

Minstrels in the drawing room:
music and novel-reading
in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Walter Scott, and George Eliot

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2014

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ABSTRACT

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“Minstrels in the Drawing Room” is an investigation of the representation of musical listening in the nineteenth-century novel. Theoretical accounts of the novel have tended to see it as a universal form, one that opportunistically subsumes all others as its represented content; descriptions of the novel’s implied audience often interpret novel-reading as an essentially absorptive activity linking private reading to public belonging through an act of identification. For the writers I discuss here, however, musical listening is interesting because it is a rival mode of shared aesthetic experience that, before the advent of sound recording, was necessarily social. This dissertation draws on recent developments in the history of reading and media theory to describe how novels by three central figures of the European novelistic canon – Goethe, Scott, and Eliot – turn to musical listening to reflect upon the ways in which the absolutely open nature of the novel’s mode of address is nevertheless prone to limitation. The dissertation thus complicates often all-or-nothing theories of novel-reading, offering instead a description of how novels model a distanced identification between reader and text.

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Acknowledgments

There can be in an enumeration of intellectual debts something unpleasantly akin to the balancing of books. Let it be understood that in thanking the people below I hope only to hold open my accounts.

My parents, Bob Lynn and Siew-Jyu Wong.

Ondrea Ackerman, Dehn Gilmore, Jesse Rosenthal, Courtney Thorsson, and Eugene Vydrin were ideal colleagues and friends at Columbia, people with serious and interesting things to say on any topic, at any moment.

The members of Columbia's Nineteenth-Century Colloquium provided invaluable comments on an early draft of chapter three.

Anahid Nersessian and Ross Hamilton read this dissertation after its completion, and I will continue to think about their charitable and probing questions for a long time.

Nick Dames, Jenny Davidson, and Jonathan Arac advised this project from its beginnings; their warmth, erudition, and wit have been both support and inspiration.

And lastly, Sarah Kerman, who thought about every page of this dissertation. She has made it and everything else better than it should have been.

Introduction

On my lap was the score of some concerto I had been studying in a lackadaisical way for the previous hour, which I had been considering abandoning for one of the nineteenth-century novels piled on the wooden floor near my feet.

-- Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*

Wavering between two of the nineteenth century's most important long forms, Ishiguro's *Ryder* knows that he can't have both.¹ The scene, like *The Unconsoled* as a whole, is an investigation of social isolation, and of its relation to those abstractions from the everyday offered both by reverie and reading. At this moment, *Ryder*, a concert pianist, is reminded of precisely how much his constant practicing removed him from society in his student years, preventing him from taking part in even that most basic ritual of going drinking after exams. The moment *Ryder* recalls here – sitting on the couch in his room on a sunny day, deciding whether to exchange concerto for novel – is accordingly one in which his choice of reading material is also a choice between two ways of living in the world. On the one hand, *Ryder*'s room is a self-conscious echo of those scenes of private reading that tend to appear early in Victorian novels: specifically *Jane Eyre*, reading a copy of Bewick's *History of British Birds* on a window-seat, placed comfortably between “[f]olds of scarlet drapery” and a window's “clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating [her] from the drear November day.”² *Ryder*, like *Jane*, seated next to a window, uses his piles of novels to create a place for himself, to turn the otherwise impersonal and barren room – “just a mattress on

¹ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 305.

² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Richard Nemesvari (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2004), 64.

the floor, and, in the corner, a small desk and upright chair” – into something he could be “very fond of.” Yet – as with Jane’s reading, though far less agonistically – Ryder’s private reading both encloses itself from and permits entry to its social surround: his remembering eye passes over those heaps of books, and finds its way to the door, which Ryder “had got into the habit of leaving... ajar so that whoever happened to be passing could just wander in for a talk”; through the open window, he remembers, he could hear the voices of other students “whom [he] had once languidly welcomed when they had peered around [that] door,” and who had often come in for an hour’s talk about “some novelist” (305).

The passage is thus a kind of metacommentary, in which Ryder’s novels remind us of what nineteenth-century novels say about reading: books do furnish a room, as reading encloses the self, nourishes it; at the same time, though, reading makes that interior space permeable, creating the possibility for a negotiation between inside and outside.³ Ryder’s nineteenth-century novels socialize as they individuate, separate as they connect: a familiar and true image of the complex double movement of novel-reading and of the self it both represents and forms, one built, as Lukács observes, in the hope “that a reconciliation between interiority and reality, although problematic, is nevertheless possible.”⁴ And what of the concerto? The scene has less to say about it, as *The Unconsoled* has little to say about music, and what it does say is far cruder, in more ways than one, than its ideas about novel-reading. If the novel creates pathways for a complex but comfortable back-and-forth movement between interior and exterior space, the concerto – at least from the perspective

³ See, for example, Nancy Armstrong’s overview of these matters in the opening of her *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005): “the modern subject came into being as it took in sensations from the outside world and, of that material, composed first the ideas and then the judgment and moral sense that gave it a self-enclosed and internally coherent identity” (1). I discuss Armstrong’s arguments at greater length below.

⁴ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1971), 132.

of society – seems to exist in an entirely oppositional world, one in which the instrumental soloist, absorbed in his obscure and fantastical doings, is pitted against a hostile and mocking mass: the performer “piano-playing in the air,” his audience united in “making the most disgusting noise, something half-way between a jeer and a retch” (304).⁵

Ishiguro’s novel is of course more complex than this schematic opposition suggests. Even within the scene Ryder recalls, it is surely important that his reading of the concerto score is not fervent but “lackadaisical”; on a larger scale, this entire process of recollection, in which the choice between the formed but permeable self of novel-reading and the absorbed, isolated self of piano-playing is posed, is itself an involuntary reverie, but one with a specifically social use: Ryder slips into apparently idle musing to isolate himself from an awkward conversation – about his isolation. Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank argue that the self-enclosure of the solitary “reading posture registers as extroversion as least as much as introversion, as public as it does private.”⁶ *The Unconsoled*, as a page-turner in which little happens, a novel about the social meaning of apparently inward states of abstraction from the everyday, is constantly undermining the distinctions this passage sets up.

Yet the choice between concerto and novel *is* in a sense true to the nineteenth-century novelistic tradition it echoes so strongly. Those novels on Ryder’s floor in all likelihood *do* represent musical listening as a threat to the self that can either overwhelm it,

⁵ My discussion of this image of reading, as enclosed from yet also connected to an outside world, clearly owes a debt to Paul de Man’s essay on Proust in *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979). It will be noted that Marcel’s “inner, sheltered space” is, as de Man emphasizes, connected to an exterior world by means of a likeness existing inside the mind of the reader – as Jane’s implicitly is, too, when she draws upon her reading to tell John Reed that he is “like the Roman emperors” (67); Ryder’s reading, in contrast, is connected to the world through what Jakobson would call a metonymic rather than metaphorical logic, of juxtaposition without similitude. The relationship between reading-as-like-the-world and reading-as-spatially-in-the-world is a major topic of this dissertation’s chapter on Scott.

⁶ Sedgwick and Frank, “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold,” in Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003), 115.

or merely fail to do so and thus be emptied of all significance. When Emma Bovary goes to *Lucia di Lammermoor*, she first “gives herself up [*se laissait aller*]” to “gusts of music,” a willed self-loss that climaxes in her uttering, at the end of the first act, a “sharp cry that merged with the vibrations of the closing chords” of the orchestra.⁷ Later, however, after Charles Bovary has punctured Emma’s reverie with his confusions about the plot, the opera turns into “nothing more than a vivid fantasy for the entertainment of the eye” (197). One can see the same stark opposition – music as wholly absorbing, or as mere cynically-produced fantasy – at work in a scene whose domestic setting could not be more different from the opera: George Eliot’s account of Rosamond Vincy at the piano. Here, however, these two accounts of music are distributed not over time, but rather between character and narration:

Rosamond played admirably. Her master at Mrs. Lemon’s school... was one of the excellent musicians here and there to be found in our provinces, worthy to compare with many a noted Kapellmeister... Rosamond, with the executant’s instinct, had seized his manner of playing, and gave forth his large rendering of music with the precision of an echo. It was almost startling, heard for the first time. A hidden soul seemed to be flowing forth from Rosamond’s fingers; and so indeed it was, since souls live on in perpetual echoes... Lydgate was taken possession of, and began to believe in her as something exceptional.

[...]

Her father looked around at the company, delighting in their admiration.⁸

Rosamond’s playing, to Lydgate at least, appears as authentic communication from her “hidden soul.” But in fact it corrupts boundaries rather than transcending them: firstly,

⁷ Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Viking, 2010), 195-6.

⁸ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Margaret Harris, Judith Johnson, and Beryl Gray (London: Everyman, 1997), II.16.

through performance itself – performance being at once socially aggressive appropriation (Rosamond *seizes* her master’s manner) and a contemptible act of self-abnegation (as, in so doing, she becomes mere echo): a whole system of social class in a single gesture – and secondly through “possession” of its hearers. The hidden soul of music is thus doubly a mere “seeming.” Music really offers masquerade and usurpation, a conquering of its listeners, and it is the measure of our status as *readers* rather than as listeners that we know this: privy to the novel’s narration, we know, as Lydgate does not, that Rosamond’s interpretations are not her own; with the larger breadth of vision afforded by novel-reading, we can see Walter Vincy’s proprietary pleasure in the scene, suggesting both paternal affection and the sense of a sound investment bearing fruit; armed with this ironic knowledge, we can step outside the mere seeming of musical rapture that traps Lydgate and see its emptiness.

Music in the nineteenth-century novel, then, appears as an all-or-nothing proposition: either it accomplishes a mystical merging of souls, or nothing at all. The trouble with music, in other words, is that it can never allow for the compound category so important to the novel: the socialized individual; the room with doors and windows. The novel’s resistance to music seems as if built into a distribution of functions between the arts in the nineteenth century, something Edward Said suggests in his *Musical Elaborations* by juxtaposing Adorno on the new music and Lukács on the novel, as two ways of responding to the “degraded and therefore meaningless world”: if the office of music is to cast its “devastatingly critical light” on that world, the novel is the always-failing attempt to reconcile it.⁹ The century’s music proclaims, with E.T.A. Hoffmann, that its kingdom is not of this world; its novels – so committed to the worldly, in both senses, and to the individual’s

⁹ Said, *Musical Elaborations* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 14.

finding a place in it – must therefore either spurn music entirely, or represent its claims to both naïveté and the transcendence it makes possible only to undermine them.¹⁰

There are, of course, good reasons to be skeptical about music's claims: Hoffmann's account of the transcendence of music from the everyday suggests an image of musical listening in which listeners gain access, together, to a realm beyond the real. To many commentators, both in the nineteenth century and after, this experience of musical listening purports to provide a "direct relationship to a collectivity," as Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler put it, and thus becomes a prominent figure for a specifically pre- or anti-rational whole, typically a national one.¹¹ These are precisely Thomas Carlyle's rhetorical aims in his 1831 essay "Characteristics," which laments the sign of contemporary decline in the proliferation of writing: "it is not in the vigorous ages of a Roman Republic that Treatises of the Commonwealth are written."¹² As Carlyle sees it, social self-consciousness – which he defines as the writing of treatises and the giving of names – is "virtually the meaning of that phrase 'artificial state of Society,'" for an "artificial Society is precisely one that knows its own structure, its own internal functions" (361). A true society, however, is unconscious of itself; true social feeling, Carlyle insists, "cannot be reasoned of; except *musically*" (362,

¹⁰ "Our kingdom is not of this world, say musicians, for where in nature do we find the prototypes for our art, as painters and sculptors do? Sound resides in all things; but notes, that is to say melodies, which speak the higher language of the spirit-realm, repose only in the breast of men." The passage is in "Johannes Kreisler's Certificate of Apprenticeship," in Hoffmann's *Kreisleriana*, first published 1814. In *ETA Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, trans. Martyn Clarke, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 163. Dahlhaus describes Hoffmann's centrality to the century's music aesthetics in his always provocative book *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1989), particularly in chapter 3, "A Hermeneutic Model." For a more recent and equally wide-ranging reading of musical Romanticism's turn towards the ineffable, see Ruth Katz's *A Language of Its Own: Sense and Meaning in the Making of Western Art Music* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009).

¹¹ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London: Continuum, 2007), 13.

¹² Thomas Carlyle, "Characteristics," originally published in *Edinburgh Review* 54:108 (December 1831), 351-383, at 361.

emphasis original). Music stands in here, and in a great many other romantic texts, for all that *Gemeinschaft* possesses which *Gesellschaft* does not.

One can hardly imagine a more unlikely partner for the realist novel. The novel is a descriptive form in which society tries to know its own structure and therefore, to stay with the terms of Carlyle's argument, must become artificial; it is also one whose central procedure, as critics from Schlegel to Bakhtin and beyond have noted, is a self-distancing irony: "Thus does Literature also," says Carlyle, "like a sick thing, superabundantly 'listen to itself'" (370). Little wonder, then, that Regula Hohl Trillini's recent survey of Rosamond Vincy and a host of other dangerous musicians finds in the nineteenth-century novel a veritable catalogue of "narrative strategies which contain and repress music" in order to preserve the boundaries between persons; the representation of music seems bound by an iron rule, that "[t]he rapture of music is never fully shared with the reader" – something for which, in this context, certain political commitments to a cosmopolitan modernity, or even the desire to keep possession of our own souls, might in fact make us rather grateful.¹³

This argument – that the novel repressed musical rapture – is not the one that I make here. This is partially for familiarly Foucauldian reasons: the containment or repression of musical rapture, after all, might in historical perspective be better thought of instead as a stage in the apophatic strategy that produced its conceptual recognition; as Carl Dahlhaus notes, "were it not for the poetic conceit of unspeakability, there would have been no words available for reinterpreting the musically confusing or empty into the sublime or wonderful."¹⁴ But even before finding a new place in a history of aesthetics – or even the

¹³ Regula Hohl Trillini, *The Gaze of the Listener* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008), 142 and 113.

¹⁴ *The Idea of Absolute Music*, 63. For a recent discussion of this apophatic strategy in Hoffmann and other central texts of German musical romanticism, see John T. Hamilton's *Music, Madness, and the*

modern system of the arts – for scenes like Flaubert’s or Eliot’s, it is worth first simply noticing that what matters in these scenes is not *music* per se, but rather musical listening. Musical listening in these novels unfolds as an experience that takes place in public, rather than as a simpler encounter between an isolated listener and the rapturous event. What is at stake here is not the essence of music, or even the movement from a musical source to a single receiver. Neither scene asks Pater’s questions: “What is this song... to me? What effect does it really produce on me?” Nor, however, do these scenes pursue Arnold’s aim, “to see the object as in itself it really is.”¹⁵ Rather, these novels ask: Is *Lucia di Lammermoor* the same thing to Charles Bovary that it is to Emma? Does Walter Vincy hear the same music as Lydgate?

These are not, of course, particularly complicated questions in these novels. But to read either novel’s engagement with music solely in terms of the opposition between transcendence and emptiness (or, for that matter, illusion and analysis) is to miss that the questions must be asked, to ignore that a crucial part of how these novels ask us to think about music’s effects is by thinking of its effects on multiple listeners – by making the full effect of the musical work knowable only as by a process of social triangulation.

I

Unworking of Language (New York: Columbia UP, 2008); for Foucault on the “repressive hypothesis,” see *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).

¹⁵ Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1980), xix-xx. Arnold, “The Functions of Criticism at the Present Time,” in *The National Review* 1 (Nov 1864), 230-251, at 230. Pater is of course not advocating for a solipsistic impressionism – on this point see George Levine, “Two Ways Not to Be a Solipsist: Art and Science, Pater and Pearson,” in *Victorian Studies* 43:1 (Autumn 2000), 7-41 – but he does put forward the individual’s testing of *himself* (and no other) as the situation of aesthetic thinking.

