation of surplus capital in London without couching this critique in the abstract depravity of man. Similarly, *Nostramo* cannot stage its critique of international finance without characterizing South American society as inherently violent and disordered. Nonetheless, Conrad's descriptions of land emphasize the disjuncture between the "real" landscape and the conceptual, institutional, and bureaucratic landscapes that blanket it. Though the novel is also indicted as a technique of artifice, it is also a tool for understanding the total system.

While Conrad's fiction marks a departure from the conventions of realist style, it shares many of the aims of high realism, including a focus on the texture of psychological individualization, a representational modelling of financial abstraction, and a

⁸⁴ This relationship is temporalized through industrialization: the metropolis seems to be developed and the rest of the world seems to be underdeveloped or developing. "Thus a model of city and country," writes Williams, "in economic in political relationships, has gone beyond the boundaries of the nation state, and is seen but also challenged as a model of the world" (279). Williams explains that the "real history of city and country" is not a case of successful development in some places and failure to develop in others; rather, "what was happening in the 'city', the 'metropolitan' economy, determined and was determined by what was made to happen in the 'country' (279). The country is developed, just as the city, but to support the city rather than itself; the colony is developed in a similar way. This symbiotic model, which Williams claims began in England as the earliest form of the now dominant model of capitalist development, has expanded outwards from England: "thus one of the last models of 'city and country' is the system we now know as imperialism" (279).

commitment to transcribing the relation between social structure and individual experience. Conrad also shares a realist commitment to rationalizing spatiotemporal abstraction, what Jameson would call the “realist floorplan,” but places the temporal emphasis on embodied experience, rather than standardized linearity.⁸⁵ In *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent* he shows that both space and time, as extensions of capitalist modes of development, fail to account for the spatiotemporal experience of modernity—in both the peripheral colonies and the urban metropolis. His critique recognizes the centrality of landscape to both capitalist historical development and the novelistic tradition. Though he fails to imagine an anticolonial future, moments of *The Secret Agent* suggest that by maintaining personal modes of agency over urban space, the disorienting screen of global standardization can be temporarily disrupted. His ambivalence about personal agency extends to the novel itself, which both produces the conceptual apparatuses of universal measurement and synchronization that support global imperialism and offers techniques for dismantling those same concepts. Conrad’s work, which marks the transition from a realist to modernist literary paradigm, affirms the continuing legacy of landscape as a representational method for identifying—and ideologically maintaining—the inequitable relation of exploitation between center and periphery.

⁸⁵ Many realist novelists, of course, did not have to contend with the concept of standardized time within their fiction—because it had not yet been “invented.” However, some of the strategies of realist narration, which presuppose the standard experience of space and time across a diverse character network, provide a conceptual precondition for the standardization of time.

CODA: The Failure of Aesthetics

Is there any relationship between beauty and goodness? This dissertation suggests that the two deeply inform one another, but that the conditions of capitalist modernity have transformed beauty into an index of violence and loss. Aesthetic theory attempts to take an empirical approach to the subjective subject of taste—either to help organize aesthetic objects or to understand that order. Aesthetics asks if we can trust our bodies to tell us what is good. Kant, for instance, separates pleasurable sensation into agreeableness, beauty, and goodness (41). The agreeable is simple gratification, beauty requires a specifically human element of rational judgement, and goodness has been more comprehensively proven to be beneficial. Beauty, in particular, is social; if a certain color is “soft and lovely” to one and “dull and faded” to another, it does not meet the standard of “objective universal validity” (44). For Kant, the subjective phenomenon of natural beauty points the viewer towards the objective realities of ethical and moral truth.

But something has dislodged that continuity between natural beauty and that objectivity. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that modernity has almost entirely extinguished the experience of natural beauty, noting that “natural beauty is ideology where it serves to disguise mediateness as immediacy” (69). Landscape gardens, specifically, “give expression to past historical suffering” (96). “It is only just,” he writes “that the image of a limited world should make us happy, provided we do not forget the repression that went into making it” (96). Without freedom, Adorno argues, there is no possibility for natural beauty in landscape. Even “nature over which no human hand has passed—alpine moraines and taluses—resemble those industrial mountains of debris

from which the socially lauded aesthetic need for nature flees” (68). Still, Adorno argues, natural beauty makes a “sporadic and uncertain” promise to the viewer who “pledges to subordinate himself” (108). Despite the inaccessibility of true natural beauty, some landscapes can offer a glimpse into a reconciliation between humanity and the world from which it has been alienated.

Words tend to bounce off nature as they try to deliver nature’s language into the hands of another language foreign to it. But this is not to say that there cannot be sunny days in southern countries which seem to be waiting to be taken notice of, never mind the teleological fallacy that seems to be implied in such a statement. When a day like this draws to a close, radiating the same peaceful brilliance it did when it began, a message seems to be inscribed in it. It says not all is lost yet, or perhaps it says, more affirmatively, that everything will be all right. (108)

Adorno holds true to the promise of Hegelian dialectical history that motivates his critique of Kant. The ruin of modern nature can still promise a natural beauty to come.

It has become familiar, in 2021, to enjoy a warm day with friends and sarcastically thank global warming for the pleasant weather. Is it still possible to imagine a world to come embedded somewhere in the ruin of climate change? Are pleasure, beauty, and goodness operable categories to describe the experience of sunshine, when that sunshine signifies increasingly volatile climatological conditions across the global south? This question is linked to the experience of walking in an English landscape garden. Can you enjoy it? Should you? If the landscape garden—as I have argued in this dissertation—is a direct aesthetic response to the enclosure of the commons, can it still be beautiful? Are these gardens—funded by the violence of British empire, which continues to enact daily harm across the world—available in any way for ethical recovery? Do they have the power to affirm, in Adorno’s phrasing, “that everything will be alright”?

Edmund Burke—better known as the father of modern conservatism than as a theorist of aesthetics—argued that beauty and sublimity worked to train the human faculty of aesthetic judgement. He wrote that, because beauty worked without “reason” or “any reference to use,” “we must conclude that beauty is, for the greater part, some quality in bodies, acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses” (102). The smooth lines of a grassy hill, according to Burke, literally caress the eye and soothe the body. The sharp edges of the sublime, on the other hand, offer “due exercise” to the “muscular parts of the constitution” which “must be shaken and worked to a proper degree” (123). Burke’s theory is physiological; as the eye traces over a craggy cliff the variation between light and shadow causes the sphincter of the pupil to rapidly contract and expand: the repeated columns of a colonnade drum a pattern of presence and void that suggest the idea of infinitude. True to his reputation as the father of conservatism, Burke uses these pseudo-scientific observations to ground his reactionary ideological investments. The soft curve of a woman’s neck confirms her social position as an object of beauty available for consumption; a black child’s skin inherently produces a sense of horror.

The lesson that Burke teaches us is not—as he surmises—that sweetness is beautiful because sugar molecules are globular. Rather, it is that aesthetic judgements that are grounded in individual experience are necessarily subject to the ideological forces that have shaped that body’s experience of the world. Politics are not just personal; they take on a physical presence that masquerades as objective reality. Realism—broadly conceived—is an archive of this transcription of politics into reality. That archive then produces its own effect on the world. This dissertation has charted some of those effects.

As land was segmented, privatized, and then redesigned to imitate historical versions of itself, the thin line between referent and reference grew thinner. In order to avoid reinscribing and reaffirming this distorted experience of beauty, it is crucial that we interrogate the collective histories of violence that have produced our shared present and celebrate emergent opportunities to create a newly durable commons.

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