WORLDLY FIGURES: CHARACTER AND BELONGING IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH FICTION

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A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in English

Written under the direction of

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and approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Worldly Figures: Character and Belonging in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction

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This dissertation examines the social aesthetics of characterization in nineteenth-century fiction, presenting a series of studies into the distinct figurative and rhetorical techniques that novelists developed for representing literary characters in fiction. During the nineteenth century, British society underwent massive change and reformation. The growth of industry, the redistribution of populations from the country to the city, the expansion of the British Empire, the dissolution of status hierarchy, and the rise of the middle class all defined this period of British modernity. Character, understood as both a semantic construction and as a quality of the individual person, became an important vehicle for negotiating this new modernity. In order to understand how the novel models or mediates this changing world beyond its pages, this project argues that critics must rethink the particular ways that literary characters are constructed across the representational space of the novel. In turn, this project argues that novelists like Walter Scott, William Makepeace Thackeray, Robert Louis

Stevenson, and Vernon Lee turn to literary character as a vehicle for engaging with the limits and conditions of subjectivity and collectivity in the nineteenth century.

This project establishes character as the expressive medium for creating conceptual and literary relations between part and whole. *Worldly Figures* reconsiders the techniques for troubling the figuration of character as unified, coherent, and particular, presenting four case studies in conceptual logics for indeterminate characterizations: singularity, exceptionality, exemplarity, and referentiality. Chapter 1 situates the logic of singularity within the context of Romantic idealizations of the individual genius and figures of abjection. Chapter 2 examines Thackeray's ambivalence toward heroism in a series of fictional narratives about soldiers. The representation of war in narrative and in history becomes an opportunity to address the question of how novels adjudicate between personal and general experience. Chapter 3 turns to the late-nineteenth-century adventure novel as a critique of British imperialism. By focusing on the question of agency and accountability in the adventure novel, the chapter argues that Stevenson uses the themes of quantification and abstraction to illustrate the ideological effect of the subject's dislocation from scenes of decision making or action. Chapter 4 turns to the problem of reference and representation in late-nineteenth-century British Aestheticism and the genre of the roman à clef. The chapter argues that Lee connects questions of reference and identity to the roman à clef's formalization of vulnerability and exposure.

Acknowledgements

One of the pleasures of writing a dissertation on belonging has come in the realization that I have acquired an extensive community of friends and colleagues who have nourished and enriched the project. When I was at my lowest, I found comfort in this community. It is a rare opportunity to get to thank those who have helped you in such a deliberate way.

I cannot imagine what this dissertation would look like without my committee. I'm not sure anyone has a better sense of the craft and discipline of literary criticism than John Kucich, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have learned from him. It's not enough to say that this project would be different if it were not for John. Every sentence has been written with him in mind, and my writing is not only clearer but also more confident as a result. David Kurnick has helped to bring my ideas into focus, providing not only feedback but also a tremendous amount of support. The generosity of Carolyn Williams is unparalleled, and I have learned so much from her about Victorian genre and parody. Yoon Sun Lee has been extremely generous with her time and feedback at conferences, and I was so grateful that she could come on as the outside reader for my dissertation. Thank you, all, for nurturing this project and my own intellectual development.

I've been fortunate to have had many supportive teachers and mentors. At the University of Maryland, I would like to thank Jason Rudy, Bill Cohen, and David Wyatt. Jason, in particular, was an amazing resource when applying for graduate school, and I am not sure I would be where I am now without his support. I would also like to thank the mentors and my peers at the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. Your feedback and encouragement still shapes the writer I am and the writer I would like to be one day.

The intellectual environment at Rutgers University is like nowhere else, and I hope to live up to the examples set by the faculty, students, and staff in the English Department. I would like to thank Billy Galperin, Richard Dienst, Stacy Klein, and Michael McKeon for their roles in my intellectual journey. I would also like to thank, in particular, Jonah Siegel and Dianne Sadoff. I was first introduced to Vernon Lee in Jonah Siegel's class on "Aesthetics and Social Critique," and since then I have not stopped writing on and in the vein of Lee. I had the pleasure to read Walter Scott for the first time in Dianne Sadoff's class, "Prehistories of the Victorian Novel," and Dianne has forever changed my sense of nineteenth-century fiction. I would also like to thank the faculty, students, and staff for the Center for Cultural Analysis, including Mukti Lakhi Mangharam, Carter Mathes, and Rebecca Walkowitz. I am especially grateful for the example set by Rebecca in her teaching and scholarship.

My fellow graduate students have been a resource, a wellspring, and a source of joy during my time at Rutgers. I would like to thank the Nineteenth-Century Studies Group and the audiences at the Princeton-Rutgers Victorian Symposium for their feedback and support. Thank you, in particular, to Scott Challener, Lauren Choplin, Emily Coyle, Clare Greene, Caolan Madden, Alexander Mazzaferro (and, of course, Kelly Sullivan), Kyle McAuley, Abbie Reardon, Anne Terrill, Alicia Williams, and Mimi Winick. I cannot imagine navigating Rutgers without the support and hugs from Courtney Borack and Cheryl Robinson.

I have been lucky to present my research at a number of conferences, and I have received immeasurable feedback that has helped push this project in new directions. I would like to thank the audiences at the annual conferences for the American Comparative Literature Association, Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies, the International Society for the Study of Narrative, the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism, the North American Victorian Studies Association, and the Northeast Victorian Studies Association. I would also like to thank Nathan Hensley and his students at Georgetown University for inviting me and listening to me present an early version of my thoughts about the adventure novel. Gabriel Rosenberg suffered through some preliminary thoughts over Bloody Marys, and I am grateful for his willingness to listen.

I have been lucky to have formed many friendships with individuals who not only support me but help keep me engaged in the world. From Maryland and DC: Renee Davidson, Chris Geidner, Natalie and Kelly Prizel, and Ryan St. Pierre. From NY: Erin Lester, Chase Purdy, and the eternal memory of Bonnie Davidson. A special word for Jesse Anderson and Dan Mandelkorn, who have created a beautiful family and source of hope for me in Paige and Lucas. From Philly: Robbie Dulaney, Zachary Teague Dutton, Alex Hamilton, Patrick Hanlin, and Arun Sethuraman. To all of my boys from Philly: I could not have survived without the support, the diversions, and the dance parties.

To my dog, Ruskin, who has given me an excuse to stand up and walk around every day. "What would the world be, once bereft / Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left, / O let them be left, wildness and wet; / Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet."

Words fail when we need them the most, and I struggle to find the words to equal the love and support that I have received from my husband, Jason Bartles. Depression and anxiety make it very difficult for me to participate in the world or to feel as if I belong in it. When I have wanted to hide or give up, you have been a bridge back to the world. Thank you, always, for reminding me what this is all about: "We cannot live, except thus mutually."

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Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so.

—Henry James, "Preface" to *Roderick Hudson* (1907)

To be whole is to be part; true voyage is return.

—Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (1974)

Marx was right: The smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction. From such nets of souls societies, the social world, human life springs. And also plays.

—Tony Kushner, "Afterword" to *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1993)

Introduction

Worldly Figures examines the aesthetics of characterization in nineteenth-century fiction, presenting a series of studies into the distinctive ways that novelists use literary character to give form to social reality. This dissertation takes as its starting point that "proportionate anxiety" that Henry James describes in his "Preface" to the New York Edition of *Roderick Hall* to somehow give "form and composition" to a formless world. James contends that the task of the novelist is "to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle" by which the expansive, unlimited relations of the world "shall happily *appear*" finite.[1] When James qualifies that these relations will only "appear" contained by the geometry of that circle, he suggests that an experience of the uncertain, non-identical, incomplete, sublime, and irreducible somehow persists, lodged in the heart of the novel. The novelist does not, then, confuse the part for the whole. Rather, he preserves that infinitude as an "exquisite problem," which the novel can neither overcome nor forget. We can say two things about James's geometric rendering of the novel form. On the one hand, it suggests that the novel withdraws from the world in order to achieve legibility. This notion of withdrawal harmonizes with the critique that the nineteenth-century novel promotes a false ideology of containment and closure. On the other hand, the novel as James conceives it dramatizes this legibility as artifice. Through the self-reflexive spectacle of its own *appearance* as a self-contained whole, the novel preserves by negation that world to which it is related but from which it must separate itself. The topology of the novel thus creates a set of aesthetic, epistemological, and social concerns. In this dissertation, I contend that literary characterization is one site where this tension between structured form and unstructured relations is especially fraught for nineteenth-century writers. In order to understand how the novel models or mediates the world beyond its pages, we must rethink the particular ways that literary characters are constructed across the representational space of the novel.

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[1] Henry James, "Preface to *Roderick Hudson*," in *Henry James: Literary Criticism*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson, vol. 2 (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1040–1.

In *Worldly Figures*, I seek to reconsider how nineteenth-century novelists trouble the figuration of character as unified, coherent, and particular. The example of James's "exquisite problem" is instructive because it reminds us that literary character has long been a site of difference for nineteenth-century writers, even before Sigmund Freud and the modernists shattered the "unitary notion of character" to which Victorian writers were alleged to have been committed.[2] As Peter Brooks has recently argued, nineteenth-century writers understood the shape and form of literary character to be "far less defined, far more fluid, problematic, and protean" than we have been willing to acknowledge.[3] The spectacle of a character's artificial unity dramatizes this failure to resolve the form of character into something like identity or personality. Against the unified model of literary character, novelists pursue models of characterization that reflect the ontological indeterminacy of literary structure by resisting the requirement to appear as unified wholes. This study examines the distinctive ways writers disrupt the formal and semantic unity of literary character in fictional texts, as well as the formal and ideological effect this discontinuity has on literary representation. Concentrating on characters who either resist identification or who blur the lines between the particular and the general, this dissertation explores the cultural work accomplished by indeterminate forms of characterization. In turn, I situate my arguments for character in the context of specific historical and cultural changes in the nineteenth century: the internal colonization of Scotland and the rise of British nationalism; the persistence of war and the growth of the British Empire;

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[2] Peter Brooks, *Enigmas of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.

[3] Ibid., 5.

the rise of social statistics and the administration of the population as a whole; and the emergence of gender as a site of social and economic contestation in the novel at the end of the nineteenth century.

My aim is not to resolve the slippery quality of literary character in nineteenth-century fiction but to ask what social and historical experiences are mediated by these errant figures. In Walter Scott's novel *Rob Roy*, for example, there is a strong tendency to disrupt the semantic continuity of the titular character from one moment to the next. When Rob Roy first appears in the narrative, he is described as a mysterious, handsome gentleman. Then, we meet him again and again, but our narrator never seems to recognize him or to connect each new appearance to the prior iteration of the mysterious stranger. There is always a lag in the text between the scene of Rob Roy's appearance and the moment when the narrator finally recognizes him and restores continuity to the semantic field of his character. This strange, obscure figure is an object of fascination for both the narrator and the reader, and his many returns spark an interest that prompts us to keep reading. It is not until very late in our reading that we finally discover his identity, but it is an odd reading experience to have read over 300 pages of the novel, only to realize that the titular character has never once been mentioned by name until that point. On the one hand, when it finally comes, Rob Roy's name retroactively creates a structure of meaning within the text. The discontinuous repetitions of "mysterious stranger" suddenly become a unified and cohesive structure that we associate with an internally coherent character. We look back on the scenes with this mysterious stranger, and it is as if we retroactively ascribe meaning that transforms those moments of non-recognition into moments of mis-recognition. On the other, we become all the more aware that the indeterminacy and obscurity of Rob Roy's character is an important part of how we encounter him. To what extent, then, can we understand his character as discontinuous and, therefore, separate from the scene of his recognition? What effect does Rob Roy's discontinuity and repetition have on our experience of the novel, and how can we understand this effect separate from the model of the structured and self-identical subject?

In *Worldly Figures*, I examine four conceptual and literary relations that connect part to whole: singularity, exceptionality, exemplarity, and referentiality. These "character logics" form the connective tissue of the literary object, working both within and against the "presupposition of unity" that Catherine Gallagher has identified as the sticking point for the "imagined cathexis" of reading narrative fiction.[4] Rob Roy's singularity, for example, disrupts the surface of narrative continuity, as if each new iteration of the "mysterious stranger" suggests the existence of separate characters. The singularity of this narrative and characterological discontinuity, in turn, works against the pressures of fixed identity. Referentiality, meanwhile, corresponds to the connection of similar or like parts between the narrative text and the extra-diegetic world. By focusing on the problem of reference in Lee's fiction, I argue that she is concerned with character as an object of knowledge, wherein knowledge is premised on a character inhabiting a recognizable social category. Singularity and referentiality thus problematize what it means to know the particular or to know in particular. At the same time, each of these character logics models an immanent desire for collective belonging. For example, by illustrating the correspondence or iterability of parts (one part serving as an example for another), exemplarity provides an opportunity to rethink individual agency in light of new theories of distributed and collective action. Each of these character logics is interesting because of how it offers an opportunity to clarify and deconstruct the supposedly stark contrast between subject and world, part and whole, both within and without the literary text. My title reflects this desire by suggesting two possibilities: both the figuration of worlds, as well as the figures who negotiate what it means to be a part of a world.

I call these "character logics" not to emphasize an underlying rationality but to identify concepts for relating part to whole. These character logics are not meant to replace the forms of character with which we are most familiar, like the protagonist, the major or minor character, the round or flat character, or the character type. In fact, I frequently refer to these forms in my own readings. Rather, a character logic is like the geometry of James's circle: it gives the appearance of formal unity while also hinting at an immanent fragmentation. Logic and geometry are two methods with which we seek to describe and model the complexities of social reality by making that reality available as an object of knowledge and representation. Yet, in many of the cases that I examine, the force of this particular arrangement proves untenable. The logical arrangement of character—its appearance of unity or integrity across the narrative as a whole—is stretched and bent in the process of trying to accommodate this social reality.

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[4] Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 360, 350.

During the nineteenth century, British society underwent massive change and reformation. The growth of industry, the redistribution of populations from the country to the city, the expansion of the British Empire, the dissolution of status hierarchy, and the rise of the middle class all defined this period of British modernity. According to Andrew H. Miller, the British were especially responsive to the "epistemological disarray" of this history of modernity, as part and whole no longer operated in a self-evident, organic relation.[5] Character became an important vehicle not only for negotiating this new modernity but also for formulating new relations of part to whole. This blurring of part and whole allows us to treat these relations as forms, to analyze the logic of their formation, and to describe the pressure exerted by the external social reality on novelistic representation.

In the chapters that follow, I argue that novelists like Walter Scott, William Makepeace Thackeray, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Vernon Lee turn to literary character as a vehicle for engaging with the limits and conditions of subjectivity and collectivity. My argument presents a series of case studies, focusing less on a developmental or causal argument than a formal one. Yet, there are certain historical correspondences among my authors that help to give the project a sense of internal unity. The conflict between the totalizing and the singular in Scott, which reveals the limits of individual perception, is picked up by Thackeray, later in the century, as the appeal of the trivial and the ordinary. Meanwhile, Stevenson and Lee were both writing at the same moment in time on the subject of the novel as an art form. Together they reveal common fault lines in the formalization of the novel at the end of the nineteenth century. Of course, these arrangements are provisional and, therefore, merely representative of nineteenth-century literary history. Nonetheless, these novelists are all examples of the sustained, culture-wide effort to sustain protean forms of characterization within literature and to deconstruct the supposed integrity and fixity of the social whole.

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[5] Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 4.

Despite their differences, each of these four writers investigates the nature of character and the scope of novelistic representation as it confronts the crisis of resolving the connection between part and whole. Recalling the puppets at the end of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* who are shut up in a toy chest once their theatrical functions have been fulfilled, we might be tempted to think of character as a limited category of literary analysis, insofar as characters have no agency beyond the lifeworld of the text or beyond the fleeting moment of the literary encounter. The instrumentality of their powerlessness—their doll-like capacity both to play a part and to be discarded like so many childhood playthings—seems to privilege the reader's "idealized immanence."[6] On the one hand, the reader identifies with the authorial figure who manipulates and controls the strings, thereby preserving the distance of the reader from the content of literary character. On the other, the reader also finds her own limited agency reflected in the image of the puppets who are cordoned off into limited and limiting lifeworlds. In his "Dedication" to *Minima Moralia*, Adorno describes Hegel's philosophy and its failure to examine the connection between individual experience and collective being. Adorno admits that there is a certain "triumph of fatality" in any treatment of the individual as the "culmination of the social principle."[7] Following Adorno, one could argue that the novel's interest in the restrictiveness or limitations of the individual subject are an occasion to think beyond the instrumentalization of this powerless figure. That the puppets hover somewhere between the human world and the object world suggests that the equation between character and personality is not the basis for any certainty. What other models of expressive relations and connection might character offer?

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[6] Gallagher, "Rise of Fictionality," 361.

In the four chapters that comprise this study, I examine the relations encoded in the logics of literary characterization. The four authors that I examine might seem, though, to belie the collective terms that I articulate in this introduction. From Scott's focus on middling, bourgeois individuals to Thackeray's ironic deflation of the collective terms of heroism and national greatness to Stevenson's preoccupation with the puerility of the self-possessed hero to Lee's tragic vision of women's disempowerment, these authors all seem more preoccupied with the individual's diminishment than with any concept of collectivity or any expanded sense of social belonging. Yet, the possible role of character in the formation of collective concepts does not depend upon the rejection of the individual but on the dialectical connection between particular and general, part and whole. Many of the novels that I discuss in this project present the unified subject as an obstacle to flourishing rather than as the comfortable or triumphant endpoint. For example, the generic proper name, that index of a character's identity across the semantic field of the novel, is often a site of contestation and ambiguity rather than integrity. Throughout the nineteenth-century novel, characters often disguise and conceal their proper names, discover a new name and identity late in the novel, or debate the relative importance of their name. The generic proper name is no longer a simple sign of unity, and instead it serves to remind us

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7. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 17.

of the discontinuity so often immanent to the figuration of literary character. This ambiguity is symptomatic of the novel's unrest with the scale and particularity of individualism. These novels thus represent the diminishment of individualism, making it available for analysis and critique, by dramatizing or ironizing the conditions and limitations of what it means to be a recognizable character.

I want to emphasize that my analysis of the character logics of the nineteenth-century novel is an effort to think of character in dialectical terms. When read as a dialectic, character is one of the formal techniques proper to the novel that enable it to move between "procedure" and "substance." Following Erich Auerbach's theory of figuration and literary realism, Harry E. Shaw argues, "Nineteenth-century realist fiction can be seen as an attempt to balance procedure and substance, in the concrete modes by which it invites the reader to come to terms with realities, imagined and real."[8] Although "character" is not an operative term in Shaw's study, his claims about realist fiction and historicism have been consequential for my thinking of character. For Shaw, historicist realism is a "mode" that engages the reader in "mental procedures" for making sense of the material substance of reality.[9] To imagine a world, whether fictional or material, requires modes of cognition and reason—or, logic. These logics are, in turn, realized in various literary forms and tropes. While Shaw focuses on the trope of metonymy, he nonetheless suggests that the nineteenth-century novel (he writes on Jane Austen, Walter Scott, and George Eliot) is invested in its own dialecticity. The novel is a pedagogic form that teaches readers the formal and epistemological procedures for thinking and representing the particular and the general together. Instead of reifying the particulars of literary representation as data or evidence, the nineteenth-century novel refuses to treat the details of its own narration as the end of inquiry. The nineteenth-century novel promotes habits of thinking that move between part and whole, thereby allowing us to see the meaning of particulars as they relate to patterns, abstractions, and generalities that exceed the particular.

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[8] Harry E. Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), xi.

[9] Ibid., xii.

The value of literary character changes over the course of the nineteenth century, and one of the goals of this dissertation is to examine the specific meanings of different character logics at different moments in time. How novelists conceive character—the degree of particularity or generality—reveals the conditions and limitations of what it means to be a person or to belong. Often novelists will use character either intensively or extensively, either to represent individual experience or to make connections that allow us to perceive the social totality. We can see both tendencies on display in Scott's description of the portrait that hangs in Bradwardine Castle at the end of *Waverley*:

> It was a large and spirited painting, representing Fergus Mac-Ivor and Waverley in their Highland dress; the scene a wild, rocky, and mountainous pass, down which the clan were descending in the background. It was taken from a spirited sketch, drawn while they were in Edinburgh by a young man of high genius, and had been painted on a full-length scale by an eminent London artist. [Henry] Raeburn himself (whose Highland Chiefs do all but walk out of the canvas) could not have done more justice to the subject; and the ardent, fiery, and impetuous character of the unfortunate Chief of Glennaquoich was finely contrasted with the contemplative, fanciful, and enthusiastic expression of his happier friend. Beside the painting hung the arms which Waverley had borne in the unfortunate civil war. The whole piece was beheld with admiration, and deeper feelings.[10]

The unveiling of the portrait is a paradigmatic event in the novel, and critics often return to this moment in order to describe the ideological effect of the Waverley novels as "an instrument of … 'official nationalism.' "[11] At this moment in the novel, Fergus Mac-Ivor is dead, having been executed by the state for his role in the "unfortunate civil war" of the Jacobite Uprising of 1745. Transferred to the static surface of the painting, the "ardent, fiery, and impetuous character" of the Scottish Highland chief is transformed into something that can be viewed with disinterest, calm, or melancholic "admiration." "Character" in this sense describes the particular qualities that distinguish Fergus Mac-Ivor as an individual and as a person. It's tempting to read the painting as the ossification and containment of that character. That the "large and spirited painting" is done at "full-length scale" suggests the deadening effect of mimetic reproduction (the one-to-one correspondence of individual and character), over and against the dynamic, generative forms of characterization on display in the novel. The "deeper feelings" roused by the painting points to this tension and loss. At the same time, the passage also invokes the logic of exemplarity, which suggests that the meaning of Fergus's character is premised not on his individuality but on the social, cultural, and economic connections that his character makes meaningful. The novel thus makes meaning by charting the extensive web, or world, of general connections of which the particular character is a part.

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[10] Walter Scott, *Waverley* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 489.

The literary history of character in my argument builds on a tradition of literary criticism that understands nineteenth-century writers as deeply conflicted about how to represent the self in connection to the social totality. From Romanticism's many figures of abjection, poverty, and anonymity to the biopolitical management of excess or surplus populations to the liberal fantasies of sovereignty that underwrite imperial violence, nineteenth-century writers were informed by the shifting ground of British sociality, its simultaneous expansion and contraction, and its enmeshment with systems of power, domination, inequality, and exclusion.[12] Yet, I am not making a historical argument nor describing forms of historical causality that lead from context to text. While my argument tracks alongside the history of liberalism and the Victorian interest in "having" character, where character is an ethos or mode of intentional self-determination, the novelists I study are all too aware of the inauthentic and tragic vision of liberal individualism. Instead, my argument stresses the form and formation of literary character. If these two histories—one political/ethical and the other literary—seem to be easily conflated or interleaved, then it seems important to understand better how the shape or meaning of "character" undergoes considerable change and redefinition in the nineteenth century.

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[11] Ian Duncan, "Primitive Inventions: *Rob Roy*, Nation, and World System," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15, no. 1 (2002): 81–102, 82.

[12] On Romanticism and the recessive or anonymous subject, see Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); and Jacques Khalip,

A Word on Character

Who or what is a character, and what work does literary character do in the novel? In this dissertation, I argue that "character" is, first and foremost, an abstract noun. This abstraction allows us to see how character might be disarticulated from the image of a unified subject. While this approach to literary character might seem unwieldy, so capacious as to be meaningless, it is useful insofar as it helps to direct our attention away from the putative affiliation of character with humanness, individualism, and psychology. More specifically, it allows me to focus on the more simple fact that literary characters are "semiotic constructs," existing both on the page and "[i]n the sphere of our individual imagination as an object of thought."[13] My focus on character as an abstraction and as a semiotic construct will allow me to treat character as a

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Anonymous Life: Romanticism and Dispossession (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). On expendable or remainder populations and the Victorian novel, see Emily Steinlight, "Dickens's 'Supernumeraries' and the Biopolitical Imagination of Victorian Fiction," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 43, no. 2 (June 2010): 227–50; and Emily Steinlight, "Hardy's Unnecessary Lives: The Novel as Surplus," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 47, no. 2 (June 2014): 224–41. On imperial violence and the Victorian novel, see Zarena Aslami, *The Dream Life of Citizens: Late Victorian Novels and the Fantasy of the State* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); and Nathan K. Hensley, *Forms of Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[13] Uri Margolin, "Character," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67.

form whose content need not be the individuated human. In turn, I will examine alternatives to the liberal humanism often ascribed to the nineteenth-century novel.

Henry James will help us to think through some of these problems about how we define literary character. In his essay "The Art of Fiction," James argues that novelists should beware distinguishing between character and plot. Novelists who focus too heavily on plot churn out romances or naturalist fictions with little psychological interest; those who limit themselves to character risk missing the context that informs character. "What is character but the determination of incident?" asks James, "What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture or a novel that is not of a character?"[14] While in this essay James seems to treat both of these elements of the novel as complementary, at other times he seems to treat character as a more basic function of the novel. In an essay on Anthony Trollope, James writes, "Character, in any sense in which we can get at it, is action, and action is plot, and any plot which hangs together, even if it pretend to interest us only in the fashion of a Chinese puzzle, plays upon our emotion, our suspense, by means of personal references. We care what happens to people only in proportion as we know what people are."[15] Character makes the experience of a puzzle relevant or meaningful by virtue of relating it to our emotions or "personal references." By bringing incident into the orbit of individual persons, novels seem to affirm a version of the world centered on the human subject. Characters are not simply "actors" in the plot but, more specifically, human actors whom we recognize and know.

According to E. M. Forster's influential model, this ambition to represent characters as having depths or personality is what gives them their "roundedness" by implying a human personality behind or beneath the exterior surface of the character.[16] While round or three-dimensional models of character are themselves a form of abstraction, the consistent attention to the mimetic relationship between novel characters and the human subject reinforces humanistic values of individuality and identity. At the same time, Forster's description of the patterns that cohere in novels suggests a way forward from this limited focus on the mimetic reproduction of persons. Like geometric objects (Forster uses the image of an hourglass on several occasions), patterns provide a container that holds and coheres the discrete parts of the novel, including various characters, into a totalizing whole—"catch its scattered statements in a net, make them cohere like a planet, and swing through the skies of memory."[17] In Forster's account of patterns, characters are not prior but enmeshed in the structure of narrative. The novelist's responsibility, beside representing "human beings," is to "achieve something else at the same time."[18] The character logics that I focus on suggest the productive potential of moving beyond further consideration of the character as either unified or particular.

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[14] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *Henry James: Literary Criticism*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson, vol. 1 (New York: Library of America, 1984), 55.

[15] Henry James, "Anthony Trollope," in *Henry James: Literary Criticism*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson, vol. 1 (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1336.

To describe literary character as dialectically enmeshed in narrative structure and pattern is to rethink the work that characters do in a text, such that identity and subjectivity are no longer the yardsticks or limits by which we evaluate them. One version of the story of character in literary criticism has been the dismissal of character for its formalization and sublimation of the human subject. Much of the ideological analyses of character that happened in the mid-twentieth century was in response to structuralist and narratological theories of character. In response, critics demonstrated the ideological effect of character over and against a more capacious humanism. "By definition," writes Hélène Cixous, "a 'character,' preconceived or created by an author, is to be *figured out*, understood, read: he is presented, offered up to interpretation, with the prospect of a traditional reader that seeks its satisfaction at the level of potential identification with such and such a 'personage' … such that the reader is upheld, by comparison or in combination with a personage, in the representation that he wishes to have of himself."[19] Cixous argues that literary character flattens and essentializes the natural heterogeneity of human life, thus limiting the modes of being and selfhood available to the contemporary subject. Character, in this sense, is repressive or normative because it upholds an image of the subject that is knowable and available for assimilation. Identifying with characters who can be "understood" and "read" affirms the comforting illusion of certainty and stasis. Cixous points out that the "ideology underlying this fetishization of 'character' is that of an 'I' who is a *whole* subject …, conscious, knowable."[20] By virtue of the reader's omniscience, whereby character becomes an opportunity to peer into the life and mind of another person, the certainty of character gestures to a narrow and restrained portrait of the human subject, where all that is unknowable, uncertain, or uncomfortable is disqualified. Cixous's idealization of the human subject entails the resistance to or rejection of literary character in favor of multiplicity and difference: "Being several and insubordinate, the subject can resist subjugation. In texts that evade the standard codes, the 'personage' is, in fact, Nobody."[21] Yet, in portraying characters who disrupt that certainty, who are "several and insubordinate," nineteenth-century novels provide us with models and logics of literary characterization that allow us to glimpse alternatives to the subject's recognition or identification.

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[16] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1985), 43–82.

[17] Ibid., 161.

[18] Ibid., 169.

If character threatens our multiplicity with its illusion of certainty, than it also threatens us with its illusion of depth. This is the point made by D. A. Miller, following a line of Foucauldian critique, in his discussion of how characters use secrecy to create a sense of depth or hidden psychology. Writing on Dickensian characters, and *David Copperfield* in particular, Miller writes, "In a world where the explicit exposure of the subject would manifest how thoroughly he has been inscribed within a socially given totality, secrecy would be the spiritual exercise by which the subject is allowed to conceive of himself as a resistance; a friction in the smooth function of the social order, a margin to which its far-reaching discourse does not reach."[22] This illusion of "secrecy," "resistance," and "friction" has the ideological effect of providing the reader with the comforting sense of power and authority, a "comparative freedom" relative to the "constraints of character": "We condescend to praise these characters as 'inimitable' because they make manifest how safe we are from the possibility of actually imitating them. The reduced model of the subject that they exemplify is refuted or transcended automatically in any reader's experience."[23] For both Cixous and Miller, characters are reductive and limited, which either illuminates an alternative model of being that is capacious and diverse or lulls the reader into a false sense of security of his or her own comparative impenetrability. In either case, literary character is understood as an instrument of ideology, and the work of the literary critic consists in either disclosing that ideology or describing how the text deconstructs it from within. While my argument has been informed by these approaches, it treats character not as a clear technology for the transmission or inculcation of ideology; rather, as a literary dialectic, character functions by mobilizing ideas beyond the particulars of a given situation.

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[19] Hélène Cixous, "The Character of 'Character'," trans. Keith Cohen, *New Literary History* 5, no. 2 (1974): 385.

[20] Ibid., 385.

[21] Ibid., 387–8.

My argument follows a turn in literary criticism of the last few decades away from the model of literary character as a form of repression and toward explicitly ethical and moral models of literary character. For example, character has been an important part of Amanda Anderson's criticism, capturing the dynamics of critical detachment and ethical reflection in Victorian cosmopolitanism and also structuring the ways writers negotiated the lived commitments of liberalism as a political philosophy.[24] Both Adela Pinch and Rae Greiner have argued that characterization is crucial to the ways we imagine or sympathize with other minds.[25] Andrew H. Miller has revealed the ways in which character is uncovered and revealed through the process of narration in contradistinction to the model of character as integrated and formally unified. In his description of the labors and "burdens" of moral perfectionism in nineteenth-century fiction, Miller writes: "The emphasis is neither on rare heroic action nor on static categories of virtue, but on the sort of quietly accumulating and solidifying elements of character which the realistic novel realized and explored in the everyday world."[26] Similarly, Lauren Goodlad has distinguished between "descriptive" models of character—by which a norm of being is naturalized and essentialized through the presumption of unity—and a "prescriptive" model, which like Miller's model, implies the "limitless improvability of all human beings," and, therefore, the discontinuity at the heart of the character form.[27] While all of these approaches presume the affiliation between character and personality, they also allow us to see the polymorphous qualities of character as a generative tendency, connected to the ways in which literature is engaged in thinking beyond the empirical world as it is given.

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[22] D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 207.

[23] Ibid., 208.

Other scholars have sought to free the aesthetics of characterization from the political ideology of individualism and subjectivity by emphasizing the novel's collective aspirations. In *Empty Houses*, David Kurnick describes how novelists developed strategies of narration and characterization out of failed attempts to write for the theater: "the novel's interior spaces are lined with longing references to the public worlds they would seem to have left behind. In its contradictory character, at once inwardly oriented and outwardly desirous, the tradition explored here confirms the fundamental ambiguity embedded in the logic of the public/private distinction."[28] Kurnick attributes these references to a lingering desire for collectivity and publicity, which emerges most palpably in response to the Victorian novel's consolidation of character as a site of repose for the private and interiorized subject. The novel, then, is an attempt to elicit the crowded and sociable space of the theater, over and against the privatized and sublimated experience of reading the novel. For his part, character is one of many strategies that Kurnick identifies for eliciting this desire for public culture. Yet, his has been a useful argument for uncovering the phenomenological experience of reading character and how those experiences need not correspond to the minimal forms of subjectivity or identification.

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[24] Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Amanda Anderson, "Character and Ideology: The Case of Cold War Liberalism," *New Literary History* 42, no. 2 (2011): 209–29.

[25] Adela Pinch, *Thinking About Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

[26] Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection*, 13.

[27] Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 24–25.

In his influential study of protagonists and minor characters, Alex Woloch has argued for a narratological account of literary character that emphasizes the interleaving of character and structure. Woloch argues that one reason why character has been such a contentious object of debate among literary critics is because it is divided somewhere between "structure and reference." "In other words," writes Woloch, "a literary *dialectic* that operates dynamically within the narrative text gets transformed into a theoretical *contradiction*, presenting students of literature with an unpalatable choice: language or reference, structure or individuality … By interpreting the character-system as a distributed field of attention, we make the tension between structure and reference generative of, and integral to, narrative signification. The opposition between the character as an individual and the character as part of a structure dissolves in this framework, as distribution relies on reference and takes place through structure."[29] Woloch reads the narrative relation between major and minor characters as a site of formal and ideological tension that is, in turn, "generative of … narrative signification." According to Woloch, the visibility or authority of protagonists and major characters in relation to the "distributed field of attention" within the narrative structure is always at risk of being overturned by the many "minor" characters who bustle and struggle at the margins or in the background of the narrative. Although Woloch's description of literary characterization is animated by a "socioformal" argument about class struggle, he allows us to see the productive potential for a dialectical reading of literary character, as well as for a more capacious understanding of how literary form intervenes in the dynamics of social relation. My argument, in turn, is an attempt to produce even greater heterogeneity in our descriptions of nineteenth-century figurations of character.

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[28] David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.

This dissertation treats literary character not as a model of containment (what Woloch calls "contradiction") but, rather, as a model of dialectical movement. Here, I am following most closely a line of Marxian critique developed by Georg Lukács and later picked up by Fredric Jameson. In *The Historical Novel*, Lukács argues that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the genre of the historical novel became a political one insofar as it began to reflect "history as a process."[30] For Lukács, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars were watershed moments in the popular life of Western Europe. Rather than employ "professional" armies of mercenaries, France turned to its population of ordinary citizens to stock its armies. Similarly, the wars fought by these "mass armies" were no longer physically removed from the civilian population; instead, they were fought on the battleground of Europe.[31] Suddenly, the everyday life of ordinary citizens was infiltrated by history and by class struggle.

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29. Alex Woloch, *The One Vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 17.

30. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 21.

31. Ibid., 23.

Writes Lukács, "Hence the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them."[32] While historical novels existed prior to the nineteenth century, Walter Scott's Waverley novels in particular were innovative for how they set about reflecting this new collective experience. As he reflects on Scott's greatness, not only as the master of the historical novel but also as the father of the great realist novel, Lukács proposes that Scott's most important contribution was what he did for literary characterization:

> Paradoxically, Scott's greatness is closely linked with his often narrow conservatism. He seeks the "middle way" between the extremes and endeavours to demonstrate artistically the historical reality of this way by means of his portrayal of the great crises in English history. This basic tendency finds immediate expression in the way he constructs his plot and selects his central figure. The "hero" of a Scott novel is always a more or less mediocre, average English gentleman. He generally possesses a certain, though never outstanding, degree of practical intelligence, a certain moral fortitude and decency which even rises to a capacity for self-sacrifice, but which never grows into a sweeping human passion, is never the enraptured devotion to a great cause.[33]

Written during his exile and after the "great crisis" of the First World War, Lukács's description of the "middle way" and of the mediocre protagonist sounds tragic and inflected by trauma. He conceives limitation and restraint as the condition of being within history. At the same time, Lukács's theory of the historical novel is, as Perry Anderson writes, "an affirmation of human progress, in and through the conflicts that divide societies and the individuals within them."[34] In other words, the typical character of Scott's historical novels is representative insofar as he provides a model for thinking both within and above history. He establishes a "neutral ground" on which "opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another."[35] The middling protagonist allows readers to identify with the movement of history without premising that identification on a fantasy of agency or action. Instead, literary character provides a form or frame for thought, a habit of mind, that allows the reader not only to understand history as it is but to know history as capable of change and redefinition. As Yoon Sun Lee writes on Lukács's figuration of character: "His type embodies the contradictions of a historical moment rather than a reified social or demographic category."[36]

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[32] Ibid., 24.

[33] ibid., 33.

For Fredric Jameson, writers like Lukács provide an alternative to the tradition of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, with its emphasis on positive, empirical knowledge, "anti-speculative bias," and "submission to what is."[37] Also working against a deterministic tradition of Marxist philosophy, Jameson argues that literature, in particular, provides a privileged model "in which to observe dialectical thinking at work."[38] Jameson turns specifically to literary tropes, figures, and rhetoric to examine this dialectical thinking as "process"—and, in his chapter on Lukács, to the specific figure of literary characters.[39] According to Jameson, Lukács's emphasis on the "typicality" of characters evokes thought as the syncretism of the "concrete" and the "abstract": "For Lukács realistic characters are distinguished from those in other types of literature by their typicality: they stand in, in other words, for something larger and more meaningful than themselves, than their own isolated individual destinies. They are concrete individualities and yet at the same time maintain a relationship with some more general or collective human substance."[40] Central to the effect of this typicality is the "judgment of being," by which readers are asked to evaluate or adjudicate between reality as it is given and reality as it might be otherwise.[41] For Jameson, realism recovers a more capacious, less impoverished horizon of being by virtue of this dialectical movement between concrete and abstract, particular and general, present and future. Both Lukács and Jameson offer us a generative, critical version of the nineteenth-century novel that illuminates the ways in which it labors to think beyond the grounds of a concrete given toward alternative social and ethical horizons.

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[34] Perry Anderson, "From Progress to Catastrophe," *London Review of Books*, July 2011, 24–28.

[35] Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 36.

[36] Yoon Sun Lee, "Type, Totality, and the Realism of Asian American Literature," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (January 2012): 421.

[37] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), x.

[38] Ibid., xi.

[39] Ibid., xii.

Throughout this introduction and throughout my project as a whole, I frequently refer to the transformative or critical potential of attending to literary character. By emphasizing the discontinuity of the semantic field of literary character, I aim to suggest that nineteenth-century fiction labors to transcend the world as it is given. Critique, as I use it in this study, implies an attempt to disentangle literature from evidence and to associate this posture with the literary object and with narrative form. Lee, in her essay on Lukács, argues that "aesthetic knowing is transitive and can pass beyond or move outside itself."[42] Also inspired by Lukács, Anna Kornbluh has written a number of essays on how literature attempts to problematize or transcend empirical reality and, therefore promote socialities and relations that are irreducible to political formations as they are given in the present.[43] The critical potential of literature is distinct from its rational or purposive representations—and, thus, character is irreducible to the self or individual of which it is often taken as a corollary. Instead, literature is experienced, as Leo Bersani argued in 1976, "partly as an insubstantial sign referring to meanings beyond itself, and partly as a sensuous object referring to nothing but its own shape, sound and position."[44]

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[40] Ibid., 191.

[41] Ibid., 196.

[42] Lee, "Type, Totality, and the Realism of Asian American Literature," 417.

[43] See Anna Kornbluh, "The Realist Blueprint," *The Henry James Review* 36, no. 3 (2015): 199–211; and Anna Kornbluh, "We Have Never Been Critical: Toward the Novel as Critique," *Novel* 50, no. 3 (November 2017): 397–408.

Logical Figures

Each of the four chapters of my dissertation is organized around a single "character logic" that I read through works by a single nineteenth-century novelist: singularity in Walter Scott; exceptionality in William Makepeace Thackeray; exemplarity in Robert Louis Stevenson; and referentiality in Vernon Lee (the pseudonym of Violet Paget). As I previously stated, my argument proceeds by way of case study rather than narratively or causally. While I am not making a historicist argument, the choice of novelist and logic is not incidental but rather an attempt to illuminate a knot of contradictions or problems that are meaningful at distinct moments in the nineteenth century. The status of singular characters in Scott's fiction is interesting in part because of Romanticism's celebration of particularity and individual genius. Similarly, referentiality in Lee's fiction challenges the association of late-nineteenth-century British Aestheticism with aesthetic autonomy or an incipient modernist formalism.

My choice of one novelist over another to describe the workings of each character logic is provisional but not, therefore, meaningless. For example, exceptionality can help us to negotiate Thackeray's deflationary irony, which trivializes social hierarchy and pretense. Other authors, like Charles Dickens, approach the logic of exceptionality and hierarchy to a different effect, much in the same way neither Dickens nor

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[44] Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown; Company, 1976), 10.

Thackeray approach the form of the protagonist in much the same way. While parodic, Dickens never seems to match the extent of Thackeray's deflationary tendencies, which are universal in their scope and extent. At the same time, exceptionality might have proven a useful concept with which to approach Stevenson's *Treasure Island*; for example, exceptionality could have revealed the link between the exceptional state of boyhood and the state fantasy of hierarchical difference. The choice of one logic over another is partially a heuristic choice and partially a critical decision born out of my readings of these novels. My reading of exceptionality in Thackeray's fiction is not meant to suggest that exemplarity or referentiality would not also be instructive to how we read Thackeray's novels. In fact, Thackeray's playful dismantling of the conventions of historical fiction would make referentiality a useful heuristic in the same way that his distaste for moral perfectionism would make exemplarity a complicated subject. Overall, however, I have chosen logics that I feel are central to the narrative strategies of the four novelists that comprise this study.

By and large, nineteenth-century fiction complicates the relationship between the particular and the general by refusing to sublimate difference into structure. The tension between the particular and the general is thus an important dynamic that informs how we read, interpret, or approach literary characters in the novel. According to Catherine Gallagher, the novel "reverses the commonsensical empiricism that pervaded the intellectual atmosphere of England" by referring not to specific individuals but to "species" or "types" of persons: "Novelists took the abstract entity, the species or type, to be the given, the thing-in-the-world referent grounding the form, and conceded that their individuals are imaginary concoctions."[45] Under threat of libel, novelists developed the aesthetics of literary character (including generic proper names) as an elaborate epistemological armature for their novels in order to emphasize that the characters who move about their storyworlds are fictional, imaginary, or ideational. By the nineteenth-century, however, that commonsensical empiricism was enough of a product of the past for authors to exploit the relationship between the general and the particular. Numerous critics have shown how novelists like Eliot, Wilkie Collins, and Dickens have all exploited this relationship in order to explore the connections between the figuration of character and the representation of desire, violence, and agency.[46] My own reading of the flexible and protean figurations of character in nineteenth-century fiction has been informed by these studies.

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[45] Catherine Gallagher, "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian," *Representations* 90, no. 1 (2005): 62.

The logics that animate my argument overlap with other ways of describing the relation between part and whole, including the "case," the "instance," the "illustration," the "detail," the "type," and the "anecdote." In one way or another, each of these concepts has animated the ways we read and write about literary objects. Each of these concepts gives imaginative or cognitive form to abstractions or enables the literary critic to mediate between the particular and the general. James Chandler and Alan Liu have shown the ways in which New Historicism has adopted the language and concepts of the case, the detail, and the anecdote from Romantic historiography.[47] In two special issues of *Critical Inquiry*, Lauren Berlant has connected the case to a variety of disciplines and to a variety of ways of managing either the particularity or generality of an object of knowledge.[48] Similarly, Eric Hayot has connected the instance and the example to the history of moral philosophy in the West as it engages with China as a real and an ideational place.[49] What this suggests is that these logical relations have always been a part of our reading practices and our objects of study.

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[46] See David Kurnick, "Abstraction and the Subject of Novel Reading: Drifting Through Romola," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 42, no. 3 (September 2009): 490–96; Nathan K. Hensley, "Armadale and the Logic of Liberalism," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2009): 607–32; and Elaine Hadley, "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody," *Victorian Studies* 59, no. 1 (2016): 65–86. For a related examination of the logic of exemplarity in Dickens and W. G. Sebald, see Timothy Bewes, "Against Exemplarity: W. G. Sebald and the Problem of Connection," *Contemporary Literature* 55, no. 1 (2014): 1–31.

[47] James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Alan Liu, "Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail," *Representations* 32 (1990): 75–113.

[48] Lauren Berlant, "On the Case," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 663–72; and Lauren Berlant, "What Does It Matter Who One Is?" *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 1 (2007): 1–4.

[49] Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25–30.

By focusing on singularity, exceptionality, exemplarity, and referentiality, I seek to illuminate the ways in which literary character participates in these and other logical arrangements of the particular and the general—both within literary history and within the history of our discipline.

When I first began this dissertation, I was struck by the incidence of superlatives in Thackeray's fiction. For example, in *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*, Gahagan describes himself as "*the best* in the universe"; "the bravest, the most modest, and, perhaps, the handsomest man in our corps"; "the bravest man of the Indian army"; "the finest man in Europe."[50] These assertions of superiority have a peculiar effect. Almost any reader of Thackeray will recognize them as exaggerations, and we are not meant to take these statements seriously. Thackeray's well-known irony suggests that these statements, in fact, anticipate Gahagan's inevitable fall or deflation. We delight in the expectation of the great being brought low, and the more these exaggerations are repeated, the more we treat them not as the stuff of truth but rather as symptomatic of a false bravado or pathological egotism. As a result, we learn to treat any assertion of superiority, authority, or excellence with skepticism. At the same time, by withholding belief, we paradoxically accept Thackeray's strident worldview that we all share a common tendency for hypocrisy or mendacity. The logic of exceptionality—where an object is treated as the exception to a general rule by elevating it above all others of the same kind—allows Thackeray to interrogate the structures of hierarchy that reward some, but not all, for their hypocrisy. By treating hierarchy and status as artificial rather than essential, the logic of exceptionality facilitates Thackeray's proposal of a formal, horizontal relation that exceeds the social conditions as they are given.

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[50] William Makepeace Thackeray, "The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan," in *The Yellowplush Papers and Early Miscellanies*, ed. George Saintsbury, vol. 1, The Oxford Thackeray (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), 338, 346, 394, emphasis in original.

The focus on exceptionality as a "logic" allows us to recognize the work that character does as part of the overall structure of the text. Rather than treat identification or evaluation as the end of critique when it comes to literary characters, we can learn to focus on how questions of being (the particular) and belonging (the general) come under scrutiny in scenes that dramatize the rhetorical construction of character in connection to the overall narrative structure of the text. When I examined the relationship between the superlative and representation, I wanted to understand better not only what this rhetoric seems to exclude (boastfulness, egotism, hierarchy) but also what kinds of social dynamics it makes intelligible. The oscillation between high and low, between exception and rule, suggests not only a desire to demystify the concept of the hero but also to represent war and violence as the conditions for structures of hierarchy. Exceptionality will be useful for thinking about what is excluded from the general rule of British collectivity, as well as for analyzing the conditions of inclusion, by which a general rule is constituted by virtue of its exceptions. As I will suggest, the logic of exceptionality, which structures the particular and the general into a relation of high and low, might be the best index for the unequal and trivializing structure of social relations.

Both exceptionality and exemplarity describe the relation of parts to wholes. If exceptionality is a form of disjunction (or exclusion), then exemplarity is a form of connection (or inclusion). Exemplarity is often what we mean when we talk about characters being typical or representative. Exemplarity thus "denotes the meaningful, normative connection" between parts and the whole.[51] According to Giorgio Agamben, "What the example shows is its belonging to a class, but for this very reason the example steps out of its class in the very moment in which it exhibits and delimits it."[52] Agamben evokes the innocuous syntagm of "I love you" as an example of a performative speech act. In order to understand this statement as an example, we must temporarily ignore its content or meaning (as a specific statement uttered in the context of two lovers) in favor of its logical form (as a type of speech act that is itself an action in the world). Exemplarity thus allows us to see how ideas or meanings are transferred out of their immediate context and how connections become "meaningful" and "normative." Treating a character as exemplary is useful not only as a description of how ideals and norms get reproduced but also how they travel to new contexts and what kind of world gets created through that act of connection.

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[51] Bewes, "Against Exemplarity," 3.

[52] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 22.

If exceptionality and exemplarity trace the conceptual path between parts and wholes, then "singularity" and "referentiality" describe how parts relate to other parts. Singularity and referentiality are inverse concepts, with the negative non-relation of singularity standing opposite the positive, mimetic relation of referentiality. The conceptual dynamic of being singular, which various critics have defined as "irreducible," "structured, uncertain, and incommensurable," and "a pure present without a past or a future."[53] Singularity cannot be equated with individualism, even though it does dramatize the social experience of standing apart or separate. It will be important for my argument that singularity refers not just to difference but also to the subsumption of that difference into the broader institutionalization of belonging in the nation-state. Drawing on a legacy of queer theory that is invested in the non-redemptive, non-normative, and socially negative qualities of experience, my argument will use the logic of singularity to examine both the draw of those characters who resist the compulsion to be visible or relatable as well as the ways in which strangeness gets mobilized to reinforce a normative vision of national belonging.[54]

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53. André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (London: Routledge, 2016), 6; Lucien Karpik, *Valuing the Unique: The Economics of Singularities*, ed. and trans. Nora Scott (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 10; and Fredric Jameson, "The Aesthetics of Singularity," *New Left Review* 92 (2015): 113.

54. For more on the legacy of non- and anti-normativity in queer theory, see R. Wiegman and E. A. Wilson, "Introduction: Antinormativity's Queer Conventions," *Differences* 26, no. 1 (January 2015): 1–25. For a related approach to the problem of the singular and the multiple that draws on Spinoza rather than queer theory, see Marjorie Levinson, "Of Being Numerous," *Studies in Romanticism* 49

Referentiality, as I previously mentioned, describes the mimetic or positive relation between particulars, and, as a concept, it is most relevant to the problem of fictional or literary representation. The concept of reference tends to invoke either the weak relation of metaphor (where meaning is approximated across contexts) or the strong relation of mimesis (where meaning is transferred in a one-to-one correspondence). The logic of reference raises interesting questions, both for literature in general and for novelistic representation in particular, including: how do texts engage in social critique; how does literature invoke particular contexts rather than abstract or generic situations; why must literature engage in reference and what is gained or lost by limiting its function to reference; and what are the political or ethical stakes of reference, identification, and recognition? My interest in referentiality draws on a legacy of queer studies that formalizes the dynamic of relation beyond the privileged domain of sexual identity, to include problems of legibility, recognition, and truth. As Judith Butler remarks, the status of the particular subject is always governed by his or her reference to an outside world: "the very being of the self is dependent … on the social dimension of normativity that governs the scene of recognition."[55] By turning to the generic conventions of reference and recognition in the novel form, I will argue that referentiality establishes the possibility of social critique while also illuminating the normative conditions and limitations of a critique premised on recognition.