This dissertation is an investigation of musical listening as a social, public experience – that is, one that imagines feeling to be potentially generated *in* public, amongst strangers – as it is represented in writing (primarily novels) by Goethe, Walter Scott, and George Eliot. All three writers, it goes without saying, engaged with the possibilities and perils of the musical throughout their careers. More to the point, however, all three insistently positioned their writing *within* a modern world, and understood modernity more or less in Carlyle’s terms: that is, all three wrote for and of a society that was self-conscious, and ineluctably so, but also one with a supposed memory of an earlier era – or of a rural life – in which social feeling could not be reasoned of, of the pre-modern community for which music is Carlyle’s figure. I do not think there is much that is controversial in this description; I mean here nothing more than the obvious point that Goethe, Scott, and Eliot broadly share a preoccupation with the problems and uses of culture for a century imagined to be newly in need of it, in a “new kind of society” as Raymond Williams puts it, out of which the idea of culture merges two responses:

first, the recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society; second, the emphasis of these activities, as a court of human appeal, to be set over the processes of practical social judgment and yet to offer itself as a mitigating and rallying alternative.¹⁶

In this way, the grouping of Goethe, Scott and Eliot could be said to define (as three points define a plane) a common tradition that would exclude more stably urban nineteenth-century novelists – e.g., Flaubert – as well as novelists for whom a *return* to pre-critical social feeling is an important possibility – say, Disraeli; or, to aim a little higher, the Tolstoy who sends Levin to the wheat fields, and who marks the pathology of a class-riven society as one of

¹⁶ Raymond Williams, *Culture & Society, 1780-1915* (New York: Harper, 1966), xvi.

almost literal deracination, by making both Anna Karenina and Vronsky dream of a peasant speaking French.¹⁷ What Goethe, Scott, and Eliot all find in music (albeit in quite different ways) is a way of mediating between piano-playing in air and jeering retch. Each writer turns to the interrelationship between music – intensely private and yet also mysteriously shared – and the social world in which listening is embedded as a way of exploring potential alternatives to liberal modernity: modes of culture that, to again quote Williams, could fully acknowledge “the new kinds of personal and social relationship” but that could nevertheless function “both as a recognition of practical separation and as an emphasis of alternatives” (xvi).

This study has benefited from a wide range of recent scholarship, but it may be said to derive its orientation from three ongoing intellectual projects. The first of these is the turn within musicology towards an interest in the social uses of music. I mean by this two things: very broadly, the rich vein of scholarship devoted to Western art music’s social meaning that began with the “New Musicology” of thirty years ago, and one of whose originating problems has remained the work of Theodor Adorno. More specifically, this project finds models in particularly recent work within musicology and the philosophy of music that, moving out from under the long shadow cast by Nazism’s appropriation (and, it should be said, development) of Romantic musical nationalism, has taken a neutral, even appreciative interest in the socially formative or synthetic powers of musical works. In its outlines, such writing has attempted to find what Jean-Luc Nancy has described as the

¹⁷ As Nabokov observes, the French words of the peasant – “*Il faut le battre, le fer, le broyer, le pétrir*” – are part of “the French patter” both characters use “in speaking of everyday things in what Tolstoy considered a sham world.” In *Lectures on Russian Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Orlando, Fla.: Harvest, 1981), 182. See also Priscilla Meyer, “*Anna Karenina*: Tolstoy’s Polemic with *Madame Bovary*,” in *Russian Review* 54:2 (Apr. 1995), 243-259. One way of describing what I am trying to bring out in Goethe, Scott, and Eliot is the way in which musical models allow for a critique of liberal modernity that remains allergic to the opposition, so important in various nineteenth-century nationalisms, between the real and the sham.

“thinking of being-in-common” without “the thinking of an essence of community,” and which Nancy himself has found in an account of listening as a shared “relationship to meaning, a tension toward it” that never finds it.¹⁸ Similarly, Michael P. Steinberg writes, in his book *Listening to Reason*, that “the subjectivity inscribed in musical utterance is immediately a mode of intersubjectivity” – but, importantly, Steinberg further insists that the intersubjectivity both posited in, and demanded by, so much nineteenth-century bourgeois music need not be figured as an act of *possession* (as in Lydgate’s hearing of Rosamond) by another (typically national) subject. Steinberg draws on D.W. Winnicott’s well-known account of culture as transitional object, rather than on Nancy, to describe the intersubjectivity demanded of nineteenth-century listeners as “a mode of experience where self and world are difficult to distinguish.”¹⁹ What he finds musically in the requiems of Brahms, Verdi, and Dvořák, however, can be productively aligned with Nancy’s thinking: in these works, Steinberg discovers a way of grappling with an articulation of shared experience in music that does not transform the individual into a mere moment of a collective (the state, the nation) that is only instantiated in listening; a listening in which a collective is hailed, but rather than being hailed as united by a common origin, is instead conscious of being formed in the moment by aesthetic experience.

Secondly, this project relies on recent work on the dynamics and history of reading by literary critics and cultural historians. An earlier generation of historians of reading found

¹⁸ Nancy, “Preface” to *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991), xxxvii; *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham UP, 2007), 27. Nancy’s account of music and of the social is, I believe, a serious and deliberate attempt to imagine models for an open society without recourse to grounding concepts; for a perspicuous critique of Nancy’s writing as essentially apolitical, however, see Miranda Joseph’s *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002).

¹⁹ Steinberg, *Listening to Reason: Culture, Subjectivity, and Nineteenth-Century Music* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2004), 8-9.

themselves called upon to resist the hypothesized reader of reader-response theory, or the even more mythical general public for which reading could be safely assumed to be an “undifferentiatedly collective experience,” with a wide array of accounts of the particular, contingent practices of specific, real readers.²⁰ More recently, however, scholars of reading building on this important historical move have nevertheless moved beyond its polemical oppositions; as Kate Flint writes, in recent work “reading is increasingly acknowledged to be an activity poised between an intensely private, inward experience, on the one hand, and, on the other, as inseparable from a social world.”²¹ The “collective experience” of a united public, in this view, was not merely a methodological error, but actively at stake in nineteenth century controversies over styles of reading and writing. I will argue here that Goethe, Scott, and Eliot each turned to musical listening precisely in order to think through the nature of reading: to consider, on the one hand, the relationship between the reader formed by the text in the moment of reading – the single, private reader who is the text’s effect – and the particular reader existing in the world; and on the other, to test the possibilities offered in reading for the creation of a social feeling that could, in fact, be reasoned of by individuals – for imagining a fluidity of self in terms other than those of loss.

Lastly, this argument – like so much writing in the past decade – is in part a delayed response to Eve Sedgwick’s call, in *Touching Feeling*, for a form of criticism to stand alongside inherited models of ideology critique.²² Sedgwick characterizes the literary-critical scene of the late twentieth century as caught up in the “infinitely doable and teachable protocols of

²⁰ See Helen Small, “A pulse of 124: Charles Dickens and a pathology of the mid-Victorian reading public,” in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), for a capsule sketch of these developments. The quoted phrase appears on 263.

²¹ Flint, “Women and Reading,” in *Signs* 31:2 (Winter 2006), 511-536, at 512.

²² Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003).

unveiling” (143) – in which criticism seemed committed, almost without realizing it, to the operations of symptomatic reading, to the single claim “*It’s not natural*” (109).²³ I share Sedgwick’s sense that this critical style, if practiced to the exclusivity of others, both represents an impoverishment of the available ways of writing about literature and displays a strange naïveté about the political force of knowledge, and I find her account of the reparative work of Melanie Klein’s paranoid position – “to use one’s own resources to assemble or ‘repair’ the murderous part-objects into something like a whole – though, I would emphasize, *not necessarily like any preexisting whole*” (128) – to be both an appealing alternative model for criticism and a surprisingly apt description of the work of novel-writing.

One of the most significant ways of moving past ideology critique in recent years has been the so-called “affective turn” in cultural studies, in part as practiced by Sedgwick herself. Affect theory is by no means a homogeneous body of scholarship – Ann Cvetkovitch’s recent overview of the field begins, for good reason, with a diverse and lengthy list of things affect theory can be said to be doing at the moment²⁴ – but in the broadest strokes, scholarship on affect shares a concern with breaking down barriers between minds and bodies. This concern takes many forms: for Michael Hardt, the central task of affect theory is to straddle the divides “between the mind and the body, and between actions and passions.”²⁵ For many other scholars, what has been most significant about the

²³ For a recent overview of this critical style, and some suggested ways out of it, see *Representations* 108, No. 1 (Fall 2009), Special Issue: The Way We Read Now, ed. Sharon Marcus, Stephen Best, Emily Apter, and Elaine Freedgood.

²⁴ Cvetkovitch, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2012), 3.

²⁵ Hardt, “What Affects Are Good For,” in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia T. Clough (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2007), x.

vocabulary of affect has been a specifically social straddling: its ability to describe a “contagious energy” occurring between persons, as Elizabeth Wissinger writes²⁶; its access to “those intensities that pass body to body,” as Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg put it.²⁷ Yet if “contagious energy” is very much what is at stake when the nineteenth century thinks about music, that century nonetheless thinks of music’s ability to act on us as an action *on subjects*; what is most interesting in these novels is the potential resistance that music and subjectivity offer to each other. For this reason, these pages do not much resemble affect theory as such – often driven, as Seigworth and Gregg put it, by the desire to leave “behind the interiorized self” (8). Rather, like David Kurnick’s recent work on the novel and theater, this dissertation is concerned with the ways in which a private form may still be “lined with longing references to the public world.”²⁸

In the remainder of this introduction, I do three things. Firstly, I address the public setting of real musical listening in the nineteenth century, and suggest ways in which a specifically British tradition of thinking about music at the close of the eighteenth century is well suited to addressing its workings. I provide a very brief overview of three decades of British writing on music – one beginning with the Newcastle organist and composer Charles Avison’s 1752 *Essay on Musical Expression*, and continued by figures both marginal (John Brown, Daniel Webb) and relatively central (James Beattie) to British intellectual history. These writers put forward a description of musical listening which often operated via

²⁶ Wissinger, “Always On Display: Affective Production in the Modeling Industry,” in *The Affective Turn*, 232.

²⁷ Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregg and Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2010), 1.

²⁸ Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011), 3.

comparison with poetry; unlike more widely-known German theorists of music from this period and slightly afterwards, these writers placed the audience at the center of their accounts, locating the significance of music in a strange “as if” collective experience, one which both recalls the Kantian *sensus communis* and refuses it. Secondly, I consider in more detail Adam Smith’s essay on the imitative arts (likely written around 1780, but unpublished until 1795), an essay in which, as I hope to show, Smith engages in a style of writing that marks itself as writing, refusing any ability to mime music’s effects, while simultaneously doing precisely that. I treat Smith’s essay in such detail here not only because of its intrinsic interest, but also because of the importance of Smithian sympathy in many accounts of the novel’s rise. Nancy Armstrong, in particular, has recently placed Smith at the center of her description of *How Novels Think*, finding in Smithian sympathy a self-protective individualism that she correlates to the “self-enclosed” novel reader – a key opening move in the creation of a novelistic writing that can “express and ... limit the excesses of individualism at one and the same time.”²⁹ I find in Smith’s comments on music a kind of writing that provides possibilities for, as Armstrong puts it, “thinking otherwise” than inside this universalized individual subject (10) – a set of possibilities that the novels this dissertation treats will develop. And lastly, I provide a brief overview of this dissertation’s chapters.

II

That listening to music in the nineteenth century, both inside and outside of novels, was a social experience may seem a point too obvious to be worth mentioning: before the advent of sound reproduction, and indeed for the most part before the regime of darkened silence had settled over the concert, listening – in domestic parlors and concert halls alike –

²⁹ Armstrong, *How Novels Think* 42.

could hardly have been otherwise. The dating of the movement in concert halls towards something like the listening conditions that exist today – that is, towards an internalized and silent listening – varies from scholar to scholar, and according to place and genre of performance. James H. Johnson, describing the audience at the Paris Opéra, suggests that the new system was firmly in place by around 1850; Mark Twain, on the other hand, could be surprised as late as 1891 that the Bayreuth audience “sit in the dark and worship in silence,” while “in New York... they hum airs, they squeak fans, they titter, and they gabble all the time.”³⁰ Kenneth Hamilton, writing of the development of the rituals surrounding the piano recital, dates the silent concert hall to as late as 1920, and notes that a purely “internalized audience response in a public concert would have been thought inappropriate, even downright peculiar, for much of the nineteenth century.”³¹

I review this history here for two reasons. The first is that it suggests that a commonplace of much word-and-music criticism – that the novel and music could have particular relevance to each other only after writers moved away from their commitments to representation of the social world – is essentially an anachronism. Werner Wolf writes, along these lines, that modernism allowed fiction to engage with music anew, as modernism “is, after all, a period in which beaten paths of (mimetic) storytelling were abandoned on a large scale and in which the emphasis shifted from a referential focus on the outer world to a

³⁰ Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1995), 343. “At the Shrine of St. Wagner,” in *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neidler (New York: Da Capo, 2000), 69.

³¹ Kenneth Hamilton, *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2008), 85.

preoccupation with the inner world of the psyche.”³² But if the “inner world” was not, precisely, where music met its listener in the nineteenth century, it might be that our twentieth-century habits have been causing us to look in the wrong place for traces of it.

Secondly – and relatedly – the historical fact of nineteenth-century talking-while-listening should encourage us to find in that century’s representations of listening as a social event something other than failures to be “truly” musical. In a provocative essay, Daniel K.L. Chua claims that “the sound of the nineteenth-century self” has finally found its material analogue in the iPod: if the “entire Romantic project is based on an inner audition of the self,” then with the iPod (or, surely, the less glamorous Walkman too) we have finally achieved the condition of “a self closed off from the outside world like a sonic monad,” only to discover not “the revolutionary spirit of humanity hibernating in hard times but an isolated privatized self, absorbed in what it thinks it already has.”³³ Chua’s broad formulations seem in some ways familiar: consider, for instance, the young Wordsworth walking in “storm and tempest” in the second book of the *Prelude*, famously encountering “possible sublimity” in “whate’er there is in the power of sound / To breathe an elevated mood.” Sound transcends form and image to create a “shadowy exaltation” that is recalled as an effect without cause, the soul “[r]emembering how she felt, but what she felt / Remembering not.”³⁴ Yet the “nineteenth-century self,” at least as it appears in the novel, listens to actual music in quite a different way: the nineteenth-century novel, like nineteenth-

³² Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 125. For a variation on this argument, see Angela Frattarola, “Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel” in *Journal of Modern Literature* 33:1 (Fall 2009), 132-153

³³ Chua, “Listening to the Self: *The Shamsbank Redemption* and the Technology of Music,” in *19th-Century Music* 34:3 (Spring 2011), 341-355.

³⁴ *The Prelude* of 1805, II.322ff., in *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, MH Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: Norton, 1979). See also Jay Clayton, “Visionary Power and Narrative Form: Wordsworth and *Adam Bede*,” in *ELH* 46:4 (Winter 1979), 645-672.

century people, listens typically in public, and it is far more circumspect about the division between the “what” of aesthetic object and the “how” of aesthetic response.

Thinking about listening in nineteenth-century novels thus necessarily requires an approach to the relationship between literature and music that is able to theorize listening as a social activity. The nineteenth century inherited its basic structures for thinking about music from the late eighteenth century, at which time an older aesthetics based on musical imitation was in the later stages of breakdown. The so-called *Affektenlehre* – the doctrine of the affections prevailing from the seventeenth century until the middle of the 18th – had tied musical expressivity to feelings that, as Carl Dahlhaus notes, were imagined to exist objectively: music *represented* those affections rather than “expressing” them as though from within itself.³⁵ Accompanying this theory was a baroque musical practice in which certain figures were, indeed, conventionally tied to the affections they represented, thus creating a relatively stable system of musical representation. Towards the end of the century, however, this system began to break down; the problem facing critics in the late eighteenth-century was thus one of articulating an alternative way of understanding how music might comprehensibly create effects in the world without reference to representation.

There were two primary responses. The more familiar of these – the expressive theory of music associated with Richter, Tieck, Wackenroder, and above all Hoffmann – put forward an influential account of music as a transcendent world apart from the everyday, one centered on the instrumental music that would come to be called absolute, that accomplished what Ruth Katz describes as a remystification of musical language, a deliberate

³⁵ Dahlhaus, *Aesthetics of Music*, trans. William W. Austin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), 17-24.

turn to “the mysterious and magical, the ineffable and enchanting.”³⁶ As M.H. Abrams argues in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, these theorists articulated an “expressive theory” of composition in which the audience of music and literature alike became an afterthought.³⁷ Hoffmann took perhaps the most extreme position possible in his writings on Beethoven: “Music reveals to man an unknown realm, a world quite separate from the outer sensual world surrounding him, a world in which he leaves behind all feelings circumscribed by intellect in order to embrace the inexpressible.”³⁸ What Hoffmann rejects here is not merely the imitative theory of music that European modernity had inherited from Aristotle, but even the possibility of music’s expressing anything other than, paradoxically, the “inexpressible”: Hoffmann’s music thus has no referent, but also no addressee (except, perhaps, a hoped-for audience of the future).³⁹ The consequences for the representation of music in literature are likewise extreme; as John T. Hamilton puts it, “[e]very linguistic

³⁶ In *A Language of Its Own*, 161. See also Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and London: U of California P, 1989), particularly 81-83.

