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SECOND NATURE:
THE DISCOURSE OF HABIT IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH REALIST
FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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“Second Nature: The Discourse of Habit in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction” explores ideas about habit in the nineteenth century. Even as the discourse of habit took shape in psychology studies, self-help tracts, and social reform inquiries, its aesthetic realization in the novel performed the crucial task of synthesizing these psychological and sociological perspectives. My dissertation examines the ways realist writers sought to reconceive the relationship between social determination and self-improvement. I argue that they were compelled to develop new modes to represent consciousness in ways that would correspond to new theories of evolutionary progress, institutional change, and even the physiology of the brain. As science increasingly pointed toward the amorality of natural evolution, Victorian novelists derived moral

meaning from new ways of narrating the ordinary experiences that constituted people's "second nature."

In revealing the rich historical debates about habit, my dissertation contributes to our understanding of the reciprocally shaping forces of scientific ideas about the mind and realist narrative techniques. Chapter one analyzes the political, scientific and aesthetic concerns with habit, demonstrating several contradictions at work in the Victorian formulation of second nature by tracing its genealogy. The texts I examine – parliamentary reports, the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, and evolutionary controversies, among others – suggest that the training and reforming of habit was understood as a key to social reform. In the following three chapters I consider the intricate ways that Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy imagine and depict the intersecting social and psychological origins of habit. Dickens's novel *Dombey and Son* investigates the ethical responsibility for one's socialization and unconscious life. Chapter two's reading of *The Mill on the Floss* argues that Eliot's engagement with new physiological understandings of habit shapes both her ideal of sympathy and her sense of the importance of reimagining conventions. My final chapter contends that Hardy's work refutes earlier realist claims about the potential of habit for self-reform. Taken together, these fictions demonstrate an aesthetic experiment with scientific notions of subjectivity, examining how repetition, personal disposition, desire, environment, and early training are entailed in the process of becoming a moral subject.

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Chapter Three, “Habits and Subjectivity in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*” is forthcoming (Autumn 2010) from *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*.

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Introduction

We only truly know that which we are obliged to recreate in thought, that which is hidden from us by everyday life. – Alain Badiou

“Second Nature: The Discourse of Habit in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction”

investigates the Victorian understanding of habit in literary, cultural and scientific fields.

My project describes a genealogy of a concept that significantly shaped the forms of realist fiction. While the idea of habit certainly predates the nineteenth century, I demonstrate that the period gave it new relevance alongside new narratives of secular individualism. Like every project, mine is an attempt to reckon with personal obsessions. It began with an interest in how Victorian literature presents questions of transformation and conservation, viewed through the perspective of individual subjectivity. When investigated in relation to the novel, these questions take shape in the patterns, routines, and reflex actions that individualize its characters; in its exploration of the forms of determinism – both psychological and social – that shape their ways of being; and in the (always problematic) possibility of personal transformation within a realistic, or believable, plot.

It immediately should be clear what this study is not: it is not an investigation of any particular Victorian habits or training regimes – with the notable exception of reading, which I will address below. Rather “Second Nature” studies the ways in which the Victorians understood the human tendency to form habits: our disposition to acquire and repeat behavior, and the extent to which it is possible to transform behavior that is socially-conditioned and largely unconscious. Because of its determined and reflexive nature, Victorians considered habit to be the material of character – its most reliable calculus. Its effects were behavioristic and visible even though the operation of habit took

place in the invisible circuits of the mind. Most discussions of determinism in Victorian thought tend to be read as dichotomous to (an often hypostasized) will. Habit intriguingly disrupts this dichotomy; it does not correspond to the distinction between unconscious and conscious practices. While much contemporary critical work has shown the importance of debates about determinism and about will in Victorian thought, and other studies have addressed nineteenth-century ideas of automatism, almost no current work has yet addressed the pervasiveness of a discourse of habit.¹

My investigation has been motivated by what I saw as a proliferation of thinking and anxiety about habit in the writing of Victorian social theorists, psychologists, and novelists. I explore several historical explanations – interrelated conditions of modernity – to account for this propagation. New understandings of labor, natural and social evolution, and habituation had consequences not only for legislation and political reform but also for aesthetic production.

The nineteenth century was a time of flux, whether one thinks of the territory claimed by the crown, or changing beliefs about the age of the earth and the mutability of its species, or the extension of the franchise. Victorians saw radical alterations to every form of institution – law, banking, Parliament, education. During the years of Queen Victoria's reign, the invention of streetlights, telegraphs, and railroads transformed the ways in which people could see, communicate and travel. Customs were rapidly disappearing because of the massive migration of people from the country to the city and the replacement of many kinds of artisan work with machine work, and field work with servant work.² While these facts are well known, my question has been less frequently asked: what part of the human absorbs these changes? This dissertation argues that

absorption occurs in some part that is related to the cognitive-behavioral processes of habituation. The discourse of habit is a theory of acquisition – habits are acquired dispositions, not in-born traits; habits apply, then, to explanations of people’s affective incorporation of social change. Habit filled the gap left by the disintegration of custom as a category for thinking about cultural reproduction.

When the economists applied the logic of the market system to society, they created a new understanding of human nature: Economic Man. That understanding tended to condense individuals’ identity, from holistic belonging to a particular neighborhood, guild, and creed, into that of an atomized laborer.³ So long as society reproduced itself in the static terms of a traditional organic society, there was no real need for a discourse of habit as distinct from custom. Only when English society completely reorganized itself according to the logic of the market, when “habits of industry” became accepted shorthand for moral integrity, did individual laborers’ behavior begin to matter in terms of the aggregate whole.⁴ In the wake of the laws that made labor a commodity, in the 1850s, Henry Mayhew organized his entire anthropology of the urban poor as a catalogue of the peculiar habits necessitated by particular forms of labor. His accounts suggested that poverty was not a result of indolence. The proliferation of the discourse of habit was a corollary of the Victorian discovery of society, that is, of the laws governing complex society.

A second historical explanation concerns new ways of understanding evolution, and the human species as a part of natural evolutionary processes. Natural evolutionary theories, such as Charles Darwin’s and Alfred Russel Wallace’s accounts of the mechanism of natural selection, were influenced by the population hypotheses of the

early political economists. Thomas Malthus's population principle, which held that population increased at a geometric (i.e., exponential) rate while food production only increased at an arithmetic rate, predicted (incorrectly, so far) that this differential meant that eventually the number of humans would outrun the production of food. Competition was seen as a natural part of evolutionary change. Apart from (and partly in *reaction* to) the theory of natural selection, many of the other nineteenth-century evolutionary hypotheses reanimated neo-Lamarckian ideas of habit-inheritance. The work of Herbert Spencer, William Carpenter, Samuel Butler, and others shrugged off Malthus's ominous forecasts. Progress seemed unlimited. Material life, scientific knowledge and moral sense all were bound to improve under the regimes of free trade, technological development, and compulsory education. According to these theorists, better habits would not only develop from the extension of improved material conditions but also in turn would sustain further improvements.

The idea of habituation also gained in importance in early nineteenth-century aesthetics. The manifestos of many European writers, including William Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, called for new art for new times. But Wordsworth's Preface also feared that people's habituation to urban life would entail negative aesthetic consequences. Desensitization to the pandemonium of the city decreased people's affective responses, he felt, so that repeated excitement of sensations required increasing levels of stimulation to achieve the same effect. On the other hand, the serialization of fiction – also inducing a type of habituation – made it economically possible for greater numbers of readers to consume more kinds of fiction, whether of Dickens's middle-brow narratives or George Eliot's more high-brow ones. The mode of serialization and the

ideology of self-help philosophy, which was a dominant approach to practical thinking about habit in the nineteenth century, remain enormously productive forms and ideologies in contemporary society. Although any cultural study of habit will look different depending on the historical periods under one's gaze, the productiveness of the discourse of habit in the nineteenth century suggests it has an ongoing influential function in characterizing modernity.

* * *

Besides the historical relevance of habit to the nineteenth-century, why focus a cultural study of habit on the Victorian novel? Given that habit is a way of talking about character, whether real or imagined, it has a direct relation to the realist novel's depiction of character and representation of society's determining institutions.⁵ Habit, as the material of morality, as some Victorians described it, relates individuals' behavior to a social good. Therefore, habit not only defined the ways that everyday behavior ossified character but it was also suggestive of how behavior related to the more intangible operations of the mind. As Nicholas Dames has discussed in *Amnesiac Selves*, his study of nostalgia in Victorian culture, the emerging field of psychology in the Victorian period can be understood as an important parallel practice to the novel. One of the goals of Victorian novels – to understand embodied human consciousness – was shared by Victorian psychology, and novels' intensely detailed representations of subjective experience exerted crucial influences on psychology. As Dames also suggests, properly understood, Victorian psychology is a “cognitive philosophy” – more a study of

cognition, perception and sensation, than what became, in the twentieth century, inquiries into the dynamics of, for example, repression (9). Theories of habit produce important cognitive philosophical claims, by describing how the external world of sense perception and common sense cognition are registered on the mind and body and thus contribute to an individual's actions. As the novel explores characters' habits, how they develop and what sorts of plots those habits encourage, it also makes significant claims about human nature and the nature of society. However, novels do so not through philosophical abstractions but through the fascinating particularity of individuals' histories. In the novel, habit intersects the contingency of plot.

The primary data of my study of theories of habit comes from novels by Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, whose sensitivities to the nuances of subjective experience have already been well documented by numerous critics. My first chapter offers a more general historical account of Victorian theories of habit, and each of my readings of Victorian narrative is contextualized by Victorian philosophical and physio-psychological debates about habit. Such comparative analysis illuminates what can only be seen as the reciprocally shaping forces of novelistic and scientific discourse. Theories of habit, as I demonstrate, constitute an enormously important component of both modes. The work of a number of critics on nineteenth-century culture has been indispensable to my own thinking about realism, including that of George Levine, Gillian Beer, Sally Shuttleworth, and Nick Dames. They insist, rightly, that the kinds of questions science asks, as well its investigative procedures, shape literary forms.

My study investigates the patterns established by habit as working on several narrative levels, both inside and outside of texts. I discuss the aesthetics of repetition in

the novel, and its possible effects on readers. Victorian novels reflect on the potential for self-reform, my dissertation argues, by plotting the consequences of habit-formation and exploring the individual's ability to undergo changes of consciousness. Habit can only be represented by what narratologists call the iterative mode – one description standing in for a succession of repeated acts. Through iteration, habits generate the predictable inferences readers make about characters, whereas plot intervenes in this expectedness by imagining contingencies with which to test habit's durability. In these ways, habit is not merely depicted as the content of fiction; it also transforms the novel's form.

My dissertation takes seriously the absolute claims of Mr. Morfin in *Dombey and Son* that “whatever we do, good, bad, or indifferent, we do from habit.” I argue that the forms of realist fiction not only explore the causes and consequences of characters' habit-formations, but also, as realist depictions, make visible and conscious for readers social habits so familiar as to be imperceptible. We take for granted that the novel is an ideological mode, and critics of realist fiction have been in the habit of pointing to the blind spots of these narratives. But our effort to expose these blind spots often sidelines the reflexive projects that novels also instantiate for readers. It is these latter lessons, rather than the very present domestic and middle-class ideologies, that I take as the subject of my study. Novelists constantly reshape the old forms by creating new ones, and in their claim to represent realistic worlds, which we know cannot escape ideological inflection, they criticize society's blind spots as much as they figure their own.

* * *

So what can a theory of habit tell us about what is authentically human? The aspect of habit that causes the most contention in contemporary theory is its status as a function of cultural reproduction. Habit has a quality of non-consciousness that contributes both pragmatically and conservatively to social life. Such reproduction is a result of both ideology and biology. Cognitively, our brains are wired to understand new information in terms of knowledge we already have acquired. Our bodies are sites of amazing functional control over the complex external world, giving us agency and managing our interactions with other social agents. In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Anthony Giddens claims an importance for habit that reinterprets Michel Foucault's version of disciplinary power. Giddens argues that individual identity is located in "the capacity to keep a particular [biographical] narrative going" (54), and that this ability lends subjects a sense of ontological security. He points out that there are no cognitive barriers between discursive and practical consciousness, as there are between unconsciousness and consciousness (36). Giddens argues that *regimes* are not only unconscious conditioning elements of conduct but are also tied into individuals' enduring motivational patterns. While these latter are always socially or culturally organized, they are also modes formed by personal inclinations, dispositions and tastes (62).

Giddens's work suggests that to consider habit as either liberatory or as merely reproducing the status quo is oversimplifying the matter. Yet these two positions tend to represent the main views of habit in contemporary theory. One strand of thinking, best represented by Pierre Bourdieu, rejects the idea that habit originates from choice. Bourdieu argues that individuals are born into pre-existing cultures and have only limited ways of circumventing these "structuring structures." His use of the term *habitus* refers to

the patterning of dispositions and tastes that becomes the “equivalent, in the cultural order, of the transmission of genetic capital in the biological order.” Education for Bourdieu is more or less analogous to reproduction; taste replicates the structures of exclusion that ensure that those without access to cultural capital will not gain access. On the other hand, phenomenologists (in the vein of John Dewey) have taken a more optimistic view of the experiential dialectic between lived body and the world. According to Dewey, complex cultures produce habits formed on differing, even conflicting patterns. Such “internal frictions,” he felt, give rise to liberating impulses responsible for personal, institutional, and social change. As Dewey’s view implicitly suggests, habit is intersubjective in nature. Nick Crossley works from a specific theory of reflexivity that suggests that our ability to reflect upon our own habits – to make them an object of investigation rather than part of our unconscious existence – derives from an incorporation of the perspective of others into our habitus, an intersubjective process.

Intersubjectivity, then, is necessary to recognize repetitive behavior as *habit*. Habitual behaviors are those which have the most impact on the world and those around us. In a philosophical sense, habit only exists in that moment when one recognizes that things do not have to be the way that they are. Before that moment, repetition is merely unacknowledged routine. Such a view helps to make the case for the importance of habit to a theory of reading. George Eliot believed that the imaginative process of novel reading led readers to exercise the part of their brains that engendered feelings of sympathy. Current cognitive scientists also claim that synaptic connections in the brain are forged as much by actual experiences as by reflection or imagination. I argue that the forms of realism we find in nineteenth-century fiction existed in part to stimulate

reflection on familiar, unreflective ways of being and thinking; to change hearts and minds required first becoming conscious of ingrained attitudes and behaviors. Dickens felt that this self-examination was best achieved by combining entertainment with the medicine of critical self-evaluation. In my final chapter, I read Thomas Hardy's fiction for the ways in which he abandoned this project as fruitless.

For theorists of material culture, habit is suggestive because of the patterns and traces that human activity leaves on the objects with which we most routinely interact or inhabit. Michel de Certeau, Gaston Bachelard, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Elaine Scarry, among others, have addressed these questions in often counter-intuitive ways. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, criticizing the "epidemics of will" she finds in contemporary culture, suggests that habit poses an alternative to the voluntariness/ compulsion dichotomy. Reading Proust (probably the modern who has explored the aesthetics of habit more thoroughly than anyone), she claims that "habit makes us blind to – and thus enables to come into existence – our surroundings, ourselves as we appear to others, and the imprint of others in ourselves" (139). Habit can show the material world in relief. For Sedgwick, habit foregrounds the interrelations of the self acting with "the bodily habitus, the appareling habit, the sheltering habitation, everything that marks the traces of that habit on a world that metaphysical absolutes would have left in a vacuum" (138). In material terms, that is, habits don't tell us about good and evil but about the self's very intimate relations to the others and environment. Similar views can be found in the work of de Certeau, Bachelard and Scarry. A subject's habits might be seen as the literal corners she turns on her way to work every morning; the stains on a teacup that indicate the consumption of a commodity or perhaps even the ritual reenactment of this consumption.

Anyone who has ever had a relationship with a dog has experienced how we can read our habits reflected back to us in their discerning patterns of expectation. A reader's habits might be traced in a book's underscored passages, turned-down corners, or other kinds of doodles or marginalia. The novel remains "novel" in the ways it plays with formal conventions and therefore with readers' patterns of expectation.

I wish to conclude by reiterating the Victorians' sense that our habits – our most repetitive, banal, non-conscious, ordinary routines – are those that most frequently impress, that is, press upon, the people in our lives and the world around us. Realist fictions charge readers with the task of transforming habit. In the ethics of Alain Badiou, radical transformation is a possibility only when we abandon the preservation of our objective routines. In his theory of subject-formation, we only become subjects when we are impacted by what he terms the *event* – an encounter with something that does not fit with the prevailing regime of re-presentation, a surprise, a crisis. We can react by denying or suppressing the event (and remain a mere individual), or we can create a new criterion for action. At the present moment we are witnessing reinterpretations of "life" and "nature" in politics and genetics that may have devastating consequences to the vitality and variety of human life and other species living among ourselves. A truly libratory theory of habit ought to account for not only our own human ontological security but also our ethical responsibility to the generations of living beings. As long as we continue to *demand* a material way of being that we cannot achieve without injustice, the detriment to our environment and the creatures with whom we share it will also continue. Moreover, as current theories of biopolitics suggest, many of our laws and ways of approaching global problems are those that were developed in response to the

Industrial Revolution. During the course of that revolution, humans, without considering the consequences (even believing we have a divine-given right), reorganized nearly the whole of the planet to fit their needs. Thus focusing on species preservation is a myopic answer to the problem of the irreversible loss of whole ecosystems and the catastrophic threat to genetic diversity posed by some biotechnologies. We have begun the Biological Revolution; the rush to “claim” genetic information is the new gold rush. It is not yet clear what will come of our having ceded to corporations the right to own the very biological codes of life itself, but this alters our political definitions of life and sovereignty. A radical transformation of our regimes are required to confront this revolution. These questions will severely test our old habits of mind. What will the habits of the new *polis*, our globalized, bioengineered world, look like?

* * *

Four chapters comprise the dissertation. My first chapter, “Second Nature: The Matter of Habit,” demonstrates several contradictions at work in the Victorian formulation of second nature by tracing its genealogy. I argue that many fields of knowledge employed the discourse of habit to express conceptually the desire to mediate the conflicting aims of tradition and innovation, social conditioning and liberal individualism. Chapter One maps this ideological territory by examining writing from a variety of genres, including moral tracts, reform reportage, the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, psychological texts, and periodical essays on evolution and progress. The clash between amoral competitiveness and an ethic of

personal responsibility is the subject of my second chapter, “Dickens’s *Dombey and Son: Railroads, Routines and Reform.*” Long identified as a novel of social change, *Dombey* also features Dickens’s most self-conscious reflection on habit. *Dombey* depicts the sorts of perversions that result when individuals literally incorporate commercial logic into their unconscious mental and bodily routines. I demonstrate how the novel’s use of repetition reinforces the perception of this cultural crisis, the form of the novel both cashing in on habituation through the techniques that accompanied serialization and working against the lulling complacency of clockwork routine.

In my third chapter, “Habits and Subjectivity in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*,” I argue that Eliot’s engagement with new physiological understandings of habit shapes both her ideal of sympathy and her sense of the importance of reimagining conventions. Yet Eliot’s conclusion reveals that even the malleable quality of habit and its importance to moral development are ultimately subject to even larger natural forces, outside of human intention. “Habit and Intention in Thomas Hardy’s *The Woodlanders*,” my fourth and final chapter, discusses the novel in the context of William Carpenter and Henry Maudsley’s arguments about habit and volition. Whereas Eliot’s fiction explored processes of moral development through “mental differentiation,” Thomas Hardy refutes this cherished Victorian ideal by representing his characters as resistant to the transformative effects of self-conscious reflection. I argue that Hardy transforms the idea of habit-as-return into an aesthetic. Hardy’s novel explores not only the misfiring of intention due to coincidence but, more significantly, a tragic human inability to overcome habit. *The Woodlanders*, finally, refutes the argument for evolutionary progress in the moral sphere by being a novel without a moral. In Hardy’s imagination, competition,

suitability and self-awareness are all disburdened of the moral valences they had as part of an earlier nineteenth-century understanding of second nature. Taken together, these fictions demonstrate an aesthetic experiment with scientific notions of subjectivity, examining how repetition, personal disposition, desire, environment, and early training are entailed in the process of becoming a moral subject. My project asserts that literature's distinguished relevance in contemporary culture speaks to the form's continuing ability to reimagine these complex psycho-social issues for readers.

¹ A notable exception is Athena Vrettos's essay, "Dickens and the Psychology of Repetition" *Victorian Studies* 42:3 (Spring 1999-2000) 399-426, which I discuss in Chapter Two. On the importance of the will in Victorian thought see John R. Reed, *Victorian Will* (Athens, OH.: Ohio University Press, 1989). On automatism in Victorian thought see Lorraine J. Daston, "British Responses to Psycho-Physiology, 1860-1900," *Isis* 69.2 (1978): 192-208.

² In classic Thompsonian terms, pre-modern societies felt time in ways that corresponded to agricultural life: social life was typically ordered via cyclic, recurring customs, planting and harvesting seasons, and so on. Modern societies, however, are ordered around the artificial demands of industrial work and determined by marginally predictable phases of profit-turning.

³ According to the historian Karl Polanyi, "It is no exaggeration to say that the social history of the nineteenth century was determined by the logic of the market system proper after it was released by the Poor Law Reform Act of 1834." Our social consciousness, he claims, was forged in these events. We discovered society, which is to say the existence of laws governing a complex society. See *The Great Transformation* (1944; Boston: Beacon Press, 2001) 87-8.

⁴ The productivity school of economists, including Edwin Chadwick, redefined Malthus's population problem: The evil was the increase of able-bodied pauperism, and its root cause was the allowance system (under the Speenhamland Law of 1795). Chadwick and other Poor Law reform advocates claimed that population pressures could be mitigated so long as the productivity of each worker could be expanded. The new business class, who gained power in 1832, ignored Malthus's suggestion that Speenhamland be *gradually* broken down. It was done in one radical move, the Poor Law Reform Act of 1834, and for the next decade, the shift to a free labor market involved human misery unprecedented in British history, apart, that is, from the horrors of slavery.

⁵ As a middle-class form, the realist novel's concern with habit is related to professionalization, the generation of new middle-class forms of labor and upward mobility, and corresponds to what George Levine, in a seminar on the Victorian novel, called the principal question of Victorian narratives: not "who will I become?" but "what will I *do*?" This question extended even beyond the particular form of the *bildungsroman*, which was central to Franco Morretti's thesis in *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987).

Chapter 1

Second Nature: The Matter of Habit

Friedrich Nietzsche's First Essay in his *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887)

begins with the English psychologists, whom he dubs “microscopists of the soul,” and who pose a riddle for him. “What do they really want?” he asks:

One always discovers them voluntarily or involuntarily at the same task, namely at dragging the *partie honteuse* of our inner world into the foreground and seeking the truly effective and directing agent, that which has been decisive in its evolution, in just that place where the intellectual pride of man would least *desire* to find it (in the *vis inertiae* of habit, for example, or in forgetfulness, or in a blind and chance mechanistic hooking-together of ideas, or in something purely passive, automatic, reflexive, molecular, and thoroughly stupid)—what is it really that always drives these psychologists in just *this* direction? 24¹

Nietzsche's project to upend the English moralists' version of the origin of morality, a derivation, he argues, containing all their typically “idiosyncratic traits” – among which he highlights for special notice, “‘utility,’ ‘forgetting,’ ‘habit,’ and finally ‘error,’ all as the basis of an evaluation of which the higher man has hitherto been proud [...]” – is based upon his critique of their account of the genesis of valuations of “good” (25). Without intending to take on Nietzsche's account of good's origins, I would like merely to suggest that he is happily placed to generalize about the English psychologists, and that in his polemical reaction to them, we early-twenty-first-century genealogists find clues about what exactly was worth reacting to.

Habit and its mechanistic *vis inertiae* was one of those things.

Nietzsche can be accused of rather thin description of the nineteenth-century English psychologists (excused perhaps by his own admission that the *Genealogy* is

intentionally polemic). Less antagonistic students of the Victorians can easily conjure up a thicker description. Against the monolith, utility, there are Charles Dickens's satiric depictions of the "philosophy of Number One" in *Oliver Twist* (1838) and William Thackeray's portrait of Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1848), or John Stuart Mill's autobiographical reevaluation of the human need for poetry (pub. 1871). Whoever was responsible for Nietzsche's sense of the advantages of forgetting, it was not William Wordsworth or George Eliot, with their emphasis on the morality of memory, and anxiety about its fragility. Even habit, which was championed by many ideologues, including Thomas Carlyle, was not immune from contretemps. Those idiosyncratic characteristics that Nietzsche glosses as typical traits were central to the Victorians because they did not generate consensus and were not universally accepted. They were the subjects of sometimes panicky and sometimes (what seems now like bizarrely) speculative debate. This chapter draws out some of the particulars of the debate about the origin and mechanism of habit, particularly as it informed the development and demise of various forms of nineteenth-century realist fiction. The genealogy of habit, as Nietzsche points out, is closely associated with the genealogy of morals for the Victorians. Although the history of habit as a moral subject did not have its origins in nineteenth-century thought,² I will argue in this and in the chapters that follow that habit becomes uniquely the problematic of the nineteenth-century novel.

This chapter discusses why habit mattered to social thinkers in the nineteenth century. It provides the context of the Victorian discourse of habit as it is presented in a variety of texts across different fields of knowledge. As I trace the ways in which habit was employed by nineteenth-century social thinkers, my aim is to clarify its underlying

assumptions about human nature. By taking a longer view of habit's history, I discuss how it was developed in the early-twentieth century, and some connections to Pierre Bourdieu's model of the *habitus*. I also go backward in time, to discuss habit's etymology. This diachronic history of the concept helps us to understand why I argue that habit matters in a new way at the turn of the nineteenth-century. Following out the context, I discuss two Romantic texts that are suggestive for overlapping emergent and residual uses of the idea of habit. Wordsworth and Carlyle both discuss habit as tradition and custom, as accepted behavior and belief, even while the reform debates are beginning to deploy the concept in a new way: as an acquisition, as determined by environment, and as amenable to conscious alteration. Chapter One concludes this history by suggesting what the novel was poised to do with the concept of habit that these other fields could not do, and leads into the next three chapters, which take up these suggestions in detail. Chapters Two, Three and Four treat realist novels by Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, and argue that the novel not only provided representations of habits and their plots but also problematized the discourse's assumptions and exposed some of its contradictions. But first, some history.

1. Habit: Minima Moralia

“Are the actions of man, like all other natural events, subject to invariable laws?” (521), asks J. S. Mill in the culminating Book VI, “The Logic of the Moral Sciences,” of his encyclopedic *System of Logic* (1869).³ In this question, it seems to me, is embedded the crux of the relationship between nature and habit, or as it is often referred to, second nature. Many nineteenth-century social thinkers ponder a variant of this question, and it

bears particular weight on realist fiction because the novel claimed to present plot and character in “realistic” terms, that is to say, psychologically plausible characters whose plausible actions generate plausible consequences. For George Eliot, Thomas Vargish argues in his study of the providential aesthetic, as for other Victorian readers and writers, “life is didactic”: “reality is in its nature didactic, significant, symbolic” (13-4). For J. S. Mill as well as for George Eliot, the possibility of human freedom (“the actions of man”) could only be posited in a world in which natural laws applied, as George Levine’s influential essay on the subject of nineteenth-century determinism in George Eliot’s work has helped us to see.⁴ “Without determinism,” Levine writes, George Eliot, like J. S. Mill, “could have found no rational justification for [her moral biases]” (278).

Mill’s question about the natural laws of human actions goes to the heart of a society struggling to come to terms not only with the effects of change (brought on by technological developments, urbanization and capitalist expansion), but also with understanding its mechanisms. What constitutes our relationship to the past? In what direction does evolution tend? Is progress inevitable or must it be defended from an opposing force, such as degeneration? Charles Darwin’s ambivalently-rendered hope expressed one version of the Victorian anxiety. At the end of the *Descent of Man* (1871) he consoled, “Looking to the future generations, there is no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow weaker, and we may expect that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance” (129). Darwin’s tentativeness is telling. Morality, or the “social instincts,” was problematic for Darwin because he could not scientifically reconcile it with natural selection’s fundamental amorality. Nietzsche fully exploited this lapse in his *Genealogy*.

As Darwin's speculation about the role of inheritance in "fixing" virtuous social instincts suggests, habit was conceptually crucial because it identified a malleable yet durable, practice-oriented, facility-prone characteristic of human nature. Habit seemed universal: whether male or female, Protestant or heathen, master or servant, all human beings can be reduced to their habits. Once the social order that was governed by the ideology that birth determined worth had been challenged by the Victorians' enlightenment predecessors, the logical consequence was to query the nature of difference. One liberal conclusion was that the acquisition of morals and manners and their attendant ways of believing was the only difference – apart from one's literal financial inheritance – separating the individuals of one class from another. (Alternatively, the conservative conclusion justified – justifies? – difference by claiming that it is both innate and historical; some individuals were born to labor while others were born to leisure, and this always has been and will be true.)

The mechanism of habit turns classed, and more broadly, cultural, ways of being into the specific play of manners and belief that individuals "act out." In the nineteenth century, habit became a concept that helped to bridge nineteenth-century scientific and moral discourses. Whereas religious and philosophical tradition taught that man was essentially flawed and required grace to be redeemed or society to temper his animal drives, the modern science of morals attempted to find evidence for human beings' innate sympathetic tendencies. To make a science of morals required discovering natural evidence for these tendencies. (The ideologies of bourgeois femininity and the domestic were outgrowths of this pursuit.) Since habit already conveniently existed as a category for natural history and the project of species classification – all living beings manifest

habits – it served moral science as a complex term for how the acquisition and repetition of certain behaviors, despite being determined by environment, lead to consequences that can be judged as having ethical (or unethical) ends.

For example, habit had a material valence which distinguished it from character. As one noted reformer, Edwin Chadwick, put it, “Character [is] made up of habits, and habits [are] made up of series of simple acts.”⁵ But “It is good habits,” said Samuel Smiles, one popularizer of the self-help creed, “which insinuate themselves into the thousand inconsiderable acts of life, that really constitute by far the greater part of man’s moral conduct.”⁶ Sarah Stickney Ellis’s bestseller, *Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839), explicitly tied the nation’s progress to the individual woman’s creation of a domestic ideal.⁷ Apologizing for a work seemingly inconsequential in relation to signal national events, she nevertheless asserted her conduct manual’s importance to the English character, because of women’s influence over husbands and their role in childrearing: “the middle class of English women, [not “ladies”], are looked upon as upholding the moral worth of the nation [...]. It is therefore solely to the cultivation of *habits* that I have confined my attention – *to the minor morals of domestic life*” (ix, orig. ital.). Ellis, Smiles and Chadwick provide an index of why the domestic became a national ideology: it is in the home where habits are first “cultivated.”

To answer Nietzsche’s question, what the Victorian psychologists really wanted was to cultivate these minor morals, to understand how environment, biology and psychology – or, rather, their combination – operated to fix character and to what extent character had any flexibility, once trained and formed by the experiences of youth. He was justified in complaining about the Victorians’ perversity in always trying to locate

the “directing agent [...] in just that place where the intellectual pride of man would least *desire* to find it.” Thomas Carlyle, for example, expressed his conviction about habit’s centrality to human nature with his characteristic bombast: “Habit is the deepest law of human nature. It is our supreme strength: if also, in certain circumstances, our miserablist weakness.”⁸ Yet as this Carlylian formulation suggests, the Victorian discourse of habit feared as much as celebrated its “power.”

Nowhere was this more true than in the documents relating to the period’s social reform efforts – projects upon which much of the intellectual energy of the age was focused – whether top-down, such as state education and urban planning projects, or bottom-up, as in the ethos of self-help or mutual improvement. Habit was a focal point in the discourse of reform because it describes individual behavior in its seemingly determined form, as an effect of environment, but also as the only solution to the poor’s problems. Smiles opens his *Self-Help* by positing an antithesis between rights and habits:

[I]t is every day becoming more clearly understood, that the function of Government is negative and restrictive, rather than positive and active; being resolvable principally into protection – protection of life, liberty, and property. Laws, wisely administered, will secure men in the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour, whether of mind or body, at a comparatively small personal sacrifice; but no laws, however stringent, can make the idle industrious, the thriftless provident, or the drunken sober. Such reforms can only be effected by means of individual action, economy, and self-denial; by better habits, rather than by greater rights. 1

This view was representative not only of well-meaning middle-class reformers but also of conservative ideologues, as well as many in the working-class community. A secular carry-over from Protestant self-reflection, the Victorian ideology of self-improvement involved a deep distrust of paternalism and an optimism toward the mechanism of the free market to secure the social order.⁹ “Better habits” were seen as the key to self-

improvement. In the view of recently enfranchised middle-class men, better habits would lead the best of the working men into the middle class where they would gain entitlement to the political rights they desired. Working men more clearly saw the almost insurmountable obstacles to this fable of progress. But they also had first-hand experience of the potentially self-destructive habits – such as intemperance and improvidence – which contributed to holding their class in a backward state.

The discourse of habit focalized the question of determinism in other fields besides the moral and economic which I have been describing. It is important to recall that nineteenth-century fields of knowledge were not yet specialized in the ways that we have come to know them, as anthropology is differentiated from sociology, or physiology is distinguished from psychology. In fact, another field in which habit figures importantly was known as “physiological psychology,” a precursor of contemporary evolutionary biology. Around mid-century this field critically engaged evolutionary theory, and, developing an interest in the unconscious and patterns of behavior, speculated about the relations between body and mind. The cutting edge of nineteenth-century mental science, physiological psychology developed all sorts of hypotheses about the brain and behavior in which habits figured centrally.

George Henry Lewes, Alexander Bain, William Carpenter and others were interested in habit as a physiological phenomenon, one that forged deep traces in the mind, producing repetitive actions and thought. The “deepest law” that Carlyle had abstractly moralized about seemed to physiological psychologists to have a biological basis. Bain, in *Emotions and the Will* (1859) took a practical approach to “the progress of moral habits,” in which he argued that “The peculiarity of the moral habits, contra-

distinguishing them from the intellectual acquisitions, is the presence of two hostile powers, one to be gradually raised into the ascendant over the other.”¹⁰ He argued that one must endeavor never to let one’s guard down, “never, if possible, to lose a battle” because, as he put it, “Every gain on the wrong side undoes the effect of many conquests on the right.” This involved regulating the two opposing powers so “that the one may have a series of uninterrupted successes, until repetition has fortified it to such a degree as to enable it to cope with the opposition, under any circumstances. This is the theoretically best career of moral progress” (440-41). Bain’s formulation expresses a colloquial sense that habits are easier to form than break. The idea was to mitigate the repetitious determining effects of the environment by an equally self-conscious use of repetition to develop moral habits.

The problem of habit’s relationship to consciousness and will was more complicated in George Henry Lewes’s *Problems of Life and Mind* (1880). Lewes wrestled with the evidence that facility corresponded to unconsciousness, that is, to *not* having to think about what one was doing while performing an action. Regarding what he called “the law of Reinstatement or Reproduction,” he hypothesized that the effects of repetition literally took form the brain, as “excitable” connections, which explained their remarkable durability. “[O]ne neural process tends to re-excite those processes which formerly were excited in conjunction with it, or which are anatomically linked with it,” he wrote. Once those “pathways of discharge” become linked, they “will be statically connected, and hence they will form the lines of least resistance along which any fresh excitation will pass” (§37; 134). Thus he believed that human beings’ propensity to repeat was a result of human physiology.