My first chapter, "A Singular Character: Walter Scott's *Rob Roy*," situates the logic of singularity within the context of Romantic idealizations of the individual genius and figures of abjection. Turning to Scott's unique novel, *Rob Roy* (1818), the only novel not only to be written in first-person narration but also to be named after an actually existing historical figure, I show how singularity is used both to mobilize and generate narrative attention as well as to isolate characters by virtue of their anonymity and non-identity. Against a critical tradition that argues Scott's interest in

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(2010): 633–57.

[55] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 23.

representative or typical figures has the ideological effect of aestheticizing disruptive or violent social elements, I argue that the singular character in *Rob Roy* mobilizes attention to the dispossession and violent exclusion at the heart of national belonging.

My second chapter, "Between the Great and the Mean: Discourses of Exceptionality in Thackeray," examines Thackeray's ambivalence toward heroism in a series of fictional narratives about soldiers. The representation of war in narrative and in history becomes an opportunity to address the question of how novels adjudicate between personal and general experience. In *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan* (1838–39), *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.* (1844), and *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), Thackeray suggests there is something inherently reactionary and dogmatic about the image of the exceptional subject, whose greatness is related to the violent degradation of the anonymous, general soldier. This oscillation between high and low, between exception and rule, suggests not only a desire to demystify the concept of the hero but also to represent war and violence as the conditions for a collective belonging. These novels, insofar as they move between the trivial and the rarified, the domestic and the historical, reckon with the conditions and limits of a totalizing social representation.

My third chapter, "Setting a Bad Example: Adventuring with the Stevensonian Type," argues that Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) critiques the ideology of expansion in British imperialism by connecting the adventure novel to the rise of social statistics. By focusing on the question of agency and accountability in both the adventure novel and statistical discourse, I argue that Stevenson uses the themes of quantification and abstraction to illustrate the ideological effect of the subject's dislocation from scenes of decision making or action. Noting how ideas spread around the island as if by contagion when they are disconnected from a particular subject, like an example that is removed from the operative conditions of its immediate context, I show how the novel thematizes and formalizes the problem of individual accountability. By connecting *Treasure Island*'s evocation of exemplarity with accountability, I show how the novel elaborates a model of collective affiliation that is particularly salient in light of the subject's dislocation from the social as it was effected by both statistics and imperial expansion.

My final chapter, "A Tissue of Personalities: Vernon Lee, Vulnerability, and Reference," turns to the problem of reference and representation in late-Victorian British Aestheticism. Noting how Lee's novel, *Miss Brown* (1884), has been received by critics as a roman à clef, even though Lee herself identifies it as a novel, I consider what is at stake in identifying the characters in the novel with real-life subjects. I connect this question of reference and identification to the novel's thematization of social vulnerability in the character of Anne Brown, whose acquiescence to marry at the end of the novel is treated as a form of tragedy. I also examine how Lee engages with Henry James's prescriptions for the novel and how she represents an alternative pathway for the novel to the fantasy of generativeness and autonomy that was articulated by James. *Miss Brown* treats the question of referentiality not as an isolated question for specifically referential genres, like the roman à clef, but as the defining attribute of the novel as it seeks not only to represent the world but to articulate alternative visions of being and belonging.

Throughout my study, my method moves between close readings and abstract concepts (or "logics") whose role in my study is to make intelligible the patterns of these texts. I often treat moments of rhetorical strangeness—Scott's repetition of "singular," Thackeray's superlatives, Stevenson's numbers, and Lee's references to real subjects—as illustrative or crystallizing moments that establish a broader problematic in the novel. In a sense, I submit the four novelists I study as, themselves, theorists of relation, connection, and belonging, insofar as my hope has been that my readings move from text to context rather than the other way around. What I have envisaged in this dissertation is a method that sees literary character as the formal response to a social or historical contradiction. I have chosen to call these "character logics" in order to highlight the form of literary character as, itself, a mode of knowing, of making knowable the conditions of the world that exceed the particular instance or given evidence. It is an effort to prioritize the conceptual, the general, and the theoretical in order to understand better how the novel not only reflects a given situation but also purports to move beyond it.

Chapter 1
A Singular Character: Walter Scott's *Rob Roy*

> Odysseus's two contradictory actions in his meeting with Polyphemus, his obedience to his name and his repudiation of it, are really the same thing. He declares allegiance to himself by disowning himself as Nobody; he saves his life by making himself disappear.
>
> —Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1947)

Walter Scott's *Rob Roy* (1818) is set in the tumultuous years after the 1707 Acts of Union, dramatizing the long history of events that would eventually lead to the emergence of a unified British Empire. Rather than take the detached view of the *longue durée*, Scott engages with this context—and, specifically, the events leading up to the failed 1715 Jacobite Uprisings—in a close, almost microscopic way. Yet, Scott articulates two aesthetics of the particular and microscopic in *Rob Roy*: the incommensurate and the distinct. Because these two aesthetics often appear under the same sign (the "singular"), it will be important to disarticulate them and describe the effect each has on the project of narrating history. In this chapter, I will argue that *Rob Roy* shows that, in order to narrate history, the novel must not resolve these two aesthetics but must hold them together and move between them.

Walter Scott is often credited with the invention of a new historical method at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Rather than focus on progressive teleologies and universal narratives, this method began to focus on history as a site of conflict, discord, and difference. Central to Scott's innovation was his "discovery" of the representative individual, or character type, who connects the particular experiences of everyday men to the general forces of history. In making this connection, the historian creates a vision of history that is plural and interconnected, and history becomes the ground of narrating our common movement toward collectively held experiences. Scott was by no means *sui generis*, and many critcs have recently noted the degree to which his historicist methods were circulating in the culture prior to his publication of *Waverley* in 1814.[1] Nonetheless, Scott made widely available the idea that historical fiction should focus on the ordinary lives of representative subjects rather than on the mythologies of world-historical heroes. By shifting the discourse of history away from the tropes of the special, unique, and singular—that is, away from figures like the Old Pretender and Napoleon whose names held special value in the popular imagination—Scott demonstrated the value of the everyday, middling individual to historical narratives.

What, then, of *Rob Roy* (1818)? Walter Scott's fifth novel following the commercial success of *Waverley*, *Rob Roy* is also the only novel that Scott ever published to feature an actual historical figure in its title. According to Robert Louis Stevenson in a personal essay, *Rob Roy* is also "the best" of the Waverley novels "by nearly as much as Sir Walter is the best of novelists."[2] Almost immediately after publication,

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1. The figure often credited with contributing to Scott this outsized legacy and myth of originalism is Georg Lukács in *The Historical Novel.* Ian Duncan has shown the generic antecedents to Scott's fiction in the gothic romance. Similarly, James Chandler connects Scott's novels to the tradition of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy. Ian Baucom has demonstrated how both Scott's "melancholic" historicism and his use of abstracted character types were related to the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade. And, Katie Trumpener has demonstrated how many of the generic innovations and historical forms with which Scott is credited were shared by contemporary female Irish writers of the national tale. See Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

2. Robert Louis Stevenson, "Random Memories: *Rosa Quo Locorum*," in *Essays of Travel* (London:

the novel was adapted for a stage play version and quickly became one of the most popular stage versions of Scott's novels.[3] Much of the success and interest in the novel can be attributed to its titular protagonist, the chieftain of an illicit Highland clan who was a perennial thorn in the side of the British government, both before and after unification. In Scott's own words, Rob Roy was a "singular character" and a "singular man," whose controversial history and rebellious nature contributed to his legendary status both within Scotland and abroad.[4] Like most of Scott's historical novels, *Rob Roy* narrates the pre-history of the modern British nation, and especially the history that contributed to its post-Waterloo status as an imperial and economic world power. As he does in all of the Waverley novels, Scott explores this history—specifically, the history of Britain following the 1707 Acts of Union and leading up to the failed Jacobite Uprising of 1715—by narrating it from the ground up. That is, Scott narrates the experiences of ordinary people who lived amidst extraordinary historical circumstances and transformative moments of change. In exploring these stories, Scott emphasizes that history was not uniform but multiple, not continuous but disruptive and uncertain.

At the same time, and as the descriptions of the novel suggest, *Rob Roy* evidences Scott's interest in the figure of the "singular character," a particular individual with a unique capacity to capture the reader's imagination and attention. Scott is clearly interested in the concept of singularity in *Rob Roy*. In comparison to any of his other major novels, like *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe*, *Rob Roy* uses the word "singular" and its derivatives ("singularly," "singularity"), as well as its various synonyms ("uncommon," "strange"), almost three times as often to describe persons, events, and objects in the

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Chatto & Windus, 1905), 197.

[3] Alasdair Cameron, "Scottish Drama in the Nineteenth Century," in *The History of Scottish Literature: Vol. 3, Nineteenth Century*, ed. Douglas Gifford (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 434–5.

[4] Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, ed. Ian Duncan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5, 39. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the body of the text as *RR*.

novel. Following a tradition of Marxist literary criticism, we tend to think of Scott's characters as typical or representative. As Georg Lukács argues in *The Historical Novel*, Scott's characters "give living human embodiment to historical-social types."[5] Building on Lukács's definition of the character type, Fredric Jameson argues, "they stand in ... for something larger and more meaningful than themselves, than their own isolated individual destinies."[6] Singularity, meanwhile, suggests something more closely affiliated with the texture and rhetoric of Scott's writing. By focusing on Scott's language—his overdetermined, conflicting figurations of singular characters—I will argue that Scott uses the figure of the singular character to develop a way of talking about who is left out of that national-historical "destiny."

Drawing on contemporary usages of the world "singular" to mean not only "unique" and "remarkable," but also "solitary" and "single" (*OED*), I will examine the competing figurations of "singular" characters and how singularity relates to problems of representation in history. *Rob Roy* brings together two specific connotations of the word singular: distinction and incommensurability. The first is a description of value, often used to describe those characters who garner narrative attention and interest. The second is a condition of socio-political abandonment, the isolation one experiences when excluded from belonging, which Arendt describes as the loss of a "distinct place in the world," as well as "the impossibility of finding a new" place or home.[7] Scott will occasionally move in between these two meanings when describing characters as singular, but it is the case that Rob Roy is the character to whom the latter experience of isolation and incommensurability often attaches. Therefore, while distinction need not lead to exclusion, we will see how the language of distinction and value is used to rationalize the language of exclusion.

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[5] Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 35.

[6] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 191.

[7] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest, 1973), 293.

Both meanings of singularity depend upon the cognitive act of removing the subject from the plane of relation, either by elevating him above others (distinction) or by excluding him (incommensurability). While elevating is not the same thing as privileging, we will see that the novel is interested in how attention can lead to exclusion by marking a figure as illicit and, therefore, beyond the pale of social inclusion. This condition is especially acute for a figure like Rob Roy, whose interest to history is an effect of his dispossession by the British government and loss of any official clan recognition. Examining this tension between attention and exclusion, I will argue that the novel provides a model of secrecy and non-identity that tarries with the official forms of dispossession that Rob Roy, and the Scottish Highlanders more broadly, experienced following national unification. The originality of *Rob Roy* lies not only in Scott's intuition that historical narratives are determined by which figures can monopolize our attention, but also in its related acknowledgment that those who are deprived attention within the dominant historical narrative are not always able to be recovered or made legible.

Secrecy and non-identity—motifs of an incommensurable singularity—are two concepts we do not usually associate with Walter Scott or the Waverley novels. While critics like Jacques Khalip have demonstrated the legacy of impersonality and anonymity in Romantic literature, they are not usually qualities we tend to attach to Scott or his strategies for characterization.[8] For most critics, Scott assiduously represents and makes visible, and his fiction is marked by the effort to "illuminate the underlying movements common to the lives of individuals."[9] As Devin Griffiths observes, Scott was "immersed in virtually all of the historicizing disciplines of his day," and specifically in the capacity for imaginative historical fiction to become

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[8] Jacques Khalip, *Anonymous Life: Romanticism and Dispossession* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

[9] David Brown, *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 27.

"an analogue of the past that … mediates between history and the reader."[10] Scott's fiction thus participates in a broader, multi-generic tradition of nineteenth-century historical writing that, as Mark Salber Phillips argues, sought "to create the affective and ideological proximities" between the past and the present.[11] Whereas these readings privilege the power of testimony to give voice and presence to excluded subjects, my approach examines the limitations and limit cases for representation. Though often praised for the expansiveness of his novelistic vision and historical scope, Scott is also interested in the violent conditions under which subjects recede from sight and become excluded from representation.

Rob Roy's titular character illustrates a central tendency in Scott's fiction toward the suppression of personality. In an essay published after Scott's death in 1832, Edward Bulwer-Lytton commemorates the novelist's achievements as the "great genius" of nineteenth-century British literature.[12] On the one hand, Bulwer-Lytton harmonizes with many of those readers who praise Scott's ambition to represent the particular experiences of ordinary persons. "Scott has been the first great genius," writes Bulwer-Lytton, "who invited our thorough and uncondescending sympathy to the wide mass of the human family … Take up which you will of those numerous works which have appeared, from 'Waverley' to the 'Chronicles of the Canongate,'—open where you please, you will find portraits from the people—and your interest keeping watch beside the poor man's hearth."[13] The legacy of Scott's fiction, Bulwer-Lytton suggests, will be the generosity he extends to the full range of human experience. No other author, except perhaps Henry Fielding, was able to meet the ordinary person, no matter how humble or low, at his level and to treat him as a fully realized subject rather than an object of ridicule or scorn. On the other, Bulwer-Lytton suggests that Scott's writing also evinces a tendency toward reticence and restraint. Bulwer-Lytton writes that "Scott may be said … to have *no style*."[14] While Bulwer-Lytton is describing Scott's non-fiction prose, in particular, I read this lack of style as a more general condition of Scott's fiction, which not only began in anonymity but which subordinates and hides the "author" under the guise of alter-egos and assumed identities. In *Rob Roy*, that reticence gets refashioned into both an evasive narrator and an anonymous protagonist. *Rob Roy* is one of the few fictional works by Scott to be narrated in the first person, and that narrator, Frank Osbaldistone, notably refuses to mediate between past and present. In other words, he refuses to bring the past into contact with the present moment of narration, instead receding from view to allow that past to be narrated transparently and without reflection. I argue that Frank's withdrawal from narration—his deliberate refusal to reveal the secrets of Rob Roy's identity or to unveil his alter-egos—provides an avenue for Rob Roy to circulate freely and anonymously, in explicit defiance of the state imperative to identify and exclude him.

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[10] Devin Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy: Science and Literature Between the Darwins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 89–90.

[11] Mark Salber Phillips, "Histories, Micro- and Literary: Problems of Genre and Distance," *New Literary History* 34, no. 2 (2003): 221.

[12] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, "Death of Sir Walter Scott," *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 35 (1832): 302.

[13] Ibid., 302.

Throughout this chapter, I follow Scott by describing characters as "singular," and I use this term both to describe a character who merits distinction within the narrative and to characterize an experience of isolation and solitude, experienced most discernibly by Rob Roy. My chapter is divided into three parts: the first on Rob Roy, the second on the other characters in the novel, and the third on Scott's "Introduction," which he amended to the novel a decade after its original publication. Rob Roy receives the most attention in my chapter because, paradoxically, he receives so little attention in the novel. While characters like Diana Vernon and Rashleigh Osbaldistone are also described as "singular," it means something different and will, therefore, require a different account of how singularity is mobilized to describe differences in value and importance. In the first section, I examine Rob Roy's isolation and anonymity as he circulates in and out of the narrative. For much of the novel, Rob Roy appears under the assumed identity of "Robert Campbell," and it is not only until late in the novel that the reader discovers the true identity of this mysterious stranger. By focusing on Frank's evasive narration, as well as Rob Roy's evasion of narrative presence, I propose that these dynamics of withdrawal are isomorphic with the socio-political experience of dispossession. Statelessness and dispossession are important concepts in this section, and I focus on the paradoxical experience of anonymity and abandonment figured by the logic of Rob Roy's singularity. I propose that Rob Roy becomes an important figure in the novel for mediating the dispossessions of British unification, which tied social recognition to the institution of the state.

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[14] Ibid., 301.

In the second section, I turn to other examples of characters who are described as singular within the novel. By moving from the example of Rob Roy to the broader character population, I want to examine how the novel apportions attention, interest, and value, and how that distinction among parts alters our sense of the novel as a whole. The ubiquity of "singular" as a descriptive rhetoric in the novel, I argue, is a symptom of the novel's search for a unity that might provide a non-derivative model of belonging that is in excess of any normative sublimation or exchangeability of difference. Instead of treating singularity either as a shared condition or a particular trait, I argue that Scott provides a model for social collectivity predicated on isolation, separation, and difference. In place of an ideological narrative of national unification, like in *Waverley*, *Rob Roy* offers a more critical because more internally differentiated model of sociality and collectivity.

In the final section, I turn to the "Introduction" that was amended to the novel in 1829. The "Magnum Opus" edition of *Rob Roy* offers a striking counterpoint to the original narrative, and, as I argue, illustrates the difficulties of sustaining a collectivity built around non-generalizable, anonymous subjects. By filling in the gaps and silences around Rob Roy's person—by identifying him and narrating his biography—Scott produces the record of Rob Roy's life as it would have been officially recognized. In this turn from story to biography, Scott risks replacing the anonymous subject of Rob Roy with an identifiable person, and thereby erasing the subject's importance and difference in favor of his relation to social or normative value. As a result, singularity threatens to transform into something like distinction or situatedness, which emphasizes the subject's value or identity relative to the institutions of which he is a part. By emphasizing the ways in which Scott situates Rob Roy within historical, geographic, and philosophical discourses, I am concerned with Scott's efforts to rationalize and document Rob Roy's singularity as a quality that is legible and, therefore, normative. Yet, as Scott circles this official history, he confronts the limits of representation and representativeness, as a non-generalizable remainder emerges within the shadow of these discourses. As I argue, this strange figure, this non-generalizable singularity, is a symptom of the changing nature of connection in the institutional and administrative world of the rising nation-state.

Singular (adj.): Alone; Solitary

Rob Roy is singular among the Waverley novels for many reasons, but none more so than the choice to give Rob Roy himself pride of place on the title page. Scott was famously reluctant to "write up to a title," or to write about a subject with whom his readers would have been intimately familiar.[15] He was concerned that readers would bring their expectations to bear on a novel about a familiar subject, which would distract from the story that Scott was trying to tell about history and the past. In *Waverley*, for example, Scott writes that he chose the name of his titular protagonist because it was "uncontaminated."[16] Waverley's nominal originality allows him to serve as a proxy for the reader, as if he were a blank slate about which the reader had no expectations or preconceptions.

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[15] Andrew Lang, "Editor's Introduction," in *Rob Roy*, vol. 7 (London: John C. Nimmo, 1893), xi–xxiii, xii.

[16] Walter Scott, *Waverley* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 33.

Of course, many of Scott's novels do feature historical persons and fictional analogues for real subjects. The Young Pretender appears in both *Waverley* and *Redgauntlet.* In *The Heart of Midlothian*, Jeanie Dean is a fabricated version of a real person named Helen Walker, an eighteenth-century woman who allegedly walked from Edinburgh to London to beg for a reprieve for her sister who stood accused of infanticide. Yet, these world-historical figures tend to fade into the background of Scott's historical novels, ceding the foreground to those ciphers and narrative proxies who stand in for the reader.[17] *Rob Roy* is the only novel in Scott's oeuvre to refer to an actually existing person by name in the title. The next closest example is *The Heart of Midlothian*, which refers, through the circuits of metaphor, to Jeanie Dean/Helen Walker as the sentimental "heart" of the novel.[18] But this reference is oblique, which illustrates the uniqueness of the case of *Rob Roy.* On the one hand, the novel captures what is an abiding concern of all of the Waverley novels: the long history of Britain's modernization as a nation and emergence as an imperial world power. On the other, the novel is singularly preoccupied with the simultaneous centrality and marginality of actual historical figures to historical narratives.

As Scott describes in the "Introduction" to *Rob Roy*, the novel is an "account of the singular character" of that titular figure (*RR*, 5). Yet, for much of the novel's diegesis, Rob Roy disappears, either fading into the narrative background or retreating behind one of his many alter-egos. He emerges only at crisis points in the narrative, either to resolve conflicts or to precipitate new ones and move the narrative forward. If Scott's historical enterprise in the Waverley novels is to examine how the present came to be, then we might ask: Who was Rob Roy and what role did he play in this history of the present? Why does Scott organize the novel around a "singular character," only to diminish that character's presence within the narrative? In this section, I want to examine this character's singular inscrutability within the novel. For now, I will focus on the body of the novel, returning to Scott's prefatory "Introduction" in the next section. I want to consider how Rob Roy's singularity coincides with the perverse distension of his character across the space of the novel, and why he regularly appears and disappears throughout. Specifically, I will examine the formal and historical implications of Rob Roy's absence in the narrative by considering anonymity as a model for social belonging that is not predicated on recognition or identity. Far from returning us to individual distinction and particularity as the privileged loci of personhood, Rob Roy's singular strangeness invites us to consider the forms of experience and being that emerge in the absence of social recognition. Connecting these insights to the English government's history of expropriation of the Highland clans into the nineteenth century, I will argue that the particular qualities of Rob Roy's singularity—its strangeness and uncertainty; its relation to experiences of isolation and dispossession—illuminate the precarious experience of a stateless existence.

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[17] Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 46.

[18] The explicit reference of the title is to a prison in Edinburgh. For more on the title to *The Heart of Midlothian*, see Chandler, *England in 1819*, 305–6.

In his preface for a late-nineteenth-century reissue of *Rob Roy*, the Scottish folklorist Andrew Lang explains that Scott's fascination with Rob Roy has everything to do with the status of that subject, both as a "singular" character and as a representative one. According to Lang, "Names like Rob Roy, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, Cleopatra, and so forth, tell the reader too much, and, Scott imagined, often excite hopes which cannot be fulfilled."[19] Lang's comment is striking because it suggests that Rob Roy's world-historical status is paradoxically predicated on his transcendence of the limitations of historical situation. Lang suggests that what makes Rob Roy interesting is his affinity with other figures with universal interest. Likeness and similarity among these figures is contingent upon the diminishment of context, which breaks the metonymic chain that binds a subject to a particular situation in time and space. Lang's horizontal comparison, which places all of these subjects at the same level regardless of when or where they existed, allows us to interpret the affinities among these subjects in ways that are generously in excess of historical specificity or context. For example, we might imagine a reading that illuminates the enduring power of charismatic authority or a reading that examines questions of gender and sovereignty at different points in time. In these readings, contextual meaning is eclipsed by robust comparison, which breaks down the boundaries separating periods, nations, or cultures.

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[19] Lang, "Editor's Introduction," xii.

At the same time, Lang's comment harmonizes with Scott's own anxious figuration of Rob Roy, as well as Scott's general concern that charismatic individuals like Rob Roy risk obscuring the history that they are meant to represent. What figures like "Rob Roy, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, [and] Cleopatra" seem to have in common is a shared overdetermination. The sentimental nostalgia and romantic hero-worship that readers bring to these subjects tend to distort that past, concealing it underneath the weight of expectation and mythology. A more accurate historicism, Lang and Scott both suggest, would be one that simultaneously diminishes the presence of these kinds of subjects within the narrative *and* identifies them with a particular historical situation. Rob Roy's representativeness as a world-historical figure—specifically, the meaning that attaches him to the specific geopolitical conditions of the Celtic periphery following the 1707 Acts of Union and to the long history of the dispossession of the Highland clans by the English state—can only be accomplished through the negation of his transcendent value. A more situated historicist interpretation would need to focus on the meaning of that subject with relation to a particular moment in history or to a specific geographical location.

What both of these readings seem to highlight is the fact that Rob Roy's singular value—that is, his importance to history and to the novel—is connected to his disconnection from meaning and place. In the first reading, we witness the dispersal of a specific context in favor of universal or general ideas, and in the second reading, we witness the movement toward greater situational and contextual specificity (a historicizing of Rob Roy's importance). In the former, we risk uprooting the subject from the determining conditions of his birth and life, thereby obscuring the home and cultural identity of that subject. In the latter, we risk seeing him too closely or positively, thereby losing sight of the systemic forces that give him general purpose or meaning. What emerges from Lang's formulation is the central fact of Rob Roy's potential to be uprooted and differentiated, to have his enigmatic qualities dissected or discarded by the narrative and by interpretation.

As a result, and despite elevating him to the status of titular character, Scott is profoundly reticent to identify Rob Roy by name within the narrative and thereby connect the "account" to the "singular character" of whom it is given as a testimony. In many of the Waverley novels, the experience of living in the Highlands is characterized by dispossession and violence, and this experience is seen as a consequence of Scotland's internal colonization by the English state. Scott's narration of this experience of violence is often inflected by melancholy, and his backwards looking orientation allows the reader to sympathize with the excised ghosts of Britain's past, while simultaneously relegating them to a foreclosed history.[20] But, in *Rob Roy*, Scott does not make recognition a condition of recovering this history or of addressing the violent past of Britain's modernization. When Rob Roy first appears in the novel as a mysterious stranger with "a strong deep voice" (*RR*, 93) named Robert Campbell, only astute readers will make the connection to Robert MacGregor, or Rob Roy. That is because the historical background that supplies this connection is withheld for much of the novel, effectively hiding Rob Roy behind the mask of his alter-ego. Restoring the formal integrity of "Rob Roy" as a particular, distinct person is not a question of reading *better* or more intensively. Misreading is a deliberate effect of Scott's narrative strategy in *Rob Roy*. The obscurity around this central figure suggests the need

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20. See Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

to theorize the role that uncertainty, misapprehension, and anonymity play within the novel.

Part of the history that the novel withholds is connected to the politics of naming and tribal recognition. For much of the history of their clan, Scott tells us, the MacGregors were outlaws with a "contempt for laws"—"they became versed in predatory forays, and accustomed to bloodshed" (*RR*, 7). In 1603, King James VI of Scotland officially banned the clan, declaring it illegitimate in the eyes of the state. The prohibition on the clan was a response to the Clan Gregor's legacy of violent confrontations, which came to a head when belligerents from the Clan Gregor met those from the Clan Colquhoun at the Battle of Glenfruin. According to Scott, Rob Roy's ancestor Dugald, or *Ciar Mohr*, "the great Mouse-coloured Man" (*RR*, 15), allegedly murdered a group of students who were observing the battle. Scott also suggests that the ban was part of a longer pattern of opposition between the state and the wild, rebellious clan. By officially abolishing the Clan Gregor, the ban made any use of the name "MacGregor" punishable. Meanwhile, in a form of legal exception, other clans were granted impunity to hunt and kill MacGregors who would not abandon allegiance to the clan name. The ban was temporarily lifted when King Charles II was restored to the throne as reward for the loyal service of the MacGregors, who fought on behalf of the monarch during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. However, after the Revolution of 1688, the ban was later restored. Persisting in secret, the clan became associated with illicit associations and nighttime gatherings. As Scott describes in the poem "MacGregor's Gathering": "The moon's on the lake, and the mist's on the brae, / And the Clan has a name that is nameless by day."[21] Because of the proscription against the name MacGregor, Rob Roy often "bore" his mother's family name of Campbell (*RR*, 15). The effect of this elision is that the meaning of Rob Roy's name—that is, his true identity as a MacGregor—is encoded in order to subvert state suppression and avoid identification. Yet, it is not entirely clear that decoding or deciphering this message—identifying Robert Campbell as a MacGregor—is a focus of the novel. Instead, by occluding that history and allowing his alter-egos to float freely of one another, Scott marks Rob Roy as a figure of anonymity, whose strangeness and obscurity are an effect of his illicit relationship to state power.

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[21] Walter Scott, *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott, Complete in One Volume. With Introductions and Notes* (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1841), 656.

From the point of view of this illicit history, Scott draws into intimate affinity the relationship between Rob Roy's singularity (his status as a figure of immense speculation and interest) and his inaccessibility to the narrative (his difference and opacity to the tools of narrative representation). In other words, the attention he brings as a historical figure and central character is framed by the inattention that he solicits within the narrative, as he disappears and reappears with regularity. Structuring and concealing Rob Roy is the novel's narrator, Frank Osbaldistone, who is relatively silent on the subject of Rob Roy's past and his identity. The novel, as I have previously mentioned, is a first-person, retrospective account of Frank's personal history and his time amongst the Highlanders. Despite narrating a present that is several decades after the events that take place within the novel, Frank's memories are presented transparently and with little discursive mediation by his older self. Jane Millgate has suggested that Frank's silences are perhaps the result of some lingering trauma from his past. She writes, "he lacks or represses access to memory in its other, more active mode as that mediating and interpreting faculty which connects present to past and endows experience with new meaning. Memory in this novel … manifests itself as a tormenting gift."[22] Frank admits as much when he describes the difficulty of reproducing his personal experiences for the reader: "The recollection of those adventures … has indeed left upon my mind a chequered and varied feeling of pleasure and of pain, mingled, I trust, with no slight gratitude and veneration to the Disposer of human events, who guided my early course through much risk and labour" (*RR*, 65). The issue of trauma is an important one, and the novel hinges on the extra-judicial killing of a state representative, to which Frank is witness. But neither Frank nor Millgate identify that trauma with a particular content. Rather than narrate the disabling condition of a specific trauma, the novel addresses the question of how we make sense of what is secret and concealed.

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[22] Jane Millgate, *Walter Scott: The Making of the Novelist* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 134.

The effect of Frank's reticence is to draw Rob Roy into a vortex of secrecy and disguise—but it is not until the reader completes the novel that he or she will connect this elusiveness to the particular volatility of Rob Roy's identity as a MacGregor, and its potential consequences. Looking over the Highlander upon his first foray into the novel, Frank's description is strikingly generic. As Frank describes him, "Mr. Campbell" is "the first Scotchman" he has ever met, but "[t]here was much about him that coincided with my previous conceptions. He had the hard features and athletic form, said to be peculiar to his country, together with the national intonation and slow pedantic mode of expression, arising from a desire to avoid peculiarities of idiom or dialect" (*RR*, 96). Frank's description is generalizing, characterizing Campbell not as a particularized individual but as a national type. Campbell lacks the distinctiveness that we might expect from a titular character, and there is no reason to expect from Frank's narration that this character is a major figure in the novel. Frank's narration admits little irony or asymmetry between past and present, effectively collapsing the distance between the two times into a single moment of narration. It is as if the novel were dictated from the moment of Frank's younger self, and Frank's own analysis of this subject is weighted toward his past ignorance. Frank describes how "[h]is dress … *indicated* mediocrity of circumstances," "[h]is conversation *intimated*, that he was engaged in the cattle-trade," and "he *seemed* … to treat the rest of the company with the cool and condescending politeness, which *implies* a real, or imagined, superiority over those towards whom it is used" (*RR*, 97, emphasis added). Considered from the perspective of a retrospective narration, Frank's speculation ("intimated," "seemed," "implies") might be understood as ironically conscripting Campbell's performance into the larger drama around his identity. Yet, insofar as Frank's narration dwells less on what Campbell's appearance seems to conceal than on the fact that it seems in excess of his social standing, it addresses not the particular subject but the generic, national type. He treats Campbell's attitude as emblematic of the Scots peoples rather than as symptomatic of an undisclosed secret. In other words, Frank seems not to recognize the singular character in his midst.

The question, then, of whether Frank is able to reveal the secrets of his own narration—or whether his inability is somehow traumatically structured by the content of those secrets—feels beside the point. The effect of his reticence is to make the reader conscious of the fact that knowledge is intimately guarded, and Rob Roy's singularity is akin to a secret. Whether readers are able to identify Robert Campbell at the moment of his first appearance or whether, like this reader, they do not make that connection until much later—either option is ancillary to how narration encloses and conceals the meaning of Rob Roy's identity.

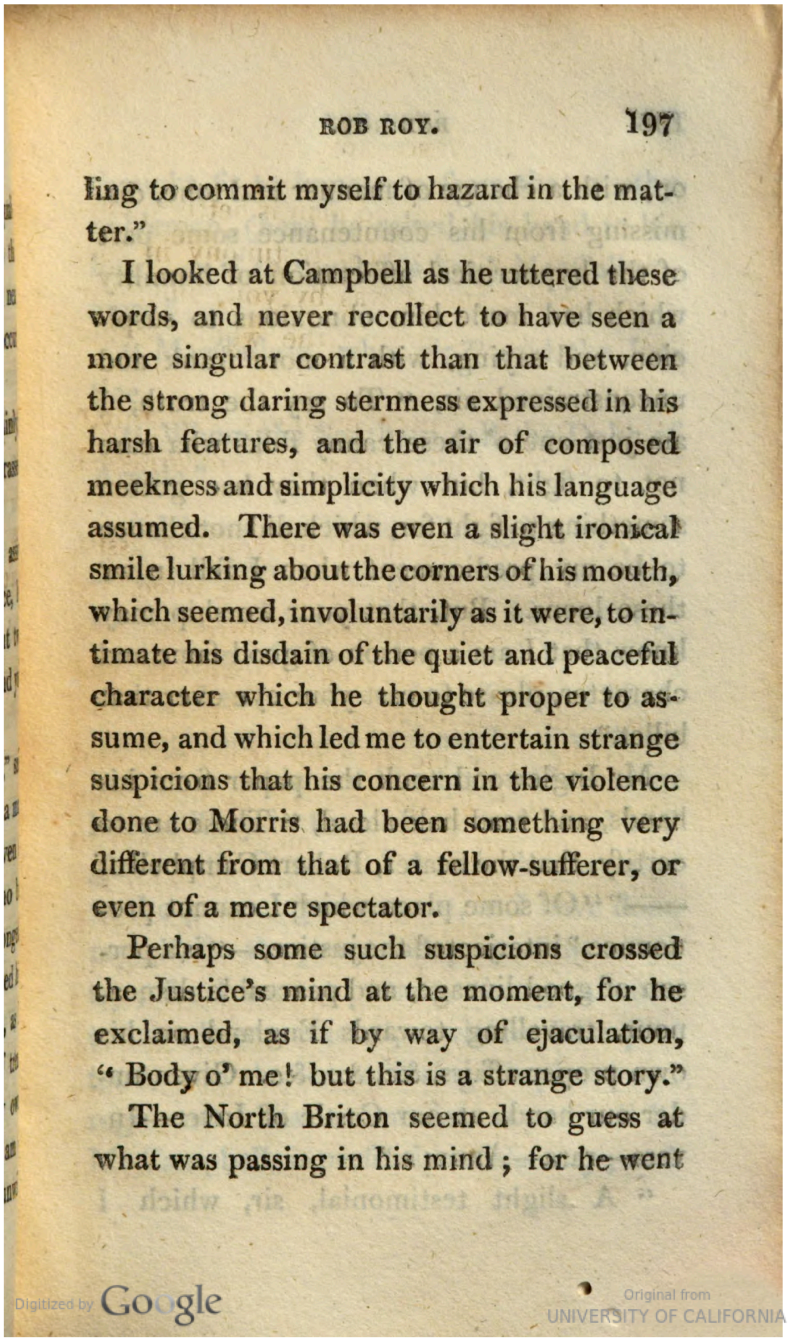
This secrecy is especially acute during scenes of publicity, when the illicit fact of Rob Roy's identity is most at risk of exposure. It is perhaps unsurprising that the first mention of Rob Roy's singularity occurs when he is testifying on Frank's behalf in front of an English magistrate. After arriving at the rustic seat of his uncle, Sir Hildebrand Osbaldistone, Frank learns from his cousin that he has been indicted on charges of robbery by a man named Morris, who was traveling to Scotland on behalf of the English government. When Frank meets with the local squire to correct what seems to be a mistake, he is unable to convince the Justice of his innocence or explain why he had (jokingly) inquired about Morris's trunk, which contained the stolen government documents, while the two were traveling on the road together. When it seems as if Frank will be found guilty, a "strange gentleman" emerges to offer his testimony on Frank's behalf (*RR*, 139). When the Justice asks why he did not intervene in the original robbery, the mysterious "stranger" (*RR*, 140), who is revealed to be Robert Campbell, pleads that he is not accustomed to fighting because he is "a man of peace and quietness, no ways given to broils or batteries" (*RR*, 141). Frank, meanwhile, describes his suspicion that Campbell's testimony is not altogether truthful:

> I looked at Campbell as he muttered these words, and never recollect to have seen a more singular contrast than that between the strong daring sternness expressed in his harsh features, and the air of composed meekness and simplicity which his language assumed. There was even a slight ironical smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, which seemed, involuntarily as it were, to intimate his disdain of the quiet and peaceful character which he thought proper to assume, and which led me to entertain strange suspicions that his concern in the violence done to Morris had been something very different from that of a fellow-sufferer, or even of a mere spectator. (*RR*, 142)

Frank's narration points out that there is something peculiar about the "singular contrast" between Campbell's appearance and his "composed" manner, a contrast that is rooted as much in what Campbell appears to conceal as in Frank's assumptions about the Scots based on their "strong daring sternness" and "harsh features." The contrast seems to conceal an "ironical" truth—that Campbell may have been responsible for the robbery in spite of his presentation as a "quiet and peaceful character." What we might notice, however, is how this description, despite motivating Frank to "entertain strange suspicions," suspends any narrative revelation of that character. Not only does the narration not proceed to inspect or sustain Frank's suspicions, but it also does not reveal the more illicit truth of Campbell's identity. The singularity, in other words, illuminates the spectacle of that obscurity rather than the underlying content of Campbell's true character. Far from registering the particular truth of who Campbell is—that is, naming him—Frank's narration instead participates in the deliberate veiling of his character and suspension of revelation.

It is not even until three-quarters of the way through the novel that Frank finally mentions the name "Rob Roy." After the "Introduction," at no point in the narrative does the name "Rob Roy" get mentioned. This minimization suggests that Scott is deliberately reducing the amount of attention that Rob Roy receives in the novel. He becomes an outsized figure of narrative placelessness. On the one hand, he is simultaneously everywhere in the novel, insofar as his name is suspended at the top of every page (fig. 1). On the other hand, he is nowhere within the narrative diegesis itself. Even when his name is finally mentioned, Frank fails to connect it to the character of Robert Campbell. The addition of the name "Rob Roy" to the character population of the novel distends that character by refusing to specify Rob Roy's identity. It is as if there were in fact two characters (one named Robert Campbell and the other named Rob Roy) rather than two alter-egos for the same person. In reproducing Rob Roy's concealed identity at the level of narrative, Scott performs the kind of eviction that the Highlanders experienced at the level of history.

The first mention of Rob Roy's name takes place shortly before Frank is captured by English soldiers. The soldiers, who are searching Scotland for the outlaw Rob Roy, mistake Frank and his partners, Andrew Fairservice and Bailie Nicol Jarvie, for members of Rob Roy's party. As many of the crises within the novel—financial, political, historical—come to a head, the rustic Lowlander Andrew declares that he will not proceed any further into the Highlands. Andrew declares that "to gang into Rob Roy's country is a mere tempting o' Providence" (*RR*, 332). Frank responds to Andrew's warning, "Rob Roy? … I know no such person" (*RR*, 333). As with so much of the novel, Frank's response reflects on the great distance between the diegesis and the narration, as well as on the novel's performance of nonrecognition. Because, as we know, Frank *does* know such a person—except, he knows Rob Roy under the assumed identity Robert Campbell. Or, rather, he knows Rob Roy's official name as it was recognized by the British state in the shadow of the prohibition on his clan name. Said somewhat differently, he knows Rob Roy but only at the extradiegetic level of



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ling to commit myself to hazard in the matter."

I looked at Campbell as he uttered these words, and never recollect to have seen a more singular contrast than that between the strong daring sternness expressed in his harsh features, and the air of composed meekness and simplicity which his language assumed. There was even a slight ironical smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, which seemed, involuntarily as it were, to intimate his disdain of the quiet and peaceful character which he thought proper to assume, and which led me to entertain strange suspicions that his concern in the violence done to Morris had been something very different from that of a fellow-sufferer, or even of a mere spectator.

Perhaps some such suspicions crossed the Justice's mind at the moment, for he exclaimed, as if by way of ejaculation, "Body o' me! but this is a strange story."

The North Briton seemed to guess at what was passing in his mind; for he went

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Figure 1: Page from the original publication of *Rob Roy* by J. Ballantyne, 1818.

narration. This inversion of naming—where alter-ego becomes a guarded secret and where a bureaucratic name becomes a way of hiding in plain sight—illustrates the ways in which the mysteries of Frank's narration manage to rend "character" from "identity." In other words, Robert Campbell's presence within the narrative is always a form of dispossession and a symptom of the novel's refusal to bind the various proper names—Robert Campbell, Robert MacGregor, Rob Roy—to the same referent.

The distinction between character and identity, between signifier and referent, supplies a narrative analogue for the experience of Rob Roy's incommensurability. Frank's response ("Rob Roy? … I know no such person") to Andrew's warning ("to gang into Rob Roy's country is a mere tempting o' Providence") is illustrative because it is a misapprehension. By pivoting from "country" to person, Frank's response simultaneously reproduces and decouples the link in the metonymic chain that binds person and place together. Andrew's subsequent reply picks up this severed link: "Ye needna ask whae Rob Roy is, the reiving lifter that he is … take care o' your young bluid, and gang nae near Rob Roy!" (*RR*, 333). Andrew warns against knowledge of Rob Roy in the particular ("Ye needna ask whae Rob Roy is") and, through elision, of Rob Roy's country in general. If the initial warning is predicated on the formal integrity of person and country, the warning that supplants it is of a man deprived of both. It is tempting to read Rob Roy as both subject and object of this "reiving." Reiving is a word that describes plundering and pillaging in general but also, in a Scottish context, the specific act of taking cattle (*OED*). Rob Roy's blackmail schemes to rob and pillage local estates, demanding payment for the safe return of cattle, mark him as an enemy of the state. His "reiving" thus excludes him from that political collectivity, effectively isolating him and divesting him of country and identity.

It is not until even later in the novel, just before Rob Roy is to be executed by the English army, that Frank finally identifies Robert Campbell as Rob Roy. The moment is chilling, not least of all because the preceding chapter ends with the extra-judicial execution of Morris by Helen MacGregor. Morris's execution upsets Frank's privileged sense of cosmopolitan detachment. As Frank describes early in the novel, he was "born a citizen of the world" (*RR*, 92), by which he signals his disinterestedness toward matters political and national, as well as his class status and the freedom it allows. Morris's death, which Frank records with the emotional detachment of an accountant balancing a log book, brings that privilege into high relief: "the wretched man sunk without effort … and the unit of that life for which he had pleaded so strongly, was for ever withdrawn from the sum of human existence" (*RR*, 365). Critics tend to write about this passage in the context of the changing definition of value and the ascendency of capitalism in Britain. In light of this shift toward the exchangeability of human life, Frank must learn to confront the limitations of his own aspiration to "circulate" freely and "to set his own value." As one critic writes, he "must face … the prospects of depreciation and arrest, as though he himself amounts to no more than what is written on a piece of paper."[23] Frank's recognition of Rob Roy, his apprehension of that character's secreted identity, is thus haunted by his realization that it is actually possible to attain the rootlessness to which he aspires—but only in the form of a violent exclusion from the norms and bonds of political and social community.

The convergence of these forms of detachment is strikingly illustrated in the description Scott offers of Rob Roy in his native dress. In the description of his character, Frank's recognition of Rob Roy's identity is haunted by the realization that his cosmopolitan fantasy is grossly personified by the Highlander and his persecution by the laws of a political community from which he has been excluded. Frank recalls,

> I had never seen this man in the dress of his country, which set in a striking point of view the peculiarities of his form. A shock-head of red hair, which the hat and periwig of the Lowland costume had in a great measure concealed, was seen beneath the Highland bonnet, and verified

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[23] Ian Duncan, "Introduction," in *Rob Roy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xx.

> the epithet of Roy, or Red, by which he was much better known in the Low Country than by any other, and is still, I suppose, best remembered. The justice of the appellation was also vindicated by the appearance of that part of his limbs, from the bottom of his kilt to the top of his short hose, which the fashion of his country dress left bare, and which was covered with a fell of thick, short, red hair, especially around his knees, which resembled in this respect, as well as from their sinewy appearance of extreme strength, the limbs of a red-coloured Highland bull. Upon the whole, betwixt the effect produced by the change of dress, and by my having become acquainted with his real and formidable character, his appearance had acquired to my eyes something so much wilder and more striking than it before presented, that I could scarce recognise him to be the same person. (*RR*, 374)

In this passage, Rob Roy is portrayed as a kind of minotaur figure that deforms the categories by which we rationalize the distinction between the human and animal worlds.[24] We can read this portrait as an effect of Rob Roy's incommensurability, as he evades the normative categories of law and culture. At the same time, it is both disturbing and fitting that Rob Roy is finally identifiable at that moment in the narrative when his person is most vulnerable to the violence of the imperial state. In other words, cognitive mastery over the irregularity of his character is associated with the enforcement of state power. In many ways, this passage echoes the historical management and identification of the rebellious populations of the Highlands and their gradual subsumption to England's imperial authority.[25] Yet, in that final line of Frank's description, where even as he moves towards identifying Rob Roy, he fails to *recognize* him. That hesitation, where he "could scarce recognise him to be the same person," reproduces the image of Rob Roy's earlier incommensurability. Frank's description confronts the reader with that earlier nobody who is anonymous precisely because he is not *this* body, not locatable or identifiable like the man before him. In this episode, Rob Roy absorbs Frank's affective investment in the fantasy of a cosmopolitan existence, but in striking counterpoint, he also reveals the possible horrors and exclusionary violences of this dispossession.

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[24] Writing on this passage, Duncan suggests that it offers the image of a "heretic or outlaw identity at human and cultural origins." Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 112.

[25] On how the English managed Scottish identity in the eighteenth century by encouraging their identification with a more encompassing sense of Britishness and how this served to integrate Scotland into the imperial war machine, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 117–32.

One way I have been describing Rob Roy throughout the section is by implicitly drawing on the distinction between identity and character. While Rob Roy's identity remains one of the central mysteries of the novel, his character has a recursive and serial life beyond that identity. According to Ian Duncan, Rob Roy appears and disappears throughout the narrative, and he "enjoys a preternatural ability to turn up in any scene, or scenario, without being confined to it."[26] In other words, while Rob Roy maintains a relatively anonymous identity throughout the narrative—and this identity is never ascribed to his person until late in the novel—his character, as a textual signifier, has a reiterative life beyond that identity. This distinction suggests that Rob Roy's incommensurability is necessary for his survival as a rebel and as an illicit figure with respects to state authority. Scott suggests that the activity of identifying Rob Roy overlaps with the imperial state's techniques of policing the Scottish Highlands. For example, the "Advertisement" for Rob Roy's arrest, which Scott included in his prefatory material, directs "[a]ll Magistrates and Officers of his Majesty's forces ... to seize upon the said Rob Roy" (*RR*, 54). The state has a vested interest in Rob Roy's debts not only because they are credited by "several noblemen and gentlemen" (*RR*, 54), but also because Rob Roy's illicitness entangles "[t]he honour of his Majesty's government" (*RR*, 55). By delaying or disrupting the process by which the anonymous figure is identified, or character is made to align with identity,

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[26] Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 113.

Scott thus tarries with the political violence to which the Scottish Highlanders were victim.

Rob Roy maintains his anonymity and non-identity throughout most of the narrative, and his incommensurability is a striking counterpoint to the statelessness and exclusion that he experiences as a MacGregor. His serial presence throughout the novel offers an analogous form of disconnection, as he is everywhere and nowhere in the novel at once. This anonymous presence enables him to operate with a measure of freedom from the determining context of the British state, because Rob Roy must maintain a certain level of singularity, or incommensurability, in order to occupy these spaces without becoming identifiable with them. That is why I have chosen to refer to Rob Roy as "singular," following Scott—the word emphasizes the interest that he garners within the narrative without ascribing those appearances to an integral, self-identical personage. It is tempting to read this ontological or categorical instability as a sign of the Highlander's transgressive potential. And, certainly, Frank regards him in this light, endowing him in memory as a figure of the very freedom to circulate and refuse identity that he desired for himself. In his final moments, Frank remembers the Highlander fondly, recalling how "he died in old age and by a peaceful death, some time about the year 1733, and is still remembered in his country as the Robin Hood of Scotland, the dread of the wealthy, but the friend of the poor" (*RR*, 452). Rob Roy is the only character in the novel to receive such a memorial in death from the narrator.

But the effect of Frank's narration is as elegiac as it is celebratory. Scott quickly notes that the novel "ends somewhat abruptly" and he has "reason to think that what followed related to private affairs" (*RR*, 452). The narrator clearly recalls the character of Rob Roy from the diminished space of a private life that is sanctioned by Frank's acquiescence to his father's will for him to inherit the family's merchant business. As a result, the figures of Frank and Rob Roy operate as looking-glass versions of each other. Frank manifests the vision of an ascendent capitalism that is rooted to the imperial, English state but whose effects are visible everywhere. His marriage to Diana Vernon is isomorphic with this history, as everything that is interesting and particular about her (her rebelliousness, her agency, her Catholicism) gets smoothed over by the story of Frank's growth into rationalization. Meanwhile, Rob Roy's singularity is expressed through his singleness and the solitude of his destiny. While married, he is never seen with his wife in the narrative, and they maintain a separability that refuses to lapse into the hopefulness of a reproductive futurism. Similarly, his legacy is remembered widely but it detaches from the specifics of his career—in other words, he is better remembered as a myth, akin to Robin Hood, than for his own sake. The memory of the Highlander is ubiquitous but, even in the end, not self-identical with his person. The effect is to see the latter abstraction of Rob Roy's character as a symptom of his stateless existence. While his illicit and anonymous characterization offers an alternative to state control and the enforcement of state law, it is a weak one, always at risk of identification and recognition. In the next section, I turn from Rob Roy's evasion of narrative attention to those other characters in the narrative who are described as singular in order to understand better the different scales at which singularity operates.

Dwelling Among Others

As I have been describing, singularity can be a lonely experience. There is also considerable anxiety around the singular subject and his ability to give embodiment to a generalizable experience. In this section, I turn from one singular character to the many singular characters that circulate in the novel. What is both strange and interesting about the novel is that the titular subject is not the only singular character—that is, he is not the only one to be described as singular, unique, and remarkable. The omnipresence of this trope of singularity brings us to the question of difference and relation. In this section, I argue that the ubiquity of this trope in the novel suggests that Scott is concerned with the place of difference in modernity, and especially with the role of the incommensurate subject within public culture. As we will see, *Rob Roy* is less about the abolishment of that difference as part of a historical shift than about registering its volatility, or obscurity, except perhaps as the substance of literature.

In comparison to the other Waverley novels, *Rob Roy*'s vocabulary is saturated with the rhetoric of singularity. As previously mentioned, Scott regularly uses words like "singular," "singularity," and "singularly" to describe persons, objects, and events in the novel. If we widen the scope of our inquiry to include synonyms of "singular," such as "uncommon," "strange," and "remarkable," we can see just how often the novel insists upon the distinctiveness of its characters. Rob Roy, as we have seen, is a "singular character," but he is also "singularly adapted" (*RR*, 20), "so remarkable," (20), a "singular man" (39), "wild, remarkable, and ... unearthly" (273), and "a remarkable man" (414). Rob Roy's son, James MacGregor, seems to have inherited his father's distinction, and he is described by Scott in the "Introduction" as "somewhat whimsical and singular" (40). Likewise, Frank describes Diana Vernon as having an "uncommonly fine face and person" (102) and a "singular dress and unexpected appearance" (102). Additionally, she is described as a "strange and uncommon" girl (115), a "singular and giddy girl" (121), and a "singular young lady" (121). The villainous Rashleigh is frequently portrayed with a "singular expression of interest" (176) on his face or a "mode of expression" that is incomparable in its "singularity" (176). Even William Osbaldistone—the novel's primary figure for mercantilism, accounting, and exchange—is "singularly absolute in his decisions as to all that concerned his family" (202).