³⁷ *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Norton, 1958), 89.

³⁸ “Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony,” in *Kreisleriana*, ed. Charlton, 236.

³⁹ On this point in Hoffmann, see Katz, 173-5. Daniel K.L. Chua makes a similar point in his *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), suggesting that the theory of absolute music arose as a response to the historical failures of the French Revolution – “instrumental music only figures in the modern discourse when modernity needs to overcome its own failure” – and takes on its importance within romanticism as a negative figure of political community, its transposition into “the figure of the vacant sign” that might, someday, become meaningful (10-11). The possibility of a future audience for which music might have concretely expressive significance is an important one, and one that plays an important role in discussions of aesthetic education and political community throughout a wide array of texts in the Romantic period. See, for example, Downing A. Thomas’s discussion of Diderot’s *Leçons de clavecin*, in which as he sees it Diderot finds in music a hypothesized relationship “between the individual body and the community” which suggests “the future promise of culture.” In *Music and the Origins of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 10.

encounter” with music necessarily “seems poised on the brink of two abysses: the emptiness of the abstract concept or the awed silence before the ineffable.”⁴⁰

The social occasion of listening falls away entirely in Hoffmann’s account. But as Abrams notes, this approach to music was only one of two strands of anti-representational thinking about music in the eighteenth century. Abrams finds an alternative account of music in a group of British critics who, in the second half of the eighteenth century, replaced the older imitative theory of music not with the ineffable, but instead with a study of music’s “power of raising affections in the listener” (Abrams 92). For Charles Avison, writing in 1752, music’s ability to create effects and generate coherence over time was best understood in terms of linguistic categories: “cadences in Music,” he wrote, “are the same as Stops in Speaking, or Writing,” thus anticipating Friedrich Schlegel’s comments on the potential relationship between literature and “grammatical music” by a good forty years.⁴¹ Others following Avison would echo his commitments, both to an expressive theory of music, and to one articulated in relationship to the other arts, chief among them poetry.⁴² The audience, rather than the composer or poet, was of primary interest for these critics. For this reason

⁴⁰ *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008), 10.

⁴¹ Avison, *Essay*, “Advertisement.” See Schlegel’s statement, in the sixty-fourth of the *Critical Fragments*, that “[f]or a proper appreciation of a number of literary works we still need a theory of grammatical music,” in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: U of Minn. P, 1991), 8. Adorno virtually re-writes Avison’s comments in the second paragraph of his essay “Punctuation Marks.”

⁴² See Charles Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression* (London: Davis, 1752); John Brown, *A Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power... of Poetry and Music* (Dublin: Faulkner, 1762); Daniel Webb, *Observations on the Correspondence between Poetry and Music* (London: Dodsley, 1769); James Beattie, *On Poetry and Music, as they affect the mind* (Edinburgh: Creech, 1776); Adam Smith, “Of the Nature of that Imitation...” in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W.P.D. Wightman and J.C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982). Overviews of the development that takes place in these texts towards an expressive aesthetic of music can be found in Herbert Schueller, “‘Imitation’ and ‘Expression’ in British Music Criticism in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Musical Quarterly* 34 (1948), 544-66; and in Edward A. Lippmann, “Imitation and Expression,” in *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1992).

these writers have received careful attention in recent years from literary scholars investigating how Romanticism conceived of its audience. Thus Kevin Barry finds that this body of writing moves beyond both the “relative emptiness” of the musical sign and alternative understandings of music as necessarily dominating its audience; instead, Avison, James Beattie, and Adam Smith treated music as an “intention towards a response which is relatively uncertain.”⁴³ More recently, Noelle Chao argues that Avison, in particular, began a tradition of English musical speculation that “by shifting the focus to ‘effects’ ... avoids a discussion of what music is, instead favoring one that covers what music can do.”⁴⁴

The often heated debate between imitative and expressive theories of music that these writers took part in can appear bewilderingly muddled – Thomas Twining’s statement that “music can be said to imitate, no farther than as it *expresses* something” is sadly representative.⁴⁵ Chao and Barry both suggest, however, the larger significance of the controversy. As Barry shows, the expressive approach to music was immediately controversial because an account like Avison’s was clearly open to the charge of dissolving musical experience into relativistic solipsism. This was the purport of the Oxford composer William Hayes’s 1753 *Remarks on Mr. Avison’s Essay*: “without *Imitation* there cannot possibly be any such Thing as true musical Expression” (quoted in Barry, 34). Imitation had provided a ground for judgment; if the new writing about music could only speak of its effects – and uncertainly at that – was there still anything about those effects that pertained, “truly” or necessarily, to the music itself? Unlike Hoffmann, these British critics could not

⁴³ Kevin Barry, *Language, Music and the Sign* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 10 and 35.

⁴⁴ Noelle Louise Chao, *Musical Letters: Eighteenth-Century Writings on Music and the Fictions of Burney, Radcliffe, and Scott* (PhD. diss., U of California Los Angeles, 2008), 3.

⁴⁵ Twining, “On the different senses of the word, imitative, as applied to music by the antients and by the moderns,” in *Aristotle’s Treatise on Poetry* (London: Payne, 1789), vol. 1, 66.

ground the identity of the musical work in a hypothesized *future* audience: what mattered about music was its real expressive power in the here and now.

Music thus found itself caught up in the larger taste debate – the controversy over “the incurably private in experience, and... the specific needs of the shareability of experience that arise in aesthetic contexts,” as Richard Moran puts it in a recent essay.⁴⁶ But music’s position was a particularly fraught one, as at once the traditionally most persuasive and, now, rather suddenly the least meaningful of the arts. As Smith put it, “[w]hatever we feel from instrumental music is an original, and not a sympathetic feeling: it is our own gaiety, sedateness, or melancholy; not the reflected disposition of another person” (198). The difficulty, of course, lies in how such specific feelings can be said to be ours *and* the music’s; why *our* being gay or melancholy means that the music is, and thus why we might expect others to respond in the same way. Harold Osborne, in a recent essay on musical expressivity that, while citing none of these authors, seems to recapitulate much of this tradition, puts the problem in a way that particularly emphasizes its philosophical awkwardness – at least in relation to more familiar, Kantian terms:

[W]hereas our experience of our own feelings is private to ourselves, to be communicated to others only by words and gesture, we believe that during a performance of music the other members of the audience have experiences very similar to our own and to this extent the feelings perceived *in* the music are nevertheless interpersonal.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “Kant, Proust, and the Appeal of Beauty,” in *Critical Inquiry* 38:2 (Winter 2012), 298-329, at 303.

⁴⁷ “Expressiveness in the Arts,” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41:1 (Autumn, 1982), 19-26, at 20.

The words echo the “as if” of the second moment of Kant’s treatment of beauty – his account of how it is that, even though judgments of taste “cannot be other than *subjective*,” the beholder of beauty will nevertheless “talk about the beautiful as if beauty were a characteristic of the object” that can be assumed “to be valid for everyone.”⁴⁸ But the situation with musical expression is if anything more excruciatingly embarrassing: the listener here is projecting a particular emotional response onto her fellow listeners, not making the normative claim that others should share her free liking of the object. Subject to these difficulties, the bulk of British musical writing abandoned the imitative hypothesis nevertheless, and therefore found itself confronting the difficulty that, as James Beattie put it, while “expression is the chief excellence of music,” and music’s chief aim one of “introduc[ing] into the human mind certain affections,” that expression is “vague or ambiguous,” and the affections produced might in fact be formed “only [by] an accidental connection.”⁴⁹

III

Smith’s essay “Of the Nature of That Imitation Which Takes Place in What Are Called the Imitative Arts” is an illuminating response to this dilemma – illuminating precisely because Smith seems to enact this difficulty, or develop a way of writing through it, rather

⁴⁸ *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), §1 and §6.

⁴⁹ Beattie, *On Poetry and Music*, 453, 461 and 463. On the vagueness of music, see also Johann Gottfried Herder’s dialogue “Does Painting or Music Have a Greater Effect,” in *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. Gregory Moore (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006), 347-356. Herder is a clear point of contact between this British tradition and later German developments, commenting as he does on James Harris’s *Three Treatises* comparing the arts in the first of the *Kritische Wälder*; like Schlegel after him, Herder reads Harris and wishes for another Lessing.

than resolve it.⁵⁰ While Smith concedes to music some imitative powers, he is particularly eager to show that expression operates independent of imitation, as “the immediate and necessary effect of melody and harmony” (206). What he is after, in other words, is an alternative way of grounding expression – the “effect upon the mind” produced by music – within music as heard, and without reference to any external source. Smith goes about this by directly addressing the social situation and effects of music. Smith’s image of music is twofold: it is, on the one hand, the most private of the arts, best suited, Smith writes, to the person who has “one thought or idea which dwells upon his mind, which continually haunts him, which, when he has chased it away, immediately returns upon him, and which in company makes him absent and inattentive” (191). As a result, Smith writes, this obsessive “takes refuge in solitude,” where he can freely indulge in the repetition – “almost always in the same words” – of the haunting thought. “Neither Prose nor Poetry,” Smith writes, “can venture to imitate those almost endless repetitions of passion,” though, as he writes, “[t]hey may describe them as I do now.” Music, however, is entirely in keeping with the compulsion to repeat: “Music frequently produces its effects by a repetition of the same idea; and the same sense expressed in the same, or nearly the same, combination of sounds, though at first perhaps it may make scarce any impression upon us, yet, by being repeated again and again, it comes at last gradually, and by little and little, to move, to agitate, and to transport us” (192). In Smith’s account, then, music does not so much imitate a particular passion, as it does the repetition that is the form of private experience; for this reason, it is ideally suited to “express sometimes all the sedateness and composure of a serious but calm discourse, and sometimes all the exquisite sensibility of the most interesting passion” (191).

⁵⁰ Adam Smith, “Of the Nature of that Imitation...” in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W.P.D. Wightman and J.C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982).

This is a startling account of music, and in Smith's portrait of the haunted obsessive, a strangely specific scene of its paradigmatic use. What is even more startling, however, is the paragraph that immediately follows the sentence I have just quoted, in which Smith – without apparent embarrassment – introduces his second image of music: “[t]he sentiments and passions which Music can best imitate are those which unite and bind men together in society; the social, the decent, the virtuous, the interesting and affecting, the amiable and agreeable...” (192). Out of a discussion of music as rooted in precisely the most *isolating* emotional experiences, ones that force the individual to take refuge in solitude, Smith develops, without transition, an account of music as a force for social cohesion.⁵¹

What is happening here? There are, I think, two overlapping answers – and both have particular relevance to the novels the remainder of this dissertation will discuss. The first connection between the solitary individual and the social whole is a conceptual one: Smith's writing here is an intervention in an ongoing discussion of melancholy. In the first of his *Essays*, David Hume separates out what he calls “delicacy of passion” – being “extremely sensible to all the accidents of life” – from “delicacy of taste,” the same extreme sensitivity towards “a poem or a picture.”⁵² The former, Hume writes, exposes the individual to every vicissitude of fortune, and makes him susceptible to self-loss: “his sorrow or resentment takes entire possession of him” (4); as a result, this delicacy of passion must

⁵¹ I am struck by how much Edward Said adopts something like Smith's method of proceeding in the third of his Wellek lectures, entitled “Melody, Solitude, and Affirmation.” Said – here and throughout the lectures published in *Musical Elaborations* – is intent to honor the privacy of musical experience. Yet what he wants to speak about here is a form of binding: how a listener binds to the music, how a performer might “tie himself to the music physically and intellectually” (80). Said's ultimate claim is that “performance of a work of music aims at identity” – an identity between performer, listener, and work. Yet Said arrives at this point through what he calls “a relatively personal experience,” a report of his own thoughts while listening to Alfred Brendel play the Brahms piano variations Op. 18.

⁵² “Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,” in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 3-4.

be eliminated. Delicacy of taste, however, distracts “the mind from the hurry of business and interest” and thereby produces the tranquility of “agreeable melancholy, which, of all dispositions of the mind, is the best suited to love and friendship” (7). Melancholy, then, is Hume’s name for the state of the aesthetic observer set apart from the everyday, and it is *this* state that he links to sociability, rooting social feeling, therefore, in an explicitly detached mode. In his description of the musical obsessive, however, Smith seems to have quite another melancholy in mind – the obsessive melancholy found in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* (and about which Johnson himself knew a great deal): “[a] kind of madness, in which the mind is always fixed on one object.”⁵³ For Smith, this obsessive insularity, so closely allied to the over-sensitivity toward the “accidents of life,” is itself and without any intermediate gesture towards self-detachment an aesthetic state productive of social feeling. But again, how?

If I am right about the dynamics of this passage, then what opens up in Smith here is not so much an argument *about* but a mode of writing *in relation to* music, and to the social feeling that occurs in moments of listening. Thinking of music leads Smith slightly astray from his familiar account of sympathy in the earlier *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In that work, as Nancy Armstrong writes, Smith preserves the “self-enclosure” of the individual by insisting that sympathy operates entirely within the self: “to share the feelings of another person [is] to imagine ourselves in that person’s place and experience his or her emotions at one remove” (Armstrong 19-20). As Armstrong sees it, this way of thinking of our relation to others is what is both tested and practiced in the main tradition of novel-writing, which from Austen on worked to maintain the “radically individualistic logic of sympathy” against the threat of “spontaneous and collective emotional responses” (20); what is at stake in

⁵³ Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1756), s.v. “melancholy.”

Smithian sympathy is, Armstrong writes, a way of converting a subject's emotional response to the world into "ideas that enrich that subject's personal storehouse of knowledge." This is this work of the novel – and indeed Armstrong means all novels: to "incorporate any number of sentimental arguments" into an amplification of the individual (16). The self-enclosed reader, like the character he reads about, feels in order to transform that feeling into experience, all in the service of "reproducing modern individuals wherever novels are written and read" (10).

In thinking about music, however, Smith carves out a quite different role for writing and reading. This is not to say that Smith advocates here for a directly expressive writing, or indeed that he attempts to produce one. Yet at the very moment that Smith disclaims any power prose or poetry might have to *imitate* the repetitions of passion, thereby installing an absolute difference between musical imitation and the mere description of writing, his own prose immediately falls into obsessive, repetitive patterns, stacking clauses one after the other: "he can repeat to himself, which he does sometimes mentally, and sometimes even aloud, and almost always in the same words..." (191). As he installs, in theory, the opposition between language's presentation of "different thoughts and ideas" and music's "repetition of the same idea," he then concludes his sentence with a series of repetitions: "the same sense expressed in the same, or nearly the same, combination of sounds, though at first perhaps it may make scarce any impression upon us, yet, by being repeated again and again, it comes at least gradually, and by little and little, to move, to agitate, and to transport us." We are moved "little by little," indeed: surely our discovery, as readers, of the binding powers of music is being doubled here by the motions, the agitations, the transports of language. Smith's writing about music explicitly opens up a space between the reader who

understands and the reader who is acted upon; Goethe, Scott, and Eliot, as I will argue, all seek to use that space to imagine alternative modes of novel-reading subjects.

The dissertation is made up of three chapters, whose arguments are as follows:

1. The opening chapter focuses closely on Mignon, the apparently mysterious and pathetic character from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Mignon poses a problem for the understanding of this hyper-canonical yet under-read novel because her songs – and her apparently musical soul – seem to represent a world of affective content that cannot be effectively incorporated into the novel's form. Mignon seems, in a word, oddly kitschy for Goethe. Drawing on the interpretation of Mignon in nineteenth-century rhetorical manuals, on the first edition of the novel (in which musical settings of her songs were printed on attached sheets, for the reader to use as she saw fit), and on a wider range of musical inserts into eighteenth-century print narrative, I argue that Mignon is troubling not because she suffers from an excess of affective content, but rather because she poses a sharp question about the experience of reading. Mignon's most famous song, "Kennst du das Land," asks the reader to consider whether the novel represents a world, or operates in one. It is *this* instability, I argue, that the retrospective re-reading of Mignon – begun, most influentially, by Friedrich Schlegel – seeks to master.