Lewes's and Bain's theories of habit were continuous with much of the eighteenth-century association psychology that is prevalent in, for example, the early-nineteenth century work of George Combe, (the popular disseminator of Franz Joseph Gall's work on phrenology), and John Amhercrombie. These theories – rather against their own logic – stressed that new behavior patterns could be developed with conscious intention and practice.¹¹ As a bridge between body and mind, the discourse of habit focuses on the serial effects of repetition, the human tendency toward developing routines, and the acquisition of facility. As unconscious behavior, reflective of psychological states, habit was used to explain the manifestation of iterative actions, as in George Eliot's spider-like weaver, Silas Marner, as well as in the varieties of idiosyncratic conduct that Charles Dickens's colorful characters display, which blur the distinction between “type” and a particularizing tic.

Finally, as an ideology, a “habit of mind” – the manner of making common sense assumptions that seem in retrospect to distinguish the character or spirit of an age – the discourse of habit included discussions of the ways beliefs become unreflective, thence unavailable to conscious critique. (David Hume was a precursor skeptic in this vein.) The concern over habit in nineteenth-century British thought accords with the culture's spirit of being – unique among nineteenth-century European states – rather unsusceptible to violent upheaval. Ideas about the malleability or inflexibility of habit varied according to the theorists' aspirations for the future of British culture. For those, like J. S. Mill, who supported the dismantling of hereditary privilege and believed that education and environment played a large role in individual development (and, ultimately, in wholesale social improvement), what was fixed and invariable in human actions was so only insofar

as it was unconscious and thence unavailable to reformation. Mill argues that “The causes, therefore, on which action depends, are never uncontrollable; and any given effect is only necessary provided that the causes tending to produce it are not controlled” (524). The reason we know habits notionally are controllable is because, looking around us, we see that not everyone has to act or believe that way.

2. The Art of Practice: Mill and Bourdieu

The qualification, notional, is important because one tends not to notice one’s own habits. Habits always tend toward becoming the automata of action. But this is also why habits appeared to be fundamental to morality. Mill’s view, in the same chapter of *The Logic* I have referred to above, of the function of authority’s discipline sounds – to our own post-Foucaultian (common sense) understanding of power as an insidious and abstract mechanism – surprisingly insistent on both the ideologue and the ideological subject’s awareness of the means and ends of education:

To train the human being in the habit, and thence the power, of subordinating his personal impulses and aims to what were considered the ends of society; of adhering, against all temptation, to the course of conduct which those ends prescribed; of controlling in himself all those feelings which were liable to militate against those ends, and encouraging all such as tended towards them; this was the purpose, to which every outward motive that the authority directing the system could command, and every inward power or principle which its knowledge of human nature enabled it to evoke, were endeavored to be rendered instrumental. 581-82

“Training” and “subordinating,” “adhering,” “controlling” and “encouraging”: these verbs all suggest the disciplinary mode – that apparently seamless conjunction between individual desire and social constraint – which Michel Foucault characterized as typical of the nineteenth-century episteme. Against Foucault’s abstraction of Power, however,

and his description of the individual's internalization of discipline's modes, we might read a rather more active practice, one which emphasizes a conscious achieving of ends through an awareness of means. This is not to deny discipline's explicitly bourgeois, essentialist, and normalizing ideological content, but it does perhaps challenge Foucault's abstract mechanism. We can see Mill's insistence on habit's having considerable power, yet it was a power *over*, in this case, "personal impulse" and "temptation," purposes that weren't consistent with the "ends of society." Because it is an aspect of physiology, or "human nature," habit is amenable to training, to the control of social antagonisms and the encouragement of proclivities toward what Mill hoped were conditions of permanent political progress.

There was no guarantee for progress, as Mill recognized. He discussed not only causes and their effects, but also the ways effects then create the next set of causal relations. This natural law was particularly significant for habit-formation and its relation to the question of free will. He wrote: "The circumstances in which mankind are placed, operating according to their own laws and to the laws of human nature, form the characters of the men; but the men, in their turn, mould and shape the circumstances, for themselves and for those who come after them. From this reciprocal action there must necessarily result either a cycle or a progress" (575). Progress for Mill was defined by an increase in democratic political participation and in improving the material circumstances and expanding the intellectual opportunities and achievements of men and women, whereas a "cycle" for Mill suggested stasis, a cycling back, or retrogression. The contemporary sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's formulation of the *habitus* tends to emphasize this unprogressive proclivity of habit, its *conservative* tendency to reproduce

the same conditions, making progress difficult to achieve. Like Mill, Bourdieu defines the *habitus* as the historical conditions of existence but he emphasizes the practice of dispositions without conscious intent. The *habitus* produces, Bourdieu says, “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures, predisposed to function as [...] principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them.”¹² The difference between the two philosophies is somewhat a matter of emphasis. Both recognize that the institutional structures which structure consciousness pre-exist any one person’s entrée into the social. But Mill was much more hopeful than Bourdieu about individual intention, that is, the “inward powers of human nature,” or the reformation of habits, as well as the cumulative effects of this intention on the state of social institutions.

Bourdieu’s stress upon the pre- or unconscious aspects of behavior which perform ideology, what he calls “practical sense,” is an attempt to explain how people can be agents making real choices within conditions circumscribed by ideology: “[S]ocial necessity turned into nature, converted into motor schemes and body automatisms, is what causes practices, in and through what makes them obscure to the eyes of their producers, to be sensible, that is informed by a common sense. It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know” (68-9).¹³ This formulation has what feels like a Darwinian insistence on the abstract agency of social practices, beyond, that is, what individual agents know they are doing. On this level, it is reminiscent of some late-nineteenth-century speculative philosophy, such as that found in Herbert Spencer and Samuel Butler. The latter, for instance,

critiqued the scientist's idealization of self-conscious knowledge. In his *Life and Habit* (1878) Butler posited that perfect knowledge is automatic or unconscious (41): "The older the habit the longer the practice, the longer the practice the more knowledge – or, the less uncertainty; the less uncertainty the less power of conscious self-analysis and control" (13). Butler found this cause for celebration, not lament. As I will show in the chapters that follow this one, the paradoxical formulation of habit as both unconscious automatism and conscious self-making troubles realist narratives throughout the nineteenth-century, in quite dynamic ways.

Obviously the period's idea of habit was defined and deployed before the Freudian Unconscious was theorized and prior to a full-fledged modern science of sociology within which Bourdieu writes. The concept of habit is better known in the early-twentieth century than in the nineteenth, in the work of William James, whose metaphor of habit as the "flywheel of society" is often cited.¹⁴ (The concept of habit also figures importantly in the later pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey, and is the crux of behavioral psychology.¹⁵) Alternatively, Freud invests habit with a traumatic history when he develops his theories of individual and cultural repression and pathologizes habit in his concept of the repetition compulsion. However, these two senses, along with Bourdieu's complex model of habit and *habitus*, are grounded in the insights of an earlier generation of social thinkers. My work intends to be something of a recovery project.

As I have already begun to show, this study's focus on the discourse of habit in the nineteenth century is not arbitrary. In the aftermath of the French Revolution and in the social unrest surrounding reformation in Britain I locate a proliferation of anxiety

over habit. I argue that this proliferation registers a complex of factors that are both ideological and material: the powerful ideology of individualism that is both a cause of and a response to the dislocation of individuals from traditional culture; the forces of capital reshaping the material environment and the radically new conditions under which the working classes were laboring and living; and the ideology of modernity itself, which posited the new as progressive and repudiated the past as no longer serving the needs of the present. In all of the various knowledge fields in which habit turns up, it defines an art or a logic of practice.

3. Custom and Costume: An Etymology of Habit

From being characterized as a function of the mechanism of thought – part of the theory of association of ideas – in Enlightenment philosophies of consciousness, habit becomes fundamental to the Victorians' increasingly complex, individualized and, indeed, commodified notion of identity. Over the course of the nineteenth century the discourse of habit shapes both a moral economic construction of the social body that stresses the naturalness of the division of labor and the necessity for prudence – shorthand for a value-laden rational economic behavior – and a progressively complex psychological understanding of individual subjectivity and the impact of environment upon it. Often, as in the novelist and popularizer of political economy Harriet Martineau's 1838 description, commerce was figured as the cause for the changes which make habits recognizable as such. It is because old habits become untenable in new economic situations: "Upon the extent of the Commerce of a country depends much of the character of its morals. Old virtues and vices dwindle away, and new ones appear.

The old members of a rising commercial society complain of the loss of simplicity of manners, of the introduction of new wants, of the relaxation of morals, of the prevalence of new habits. The young members of the same society rejoice that prudery is going out of fashion.”¹⁶ Commerce instantiates the breakdown of old ways of being that are replaced by novel ones, which, in turn, require new habits as the old ways lose their relevance and function, or merely go out of fashion.

While the theorization of subjectivity is certainly not new to the nineteenth century, its terrain does broaden in response to the intensification of relatively new social formations, and therefore corresponds to a considerable semantic shift in the term habit occurring at the beginning of the period. Close to the French, *habitude*, and derived from the Latin *habēre*, “to have or hold,” according to the *OED*, habit only acquired its distinctive modern sense – as in, to get “in the habit of doing something, or having a habit or custom of so doing” – at the beginning of the century. (The first citation is from 1801. *OED*.) What is the origin of habit and what can interrupt or alter its course, or as it is more routinely rendered, its *force*? What differentiates habit from simple repetition? It is not merely unreflectiveness or unconsciousness. As I have been suggesting, habit seems to mark precisely the liminality where conscious practice becomes unconscious practice. It describes how we behave at the moment we recognize that we do not necessarily have to behave that way. But as *prescription*, the discourse of habit encourages consciousness that leads to unconsciousness, or reflectiveness that leads to reflexiveness. J. S. Mill’s *Utilitarianism* (1863) suggested this view when he wrote: “Will is the child of desire, and passes out of the dominion of its parent only to come under that of habit. [...T]he influence of the pleasurable and painful associations which prompt virtue is not

sufficiently to be depended on for unerring constancy until it has acquired the support of habit” (52-3). For Mill, virtue is not reliable until it has been trained into a habit.

Etymologically what appears to be new in the nineteenth century is habit’s sense of an acquired tendency. According to the *OED*, this sense has no etymological ground, and its development is late in both French and English. Why did this signification emerge only at the beginning of the nineteenth century? How does this meaning relate to the revolutionary social and political changes then occurring? From its early modern denotation of dress, or clothing, habit develops the sense of outward appearance – the nun’s habit is a residual linguistic mark – and then becomes a way of describing a person’s character: mental constitutions, dispositions, ties. It is also a tendency, acquired through practice or repetition, which is one way of describing how the self coheres, how the past can predict the future in terms of an individual’s beliefs and behavior. This semantic evolution makes perfect sense when one considers that dress (unless disguised) cannot but disclose social station. As the division of labor increasingly differentiated types of work, one’s habit-as-dress often came to designate one’s occupation, until, as occupations become more specialized and opportunities to enter different fields increasingly accessible – when the candlemaker’s son becomes an apprentice printer, as did Benjamin Franklin – occupation and its uniform, too, begin to inhere in this new amalgam of identity.¹⁷ The sansculottes’ change of breeches for trousers was a costume change that certainly signified a break from custom. It was also a habit-change that defined a distinctive political consciousness of a social group.

A city pamphlet from the mid-seventeenth century provides a sense of habit’s archaic meaning. I discuss it not only in order to justify the synchronic treatment of habit

in this dissertation, but also to reveal the diachronic continuities between early modern and modern capitalist formations in Britain, shifts which contribute to the linguistic and figurative differentiations of habit from related terms such as “manners,” “character” and “custom” at the turn of the nineteenth century. “Apprentices No Slaves: An Answer to a Nameless Pamphlet Lately Published as an Act, Declaring What Habit Apprentices Are to Wear” (1662) is an example from the seventeenth-century pamphlet wars which shows that habit has long been associated with shifts in social consciousness.¹⁸ According to the original “nameless” (i.e., anonymous) pamphlet, the problem relates to the cost of outfitting apprentices according to some new-fangled fashion; but it is also apparently concerned that apparel encourages apprentices to act bigger than their britches. Harboring dissatisfaction over habit, or dress, indicates the first signal of deeper social antipathies. The connection between the “excess” of “strange fashion” and inner discontent, and the relation between “fitting” uniform and curbing “abuses,” or discipline, both suggest the ways costume is seen to shore up custom. Habit (as costume/custom) is meant to be an easy sartorial guide to one’s status and occupation.¹⁹

The *Answer* (after poking fun at the original pamphlet’s unidiomatic grammar, perhaps a sign of the merchant-author’s own status inconsistency) dismisses the author’s sentiment, finding it as outmoded as the fashion it mandates to apprentices, “the odd and antick [antique] kind of Habit, enjoined in the ensuing orders ... for Forty years past hath been exploded and dismissed” (5). The *Answer* turns the politics of fashion around, arguing that costume ought to reflect new customs, not fix the old. The City has changed and so must custom:

But this Cato talks of Reformation, a dangerous word, and mainly driven on lately by Shoemakers and Taylors, and we all know what it proved. It

is a maxime of State, that even evils of Custome, and which are deep rooted in the minds of men, are rather to be endured than to substitute new ones in their places, which might bring danger to the Common wealth by the alteration of them. . . . This City is now another place then what it was formerly, not only to the Gentility and Wealth of those that are bred in it . . . but also in regard of its Potency and Commerce; we deal now in our own Shops with most People of the World, from whom we have learned Civility with their fashions, and therefore 'tis fit Apprentices should not be in that despicable Habit as to cause men to disdain converse with them, which is the only means of promoting Trade. 7

Not surprisingly, when we recall that most of England's wealth and trade in the early modern period concerned cloth, the battle between custom and habit is waged over the "Common wealth," that is, the stability commerce requires, as well as the stability commerce (is thought to) ensure. Between 1550 and 1750, when London's population increased dramatically from about 50,000 to 600,000, the city's growth was primarily due to its role in the cloth industry. Moreover, social relations were marked by status ambiguities, making the signs to which habit referred especially fraught. Those signs, as in the *Answer*, often related to a certain commercial *savoir faire*, or a kind of cosmopolitan savvy – one's own fashion or habit indicated an awareness of foreign customs and costumes. The point is that historically clothing and status not only were the markers by which people read the status of others, but also were often linked in the English imagination with Britain's prowess as a commercial state. One historian, writing on the politics of early modern industry argues that "the cloth industry [connected] regions, districts and households" by "routine *trafike* with many more communities and cultures than their ancestors, in ways that made old habits of thought and life, old governmentalites and attitudes toward status, and old horizons irrelevant."²⁰ Thus we see the material and the ideological senses in which habit develops linguistically: habit as a

sign of (economic) status and, more diffusely, as the habits of mind that constitute different attitudes toward social change.

If this can be argued about the seventeenth-century aspects of social change brought on by industrial and imperial expansion, it must certainly be true of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, when the population explodes and urbanizes and London is even more the epicenter of world trade. No wonder, then, that one of the new habits of thought for the nineteenth century is a particular fascination with the idea of habit itself, no longer primarily referring to fashion, but to ways of being, and especially as the century progresses, to class traits that are considered a second nature. Although a figure like Jingle in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* (1837) turns up as a quintessentially modern type – and theatrical – because he can disguise himself by changing costumes, in *Great Expectations* (1861), Pip can dress Magwich in a new set of clothes, but the man cannot lose the air of a convict.

4. Repetition or Revolution: The Trajectory of Habit

Modern theories of change and stasis identified habit as a giant either/or: as Carlyle put it, “our supreme strength” or “our miserablest weakness” (788). Habit was seen as either the positive practices that weave the social into a coherent, stable whole or a block to individual and social reformation.²¹ Because habit operates similarly to the dynamics of inertia, these theories locate in habit the precise mechanism where one intervenes in order to instigate change. Ralph Waldo Emerson, an early admirer of Carlyle, used these common senses of the term in an early sermon on habit, in which he dubbed habit a “blind giant.” He merely rehearses proverbial wisdom when he preaches,

“In that which we call Habit, our identity and our power of improvement seem to reside. To describe our habits, is to describe ourselves. ‘A man’ has been called ‘a bundle of habits’” (76).²² Inanimate nature does not change, he says, “But man is subject to another law.” The repetition of an act creates facility: “to do with ease the thousandth time that which was done with great pains the first; further, to do it with such steadily increasing torrent of will and power, as to require the greatest efforts to resist and change a course of action. And herein resides the force of human beings” (76-7). Thus for Emerson and for others, such as those writing in the advice manual culture, habit becomes the focus of an intense effort of self-scrutiny, and seems to suggest the continuity between forms of religious ritual and relatively modern and increasingly secular practices of self-reflection:

[...] I desire to warn you against the smallest taint of evil existing in you, because, *there are such things as habits*. I beseech you to consider that every action you do is either the beginning of a habit, or is part of a habit already existing. And the terror of this consideration lies in this fact, that we are not one thing, and our habits another, but that we are formed by them, and changed by them. 79, original italics

Emerson’s “terror” of the shaping power of habit seems instigated by the recognition that habits pre-exist our actions; every act is a habit *in potentia*. In similar, though distinctively secular, terms, Samuel Smiles’ *Self Help* argues that “Self-respect, self-help, application, industry, integrity—all are of the nature of habits, not beliefs. Principles, in fact, are but the names which we assign to habits; for the principles are words, but the habits are the things themselves.”²³ Smiles’s concern shifts to the economically rational, future-planning behavior that constitutes a very this-worldly success.

What apparently marks habit from the general mode of repetition is a span of time. Only those behaviors the individual repeats continuously can be described truly as habitual. As the critic Bill Brown suggests, habit might be said to be the iterative mode of

personality.²⁴ Perhaps the proliferation of concern over habit suddenly appears around the beginning of the nineteenth century because habit is associated with the part of consciousness that feels the shocks of modernity. Shocks caused by the breakdown of traditional forms of repetition – inherited customs and practices and authorities – produce a sense of jarring dislocation. If, as association theory held, understanding is constituted by reflection on experience, in a period of rapid and radical change, the question arises, how does one understand fundamentally new experiences to which no past experience can readily correspond? Clearly, we do accustom ourselves to new historical ordinaries: from our orange alert warnings for terrorist attacks on our planes and mass transit systems to our wireless communications devices, which send more and more visual as well as auditory information; we adjust our perceptions and expectations to the changing environment. Habituation is the process by which we absorb the shock of the new through repeated exposure and consequently form habits that incorporate change into the fabric of daily existence.

Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837), an important attempt to register the profound shock the French Revolution created in nineteenth-century European culture, represents habit as the crust, "a thin Earth-rind," upon which society's entire existence is dependent.²⁵ The roiling volcanic chaos of the Revolution occurs when this thin Earth-rind is broken:

Rash enthusiast of Change, beware! Hast thou well considered all that Habit does in this life of ours; how all Knowledge and Practice hang wondrous over infinite abysses of the Unknown, Impracticable; and our whole being is in an infinite abyss, *overarched* by Habit, as by a thin Earth-rind, laboriously built together? ...[I]n this its System of Habits, acquired, retained how you will, lies the true Law-Code and Constitution of a Society; the only Code, though an unwritten one, which it can no wise disobey. The thing we call written Code, Constitution, Form of

Government, and the like, what is it but some miniature image, and solemnly expressed summary of this unwritten Code? *Is*, -- or rather, alas, is *not*; but only should be and always tends to be! In which latter discrepancy lies struggle without end. II.iii, 40 original italics

Perhaps acknowledging habit as this system is not entirely new: both Rousseau and Bentham held that law should rest on the “force of habit, [rather than on] the force of authority.”²⁶ Precedence, they argue, creates authority. But Carlyle registers more anxiety over this laissez faire state. Disrupt habit, he says, and the tenuous balance in which society apparently hangs tips toward an abyss of speculative theory and experiment. Habit is thus closely related to the Unconscious for Carlyle, which his well-known essay, “Characteristics,” associates with the dynamic and unconscious vital forces of creation – or better perhaps, re-creation. Habit allows change to progress gradually, in the tone and temper of the past. For this reason, he sees habits as the unwritten foundation for any system of government. Government’s “written Code” can only approximate the unwritten code of Society’s habits. Constitution or the law consistently lags behind, “struggling” to give form to the inviolate law of habit.

If habit is a second nature, as Carlyle, Emerson and Wordsworth among many others were fond of repeating, of what does that secondariness consist? Neither innate nor exactly instinctual, habits are acquired through means similar enough to warrant our attention: imitation, education, and ideology or indoctrination. Habits are seen as derived from, dependent on, and supplementing nature. Yet because a second nature, habits are figured as potentially malleable through self-conscious, rational reflection and practice. Many early-century commentators besides James Mill asserted that a natural desire for the esteem of others compels us to conform to society: “operating upon us continually, [these inducements] have an irresistible influence in creating habits, and in moulding, that

is educating us, into a character conformable to the society in which we move” (192).²⁷ Chapter Two’s discussion of the work of Charles Dickens will examine Dickens’s investigation and critique of some of the more pernicious ways in which social conformity operates. But earlier in the century, as, for example, when James Mill discusses the category of social education, habit was identified optimistically as the means by which ideas, public opinion, and other sorts of axiomatic knowledge and common sense come to constitute the content of the individual’s own thinking: “[W]hen by means of words and other signs of what is passing in the minds of other men, we are made to conceive, step by step, the trains [of association] which are governing them, those trains, by repetition, become habitual to our own minds, and exert the same influence over us as those which arise from our own impressions” (191). James Mill, like his son, hoped that a free exchange of ideas would stamp out superstition, and produce over time more enlightened individuals rather than ideologically-blinded ones. As I will discuss in Chapter three, the trope for those impressions of experience changes from “trains” to “channels”; nevertheless the routes that impressions create for thought become important metaphors for the physiological psychologists of the mid-century, who attempted to graft evolutionary thinking onto Lockean association psychology. The discourse of habit debated the permanence of those impressions and the difficulty of creating new impressions, as well as the hypothesis that the deeper the impress, the more difficulty in being conscious of it. But the question, finally, of whether consciousness or automata was for good or ill depended on one’s view of the benefits or perniciousness of social change.

5. “Organic Sensibility” and the “Mechanical Impulses” of Poetic Habits

In spite of tensions between residual and emergent meanings, these senses of habit, I argue, make up a coherent discourse indispensable to the nineteenth-century understanding of subjectivity and the rationale for reform. In later chapters I will discuss the ways the discourse of habit is implicated in formal aspects of realist narrative: its deployment of duration to denote serious (non-frivolous) reading; its use of iteration to create “knowable” communities of characters; its experiments with convention, which Mikhail Bakhtin argued characterized the novel as a genre; and its mode of commodification through serial publication.²⁸ The remainder of this chapter examines two Romantic texts – Wordsworth’s Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* and Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* – whose wide influence on Victorian writers is well-known, in order to analyze how the senses of habit that I have been describing in the broader cultural discourse operate in a literary text. Wordsworth’s Preface is significant not only because it marks the post-Revolutionary moment when I argue that habit surfaces as a complex problem in British culture but also for its attempt to graft emergent senses of habit onto traditional ones. It is worth attempting to see the familiar Preface anew through the particular problematic of habit.²⁹

The formal engagement Wordsworth speaks of in terms of verse is a (social) contract with the reader, based upon accepted “habits of association” and, importantly for the Romantic project (as other European Romantic manifestos by Stendhal and Victor Hugo also make abundantly clear) dependent upon historical circumstances: “It is supposed, that by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association, that he not only thus apprizes the

Reader that certain classes of ideas and expression will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded. This exponent or symbol held forth by metrical language must in different æras of literature have excited very different expectations...” (17).³⁰ Wordsworth’s language borrowed not only from the democratic ethos of Paine but also from the associationist tradition of Locke and Hume, in which “expectations” are conditioned by the previous experience that constitutes the association of ideas and confers upon their patterns of repetition a certain status of truth or reality or common sense. Hume, for example, though fundamentally skeptical regarding empirical evidence, claimed that reason was itself allied to habit. His naturalism led him to the philosophical position in which “the supposition, that the future resembles the past, is not founded on arguments of any kind but is deriv’d entirely from habit, by which we are determin’d to expect for the future the same train of objects, to which we have been accustom’d” (*Treatise* 134). Wordsworth, like other Romantics, stressed the shifting generic expectations generated by different historical times. New times created new needs in audiences, which required a consideration of what kind of form/content will best answer those needs. In the Preface, Wordsworth posited the transformative power of poetry as an alternative to the unproven advantages and certain violence of political revolution. In poetry he felt he could fulfill the social contract with the reader as well as revolutionize poetic form.

As critics have discussed, within Wordsworth’s poetic project, the role of the modern artist assumes a new status: a kind of secular minister and educator, whose diffusion of his (it is mostly an assumed male) poetic sensibility counteracts society’s fractious tendencies.³¹ Defending his subject matter, Wordsworth says, “I believe that my

habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose*. If in this opinion I am mistaken I can have little right to the name of a Poet.” In other words, it is the poet’s habits of meditation and the consciousness of the artistic enterprise’s purpose created through this reflective process that earns him the “name of a Poet.”

Following is the line we can all recite by rote: “For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply.” Not only powerful feelings, good poetry demands a *duration* of thought. The poet’s habits of meditation – habit here suggesting the acquired facility conferred by practice and repetition, a common definition of the term in the period – are also a form of *mediation* between himself and his audience, and between the material and its form. Form confers purpose upon content that might otherwise seem inappropriate because unprecedented, an apparent break with tradition. But as a reflexive *avant garde*, the poet follows his own feelings to create the forms he believes are fit to meet new needs in his audience. It is a revolution, then, although Wordsworth importantly viewed it as an organic one, derived inwardly from affect and reflection and moving out to the social, not imposed upon the social through experiment or speculation.

There is an implicit division of labor involved in Wordsworth’s account.

Foremost, the poet (and a special class of readers) is the proprietor, that is, possessed of the organic sensibility required to assess the needs of the people and judge the appropriate purpose of the art work. Wordsworth then discusses the practices which make

the dissemination of the poet's own organic sensibility to his audience possible. As the passage above from James Mill also suggested, repetition and habit are central to this process, both within the individual and transindividually across the social body. The poet's habit of mind is replicated in the minds of his audience:

... as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives [of our past thoughts] to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings connected with important subjects will be nourished, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much organic sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated.

Wordsworth's account was not only sanguine regarding the process of enlightenment via blind obedience to the mechanical impulses of habit that develop out of a repetitious reflection on subjects important to the self. It was also confident regarding the congruity between those self-reflective subjects and what counts as important for men generally. Later-century commentators will worry over the problem of unconsciousness toward which habits tend. But for Wordsworth, the continuity with the past, which is how habit reflects prior experience, was an antidote to the "excitement" produced by urban modernity.

My reading of the discourse of habit suggests that we should pay close attention to the questions of mode and to the degrees of consciousness involved in this diffusion of aesthetic sensibility because it becomes central to why the novel accomplished what Wordsworth hoped poetry would establish.

It is significant that Wordsworth was talking about poetry here – and not about the stage or about fiction as representing the national popular mind, both genres of literary culture which had much to do with social association.³² (Novels, as we know, were routinely read aloud and discussed in the nineteenth-century – as well as borrowed, because of their expense – lending them a social character.) Poetry, at least of the sort Wordsworth championed, was envisioned as solitary and contemplative reading. Wordsworth asserted that the principal purpose of the *Lyrical Ballads*' poems is “to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement” (19). The method he constructed to achieve this was “to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature” (20). Excitement of this type, that is, the type related to traditional relations, is determined by feelings which arise from within the self, and that he assumes are, therefore, universal (e.g., Michael's “simple affection” for his son, Luke, rather than the temptations of the city that Luke finds irresistible). Wordsworth differentiates this sentimental excitement from a sensational kind of excitement, one brought on by the “gross and violent stimulants” (21) of the new historical formations, revolution (the “great national events which are daily taking place”) and industrialization (“the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies”). To these Wordsworth feared the “tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves” (21). As he summed up in his famous diagnosis:

For a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and

unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. 21

According to Wordsworth, the assault of modernity engenders desires that present new challenges to individual identity. Other “unknown causes,” related to revolution and war, were the rapid means of communication offered by the mail coach, the telegraph and the proliferation of news media, which one might assume Wordsworth felt interrupted the time required to reflect on events and process them in terms of past experience. “[T]he blunt[ing of] the discriminating powers of the mind,” is exacerbated by industrialization: the proximity of association – the “encreasing accumulation of men in cities” – and the effects of the division of labor – the “uniformity” of work which creates “the craving for extraordinary incident” that new mass media “hourly gratifies.” (e.g., daily papers become morning *and* evening papers.) Wordsworth was worried not only about the lack of time people had to contemplate the sentimental when they are saturated with sensational stimuli, but also about sensational impressions on the body and mind.

I think we can hear in the Preface an echo of Adam Smith’s analysis in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) of the impact of the division of labor on the working population. Smith’s analysis was endlessly repeated throughout the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century in the moral philosophy, religious sermons, and, significantly, in the material resulting from Parliamentary investigations. For instance, James Kay-Shuttleworth and James Mill both quoted the same passage of Smith’s to which Wordsworth also seems to refer. It is particularly related to the idea of habit.

Smith’s description of the division of labor’s effect upon habit not only illustrated his view of the results of new forms of labor upon the mind and body, but also revealed these consequences as transindividual. Industrial labor’s effect upon the individual – a

loss of the “habit of exertion” from being confined to a few very simple operations – is repeated across the mass of the laborers, making them unfit for democracy, unfit for any activity other than the one to which they have been bred. Because the individual’s understanding is formed by “ordinary employments,” Smith wrote,

The torpor of his mind renders him not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life. Of the great and extensive interests of his country he is altogether incapable of judging; [...]. It corrupts even the activity of his body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance in any other employment than that to which he has been bred. His dexterity at his own particular trade seems in this manner to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues.

It should be clear by now that the “acquired dexterity” Smith speaks of pertains to the more mechanical, facility-prone aspect of the concept of habit. Smith’s influential analysis claimed a psychic economy of labor operates parallel to the political economy. I would like to suggest that Wordsworth’s “savage torpor” can be read as a heightening of Smith’s diagnosis that mind and body are both “corrupted” by mundane, repetitive work, an emphasis generated by twenty-five years of the hastening of the effects of industrialization. Wordsworth is reflecting that peculiarly modern sense of time’s acceleration, of which E. P. Thompson, Reinhart Koselleck and David Harvey, among others, have written.³³ The problematic Smith identified, that the cost of dexterity at a particular trade is torpidity and deformity for an entire class, is precisely the place at which Wordsworth attempted to make poetry (and the poet’s habits of mind) intervene.

Between the two types of excitement Wordsworth identifies lie two crucial dimensions of history. One is the “lagtime” between the “fluxes and refluxes of the mind,” that is, between experience and reflection. Dietmar Schloss reads in

Wordsworth's celebration of the durability of rustic life, diction and manners, a dimension of history and process that signals a departure from earlier Enlightenment anthropologies.³⁴ "The rustics speak a simple language and exhibit essential passions," Schloss insists, "not because they are equipped with them *qua* nature, but because they have acquired them. Wordsworth suggests that man's realization of his own nature requires a process of education" (194). This is repetition as "a mode of becoming historical," as the critic Bill Brown has suggested in another context.³⁵ The poet plays an important role in this process because his sensibility can be a means of educating or forming the minds of his audience. The other significant historical dimension is the novel causes operating on humanity, namely urbanization and industrialization, or what Schloss neatly describes as capital's process of "divestment." In the etymology of divestment, to disclothe takes on the general sense of dispossession. Divestment tears at the weft of habit, out of which the social fabric is fashioned.

The Prelude presents several scenes in which the idea of habit marks an important moment in Wordsworth's process of understanding second nature itself, and its relationship to the development of a moral and aesthetic sense. *The Prelude's* "Book First" discusses those initial impressions of nature – originless moments of pure experience – that form the poet's capacity for aesthetic experience, and become the memories which the poet will recollect and transform into the act of creative expression. Wordsworth describes these scenes, "a daily sight," which as a child, "even then I felt/ Gleams like the flashing of a shield; --the earth/ And common face of Nature spake to me/ Rememberable things" (585-88):

... and thus
By the impressive discipline of fear,

By pleasure and repeated happiness,
 So frequently repeated, and by force
 Of obscure feelings representative
 Of things forgotten, these same scenes so bright,
 So beautiful, so majestic in themselves,
 Though yet the day was distant, did become
 Habitually dear, and all their forms
 And changeful colours by invisible links
 Were fastened to the affections. 602-12

The “distant day” marks the sense in which we can only recognize actions, or feelings in this case, as habitual when we are able to see them from a temporal distance. The “obscure feelings” he refers to suggests the way that habit stores “Rememberable things” from the unavoidable process of forgetting. These experiences “so frequently repeated” are the stuff which constitute Wordsworth’s “superadded soul” (Book Second: 328), the imagination’s ability to add virtue to the already pleasing power of nature, to perceive the existence of a shared life-force between the mind and the organic world.³⁶

Another moment of reflection upon habit in *The Prelude* occurs in the revision of the end of “Book Seventh,” the section of the poem which recounts Wordsworth’s residence in London and depicts his experiences with some of the urban problems he discussed in the Preface. I find it interesting that habit drops out of the conclusion in the 1805 edition of the poem for the 1850 edition.³⁷ Following the justly famous passage describing the city as “blank confusion,” and after positing the poet as one “who hath among least things/ An under-sense of greatest” – the capacity for seeing “parts/ As parts, but with a feeling of the whole” – similar to his discussion in the Preface, Wordsworth elaborates the manner in which virtue is instilled in us by a reverence for “perennial” nature. Because of Nature’s tutelage, even within the city, the “changeful language of [the] countenances” of the “ancient hills” provides him with a sense of “order and

relation” that allows him to make harmony out of the urban chaos, the “vast receptacle,”

London:

This did I feel in that vast receptacle.
The spirit of Nature was upon me here,
The soul of beauty and enduring life
Was present as a habit, and diffused—
Through meager lines and colours, and the press
Of self-destroying, transitory things—
Composure and ennobling harmony.

(lines 765-771 in 1805)

In line 768, Wordsworth alters the phrase “was present as a habit” to “Vouchsafed her inspiration,” an arguable improvement in the clarity of his idea in the sense that he makes Nature an active force rather than passively part of the poet’s consciousness. The parallel structure shifts from “was upon me” and “was present as a habit” to “Vouchsafed” and “diffused,” highlighting this active power. Inspiration, like the Romantic investment in Imagination, is, on the face of it, a more resonant concept than habit. But I would counter that the 1850 version ruined Wordsworth’s sense of a more bodily inhabitation of beauty and life rather than abstract mental inspiration. That this move is symptomatic of a larger cultural concern with the power of habit.