Throughout the novel, the trope of singularity attaches to those characters we are meant to notice, and it therefore functions as a way of distinguishing major from minor characters, value from non-value. As with the particular case of Rob Roy, singularity, when it attaches to individual characters, emphasizes the subject's value in comparison to the broader character population in the novel. Non-singular characters—typical, even static characters—tend to fade into the background or fail to achieve the distinction or particularity that warrants attention. For example, we might compare the singular characters we have been examining to the collective, group portrait of Sir Hildebrand Osbaldistone's sons. "The sons were," recalls Frank, "heavy unadorned blocks as the eye would desire to look upon … The strong Gyas, and the strong Cloanthus, are not less distinguished by the poet, than the strong Percival, the strong Thorncliff, the strong John, Richard, and Wilfred Osbaldistones, were by outward appearance" (*RR*, 110). The submission of individual difference to an abstract or collective form is apparent in Frank's characterization of the brothers as "Percie, Thornie, and Co." (*RR*, 110), as well as in the plot device of the "family-contract," wherein Diana is bound "to marry *Blank* Osbaldistone, Esq., son of Sir Hildebrand Osbaldistone, of Osbaldistone Hall, Bart., and so forth" (*RR*, 170, emphasis in original). While Diana acknowledges that "there are minute shades distinguishing the individuals" within the brother group, those differences "require the eye of an intelligent observer"—"the species," meanwhile, "may be distinguished and characterised at once" (*RR*, 111). The "uniformity" of the brothers, their species-like portrait that dispenses with individual variation, thus provides an alternative to the characterization of that *particular* Osbaldistone son, Rashleigh, and his "singular contrast in person and manner" (110). In this and the other examples cited above, "singular" is a sign of a discrete, non-exchangeable particularity, and this logic of difference allows the reader to perceive the value, importance, or centrality of potential major characters. That Rashleigh's "person and manner" contrasts with the generalizable group of brothers suggests both something about the relative centrality of these characters to the plot, as well as something about the novel's marginalization of similarity.

As we are starting to see, for many of the characters in the novel, singularity is a question of attention and perception. For Rob Roy, this attention is negative, as he slips beneath the radar of the narrative diegesis; yet, for many others, that attention is invasive and intrusive. For Diana, in particular, singularity brings with it narrative scrutiny, as she is relentlessly dissected, inspected, and identified by the narrator. Shortly after Diana is introduced to Frank, he observes the effect this "singular young lady" has on him: "her extreme beauty; her very peculiar situation, relying solely upon her reflections, and her own spirit, for guidance and protection; and her whole character offering that variety and spirit which piques our curiosity, and engages our attention in spite of ourselves" (*RR*, 121). The eroticism that saturates Diana's appeal is predicated on her exceptionalism, her solitary existence, and her remarkableness: the *extremity* of her beauty, the *peculiarity* of her situation, and the self-sufficiency of her "relying solely upon her reflections, and her own spirit." But, at the same time, the attention she garners dramatizes the force of sociability and connection, as she "engages" her audience "in spite of [them]selves." It's an odd, almost paradoxical situation: that she is remarkable precisely because she is self-sufficient and unique, but the spectacle of her singularity cannot help but undermine that difference. This paradox is underscored by the novel's comical treatment of Frank's callous and painful demands on Diana, her time, and her attention.

Implicit in the novel's approach to these questions of difference and similarity is the suggestion of a larger crisis of socio-political connection, by which the singular has been superseded by the general. This crisis is intuited by the recurring motifs of political revolution and republicanism. Long before Frank learns that Diana is the daughter of Jacobite reactionaries—and, therefore, an illicit subject like Rob Roy—he suggests that what he finds interesting about her is the likeness of her to a fallen monarch. When Frank learns that Diana is to marry a "*Blank* Osbaldistone," he naturally assumes that his rival for the hand of Diana is Rashleigh (therefore, misreading the ability of a "singular" subject to assume a general, universal form). In a fit of wounded pride, Frank drinks to intoxication at dinner and insults Diana. Later, in a private meeting, Diana demands from Frank an explanation, "as a creature, motherless, friendless, alone in the world, left to her own guidance and protection, has a right to require from every being having a happier lot" (*RR*, 182). As in the previous passage, Diana's solitude, even as it is remarkable and unique, is also the basis of her appeal to a connection (her "right") with others. After confessing to her about his discovery of the marriage contract, Frank observes the effect his confession has on her, conjuring up the image of a deposed sovereign in an age of mass democracy: "So young, so beautiful, so untaught, so much abandoned to herself … She seemed a princess deserted by her subjects, and deprived of her power, yet still scorning those formal regulations of society which are treated for persons of an inferior rank" (*RR*, 184). The anaphoric repetition ("so … so … so … so much") has the effect of distinguishing and elevating her—that is, of providing a rhetorical analogue for her social and political abandonment. Frank's comparison of Diana with a monarch, "deserted by her subjects," affirms her distinction (the distinction of a monarchial rule by the few), but it also suggests a historical context for this crisis of connection. That is to say, it suggests that the problems of difference, distinction, and dispossession ramify beyond the individual subject.

This association of Diana with a singularity that is at risk of disappearing is also echoed in the novel's explicit linkage of her with Rob Roy's wife, Helen MacGregor. Both are compared by Frank to the Amazons (*RR*, 102, 349) and both are wearing men's clothing when Frank first meets them (*RR*, 101, 349). Similarly, the two figures are figuratively linked to historical women who threatened male hegemony—Diana is compared to "Diana of the Ephesians" (*RR*, 252), a local form of the goddess who was "denounced by the apostle Paul" (*RR*, 486), and Helen is compared to Judith who beheaded Holofernes, Deborah who overthrew the commander of the Canaanite army, and Jael "the wife of Heber the Kenite" who slew the same commander (*RR*, 357). Both Diana and Helen also bear the weight of their family's social exclusion and dispossession. When Bailie Nicol Jarvie appeals to their common genealogy in order to remind her and her husband for their illegal acts, Helen responds in grandiloquent terms:

> Yes … you, and such as you, might claim a relation to us, when we stooped to be the paltry wretches fit to exist under your dominion, as your hewers of wood and drawers of water—to find cattle for your banquets, and subjects for your laws to oppress and trample on. But now we are free—free by the very act which left us neither house nor hearth, food nor covering—which bereaved me of all—of all—and makes me groan when I think I must still cumber the earth for other purposes than those of vengeance. (*RR*, 359)

It's important to note that Helen's appeal to injustice is premised as much in her sense of oppression (the "we" who stoops and is subject to oppressive laws) as in her resentment toward a reoriented political collectivity that has dissolved all of her authority and distinction. Helen's vision of what collectivity entails is affecting but also terrifying, especially when she uses it to justify her execution of Morris. "But you—wretch!" she bellows to Morris. "You could creep through the world unaffected by its various disgraces … you could live and enjoy yourself, while the noble-minded are betrayed—while the nameless and birthless villains tread on the neck of the brave and long-descended" (*RR*, 364). We can hear in her appeals not only the condescension she holds for the lower classes but also her resentment towards a political system that is no longer premised on the authority and power of hierarchy. She condemns the generalized, "nameless" mass that steps on a single "neck," thereby granting the supposed victims of this class revolution a particularity that is denied to the many. It is, then, fitting that Helen's execution and murder of Morris reverses that political arithmetic—he is reduced to an exchangeable form, a "unit," that, even in death, is denied the particularity of being understood except in relation to that general "sum of human existence" (*RR*, 365).

Scott's audience would have connected Helen's appeals to their own political moment. Not only was Britain just beginning to emerge from the shadow of the French

Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, but poor economic conditions at home were beginning to exacerbate political uncertainty and stoke the threat of political radicalism. Implicit, then, in the trope of the singular character is the fear of the "one," of a dynamic and charismatic individual who is able to morph into a political force, or demagogue. It suggests that Scott is questioning "singularity"—distinction, separation, remarkableness, and difference—as an uncontested site of social and political value. In other words, for characters like Diana and Helen, singularity only seems possible through a suspension of the similarities that are premised on exchangeability and generality.

The isolation and difference experienced by Diana and Helen is not congruent with the dispossession and solitude experienced by Rob Roy, but the rhetoric of singularity shared by these two social experiences implies a principle of relation. What happens, then, when we understand the logic of the singular character as the basis for a principle of relation? Can we extrapolate from the being of singularity to a concept of singular belonging? If we take each of these singular characters as a whole, we can begin to glimpse a logic that cuts across categories of experience—social, political, and historical—which so often frame belonging. Typically, when we encounter a novel character, we might identify them with one of many subjective categories or classes: political (e.g., Jacobite, Whig), national (e.g., Scottish English), geographic (e.g., Highland, Lowland, London), economic (e.g., clan paternalism, commercial economy), and narrative (e.g., hero, villain, major, minor). Such a focus tends to illuminate the violent and historical conflict among these identitarian positions. At the level of plot, Scott makes it clear that the differences among these categories can only be overcome through violence, war, and political exclusion. Thus, the ideology of the historical novel is so often premised on the progressive fantasy of national unification, by which the element of non-exchangeable difference (the Highlander, the Jacobite) is excised, subsumed, or relegated to a national prehistory.

Rob Roy resists undoing the lines of difference and relation that preexist the novel, instead operating as a weak point of connection (only ever rhetorical, only ever semantic) across social categories. Scott himself never examines the implications of this connection, instead trailing off in the abrupt ending of the novel (*RR*, 452). Left unexamined, this connection remains obscure, strange, and unrepresentable. As a principle of multiplicity or connection, singularity fails to achieve presence within the novel, instead dissipating into the violence of modern social identity and quantitative exchangeability. Consequently, alternatives to belonging as it is structured by the nation-state are left unexplored and open.

Nonetheless, the fact of repetition demands asking whether there is something generative or meaningful in the shared rhetoric of singularity. In Scott's *Rob Roy*, the conceit of the singular character is not a solution to the conflicts and contradictions presented in the novel but rather the opportunity to pose a question. Singularity is, in itself, not an example of anything, and it is not clear that we are meant to take from any of these singular characters a model of community. At the same time, the dynamism and spectacle of the singularity—its demand for attention and engagement—suggests the need to theorize this concept as non-trivial. In Scott, the singular character gets identified as the basic substance of being, as the anonymity of life prior to social inclusion or following social exclusion and dispossession. It is perhaps not surprising that many of the characters to whom this description attaches—Rob Roy, Diana, and Rashleigh, in particular—are figures for alienation, whether social, cultural, or political. Thus, the "singularly repulsive" (*RR*, 249) Robert Campbell seems to Frank "wild, irregular, and, as it were, unearthly ... a sort of half-goblin half-human being[]" (*RR*, 273). The distinctiveness of the singular character corresponds to a sociality beyond or against normative categories. The relationality suggested by this shared experience of dispossession is only every formal—but literature is a privileged site for experiencing something insubstantial and not yet given. Yet, one must bear in mind the volatility and fragility of this non-identity. Scott never quite locates a redemptive form of belonging from this experience, and, in the next section, we will examine some of the symbolic and material risks of identifying or specifying the connections that bind or entangle differentiated subjects.

Singular (n.): Superposition

In my argument, Scott offers two ways of reading that "singular character" in *Rob Roy*: the first, premised on obscurity and misreading, and the second, on identification and revelation. In the push-and-pull of these two heuristics—oscillating between the negative and the positive—Scott suggests that the singular subject creates a problem for any account of society. The strangeness or remarkableness of a singularity risks distorting our picture of the relationship between the individual and the collective, either by obscuring that relationship or by making it seem irrelevant.

In this final section, I turn to the "Introduction," in which Scott offers a biography of Rob Roy and a history of his clan and family. While Scott retains the description of Rob Roy as a "singular" subject, he begins to use it in an ironic, deflated way. In the first section, singularity was a sign of the subject's obscurity and anonymity; in this section, it signals the subject's distinction and superposition within the economy of the novel. Here, "singular" has a lot in common with "representative" or "exemplary," insofar as it describes an ideal relationship between part and whole; but, it also retains an elemental sense of particularity and uniqueness. When Scott describes Rob Roy as a "singular character" in the "Introduction" to *Rob Roy*, he is describing the subject's value to history and his centrality to historical forces. The use of "singular" in this instance is ironic because Scott seems less interested in a qualitative account of Rob Roy's character than in a quantitative, even structural, account of his relation to historical circumstances and contexts.

By focusing on the changing meaning of "singularity" between the diegesis and the "Introduction," I want to bring attention to that asymmetry between representation and substance. It is not that the character Rob Roy has somehow changed (he is a different *kind* of person), but we have moved to a different type or genre of representation, in which opacity and secrecy are anathema to the logics of writing. In other words, the conditions under which that singularity is presented have changed. For Scott, ever the thoughtful historian, the question of singularity cannot be understood except through the stories we tell about the singular character. How do we understand that subject, and what do we risk losing by identifying him too closely with the overdetermined relations of which he is a part? As I argue, these questions illustrate Scott's concern that singularity was non-redemptive because it was impossible to maintain separate from normative relations, like those offered by Enlightenment historiography and national unification. In this final section, we will examine how Rob Roy becomes a figure of congruency—that is, a subject who is identifiable by virtue of standing at the superposition of multiple institutions.

Singularity is a logic of both relation and of difference. In the nominalist tradition of classical scholasticism, singularities are objects about which it is impossible to generalize. Nominalism was a controversial philosophy because it upset any clear link between substance and representation, and medieval scholastic scholars argued that categories and concepts have no basis in reality. A particular tree, like an old oak planted at the entrance of a building, is real, insofar as it has material and organic existence. The universal concept of the "tree" and the signifier "tree," meanwhile, are not. According to Jameson, "Singularity, in other words, proposes something unique which resists the general and the universalizing (let alone the totalizing); in that sense, the concept of singularity is itself a singular one, for it can have no general content."[27] We can see how the concept of singularity is given face by Rob Roy, insofar as he evokes strangeness and obscurity, and it is difficult to pin him down with language. Semiotic systems that attempt to circumscribe him instead break down, as in the passage previously mentioned that characterizes Rob Roy as a conceptual freak, a Minotaur figure with the body of a man and "the limbs of a red-coloured

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[27] Fredric Jameson, "The Aesthetics of Singularity," *New Left Review* 92 (2015): 126.

Highland bull" (*RR*, 374). Rob Roy's anonymity is thus a sign of his resistance to the totalizing force of narration and its promise of unity.

At the same time, Jameson points out how easy it is for the aesthetics of singularity—an aesthetics of fleeting, contextual-specific meanings and of institutional situatedness—to recast the "distance and indifference" of objects to one another into something like institionalization.[28] In the "Introduction" to *Rob Roy*, we witness how Scott locates that titular character within the superposition of abstract systems. Scott implies that it is no longer possible to invest in "singularities" as something that might resist (whether symbolic or otherwise) normativity. In the world of the novel, identity is increasingly routed through forms of the state and of the nation, as global commerce comes to structure the relations among persons and collectives. It is not incidental that the novel's plot is organized around a financial conspiracy to ignite rebellion among the Highland clans, which reveals the degree to which the novel is motivated by the logic of financial circulation and exchange. A singularity, as something "unique which resists the general," is unthinkable in a world of exchange values, and so Scott's use of the trope of singularity to describe Rob Roy is ironic, if not melancholic. The world the "Introduction" describes no longer operates at the level of the individual, no matter how remarkable or unique. As a result, the revelation of Rob Roy's identity, and his circumscription by political, epistemological, and social systems that exceed his person, signal the loss of the unique, strange, and obscure as bearers of value. In his "Introduction," then, Scott theorizes the impossibility of a form of connection or belonging that is not related through the conditions and limitations of the state.

Between the narrative and the "Introduction," *Rob Roy* depicts the loss of non-identity, as the secrets and aporias of Rob Roy's character are revealed. When Scott first published *Rob Roy* in 1818, it had no preface or appendices; instead, the novel opened with the story of Frank Osbaldistone, tracking his journey through the North of England and his many chance meetings with a mysterious stranger named Robert Campbell. After a decade, Scott elected to reissue all of the Waverley novels in a definitive, "Magnum Opus" edition, partially to control the legacy of his novels and partially to solve his financial troubles.[29] The "Magnum Opus" editions added prefaces, copious notes, and supplementary materials in order to frame the novels and manage their reception. For example, the "General Preface to the Waverley Novels," in which Scott describes the origin story for *Waverley* and his choice to remain anonymous, was not published until the 1829 edition. The "Magnum Opus" editions thus mark the moment when the various historical novels published by Scott in the preceding decade came to be thought of as part of a single, unified project known as the Waverley novels.[30]

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[28] Ibid., 109.

For the 1829 re-issue of *Rob Roy*, Scott includes a lengthy introduction that offers greater details of the Highlander's family history, his life, and his legacy both within and without Scotland. Also included in the "Magnum Opus" edition are reproductions of material and cultural objects related to Rob Roy, including the English government's "Advertisement for the Apprehension of Rob Roy," as well as "Scottish Ballads" that celebrate the national hero. The prefatory materials that Scott collects for *Rob Roy* would have appealed to the antiquarian sensibilities of his contemporaries, and they demonstrate Scott's deep and abiding interest in the array of historiographical practices that were in fashion during the early decades of the nineteenth century, including ballad collection, translation, and bibliographic research. According to Millgate, the introductions and appendices that Scott amended to the novel for his "Magnum Opus" editions are "rhetorical devices"—"the citing of sources and invocation of parallels becomes a special version of the trope of amplification."[31] Similarly, Devin Griffiths emphasizes that the antiquarianism on display in the prefatory materials "generally emphasized distinction over commonality."[32] In the case of *Rob Roy*, amplification and distinction are both positive and negative strategies. Scott is clearly enamored by the folk hero, but he sets out to correct the exceptional, Romantic portraits of the Highlander that were popular at the time, including William Wordsworth's paean "Rob Roy's Grave," which Wordsworth wrote in 1803 "In honor of that Hero brave."[33] As Scott writes, "No introduction can be more appropriate to the work than some account of the singular character … who, through good report and bad report, has maintained a wonderful degree of importance in popular recollection" (*RR*, 4). What emerges from this "Introduction" is a record of that subject's "importance"—not his transcendent or universal value but his relation to specific historical circumstances. The forensic nature of the editorial apparatus, and its investigation into his origins and history, thus illuminates how Rob Roy's interest as a "singular character" is connected to the multivalent material and cultural histories of which he was a part.[34]

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[29] For readings that consider Scott's editorial, compositional, and historiographical strategies on display in the paratextual material he added to the "Magnum Opus" editions, see Simon Eliot, "1825–1826: Years of Crisis?" in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland. Vol. 3, Industry and Ambition 1800–1880*, ed. Bill Bell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 91–95; Peter Garside, "Waverley and the National Fiction Revolution," in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland. Vol. 3, Industry and Ambition 1800–1880*, ed. Bill Bell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 222–31; Maxwell Richard, "The Historiography of Fiction in the Romantic Period," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7–21; and Bianca Tredennick, "'A Labor of Death and a Labor Against Death': Scott's Cenotaphic Paratexts," *European Romantic Review* 21 (2010): 49–64.

[30] On Scott's strategies for establishing, cultivating, and deviating from this project, see Millgate, *Walter Scott*.

As I have been suggesting, the figure of the "singular character" as it is used in the "Introduction" is ironic. Unlike the narrative diegesis, in which Rob Roy appears as a secretive and obscure figure, the "Introduction" illustrates how Rob Roy's importance is a function of his situation and location at the intersection of multiple historical forces. Singularity, in other words, is not just another way of referring to some strange, sublime quality of his person or character; when Scott uses the word "singular" to describe Rob Roy in the "Introduction," he does not attach it to the usual meanings of either "remarkable" or "one of a kind." Instead, "singularity" comes to mean something like *particular* or *local*, insofar as it charts the point at which multiple abstract configurations (nation, state, economy, history) intersect. This is different from the Lukácsian character type, which tends to suggest that the character type is an embodiment of a particular social element, like class. Scott, meanwhile, tends to situate Rob Roy within the multiple contexts for his actions. In other words, by differentiating this singular subject from those romanticized protagonists of "popular recollection," Scott illustrates the changing context for historical value, as it moves from the particular to the general or structural.

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[31] Ibid., 155.

[32] Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy*, 102. For more on the relationship between antiquarianism and the negotiation of civic nationalism in Scott, see Yoon Sun Lee, *Nationalism and Irony: Burke, Scott, Carlyle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 74–104.

[33] William Wordsworth, "Rob Roy's Grave," in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Charles Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 314–18, l. 8.

[34] For more on Scott's antiquarian and forensic historicism, see Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy*, 95–102.

As a result, singularity comes to signify the unique point at which multiple systems intersect—a point of congruency, or superposition. The "importance," or value of this singularity, is thus comparative, insofar as it acknowledges the overlap and contest of forces that exceed and subsume the individual. Perhaps the most striking example of this logic of relation is the opening of the "Introduction," where Scott wrestles with various, competing discourses in his efforts to understand the unique historical value of the Highlander:

> No introduction can be more appropriate to the work than some account of the singular character whose name is given to the title-page, and who, through good report and bad report, has maintained a wonderful degree of importance in popular recollection. This cannot be ascribed to the distinction of his birth, which, though that of a gentleman, had in it nothing of high destination, and gave him little right to command in his clan. Neither, though he lived a busy, restless, and enterprising life,

> were his feats equal to those of other freebooters, who have been less distinguished. He owed his fame in a great measure to his residing on the very verge of the Highlands, and playing such pranks in the beginning of the 18th century, as are usually ascribed to Robin Hood in the middle ages,—and that within forty miles of Glasgow, a great commercial city, the seat of a learned university. Thus a character like his, blending the wild virtues, the subtle policy, and unrestrained license of an American Indian, was flourishing in Scotland during the Augustan age of Queen Anne and George I. Addison, it is probable, or Pope, would have been considerably surprised if they had known that there existed in the same island with them a personage of Rob Roy's peculiar habits and profession. It is this strong contrast betwixt the civilised and cultivated mode of life on the one side of the Highland line, and the wild and lawless adventures which were habitually undertaken and achieved by one who dwelt on the opposite side of that ideal boundary, which creates the interest attached to his name. (*RR*, 5)

I will return to this passage throughout the following paragraphs, so it is useful to read it in full. The first thing to note about this passage is Scott's deployment of various literary, cultural, and anthropological types to characterize Rob Roy, including the gentleman, the freebooter, Robin Hood, and the American Indian. In his attempts to provide evidence for, and examples of, Rob Roy's importance, Scott weaves in and out of these types, as if he found each applicable but, at the same time, incomplete for framing the portrait of the Highlander. The "distinction" of Rob Roy's birth is visible in comparison to the type of the "gentleman," but in many important respects, the case of the Highlander is more complicated than that type will allow. At the same time, when compared to the type of the "freebooter," Rob Roy's career is relatively uninspiring and his case inexplicable, given what other freebooters were able to accomplish. Similarly, Scott diminishes the value and originality of Rob Roy by pointing to a literary and cultural antecedent in the figure of Robin Hood.

The type of the "American Indian" is slightly more complicated, and so I want to linger on it for a moment. When Scott invokes a "character *like* his, blending the wild virtues, the subtle policy, and unrestrained license of an American Indian," he is not directly comparing the Highlander to the American Indians. Instead, he is appealing to an anthropological and philosophical project that understood cultural differences in terms of temporality. Later, in the same "Introduction," Scott writes that Rob Roy had the "idea of morality … of an Arab chief, being such as naturally arose out of his wild education" (*RR*, 20). Similarly, in "Culloden Papers," a review of the papers of Duncan Forbes which Scott published in 1816, he describes the developmental resemblance between the Scottish Highlanders and Afghan tribes. "The genealogies of the Afghaun tribes may be paralleled with those of the clans," writes Scott, "the nature of their favorite sports, their love of their native land, their hospitality, their address, their simplicity of manners exactly correspond. Their superstitions are the same, or nearly so."[35] We can see here that the comparison among these groups is not always direct, but instead, a comparison gets made based on the isomorphism of their presumed level of social development. In other words, it is not that the groups are commensurable with one another but each is assumed to relate, in analogous or complementary ways, to the "wild" or "native land," and this relation is thought to depend upon their subordinate, anterior position within a "progressive" narrative of historical development.

The point is not that Rob Roy is similar to an American Indian or an Arab chief, nor that Highland culture is commensurable with Afghani culture, especially as either would have existed contemporaneous with Scott or the historical Rob Roy. Rather, the comparisons depend upon a second-order typology, in which these cultural groups are, first, abstracted into an anthropological type (like the "savage" or "wild") and, then, abstracted further into a developmental narrative of sequential social "ages." Most readings of Scott's historiographic project in the Waverley novels follow James Chandler, who demonstrates how Scott follows the historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment, and particular the conjectural histories of philosophers like Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and John Millar. According to these histories, all societies, cultures, and nations pass through the same historical stages of development, which are diachronic, sequential, and progressive. Writes Chandler,

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[35] Walter Scott, "Culloden Papers," *The Quarterly Review* 14, no. 28 (January 1816): 289.

> On the one hand, each society is theorized as moving stepwise through a series of stages sequenced in an order that is more-or-less autonomous and stable. Insofar as the stages are also "ages," these sequencings can be said to constitute temporal orders. On the other hand, this same historiographical discourse always implies a second temporality, one in which these different national times can be correlated and calendrically dated in respect to each other.[36]

This philosophy of history enables writers to compare societies at the same "stage" of development, even if those groups exist at radically different moments in time.[37] The categories that these Enlightenment philosophers use to understand social and historical development are fixed, static, and discrete, thus allowing writers to argue that allegedly "uncivilized" societies exist at developmentally earlier moments in time. Some philosophers, like Millar, admit that, while similar, societies in the same stage of development are not commensurate with one another and differences between societies can be traced to the broader situation of when a society progressed to a particular stage of development. According to Chandler, Millar's philosophy

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36. Chandler, *England in 1819*, 128.

37. By extension, one could compare different but contemporaneous societies by comparing their respective stages of development. This idea served as the foundation for various Marxist philosophies of "uneven development." See ibid., 130–5; and Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 101–4.

asserts that these stages are not "autonomous and stable," as they are in the philosophy of Smith. Instead, each stage, or "age," is situated within a set of "global circumstances" that shapes how a society adapts or progresses through a universal developmental narrative.[38] Thus, a "wild" or "savage" society at the beginning of the eighteenth century is similar, but not commensurate with, a society at the same stage of development, but which exists at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In the "Introduction," Scott describes not a sequential, progressive narrative of social development but something more akin to Millar's "global circumstances." Through the figuration of Rob Roy, situated in the superposition of competing and overlapping metaphors and concepts, Scott creates an array or intellectual configuration wherein we understand these cultural and historical types as if they were synchronic to one another. Instead of a narrative of development, and its ideology of cultivation and progress, Scott flattens these groups into a horizontal array or pastiche. That "same island" to which Scott refers as a literal space also stands as a metaphorical space wherein those cultures and societies are placed in conceptual relation to one another.[39] From this crucible of overlapping and multiple societies, Rob Roy emerges not as a figure of inequality and difference—a savage subject who has been relegated to a foreclosed past—but as a figure of difference *and* relation, exclusion *and* inclusion, which structures and binds the two states, England and Scotland, into one.

The second point about the "Introduction": it is perhaps not a surprise that the privileged chronotope to articulate this relationship between times and spaces is the border, that "ideal boundary." Framed by the Highlands on one side and the "great commercial city" of Glasgow on the other, Rob Roy embodies the specific geographic circumstances of the borderlands between Highland and Lowland Scotland.

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[38] Chandler, *England in 1819*, 129.

[39] For more on the conceptual reduction of these distinct cultures to the same moment in time and space, see Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, 107–15.

His "singular character" is traceable to the economic and political contradictions of that particular space. According to Andrew Lincoln, Rob Roy represents a "conflict of discourses"—specifically between an "enlightenment discourse of civilization," on the one hand, and a "romantic discourse of primitive liberty," on the other.[40] Yet, these contradictions are not resolved or accommodated by the figure of Rob Roy, and the border emerges not as a space where those differences are erased but where they are given proximity and congruency.[41] Rather, Rob Roy mediates this situation, and his singularity is a function of his location at the overlap and conflict among those discourses. He "blends" and "contrasts," operating as he does on the threshold, border space between two categories of difference.

That is to say, he represents a world that is structured by relation and difference, a specific impasse between two societies that simultaneously gives Rob Roy purpose and meaning as a figure who is able to traverse that border space. Yet, there is always the fear or anxiety, animated by Scott's digressive and expansive "Introduction," that this situation and its complexity will eclipse Rob Roy as a subject of interest. If the comparison between the Highlander and the American Indian is less about similarities between those two cultures or groups than about the conditions under which comparison is made possible, then the borderlands are part of that enabling condition. The border space, in particular, suggests a zone of interconnection and overlap. In the final sentence of that passage, for example, we can witness the two spaces on either side of the border become interchangeable through the grammatical vagueness of "one side" and "opposite side," as if the civilization and barbarism divide were a matter of location. By extension, both the "Highlands" and "Glasgow" (or Lowlands/England) are themselves "typical," insofar as they represent social, political, and economic conditions that far exceed those places as discrete locations. In the diegesis, for example, Frank imagines a future wherein Glasgow might “support an immense fabric of commercial prosperity” that extends to the West Indies and American colonies (*RR*, 236). Within this colonial and imperial fantasy, the Highlands are not an impediment to progressive development but a vital force for its success: “This supply of a hardy and useful population was of consequence to the prosperity of the place, furnished the means of carrying on the few manufactures which the town already boasted, and laid the foundation of its future prosperity” (*RR*, 237).

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[40] Andrew Lincoln, "Scott and Empire: The Case of *Rob Roy*," *Studies in the Novel* 34, no. 1 (2002): 44.

[41] For more on the internal border in Scott's historical fiction, see Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1998), 35–40.

Through his efforts to identify and situate Rob Roy—which is to say, to rationalize his singularity—Scott suggests a series of organic relations between the individual and the collective that at once particularize Rob Roy and generalize him. At the same time, what seems to animate Scott’s account of the Highlander is the impossibility of capturing the quality or value of his singularity. The pattern of negations in the passage quoted above—“this cannot,” “nothing,” “neither”—has the effect of circling, but never landing on, the particular content of his character. Rob Roy’s individual variation away from the type of the gentleman or the freebooter does less to dispel the accuracy of this type than to clarify its flexibility as a container of difference and variation. Similarly, the differences between Rob Roy and the hypothetical American Indian do not resolve the differences between those figures but create a structure of relation across and within those differences. We can see in this additive, comparative mode not the elimination of Rob Roy’s difference but his capture, as Scott wrestles with how to explain, and therefore identify, that difference.

Rob Roy is singular in two senses: as a distinct, and therefore notable, subject and as an incommensurable figure. While Rob Roy’s incommensurability emerges most clearly in the diegesis—his strangeness and opacity to the narrative structure—his difference and distinction is elaborated most clearly in the “Introduction.” Insofar as he is distinct, that value is attributable to his particular location, his superposition, at the intersection of multiple discourses of history, geography, society, politics, and the economy. His singularity is subject to his vertical relation to those systems. He stands at the intersection of multiple conceptual relations, as if he were the point of overlap within a Venn diagram. The analogy to a Venn diagram is useful because it illustrates how Rob Roy models the conceptual affinity among divergent ideas, ideas which include but exceed him. He navigates the "boundary" as a point of differentiation and contact, like the exact point at which the warp and weft of an "immense fabric" meet. In the textile metaphor that Scott uses to describe the future prosperity of the British empire, the idiosyncratic and the singular are not contrary to the normative and the essential. Instead, they are part of the texture that makes up the uneven whole, knitting together a complex reality composed of multiple, competing, and overlapping discourses.

Throughout this section, I have focused on the "singular character" of Rob Roy as it emerges in the "Introduction," but I have been careful to differentiate my use of "singularity" from the connotations we might normally attach to that word. The idea of singularity as Scott describes it in the "Introduction" is not an essence or individuality that deviates from the norm or the collective. Rather, I have argued that the concept of the singular emerges as a site of ambiguity in the novel, insofar as it is neither reducible to the unique or the particular, nor assimilable to a homogenous whole. Instead, the concept of the singular illuminates a whole that is heterogenous, contingent, and dynamic. A singularity marks a unique point within this larger array of situated and overlapping discourses, and therefore it provides a conceptual model for thinking or representing a totality that defies internal coherence through the force of its dynamism and volatility. Rob Roy's success and his fame are singular not because of any particular quality or essence of his character but because of his position in relationship to multiple, overlapping identities that inform his way of being in the world.

The "singular character" of Rob Roy, as it is animated both in the "Introduction" and in the narrative diegesis, reveals a subject that is increasingly unknowable as a *person.* Throughout the "Introduction," Scott mobilizes a series of recursive and self-cancelling images to describe Rob Roy, and no one explanatory system emerges as the definitive heuristic that might rationalize his success or his fame. To judge Rob Roy "singular" is, of course, to make a value judgment. But, it is also to respond to something idiosyncratic and interesting about a subject, something different that collides with our expectations and understanding of the world. Singularity registers a desire to know the subject better. However, as Scott illustrates in *Rob Roy*, to know that "singular character" better involves moving in and out of knowledge, thereby acquainting ourselves with a world that is complex and withholding.

Hence the ambiguity of the novel: it at once demonstrates a subject who is exempt from the necessity to be visible or self-identifiable, and suggests that the subject himself is no longer the basis for knowledge. By focusing on Scott's "Introduction" and his characterization of Rob Roy as "singular," I have been attempting to describe what that singularity means for his historical and social realism. Rather than suggest that the Highlander's singularity is a sign of his potential to subvert the novel's social arrangements, I argue that it is a sign of his simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from those arrangements. One condition of this arrangement is the absorption of any external position. By equating singularity with difference and relation (secrecy and identity), Scott comes to provide an account of the conjunction of social exclusion and inclusion. Replacing a progressive narrative of before and after with one of synchronicity, Scott thus suggests the vitiation of alternative modes of being or belonging in the aftermath of national unification.

CHAPTER 2

Between the Great and the Mean: Discourses of Exceptionality in Thackeray

> It is no easy task in this world to distinguish between what is great in it, and what is mean.
>
> —William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Second Funeral of Napoleon* (1841)

The career of William Makepeace Thackeray provides an excellent opportunity to examine the difficulty of envisioning relational modes that break with the material and symbolic violence of social differentiation. In the previous chapter, I examined the changing meaning of the word "singular" in Scott's descriptions of characters in *Rob Roy*. Singularity brought into focus the tragic experience of dispossession and assimilation faced by the Scottish Highlanders amid the rise of British nationalism, and also highlighted the pressure to be identifiable as a condition of belonging to the nation. While Rob Roy's evasiveness and anonymity disrupt the surface of narrative continuity, suggesting the possibility of an escape from the pressures of fixed identity, Scott ultimately treats this formal effect as a reactionary and non-redemptive response to the violence that is a thematic element of the novel itself. As a concept that is connected to the experience of limited agency, singularity thus illuminates the discontents and exclusions inscribed in certain ways of imagining national collectivity.

In this chapter, I turn to a cluster of novels by Thackeray on the subjects of warfare, racial violence, and political conflict. In these texts, "it is no easy task … to distinguish between what is great … and what is mean," in part because of Thackeray's comic and catholic irony. Relentlessly trivializing the subject matter of his novels, Thackeray never allows the reader to establish anything for certain. In what follows, I highlight how Thackeray's fiction negotiates difference as it gets mapped onto hierarchical structures of power. By virtue of his irony, which oscillates between non-identical terms, Thackeray promotes an alternative to the vertical differentiation of persons. In my argument, the formal relation inscribed in this correspondence between terms reflects Thackeray's view that everyone shares a capacity for immoral behavior and hypocrisy. At the same time, this vision of a universal community of the mean is, to say the least, unsatisfying. Admitting no outside, Thackerayan irony is unable to escape or confront its origins in the violent content of his novels. On my view, the equivocal nature of this irony operates as a double bind: it simultaneously offers the promise of a liberating relationality rooted in the formal correspondence of high and low, and suggests the difficulty of escaping the allures of difference, status, and power.

The task of distinguishing between the great and the mean is wrapped up in the broader problematic of how the novel reflects or mediates the world beyond its pages. Victorian novelists were especially adept at evaluating and judging the norms of their own culture, as well as responding to the forms of hierarchy and exclusion that create unfair distributions of power and authority. As Amanda Anderson has shown, novelists developed countless procedures for cultivating a detached, critical perspective on the assumptions and conventions of the Victorian social and moral order. Alongside "new ethnographic and protosociological methods" in the human sciences, the novel was a vital technology for the production of comprehensive and objective knowledge about British society and culture.[1] In their novels, writers like Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot all seek to reflect on these cultural norms. While

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1. Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 9.

they often promote critical or progressive ideals, they were also concerned that certain practices of reflection or judgment might "corrode moral character."[2] Dickens, for example, was as skeptical as Thackeray of the corrupting force of greatness, yet he was more willing to elevate the poor and the meek in his novels—that is, to reconstitute a new definition or ideal of greatness. Thackeray, meanwhile, was less ready to acknowledge the possibility of moral elevation. In many ways, Thackeray is an unlikely author to turn to for evidence of forms of belonging that escape the violence of differentiation. As George Henry Lewes complains in a review of Thackeray's writing, "he shows us *everywhere* corruption underneath the mask."[3] Throughout his fiction, Thackeray dismisses all of the collective fantasies of greatness that inform British subjectivity. Like Scott and Dickens, Thackeray exposes the histories of violence that subtend these abstract fantasies, as well as the ways in which exclusion is wielded to support a totalizing vision of the nation. Yet, unlike these authors, Thackeray seems less invested in reconciling these differences. Thackeray's well-known irony makes it difficult to secure any values that might allow for the survival or perpetuation of a community. Anyone can become a target of Thackeray's irony, which is to say that everyone is a target of Thackeray's irony. What happens, though, when the vertical differentiation of persons is replaced by a flattened, horizontal relation, where the distinctions between great and mean are rendered obsolete?

For many of his critics, Thackeray challenges conceptual hierarchies and our standards of judgment through his deflationary approach to fictional representation, which proves an obstacle both for the mediation of historical reality and for the mobilization of radical critique. Lukács introduces this line of criticism in *The Historical*

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[2] Ibid., 21.

[3] From a review in the *Morning Chronicle*, 6 March 1848, 3. Reprinted in Geoffrey Tillotson and Donald Hawes, *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 46, emphasis in original.

Novel, when he complains that Thackeray's writing promotes the "distortion of history, its degradation to the level of the trivial and the private."[4] D. A. Miller suggests that Thackeray's "noisy" narrative voice repels the "godlike view" that Miller identifies with Jane Austen. Rather than aspire to a detached perspective that might be capable of authorizing judgments, Thackeray "relentlessly humanize[s] that authority, [and] never let[s] us forget its early origins as a glamorization of some garden-variety male know-it-all."[5] Yet, despite the topicality of his writing—on demagoguery, social immobility, warfare, and imperial violence—Thackeray has become a minor figure in scholarship on the literature and culture of the nineteenth century.[6] Perhaps Thackeray's minorness is a symptom of his triviality and his refusal of the vatic authority that we associate with authors like Austen, Dickens, and Eliot. Yet, one could also argue that Thackeray's interest in the trivial, as a non-redemptive yet critical aesthetic, is what makes his fiction relevant. One of the goals of this chapter is to suggest that Thackeray's fiction is especially well suited for mediating the character of modernity, especially as it gets constituted by war, nationalism, and violence.

By refusing an outside position that might allow for judgment, Thackeray's irony frustrates the will to know or to judge the characters in his novels. For example, irony allows us to read the subtitle of *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero* (1848) as both a positive description of the novel's investment in morally complex characters, as well as a statement on the novelist's refusal to authorize a stance vis-à-vis his characters. By divorcing his characters from moral types and by depersonalizing the targets of his irony—or, rather, by making everyone into a possible target of his ironic reversals—Thackeray problematizes the role of character in directing judgment or producing knowledge about the world. Distinguishing, then, between the great and the mean is not simply difficult, but difficult precisely for the fact of living in the absence of any divine authority to guide our judgments. Character in Thackeray's writing is thus part and parcel of the larger role that the novel has in the representation and evaluation of the Victorian social order.

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[4] Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 204. David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 29–66, makes a compelling case for Thackeray as a "historian of intensifying domesticity."

[5] D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 31.

[6] On the marginalization of Thackeray, see Amanpal Garcha, "Forgetting Thackeray and Unmaking Careers," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 46, no. 2 (June 2018): 531–45.

Each of the novels that I discuss in this chapter mediates between an aesthetics of the trivial and the social experience of trivialization. As a whole, these novels approach the trivial and the mean through the thematization of war and violence, and it is this dynamic interplay between the violent content of Thackeray's novels and the formal movement of irony's many reversals that will guide my arguments in this chapter. In order to capture the oscillating movement between high and low in these novels, I focus on the trope of exceptionality, which coordinates a relation among non-identical terms. Exceptionality is a conceptual relation in which a particular subject is elevated above all others of the same kind, thereby distinguishing the great from the ordinary, the typical, or the mean. The grammatical index of this exceptionality is often the superlative—the best, the most, the greatest. Yet, as the structure of the superlative attests, exceptionality is a comparative relation; one cannot be the greatest without the general order of the mean to which to compare. Exceptionality thus models, in miniature, social life, as well as the particular challenges involved in the differentiation of value and quality within a given sociality. In other words, the logic of exceptionality not only illustrates the importance of particular subjects relative to others, but it makes this question of mattering available for evaluation and debate. Of course, exceptionality is not unique to Thackeray. I have already suggested that Dickens is also interested in the problematic of social value and differentiation. Other writers—like Carlyle—are similarly invested in distinguishing the qualities that define an exceptional subject. Thackeray is unique, though, in the way he uses irony to create formal correspondences between the high and the low. Every invocation of greatness is ironically shadowed by the possibility of meanness. The equivocality of this exceptionality—which seems to confound the distinctions between high and low, elevated and degraded, great and mean—evidences the complex nature of social life. At the same time, this formal correspondence also suggests a resource for thinking social relations beyond hierarchical differentiation.

I flesh out this link between the ironic structure of exceptionality and the representation of social life in Thackeray's writing by focusing on a variety of texts that span his career. In the texts I have chosen—*The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan* (1838–9), *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.* (1844), and *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852)—Thackeray documents the lives and careers of common soldiers. Each of these texts is set against the backdrop of a large, international conflict, stretching back into the long history of the British nation and empire. In his writing, Thackeray investigates how war shapes ways of imagining the nation and how fantasies of national heroism belie an exclusionary and essentializing image of Victorian society. Yet, despite how often the plots of these texts are propelled forward by explosive battles and conflicts, Thackeray seems uninterested in recording faithfully that history. Instead, he uses the logic of exceptionality to draw formal correspondences between the high and the low that, in turn, intimates an alternative to the thematizations of violence, conflict, and warfare that are the content of these texts. By structuring a unique relation between non-identical terms, and thus revealing their common intimacy, exceptionality is an important literary resource for negotiating the boundaries and exclusions of social belonging not only in Thackeray's fiction but in the broader Victorian culture.

This chapter is comprised of four parts, and in each part I identify how Thackeray's ironic treatment of character coordinates between incompatible ideas. Irony creates the literary conditions wherein we must imagine characters as both great and mean in order to glimpse the movement of that ironic reversal. In other words, Thackeray's irony is not merely deflationary and the ironized subject is never identical to itself. I use this polyphony to examine the effect irony has on representation and how Thackeray represents social relations. In the first section, I expand on my definition of exceptionality by distinguishing it from political exceptionality and national exceptionalism, which might be more familiar to the reader. In the second part, I turn to one of Thackeray's earliest texts: the imperial burlesque *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan* (1838–9), which is set during the Second Anglo-Maratha War (1803–5). In this section, I describe how to read the trope of exceptionality as dynamic, rather than merely deflationary. In the third part, I turn to Thackeray's mock-heroic novel *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.* (1844). A first-person account of an Irish adventurer who travels about Europe during the Seven Years' War, *Barry Lyndon* raises the question of moral judgment. Among Thackeray's contemporaries, many were concerned that his irony made evaluation or authority impossible. Instead, I want to focus on the formal relation of his universalizing approach to irony and satire. I conclude with a final section on the social-realist novel *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852). For many, *Henry Esmond* is the high point of Thackeray's career, but it is also the example to which many critics turn to illustrate how Thackeray's irony promotes a trivialization of social representation. Instead, I will argue that, in *The History of Henry Esmond*, Thackeray uses the aesthetics of the trivial to illustrate how the novel can promote correspondences across the field of social differentiation. Throughout this chapter, my argument is built around a careful reading of how these texts model formal alternatives to the exclusionary, hierarchical, and violent conventions that are thematic elements of the texts themselves. Yet, as I argue in my final section, the trope of exceptionality also signals Thackeray's own reckoning with the limits and conditions of this formal model of social belonging.

The Return of the Ashes

To better illustrate what I mean by exceptionality—a trope of ironic oscillation or movement between non-identical terms—let's start with an example. In May of 1840, at the same time that Thomas Carlyle was giving his lectures that would eventually become *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, the French government submitted a request to the British to return the body of Napoleon to Paris. Many saw King Louise-Philippe's request for Napoleon's body, which was buried on the island prison of St. Helena, as a transparent attempt to garner populist support. At the time, Thackeray was in Paris and he provided journalistic reportage on the event, known as *le retour des cendres* ("the return of the ashes"). Many sites were suggested for the final resting place for Napoleon's remains. Each site, in turn, was rejected for failing to realize the greatness of Napoleon in the French imagination. The return of the ashes, then, is an important cultural event for the memorialization and remembrance of greatness, as well as the difficulties involved in representing that elevated image.

In *The Second Funeral of Napoleon* (1841), Thackeray burlesques the French response to the return by appealing to the humor of a greatness brought low. According to Michael Angelo Titmarsh, one of Thackeray's authorial personas, the column of the Place Vendôme was rejected because it was thought that the clattering heels of the pedestrians would rouse the Emperor from his subterranean repose. It was also believed that there was no way a man of Napoleon's extraordinary reputation, "should find a column, of which the base is only five-and-twenty feet square, a shelter vast enough for his bones." Finally, the French settled upon L'Hôtel national des Invalides, the "national residences," or retirement home, for French war veterans:

> Under the immense gilded dome of the Invalides he would find a sanctuary worthy of himself. A dome imitates the vault of heaven, and that vault alone … should dominate above his head. His old mutilated guard shall watch around him: the last veteran, as he has shed his blood in his combats, shall breathe his last sigh near his tomb. And all these tombs shall sleep under the tattered standards that have been won from all the

> nations of Europe.[7]

Thackeray's reportage dramatically exaggerates the image and appeal of the former Emperor by comparing him to the "immense gilded dome" of the Invalides and to the "vault of heaven." Both of these images evoke the motif of elevation, a kind of rising above or transcendence of the ordinary, which connects the exceptional subject to the universal. Yet, related to that elevation is the deflationary pressure exerted by the subsequent images of brutal, bloodied embodiment, including the "old mutilated guard," the bloodied combats, and the "tattered standards." Written during a time of intensifying pressure from the working classes (of both France and England) for political representation and equality, *The Second Funeral of Napoleon* thus suggests that there is something inherently reactionary and chauvinistic about the myth of national heroism. Greatness is conditional upon the violent degradation of anonymous, ordinary soldiers. This oscillation between high and low, which I am flagging as the logic of exceptionality, does more than demystify the concept of the hero. It also replaces that myth of heroism with an appeal to new forms of belonging that break with the violent differentiations of an exclusionary social hierarchy.

A ballad that originally accompanied the first edition of *The Second Funeral of Napoleon* picks up on this theme of greatness by connecting the fantasy of national exceptionalism to the disproportionate burden shouldered by the common soldier. The ballad, entitled "The Chronicle of the Drum," narrates the history of a family and their participation in centuries of European conflict, starting with the Thirty Years' War and moving through the Napoleonic Wars.[8] The ballad concludes with the voice of the anonymous speaker as he reflects in the warmth and familiarity of his hearth. The speaker refuses to lament "how kings and heroes rise and fall"—"what care we for war and wrack, / … / Look yonder, in his coffin black, / There lies the greatest of them all."[9] The speaker's attitude is critical of heroic culture and parodic of that elevation—even "the greatest of them all" ends up in a "coffin black." The poem seems to galvanize our affective investment in the image of the family and the premise that "domestic happiness should be placed above 'greatness' of any sort, since the paths of glory lead but to the grave."[10] At the same time, I would hesitate to call this treatment redemptive, since the speaker (and, by extension, Thackeray) acknowledges that war rages on and the family will continue to fight in those wars. Rather than place the domestic "above" the great, Thackeray compels the reader to focus on the correspondences between the high and the low: "He captured many thousand guns; / He wrote 'The Great' before his name; / And dying, only left his sons / The recollection of his shame."[11] The rhyming of "name" and "shame" signals the affiliation of these terms. In Thackeray's trumped up discourse, we witness the play between the great and the mean, and this juxtaposition alerts us to the correspondences between those terms rather than to their exchangeability.

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[7] William Makepeace Thackeray, "The Second Funeral of Napoleon," in *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), 395–449, 402.

[8] George Saintsbury's *The Oxford Thackeray* gestures to this original publication by including a facsimile of the Pictorial Cover for the first edition of *The Second Funeral*, which includes mention of the ballad. The text of "The Chronicle of the Drum," however, is indexed in a separate volume dedicated to Thackeray's ballads and his contributions to *Punch* magazine. Saintsbury's decision to split the two texts is not unusual, insofar as "The Chronicle of the Drum" was published as a stand-alone book throughout the nineteenth century.

In foregrounding this equivocal, oscillating function of the trope of exceptionality, I want to avoid any suggestion that the effect of Thackeray's irony is pure deflation. The "greatest of them all" is not brought low, even in death, and the anonymous, ordinary soldier is never given recognition. Thackeray warns us elsewhere against treating a character's social position within a narrative economy as an index of his or her position within a social or moral economy. Badness is not always punished, in the same way that goodness is not always rewarded. In an editorial note that was later expurgated from the book publication of *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.*, Thackeray writes, "Does human life exhibit justice after this fashion? Is it the good always who ride in gold coaches, and the wicked who go to the workhouse? … Sometimes the contrary occurs, so that fools and wise, bad men and good, are more or less lucky in their turn."[12] The effect of irony is more ambiguous and polyphonic than a reductive reading of moral allegories might allow, and it is more useful to focus on the twisting, oscillating movement between terms. While irony does involve the "attribution of an evaluative, even judgmental attitude," Thackeray's fiction gives the impression that the only person who escapes the sharp cut of irony, and is therefore qualified to judge, is the author himself.[13] By depersonalizing the objects of his irony, Thackeray seems to interrogate the forms of social inequality and hierarchies of power that allow one to take up an evaluative position. At the same time, this allows him to step to the side of those hierarchies in order to propose alternative models of social relations.