2. The dissertation's second chapter discusses Walter Scott's techniques for hailing the reader's interest in both his verse romances and the Waverley novels. The received critical account of Scott finds in his historical fiction a paradigmatically modern gesture of ironic framing, an ideological obfuscation in which history (as romance) can be safely isolated from the everyday reality of the reader's own existence, which is therefore upheld as the normal. I

suggest, through a more surface reading of explicit calls for attention in Scott's fiction, that Scott – though undoubtedly at times practicing this sort of double-switch – is typically at once more obvious and less nefarious than this. Scott uses a visual language for attention, I argue, in his verse romances to model for the reader an experience of intense absorption; in these long poems, he stages visual absorption repeatedly in ways, as I will suggest, that closely resemble Michael Fried's reading of Greuze.⁵⁴ However, Scott's second verse romance, *Marmion*, itself shows that this form of consciously sought-after absorption in fiction is too easily dismissed as an escapist maneuver. Scott's novelistic style, however, draws upon a quite different, and specifically musical model for layered attention that Scott first crafted in his work as a ballad collector: one that demands from its reader not an absorbed encounter with the page, but rather a layered one – one in which the reader can exist in both the fiction and her reality without, however, enforcing an opposition between the two.

As both a translator of Goethe and a primary site of what Homer Obed Brown refers to as “the institution of the English novel,” Scott is both the chronological and conceptual center of this dissertation's argument.⁵⁵ I therefore connect this central chapter to the two on either side of it with two brief inter-chapters. The first focuses on Scott's reception of Goethe in his early translation of Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*. Goethe's play rejects the possibility of a literature that could attach its readers to a culture; Scott's translation, however, subtly modifies the play so as to leave open the possibility that reading might perform the task of cultural attachment that Goethe reserves for listening. The

⁵⁴ Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1980).

⁵⁵ Brown, *Institutions of the English Novel: From Defoe to Scott* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

second inter-chapter indexes, via Maggie Tulliver's reading of Scott in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, the development of the Victorian image of Scott into what I argue he never was, a natural storyteller.

3. The third and final chapter of this dissertation treats George Eliot's final novel, *Daniel Deronda*, which represents both *becoming* and *being* Jewish as being moved by a song whose words one cannot understand. If theory, as Sedgwick and Frank write, has indeed seemed at times to reduce itself to a pointing-out of the unnatural, then I would suggest *Daniel Deronda* has drawn so much attention in recent years precisely because it is a post-theoretical novel in those terms: one that knows that meaningful cultural and political attachments are unnatural, and yet strives to make them convincing nevertheless. Listening to poorly understood music is Eliot's model for that kind of attachment – an experience, as I will argue, that both links Eliot back to Scott (despite her earlier criticism of him), and allows Eliot to combat the technologization of music's potential in Richard Wagner's musical drama.

The Interesting Child: Mignon (as though) for the first time

Mignon and “Kennst du das Land” – the character’s first song in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, and the one that often stood in for its singer in the nineteenth century – represent an interpretive problem.⁵⁶ The problem arises less because we do not know how to understand the singer or her song, but because we seem to understand both all too well.

What does a reader of this novel know about Mignon? The circumstances leading up to her first appearance are these: Wilhelm, the novel’s mild-mannered hero, loiters in the square of a small town outside of an inn where he is thinking of taking a room, and buys a bouquet of flowers; suddenly “the window of another inn on the other side of the square” opens and Wilhelm sees in it “an attractive woman” whose face he longingly observes: “Her blond hair fell loosely around her neck, and she seemed to turn and look at him” (49-50). This silent scene of looking is then replaced by an exchange of messages. The woman in the window sends a boy to ask for Wilhelm’s flowers; he gives them to her “with... his compliments,” and the woman responds “with a friendly greeting” (50). It is as Wilhelm walks away from this satisfying exchange that he first encounters Mignon: “Reflecting on

⁵⁶ For the interchangeability of Mignon and “Kennst du das Land,” one need only look at the many, many instances in nineteenth-century periodicals in which this song – unlike, for the most part, Mignon’s others – is identified as “Mignon’s Song” or even only “Mignon” – as, for example, “In that splendid song, Mignon, again, the refrain is neglected...” See the review of *Poems and Ballads of Goethe* in *Bentley’s Miscellany* 45 (1859), 403.

A note on editions: In this chapter, I chiefly use three editions of Goethe’s novel. All references in German are to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in the fifty-five volume Weimarer Ausgabe, or WA (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1887-1918), vols. 21-23; following the congenial procedures of the Goethe Society, I cite the German text by book and chapter, where practical, rather than volume and page. For reasons that will become clear below, I also discuss the layout of the novel’s first edition, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Unger, 1795-6); though I have consulted this edition, for reasons of quality my images are from the exact reproduction of this edition in *Goethes Werke in Form und Text ihrer Erstausgaben*, ed. Karl Georg Wendriner (Berlin: Morawe und Scheffelt, [1912]). For a useful discussion of the Unger edition itself, see Siegfried Unseld, *Goethe and his Publishers* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996). References to the novel in English are, unless otherwise noted, to *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, ed. and trans. Eric A. Blackall and Victor Lange (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995); page citations will be given in text. The English translation of “Kennst du das Land” is also to the translation in this edition, by Hal Draper.

this pleasant episode, he was going upstairs to his room when a young creature jumped out at him and immediately attracted his attention” (50). He looks at her “with amazement” and tries to speak with her, but loses her in the crowd. This sequence of events – (longing) observation, (satisfying) interaction, Mignon – then neatly repeats itself. Again, Wilhelm finds himself in fascinated observation – this time, watching “two men... practicing fencing, trying out their skill on each other.” He “admire[s]” their skill, and after one of the two has “left the scene,” Wilhelm enters into it himself, first fencing with and then speaking with the man who remains. This conversation, however, is itself “interrupted”; at this point that Wilhelm “notice[s] again the dark, somber-looking young girl” (50).

Mignon is a being that attracts attention, then, and she does so at very particular moments. Twice she interrupts narrative scenes, or appears during moments of reflection upon “episodes”; more specifically, she twice appears immediately after Wilhelm has entered into an exchange of some kind with the very scene he has observed. Like the woman in the window, or the men fencing, Mignon draws Wilhelm’s eye – but she draws the eye only to escape it. When she reappears yet again, she does so as “the child who so interested him earlier” (53), and it is this quality, that of being consistently *interesting*, that seems to best describe her. Repeatedly in the novel, she is *das interessante Kind* – the object, as one recent critic writes, of “interest never-ending.”⁵⁷

Mignon, then: the interesting child. The phrase’s first appearance is near the end of the fourth chapter of the novel’s second book of eight, and it has seemed oddly difficult to render literally into English. Perhaps the best recent translation of the novel, that by Eric Blackall and Victor Lange, translates *das interessante Kind* as “the mysterious child” (57); Thomas Carlyle, translating the novel into English for the first time, in 1824, thought to

⁵⁷ Thomas Fetzer, “Interest Never-Ending: Mignon-Echoes in Thomas Mann’s Echo,” in *Goethes Mignon und ihre Schwestern*, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).

provide his readers with “poor Mignon.”⁵⁸ Mignon’s ability to draw and hold attention is thus changed, via translation, into either enigma or pathos; in each of these translations a phenomenological fact has been replaced by an inferred cause. These are not at all unreasonable interpretations of Mignon’s interest, or rather of Wilhelm’s interest in her: Mignon *is* enigmatic, not least in her ambiguous gender status (the novel uses masculine, feminine, and neuter pronouns for her initially): “He looked at the figure with amazement, uncertain whether it was a boy or a girl” (50). She (the pronoun the novel eventually settles on) is also, from the beginning, moving: in the moment in which Goethe makes Mignon interesting and Carlyle poor, she is being dragged by the hair and beaten, and Wilhelm’s response is immediate and direct: “Wilhelm tore over to the man and seized him by the chest. ‘Let go of that child!’ he cried, yelling like a maniac, ‘or one of us will be dead!’” (57). These translations of Mignon’s interest, into mystery and into moving victimhood, are therefore exactly right replacements. They are, furthermore, replacements that can almost stand in for much of an entire century’s habits of thinking about music – as a moving force of mysterious power.

As I have suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, music in the nineteenth century novel is not merely a shadowy force; music also serves novelists as a way of reflecting on their audiences, of imagining forms of reading that are other than merely private. *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* is, of course, a founding instance of that most central genre of liberal, private reading: the *Bildungsroman*. Part of my argument thus traces the formation of that private reader, who is both moved and puzzled by Mignon’s music in ways that, as I will suggest below, are ultimately self-protective. Yet my argument here is also that to forget that Mignon is above all interesting, and interesting *before* she is either mysterious or moving, is to have in effect re-read the novel before reading it – a strange activity that

⁵⁸ *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, trans. Carlyle (New York: Collier, 1962), 109.

immediately catches us in an unhappily familiar revolving door of cultural criticism, one whose motion is already signaled in the choice between *poor* Mignon and *mysterious* Mignon. It is also, as I will argue, to obscure the extent to which *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* is, especially around Mignon, a deliberate intervention into styles of reading – to forget, that is, that the novel enacts a transformation of reading for what is interesting into reading for explanation *or* pathos.

***Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* ; or, the re-reading of “Kennst du das Land”**

I make this argument here almost exclusively with reference to “Kennst du das Land.” I quote the poem here, in Goethe’s German and the English version by Hal Draper⁵⁹:

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen	Know you the land where lemon blossoms
blühen,	blow,
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen	And through the dark leaves the golden
glühen,	oranges glow,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,	A gentle breeze wafts from an azure sky,
Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht.	The myrtle’s still, the laurel tree grows high–
Kennst du es wohl?	You know it, yes?
Dahin! Dahin	Oh there, oh there
Möcht’ ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter, ziehn!	With you, O my beloved, would I fare.
Kennst du das Haus, auf Säulen ruht sein Dach,	Know you the house? Roof pillars over it,
Es glänzt der Saal, es schimmert das Gemach,	The chambers shining and the hall bright-lit,
Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an:	The marble figures gaze at me in rue:

⁵⁹ See note 1 above.

Was hat man dir, du armes Kind gethan?	“You poor poor child, what have they done to
Kennst du es wohl?	you?”
Dahin! Dahin	You know it, yes?
Möcht’ ich mit dir, o mein Beschützer,	Oh there, oh there,
ziehn.	With you, O my protector, would I fare.
Kennst du den Berg und seinen	Know you the mountain and its cloudy trails?
Wolkensteg?	The mule picks out its path through misty veils,
Das Maulthier sucht im Nebel seinen Weg,	The dragon’s ancient brood haunts caverns here,
In Höhlen wohnt der Drachen alte Brut,	The cliff drops straight, the stream above falls
Es stürzt der Fels und über ihn die Fluth:	sheer.
Kennst du ihn wohl?	You know it, yes?
Dahin! Dahin	Oh there, oh there
Geht unser Weg; o Vater, laß uns ziehn!	Our path goes on! There, Father, let us fare!

The song appears at the very beginning of the third book of the novel, and, like its singer a few chapters earlier, makes a great initial impression upon Wilhelm – “[t]he melody and the expression pleased Wilhelm greatly” (83). Later, in its eighth and final book, the novel devotes an extraordinary amount of space to re-reading Mignon, and this song in particular. As Mignon is dying, and after she is dead, various authority figures provide Wilhelm and the novel’s readers with an account of what these words mean; perhaps most memorably, the novel inserts, after narrating her sentimental and aestheticizing funeral, a brief history of her life in the form of a letter from her uncle. The letter refers explicitly to many of the images from “Kennst du das Land,” and it seemingly offers the pleasure of explanation: So *that’s* what she meant! Mignon sings of lemons, oranges, and myrtle because her father spoke of them; Mignon sings of marble figures because she used to visit a villa to “peer at the statues”

(359) on long walks; Mignon sings of a waterfall because she lost her hat near “the place where a mountain torrent gushed into the lake” (360) while running away from home.

The problem with these explanations is of course that they hardly offer pleasure at all, seeming indeed to mock rather than supply satisfactory explanations. In his book *Wonder, The Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*, Philip Fisher attacks an “anti-intellectual idea of poetry” associated with the sublime that can only imagine explanation as loss.⁶⁰ Fisher finds a representative of this strand of thinking about explanation in Keats’s *Lamia*, the second part of which contains the famous lament on “cold philosophy,” which transforms the “awful rainbow” into a mere part of “the dull catalogue of common things.” Mignon could have served Fisher just as well as an example (except, perhaps, that she might work *too* well with his claim that narrative is in its essence inimical to wonder): for George Henry Lewes, the reader’s first sight of Mignon has “the effect of a rainbow in the London streets” – and as Lewes notes elsewhere, “in the case of a rainbow, we discover that it is only the appearance of certain drops of water.”⁶¹ To learn that Mignon saw statues, or lost her hat at a waterfall: these are prime instances of explanation as damaging demystification, inviting the disgust (and subsequent, thickly remystifying, novel-writing) of a reader like Novalis, who after a first, equivocal response, eventually determined that “*Wilhelm Meister* is actually a *Candide* directed against poetry.”⁶² Readers of the novel’s concluding revision of Mignon have long responded, in part, like the one Walter Scott imagines when considering the dangers of the explained supernatural in Radcliffe’s Gothic: if an “inadequate cause is

⁶⁰ *Wonder, The Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1998), 89.

⁶¹ *The Life and Works of Goethe*, vol. 2 (Boston: Ticknor, 1856), 213; *A Biographical History of Philosophy*, vol. 3 (London: Knight and Co., 1846), 115.

⁶² “Last Fragments,” in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: SUNY P, 1997), 159.

assigned for a strong emotion, the reader feels tricked, and like a child who has once seen the scenes of a theatre too nearly, the idea of paste-board, cords, and pulleys destroys forever the illusion with which they were first seen from the proper point of view.”⁶³ Central to a view of Mignon-as-rainbow is, as Scott suggests, the notion of an absolute and destructive distinction between a first and a second reading created by a change in the reader’s knowledge. As Scott wrote elsewhere of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, it is “impossible to re-peruse the book without feeling... contempt.”⁶⁴ Once we know that Mignon is from Italy, and was abducted, and lost her hat at a waterfall, “Kennst du das Land” loses its charm for us; the child’s taste for theater collapses after he has seen behind the curtain.

But of course this has not been true of readers responding to Mignon: the novel’s concluding re-reading of Mignon may produce contempt, but that contempt never seems to have made “re-perusal” impossible. The nineteenth century always wanted to hear “Kennst du das Land,” and indeed preferred it to the novel – Willi Schuh finds that this one song receives at least eighty-four settings over the course of the century, a density of musical output that suggests not only popularity but a longstanding desire to get this song *right*.⁶⁵ Carlyle wrote in the preface to his translation of the novel that the reader unconvinced by the narrative as a whole should simply “turn to the history of Mignon.”⁶⁶ Following his suggestion, Carlyle’s reader did indeed consume Mignon in precisely this way, as a part best consumed independent from its whole: indeed those who, like a critic in *The Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette*, found the novel “nothing but a piece of patch-work” were haunted all

⁶³ “Mrs. Ann Radcliffe,” in *The Novels of Ann Radcliffe*, vol. 10 of Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1824),

⁶⁴ In *Quarterly Review* 3 (May 1810), 339-347, at 345.

⁶⁵ See Schuh, *Goethe-Vertonungen: ein Verzeichnis* (Zürich: Artemis, 1952).