Once confidently felt to be constitutive of social cohesion through individual practices, as in the passage from Carlyle’s *French Revolution* quoted above, by mid-century, social commentators became increasingly anxious about and skeptical of habit and its power for positive reformation, especially for those who saw habit, in physiological terms, as transforming the human into an automaton, and in aesthetic terms, associated habit with mechanized, highly reproducible commodities. Later in the century, Walter Pater, in the Conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873 and 1893), famously protested that habit is antithetical to achievement: “To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame,

to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike.” Pater’s view that “habit is relative to a stereotyped world” not only registers the aestheticist rejection of the mechanized and mass produced commodity and its correspondingly produced conformity of mind. It also resists the associationist model of mind, which championed the reflexiveness of habit. Pater’s model of mind favors the unpredictable effects of finding not similarity but difference; it imposes historicism on the mind itself, so that no thought, even a repeated one, should ever be the same twice.³⁸

6. The Diffusion of Useful Habits

The rejection of habit that Pater’s aestheticism of experience reveals is a late version of Wordsworth’s anxiety over the aesthetic education of men. Both can be situated within larger debates about education in the period, particularly whether educating the working classes would foment revolutionary energies or quell them. (Pater’s *The Renaissance* is published just three years after the 1870 Education Act, which mandated state education for children.) As I have been demonstrating, the psychological principle of association – itself understood as a habit of mind governing behavior – was foundational both to Wordsworth’s ideas about the diffusion of poetic sensibility as well as to more general pedagogical theories. James Mill in his writings on education will insist, “The business of a skilful [sic] education should be conducted as to make the train [of associations] run habitually from the conception of the good end to the conception of the good means.”³⁹ He even calls education “the care of forming habits”

(176). The stability of British society was seen as dependent upon educating the mass of people in the face of revolutionary pressures offered by new forms of association – of ideas, on the one hand, and of physical bodies on the other. The proliferation of newspapers that Wordsworth condemned, as well as more politically incendiary print material aimed at the working class, was countered by projects such as the *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* and other publications of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which focused on historical, literary and scientific knowledge. Groups organized by middle class reformers, such as the various Working Men's Associations – enormously popular in the 1830s – as well as mutual-improvement societies, which rejected paternalist directives from the wealthy, hoped to drain revolutionary energies from working class political organizations like the Chartists. James Kay-Shuttleworth, one of Britain's early and leading education reform activists, wrote in *Recent Measures for the Promotion of Education in England* (1839),

In the concentrated population of our towns, the dangers arising from the neglect of the intellectual and moral culture of the working class are already imminent; and the consequences of permitting another generation to rise, without bending the powers of the executive government and of society to the great work of civilization and religion, for which the political and social events of every hour make a continual demand, must be social disquiet little short of revolution. But the same masses of population are equally open to all the beneficial influences derivable from a careful cultivation of their domestic and social habits; from the communication of knowledge enabling them to perceive their true relation to the other classes of society, and how dependent their interests are upon the stability of our institutions and the preservation of social order. 18

Kay-Shuttleworth's description encapsulates the way habit was viewed as an antidote to political revolution. Unlike Adam Smith's analysis, Kay-Shuttleworth argued that the working-class were "equally open" to the effects of education. His argument ties intellectual and moral together as constitutive of culture, just as it enfolds government

and society into the same “great work” and links “civilization and religion.” Similarly his case puts an established bourgeois ideology (the masses’ “true relation to the other classes of society” is constituted by their “dependent interests”) into proximity with a liberal ideology (the potential for the masses to acquire “beneficial influences” from the “careful cultivation” of their “domestic and social habits”). Kay-Shuttleworth’s description perfectly illustrates one reformist rhetorical device: invoke revolution in order to gain some measure of reformation.

Reformers similarly handled conservatives’ fears about secularizing education. The latter preferred religious indoctrination but according to Kay-Shuttleworth, Edwin Chadwick, James and John Stuart Mill, the Martineaus and other reformers, the education required by the working population depended less on notions of religious duty than on the “truth” of political economy – “their true relation to the other classes of society.” Though Kay-Shuttleworth placed particular emphasis on education’s secular project of habit-formation, he also appeased conservative fears: it would “materially assist” the clergy’s overt religious indoctrination. The poor’s children should be given instruction, he argued, “in such a form as not merely to inform their minds on their duties to God and to man, but influence their habits and feelings, so that a sense of the true source of all moral and social obligations, might not merely be instilled as a precept on the understanding, but be imbibed from every part of the daily routine in such a way as to influence the life” (61-2). The importance of daily routine as a means of instilling belief should be familiar to us through Louis Althusser’s discussion of Pascal’s injunction to the skeptic: belief follows practice. Kay-Shuttleworth’s description does not signify a radical break from earlier pedagogical models, but it certainly departs from the rationalist model of Enlightenment

thought in that it emphasized not conscious, reflective behavior but rather enlisted the mind as it is affected by routine.

Forty years after *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth's idea about habit was a commonplace: that environmental circumstances, such as close, crowded working conditions, produce a type of habituation – a desensitization to stimulation that in turn requires more stimulation. Thus, working and living conditions were believed to produce the laboring class' need for stimulants like tobacco and alcohol, as well as the desire for the exciting effects of sensational, spectacular or morally vitiated entertainment, all of which increased the poor's tendency to become “apt instruments for political discontents.”⁴⁰

This, at least, was the analysis of one of the new bureaucrats whose work came to define a new type of state-making power appropriated by nineteenth-century British government, Edwin Chadwick, whose reports on Poor Law administration, factory and sanitation investigations held many middle-class Victorian readers in thrall. In Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population, and on the Means of Its Improvement* (1842), the idea of habit is analyzed in terms of both the environment's debilitating influence and the necessity of individuals' prudent economic behavior to overcome the detrimental effects of the environment. Although critical of overcrowded housing and working conditions, Chadwick's investigations validated the model of the moral economy and the naturalness of the division of labor, particularly by confirming that higher wages did not correlate to better living standards.⁴¹

In one section of the *Report*, Chadwick, who collated material evidence gathered from throughout the British Isles, cites one of his investigators on the working and living conditions of the tailors:

I have collected the evidence of several master tailors on the effects of work in crowded or badly ventilated rooms. Some are inclined to ascribe more of the ill health to the habits of the journeymen in drinking at public-houses, and to the state of their private dwellings, but in the main results, the loss of daily power—i.e., the loss of at least one-third the industrial capabilities enjoyed by men working under advantageous circumstances—the nervous exhaustion attendant on work in crowds, and the consequent temptation to resort continually to stimulants, which in their turn increase the exhaustion, are fully proved, and indeed generally admitted. 103

While the report shows evident concern with the debilitating working and living conditions of the tailors, the primary rationale for addressing the problem is not the physical misery of factory labor which drives working men to drink (not to mention revolutionary activity) but the fiscal statistic – the loss of one-third of the industrial capabilities. Justification for reform is based on the adverse effects of overcrowding upon the national economy.⁴² Nevertheless the passage illustrates the connection between habit and one of modernity’s important new formations – here, nervous exhaustion brought on by industrial working conditions. What we see elaborated in Chadwick’s analysis is an example of the etymological evidence that habit itself acquires new meanings in the nineteenth century. Chadwick describes habit not as facility but as a kind of addiction that requires increasing amounts of stimulation, which, in turn, engenders increasing exhaustion, *ad infinitum*.

Often countering these bourgeois views of the laborer’s capacity for “rational conversation” upon “the great and extensive interests of his country” are many accounts by workers themselves. Some workers gave precisely the opposite picture of the process

of becoming literate amid the demands of new kinds of work. Artisinal life generally continued to be less disciplined than factory life, and therefore, according to David Vincent, afforded working men chances of coming by an old book or periodical to peruse during the odd free hour. Besides the opportunity for conversation about political or literary topics, workshops often provided young working men contact with older, better paid employees who owned books and might lend them out. Men also “clubbed” together with other workers to purchase books and newspapers.⁴³ Those who did work in the factories disputed Smith’s (and all those who uncritically cited him) account of repetitive work as detrimental to laborers’ rational capacities. Their autobiographies assert that repetitive work actually could be better suited to rational pursuits than the trades which demanded more focused concentration. Some working-class autobiographers described repetitive monotonous labor as conducive to mental exercise, such as memorizing passages of *Paradise Lost* or soliloquies from Shakespeare’s plays or reviewing algebraic equations while at work. One laboring man, J. A. Leatherland, described his experiences working as a velvet-weaver as “a highly suitable occupation for the exercise of thought and meditation,” precisely because of the work’s mechanical nature. He claimed to have “read at leisure intervals, and ... ruminat[e] on such reading whilst engaged in manual occupation. If in the course of my thoughts anything struck me particularly, I made a note of it in a memorandum book, which I kept by the side of my loom for the purpose.”⁴⁴ His account was no anomaly, as the research of Jonathan Rose has also demonstrated.⁴⁵ The process of self-improvement was by no means simple for those without the money for books, leisure time, social support, or even the means to afford good light to read by, but it is important to challenge the monolithic Smithian account of the psychology of

repetitive work; doubtless it was boring, and the conditions were not merely dangerous and unhealthy but, in many cases, literally debilitating. But the ideology that it was turning men into machines was a convenient fiction, employed both by those who refused reform and by those who sought it.⁴⁶ Working men had to struggle against this dominant view of themselves as much as they had to struggle for education, higher wages and better working conditions.

7. Clothes Philosophy

Sartor Resartus was another Romantic text influential among Victorian novelists, which, like Wordsworth's "Preface" also participated in the discourse of habit. *Sartor Resartus* aimed to reveal the interconnections between the material and the transcendental, between clothes and the "spirit" they cover up. "Teufelsdröckh," claims the Editor of that author's volume, "*Die Kleider ihr Werden und Wirken*" (Clothes, their Origin and Influence), "undertakes no less than to expound the moral, political, even religious influences of Clothes; he undertakes to make manifest, in its thousandfold bearings, this grand Proposition, that Man's earthly interests 'are all hooked and buttoned together, and held up, by Clothes.' He says in so many words, 'Society is founded upon Cloth'" (41). This foundation, as I have suggested above, was factually true in the case of England's mercantile history.

Yet British society was often figured as a fabric, with its various ranks woven together, or one class fraying at the edges and thus potentially ripping the whole fabric to shreds. When Carlyle (in the voice of his German professor) writes of tradition, he employs this metaphor: "If now an existing generation of men stand so woven together,

not less indissolubly does generation with generation. Hast thou ever meditated on that word, Tradition: how we inherit not Life only, but all the garniture and form of Life; and work and speak, and even think and feel, as our Fathers and primeval Grandfathers, from the beginning, have given it us?" (186-87). This passage expresses the residual sense of habit as inherited tradition. Yet Carlyle and many of the Victorian thinkers who followed him feared the strength of the fabric of tradition to hold together as what the next generation inherited was altered by new social forms of being. What happens when many of those "garnitures and forms" basically are obsolete by the next generation?

In true reformist style, Carlyle plays both sides of the fence in *Sartor*: he reassures readers of the strength of tradition while also asserting its frailty. In some passages, Teufelsdröckh has "radical *sanscullostist*" (meaning, literally, "without breeches") leanings, as in his toast, at the beginning of the book: "The Cause of the Poor in Heaven's name and ----'s!" (12), or as his editor remarks: "... Teufelsdröckh is one of those who consider Society, properly so-called, to be as good as extinct; and that only the Gregarious feelings, and old inherited *habitudes*, at this juncture, hold us from Dispersion, and universal national, civil, domestic and personal war!" (176). The professor's nightmare vision, at the end of the novel (if this is what *Sartor* is) is of a Society without a middle class, one split into two unequal parts, Poor-Slaves and Dandies. Whereas "Every faculty of [the Dandy's] soul, spirit, purse, and person is heroically consecrated in this one object, the wearing of Clothes wisely and well" (207), the Poor-Slave is bound "even *before* birth" to vows "of Poverty and Obedience" (213). Protesting the fact of the rich/poor divide, he likens the two to positive and negative charges, set on an explosive course.

The biographical chapters of *Sartor Resartus* are calculated to gain credibility for his views, by showing how they were gained through experience, as well as to show that the individual life is part of the “weave” of the fabric of time. In this sense, Teufelsdröckh’s view of Society is coincident with his having gained maturity. *Sartor Resartus* relates a transcendental philosophy via a pattern of conversion that would have been familiar to most nineteenth-century readers, versed as they were in their *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Carlyle also modifies a plot from Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*, but, as befits his hero’s more robust character, Teufelsdröckh weathers his romantic storm, proceeds through his “Everlasting No” to his “Center Of Indifference” and eventually on to his “Everlasting Yea,” from which recuperative position he sees the limitations of Utilitarian philosophy (and Malthusian conjecture) as though these were transparent. All of this experience he develops into his transcendental philosophy of “Natural Supernaturalism.”

“Who ever saw any Lord my-lorded in tattered blanket, fastened with wooden skewer?” the Professor asks, emphasizing that people reverence the material rather than the spirit: “Is it not to Clothes that most men do reverence?” (182). *Sartor Resartus* finally satirizes a society divided into the Tailored and the Tailors. Teufelsdröckh disputes that “Tailors are a distinct species in Physiology, not Men, but fractional parts of a Man,” and insists that “the Tailor is [...] something of a Creator or Divinity” (referring to another eighteenth-century text, the tailor-worshipping sect in Swift’s *Tale of a Tub* [218-19]). Tailors, the sign-makers, must be more than men since society, and beyond it – politics and nations – are all brought into coordination by “royal mantles and pontifical

stoles.” Teufelsdröckh prophesies a day will come when tailors will be acknowledged for their true worth.

Sartor’s downtrodden heroic tailors are not literal tailors, of course; Carlyle’s *tailor* refers to anyone who “weaves the time spirit.” Yet historically (if too literally) tailors were some of the most well-educated and politically radical of the working class.⁴⁷ And as he is making fun of the horrible division of society, the tailors nevertheless are figures for dignified labor, as opposed to the Poor Slaves, who are little better than beasts, (and predominantly Irish, to boot). The Poor Slaves are condemned to misery by their environment but also, in reproducing the habits of their environment, have no possibility of ever escaping it. Yet the same inescapableness due to unreflective behavior is characteristic of the Dandies, too: as they unconsciously concentrate wealth within their small rank, they are increasing the numbers of Poor Slaves, who eventually will have to revolt to stay alive. The scenario resembles that of pre-revolutionary France. Carlyle makes his tailors – those who metaphorically re-clothe the society – the dialectical third option, the escape route from certain revolutionary catastrophe.

For all this material theory of society, Carlyle’s Clothes Philosophy insists that the material is not the point. The chief results of man’s “Activity” are “preserved in Tradition only.” “Such,” the professor insists, “are his forms of Government, with the Authority they rest on; his Customs, or Fashions both of Cloth-habits and of Soul-habits; much more his collective stock of Handicrafts, the whole Faculty he has required of manipulating Nature.” He claims that knowledge and skill, like laws, are immaterial when he insists: “[W]here does your accumulated Agricultural, Metallurgic, and other Manufacturing SKILL lie warehoused? [...] In like manner, ask me not, Where are the

LAWS; where is the GOVERNMENT? In vain wilt thou go to [...] Downing Street [...] thou findest nothing there, but brick or stone houses, and some bundles of Papers tied with tape” (131). As we saw in the passage from *The French Revolution* quoted above, Carlyle understood that laws often are made in reaction to the needs of the society; laws often are written only after the society recognizes a need for a law that (for whatever ideological or technical reason) previously had no motive to exist. The Factory Acts post-dated factories by at least a century, though their abuses existed all the while.

8. Conclusion

Carlyle, like Wordsworth, can be seen as the last of a generation who viewed habit as something “mystic” (131), which functioned like tradition or custom in being handed down from generation to generation. When Matthew Arnold wrote his polemic, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), he found it necessary to redefine culture as “the best that has been thought and said,” (in other words, to capitalize Culture,) in order to distinguish it from what he, somewhat akin to Pater, dismissed as men’s “stock notions and habits” (5). Clearly all of these writers express anxiety about inheritance as a mode, just as Wordsworth’s insistence on the naturalness of rustic life illumines his fear of its fragility and transience. This is why I argue that a shift from culture to habit – from inheritance to acquisition of habit – becomes necessary in order to think about individuals as representative of society. The growth of the poet’s – or the professor’s – mind turned, with the nineteenth-century realist novel, to portraying the development of a particular yet ordinary individual, with all the complications and contingencies of his or her environment. Narratives of various types – from autobiographies and biographies, to anecdotes in reform reports, to philosophical speculations about the progress of the

human race – gave a *form* to the discourse of habit’s universalizing claims about causes and effects. The optimistic Victorian reformers who contributed so much to the development of the discourse of habit were interested in its psychological intangibility, but they took its material effects very seriously. They quantified it and analyzed it and even, with the physiological psychologists, attempted to locate its precise operations in the brain and nervous system.

Alongside these developments the realist novel in Britain was emerging as a major cultural phenomenon. Although people of all social classes in Britain still read and revered their Bibles, Robert Darnton’s comparison of European borrowing statistics has indicated that fiction dominated libraries’ inventories by the end of the nineteenth-century, leading him to conclude that over a two hundred year period, reading practices had been radically transformed.⁴⁸ I argue that part of the reason for the novel’s currency was that the stories it told were affective versions of the very questions of self and society that reform reports, psychological treatises and self-help or other didactic and religious material claimed to explain. The nineteenth-century realist novel imaginatively responded to the assumptions behind and investigations into the discourse of habit that were integral to the debates about moral reform, about evolution, about human subjectivity, and about the course of human history.

The next three chapters will examine the ways realist fictions represented the acquisition of habits, and the effects of material conditions on the lives of its characters. In their representations, realist novels always imply an argument about what determines character and how morals are acquired. The question of how flexible or fixed is human nature, and therefore of the formation and possibilities for reformation of character,

depended upon the novelist's view of habit: why do some characters act ethically in the face of trouble while others are tempted into transgression? What makes it possible for some characters to reform but not others? Because the novel can represent contingency in ways that these other kinds of discourse I have been describing could not, the novel experientially tested these other fields' hypotheses about habit. One real significance of the realist novel, I argue, was that it problematized the scientific or moral representation of habit by revealing contradictions within the broader discourse.

Realism claimed to represent the way things are. This is why George Eliot eschewed the happy ending, and Dickens always had unredeemable villains (however melodramatically they met their deserved ends). Although the scientific and sociological discourse of habit also tried to define why people behaved and believed the way they did, these theories of habit were abstractions; they generalized about human nature, (prudence = success, for anyone anywhere, at any time) and could not account for the webs of contingency which make up any individual's history. The autobiography was another form in which an author attempted to account for how dispositions come into being, but the view of self-analysis is limited and will inevitably have blind spots and a tendency to try to resolve or contain ambiguities. It will invariably have certain conscious or unconscious reticences. In contrast, the realist novel came equipped with an interventionist narrator, whose drive to reveal interconnections between the individual and the social leads him or her to draw moral distinctions as well as to analyze cause and effect, and whose omniscience, besides having the ability to see inside all its characters' consciousnesses, has an archivist-like fascination with characters' personal history, and turns an unblinking eye upon characters' unconscious desires and conscious will. Thus,

another aim of the next three chapters is to investigate ways that the nineteenth-century's understanding of habit infiltrated the form of the novel itself.

Form in the realist novel not only reflected the discourse of habit and challenged some of its universalizing claims, but also engaged the phenomenology of habit in its endeavor to alter the consciousnesses of readers about their own and their society's habits. By representing habit, the realist novel forced "ways of being" into consciousness, making habits available for analysis, and, it hoped, for subjecting them to intentional change. I argue that serialization, the aesthetics of repetition and iteration, and the manipulation of genre expectations, as well as the variety of problems novelists encountered in representing character motivation, are ways the genre contended with a phenomenology of habit. These are insights which continue to have relevance to our contemporary culture. As the Victorians understood, habits tie material life to the everyday well-being of individuals.

¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufmann, trans. (1967; New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

²Habit's association with moral actions reaches back to the ancients. In Greek, the term *ethike* is formed by a slight variation of the word *ethos*, habit. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachian Ethics*, begins the tradition of viewing habit as a "second nature," and habit's proximity to the "natural" continues to lie at the basis for much philosophical reflection about states of consciousness, belief and action. The "second-nature" of habit had genuine resiliency; it is seen in the works of medieval scholastics, reformed theologians, and numerous early modern philosophers and litterateurs. The most familiar is probably David Hume's position that judgments concerning cause and effect are derived from habit and experience. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 147-48. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* references Hume's position in several passages. One example: "Philosophy complains that Custom has hoodwinked us, from the first; we do everything by Custom, even Believe by it; that our very Axioms, let us boast of Free-thinking as we may, are oftenest simply such Beliefs as we have never heard questioned" (196).

³J. S. Mill, *The System of Logic* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1969.)

⁴George Levine, "Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot" *PMLA* 77 (1962): 268-79. "In a wholly or even partially undetermined universe, every act would be capricious because it need not be the result of one's own past thinking and experience or of one's consciousness of its possible effects" (277-78).

⁵Edwin Chadwick, *An Article on the Principles and Progress of the Poor Law Amendment Act: and also on the Nature of the Central Control and Improved Local Administration Introduced by that Statute* (London, 1837): 21.

⁶Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (1859; London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1996): 185.

⁷Sarah Stickney Ellis, *Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1839). The implications of women's influence was given a more radical interpretation in an earlier text by Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*: "The general state of civilized society depends, more than those are aware who are not accustomed to scrutinize into the springs of human action, on the prevailing sentiments and habits of women, and on the nature of the estimation in which they are held." (Oxford; New York: Woodstock Books, 1995; from the 3rd ed. London: T. Cadell Junior and W. Davies, 1799).

⁸*Past and Present* vol. 10 (1843; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904) Book II, chap. XVII.

⁹For a reevaluation of the political role of Christian landowners in instituting reform legislation, see Peter Mandler, "Tories and Paupers: Christian Political Economy and the Making of the New Poor Law," *The Historical Journal* 33.1 (1990): 81-103. He argues that the attribution of responsibility for reform legislation to the Utilitarians has been overemphasized. For a reevaluation of Smiles's politics, see R. J. Morris, "Samuel Smiles and the Genesis of *Self-Help*: The Retreat into a Petit Bourgeois Utopia" *The Historical Journal* 24.1 (1981): 89-109. Morris argues that Smiles's *Self-Help* has been characterized unfairly as a celebration of mid-Victorian confidence; rather, he concludes, "it was a charter by which the lower middle and prosperous working classes might restore their self-respect after the defeats of the 1840s" (109). A similar view that argues for Smiles's importance to the heterodox campaigns of the 1830s, among which was that of a limited version of women's emancipation, see Alex Tyrrell, "Samuel Smiles and the Woman Question in Early Victorian Britain." *Journal of British Studies* 39 (April 2000): 185-216.

¹⁰Alexander Bain, *Emotions and the Will* (1859; 4th ed. 1899) chapter 9, "Moral Habits," 440.

¹¹The popularity of phrenology lasted throughout the nineteenth century, though as a science it began to lose ground by mid-century. Phrenology's appeal was due to its – to my mind, counterintuitive – progressivism. In spite of a determinist conception of human nature, that the shape of the skull determines behavioral dispositions, abilities and incapacities, phrenology had a sort of "knowledge is power" ethic, that is, if one knew one's weaknesses, one had the opportunity to deliberately exercise those disadvantages and focus on one's strengths. Cf. George Combe, the popular disseminator of Franz Joseph Gall's work, *The Constitution of Man in Relation to External Objects* (1851). Combe's work is important for introducing the idea of progress to Gall's relatively static conception of the faculties. Taylor and Shuttleworth suggest that phrenological theory was a scientific authorization of the tenets of self-help: *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts, 1830-1890* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 5.

¹²Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. trans., Richard Nice. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990): 53.

¹³ Bourdieu writes: “The habitus is the principle of a selective perception of the indices tending to confirm and reinforce it rather than transform it, a matrix generating responses adapted in advance to all objective conditions identical to or homologous with the (past) conditions of its production; it adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps to bring about because it reads it directly in the present of a presumed world, the only one it can ever know. It is thus the basis of what Marx [in the 1844 manuscripts] calls ‘effective demand’ (as opposed to ‘demand without effect,’ based on need and desire), a realistic relation to what is possible, founded on and therefore limited by power. This disposition, always marked by its (social) conditions of acquisition and realization, tends to adjust to the objective chances of satisfying need or desire, inclining agents to ‘cut their coats according to their cloth,’ and so to become the accomplices of the processes that tend to make the probable a reality” (65).

¹⁴Much recent work on habit treats William James’s chapter on “Habit” from his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), which deals positively with the subject as the way the self brings order to its interactions with the world. See, for example, the critic Renee Tursi’s dissertation work, *The Force of Habit at the Turn of the Century: William James, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and W.E.B. du Bois*, and also her article, “William James’s Narrative of Habit,” *Style* 33.1: (1999). The extension of this socially conservative conception leads directly into the work of the early twentieth-century behaviorists, and is interestingly counterpoised to Freud’s conception of habit as illness, as repetition compulsion. Yet both James and Freud’s work builds on a whole century of thinking about the subject. See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. Intro. Gregory Zilboorg. (New York: Norton, 1975).

¹⁵For a classic behaviorist view, see Elinor Verville, *Habit*. (Springville, IL: Thomas 1988). See also Steven Fesmire, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2003).

¹⁶Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe: Morals and Manners* (New York: Harper, 1838): 138.

¹⁷Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* was very popular among working-class readers in nineteenth-century Britain. It was also a text that middle-class reformers recommended to working-class men to inspire attitudes and practices of self-improvement. Henry Brougham’s *Practical Observations Upon the Education of the People, Addressed to the Working Classes and Their Employers* (6th ed. London: Richard Taylor 1825), for example, ended with a suggestion to read Franklin’s book: “Those who have already started in the pursuit of science, and tasted its sweets, require no exhortation to persevere; but if these pages should fall into the hands of any one at an hour for the first time stolen from his needful rest after his day’s work is done, I ask of him to reward me (who have written them for his benefit at the like hours) by saving threepence during the next fortnight, buying with it Franklin’s Life, and reading the first page. I am quite sure he will read the rest. [...]” (32-3).

¹⁸Anon. “Apprentices No Slaves: An Answer to a Nameless Pamphlet Lately Published as an Act, Declaring What Habit Apprentices Are to Wear,” (J. Hawkins, London, 1662. Wing, 2nd ed., 1994) A3585A. [also available on EEBO].

¹⁹We can see this situation of an apprentice’s discontent depicted in Charles Dickens’s historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), though it is already residual in *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), especially with the comic character Mr. Jingle.

²⁰David Rollison “‘Discourse and Class Struggle’: The Politics of Industry in Early Modern England,” *Social History* 20.2: (2001) 166-89; 168. Rollison discusses the dialectical relationship between protoindustrialization in the cloth industry and the emergence of a discourse of industry linking countryside to city to world markets in both the historical record and ideology.

²¹Clearly the sense of habit as “tendency” is ancient, as is habit’s association with moral actions. (See note 2).

²²Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson, in four volumes*. Eds. Teresa Toulouse and Andrew Delbanco. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990). *Sermon LIV* (vol.2) pp. 76-81. vol. 2. According to the notes, an earlier and a later manuscript of this sermon were marked “Princeps” and “Palimpsest” respectively by Emerson. The earlier manuscript is dated November 6, 1829, but was apparently never delivered; the second manuscript carries the notation “Preached at Second church Nov. 8, 1829”; the additional inscribed date of July 10, 1831 refers to its second delivery at the Second church. The sermon was delivered in its revised form a total of five times, having also been given December 29, 1829, in Cambridge; September 19, 1830, in Concord, N.H.; and July 3, 1836, in East

Lexington. The Biblical text for the sermon is from Jeremiah: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23). The metaphor of habit as a “blind giant” is perhaps the most far-out bit of the sermon: “[God] gave us the power [of Habit], like a blind giant to be our servant, to work with all his might for our comfort; to do our errands of benevolence in the earth; and to bring aid to our side in every fainting hour of conflict; but he left us free to make him our master, if we chuse, and to surrender the heaven born reason to lie in bondage to his brute force. Here he is, with his vigorous hands, equally ready for any work, --to traverse land and sea for knowledge, or to save and hoard and multiply wealth, or to go like an angel of mercy round the globe, scattering health, and truth, and comfort, or to fight with temptations at home, and uplift the standard of Heaven in the very tents of sensuality and selfishness;--or, to make life a curse to ourselves and others, by all the arts of wickedness. He will make or unmake, he will do good or destroy,--but some way he must work. He is of an industrious nature. Here he is in your house, and the harm he may do, is your own proper peril” (79). Emerson’s sermons are studied in Susan L. Roberson, *Emerson in his Sermons: A Man-Made Self* (Columbia, MO: University of Columbia Press, 1995). Emerson’s relationship to Carlyle is well-established. See, for example, Richard E. Brantley, *Coordinates of Anglo-American romanticism: Wesley, Edwards, Carlyle and Emerson* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993). Emerson was also an influence on many British middle-class reformers, such as Samuel Smiles, who claims his *Self-Help* was inspired by Emerson’s lecture to the Manchester Mechanics Institute. Emerson’s work was also popular among the British working-classes.

²³Samuel Smiles. *Self-Help* (1859; London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1996): 238-9.

²⁴Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 64.

²⁵Many thanks to Virginia Gilmartin for pointing me to this reference. In another passage, Carlyle critiques “Dominant Sansculottism” as “one of the strangest temporary states Humanity was ever seen in. A nation of men, full of wants and void of habits! The old habits are gone to wreck because they were old: men, driven forward by Necessity and fierce Pythian Madness, have, on the spur of the instant, to devise for the want the way of satisfying it. The Wonted tumbles down; by imitation, by invention, the Unwonted hastily builds itself up. What the French National head has in it comes out; if not a great result, surely one of the strangest” (*French Revolution*, II: 335).

²⁶ See Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* and Bentham’s *Nonsense Upon Stilts*.

²⁷See Elie Halevy’s classic study, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, Mary Morris, trans. (London: Faber, 1972). Even William Hazlitt, who staunchly opposed the Utilitarians’ reduction of human motivation to self-interest, held a similar view to James Mill’s regarding habit: “[A]s the generous concern for others, and readiness to promote their welfare cannot be broken in upon at will in every particular instance where our immediate interest might require it, it becomes necessary to disregard all such particular, accidental advantages for the sake of the general obligation, and thus confirm habit into principle.” *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805): 15.

²⁸See Bakhtin’s “Epic and Novel.” For research on serialization, see Tom Keymer, “Reading Time in Serial Fiction before Dickens” *Yearbook of English Studies* 30 (2000): 34-45; Jennifer Hayward, *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fiction from Dickens to Soap Opera* (1997); Carol A. Martin, *George Eliot’s Serial Fiction* (1994); Robert L. Patten, “Pickwick Papers and the Development of Serial Fiction,” *Rice University Studies* 61(1975): 51-74; Bill Bell, “Fiction in the Marketplace: Towards a Study of the Victorian Serial” in *Serials and Their Readers, 1620-1914*, eds. Robin Myers and Michael Harris (1993); Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (2000).

²⁹James K. Chandler has discussed the problem of second nature in Wordsworth at length. See his *Wordsworth’s Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Chandler’s concern is to show that Wordsworth is early and thoroughly influenced by Burke’s second nature philosophy, and that this type of traditionalism influences the politics of Wordsworth’s poetry.

³⁰William Wordsworth. *Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth*. Ed. Paul M. Zall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966).

³¹ See, for one example, Joss Marsh, *Word Crimes: Blasphemy, Culture and Literature in Nineteenth-Century England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

³²See Dugald Stewart *The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man* (1829): 113; Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe: Morals and Manners* (1838): 126. Martineau writes: “It requires no proof that

the popular fictions of a people, representing them in their daily doings and common feelings, must be a mirror of their moral sentiments and convictions, and of their social habits and manners. The saying this is almost like offering an identical proposition.” This suggests how dominant a mode realism became; it is practically second nature.

³³E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism”; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. (Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1979).

³⁴Dietmar Schloss’s study of the “Preface” argues that Wordsworth’s adoption of a Burkean anthropology based on habits, customs, and tradition was a response to wholly new threats to identity than those Rousseau and Paine had critiqued. Instead of civilization or feudal privilege it was the forces of urbanization and industrialization that were threatening the social fabric. Dietmar Schloss, “Wordsworth on Habit: The Historical Logic of Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.” *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch Dreiunddreissigster* 33(1992): 189-208. Schloss carefully reconstructs Wordsworth’s deployment of Burke’s second-nature philosophy, which adopts the deep experience of habit without embracing Burke’s “feudal status quo,” as Schloss puts it. In the *Reflections* Burke emphasizes “prejudice”: “Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency [...] . Prejudice renders a man’s virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes part of his nature” (183; qtd in Schloss, 199 n.). Clearly Burke’s concern is continuity, particularly the continuity of individual duty that consistently and unconsciously reproduces the social hierarchy. Wordsworth, too, like Carlyle in my discussion above, is skeptical of rationalist theory that would strip society of its customs and conventions.

³⁵Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 73.

³⁶Cf. Norton Critical Edition of *The Prelude*: 86, n.3.

³⁷The Norton Critical Edition vastly simplifies such analysis: William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*. Eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1979).

³⁸See Carolyn Williams’s study *Transfigured World: Walter Pater’s Aesthetic Historicism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), especially the “Opening Conclusions,” which discuss Pater’s late Romantic problematizing of the mind reflecting upon itself.

³⁹*James Mill*, Terence Ball, ed.. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) I, 181-82.

⁴⁰Edwin Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*. Intro. David Gladstone (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1997, 5 volumes): v. 2: 132. Chadwick’s Parliamentary reports partly had the appeal of travel writing describing a foreign land – the kind of allure that Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and The London Poor* (serialized accounts published by the *Morning Chronicle*) would later have – and partly tapped the “improving” energies of the bourgeoisie, justifying their sense of moral authority on which rested their claim to political authority.

⁴¹One report Chadwick included came from an inspector, “Mr. Wood of Dundee”: “Now it is among the former [better paid] class of families where generally there appears to me to be a deficiency of wholesome food and of warm clothing; where contagious, febrile diseases are most commonly found; and from whence they most extensively propagate. Fever is no doubt found among the latter, more frugal, and therefore better conditioned families, but seldom of that malignant, contagious character which it invariably assumes among the other class of families. Here, then, we have on the one hand, filth, destitution, and disease, associated with good wages; and on the other, cleanliness, comfort, and comparative good health, in connexion with wages which are much lower. The difference in the amount of their incomes does not account for the difference in the amount of comfort which is found existing among the working classes. The statement just made makes known the fact, that above a certain amount, say 12s. or 14s. of weekly income, wages alone, without intelligence and good habits, contributes nothing towards the comfort, health, and independence of the working population. *** Were I asked how I would propose to relieve such a family, I would say, show them how they may live comfortably within their incomes; let them be taught and trained to habits of industry, frugality, sobriety, cleanliness, &c., and with this 12s. or 14s. they may live in health and happiness as others in similar circumstances have lived and are now living. The man who maintains himself and his family in comfort on 12s. or 14s. of weekly income, possesses what he well deserves, happiness at home, and he stands forth in his neighbourhood a noble example of honest independence. I am persuaded that the filth, fever, and destitution in many families is occasioned, not by

their small incomes, but by a misapplication or a prodigal waste of a part, in some cases a great part, of their otherwise sufficient wages. Frequently cases are found where, with a want of skill and economy, there is combined the intemperate use of intoxicating liquors, and here the misery may be said to be complete” (143).

⁴² Another passage reiterates the problem, even downplaying the incitement of association in its comparison of city and country: “The close, pent up air in these abodes has, undoubtedly, a depressing effect on the nervous energies, and this again, with the uneducated, and indeed with many of the educated workpeople, had an effect on the moral habits by acting as a strong and often irresistible provocative to the use of fermented liquors and ardent spirits. Much may be due to the incitement of association of greater numbers of people, but it is a common fact that the same workpeople indulge more in drink when living in the close courts and lanes of the town than when living in the country...” (130).