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[9] William Makepeace Thackeray, "The Chronicle of the Drum," in *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, vol. 7 (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), 15.

[10] Gordon Ray, *Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity, 1811–1846* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), 263.

[11] Thackeray, "The Chronicle of the Drum," 15.

Even when Thackeray's fiction displays a thematic interest in the exceptional subject, exceptionality is nonetheless a formal, literary relation. By focusing on exceptionality as a dialectical and polyphonic trope of literary relations, my analysis departs from the concept of political exceptionality popularized by Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception." Agamben's concept focuses on the scene of sovereign power and the sovereign's right to suspend the rule of law during moments of crisis or catastrophe. While Agamben's focus on twentieth-century constitutional and legal norms raises questions about the ability to generalize about his theory and to extend it backwards in time, I am also not making an argument about sovereignty or legality, which are two terms that would otherwise be overturned by Thackeray's destabilization of authority and judgment.[14] In addition, while I borrow the motif of the exceptional subject's elevation, which Agamben develops from set theory and symbolic logic, my interest is in the ironic capture of that elevated subject in a formal relation with the non-elevated generality, whereas Agamben uses elevation as a synonym for exclusion.

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[12] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.*, ed. Andrew Sanders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 310.

[13] Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 35.

[14] See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen

Similarly, while my analysis takes some motifs from the discourse of national exceptionalism, I am not as interested in making a case for that term's transcendence of historical specificity, which is why I often use the word "exceptionality" instead. The word "exceptionalism" is often used to describe the fantasy of national distinction and is linked most prominently to the context of American self-identity and foreign policy. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "exceptionalism" was first used in 1928, when Jay Lovestone, an American communist leader, argued that "the peaceful capitalism of the United States constitutes an exception to the general economic laws governing national historical development."[15] Lovestone and other American radicals used this difference to justify a break with official Stalinist policy and the idea of violent class revolution. The United States was purportedly different from European countries, not only for having developed within unique historical and economic conditions but also for having never acquired colonies.[16] By describing a general pattern of development from which the U.S. diverged, Lovestone sought to rationalize the uniqueness of the working class in the United States. Yet, since 1928, the word has gained a life beyond its radical roots, characterizing everything from American militarism to the post-9/11 security state. As a result, a word like "exceptionalism" has both a specific and a general usage. On the one hand, it names a history that is unique to the United States. British exceptionalism or Russian exceptionalism would be unthinkable concepts because both nations would fall under

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(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); and *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[15] "exceptionalism, n.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.

[16] Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 13.

the "general economic laws governing national historical development." This redundancy forecloses the possibility of comparison or continuity that would allow for other, even competing, histories of national exceptionalism. On the other, the phrase depends upon a paradoxical claim to the wholeness of national identity or character. Exceptionalism thus reifies the category of the nation against divergent, minoritarian, alternative, or subaltern histories that might illuminate its fractures and internal differences. Instead of focusing on the ways that collective, national fantasy is maintained, I instead turn to the formal relations that would otherwise be obscured by this chauvinistic way of thinking the nation.[17]

My argument more closely follows that of Erik Gray, who identifies the trope of exceptionality as the rhetorical device *par excellence* of literature. Identifying exceptionality with the trope of "save where" in loco-descriptive poetry, Gray argues that exceptionality "creates meaning by setting up normative patterns and breaking them."[18] By describing exceptionality as a rhetorical trope, Gray illustrates the connection between literary meaning and the suspension of conventions or norms. While exceptionality in Thackeray's fiction also coordinates between the particular and the general, my argument more closely follows the motifs of elevation and degradation. By developing correspondences between the high and the low, Thackeray creates meaning by suspending our expectations about national or literary heroes. It is in this act of breaking that Thackeray suspends judgment by magnifying the reader's awareness of the ways that specific structures of hierarchy and inequality condition our judgments and values. Exceptionality highlights the unstable relationship between value and the character forms that are supposed to represent that value. As a result, the ironic structure of the trope of exceptionality, as it gets mobilized in Thackeray's fiction, allows him to examine why certain subjects matter to us, as well as the ideologies that condition or limit that investment.

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[17] On U.S. exceptionalism, see Donald E. Pease, "Exceptionalism," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 108–12; and *The New American Exceptionalism.*

[18] Erik Gray, "'Save Where…': The Trope of Exceptionality," *ELH* 77, no. 3 (2010): 647.

History, Exaggerations, Exceptions

As Thackeray uses it, the trope of exceptionality attempts to align two opposing movements: the act of elevation and the act of degradation. First, the subject is elevated above all others of the same kind. According to Agustín Zarzosa, "The exception consists in elevating the particular … that is, in accessing the universal by means of the particular."[19] The exceptional subject is thought to "access" and isolate the universal by virtue of deviating from and rising above the ordinary. This gives the conceptual relation a spatial organization that is implicitly hierarchical. Especially when elevation dovetails with themes of war and national subjectivity, it attests to the epic, collective dimensions of life, to universal values, and to forms of belonging that transcend the local and the partial. In this manner, interest in the elevated subject emanates from the perceived distance of the great from the degraded realm of the mean. Yet, as we shall see, elevation is inextricable from degradation, and exceptionality is defined by this correspondence.

In this section, I examine the logic of exceptionality as it concerns the relationship between the great and the mean in historical narratives. Thackeray's comic, imperial burlesque *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan* (hereafter, just *Major Gahagan*) is an interesting text with which to consider this dynamic of exceptionality. It evinces Thackeray's career-long interest in the dissolution of collective meaning, epic values, and national heroes. Gahagan's elevation relative to the other characters and historical figures in the narrative marks the specificity of his authority at a moment of provisionality, when war and colonialism become the historical forces behind the dissolution of an overarching vision of social order and organization. Far from privileging the elevated subject—or, in much the same way, privileging the individual as the locus of modern sociality—Thackeray uses exceptionality to contest the violence of differentiation. By amplifying the voice of a subject at risk of disappearing from the record—and therefore implicitly trivializing the status of national heroes in the collective imagination—Thackeray reflects on the equivocality and discontinuity of social belonging. Throughout the narrative, Gahagan does not simply replace national heroes but figures the relation between the heroic and the forgotten, the elevated and the degraded. For Thackeray, narrating the lives and experiences of forgotten subjects becomes an occasion to look at the irregular and volatile forms of being and belonging that organize ways of narrating the history of the nation.

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[19] Agustín Zarzosa, "The Case and Its Modes: Instance, Allusion, Example, Illustration, and Exception," *Angelaki* 17, no. 1 (March 2012): 48.

Major Gahagan is a raucous imperial burlesque set in the time of the Second Anglo-Maratha War, which lasted from 1803 to 1805. In the text, that relatively minor war for colonial domination of the Indian sub-continent becomes the occasion to deconstruct the implied chauvinism of British war narratives. Looking back on those literary genres of military experience, including the Irish military novel and the military memoir, both of which flourished in the literary marketplace following the Napoleonic Wars, Thackeray ironizes and deflates the image of the war hero and the myth of the soldier as a self-made, self-authoring individual.[20] First serialized in *The New Monthly Magazine* from 1838–39, *Major Gahagan* was later reprinted in Thackeray's collection *Comic Tales and Sketches* in 1848 and again, with slight amendments, in the first volume of *Miscellanies* in 1855. *Major Gahagan* is one of Thackeray's earliest forays into fiction, written while he was still a struggling journalist and well before the commercial success of *Vanity Fair* (1848). Like a lot of Thackeray's fiction, it indexes his ever-present anxieties and uncertainties about the literary marketplace and the commodification of art.[21] It was also written at a time of intensive instability at home and abroad, well before the supposed settlement of the mid-Victorian "Age of Equipoise." Gahagan registers this instability in his many slights against status and the uneven distribution of authority immanent to the Victorian social order.[22]

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[20] On Thackeray and the Irish military novel, see Jim Shanahan, "Paddythackeray: Thackeray and the Timeless Space of the Irish Military Novel," in *Thackeray in Time: History, Memory, and Modernity*, ed. Richard Salmon and Alice Crossley (London: Routledge, 2016), 86–100. On the military memoir, see Rae Greiner, "The Victorian Subject: Thackeray's Wartime Subjects," in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. Juliet John (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 27–44.

At the level of plot, *Major Gahagan* describes the titular character's military career during the Second Anglo-Maratha War. As previously intimated, the Second Anglo-Maratha War was a series of conflicts between the British East India Company and the Maratha Confederacy, an indigenous empire that dominated much of the sub-continent prior to the British presence. By setting Gahagan's adventures in the recent past of the nineteenth century, Thackeray is able to reflect on the formation of national fantasies and myths, as well as how historical discourses perpetuate forms of violence, domination, and control into the present moment. As Christopher Bayly argues, the Anglo-Maratha conflicts were part of the "world-wide strategy dictated by the unprecedented demands on Great Britain for resources during the Napoleonic Wars," a deliberate attempt by the British not only to forestall French influence in the region but also to establish the preconditions for a greater British colonial presence in India and the surrounding region.[23] At the same time, Gahagan's adventures are not really about that history and they do not presume to represent history with any accuracy. Instead, the historical event becomes an occasion for considering the instability of national heroism and the hierarchy that it insinuates. As we shall see, the trope of exceptionality in *Major Gahagan* is always reflexive and volatile. Every promotion of greatness is burdened by the ever-present threat of degradation, and this equivocality indexes Thackeray's anxiety about the centrality of individualism and status to the ways of thinking or participating in the nation.

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[21] On Thackeray's concern about the literary marketplace and writing as paid labor, see Amanpal Garcha, *From Sketch to Novel: The Development of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 53–109; and Garcha, "Forgetting Thackeray and Unmaking Careers."

[22] In Martin Hewitt, "Prologue: Reassessing *the Age of Equipoise*," in *An Age of Equipoise? Reassessing Mid-Victorian Britain*, ed. Martin Hewitt (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 1–38, Hewitt has shown that the mid-Victorian period was, contrary to the image of security projected by the Victorians, a time of contest and dissent. Similarly, in Nathan K. Hensley, *Forms of Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Hensley has shown how prevalent war and extrajudicial violence were throughout the nineteenth century, despite the image of peace that writers cultivated.

[23] Christopher Alan Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 80.

The text comprises three, uneven parts, each of which narrates a momentous occasion in Gahagan's career, as well as the difficulty of translating the strange and extraordinary details of his experiences to a metropolitan audience. The overall exaggerated, comic tone of the text can best be summarized by the title of the first chapter: "Truth Is Strange, Stranger than Fiction."[24] The first part of *Major Gahagan* comprises the first chapter, in which Gahagan describes his misguided attempts to woo the daughter of an English colonel. His courtship fails both because Gahagan is a poor Irish soldier but also because the daughter has already married an Indian officer. The second part, which includes the second chapter, narrates Gahagan's outsized role in the battles at Allyghur and Laswaree.[25] The strangeness of these events, as they are described by Gahagan, induces him not only to relate the events as they supposedly occurred but also to mediate his own testimony with military reports and newspaper accounts that attest to the truthfulness of his account and to his extraordinary role in bringing about the British victories. The third, and longest, section spans the third and subsequent chapters, and it describes a momentous and outlandish event toward the end of the war, when the British cantonment at Futtyghur was surrounded by Maratha forces. Framing the diegesis is an odd narrative set in the contemporary moment of 1838, and the frame narrative describes Major Gahagan's service in the Carlist Wars, a series of civil wars in Spain between religious traditionalists and urban liberals.[26] In all three parts, Gahagan is the narrative locus, and his experiences become the occasion to consider the broader myth of the heroic soldier and his military achievements. Despite how the narrative escalates from one part to the next, becoming increasingly unbelievable and absurd, Gahagan's narrations of those events is often met with disregard, indifference, or contempt. In the third part, the Spanish soldiers with whom he is sharing his story are slumbering and snoring around the campfire as he describes his past military exploits. Throughout *Major Gahagan*, the treatment of the protagonist's heroism is always reflexive and trivializing, throwing into relief his proximity to the degraded and invisible realm of history's forgotten subjects.

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[24] William Makepeace Thackeray, "The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan," in *The Yellowplush Papers and Early Miscellanies*, ed. George Saintsbury, vol. 1, The Oxford Thackeray (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), 335–415, 337. Hereafter references to this text will be cited parenthetically as *MG*.

[25] For many of the place names and proper names used in the text, I will favor the spellings given by Thackeray. For example, instead of "Aligarh," I will refer to Allyghur throughout the text.

According to his own testimony, Major Gahagan is a military hero of extraordinary proportion, and one of the ways he exhibits his value to the historical narrative of which he has been excluded is through the motif of elevation. His heroism is often identified with superlatives, like "best" and "most," which contribute to the text's exaggerated and comic effect. For example, after he slays his brother in a duel, Gahagan declares, "I was *the best* in the universe" (*MG*, 338, emphasis in original). At the Battle of Assaye on September 23, 1803, when the British forces were massively outnumbered by the French-trained Maratha army, Gahagan observes, "Wellesley would have been beaten but for me—me alone" (*MG*, 341).[27] Similarly, after disguising himself to infiltrate the military camp of Yashwant Rao Holkar, the Maharaja of Indore, Gahagan reveals himself to Holkar's wife as "the world-renowned *Gahagan*," and "as the long ringlets of red hair fell over my shoulders … I formed one of the finest pictures that can possibly be conceived" (*MG*, 391, emphasis in original). On the one hand, we are not supposed to take these statements seriously, and one of the ways Thackeray's humor operates is by exaggerating a subject beyond all reasonable or believable proportion.

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[26] On the Carlist Wars, see Raymond Carr, "Liberalism and Reaction, 1833–1931," in *Spain: A History*, ed. Raymond Carr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 205–42.

[27] On the history of the Battle of Assaye, see Jeremy Black, *Britain as a Military Power, 1688–1815* (London: Routledge, 1999), 260–1.

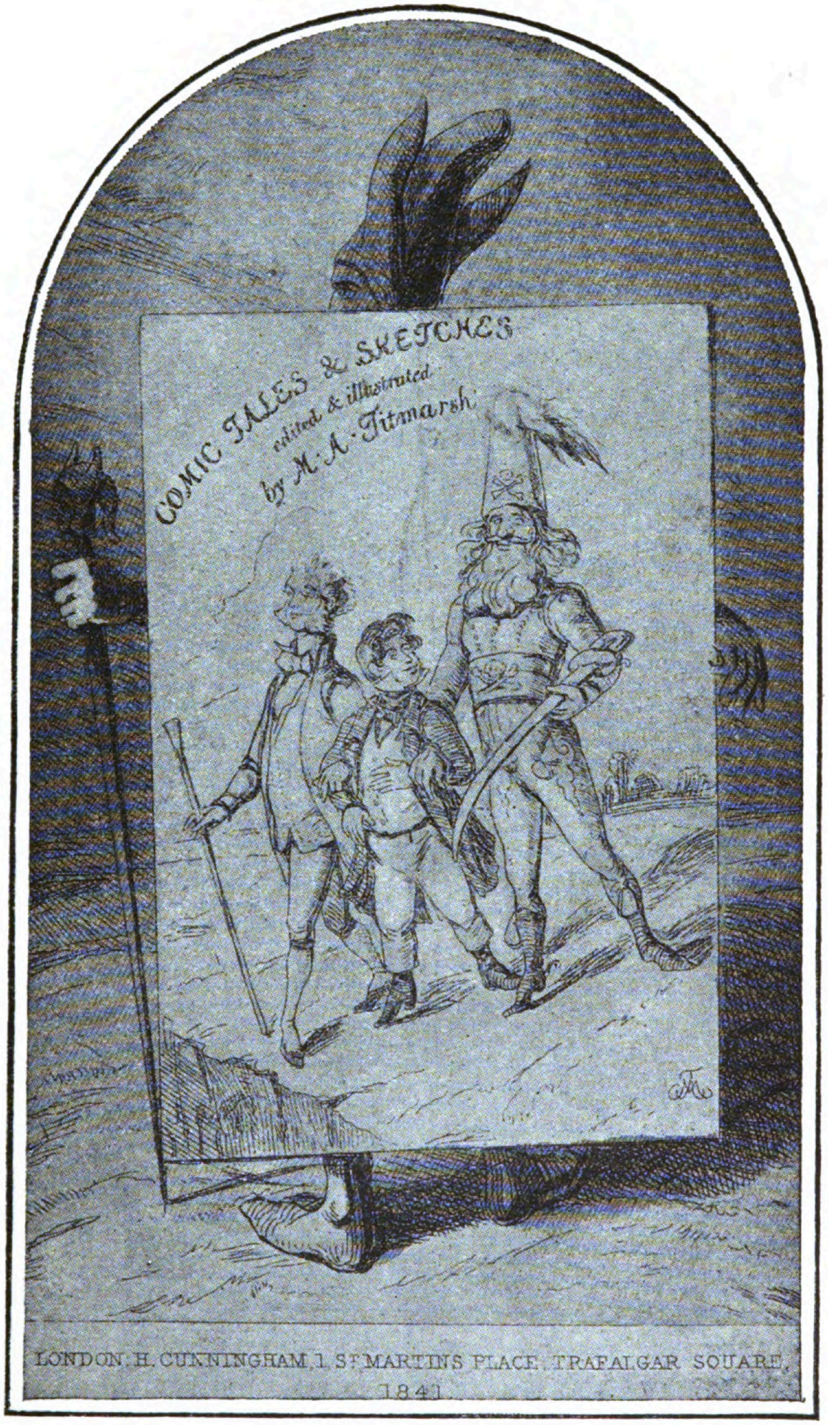
On the other, we cannot see these moments as properly ironic unless we acknowledge the correspondence that irony draws between the high and the low. The trope of exceptionality promotes this exaggeration of Gahagan's social difference by turning him into a caricature whose outsized personality is out-of-proportion with the supposed history he is meant to mediate. At the same time, it complicates nationalism's more conventional focus on simplistic and uncompromising heroes.

This sense of comic exaggeration and disproportion is given visual representation in the illustrations that Thackeray included in the edition of the text printed in *Comic Tales and Sketches*. As we have already seen, Gahagan's rhetorical elevation is often marked by the exaggerated size and effect of his body: the fine "picture" formed by the mass of red hair that cascades down his shoulders or the repeated mentions of his height. "I am," Gahagan reminds us, "six feet four inches in height, and of matchless symmetry and proportion. My hair and beard are of the most brilliant auburn, so bright as scarcely to be distinguished at a distance from scarlet" (*MG*, 370). Gahagan's physical appearance and bodily gigantism always seem to turn him into a caricature. In the frontispiece for *Comic Tales and Sketches*, we can see how his body looms over the figures of Thackeray and Yellowplush, the sword he is carrying nearly the length of Thackeray's entire body (fig. 2). At the end of the second chapter, when Gahagan meets Napoleon in exile on St. Helena, he is shown stooping down over the corpulent figure of the Emperor (fig. 3). Echoing the major's outsized and exaggerated legacy, Napoleon notes how Gahagan was single-handedly responsible for the British victory at the Battle of Delhi and, thus, the end of French influence in the region: "the ruin of the English East India Company would have established my empire … in the East; but that the man before us … was riding at the side of General Lake" (*MG*, 363). In many of the illustrations, the effect of Gahagan's figure suggests movement and dynamism, and he is depicted as either wildly and comically charging into battle (fig. 4) or bursting into the frame of the illustration (fig. 5). The comedy of these illustrations is related to Gahagan's expressive face, which always seems in excess or exaggerated disproportion to the scenes he is manically invading. That disproportion also suggests volatility, as if the image were a balloon about to burst from the pressure of its own exaggeration.

The focus on Gahagan's exaggerated size and the extremity of his bodily movements frustrates the will to represent faithfully the history of the Second Anglo-Maratha War. The parodic swing from high to low in the text prevents the ideological effect of a moderate representation. There is thus always something excessive or improbable about the scale of Gahagan's accomplishments, and we are left to doubt his ability to confront such insurmountable odds and extreme conditions. After the Battle of Allyghur, an early battle in the Second-Anglo Maratha War which took place in September 1803, Gahagan quotes General Gerard Lake's report on the circumstances of the British victory:

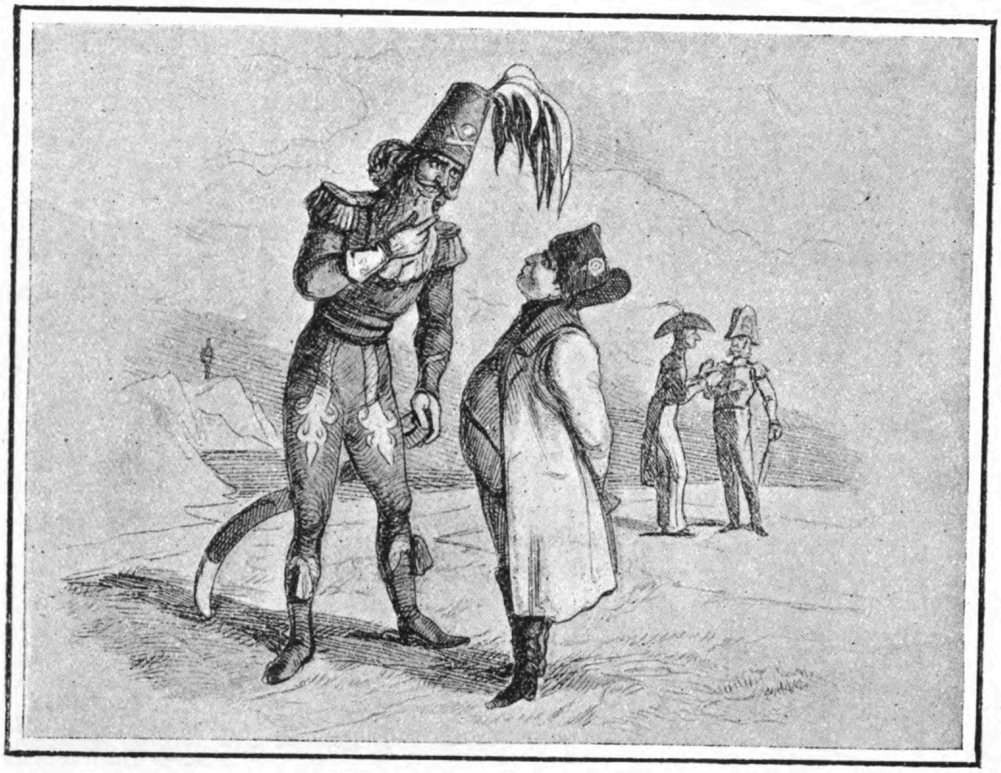
> In the storming of the fortress, although unprovided with a single ladder, and accompanied but by a few brave men, Lieutenant Gahagan succeeded in escalading the inner and fourteenth wall of the place. Fourteen ditches lined with sword-blades and poisoned chevaux-de-frise, fourteen walls bristling with innumerable artillery and as smooth as looking-glasses, were in turn triumphantly passed by that enterprising officer. His course was to be traced by the heaps of slaughtered enemies lying thick upon the platforms. (*MG*, 354)

The quote begins with his specific achievements but gradually expands to vague, indeterminate odds, as if to illustrate the exaggeration of his narration. Like a camera panning over a bloody battlefield, we witness a world that seems to resist our judgment by virtue of its disproportion. Fourteen ditches and fourteen walls suggest still a world of human rationality—but, then, the text confronts the vague and imprecise world of the "innumerable" and "heaps." Of the 900 men who initially storm the fort, Gahagan is only one of three to survive. Following Lake's report, Gahagan provides


COMIC TALES & SKETCHES
edited & illustrated
by M. A. Titmarsh
LONDON: H. CUNNINGHAM, 1, St MARTINS PLACE, TRAFALGAR SQUARE,
1841

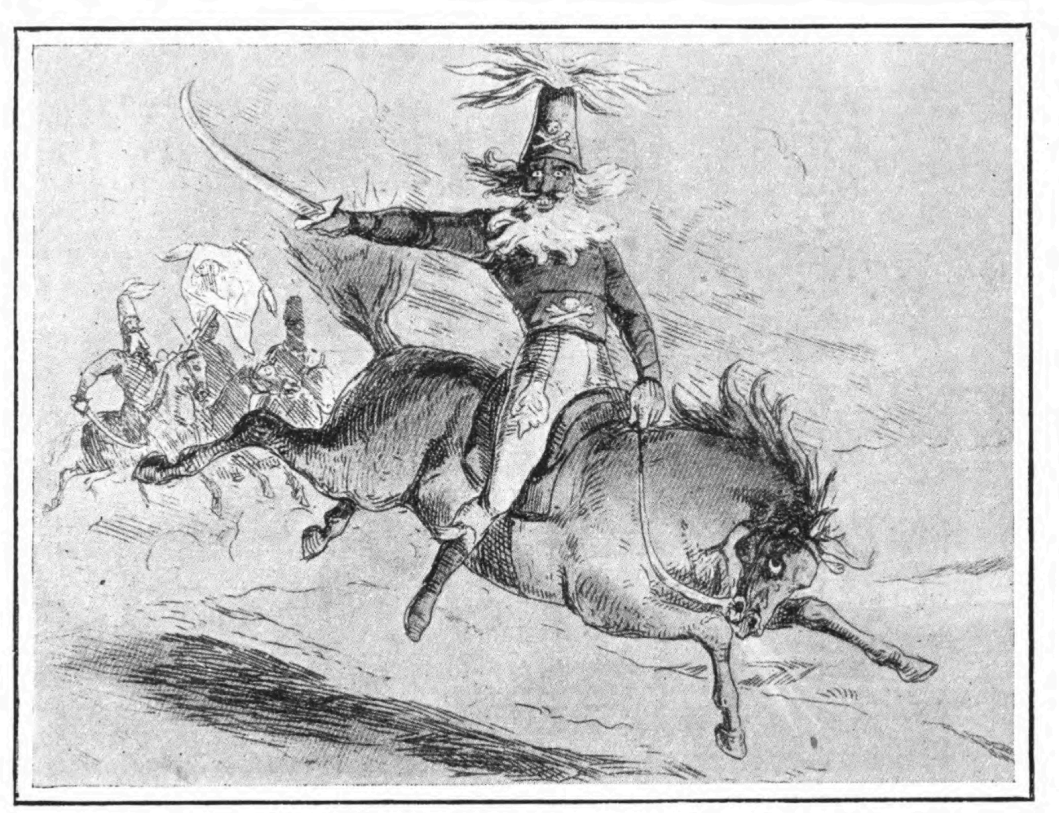
FACSIMILE OF THE ORIGINAL FRONTISPIECE TO 'COMIC TALES AND SKETCHES,' 1841

Figure 2: Facsimile of the original frontispiece to *Comic Tales and Sketches*, 1841.



THE MAJOR'S INTERVIEW WITH A CELEBRATED CHARACTER

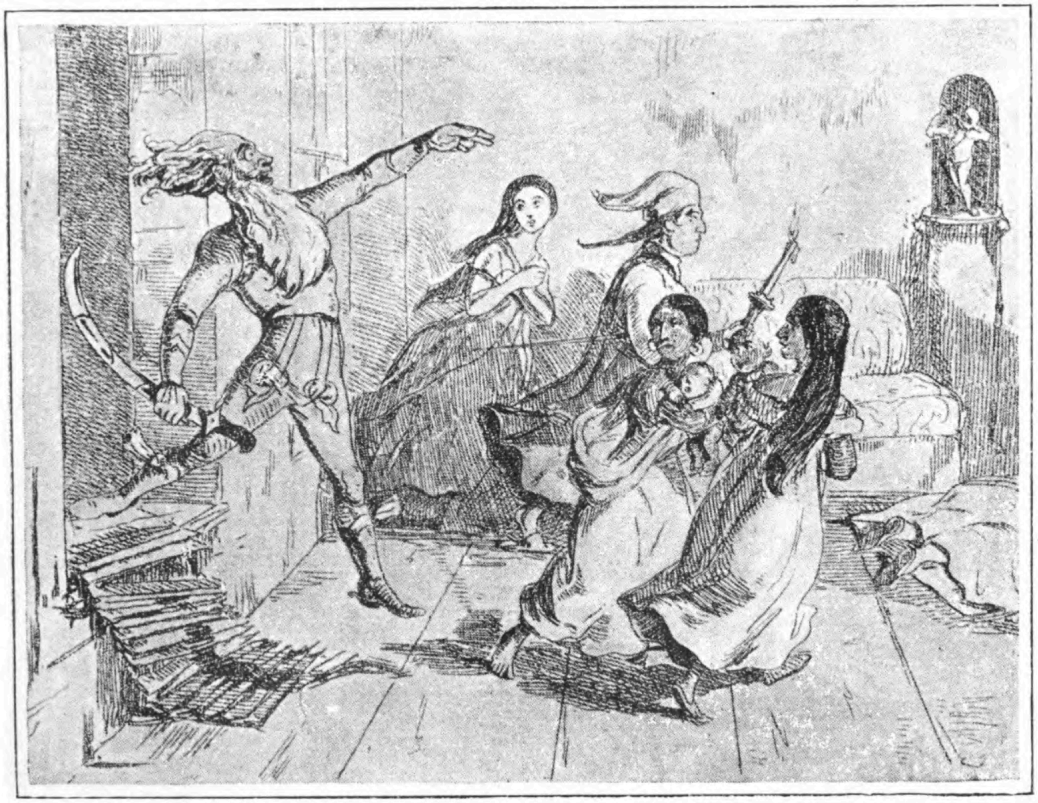
Figure 3: “The Major’s interview with a celebrated character” (*MG*, 361)



GAHAGAN.

From the great portrait by Titmarsh in the Gallery of H. H. the Nawaub of Budge Budge.

Figure 4: "Gahagan. From the great portrait by Titmarsh in the Gallery of H. H. the Nawaub of Budge Budge" (*MG*, 336)



THE MAJOR DISCOVERING THE INFIDELITY OF MRS. CHOWDER LOLL

Figure 5: “The Major discovering the infidelity of Mrs. Chowder Loll” (*MG*, 349)

his own account of the battle, which supplements the "extraordinary" report narrated by Lake with Gahagan's "authentic" account (*MG*, 355). He describes his ingenious decision to have the soldiers fire rounds into the protective walls to make handholds for the soldiers to scale. He also attributes his own survival to the enemy's cowardice and poor maintenance of their guns. It's not quite right to suggest that Gahagan's correction collapses or deflates the exceptional report offered by Lake. Instead, the effect of his supplementary account is to highlight the distance of the exaggerated and the comic from the ordinary. The ordinary, in turn, cannot be thought of as an essential or inherent quality of historical narration but is, instead, constructed through comparison and calculation. It is, in other words, no more plausible or real than the report of Gahagan's wild and ludicrous actions.[28]

In one of the most memorable moments in the text, Thackeray provides the reader with an even more absurd account of Gahagan's heroism. During the Battle of Futtyghur, which Gahagan chronicles in the third section, he describes how he manages to subdue the Maratha forces that have surrounded the British fort. With only 36 "charges of shot" left, Gahagan does not risk shooting at the soldiers unless "I could kill a hundred men by a single discharge of a cannon" (*MG*, 403). Among the cavalry forces are three hundred elephants, which line up perpendicular to the wall of the fort. To illustrate what he does next, Gahagan provides two diagrams, but they hilariously do little to explain his actions or his reasonings (fig. 6–7). Together, the two diagrams suggest a sense of causality, with something happening between the first and the second, but it is unclear what exactly has taken place. Seen from above, everything human and substantive has been replaced by lines, dots, and letters; rationality and decision making have been abstracted into nothing. Drawing on geometric and diagrammatic representations of military battles, which were popular in eighteenth-

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[28] Despite all of these fantastical and absurd exaggerations, *Major Gahagan* somehow remains the primary reference text for the "Siege of Aligarh" Wikipedia page as of June 15, 2018. "Siege of Aligarh," *Wikipedia*, April 2017.

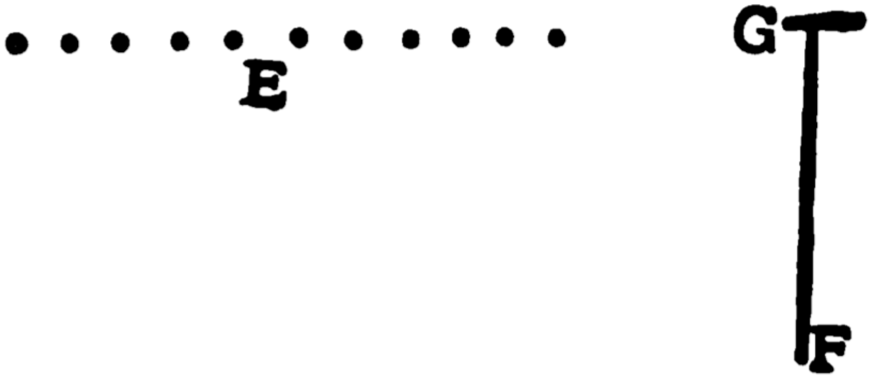

Figure 6: Diagram of the Battle of Futtyghur, 1 (*MG*, 403)

and nineteenth-century histories, Thackeray takes the visual logic of abstraction central to the diagram to its absurd limit.[29] The principle of concision on display in the diagrams has the effect not of ideally translating the events into the rarified realm of mathematics and probability but of obscuring that quality of the event that defies rationalization. Thackeray's sly suggestion: by virtue of its collusion with mythologies of national heroism, objective representation is a more parodic mode of representation (because more abstracted from the truth) than Gahagan's own narration.

At the absolute limits of narrativity, the diagrams risk erasing or subsuming the extraordinary quality of Gahagan's achievements, which is why, despite his contention that "the reader will see what I did," Gahagan must further supplement that diagrammatic representation with his own narration. Gahagan describes, "The elephants were standing, their trunks waggling to and fro gracefully before them; and I, with superhuman skill and activity, brought the gun G … to bear upon them … x is the line taken by the ball fired from G, which took off one hundred and thirty-four

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29. On the Enlightenment history of diagrammatic knowledge, see John B. Bender and Michael Marrinan, *The Culture of Diagram* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), esp. 1–52. On the relationship between the Napoleonic Wars and the development of probability as a discourse of knowledge, see Anders Engberg-Pedersen, *Empire of Chance: The Napoleonic Wars and the Disorder of Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

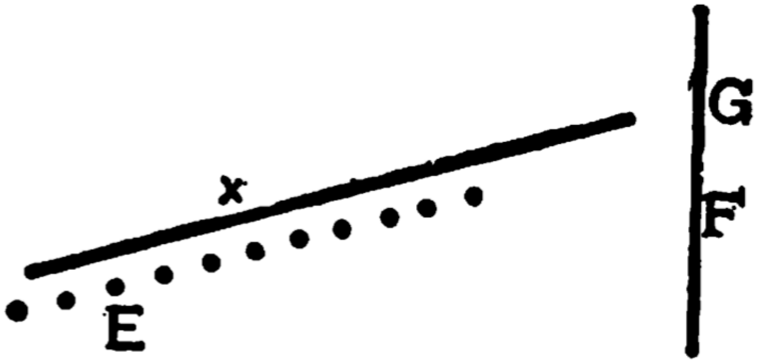

Figure 7: Diagram of the Battle of Futtyghur, 2 (*MG*, 404)

elephants' trunks, and only spent itself in the tusk of a very old animal, that stood the hundred and thirty-fifth!" (*MG*, 404). By Gahagan's account, his skill and achievement is without comparison: "I say that such a shot was never fired before or since; that a gun was never pointed in such a way" (*MG*, 404). Like the illustrations we previously looked at, which vibrate in their depiction of Gahagan's dynamic energy and movement, the gun shot dramatizes the trope of exceptionality as something that is volatile and unstable. The motion of the bullet thus irrupts the suspended time of the diagrams, shooting across the page just as it shot across the field of battle. The exceptional, in other words, can never be exceptional in and of itself, can never be reduced to the static image of lines and dots. The fact that the exceptional can only ever achieve recognition in the movement of reading reinforces the sense that it is an evaluative proposition and therefore dependent upon the lines of relation and comparison that attach it to the realm of the general from which it departs (as in those 900 men who die or the generality of the "before or since" against which his shot is measured).

As such, exceptionality is an unstable relation or correspondence between the elevated character and the degraded mass from which he is meant to be distinguished. The desire to amplify the achievements or actions of a particular subject is driven by the anxiety that exceptionality is never inherent. Throughout *Major Gahagan*, we have witnessed how easily amplitude can give way to degradation. That is why Gahagan must continually reiterate his particularity and distinction and why Gahagan places so much stress on his identity. In the opening of the first part, Gahagan describes the confusion around his name: "I think it but right that in making my appearance before the public I should at once acquaint them with my titles and name … Major Goliah O'Grady Gahagan, H.E.I.C.S. [Honourable East India Company Service], Commanding Battalion of Irregular Horse, Ahmednuggar" (*MG*, 337). The proper name presupposes the integrity and self-identity of the individual. Yet, as Gahagan relates, there is a lot of confusion surrounding his identity: "There has been no end to the blunders regarding this humble title of mine" (*MG*, 337). Gahagan recalls how, after he publishes a collection of lyric poetry, the *Morning Post* assumes the author is a "Miss Gahagan"—perhaps owing to their "sweet[ness]" and sentimentality—and, after he publishes "Observations on the Pons Asinorum" (Latin for "bridge of asses," a common name for the Pythagorean theorem), Gahagan is confused for a "Doctor Gahagan" (*MG*, 337). Worse still are those readers who confuse our narrator with his brother, "Gregory Gahagan, who was also a major," and whom the "true" Major Gahagan kills in a duel following a scuffle over a gift nebulously addressed to the person "Captain G. Gahagan" (*MG*, 338). Poor Gregory was no match and his defeat is offered as proof of Gahagan's exceptionality: "he was a good swordsman enough—I was *the best* in the universe" (*MG*, 338).

Gahagan's address to the reader to learn his name is an instance of what I have been calling the logic of exceptionality: an elevation that reveals the correspondence between the high and the low. Gahagan's narrative begins with the performative act of naming himself because of his tenuous (and, therefore, mediated) relation to history. Indeed, what we come to learn is that he is in excess of the "official" history of the Anglo-Maratha War in two respects: first, as a subject who has been excluded from narratives of that war; and second, as a fictional character without a biological or historical referent.[30] Against those journalists who accuse Gahagan of "assail[ing] private characters, and willfully pervert[ing] history," Gahagan retorts:

> was any one of these men in Bengal in the year 1803? Was any single conductor of any one of these paltry prints ever in Bundelcund or the Rohilla country? ... Not he! And because, forsooth, in those strange and distant lands strange circumstances have taken place, it is insinuated that the relater is a liar: nay, that the very places themselves have no existence but in my imagination. (*MG*, 352)

What Gahagan's narration evinces is the discursive construction of truth and the contestability of narrative. Exceptionality reveals this construction by dramatizing its own artifice through exaggeration and amplification. If the details of Gahagan's narrative appear strange, exaggerated, or implausible, then, as he asserts, it is because of the assumptions made by metropolitan subjects about what experiences have a valid "existence." When the colonial or marginalized experience is marked as exceptional, it is easier to either exclude or ignore it. As Gahagan insists, following the Battle of Laswaree: "Gleig, Mill, and Thorn have all told the tale of this war, though somehow they have omitted all mention of the hero of it" (*MG*, 359). The heroic character, linked to the "strange and distant," presents an elevated form of experience that is also at risk of being excluded. Exceptionality thus indexes the experience of social exclusion, and in doing so challenges the ideological assertion of difference upon which that exclusion is made possible.

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[30] I want to briefly mention that Gahagan's fictionality—and, thus, his exceptionality—has not always been reliably assumed. An article published in the Calcutta Review in 1891 claimed to have identified the "real" Major Gahagan as William Linnaeus Gardner. Writes the anonymous author: "Like his fictitious representative, our hero was a tall and brave wielder of the sabre, who raised and commanded a body of Irregular 'Horse.' Like Gahagan, he bearded the truculent Holkar in his durbar-tent and won the love of a dusky Princess of Ind. But with these circumstances the resemblance ends; for, while Thackeray's hero was a braggart and a swaggerer, our own Anglo-Indian Major was a modest, retiring gentleman with an almost morbid hatred of self-assertion." "The Real Major Gahagan," *Calcutta Review* 93, no. 185 (July 1891): 20–36, 20.

The trope of exceptionality produces an alternative to the heroic narration of history by virtue of the formal relations it draws between the high and the low. For many of Thackeray's readers, this connection between exceptionality and the truth of historical representation is one of his principal achievements in *Major Gahagan*. In his "Introduction" to the first volume of the *Oxford Thackeray*, which collects *Major Gahagan* alongside other early miscellanies like *The Yellowplush Papers*, George Saintsbury crowns *Major Gahagan* one of the best of Thackeray's early-career burlesques. According to Saintsbury, the text "carries 'suspension of disbelief' with it like a fairytale. You know, of course, all the time, not merely that the Tremendous Adventures never happened, but … that they never could have happened. But this doesn't matter. They are quite real *ex hypothesi*."[31] Similarly, in his definitive biography of Thackeray, Gordon Ray identifies *Major Gahagan* as one of the few texts from Thackeray's early career worth mentioning, in part because of the way that exaggeration and amplification relate to the disclosure of reality. According to Ray, the tales are "a hilarious extravaganza, laid in the India of Wellesley's day," an "exaggerated" tale, and an "extravagant burlesque."[32] Central to this representation is the comic effect that Thackeray adapts from Edward William Clarke's *Library of Useless Knowledge* (1837): "The identifying mark of this peculiar and illusive brand of humour is perhaps its air of specious plausibility. So grave and circumstantial are the terms in which an absurd proposition is advanced that, for one wild instant before common sense reasserts itself, the statement seems almost credible."[33] Like the trope of exceptionality, with its propensity for heightened absurdism and ironic reversals, specious humor transforms the object of representation into a spectacle of artifice.

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[31] George Saintsbury, "Introduction," in *Yellowplush Papers and Early Miscellanies*, ed. George Saintsbury, vol. 1, The Oxford Thackeray (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), xv–xlvii, xliii.

[32] Ray, *Thackeray*, 236, 339, 381.

[33] Ibid., 224.

What specious humor dramatizes is the proximity or relation between the exaggerated and the plausible, the high and the low. This brand of humor is specious not because it veils the implausibility of its representation but because it risks bringing the high and the low into an intimate, and therefore disquieting, correspondence.

Rae Greiner has recently traced in *Major Gahagan* and other war narratives by Thackeray a parodic send up of the war memoirs that flooded the literary marketplace in the early nineteenth century. According to Greiner, at stake in the genre of the war memoir is the quintessential question of whether it is possible to generalize from the particular experiences of a single individual, and this question is further destabilized by the massive and de-individualizing scale of modern warfare. In texts like *Major Gahagan*, which link the problem of the individual to historical representation, Thackeray exposes the partiality of war memoirs, which fail to achieve what is "representationally most important"—namely, "generalizing from private experiences." Writes Greiner, "They [the war memoirists] could not possibly add to a more global understanding of war's causes, mechanisms, or effects."[34] Greiner's focus is on "stupid" characters, like Gahagan, who are unable to think or conceptualize beyond their limited, private understandings. Major Gahagan's narcissistic egotism and his exaggerated sense of accomplishment thus signal an inability to see beyond himself or to grasp the systematicity of war. In Thackeray's fiction, stupidity makes the task of representing the general into an explicit problem. The elevated subject, like the stupid character, is limited by his partiality, as elevation is always at risk of exaggerating or misrepresenting the effects of his accomplishments. Yet, exceptionality provides a logic for thinking and representing the correspondence between the high and the low, the heroic and the forgotten, as a shared (if discontinuous and unequal) relation.

In this section, I have discussed the concept of exceptionality and the various leitmotifs of exaggeration, distortion, and strangeness that mark the exceptional subject's elevated or amplified position. Exceptionality has been considered as a dialogue between amplification and degradation, between the high and the low with regard to war and the narration of history. Central to Gahagan's own anxious representation of his achievements is the knowledge that his heroism is privileged only by accident and not because of some intrinsic quality of his person. Exceptionality thus marks the subject's own proximity to degradation and exclusion—or, alternatively, to historical forgetting. Yet, at the same time, by promoting a correspondence between the high and the low, exceptionality mobilizes our attention to the construction of that social differentiation. In the next section, I will pick up on this question of correspondence by considering how that flattening effect problematizes our ability to step outside the situation of correspondence and authorize a moral judgment.

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[34] Greiner, "The Victorian Subject," 36.

Exceptionality and Moral Judgment

As I have been using it in this chapter, exceptionality draws a conceptual relationship between irreconcilable differences. Exceptionality, in this sense, is connected to judgment, insofar as it models the conditions and limits of moral knowledge. By mediating between the elevated and the degraded, the high and the low, exceptionality emerges as a way to determine the rules and norms for judgment. As I will argue, exceptionality troubles the sense of what is proper to representation and the delimitation of what is acceptable, believable, or moral expression. Of course, what is believable is not, per se, the same as what is moral. However, in the case of Thackeray's writing—often historical fiction set against the backdrop of war and military conflict—the two tend to converge. In this section, I offer some observations about how the logic of exceptionality relates to the question of moral value and differentiation.

In *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.* (hereafter, just *Barry Lyndon*), we can see repeated the motifs that we observed with *Major Gahagan*: first, the motif of elevation, and, second, the motif of degradation. Together, these two motifs reflect the movement or oscillation of Thackeray's ironic characterization, as it limns the extremes of personhood. *Barry Lyndon* reflects an important midpoint in Thackeray's career, a point at which his early burlesques meet the serious, realist novels that mark his achievement as a writer. *Barry Lyndon* reminds us that there are striking continuities among the three texts that I examine in this chapter despite their generic differences, which is evidence for Thackeray's abiding concern for the stakes of representation. Even in a novel like *The History of Henry Esmond*, which is more moderate in its irony and satire than either *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan* or *Barry Lyndon*, critics and readers still raise the concern that Thackeray's representations are too extreme—swinging between high and low with no sense of moderation or proportion—to be meaningful or accurate. No doubt this propensity toward irony is important for Thackeray's strategy for representation in his fiction, and this oscillation between high and low, great and mean, illustrates how Thackeray uses character to model society.

Set against the backdrop of the Seven Years' War, which lasted from 1756 to 1763, *Barry Lyndon* explores what is proper for representation by negotiating how distinctions between rule and exception both limit and delimit what is meaningful in individual experience. *Barry Lyndon* documents the titular protagonist's journey from the petty gentry to the ordinary ranks of the military, from adventurer to debtor. Much like Scott's *Rob Roy*, *Barry Lyndon* raises the question of the role of the Celtic periphery in modern British society, and, in particular, the question of what to do with the rabble-rousing sons of once exalted families who must learn to negotiate their marginality and insignificance. As a first-person narrative, the novel is a playful account of the pleasures and the discontents of bad behavior. The novel begins in Ireland, "alive with war's alarums," but Barry is quickly forced to leave after he injures a respected man in a duel.[35] Penniless but stoked by the desire to see the world, Barry joins the British army and is sent to fight on the Continent. After a short and violent career, he abandons his post by assuming the identity of an officer. He is soon caught by Prussian soldiers and, under threat of execution, is forcibly conscripted into the Prussian army. He is then hired by the Prussians to spy on the mysterious Chevalier du Balibari, who it turns out is Barry's uncle. Together, they escape the Prussian army and tour Europe, gambling and drinking in clubs before absconding from their debts. Barry soon meets a wealthy heiress, the Countess of Lyndon, whom he tricks into marrying him. He uses her fortune to ingratiate himself into English society but, when their son is killed in a tragic accident, he and his wife separate. Without any fortune and with substantial debts, Barry ends up in a debtor's prison in London, where he eventually dies. As we can see, the novel is "about a rogue in the manner of his eighteenth-century predecessors," focusing on the moral drama of that rogue character as he adventures throughout Europe.[36]

Barry Lyndon is an interesting and a difficult text with which to explore the concept of exceptionality with regards to judgment. Thackeray's ironic mode raises the question again and again of Barry's relation or proximity to the reader. Is he the exception to moral behavior or does he evidence some underlying rule? Readers return to these questions because of the ambiguities involved in raising and lowering, of demarcating or delimiting lines of relation and correspondence. Yet, it seems commonly accepted among critics that there is something instructive or pedagogical in Thackeray's irony.[37] While the question of how irony relates to judgment seems to presume a notion of sympathetic correspondence, I want to focus instead on the imbrication of rule and exception in the oscillating movement of irony. For example, when Barry leaves Ireland early in the novel, he promises only to return when he has ascended to the social status he believes is his right: "I vowed I would never re-enter the place but as a great man; and I kept my vow too, as you shall hear in due time" (*BL*, 50). The reader's initial impression might be that Barry keeps his vow by returning as a "great man." Here we can see the first motif: of greatness and elevation. Yet, the truth we learn "in due time" is that Barry fulfills his vow by never returning at all. The second motif thus emerges in the image of Barry's ironic fall or descent, as he is brought down to a degraded or humbled position. As one critic writes, "The wit of *Barry Lyndon* depends … on the incongruity between what the narrator wants us to believe about himself, and what we actually infer from his testimony."[38] This sense of adjustment between or adjucation of contrary positions is a central element of the novel's irony.

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[35] Thackeray, *Barry Lyndon*, 24. Hereafter references to this text will be cited parenthetically as *BL*.

[36] David Parker, "Thackeray's Barry Lyndon," *Ariel* vi, no. 4 (October 1975): 68.

[37] Janice Carlise, for example, suggests that irony's relation to and construction of an audience can be morally instructive. Similarly, Robert Fletcher argues that Thackeray's irony "offers fiction itself as a pedagogical tool par excellence for teaching the intricacies of interpretation" (494). More specifically, Micael Clarke argues that *Barry Lyndon* uses irony to target the misogynist belief that women are morally inferior to men. Janice Carlisle, *The Sense of an Audience: Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot at Mid-Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981); Robert P. Fletcher, "'Proving a Thing Even While You Contradict It': Fictions, Beliefs, and Legitimation in *The Memoirs of Barry*

There are two important things to note about this particular moment of ironic reversal. First, it evinces the novel's primary irony, which is that Barry is narrating his memoirs, and his supposed ascension to greatness, from a debtor's prison. Recognizing this inevitable conclusion only in hindsight, the reader must entertain the possibility while reading that Barry's bad behavior will be rewarded with greatness. Second, the anticipation of ironic reversal promotes a kind of passivity, where we witness Barry's descent as *inevitable*, secure in the knowledge that his exceptionality (the height of his rise, the depth of his fall) means he is distinct and, therefore, non-generalizable. The logic of exceptionality, which oscillates between high and low, thus adjudicates the moral propriety of Barry's behavior while also forcing the

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Lyndon, Esq." *Studies in the Novel* 27, no. 4 (1995): 493–514; and Micael M. Clarke, "Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon*: An Irony Against Misogynists," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 29, no. 3 (1987): 261–77.

[38] Robert A. Colby, "Barry Lyndon and the Irish Hero," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 21, no. 2 (September 1966): 111.

reader to dwell in the experience of his impropriety.