⁶⁶ “Translator’s Preface,” in *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, trans. Carlyle, 19.

the more by Mignon: “The flavor is on your lip. The impregnating odor about you, and the color pursuing you, *forever...*”⁶⁷ For Francis Jeffrey in 1825, Mignon’s songs were moving evidence of the character’s own disordered but therefore all the more fascinating inwardness – her “unaccountable” nature that was “full of sensibility.”⁶⁸ Twenty years later, Margaret Fuller refers to Mignon as an “inspired, lyrical nature” – a prime example of those women who, “though we see them in relations, we can think of as unrelated” to the society, the world, or for that matter the novel in which they live.⁶⁹

How, then, is one to read the persistence of Mignon’s appeal? Perhaps the simplest statement of our problem with Mignon is this: that around her we seem to still have feelings that, according to standard narratives of demystifying explanation, are no longer appropriate. We can have “poor Mignon,” who stands apart, “unrelated” to a whole; we can also have the “mysterious child” whose mysteries are explained away; our difficulty is that we seem to be stuck with *both* at the same time. Wilhelm himself suggests one vaguely unsettling model for this desire in his childish attitude towards the theater’s curtain, so unlike that of Scott’s reader of Radcliffe, or for that matter Dorothy’s feelings upon finally seeing the Wizard:

The first time I had the joy of surprise and astonishment; at the second performance I was intensely curious and observant. This time I wanted to find out exactly how everything was done. I had decided on the first evening that it couldn’t be the puppets themselves that were speaking... But why it was all so agreeable, and why the puppets themselves seemed to speak and move, and where the lights were, and

⁶⁷ Review of Carlyle’s translation in *The Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette* 2:6 (February 1829), 46. Emphasis original. This stylistically notable but anonymous critic is likely to have been John Neal, to whom Hawthorne refers in “P.’s Correspondence” as “that wild fellow... who almost turned my boyish brain with his romances.”

⁶⁸ Jeffrey, “Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*,” in *Edinburgh Review* 42:84 (Aug. 1825), 409-449, at 429.

⁶⁹ Fuller, “The Great Lawsuit: Man *versus* Men; Woman *versus* Women,” in *The Dial* 4:1 (Jul. 1843), 1-47, at 46; reprinted in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Greeley, 1845).

the people who operated all this – these mysteries disturbed me so much that I wanted to be both among the enchanted and the enchanters, somehow secretly to have a hand in it, and at the same time, as a spectator, be able to enjoy the pleasure of the illusion. (7)

Carolyn Steedman suggests that the nineteenth century's craze for Mignon and "Kennst du das Land" is childish in much the same way, a deliberate forgetting of what the novel tells us, a purposeful reversion to an innocent first reading: as though one needed to forget that the rainbow is made of water to find it interesting.⁷⁰ In Steedman's account, then, Mignon's appeal for the nineteenth century (and for us) is ultimately a kind of false consciousness; in Scott's language, it is a continued liking for which we ought to have learned contempt, yet somehow haven't.

The name for this structure is kitsch. Where Wilhelm wants "to enjoy the pleasure of the illusion," Milan Kundera identifies kitsch as the "second tear" in our weeping, the one that says "How nice to be moved."⁷¹ And for the Frankfurt School critics who gave the term its decisive meaning in cultural criticism, kitsch is an effect of precisely the kind of decontextualization Margaret Fuller suggests we fall into with Mignon. For Walter Benjamin, in his essay "Dream Kitsch," the decontextualization is above all historical: "No one really dreams any longer of the Blue Flower. Whoever awakes as Heinrich von Ofterdingen today must have overslept."⁷² Kitsch is a soporific one applies to oneself, an effect of remaining caught up in ways of living – particularly in longings, as in the case of

⁷⁰ Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (London: Virago, 1995).

⁷¹ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 251.

⁷² Benjamin, "Dream Kitsch," trans. Howard Eiland, in *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, vol. 2, part 1 (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap P, 1999), 3.

Novalis's blue flower – that have become outmoded. Theodor Adorno develops Benjamin's account across a wide range of texts; like Benjamin, he sees kitsch as the past in the present, the "precipitate of devalued forms and material into history."⁷³ Adorno particularly emphasizes, however, that the dehistoricization that happens in our liking for kitsch is typically made possible by a *formal* decontextualization of some element that, in so being cut off from its context, *becomes* kitsch. When one removes the blue flower from *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, or the Adagietto from Mahler's Fifth, one is left with what Adorno refers to as a "deceptive image of uniqueness": a mere "illusion of the concrete," of an immediate experience of subjective emotion beyond history or large-scale form.⁷⁴ In enjoying kitsch, as Wilhelm wants to enjoy illusion, I persuade myself to be contented with what I know to be fake. Such "delight in the moment," Adorno writes in his essay "On the Fetish-Character in Music," "becomes an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole."⁷⁵

Mignon thus creates a bad choice between two bad satisfactions: that of explanation, or that of an illusionistic and self-defeating kitsch. Critics have made this case – notably Michael Minden, who finds in Mignon a "pure and original" subject, a kind of not-yet-objectified interiority whose death and subsequent revivification marks the creation of

⁷³ Adorno, "Kitsch," trans. Susan H. Gillespie, in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002), 501.

⁷⁴ Adorno, "Veblen's Attack on Culture," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1981), 85. It is necessary to note that both Adorno and Benjamin see in kitsch the negative (because affirmative) image of a true utopia: One of Adorno's earliest texts, an agenda for the musical journal *Anbruch*, included a demand for a defense of kitsch against "the now rotten ideals of personality, culture, etc." (translated in Thomas Y. Levin, "For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *October* 55 [Winter, 1990], 23-47, at 28). And at the other end of Adorno's academic life, his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* describes the formal experimentation of modernism as the "revolt against art's *a priori* affinity with kitsch" and imagines a future in which kitsch has been redeemed, as "the true progress of art." *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997), 245.

⁷⁵ "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," trans. Richard Leppert, in *Essays on Music*, 291.

kitsch, that is, “what becomes of the aesthetic ideal of Goethe and Schiller in the increasing divergence between private and public worlds of the nineteenth century.”⁷⁶ Mignon’s revivification after her death offers us the “inauthentic autonomy of consumption” that has been cut off from the historical: we enjoy Mignon only because she is dying, and will never be able to make her inward, private feelings public (165). And, in fact, in *Minima Moralia* Adorno himself reads the response to Mignon in much this way, as a marker of the reader’s complicity in a course of events that he only pretends to mourn:

So Sade’s Justine, who falls from one torture-trap into the next, is called “*notre intéressante héroïne*,” and likewise Mignon, at the moment of being beaten, the interesting child... There are traces of this in the relation of northern peoples to the southern: the prosperous Puritans vainly try to get from the dark-haired denizens of foreign countries what the course of the world, which they control, denies not only to them but all the more to the vagrants...⁷⁷

We are struck by “Kennst du das Land,” in this reading, *because* we in a sense always already know the story behind it, and thus enjoy falsely – even ghoulishly – consuming it out of its context: “this is the circle,” as Adorno puts it, “of bourgeois nostalgia for naivety” (170).

Yet to read the re-use of Mignon as kitsch is, as Terence Cave has recently argued, to castigate as inauthentic much of what makes Mignon interesting to begin with.⁷⁸ It is also,

⁷⁶ Michael Minden, *The German Bildungsroman* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 57 and 165.

⁷⁷ Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London and New York: Verso, 1978), 170. Adorno’s reference to Mignon as “das interessante Kind” is to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, book 2, chap. 4: “Wilhelm rushed over and pushed his way through the crowd to see what was happening, and, to his horror, saw the manager of the troupe dragging the interesting child by the hair out of the building...”

⁷⁸ *Mignon’s Afterlives: Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 30-33. Cave’s basic concerns are in many ways quite different from my own: as he writes, “formal issues are not salient” in his discussion (x). Rather, his book treats Mignon as a “cultural figure” generally – in novel, opera, and song. My concerns are more narrow: the story I am telling is about

paradoxically, to take for granted the position created in the moment of second, “demystified” reading: to presume that whatever made Mignon interesting was the unknown content of an original, not-yet-objectified interiority and the mysteriousness of its words, and to presume that the significance of Mignon’s singing lies in the link between music and “unmediated” or “unrepressed” feeling.⁷⁹ And Minden’s broader historical argument – based on a narrative of Mignon’s gradual kitschification, corresponding to a disappearance of a possible harmony of public and private, or the fall from response to self-congratulation – seems shaky, when Goethe’s very first English readers in 1824 are already constructing for themselves a sociology of taste, in which Mignon’s story is of the “greatest interest” for the “mere novel reader”⁸⁰; or when Goethe himself, in June of 1796, is already writing to Schiller that “I had to insert Mignon’s song because of its effect, as you will see.”⁸¹

Most importantly, as I will argue below, the evidentiary basis of the critique of Mignon as kitsch – that “Kennst du das Land” is taken out of context by readers, musicians,

the novel and its mode of address, not about Mignon as a phenomenon in cultural history generally, and I thus take up Mignon as a figure around which Goethe’s novel works through questions about how it can speak to unknown readers. My Mignon, in that sense, is not Cave’s “crossover phenomenon” (10). These differences aside, Cave’s understanding of “Kennst du das Land” is quite similar to my own: he too sees the song as having an important “threshold” function, and he too emphasizes the disorientations that this song works on its readers (he indeed refers to the appearance of the song as “one of the most arresting moments in the history of the novel” [14]). While Cave notes his heavy use of electronic archives to create the “Mignon corpus” his book investigates, he is also one of the few English-language critics to consider Goethe’s novel in its initial form of publication. As I argue here, in the 1795-6 Unger edition – both because of the division of the novel into four volumes (not something Cave points out, strangely) and the presence of Reichardt’s songs (which he does) – the question “who speaks,” though implicit in this moment generally, in whatever edition, is as it were forced on the reader in a way it is not when the book is read in a single volume.

⁷⁹ Variations on this argument are common; I quote here from Stefanie Bach, “Musical Gypsies and Anti-Classical Aesthetics: The Romantic Reception of Goethe’s Mignon Character,” in *Music and Literature in German Romanticism*, ed. Siobhán Donovan and Robin Elliott (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 106-7.

⁸⁰ Review of Carlyle’s translation, in the *La Belle Assemblée* 30:191 (August 1824), 78-82, at 80.

⁸¹ Goethe to Schiller, 26 June 1796, in *Correspondence between Goethe and Schiller, 1794-1805*, trans. Liselotte Dieckmann (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 117.

and listeners throughout the nineteenth century – is misplaced. Just as Mignon’s “interest” is born from her appearance *between* moments of Wilhelm’s absorption into what he observes, so too “Kennst du das Land” was *always* out of context; the song has its effect within the novel – most spectacularly, but not only, in its first edition – because it already appears to exist in a way displaced from the narrative around it. We need not so quickly project our embarrassment as readers of Mignon – that we have too much feeling about her song to know what to do with – so quickly onto a speaker’s “fervid and alive” interiority, to use Franco Moretti’s phrase, or onto her “prehistorical dimension,” to use Adorno’s.⁸² And yet as soon as we think of Mignon as a part within the whole of the novel, we seem locked into the very binary that gives rise to this entire interpretive dilemma – Mignon as the “poor” part stuck in a ruthlessly demystifying whole.

The doctor’s case: the production of systematic reading

Now is the right time to recall that for the novel’s earliest reader, Schiller, and the Jena Romantics after him, Mignon was not a passive part of an aesthetic whole, but was more specifically where readers of Goethe’s novel learned to become systematic readers of aesthetic wholes. Thus, Schiller on the novel’s final book:

How did you succeed in bringing so closely together the encircling persons and events which had been scattered far and wide! It all stands there like a beautiful planetary system; everything belongs together. Only the Italian characters [i.e.,

Mignon and her father, the harpist], like comet-figures and just as horrifying, tie the

⁸² Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, new edition (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 46-7. Adorno discussed Mignon as pre- or ahistorical in the first course he taught at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research – see Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 141.

system to something distant and larger... What a beautiful thought it was to derive, from the theoretical horror and misconceptions of reason, the terrible pathos of Mignon's and the harp player's fate... [In their] cases one prefers to turn away from the individual to the idea of the whole.⁸³

Schiller's terms are slightly confusing in this context, but his basic argument is this: in Mignon's death, the aesthetic whole comes into view as a matter of the reader's *preference*. It is around Mignon, we might say, that the aesthetic whole is transformed from an object that *is* (as the planetary system "stands there") to an object that is *sought after*.

Friedrich Schlegel makes this claim the center of his celebrated 1798 essay "On Goethe's *Meister*." In it, Schlegel understands Goethe's novel as a unified whole, a "divine organism."⁸⁴ But Schlegel's organicism is not Aristotle's. Aristotle's poetic organism is a shape made present to its viewer's memory, as the form of an animal is present to perception; thus, for example, one can determine that a work cannot have an overly long plot, as this would make it resemble "an animal a thousand miles long": its "unity and wholeness [would] vanish from view."⁸⁵ But for Schlegel, the organicism of *Wilhelm Meister* is not something present (to a viewer, to memory) – as he puts it, for "poetic criticism," the "original constituents [of a] work are dead things" (281) – but rather lies in hidden principles of organization. What matters instead of an apparent, visible connection between parts is connection-forming as an activity; the unity of *Wilhelm Meister* for Schlegel is, as Elizabeth

⁸³ Schiller to Goethe, 2 July 1796, in *Correspondence*, 120.

⁸⁴ Schlegel, "On Goethe's *Meister*," trans. P. Firchow, in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 269-286, at 275.

⁸⁵ "A fine animal can neither be very small, for observation becomes confused when it approaches an imperceptible instant of time; nor [can it be] very large, for observation cannot happen at the same time, but its unity and wholeness vanish from the observers' view, e.g. if there were an animal a thousand miles long." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 10-11.

Millán-Zaibert writes, “a kind of unity that comes precisely by taking the parts and piecing them together.”⁸⁶ Schlegel’s word for this is system – the novel is one “entire massive system” (272-3) – and it is as a system that the novel disappoints our “usual expectations of unity and coherence.” Its coherence is not merely there to be viewed; rather, it requires a new kind of reader, “the reader who possesses a true instinct for system” (276). As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy gloss Schlegelian system, it “is not there (does not exist). It is ‘to do.’”⁸⁷ For Schlegel, as for Schiller, the energy of this system-as-process comes into being around Mignon: “with her appearance the innermost spring of this strange work is released” (272).

In a series of provocative essays, Clifford Siskin has recently argued that in order to accurately conceive both of Romanticism’s continuity with and difference from the Enlightenment, we need to focus on the genre of the system: as he puts it, “[i]n system... lies the secret history of Romanticism.”⁸⁸ In brief, Siskin’s argument is this: While we – as post-Romantics – are likely to imagine “System” as a ubiquitous entity to be ineffectually fought or blamed, it was also the *genre* of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment: a mode of book-writing that “proceeded by incorporating earlier systems into master SYSTEMS.”⁸⁹ Romanticism made itself up, in large part, by attacking systematicity – Siskin quotes Anna Barbauld’s bombastic “Let me make the novels of a country, and let who will make the systems” (“Novels and Systems,” 202) – yet in fact worked by incorporating systematicity

⁸⁶ Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY P, 2007), 152.

⁸⁷ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 33.

⁸⁸ Siskin, “The Problem of Periodization: Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the fate of system,” in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 105. See also Siskin, “Novel and Systems,” in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 34:2, The Romantic-Era Novel (Spring 2001), 202-215; and Siskin, “Mediated Enlightenment: The System of the World,” in *This Is Enlightenment*, ed. Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010).

⁸⁹ Siskin, “Novel and Systems,” 205-6.

into its own mode of writing. As Siskin argues in “The Problem of Periodization,” Romanticism, and above all the Romantic novel, are the literary-historical moment at which systematicity is “redeployed as form and thematized” – negatively – “as content” (118). Siskin keeps his historical eye firmly trained on British developments; as writers in German (or, indeed, Coleridge), in whose texts system is the quite explicit history of Romanticism, have as of yet played little role in his arguments, it seems unclear whether he intends his critique of Romanticism’s account of itself to include the Jena circle, or rather to champion Schlegel’s coherence-as-system in a new literary-historiographical context. All the more reason, then, to eagerly await Siskin’s book – but in the meantime, I would suggest that Siskin’s insistence on system as the genre of incorporation, one defined quite simply as “anything that talks to itself” (113), suggests a path out of the unfortunate loop between Mignon-as-subject and Mignon-as-victim: that is, that in reading Mignon we might be looking for *where* in this book it is that we learn to read her as part of a system, where it is that we learn to hear her utterances as part of a larger talking-to-oneself belonging to the novel as a whole.

For, indeed, the pivotal moment in the creation of our Mignon problem is not the addition of new biographical information with which we can suddenly understand what Mignon meant all along. Rather, the key moment comes earlier: long before the letter appears, after Mignon’s death, to fill in the details of Mignon’s early life, the doctor who has been treating her in her illness arrives to report to Wilhelm on her “condition.” It is in the doctor’s visit that the novel transforms Wilhelm’s understanding of Mignon; as the doctor makes clear, what is at stake in Mignon’s condition is not an irreversible narrative of disenchantment, but rather a conceptual alternative between styles of reading.