⁴³David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, (London, New York: Methuen, 1982) 123.

⁴⁴Quoted in David Vincent, 125. J. A. Leatherland, *Essays and Poems with a Brief Autobiographical Memoir* (London: 1862): 12.

⁴⁵See Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁴⁶Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848) also makes use of the men-as-machine figure, but further intensifies it. In his account, the laborer becomes not just machine but an undifferentiated mass, sexless and ageless but for distinctions in its expense to upkeep as labour: “Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. [...] The less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labour, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labour of men superceded by that of women. Differences of age and sex no longer have any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex.” (Boston, New York: Bedford, St. Martin’s Press, 1999) 71-2.

⁴⁷ Carlyle compares Tailors to poets: “What too are all poets, and moral Teachers, but a species of Metaphorical Tailors?” (219). The politically well-organized tailors commanded wages above other classes of laborers. In many communities they were the avant garde of the working class. See the Introduction to the Oxford edition by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁴⁸Darnton claims that patterns in German, English and American libraries were strikingly similar: “seventy to eighty percent of the books came from the category of light fiction (mostly novels); ten percent came from history, biography and travel; and less than one percent came from religion.” Robert Darnton, “First Steps Toward a History of Reading” *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23.1 (1986): 9. For a study of women’s reading in the Victorian period, see Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

Chapter 2

Dickens's *Dombey and Son*: Railroads, Routines and Reform

For there is nature, in the common life of what she usually does; and there is nature, in the higher sense of what in given circumstances she might or would do; and from the latter the principal power of this novel is derived. But we are not certain if the appeal thus made is not to deeper sympathies than, in the swift and cursory reading which is one of the effects of serial publication, are always at hand to respond to it. – John Forster, *The Examiner*

Charles Dickens's obsessive-compulsive behavior makes him a tantalizing subject for an analysis of habit, or at least a peculiar species of habit, in his own right. The particularity with which he describes habits in his characters suggests that he knew of which he spoke. Alexander Welsh comments that "More than any other English writer Dickens was the master of the surface of people and things."¹ As Peter Ackroyd claims in his biography of the writer, "Dickens invariably notices the small nervous habits, the professional gestures, the unconscious movements" (400). As has long been noted, he often associates characters and their costume with a distinctive gesture, tic or repetitive behavior. Consider the constant hair-fixing of Mr. Grewgious (a habit that was, according to biographers, Dickens's own²), Miss Flite's daily court appearance with her bag of nonsensical documents, Mark Tapley's resolve to be "jolly" even as his circumstances become more and more wretched, Mr. Dick's obsession with the head of Charles II, Flora's Aunt and her Tourette's-like, explosive barrage of obscenities. However, habit is more than a surface phenomenon; it has deep social and psychological implications. Bert Hornback argues in this vein, that the peculiarity of gesture in Dickens becomes symbol: "his major characters are always more than psychological types, and their special gestures usually signify something larger than simple psychological traits."³

Biographies and accounts of Dickens's working habits enumerate his peculiarly exaggerated behaviors. Not only was he "a man of relatively fixed habits"; also marked was "his excessive punctuality, his obsessive love of order, his neatness and precision of dress" (Ackroyd 270; 829). In his speeches and letters, Dickens often spoke of his "invariable habits" of working (Lettis 6). For example, in a speech to the Workingmen's Association he claimed that it was less his "genius" than his daily drudging work that counted for his success.⁴ Both Ackroyd and Dickens's chosen biographer, John Forster, have described those habits as remarkably – almost compulsively – consistent. Dickens most often wrote in an office at home from 9-2, his daily time to think and write, and apparently demanded uninterrupted quiet during his work hours, which must have been a miracle in a household with ten children. Even his breaks from the intense pressure of serial writing were predictable: the first twenty or so days of the month he worked diligently, relaxing his pace for the last ten, according to Richard Lettis.⁵ Ackroyd claims, "Order was of extreme importance to him, and he had a nervous habit of placing chairs and tables in precisely the right position before he could get down to a day's work. He could not bear anything to be out of place" (222). Lettis describes a similar compulsiveness; he asserts that Dickens liked his writing environment "to be exactly the same each time he wrote – just as he liked the same desk, backdrop and lighting when he read from his works" (21).

One might think that such fastidiousness would preclude attempting to write in places other than his home at Gad's Hill Place, but in fact, Dickens's frantic work pace either resulted in or perhaps was counterbalanced by a peculiar physical restlessness. In addition to the twelve to twenty mile walks he took almost daily, he often felt he had to

escape from the city in order to invent fresh ideas for his fictions. On those occasions he would press his entire family on excursions abroad. In Lausanne, for instance, anxious to begin working on *Dombey and Son*, Dickens was hung up starting the novel because his box of materials had not yet arrived. It contained all the appurtenances of his desk, including the goose-quill pens and blue ink with which he always wrote; his bronze images: one, of two toads dueling, another of a dog-fancier with the puppies and dogs swarming all over him; a paper knife, and a gilt leaf with a rabbit seated on it. According to his son-in-law, Dickens grouped these figures on his desk, describing them as “images ‘for his eye to rest on in the intervals of actual writing,’ and so great was his love of habit and order that he could not write without their silent presence in front of him. As soon as they were placed in his study at Rosemont, he began” (Ackroyd 503).⁶ Forestalling some travel during the writing of *David Copperfield*, Dickens feared, in one letter, “departing from my inventive habits for a fortnight or more” (Lettis 7). He also had a superstitious habit of absenting himself from London on the dates of the first publication of his works. Ackroyd suggests that the point about Dickens’s “capacious imagination is that it was also a disciplined and habitual one; once he had hit upon the form which seemed most truly to reflect the exigencies of the story and the demands of his own time, he kept to it throughout the entire book” (311).

Admiration for Dickens’s early work was inspired by both his gift for demotic, the vivid and graphic way in which he described the speech of London, and the descriptiveness with which he imbued his characters. “We strongly recommend this facetious work to the Americans,” one newspaper commented. “It will save them the trouble of reading some hundred dull-written tomes on England, as it is a perfect picture

of the morals, manners, habits of a great portion of English society.”⁷ As many critics have pointed out, Dickens’s mode of characterization is indebted to the dramatic entertainments of the early Victorian stage. Although he claimed that his characters could literally be seen walking around London, and thus maintained his art was true to life, it is probably more accurate to say that they were walking the boards of London stages. Nevertheless, governing Dickens’s representation of character, and its function in the novel, are those habits of mind created by the familiar forms of the nineteenth-century theater, especially melodrama. Numerous studies have demonstrated that Dickens’s characters are based not only on the picaresque types of the eighteenth-century novels he loved but also on the period’s recognizable stage types – Simon Dentith’s list for *Dombey and Son* includes “the Jolly Jack Tar (Cap’n Cuttle), the termagant (Mrs. MacStinger), the hen-pecked husband (Mr. Chick), the aspiring spinster (Miss Tox).”⁸ Noteworthy studies by Juliet John, Joseph Litvak, Paul Schlieke, and William Axton also have discussed the relationship of Dickens’s characters to the theater.⁹ Axton concludes that Dickens desired to “transform the reader’s habitual vision of the world around him to a perspective comparable to that of an audience at a theatrical performance” (57). I suggest Axton’s lively conclusion is only part of the story, however. Dickens did not only want his readers to see the characters around them as symbolic of the values and faults of his society. He also wanted people to break out of their “habitual vision,” because accepting things as they are or refusing the truth that one’s habitual vision obscures merely because it causes a feeling of disgust is the greatest obstacle to envisioning a more just world.¹⁰

This chapter will argue that the governing idea of *Dombey and Son* is an analysis of habit. Not coincidentally, perhaps, *Dombey* is the first novel for which we have

evidence of Dickens's detailed working notes.¹¹ Evidence suggests that, as his career progressed, Dickens began to invest more effort in planning and plotting out each of the serial numbers in advance of their publication. His earlier, more episodic and serendipitous fictions began to transform into narratives whose components were all integrated toward achieving one main idea. *Dombey and Son: Dealings with the Firm, Wholesale, Retail, and for Exportation* (1848; published in monthly parts, 1844-1846) analyzes the conjunctions between technology, commercialism and subjectivity.¹² The idea of habit ties Dickens's aesthetic to his novel's ethics, informing plot and characterization, as well as his argument for the social role of fiction.

The communal ideology that Dickens touts in his fiction seems opposed to the "business-like" habits of commercialism (*Dombey* 560), so it is paradoxical that Dickens's art utilizes habituation to critique habit. He achieved his analysis of social "mechanism" through the commercialization of his novels (with all the mechanization that printing and advertising entails), within the periodically predictable structure of serial publication, and through the use of the conventions of melodrama, especially its transparent character types. Dickens's commercial strategies for the production and consumption of his texts certainly exploited habit. The multi-plot novel positively necessitates exaggerated characters as an *aide de memoire*, to assist those who read the fiction in weekly or monthly segments, for whom a gap of time existed between the consumption of each of the novels' parts.

Moreover, serialization itself can be understood as a process of habit-formation. As Jennifer Hayward suggests in her study of the serial form in modern media, *Consuming Pleasures* (1997), "Habit, as any serial producer knows, is perhaps the most

important factor in holding an audience.”¹³ Serialization also allowed Dickens to alter his fictions in response to his readers’ tastes. Such characteristics as multi-plots, typed characters, hooks and cliff-hanging, and spin-off products remain staples of contemporary serials in various media, from comics to television to film. Yet the epigraph from John Forster’s unsigned review of *Dombey and Son* acknowledged that serial publication was too well-suited to “the swift and cursory reading” that he felt characterized the responses of Dickens’s readers. Their “deeper sympathies” had yet to be trained to see the distinction between nature and second nature. As with Thomas Carlyle, whose influence on Dickens has been well documented, it was not the particular innovations of modern technology, such as printing presses, factory machines or the railway, that concerned the two writers but rather the propensity of commercialism and its sterile ideologies to alter human subjectivity.¹⁴

Indeed, the railway provides a significant though ambiguous motif in *Dombey and Son* for the kinds of social change that came in tandem with industrialization. In chapter twenty, “Mr. Dombey Goes Upon a Journey,” the railroad is likened to “a type of the triumphant monster, Death” (354). Death is the subject uppermost in Dombey’s mind after the premature loss of his only son, Paul, who seems to die not as a result of any specific disease such as consumption but rather from a social malaise – the sterility and lovelessness evident in the world around him. Mr. Dombey, in order to conceal his grief, takes a railway trip to a spa town, whose route offers sights of landscapes and suburban construction as well as brief views into impoverished homes. Dombey registers none of this; however, the narrator observes what Dombey fails to perceive. Moving at lightening speed, Dombey’s train ride traverses a panoply of scenes that offer quick “glimpses” of

people and places and paths, “insignificant as they are left behind” (354-55). Some of those scenes are of “miserable habitations,” where “through the battered roofs and broken windows, wretched rooms are seen, where want and fever hide themselves in many wretched shapes, [...] and deformity of brick and mortar penning up deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance” (355). The emphasis, evident in the word repetitions – “wretched,” “deformity” – and in the sonic resemblances – such as the inversion of the initial consonants of “brick and mortar” and “mind and body” – is on the correspondence of external and internal, polluted environment and ill-health. The broken-down-ness of the “habitations” makes these places permeable to the train-passengers’ view, vulnerable to observation.

Yet it takes more than mere glimpses to make these sights truly cognizable. The narrator comments on that which Mr. Dombey – and, implicitly, many Victorians – unconsciously repress: “As [he] looks out of his carriage window, it is never in his thoughts that the monster [i.e., the train] who has brought him there has let the light of day in on these things: not made or caused them” (355). Echoing Carlyle’s point in “Signs,” the narrator’s statement criticizes the false causal explanation that an abstraction such as “industry,” or even the more concretely material railroad, makes these decrepit places and their inhabitants rather than the “spirits” of Victorian culture: greed and exploitation which prosper amid indifference. Indeed, Dickens’s narrator later likens himself to the “good spirit” who takes off these rooftops to “show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes” (738). The narrator attempts to “rous[e] some who never have looked out upon the human life around them, to a knowledge of their own relation to it, and mak[e] them acquainted with a perversion of nature in their

own contracted sympathies and estimates; as great, and yet as natural in its development when once begun, as the lowest degradation known” (739). The passage emphasizes the immoral developments, or “perversions,” of the commercial society, of which *Dombey* himself is the novel’s principal symbol. Perversions are a “natural” consequence of people’s refusal to look at the degradation in their midst, and a refusal to acknowledge their responsibility for and complicity in it. As I will demonstrate, both kinds of repressions are linked to Dickens’s representations of habit and are crucial to his social critique in the novel.

Dombey and Son is Dickens’s great novel of social change, as critics have repeatedly acknowledged. Raymond Williams’s celebrated reading of the novel argues that its aim is to teach readers to see general social causes. Earlier types of fiction represented virtues and vices as the products of an individual’s own strength or failing, but, he claims, what is new in nineteenth century fiction, and particularly in Dickens, is a kind of moral analysis that becomes a social analysis.¹⁵ Kate Flint observes that Dickens’s work in the 1840s – like that of many other Victorian novelists – is preoccupied with mobility and creates “a dialogue between consciousness and world, and the incessant interaction between the conscious and unconscious mind.”¹⁶ With her, I read these two relationships as mutually dependent, provoking an interlocking set of recognitions about human nature and the material and social environment. John Kucich contends that repression in Dickens’s imagination is less a psychological mechanism than a rhetorical figure, which leads to his argument that, for Dickens, violence and repression are “associational, not substitutive, terms—parts of a larger order, not comprehensive images of that order as a whole.”¹⁷ My reading of *Dombey* also locates an associational

logic within Dickens's analysis of repressive behavior, one that is deeply indebted to the discourse of habit. *Dombey* depicts a whole range of violences that result when individuals literally incorporate commercial logic into their unconscious mental and bodily routines. Dickens's characters are representations of mechanism and criticize corresponding modes of human subjectivity.

1.

The most familiar Victorian tenets of the discourse of habit were philosophically Utilitarian, politically reformist, and popularly celebrated as "self-help." Based upon Locke's and Hartley's earlier theories of association and repetition, the Victorian discourse maintained that an individual's character was largely the result of early training and the establishing of routines: the associative trains of thought that turned training into predictable, virtually mechanical, behavior. Writers stressed the individual as actor, that is, his or her activity in the world; behavior *was* character. James Mill's *Education* (1823) acknowledged the "great effects" that the society within which an individual moves has upon "his mode of thinking and acting" (191).¹⁸ Whereas mid- and late- nineteenth-century psychological theory, such as G. H. Lewes's, frequently employed organic images, such as the "stream of consciousness" (later appropriated and popularized by – and often attributed to – William James), eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century association psychology employed the metaphor of the "train of thought" to refer to the sequences of ideas, which, oft-repeated, caused thought and behavior to run along regular lines. What was clear to the elder Mill, as to Hartley and Locke before him, was that "the earliest repetitions of one sensation after another produced the deepest habit" (175); the

“early sequences to which we are accustomed form the primary habits; and that the primary habits are the fundamental character of the man” (176).

The practically self-evident claims of association psychology conferred enormous weight to training – as in the common meaning, “to instruct or drill in habits of thought or action” (Websters). Utilitarian theories emphasized that, once acquired, habit could be depended upon as a support for moral behavior – a sort of moral reflex. Critics have noted that the metaphor of machinery was often used in the nineteenth-century to describe the “production” of character. The champion of self-help philosophy, Samuel Smiles, wrote, for instance, that “It is in the outworks of the habits formed in early life that the real strength of the defence must lie; for it has been wisely ordained, that the machinery of moral existence should be carried on principally through the medium of habits, so as to save the wear and tear of the great principles within” (*Self-Help* 185). Habits appear to be a kind of casing (or perhaps grease) for the principles, as gears, within. Philip Fisher finds that “Through all discussions of habit runs the metaphor of industrial production, the relation among raw material (the self), human will, and a designed product (character) intended for a limited use” (7).¹⁹ Yet Dickens’s novel contributes to this Smilesian discourse a sense of the importance of the environment’s determining force.

One reason the machine metaphor was appealing was that a machine is not only unconscious and impersonal. But it was also an expression of a period’s anxiety. For others in the period, approaching personality through the psychology of habit also registered a fear of the automaton, a human in form only, devoid of human emotional complexity. In her essay on the subject of Dickens and the psychology of repetition,

Athena Vrettos investigates the recurring patterns in Dickens's characterizations and discusses his use of habit to identify his many eccentrics' peculiarities.²⁰ As I do, she situates his representation of the "deadening effects of routine" on consciousness within a nineteenth-century discourse preoccupied by mechanization and its physiological, moral and social consequences.²¹ Vrettos claims that "Habits are dangerous precisely because they do not necessitate consciousness or evoke emotion. Paradoxically responsible for both human individuality and mechanicality, habits make people unique while simultaneously threatening to transform them into things" (417). Dickens's style famously blurs the distinctions between people and things, yet few critics have contextualized this aspect of his technique, as Vrettos does, in the discourse of the period, with its emphasis on repetition, habit, and training.²²

In *Dombey and Son*, Dickens engages with the discourse of habit in the terms of nature and second nature. When people behave like unthinking machines, devoid of emotion or sympathy, or treat others as objects to be bought and sold, they have internalized completely the logic of the commercial society. An example is Edith Dombey's mother, Mrs. Skewton, perhaps the most emotionless and unreflective character in *Dombey and Son*. A crude schemer and Swiftian caricature of artificiality (the narrator nicknames her Cleopatra), Mrs. Skewton attempts to convey a pastoral nostalgia and a penchant for rustic simplicity. Yet meanwhile she has trained her daughter from childhood to make a mercenary marriage, a coup she finally accomplishes when her daughter weds Mr. Dombey. In one of the early scenes in which Dombey is introduced to Edith and her mother, Mrs. Skewton takes up the theme of "the natural," which places pressure on the distinction between nature and second nature.

When her daughter characterizes her as having a preference for novelty, Mrs. Skewton denies it. She assures Mr. Dombey, “Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion. What I have ever sighed for, has been to retreat to a Swiss farm, and live entirely surrounded by cows – and china.” Her absurd association of ideas, cows and china, fails to alarm Mr. Dombey, and lest the reader miss the point, too, when Mrs. Skewton complains that what she wants “is heart [...] We are so dreadfully artificial,” the narrator interrupts her performance to comment that “It was frightfully true in one sense, if not in that in which she used the phrase” (363). Putting the observation, “We are so dreadfully artificial,” into the mouth of the most predictably phoney figure in the novel skewers the ideal of the “natural.” The irony is supplemented by the narrator’s comment on the strength of second nature. He says of Skewton, “The loving mother can scarcely be described as resuming her insipid and affected air [...] for she had never cast it off; nor was likely that she ever would or could, in any other place than in the grave” (449). Her artificiality is so ingrained in her character that it becomes a natural attribute. Mrs. Skewton’s character suggests that the distinction between nature and the second nature of habit becomes practically meaningless once it is “cast.”

Her observation about artificiality is, of course, pure disingenuous performance, yet as performance, it distinguishes between second nature and nature when it highlights that her behavior is learned. Habituated to familiar scenes and rote ways of thinking, we take them for “natural,” and cannot see the human agency behind them. Mrs. Skewton is among a cast of other habit-driven yet unreflective characters in the novel, as well as in Dickens’s other fictions. In *Dombey*, she provides a useful contrast to Solomon Gills, a character who feels caught in changing times but one with whom the narrator obviously

sympathizes. Sol Gils, uncle and guardian of the young Walter Gay, and owner of the Little Midshipman, a supplier of now-obsolete ship's instruments, tells his nephew that his business "is merely a habit with me":

I am so accustomed to the habit that I could hardly live if I relinquished it: but there's nothing doing, nothing doing. When that uniform was worn...then, indeed, fortunes were to be made, and were made. But competition, competition – new invention, new invention – alteration, alteration – the world's gone past me. I hardly know where I am myself; much less where my customers are. [...] The world has gone past me. I don't blame it; but I no longer understand it. Tradesmen are not the same as they used to be, apprentices are not the same, business is not the same, business commodities are not the same. Seven eighths of my stock is old-fashioned. I am an old-fashioned man in an old fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it. I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again. Even the noise it makes a long way ahead, confuses me. 93-4

The pathos of Solomon's tirade lies in his linguistic repetitions – "nothing doing, nothing doing," "new invention, new invention," "alteration, alteration" – which underscore the ways that repetitions mark out one's sense of time and place, and the security that comes from feeling as though one belongs to that time and place. The repetitions that characterize Sol's manner of speaking reveal him to be befuddled but thoughtful; they are a repository for the kinds of repetition that he can no longer daily enact now that he has "fallen behind the time" and everything about him – the commodities in his shop, the street in which his shop stands, his ways of doing business – are all "old-fashioned." Time itself, according to the old man, already having passed him by, makes a noise that he hears but finds incomprehensible. Like the inhabitants of the urban slums, Sol Gils's experience is determined by the changes around him. Yet, as distinguished from Mrs. Skewton, Dickens renders Solomon sympathetic by making him reflective about the changes he doesn't understand.

Dombey and Son is regarded by general critical consensus – accurately I believe – as the first example of Dickens’s mature fiction. Its maturity is marked not only by the more careful planning that went into the novel but by a deepening investigation of some of the more complex abstract issues of the day. I argue that *Dombey* begins to tackle a central paradox of liberal philosophy: on the one hand, environment determines character; on the other, character can determine itself.²³ In the terms of nineteenth-century morality, the paradox of determinism is most clearly explicated – and synthetically resolved – in Book VI of John Stuart Mill’s *Logic* (1843).²⁴ J. S. Mill argues that as those who formed our characters had no direct power over anything but their own actions, so we, “when our habits are not too inveterate, can, by similarly willing the requisite means, make ourselves different. If they could place us under the influence of certain circumstances, we, in like manner, can place ourselves in the influence of other circumstances. We are exactly as capable of making our own character, *if we will*, as others are of making it for us” (524). As the popular advice manual writer, Sarah Stickney Ellis, claimed, “Habit, we know, is proverbially accounted second nature; but we know also that even our first nature is capable of being changed” (203).²⁵ Even though Dickens felt himself in opposition to Utilitarian doctrine (especially that of self-interest, which he dubbed “the Philosophy of Number One” in *Oliver Twist*), Dickens’s solution in *Dombey and Son* is similar to the one in which Mill’s Social Logic culminates. Like Dickens in his role as philanthropist, the narrator sympathizes with the determining effects of malign social ills such as poverty, disease, and neglect – the “deformity of brick and mortar” leading to the deformity of “minds and bodies.” The problem is that Dickens barely acknowledges a will to transform in his fiction; he relies

on external, melodramatic or providential fate to change his characters' moral trajectory. Yet the fiction makes clear his opinion that individuals become responsible for their behavior by continuing to enact it, and that repressing knowledge of its mechanism does not clear one's guilt.²⁶

Therefore the narrator caricatures Mrs. Skewton for her mechanical mendaciousness and for her "unnatural" training of Edith. Similarly, the more Dombey surrounds himself with people who mirror back to him his own self-importance – his sister Mrs. Chick, his manager James Carker, and the hypocritical Major Joe Bagstock – "the more he represses [his sense of his injustice] the more unjust he necessarily is," as Dickens claims in the 1867 Preface. Joey Bagstock cautions Dombey, who had been thinking of Florence's crestfallen face, "don't be thoughtful. It's a bad habit. [...] You are too great a man, Dombey, to be thoughtful. In your position, Sir, you're far above that kind of thing" (357). What is the difference between Mrs. Skewton's sort of repression and Dombey's? Mrs. Skewton's repression is second nature; it therefore bypasses consciousness altogether, whereas Dombey is expressly conscious – in the sense of aware or thoughtful. He knows his bitter feelings toward his daughter are, however real, unmerited, and that his behavior toward her is unjust. But, taken together, these repressions of thoughtfulness appear in the novel as a cultural epidemic.

The novel's use of repetition reinforces the perception of this cultural crisis. Dickens favors anaphora, the rhetorical repetitions which characterize his prose. Anaphora enables a rupture in the taken-for-grantedness of habit. In Chapter 47, "The Thunderbolt," after beginning to reflect upon the awful clash of pride and will that characterizes the marriage of Edith and Dombey, the narrator inquires whether, given the

ways “men work to change Nature,” and “in the enforced distortions so produced, it is not natural to be unnatural” (737). The narrator even asks his readers whether, within the context of a commercial culture, Mr. Dombey’s “master-vice” (pride) is “an unnatural characteristic?” This enquiry is the preface to an extended narratorial meditation on the question of “nature,” which transposes the common moral associations with natural and unnatural: “Alas! are there so few things in the world about us, most unnatural, and yet most natural in being so? Hear the magistrate or judge admonish the unnatural outcasts of society; unnatural in brutal habits, unnatural in want of decency, unnatural in losing and confounding all distinctions between good and evil; unnatural in ignorance, in vice, in recklessness, in contumacy, in mind, in looks, in everything” (737). The repetition of “unnatural” uncouples or breaks the commonplace assumption that inequity and vice are the consequences of personal failing. What are “natural affections and repulsions” in such an environment, the narrator asks? Though he acknowledges that natural images of organic life “vainly attempt” to do adequate symbolic work to represent conditions in the urban slums, he compares a “simple plant” “set in this foetid bed” to the “stunted form and wicked face” of “some ghastly child” condemned by the magistrates as “unnatural[ly] sinful[]” (737).

Repetition is natural, its effects are causally inferable. But the content of the repetition may be unnatural and yet have “natural,” that is to say predictable, results. The key to this social analysis in *Dombey and Son* lies in the connected patterns between the novel’s representation of the material world and its symbolically representative characters. Dickens gave imaginative form to these patterns by portraying the power of repetition to determine behavior and character. Society’s habits, the institutions and other

structures and circumstances in which one is raised – Pierre Bourdieu calls them “the rules of the game” – undoubtedly shape and reinforce one’s unconscious and unreflective ways of interpreting the world, judging right from wrong. They therefore mold one’s repertoire for acting in the world. Although habit is notionally controllable, it is problematically so. Why, Dickens’s novel explicitly inquires, do we go on in our “business-like” ways, “taking everything for granted,” as Mr. Dombey’s clerk, Mr. Morfin says, “until whatever we do, good, bad, or indifferent, we do from habit” (560)?

2.

Mr. Morfin’s question has to do with that aspect of habit that is unconscious, automatic, unthinking reflex. Dickens’s imagination seems struck with habit because, while it identified the mechanism behind unconscious and routine thought and behavior, it also offered evidence for the “transparency” of character. This latter evidence Juliet John has argued, was crucial to his communitarian vision.²⁷ John refers to this representation as “*externalization*” and describes it as “the melodramatic meta-technique by which depths and surfaces become synonymous” (28, original italics). In John’s view, externalization challenges the value, in nineteenth-century culture generally and in the realist novel in particular, of the “private” individual (28). To recognize the appeal of externalization, where depths and surfaces have an equivalent meaning, is certainly to appreciate the role of habit in Dickens’s aesthetic. Many critics, such as Robert Patten and Bert Hornback, have analyzed the ways in which Dickens employs the metaphoric possibilities of names, clothing, speech patterns and idioms, as well as tics and other gestures, to represent character.²⁸ These externalized, repeated behaviors are the habits

that tend to make characters into mechanical types. Yet, as John argues, types in the melodramatic aesthetic become more relevant than individuals, and emotional expressivity more significant than psychological – and psychologically convincing – representations of consciousness, because they signify their social and moral status in entirely legible ways.

But, furthermore, I contend that externalization is crucial to understanding the patterning of subjectivity and social phenomenon that *Dombey*, among others of Dickens's novels, so brilliantly dramatizes through its form. That patterning is Dickens's aesthetic version of habit, there to help readers to analyze the determining effect of environment on individual subjectivity. Apart from the rhetorical repetitions, there also are significantly repeated patterns between plots and subplots. For instance, Miss Tox, the Dombey family's hanger-on, and to whom readers are introduced early in the novel, suggests a comic version of Edith's mercenary marriage plot, comic because she has no chance of succeeding, having none of the attributes of the beautiful, haughty Edith.

Like Edith's, Miss Tox's social position is precarious. The narrator reiterates that her "habit of making the most of everything" is necessitated by her being a "lady of what is called limited independence" (56). Her genteel poverty is emphasized in her "long lean figure," and her "faded air," which made her seem "not to have been made in what linen-draper's call 'fast colours' originally, and to have by little and little, washed out" (55-6). Miss Tox exhibits habitually spasmodic gestures, such as being "much given to the carrying about of small bags with snaps to them, that went off like little pistols when they were shut up" (56). Though Dickens recuperates her character later in the novel, he initially depicts her as fecklessly ingratiating. In all his representations of Miss Tox's

habits, he underlines the interdependence of socio-economic status and recurring mannerisms: “her head had quite settled on one side,” the narrator says, “[f]rom a long habit of listening admiringly to everything that was said in her presence,” and “Her hands had contracted a spasmodic habit of raising themselves of their own accord as in involuntary admiration. Her eyes were liable to a similar affectation” (55-6). The apparent reflexiveness of her gestures is reinforced by making her hands and eyes the agent of the “spasmodic” action rather than her conscious mind. That her admiration is “involuntary” suggests a practiced artifice – an originally rehearsed “affectation” that has become second nature, like Mrs. Skewton’s, though without the same degree of censure.

At the level of plot, Miss Tox’s failed “speculation” contrasts with the successful one launched by Edith and her mother. Similarly, another pattern is exposed in the narrator’s clear parallel between Edith Dombey and her mother, and the mother-daughter pair at the destitute end of the social spectrum, Alice Marwood and her mother. He asks of this latter pair, “Were this miserable mother, and this miserable daughter, only the reduction to their lowest grade, of certain social vices sometimes prevailing higher up? [...] Allowing for great difference of stuff and texture, was the pattern of this woof repeated among gentle blood and all?” (579). The fabric metaphor – “stuff and texture” and “the patterns of this woof” – that Dickens enjoins readers to recognize recalls the presiding metaphor of Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*. The “certain social vices” Dickens compares are the unnaturalness of Edith and Alice’s “education,” summed up in Edith’s prenuptial accusation to her mother: “You gave birth to a woman” (472-73); and Alice’s dismissal of her mother’s complaint: “Don’t let you and I talk of being dutiful, whatever we do. Your childhood was like mine, I suppose. So much the worse for both of us”

(571). Dickens is suggesting the fine line between the prostitute Alice and Edith's admission that Dombey has "bought" her (472). The mother-daughter pattern reinforces broader narrative repetitions, in which characters approach human relations as mercenary – not only those between parent and child or marriage partners (which traditionally was alliance-driven), but also between employer and employee, educator and student, landlord and tenant, and so on. *Dombey* portrays the habits of the commercial world pervading every sort of human relationship (a theme to which Dickens returned in *Our Mutual Friend* [1864-65].) The externalized effect of these repetitions in *Dombey and Son* depicts an insidiously indifferent and wholly naturalized "mechanistic" society.

In addition to plot, the novel's patterning of character also reinforces this social critique. Edith Dombey is one of Dickens's most fascinating female characters because she represents what is called, in contemporary melodramatic form such as soap opera, a "transitional" character: one who is fallible but struggling to make good choices. Transitional characters fully exploit the paradoxes of habit, because they symbolize what Mill's *Logic* referred to as "making one's own character." This is particularly true of Edith since her mother's training was so much to the detriment of her moral character. Dickens achieves full dramatic tension from his use of the transitional character by showing the hold that habit has on personality, even in one who has the capacity for transformation. The villains and the heroes represent static ends of the moral spectrum and offer reassuring claims about the visibility and intelligibility of character. Whereas the audience of a melodrama knows that a villain such as Mr. Carker will come to a bad end, transitional characters generate intense dramatic interest and affective responses because their moral trajectory is unclear.

Edith's consciousness that she fails to rise above her training is part of what attracts us to her, and partly what makes her seem tragic, in spite of her failure to resist the marriage of convenience with Dombey and her consequently unenviable conjugal circumstances. She never pretends to feel anything for Dombey, nor to "vaunt[] and press[] the bargain," as she puts it; she knows he buys her as an ornament for his table. Her love for Florence is another marker that reveals Edith as potentially recuperable. Despite Florence's pleas, Edith cannot forgive Dombey at the end of the novel; her hatred of him – perhaps a reflection of her self-loathing for having sunk so low as to marry him – is consistent to the end. But Edith is the dramatic center of the novel because she is a powerful portrait of a character struggling with her habits and their consequences. She is a self-divided figure, who always exhibits a "remarkable air of opposition to herself" (369).²⁹

The characterization of Edith as a transitional figure adds complexity to Dickens's satiric depiction of the unnatural habits of commercial society. Dickens's representation of habit finds another complication in the positive effects of repetition. Amid the invective and the patterns in which the environment's effect on individuals appears totally determinist, he holds out subjectivity's transformative potential. Individuals become not only unconsciously blind to habit like Mrs. Skewton, or nearly powerless to change their habits, like Edith or Mr. Dombey. Like Sol Gills, they also become attached to the repetitions they enact, to their routines, to familiar scenes and faces, to what they know. Attachments of this kind in Dickens's fiction are indebted to the discourse of habit, which recognized (as did ancients such as Aristotle) an ethic in repetition. Dickens's analysis suggests that genuinely "natural" habits are those that foster human

relationships. This explains why everyone with whom the innocent Paul Dombey comes into contact is made miraculously a little more human and a little less mercenary and mechanical.

Dickens's counter-claim to the mechanically determining effects of the commercial society can be seen in the example of Miss Tox's re-training Robin Toodle, the son of Paul's nurse, who becomes the unfortunate beneficiary of Mr. Dombey's charity.³⁰ Robin goes to the bad but eventually straightens out, particularly under the tutelage of Miss Tox. She coaches Robin to replace his habitual use of "cove" with "individual," implicitly suggesting this reformist ideal. Substituting the benign "individual" for an insult insists on the power of language to alter not just patterns of thought but actual social relations, which are determined by how we see the world and others in it. Condensing a great deal of the novel's quiet optimism into a one-liner, Robin tells Miss Tox, it's "never too late for a indiwiddle to mend" (942).

3.

While the two antagonistic forces of *Pride*, Dombey and Edith, are set like trains on a collision course, further destabilized by the malevolent "Manager" James Carker, the railway construction continues, tearing up neighborhoods and altering the landscape. In *Dombey*, the railroad is a "monster," but one whose path of destruction lays waste to already blighted places. When the narrator describes the tumult the railroad's construction causes to the London suburb, Camden Town, and the particular locale known as Stagg's Gardens, he says the neighborhood was "shy to own the railroad," and "the general belief [in it] was very slow"³¹ The Stagg's Gardeners customarily

used the spot for growing beans and keeping rabbits, for drying clothes and smoking pipes. It is, as Jeremy Tambling notes, “a paradigm not of nature, but of urban squalor,” obviously doomed to succumb to the railroad’s “mighty course of civilization and improvement” (*Dombey* 121).³² Although “Stagg’s Gardens was regarded by its population as a sacred grove not to be withered by Railroads” (122), it shortly and entirely succumbed, as described in Chapter 15, when Walter escorts Susan and Florence to find a dying Paul Dombey’s former nurse, “Mrs. Richards” (Polly Toodle). We read: “There was no place such as Stagg’s Gardens. It had vanished from the earth. The miserable waste ground, where the refuse-matter had been heaped of yore, was swallowed up and gone; and in its frowsy stead were tiers of warehouses, crammed with rich goods and costly merchandise. [...] Bridges that had led to nothing, led to villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks” (289). Out of waste ground come warehouses and from refuse-matter rich goods; this material progress resembles an organic process – new commercial and cultural growth from decay. This is culture represented as nature.