Yet, closely linked to the ironic equivocality of Barry's exceptionality is the sense that, in falling, Barry is made proximate with the reader. Shortly after escaping his conscription by the Prussian military, Barry travels throughout Europe, "restored to [his] natural station" (*BL*, 127). "What a delightful life did we now lead!" Barry muses. "I knew I was born a gentleman, from the kindly way in which I took to the business, as business it certainly is. For though it *seems* all pleasure, yet I assure any low-bred persons who may chance to read this, that we, their betters, have to work as well as they" (*BL*, 127, emphasis in original). Here, Thackeray is more explicit that the reversal of Barry's fortunes, his fall from high to low, involves drawing a textual relationship between him and the reader. This oscillation—and the realization that Barry's exceptionality is accidental, temporary, and thus not an inherent or essential quality of his person—implicates the reader by virtue of Barry becoming *like* the "low-bred persons who may chance to read this." In other words, Thackeray's narration gestures to an equation between Barry's difference, which allows us to observe him from the secure position of spectators, and the continuity of kinds, as we are said to be like him in his descent.

In *Barry Lyndon*, the logic of exceptionality yokes together the two motifs of elevation and degradation. Rather than delimit the high from the low, or the great from the mean, the narrative makes us feel as if there is no meaningful difference between them. Undone by irony, the great and the mean are less fixed or discrete values than permeable and shifting positions. Just as he ironizes Barry's sense of self, Thackeray de-familiarizes the reader by refusing to maintain any conventional separation of categories or meaningful distinctions among kinds. When Barry sets himself the task of wooing and marrying the Countess of Lyndon, he warns the reader against "presum[ing] to sneer" at him: "nor let any scoundrel presume to ... call me an adventurer, or say I was penniless or the match unequal. Penniless! I had the wealth of Europe at my command. Adventurer! So is a meritorious lawyer or a gallant soldier; so is every man who makes his own fortune an adventurer … one man is just as much an adventurer as another" (*BL*, 180). A world in which "lawyer" and "soldier" bear no meaningful distinction from "adventurer" is a world of relative value. At stake in this ambiguity of terms and values is the possibility of a world without consistent values, where any position of greatness is liable to be overturned or made interchangeable with the mean. In a novel like *The History of Henry Esmond*, as we shall see, that proximity of the great to the trivial is a crucial way the novel charts a more inclusive sociality. In *Barry Lyndon*, meanwhile, that proximity evokes a more disturbing vision of a universal community of immoral hypocrites.

Part of what Thackeray is doing in *Barry Lyndon* is to suggest that Barry's unstable value means he is an unstable object for moral judgment. The oscillating reversals of Thackeray's irony call attention to Barry Lyndon's discreteness from and his continuity with moral norms. Thackerayan irony and humor, in turn, refuse to allow the reader to take up an objective or detached perspective that might allow for judgment or authority. By thematizing this oscillation, Thackeray enables us to discern the conditions and contexts that determine our judgments. For example, in an editorial amendment that he included at the end of the first edition of *Barry Lyndon*, which was serialized in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1844, Thackeray warns against seeking moral meaning in the novel because moral judgment is so often conditioned by generic expectations that have no relation to moral value. In the voice of George Savage Fitz-Boodle, Thackeray writes, "If the tale of his life have any moral (which I sometimes doubt), it is that honesty is *not* the best policy." (*BL*, 310). Observing that the world does not "always reward merit" and occasionally "raise[s] mediocrity to distinction," Thackeray suggests that it is false to treat the novel as if it were an object of knowledge: "Novelists especially make a most profuse, mean use of this pedlar's measure ["honesty is the best policy"], and mete out what they call poetical justice" (*BL*, 310). Instead, Thackeray concludes that it would be better for the novelist to represent "to the best of their power life as it really appears to them to be"; instead of presenting archetypes or moral exemplars, "being representatives of beings that never have or could have existed," the novelist should "describ[e] not only what is beautiful, but what is ill-favoured too, faithfully, so that each may appear as like as possible to nature" (*BL*, 310). Crucially, Thackeray refuses to give explanatory significance to either the "beautiful" or the ill-favoured, observing instead how their mutual imbrication in the narrative (as in nature) collapses the hierarchy of significance between them.

It is perhaps not surprising that the question of Barry's status, the value he is accorded as a character, has been central to the reception of the novel. Disgraced in prison and cut off from the rest of the world, Barry thus figures the isolating experience of social difference; yet, at the same time, he also represents a form of similarity. On the one hand, Barry is evidence of Thackeray's strategic refusal, throughout his writing, of Victorian standards of respectability in literary representation. On the other, Thackeray's figuration of Barry Lyndon invites us to consider how belonging is subtended by the universalization of immorality. In a review of the third volume of Thackeray's *Miscellanies* from 1856, which revised and reprinted *Barry Lyndon* for the first time since its original serialization in *Fraser's Magazine*, James Fitzjames Stephen argues that Thackeray's humor depends upon the equivocality of Barry's exceptionality. Writes Stephen, "The parenthesis which marks the point at which Mr. Barry has succeeded in convincing himself that his profession is, on the whole, highly honourable and noble ... is inconceivably ludicrous, and shows a depth of humour almost sublime." Of that sensibility, Barry is analogized to those Englishmen who see themselves as exempt from the bonds of national character: "It is a sort of typical specimen of the spirit which makes ... the vulgarest dandies who disgrace our name and nation on the Continent sneer at 'those English.' "[39] The irony is not simply that Barry is common in spite of his self-valorization but that he is common because of this pretension, just like those Englishmen who, by virtue of their contempt for and sense of difference from their fellow countrymen, reveal their affiliation and commonality. The pretension of separation, of a discrete and valorized personality, is, in fact, the sign of similarity.

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[39] From a review in *Saturday Review*, 27 December 1856, ii, 783–5 . Reprinted in Tillotson and Hawes, *Thackeray*, 26–29.

While, for Stephen, this oscillation produces the distance that is occasioned by irony and humor, for other reviewers it produces the uneasy sense that Thackeray's irony might be too universalizing. This is the implication of George Henry Lewes's claim that Thackeray is too inclusive with his irony. In a general review of Thackeray's writing, Lewes writes that Thackeray's rigorous irony risks universalizing the bad behavior that he mocks. "As a satirist," writes Lewes, "it is his business to tear away the mask of life, but as an artist and a teacher he grievously errs when he shows us *everywhere* corruption underneath the mask … in thus making the exception stand for the rule he has erred both against art and nature."[40] Wanting to preserve the distinction between good and bad, Lewes argues that, in seeing corruption "everywhere," Thackeray fails to find moments to elevate good or decent subjects. By centering the first-person point of view of Barry Lyndon, Thackeray rejects the comfort of distance. There is a "strong sense of reality pervading his writing," writes Lewes, that is characterized by an assertion of continuity between high and low, rich and poor: "The impartiality with which he has laid on the lash, is one of the most amusing things … he does not content himself with sneering at the rich and titled snobs, but turns round with equal severity upon the poor and envious snob."[41] This impartiality is "amusing," but it produces an uncomfortable humor. Rather than allow the reader to observe from a position of relative security, it implicates her in the "corruption" that Thackeray observes hiding everywhere.

As Lewes's comment attests, the drama of Thackeray's writing depends upon the potential of its ironic leveling to create a universe of moral relativism, where moral value is, at best, unstable or, worse, non-existent. By way of conclusion and transition, I want to suggest that, while Thackeray's irony produces a sense of generalized suffering and meanness, the logic of exceptionality does not so much annihilate those differences as relate them. Rather than collapse all instances into a homogeneous set, exceptionality provides a formal relation that illustrates the problems of differentiation. In a memorable discursive monologue that follows the Battle of Minden, a critical conflict of the Seven Years' War during which the allied armies of Britain and Germany defeated those of France, Barry reflects on the problem of representing injustice and distinguishing particularized from generalized suffering. Distinguishing between the particular and the general is thus critical to the representation of war and large-scale conflict:

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[40] From a review in the *Morning Chronicle*, 6 March 1848, 3. Reprinted in ibid., 44–49.

[41] Ibid., 48.

> It is well for gentlemen to talk of the age of chivalry; but remember the starving brutes whom they lead … It was with these shocking instruments that your great warriors and kings have been doing their murderous work in the world … What a number of items of human crime, misery, slavery, to form that sum-total of glory! (*BL*, 71)

Like much of the novel, this passage is directed by a general deflationary tone, which draws into correspondence the experiences of "gentlemen" and those of "starving brutes" to form the composite image of war as an experience of "human crime, misery, [and] slavery." The movement between these two groups is notable because Thackeray does not move to replace the artificial history of gentlemen with testimonials of those unremembered soldiers. Instead, the scene has a flattening effect, drawing down the elevated subjects in order to acknowledge the correspondence between their crimes and the crimes of those petty soldiers. On the one hand, holding up the experiences of those "suffering brutes" would misrepresent the ways in which they were used as "instruments" by "great warriors and kings." On the other, focusing solely on the romantic stories from the "age of chivalry," and on the subjects who benefit the most from chauvinistic narratives of national heroism, prevents an understanding of the continuity of being within that experience.

In other words, exceptionality suggests that taking up a position of judgment means taking a position with respects to the conditions that define what is exceptional. George Saintsbury, who edited the 1908 collected edition of Thackeray's work for Oxford University Press, notably identifies this scene and Barry's address as the fly in the ointment preventing the novel from being considered great. Saintsbury writes, "I have no objection to moralizing if 'de morals is goot'. Thackeray's sermons never bore me when they are his … But that Barry should preach me I own surprises me."[42] The challenge, Saintsbury suggests, is to evaluate the substance of Barry's claim against the value of his character. Yet, as we have seen, the novel highlights the unstable relationship between value and the character forms that are supposed to represent value. The logic of exceptionality highlights this instability and problematizes the act of taking up any position of authority. Despite his puffery and lack of self-consciousness, Barry's narration signals the interdependence and instability of rule and exception. Whether we identify Barry as either rule or exception, the text's ironic flipping and turning suggests the instability of our judgment and the social values encoded in that judgment. In the next, and final, section, I will turn to the broader social relations modeled by this equivocal formal logic.

"Would You Celebrate Them All?": *Henry Esmond* and Trivialization

Throughout this chapter, I have been exploring the polyphonic quality of exceptionality, as it bridges terms, positions, and values in order to orchestrate continuities, similarities, and relations. While exceptionality is often aligned with the tropes of amplification, elevation, and greatness, Thackeray's relentless ironizing also means that the exalted subject is always at risk of falling back into the degraded realm of the mean from which he departs. In many ways, this equivocality exerts a counterforce to those ideologies, like the Hegelian theory of world-historical individuals or the Carlylean philosophy of great men, that both enable and sustain social relations based on status, rank, hierarchy, and difference.[43] Focusing on the historical past and on representations of war and violence, Thackeray's writing not only corrects for the artificial elevation of hero-worship but also suggests that what renders us similar is the human capacity for bad behavior and immorality. The ambivalence of exceptionality highlights both the common structure of our shared debasement and a relationality that is in excess of the content of these constellated terms. Especially in Thackeray's satirical writing on egotistical or antiheroic soldiers, like Major Gahagan and Barry Lyndon, the logic of exceptionality provides a unique resource for investigating the contexts for social relations, as well as the conditions and limitations of our social agency within these contexts. By turning away from psychological or moral accounts of character, which might attribute exceptionality or debasement to an essential quality of the self, Thackeray is better able to represent the contexts for social differentiation, limitation, and suspended agency—the conditions that either ennoble or degrade, raise or lower.

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[42] George Saintsbury, "Introduction," in *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq. And the Miscellaneous Papers Written Between 1843 and 1847*, ed. George Saintsbury, vol. 6, The Oxford Thackeray (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), ix–xxii, xii.

In this final section, I want to turn to the question of triviality, which is an enduring problem in critical studies of Thackeray and also a central dynamic of the trope of exceptionality as it appears in Thackeray's fiction. I take exceptionality as a sign of the difficulty of representing a comprehensive, inclusive social totality—that is, the difficulty of representing the high and the low together, as parts of an encompassing or entangled situation. What exactly are we at risk of when we represent

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43. For more on the literary relationship between Carlyle and Thackeray, see Ian Ousby, "Carlyle, Thackeray, and Victorian Heroism," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 12 (1982): 152–68; and Robert P. Fletcher, "'The Foolishest of Existing Mortals': Thackeray, 'Gurlyle', and the Character(s) of Fiction," *Clio* 24, no. 2 (1995): 113–25.

the world-historical together with the trivial and ordinary? What happens to representation when a novel shifts from histories of great men to those "histories from below," which, perhaps, risk trivializing the scale or complexity of events? In the prologue to *The History of Henry Esmond*, for example, Thackeray imagines a historical representation that might be "familiar rather than heroic"—and, figuring history as a female domestic servant, he writes, "I am for having her rise up off her knees, and take a natural posture: not to be for ever performing cringes and congees like a Court-chamberlain, and shuffling backwards out of doors in the presence of the sovereign."[44] In the case of *Henry Esmond*, the structure of exceptionality alerts us to the proximity between the protagonist and world-historical individuals, like the Duke of Marlborough, Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, and James Francis Edward Stuart. In what follows, I examine how exceptionality structures comparisons between the high and the low, which allows Thackeray to investigate the difficulties of totalizing representations. In this final section, I argue that the trivial, as a reflexive treatment of the powerless and unacknowledged, is precisely what allows Thackeray to engage with the exclusionary ideology of Victorian sociality.

Written at a time of escalating dissatisfaction with the propertied classes and with conventional hierarchy, *Henry Esmond* seems preoccupied with the question of individual value and distinction irrespective of lineage or status—who has it, what it entails, and whether it is an essential or circumstantial quality of individual character. The novel calls attention to the differences between the industrious and honorable protagonist, who eschews title and inheritance, and his moribund and immoral cousins, Beatrix and Frank, who chase status and aristocratic distinction. Set during the decades following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the novel tarries between hereditary right and personal merit, charting Esmond's military service during the

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[44] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The History of Henry Esmond*, ed. John Sutherland and Michael Greenfield (Harmondsworth, Eng: Penguin Books, 1970), 46. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the body of the text as *HE*.

War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), his brief career as a writer in London, and his eventual emigration to the American colonies. If the novel seems to reflect the imperialist and capitalist ideology of British nationalism, which emphasizes the moralizing of personal industry and the dissemination of British cultural values around the globe, then it is key to note that the end of the novel, and thus the priority of Esmond's bourgeois exceptionalism, is far from inevitable. George Eliot famously wrote in a private letter that the novel was "the most uncomfortable book you can imagine … The hero is in love with the daughter all through the book, and marries the mother at the end."[45] Recasting the ending as a moment of rupture, or surprise, rather than closure, Eliot's comment evinces the novel's agitation against ideological harmony in favor of equivocality and ambivalence. It is as if Thackeray raises the question of whether Esmond's rise is inevitable, and thus representative, or whether it is "trivial" in the sense of offering no paradigmatic or general insight.

Like *Major Gahagan* and *Barry Lyndon*, *Henry Esmond* dramatizes the difficulty of acclimating the historical "backdrop" to the particular, limited history of its protagonist. Yet, more than those other novels, *Henry Esmond* has been a lightning rod for charges of triviality. The novel emblematizes Thackeray's propensity to focus on the low, common, and partial not only to raise these subjects but as a general self-effacing strategy to distance himself from the chauvinism of bourgeois nationalism. For many readers, including later literary critics, this "trivialization" is itself non-trivial. This is the complaint made by Lukács in *The Historical Novel*, when he dismisses Thackeray's management of history and historical actors: "The memoir is an appropriate form for Thackeray's exposure of pseudo-greatness. Everything can be seen from the proximity of everyday private life and, shown in this microscopic way, the false pathos of the artificial, self-imagined hero collapses … Proximity destroys the alleged greatness of Marlborough, the Stuart Pretender, and many others."[46] In reducing the forces of history—and, especially, history as the story of class conflict—to the petty domain of the personal and the subjective, Thackeray strips history of its narrative quality, its potential for change and progress. "What made them into important representatives of the epoch," writes Lukács, "into ideologists of big social changes is excluded from the story."[47] This connection between trivialization and the exclusion of "big social changes" is significantly underscored by Lukács's reading of *The Spectator* paper that Henry Esmond writes to discourage his young lover Beatrix's romantic profligacy.[48] Lukács dismisses this episode as paradigmatic of the novel's trivialization of historical forces and world-historical actors: "No doubt such articles did appear in the journal. But to reduce its historical role to private episodes of this kind means, objectively, the distortion of history, its degradation to the level of the trivial and the private."[49] For Lukács, *Henry Esmond* marks Thackeray's ideological commitments by failing to represent the possibility of "big social change" or generalized historical movement.

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[45] From a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray dated November 13, 1852. Reprinted in Tillotson and Hawes, *Thackeray*, 151.

Contemporary readers of Thackeray also questioned his relentless irony and trivialization; less invested in the political or revolutionary implications of this aesthetic, readers worried that the desire to bring down all heroic men or world-historical actors meant that Thackeray held no vision of goodness or moral elevation. In a previous section, we examined George Henry Lewes's general complaint that Thackeray "errs when he shows us *everywhere* corruption," but this sentiment was repeated in multiple reviews of *Henry Esmond* upon its publication. In a review for the *Examiner*, the critic and biographer John Forster writes that, while the novel displays an "elegance of form," "There is not a character in *Esmond*, not the most spotless, over which we do not constantly feel that Mr Thackeray is bending with a smile of pity." Unable to claim that everyone has the potential for goodness, Thackeray instead "falls back upon another fundamental principle ... namely, that in everybody there is some part bad."[50] Similarly, Samuel Phillips complains in an article for *The Times* that, in *Henry Esmond*, Thackeray erroneously demolishes all pretense of heroism and goodness. In an indignant prose that allegedly "absolutely stopped" all sales of *Henry Esmond*, Phillips laments, "We dared not believe in heroism, for he rebuked the belief with a sneer; we could not talk of human perfectibility, for he pooh-poohed the idea with a smile of contempt. If he introduced us to a clever girl, it was simply that we might detect hideous selfishness in its most delicate form."[51] Whereas Lukács describes Thackeray's trivializing aesthetic as an example of how Thackeray is blind to the forces of history and to the importance of world-historical readers, readers like Forster and Phillips describe this triviality as evidence of a disquieting, if not paralyzing, universalism that rejects the possibility of moral elevation.

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[46] Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 202.

[47] Ibid., 204.

[48] For an analysis of the fake *Spectator* paper in *Henry Esmond*, see Daniel Hack, *The Material Interests of the Victorian Novel* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 11–36. For the relationship between *Henry Esmond* and the literary marketplace, see Peter Shillingsburg, "The Autonomous Author, the Sociology of Texts, and the Polemics of Textual Criticism," in *Devils and Angels: Textual Editing and Literary Theory*, ed. Philip Cohen (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 22–43.

[49] Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 204.

The problem of triviality in Thackeray's writing also extends to a related question about the status of the historical novel by the mid-nineteenth century. While Scott popularized the genre at the beginning of the nineteenth century—to the degree that it seems as if every major nineteenth-century novel were set "sixty years since"—the historical novel had fallen into disrepute by the time Thackeray published *Henry Esmond*. There was a prevailing sense that Scott's imitators had trivialized the historical consciousness embodied by the genre. While figures like Thomas Babington Macauley kept history alive as a popular subject among the literate classes of England, writers like G. P. R. James, William Harrison Ainsworth, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton were thought to have trivialized the genre by focusing too much on circumstantial details or leaning too heavily into romance and artifice.[52] For Thackeray, one of the central concerns about the historical novel was its focus on fantastically unrealistic subjects who strain realistic representation. For example, in a parody of Bulwer-Lytton (or, "Sir E. L. B. L., Bart.," "BB. LL. BBB. LLL") entitled *George de Barnwell*, Thackeray writes,

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[50] From a review in the *Examiner*, 13 November 1852, 723–6. Reprinted in Tillotson and Hawes, *Thackeray*, 144–150.

[51] From "Mr. Thackeray's New Novel," *The Times* (22 December 1852): 8. Reprinted in ibid., 151–9.

> While Love hath no end, Can the Bard ever cease singing? In Kingly and Heroic ages, 'twas of Kings and Heroes that the Poet spake. But in these, our times, the Artisan hath his voice as well as the Monarch. The people To-Day is King, and we chronicle his woes, as They of old did the sacrifice of the princely Iphigenia, or the fate of the crowned Agamemnon.
>
> Is Odysseus less august in his rags than in his purple? Fate, Passion, Mystery, the Victim, the Avenger, the Hate that harms, the Furies that tear, the Love that bleeds, are not these with us Still? are not these still the weapons of the Artist? the colors of his palette? the chords of his lyre? Listen! I tell thee a tale—not of Kings—but of Men—not of Thrones, but of Love, and Grief, and Crime. Listen, and but once more. 'Tis for the last time (probably) these fingers shall sweep the strings.[53]

Emphasizing an epic and romantic tradition—the Bard, Homer, Euripedes, Aeschylus—this kind of historicism, even as it takes as its subject the "people To-Day" and "Odysseus ... in his rags," is seen as over-the-top, naive, and artificial. It has the effect of exaggerating or aggrandizing the ordinary subject, which Thackeray suggests replaces the artificial elevation of the heroic with the artificial elevation of the common. The low yet exalted subject of history underscores this decadent historicism, as well as the immanent enervation and obsolescence of the historical novel ("but once more," "'Tis for the last time").

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[52] John Sutherland, "Introduction," in *The History of Henry Esmond*, ed. John Sutherland and Michael Greenfield (Harmondsworth, Eng: Penguin Books, 1970), 10–13.

[53] William Makepeace Thackeray, "George de Barnwell," in *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, vol. 8 (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), 84–98, 84–5.

Rather than consign certain subjects to a foreclosed past or exaggerate the elevation of the common, the trope of exceptionality has the effect in *Henry Esmond* of producing a correspondence between the high and the low. Although Thackeray's irony often seems intent upon pulling down all social and cultural structures, his interest in heroism and exceptionality is marked simultaneously by a desire for totalizing representation as well as by the difficulty of achieving that perspective. In this sense, what is productive about this dynamic of exceptionality in Thackeray's writing—not in spite of but because of its negativity and ironic deflation—is that it allows us both to understand better the historical actuality of a given representation, as well as to register the difficulty of any act of representation that aspires to totalizing perspective. The logic of exceptionality, rather than take us out of history or trivialize momentous historical events, is the key to perceiving historical embeddedness, insofar as it produces a correspondence between the high and the low. Thackeray's fiction, in turn, gives us that movement in the moment of reading. At the end of the prologue to *Henry Esmond*, Thackeray writes in typically ironic fashion: "Give me a chain and red gown and a pudding before me, and I could play the part of Alderman very well, and sentence Jack after dinner. Starve me, keep me from books and honest people … and put me on Hounslow Heath, with a purse before me and I will take it … I can't but accept the world as I find it, including a rope's end, as long as it is in fashion" (*HE*, 48). In this manner, Thackeray suggest that the oscillation between high and low indexes the limits of our ability to transcend historical situations, insofar as evinces a class structure ("the world as I find it") that shapes and determines our knowledge and ways of thinking.

An early example from *Henry Esmond* captures this logic of exceptionality, providing a model that emphasizes the relation between the high and the low. In this scene, Esmond meets Rachel, the Lady Castlewood and his future wife, for the first time after the death of his warden. After Thomas, the third Viscount Castlewood and Esmond's legitimate father, dies, the estate passes to Francis, who assumes the position of fourth Viscount. Previously, Henry Esmond lived with Thomas and his wife, Isabel, under the assumption that he was either the Viscount's illegitimate son or he was merely an orphan who was cared for by the Viscount. When Esmond meets Rachel, Thackeray emphasizes how their relation is structured by a logic of exceptionality, where the high and the low, the exalted and the generic, are juxtaposed:

> The new and fair lady of Castlewood found the sad lonely little occupant of this gallery busy over his great book, which he laid down when he was aware that a stranger was at hand. And, knowing who that person must be, the lad stood up and bowed before her, performing a shy obeisance to the mistress of his house.
>
> She stretched out her hand—indeed when was it that that hand would not stretch out to do an act of kindness, or to protect grief and ill-fortune? 'And this is our kinsman,' she said; 'and what is your name kinsman?'
>
> 'My name is Henry Esmond,' said the lad, looking up at her in a sort of delight and wonder, for she had come upon him as a *Dea certè*, and appeared the most charming object he had ever looked on. Her golden hair was shining in the gold of the sun; her complexion was of a dazzling bloom; her lips smiling, and her eyes beaming with a kindness which made Henry Esmond's heart to beat with surprise. (*HE*, 48–9)

For much of the novel, Rachel appears as a goddess like this—beatified, exalted, and elevated. She occupies the moral center, providing an emotional foundation for Esmond and a point to return to throughout his narrative. Her elevation, however, is dependent upon his depression, both in a physical sense ("bowed before her," "looking up at her") and in a psychological sense ("sad lonely little occupant," "performing a shy obeisance to the mistress"). This scene emblematizes the discomfort that

George Eliot refers to in her letter, insofar as it seems to conflate the erotic and the sacred, the domestic and the spiritual, the amatory and the maternal. The logic of exceptionality is contrapuntal, requiring if not two subjects than two categories that are suspended and unresolved. Rather than somehow trivialize the sacred image of Rachel, Esmond's lowness makes her elevation perceptible, as something that appears not in spite of but because of his depression. At the same time, the spectacle of her elevation evinces a broader category of social belonging, insofar as her glorification is rendered as a symptom of Esmond's social alienation (his loneliness) and his substitutability ("when was it that that hand would not stretch out to do an act of kindness"). The logic of exceptionality thus stages the differences between high and low not as inevitable or natural categories but as symptoms of a broader structure and economy of social categories and relations.

Exceptionality is related to the "language of the family" that Eve Sedgwick identifies as the discursive medium for the negotiation of an emergent "class-marked family of industrial capitalism" and pre-existent gendered forms.[54] According to Sedgwick, *Henry Esmond* in particular dramatizes the historical shift from a social order characterized by a Jacobite feudal aristocracy to one defined by the capitalist bourgeoisie by locating this shift in the novel's depiction of the changing shape of the gendered family: "the perceived norm moves from a demographically elastic, untidy family led by an incisive woman, to a small, well-defined family led by a man, and in which the woman's role is both economically undercut and intensively and circumscriptively moralized."[55] For Sedgwick, Rachel's power over Esmond, her intense sexual and allegorical authority in the novel, "disguise[s] the relative powerlessness of bourgeois women."[56] This chiastic structure parallels the oscillation embedded in the logic of exceptionality. The closure of the novel's plot in the form of Henry Esmond's marriage to Rachel provides a symbolic resolution to the Victorian conflict between the social exaltation of women and their gendered demotion in the bourgeois family. At the same time, I want to suggest that the logic of exceptionality, rather than codify this relationship and secure it against any sense of inequity or dissatisfaction, actually helps to expose the role of power and inequity in the relationship between high and low.

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[54] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 136.

[55] Ibid., 146.

[56] Ibid., 158.

Because the logic of exceptionality is comparative, negotiating between relative positions rather than locking them into a fixed structure, it is necessarily a way to represent the experience of limitation or suspension. It's tempting to argue that exceptionality becomes an affective or ideological investment in hierarchy and reciprocal—if unequal—care. Yet, I want to contend that exceptionality is instead a double figure for a critical and radical relationality: it both evinces the structures that condition social differentiation and suggests the desire to think beyond those differences. In other words, exceptionality, as a kind of tableau or trope of connection, indexes the aspiration for a new relationality without, per se, neatly translating the image of that relation into an object of knowledge. In the scene that follows the previously discussed scene of Henry meeting Rachel for the first time, we again see him pictured as her obsequious faithful except, this time, we get to see that relationship from without, as it is perceived by the Viscount:

> Her heart melted I suppose (indeed she hath since owned as much) at the notion that she should do anything unkind to any mortal, great or small … and, coming back to the lad, with a look of infinite pity and tenderness in her eyes, she took his hand again, placing her other fair hand on his head, and saying some words to him, which were so kind and said in a voice so sweet, that the boy, who had never looked upon so much beauty before, felt as if the touch of a superior being or angel smote him down to the ground, and kissed the fair protecting hand as he knelt on one knee.

> To the very last hour of his life, Esmond remembered the lady as she then spoke and looked, the rings of her fair hands, the very scent of her robes, the beam of her eyes lighting up with surprise and kindness, her lips blooming in a smile, the sun making a golden halo round her hair.
>
> As the boy was yet in this attitude of humility, enters behind him a portly gentleman, with a little girl of four years old in his hand. The gentleman burst into a great laugh at the lady and her adorer, with his little queer figure, his sallow face, and long black hair. (*HE*, 49–50)

Again, the high and the low are juxtaposed in the image of a "superior being or angel" and her kneeling servant. The tableau is a spectacle of women's empowerment, as she is transformed into a divine being, or into the altruistic, magnanimous angel who extends her grace to her pious and mortal devotee. But the scene also makes it clear that there is something volatile about this juxtaposition. The Lord Viscount's external perspective gives us the sense that Henry's "attitude of humility" is absurd or "queer." His "great laugh" has the effect of pointing out the overdetermination of the scene, thereby stripping it to its barest form: that of a "lady and her adorer." We see, in other words, the relationship of a superior to her inferior. In a sense, the Lord Viscount exposes the trivialization of which Thackeray stands accused by pointing out the artificial edifice propping up the allegorical figuration—that is, he drags the scene back down to reality. Nonetheless, this moment of trivialization isn't without purpose: cutting the tension, it forces us to look at the scene and to see it as an image of inequality. At the same time, it also gestures to the difficulty of thinking beyond that limited image. In other words, the scene between Henry and Rachel becomes not only a scene of diminishment—his physical, social, and theological submission to her—but also a scene of our diminished capacity to think or represent beyond the confines of the historical moment.

Rather than either concretize or subvert the hierarchies of power that it thematizes, the logic of exceptionality connects across those points of difference in a dynamic way. By bringing together the high and the low, exceptionality figures the process of adjudication and adjustment, and thereby illustrates the difficulty of thinking a social totality. Let's consider another moment in the novel, similar to some of the scenes of military exploit that we examined in previous sections. In this scene, we can see a rigorous attempt to think the totality of experience as well as the difficulty of doing so. During the ruination of Bavaria, leading up to the Battle of Blenheim, Esmond remarks:

> And now, having seen a great military march through a friendly country; the pomps and festivities of more than one German court; the severe struggle of a hotly-contested battle, and the triumph of victory; Mr Esmond beheld another part of military duty; our troops entering the enemy's territory, and putting all around them to fire and sword; burning farms, wasted fields, shrieking women, slaughtered sons and fathers, and drunken soldiery, cursing and carousing in the midst of tears, terror, and murder. Why does the stately Muse of History, that delights in describing the valour of heroes and the grandeur of conquest, leave out these scenes, so brutal, mean, and degrading, that yet form by far the greater part of the drama of war? (*HE*, 276–7)

Set against the backdrop of the War of Spanish Succession, *Henry Esmond* provides an earlier moment of the "mass experience" that Lukács identifies as the precondition of historical consciousness.[57] Like the description of the Prussian military in *Barry Lyndon*, this scene has a leveling effect. It juxtaposes the "stately" with the "brutal, mean, and degrading." The "friendly" experience of pomp and circumstance connects with "tears, terror, and murder." This scene represents one of the most concerted efforts on Thackeray's part to represent the totality of war and to show the breadth of wartime experiences. At a later moment, as Rae Greiner points out, Esmond is knocked unconscious, thus suggesting that "[t]he subjects of history, even mass catastrophe, can remain unremembered or incomplete."[58] At this moment, however, Thackeray suggests that representing history faithfully requires an act of trivialization, or a refusal of the artificial elevation of certain subjects. The scene is "trivial" in the sense described by Forster and Phillips, insofar as it sees brutality and meanness as the general experience ("the greater part of the drama of war") rather than mere exceptions. Like the scene between Esmond and Rachel, it is structured by a moment of comparison or negotiation between two different experiences without, per se, giving either authority.

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[57] Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 23.

Thackeray elaborates on the connection between the logic of exceptionality and the problem of representing a totality by connecting this scene to the lofty point of view of the Duke of Marlborough, the supposed hero of the War of the Spanish Succession:

> Our chief, whom England and all Europe, saving only the Frenchmen, worshipped almost, had this of the godlike in him, that he was impassible before victory, before danger, before defeat. Before the greatest obstacle or the most trivial ceremony; before a hundred thousand men drawn in battalia, or a peasant slaughtered at the door of his burning hovel; before a carouse of drunken German lords, or a monarch's court, or a cottage-table, where his plans were laid, or an enemy's battery, vomiting flame and death, and strewing corpses round him;—he was always cold, calm, resolute, like fate … Perhaps he could not have been the great man he was, had he had a heart either for love or hatred, or pity or fear, or regret or remorse. He achieved the highest deed of daring, or deepest calculation

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[58] Greiner, "The Victorian Subject," 33.

> of thought, as he performed the very meanest action of which a man is capable … with a like awful serenity and equal capacity of the highest and lowest acts of our nature. (*HE*, 277–8)

Here, we have the logic of exceptionality: the oscillation between high and low, the coincidence of the great and the trivial, and the movement between an expanded vision and the partial perspective of a particular subject. The cataloging of events, objects, and subjects ("before … before … before") aims to record a comprehensive account of wartime experience, to archive and to constellate many, disparate things that would, in other accounts, be unthinkable together. It's tempting, with all of this in mind, to argue that the Duke of Marlborough, therefore, authorizes this extensive totality and radical inclusivity of representation—such a move, while correct on its face, would re-inscribe the hierarchy of differentiation. At the same time, Esmond (and, by extension, Thackeray) is careful to record not only the representation made possible by the Duke's inclusive gaze but also the effect of this representation and its compulsory ideology. Esmond recalls, "After the great victory of Blenheim the enthusiasm of the army for the Duke, even of his bitterest personal enemies in it, amounted to a sort of rage … Who could refuse his meed of admiration to such a victory and such a victor? Not he who writes" (*HE*, 278–9). Thackeray, in other words, understands that the desire for a totalizing representation is simultaneously necessary yet ideological. On the one hand, it is necessary in order for the breadth of experience, including low experience, to be included within the official record; on the other, it is ideological insofar as it risks compelling us to conflate the internal conflicts between high and low in the name of an authoritative account of national exceptionalism. Thackeray's writing thus exposes the difficulty of moving beyond the violent content toward some more inclusive, formal relation.

By questioning the conventions of romantic historiography and representation, *Henry Esmond* offers a compelling account of the conditions and contexts for social differentiation. Having returned to England, Esmond meets Joseph Addison, who, while familiar to poetry enthusiasts, had not yet distinguished himself as a public man of letters. Taking up Addison's draft of what would soon become *The Campaign*, an epic poem commemorating the Duke of Marlborough's victory at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704, Esmond questions the writer's exceptionalist version of the events. He declares, "You great poets should show it as it is—ugly and horrible, not beautiful and serene" (*HE*, 297). After Addison retorts that there are conventions and rules that govern what is proper for art, Esmond continues:

> 'There were as brave men on that field,' says Mr Esmond … '—there were men at Blenheim as good as the leader, whom neither knights nor senators applauded, nor voices plebeian or patrician favoured, and who lie there forgotten, under the clods. What poet is there to sing them?'
>
> 'To sing the gallant souls of heroes sent to Hades!" says Mr. Addison, with a smile: 'would you celebrate them all? If I may venture to question anything in such an admirable work, the catalogue of the ships in Homer hath always appeared to me as somewhat wearisome; what had the poem been, supposing the writer had chronicled the names of captains, lieutenants, rank and file?' (*HE*, 298–9)

Addison's patronizing remarks reinforce what is at stake in the logic of exceptionality: namely, attention. The novel cannot retain the "all" that Esmond seeks to remember without somehow clotting the reader's attention. The desire to rehabilitate the "forgotten," or low, threatens to burst the aesthetic container that would seek to contain it. *Henry Esmond*, meanwhile, can represent that aspiration as well as its dissatisfaction.

The logic of exceptionality indexes the conflict or competition between perspectives, accounts, and experiences. By orchestrating a tableau or point of contact between the high and the low, the trope puts those differentiated terms on display and also contests the logic of their differentiation. As I have been describing it, the logic of exceptionality in *Henry Esmond* is a radical departure from the forms of comic or ironic exceptionality on display in *Major Gahagan* and *Barry Lyndon.* In particular, exceptionality in *Henry Esmond* is irreducible to a particular character. Instead, the logic of this trope unfolds in the point of comparison or juxtaposition between high and low, which illuminates the contexts for those differentiations. The self-conflicted tableau of two characters, or modes of experience, meeting is the means by which Thackeray attempts to represent an extensive totality while also making available that representational ambition as an object of critique.

Chapter 3

Setting a Bad Example: Adventuring with the Stevensonian Type

> I beheld great heaps of coin and quadrilaterals built of bars of gold. That was Flint's treasure that we had come so far to seek, and that had cost already the lives of seventeen men from the *Hispaniola.* How many it had cost in the amassing, what blood and sorrow, what good ships scuttled on the deep, what brave men walking the plank blindfold, what shot of cannon, what shame and lies and cruelty, perhaps no man alive could tell.
>
> —Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (1883)

> [The] adaptation to death through language contains the schema of modern mathematics.
>
> —Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1947)

In this chapter, I turn to Robert Louis Stevenson's adventure novel *Treasure Island* (1883), arguing that Stevenson develops a critique of British imperialism through his playful revisions of the adventure novel genre. By overturning the principles of sovereignty and identification that are foundational to the genre, Stevenson subverts the ideological supposition that imperial expansion was propagated, in part, absentmindedly. In *Treasure Island*, a mysterious island and its enormous stockpiles of wealth—gathered from all of the nations of the world—represent a fantasy of colonial extraction and expropriation. In that way, the novel registers not only the ideological fantasies of imperialist capitalism and colonial expansion, but also how these fantasies have shaped modern sociality. I will argue that *Treasure Island* engages with these themes through its representations of heroism and boyish adventure. What is troubling about the thematization of heroism in the adventure novel is how often it mobilizes the moral exemplarity of the British subject, and the hero's extraordinary feats of valor and courage become a way of distributing a particular, limited model of Britishness in the world. In turn, this exemplarity also perpetuates the illusion of imperial absentmindedness by isolating the heroic individual from his actions, encouraging the propagation of a subjectless British identity to which everyone is sublimated but for which no one is responsible.

In order to draw out the contradictions and incoherences of the adventure novel, as well as Stevenson's immanent critique of the genre, I will focus on Stevenson's figurations of character in *Treasure Island*. In the novel, characterization becomes a site at which the formal and conceptual tensions between the particular and the general are dramatized. By turning to Stevenson's theory of the "typical" character, which undoes the principle of the hero's sovereignty, I will argue that Stevenson's characterizations in *Treasure Island* are critical by virtue of their provisional coordination of the particular and the general. This provisionality, in turn, offers a salutary representation of social multiplicity and collective experience. Part of the cultural work accomplished by the character type is the way it withholds both individualism as a source of value and a more fatalistic account of social determination. Rather, the character type makes this alignment between the individual and the general a provisional relation, and this provisionality enables the possibility of recognition and critique.

By all accounts, the dashing adventure of Jim Hawkins and the crew of the schooner *Hispaniola* is a success—and, therefore, an iconic example of the imperial adventure genre. Having risked life and limb against mutiny, piracy, and the dangers of the high seas, the adventurers discover an immense fortune that allows them to live out their lives as respectable gentlemen. Even the former pirate Ben Gunn, despite blowing through his portion of the fortune, settles into parish lodging, where he becomes "a great favourite ... with the country boys, and a notable singer in church."[1] The discovery of treasure—no matter its origins in expropriation and violence—would seem to be a signal technique for facilitating an ideological closure that affirms the novel's heroes and their exemplary models of heroic subjectivity.

Yet, despite its appearance of affirmation, the novel's conclusion is strangely undermined by a motif that suggests the substitutability of its central characters. While en route to Bristol, where the journey began, Jim calculates that "five men only of those who had sailed returned with her" (189). The calculation that "five men only" return is just one example of the ways in which the novel undermines the sovereignty of heroism. On the one hand, numbers solicit a feeling of suspense, uncertainty, and impossibility, like when Jim estimates that "there were only seven out of the twenty-six on whom we knew we could rely" (66). The reader feels with Jim the improbability of his success, which in turn reinforces the sense of cunning and resourcefulness that we associate with his character. This evaluation of odds and risk is necessary to the evocation of the hero as a subject. In the words of Horkheimer and Adorno, writing on *The Odyssey*, "By calculating the risk he incurs as victim, he [the hero] is able to negate the power to which the risk exposes him. By such bargaining he retrieves the life he has staked."[2] On the other, the tally of "five men only" creates an undifferentiated generality out of what was formerly a multiplicity, thereby distancing readers from the particular characters that they have come to know and identify. It is not that Jim, Captain Smollett, Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and Abraham Gray return against unlikely odds, but "five men only." I will return to this scene later in the chapter, but for now, I want to note how disinterested this evocation of numbers is for a novel preoccupied with the ways in which English, male professionals adapt to equivocal and risky circumstances. De-personalization undercuts success, which no longer derives from any force of character or quality of a particular subject. Numbers, especially here at the end of the novel, point to an abstract domain of mechanical causality, where individual action is replaced by an impersonal description of bodies in motion.

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[1] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, ed. John D. Seelye (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 190.

[2] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 40.

What is the adventure novel absent this agential and heroic subject? In the pages that follow, I trace *Treasure Island*'s multiple examinations of character, and, in particular, its attempts to understand the circuits of power and ideology that are perpetuated by specific forms of characterization. One of the goals of this chapter is to unwind the ideological knot of the particular and general that is coiled at the heart of the adventure novel genre. The genre would seem to enshrine an image of the heroic subject as self-determined, purposeful, and capable. That is why some of the most canonical examples of the adventure genre—Homer's *The Odyssey* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, for example—read like biographies of great men who are extraordinary by virtue of their ability to negotiate the hazards of the world. Revolving around the capacities of the human subject, the adventure novel is overtly individualistic, affirming the hero by separating him from the social infrastructure of the everyday in order to test the substance of his response. The adventure novel inscribes the "myth of meaning … which is briefly sustained by the personal power and authority of the charismatic figure."[3] Yet, as Jameson suggests, this "charismatic figure" is anachronistic, only visible "at the moment in which it has ceased to exist as such."[4] In Jameson's Marxist analysis, what has superseded this monadic personhood is the market, or a system of commodity exchange that transforms singular objects into exchangeable units. For Jameson, what characterizes the adventure novel is a melancholic mood generated by the undisclosed fact of the individual's social determination by "definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will."[5] Part of the argument of this chapter will be that *Treasure Island* is not only sensitive to this contradiction but critical of both the charismatic hero and the relations of imperial capitalism by which he is determined.

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[3] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 250.

[4] Ibid., 250.

In this chapter, I situate *Treasure Island* within two major nineteenth-century events that revolutionized the relationship between the particular and the general: first, the rise of social statistics, and, second, the expansion of the British Empire. Like the market forces that animate Jameson's and Marx's analyses, statistics and imperial expansion gradually effaced the particular subject in favor of determining, abstract institutions, like the state or society. For some, the effacement of the individual actually created an opportunity for individual variation and agency, and I will examine this fantasy in the context of the novel's competing figurations of Long John Silver. Both compelling and repugnant, Silver dramatizes the novel's deep skepticism toward the sovereignty of the individual, which, by virtue of denying the existence of determining structures of society, simply reinforces their normative force. At the same time, the effacement of the particular in statistical models also perpetuated the fantasy that structures of collective life operate "independently" of individual will. In this fantasy, the actions of individual characters are unassimilable to the anonymous and mechanical behavior of the collective operations of the "five men" who return. The growth of statistical rationality and the expansion of the British Empire both suggest that macro-social patterns were often incommensurate with the everyday experiences of particular individuals. In this essay, I show how both of these events, which I argue are paradigmatic of a broader conceptual shift in the nineteenth century toward quantity, contributed to the subject's gradual dislocation, as the one and the many came into conflict with one another. *Treasure Island* not only registers this dislocation but raises important questions about agency and accountability within this quantitative universe of statistical rationality.

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[5] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1904), 11.

By connecting *Treasure Island*'s evocations of heroism to the problem of accountability, I will show how the novel elaborates an ethical model of collective affiliation that is particularly salient in light of the subject's freedom from social determination. Nineteenth-century critics of statistical rationality often argued that its exclusive focus on frequencies, patterns, and distributions seemed to confound judgments of guilt and responsibility. Similarly, partisans of imperial expansion often imagined that it took place independently of particular subjects. This divorce of imperialism from individual accountability allowed arguments in favor of imperial domination to cohabit the same discursive space as those arguments in favor of liberal individualism. Yet, as *Treasure Island* dramatizes, structures and patterns do not absolve the question of accountability. As Stevenson suggests, it becomes necessary to articulate new models of accountability that are not beholden to the sovereignty of the individual subject. Drawing on Stevenson's defense of the "typical" in his essay "A Humble Remonstrance," I will argue that *Treasure Island* addresses this conundrum by promoting a model of relation that is reflexive and provisional. "Navigating without Heroes," in the words of my title and in the context of the novel, means operating in the absence of the individual as a reliable model for the order and patterns of collective behavior. Instead—and this is the point made most clearly by the novel in its characterization of Jim—participation in a group or community becomes the basis of individual judgments and relations.

The sections of my chapter unfold the formal and conceptual relationships among parts and wholes in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. In section one, I turn to the frontispiece map as a heuristic for the principles of reality and relation that I will examine with respect to the characters in the novel. Rather than offer a totalizing view of the island, the map is riven by the multiple perceptions, or experiences, that mark its surface. The map, I will argue, emphasizes a principle of reality that is important for the novel, one in which particular phenomena are variable and contingent yet nonetheless part of a common structure.

In section two, I extend this principle to Stevenson's defense of "typical" representation against mimetic realism. Typological representation, according to Stevenson, is preferable to mimesis because it abandons the faithful reproduction of particular phenomena and instead mediates a given reality by representing the relationships among those parts. The type, like the map, achieves a kind of generality through its social circulation, where it is tested and altered to fit new contexts, and thereby represents the grounds of a shared, collective reality. By foregoing fidelity, the type actively produces a world in the process of representing it. This active production is important for how we understand the social and imperialist ideologies at work in *Treasure Island*.

In my third section, I analyze a specific character type that I call the "bad example." At the heart of the imperial adventure novel is the myth of the heroic individual, who is simultaneously characterized as willful and independent and yet understood to be representative of the values of the society of which he is a part. The "bad example" is not bad because it fails to be representative but because it attempts to disguise the provisionality of its own mediation. The specific "bad example" that I turn to in this section is Long John Silver, who models a form of imperial power in which hierarchy preserves the dominance of some individuals over others.

In the fourth and last sections, I turn from the novel to its contexts. In section four, I analyze the novel in the context of an emergent statistical rationality in the nineteenth century. This context is useful for considering the distinction between the fixed model of social hierarchy represented by the bad example and the more flexible social model of the Stevensonian type. While Stevenson's novel expresses concerns about the de-individualizing thrust of statistical rationality, his novel also promotes a version of social adaptation and progress that was deeply implicated in the statistical consciousness of the nineteenth century. The final section turns from statistics to imperial expansion, considering what new socialities are made possible by this statistical consciousness. My discussion of the conclusion of *Treasure Island* shows how Stevenson's novel is reflexively attuned to the problem of understanding the relationship between individual and collective experience. While Jim Hawkins consistently invokes his own individualistic, egotistical power, the novel reflexively allows for an ethical model of social relation. That these two, contradictory possibilities can exist simultaneously in the novel is one way in which *Treasure Island* explores and critiques British imperialism's own complicated relation to individual subjects and abstract structures.

Expanse and Affiliation

In this first section, I examine the frontispiece map as a heuristic for reading the logic of relation in *Treasure Island*. The map was first included in the original publication and has been a featured element of the novel ever since. While the map's principle of representation is different from the character logics that I will examine in later sections (it's primarily visual rather than textual), it nonetheless provides a useful heuristic for my argument. The map offers a non-totalizing, contingent representation that holds multiple, affiliated experiences together without giving priority or distinction to any one experience. By assembling all of these perspectives into a single field of representation, the map aggregates these seemingly dissimilar parts not into a closed totality but into an open and non-derivative form. The frontispiece map thus illustrates the representation of collective experience. At the same time, it also suggests the immanent contradictions within any given collectivity, which are impossible to contain or sublimate.

The map opens the novel and thus prepares readers for how to navigate or imagine the world within the novel. Criss-crossing the island are a series of navigational lines, also known as a windrose network, and spreading out around it are a series of soundings, or numbers measuring the depth of the water that surrounds the island (fig. 8). According to Jim, when he views another version of the same map within the diegesis, the map details "every particular that would be needed to bring a ship to a safe anchorage upon its shore," as well as "several additions of a later date" (33). These additions include several annotations that document the history, exchange, and inscription of the map: "Treasure Island, August 1 1750. J. F."; "Given by above J. F. to Mr W. Bones ... this twenty July 1754 W. B." To these annotations, Jim adds his own after the completion of the plot that he records in the novel: "Facsimile of Chart; latitude and longitude struck out by J. Hawkins." In a version of the map from an 1885 edition of *Treasure Island*, held by the Beinecke Library at Yale University, these annotations are given in different colored ink to indicate the multiple authors of the document. The map makes visible the multiple temporalities that play out on its surface, a series of parts that all coalesce into a general object of cognition. No one of these parts is interchangeable with another; as the map changes hands, it is transformed, or "struck out," by its new owner while retaining the mark of that transformation. Nor is there one prior, original meaning for the map; the flat surface of the page effectively erases any hierarchy of meaning and entangles these histories into an uneven whole. A version of the map printed in the Penguin edition dramatizes this ambiguity by removing Jim's annotation, which effectively erases an acknowledgment of Jim's own erasures while retaining the effect of Jim's annotation (his removal of the "latitude and longitude"). These many inscriptions and erasures attest to the fact of the island's ungroundedness and the elaborate textual mediations that make it available to the reader.