From his first appearances in the novel, the doctor has been closely affiliated with the mysterious Society of the Tower, the mysterious and vaguely Masonic educational conspiracy that has been coordinating crucial episodes in Wilhelm's life. So, in the manuscript of the *Confessions of a Beautiful Soul* which makes up the novel's sixth book, and in which he makes his first appearance, the doctor transmits the educational philosophy of the Society's head pedagogue, the Abbé: "in order to promote a child's education, one must first find out where its desires and inclinations lie" (255). A more complete account of that principle is revealed to Wilhelm only after he has been inducted into the Society himself, near the close of the seventh book, and has learned to see his own past as subject to the Tower's peculiarly passive guidance (as Michael Bell notes, the Tower shares with Rousseau a commitment to delay as pedagogical means).⁹⁰ At this point, Wilhelm objects to the fecklessness of his teachers: "If so many people have been taking an interest in you, knew what your life was and what was to be done about it, why didn't they guide you more firmly, more seriously? ... Why did they encourage your pastimes instead of deflecting you from them?" (303).

A full answer to his objections comes only in book eight, as Wilhelm waits with Natalie for the doctor to report his findings. As they wait, Natalie distracts the impatient Wilhelm by explaining – indeed, quoting – the Abbé's theory of development in a way that makes the function of Wilhelm's misguided "pastimes" clear. The Abbé, she says, believes that while "one cannot engage in any activity without the necessary predisposition," one also cannot uncover that predisposition without first attempting to engage in the wrong activities. The young person, therefore, must be allowed to "go astray on his chosen path" in order to determine the latent predisposition – the rule of self – by which the *right* path might be

⁹⁰ See Bell, *Open Secrets: Literature, Education, and Authority from J.-J. Rousseau to J.M. Coetzee* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 89-92.

found. Teaching must be passive: otherwise, it runs the risk of directing its pupils' "activity towards objects, which are often out of line with the minds that are so taken up with them" (319). Wilhelm's initial response to the strange theatrical show of his induction into the tower had been an abashed skepticism: "is what we call 'fate,' really only chance?" (302). What the Tower allows for, however, is an ironic recovery of the sequence of chance errors that have made up Wilhelm's life for meaning: only in the sequence of errors could Wilhelm's "mind" or "predisposition" be determined.

In German, the Abbé moves through a set of different nouns for this "predisposition," that quality within the young person that makes some activities more appropriate than others and which education must find and develop: in order, they are *Neigung* (inclination); *Anlage* (gift for, tendency, "the makings of"); *Instinkt*, *Fähigkeit* (aptitude); and again, *Anlage*. It is as though the Abbé, conscious that the potential inclinations of the youth cannot be known from the beginning, is careful to avoid fixing those inclinations by rendering them in a consistent conceptual language. Once education is complete, however, a single word comes into play: *Natur*. The correctly-educated youth finds "the path suited to [his] nature," just as it is the youth's *Natur* which will, eventually, come to resist the objects that a too-directive education forces upon him. For the Society of the Tower, in other words, "nature" is properly a concept that applies only to the fully-formed, or rather fully-revealed, individual.

It is at this point, as a sense of the principle of Wilhelm's life's – and the novel's – shape is taking form, as the revelation of nature by error, that the doctor returns and makes his report on Mignon. The explanation the doctor gives for Mignon's illness is twofold: firstly, he links her current illness to an incident in the fifth book, in which Mignon (as we now learn), hoping to spend the night with Wilhelm, instead found him in bed with another

woman: “Her heart,” the doctor says, “which up till then had been beating with expectation and yearning, suddenly stopped” (321). But secondly, this incident had its effect on Mignon only because of what he calls her *Natur*: “what we are concerned with is the strange personality [*die sonderbare Natur*] of that dear child Mignon.” The doctor here supplies Wilhelm with a brief outline of the narrative of Mignon’s life – abducted by acrobats as a child, she begged to be allowed to return home, but was treated cruelly and gave in to despair. As a result, she made a vow “never again to reveal her home and origins to a living soul”; cut off from speaking of herself to others, Mignon instead determined to “live and die in the expectation of direct divine sustenance.” For this reason, the doctor explains, Mignon’s desire is permanently directed towards objects she cannot attain: she longs for what is “inaccessible to her unusual nature” (320). Mignon cannot change, but it is not because she is (“by nature”) uneducable; it is because her nature has been created by a bad education.⁹¹ But at the same time, the relationship between nature and biography seems to have subtly shifted: for Wilhelm, events reveal nature, in the sense of unfolding it; for Mignon, biography reveals nature in the sense of being its sign – it is how we know that her nature “consists almost entirely of a deep sort of yearning” for two things she cannot have (320).

But how has the doctor learned all of this biography? And how, ultimately, should this new biographical knowledge be treated – that is, what *difference* does knowing Mignon’s nature make? The novel’s answer to these questions is neatly circular:

“... What I have been telling you, was not something she conveyed in so many words to Natalie, but what Natalie has pieced together from occasional remarks,

⁹¹ On this point, see William Gilby, “The Structural Significance of Mignon in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*,” in *Seminar* 16 (1980), 136-150.

from songs and childish indiscretions which revealed what they intended to keep secret.”

Wilhelm could now account for many a song, many an utterance of the poor girl.

(320)

Mignon’s songs appear here as part of a larger set of parapraxes which Natalie and the Tower both have been able to read through, so as to “piece together” the narrative that lies beneath.⁹² And as a *result* of that pieced-together truth, Mignon’s songs can be “accounted for.” Mignon, in the doctor’s telling, appears as the individual constituted as a “case” by what Michael Foucault calls a “field of documentation.”⁹³ But – and this is the crucial point – there are no *new* documents produced here. What allows Wilhelm to newly “account for” Mignon is a change in the way he interprets the songs and utterances that are already available to him.

In the double movement formed first by Natalie’s “pieced together” synthesis, and then by Wilhelm’s application of that synthesis to each constituent fragment, Wilhelm learns to read “many a song, many an utterance” *as* documentation. Mignon’s sum total of utterances reveal her nature which explains the sum total of her utterances. The doctor, then, instructs Wilhelm in what Schleiermacher will later call the hermeneutic circle:

Complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, [so that] each part can be understood only out of the whole to which it belongs, and vice versa... [A] text can never be understood right away. On the contrary, every reading puts us in a better

⁹² See Robert Tobin, “The Medicalization of Mignon,” in *Goethes Mignon und Ihre Schwestern: Interpretationen und Rezeption*, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 52-3.

⁹³ *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 193. See also James Chandler, “On the Face of the Case: Conrad, *Lord Jim*, and the Sentimental Novel,” in *Critical Inquiry* 33:4 (2007), 837-64.

position to understand because it increases our knowledge. Only in the case of insignificant texts are we satisfied with what we understand on first reading.⁹⁴

Wilhelm learns to re-read Mignon – and in this case, learning to re-read her means forgetting what he already knew. “Kennst du das Land?” The doctor’s lesson imposes upon Wilhelm an answer. If Mignon’s nature includes having decided “never again to reveal her home and origins to a living soul,” the answer can only be no: I *can’t* understand these words; they *aren’t* spoken to me, but were purely a kind of soliloquy, a self-enclosed lyrical utterance. Mignon appears in this moment as she will haunt the nineteenth century, as an inverted image of the aesthetic object itself: as an excessively interiorized subject whose words cannot be understood but only overheard. Mignon’s kitschiness, then, is not *merely* hers, or her songs’ – rather it is the effect of re-reading what were songs as documents.

To recall this is to realize that Mignon’s lasting allure need not be castigated as kitsch; rather, the appeal of “Kennst du das Land” belongs to another style of reading, one better suited to song as a form in its own right, rather than as a mere part of the whole.

“Yes, I know...”

What, then, is a song in this novel? What would it look like to read “Kennst du das Land” as something other than a document within a field, within a contextualizing system? Mignon, as I suggested at the opening of this chapter, interrupts Wilhelm’s absorption into scenes that he observes; “Kennst du das Land” performs an analogous task for the reader of

⁹⁴ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman (Missoula, Mont.: American Academy of Religion, 1977), 113. Friedrich Kittler’s comments on this passage – that it “soars above the many reading practices which have existed and still do exist as if to exclude them” – have been particularly helpful. In “Forgetting,” trans. Caroline and David Wellbery, in *Discourse 3* (Spring 1981), 88-121, at 98.

Wilhelm Meister, isolating him in his interest. Siskin suggests that *system* is that which talks to itself, whose parts talk to each other; Schlegel adds that that I, as the good systematic reader of the Romantic text, am constituted in the *overhearing* of this talk. Song in *Wilhelm Meister*, however, is what talks to *me*.

What I propose here is an attempt at a “first reading” of Mignon. Not the “innocent” first reading of an attempt to imagine Mignon without her eventual fate – the after-effect of the novel’s own demystified second look at her – or as a lyrical nature free from its relations to a larger whole. Instead, I aim here at a naïve reading, one focused entirely on the first appearance of her “Kennst du das Land”: what is it about the song that catches us, even before it has been placed into the opposition between responsible reading for the whole, and kitschy reading for the part-in-spite-of-the-whole?

The novel’s first edition, fortunately, makes such a reading relatively easy to achieve. In this four-volume edition, published by J.F. Unger in 1795-6, “Kennst du das Land” appears virtually without context, immediately following the title pages of the second volume:

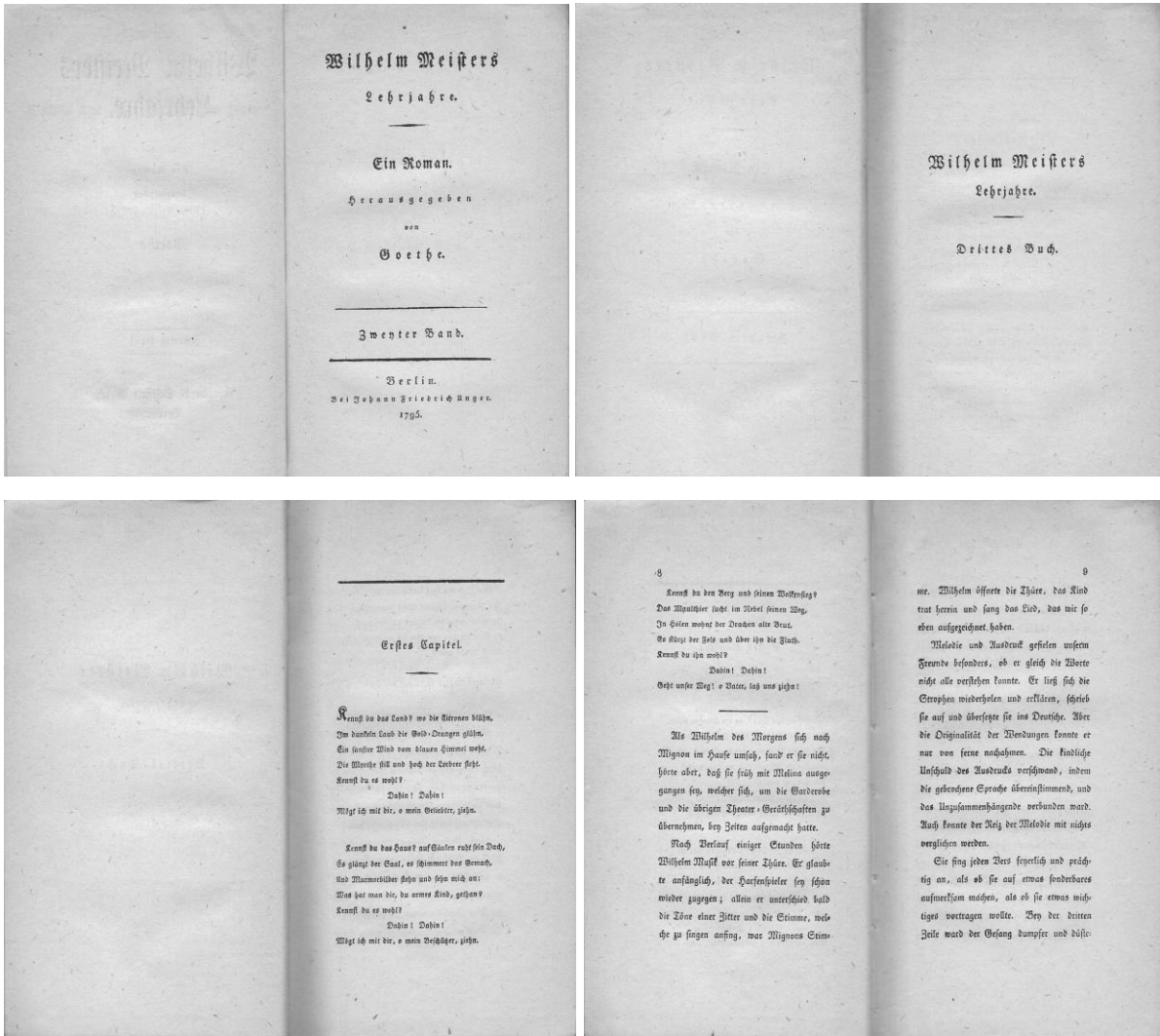


Fig. 1. The opening of volume 2 of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, in the 1795 Unger edition.

Who asks these questions, and of whom? These questions, of course, are there in every edition of the novel. In modern one-volume editions and nineteenth-century three-volume ones, the voice that asks “Kennst du das Land” seems most likely to be the Harper’s, as his “heartfelt songs” are heard at the end of the second book (82). In the first edition in particular, however, the lines raise a slightly different question: Are they part of an epigraph? As Gérard Genette points out, the years of *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship’s* first publication were those in which epigraphs were very commonly used in precisely this way, immediately after chapter headings, particularly in the English Gothic: Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, with an epigraph for every chapter, was also published in 1795. Genette understands the function of this practice in the late eighteenth century as the provision of the novel with a “password of intellectuality,” a means of joining the perhaps lower-status book in hand to “cultural tradition” generally.⁹⁵ In this sense, the epigraph (which this poem initially seems to be) is a specific case of the larger function of paratext: to “enable a text to become a book,” that is, to function as a permeable membrane, to at once serve as a boundary (enclosing the book) and as a “‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back” (1-2).

Genette suggests that the epigraph is typically a kind of “password” whose central element is the signature: the epigraph as quotation is a communication from the epigrapher-author to the “potential reader, and, in practice, every real reader” (155). But “Kennst du das Land,” however, lacks the kind of authorizing signature that would serve to join this book in hand to some larger tradition via the “password” of the tradition-bound name. A “password” is something that (at least) two people know: when I open to the first chapter of *The Monk* and see four lines from *Measure for Measure*, I am pleased that both the author says

⁹⁵ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 160.

“Shakespeare” to me (the lines themselves, Genette suggests, don’t much matter, as indeed – in *The Monk* – they don’t); this shared knowledge of the password of the name is part of what invites me into the book.⁹⁶ But in “Kennst du das Land,” of course, I do not find shared knowledge – an assurance that I am the right reader for the book, and that the book is the right book for me – but instead a question about what I know.

This moment thus deserves to be read as bearing a family resemblance to Goethe’s many games with the idea of a reading public – his recurring exploration of instances of mistaken address, of actual overhearing, of the possibility that messages go awry or are received by the wrong recipient. Examples from Goethe’s work run across a wide range of texts. The late *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* is particularly rich in such oddities; perhaps the strangest is Lucidor, the hero of the inset novella “Who Is the Traitor,” who struggles to find out who has been betraying his inner feelings to his friends, only to eventually discover that he has been continually betraying himself through the habit of “passionate soliloquy” in his sleep.⁹⁷

But of course Goethe’s early works also abound in examples, in a wide variety of moods: to one extreme, the scene in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in which Werther reads Lotte’s letter to her husband (“My dearest love, come back as soon as you can”) while imagining that “this was written to [him]” is only the most literal case of misplaced speech in a novel full of it.⁹⁸ Werther places himself in the position of the letter’s “you,” allowing the pronoun to direct the letter to him just as we do, in reading his letters. On the one hand,

⁹⁶ Matthew G. Lewis, *The Monk* (New York: Grove, 1952).