These buildings, moreover, are not solely the riches of individuals – the Mr. Dombey of the era – but the products of the shared wealth of a civilization: warehouses, where people carry on business and trade, gardens and walks in which to spend leisure time, churches where communities of believers express their faith. The regeneration implies the naturalness of mankind’s exploiting of raw material for progress (“swallowed up and gone”). In depicting the Stagg’s Gardeners, such as Mr. Toodle, who begins as a stoker on the railway and eventually becomes an “engine driver, and well to do in the world,” (932) as progressing along with the improved environment, it also suggests a dialectic between progress and demolition: that the railroad’s destruction/construction

offers opportunities for better lives through reformed habits. It is in the manner of Robin Toodle, in the development of seemingly minute new habits, that Dickens suggests, with the ambivalence of Sol Gills in mind, that characters can positively transform themselves and their world. Thus the railroad in *Dombey and Son* is not only a monster. Dickens's somewhat monstrous references to killing off Paul Dombey ("Paul, I shall slaughter at the end of number five") also can be read in terms of the kind of affective release he felt was required for readers to alter their habitual views.³³

The novel incorporates many examples of reformation – if not of transformation – the primary one being that of Mr. Dombey himself, after the bankruptcies of both his business and his marriage. (I will return to Dombey in section 4.) Other examples are found among the minor characters in the novel, such as Mr. Toots, or those who work at Dombey's firm. One, Mr. John Carker (brother of James Carker) is caught stealing and demoted. Unlike James, who perpetually reminds John of his transgression, their sister, Harriet, is the embodiment of compassion. She follows her disgraced but repentant brother to make a home with him. It is a poor dwelling (but tidy, of course); the pair scrimp to get by. In one scene, Harriet is visited by Mr. Morfin, Dombey and Son's "officer of inferior state" (238). (His inferiority is ironic because he manages the firm disinterestedly. In fact, Mr. Morfin attempts to ward off the firm's overextending, a disaster that James Carker deliberately encourages as part of his revenge, but the firm fails when Dombey won't heed Morfin's advice.) Unbeknownst to the extremely reserved John Carker, Mr. Morfin calls upon Harriet to offer aid to the impoverished pair. Morfin explains his former habit of indifference as a reflex of his "jog-trot life": "I have been in the habit of thinking that there was nothing wanting to be done for [John]; and that it was

all settled and over; in short, of not thinking at all about it. I am different now. Let me do something for him. You too..." (238?). In Morfin's name, suggesting change, and insistence on being "different now," Dickens identifies habit – as Carlyle had suggested – as both the obstacle and the key to reform.³⁴

Before his plea to allow him to aid them, however, Morfin explodes into an invective on habit. His analysis turns a reflective eye upon reflexive behavior:

‘I am sure,’ said the gentleman, rubbing his forehead again; and drumming on the table as before, ‘I have good reason to believe that a jog-trot life, the same day to day, would reconcile one to anything. One don’t see anything, one don’t hear anything, one don’t know anything; that’s the fact. We go on taking everything for granted, and so we go on, until whatever we do, good, bad, or indifferent, we do from habit. Habit is all I shall have to report, when I am called upon to plead to my conscience, on my death-bed. “Habit,” says I; “I was deaf, dumb, blind, and paralytic, to a million things, from habit.” “Very business-like indeed, Mr What’s-your-name,” says Conscience, “but it won’t do here!”’ 559-60

The passage portrays the whole range of associations with the notion of habit, from its amusingly self-referential description of Morfin's habitual tics – repeatedly rubbing his head and drumming his fingers – while he muses on the subject of habit, to his name's proximity to the idea of metamorphosis. Habituation operates to make people “deaf, dumb, blind, and paralytic,” “taking everything for granted [...] until whatever we do, good, bad or indifferent, we do from habit.” Morfin describes the way the repetition of “clockwork” routine lulls people into complacency, and the dynamic that complacency then perpetuates. He contemplates the ease with which we rationalize our indifference as an inability to imagine “something to be done.” Even the phrase Morfin uses, “there was nothing wanting to be done,” elides an active agent for the empty, past tense, passive voice construction.

In a fascinating representation of psycho-machia, a bifurcated mind, Morfin splits his psyche into two, the personae of Habit and of Conscience, who ultimately will not let Habit off the hook. This version of subjectivity emphasizes the unconsciousness of habit, and the necessity for conscience to provide a check on habit. But how does one know? By what signs does Mr. Morfin come to recognize that his business-like behavior is a rationalization of callous indifference to injustice? The novel is obscure on this point. At some moment, a chain of associated reflections is set in motion: he begins to recognize the punishment James Carker continues to inflict on his brother, long after the event, and this leads Morfin to consider the extended atonement John Carker is being asked to serve. His recognition prompts him to investigate the home of John and Harriet.

His conscience gets the better of habit in that last action – his curiosity transformed finally into a long stroll to an out-of-the-way place, an inquisitive knock on a door, an offer of aid. Yet before Morfin departs, he asks Harriet to allow him to form a new habit of walking by and signing to find out, unobtrusively, if she is all right, thus turning his former habit of indifference into a new habit of solicitude. He does so, “once every week [...], and always on the same day, and at the same hour” (838), as Harriet later tells her brother. Regularity, repetition and routine are not in and of themselves problematic, the novel contends through Morfin’s illustration; their tendency to produce reflexive behavior and indifference is the trouble. As Carlyle and Mr. Morfin both suggest, it is easy or “apt” to see habit as “natural, as if it could never have been otherwise.”³⁵ Critics have claimed that Dickens’s idea of social reformation is grounded in changes of the individual heart, yet in *Dombey*, particularly, the parallels between individual change brought about by conscience and reformulated habit, and social change

as in the figure of the railroad, which forces previously hidden scenes of poverty into view, suggest that both means are necessary and interrelated.

4.

In his characterization of Mr. Morfin, Dickens is working out a method for a kind of cultural self-help, which also serves as an argument for the function of fiction: a way of making patterns of behavior conscious. The character of Mr. Morfin offers a middle perspective, between Sol Gills's reflective disorientation and Mr. Dombey's reflexive and single-minded pride. Developing a different way of relating to others, as Morfin does by the extension rather than the contraction of sympathies, was not easy, not least because, as the Victorians conceived it, experience and association so shapes the human mind and its understanding that these processes tend to blind people to alternative perspectives. It is not only Pope's argument, but a human tendency to assume that what "is" is natural – to be "deaf, dumb, blind, and paralytic, to a million things, from habit," as Mr. Morfin says. But ethics is doomed if everyone rationalizes their indifference to injustice.

In the analogy with the railroad, however, habit's trains of association are being rerouted, pulling down old structures in the making of new paths, exposing the repressed sights. Kucich suggests that it is problematic to assume "that repression in Dickens is finally related to the establishment of collective values" (213). The character of Dombey certainly supports this contention (if not in precisely the theoretical manner Kucich discusses). Dombey represses, in particular, his knowledge that his unfeeling behavior toward Florence is injurious to her development, and therefore, by implication, to himself, and that Edith does not respect him (let alone *love* him) as a wife ought to. His

repression of self-knowledge thwarts his inclusion in genuine human relationships. It is only once this repressed knowledge explodes to the surface of Dombey's life that he is able to reflect on what he has thrown away, and to be open to reconciliation with his daughter.

Raising to the level of consciousness a repressed truth about one's behavior and actions is what drives the moral drama of the novel. It not only links Dickens's role as author to the Good Spirit in the novel, "taking off the housetops," but also links the Good Spirit to the railroad's dialectic destruction/construction. It is the strategy by which readers are enlisted to care about Edith, as well as our means to understand Florence's rejection of her father, after he hits her, when she runs away to Sol Gill's Little Midshipman. The truth that Dombey's rejection of her was not her failing becomes suddenly transparent. Dickens alerts us to the fact that Dombey is not unconscious of his pride. Although several reviewers viewed Dombey as "unnatural" – by which they meant his transformation was unbelievable – Dickens defended his characterization of Dombey, and, by extension, his representation of repression in his 1867 Preface.³⁶

Late in the novel, Edith apparently has run off with his manager, whom Dombey had employed as a go-between in an effort to humiliate Edith into submission. At this point Dombey has lost all of the appurtenances that contributed to his pride – both his houses, both his children, both his wives. Refuting criticism of the inconsistency of Dombey's conversion at the end of the novel, Dickens insists that Dombey, while struggling to repress his unjust behavior towards his daughter Florence, is nonetheless aware of this injustice throughout the narrative. Dickens depicts the spiraling effect of the repression of a truth; in calling it "a sense," he emphasizes knowledge as bodily feeling

(43). However, instead of demonstrating it through action, and dramatizing it, the narrator most often reports on Dombey's repression. As Dickens tells us in the Preface, it requires steadily increasing efforts of repression for Dombey to keep that sense at bay. In Chapter 40, we get a picture of Mr. Dombey brooding over his domestic relations. "Such wounds were his," readers are told, "He felt them sharply, in the solitude of his old rooms, whither he now often began to retire again, and pass long solitary hours. [...] In his sullen and unwholesome brooding, the unhappy man, with a dull perception of his alienation from all hearts, and a vague yearning for what he had all his life repelled, made a distorted picture of his right and wrongs, and justified himself with it against her" (648-49). The iterative exposition of Dombey's antisocial habits of retiring and brooding reveals his moral state. His retreat is a sign of his alienation, even though the representation rather lacks dramatic force compared with the tense scenes between him and Edith. Nevertheless his retreat-repression is consistent with John's analysis in *Dickens's Villains* of the melodramatic aesthetic "externalization." We are told of his behavior, and it is interpreted for us, but we are not given an extensive picture of Dombey's private interiority. We never hear his own internal monologue, for example, perhaps because, in repressing the knowledge, Dombey cannot express it even to himself.

Dombey's recuperation is not internally motivated by his recognition of his blinding pride. First the entire architecture that held this view of himself in place must crash down upon him. Thus he loses his son, Paul, and thus he marries one whose pride equals his own and who refuses to submit to his will. Thus he allows his business to fall precariously into the corrupt hands of his manager, and when he refuses to acknowledge that he must consolidate in order to recuperate his losses, he is bankrupt. At this point, his

fiscal state finally corresponds to his moral state. I argue that John's analysis of externalization can be even further extended: Dombey's pride is systematically attacked by a moral universe in order to teach him the error of his ways because, as Dickens envisions him, Dombey's character does not encompass the will to change. His whole self is defined by tradition, power, authority. Employing the melodramatic mode to represent the external force that compels recognition upon Dombey (bringing repressed truth into view) may suggest a Providential universe. But another, more realistic, implication is that Dickens is suggesting the difficulty of internally-motivated conversion.

This latter interpretation is supported by the implied argument about habit in the 1867 Preface. Dickens claims that Dombey "undergoes no violent change"; rather his "obstinate nature exists in perpetual struggle with itself" (43). His conversion seems externally rather than internally motivated because the edifice of his world collapses prior to his self-reappraisal. Moreover, his realization does not really garner Dombey the forgiveness that he receives at the end of the novel, when he finally is sustained by all those of whose value he earlier had tried to deny – his daughter, Walter Gay, Harriet and John Carker (who, secretly through Mr. Morfin, make Dombey an annuity after his bankruptcy). Even Polly Toodle, the unjustly dismissed nurse of his son Paul, comes to look after the miserable man, and Miss Tox, the spurned spinster, comes to keep Polly company (932-34). These characters required no conversion. Their habits were (always) already life-sustaining. Dombey has an "altered heart" (976) but it is altered exactly in reverse, so that his conversion still feels consistent with his personality. The narrator comments that the old man "hoards [his granddaughter] in his heart" (975).

Dickens's characters rarely transform themselves in the way that J. S. Mill describes, through willpower alone. More typically, they remain transparently static. Until the end of his days, Mr. Skimpole will be "just a child." Those who do change have to be "lessoned," through the harsh realities of experience, as with David and Pip's de-romanticization, or through subterfuge, as is the case with both Bella Wilfer and Martin Chuzzlewit. Mr. Gradgrind only learns to see the error of his educational model after the terrible consequences to his children become evident. Even Richard Carton's self-sacrifice has something of his earlier nihilist abandon. In Dickens's novels, then, external circumstances not only mold character; circumstances also instigate characters to change their understanding of themselves, as well as their intersubjective behavior. The force of circumstances, the external world, becomes a substitute for an agent of a "Providential" outcome.

We are left with the puzzling Preface of 1867 to the novel, which most certainly reflects the fact that Dickens thought his critics were missing his point.³⁷ The document's claims are consistent with the implications of the railroad/good spirit/novelist parallels. The parallels suggest, as I have been arguing, that habits are social causes, instilled in individuals by society and material circumstances, and then perpetuated in socially-produced beliefs and behavior. It takes a railroad's construction, or a good spirit's intervention, or a novelist's imagination to make those causes apparent to people, yet they are not the causes of change themselves.

Dickens thought that if habit can be represented and effectively communicated to readers, literature might have material effects in reforming the "habits of heart and mind," just as the furor over boarding schools precipitated material reform after the

publication of *Nicholas Nickleby*, a novel which opened readers eyes to abuses of which they either had been ignorant or wished to remain so.³⁸ Readers require practice, to get in the habit of seeing the world as a tragedy of their own making.

In *Dombey's* Preface, Dickens sets the artist apart, insisting upon the artist's rare and accurate interpretation of character, as opposed to the understanding of ordinary people: "I make so bold as to believe that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing the characters of men, is a rare one. I have not even found, within my experience, that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing so much as the faces of men, is a general one by any means." The parentheses signal a link between "faculty" and "habit." Both terms refer to a power or capacity, which can be either innate or acquired, though it was more typical to associate the faculties with universal traits and habits with more individually acquired ones.³⁹ (Whether or not Dickens's aptitude was innate, his facility was certainly practiced.) Whether or not "correctly observing the faces of men" is a facility that can be acquired, the realist novel's project to expose causes and effects is fundamental to readers' better understanding of themselves and their society. As Dickens laments the failure of most people to read character, the Preface indicates the same problem that the novel exposes: the generally "unobserving," unconscious condition of his society, the worst of whom, like Mrs. Skewton and Mr. Dombey, actively repress knowledge that would expose their sham and hypocrisy. And yet more than exposure is at stake for Dickens and for his version of realist fiction. The knowledge he would bring to readers would help them find ways to change their society.

G. H. Lewes, in an essay, “Dickens in Relation to Criticism,” published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1872, claimed that Dickens’s characters were “merely masks... caricatures and distortions of human nature.” In Lewes’s developing literary theory, the novel meant realism, and realism meant a very subtle depiction of psychology, which avoided exaggeration. But Dickens, too, was engaged with developing theories of identity (as we saw in the example of Mr. Morfin and his split model of the mind, in which habit and conscience struggle for the upper hand). Metaphor in Dickens’s characterization often reduces characters to their fetishes, sartorial quirks, or their verbal or psychological tics, but his characterization utilizes the metonymy of habit to inform his social analysis. He explores the fear of “mechanism” in terms of the unnatural social structures that were turning out vicious criminals, starving workers, and deformed children like some kind of assembly line, as well as portraying individual characters who are unable to reflect upon their own unnaturalness, as in the characters of Mrs. Skewton and Mr. Dombey.

This is to say that his stylistic technique, paradoxically, had a higher end: to critique that very sort of reduction and one-dimensionality. Lewes misses the point about “mechanism” in Dickens’s characters entirely. The critic writes, “Unreal and impossible as these types were, speaking a language never heard in life, moving like pieces of simple mechanism always in one way (instead of moving with the infinite fluctuations of organisms...) these unreal figures affected the uncritical reader with the force of reality.” As George H. Ford points out in his discussion of Lewes’s essay, Lewes never seems to consider that this may in fact be the point, “effective and probable in its own way.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, Lewes values a different version of realism, and also envisions a more plastic and malleable model of mind, both of which

his companion George Eliot developed with an astounding intellectual command. Yet, as we shall see, the mind that Lewes scientifically described and Eliot fictively imagined is one that builds on the mechanical, train-track associational one that Dickens employed.

¹Alexander Welsh, "Satire and History: The City of Dickens" *Victorian Studies* 11 (1968): 379-400; quoted on 383.

²Ackroyd claims he had "the habit of constantly combing his hair in case a strand of it had fallen out of place" (829).

³Bert G. Hornback, "Dickens's Language of Gesture: Creating Character" *Dickens Studies Newsletter* 9 (1978): 100-106; 101.

⁴In a speech he made in Birmingham in 1869, Dickens extolled the virtue of regular work habits. "My own invention and imagination, such as it is," he adds modestly, "I can most truthfully assure you, would never have served me as it has, but for the habit of commonplace, humble, patient, daily, toiling, drudging attention. Genius, vivacity, quickness of penetration, brilliancy in association of ideas [...] will not be commanded; but attention, after due term of submissive service, always will." Quoted in Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (1971): 75. [check; to a workingmen's association?]

⁵See Richard Lettis, "How I Work: Dickens in the Writer's Chair" *Dickensian* 89 (Sp 1993): 20.

⁶Forster gives the account in his *The Life of Charles Dickens*, J. W. T. Ley, ed. (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928): Book V, chapter 2, 399-400.

⁷[Unsigned review] "Sketches by Boz," *Metropolitan Magazine*, March 1836, xv, 77.

⁸Simon Dentith, "How Popular was *Dombey and Son*?": 71. Dentith's essay makes the useful argument, in assessing how popular the novel was, that [*Dombey*] "transform[s] the elements of popular culture on which it draws" (78).

⁹Joseph Litvak's study, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (1992) finds that rather than repudiating theatricality, the tradition of the novel in England tends to document its diffusion and normalization. See also Deborah Vlock, *Dickens, Novel Reading and the Victorian Popular Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); Paul Schlicke's *Dickens and Popular Entertainment* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985); and William Axton's *Circle of Fire: Vision and Style and the Popular Victorian Theater* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1966). According to Axton, Dickens's writing rehearses the strategies of English pantomime, with its "amalgam of impostures, disguises, slapstick unmasking, motley and grotesquerie" – the visceral content of his and other Victorians' theatrical experience. Axton describes the pantomime of Dickens's age as often mixing fantasy with topicality and social satire by a deliberately ludicrous use of a folk tale in an altered setting that reproduced recent news events, and he notes that stage sets and figures displayed properties which "commonly played upon grotesque incongruities in scale or context, and comic animism was a favorite device. Thus clowns went disguised as kitchen implements, animals, outsized vegetables, even plants and trees" (19). This jumble of absurdity and social satire appealed to a broad range of society, unlike other forms of drama such as those that parodied manners in high society, or those that appealed to "low" culture because they contained lewd material deliberately meant to offend middle-class proprieties. On this latter point, see Peter Bailey, "Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture," *Past and Present* 144 (138-170). I discuss Juliet John's work at length on pages 85-86 below (see note 27 for reference). See also Robert Garis, *The Dickens Theatre* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) and Edwin Eigner, *The Dickens Pantomime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁰Polite readers found many scenes in Dickens's fiction to be "low." A comment from Henry Fox on *Oliver Twist* is representative: "I know there are such unfortunates as pickpockets and streetwalkers. I am very sorry for it and very much shocked at their mode of life, but I own that I do not much wish to hear what they say to one another." *Chronicles of Holland House 1820-1900*, Earl of Ilchester, ed. (1937) 245. It is precisely this attitude of knowing of but refusing to acknowledge inequity that Dickens takes as his subject in *Dombey and Son*.

¹¹See John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson's *Dickens At Work* (London: Methuen, 1957).

¹²All quotations from the 1985 Penguin Classics edition: edited by Peter Fairclough, introduction by Raymond Williams.

¹³Jennifer Hayward, *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1997): 1. On the subject of serialization in Victorian culture see Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University

Press of Virginia: 1991); Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (Houndsmills and New York: Palgrave, 2000); and David Payne, *The Reenchantment of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and Serialization* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2005). In "Revisiting the Serial Format of Dickens's Novels; or Little Dorrit Goes a Long Way," in Christine L Krueger, ed. *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2002) 157-70, authors David Barndollar and Susan Schorn describe their research projects that attempted to recreate the experience of reading Dickens serially. One interesting point they make is that Dickens's plots can be more difficult to follow in the serial format, because what tend to stand out are his long descriptive passages. For contemporary readers, they assert, "[M]easured doses of Dickens can be frustrating simply because they thwart our usual reading habits: one thing we almost never do with a Dickens book is close it voluntarily." See especially 161.

¹⁴ In a study of Carlyle's influence on Dickens, Michael Goldberg examines many correspondences in Dickens's novels to Carlyle's fear of commercialism. Michael Goldberg, *Carlyle and Dickens* (Athens: U of Georgia Press, 1972). See notes 34 and 35 below on Carlyle.

¹⁵ Williams writes in his "Introduction" to the Penguin edition of *Dombey* (first published in 1970), "Pride is transformed from a traditional vice [...] to something created by a particular social world, and by the habits of heart and mind which such a world teaches and sustains" (21). He refers to the Victorians' recognition of the impact of social institutions on the individual: the fact that different historical moments engender a second nature particular to it. His somewhat sentimental phrase, "habits of heart and mind," suggests how ideology induces behavior through feeling and belief.

¹⁶ Kate Flint, "The Middle Novels: Chuzzlewit, Dombey, Copperfield" John O. Jordan, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*, 34.

¹⁷ Kucich, John, "Repression and Representation: Dickens's General Economy," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 38.1 (June, 1983) 62-77, 69.

¹⁸ James Mill, "Education," *James Mill: Political Writings*, ed. Terrence Ball (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 139-94. Mill's treatise attempted to answer the perennial questions of "wherein human happiness exists" and what sorts of education are required for the different classes of society. But it also poses paradoxical assumptions. On the one hand, "human happiness" is assumed to be universal; on the other hand, no universality is assumed when it comes to the "different classes" of society requiring different sorts of education.

¹⁹ Philip Fisher, "The Failure of Habit," *Uses of Literature*, ed. Monroe Engel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1973). This claim neglects other widespread, and competing, metaphors for habit, such as the "fabric" of society (a perhaps quasi-industrial metaphor), as well as organic metaphors for habit, often expressed in terms of "cultivation" or self-cultivation, Carlyle's volcano, and the stream, which I discuss in Chapter three's reading of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*.

²⁰ Athena Vrettos, "Defining Habits: Dickens and the Psychology of Repetition," *Victorian Studies* 42:3 (Spring 1999-2000) 399-426.

²¹ An enormous amount of critical work attests to Dickens's prescience in matters of psychology. Much of this work is psychoanalytic, or uses Freudian terminology such as doubling, repression or Anti-Oedipal structures. Few attempts are made to read Dickens's work in the terms of the nineteenth-century mental physiology to which Dickens himself would have had access, and therefore such criticism tends to tell us more about psychoanalysis than about Dickens's imagination of the mind, mental events, or the relations between mind and body. Examples (which tend to focus on *Great Expectations*) include, Stephen Bernstein, "Oliver Twisted: Narrative and Doubling in Dickens's Second Novel" (1991); Douglas Steward, "Anti-Oedipalizing *Great Expectations*: Masochism, Subjectivity, Capitalism" (1999); James Leo Spenko, "The Return of the Repressed in *Great Expectations*" (1980); David T. Thomson, "Pip: The Divided Self" (1977). Frank McCombie's "Sexual Repression in *Dombey and Son*" investigates the subject through a study of the novel's engravings.

²² Vrettos's essay attends to the significant tension between individuality and conformity suggested by the notions of habit as either idiosyncratic or routine. Between the two notions lie opposing anxieties: of the homogenous mass production of character or the potentially radical, non-conformist eccentric. Whereas Vrettos emphasizes consumer behavior in market economies, and focuses attention on the sartorial and proprietorial dimension of theories of habit, I am more interested in the novel's ideology regarding the externalization and processes of self- and social-reformation. See also Julia F. Saville's essay on *David Copperfield*, "Eccentricity as Englishness in *David Copperfield*," *SEL* 42, 4: 781-797 (2002),

which finds that eccentricity “operates as the site of negotiation between individual and communal imperatives” 784, and argues that, as part of the nationalizing tendencies of the early nineteenth century, Dickens reinvents character as eccentricity. Interestingly related to the notion of habit-formation, Saville describes Dickens’s use of eccentricity as exploiting the possibilities of masquerade, “the power to don and remove masks that does not depend on some original essence but rather brings that essence into being” 785.

²³ There is a vast amount of critical literature on the subject of determinism and will in Victorian thought; to attempt to rehearse this here would be impossible and distracting from the central problem of habit that I am tracing, although habit cannot be separated from the philosophical concerns of determinism and human will. An excellent account of these debates can be found in Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Literature: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); see also John Robert Reed, *Victorian Will* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989).

²⁴ *System of Logic* (1869 ed. Harper and Brothers, NY.) Bk. VI. “On the Logic of the Moral Sciences.”

²⁵ *Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1839).

²⁶ During the writing of *Dombey and Son*, Dickens administered a philanthropic project, a home for homeless women called Urania Cottage and financed by his friend, the wealthy Mrs. Burdett-Coutts. Many of the women he recruited had come from prison, arrested for prostitution. In a pamphlet written to persuade women to join the reform house, which culminated in a new life in the Australian colonies, the terms he uses are similar to Mill’s: “you must have the strength to leave behind you all old habits. You must resolve to set a watch upon yourself, and to be firm in your control over yourself, and to restrain yourself.” See Edward F. Paine’s *The Charity of Charles Dickens* (44). That Dickens had a lifelong interest in streetwalkers is evidenced by his inclusion of many such characters in his novels: from Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, to Emily in *David Copperfield*, to Alice Marwood in *Dombey*. Undoubtedly this episode influenced the writing of *Dombey*. A final, compelling coincidence: As with other schemes it resembled, Urania Cottage proved a failure, and the house was eventually demolished in order to make way for a railroad line! (See *Charity* 51).

²⁷ Juliet John, *Dickens’s Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

²⁸ Robert L. Patten, “‘I Thought of Mr. Pickwick, and Wrote the First Number’: Dickens and the Evolution of Character,” *Dickens Quarterly* 3.1, 1986, 19. In Dickens’s development of characters’ particular speech-habits, Patten has seen an innovation on the old character types signified by clothes, what he refers to as “the inherited system of characterological signs.”

Bert G. Hornback’s article, “Dickens’s Language of Gesture: Creating Character,” *Dickens Studies Newsletter* 9: 100-06 (1978) argues that the language of gesture dramatically represents cause or source. I agree with much of Hornback’s analysis, but remain unconvinced that Dickens is as interested, apart from training, in the *causes* of behavior as he is in transparent states of consciousness.

²⁹ Of Edith’s beauty the narrator remarks, “It was a remarkable characteristic of this lady’s beauty that it appeared to vaunt and assert itself without her aid, and against her will. She knew that she was beautiful: it was impossible that it could be otherwise: but she seemed with her own pride to defy her very self” (367).

³⁰ On Dickens’s antipathy toward compulsory education see David Paroissien, “Ideology, Pedagogy, and Demonology: The Case against Industrialized Education in Dickens’s Fiction,” *Dickens Studies Annual* 34 (2004): 259-82. and R. D. Altick, “Education, print, and paper in *Our Mutual Friend*,” ed. Clyde de L. Ryals, John Clubbe and Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, *Nineteenth-Century Literary Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Lionel Stevenson* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974).

³¹ Though the Stagg’s gardeners debate about where the name came from, a “stag” was a term for a railroad speculator, which surely is Dickens’s ironic source for the name.

³² Jeremy Tambling, “Death and Modernity in *Dombey and Son*,” *Essays in Criticism* 43.4 (1993): 321.

³³ Forster recounts letters from Dickens during the composition of *Dombey*; see book VI, ch. II. My comment relies on John Kucich’s argument in *Repression in Victorian Fiction*.

³⁴ As we saw in Chapter one, Carlyle wrote in *Past and Present*, “Habit is the deepest law of human nature. It is our supreme strength: if also, in certain circumstances, our miserableness weakness” (“The Beginnings,” Book II, chap. xvii). This chapter discusses the need for “Formulas” because the more “completely cased with Formulas a man may be, the safer, happier it is for him.” Yet Carlyle also argues that “a man’s Formulas become *dead*; as all Formulas, in the progress of living growth, are very sure to do!” Such an account is suggestive of the plot and moral of *Dombey and Son*. See *Past and Present* vol. 10 (1843; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904).

³⁵ Carlyle addressed the idea of second nature in the so-called “mechanical age” in his polemic, *Signs of the Times* (1829), in which he argued that a faith in materialist method created the impetus for belief and behavior that mimicked the mechanicality of technology, “the great art,” as he put it, “of adapting means to ends.” He acknowledged the benefits of materialist philosophy and science for improving the lives of many, but he also feared that “this same habit regulates [...] our modes of thought and feeling.” He criticized, that is, the “manage[ment] by machinery” of those aspects of being which were immaterial (such as the learned doctor who discovered that poetry and religion are “a product of the smaller intestines”). Carlyle also addressed the difficulty of parsing nature/ second nature: “To us who live in the midst of all this, and see continually the faith, hope and practice of every one founded on Mechanism of one kind or another, it is apt to seem quite natural, and as if it could never have been otherwise.” (New York: AMS Press, 1969) 56-82.

³⁶ Reviews were mixed on the characterization of Dombey. The *Blackwood’s Magazine* review (see below, note 35 for full reference to this and to Forster) thought it “out of nature” whereas Charles Kent’s review in *The Sun* (13 April 1848) found a “pervading loyalty to the natural.” Forster’s review amicably suggests that the novel’s recurring phrase “most unnatural, and yet most natural in being so,” is “probably what all [Dickens’s] readers have not been able to concede, in the instance of Mr. Dombey and his Wife.” In his view, however, “The past antecedents of both make the truth of the existing picture,” that is to say, Dombey’s arrogance is natural in never having had the experience of being thwarted. Edith’s unnatural training by her mother makes her naturally bitter and willful. While Edith will make the marriage in order to secure her mother and herself a place in society, she is intractable in her refusal to act the part of the submissive wife.

³⁷ The Preface echoes an unsigned [John Eagles] review in *Blackwood’s Magazine* (October 1848) lxiv, 468-69. After complaining that the characters are “extreme” and “exaggerated” and offer readers “too frequently a disgusting picture of life,” Eagles writes, “The entire change of character in Dombey is out of all nature—it is impossible.” He also apparently misses the blackmail of Edith by both Dombey (emotional, respecting Florence) and James Carker (threatening exposure, which she has already sacrificed), when he claims that “The whole conduct of the wife is out of nature. Such a character should have a deep cause for her conduct: she has none but the having married a disagreeable man [...]” The critic deems *Dombey* Dickens’s “greatest failure.” John Forster’s review from *The Examiner* (28 October 1848) 692-93 admires the novel, yet pauses to suggest that “What we occasionally find when we would rather have it absent, is, that what should be, and would formerly have been, a mere instinct shown in the silent action of a character, has here and there come to be too much of a conscious feeling, and receives too elaborate expression.” Harriet Martineau’s assessment was that “While he tells us a world of things that are natural and even true, his personages are generally, as I suppose is undeniable, profoundly unreal.” Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, 1877; ed., Linda H. Peterson (Peterborough, Ont.; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2007) vol. ii, 378-79.

³⁸ The phrase, “habits of heart and mind” comes from Raymond Williams’s introduction to the Penguin edition of *Dombey* (21). Dickens claimed in his 1848 Preface to the Cheap Edition of *Nicholas Nickleby* that by that date nearly all the Yorkshire boarding schools had been forced to close down. See Mark Ford’s Introduction to Penguin edition (xv). For more on the historical consequences of *Nicholas Nickleby* see Philip Collins *Dickens and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1963).

³⁹ Nineteenth-century phrenologists optimistically united body and mind by applying *faculties* to the literal shape of the skull: cranial ‘organs’ or ‘bumps’ were supposed to indicate congenital aptitudes, such as language, imitation, constructiveness or aggressiveness. (The OED comments that this sense has greatly influenced popular language.)

⁴⁰ Quoted in George H. Ford, *Dickens and his Readers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965) 152-54.

Chapter 3

Habits and Subjectivity in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*

A vigorous superstition, that lashes its gods or lashes its own back, seems to be more congruous with the mystery of the human lot, than the mental condition of these emmet-like Dodsons and Tullivers. – George Eliot, *The Mill*

George Eliot's representation of the "mental condition" of the "emmet-like" Dodsons and Tullivers in *The Mill on the Floss* confronted her readers with a challenge. Why should we sympathize with their prejudices, parsimony and clannish pride? Her narrator declares that it is "necessary for us to feel" the "oppressive narrowness" of their mental condition "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 nevertheless been tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts" (273). Eliot grants Maggie and Tom's predicament a broader significance than their own particular histories when she extends her observation to "young natures" generally; in generation after generation, young natures "rise above" the mental development of their elders, and this causes in them, in the narrator herself, and, perhaps even in Eliot's readers, a sense of oppression. She characterizes the world, "human things," as tending to advance via the mind, or "mental levels," which surpass those of parents and grandparents. A dilemma arises from this advance, because as our minds progress we feel a backward tug and an attendant commitment to the ones we have superceded. Although she describes this tie as a heart-string, this really is also a matter of mind, because

emotional connections are based on associations in the brain, as Eliot believed from her knowledge of contemporary studies by physiological psychologists.

A great deal of the mental condition with which Eliot is concerned in her novel is best understood in the context of Victorian beliefs about *habit*. One of the hallmarks of modernity, according to Anthony Giddens, is the way post-traditional societies tend to make the self a reflexive project.¹ Victorian ideas about habit described, on a continuum, two very different kinds of behavior—passive, unconscious reflex and self-actuating, reflective behavior. In Giddens’s view, subjectivity is not limited to a discursive consciousness of one’s actions. Many activities are enacted at the level of practical consciousness (35-6). Once a skill is acquired through repetition or practice, a task that initially required conscious effort, such as learning a new language, becomes an unconscious facility—a habit. Victorian reformers and writers of various types of self-improvement literature understood repetition and seriality to constitute the origin of habits.² Victorian physiologists believed that habits were established through the “exercise” of the brain so as to form permanent knowledge routes and persistent behavioral “discharge” paths, as George Henry Lewes discussed in his *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859).³ Though believed to be closely allied to instincts because of their durable and unconscious nature, habits, paradoxically, also were described as flexible dispositions, capable of being retrained through conscious effort. Thus for Victorian culture, one’s habitual regimes were intensely moralized: as one best-selling conduct manual had it, habit “consequentially form[s] the basis of moral character.”⁴ Significantly, however, the Victorians recognized that habits not only define but preexist

one's character, in that habits are socially shaped, unconscious modes of response to the environment.