In many ways, the map is not merely an analogy for the figurative logic of the novel—it is the point of conception for that logic. Stevenson famously attributed the

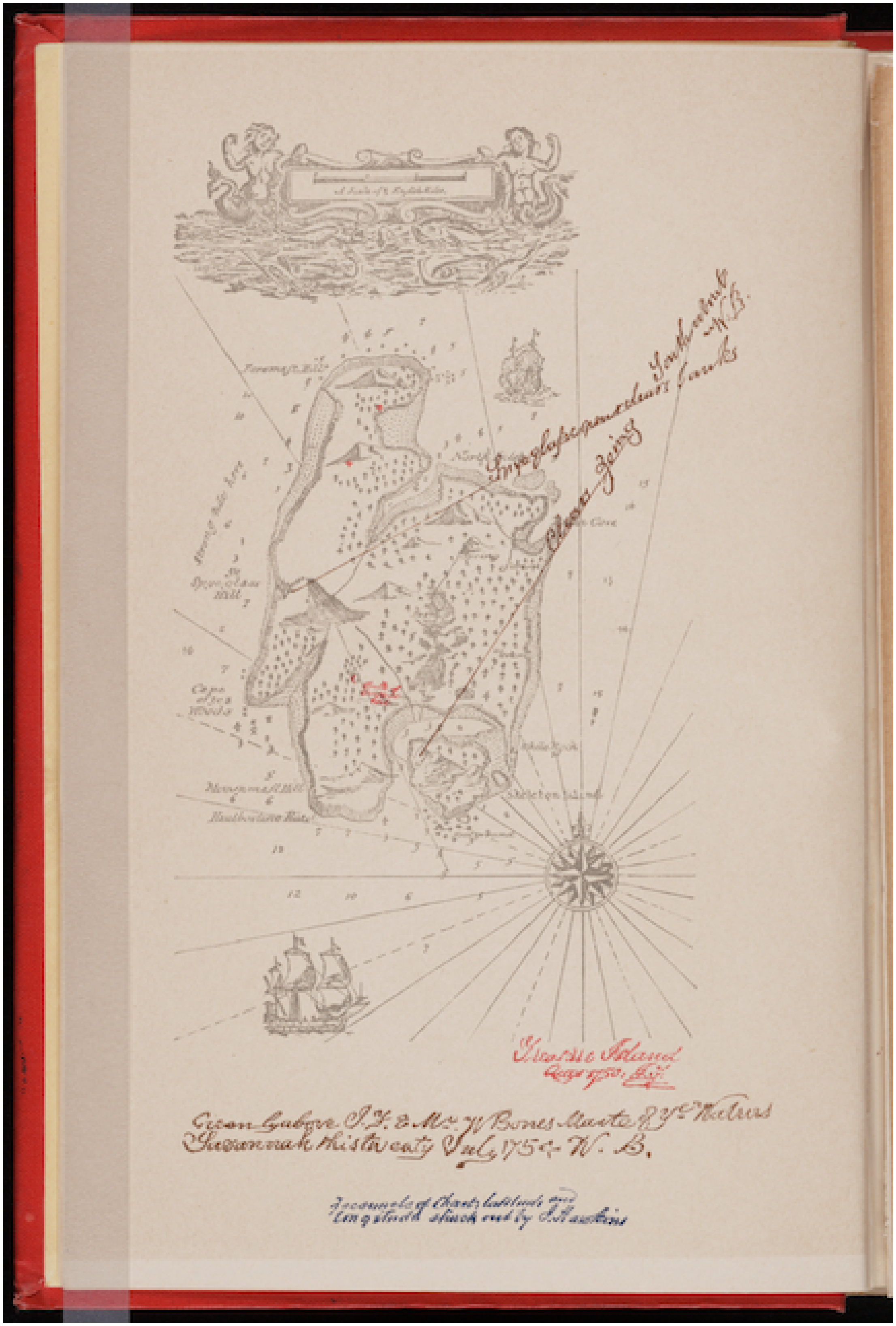
Foremast Hill
Spyglass Hill
Cape of the Woods
Mizzenmast Hill
Haulbowline Head
White Rock
Skeleton Island
Treasure Island

Figure 8: Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 1883. Illustrated map. Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

design for *Treasure Island* to a version of the map that he sketched one afternoon while vacationing in Braemar, Scotland. "I made a map of the island," Stevenson recalls in an article for *The Idler*, "it was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression … here is an inexhaustible fund of interest for any man with eyes to see, or twopence worth of imagination to understand with."[6] While Stevenson lost the original version of the map (it was supposedly lost in the mail to his publisher), his comments nonetheless underscore the effect the map has as an object that mediates rather than represents space. By combining a material existence (the physical copy of the map, both as a frontispiece and as an "elaborately and … beautifully coloured object") with transcendental form ("the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression"), the map toggles between the particular and the general. That is, the map represents both an object in the world (the "island," no matter how fanciful) and the multiple experiences involved in the perception of that object. In other words, the map is irreducible to what it represents or to a singular perspective and is therefore an important element in the novel's efforts to make structure visible.

Despite the claim made by the editor of the Penguin edition that Stevenson "drew a map of Treasure Island so as to render it all the more vivid,"[7] the map is irreducible to the island. Said somewhat differently, the map deliberately challenges our will to interpret the island as an island, which is closed off and complete in and of itself. By representing on the surface of the map the processes of material change and social exchange that took place in the history of its composition, Stevenson prompts readers to acknowledge the provisionality of that representation, insofar as it constantly rewrites its own principles of certainty. Features like the traces of previous owners, addenda, and hints of erasure all suggest that the map dramatizes its own provisionality and transformation. My reading of the map takes this point of ambiguity as the starting point for the novel and an analogy for the novel's broader representation of collective experience. The product of multiple authors, temporalities, and geographies, the map is always in excess of any structure of closure or certainty.

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[6] Robert Louis Stevenson, "My First Book," in *Treasure Island*, ed. John D. Seelye (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 193.

[7] John D. Seelye, "Introduction," in *Treasure Island* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), vii–xxvi, xxii.

In its primacy at the beginning of the novel, the map of Treasure Island ties issues of multiplicity and repetition to interpretation. Bearing the traces of its many reiterations, the map is an ineffective *reproduction* of the island because it highlights its many absences and elisions. "That was all," Jim notes after seeing the map and its inscriptions for the first time, "but brief as it was, and, to me, incomprehensible, it filled the squire and Dr. Livesey with delight" (34). Jim's focus on the map's brevity—"That was all … brief as it was"—foregrounds the ways in which it is not simply a transparent representation but an emblem of its own incompleteness. Yet, for others, like Squire Trelawney and Dr. Livesey, the map is generative, filling them with "delight" and inspiring them with the promise of "money to eat—to roll in—to play duck and drake with ever after" (34). And, for Stevenson as well, who notes: "as I pored upon my map of 'Treasure Island,' the future characters of the book began to appear there visibly among imaginary woods; and their brown faces and bright weapons peeped out upon me from unexpected quarters, as they passed to and fro, fighting, and hunting treasure, on these few square inches of a flat projection."[8] Such observations suggest that "flatness" does not so much diminish the richness of representation as serve as the grounds on which speculation can take place. The map, in other words, suggests that the reality of the island is not self-evident but nonetheless capable of aesthetic mediation.

The resonance between the "delight" that the doctor and squire share when viewing the map and the imaginative pleasure that Stevenson recalls suggests an uneasy alliance between the map's aesthetic richness and the island's material resources.

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8. Stevenson, "My First Book," 193.

Both affective and cognitive responses to the map are premised in its ability to represent something that lacks ontological positivity. For Stevenson, that is the novel-to-come. For the adventurers, however, it is the social and cultural capital—leisure, comfort, and satisfaction—that comes with material wealth. There are, thus, good reasons to be skeptical of the map's generativeness, especially as it aligns with the fantasy of a space of profit and wealth beyond the imperial metropole. Yet, as I have been arguing, moments of difference and discontinuity that irrupt the surface of the map are essential to how we read it. As such, the map makes visible what would otherwise be unavailable to individual perception—namely, the fantasy of accumulation—and thereby makes those ideas available for recognition and critique. This dynamic of mediation, in turn, justifies Stevenson's description of the map as interesting ("here is an inexhaustible fund of interest"). Writing on the "interesting" as an aesthetic category, Sianne Ngai argues that it is "an effort to reconcile the idiosyncratic with the systemic" and is thereby bound up with the "friction between ideas and sensory experience."[9] As we have seen, the map is an important emblem for this friction, a friction that is carried out on the very surface of the map and through its many, layered interpretations. By calling attention to the limitations of individual perception, the map thus enables readers to confront an idea that lacks ontological positivity not by laboring to reproduce that idea in its totality but by representing the relations among its parts and how those relations inform the structure of that idea's circulation and reception.

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[9] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 6, 165.

The Geometry of Typical Representation

In his writings on literature and art, Stevenson develops an argument for what he calls "typical" representation. The typical, according to Stevenson, is neither particular nor universal but mediates between the two by offering a representative selection of reality. The typical, like the cartographic representation I discussed in the previous section, represents a general, collective experience and gives that experience embodiment in the figure of a particular character. What is unique about Stevenson's formulation of the typical is that he does not see this embodiment as a resolution of the differences and contradictions within that collective experience—rather, the typical is premised on the mutual adjustment and adaptation of the particular and the general.

In "A Humble Remonstrance," which Stevenson published shortly after *Treasure Island* in response to Henry James's essay "The Art of Fiction," Stevenson breaks with Jamesian realism and its over-investment in specificity, particularity, and concreteness. Instead, Stevenson makes a claim of value for what he calls the "typical": "Our art is occupied, and bound to be occupied, not so much in making stories true as in making them typical; not so much in capturing the lineaments of each fact, as in marshalling all of them towards a common end."[10] What seems important for Stevenson in this essay is to disarticulate typical representation from empiricism, the typical "all" from the singular "each." The artist is one who mediates historical or social life instead of representing it with granular and atomistic realism. The relation of power and agency seems equally important for Stevenson; against the imperious domination implied by "capturing" reality, Stevenson suggests that the novelist must be humble, "marshalling" and collecting the elements of that reality without a prescriptive intent.

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[10] Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," in *Memories and Portraits*, 13th ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1906), 284.

In a later passage, Stevenson makes the surprising turn to the subject of geometry to elaborate on his philosophy of literary composition. What unites these two domains, Stevenson writes, is their shared investment in an anti-positivist aesthetic, which he calls the "figmentary abstraction":[11]

> Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant; a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate ... A proposition of geometry does not compete with life; and a proposition of geometry is a fair and luminous parallel for a work of art. Both are reasonable, both untrue to the crude fact; both inhere in nature, neither represents it.[12]

Stevenson's characterization of art as "finite," "self-contained," "flowing and emasculate" is odd, if only because it is not clear that the world-downsizing of geometric or typical representation is unquestionably good. Especially with a word like "emasculate," there is a sense that something is lost or castrated in the act of downsizing. Nonetheless, art and geometry evince a common compulsion to formalize by drawing boundaries, instantiating limits, and, even, making vital cuts. At the same time, Stevenson suggests that both art and geometry aspire to affirm continuities, patterns, or similarities within reality. Thus, form is also a method of union, which Stevenson echoes through his repetition of "both ... both ... both." This rhetoric produces a formal parallel between the seemingly dissimilar domains of art and geometry, while the final term in the series ("neither") extends that continuity while still allowing space for particular difference and loss.

What is unique about Stevenson's formulation of the typical, as an aesthetic, is that it applies equally to all facets of literary composition, from rhetoric to plotting. Nonetheless, *Treasure Island*, with is memorable portraits of sailors and pirates, is an important case study for how this aesthetic applies specifically to the domain of characterization. The novel shows how the typical is an important resource for negotiating dynamic situations, like the shifting currents of the modern ocean, because it provides stability by linking individual perception to collective experience. Specifically, *Treasure Island* records Jim Hawkins's gradual discipline by the institutions of British imperial modernity and his emulation of those rationalities. These institutions are figured by the character types Captain Smollett (the navy), Squire Trelawney (the aristocracy), and the magistrate Dr. Livesey (the bourgeois, bureaucratic state). According to Naomi Wood, Jim gradually follows the examples set by these men, and the novel concludes with "Jim's transmutation from Other into establishment man."[13] In this reading, Jim becomes an example of the power of British institutions to compel their own reproduction by imposing a normative form on the variable individual. He is less a character type that is representative of a specific institution than a type of a type. To be typical in this sense entails an adjustment of the part to the whole, by which a national ideal is not only modeled *by* representative figures but also analogically models others in its image.

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[11] Ibid., 283.

[12] Ibid., 285.

To be typical or representative of an institution, as in the case of Dr. Livesey, or of a social class, as in the case of Squire Trelawney, is to "concentrate … the prime historical determinants of an age, the indicators of the forces that allow us to grasp the movement of history itself."[14] Typical characters embody the totality of an institution of which that character is a part, thereby allowing readers to apprehend what would otherwise be too large, complex, or abstract to be held as an object of individual perception. At the same time, the typical character bears a *provisional* meaning. Following Lukács's theory of the character type, Yoon Sun Lee writes, "The typical character, detail, or event stands for something larger and more real than its own particularity … [T]he type is achieved through a careful qualification, mediation, or placement that links it with other instances and gives it a social though not purely empirical generality."[15] By representing the pathways that lead from part to whole and back again, typical representation preserves the diversity and distinction between its component meanings.

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[13] Naomi J. Wood, "Gold Standards and Silver Subversions: *Treasure Island* and the Romance of Money," *Children's Literature* 26, no. 1 (1998): 67–68.

[14] Harry E. Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 12.

The type is, in other words, not a representation of a thing (like an institution) but of the relation among the parts that gives that thing an approximate appearance of wholeness. I say "approximate" because of the ways in which Stevenson suggests that these exemplary, average men are not self-evident or identical with their institutions or, for that matter, with a more encompassing sense of national character. Shortly before setting off, Squire Trelawney declares that Captain Smollett acts "unmanly, unsailorly, and downright un-English" when the captain approaches the squire, the doctor, and Jim to express concerns about the trip (50). The doctor's response, "we shall see," rather than temper the squire's criticism, supports the metonymy between the captain's personal virtue and the English state by making that alignment provisional. In this case, the type offers a procedure for making sense of unseen or abstract systems, rather than a substantive account of them; the type is proven to be representative only within narrative and as a movement to think the variable part and general idea together. This definition of the typical thus offers an important corrective to the normativity of institutional reproduction that I previously suggested was implied by the argument that Jim models himself in the image of these exemplary figures. That Jim does not thoroughly model himself after the distinguished gentlemen of which he has many examples until the end of the novel suggests a certain affective investment in his variability and difference from disciplinary norms.

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15. Yoon Sun Lee, "Type, Totality, and the Realism of Asian American Literature," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (January 2012): 420.

Treasure Island thus examines the paradoxes and tensions involved in extrapolating from part to whole, thereby critiquing ideas of the typical that emphasize normative sameness rather than individual variance. Stevenson's adventure for boys is an important case study for these ambivalences and particularly for the ways in which those ambivalences authorize imperial power. Yet, while individuals like Captain Smollett, Squire Trelawney, and Dr. Livesey represent different facets of British society, these roles do not assure their success, and they are always at risk of being beaten by the equivocal figure of Long John Silver. The dynamism of the novel comes not from the inevitability of the triumph of metropolitan values—we know the protagonists survive from the very first page—but from indicating the conditions under which that normativity is temporarily suspended or altered.

The question of identifying and moving between general principles and particular instances is important and has a direct bearing on the problem of representing collective experience. *Treasure Island* thematizes this problem most dramatically in its narration of the battles against the pirates. While the novel thematizes the difficulty of making social assignations—who is good and who is bad? who is a friend and who is an enemy?—it also illustrates how the grounds of any collectivity are inherently unstable and, therefore, adjustable. The immanent contradictions among dissimilar parts make closure impossible, as exceptions and variations irrupt the surface of the totalizing whole. The typical does not so much eliminate these contradictions as hold them in suspension alongside the formalizing impulse.

My focus on the typical or normative might seem odd or surprising, given Stevenson's delight in the unusual, the monstrous, and the singular. In a review of Stevenson's body of work, which originally appeared in *Century Magazine* in 1888, Henry James writes that what is most notable about Stevenson is his "portrayal of the strange, the improbable, the heroic."[16] One point I have been arguing is that the idea of the "heroic" undergoes a modification in *Treasure Island*, which reflects the contradictions of his social moment. Yet, critics of Stevenson often fixate on this singularity. In his discussion of Stevenson's Pacific novels *The Wrecker* and *The Ebb-Tide*, Philip Steer argues that these novels display a non-rational aesthetic, defined by "a relentless discontinuity and non-linearity."[17] Steer observes that these novels reflect the archipelagic geography of the South Pacific and, by resisting the neat chronology and teleology of the imperial romance, offer evidence of Stevenson's anti-imperialist sentiments. Wood draws a similar conclusion in her discussion of *Treasure Island*, which she situates in the context of contemporary debates around the gold standard and the cultural construction of economic and social value. Wood's discussion of Stevenson's ludic de-mystification of value "shows him resisting categories and actively deconstructing binaries in favor of a far more ambiguous aesthetic."[18] These readings evoke the aesthetics of ambiguity and anti-essentialism as evidence of Stevenson's critical response to imperialist and capitalist ideologies.

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[16] Henry James, "Robert Louis Stevenson," in *Henry James: Literary Criticism*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson, vol. 1 (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1248.

However, this emphasis on the particular not only overlooks Stevenson's defense of the typical, but also, as I will argue in a later section, overlooks how the mediatory structure of the type is crucial to the way in which we understand Stevenson's critique of imperialist expansion.[19] The type in Stevenson's fiction is dialectical, moving between the particular and the general, and cannot easily be conflated with imperialist hegemony at the late century, which Said defines according to a "fundamentally static notion of identity."[20] While it produces correspondences and relations among dissimilar parts, the type does not necessarily compel identification to a singular form. In this section, I have been arguing for the flexible structure of the typical, both as a general aesthetic and as a particular strategy for characterization in the novel. In the next section, I will examine more closely the limitations of both singular individualism and compulsive identification, which attempt to eliminate or disguise the contradictions involved in this mediation and, therefore, offer an ideological resolution that perpetuates imperial hierarchies built on the domination of the one over the many.

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[17] Philip Steer, "Romances of Uneven Development: Spatiality, Trade, and Form in Robert Louis Stevenson's Pacific Novels," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43, no. 2 (June 2015): 344.

[18] Wood, "Gold Standards and Silver Subversions," 62.

[19] A related approach is that of John Kucich, who relates characters in Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae* (1888–89) to psychoanalytic models of masochism, which by virtue of its typification of subjective modes is related to my own analysis of representative and typical characters. John Kucich, "Melancholy Magic: Masochism, Stevenson, Anti-Imperialism," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56, no. 3 (December 2001): 364–400.

[20] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxv.

Setting a Bad Example: Long John Silver

In this section, I elaborate on the problem of identification in the novel and how a fixed notion of identity perpetuates troubling forms of individualism based on power and domination. Central to this problematic of identification is the imperial adventure novel's myth of the triumphant and heroic individual. The hero is not typical in the sense that Stevenson describes in "A Humble Remonstrance." Instead, the heroic individual manifests a will to power that betrays both the horizontal affiliation among dissimilar rather than equal members, as well as the vertical relation between independent individuals and the structure of collective experience. Stevenson's ambivalence toward this figure manifests most clearly in his parodic designation of Long John Silver as the novel's exemplary hero, rather than Jim. Long John Silver's individualism and capriciousness, as well as his desire for status and command, suggest a will to re-create the world in his image. I will refer to this parodic figure as a "bad example" in order to illustrate both its distance from the more ethical model offered by the "typical" and its perverse performance of the adventure novel's more troubling and ideological aesthetic effects.

By narrating the courage of man as he struggles against the unknown, the adventure novel endorses the fantasy of an individual who makes his way through the world through force of will and character. Homer's *The Odyssey*, for example, narrates the career of a "man of twists and turns"—a man at the mercy of chance events that he can neither predict nor control—who struggles "to save his life and bring his comrades home."[21] Citing Mikhail Bakhtin's influential theory of the adventure novel, Margaret Cohen argues that "adventure fiction subjects its protagonists to dangers to test and thereby affirm their identity."[22] As the genre developed, this identity took on new social value, and novels like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) were no longer primarily concerned with the existential meaning of man's perseverance. Instead, the adventure novel expressed the social value of individualism as such by thematizing the constraints of tradition and the freedom that is to be found in self-determination. In the historical context of an emergent modernity, understood as a deliberate break with the past, the protagonist hero came to embody "the autonomy of the individual, irrespective of his particular social status or personal capacity."[23]

During the second half of the nineteenth century, imperial adventure novels were massively popular across the reading public, with writers like W. H. G. Kingston, R. M. Ballantyne, G. A. Henty, H. Rider Haggard, and Joseph Conrad publishing novels that followed the examples set by James Fenimore Cooper and Frederick Marryat during the first half of the century. In these novels, individualism took on a new tenor that reflected the changing dynamics of an organic society in dissolution by the forces of modernity. Writing on Conrad, Jameson describes the process of "rationalization" by which wholes are broken up into their constituent parts and these parts are set within "more efficient systems."[24] Individual autonomy was no longer an end to itself because "rationalization involves the transformation of everything into sheer means," or what Jameson earlier refers to as "sheer market equivalence."[25] Within the highly developed industrial capitalism of the late-nineteenth century, individualism was no longer the expression of absolute freedom from social or historical determination. Rather, it was a means to specialization and the division of labor. In the historical context of this rationalization, the adventure novel's representation of life onboard the ship, with its highly disciplined organization of work, allegorizes the broader conditions of alienated labor and life within modernity and specifically within the system of capitalist production.

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[21] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1997), I:1, 5–6.

[22] Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3.

[23] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 60.

[24] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 227–8.

The diminution of the adventure novel at the turn of the century and its relegation to low culture reflects, at least in Jameson's view, a broader incapacity of the genre to do more than serve as a vehicle for this ideology of rationalization. Stevenson ironizes this incapacity in *Treasure Island*'s verse preface, "To the Hesitating Purchaser," which declares the novel's ambiguous affiliation to the tradition of the adventure novel. Part of this ambiguity is a product of Stevenson's subtle characterization of *Treasure Island* as both a recapitulation of this genealogy and a protest against the genre's failure to respond to its own cultural degradation:

> If sailor tales to sailor tunes,
> Storm and adventure, heat and cold,
> If schooners, islands, and maroons
> And Buccaneers and buried Gold,
> And all the old romance, retold
> Exactly in the ancient way,
> Can please, as me they pleased of old,
> The wiser youngsters of to-day:
>
> —So be it, and fall on! If not,

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[25] Ibid., 250, 221.

If studious youth no longer crave,
His ancient appetites forgot,
Kingston, or Ballantyne the brave,
Or Cooper of the wood and wave:
So be it, also? And may I
And all my pirates share the grave
Where these and their creations lie! (xxx)

The ballad form, with its emphasis on patterns of repetition, helps to emphasize the substance of the poem and its emphasis on intertextual correspondences. Yet, Stevenson's parallel statements—"So be it" and "So be it, also?"—suggest both an affirmation of this tradition and a protest against the genre's diminishment in contemporary culture. The sense of resignation involved in Stevenson's melancholic invocation of his own death, alongside the death of his creation, highlights the distance between the adventure novel as it once circulated and its contemporary instantiations. The genre is, in this sense, anachronistic: out of time with the "wiser youngsters of today." I want to suggest that it is this acknowledgment of its own diminished agency that makes *Treasure Island* a reflexive account of instrumentalization rather than a recapitulation of it. The supposed inevitability of the genre's cultural death—its relegation to low culture or mass commodity—in the final lines of the poem demands that we re-evaluate how the novel reflects and critiques the function of individual agency in relation to this situation.

Recent reclamations of the adventure novel have attempted not only to rescue the genre from its status as a "minor" genre but also to understand better the importance of its aesthetic protocols in relation to the situation of its production and consumption. Cohen's genealogical investigation into maritime adventure fiction, for instance, re-evaluates the function served by flat characters. She argues that this model of characterization highlights the performative ability, rather than deep psychology, necessary for survival on the high seas. "In adventure fiction from its prehistory in classical romance," Cohen writes, "adventure challenges test the constancy of the protagonist's identity. Thoughts, feelings, background, and status fade in comparison to what the protagonist achieves in action."[26] To be successful, the protagonist must learn to emulate the duties and craft of the maritime professionals with whom he surrounds himself. This focus on craft and emulation suggests that the adventure novel is less a genre about the autonomous and self-determining individual than about collaboration and collectivity. Writing on the sailors of Cooper's *The Pilot*, Cohen argues, "Even as characters like Long Tom Coffin and Boltrope embody different social types found at sea, they embody different facets of craft, a capacity that may be glamourized in the figure of the exceptional individual but that is in fact collective."[27] From this "integrated vision of labor," the adventure novel, despite the many, layered hierarchies that organize collective life onboard the ship, "offered a message of democratic empowerment."[28] In contradistinction to the isolation and alienation of the laborer within the industrial factory, the mariner in Cohen's genealogy embodies "a genuine ethos" of dignified work and a salutary vision of collective life.[29]

Between the models set up by Jameson and Cohen—between heroic individualism as a vehicle for rationalization and the flat character as a figure for dignified labor and democratic empowerment—I have proposed we consider the "typical" as a form of characterization in which the individual embodies the multiplicity of a system's constituent parts. The typical is thus an important alternative to the materialism offered by Jameson and the idealism suggested by Cohen insofar as the horizontal relation that the type structures among dissimilar parts refuses to resolve those parts into equivalences (Jim is never quite like any of the other men he models himself after) and the vertical relation that the type establishes between part and whole remains flexible and, therefore, anti-normative. What's troubling about the "bad example" is that it attempts to undermine this provisionality by suspending it, thereby replacing multiplicity with a totalizing model of identification.

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[26] Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea*, 140.

[27] Ibid., 141.

[28] Ibid., 144.

[29] Ibid., 146.

When the adventurers first land at Treasure Island, an atmosphere of danger pervades the island like a toxic cloud. In the shadow of that cloud, the novel joins the threat of environmental peril with social uncertainty, thereby narrativizing the making and unmaking of social forms in non-metropolitan zones by likening that process to the invisible, airborne creep of a virus. Jim notices that while the air is still and silent over the island, a "stagnant smell hung over the anchorage—a smell of sodden leaves and rotting tree trunks" (70). Dr. Livesey interprets the smell as evidence of a biological, rather than social, threat: "I don't know about treasure ... but I'll stake my wig there's fever here" (71). While Dr. Livesey's fear is that the island might be the grounds for a literal viral outbreak, the novel immediately transforms this threat of contagion into a metaphor for the transmissibility of social unrest and mutiny:

> If the conduct of the men had been alarming in the boat, it became truly threatening when they had come aboard. They lay about the deck growling together in talk. The slightest order was received with a black look, and grudgingly and carelessly obeyed. Even the honest hands must have caught the infection, for there was not one man aboard to mend another. Mutiny, it was plain, hung over us like a thunder-cloud. (71)

Like a viral contamination, mutiny has the potential to compel its victims. Even those "honest hands," whom we would expect to be immune to its effects, succumb to the spread of mutiny. It reduces all of the characters to a base animalism, effectively stripping the crew of the social distinctions that would preserve an "us" from a "them"—in fact, the "us" in the final sentence that Jim fears to be susceptible to the mutinous "thunder-cloud" is universal. The passage displays a curious logic of mimetic reproduction, with mutiny operating as a biological or viral inducement to identify, even against one's will.

Reinforcing this anxiety toward compulsory behavior is Long John Silver himself, who, perhaps more than any other character, displays an uncanny ability to model others after himself. Throughout the novel, he is offered as an "example" to his fellow sailors, which means he is less an exceptional or commendable individual than someone capable of transmitting his behaviors or intentions to other characters. In other words, he makes them follow his example. When the schooner lands and shortly before embarking, Jim describes Long John Silver's behavior in response to the growing dissatisfaction among the crew: "And it was not only we of the cabin party who perceived the danger. Long John was hard at work going from group to group, spending himself in good advice, and as for example no man could have shown a better … he kept up one song after another, as if to conceal the discontent of the rest" (71). It's important to note exactly what Jim means when he describes Silver as an "example" for the other members of the crew. As I previously suggested, Jim is not praising the content of Silver's character, which, from the privileged vantage of Jim's perspective, the reader knows to be duplicitous. Rather, Silver's exemplarity is functional and performative: it reflects his ability to compel the other sailors to identify with him and to emulate the model he has set. *Treasure Island* makes this compulsory identification obvious when it acknowledges Silver's ability to control the contagious spread and dissemination of this model. Like the viral transmission of mutiny, Silver compels even honest sailors to identify with him, at least temporarily:

> Silver was the captain, and a mighty rebellious crew he had of it. The honest hands—and I was soon to see it proved that there were such on board—must have been very stupid fellows. Or, rather, I suppose the truth was this, that all hands were disaffected by the example of the

> ringleaders—only some more, some less; and a few, being good fellows in the main, could neither be led nor driven any further. (72)

Silver's demagoguery has a limit, but it seems important for Stevenson to acknowledge that this limit is not a measurement of intelligence or morality, if only because Jim himself has previously succumbed to the influence of Silver's dynamic and magnetic personality. "All" are susceptible to his example—even, perhaps, the reader for whom Silver is the most exciting and compelling character in the novel.

Yet, insofar as there might be a limit to Silver's powers of seduction and compulsion, that limit seems to be premised on the variability of Silver's identity, which makes him such a compelling character to read. In other words, the novel dramatizes the tension between the form of Silver's exemplarity, or his ability to compel identification with and repetition of the example he sets, and the content of that character, which is always shifting and variable depending on context. Having grown tired of Silver's commandeering and despotic personality, the five remaining pirates split on the subject of whether or not to kill Jim, and they eventually break with Silver to form a separate "fo'c's'le council" (156). When asked to justify their decision, one of the men responds, "you're pretty free with some of the rules; maybe you'll kindly keep an eye upon the rest. This crew's dissatisfied; this crew don't vally bullying a marlinspike; this crew has its rights like other crews" (155). The crewman then gives Silver an affected salute before leaving, and "[o]ne after another, the rest followed his example; each making a salute as he passed; each adding some apology" (156). It's interesting that the defection of the pirates against Silver follows the example set by Silver's own orchestrated mutiny, with one man leading and the others following his "example." We could read this repetition as the trace of Silver's influence, which makes it impossible for other characters to imagine acting independently without first emulating Silver's model. Far from trying to overthrow the model of Silver's control, the pirates attempt to displace his position within that model.

What's interesting about this model of emulation is that it operates as a kind of perverse analogy for the disciplinary and institutional models set by figures like Captain Smollett and Squire Trelawney, which function according to a very rigid, vertical distribution of power. As a result, Long John Silver's infectious model is less a refutation of hierarchy than its double. Silver himself makes this comparison when he attempts to exhort the crew members to act like him and to see the possibility of their own upward social mobility in the example he has set. "Here it is about gentlemen of fortune," lectures Silver, referring to common pirates. "They lives rough, and they risk swinging … Now, the most goes for rum and a good fling, and to sea again in their shirts. But that's not the course I lay. I puts it all away, some here, some there … I'm fifty, mark you; once back from this cruise, I set up gentleman in earnest … And how did I begin? Before the mast, like you!" (58). If there is a content to Silver's character, it is to be found in this ethos of self-assertion and individualism. Yet, Silver's individualism is inextricably linked to a sense of hierarchy and order, embodied in his fantasy of ascending to "Parlyment" and riding in a coach (61). The conflict in the novel between "gentlemen of fortune" and the familiar orders of British society ("gen'lemen born") is not a conflict over the nature of hierarchy but over who gets to be at the top of the system. As Silver declares in imitation of Captain Smollett: "Dooty is dooty, mates" (61).

Writing on the vagaries of Silver's character, Wood argues that he embodies the lineaments of an emergent social order premised on performance and flexibility rather than fixity and birth. According to Wood, "Silver's success … depends on his sensitivity to situational changes and his quick adaptability to those changes."[30] Elaborating on Silver's connection to the novel's tropologies of money and currency, Wood writes, "The Silver-led gentlemen of fortune gain their identity not from blood but from the turns of fortune's wheel: rather than maintaining a static position, gentlemen of fortune fluctuate in value, deriving their significance from contextual rather than inborn traits."[31] Yet insofar as this quality of "adaptability" highlights the performance of Silver's character, the fact of his contentless character would suggest that he is dependent upon this context rather than independent of it. While his flexible accommodation to shifting circumstances does appear to grant him a singular subjectivity—a control and self-determination unmatched by anyone else in the novel—this flexibility locates Silver's identity beyond himself.

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[30] Wood, "Gold Standards and Silver Subversions," 74.

In this sense, Long John Silver's exemplarity gets flipped from a model of imitation into one of probative value—he is offered as evidence of a system of which he is a part. Ironically, his "example" function emerges almost as if by negation and through the struggle of characters to accommodate him within a normative rule. In a letter to Dr. Livesey when they are making preparations for the journey to Treasure Island, Squire Trelawney writes, "Long John Silver, he is called, and has lost a leg; but that I regarded as a recommendation, since he lost it in his country's service, under the immortal Hawke" (38). Silver's disabled body is bound up with judgments of personal and moral fitness. But, rather than disqualify him from service, his disability serves as an indication of his exemplarity. Likewise, the squire adds, in a postscript to the letter, that "Silver is a man of substance; I know of my own knowledge that he has a banker's account, which has never been overdrawn" (39). Silver's financial health is an important corollary of his bodily or moral health and is repeated throughout the narrative—as we have seen—as an indication of his exemplarity.

The rhetorical tropes Stevenson uses to describe Silver highlight his resistance to discursive categories. His "left leg was cut off close by the hip, and under the left shoulder he carried a crutch," giving him the appearance of a "bird" (42), an animal-like quality that later returns in the image of Silver with a parrot perched on his shoulder. He is "plain and pale," but with extraordinary features like a "face as big as a ham" (42). When Jim witnesses Silver murder the innocent Tom, he writes, "Silver, agile as a monkey … was on top of him next moment" (77). Stunned, Jim describes "the whole world" swimming around him, flattening all of the objects around him into a mass of indistinct objects: "Silver and the birds, and the tall Spy-glass hilltop, going round and round and topsy-turvy before my eyes" (77). Long John Silver's appeal is in his ability not to dis-identify with categories like human/non-human, gentleman/sailor, abled/disabled, but in his ability to transmogrify and morph to fit these categories. In this sense, Silver is a figure of ontological miscegenation, which echoes the novel's anxious regard of the very real possibility of racial miscegenation suggested by his wife (39).

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[31] Ibid., 66.

This descriptive flux helps to clarify Silver's unique role in the novel. On the one hand, his categorical liminality is an effect of his flexibility, and as such, his character can never quite manifest the truth of his identity. That is why Silver is such a difficult character for others to interpret. When Jim is taken captive by the pirates, Silver arranges for a meeting between Jim and Doctor Livesey on the condition that the doctor treat the wounded or ill mutineers. The crew's reaction to this arrangement is swift and damning of Silver's exemplarity: "The explosion of disapproval, which nothing but Silver's black looks had restrained, broke out immediately … Silver was roundly accused of playing double—of trying to make a separate peace for himself—of sacrificing the interests of his accomplices and victims; and, in one word, of the identical, exact thing that he was doing" (166). But, even though he knows of Silver's duplicity, Jim cannot be sure of the pirate's fidelity: "Should the scheme he had now sketched prove feasible, Silver, already doubly a traitor, would not hesitate to adopt it. He had still a foot in either camp, and there was no doubt he would prefer wealth and freedom with the pirates to a bare escape from hanging, which was the best he had to hope on our side" (171). The doubling, of which we can hear echoes of other Stevenson fictions, suspends the interpretive penetration beneath the surface of his character toward some depth or truth. As a result, it becomes nearly impossible to make a decision about Silver, which is to say it becomes nearly impossible to know the content of his subjectivity.

On the other hand, Long John Silver's multiplicity and doubling allows us to see better the ways in which his lack of characterological *content* ultimately make the *form* of his authority more durable and, thus, the form of authority as such durable. Here, his elasticity is the grounds for a social fluidity that does more to reinforce social hierarchy and structure than nullify it. While Silver escapes punishment, Jim nonetheless imagines that he will one day face judgment from a higher law, thereby fulfilling terrestrial order: "Of Silver we have heard no more … but I daresay he met his old negress, and perhaps still lives in comfort with her and Captain Flint. It is to be hoped so, I suppose, for his chances of comfort in another world are very small" (190). Long John Silver's disciplinary punishment ultimately fulfills the logic of his characterization by targeting his individual body. This emphasis on the willful subject and his punishment is one way in which the novel parodies the adventure novel's individualizing strategies, which make the hero a subject of power to the extent that he is identifiable and, therefore, capable of being emulated. This is a far cry from the more flexible, ethical model of collective affiliation offered by the "typical." Before elaborating on that ethical model, I turn first to the context of nineteenth-century social statistics and probability, which offers a way of thinking about the relationship between social wholes and individual subjects in such a way as to elucidate the concerns we are mapping.

The Rise of Statistics and the Fall of the Individual

In the nineteenth century, statistics was an emergent discipline and thus a contradictory field of knowledge. Influencing everything from the study of the stars to the study of gases, statistics elucidated a principle of reality where general abstractions, like society, were simultaneously real and yet independent of their constituent elements. To be real, the statistical abstraction must be capable of being turned into an object of knowledge. To be independent, it must exceed things like individual behavior and intention. *Treasure Island*, I will argue, demonstrates both an interest in and suspicion of the principle of independence, which threatens to overturn questions of accountability.

In *Treasure Island*, the thematization of adventure and piracy is given an additional, rhetorical dimension as evidenced by the novel's insistent return to numbers in order to capture the chaos and contingencies of battle. The idiom of enumeration underwrites both the harrowing sense of being "outnumbered" by the pirates (109) and by Long John Silver's acts of "playing double" (166). Even seemingly banal phrases take on a secondary meaning within this ever-present numerical discourse. Shortly after learning about the pirates' plan for mutiny and murder, Captain Smollett asks of Squire Trelawney, "We can *count*, I take it, on your own home servants?" (65, emphasis added). And, when all is said and done, Jim values their treasure at the cost of "the lives of seventeen men" (185).

The preponderance of these numbers in *Treasure Island* suggests that what is at stake in the novel is a perception of continuity, or a structure that might bestow upon the contingent and particular objects of the world a continuous reality. The preponderance of chance and fortuitous events in the novel suggests that characters cannot depend upon the past or individual experience to guide their expectations for the present and future. Billy Bones's unexpected intrusion into the "lonely" life at the Admiral Benbow Inn thus kicks off a series of incidents without precedent (4). Breaking with the past and the routine of terrestrial life, adventure in the novel is insistently framed as irrational, strange, and new: "I never saw in my life a more dreadful looking figure" (18); "in all my fancies nothing occurred to me so strange and tragic as our actual adventures" (37); "I seemed never to have been near the sea till then. The smell of tar and salt was something new" (40); I was going to sea myself; to sea in a schooner ... to sea bound for an unknown island, and to seek for buried treasures!" (41); "all was so new and interesting to me" (52). The novel's departure from Jim's point of view halfway through the novel, when it suddenly shifts to a "Narrative Continued by the Doctor," seems a violation of the norms of first-person narration and the unity of perspective one would expect from a coming-of-age story. Unlike the kind of formal discontinuity of a novel like *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which serves as an objective correlative of the psychological fracturing of its main character, the break in *Treasure Island* emphasizes the impossibility of assimilating disparate and unfamiliar experiences within a single perspective.

Throughout the novel, the act of enumeration creates a field of relation in which dissimilar phenomena can be negotiated or managed by reason. Survival in a world that appears incoherent and full of risk is connected to judging correctly, or finding patterns and relations within the morass of contingencies. In a crucial narrative moment, with the protagonists defending their garrison against the pirates, individual distinctions dissolve in the hurly-burly of armed conflict. Accounting for the enemy quickly becomes a way to eliminate chance and to control the contingencies of battle: "Of the four who had scaled the palisade, one only remained unaccounted for" (113). After the pirates retreat, Captain Smollett counts over the dead bodies: "Five against three leaves us four to nine. That's better odds than we had at starting" (113). Like the double-entry pages of modern accounting, the captain's system of counting and calculating odds here is premised on "the effect of accuracy," whereby the precise nature of enumeration is supposed to produce an accurate reflection of reality.[32] Yet, Jim's narration confounds this accuracy. In the only editorial note given in the entire novel, Jim adds to the captain's calculation, noting that "the mutineers were soon only eight in number, for the man shot by Mr. Trelawney on board the schooner died that same evening of his wound. But that was, of course, not known till after by the faithful party" (113). Rather than undermine the captain's calculations, Jim's editorial correction reinforces the limitations of the individual point of view and, therefore, justifies the epistemology of risk analysis, which disregards the individual. In that method, knowledge of the unknown or unseen is mediated through quantification, and the concrete specifics of the present become evidence of a general concept or truth. In the absence of an omniscient perspective, any generalization must remain an approximation of what is uncertain and open to ironic reversal or correction.

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[32] Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 30.

By the 1880s, when *Treasure Island* was first published, this inferential movement from particular to general was widely associated with statistical rationality. Having begun training as a marine engineer, following his father and grandfather, Stevenson would have been familiar with statistical methodology, at least casually.[33] Since Foucault's influential account of statistics and the rise of biopolitics, literary critics have begun to elaborate on the influence of statistics in nineteenth-century culture. Critics have demonstrated how the sheer ubiquity of this new disciplinary knowledge complicates our ideas about Victorian liberalism and utilitarianism, social reform, and literary aesthetics.[34] It is generally accepted that, with the adoption of the national census in 1801 and the establishment of the British General Register Office in 1837, the nineteenth century marked a turning point in the history of statistical rationality.[35] Between 1820 and 1850, the British exhibited an unprecedented "enthusiasm for statistical data-collection," and inquiry was directed toward the large-scale enumeration of the population, of behavior, of bodies, and of the contingencies of modern social life.[36]

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[33] Cannon Schmitt, "Technical Maturity in Robert Louis Stevenson," *Representations* 125, no. 1 (February 2014): 54–79.

[34] For an elaboration of Foucault's notion of biopower and its relation to the history of nineteenth-century statistics, see Ian Hacking, "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers," *Humanities in Society* 5 (1982): 279–95. For examples of how literary criticism has been influenced by these histories, see Elaine Hadley, "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody," *Victorian Studies* 59, no. 1 (2016): 65–86; Nathan K. Hensley, "Armadale and the Logic of Liberalism," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2009): 607–32; Jesse Rosenthal, "The Large Novel and the Law of Large Numbers; or, Why George Eliot Hates Gambling," *ELH* 77, no. 3 (2010): 777–811; and Emily Steinlight, "Dickens's 'Supernumeraries' and the Biopolitical Imagination of Victorian Fiction," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 43, no. 2 (June 2010): 227–50.

[35] Influential histories of statistics and probability that center on the nineteenth century include Alain Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Stephen M. Stigler, *The History of Statistics: The Measurement of Uncertainty Before 1900* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986).

What fueled the statistical revolution was the discovery of an underlying regularity within seemingly accidental and contingent events. From the rate of undelivered mail in Paris to the spread of cholera among soldiers during the Crimean War, this regularity became newly visible as a consequence of enumeration.[37] The regular pattern within collected data came to be known as the Law of Large Numbers. The Law of Large Numbers was first demonstrated as a general mathematical principle by the Swiss mathematician Jakob Bernoulli in the 17th century. In 1837, the French mathematician Siméon-Denis Poisson connected the principle to social statistical data. Poring over census data collected within France, Poisson realized that the average frequency of events tended to remain regular from year to year.[38] Some Victorian writers, like the historian Henry Thomas Buckle, argued that this regularity was evidence of universal laws for natural and social life, while most others hesitated to infer any sort of causality about these patterns and frequencies. Thus, one of the great intellectual developments of the nineteenth century was the idea "that the world might be regular and yet not subject to universal laws."[39] Statistics guaranteed a regular order at large scales without necessarily implying causal determinism.

One of the principal features of statistical rationality that developed as a consequence of the Law of Large Numbers was the belief that this large-scale quantification

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36. Hacking, "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers," 281.

37. The idea of "dead letters" is brought up in both Rosenthal, "The Large Novel and the Law of Large Numbers"; and Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 91–118. Statistical data connected to the health of soldiers during the Crimean War were famously collected and analyzed by Florence Nightingale. See Hadley, "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody"; and M. Eileen Magnello, "Victorian Statistical Graphics and the Iconography of Florence Nightingale's Polar Area Graph," *BSHM Bulletin: Journal of the British Society for the History of Mathematics* 27, no. 1 (March 2012): 13–37.

38. Gerd Gigerenzer et al., *The Empire of Chance: How Probability Changed Science and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 39–40.

39. Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*, 1.

of society offered a clearer portrait of objective reality than the messiness of life at the scale of the individual. The historian Alain Desrosières argues that these statistical patterns "had to do with society and its stability, and no longer concerned individuals and the rationality of their decisions."[40] As a result of this statistical evidence, probability models abandoned efforts to make speculative or predictive claims about particular events or subjects. While probability was a distinct area of study, separate from statistics, probability models were nonetheless influenced by social scientific data, and the study of probability turned away from earlier models of classical probability, which attempted to answer questions of subjective belief and expectation, for what is known as objective or frequentist probability, which focused on patterns and distributions within aggregated data. According to Lorraine Daston, classical probability came to be seen as "dangerously subjective," which meant that it was limited both by the fallibility of individual interpretation and by its emphasis on conduct and behavior.[41]

Objective probability, in turn, stressed that individuals were, in some sense, ancillary to statistical models and frequencies. In *The Logic of Chance* (1866), the philosopher John Venn writes of these frequencies, "Here then we have a class of things as to the individuals of which we feel quite in uncertainty, whilst as we embrace large numbers in our assertions we attach greater weight to our inferences."[42] While Venn refers to this class, which he also calls a series, as a "mere fiction or artifice necessarily resorted to for the purpose of calculation" (120), he nonetheless argues that it is the basis of all knowledge, citing the epigrammatic "ignorance of the few, knowledge of the many" to summarize his epistemology (124).[43] Like John Stuart Mill, who offered a similar defense of the frequentist interpretation in *A System of Logic*, Venn refused to make inferences about the single case, arguing that it could easily match with any number of different and even contradictory probability series.[44]

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[40] Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers*, 68.

[41] Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 370.

[42] John Venn, *The Logic of Chance*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1888), 3.

[43] Daniel Williams draws on Venn's definition of series to describe what he calls "serial thinking," which he connects to literary genre and Thomas Hardy's inferential method. See Daniel Williams, "Slow Fire: Serial Thinking and Hardy's Genres of Induction," *Genre* 50, no. 1 (April 2017): 19–38.

In a famous example, Venn imagines the case of a "consumptive Englishman" who must decide whether to travel to Madeira or not.[45] The example is suggestive, and the island of Madeira has a number of important imperial and material resonances in nineteenth-century culture, least of all its association with the fortune that Jane Eyre receives at the end of Charlotte Brontë's novel.[46] In Venn's example, the island of Madeira and the island of Britain become two closed and contradictory probability sets. The closure of the islands becomes a metaphorical resource for imagining the conceptual closure of the sets. The two sets, based on vital statistics that were gathered by health reformers and life insurance companies, are non-congruent. One suggests that the consumptive would benefit from the trip, and the other suggests that the Englishman would be negatively affected. What would be the rational or probable consequence of a decision to travel to Madeira? Can, in fact, statistics be appealed to when making judgments of this sort? "One would cause us in some considerable degree to believe what the other would cause us in some considerable degree to disbelieve," writes Venn before concluding, "Without further data, therefore, we can come to no decision" (223).

Venn's defense of the frequentist interpretation is interesting because, by taking the series as the basis of knowledge and judgment, he retains a space for individual autonomy while nonetheless making the individual subject all but disappear.

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[44] On Mill's discussion of probability and statistical rationality, see Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900*, 87. While Venn's defense of frequentism had more influence on other philosophers, like Charles Sanders Peirce, Mill's defense had more explicitly political influence on mid-century concepts of sovereignty and liberal subjectivity. See Hensley, "Armadale and the Logic of Liberalism."

[45] Venn, *The Logic of Chance*, 222.

[46] On Madeira and the material and cultural history of that island in the British imagination, see Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 40–2.

Mary Poovey refers to this dynamic as the "double paradox of statistical thinking."[47] On the one hand, the individual forms the basis of statistical data-collections, insofar as nineteenth-century statistical methods had not yet developed techniques for sampling and, therefore, were dependent upon empirical experience. On the other, probabilistic inferences depend upon relative frequency and repetition; the individual, as a result, "is obliterated by the numerical average or aggregate that replaces him."[48] Adolphe Quetelet's *l'homme moyen*, or average man, is a perfect example of this propulsive movement away from particularity toward the representativeness of an artificial construct that nonetheless retains the shape of that original individual. The example of the consumptive Englishman in Venn's *Logic of Chance* is illustrative because it is not so much an exception that proves the rule as it is a singularity that cannot be accommodated within a higher-order abstraction. Indeed, the consumptive Englishman is distinct from the notion of a statistical outlier—the "monstrosities" and "dwarfs and giants" that Venn argues must be included within probabilistic frequencies for accuracy.[49]

It's hard not to read these statements about probabilistic series and not think of the case of the double-crossing Long John Silver. Despite the ways in which the novel frames him as an oddity or an outlier, Silver is more like the consumptive Englishman insofar as he occupies different categories with contraindications.[50] As I've previously discussed, he often operates within the threshold between categories. This hybrid status—at the ontological boundary between human and animal, human and material—generates a particular for which there is no general type. According to Emily Steinlight, the focus of statisticians on frequencies and patterns leads to "the potential for statistical evaluation to produce its own exception."[51] Through his duplicity and categorical liminality, Silver is produced as an exception. But, in some ways, it also explains one affective draw of the adventure novel: the lure of exceptional individuals and extraordinary feats of courage.

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[47] Mary Poovey, "Figures of Arithmetic, Figures of Speech: The Discourse of Statistics in the 1830s," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 269.

[48] Ibid., 269.

[49] Venn, *The Logic of Chance*, 30.

[50] The only exception to Silver's singularity, which points to the ways in which he is unquestionably a statistical being, is to be found in his disability. Disability studies has provided literary criticism with a notably attentive and responsive approach to the normative and prescriptive histories of statistical research and methodology. For more history on statistical methodology and disability, see Lennard J. Davis, "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3–16.

Earlier, I quoted Jim's tally at the end of the novel that "five men only of those who had sailed returned." What I delayed mentioning was the fact that Jim's calculations do not end with his enumeration of the crew. In the next sentence, Jim compares the mortality rate of the *Hispaniola* to another "case": "to be sure, we were not quite in so bad a case as that other ship they sang about: '*With one man of her crew alive, / What put to sea with seventy-five*' " (189, emphasis in original). Alone, neither calculation is really statistical. Together, however, they demonstrate a movement toward statistical inference, as discrete particulars combine to produce a truth that is greater than the sum of its parts. What's striking about this example is that it not only implies the effacement of the particular by the statistical sum but it also carries that effacement in its content—or, rather, in what is missing from that content. The "one man" of the lines of verse is not just *any* man: he is the famous English pirate Blackbeard, who reportedly marooned an entire crew on a deserted island in the Caribbean following an attempted mutiny. Ironically, "one man" undermines the one-ness of that man by refusing to name him and thereby withholding the particularity of his will. The lines suggest that individual particularity in this case is less an effect of having done anything than simply having returned.

What emerges in Jim's comparison is a more general sense of the risk or danger involved in sea travel, which justifies the need for an intentional and heroic subject while simultaneously suggesting that the final circumstances of travel are independent of individual will. Together, these two cases appear less like the summaries of exciting adventures and more like the tables of "wrecks and casualties" that were collected by statisticians and published by insurance companies in order to calculate risk (fig. 9).[52] In the table, individual variance and accountability are sublimated to the general quantification of "missing," "abandoned," and "stranded" sailing vessels. Insurance agents would have looked to these tables to calculate the rates for insuring vessels and cargo. This aggregation of information was not meant to predict the future but, rather, to create conditions under which the insurance agent might profit in the event a particular future—collision or piracy—does not take place. Yet, at the same time, the table also demonstrates the value or interest in this data to outside populations, as it was published not by insurance agents but by the Royal Statistical Society. It suggests a moment, before disciplinary specialization, when this data would have had narrative or aesthetic value.