⁹⁷ “You have the commendable or uncommendable [!] habit of talking to yourself, and I will confess to you, in the name of all of us, that we took turns eavesdropping.” In *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years, or the Renunciants*, trans. Krishna Wilson, ed. Jane K. Brown (New York: Suhrkamp, 1989), 171-2.

⁹⁸ *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, trans. Victor Lange (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), 55-6.

“you” is of necessity open, referring only (as Benveniste says) to a “reality of discourse” rather than referring to any particular person⁹⁹ – like the letter, like print, anyone can receive it; on the other hand, *Werther* reminds us there is always an intended you: as Barthes points out, the non-correspondence between writing’s mode of address as a “pure structural operation” and its direction towards the right reader is *Werther*’s tragedy.¹⁰⁰

At the other end of the spectrum, we have Goethe’s *Die Geschwister*, whose opening scene deploys a related mistake for rather more vaudevillian purposes:

WILHELM: [...] O Marianne! if you only knew that he whom you call a brother was working for you, with quite a different heart, with quite different hopes! Maybe – ah! It’s bitter. – – She loves me! – yes, as a brother. – No, no! Again, doubt – and that has never done any good. Marianne! I will be happy, and you too, Marianne!

MARIANNE [*entering*]: What do you want, brother? You called me.

WILHELM: I didn’t, Marianne.

MARIANNE: Then are you willfully making jokes, to drag me out of the kitchen like this?

WILHELM: You heard a ghost.¹⁰¹

“Kennst du das Land,” similarly, is a self-conscious exploration of how a speaker – and implicitly how the page – can call upon an audience, or hail the “you” who reads or listens.

⁹⁹ “The Nature of Pronouns,” in *Problems of General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: University of Miami, 1971), 218.

¹⁰⁰ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 129.

¹⁰¹ In WA, vol. 9, 120; my translation. The work was translated as “The Sister, a drama” in *Dramatic Pieces* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1792).

Am I the right reader for Mignon's questions? When the book speaks to me in this way, is it to *me* – or am I making Werther's mistake, overhearing a communication made to another?

Questions about what I know are not in themselves necessarily destabilizing: often, they are quite the opposite. In a suggestive comment, Mark W. Booth writes that "In a song where the singer addresses a second person... the audience identifies with the speaking voice."¹⁰² Yet this seems to be by no means the case: one can just as easily identify with, or more precisely *recognize* oneself as, the song's addressee. This result seems particularly likely in question songs – typically, songs that bind singer and audience into a shared rhetorical structure, sometimes by literally allowing the audience to respond. A look at two examples whose questions particularly resemble Mignon's, however, suggests the extent to which songs of this form can work along quite different axes:

D'ye ken John Peel with his coat so gray?
D'ye ken John Peel at the break of the day?
D'ye ken John Peel when he's far, far away,
With his hounds and his horn in the morning?

Do you know the muffin man,
the muffin man, the muffin man?
Oh, do you know the muffin man,
who lives in Drury Lane?

'Twas the sound of his horn call'd me
from my bed,
And the cry of his hounds has me oft-times led;
For Peel's view holloa would 'waken the dead,
Or a fox from his lair in the morning.

Yes, I know the muffin man,
the muffin man, the muffin man;
Oh, yes, I know the muffin-man
who lives in Drury Lane.

Yes, I ken John Peel and auld Ruby, too,
Ranter and Royal and Bellman as true;
From the drag to the chase, from the chase
to the view,
From the view to the death in the morning.

--*sometimes*--

¹⁰² *The Experience of Songs* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1981), 16.

‘Twas the sound of his horn, [etc.]¹⁰³

Then two of us know the muffin man,
the muffin man, the muffin man...¹⁰⁴

Neither the Cumbrian huntsman nor the London child hails any particular you; both songs, however, immediately move to reveal that I am the right you, qualified to say “Yes” to their own opening questions. In the case of “John Peel,” the song works as an extended play on the two main senses of “to ken” – both to see and to know. By starting from a question apparently about what is present (Peel with his gray coat), the song seems initially *not* to speak to me – that is, the first line suggests that the singer sees what I cannot and what no listener ever could, as though in some inner vision (unless, of course, one believes the story of John Woodcock Graves, the song’s author: that “John Peel” was written sometime in the 1820s on the night before a hunt with Peel, and then first sung to the man himself the next morning).¹⁰⁵ Yet as the stanza progresses and Peel moves out of view, receding into the “far, far away” of the third line, it becomes apparent that what is at stake is in fact familiarity, acquaintance. This almost maudlin transmutation of vanished sight into the fullness of memory is, of course, what makes it so strange to imagine the song as anything other than elegy – and it is also what allows me to say yes to the song, because it in fact acquaints me with a wealth of representative details: the names of Peel’s dogs (“the real names of the hounds which Peel in his old age said were the very best,” Graves assures his reader in a note [417]); a modicum of hunting vocabulary (drag, chase, view, death); or, in other verses,

¹⁰³ John Woodcock Graves, “D’Ye Ken John Peel?” in *Songs and Ballads of Cumberland*, ed. Sidney Gilpin (Carlisle: Coward, 1865), 416-7. “Sidney Gilpin, of Derwent Cottage” was the assumed name of the book’s publisher, George Coward.

¹⁰⁴ In Mrs Henry S. Mackarness, *The Young Lady’s Book: A Manual of Amusements, Exercises, Studies, and Pursuits* (London: Routledge, 1888), 278-80. For more on “The Muffin-Man” and the class of counting games to which it belongs, see Iona and Peter Opie, *The Singing Game* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985). Opie and Opie date the song to sometime before 1820 (380).

¹⁰⁵ “An Autobiographical Fragment,” in *Songs and Ballads of Cumberland*, 414.

an array of local place names (Low Denton-holme, Scratchmere Scar) and a rider's technical vocabulary for the built landscape ("I've follow'd John Peel both often and far / O'er the rasper-fence and the gate and the bar"). For a particular listener, these may be deeply familiar things that the song merely brings to mind – and quite possibly were, for the song's initial hearers in Carlisle, where the song was first published, or Cockermouth, where Groves lived as a child. But – and this is the song's success – they also become immediately familiar to a listener as a stock of referents, of common experience, that are firmly rooted enough in place to be safely exported, as the song's first editor says, to "wherever English hunters have penetrated in the world" (416).

The Victorian child, meanwhile, addresses the "you" as a test: do you have this knowledge, do you know of this muffin man in Drury Lane? But of course the right answer is not "Why yes," I know of this or that detail about the muffin man, but rather the sung "Yes, I know..." What I "know" here is not a matter of experience, or of knowledge of the world; this question does not *refer* to any particular place or way of life. The pleasure of this game comes about when I, the hearer, become the singer – something that is made possible simply by my having heard the song before and thus knowing the abstract rules of the game. I am addressed effectively as "you," then, not because of an experience I have had outside the song (of muffin-buying), or because I have learned about those details from the song itself, but rather because of my familiarity with the *structure* of this song. If I know the song, I know that the question about the muffin man, the person, is in fact a question about "The Muffin Man," the song which I now know; the apparently specifying "who lives in Drury Lane" – so clunkily formulaic in melody – is not meant to recall a specific man (whom I may or may not know), but is instead to be enjoyed sensuously (as metrically and melodically necessary). The voice here takes on aspects of a game – becomes a kind of self-enclosed

aesthetic function – because it appears to refer when it does not, or rather refers only to itself. Importantly, it is precisely this nonreferential game-character that allows the song to teach something “new.” Homi Bhabha writes that the nation makes itself up in a tension between the “people as an a priori historical presence” and as “the people constructed in the performance of narrative” – between the pedagogical and the performative.¹⁰⁶ These two songs define a similar opposition, between two ways of hailing a “you”: where “D’Ye Ken John Peel” both relies upon and forges a commonality between singer and audience based upon the details of a way of life, “Do You Know the Muffin Man” creates a commonality based around the event of the song itself.¹⁰⁷

So, then: “Kennst du das Land?” It depends, we might say, on whether or not Mignon is asking a question like “Do you know the muffin man,” or one like “D’Ye Ken John Peel” – whether her song gives me knowledge *of* something, or happens of itself; whether her words are present in themselves or allude to absent things. The difficulty “Kennst du das Land” presents, however, is that it seems to alternate unstably between these two models of hailing a “you.” Mignon sings of a class of objects I *do* know (e.g., the old dragon, familiar from many a Lutheran hymn¹⁰⁸); of a class of objects I know that I don’t know (e.g., the lemon tree); and of a class of objects that are so specific and strange that I could only be hearing about them for the first time now (e.g., the neologism “Wolkensteg,” or “cloud bridge”: how could I possibly be asked whether I know this?). The question

¹⁰⁶ Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” in *The Location of Culture*, new ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 211.

¹⁰⁷ On the self-enclosed nature of games and the connection between games and the aesthetic, the classic texts are Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* and Caillois’s *Man, Play, and Games*. Huizinga, particularly, stresses the role of play in the formation of social groupings.

¹⁰⁸ At least seven such hymns, for example, can be found in Johann Crüger’s seventeenth-century hymnal *Praxis Pietatis Melica* – most famously the one beginning “Trotz dem alten drachen,” set in J.S. Bach’s *Jesu, meine freude*.

Mignon asks is therefore an impossible one – I do know, because I know her song; I don't know, because I only know her song.

“Kennst du das Land” in the rhetorical classroom

This ambiguity about the status of the song's words, the way they seem to both supply familiarity and refer to it, unfolds its implications in a rather unlikely place: a century's worth of the song's appearance as an example in German rhetorical textbooks. Unlikely, because Goethe is often read as the key figure through which German poetry “freed itself from the rules of ancient rhetoric,” putting in their place the author as horizon of poetic interpretation.¹⁰⁹ Yet if we would like to attend to the meaning of “Kennst du das Land” – and of its proliferation throughout the nineteenth century – it makes a great deal of sense to examine rhetorical textbooks: in the pages of these textbooks, writers make explicit attempts to make sense of the poem, or a part of it, under the conditions of mass reproduction, and to both explain the poem's power and capitalize on it for pedagogic purposes.

There is an interesting and rather technical controversy over “Kennst du das Land” in these manuals: the poem is very commonly cited as an example, but to teach two quite different figures. On the one hand, the song combines with Friedrich von Matthisson's “Elysium” in the early decades of the century to become the standard way of teaching periphrasis. Around 1800, periphrastic style was widely understood as belonging to ancient

¹⁰⁹ Klaus L. Berghahn, “From Classicist to Classical Literary Criticism, 1730-1806,” trans. John R. Blazek, in *A History of German Literary Criticism, 1730-1980*, ed. Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1988), 29. Certainly this is the explicit aim of the oft-quoted line from *Poetry and Truth*: “All, therefore, that has been confessed by me, consists of fragments of a great confession.” See also Sandra Richter, *A History of Poetics: German Scholarly Aesthetics and Poetics in International Context, 1770-1960* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 11. This is also the point of much of Friedrich Kittler's reading of *Faust* as the creation of poetry via a turning away from the book, in *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metter with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990).

ballad and to epic (as in Scott's 1805 essay on the authenticity of Ossian).¹¹⁰ Apart from its association with the sublimity of "the poetry of a rude people," as Scott put it (447), periphrasis is also a sublime figure in Longinus; Quintilian discusses it as useful for the concealment of "something which would be indecent, if expressed in so many words."¹¹¹ Indeed, as an anti-representational trope of absence or veiling, periphrasis can be seen as a kind of central term in discussions of the sublime. This is particularly the case for modernists such as Walter Benjamin, who writes of the sublime in his essay on *Elective Affinities* in terms seemingly borrowed from Quintilian's account of periphrasis, as a relationship between viewer and object that is possible only where the opposition of nakedness and veiling pertains. In Benjamin's account, the sublime is thus "a work beyond all images [*Gebilden*]," or a naked body whose "majesty" can be perceived only by not looking at it. The sublime asks us both to look and not to look beneath (and here Benjamin quotes a letter of Goethe's) "the transparent and opaque veil... to the form truly intended."¹¹²

When Karl Pöhlitz described periphrasis in 1825 as a way of "representing an object without its name, according to its characteristics," he turned to Matthisson and to Mignon: "So Matthisson describes Elysium without naming it in the poem, and so Goethe Italy in his famous poem: Kennst du das Land."¹¹³ "Elysium" is in many ways the more straightforward

¹¹⁰ "Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland," in *Edinburgh Review* 6:12 (Jul 1805): 429-462.

¹¹¹ *Institutio Oratoria*, vol. 3, in the Loeb Classical Library, trans. H.E. Butler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1922), 335 (VIII.6.59).

¹¹² "Goethe's Elective Affinities," trans. Stanley Corngold, in *Selected Writings* vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard, 1996), 351-2. For clarity, I have altered Corngold's translation of *Gebilden* (from "creations" to "images"). Benjamin goes on in the essay to identify Mignon, Otilie, and *Faust's* Helena as such figures of veiled sublimity.

¹¹³ Karl Heinrich Ludwig Pöhlitz, *Das Gesamtgebiet der deutschen Sprache*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1825), 455. I found the capacious bibliographies in Richter's *History of Poetics* to be of great assistance in fixing the historical data of the narrative I tell in this section.

example for textbook purposes – after all, the poem names in its title what it indirectly describes.¹¹⁴ Rhetoricians after Pölitz seem sensitive to this: they typically only refer to “Elysium” in a definition of the trope, but will quote Goethe’s first two or first four lines, leaving the identification of the place in question (and thus the confirmation of the concept) up to the eager student: periphrasis as time-bound process (*now* I see...).¹¹⁵ “Kennst du das Land” was thus not merely a common example but a good one: Johann Georg Beilhack’s 1835 *Lehrbuch der Deutschen Stylistik* found the poem’s first four lines to be a “most excellent periphrasis,” defining the trope as that “through which the topic itself is not mentioned, but becomes recognizable through enumeration of its features.”¹¹⁶ C. F. Falkmann’s *Praktische Rhetorik* made the same enthusiastic classification in 1831 (“a beautiful periphrasis”), defining the figure as the “description of an object... without naming it.”¹¹⁷

As the century progresses, however, the handbooks’ enthusiasm declines; the “beautiful” and “excellent” periphrasis of the 1830s has become, in Karl Becker’s 1850 *Lehrbuch des deutschen Stiles*, a pragmatic way of overcoming conditions in which a word has become commonplace by overuse – of saving the everyday for poetry by obscuring it.¹¹⁸ And in 1892, Karl Tumlriz supplies in his *Lehre von den Tropen und Figuren* a standard definition of the figure – the circumlocution of a topic through identifying it with an associated attribute – but arrives at “Kennst du das Land” in a particularly interesting way.

¹¹⁴ The poem was indeed printed under that title from the 1790s; “Kennst du das Land,” to my knowledge, has never been printed under “Italien.”

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Karl Becker’s *Lehrbuch des deutschen Stiles* (Frankfurt: Rettembeil, 1850), 81, or C.H. Reichardt’s *Logik, Stilistik und Rhetorik*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hahn, 1877), 158.

¹¹⁶ *Lehrbuch der Deutschen Stylistik für Studienschulen und Gymnasien*, 2nd edition (Munich: Joseph Lindauer, 1835), 175.

¹¹⁷ *Praktische Rhetorik*, 2nd ed. (Hannover: Hahn, 1831), 184.

¹¹⁸ Becker, 81.

Tumlirz clarifies that the attribute named need not necessarily be an important one, but merely should be “regularly associated with the topic in our minds”; he continues that “for us Italy is chiefly the country from which we obtain *Südfrüchte* [“southern” or tropical fruits]; hence we understand Goethe immediately when he has Mignon say, ‘Kennst du das Land...’”¹¹⁹ A hundred years of reading the novel (and seventy years of rhetorical exemplification) have transformed what was once a “beautiful periphrasis” – an example that the student reader could be invited into figuring out for himself – into a dead one. Tumlirz seems to say, along with Donald Davidson, that “there is nothing left to notice” about these lemons and oranges, as there is nothing to notice in bottles having mouths. If Italy is “for us” where lemons come from, then Mignon’s line simply refers us to what we already know Italy is.¹²⁰

Yet if the phrase “das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen” was dying as a periphrasis – becoming an ever more “immediate” association with the missing name “Italy” – it was, simultaneously and paradoxically, becoming less obviously a periphrasis for Italy at all. Hermann Menge’s *Repetitorium der lateinischen Grammatik und Stilistik*, first published in 1871, places Goethe’s line at the end of a set of examples, with the note “(=Italien?).”¹²¹ Most interestingly, rhetoricians in the second half of the century began to edge away entirely from the classification of the phrase that had dominated earlier. Thus, Gustav Brugier’s

¹¹⁹ *Die Lehre von den Tropen und Figuren nebst einer kurzgefassten deutschen Metrik*, 3rd edition (Prague: Dominicus, 1892), 31-2.