The narrator participates in this discourse when she describes the Dodsons' "inalienable habit of saving, as an end in itself," as "constitut[ing] them a 'race'": "the worthy tax-payers, who, having once pinched from real necessity, retained even in the midst of their comfortable retirement, with their wall-fruit and their wine binds, the habit of regarding life as an ingenious process of nibbling out one's livelihood without leaving any appreciable deficit" (121-22). That "saving," "pinching," and "nibbling" are described as "inalienable habit" and a "habit of regarding life" suggests the ways in which acquired behavior becomes so ingrained as to turn into stable attributes. Even behavior with conscious ends and formed by genuinely pressing circumstances (the "real necessity") turns into an automatic reflex, one that will often remain unaffected by a complete change in circumstances, as, say, having achieved a "comfortable retirement." How do experience and belief shift from conscious action to unconscious repetition? The answer to this question is one focus of Eliot's exploration of subjectivity in *The Mill on the Floss*. And one reason for her insistence on the necessity of our shared sense of its limitations stems from her belief that our mental life "acts on" the natures of those around us and therefore has ethical implications.

Eliot models human experience as an accumulation of patterns of thought and behavior, more unconscious than conscious. The dialectical relationship between individual habits and the mental level of St. Ogg's is part of the novel's complexly-realized organicism, which, as the critic Sally Shuttleworth has argued, was not a single worldview but a complex of ideas which Eliot worked and reworked in her fictions.⁵ The

organic society was understood not as a whole equal to the sum of its parts, but rather as an organism formed by dynamic, interdependent and constantly evolving pieces. As she claimed in a letter to the critic R. H. Hutton, “it is the habit of my imagination to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself.”⁶ The phrase turns her own creative faculty into a habit of the type recognized as a basic principle of modern psychology, extending back through the associationism of Locke, and beyond, to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. In identifying her imagination with habit, Eliot indicates how closely intertwined her organicist views were to her creative energies, and how both were informed by psychological principles.

“[P]sychological causes,” she told Hutton, “determined me in giving the details of English village life” in the novel.⁷ *The Mill*, with its intense, troubled sibling relationship, and Maggie’s wavering between religious asceticism and the aesthetic pleasures of music and literature is, indeed, the closest Eliot came in her fiction to exploring her own mental development. In this essay I look specifically to her 1860 novel to argue that Eliot’s goal in depicting the realistic “details” of her St. Ogg’s characters was not to naturalize English habits, but, precisely the opposite: to defamiliarize them for her readers. In doing so, *The Mill on the Floss* modeled a new understanding of subjectivity.

The new mental model Eliot’s fiction presented was materialist and scientific.⁸ Gillian Beer has argued that Eliot explored “the imaginative and emotional implications” of nineteenth-century scientific research. I develop Beer’s claim that Eliot’s effort “creates a reader alert equally to the scientific potential of everyday language and to the everyday potential of scientific terminology” (144). Everyday language and scientific terminology converge in an analogy that compares the mind to a channel. As critics such

as Sally Shuttleworth and Michael Davis, as well as Victorian reviewers such as Sidney Colvin and R. H. Hutton, have pointed out, the channel was an important materialist metaphor for the mind's association of ideas, a cognitive result of innate, physiological responses to the environment.⁹ The novel is full of channel metaphors, such as when the narrator likens Maggie's destiny to "the course of an unmapped river"(402), prompting Colvin to characterize Eliot's "habitual drift" as emphasizing that "the only true private happiness is to be found in the same channels along which flow the currents of universal good."¹⁰ In her novel Eliot carefully ties commonplace notions of habit as a moral reflex to the more contentious claims of materialist science about habit as existing largely beyond conscious control. Yet far from "valorizing" habit, as Stefanie Markovits claims Eliot does in her early work, her second novel, *The Mill*, represents habit as the primary and intricate mechanism that constitutes identity and occasions moral growth.¹¹ *The Mill on the Floss* asks its readers: How do we determine the moral culpability of unconscious and socially-reflexive behavior? Eliot represents her characters as developing from a primitive egoism to a mature altruism. But her fiction does more than this: it elaborates an understanding of imaginative experience—reading fiction, especially—as a way of developing new cognitive skills.

I begin by describing the nineteenth-century physiological ideas of habit. The sections that follow suggest how the Victorian physiology of habit is drawn into Eliot's realist representations of her characters' unconscious behavior and self-conscious analysis, and demonstrate what mid-century theories of habit have to do with reading. I will examine several important ideas about habit that Eliot explores in *The Mill*. First, because habit is a physicalized form of determinism in the individual's character, Eliot

represents habit's cumulative effects. It is this point, rather than habit's inheritability that I argue is her most significant materialist and ethical claim. Second, although habit exists primarily at an unconscious and reflexive level, when brought to one's attention, particularly through acute emotional experience, it becomes potentially transformative. Lastly, even the cumulative quality of habit and its meaning for moral development or moral failing is ultimately subject to even larger natural forces—such as floods and unhinged debris—outside of human will and intention.

1.

Acknowledging habit as a part of human nature was common sense to Victorians, apparent to anyone who noticed their own mental and behavioral patterns—or that of their neighbors, given that other people's habits are easier to identify than our own. Habit would also have been a familiar idea from Locke's philosophy of education, from the domestic manuals of Sarah Stickney Ellis or the self-help philosophy of Samuel Smiles.¹² "Principles," Smiles wrote, "are but the names which we assign to habits, [. . .] but the habits are the things themselves."¹³ While principles were viewed as abstractions, habits were commonly invoked as the "material" of morality—the thing itself. The reform-minded individuals who were so vital to the period attributed to habit the means for curing the ills of Victorian society, from intemperance and criminality to "social disquiet."¹⁴ New evolutionary hypotheses speculated that individuals might come into the world not as "blank slates" but with a sort of pre-consciousness, though the mechanisms which might enable it—instinct, environmental-conditioning, inheritance—were matters of intense debate.

Nevertheless, for mid-Victorian psychology the basis of habit remained Locke's frequency of association between states of consciousness. Association creates a stable "discharge" pathway for the force of sensation. In *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859-60), Lewes wrote that, "Habits," together with "Fixed Ideas and what are called Automatic Actions [...] all depend on the tendency which a sensation has to discharge itself through the readiest channel" (I, 57). Lewes and other psychologists employed the figure of the channel for habit because the metaphor suggested the way habits operate by utilizing previously-formed sensory paths; they become, therefore, as with water running downhill, the pathways of least resistance. It is no coincidence that channels, streams, and other water imagery permeates *The Mill*, as when Maggie's mother frets over her child's persistence in playing near the river (Bk. I, chap. ii), or when Tom and Maggie fish together on its banks in one of their rare scenes of felicity (Bk. I, chap. v), or when Maggie, in a jealous pique, shoves her perfectly neat cousin into the mud near the pond (Bk. I, chap. x), or finally, when Maggie allows herself to be rowed a damningly far distance by her cousin's suitor, Stephen Guest (Bk. VI, chap. xiii). I argue that Eliot used these image patterns to materialize, or make visible, habit's repetitive nature.

Channels of association were thought to be formed in the individual's brain by bodily, sensory and emotional experiences. As associations are repeated, the brain's channels deepen, creating patterns of reflex responses, or "automatic actions," that make up a person's habits, and which they perform unconsciously. Deepened channels induce a repetition of the same associations and actions as were previously thought or performed, so the deeper the channels, the more predictable the outcome. Hence the "force" of habit. Scientists and moralists alike warned about the difficulty one encountered in breaking

associative patterns. Habit's predictability thus was both celebrated as a support for moral behavior and despaired of, from the point of view of the will's controlling power, as a troubling withdrawal into the inaccessible regions of the unconscious mind.¹⁵

The Mill on the Floss is deeply committed to representing these channels of association, beginning with the narrator's dream of Dorlcote Mill at the opening, which recalls to her mind Maggie Tulliver's story, and extending to her accounts of the "particular ways of doing everything in that [Dodson] family" (43): their "particular" manner of bleaching linen, making cowslip wine, observing funeral etiquette, etc. Rather than describing these practices, the narrator repeats the word, "particular," playfully hinting at the sisters' fussiness. The emphasis on the undeviating performance of these ordinary tasks defines the sisters' continuity with family traditions as well as their sense of moral superiority over their neighbors. It is the novel's first indication of how significant domestic life is to the development of habit.

Even when Eliot's narrator explores events that break with the customs of the Dodson or Tulliver clans, she uses the channel metaphor to suggest a certain regular operation of the mind. So when, heedless of his in-law's warnings, the stubborn Mr. Tulliver loses the lawsuit, the narrator claims that "all the obstinacy and defiance of [his] nature, driven out of their own channel, found a vent for themselves in immediate formation of plans by which he would meet his difficulties, and remain Mr. Tulliver of Dorlcote Mill in spite of them" (195). Similarly, much later in the novel, after Maggie has apparently run off with her cousin's fiancé, the "surprise" occasioned in the reader by Mrs. Glegg's championing Maggie's innocence is accounted for by "her hereditary rectitude," which "found a common channel along with her fundamental idea of clanship,

as they did in her lifelong regard to equity in money matters” (499). Sometimes, old prejudices become novel in unexpected contexts. Eliot’s representation of the channels that form the particular characters of her characters reveals that, like her scientific contemporaries, she understood the brain as tending to develop fixed associations through experience but also being capable of forging new channels, either through substituting a new habit for an old one, or rerouting an old channel into a new “vent,” as in Mr. Tulliver’s case.

Physiological psychologists believed that mental relations become static or fixed because idea-channels permanently alter the brain’s physical structure. The repetitiousness of the great proportion of human experiences had the effect of reinforcing and deepening already existing channels, although new experiences always held the affective potential to create new ones. William Smith, evaluating some of these claims for the *Contemporary Review*, explained that changes in consciousness have a corresponding change in “some action” in the brain: “and it is moreover supposed that in many cases such action leaves behind it some slight alteration in the structure or composition of the brain itself, whereby it is rendered more fit for that very action. [. . .] Habit, which lies at the basis of all individual progress, has been explained as a growth of this description.”¹⁶ The language of “fitness” in Smith’s fascinating description of habit as the basis for all individual progress clearly echoed evolutionary discourse with its signaling the importance of adaptation. His emphasis on “alteration” offered an inspiring view of mental conditioning. Both physicalized and adaptable, the mind becomes “fitter” for reactions through experiences that develop more and more complex connections in the brain. Similarly, Eliot does not damn the Dodson sisters for their “hereditary

rectitude” but she finds their insistence that nothing in their habits requires improvement or adjustment blameable.

Spencer and Lewes’s Lamarckian ideas further amplified the importance of habit. Habit not only had the potential to make the individual more fit for the environment, but, in their view, the various types of fitness (or weakness) an individual acquired and deepened into habit, what Lewes referred to as “organisation”—a way of describing the physicalized effects of acquired habit—was inheritable.¹⁷ In dispute with Darwin’s non-teleological understanding of adaptation, the neo-Lamarckianism that Lewes, Spencer and others espoused provided a rationale for the ideology of progress.¹⁸ Because, as Spencer argued, hereditary transmission operated on both physiology and psychology, the formation and function of habit was paramount for progressive adaptation: the better that repetition’s effects on the mind were understood, the more control individuals could exercise over their habits, “modify[ying] and “bequeath[ing]” the “nervous tendencies produced by such new habits of life.”¹⁹ Though Eliot absorbs the materialist scientific ideas regarding the channeling of new experience and emotion, *The Mill* depicts the brake that habit often puts on change. Her novel is more concerned with the generational conflicts and self-divisions that the evolutionary “onward tendency” creates than with any certainty about progress.

2.

The notion of the hereditary inheritance of habits was to later be refuted, of course, by a fuller understanding of how genes disseminate biological traits. Although heredity and environment interact to manifest many traits, true alteration in gene and

chromosome structure is the product of mutation, and not produced by environmental conditions, as in the theory of acquired characteristics. But the brain and its cognitive operations remain, even today, topics of much dispute. Like Smith's view of the capacity of the brain for alteration, Lewes developed a concept he called "mental differentiation," which argued that the "exercise" of an organ such as the brain led to a "differentiation" of its structure: "each modification renders it fitted for more energetic reaction and for new modes of reaction," a process important for "the evolution of our moral no less than our intellectual aptitudes" (*Problems I*, 108-9). Victorian modification hypotheses implied a significant claim for novel reading: that imaginative experience contributes to the brain's development. According to the physiological psychologists, imagination creates complex connections in the brain as well as "energizes," or enhances, the "nervous" and "sympathetic" tendencies that form part of the body's response to the mind.

Lewes' notion of mental differentiation surprisingly anticipates many of our present-day understandings of neural pathways' operations. Jerrold Seigel, for instance, discusses the work of neurologist Gerald Edelman and the twenty-first-century neurological conception of the brain as both "a material object and a source of intentionality."²⁰ Noting that cultural material affects the brain's ongoing development, Seigel contends that synaptic connections in the brain are forged by actual experiences as well as by reflection: "As people acquire new cognitive tools from language and culture, the maturing brain makes them part of its physical structure, so that there takes place a 'continual revision and reorganization of perception and memory'" (20-1). Most importantly for a consideration of the effects of reading, this hypothesis suggests that imaginative experience contributes as significantly to an individual's mental development

as does real world experience. Reading about it is, physiologically, so to speak, to enact it.

The importance of the channel metaphor in Eliot's fiction is not that it naturalized bourgeois values or falsified the role of acculturation. Rather it engaged something far stranger and far more complex: the intertwining dialectics between the innate nature of the brain and the second nature of individual and cultural experience. While it remains a question today precisely where the innate and inherited part of identity ends and the acquired and reinforced part of character begins, to Victorians the moral consequences of everyday routine actions and feelings were undoubted. As *The Mill's* narrator reflects, "everyday things [are] sure to have a cumulative effect that will be felt in the long run" (77). Here, expressing Eliot's cautiousness, "cumulative" is not necessarily progressive but it is just as clearly not static. In effect, the longer an "everyday" behavior was practiced, the deeper it became established in the unconscious and reflexive part of a person, in the mind-body circuit of habit. This sense of depth relates to both the forgetfulness and the facility that are markers of habit. Habits don't just denote the general predictability of a particular individual's behavior, so that one can judge an act as "in character" or "out of character." The point is that there are certain to be moral consequences from the accumulation of everyday actions—even (or, perhaps, especially) those whose familiarity makes them unrecognizable to the agent enacting them.

One way Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* defamiliarizes habits is through her explicit analogies between animal and human behavior. These comparisons are so pervasive that they threaten to overrun *The Mill's* narrative. They have the effect of leveling human actions, as one review put it, to "the sterile flats of habit," that is, to the manner of

animals' instinctual and reflexive responses.²¹ In its repetitive analogies, *The Mill* itself risks becoming the monotony it seeks to depict. But Eliot's humorous depictions contain a subtle corrective, as when she describes Bessie Tulliver's unproductive management of her husband. She had "a facility of saying things which drove him in the opposite direction to the one she desired," the narrator points out; just "as a patriarchal gold-fish retains to the last its youthful illusion that it can swim in a straight line beyond the encircling glass," Mrs. Tulliver, "after running her head against the same resisting medium for fourteen years, would go at it again to-day with undulled alacrity" (75). Analogies such as this certainly were in dialogue with accounts of habit's operations by contemporary psychologists, such as the unconscious, routine nature of behavior. But I find a further point in the narrator's exposing Bessie Tulliver's unconscious repetition. Readers recognize her behavior as obviously foolish because she expects that expressing her opinion to her husband will effect a different outcome than the one that fourteen years of experience should have given her, and through the homeliness of the analogy, potentially are led to reflect on their own embedded, but ultimately futile, habits of mind. Later in the narrative, we watch with dread as Bessie foils Lucy's plot to persuade her father's business associates at Guest and Co. to purchase Dorlcote Mill. Bessie's imprudent maneuver ultimately installs her husband's enemy, Mr. Wakem, as his new superior. Eliot represents habit as what we might call "cumulative character," and, when her depiction of habit is plotted, it reveals habit's material effects. Just as the miller's foolhardy lawsuit is shown to be a cumulative effect of his obstinate and suspicious character, Mrs. Tulliver's consistent views in opposition to her husband finally lead her

to an action which does great harm to his social position, mental state and physical health.

As the novel delves into the after-shocks of the family's crisis, habit becomes more and more self-consciously represented. In Book VI, chapter II, after Maggie has gone to work as a schoolmistress and found it dull and drudging, she pays a holiday visit to her cousin. In a conversation about habit with Lucy, Maggie compares herself to a bear in a circus show. This analogy operates at an entirely different level than the narrator's animal-human analogies because it is not the narrator but Maggie who describes herself this way. At first Maggie resists the pleasures of Lucy's genteel life, worrying that the leisure will unfit her for the routines to which she must eventually return. "Yes," said Maggie, "It is with me as I used to think it would be with the poor uneasy white bear I saw at the show. I thought he must have got so stupid with the habit of turning backwards and forwards in that narrow space, that he would keep doing it if they set him free. One gets in a bad habit of being unhappy" (373). Lucy responds that she will put Maggie "under such a discipline of pleasure that it will make you lose that bad habit" (373). Our heroine's sensual predisposition easily accommodates Lucy's ministrations.

Maggie's striking analogy between herself and the caged circus bear suggests that her work has left her feeling stifled and depressed. Significantly the comparison insists that regimes affect emotions and even intellectual life. Maggie fears the possibility that her boredom with the routines of her "dreary situation" (365) may blunt her capacity for pleasure, making her too "stupid" to enjoy the music and polite conversation of Lucy's home. Maggie's cousin alternatively suggests that a counter-regimen can effectively retrain her for enjoyment. A third alternative was presented earlier in the narrative, when

Philip Wakem chided Maggie during one of their meetings in the Red Deeps for believing that asceticism could solace her needs for affection and intellectual stimulation. Convinced she cannot train herself into a “narrow asceticism,” Philip called her resignation “a long suicide” (329). Maggie knows his argument is not disinterested yet the girl hears some truth in his reproaches. Philip tells her, “no one has strength given to do what is unnatural. [...] You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite” (329). Each of the three characters describes a different implication of the physio-psychology of habit: Maggie comes in for the force of environmental circumstances in determining habit; Lucy for the flexible effects of “mental differentiation”; and Philip for the individual’s innate dispositions, which are impossible to contradict. Does the fact that Philip predicts correctly suggest that Eliot’s own view corresponds most closely with his?

Eliot’s familiarity with the tenets of physiological psychology surely suggests that she understood the mind’s “nature,” that is, the mind’s innate physiological make-up, to have the capacity for being blunted by repetition *or* of being retrained. This ambiguity, as Michael Davis recently has argued, raises the question of “the degree to which moral qualities [. . .] are able to be taught or, just as importantly, distorted or weakened by experience.”²² Eliot’s view, similar to that of Spinoza, whom she translated, was that experience—especially if it affected the emotions—could alter individuals’ habits, but cumulative character was by no means ensured to be morally progressive.²³ For Eliot moral progress required the ability to recognize one’s own habitual behaviors and beliefs. It demanded more than the mere will to be good: it called for an understanding of the

dynamic between habit and the environment. Eliot felt that only knowledge regarding the effects of interpersonal relationships and material life, and the cumulative quality of character, could lead to more self-reflective ethical practices.

3.

Eliot's fictional representations suggest that it is in the interactions between individuals and cultural forms—the prejudices and values of one's family and society, religious beliefs, aesthetic experience, etc.—that subjectivity is produced. When these bio-cultural forms are revealed as having cumulative consequences, that is, *a plot*, they become part of that mode of reflexive self-knowledge so crucial to modern subjectivity which Giddens observes. Just as Maggie's analogy between herself and the circus bear operates at a higher level of self-consciousness than the narrator's analogy between Mrs. Tulliver and the venerable fish, so too do the descriptions of reading in the novel.²⁴ In the fourth book of *The Mill*, after the Tullivers' downwardly mobile turn, we find Maggie struggling with her lot, yearning and hopeless, feeling that she was alone in having “a soul untrained for inevitable struggles,” and an insufficient education, the “shreds and patches of a feeble literature and false history” (288). Then the narrator explicitly calls attention to what Maggie doesn't know: “of the irreversible laws within and without her, which, governing the habits, becomes morality” (288). While much of Maggie's immaturity is a function of her inexperience, the narrator here explicitly links the psychological and the physical—“within and without her.” The “irreversible laws” that govern habit are irreversible because they are cumulative, always moving toward a deepening of the channels of association by experience.

Before the crisis of her renunciation of Stephen, when her family is forced to adjust to their reduced circumstances, Maggie craves literature to compensate for the depressed atmosphere of her home. The books that remain to her after the sale of the family's possessions, the didactic romance *Télémaque* seemed “mere bran” to her, as were the questions on Christian Doctrine (286). She yearns for Scott and Byron, but receives instead the fourteenth-century Christian mystic Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*.²⁵ Upon reading it Maggie feels “a strange thrill of awe” as if “wakened [...] by a strain of solemn music” (289). She reads, “hardly conscious that she was reading—seeming rather to listen” (290). Although the narrator defends religious “enthusiasm” of the sort that the *Imitation* inspires, shielding it from the condescension of “good society,” it is also clear that she judges Maggie's belief that submission was the key to happiness to be mistaken. Eliot employs the iterative mode, which relies on habit's predictability, to report the effects of Maggie's new habit: the girl read so “constantly in her three books, the Bible, Thomas a Kempis, and the ‘Christian Year’ [...], that they filled her mind with a continual stream of rhythmic memories; and she was too ardently learning to see all nature and life in the light of her new faith, to need any other material for her mind to work on” (293). The *Imitation* precipitates her experiment with asceticism, that refusal of the world which maddened Philip into charging her with attempting suicide.

As in her argument with Lucy, Maggie initially refuses to accept Philip's offer to lend her Walter Scott's fiction because it disquiets her, and creates desires in her that she believes her life's circumstances can no longer fulfill. She tells him, “It would make me in love with this world again, as I used to be—it would make me long to see and know many things—it would make me long for a full life” (306). Philip, of course, disagrees;

we get a passionate version of Eliot's view that literature potentially improves morals in his argument that Maggie's denial of "rational satisfaction[s]" will return to "assault [her] like a savage appetite" (329). Whether an old habit of curiosity, or an innate habit of imagination, her longing to experience the richness of life proves stronger than her newly acquired ascetic regime. Philip manages to convince her to meet him in the Red Deeps, the forest outside of Dorlcote Mill—despite her reservations about their clandestine activity—where he sketches her portrait and they discuss fictions by Scott and Madame de Staël.

During one meeting, Maggie playfully refuses to finish reading *Corinne*, de Staël's most celebrated novel, because she objects to its forming a prejudice in her. She begins to recognize a convention in novels, in which the dark heroine is destined to tragedy. As she recounts to Philip:

I foresaw that light-complexioned girl would win away all the love from Corinne and make her miserable. I'm determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness, I should begin to have a prejudice against them. If you could give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance. I want to avenge Flora MacIvor and Minna and all the rest of the dark unhappy ones. Since you are my tutor, you ought to preserve my mind from prejudices—you are always arguing against prejudices" (332).

It is not her own darkness (a simple physical correspondence) but rather evidence of her sympathetic disposition that makes Maggie want to avenge Flora and Minna. "It's because I always care the most about the unhappy people: If the blond girl were forsaken, I should like *her* best," Maggie insists (333). Her prescient conditional statement portends the difficult choice Maggie later will have to make when she refuses Stephen and learns to care more about the unhappiness she has caused others than about her own pain.

These intertextually-suggestive scenes of reading draw upon the physiology of habit in their depiction of the effects of imaginative experience on the character who reads. Eliot's Victorian audience would likely have understood the joke about the novels of Scott prejudicing her against blondes in the context of a critique of well-established romance conventions as well as an amusing reference to the debates in the period about reading habits and the physiological effects of reading, that sensationalized material desensitized the nerves of readers, for example.²⁶ But at another level, these scenes ask the reader to consider the operations of generic expectation during the reading process. What sorts of patterns do we anticipate, and how do we feel when these patterns are either fulfilled or thwarted?²⁷ More and more self-reflexively, *The Mill* alerts its readers to the ways that repetitious patterns inscribe expectations, which in turn, deepen the channels of association and reinforce habits of mind. In revealing that "The mind of St. Ogg's did not look extensively before or after. It inherited a long past without thinking of it, and had no eyes for the spirits that walked the streets" (118), the narrator criticizes the town's provincial habits of mind. But this critique could also provoke readers to question the degree to which their own assumptions are inherited "without thinking," as well as to reflect on the alternatives to which they are blind.

Moreover, the narrative invokes the novelistic convention of the dark girl's tragedy without merely reinscribing it. In raising literary conventions to a level of self-consciousness, Eliot's fiction moves beyond "a kind of enthusiastic homage to physiological law," that is, indoctrinating readers with the tenets of physiological psychology.²⁸ The implication for literature of Lewes's mental differentiation, which utilized "exercise" to amplify and develop new aptitudes through the physiological

“differentiation” of channels in the brain, becomes clearer. In the *Origin of Species* Darwin argued that variation served an enormously important role in the success of species because the environment does not remain static: its conditions change constantly, though usually gradually. Eliot’s sense that the human environment—culture—also constantly evolved in an analogous (if not exactly parallel) manner meant that, as a type of variation within individual minds, “mental differentiation” was the key to successfully adapting to social change and developing ethically. Without differentiation, the sensory paths are deepened and entrenched by associative repetition but not altered significantly, and therefore provide no adaptive benefits for rechanneling habit to fit a changing world. Or, in a more utopian vein, differentiated habits lead to fashioning a more just and compassionate society.

Eliot’s fiction makes her readers aware of this whole process as she encourages her readers to sympathize with Maggie’s inexperience, her lack of wise counsel, her unconscious sexual desire, and her explicit repudiation of Stephen’s offer to marry her because she cannot find happiness where she has caused others pain. Reading about Maggie’s mental development, following the steps of her cumulated character to the narrative climax of this crucial act of self-denial, should make us feel with her, so that judging her—and other young natures like her—becomes more complicated than applying maxims or allowing the “world’s wife” (490) to her spread her censorious view.²⁹ Eliot’s realist representation of habit becomes a special instance of narrative in that it has the potential to transform a reflexive way of registering experience into a reflective one. It opens up the tensions between human nature as social being and human nature as biological needs and drives, in order that readers might make finer distinctions

than they would have done otherwise in their moral judgments about the power of the unconscious mind and about socially-reflexive beliefs.

4.

The conclusion to *The Mill on the Floss* has troubled readers and critics since it was first published. Even with all the narrative's watery insistence, Maggie's death arrives like a *deus ex machina*, a shocking deviation, an inconsistency.³⁰ R. H. Hutton viewed *The Mill's* "homage to physiological law" as "a very dark blot on a fine picture." And he concluded his 1860 assessment of the novel for *The National Review* by protesting against "the virtual assumption that the most deeply-rooted habits of thought and feeling in the finest natures are far too weak to paralyse the force of this assumed physiological omnipotence."³¹ Such a judgment reveals that even though habits of thought and feeling were understood as "deeply-rooted"—presumably in the soul (or wherever one's moral center was thought to reside)—they were not necessarily understood to be physiological. It's difficult now, within our post-Darwinian, post-Freudian worldviews, to comprehend the dismay with which Victorians greeted the philosophy that described both the unconscious and the body-mind as one unified circuit.

Similar to Hutton's critique was Dinah Mullock Craik's 1861 anonymous review, one of the few to which we have evidence of Eliot's reaction.³² Craik (whose religious views predictably prejudiced her against an ending that didn't "teach readers faith in God") objected that the ending of the novel left readers "undecided whether this death was a translation [i.e., in the Christian sense] or an escape." She wanted to be satisfied as to the "radical change" in Maggie and Tom, "else," she warned, "we fall back upon the

same dreary creed of overpowering circumstances” (446). Hutton’s and Craik’s reactions indicate a sense of the frustration that *The Mill* presented to many Victorian readers’ understanding of moral responsibility and of character as innate disposition. Hutton was bothered by the insistent linking of physiology to morality, and the transferring of habit from being a quality of the innate soul to being a function of acquired experience. Perhaps above all, these reviews suggest how *The Mill* frustrated their sense of novelistic conventions. Craik was disturbed by the narrative’s lack of agency: the “undecidable death,” “the dreary creed.” Maggie was supposed to be uncontrovertibly converted, in the conventions of conversion narratives; or she was supposed to be married to live happily and so on in the conventions of romance. The ending of the novel might be understood as confirming Maggie’s guilt by killing her off. But its ambivalence toward such an interpretation is explicit. Rather, the ending invokes as it simultaneously repudiates the familiar didactic pattern of fallen woman “equals” death by insisting that Maggie is innocent of that which the St. Ogg’s townsfolk take her to be guilty.

However, in confounding the conventional expectations of narrative closure, I argue that Eliot used her fiction to create a productive ambiguity. The overwhelming majority of experiences can be comprehended through one’s pre-existing associations, and therefore fall under predictability of habit. Yet this causes anything non-habitual to be experienced as disruptive. The ambiguousness of the protagonists’ drownings forces readers to interpret the significance (or the limited significance) of the deaths of Maggie and Tom. Countering the effects of habit, the ending emotionally “shocks” readers—to borrow Henry James’s reaction—from their conventional expectations; Eliot encourages the formation of a new channel, “exercising” her readers’ own processes of mental

differentiation. It is only when we are presented with obstacles to habitual associations—a sort of inundation of meaning, as it were—that habit becomes available to analysis, allowing us to revise our patterns of thought and moral assumptions. Having evoked its own textual pattern of repetition, even our expectation of the dark heroine's tragedy, the novel's conclusion finally is not indecipherable but provocatively undecidable.

Eliot was committed to representing the complex physio-psychological nature of the mind. Her aesthetic carefully plotted the consequences of characters' habits in order to encourage readers to recognize how their own pervasive habits operate.³³ But fiction's meaning only exists in the textual act of interpretation, in the overlaying of new meaning in the forms through which we have inherited it. As the text insists on the realist details of the provincial, early-nineteenth-century English world, it maintains that its characters are constituted by the same contradictions and conflicts as the culture itself. Subject-formation in *The Mill* demands to be understood as a complicated process. It is both ongoing and inherited (in the sense that we inherit institutions), part-individual and part-collective, both conscious and unconscious. The conclusion of the novel thus becomes a formal forging of new channels of ideas about the taken-for-grantedness of culture, about the mind's processes of repetition, about the cumulative moral effects of habit, and about the kinds of self-reflective consciousness required to manifest our best selves. Eliot's novel ultimately insists on the textual process of subject-formation, and asks her readers to transform their ideas of human nature, gradually, over the course of its seven books.

As a secular rewriting of the Biblical flood, the text suggests that rather than an event signifying God's hand in the ordering (or punishment) of the world, there is no external meaning in nature. Maggie is not destined to suffer and die. She and Tom die

because of a contingent event: a piece of machinery destroys the boat they were trying to navigate in perilous flood waters. In that accidental sense, the deaths suggest a moment in a process, a physical culmination but not a moral one. The deaths are never finally able to rest in one meaning—punishment, or release, for instance. The kind of evolutionary and physiological view of habit that Eliot explored in her St. Ogg's characters is not the final word, I argue. The contingency of *The Mill's* dénouement has the effect of countering the physiologists' emphasis upon habit's "inheritability" by introducing chance and cutting short her protagonist's moral development. But perhaps our discomfort with this contingency comes as a result of our trained attention to the evolution of the novel's form. If we are suspicious of Destiny, it is due, at least in part, to Eliot's training us in the reading of novels.

¹ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1991).

² The noted Poor Law reformer, Edwin Chadwick wrote in his *Poor Law* article, "Character [is] made up of habits, and habits [are] made up of series of simple acts." *An Article on the Principles and Progress of the Poor Law Amendment Act: and also on the Nature of the Central Control and Improved Local Administration Introduced by that Statute*, (London, 1837), pp. 21.

³ See George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, 2 vols. (1859-60; New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1867), especially p. 57; and his *Problems of Life and Mind* (Boston: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1880), especially pp. 103-9.

⁴ Sarah Stickney Ellis, *Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1839), p. vi.

⁵ Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984).

⁶ Gordon S. Haight, "To Richard Holt Hutton," London (8 August 1863), *The George Eliot Letters*, Vol. IV (New Haven, CN.: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), pp. 96-7.

⁷ Two venerable examples of the determinism debate in Eliot criticism are Elizabeth Ermarth's "Incarnations: George Eliot's Conception of 'Undeviating Law'" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 29 (December 1974): 273-86, and George Levine's "Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot" *PMLA* 77 (June 1962): 268-79. I only discuss determinism to the extent that it intersects the concept of habit and its implications for fiction.

⁸ The scientific background to *The Mill on the Floss* is particularly well established. Eliot was familiar with Spencer's *Principles of Psychology* (1855); Lewes was composing his *Physiology of Common Life* (1859) around the same period as she was writing her novel, and, while she was writing *The Mill on the Floss*'s final book, in November of 1859, both she and Lewes read and discussed Charles Darwin's revolutionary *The Origin of Species* (1859).

⁹ Michael Davis, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006). In addition to Shuttleworth (*op cit*), see Gillian Beer's influential study, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2nd ed. 2000); Nancy Paxton, *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism and the Reconstruction of Gender* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991); George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988). Two important nineteenth-century reviews are Sidney Colvin, "Daniel Deronda," review of *Daniel Deronda*, *The Fortnightly Review* 20 (1 November 1876): 601-616; and R. H. Hutton [anonymous], "The Novels of George Eliot," *The National Review* [Article X] (July 1860): 191-219.

¹⁰ *The Fortnightly Review*, 602.

¹¹ Stefanie Markovits, "Eliot's Problem with Action," *SEL* 41, 4 (Autumn 2001): 785-803, 790. In my understanding of the period's use of the concept, habit doesn't so much substitute for action as substitute for deliberation about action. This is a technical but nevertheless important distinction because it raises the question of different levels of consciousness within action, which Markovits's description elides.

¹² John Locke *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1692), ed. R.H. Quick, (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1934), §42;lvii. The nineteenth-century discourse is largely influenced by the association psychology of Locke and Hume, where the tendency to think of habits as operating outside the processes of Reason, and yet a staunch support of moral development can be seen (§110; 91). Richard A. Barney's *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999) claims that Locke's *Some Thoughts* became "a cultural touchstone" (24). Ellis's bestseller, *Women of England* (*op cit*), explicitly tied the nation's progress to the individual middle-class woman's creation of a domestic ideal. Bourgeois manuals provide an index of why the domestic became a national ideology: it is in the home where habits initially are acquired.

¹³ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (1859; London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1996), pp. 238-39.

¹⁴ For example, Edwin Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population, and on the Means of Its Improvement* (1842) concluded that "The depression of the tenement is practically a depression of the habits and condition of the inhabitants" (231). James Kay-Shuttleworth's *Recent*

Measures for the Promotion of Education in England (London: Ridgway, 1839) argued that ignoring the intellectual and moral culture of the working class was tantamount to securing “social disquiet little short of revolution.” (18).

¹⁵For example, George Henry Lewes’s *Physiology* comments on the force of repetition (192) while J.S. Mill’s tract, *Utilitarianism* (1861) celebrated habit, not will, as a “support” of virtuous behavior. See John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, *Utilitarianism and Other Essays* (New York, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 313.

¹⁶William Smith, “Knowing and Feeling,” *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 16 (1870-71): 390-407, 403.