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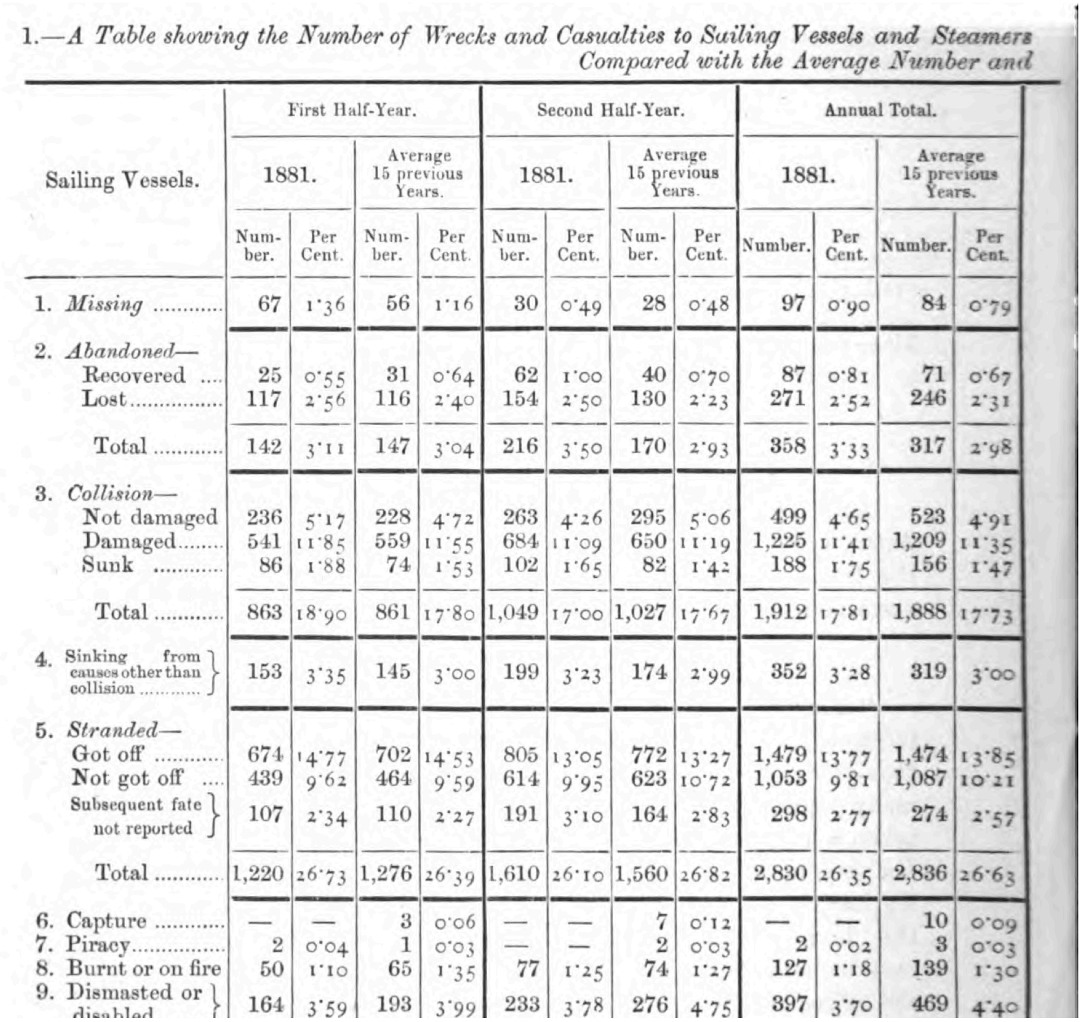
[51] Steinlight, "Dickens's 'Supernumeraries' and the Biopolitical Imagination of Victorian Fiction," 230.

Because statistical rationality focused on aggregation and large-scale patterns, nineteenth-century writers worried that the discipline confounded the important questions of individual accountability, agency, and intention. Writing on Thomas Carlyle's admonishment of statistically motivated reform, Elaine Hadley writes, "Liberals have always troubled over the relation between the 'machinery' that sought to change 'society' or 'the population' or some other aggregative entity and the soul of the individual whose isolated journey to freedom, judgment, and accountability seemed a different story."[53] *Treasure Island*, I have been suggesting, refuses to isolate

[52] Starting in 1872, the *Journal of the Statistical Society* of London began to publish the yearly statistics of maritime casualties that were gathered by the trade periodical *Lloyd's Lists*. Previously, this data was published by *Lloyd's*, but when that publication was discontinued, the Statistical Society elected to publish the data, citing "considerable value, both actual and potential." Editors, "Lloyd's Statistics of Marine Losses in 1872," *Journal of the Statistical Society* 37 (1874): 519–31, 519. For more information about the Statistical Society and how it fit into the growth of statistics during the nineteenth century, see Hacking, "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers"; and Poovey, "Figures."

[53] Hadley, "Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody," 74.



1.—*A Table showing the Number of Wrecks and Casualties to Sailing Vessels and Steamers*
Compared with the Average Number and

Sailing Vessels.	First Half-Year.				Second Half-Year.				Annual Total.			
	1881.		Average 15 previous Years.		1881.		Average 15 previous Years.		1881.		Average 15 previous Years.	
	Number.	Per Cent.	Number.	Per Cent.	Number.	Per Cent.	Number.	Per Cent.	Number.	Per Cent.	Number.	Per Cent.
1. *Missing*	67	1·36	56	1·16	30	0·49	28	0·48	97	0·90	84	0·79
2. *Abandoned*—												
Recovered	25	0·55	31	0·64	62	1·00	40	0·70	87	0·81	71	0·67
Lost	117	2·56	116	2·40	154	2·50	130	2·23	271	2·52	246	2·31
Total	142	3·11	147	3·04	216	3·50	170	2·93	358	3·33	317	2·98
3. *Collision*—												
Not damaged	236	5·17	228	4·72	263	4·26	295	5·06	499	4·65	523	4·91
Damaged	541	11·85	559	11·55	684	11·09	650	11·19	1,225	11·41	1,209	11·35
Sunk	86	1·88	74	1·53	102	1·65	82	1·42	188	1·75	156	1·47
Total	863	18·90	861	17·80	1,049	17·00	1,027	17·67	1,912	17·81	1,888	17·73
4. Sinking from causes other than collision	153	3·35	145	3·00	199	3·23	174	2·99	352	3·28	319	3·00
5. *Stranded*—												
Got off	674	14·77	702	14·53	805	13·05	772	13·27	1,479	13·77	1,474	13·85
Not got off	439	9·62	464	9·59	614	9·95	623	10·72	1,053	9·81	1,087	10·21
Subsequent fate not reported	107	2·34	110	2·27	191	3·10	164	2·83	298	2·77	274	2·57
Total	1,220	26·73	1,276	26·39	1,610	26·10	1,560	26·82	2,830	26·35	2,836	26·63
6. Capture	—	—	3	0·06	—	—	7	0·12	—	—	10	0·09
7. Piracy	2	0·04	1	0·03	—	—	2	0·03	2	0·02	3	0·03
8. Burnt or on fire	50	1·10	65	1·35	77	1·25	74	1·27	127	1·18	139	1·30
9. Dismasted or disabled	164	3·59	193	3·99	233	3·78	276	4·75	397	3·70	469	4·40

Figure 9: A table showing the number of wrecks and casualties to sailing vessels and steamers in 1881, from the *Lloyd's Lists*.

these stories. On the one hand, the novel documents Jim Hawkins's growth into discernment, or a more acute and hawk-like judgment. By the end of his journey, Jim is more clearly the hero of an adventure novel. Yet, on the other hand, the novel makes it clear that in order to act *as* a hero, Jim must first abandon the self-interested individualism modeled by Long John Silver. This requires acknowledging that individual judgment is most acute and rational when it is in service of a broader community of which he is a part.

Jim's spontaneous acts and haphazard reactions demonstrate an increasing attention in the novel toward the alignment of individual actions and the collective good. In the next section, I will examine how this mediation of the particular and the general carries over into the novel's critique of imperialism, which attempted to justify expansion by rationalizing empire as if it operated devoid of subjects. I want to conclude this section by suggesting that one effect of the circulation of statistical discourse and numbers in *Treasure Island* is that it shifts the locus of the novel from the particular "I" (Jim) to a general "we" (the sailors, the nation). To return to my first example, it is the shift that Jim alludes to when he calculates that "five men only of those who had sailed returned with her." In other words, *Treasure Island* is less a novel about Jim than about social participation and the construction, transport, and legibility of that community as an object of knowledge. Venn, in his discussion of statistical series, is quick to dissuade readers from assuming that any one series is fixed or determined in advance: "Keep on watching it long enough, and it will be found almost invariably to fluctuate."[54] In *Treasure Island*, the unpredictability of this collective structure is both a cause for suspense and frustration and one of the motivating factors for the novel's critique of imperial forms.

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[54] Venn, *The Logic of Chance*, 14.

Absent-minded Imperialism and Distributed Experience

In the previous sections, I have attempted to elaborate several models that illustrate the ways in which parts relate to other parts, as well as to wholes. By the 1880s, this relationship was no longer self-evident, in part because the rise of social statistics had left a gap between the individual and society. As I have been arguing, Stevenson was not necessarily nostalgic for an earlier, organic relationship, but rather he was actively pursuing other models of collective affiliation to address this gap. The type was one such model that offered a reflexive and provisional account of the relation between an individual and the collective group of which he was a part. In this final section, I turn to another context that makes the gap between part and whole evident: late-nineteenth-century imperialism. Central to the ideology of this history was the sense that imperial expansion occurred as if there were no subjects of this expansion. By connecting this imperial attitude to the foundational epistemologies of nineteenth-century statistics, Stevenson attempts to illustrate how an account of distributed, or collective, responsibility—where accountability is held in common because it is no longer limited to an expression of individual guilt—might offer a critical and salutary vision of group affiliation.

In a representative statement on imperial history, the English history J. R. Seeley argues that the patterns of extension that were retrospectively attributed to the imperial state were supposed to take place independently of conscious will or individual action. Seeley writes, "There is something very characteristic in the indifference which we show towards this mighty phenomenon of the diffusion of our race and the expansion of our state. We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind."[55] According to Edward Said, this absent-mindedness was an enabling fantasy of British imperialism.[56] The erasure of the individual subject justified imperial expansion by suggesting that it was merely the product of universal laws rather than of will, intention, or agency. It also, conveniently, left no one responsible for these acts.

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[55] John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 8.

[56] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 9.

In her study of twentieth-century totalitarianisms, Hannah Arendt turns to the late-nineteenth-century imperial romance in order to describe models of human agency and responsibility that operate independently from intention, or the "conscious founding of colonies."[57] Arendt describes the British style of colonial governance as one that attempted to square a circle, or to align the economic realities of imperial expansion with liberal philosophies of independence and self-governance. One technology of this self-justification of expansion was the "legend" of the imperial romance. "Man, who has not been granted the gift of undoing," writes Arendt, "who is always burdened with a responsibility that appears to be the consequence of an unending chain of events rather than conscious acts, demands an explanation."[58] According to Arendt, the explanation that imperialist hegemony offers is given by the figure of the "imperialist character."[59] This imperialist character was typical in the sense that it modeled a worldview that was able to rationalize the co-existence of imperial domination and liberal self-determination. In Arendt's formulation, the idea of imperialism as it was modeled in the British imagination was chiasmatic, offering an inversion of historical reality. Instead of a planned and systematic expansion, imperialism was supposed to occur absentmindedly, as if "the consequence of an unending chain of events." And instead of the imperialist as a participant in the reproduction of British hegemony, the imperialist character was supposed to be an autonomous and intentional subject.

While we have long recognized the ways in which imperial romances either transmit or critique hegemonic forms—with what counts as critique often modeled as a singularity that opposes or resists normative imposition—we have fewer models for discussing how literary texts can be responsible for and responsive to their context without this looking like a project of blame. I have been suggesting that *Treasure Island* is valuable for how it allows us to think part and whole, individual and structure, in productive tension with one another rather than wholly in terms of conflict or separation. Statistics and probability provide us with one kind of language for thinking the co-operation and incommensurability of the individual and the structure. As I conclude, I would like to consider how *Treasure Island*'s reflexivity enables an approach to the de-individualizing force of imperialism without thereby valorizing or re-locating the individual as the subject of history.

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[57] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest, 1973), 209.

[58] Ibid., 208.

[59] Ibid., 209.

Throughout the novel, Jim moves through the world as if responding to events spontaneously or without reason. In his influential theory of the adventure novel, Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that this form of diminished agency is the sign under which the protagonist's heroism manifests. It is through this diminished agency that the adventure novel represents a materialist world, governed by chance and devoid of transcendental meaning.[60] For example, shortly after arriving at the island, Jim makes the reckless decision to journey to shore with the pirates:

> At last, however, the party was made up. Six fellows were to stay on board, and the remaining thirteen, including Silver, began to embark.
>
> Then it was that there came into my head the first of the mad notions that contributed so much to save our lives. If six men were left by Silver, it was plain our party could not take and fight the ship; and since only six were left, it was equally plain that the cabin party had no present need of my assistance. It occurred to me at once to go ashore. (72)

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[60] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 86–110.

As with other examples of counting in the novel, these numbers facilitate a crucial movement toward generalization. On the one hand, they enable the representation of a known quantity of discrete particulars as an aggregate or serial form. Despite the fact that we might be able to name some of the six or the thirteen, it seems beside the point to individualize in this way. What matters is the pattern of repetition that transforms the individual variations into a single unit, a movement whereby aggregation produces generality and formal unity, as in the case of the "six fellows" who become "six men" and finally just "six." Counting and numbers lubricate this transformation. On the other hand, it is also this counting which permits a vital exclusion. Jim, like Silver, resists being counted or made into a generalization. Jim, more than any other character, is at the mercy of chance—"Then it was that there came into my head ... It occurred to me at once." As with Bakhtin's discussion of the phrase "suddenly," phrases like these reflect the submission of the individual to the shifting winds of chance.[61] Yet, in certain respects, it is the fact of Jim's exclusion that permits the formal coherence of the others into a known quantity. What's more, Jim's haphazard and spontaneous actions, as well as his cleverness and ingenuity, facilitate the survival of this group.

But the rhetoric with which Jim articulates his actions, despite the impersonal obligations of chance that so often motivate his decisions, invokes a similar individualizing, egotistical power that we saw with Long John Silver. After Jim successfully retakes the *Hispaniola* and navigates it to rescue his shipmates, he declares rather fatuously to Silver, "here you are, in a bad way, ship lost, treasure lost, men lost; your whole business gone to wreck, and if you want to know who did it—it was I! ... And as for the schooner, it was I who cut her cable, and it was I that killed the men you had aboard of her, and it was I who brought her" (153–4). Despite Jim's repeated pronouncements that "it was I," the reality of his actions is much less heroic. O'Brien was dead when Jim first arrived at the ship, most likely killed by Israel Hands in a drunken brawl. Similarly, Jim's captaining of the *Hispaniola* would have been an impossible solo feat, and he conveniently leaves out how necessary Israel Hands was to this achievement. What's more, Jim acknowledges that Hands's death was an accident and not a consequence of his intention: "In the … surprise of the moment—I scarce can say it was by my own volition, and I am sure it was without a conscious aim—both my pistols went off" (142).

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[61] Ibid., 92.

Oscillating between hapless simpleton and dynamic hero, Jim represents the problems of agency that have been at the center of this chapter. The new philosophies of probability and statistics, as well as the contemporary accounts of imperial expansion, disturbed the Victorians in part because they were not capable of answering how social and historical conditions both determined subjects in the aggregate yet left them independent at the scale of the individual. What distinguishes Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is that it disrupts both the triumphalism of the adventure novel, which granted the individual an over-determined and extraordinary measure of agency, as well as the more impersonal account offered by Bakhtin, which while celebratory of the individual nonetheless evokes impersonal chance as the primary source of agency within the adventure novel.

It's important to acknowledge that there are two accounts of Jim's achievements: the heroic account he offers to the pirates and the more critical account offered by Jim in the present moment of narration, wherein Jim acknowledges his past-self's limitations. The distance between these two accounts might allow for a touch of irony to slip into a novel that is otherwise faithful and consistent in its portrayal of the protagonists. To argue that the novel might not fully endorse its portrayal of Jim's heroic individualism seems to exaggerate the effect of this distance. Yet, the novel's decision to hold impersonal obligation and egoism together suggests that the novel promotes a form of reflexivity toward this relation, demanding a dialectical awareness of the traffic between part and whole rather than a binary view that would promote either individual experience or system to dominance. Specifically, the novel offers for readers a model for reckoning with the contingency of the individual when measured against the larger workings of a collective structure. The novel encourages an awareness of this dialogism by linking Jim's account of his own achievement not only to an alternative interpretation of that account but to other narratives as well—like, for example, those sailors laboring against the pirates in Jim's absence, as captured in Dr. Livesey's narration.

Treasure Island offers a challenge to the absentminded account of imperial expansion not by returning individual experience to the center of imperial history but by representing the multiple, even contradictory perspectives that are a part of any collective experience. The effort to represent how individual experience intersects with others may allow readers to witness collective histories, which are often elusive in part because they exceed any one perspective. In his essay "A Gossip on Romance," Stevenson argues that this capacity to include readers in the world of the novel—in effect, to encourage an absorptive reading practice—is an important feature of romantic representation. Originally published in *Longman's Magazine* in 1882 and later collected alongside "A Humble Remonstrance," Stevenson defends literary romance, which he terms "the poetry of circumstance," against the dominant style of "pedestrian realism."[62] What distinguishes romance, according to Stevenson, is that it promotes reflexivity, whereby readers project themselves into the narrative situation, "forget the characters," and "push the hero aside."[63] We previously saw how this tendency to elide character is an important effect of Stevenson's anti-heroic and anti-individualizing adventure novel. To identify with the narrative, to feel pulled into the world, means that the *particular* subject is incidental to the novel. If romance's commitment to the aesthetics of circumstance fosters a sense of expendability, then

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[62] Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Gossip on Romance," in *Memories and Portraits*, 13th ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1906), 250, 264.

[63] Ibid., 268.

Treasure Island extends this protocol to critique the exaggerated, even domineering, agency of the individual subject, best represented by a figure like Long John Silver (or, even, Jim at his most egotistical).

Yet, insofar as this structure of romantic affect is de-individualizing, it also promises to connect particular experience to social belonging. The absorptive potential of romance promises that even readers who have not had the particular experiences described within the romantic adventure novel can nonetheless participate in its world. In "A Humble Remonstrance," Stevenson suggests that the appeal of the adventure novel is to be found in its appeal to the desire for a social belonging that reaches across individual experience. Responding to James's critique that the novel should appeal to what is probable rather than what is possible, Stevenson writes, "Now, while it is true that neither Mr. [Henry] James nor the author of the work in question has ever, in the fleshly sense, gone questing after gold, it is probable that both have ardently desired and fondly imagined the details of such a life in youthful daydreams; and the author, counting upon that … finds a readily accessible and beaten road to the sympathies of the reader."[64] The critical appeal of the romantic adventure novel is in its affirmation of the general significance of these feelings and sympathies. Even when the novel ultimately concludes by valorizing a particular form of subjectivity—masculine, bourgeois, heroic, and individualized—it nonetheless makes a claim for a certain generality or multiplicity of experience within that model. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, insofar as it uses the form of the typical character to mediate multiple logics of part and whole, works to challenge an imperial ideology that promotes an illusory heroism. At the same time, it separates that heroism from the structure of imperial reproduction. Character is an important site at which this negotiation takes place, and, as I have argued, it is the specific figuration of literary character in the novel that makes these ideologies available for analysis and critique.

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[64] Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," 287.

CHAPTER 4

A Tissue of Personalities: Vernon Lee, Vulnerability, and Reference

> For, in his constant reference to a spiritual meaning, Ruskin has not only wasted and sterilised our moral impulses, but has reduced art to mere foulness; in his constant sanctifying of beauty he makes it appear impure.
>
> —VERNON LEE, "On Ruskinism" (1881)

I return in this chapter to a concern that animated the first chapter but which takes on new life and legibility at the end of the century: identity. British Aestheticism presents a curious case for the problems of identification or legibility, least of all because of Oscar Wilde's famous declaration in favor of "lying." For aesthetes like Wilde, art should forestall or suspend any movement toward the world beyond its pages or beneath its surface: that is, suspend a movement toward social knowledge and legibility. Particularly in satirical texts and artworks, this suspension has the potential to obviate any epistemological movement toward insight, identification, or knowledge. The impulse to lie or suspend thus does not produce un-truths but, rather, delights in the silence that wraps around truth, thereby concealing and obscuring it.

For the writer Vernon Lee, however, literature is inescapably referential. Lee was intent upon separating the textual arts from those other art forms, like sculpture and music, on the basis of its obligation to refer. Particularly in the writing that she completed in the 1880s and early 1890s, Lee classifies literature as a "half-art," by which she means a form of production that is restrained by its own internal requirement to refer. Literature, then, is tainted (its "half"-ness) by reference, which prevents it from achieving formal autonomy. Unlike sculpture and music, literature cannot be evaluated for its formal achievements—and this is especially true for the novel, which Lee considered literature's representative genre. A statue, Lee argues, is a "meaningless thing"—it "can tell us nothing."[1] Music, likewise, is "the embodiment of the intangible, the expression of the inexplicable, the realisation of the impossible."[2] Literature, meanwhile, "appeals direct to the mind." "Instead of visual or audible forms," Lee declares, "you have feelings and fancies"; "instead of your eye and your ear, your imagination and feeling have been active"; and "instead of appreciating the work of art itself, you will appreciate merely your intellectual equivalent of it."[3] Signification, meaning, and intellection are all vital elements of literature and the qualities that distinguish linguistic form from other, "meaningless" art forms. Unlike those "intangible" and "inexplicable" art forms, literature is obligated to refer to concepts and ideas (signifiers) that bear a relation to real world objects (signifieds).

Yet, it is because of this approximate quality, or half-ness, that Lee suggests fiction is unique for mediating and intervening in contemporary society. In her essay "On Novels," which she published in 1885 in response to Henry James's famous article "The Art of Fiction," Lee argues that literature primes readers to recognize the material obligations that stand in the way of moral or social progress. Clarifying literature's instructive function, Lee declares, "While fiction … evades some of the laws of the merely aesthetical, it becomes liable to another set of necessities, the necessities of ethics. The novel has less value in art; but more importance in life."[4] Lee inevitably concludes that this knowledge of "the necessities of ethics" and "life" is not enough—literature must also offer some path forward toward a new or altered future. Thus,

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1. Vernon Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry æsthetical Questions* (London: W. Satchell, 1881), 60.
2. Ibid., 107.
3. Ibid., 64.
4. Vernon Lee, *Baldwin: Being Dialogues on Views and Aspirations* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1886), 207.

she concludes, "These nobler moments are not moments of revelation of the reality; they are moments of transfiguration of the possibility; and for this very reason they are much more useful and worthy."[5] Literature not only narrates the mental circuit between the real and the figurative, life and aesthetics, but it also teaches readers how to grasp what is not immediately apprehensible within that reality—namely, the "possibility" of some *different* reality.

In her debut novel *Miss Brown* (1884), Lee attempts to align literature's revelatory and transfiguring potential with the oblique silences of satire. *Miss Brown* is a scathing satire of the art-for-art's-sake movement, which she calls "clique-and-shop shoddy aestheticism" in order to mock its social and consumerist posturing.[6] Like John Ruskin before her, Lee is keen to connect the decline of art to economic concerns, like consumerism and industrialization. Yet, unlike Ruskin, Lee argues that Aestheticism and art are ill equipped to address or resolve this situation, especially for women. *Miss Brown* thus opens with a scene of retreat, which mocks Aestheticism's flight from society into the autonomous sphere of art. Walter Hamlin, a decadent poet-painter, is vacationing in Italy and mourning the diminished flame of his creative output: diminished, in part, because of the "clique-and-shop shoddy aestheticism" he associates with the London scene. At the country estate of a friend, Hamlin meets a beautiful, young Scotch-Italian maid named Anne Brown. In her outward form, Anne suggests the "possibility of thought and emotion enclosed like the bud in its case of leaves" (1:130). It is at this point that the novel turns from satire to social tragedy, as Hamlin entertains the fantasy of possessing Anne so as to possess her beauty. Intent upon cultivating her like a prized rose, Hamlin proposes to fund Anne's education, provide her with an income and apartment in London, and oversee her introduction into fashionable society. The only condition to his patronage: Anne must consider (but not, per se, accede to) his marriage proposal at a future date. His rationale for postponing this provision is that Anne's social ascent will bring with it increased autonomy and social authority, which means that she can make her decision not as his social and class inferior but as his equal.

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[5] Ibid., 215.

[6] Vernon Lee, *Miss Brown: A Novel* (Edinburgh; London: William Blackwood; Sons, 1884), 1:7. Hereafter cited parenthetically by volume and page number within the body of the text.

Anne quickly becomes the darling of London, a beautiful adornment for all those who wish to signal their cultural capital through their proximity to beauty. Yet, despite her newfound freedom, Anne bristles against the gender conventions of late-nineteenth-century Britain and the sexual license of London society. She also finds herself disgusted by Hamlin's drinking and smoking, and she also judges his poetry to be too immoral, raunchy, and decadent. When Hamlin's cousin Sacha Elaguine, a Russian femme fatale with a controversial past, enters the picture, Anne begins to fantasize that she will be freed from her indenture to Hamlin. Yet, Anne soon realizes that she cannot in good conscience default on her moral (and financial) debt to Hamlin. Anne's friends protest her choice to marry him, but she justifies her decision by saying that it is necessary for her to care for Hamlin's soul. The suffering that follows Anne's decision not only affirms her martyrdom but also reveals the broader un-freedoms of social life for women at the turn of the century. In the stark universe of Lee's novel, Anne is analogized to the figure of a fallen woman; to marry Hamlin is to acquiesce to a "mere legalized form of prostitution" and to relinquish the "liberty of being herself" (3:280, 3:276).

Miss Brown, then, addresses the social and political question of what it means to be an autonomous individual, especially as it relates to the historical conditions of women's limited agency at the end of the nineteenth century. Anne's inability to be "herself" is linked not only to the social conventions that inhibit her flourishing but also to the loss of her *self* as the privileged subject of a "will to power." Through the tragedy of the novel's marriage plot, Lee engages with the problem of women's determination and insecurity as a result of social and economic norms. As a satire, the novel is a profoundly serious indictment of the role that British Aestheticism played in reproducing or extending these limitations.

Yet, if this "revelation" of the grim reality without the novel is central to the content of the novel, it also underwrites the novel's formal exploration of literary character. Since its publication, *Miss Brown* has invited debate and speculation about the "real" identities of its characters. Friends like Walter Pater, William Rossetti, and the Morrises all ended or suspended communications with Lee after the book's publication.[7] Lee's associates were not simply reacting to the fact that she wrote a satire; rather, the feelings of injury were the result of the broad opinion that Lee had written a roman à clef, or "novel with a key." As a sub-genre of satire, the roman à clef represents real or historical persons in allegorical scenarios. Unlike the Wildean lie, which suspends knowledge and disclosure, the roman à clef is deliberately and unavoidably referential. As a result, the roman à clef, like satire more broadly, represents the inadequacy of the appeal for aesthetic autonomy. Even when limitation and restriction are subjects of its satirical critique, the roman à clef ridicules the ideal of artistic freedom. The roman à clef thus draws attention to the representational limits of autonomy by extending awareness to the metonymic lines that join subjects within the novel to a social and historical context without.

The roman à clef has always held a tenuous relationship with the novel. Prior to the formalization of fictionality, novelists had to distinguish carefully their representations from living persons so as to avoid charges of libel. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, when realism had gained cultural ascendency and readers were more skilled at distinguishing literary from literal representation, the roman à clef had fallen into disrepute. As Sean Latham points out in his study of the modernist roman à clef, the genre "profoundly troubles any easy attempt at categorization since it must be defined, in part, by its duplicity … Neither quite fiction nor nonfiction, it tests the self-sufficiency of these categories."[8] Importantly, romans à clef like *Miss Brown* reveal how the realist novel has informed the habits and assumptions around how we read. Central to this history of reading is the assumption that novel characters are ideational—that is, they represent fictional persons even when they are plausible representations. Romans à clef, meanwhile, labor toward the revelation and identification of characters in their pages. What work does the roman à clef accomplish, then, in a cultural movement devoted to aesthetic autonomy? How does *Miss Brown*, in particular, work within and against this movement? My reading of *Miss Brown* suggests that Lee prompts readers to hold two contrary positions in mind: the first, the possibility that historical referents exist (or once existed) for the characters in her novel, and, the second, the equal possibility that the characters are merely ideational and the text, duplicitous.

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[7] For the specific reactions to the novel by her friends, see Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 104–7.

My reading of *Miss Brown* is perverse because it does not take for granted that Lee actually *wrote* a roman à clef. Despite incentivizing a transparent or referential reading, Lee herself avoids the terms roman à clef and satire when describing the novel. By and large, these generic designations were retroactively applied by generations of readers, from early reviewers to present-day literary critics. My reading stresses this generic ambiguity as a point of entry into the more complex epistemological and representational concerns for the novel. As Lee argues in "On Novels," *all* literature is burdened by reference, so the roman à clef exemplifies the conditions and constraints of all writing.

In *Miss Brown* and other fictions, Lee engages with the dynamics of obligation and reference in two ways. First, Lee uses this referential capacity to leverage a social critique of women's disempowerment at the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to representing this disempowerment in the content of her novel, Lee also uses the formal capacities of reference to highlight the stakes of women's vulnerability. In other words, Lee creates an hermeneutic relation between the vulnerability experienced by women and literature's formal vulnerability to disclosure and revelation. Literature and women are thus both limited by the pressure to be visible and identifiable—that is, to have meaning tied to external social categories. For Lee, this vulnerability is as much a formal or epistemological concern as it is a social and economic one.

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[8] Sean Latham, *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

Second, by defining literature as vulnerable to exposure, Lee evinces skepticism toward the growing belief that art was infinitely productive. During this time, writers like Henry James were beginning to justify literature's artistic value by defending the integrity, or organic wholeness, of its form. Unburdened by authorial intention or moral response, literature, according to James, evokes the generative possibility of interpretive freedom and the infinite renewability of aesthetic resources. Lee, meanwhile, suggests that literature's referentiality, its obligation to be tied to the subject of its reference, offers a model for considering the broader consequences of being subject to exposure.

In order to incorporate Vernon Lee into a scholarly conversation she is normally excluded from—the history of the novel—my argument proceeds in three parts. First, I examine the dynamic of revelation that envelops *Miss Brown*'s titular character, Anne Brown. By focusing on the narrative's ambition to scrutinize her interiority, I propose that Anne's eventual revelation is less the desirable outcome of the novel than a condition of her socialization. Knowing Anne means subjecting her to social categories, and through this dynamic of revelation, Lee reveals how knowledge has the potential to mobilize power, force, and determination. I then show how Lee's ambivalent attitude toward revelation connects to a mode of critique that is central to the function of the roman à clef as a genre of renewed interest to writers at the end of the nineteenth century. By occupying the roman à clef genre, *Miss Brown* explores the social and political effects of simultaneously revealing and obscuring the referents, or identities, behind its characters. I finally connect the concept of vulnerability to the ideology of aesthetic autonomy, especially as it was heralded by Henry James in his public essays and private correspondences. Instead of treating literature as endlessly productive, I argue that Lee provides a model for treating literature's limits without, therefore, abandoning its critical force.

A Strange and Silent Statue: Considering Anne Brown

Vernon Lee's satirical novel *Miss Brown* is a tragedy that ends in marriage. Anne Brown's story is tragic not just because she consents, in the end, to marry a drunken womanizer. Rather, the tragedy of her fate is underscored by a deeper pain: the loss of herself as a figure of privacy. Consider the novel's reflection on what is implied when Anne surrenders the "liberty of being herself":

> Anne was one of those natures which … do not believe much in happiness; to whom … happiness is a mere name, a negative thing—but to whom unhappiness is a positive reality … The happiness, therefore, which she was losing—the independence, the activity, the serenity, the possibility of a life of noble companionship with Richard Brown—all this was only a distant and unsubstantial thing; she had never experienced it, and it could not well be realised. But she knew by experience, familiar with its every detail, the unhappiness which lay in the future as Hamlin's wife, for this future would be but a return to the past. (3:276–7)

Marriage is the culmination of Anne's gradual absorption over the course of the novel into social meaning, here characterized as the "positive reality" of unhappiness. All of the qualities that Anne associates with her foreclosed future—"independence," "activity," "serenity," "a life of noble companionship"—are unrepresentable because "distant and unsubstantial" and never able to be "experienced" nor "realised" in the present. Even Anne's relationship with Richard Brown, her socialist reformer cousin, which is the closest that this description of happiness comes to having a positive content, is nothing more than a conditional, having been abstracted and removed to some future "possibility." Of her unhappiness, however, Anne is quite certain. "Familiar with its every detail," she is able to trace its outline, to give it form and substance, and to make sense of it as a positive, empirical reality. Within the context of marriage, Anne seems less enclosed by her relationship with Hamlin as *identified* by it. In this section, I will elaborate more on her vulnerability, as it relates to the experience of being at risk or subject to exposure. In later sections, I will connect exposure and identification to the roman à clef's formal logic of characterization. For now, however, I want to focus on what is at stake in social existence for Anne.

For much of the novel, Anne is a cypher, or an unknowable figure whose self is in conflict with the social requirement to signify or be identifiable. In the original definition of "cypher" given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the "arithmetical symbol or character" of zero (0) has "no value by itself." According to the English mathematician Olinthus Gregory, who is cited in the entry for "cypher," a cypher by itself is "quite insignificant." I do not mean to privilege interiority or to suggest that it is always in excess of social signification. *Miss Brown* is not a novel that locates a refuge from social limitation in the illimitable horizon of the human mind. Yet, Lee's characterization of Anne does suggest that social existence is often value *added* to something else so as to make it more visible, positive, or "significant." To be known in the novel means to make that circuit from "mere name" to "a positive reality."

When Anne is introduced in the novel, she bends narrative attention around her, as if she were a black hole bending the fabric of time and space but not admitting information to escape. She is less an absence within the narrative than a weighty and consequential thing to which we do not have access. We can see this dynamic at play when she is first discovered by Hamlin. While vacationing at his friend's estate in Florence, Hamlin goes off in search of breakfast among the servants' quarters, where he eventually stumbles upon the nursery:

> In the middle of the room was a large deal table, covered with singed flannel, on the corner of which stood a brasier with some flat-irons, and a heap of crumpled pink pinafores; and behind this table, her tall and powerful figure, in a close-fitting white vest and white skirt, standing out against the dark-blue painted wall and the green shimmer from outside, was a young woman bending over a frock which she was ironing, her bare brown arms going up and down along the board; her massive and yet girlish body bending with the movement, and singing that strange chant which Hamlin had heard from outside. (1:14–15)

I want to offer two remarks on the tableau that Hamlin discovers. First, its location. Tucked at the end of a hallway, past an empty kitchen, vacant offices, and silent rooms, the room is a space beyond the "effusive aestheticism" of Mrs. Perry (1:12). Hamlin's resentment toward Mrs. Perry, the wife of his friend and host in Italy, reflects the broader context of his retreat from the "professional poetry" of London, with its "clique-and-shop shoddy aestheticism" (1:7). Hamlin is fleeing Aestheticism's ossification into something consumable, fashionable, and, above all, social. The room, with Anne in it, is separate from that public world. It is functionally a part of the house that has been set aside for the anti-social work of domestic labor that nonetheless makes the social operations of the house possible. In other words, the room has not been arranged *for* anybody—or, at least, it has not been arranged with the aesthetic sensibilities and delicacies of the house's guests in mind.

Even if the room is not aesthetic in any socially recognizable way, it is nonetheless beautiful. This second observation will seem to be in conflict with my first claim. Yet, observe how color washes the room, as if it were somehow less a domestic space than a flattened painting or a shimmering stained glass window. Even Anne's laboring body—"tall and powerful," "massive and yet girlish"—moves as if in rhythm with itself, "bending with the movement" of her song. This rendering has the effect of refracting the room's original purpose as a space of work and labor. Even when we are asked by the narrative to look at Anne in this scene, we are not actually seeing her as she is. Instead, we are witnessing Hamlin's desire for a beautiful experience, which might restore the "emotional colour" and "imaginative luminousness" that he had lost while in London (1:4). Behind this swirling mass of fluorescent colors, though, Anne labors in silence.

For Lee, the silent or withdrawn self is a paradoxical figure. On the one hand, this subject suggests unity, without internal division or conflict. The narrative frequently draws on the motif of unity to describe Anne: she is a "strange statue" (1:24); she is "too completely homogeneous—too completely without the innumerable strata, and abysses, and peaks, and winding ways of modern women's characters" (2:18); "her character was so completely of a piece" (2:57); she is "not a woman," but a "mere splendid statue," "an intellect and a will" with "no soul" (2:238–9). Lee's language to describe Anne implies integrity, solidity, wholeness, and unity. But, most of all, it suggests the concurrence of parts, of interior and exterior, of surface and depth. Anne's unity suggests that her public face will always betray her and reveal her private thoughts, which is why Anne has a difficult time understanding characters like Hamlin and Madame Elaguine, who possess the ability to unite "reality and unreality," "genuine and affected feeling" (2:57). For Anne, affectation or insincerity would only be possible if she were a "heterogenous" woman.

On the other, the silent or withdrawn self suggests a kind of dimensionality or difference, as if she contains a hidden depth that is capable of being plumbed or discovered. Defending Anne against the charge that she is "a mere sexless creature," Hamlin claims,

> She has not one fibre of what you could call womanhood in her—not one shred of the beast which lies at the bottom of all our natures has entered into hers; she is a woman of mere stone and ice and snow for men like you. But just for that reason has she got a capacity for passion—for a

> passion which you can never understand—such as no other woman ever had. (2:239)

Hamlin's description of Anne gestures to an unknowable subject, a being of radical difference and uncertainty who disrupts the standards that we use to *know* what it means to be a particular kind of person, such as that "fibre" that defines "womanhood" or the "shred of the beast" that defines human nature. At the same time, Hamlin's description reminds us that the unknowable need not conflict with the transparently knowable. In fact, the coexistence of the two in the figure of Anne suggests a kind of incentive to interpret her character, to affirm what is already known. For Lee, it is this enticement to identify the unknown, to get at that "capacity" which we cannot understand, that structures Anne's vulnerability within the world of the novel and women's vulnerability more broadly.

For the first half of the first volume, before the narration inexplicably switches to focalize on her, Anne remains a silent, laboring figure. Implicit in her silence is a refusal of access, an engaged withdrawal from Hamlin's presence and from the burden of interpretation and meaning. When Hamlin sits down to breakfast with the Perry children, he notes how Anne "seemed determined, in her sullen indifferent way, to make [him] understand that he might intrude his person at that breakfast-table, but that he had no chance of intruding his personality upon her notice" (1:23). The evasiveness with which Anne apportions "her notice" is expressive ("determined," "sullen") while also remaining indiscernible. In this sense, her external appearance is formal: it affords a response but does not identify that response with any content. This moment is troubling because, while her silence distances her from any relation with Hamlin, it simultaneously makes her more vulnerable to his appropriation. As the narrator remarks, "her very indifference afforded Hamlin an opportunity, and, as it were, a right, to examine her appearance: one may surely look at a person who obstinately refuses to notice one" (1:23).

Yet, what this scene dramatizes is the distinction between *looking* at Anne and *knowing* her, a distinction that depends upon Anne's obstinate refusal to let Hamlin measure the depths of her person. That is why the novel's chosen metaphor to describe Anne in this moment (and others) is statuary—a metaphor that evokes the novel's implied revision of the Pygmalion myth. The "perfect negation of youth," she sits "motionless" like "some sort of strange statue ... a beautiful and sombre idol of the heathen" (1:24). Hamlin's tendency to compare her to racial and ethnic types—"this strange type, neither Latin nor Greek, but with something of Jewish and something of Ethiopian subdued into a statuesque but most un-Hellenic beauty" (1:25)—further extends this monumentalizing, "subdu[ing]" her so as to make her more available as an object of inquiry. Yet, even in this objectification, we can see the limits of Hamlin's aesthetic appropriation, as some indefinable aspect of her person (the "strange" that gets repeated several times in this scene) exerts a disruptive pressure on the categories that get applied to her.

The force of this pressure becomes more apparent when we consider Vernon Lee's art-critical writing on statuary. Shortly before leaving for the trip to London that would inspire *Miss Brown*, Lee released a collection of essays on the nature of aesthetic experience and the beauty of the Italian landscape, entitled *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (1881). Inspired by Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* (1873) and based on Lee's first-hand experiences among Italy's museums and archives, the essay collection brings the readers into the Vatican Museum in Rome, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, and small villas across the countryside.[9] The most well known essay from the collection, "The Child in the Vatican," demonstrates Lee's early affinity with Pater, especially his imaginary portrait "The Child in the House" (1878). Yet, it is in the essay "Orpheus and Eurydice" that Lee establishes the vital distinction between

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9. For more on how Lee playfully subverts the line between material presence and the imagination in her writing on statues in *Belcaro*, see Jonah Siegel, "The Material of Form: Vernon Lee at the Vatican and Out of It," *Victorian Studies* 55, no. 2 (2013): 189–201.

the stalwart and static energy of the formal arts, like sculpture, and the historical dynamism of narrative.

The essay centers on an embarrassing moment of critical misappraisal. Lee, who had traveled to the Villa Albani to study the legacy of Johann Winckelmann, incorrectly assumes that a bas-relief she is studying represents a scene of Orpheus and Eurydice from Virgil's *Georgics.* She is shocked to learn that Wincklemann had previously identified the subjects of the bas-relief as Amphion and Zethus—twin brothers rather than tragic lovers. Her initial response is to flee the scene in embarrassment, but she later returns to meet a fellow scholar who is undisturbed by the question of the statue's subject. "This fellow," Lee writes, "has not found the bas-relief a blank; it has spoken for him, the clear, unmistakeable language of lines and curves … and it has told him the fact, the fact depending on no previous knowledge, irrefutable and eternal, that it is beautiful."[10] The lesson that Lee draws from her mistake is that a sculpture is a "meaningless thing, to which we have willfully attached a meaning which is not part or parcel of it."[11] Lee extrapolates this lesson to all of those formal arts—music, dance, painting—that exist independently of verbal articulation. In particular, it is the *indifference*, or "meaningless[ness]", of sculpture to moral, historical, or generic capture that distinguishes it from literature: "The difference, then, between the poem and the bas-relief is that … the story of Orpheus is separate from the organic existence of the bas-relief, it is arbitrarily connected with it, and they need not co-exist."[12] Like the sculpture, Anne is separate from the story that Hamlin tells of her origins, especially with its racial and orientalist fantasies. This comparison between Anne and the bas-relief has the effect of highlighting both her freedom in the formal sense of having an "organic existence" that is "connected" but not coterminous with her relation to others, as well as her freedom in the personal sense, as an effect of her self-determination and personality.

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[10] Lee, *Belcaro*, 61.

[11] Ibid., 60.

[12] Ibid., 60.

Unlike Madame Elaguine, who emerges midway through the novel as the ungovernable alternative to Anne, a vector of appetite and desire that threatens to pull Hamlin and the reader's attention into the muck of the social depths, Anne is self-limiting and obscure, like a statue. In a narratological sense, she is non-productive, refuting the formal, aesthetic, and erotic logics that demand she be recognizable, visible, and available. Before the narrative shifts to give us privileged access to her interiority and to turn her into the eponymous heroine of the novel, Anne virtually disappears from the narrative, even when she is present. As a result, she is never quite a character; she does not occupy the center of narrative attention, influence the plot, or seek space within the narrative structure. When considering a figure like Anne, we must ask ourselves: can an emotionally reticent and anonymous subject ever be a character in a novel? Here I am drawing on Alex Woloch's influential study of character, and in particular his definition of character-space as an "encounter" between "an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole."[13] This encounter is often competitive, argues Woloch, as minor characters jostle among one another and with protagonists for readerly interest and attention. In the case of Anne, this encounter is one of engaged withdrawal, as an individual personality seeks not "space" but freedom from any discrete position within the novel that might garner her attention. If, as Woloch argues, the very form of character invokes presence, then can we say that Anne is a character? This question is especially important when framed by the Victorian interest in *having* character, where character is an ethos or mode of intentional self-fashioning.[14] On the one hand, there is a clear sense that Anne's reticence is a deliberate strategy of self-cultivation and detachment, a tactical reservation that only really becomes chilly when she encounters Hamlin's imposing personality and gaze. On the other, her indifference and the inertia it creates have the potential to derail the narrative's momentum by opposing any action that might contribute to plot.

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[13] Alex Woloch, *The One Vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 14.

[14] See Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

At stake in this question of Anne-as-character are the particular implications of her unknowability vis-à-vis interpretation. When Hamlin sits down to paint Anne's portrait, this is the question that is on his mind. He fantasizes that there is some germ, some "mystery … hidden in that singular nature," that might bear an affinity with the "Anne Brown of his fancy" and justify his interest (1:129–30). What seems to concern Hamlin is both the reliability of her exterior form and of his own strategies for uncovering the latent content of her character, which remains variously undisclosed and unrealized:

> There was, he felt, something strange there, something which corresponded with the magnificent and mysterious outside,—a possibility of thought and emotion enclosed like the bud in its case of young leaves—a potential passion, good or bad, of some sort. At Anne Brown's *actual character* it was difficult to get; or rather, perhaps, there was as yet but little actual character to get at. (1:130, emphasis added)

The most striking aspect of this passage is that it elides two dynamics of interpretive agency that are not, strictly speaking, interchangeable. The first relates to textual surfaces and depths. The concern with a "something strange *there*" suggests a spatial relation of inside and outside. "To get" at her character, Hamlin need only break the surface of her "mysterious outside"—or, better yet, chip away at it like an artist carving a statue out from a slab of marble. Uncovering Anne's "actual character" means recognizing some latent content or undisclosed referent that remains either repressed, hidden, or absent. To know Anne, in this case, assumes that she possesses a round character or a depth beneath the surface of her "mysterious outside" that might be penetrated with sustained attention and close analysis.

The second hermeneutic strategy relates to the temporal metaphor of a "bud in its case of young leaves." Lee's horticultural metaphor for the "possibility of thought and emotion" figures the present as revelatory of an "as yet," unrealized future. This metaphor is anticipatory but also tautological, insofar as it demands Anne's submission to development, education, and cultivation in the present so that she might earn that anticipated future possibility. To be a character within the novel, in this sense, presupposes one day "having" character. As readers, we feel justified attending to the narrative of Anne Brown's maturation because it promises a return on our investment in the form of her realizing her own worth, just as a flower bud realizes the possibility of beauty in the moment of its blooming. The texture of this image's eroticism is an effect of the interleaving of a future culmination with the gradual unfolding, petal by petal, of that "actual character," as in the turning of the pages of a novel or the unbuttoning of a shirt.

Another metaphor that Lee uses to describe this future potential lodged anachronistically within the present moment is a financial one. Shortly prior to the scene where Hamlin paints Anne, Lee describes his decision to offer her patronage as a kind of speculative investment: "he [Hamlin] had determined on educating, wooing, and marrying a woman like what Anne Brown seemed to be, as a man might determine to buy a house in a particular fishing or hunting district" (1:122–23). As Mary Poovey has shown, disclosure and secrecy were important motifs in financial journalism and fictional writings on finance during the nineteenth century.[15] The reference to fixed assets, like real estate, is therefore an apt one for the novel, even as it is jarring moment of possessive misogyny. Yet, it is also a confusing metaphor because property and realty can easily be realized in the most basic sense of being liquidated back into capital.[16] This is quite different from Anne's value, which is only ever speculative, mediated by metaphor ("like") and image ("seemed"), and only ever able to be realized at some point in the future. Hamlin's investment is in Anne's *future* potential, which is waiting to be unlocked by the magic of credit. Yet, by comparing that investment to realty—and, especially, a form of property that is devoid the expectation of future financial returns—the novel dissolves all pretense of uncertainty. Like Hamlin's fantasy of "educating, wooing, and marrying a woman," Anne's future is "determined" in advance of her realizing that potential. In other words, like the bud that portends a flower, Anne-as-hunting-lodge justifies the investment in her future "character" by *being* a novelistic character, which entails occupying space and place within the narrative structure and its plot of education, cultivation, and maturation.

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[15] Mary Poovey, "Writing About Finance in Victorian England: Disclosure and Secrecy in the Culture of Investment," *Victorian Studies* 45, no. 1 (2002): 17–41.

In all three cases, Anne's status as a character is predicated on the assumption of knowability, which bizarrely distorts her many refusals into an invitation to look more closely, to observe, and to penetrate. If in the metaphor of a statue, knowledge is occluded or hidden, then in the metaphor of the flower bud, knowledge is realized in the future following a period of exposition, which transmutes the present moment of obscurity into the possibility of a future "actuality." Following Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, we could argue that "not being has certain modes of visibility," and character is less the attempt to formalize that being into a socially legible category than an attempt to register non-being as such.[17] In *Miss Brown*, it can be said that Lee is interested both in the limits of human knowledge and in the social implications for the forms and methods we use to detect the unknown, the obscure, and the unrealized.

When critics write on Vernon Lee, whether specifically on the subject of *Miss Brown* or on any text from her generically diverse oeuvre, they tend to identify such silences and refusals as evidence of a putative absence in her writing. Typically, but not always, that absence is connected to the repressed or obscured subject of Lee's sexuality. Thus, Lee's strategy of refusal is an appeal "to readers wishing to escape into a secretive, passionate world [of lesbian desire] that did not depend on normative behaviors"; a sign for "the cataclysmic consequences for subjectivity that ensue when one person seeks to know another"; a "method of appreciation that acknowledges the historical otherness of the cultural relic"; and a critique of "masculinist conventions of visual knowing."[18] Unknowability thus proliferates: as sign of the "fundamentally unknown" of the ancient past, of "a carnal knowledge" of same-sex desire that can never be consummated, or of the aesthetic itself.[19] In her examination of the role of women in *fin-de-siècle* Aestheticism, Talia Schaffer suggests that such refusals are emblematic of a broader "anxiety" among female aesthetes, which "led them to develop self-defensive literary techniques designed to baffle the intrusively curious reader."[20]

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[16] According to Anna Kornbluh, "to realize," as the Victorians understood it, "connotes the *conversion of land into money*, and more generally the conversion of assets … into the realer real of capital" (2). See Anna Kornbluh, *Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

[17] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 3.

Too often critics transform these refusals, silences, and unknowns into positive strategies, whether queer, feminist, or otherwise, for resisting hegemonic structures. I am skeptical of any reading that might value Anne Brown or transform her into a figure of outsized agency, which would suggest her ability to stand above the system that constrains her. At its best, the novel's conclusion, which brings with it Anne's disempowerment by marriage, would suggest that such strategies are not enough to destabilize the dominant social, economic, or gender norms that limit her authority. At its worst, the conclusion might suggest Anne's own complicity in this structure, as her silent and reticent character is made to align with Hamlin's rent-seeking behavior or dubious social behaviors. In *Miss Brown*, Lee registers her ambivalence toward such narratives of progress and individual uplift, especially insofar as they over-exaggerate the capacity of art or culture to enact this transformation. Against this argument, then, I want to suggest that Anne's eventual revelation as a character is evidence of her vulnerability, which I define as the damaging experience of being subject to social exposure.