¹⁷Lewes claims that a habit, “organised in the individual [. . .] will stand the same chance of being inherited, as the bulk of bone and muscle” (*Physiology*, 320). According to Laura Otis, German *Naturphilosophie* used the term “organization” to imply incorporation into a unified system of interdependent parts, not only in a physiological sense but also in an epistemological one. See *Organic Memory: History and the Body in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Lincoln, NE and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 13.

On Lamarckian evolutionary ideas in Victorian science see, Robert M. Young, “The Historiographic and Ideological Contexts of Nineteenth-Century Debate on Man’s Place in Nature,” in *Changing Perspectives in the History of Science: Essays in Honor of Joseph Needham*, ed. M. Teich, and R. M. Young (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. 344-438. For a full analysis of traditional and emerging theories of mind in the period see Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000). For an account of Lamarckian ideas in Darwin’s ideas of instinct, see Robert J. Richards, “Darwin and the Biologizing of Moral Behavior,” in *The Problematic Science: Psychology in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, ed. Mitchell G. Ash and William R. Woodward (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp. 43-64.

¹⁸Darwin, Spencer and Lewes attempted to reconcile the “law” of habit with their understanding of the mechanism of hereditary inheritance. Darwin noticed how random mutation was often key to adaptive struggle; but in Spencer’s and many of his adherents’ writing, a neo-Lamarckian argument emerges whereby individuals inherit the characteristics their parents acquired, and so on back through the generations. This principle of heredity also works in a forward trajectory. National progress and the evolution of morality thus depended upon the virtuous and vigorous habits of individuals. See Spencer’s *Principles of Psychology*, IV, iii, sec 180. See also Robert J. Richards, “Darwin and the Biologizing of Moral Behavior” (*op cit*).

¹⁹*Principles of Psychology*, Part IV; Chapter III, § 180; Lewes’ *Problems of Life and Mind*, pp. 108-09.

²⁰See Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), pp. 20-1; Gerald M. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 92-96. Contemporary neurology still uses the term “channel” to describe neural connections. For a readable, non-specialist introduction to the subject see Adam Zeman, *Consciousness: A User’s Guide* (New Haven, CN and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2002). The work of Oliver Sacks and Antonio Damasio also importantly refutes models of mind that insist on its purely genetic inheritances.

²¹“The Novels of George Eliot” [R.H. Hutton], review of *Scenes, Adam Bede and The Mill*, *The National Review* (July 1860): 218-19. Hutton’s anonymous review unfavorably compared *The Mill* to *Adam Bede*: “the rich and various forms of life which are so powerfully delineated in *Adam Bede* are exchanged for the sterile flats of habit, on which the social as well as individual life of this tale are built” (216).

²²Michael Davis contends of *Daniel Deronda* that Eliot’s representation of the role of heredity has more in common with Darwin than with Spencer’s Lamarckian model because of her insistence that lived experience “develops and shapes inherited characteristics in unpredictable ways” (*George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology*, 57-8, 65).

²³George Eliot translated Spinoza’s *Ethics* in 1854-55. He argued that consciousness about an emotion could relieve us from its powerful effects. (Spinoza, *Ethics* Pt. 5, “On the Power of the Human Intellect, or, On Human Liberty,” Preface.) See George Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 79-80.

²⁴ Although there isn't space to consider them here, these two "reading" scenes make for valuable comparison of, and prepare the reader for the striking difference between, the two letters Maggie receives from Stephen and from Philip toward the end of the novel.

²⁵ This type of ascetic practice regarding self-observation and self-training suggests a long history of the discourse of habit; taking modernity only into account, the secular version found in self-help ideology, for example, and which focuses on worldly rewards rather than those of the afterworld, clearly contains a carryover from Protestant practices of self-reflection. It is a well known bit of Eliot biography that she rejected asceticism after having experimented with it as a young woman. See Gordon S. Haight's account in *George Eliot: A Biography* (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), especially chaps. 1 and 2. Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (London: S. Ballard, 1722.) An example of À Kempis's maxims regarding habit is found in Bk III, pt. V, 218.

²⁶ For various accounts of the critical disapprobation of sensational reading see Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader* (1957; Columbus OH: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1998); Kelly J. Mays, "Reading and Victorian Periodicals" in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. John O. Jordan and Richard L. Patten (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 165-94; David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture, England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989); Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1998); and Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993).

²⁷ New interdisciplinary approaches to the history of reading practices have recently emerged. For example, see the "Introduction" to *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), and, in particular, Adrian Johns's contribution to the collection, "The Physiology of Reading in Restoration England" pp. 138-61. Cognitive approaches to literature suggest another new avenue—immensely complicated—for interdisciplinary research. To take just two examples: Richard J. Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), and *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity*, ed. Alan Richardson and Ellen Spolsky (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

²⁸ "The Novels of George Eliot," [R. H. Hutton], 218.

²⁹ I do not wish to be mistaken for assuming that Eliot's women readers *identified* with Maggie, but rather that Eliot was engaging her readers in the process of developing sympathy.

³⁰ A few of the most memorable critical opinions: Henry James claimed the ending came as a "shock," (*Atlantic Monthly* Oct. 1866); F. R. Leavis called it the "dreamed-of perfect accident that gives us the opportunity for the dreamed-of heroic act," reprinted in *George Eliot and her Readers*, ed. John Holmstrom and Laurence Lerner (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966.); Barbara Hardy found it "bad faith [...] with the authenticity of everything that comes before," in "The Mill on the Floss," *Critical Essays on George Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 50. See also the sensitive reading by Renata R. Mautner Wasserman, "Narrative Logic and the Form of Tradition in *The Mill on the Floss*," *Studies in the Novel* 14, 3 (Fall 1982): 266-279.

³¹ In Hutton's view, in "The Novels of George Eliot," the last book of the novel produced a "painful impression" because Eliot "enthrones physiological law so far above both affections and conscience in point of *strength*, that she represents Maggie as drifting helplessly into a vortex of passion, and rescued at last only by the last spasmodic effort of a nearly overpowered will" (217).

³² Dinah Mullock Craik, "To Novelists—And a Novelist," review of *The Mill on the Floss*, *Macmillan's Magazine* 3 (April 1861): 441-448. Few of Eliot's reactions to her critics are left to posterity because Lewes buffered Eliot from reviews of her work for much of her career. But *The Mill* was written before Lewes's careful censorship was in place. Eliot did read Craik's anonymous *Macmillan's* review, and praised the reviewer for recognizing the high mission of literature. But, she added: "I cannot, of course, agree with the writer in all his regrets: if I could have done so, I should not have written the book I did write, but quite another" (394). "To John Blackwood," 30 March 1861, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, (New Haven CN: Yale Univ. Press, 1954).

³³ Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader* (*op cit*) includes a wonderful anecdote from Cambridge student Jane Harrison's *Reminiscences of a Student's Life* (1925), in which she claims, "Until I met Aunt Glegg in *The Mill on the Floss*, I never knew myself. I am Aunt Glegg; with all reverence I say it" (original italics, 229).

Chapter 4

Habit and Intention in Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*

[*The Woodlanders*] would have made a beautiful story if I could have carried out my idea of it: but somehow I come so far short of my intention that I fear it will be quite otherwise—unless I pick up toward the end.
 -- Hardy, "To George Gissing," 1886¹

Representations of habit within realist fiction, and the formal strategies employed in such representations, have not only ideological but also ethical implications. *The Mill on the Floss*, a novel predicated on developmental structure, allowed George Eliot to investigate the determined nature of human character. For Eliot, personality is formed by all the circumstances of cultural and biological inheritance: history, material environment, individual disposition, family traits. *The Mill* draws on the metaphor of the channel to reveal characters' habits as having morally cumulative qualities which are not always obvious from habit's generally repetitive, and therefore seemingly static, nature. Eliot portrays the ways in which unconscious life – physiological needs, unacknowledged desires, drives and motives – surface in and are demonstrated by characters' reflexive behaviors and beliefs. But Eliot also believed that willed effort and reflective practices allowed one to change one's innate, or physiologically determined, character through the formation of new channels in the mind. This optimism would seem to be belied by the ending of *The Mill*, which, I argue, finally subjects the will's power to redirect habit to the formidable and unpredictable forces of chance and circumstance. Yet the ending embodies Eliot's faith in the potential of sympathetic feeling to elicit consciously reflective states in her readers. The tragedy and its unresolved meaning are meant to spark the reader's emotional reaction and self-reflection. Over and above the emphatic denouement of Maggie and her brother Tom's deaths, Eliot devotes the bulk of the

narrative to the careful exploration of “mental difference,” the understanding of which was central to her effort to create readers able to diffuse sympathetic feeling.

In his fiction Thomas Hardy observes mental differences of various kinds, but he repeatedly returns to a distinction that would have been familiar to Victorians’ experience of social change, especially of social and geographical mobility: the marked distinctions between “natives” and those who have left and “returned.”² In turning to Hardy’s fiction, I find that his novels’ most persuasive argument for the determining influence of environment emerges from those characters, like Clym Yeobright and Grace Melbury, who leave home, experience a wider life in city or town and have access to education or to association with a higher class, and yet whose homecoming precariously poises them to “sink” back into their former modes of being. Mrs. Melbury optimistically predicts of her returned stepdaughter Grace, “She’ll soon shake down here in Hintock and be content with Giles’s way of living” (80). But her husband is dismayed by the same likelihood: “I *know* Grace will gradually sink down to our level again, and catch our manners and way of speaking, and feel a drowsy content in being Giles’s wife.” He is distressed that Grace’s expensively acquired, finishing school traits – her “white” hands, the “up-country curl” in her speech, her “bounding” step – will all regress into the “regular Hintock shail-and-wamble” (80). In part, Melbury is ambitious for Grace to succeed, which, in his snobbish terms, means to marry a professional man of better station than his own. But he also clearly fears that her education can somehow come *undone* once she is under the influence of her old environment.

Hardy’s fiction continues earlier realist writers’ aesthetic endeavor to comprehend the nature of habit in terms of environment. *The Woodlanders* is concerned with the

subtle shifts in manner and consciousness brought about by education and by contact between different spheres of society. The concept of habit provides Hardy with an angle from which to investigate both elemental human nature and bourgeois respectability. Hardy's mobile characters, as John Bayley observes, "like Hardy himself, are conscious of living in two worlds."³ Bayley claims that Hardy's depiction of their dual consciousness tends to raise the question of fitness: "by being so emotionally and intimately aware of both [worlds], they are unfitted for either" (196). This chapter explores in detail the *kinds* of awareness Hardy depicts in his characters. What does the novel claim about the relationship between habit, consciousness and fitness? What does "fitness" mean exactly? Is it moral, mental-physiological, emotional, evolutionary? I contend that the dual-world experience alters more than just the mobile characters in the novel. But is any ethical perspective gained by this duality? These are the questions this chapter will address, in addition to situating Hardy's work within the broader realist project that intended to raise readers' consciousness about the nature of habit, that is, to explore further its basis in repetition and its consequences for morality. Notably, however, Hardy's view of habit as predominantly unconscious and nature as amoral shifts the grounds of that enterprise.

Critics such as Peter Casagrande, Roger Ebbatson, George Levine, Gillian Beer, and Angelique Richardson have all examined the ways evolutionary thought, Darwin's particularly, influenced Hardy's fiction.⁴ As Gillian Beer argues in *Darwin's Plots*, novelists of the Victorian period had to contend with new theories in which man's experience existed within a cosmic order that "take[s] no account of his presence." She maintains that, in a writer like George Eliot, "The *methods* of scientists become the

methods of employment and scientific theories suggest new organisations for fiction” (150). This statement applies to Hardy’s fiction as well. I propose to follow out how new evolutionary ideas about the nature of human consciousness provided him with stimulating aesthetic material. The idea that habits could pre-exist individuals and that the human species’ improvement (or decline) depended upon habits acquired and passed down through the generations had revolutionary implications for the Victorians’ conceptions of behavior and morality. Scientists and moralists debated forcefully the degree to which behavior was automatic, driven by social and biological inheritance and by environmental factors for the mere reproductive benefit of the species rather than for the individual’s happiness. Hardy takes up these ideas in his fictions – and not merely as narrative content.

Habit becomes more than a topic for Hardy’s study of human nature and the impact upon it of social mores. My interest lies in the ways Hardy formally figures habit through the motif of the return. The absence in Hardy’s fiction of an ironic narrator’s commentary on the characters’ activities is quite a startling change in narrative method. Levine describes the narrator’s omniscience in Hardy’s fiction as “restrained.” “Without entering the minds of his characters he implies a wise familiarity with their ways of thought and feeling” (*Realistic Imagination* 245). The literary tradition of a privileged, omniscient point of view seems to me to be displaced by the characters’ own dramas of misperception and anxious self-awareness. In his essay “The Science of Fiction” (1891), Hardy claimed that art was a disproportioning of reality, “with an eye to being more truthful than the truth.”⁵ His art disproportioned by creating an unlikelike architectural symmetry that emphasizes repetition, what Marcel Proust has called Hardy’s “stone-

mason's geometry.”⁶ Hardy created characters who are distinguished for their paralyzing passivity. I argue that, in addition, the plots of repetition, at least implicitly, reject the Victorian veneration of the mastering of habit to achieve self-transformation.

This chapter thus locates Hardy's representations of subjectivity within debates about mechanization, morality and the unconscious that were rife during his career. Before degeneration theory exploded on the scene at the end of the nineteenth century, there was a predominant optimism about the progress of morality. For example, Charles Darwin speculated in *The Descent of Man* (1871) that an evolution in human morals was in the process of a steady advance: “as from habit, following on beneficial experience, instruction and example, his [man's] sympathies became more tender and widely diffused,” he wrote (129). A similar view was held by psychological theorists, such as Herbert Spencer and William Carpenter, who believed that self-reflectiveness formed into habit would lead to ethical progress through hereditary transmission. According to Carpenter, “there is a strong Physiological probability that the effect of such habitual self-discipline does not end with the individual, but is exerted upon the Race; the Emotional tendencies having so much of the character of Instincts, that the Hereditary transmission of the form they have acquired may be expected in the one case as in the other” (336). But while Hardy personally held similar hopes, what his fiction demonstrates is the way in which “present culture” has managed to “bind[] the passions [...] with a silken thread only”: “In the lapse of countless ages, no doubt, improved systems of moral education will considerably and appreciably elevate even the involuntary instincts of human nature; but at present culture has only affected the surface of those lives with which it has come in contact, binding down the passions of those predisposed to turmoil as by a silken

thread only, which the first ebullition suffices to break.”⁷ His fictions dramatize self-consciousness interfering with the actualization of intentions or desires. In this view, the habits of self-consciousness, as with those of compromise and self-discipline, might not promote more ethical or rational choices, but instead may be maladaptive.

My chapter illustrates this problem of subjectivity through a discussion of *The Woodlanders* (1887). After a brief synopsis of a debate about habit and the will between two prominent Victorian psychologists, whose terms help illuminate the representation of subjectivity in Hardy’s work, I turn to the novel’s representations of habit and intention. *The Woodlanders* insists upon the power of the unconscious, chiefly motivated by desires and fears, to prompt much human behavior in spite of reflective activity. In depicting the inability of awareness and reflection to determine behavior, Hardy’s narrative inverts the lessons of prior literary realists’ texts about the potential for habit to ameliorate social ills. He solidifies this critique by “disproportioning” coincidence, that is, weighting coincidence, in order to favor repetition. The idea of habit-as-return is transformed into an aesthetic; it underpins plot coincidence. *The Woodlanders*, finally, refutes the argument for evolutionary progress in the moral sphere by being a novel without a moral. Instead, *The Woodlanders* reveals fitness to involve moral flexibility and therefore inherently is compromised. The concept of habit, with its emphasis on repetition and its alliance to the rhythms of organic nature, gave Hardy both a subject and a vehicle for his third novel of return.

1.

Theories of habit were intrinsic to the Victorians’ debates about volition because people supposed that the repetition of habit determined behavior – especially unconscious

behavior – through physiological channels. Lorraine J. Daston argues that volition, as well as processes of attention, were central to the conflicts between “old” and “new” sciences of the mind. Whereas the “old” science of mind relied on “the subjective testimony of introspection” and tended toward metaphysical or spiritual explanations for mental phenomena, the “new” science of mind, physiological psychology, depended on “the allegedly objective methods of physiological observation.”⁸ Daston finds a coalition of markedly different brands of “‘scientific’ psychology” banding together against the concepts of consciousness, volition, introspection and other distinctive aspects of mind: “What psycho-physiologists, associationists, and evolutionists all shared was chiefly a belief that the expanding empire of deterministic scientific explanation was synonymous with intellectual progress, and that the category of mind, conceived as self-determining ego, posed the most formidable obstacle to that advance” (96). In this chapter I’ll demonstrate how Hardy’s *The Woodlanders* represents subjectivity in ways similar to these new practitioners of physiological psychology and argue that his art participates in advancing the new science.

Historians of psychology such as Daston and Kurt Danziger claim that around 1865, a new attitude becomes perceptible in naturalistic hypotheses about the conditions determining human and animal behavior. The implications of natural selection gained ground on models that based the origins of life on teleological design. Analogously, the special nature of humanity was disputed by new research on the functions of the brain, much of which provided physiological evidence that a large proportion of human action carries on without volition and without a subjective awareness of operative connections. The force of habit was the default explanation for such behavior: motor forces are driven

through channels of association. The important fact seemed to be that behavior originates in response to the environment and catches on through repetition. When Victorian physiologists applied natural selection to humanity, and began taking a long view of human behavior, many speculated that habits that functioned to help the species thrive and survive were selected and repeated generation after generation (those that didn't aid the species, it was believed by Darwin and others, were simply not reproduced). This led some to conclude that a blind natural law was operating, just as it did with other, lower species. Some, for instance Herbert Spencer in his late-career, concluded that so long as the system is left alone, the most beneficial habits will survive to be reproduced. He argued that as self-help was a natural development, interference with its reproduction, such as charity, would lead to "the enervation of a people" (102).⁹ The "system" essentially described a mechanism that did not require a consciousness of means in order to produce ends, and that had no ethic other than survival in a changing environment. However, only a minority was prepared to embrace this view; most Victorians strongly rejected such an idea and defended both the will and reflective types of awareness as special human characteristics.¹⁰ It remained very controversial to claim, as Samuel Butler did in *Life and Habit* (1878), that perfect knowledge is automatic or unconscious (41).¹¹

The nub of this debate can be summarized effectively by introducing the work of two eminent Victorian physiological psychologists, William Carpenter and Henry Maudsley, and in particular, by analyzing their diverging opinions about habit and volition. Hardy knew of Maudsley's work: he copied excerpts into his literary notebooks. It is very likely that he would have been familiar with Carpenter's work too, given that he was a widely admired psychologist and also published in the periodicals that Hardy is

known to have read.¹² For Carpenter, material terms couldn't account for the problem of the human will; he claimed it is "independent of Physical Causation."¹³ In the section on "General Relations of Mind and Body," in his *Principles of Mental Physiology* (1876), Carpenter argued that the will formed the character through habit: "if habitually exerted in certain directions, [the Will] will tend to form the Character, by establishing a set of *acquired habitudes*; which, no less than those dependent upon original constitution and circumstances, help to determine the working of the 'Mechanism of Thought and Feeling.' [...]" (26). Carpenter celebrated self-discipline and believed it could conquer the tendency toward automatic behavior, and that the "controlling power of the Will" could "indirectly modify" even unconscious action (15). Thus he claims, "in proportion as the Will acquires domination over our Automatic tendencies, the spontaneous succession of our Ideas and the play of our Emotions show the influence of its habitual control; while our Character and Conduct in Life come to be the expression of our best Intellectual energies, directed by the Motives which we *determinately elect* as our guiding principles of action" (26). His view emphasized consciousness: motives are "elected," and "habitual" describes the Will's control more in the sense of "regularly" than by underscoring its unconscious reflexivity. He also describes a use-improvement function that suggests the influence of both self-help philosophy and neo-Lamarckian ideas of inherited habit.¹⁴ As Danziger points out, Carpenter assumes a dichotomy between a purely automatic level of functioning (reflex and sensorimotor) and a level of intelligent and voluntary action that is not automatic but "self-determined" (Danziger 128).

In his influential early work, *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind* (1867), Henry Maudsley (1834-1918) represents an opposing view, which makes even voluntary action subject to automatic reflex. He develops what Danziger characterizes as a “militant scientific naturalism” (135). Maudsley claimed that unconscious reactions are the basis of every conscious thought or act.¹⁵ In *Life in Mind and Conduct* (1902) Maudsley was to go on to argue that “the largest part of any act of will is always unconscious and the best-fashioned will is unconscious in largest measure” (40). In his view, volitional action is essentially reflex, a construction in which “a latent incorporation” of embodied past experience determines the relation between stimulus and response.¹⁶ Not consciously felt, past experiences operate as “silent memories” that structure sensory and motor responses.¹⁷ Moreover, “Silent memories” are not limited to individual experiences. They also derive from “ancestral reflections” incorporated into the brain by the millions (*Life in Mind and Conduct* 40).¹⁸ Danziger claims that this view of organic inheritance leads Maudsley “to deny the doctrine of freedom of the will (as an unreal abstraction) and to insist on the predictability, in principle, of human behavior” (135). In effect he reverses the relation between habit and will that Carpenter insisted upon: it is not the will that determines habit but habit that determines the will. Once consciousness is devalued, as Danziger points out, the moralistic terms in which socio-psychological matters had previously been regarded no longer apply; instead they are given a “naturalistic reformulation.” Danziger offers education as an example. Education shifts from being described as a process of moral development to “a value-free process of sensorimotor learning” (136).

Maudsley's "value-free" emphasis on automatic behavior provides a compelling context for understanding Hardy's realist technique. It helps explain, for instance, the shift from Eliot's portrait of Maggie Tulliver to that of Hardy's Grace Melbury. For, compared with Eliot's heroine, Hardy transforms both the representation of subjectivity and the moral implications of his narrator's objectivity and the narrative ending along naturalistic lines. In addition to Patricia Gullivan, who has shown that Maudsley's thought influenced Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Angelique Richardson has argued that Hardy provides a view of the essential connectedness of world and mind" (165).¹⁹ The notes in Hardy's *Literary Notebooks* suggest that he was reading Maudsley's *Natural Causes, Supernatural Seemings*, in its first edition of 1886. But whether or not this can be definitively established, there is no doubt that Hardy's *The Woodlanders* explores automatism and the operations of the unconscious.²⁰ As his character Fitzpiers, says, "no man's hand could help what they did any more than the hands of a clock" (49).

2.

Grace Melbury's return to Little Hintock from her boarding school sets in motion the plot of *The Woodlanders*. Though a native, Grace has been fashioned into something else through her education. It is interesting that the novel does not record her transformative experiences at school; readers only are only given a sense of the ways in which she has changed through the eyes of the woodlanders. Always "good material," she has more than fulfilled her proud father's expectations (155). According to her childhood sweetheart, Giles Winterborne, her "cultivation" has introduced a distance in her manner, prompting the narrator to remark that she had "fallen from the good old Hintock ways" (43-4). Grace is estranged from her native place, ironically "cultivated,"

though she no longer can distinguish bitter-sweets from John-apples in the orchards she drives past with Giles. However “alien” to her original surroundings she has become, though, she has not guaranteed herself (through marriage or patronage) a place in the world to which she has grown accustomed (46). Little Hintock is no longer home – its habits and routines and worldviews are no longer hers – but neither does she belong anywhere else.

Grace’s new habits, costume, and tastes make others self-conscious of their own. Mr. Melbury, with a mixture of pride and anxiety, fears that his daughter will return only to feel disturbed by the differences between her school life and her old home. Sprucing up the gig in which he is sending Giles to fetch her, he tells Winterborne that “coming from a fashionable school she might feel shocked at the homeliness of home; and ‘tis these little things that catch a dainty woman’s eye if they are neglected” (32). While her father is proud, Giles is sensitive. He registers Grace’s new, refined manners and compares them to his own coarseness. His feelings of inferiority are reiterated by the narrator, who more than once declares with emphasis, “*True it was* that Giles Winterborne [...] looked rough beside her” (37, italics added). Giles, of course, is well-mannered enough for a yeoman. Nevertheless his sensibilities tell him that “external phenomena – such as the lowness or height or color of a hat, the fold of a coat, the make of a boot, or the chance attitude or occupation of a limb at the instant of view – may have great influence upon feminine opinion of a man’s worth” (37). Giles is aware that his costume may matter to Grace’s tastes, but as the narrator remarks, “a causticity of mental tone” in him “prevented to-day, as always, any enthusiastic action on the strength of [his] reflection” (37). In other words, he is conscious of the general rule about women’s

opinion and can predict the likely consequences of not having the right cut coat, but it is not in his “mental tone” to act on that knowledge. *The Woodlanders* proceeds, of course, to undermine the assumption that haberdashery is associated with moral worth or that upward mobility is synonymous with progress. But I want to follow out a point suggested here by the narrative perspective. As in the example of Giles and the habit of dress, self-consciousness does not necessarily enable one to change one’s own modes of being, because material forces – “ancestral memories,” unconscious drives, the environment – determine our reflexes.

The formal patterning of the novel both employs and disrupts the traditional generic associations of pastoral. Despite Hardy’s own dismissive comments about novel-writing, alert readers of his fiction cannot but marvel at his novel’s sophisticated formal structure, how the seasons are intricately tied to the progress and decline of the romantic plots, for example. *The Woodlanders* plays brilliantly upon “man’s doings in nature” and repetition in its plot. Among its other insights, Mary Jacobus’s essay, “Tree and Machine: *The Woodlanders*,” outlined the tightly-focused structure of the novel.²¹ Published in monthly parts in *Macmillan’s Magazine* from 1876-77, each one of *The Woodlanders*’s twelve portions was composed “to maximize the opportunities for suspended action and ironic reversal,” Jacobus claims, with Grace’s marriage to Fitzpiers occurring at the precise center of the novel. For the book publication, Hardy structured three blocks of four parts, “each comprising a crucial stage in Grace’s marital adventures and creating a larger, tripartite structure” (122). Jacobus notes that nature’s seasons also play a part in this patterning:

Autumn brings her return to Little Hintock, winter the death of Giles’s hopes, spring and summer her courtship and marriage to Fitzpiers; the

second autumn and winter bring his infidelity with Felice Charmond, and spring the open breach with Grace. Early summer marks the renewal of Giles's courtship, this time followed, not by marriage, but by the news that there can be no divorce; with autumn comes his death, and winter Grace's mourning, while spring completes her reconciliation with Fitzpiers. 121

Jacobus calls the effect a "rigid determinism," one that emphasizes plot over character (122). Her interpretation is consistent with Hardy's notes about fiction, where he claimed that "the uncommonness must be in the events, not in the characters."²² Here I'll focus on the repetition in the novel, which I contend challenged something valued by a majority of Victorians, that is, the effect of conscious intention in the material world. Nevertheless, as with other realists such as Dickens or Eliot, who use plot to tell readers something ethically significant about subjectivity, Hardy's exploration of repetition reveals subjectivity to consist primarily of reflex activity.

The two most obvious repetitions in the narrative are the twice-frustrated union of Giles and Grace, and the marriage and return of Grace to Fitzpiers. As plot, they resemble the "looped orbit" that fascinated Hardy as a description of social progress. The looped orbit suggests an ancient concept of cyclical time conceding to modern notions of evolutionary time.²³ For certainly the three romantically-entangled characters end up in the same spot, despite having moved forward in time, and notwithstanding having yearned to reach a different place. The looped orbit suggests a repetition with a difference because, while it re-elicits the emotions of the earlier experience, it revises them in the second instance. So, for example, when Giles and Grace attempt to re-initiate their engagement, Giles cannot take part in it with his earlier spirit: "Though it was with almost the same zest, it was with not quite the same hope, that he had begun to tread the old tracks again, and had allowed himself to be so charmed with her that day" (287).

Similarly, when Fitzpiers tries to mend matters with his wife, he discovers new qualities to her “character and goodness” (ironically, mostly stemming from her less submissive behavior) (340). Within such a looped structure, progress is muted: changes added to later versions of the novel’s conclusion imply that Grace’s future will likely involve more repetition in the form of her husband’s infidelities.²⁴ *The Woodlanders* has been characterized as Hardy’s third novel of return. Formal repetition in the fiction bears a special relation to Hardy’s representation of subjectivity because repetition gave Hardy an aesthetic form for the psychological presentation of predictability, and the automatic basis of seemingly voluntary behavior.

One of the ways Hardy elicits a sense of human repetition is through his use of the term *mechanical*. It stands out in the novel, first, because the term is applied to every major character, and second, because it strikes incongruously with the fiction’s woodland setting, especially given that much of the work done by the country people in the novel is skilled handiwork, such as Giles’s tree planting, or the spar- or cider-making, rather than work with machines. Mechanical almost always refers to a character’s mental distraction or abstraction while he or she repeats a certain physical action. As such it reflects the relationship between the mind and the body, as though mental absorption requires a somatic discharge. So the barber Mr. Percomb’s fingers “mechanically played” with the pair of scissors in his waistcoat pocket as he fancies Marty’s hair from outside her door (11). Giles is described as “mechanically stirring the embers with a spar-gad” as he listens to Melbury brag about his daughter’s expensive education (29); later, after fetching Grace from Sherton and delivering her to her parents, he observes the reunion from the doorway, hanging back from joining the family, and “mechanically tracing with

his fingers certain time-worn letters carved in the jamb” (45). Mrs. Charmond’s (apparently well-rehearsed) flirtation with the doctor involves an intense gaze, a deep blush, and a marked retraction of her gaze as she “mechanically applied the cigarette again to her lips” (187).

These examples all show, at a micro-level, repetitious behavior enacted unconsciously, and bear comparison to Fitzpiers’s acknowledgement of his resemblance to “a Leydon jar,” charged “with electric, for want of some conductor at hand to disperse it” (114). (A Leydon jar is a modified glass jar that can store electricity for a short period, and is of eighteenth-century invention.) One of the most remarkable scenes of abstraction in the novel is Giles’s “incoherent” bidding on the timber – “unwittingly” he is bidding against Melbury – while he absorbedly observes the snowflakes fall on various parts of Grace’s body (54). Indeed, nearly all of the instances of “mechanical” activity refer to behaviors enacted under the influence of desire, or in an effort to banish desire from the mind, as when Giles is said to have gone to “work daily like an automaton,” after his loss of Grace (224).²⁵ These instances suggest the unconscious mind in operation: as conscious thought of the desired object is suppressed, a somatic reaction is discharged automatically.

Hardy’s portrait of mechanical behavior is distinctively different from Dickens’s and Hardy’s organicism differs from Eliot’s with particular respect to what sort of morality can be gleaned from the natural world. Where the channel metaphor occurs in *The Woodlanders* – which is not nearly as often nor as overt as we saw in *The Mill on the Floss* – it is associated with a particular kind of desire: sexual desire. Of Grace’s marriage to Fitzpiers the narrator claims that “the possibilities of a refined and cultivated inner life,

of subtle psychological intercourse, had their charm. It was this rather than any vulgar idea of marrying well which caused her to float with the current, and to yield to the immense influence which Fitzpiers exercised over her whenever she shared his society” (164).²⁶ As much as he was able to represent it overtly in *The Woodlanders* (while necessarily deferring to his editors’ fears concerning propriety), Hardy depicted the reflexes of sexual desire as consistently overriding consciousness. “To yield” has had sexual connotations since antiquity, but, regarding Grace’s “floating” and “yielding,” Hardy’s language is “value-neutral,” neither judging nor justifying.²⁷

“Floating with the current” suggests a reflexive and repetitive unconscious condition. That it is not one confined to the natives of Little Hintock suggests Hardy viewed it as a universal propensity. The “outsider” characters, Mrs. Charmond and Edred Fitzpiers, exhibit a similar tendency to be carried away. The narrator suggests that Mrs. Charmond’s “lymphatic temperament” is more performance than biological inheritance; she behaves like the type of women who “inveigle rather than prompt, and take advantage of currents rather than steer” (59). Perhaps as a result of her career on the stage, this indolence has become her habitual way of reacting to circumstances. The doctor’s interest in Grace is also described as current-like: “He allowed himself to be carried forward on the wave of his desire” (154). The self-reflexive semantic construction indicates his passivity without abdicating his responsibility. The references to currents and waves in both characters’ descriptions explicitly evoke sensual and sexual desire while associating it with reflexive habitual behavior. After *The Mill’s* infamous scene of Maggie floating down the river with Stephen Guest, it is not surprising to find Hardy also employing channels and currents as a representation of the power of unconscious desire.

Hardy records these amorous expressions as *conative*, a term from biology which means “instinctually motivated biological striving that may appear in consciousness as volition or desire, or in behavior as action tendencies.”²⁸ But what seems to have alarmed Victorian readers and critics was that Hardy’s text refused to overtly condemn this condition.²⁹

3.

If behavior merely appeared in consciousness as volition but was at bottom “biological striving,” and if Hardy’s realist aim was to “disproportion” this natural phenomenon, then we can expect the fiction to exaggerate this unconsciously repetitive condition. Similar to Hardy’s interest in the unconscious, Maudsley emphasized “reciprocal reflection” as the chief condition of social life. This leads him to conclude that self-analysis had limited benefits.³⁰ “Prying into the self will not carry any one very far in self-knowledge,” he wrote; “a more modest and hopeful” procedure was phenomenological: “observation of, and reflection on, [man’s] doings in nature – what they have been and by what natural laws they became what they were” (295). Only by closely analyzing human behavior and discovering what laws operate under what sorts of conditions, went this theory, can we amend cultural structures to promote a better fit to human needs. (The contemporary debate about class-biased divorce laws, which Hardy drew on in *The Woodlanders*, is the obvious example.) Maudsley’s preference for the examination of individuals’ “doings in nature” and his rejection of self-analysis seem to me a very useful comparison to Hardy’s narrative technique in *The Woodlanders*, especially when it comes to the latter’s study of reflexive behavior and his narrator’s detached point of view.

In addition to those instances of unconsciously repeated behaviors, such as Giles's finger tracing the initials in the doorjamb, Hardy also depicts a more macro-level automatism: passivity. In the novel passivity becomes an especially complicated representation of habitual reflex. Not only does Hardy depict volition as resembling automatic behavior, such as Grace's desire for Fitzpiers. But passivity – the apparent absence of volition – becomes a figure for characters rooted in their habitual patterns. Giles refusing to come out of the tree after Grace, for example, is part of a larger pattern of his “retiring” disposition, which ends with his retiring straight out of life. What emerges most fascinatingly in *The Woodlanders* is a view of habit in which characters are reflectively aware of their habits and nevertheless unable to resist those habitual modes. So, for example, Melbury, struck by the way in which he has trapped himself regarding the relationship between Winterborne and his daughter, wonders how he could “nullify a scheme he had laboured to promote – was, indeed, mechanically promoting at this moment?”(80).

Maudsley claimed that habit is more than a disposition to a certain behavior. “For,” he writes, “habit, if we consider it well, does not mean the construction of modes of conduct only, it means also the construction of modes of feeling and thought. The conditions of every life and the mental atmosphere pertaining to them are a continual training and edification of thought and feeling, consciously or unconsciously done” (259). For Maudsley, consciousness is irrelevant compared to the effects of “continual training and edification.” Instruction need not be conscious, as Bourdieu has discussed.³¹ People tend to adjust their expectations to the objective conditions they continually experience. (The way we learn about social manners is often oblique; for instance, which

cheek is kissed in an introduction, and how many times, depends upon what part of the country you're in.) *The Woodlanders*, too, suggests that much practical sense is gleaned through the "mental atmosphere," and that consciousness has little to do with determining behavior. Trained as an actress to consider her effect on an observer, Mrs. Charmond has only to glance at herself adjacent to Grace in the mirror to register – at a barely conscious level – that Grace's coloring does not set hers off well. Thus ends Grace's chance at patronage, of becoming Felice's traveling companion. Grace's disregard of her "premonition" about Fitzpiers's infidelity, and the ease with which she is convinced by his falsehood, exemplifies how reflex trumps reflection. Her excitement about her marriage, the narrator comments, was neither love nor ambition but "rather a fearful consciousness of hazard in the air" (162). Yet even conscious of "hazard" she chooses to marry him.

Often represented as intensely aware of their emotions or the negative moral implications of their behavior, Hardy's characters form intentions but aren't able to follow their intentions through because their habits prove the stronger motive force. This is because, supposedly, biological drives, feeling, desire and a whole history of repetition underwrite habits. Fitzpiers's sensualism provides an illustration. When he is on the verge of making the marriage to Grace irrevocable, the narrator says, "Over and above the genuine emotion she raised in his heart there hung the sense that he was casting the die by impulse which he might not have thrown by judgment" (163). The hierarchy of "sense" and "judgment" over "emotion" and "impulse" in the sentence is significant. "Sense" is said to have "hung" there, present to consciousness, but nevertheless was weaker than his "genuine emotion," his real feelings of desire. In these examples, Hardy

undertakes a significant fictional revision of the discourse of habit, which involves reflectivity, or, as he generally presents it in *The Woodlanders*, intention. Hardy's representation of his characters' self-conscious-yet-habitual behavior refutes the cherished Victorian idea that moral development can be achieved through what G. H. Lewes called "mental differentiation," that is, by transforming reflexive behavior and beliefs into reflective and self-aware practices.

Without denying the existence of intention, Hardy's representations of passivity suggest that habit is operative *in spite of* conscious intention. Hardy's characters are often said to *acquiesce* in relation to a choice or decision. "Fate it seemed would have it this way, and there was nothing to do but acquiesce" (109) the narrator describes Grace as thinking, when she receives Giles's letter informing her that he considers her absolved of their former promise to marry. In those moments, characters refuse to acknowledge responsibility at the very same instant that the text insists upon their consciousness, ignored intention, or accountability. So Grace feels later that having "acquiesced" in her father's plan to marry Fitzpiers was "a degradation to herself." Free indirect discourse follows her admonishments to herself: "People are not given premonitions for nothing; she should have obeyed her impulse on that early morning when she peeped from her window, and have steadfastly refused her hand" (209). Insofar as Hardy's characters are resistant to the supposed self-transformative effects of self-conscious reflection, the text remains skeptical that self-consciousness can reliably operate as an antidote to the human tendency to behave in pre-established habitual modes.

The Woodlanders shows the relationship between passivity and self-consciousness, even being generated by the doubts and uncertainties that reflection

inevitably produces. Hardy is careful to show subjectivity as conflicted between conscious and unconscious feelings and behavior. He envisions subjectivity as a mixture of emotion, sensation, and habitual reflex, and consciousness comes across as a variety of competing awarenesses. But ultimately, even a conscious awareness of self cannot assist characters in breaking out of habitual patterns. The dramatic tension in the novel, often commented upon in the narrator's "if only" formulations (which stand out because of the relative rarity of such narratorial intrusion in Hardy's novels) derives from the sense of doom created by the knowledge that a character *will act predictably* – to his or her own detriment. Hardy explores not only the misfiring of intention due to coincidence, but, more significantly, the tragic human inability to overcome habit; intention cannot combat the combination of repeated modes of conduct and feeling and thought. Melbury is genuinely conflicted between his "strong desire" to instill social ambition in Grace and the "better feeling which had hitherto prevailed with him" (88) – at least until the morning of his ramble with his daughter, when he was incensed by a passing fox hunter's rudeness to her. *The Woodlanders* depicts passivity as the result of self-consciousness because it interferes with impulse and engenders contradiction and self-division.

For example, an early pivotal plot moment occurs because of Giles's "retiring habits" (70). He is not "persevering" in his suit for Grace (142). He overtly makes efforts to win the girl, but is too hesitant or diffident to follow through when obstacles appear.³² His disposition drives him further up the tree in front of old John South's cottage instead of going after Grace when he had the opportunity:

Had Giles, instead of remaining still, immediately come down from the tree to her, would she have continued in that filial, acquiescent frame of mind which she had announced to him as final? [...T]he probabilities are that something might have been done by the appearance of Winterborne

on the ground beside Grace. But he continued motionless and silent in that gloomy Niflheim or fog-land which involved him, and she proceeded on her way. 94

Giles “continues motionless and silent” in the same way that Grace and other characters “float.” His habit of reticence drives him further into the woods, into an obscure hut, when he loses his lifeholdings to the cottages his forefathers had always held, and thereby considerably diminished his material prospects. Hardy’s narrator comments that Giles “was one of those silent, unobtrusive beings who want little from others in the way of favour or condescension, and perhaps on that very account scrutinise others’ behaviour too closely” (287). His scrutiny makes him less inclined to take action. His sensitivity to the superficial differences between himself and Grace prevents him from proceeding on the knowledge that those minor matters are less weighty than the fact of his constant and genuine feelings for her and her “old simple indigenous” ones for him (81).

It is not just that our conscious plans have unintended consequences, as when Mr. Melbury tells his wife, “I didn’t foresee that, in sending [Grace] to boarding-school, and letting her travel, and what not, to make her a good bargain for Giles, I should really be spoiling her for him!” (76-77). As Hardy depicts it with a disproportioned irony, intention will always be at odds with habit. His fictions suggest this to be a universal aspect of the human condition. When Giles learns that his father had overlooked the opportunity to renew the lease on his life-hold properties, the narrator, in free indirect discourse, has him wonder, “Why should not the intention be considered by the landholder when she became aware of the circumstances, and his moral right to retain the holdings for the term of his life be conceded?” (104). Before the doctor begins his serious courting of Grace, we hear the narrator again reflect upon intention: He “bestowed a regulation thought on the

advantageous marriage he was bound to make with a woman of family as good as his own, and of purse much longer. But as an object of contemplation for the present, Grace Melbury would serve to keep his soul alive, and to relieve the monotony of his days” (135). Felice Charmond leaves for Sherton Abbas intending to discourage Fitzpiers’s attentions, but when he follows her there she will not turn him away. There is no sense in *The Woodlanders* that the cross-purposes of reflexivity and reflectivity will be ameliorated by historical development, by the advancement of human consciousness in the abstract, or by the effects of personal experience in the individual.

The Woodlanders reveals habit interfering with intention because the two are structurally dissimilar modes of being. Habits are reflexive and passive, whereas intentions are reflective and active. Yet there is empathy for that moment of recognition – the sad epiphany of baulked intention – that comprises his vision of the human condition. After Grace’s marital trouble, she feels repulsion for Fitzpiers’s refinement and finds a beauty in Giles’s simpler form that her own training had taught her to overlook. She believes she has discovered the veneer of refinement and its meaninglessness by comparison with Giles’s trustworthy tenderness. Nevertheless, accustomed to the elegance of hotels, she experiences painful discomfort at the humble Three Tuns tavern, where Giles has lunch arranged for her. When she arrives there, the narrator exclaims, “And yet how unprepared she was for this change! The tastes that she had acquired from Fitzpiers had been imbibed so subtly that she hardly knew she possessed them til confronted by this contrast” (285). “Contrast” is what forces the unconsciousness of habit into sudden visibility. Giles, sensitive as ever, “noticed in a moment that she shrank from her position, and all his pleasure was gone” (285). The narrator intrudes here with a

relatively rare ironic comment, which transcends the limited perspective of both Grace and Giles: “The elegant Fitzpiers, in fact, at that very moment owed a long bill at the abovementioned hotel [Earl of Wessex] [...]. But such is social sentiment, that she had been quite comfortable under those debt-impending conditions, whilst she felt humiliated by her present situation, which Winterborne had paid for honestly on the nail” (285). The irony of the incident is also underscored by the repetition in the characters’ reactions: For Giles, “It was the same susceptibility over again which had spoiled his Christmas party long ago” (285), whereas Grace felt unable to explain that it was merely “her superficial and transitory taste which had been offended, and not her nature or her affection” (286).

The narrator generalizes Grace’s experience of disrupted habit at the Three Tuns. It was a “recrudescence”, a revival, renewal, return: “one of those sudden surprises which confront everybody in bent upon turning over a new leaf” (285). Less interested in the particularity of human consciousness, its generation and acquisition of a moral sense through understanding the natural law of cause and effect, Hardy reveals what we might call a universal perversity of character. *The Woodlanders* suggests that despite reflective self-analysis, humans nevertheless act reflexively, in a style, ingrained and rooted in their characters through repetition. Most of human behavior emerges from reflex, the novel argues, regardless of conscious intention. So, despite a promise to cancel a moral debt to a man’s father by marrying his daughter to a deserving son, Melbury finds himself breaking his pledge. Despite a young doctor’s intentions to marry for wealth and position, and merely to flirt with the timber-merchant’s daughter, he finds himself marrying her. Despite Grace’s intuition that Fitzpiers was not the man to trust with her heart, her

recognition that she does not love him, and her suspicion that he is not faithful, she finds herself agreeing to be his wife. The reflexive mode best suits Hardy's characters.

In Hardy's fiction, habit is not malleable; it is less accessible to conscious restructuration than in Eliot's novels. Rather than showing experience to occasion reflectivity and, hence, to spur ethical development, Hardy's fiction depicts the divergence between human action-as-tendency and one's intention. Heightened self-awareness and knowledge of others do not guarantee a more ethical way of learning to live in the world. In its plot repetitions, *The Woodlanders* suggests we are, paradoxically, self-conscious automatons, reflexive beings, who see their reflexes but are powerless to alter them. The view of habit in Hardy's realism shifts the ground of his predecessors' enterprise when his novel resigns the argument for moral development.

4.

The most deeply ethical acts performed in *The Woodlanders* might very well be those performed through the kind of habit that Bourdieu and Giddens refer to as practical consciousness, or as Hardy describes it, in a remarkably Lewesian manner, "the secondary intelligence of the hands and arms" that "carr[ies] on without requiring the sovereign attention of the head" (26). In this kind of non-conscious behavior humans are most like nature itself. Practical habit is described most beguilingly in the scene in which Giles is planting tiny saplings, where we hear of his "marvelous power of making trees grow":

Although he would seem to shovel in the earth quite carelessly there was a sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak, or beech that he was operating on; so that the roots took hold of the soil in a few days. [...] Winterborne's fingers were endowed with a gentle conjurer's touch in

spreading the roots of each little tree, resulting in a sort of caress under which the delicate fibres all laid themselves out in their proper directions for growth. He put most of these roots towards the south-west; for, he said, in forty years' time, when some great gale is blowing from that quarter, the trees will require the strongest holdfast on that side to stand against it and not fall. 64

Can one only develop this kind of sympathy after much practiced repetition? Hardy's narrator points out that when the other, skilled "journeymen" planted in what seemed an "identically similar" process, they would lose a quarter of their trees (63). This indicates that Giles's skill is more than merely acquired – a "sort of sympathy": a knowledge, a perception, a compassion. Indeed, Giles thinks of trees in the way one might think of an heir, as living on when he himself is consigned to the grave. Man and nature are unified in this image; unlike the journeymen's process, Giles's fingers and the trees' "delicate fibres" seem to be made up of identical material. His apparent carelessness disguises an almost supernatural knowingness, one that encompasses ecological forethought as well as present economy. However, economic gain is not Giles's primary drive; the narrator notes that he "found delight in the work even when, as at present, he contracted to do it on portions of the woodland in which he had no personal interest" (63). The mention of "delight" is worth pausing over because delight, or anything akin to it, is a rather scarce sensation in *The Woodlanders*. The scene marries the human sensation of delight to a universal vitality – in spite of threatening "great gales." The immanent rootedness of the thousand little saplings is suggested by the poetic compound "holdfast."

Surely "holding-fast" is the naturalized image of habit. With reference to human beings, it is rootedness, signaling attachment and intimacy, which repetition can breed. Contrasted with Fitzpiers's fickleness are Giles's and Melbury's abiding love for Grace, however idealistic. In other words, habit, and that which is unconscious or routine in it,

do not discount authentic feeling. In spite of humans being, for the most part, automata bound to repetitious patterns, those patterns include meaningful attachments, to work, to place, to community. There is Melbury's visit to Mrs. Charmond to plead for Grace's cause, when Grace was too proud and too humiliated to do so herself. There is Marty's letter to Fitzpiers, and when Grace disappears unexpectedly and Melbury fears something terrible has happened, his neighbors respond to his call for lit lanterns and search until she's found. And, finally, Giles's "sacrifice," which the novel surely depicts, and most critics read, as stemming from an overwrought sense of propriety on both characters' parts, has another, material explanation. Though the text at one point states that he did not think his illness serious enough to require medical attention, it also says that Grace's disturbing him was an interruption that his convalescence could not afford. His decision to remain out of doors might not only have been intended to protect Grace's reputation but to prevent her from being infected. Ultimately, however, what makes for the novel's tragicomic strain is that, upon close inspection, the objects of love in *The Woodlanders* are never quite deserving. This is the not-so-distorted view of habit's intimacy we find in Hardy.

Fitzpiers's complaisance has already begun to wear down the intention Grace has to separate from him – she tells him her heart is in the grave with Giles. But her near accident in the man-trap (which Tommy Tang had intended for Fitzpiers) startles both her and her husband into rekindling their intimacy. Melbury's frantic search for her, after finding a scrap of her dress in the jaws of the trap, finally locates her at the Earl of Wessex Hotel where she has gone with Fitzpiers after the accident, "looking as if she lived there" (362). The novel ends in anti-climax. Melbury can barely repress disgust at

her inconsiderate treatment of him and his men, and of her decision to return to her husband without his advice, says “H’m – very well – you’re your own mistress,” but as the narrator remarks, his tone “seemed to assert otherwise” (362). In 1896, Hardy made Melbury’s pessimism regarding Grace’s chance at happiness completely explicit: “it’s a forlorn hope for her; and God knows how it will end. But let her bear in mind that the woman walks and laughs somewhere at this very moment whose neck he’ll be coling next year as he does hers to-night; and as he did Felice Charmond’s last year; and Suke Damson’s the year afore!” (n. III, XV, #3). Hardy might have mistrusted his readers and felt that they would prefer to imagine a happy ending. The chorus of Melbury’s neighbors in the Three Tuns tavern trading tales of odd and unhappy marital arrangements adds to the renewed relations between Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpiers the sense that infidelity and strife, abandonment and simple deception are all common to the matrimonial state. For Hardy, habit reveals our secret weaknesses. The fact that the characters for whom readers feel most sympathy, Giles and Marty, wind up dead and isolated, respectively, and the most reprehensible and solipsistic character in the novel, Fitzpiers, ends up forgiven and thriving, did not make the kind of moral statement to which Victorian audiences were accustomed.

Hardy claimed that he did not feel he “picked up toward the end” of *The Woodlanders*, as he hoped to Gissing that he might. To other correspondents he expressed dissatisfaction with the novel’s conclusion, though in later years he also said that “as a story” it was his favorite of his fictions.³³ If predictability was the structural disproportioning Hardy engaged in order to follow habit to its logical conclusion, then the anti-climax of the novel appears unavoidable. Habit’s thematic and formal importance to

The Woodlanders determines its conclusion: with the sense that Grace cannot help but return to Fitzpiers. She cannot help returning to the habits and lifestyle that he offers and that her training has instilled in her, as little as readers can avoid the expectation that her experience of his infidelity is bound to repeat itself. Hardy absorbed the determinist argument that physiological science and the new psychology posed, and he translated it into an aesthetic form that was also an innovation upon and inspired by the ancient form of tragic drama, with its inexorable meting out of fate. Like other realists, he understood that characters had to be ordinary and thus his conclusion to *The Woodlanders* is characteristically a mixture of modes, best described as tragi-comic. Whereas Eliot challenged Novalis's aphorism, "Character is fate," in *The Mill on the Floss*, Hardy is artistically true to its determined sense.³⁴ Character for Hardy is resistant to self-help or other kinds of conscious restructuration. Maudsley, too, was convinced that character was a combination of "ancestral predestination" and a "special bias." He insists, like Hardy, that character can be "determined by the merest chance at a supremely critical moment – that is to say, by some trivial circumstance, or transient passion, or accidental infirmity, or unlucky jar..." (275). Maudsley writes, in Hardian fashion, about the futility of conscious character transformation: "Though his noble head strike the stars in its human pride, his fate lies in the humble atoms. Let him spend his life in studious and strenuous struggle against a native bias of character, in the end he will probably spend it ineffectively and unhappily" (275). Hardy's fiction dwells in the rootedness of "humble atoms" which is the inheritance of habit, and makes his readers feel nature's indifference to "noble heads striking the stars."

¹ “To George Gissing,” (1.7.1886) *Selected Letters*, Michael Millgate, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

² Peter Casagrande groups Hardy’s major novels into two sets: novels of return and novels of restoration. Of the novels of return, Hardy writes a comedy (*Under the Greenwood Tree*, 1872), a tragedy (*The Return of the Native*, 1878), and a tragic-comedy (*The Woodlanders*, 1887). *Unity in Hardy’s Novels*, 1-2.

³ John Bayley, “A Social Comedy? On Re-reading *The Woodlanders*,” in *Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy: The Novels*, Dale Kramer, ed. (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co. 1990): 196.

⁴ Peter Casagrande, *Unity in Hardy’s Novels: Repetitive Symmetries* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982); in Philip Mallett, ed. *Palgrave Advances in Thomas Hardy Studies* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2004): 156-80; George Levine’s chapter on *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in *The Realistic Imagination* (1981); Roger Ebbatson’s *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence*, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982) suggests that the after-life of Darwin’s thesis gave novelists a new mode for handling temporal experience, and stimulated thought about mutation (x). Gillian Beer’s chapter “Finding a Scale for the Human: Plot and Writing in Hardy’s Novels” in *Darwin’s Plots* argues that Hardy turns natural laws into plot, which “he reads as malign or entrapping because it is designed for the human race not the individual” (57).

⁵ *New Review* (April 1891) 315-19; reprinted in Harold Orel, *Thomas Hardy’s Personal Writings*, (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas 1966) 134-38. Quoted on 134.

⁶ This descriptive phrase is thrice borrowed. My debt is to David Lodge, “Pessimism and Fiction Form in *Jude the Obscure*” in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, Dale Kramer, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1979) 195; but Lodge borrows from J. Hillis Miller’s *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (1970), p. 206. Miller borrows from Proust.

⁷ See Hardy’s essay, “The Profitable Reading of Fiction,” Orel, *Personal Writings*, 124. Originally published in *Forum* (New York 1888) 57-70.

⁸ Lorraine Daston, “The Theory of Will versus the Science of Mind” in *The Problematic Science: Psychology in Nineteenth-Century Thought*. William R. Woodward and Mitchell G. Ash, eds. (New York: Praeger, 1982) 88-115.

⁹ In “Over-Legislation,” Spencer argues that the spontaneous development of private enterprise will always out-compete public (non-competitive) governmental/ State action. “In the order of nature, a capacity for self-help must in every case have been brought into existence by the practice of self-help; and, other things equal, a lack of this capacity must in every case have arisen from the lack of demand for it. Do not these two antecedents and their two consequents agree with the facts as presented in England and in Europe? [...] Has not the immense relative change the English have undergone in this respect [of manufacture, colonization, and commerce], been coincident with the great relative self-dependence they have been since habituated to? And is not this change proximately ascribable to this habitual self-dependence? [...] Whoever admits it, must admit that the enervation of a people by perpetual State-aids is not a trifling consideration, but a most weighty consideration” from *Essays: Moral, Political and Aesthetic* (New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1866) 102-3.

¹⁰ See the *Cambridge Companion to Darwin*. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick eds. (Cambridge and New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003.), especially John Hedley Brooke on “Darwin and Victorian Christianity.”

¹¹ Samuel Butler, “The older the habit the longer the practice, the longer the practice the more knowledge – or, the less uncertainty; the less uncertainty the less power of conscious self-analysis and control” *Life and Habit*, (1878; London: A. C. Fifield, 1916) 13.

¹² For an illuminating discussion of psychological debate in the Victorian periodical press, see Rick Rylance, “‘The Disturbing Anarchy of Investigation’: Psychological Debate and the Victorian Periodical” in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, Louise Henson, et al. Eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) 239-50.

¹³ Kurt Danziger, “Mid-Nineteenth-Century British Psycho-Physiology: A Neglected Chapter in the History of Psychology,” in *The Problematic Science: Psychology in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, William R. Woodward and Mitchell G. Ash, eds. (New York: Praeger, 1982) 119-146; 128.

¹⁴ “In so *utilising* it, the Will can also *improve* it by appropriate discipline; repressing its activities where too strong, fostering and developing them where originally feeble, directing all healthful energy into the most fitting channel for its exercise, and training the entire Mental as it does the Bodily organism to harmonious and effective working” (*Principles* 26).

¹⁵ Henry Maudsley, “Whatever the conscious element in a vital reaction, and wherever in the scale of life it first faintly dawns, it manifestly develops insensibly and progressively from unconscious reaction” *Life in Mind and Conduct: Studies of Organic in Human Nature* (London: Macmillan and Co. 1902) 34.

¹⁶ He describes the process as “excito-motor”: “in which a cerebral mechanism of extreme delicacy of construction, embodying past experiences in its structure, intervenes between the ingoing stimulus and the outgoing movement.” *Physiology of Mind*, 441.

¹⁷ On “reflex” he writes: “the definitely organized configuration or pattern of a complex reflex contains implicitly the sensory as well as the motor elements of its composition; not only the simpler constituent reflex movements, that is to say, but a latent incorporation of the sensory stimuli in response to which they were formed in the past and now tacitly respond. Though not consciously felt, these are silent memories represented in structure and functioning in its function” *Life in Mind and Conduct* 38.

¹⁸ The passage in its entirety reads, “The present wise reflection never could be performed had it not been made potential by the incorporation in the brain of millions of ancestral reflection reaching back immemorially to simpler primal forms, any more than a man could grow to think and do as he does but for the long line of his organic antecedents quintessentially and invisibly incorporate in the richly pregnant germ from which its mature structure is step by step evolved visibly” (40).

¹⁹ Angelique Richardson, “Hardy and Science: A Chapter of Accidents” in Philip Mallett, ed. *Palgrave Advances in Thomas Hardy Studies* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2004) 156-80.

²⁰ The editor of Hardy’s *Literary Notebooks*, Lennart Björk, claims that Hardy’s notes from Maudsley’s *Natural Causes* correspond to the pagination of the first edition of that text, but not to the second edition of 1887. Although this does not guarantee that Hardy actually read the first edition in the year he was working on *The Woodlanders*, the possibility exists.

²¹ Mary Jacobus, “Tree and Machine: *The Woodlanders*,” in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, Dale Kramer, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1979) 116-34. See also Peter Casagrande’s discussion of Grace’s six ventures into the woods, each of which, he claims, ironically enlightens her to issues of culture rather than nature. “The Shifted Centre of Altruism,” *ELH* 38 (1971) 104-25.

²² Florence Emily Hardy, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1891* (London, 1928) 193-94.

²³ A drawing of the looped orbit appears in Hardy’s *Literary Notebooks* (Vol. I). That this idea preoccupied him until the end of his life is suggested by his mentioning the idea in relation to events of the first World War. Its brutality prompted him to reflect that “the recognition that we are living in a more brutal age than that, say, of Elizabeth . . . does not inspire one to write hopeful poetry, or even conjectural prose, but simply make one sit still in an apathy, & watch the clock spinning backwards, with a mild wonder if, when it gets back to the Dark Ages, & the sack of Rome, it will ever move forward again to a new Renaissance, & a new literature.” “To Sidney Cockerell,” 28 August 1914 in Millgate, *Selected Letters*.

²⁴ See Ingham’s “Introduction” comparing different editions’ versions of Melbury’s reaction to Grace’s return to her husband (xxxiii).

²⁵ Scarry’s essay, “Work and the Body in Hardy and other Nineteenth-Century Novelists,” argues that Hardy registers character most deeply through the activity of work because it is in this activity that the “reciprocal alterations” between human and material world are “most consciously sought” (94). This is generally descriptive of work, however, the habitualness that comes from the repetition of work means that it is only consciously sought in the initial stages; after that it can be performed without consciousness. And, as Scarry acknowledges, work is difficult to represent precisely because of its habitualness and repetitiveness (102). *Representations* 3 (Summer 1983): 90-123.

²⁶ In an example of iteration we read of how Fitzpiers influences Grace through repeated visits, though the narrator is careful to add that Grace’s own inclinations hastened the effect: “This visit was a type of many which followed it during the long summer days of that year. Grace was borne along upon a stream of reasonings, arguments, and persuasions, supplemented, it must be added, by inclinations of her own at times” (164).

²⁷ There are several other incidents in which Fitzpiers’s influence has this effect upon her, most notably when she tries unsuccessfully to break off their engagement: “From this hour there was no serious

recalcitration on her part. Fitzpiers kept himself continually near her, dominating any rebellious impulse, and shaping her will into passive concurrence with all his desires" (171).

²⁸ From *Webster's*.

²⁹ R. H. Hutton's *Spectator* review was the most vehement I have come across. He called the book "as disagreeable as it is powerful," and "a picture of shameless falsehood, levity, and infidelity, followed by no new repentance, and yet crowned at the end with perfect success; nor does Mr. Hardy seem to paint his picture in any spirit of indignation that redeems the moral drift of the book." In, *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, R. G. Cox, ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) 142.

³⁰ Maudsley understood social life as the "life-reflection of self in others and of others in self" (*Life* 295).

³¹ In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu discusses non-conscious behavior as "practical belief" and "Doxa": "Practical belief is not a 'state of mind,' still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines ('beliefs'), but rather a state of the body. Doxa is the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between a *habitus* and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense. Enacted belief [is] instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad, an automaton that 'leads the mind unconsciously along with it,' and as a repository for the most precious values[. . .] Practical sense, social necessity turned into nature, converted into motor schemes and body automatisms, is what causes practices, in and through what makes them obscure to the eyes of their producers, to be sensible, that is informed by a common sense. It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know" (68-9). *The Logic of Practice*, Richard Nice, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.)

³² This is even more true in the first volume edition, in which Hardy altered Giles's character to one less sure of himself, less inclined to sarcasm and less capable of criticism of Grace and her father. See Patricia Ingham's "Notes" to the text in the Penguin edition (1998) xxxix-xl.

³³ "To Florence Dugdale" (22 April 1912). Millgate, *Selected Letters*.

³⁴ Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Conclusion

“But I always want to know the things one shouldn’t do.”

“So as to do them?” asked her Aunt.

“So as to choose,” said Isabel.

-- Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*

Henry James’s approach to “the subject” in fiction insists, like Isabel, upon the choices a character makes. What I offer here is less an interpretation than a proposal, one I hope to follow out in the next stage of this project. I propose that James’s fiction is a fitting subject for a conclusion to this study because he seems little interested in what mainstream realism maintains, that is, the traceability of causes and effects, especially between apparently discreet events or choices. This realist convention, as my dissertation examines, is part of a larger cultural effort to relate determinism – both social and biological – to individual subjectivity. For realists such as George Eliot, habit provided a concept for exploring how character is formed, how it might be transformed, or what restricts its malleability. James’s fiction provides some friction to those earlier realists. For James the irony is not, as in Hardy, the fact that self-consciousness is more of an obstacle than a support to realizing intentions. The irony is that the effects of intentions themselves, once enacted, cannot be determined. As Laurel Bollinger suggestively offers in her reading of *The Portrait of a Lady*, it is Isabel’s vulnerability to transformation that is problematic.¹

Where earlier realists emphasized the world impinging on character and shaping it into predictable channels, James is interested in the inner story, of character asserting itself on the world. “Place the centre of the subject in the young woman’s own consciousness,” James claims to have said to himself, in the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), “and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish.

Stick to that for the centre; put the heaviest weight into that scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself.”² Because Eliot gives us so much of Maggie’s history, the question of what she will *do*, as James will ask of Isabel, is really not much of a mystery. Maggie will renounce her cousin’s fiancé, true to her own sense of integrity, and regardless of how much it rattles St. Ogg’s sense of propriety. Our first notion of Isabel Archer, on the other hand, comes via the marvelously condensed form of Mrs. Touchett’s telegraph. All we hear of her character is that she is “quite independent.” Like Lord Warburton, Mr. Touchett and Ralph, at least initially, we know not whether her “independence” refers to her financial status, her moral sense, or her being “simply [...] fond of [her] own way” (10).

Isabel insists that there was no plot involved in the story of her marriage to Gilbert Osmond: “There had been no plot, no snare; she had looked and considered and chosen. When a woman had made such a mistake, there was only one way to repair it – just immensely (oh, with the highest grandeur!) to accept it. One folly was enough [...] a second one would not much set it off” (440). Yet the plot of the novel turns on Ralph Touchett’s request that his father divide Ralph’s fortune with his cousin Isabel. Ralph wants to see what will happen when Isabel has the *means* to be independent. Ralph’s position, of course, is that of the novelist himself. And we understand some of James’s ambivalence about such a plot when Mr. Touchett expresses his concern about the bequest to Ralph: “It seems to me immoral,” he tells him. “I don’t know that it’s right to make everything so easy for a person” (198). On the contrary, the money does not make it easy for her, though it does give Isabel perfect freedom to choose, and perfect freedom to make her terrible mistake. It’s “a risk,” as Ralph concedes to his father regarding

Isabel becoming a target of fortune hunters, “but I think it’s small, and I’m prepared to take it” (199). The calculated risk Ralph claims that *he* takes is not ethical; it is not his risk. He treats Isabel like a piece of fine entertainment. (Which is, of course, exactly what Isabel Archer is.)

Readers have long understood the realist novel to be concerned with moments of moral choice. But readers of James’s fiction cannot default to the perdurability of habit to explain the behavior that gets characters into moral predicaments. It is difficult to say with certainty that Isabel’s independence causes her wretched marriage. Ralph and Mrs. Touchett both warn her against Gilbert Osmond, and Isabel thinks she knows better than they who would suit her. Perhaps the problem occurs in losing her sense of independence, and choosing to marry rather than look about her, as she had intended. Or then again, we could blame her mistake on the fact that she is just too naïve for the worldly machinations of Osmond and his old lover, Serena Merle. The focus on Isabel’s consciousness highlights her agency and her sensations of awareness rather than the predictability of any of her actions. Even where cause and effect are known, James creates a complex of motives that makes it impossible to trace a single cause to a particular effect. Her own sensations, moment to moment, while physiological, are not habitual. It is difficult to guess what Isabel will decide to do.

Indeed, James often skips over moments of decision altogether, as J. Hillis Miller claims in an essay on *The Portrait of a Lady*, “What is a Kiss?” Miller finds this “systematic nonrepresentation of Isabel’s crucial moments of decision [...] exceedingly peculiar and in need of explanation.”³ Bollinger similarly points out in her essay that James, different from other realists, “relinquishes control of his narrative at the very point

where meaning is most at stake” (141). By focusing on Isabel’s consciousness, James is able to conceal information that Isabel does not have. George Eliot, in the passage I examined in Chapter three, alerts her readers to what Maggie does not know, aligning her readers with the superior knowledge of the narrator. (*The Mill* 288; Allen 122). James achieves great ironic effect by revealing information crucial to understanding the story only after the fact, or rather, after the event. The reader’s knowledge is aligned with Isabel’s in her slow realization – a putting two and two together – of the dismal circumstances of her marriage: “to live in world illumined by lurid flashes” (610). The illuminations are quite lurid – Pansy’s genealogy, Osmond’s adventuring, and worst of all, that Isabel herself played tame to attract him. Her desire to expand herself and her subsequent attachments to her decisions are conflicting and variable.

James’s representation of subjectivity as mysterious and contradictory feels very different from earlier realists. Readers discover Isabel’s second nature in the usual ways: through her own self-reflection, through the commentary of other characters, and through the narrator’s judgments. Yet Isabel remains inexplicable. Why, for instance, is she drawn to Madame Merle? Upon meeting Madame Merle, Isabel is impressed by her extremely polished exterior – her musical talent especially, but more so her self-command, her “suppressed enthusiasm.” The narrator tells us that Isabel “had become aware more than before of the advantage of being like that – of having made one’s self a firm surface, a sort of corselet of silver” (436). Through that awareness, Isabel herself acquires a silver corselet, no longer out of aesthetic admiration for such body armor but rather out of necessity. She needs to hide her shame from Ralph, and to shield herself from Serena Merle’s duplicity and her husband’s cruelty. Caspar – as well as Henrietta

and Ralph – find Isabel profoundly altered after her marriage: “You’re somehow so still, so smooth, so hard. You’re completely changed. You conceal everything” Caspar says despairingly to her. Ralph thinks, “The free, keen girl had become another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. What did Isabel represent? Ralph asked himself; and he could only answer by saying that she represented Gilbert Osmond. ‘Good heavens, what a function!’ he then woefully exclaimed. He was lost in wonder at the mystery of things” (426-27).

The greatest mystery of the novel is why Isabel decides to return to Rome after Ralph’s death. Miller proposes that Isabel sticks to her promise, to her inhospitable home and loveless marriage because – for James, for the narrator, and for Isabel – “it is a way to avoid confronting the fact that selfhood is ‘ondoyant et divers,’ as Montaigne put it, ‘wavering and diverse’”:

Subjectivity has no solid basis in a perdurable, preexisting, and indestructible selfhood. [...] You do not have a self first and then decide on the basis of that. You decide, for reasons that remain ineffably mysterious and unaccountable. The decision gives you a self. This means that a new decision will give you a new self, for example, if Isabel is false to her solemn marriage vows and runs off with Caspar. 741-42

Such a view of subjectivity is one that Isabel initially does not see. She thinks her independence is inviolable, then Isabel feels that the “sole source of her mistake was within herself.” For all her sense of superiority, her view of marriage is as conventional as Osmond’s; it is a solemn vow, one that it would only make her look ridiculous to break. Though she never believed people were meant to suffer, at the end of the novel,

she seems to think that she must be heroic, and play her tragic role to the end. When she speaks with Caspar Goodwood, she does see the world as very big, “a mighty sea” even, but the “noise of waters [...] in her own swimming head” somehow reminds her that her course is “a very straight path” (644). Her decision is “a subjective fact,” just as her confusion is (644).

Miller proposes that *The Portrait of a Lady* has an ethical lesson to teach its readers. He says, “It teaches that ethical decisions, if they are real decisions and not automatic preprogrammed actions, are never fully justifiable by rational explanations. They are leaps in the dark” (746). Subjectivity, as James explores it in *The Portrait*, is irrational. But at least we may keep company and be illumined by good spirits in the faint dawn.

¹ Laurel Bollinger, "The Ethics of Reading: The Struggle for Subjectivity in *The Portrait of a Lady*," *Criticism* 44.2 (Spring 2002), 139-60; 150.

² Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Nicola Bradbury and introduction Graham Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) xxxv; epigraph, 71.

³ J. Hillis Miller, *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Spring 2005), 722-46; 738.

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