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[18] Martha Vicinus, "'A Legion of Ghosts': Vernon Lee (1856–1935) and the Art of Nostalgia," *GLQ* 10, no. 4 (2004): 599–616, 603; Nicole Fluhr, "Empathy and Identity in Vernon Lee's *Hauntings*," *Victorian Studies* 48, no. 2 (2006): 287–94, 287; Kristin Mahoney, "Haunted Collections: Vernon Lee and Ethical Consumption," *Criticism* 48, no. 1 (2007): 39–67, 39; Hilary Fraser, "Women and the Ends of Art History: Vision and Corporeality in Nineteenth-Century Critical Discourse," *Victorian Studies* 42, no. 1 (1998): 77–100.

[19] Stefano Evangelista, "Vernon Lee in the Vatican: The Uneasy Alliance of Aestheticism and Archaeology," *Victorian Studies* 52, no. 1 (2009): 31–41, 32; Kathy Alexis Psomiades, "'Still Burning from This Strangling Embrace': Vernon Lee on Desire and Aesthetics," in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 21–41, 36; Angela Leighton, "Ghosts, Aestheticism, and Vernon Lee," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28, no. 1 (2000): 1–14, 10.

[20] Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 5.

One way a third-person novel like *Miss Brown* risks exposing the individuals that populate its pages is through the discursive pressure of focalization. Focalization directs the reader's attention by identifying and constructing a hierarchy of importance within the novel's character-system. A character, in other words, is elevated into a protagonist or major character when a narrative focalizes her by moving more intimately alongside her or by probing her interiority. Throughout this section, I have often alluded to the moment in *Miss Brown* when the narration shifts to privilege Anne, her experiences, and the psychological burden of her upward mobility. In its formal structure, then, *Miss Brown* is clearly interested in what is at stake in Anne's visibility as a distinct character and as a possible agent of the plot. Yet, the shift in narrative attention that takes place in *Miss Brown* is subtle and imprecise. The transaction centers on the moment when Hamlin presents his contract to Anne, which suggests that her interpellation into a narrative of cultivation depends upon her knowability and visibility as a character. Nonetheless, the moment when the narrative shifts goes unannounced, much like Anne herself. Simply, one moment the novel is documenting Hamlin's "brooding and day-dreaming" (1:117) and the next, Anne's thoughts of "sadness" as she enters Hamlin's studio for, perhaps, the last time (1:144).

Even as it focalizes her subjectivity, cracking open her interiority to make it more available to the reader, the narration has an oddly exteriorizing effect. As

Anne climbs the stairs to Hamlin's studio, the novel notes her anxiety that "the cheerless, colourless, eventless, joyless routine of ordinary life was about to close over, to engulf, her little island of brightness" (1:144). The relentless dullness of her environment—the "cold and drizzling February morning" and the "grey sky and wet roofs" that she spies through a nearby window (1:144–5)—is allegorical but not, per se, metonymic, which has the effect of throwing the reader out of Anne's mind and into the world. When the novel registers Anne's sense that "she must look at everything well one last time," it casts that looking as withdrawn, sanitized, and unsentimental. Thus, she observes "the bits of brocade and the photographs on the wall, the plaster-casts on the shelf, the scarlet and purple anemones in the cracked china bowl, the brass synagogue lamp hanging in the window" (1:145). Rather than a canny, intimate portrait of Anne's interiority, this description of the room evokes a social life beyond its walls, as the many objects that populate the room index the trends, fashions, and commodity forms that signal Hamlin's cultural capital and taste. In other words, the novel resists embruing these objects with an affective aura that would conjure up Anne's hidden psychology. In its moment of realization, then, the narrative's movement toward her interiority stops short of identifying it publicly or making it available to interpretation.

That is not to say that Anne always remains so circumspect. If Anne's prevarication early in the novel signals a form of being-in-the-world that resists the claims that others might make on her, then her gradual exposure gestures to the vulnerability that social life entails. The novel insists on reading Anne's vulnerability to Hamlin's gaze as of-a-piece with her social and economic vulnerability. The revelation of Anne Brown's character is not incidental to but an effect of her subordination to *fin-de-siècle* socio-economic pressures, or what Lee otherwise calls "the exclusion of women from the world's activity and their subordination to men."[21] If Anne's initial detachment suggests a withdrawal from the scrutiny of public life, then her visibility can be read as the melancholic consolation for her absorption into social life and its limited definition of female agency.

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[21] Vernon Lee, "The Economic Parasitism of Women," in *The Gospels of Anarchy* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 275.

Importantly, the novel resists treating this revelation as itself consequential. In this case, knowledge does not lead to newfound freedom for Anne nor does it incentivize the reader to act in any particular way so as to prevent similar "exclusions of women" in the world. Too often, disclosure—whether moral or social, psycho-sexual or economic—is not enough to provoke action, change, or intervention. For example, when Anne learns about the poor conditions of the working class in Britain—even though she herself was born into and subsisted among the working classes for much of her life—her initial response is to refuse that knowledge: "When Marjory Leigh had first … told her of the pools of sin which stagnated among the starving, unwashed, and unlettered million, Anne had recoiled, and felt a sort of momentary horror for Marjory, a sort of resentment at this foulness thus obtruded on her" (2:197). Anne Brown's response is decidedly messy; her correction, where she throws herself so far into reading books on political economy that she makes herself sick from overexertion, isn't much better. Ultimately, Lee is skeptical that this heroic posturing, with its assumption that knowledge is a prelude to moral action, is necessarily a better response than ignorance. Both are structured by knowledge and are thus incapable of imagining action or change without first passing through the event of disclosure, illumination, or revelation. As the example of Anne Brown suggests, this desire to penetrate the interior and to make it available for public consumption can easily be exploited. Worse, knowledge might further materialize the limitations on women's agency by binding them to the conditions of their limitation. When Anne learns the truth of Madame Elaguine's past—her former marriage to a man who later committed suicide when Sacha left him a penniless addict—as well as Madame Elaguine's present attachment to Hamlin, Anne breaks down and consents to marry Hamlin. "[H]e must be saved," Anne contemplates in a matter-of-fact tone, "and only one thing could save him—hence that one thing must be done" (3:284). The emergence of these secrets—the revelation of hidden truths and disclosure of foul facts—further realizes the brutal determination that Anne's expressive silences so long sought to withhold.

Despite criticizing British Aestheticism and London's social scene in *Miss Brown*, Lee was always careful not to premise her satire on disclosure, which would reduce art to bare instrumentality. Lee famously declares in an essay on John Ruskin that "art has no moral meaning."[22] Those who seek to discover in art some revolutionary truth or "moral meaning" do so in vain. For Lee, the enticement to reduce art to its capacity to manifest concealed or hidden truths implies a kind of productivity that is at odds with art's formal ambitions. In the next section, I will examine more closely how this reticence figures in Lee's appraisal of character, as well as how she uses the generic conventions of the roman à clef to gesture to literature's nonproductive use.

Disclosure and Character in the Roman à Clef

What role does the reticent subject have in literary criticism? How do we write about her opaque personality without submitting her to inspection and exposure? We have so many critical tools for making visible the withdrawn, silent, repressed, hidden, and undisclosed. Yet, how do we sit with that impersonal self, meet her in the condition of her privacy and obscurity, and forestall that desire for knowledge and intervention? The case of *Miss Brown* would suggest that these are not only theoretical or ethical questions, but generic ones as well. The roman à clef, or novel with a key, would seem at odds with the suspended forms of knowledge that we have witnessed coalescing around the figure of Anne. In the seventeenth century, keys were often published or circulated alongside romans à clef, but by the eighteenth century that practice had largely been abandoned, which meant it was no longer expected that the text would supply or translate the identities of its characters.[23] Nonetheless, the response to Lee's novel suggests that characterization in the context of the roman à clef has a potent hermeneutic potential and that character is always at risk of compulsory exposure. How, then, do we translate the obscure content of the novel, as well as the epistemological and ethical problems that obscurity showcases, to the domain of generic form, especially for a genre that is so intent upon representing, identifying, and naming actually existing persons? In this section, I want to ask what the critical potential of the roman à clef might have been for Lee and what potential it might hold to re-orient our understanding of the history of the novel at the end of the nineteenth century.

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[22] Vernon Lee, "Ruskinism: The Would-Be Study of a Conscience," in *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: W. Satchell, 1881), 229.

The roman à clef evokes a tenuous relationship to an external world, at once satirizing real events and persons while also distancing itself from that world so as to remain free from accusations of libel. In the case of *Miss Brown*, Lee wrote the novel following an extended stay in London in the early 1880s. Despite spending her childhood in cosmopolitan wandering around the European continent, Lee had settled with her family in a country estate outside Florence in 1873, and she would remain there for the rest of her life. Her trip to London was her first prolonged separation from her family, and it was her first visit as an adult to the country from which her parents had emigrated.[24] While in London, Lee met many of the fashionable luminaries of the British art scene, including several members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, known as the "Fitzroy Square set" for where they resided, such as William Rossetti, Henry Holliday, and Ford Madox Brown.[25] The early 1880s was a rare period of economic improvement in England after almost a decade of stagnation, and so Lee was witness to Britain's burgeoning consumer society. Set during this moment of uneven and asymmetric economic recovery, *Miss Brown* is a story about the disparities of wealth and art's growing impotence in the face of structural inequality.[26] What came to concern Lee, both in her personal life and in her writing, was the widening gap between living an aesthetic life and an ethical one. Lee had previously explored this theme in several essays, including "Ruskinism" and "A Dialogue on Poetic Morality," both of which were collected in *Belcaro.* Where those works were more hopeful of the artist's role as a purveyor of beauty, *Miss Brown* is more skeptical. Despite mobilizing satire and critique against the degradation of art by the Aestheticist movement, *Miss Brown* suggests Lee's wariness to reduce art to its "moral meaning."

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[23] Writing on Eliza Haywood's secret histories, Michael McKeon argues the syncopations in her keys suggest that the form of the key was, by the 1740s, a "vestigial convention." Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 632.

[24] For a discussion of Lee's biography, see Colby, *Vernon Lee.*

[25] Leonee Ormond, "Vernon Lee as a Critic of Aestheticism in *Miss Brown*," *Colby Library Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1970): 134.

If we examine the work that Lee had published leading up to *Miss Brown*—a history of eighteenth-century Italian music, a collection of essays on aesthetics in the vein of Pater, a historical novella set in eighteenth-century Germany—a satirical novel both was and was not an obvious next step in her career. Despite her miscellaneous output, Lee was a profoundly serious person and writer, and in many ways, *Miss Brown* extends the sober and severe character of Lee's early writings. In a private letter, for example, Henry James wrote to tell Lee that she was "really too savage" in her composition of *Miss Brown*: "your hand had been violent," he warns, before advising, "the touch of life is lighter."[27] Yet, by the time Lee had published *Miss Brown*, satire was the most appropriate mode with which to critique British Aestheticism and art culture. As other critics have observed, *Miss Brown* draws on many popular satires and parodies from the 1870s and early 1880s, including George du Maurier's cartoons for *Punch*, W. H. Mallock's satirical novel *The New Republic* (1877), and W.

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[26] While the economic conditions during this time were not universally depressed, the perception of economic precarity was high. For a more comprehensive account of the economic statistics of this period, see A. E. Musson, "The Great Depression in Britain, 1873–1896: A Reappraisal," *The Journal of Economic History* 19, no. 2 (June 1959): 199–228.

[27] Henry James, *The Selected Letters of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Farrar, Straus; Giroux, 1999), 206.

S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's comic opera *Patience* (1881).[28] For example, Lee references both du Maurier's cartoons and *Patience* during a scene at Anne's boarding school. Sent to the boarding school to prepare her for her new life among London society, Anne is relentlessly mocked by the other girls, who draw "pictures of the solemn and tragic girl dressed in the most draggled aesthetic manner, surrounded by a circle of young aesthetes copied out of 'Punch' (Bunthorne did not exist at that time)" (1:215). Not only do these references position *Miss Brown* within a constellation of satirical and parodic texts, but they also gesture towards a specific situation—a time and a place—that locates the novel within history.

It is crucial, as we shall see, that Lee establishes the novel's context by recycling a set of familiar character types, drawn from *Punch* and other popular satires of British Aestheticism. In other words, the context *without* the novel is tethered to the content *within* by this circuit of recycled images, meaning that even as the novel strains to satirize a specific context it finds itself caught up in a swirling morass of generic and heavily mediated images *about* that context. Despite establishing a point of reference beyond representation, these satirical character types remain broad (referencing not a particular aesthete but a set of recognizable and popular images that would have circulated concurrent with the publication of the novel) and diffuse (referencing not a particular individual's behaviors or even a particular personality but the general, sociological sensibility of the "solemn and tragic" girls who surround her). These character types figuratively circumscribe Anne, much in the same way that "young aesthetes" encircle the bedraggled girl. By only tenuously linking Anne's representation within the novel to an abstract situation without, the novel deliberately obscures the referential movement toward a *particular* or concrete referent. Through these character types, the reader encounters the real not as a material or empirical substrate but as always already enclosed by discourse and by representation. As I will argue, this simultaneous referencing of and buttressing against an extra-textual real is not simply a case of language games or the inadequacy of literature to represent an external reality. Rather, it is endemic of Lee's self-conscious effort to play with and critique the conventions by which reality is constructed and made knowable within literature and art.

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[28] See Laurel Brake, "Vernon Lee and the Pater Circle," in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, ed. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 40–57; Dennis Denisoff, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody, 1840–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30–55; and Ormond, "Vernon Lee as a Critic of Aestheticism in *Miss Brown*."

One way in which Lee activates the circuit between text and reality is through parody. We might even call the novel a second-order parody. As I have discussed, many of the novel's parodic elements are recycled from earlier sources or pastiches of various cultural objects. Parody is one way in which the novel mingles and blurs the boundaries that separate text from world, content from context. As Carolyn Williams argues, this is one of the foundational acts of parody: "Parody turns things upside down, inside out, and backward."[29] Through its topsy-turvy disorientations, parody is capable of interrogating the formalization of things and the definitions we use to separate one category of things ("real") from another ("fictional"). In particular, by clouding that distinction between "inside" and "outside," Lee challenges common assumptions about what a novel should represent and the fictionality of its representation.

Despite having used the terms interchangeably, it is worth noting that the genre of the roman à clef has an altogether different relationship to the real than either satire or parody. Satire is generally used to describe any form of mockery or ridicule, whereas parody, like the burlesques that we saw with Thackeray, names a type of satire based on the imitation of an author, art work, or genre. Both have a flexible and circumspect relation to the context of their production. Meanwhile, the roman à clef operates according to a principle of referential transparency, which connects the characters and situations within the text to the material world beyond the novel. That extra-textual reference might either be displayed in the key, as previously discussed, or revealed through a process of "narrative concentration," by which "the identity of the public figures" is "silently referred."[30] McKeon refers to this dynamic as one of "metonymic contiguity" or allegorical affinity between characters and persons, signs and referents.[31] In theory, neither satire nor parody need be about living or historical persons. *Patience* need not refer to a *particular* individual with its representation of Bunthorne. Even were we to locate a source, like the original manuscript or Gilbert's journal, that might identify an original to this character, we have largely accepted as literary-critical practice that the play is more generally *about* Victorian England and British Aestheticism, rather than any one person.

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[29] 29. Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 7.

The roman à clef challenges that assumption, and readers of *Miss Brown* have delighted in elaborate pursuits of the original referents. In her literary biography of Lee, Vineta Colby connects the characters Mary and Marjory Leigh to the poet A. Mary F. Robinson and her sister Mabel, who wrote under the pseudonym W. S. Gregg; Mrs. Argiropoulo with the Ionides family, who were patrons of the Rossettis; William and Lucy Rossetti with Mr. and Mrs. Spencer; Posthlethwaite with Oscar Wilde; and, troublingly, Hamlin and Anne with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal.[32] While Colby dismisses the comparison between Hamlin and Walter Pater, Leonee Ormond makes the connection, adding to it the connection between the character Cosmo Chough and the poet Alfred O'Shaughnessy; Edmund Lewis and the writer Edmund Gosse, Thaddeus O'Reilly and the Irish painter Henry Thaddeus Jones; and Anne Brown and Jane Morris.[33] Ormond contradicts the references made by Colby, writing that Mrs. Argiropoulo was modeled on Mrs. Charles Tennant, a

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[30] McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 455.

[31] Ibid., 472.

[32] Colby, *Vernon Lee*, 100–105.

[33] Ormond, "Vernon Lee as a Critic of Aestheticism in *Miss Brown*," 142–48.

"famous society hostess," or possibly on "the wealthy hostesses of the Greek community in London, possibly Mrs. Spartali."[34] And, instructively, Ormond suggests that it is this principle of confusion and mixture that informs Lee's characterization of Dennistoun, who "seems to have had no single prototype but is rather a synthesis of the later poets of the 'fleshly school,' " such as William Sharp or Philip Marston.[35] Ever since its publication, *Miss Brown* has invited such debate and speculation about the "real" identities of the persons that figure in its pages. As a result, many of Lee's friends ended or suspended communication with her after the book's publication.[36]

Perhaps the clearest instance of Lee's tortured, yet oblique, reference comes in her portrait of Oscar Wilde. Lee clearly models the character Posthlethwaite on "Postlethwaite," a popular satirical image of Wilde by George du Maurier that circulated in *Punch* during the 1870s. For example, in his cartoon "An Æsthetic Midday Meal," du Maurier depicts an effeminate, immaculate "Jellaby Postlethwaite" "los[t] ... in contemplation" of a lily that he has placed in a glass of water (fig. 10). When asked by a waiter if he will need anything more, Postlethwaite responds, "Thanks, no! I have all I require, and soon shall have done!" The cartoon is a send-up of the literal body politics of the Aestheticist movement, which Lee clearly had in mind. On the one hand, the image evokes the corporeal privilege of the aesthete, whose own contemplation is maintained by the invisible labor and wealth creation of others. He has "all" that he "requires" because his expanded form suggests that he has escaped bare necessity for the rarified realm of the aesthetic. On the other, the image alludes to the threat of death and decay that haunt the Aestheticist movement. Like Narcissus, Postlethwaite risks drowning in his fantasies—or, in this case, wasting away from literal hunger while staring intently upon the image of beauty. In *Miss Brown*, Lee describes Posthlethwaite (Lee adds an "H" to the name) as an "elephantine" and

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[34] Ibid., 146.

[35] Ibid., 144.

[36] For the specific reactions to her novel by friends, see Colby, *Vernon Lee*, 104–7.

"flabby flat-cheeked" man with a "Japanese lily bobbing out of the button-hole of his ancestral dress coat" (2:8). Like du Maurier's cartoon, Lee's characterization advances a critique of Wilde that centers on the perceived excesses of his body. Like his dress, which is a pastiche of styles and origins, Posthlethwaite is a haphazard pastiche of the popular caricatures of aesthetes that circulated in the 1870s. But, it is also a cruel and transparent portrait of a man with whom she had only a passing familiarity at the time.

Traditionally, the roman à clef borrows from the broader category of allegory the assumption of simple relations, or the belief that text and world can be made to relate in a concrete, one-to-one correspondence. According to McKeon, the roman à clef was one of many genres that circulated in the early modern period—alongside "secret histories," like *chroniques scandaleuses* and parables—which sought to interrogate the limits between public and private knowledge. Through allegorical representation, these genres "accommodate what is difficult of access by figuring it in more familiar and available terms."[37] Yet, for legal, political, and epistemological reasons, this accommodation resulted in serious ambiguity. "The purpose of political allegory," writes McKeon, "is simultaneously to reveal and to conceal reference: to tell a story that allusively signifies affairs of state (hence the need for a key) while at the same time purporting to contain its own key, to signify nothing beyond itself."[38] McKeon's study ends with the emergence of the domestic novel, as well as the gradual disappearance of actual "keys" that might identify the characters within the text. He argues that the re-location of the form of allegorical revelation within the space of the domestic interior thus corresponds with the establishment of the modern separation between the public and the private.

It is telling that the domestic novel ultimately subsumes the secret history and effectively negates its principle of revelation at the same time that realism emerges

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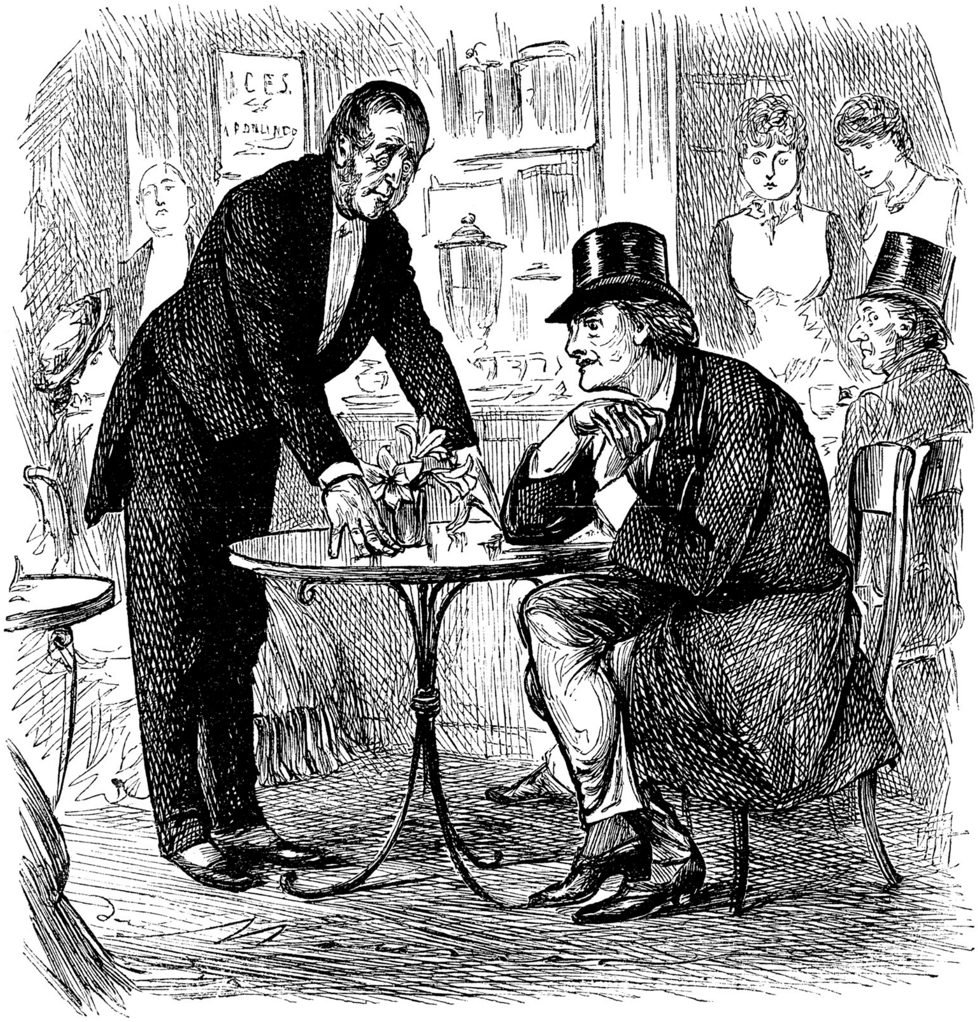
[37] McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 473.

[38] Ibid., 473.



AN ÆSTHETIC MIDDAY MEAL.

At the Luncheon hour, Jellaby Postlethwaite enters a Pastrycook's and calls for a glass of Water, into which he puts a freshly-cut Lily, and loses himself in contemplation thereof.

Waiter. "SHALL I BRING YOU ANYTHING ELSE, SIR?"

Jellaby Postlethwaite. "THANKS, NO! I HAVE ALL I REQUIRE, AND SHALL SOON HAVE DONE!"

Figure 10: George Du Maurier, "An Æsthetic Midday Meal," *Punch*, 1880. British Library.

in the nineteenth century as the privileged representational aesthetic for the novel. In his book on the modernist roman à clef, Sean Latham argues that the rise of the realist novel during the Victorian era corresponds with a general disappearance of the roman à clef as a genre, even as novelists like Dickens, Eliot, and James are interpreted according to the protocols of this allegorical form. Latham argues that the genre's most distinguishing feature is its "conditional fictionality," which is a term he borrows from Gérard Genette. As a result of this conditional fictionality, only certain readers are privileged enough to possess the key that might unlock the allegorical references within a text.[39] Latham argues that the roman à clef genre possesses tremendous social energy through its threatening potential to "transform any fictional text into a narrative of fact," thus "transfer[ing] interpretive authority from writers to readers."[40] Importantly, the roman à clef frustrates the conventions of aesthetic autonomy within high modernism by suggesting that there is always a context or external reference to the narrative, surrounding and subsuming any claims to self-sufficiency.[41]

This "conditional fictionality" is a fundamentally different form of representation than that which is employed by the realist novel, which operates according to a principle of "probable fictionality." If the roman à clef links "fiction" to a particular truth, then the realist novel links "fiction" to a general truth. For both, however, this link is established by the identity or non-identity of characters. Catherine Gallagher has argued that the characters that populate the realist novel are stand-ins for broad, sociological types rather than particular, actually existing persons. "The referential claim of the novel," writes Gallagher, "its stake in the world outside the text, therefore attaches to classes of persons, whereas the fictionality of the novel, its disavowal of personal reference, defines the individual characters. The novel is thus

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[39] Latham, *The Art of Scandal*, 15.

[40] Ibid., 44.

[41] Ibid., 9.

'true' in its generality even though all of its particulars are merely imaginary."[42] Similarly, Nathan Hensley has connected this "generality" to the mid-century liberalism of John Stuart Mill, arguing that the realist novel was a key cultural object by which the Victorians cultivated a belief in democratic universalism.[43] For both Gallagher and Hensley, the realist novel's relation to the world was mediated by the probable, rather than concrete, existence of the characters that appeared within its pages.

However, absent a key, the roman à clef is liable to lead critics and readers towards misinterpretations. According to Brian McHale, "Transworld identity between real-world persons and fictional characters has been deliberately *occluded*, requiring of the reader an act of decoding or decrypting."[44] We have already seen how there is no clear consensus on the correspondence of characters in *Miss Brown* to Lee's contemporaries. Depending on the critic, Mrs. Argiropoulo in the novel references either Mrs. Ionides, Mrs. Tennant, or Mrs. Spartali; whereas, Dennistoun is a "synthesis" of many different poets. Perhaps the most egregious suggestion is the one that was made by Mabel Robinson in a private letter to Lee. She writes, "in all her sudden impulses and tricks of expression reminds me of a certain animal (not without piquancy and charm) familiarly known as the 'little vermin flea.' "[45] As Colby notes, "little vermin flea" was Mary and Mable Robinson's pet name for Lee. As ridiculous as these connections may seem, they pile and compound in almost all criticism of *Miss Brown*.

Whether there is any truth to these correspondences, critics have nonetheless long argued that Lee muddies her critique by mingling and synthesizing the identities of real persons within the novel. The poet and critic Cosmo Monkhouse produces a representative example of this kind of criticism in his review of *Miss Brown* for *The*

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[42] Catherine Gallagher, "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian," *Representations* 90, no. 1 (2005): 62.

[43] Nathan K. Hensley, "Armadale and the Logic of Liberalism," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2009): 607–32.

[44] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2001), 206, emphasis in original.

[45] Qtd. in Colby, *Vernon Lee*, 112.

Academy: "By first separating and then mixing haphazard … the elements of character … appertaining to a number of more or less known persons, the author has, indeed, effectually confused their identities, but has nevertheless ridiculed them individually as well as collectively."[46] Monkhouse complains that Lee's inconsistencies produce a kind of waywardness, a satire directed everywhere and nowhere at once. Monkhouse therefore demands either greater mimetic fidelity or greater detachment. Anything that blurs the distinctions among particular persons therefore prevents the disclosure of secrets, the transfer of knowledge, and the revelation of particulars that are necessary for good satire.

One limitation of the roman à clef, which might explain why it held so little prestige during the height of the realist novel, is that the genre militates for a restrictive theory of meaning in which interpretation mediates solely between concrete particulars. Language, as a result, is stripped of surplus meaning. If Anne Brown is taken to be a portrait of Jane Morris, model and wife of the socialist reformer William Morris, then her "iron-black hair" can only reference Morris's iconic tresses. Drawing on this reference, Colby writes, "Physically they are mirror images … Like Miss Brown she [Jane] was statuesque, with large dark eyes and masses of curly … dark hair."[47] Any additional connotations to words like "iron" or "black," like Anne's resolve or emotional reticence, are ancillary to the true meaning of the text (2:293). Latham refers to this dynamic as the "aesthetics of the detail," whereby seemingly trivial features of character, description, and atmosphere lead the reader "beyond the diegesis to the historical world."[48] The roman à clef's "aesthetics of the detail" rejects the possibility of autonomy, instead tethering value to disclosure and publicity. In *Miss Brown*, however, the interpretive movement from literary characters to literal persons is complicated by the mixing of names and persons that Monkhouse identifies.

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[46] Cosmo Monkhouse, "Miss Brown: A Novel," *The Academy*, January 1885, 7.

[47] Colby, *Vernon Lee*, 106.

[48] Latham, *The Art of Scandal*, 27.

The many names that accrue around an object make it difficult to locate an original referent, effectively confusing the identities of historical persons.

As many references and names start to crowd individual characters within the novel—or, alternatively, as many characters vie for the same referential relation to a particular individual in the real world—the effect is a synonymous, lateral relation where no one name achieves an authoritative relation to the real. Synonymy has a way of challenging the desire to read a novel like *Miss Brown* as an object of knowledge by breaking the metonymic chain that links sign to referent. As Lorraine Daston has argued, the problem of synonymy is especially acute in those forms of representation, like botanical nomenclature and "literary personification," that attempt to "compress the many into the one, to render the abstract via the concrete, and to tether words to things."[49] For the novel, which is torn between the compulsion to represent both a social totality and a psychological particularity, synonymy disrupts that compression by simultaneously distancing the social ground of representation and multiplying the figures of personification. The many names that accrue around an object make it difficult to locate an original referent, effectively confusing the identities of historical persons. For the roman à clef, in particular, synonymy disrupts the hermeneutic impulse to identify. As synonyms and names proliferate, they exert an anti-empirical drag on the text, thereby suspending the identification of characters with their real-world referents.

The model of synonymy suggests that the roman à clef might offer insight into the epistemological tensions at play in characterization and naming in the theories of the novel. Conventions around naming remain central to the history of the novel and its development out of and distinction from other genres, like romance. On the face of it, the proper name is a potent technique for particularizing a character. By giving a character a name like "Dorothea Brooke" or "Anne Brown," the novelist not only differentiates her from other characters within the novel but also from a broader class of persons. According to Ian Watt, one of the most manageable ways for a novelist to "indiciate[] his intention of presenting a character as a particular individual [is] by naming him in exactly the same way as particular individuals are named in ordinary life."[50] A proper name, like Dorothea Brooke, thus signals her difference not only from another character, like Rosamond Vincy, but also from an abstract character type, like those "Many Theresas" to which Eliot refers in the "Prelude" to *Middlemarch*.[51] The implication of this double act of differentiation is profoundly important for the novel's development of a realist technique of representation: a generic proper name, in other words, indicates the probability that individuals *like* Dorothea Brooke exist in the real world rather than the more salacious possibility that Dorothea Brooke exists herself as a real, breathing person. The generic proper name is thus a key technique for indicating that characters are ideational rather than referential. In her discussion of the history of fictionality, Gallagher argues, "As opposed to the outlandish names of characters in romances, 'Tom Jones,' 'Clarissa Harlow,' and 'Pamela Andrews' sound like contemporary English names. This phonological normality is a convention alerting the reader to the fact that the name refers to nobody in particular, to a fictional entity."[52] The qualities associated with this principal of naming—probable but not literal, representative but not referential, fictional but not false—become so foundational to the history of the novel, so seamlessly integrated into its machinery, as to be a practically invisible.

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[49] Lorraine Daston, "Type Specimens and Scientific Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 1 (September 2004): 157.

Yet, satirical genres, like the roman à clef, even when they disguise and encrypt living individuals by giving them pseudonyms, expose the gears of the novel's hidden machinery. In a short story that she wrote not long after the publication of *Miss*

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[50] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 18.

[51] George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

[52] Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 352.

Brown, Lee deliberately draws attention to proper names, as well as to the significant relation between the technique of naming and the reader's willingness to believe in the veracity of representation. In "The Legend of Madame Krasinska," Lee narrates the story of a wealthy socialite who attempts suicide. When the rope by which she had hoped to hang herself breaks, the legendary Madame Krasinska thanks God by repudiating society and taking up a nun's habit in a mendicant order known as the "Little Sisters of the Poor." According to Lee, she first heard the story from her friend "Cecco Bandini." In the story's original publication in the *Fortnightly Review*, it is noted by way of parenthesis that Cecco Bandini, or Cecchino, is "not his real name, of course."[53] In the book publication, this correction is removed, which effectively neutralizes the threat of reference or the possibility of proliferating synonyms. Despite removing this acknowledgment of Bandini's pseudonymous identity, the story's frame nonetheless evokes the thrilling possibility that we might identify the characters within the story. Lee writes that Bandini told her the story so as "to help … in the accomplishment of a good work by a real saint."[54] Acknowledging Lee's potential skepticism—and, by proxy, the reader's skeptical unwillingness to confuse representation with reference—Bandini prompts her to "write down her narrative without any comments, and leave to the heart of the reader the decision about its truth or falsehood."[55] By foregrounding how our willingness to believe in the "truth or falsehood" of a narrative is dictated by certain protocols of narration, Lee gestures to how we have been trained to read. Especially, Lee highlights our tendency to read *skeptically*—that is, to read narrative as fictional even when we believe that it is plausible. By contrast, "The Legend of Madame Krasinska" prompts us to speculate on the possibility that a living referent exists for the characters in her stories, while also suggesting the equal possibility that the characters are *merely* ideational and the text, a “falsehood.”

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[53] Vernon Lee, "The Legend of Madame Krasinska," *Fortnightly Review* 53 (March 1890): 377.

[54] Vernon Lee, *Vanitas: Polite Stories* (London: William Heinemann, 1892), 227–8.

[55] Ibid., 228.

It is thus fitting that the narrative ends with an act that at once draws the narrative closer to reality while also withholding a strict correspondence of referential names. After documenting Bandini’s story as it is told to her, Lee concludes, “Such is the legend of Madame Krasinska, known as Mother Antoinette Marie among the Little Sisters of the Poor.”[56] It’s difficult to know whether, in the final moment of the story, Lee has revealed the referent behind Madame Krasinska’s character or whether she has added another signifier to muddy the waters of that reference. The interpretive movement from literary characters to literal persons is thus complicated by this multiplication of names, as Madame Krasinska transforms into Mother Antoinette Marie and as that latter name splits into two registers, one true because referential and the other true because fictional. Who is the “real saint” that is conveyed by the cluster of signs to which we alternatively attach the name Madame Krasinska and Mother Antoinette Marie? Does the addition of a second name bring us closer to or farther from that reality? This ambiguity is one way in which the roman à clef projects a fantasy that the world of the diegesis and the world of the reader might coincide with one another, creating an ontological blurring that actually gives the details of the narration a vital presence for the reader. This fantasy of referential presence achieving a kind of mastery over representation is one way in which the genre generates value: from private plots, we gain valuable knowledge about the public world. While the roman à clef may never actually be effective at achieving this ideal of referentiality or presence—*Miss Brown* provides a perfect case in point for the ways in which a text can fall far short—it is nonetheless useful to illustrate the fantasies that motivate the production and consumption of these texts and how the careful disclosure of a secret history might have social value.

One of my basic claims is that romans à clef, like *Miss Brown*, are central to the history of the novel at the end of the nineteenth century, and therefore central to the heritage of our modern critical practices. When reading novels like *Middlemarch* or *Vanity Fair*, for example, we do not assume that characters like Dorothea Brooke or Becky Sharpe have extra-textual referents. By contrast, romans à clef, autobiographies, and some historical novels all feature characters that purport or suggest the existence of an original referent. Yet, unlike most historical novels during the nineteenth century, the roman à clef codes and disguises the identities of the real-world persons it references, which allows the representation to exist *relatively* independent of any causal connection to its extra-textual antecedent. In autobiography, this coding need not take place—think John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* (1873)—but when it does, autobiography and roman à clef effectively become indistinguishable. The relative independence, or "conditional fictionality," of characters in the roman à clef is its signal contribution to literary history and to the history of the novel as a mode and genre of social representation. Writes McHale, "Swerving from one position to another, from assertion of fictionality to denial of fictionality, the author effectively destabilizes the ontological status of his characters. The *roman-à-clef* element [of autobiography] unmistakably functions here as a means of intensifying ontological flicker."[57]

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[56] Ibid., 276.

Through suspension and encoding, the roman à clef illuminates a fundamental vulnerability of the literary text, which is to have its diegesis explicable only in relation to an external world. As Lee argues in "On Novels," all literature is burdened by reference, insofar as meanings often get attached to the material world or by virtue of the referential function of language. The roman à clef dramatizes this referentiality by forcing readers to hold two realities in mind—one extra-diegetic and real, the other intra-diegetic and fictional—without giving the reader the keys to negotiate that difference. Without a key, which unlocks the intended meaning of the text, there is always the threat that the "real" might encroach upon the "fictional" and vice versa.

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[57] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 207.

This is what I have referred to throughout as "formal" vulnerability, and the roman à clef simultaneously demands absolute meaning and withholds it. In order to differentiate between the idea of Anne Brown and her real-world referent, the reader must construct a reality *like* our own but decidedly not our own. The realist novel cannot compel such acts of world-construction because there is no presumption of overlap or threat of intended meaning.[58] World-construction is thus a critical function unique to those literary genres, like the roman à clef, that force readers to adjudicate between the real and the fictional, reference and meaning. As I previously mentioned, Lee refers to this act of world-construction as literature's critical force, whereby it offers figurations of the "possibility," as a potential for change and difference, that is lodged within the real. In the next section, I will turn to the question of how the provisionality of literary meaning might allow us to rethink the story of the novel at the end of the nineteenth century.

Vulnerability and Referentiality

So far, I have made two interrelated claims. First, the content of character in *Miss Brown* evokes a tenuous relationship to content as such. Reticence, silence, and obscurity are the organizing tropes for this withdrawn content, and Anne, a singularly suggestive instance of this character dynamic. In *Miss Brown*, Lee connects this social pressure to be recognizable and identifiable to Anne Brown's vulnerability in the face of external limitation and determination. Lee ultimately leaves unspecified the hermeneutic protocols for recovering or manifesting Anne's content, instead reflecting on the hierarchy of knowledge and insight that attends the desire to penetrate her interiors. Second, the formal dynamics of the roman à clef genre extends this character dynamic of withdrawn content by blurring the categorical boundaries that differentiate "character" from "person." If Anne's experience of vulnerability is connected to her *risk* of being subject to external influence by Hamlin, then the novel proposes a model of *formal* vulnerability, or the risk of the text being limited to an external, intended meaning. Formal vulnerability rests on the provisionality of the literary text—not its absolute determination by meaning but its potential subordination to reference. If my use of the word "vulnerable" to talk both about the dynamics of character and the dynamics of reference is odd, I do not want to suggest that books are like people, or that both are vulnerable to the same forces. Rather, the formal vulnerability of the roman à clef highlights what the content of the novel cannot: a non-redemptive model for mediating women's disempowerment without, per se, making referential knowledge the end of critique. The vulnerability of the roman à clef—its potential to have its concealed meanings disclosed or illuminated—leverages a critique of social vulnerability that does not depend upon the knowledge *of* the vulnerable subject. The point is not that both are premised on isomorphic or analogous forms of knowing (where knowledge of subjectivity is equated with knowledge of reference) but that they both reflect back on the protocols and conditions of knowledge. In other words, vulnerability dramatizes the hierarchy of knowing, especially when literary representation gets reduced to moral meaning or instrumental knowledge.

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[58] According to Catherine Gallagher, the realist novel does not need to differentiate between the real world and the diegetic world because there is never a moment of counter-factual collision. Catherine Gallagher, "What Would Napoleon Do?: Historical, Fictional, and Counterfactual Characters," *New Literary History* 42, no. 2 (2011): 315–36, 332.

Reticence, silence, obscurity, and ambiguity all invoke the limits of examination and critique. Additionally, they dramatize how our epistemological protocols for knowing are mired in what Eve Sedgwick calls a "magnetic field of power," which "mobiliz[es] the flowers of energy, desire, goods, meanings, persons."[59] In her fiction, Lee demands we recognize the affinity between our critical and hermeneutic practices for penetrating or revealing the meaning of a text *and* and the limits of our actions if they are premised solely on knowledge. Anne Brown's social vulnerability is thus structurally linked to the formal vulnerability of the literary text, its provisionality, and its limitation by absolute reference. The link between character and text suggests, over and against the demand to reveal, disclose, or identify, the need for a model of literary criticism that separates action from knowledge.[60] But, it also illustrates what is at stake in our preservation of a model of the novel that is premised on the assumption of generativity and productivity, a premise that, as we shall see, we inherit from the late-Victorian context to which Lee is responding.

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[59] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4.

The roman à clef haunts the realist novel by embodying an exaggerated version of realism's claims to mimetic fidelity. As Latham points out, the genre willfully courts association with the novel, while also demanding to be engaged on its own terms. Referencing Richard Poirier's study of style and the American novel, Latham argues that the confluence of the diegetic and the extra-diegetic in the roman à clef—the fictional and the real, sign and referent—"tests the self-sufficiency of these categories and thereby undermines the modernist novel's ability to construct 'a world elsewhere.' "[61] We can hear parallels between this definition of the roman à clef and Lee's theory of fiction as a "half-art," as a generic procedure for organizing our perception of the world and for imagining altogether different possibilities for that world.

While for much of the nineteenth century, the roman à clef haunted or lurked in the shadows of the realist novel, the tension between the two came to a head at the end of the nineteenth century when Henry James began to formulate his theory of the novel. A key point from literary history that often goes unremarked is that the earliest entry for the "roman à clef" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is attributed to James. In the winter of 1893, Henry wrote a letter to his brother William, who was traveling near the Florentine estate of Vernon Lee. In his letter to William, James warns: "she [Lee] has lately, as I am told (in a volume of tales called *Vanitas* which I haven't read) directed a kind of satire of a flagrant & markedly 'saucy' kind at me (‼) exactly the sort of thing she has repeatedly done to others (her books—fiction—are a tissue of personalities of the hideous roman à clef kind)."[62] In 1892, Lee had published a collection of short stories entitled *Vanitas: Polite Stories*, which included the stories "Lady Tal," "A Worldly Woman," and "The Legend of Madame Krasinska." Contrary to the claim made by the collection's subtitle, Lee's short stories were rather impolite. James took particular offense to the short story "Lady Tal," in which Lee slyly caricatures him as the character "Jervase Marion." Lee describes Marion as a "short, bald gentleman" and a "dainty but frugal bachelor."[63] Lee had previously dedicated *Miss Brown* to James, but their relationship had cooled somewhat after he criticized the novel in personal correspondence to Lee and their mutual associates. In *Vanitas*, Lee not only mocks James but offers that mockery up for public consideration.

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[60] For one such model of "nescience," or the science of non-knowledge, see Anahid Nersessian, "Two Gardens: An Experiment in Calamity Form," *Modern Language Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (January 2013): 307–29.

[61] Latham, *The Art of Scandal*, 9.

Yet, James's offense extends beyond the personal and reflects his philosophy of the novel as an art form. James's characterization of *Vanitas* as "flagrant," "saucy," and "hideous" draws on popular assumptions about the roman à clef in nineteenth-century British culture—that is, it was a sordid genre, with a predilection for cheap gossip and the impolite disclosure of private lives. By satirizing real, living persons, the roman à clef punctures the veil of privacy that novelists like James sought to erect in order to detach and separate art from life. The tissue-thin transparency of Lee's fiction thus troubles cultural expectations for literary autonomy, challenges the formalist values that modernist writers like James were beginning to espouse, and reveals a broader tension between reference and representation in the history of the novel.

In private correspondence with Lee from 1885, James evokes a similar disdain for her satirical streak when he suggests that Lee might repair the faults in *Miss Brown* by abandoning the impulse to moralize. After apologizing for the belatedness of his review, James writes that he found Lee's novel "imperfect" but "very interesting." Elaborating, James draws a distinction between the "idea" of the novel and certain nagging features of its composition. Even though he praises "the *donné* of Miss Brown," he simply cannot believe that a character like Anne would choose to marry a man like Hamlin. "Making every allowance for a kind of grand rigidity and mournful, dismal, heroism that you have attributed to her," writes James, "her offering to marry Hamlin strikes me as false, really unimaginable."[64] The imperfection of Lee's novel rests with this "false" and "unimaginable" representation and the way it diverts the novel toward melodrama. By excluding a more credible because more moderate ending—where perhaps Anne declines Hamlin's proposal or perhaps Hamlin never offers it to begin with—Lee appeals too forcefully to the reader's "moral sense."[65] The artist, James instructs, approaches her craft neither with fire nor equanimity but with a chill that tempers to extremes of melodrama into a rough average of the real: "You are really too savage … *life* is less criminal … more mixed and casual, and even in its most offensive manifestations, more *pardonable*."[66] James's temperature-taking reveals art to be an adjustment, an operation that accommodates the extremes of life and passions to the more moderate surface of reality. By tempering these extremes, the novelist creates a more believable—because more continuous, even, and sustained—world in which all of the parts compound to build a singular whole.

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[62] William James and Henry James, *William and Henry James: Selected Letters*, ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 276–77. Qtd in Colby, *Vernon Lee*, 196.

[63] Lee, *Vanitas*, 50, 12.

We can see how different this version of the novel is from Lee's theory of the novel, where she describes it as a "half-art." Whereas the latter yokes language to concrete reference, the former depends upon a notion of general, constructed representation. In earlier essays like "The Art of Fiction," James develops this aesthetic by marshalling Romantic metaphors of an organic whole to the defense of the novel.

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[64] James, *The Selected Letters of Henry James*, 205–6.

[65] Ibid., 206.

[66] Ibid., 206, emphasis in original.

Published in *Longman's Magazine* in 1884, the same year that *Miss Brown* was published, "The Art of Fiction" was initially written as a response to Walter Besant's lecture series and pamphlet, "Fiction as One of the Fine Arts." Principal to James's defense of the novel is his sense that Besant's distinction between novels of "character" (psychological realism) and novels of "incident" (romance) was artificial. According to James, it is "exactness," which he defines as "truth of detail," "air of reality," or "solidity of specification," that is the "supreme virtue of a novel—the merit on which all its other merits … helplessly and submissively depend."[67] Unlike the "aesthetics of the detail" (Latham) that characterize the roman à clef, "exactness" and the "truth of detail" are formal qualities rather than substantive ones, holistic ("detail") rather than particular ("the detail"). Air, solidity, and virtue cannot be distilled into a particular thing or essence and, therefore, remain independent of any one factor within the novel. This atmospheric or formal integrity suggests that "a novel is a living thing, all one and continuous," such that it would be impossible to distinguish which of its constituent parts is foundational to the aesthetic effect of the novel.[68] Neither "character" nor "incident," argues James, are sufficient to define what makes for good fiction and, as a result, all of the parts of the novel interleave in the process of forming the novel as an organic whole.[69]

The organic metaphor that James evokes in "The Art of Fiction" has been central to how James's ideas have been received both by other modernist writers and by later literary critics. According to Poovey, James's organicism underwrites the primacy of "lyric" form in New Criticism and later formalisms. She argues that this heritage secures many of the features of literary-critical practice that are common today, including the use of "embedded quotations," the "reliance on analytic description" and close reading, the "textualization of nonliterary objects," and the emphasis placed on "self-reflexivity."[70] Literary critics, in other words, extend James's organic metaphor from the particular domain of the novel to the broader domain of professional literary criticism, thereby treating all objects of literary analysis as if they were organic wholes.

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[67] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *Henry James: Literary Criticism*, ed. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson, vol. 1 (New York: Library of America, 1984), 53.

[68] Ibid., 54.

[69] Ibid., 54.

At stake, though, is a broader assumption about literary resources and the productivity of literary form. Poovey writes that one assumption that literary critics make is that the literary object is "an autonomous whole with interacting parts," and "as those parts refer to and reflect one another, they simply generate a larger whole."[71] Freed from that requirement to convey a *particular* idea, the text instead embodies the generativity and productivity of aesthetic meaning. While the critic may uncover meaning from the text, she does so knowing that the text is functionally self-renewing and endlessly regenerative. Her act of penetrating insight cannot take from that store of total meaning, and while her analysis might pierce the surface of the text, it will not rupture or disturb the overall edifice of the organic form.[72]

Taken together, James's letter to Lee and his essay on the novel erect interpretive barriers that limit our understanding of both *Miss Brown* and Lee's theory of the novel as a "half-art." James is right, in a sense, that Lee is a didactic, moralizing writer. She willfully confronts the altered landscape of British modernity and calls attention to an absent moral center. *Miss Brown* has little interest for the reader outside of that moral appeal. Yet, by abandoning the referential function of the text, we lose sight of that critique and effectively privatize any disclosure or knowledge afforded by the roman à clef. Were we to apply James's definition of organic form to *Miss Brown*, we would either have to ignore its referential potential, follow that reference only to a general historical context, or judge, as James did, Lee's novel to be flawed. In the face of this challenge, we must acknowledge how our analytical authority risks submitting the novel to a form for which it was not meant.

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[70] Mary Poovey, "The Model System of Contemporary Literary Criticism," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 3 (2001): 434–5.

[71] Ibid., 435.

[72] For an alternative reading of James's argument for autonomy, see Christopher Lane, "The Poverty of Context: Historicism and Nonmimetic Fiction," *PMLA* 118, no. 3 (2003): 450–69.

When Henry James writes that the ending of *Miss Brown* is "false, really unimaginable," the formal assumption he makes is that the novel is beholden only to the internal conventions it has set for itself. And yet, what we discover in *Miss Brown* is that the novel's claim to reference challenges both our sense of critical agency and the limits of the organic metaphor. On the one hand, Lee suggests that by manifesting some hidden or obscured content, we risk exposing that content and making it vulnerable to external influence. On the other, Lee reveals how knowledge is often limited and non-generative. Unlike other fin de siècle and modernist novels, which seem motivated most presciently by the ambition to bring to light truth, whether psycho-sexual or social, *Miss Brown* underscores the limitations of knowledge as a mechanism of volition and change. Resigning herself to marriage, Anne performs the privatization of knowledge, as truths of economic exploitation are internalized and refigured in sentimental terms.

The mode of reading that I have proposed is one that proceeds modestly, taking as its model the figure of Anne, whose own obscurity and vulnerability registers not the limit of criticism but its foundation. The centrality of vulnerability and reference in Lee's novel suggests the viability of what has always been of vital interest for critics of British Aestheticism and of the history of the novel: namely, the relationship between limitation and freedom, reference and representation. Rather than enforce their separation, Lee invites us to speculate on how reference and representation become interleaved at various points in literary history, as well as how our critical engagement with that discomforting relationship might foment productive engagements with the obscure and the vulnerable.

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