¹²⁰ Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 252. Davidson observes that in metaphor at least that “novelty is not the issue”; repeated exposure cannot kill a metaphor, in his view, but instead “the element of novelty or surprise in a metaphor is a built-in aesthetic feature we can experience again and again, like the surprise in Haydn’s Symphony No. 94” (252-3). Periphrasis in these handbooks, however, seems to be imagined precisely as a kind of miniature narrative of discovery, and thus subject to death by repetition.

¹²¹ *Repetitorium der lateinischen Syntax und Stilistik*, 7th edition (Wolfenbüttel: Zwißler, 1900), 380.

discussion of the poem in his *Geschichte der deutschen National-Literatur*, first published in 1865, places “Kennst du das Land” not under periphrasis but rather under “distribution or individuation” – terms of rhetorical division, that is, used to refer to the process of describing a thing “in its constituent features.”¹²² This trope, Brugier writes, is easily confused with periphrasis, but in fact has a quite different purpose; the difference between the poet who lists the features of an object to “individualize” rather than as a way of referring to an unmentioned topic is that the former is attempting something far closer to hypotyposis: the poet who individuates does not refer indirectly to a single absent name, but instead simply amplifies an idea by presenting each feature “vividly and clearly.”¹²³ Longinus excluded tropes of amplification from the sublimity of periphrasis for precisely this reason: sublimity “depends on elevation, whereas amplification involves extension; sublimity exists often in a single thought, amplification cannot exist without a certain quantity and superfluity.”¹²⁴ What is at stake in Brugier’s reclassification of the lines, in other words, is whether the blooming lemon tree and the golden orange are each “vividly” present in Mignon’s lines, or disappear as objects in their own right in the process of becoming features of the name that they simultaneously suggest and obscure: Italy. Paul Heinze and Rudolf Goette emphasize this further in 1891, in the section of their *Deutsche Poetik* devoted to classical rhetoric, calling the poem a “prime example of distribution”: what is important about “Kennst du das Land” in their account is not the absence of a name, but rather the “unfurling” (*entfalten*) of a set of “vivid images” for a “purely intellectual concept”: “the

¹²² For a contemporary gloss of *Distribution*, see Otto Lange, *Deutsche poetik*, 5th edition (Berlin: Gärtner, 1885), 13.

¹²³ G. Brugier, *Geschichte der deutschen National-Litteratur*, 10th edition (Freiburg: Herder, 1898), xlv.

¹²⁴ Longinus, “On Sublimity,” trans. D.A. Russell, in *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations*, ed. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972), 474.

embodiment of what is less graphic [*die Verkörperung des minder Anschaulichen*] is thus the real purpose here.”¹²⁵

A century of reading the rhetoric of “Kennst du das Land” thus produces two narratives. Periphrastic reading of the song, which treats the words as a veil, begins a process that inevitably lifts that veil as repeated reading-through kills the trope. The song, read this way, becomes an attempt to obscure knowledge, or indeed a rather debased riddle – as it quite literally did in various parodic reformulations. Thus, for example, two propagandistic Masonic songs of the 1860s begin with Mignon’s questions (“Do you know it well?”; “Do you know the land?”) but, after enumerating a set of characteristics (“it” is the most faithful heart of all, which sacrifices itself in duty; the “land” is where the wise scepter reigns and men live in harmony), then quickly proceed to the satisfaction of answers (it is the mother’s heart!; it is the fertile land of Prussia!).¹²⁶ Sublimity exhausts itself when exposed to knowledge; reading “Kennst du das Land” as periphrasis is itself a miniature version of the Mignon problem as a whole. Yet the collapse of the sublime does not exhaust the poem as a rhetorical example, but instead causes rhetoricians to re-describe it: lemons and oranges are no longer a way of making what is not mentioned recognizable, as Beilhack put it, but are rather present in the poem. In Heinze and Goette’s language of *Verkörperung*, we are quite far away from the chastity of the Benjaminian sublime: the words no longer serve as a “transparent and opaque veil” over a body, but instead are the incarnation themselves.

¹²⁵ *Deutsche Poetik* (Dresden: Heinze, 1891), 106-7.

¹²⁶ In *Liederbuch für die Große Landes-Loge* (Berlin, 1869), 264 and 39. Gerhart Hoffmeister collects a number of parodies, not including these, in “Mignon-Parodien: von Falk bis Artmann (1797-1975),” in *Goethes Mignon und ihre Schwestern*, ed. Hoffmeister.

Repetition and allusion in the eighteenth-century musical insert

As I have been suggesting, “Kennst du das Land” sets up a deliberate tension between two versions of the song’s addressee – two ways in which the song might speak to me: as the reader who is called into being by the song, and as an actually existing reader who exists apart from the moment of reading. The first edition of *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* raises questions about the relationship between the reader of the text and her social existence in a still more direct way, by actually providing for its readers a way to allow Mignon’s song to become installed in real, social space. In that edition, all of Mignon’s songs, and those of the Harper, were set to music by Johann Friedrich Reichardt, and inserted as foldout sheets:

Erstes Capitel.

Kennst du das Land? wo die Aestronen blühen,
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Drangen glühn,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,
Die Wäldche still und hoch der Lorbeer steht.
Kennst du es wohl?
Dabin! Dabin!
Mögt ich mit dir, o mein Weislicher, ziehn.

Kennst du das Haus? auf Säulen ruht sein Dach,
Es glänzt der Saal, es schimmeret das Gemach,
Und Marmorbilder stehn und sehn mich an:
Was hat man dir, du armes Kind, getan?
Kennst du es wohl?
Dabin! Dabin!
Mögt ich mit dir, o mein Beschützer, ziehn.

Mit Ernst und Affekt. Reichardt.

Kennst du das Land? wo die Aestronen blühen, im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Drangen
glühn, ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht, die Wäldche still und hoch der Lorbeer
steht. Kennst du es wohl? da hin da hin mögt ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter ziehn.

Fig. 2. *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Berlin: Unger, 1795), opening of the second volume.

The range and function of musical inserts into eighteenth-century narrative is, as Tom Keymer observes, relatively uncharted territory.¹²⁷ What discussions of the topic do exist tend to treat only single instances exclusively, and are thus likely to find each one to be a textual curiosity of uncertain use, surprising the reader with the absolutely new. On the one hand, these discussions are surely mostly right: each instance of musical insertion into a book of print narrative *is* a new thing, a self-conscious and attention-grabbing foray across the boundary of medium and into a different mode of reading, one with different rules. Yet some attempt at generalization, both theoretical and historical, seems in order – particularly because the musical insert proves to have been, for eighteenth-century writers, a complexly interesting tool through which they could not only *notice* the problems raised in Mignon’s song, that the page asks me to both be its reader and myself, but make use of that ambiguity for a range of effects.

The only familiar case is that of *Clarissa*, in whose fiftieth letter Richardson inserts a fold-out sheet of Elizabeth Carter’s “Ode to Wisdom.” As a number of critics have recently noted, the insertion here takes full advantage of the novel’s documentary fiction: in December of 1747, when the first two volumes of *Clarissa* were published, Carter’s poem circulated widely in manuscript copies – but, by Carter’s instruction, had never been published.¹²⁸ When *Clarissa* refers to the poem, assuming that Anna Howe has already read it, she refers to a poem that Richardson’s readers, too, had likely read or heard read aloud:

¹²⁷ See Tom Keymer, “William Toldervy and Smart’s *A Translation of the Psalms of David*,” in *The Review of English Literature*, New Series 54:213 (2003), 52-66.

¹²⁸ I have benefited particularly from Steven R. Price, “The Autograph Manuscript in Print: Samuel Richardson’s Type Font Manipulation in *Clarissa*,” in *Illuminating Letters: Typography and Literary Interpretation*, ed. Paul C. Gutjahr and Megan L. Benton (Amherst: University of Mass. P, 2001); Janine Barchas, *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003); and Thomas McGeary, “Clarissa Harlowe’s ‘Ode to Wisdom’: Composition, Publishing History, and the Semiotics of Printed Music,” in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 24:3 (Spring 2012), 431-458.

I have been forced to try to compose my angry passions at my harpsichord; having first shut close my doors and windows, that I might not be heard below. As I was closing the shutters of the windows, the distant whooting of the bird of Minerva as from the often-visited woodhouse gave the subject in that charming Ode to Wisdom, which does honour to our sex, as it was written by one of it. I made an essay, a week ago, to set the three last stanzas of it, as not unsuitable to my unhappy situation; and after I had re-perused the ode, those three were my lesson.

Clarissa encloses the fourteen-stanza poem and, then, her setting of it (fig. 3 below). Before these pages, however, the letter itself ends with Clarissa's sense that she "has not been quite unhappy" in her composition, adding that "If it obtain your approbation, I shall be out of doubt: and should be still more assured could I hear it tried by your voice and by your finger" (231).

The image shows a page from a musical manuscript. At the top left, the word "Andante" is written. In the center, "XIV." is written above the first staff. At the top right, "Vol. II. P. 50" is written. The music is written on two staves, with lyrics written below the notes. The lyrics are: "No more to fabled Names confin'd; To the Supreme all-perfect Mind My Thoughts direct their Flight. My Thoughts direct their Flight. Wisdom's My Gift: & all her force from her deriv'd: Eternal Source of Intel-lectual Light. Of Intel-lectual Light." Below the music, there are two stanzas of lyrics, labeled "XV" and "XVI". Stanza XV: "O send her sure, her steady Ray, To regulate my doubtful Way, Thro' life's perplexing Road: The Mists of Error to controul, And thro' its Gloom direct my Soul To Happiness and Good." Stanza XVI: "Beneath Her clear discerning Eye The visionary Shadows fly Of Follies painted Show. She sees thro' ev'ry fair Disguise, That All but VIRTUE'S solid Joys, Are Vanity and Woe." The page is numbered "6" at the bottom left.

Fig.3: Clarissa's setting of the "Ode to Wisdom," in the second volume of *Clarissa* (1748).

Virtually everything Richardson as author-printer does at this moment aims to simulate the experience of reading assembled manuscripts rather than a bound volume: Richardson's font, printed via an expensive copperplate process, stands in for Clarissa's handwriting, while the surprise of the music itself create a moment of pleasurable recognition (the music Clarissa writes about is *actually here!*).¹²⁹ And this pleasurable surprise is, in turn, echoed in the fold-out format, which requires the reader to engage in a self-conscious *handling* of the book, of the kind Diderot imagines were he to find, in the corner of a room, "higgledy-piggledy, the letters of Clarissa and Pamela": here, the fevered pleasure of arranging, of handling the page, is part of absorption in the narrative.¹³⁰

But all this, of course, is precisely not what is happening when we open the second volume of *Wilhelm Meisters Lebrjahre* and find music for "Kennst du das Land" printed there. *Clarissa* explicitly supplies the reader with a role to play: we can stand in for Anna Howe, providing Clarissa, by our playing of her song, with our approbation, in a kind of paradigmatic case of sentimental reading. But what happens when I play and sing, without being able to slot into a role of this kind? What happens when I move from the reading of a poem, to the reading of a score on the same page?

This is, in part, a theoretical question about the rules by which I read music. The nature of the musical score – its resemblance to and difference from other kinds of meaningful marks on a page – has been much debated of late, often subsumed into the larger controversy over Nelson Goodman's claims about the nature of the musical work in

¹²⁹ On the copperplate process, see especially Price, 117. I depart here from Janine Barchas's reading of this moment; Barchas claims – for reasons that seem to me not entirely clear – that this page, "despite its mimetic conceit and musical conventionality, aligns the novel not with the private epistle or even the epistolary novel but with the protean variety of contemporary print culture" (100).

¹³⁰ On "handling," see Leah Price, *How to Do Things With Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012).

Languages of Art (that is, that a musical performance exists as the Peircean token of its type, the score).¹³¹ For the purposes of the discussion here, however, Theodor Adorno's more focused (though still elusive) comments on the distinction between musical notation and language are more to the point:

To interpret language means to understand language; to interpret music means to make music... [Musical notation] demands that it be imitated, not decoded. It is only in mimetic practice – which may, of course, be sublimated into unspoken imagination in the manner of reading to oneself – that music discloses itself, never to a consideration that interprets it independent of the act of execution. If one wished to compare an act in the signifying languages with the musical act, it would more likely be the transcription of a text than its comprehension as signification.¹³²

The musical score, for Adorno, is a set of rules for use, leading the reader to an activity rather than an understanding: faced with a score, inserted into a sheet of text, I “decode” the latter, while I “imitate” or “execute” the former. To be clear, this distinction has nothing to do with imitations involved in sympathetic reading: a reader responding to Rousseau's *Julie* may well have “felt all the feelings expressed in those letters become personified in [him] while reading them,” but surely that reader still decoded rather than imitated the marks he

¹³¹ See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1968), and, for a response to Goodman, Lydia Goehr's call for the historicization of the work concept in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1992). Among musicologists, a major methodological development of the 1980s and 90s that continues to have widespread influence today was the turn towards semiotics as a way of thinking through longstanding problems of conceiving musical meaning; the score has tended to come under discussion as a subcategory of this problem. Jean-Jacques Nattiez takes a Peircean look at the score in *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990). Kofi Agawu adopts a more Saussurean line of thinking in *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991).

¹³² “Music, Language, and Composition,” trans. Susan H. Gillespie, in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002), 115. See also Max Paddison, “Mimesis and the Aesthetics of Musical Expression,” in *Music Analysis* 29 (2010), 126-148.

found on the page.¹³³ Rather, what Adorno has in mind by describing musical notation as demanding imitation is something like what Barthes calls “the operable” – the claim that written music is precisely what (as Barthes claims) novelistic realism never could be: a “code of execution.”¹³⁴

The conceptual distinction between imitation and decoding that Adorno makes by referring to the musical “mimetic practice” seems to be twofold: firstly, musical reading, as “mimetic,” is somehow like-for-like – when I interpret the musical score, I end up with music, while when I interpret language I end up with something that isn’t language but an “understanding” of it; “Hence,” Adorno writes, “the idea of interpretation belongs to music essentially and is not identical to it” (115). Secondly, the outcome of musical reading is an activity that takes place *in time* – thus its kinship to transcription rather than comprehension. One must make an exception here, of course, for the special instance of what Leo Treitler calls “read[ing] a score for study” – in which condition “we do not necessarily reproduce in our minds the sounds of music,” but instead perceive “the structure of the music” – as when, for example, I read the score of Mahler’s Seventh, but instead of internally “hearing” or “following” the music, instead notice or recognize that the same series of intervals appears first in the clarinet, and then in the cello eighteen bars later, etc.¹³⁵ Otherwise, however, in reading music I am, as Jerrold Levinson argues, caught up in what he calls “flow,” the movement from one moment to the next. As Adorno points out, this imitation need not be physical; even in the privacy of “silent” musical reading I am caught in what Levinson calls an interior “seconding” of the score: this interior *following* in time is the

¹³³ In Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 247.

¹³⁴ Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 80. I think Nicholas Dames for pointing me to this reference.

¹³⁵ “The Early History of Music Writing in the West,” in *JAMS* 35:2 (1982), 237-279, at 242.

content of musical interpretation; as Levinson writes, musical interpretation – unlike the interpretation of language – does not contain a moment of reflection or abstraction as a part of “basic understanding.”¹³⁶ Assuming I have the necessary competence, then, when I encounter a musical score within a narrative, I move from reading as understanding (decoding, in a way fundamentally free from time, language into understanding) to reading as an imitation.¹³⁷

And this is precisely how eighteenth-century print narratives tended to deploy the musical insert: as a way of playing on the relationship between the *present* of reading-as-reference and the *absence* of an original that the reader-as-music-maker imitates. To be clear, this practice was an almost entirely eighteenth-century one: as Margaret Mahony Stoljar notes, in her study of *Sturm and Drang* song, that the insertion of music into narrative of various forms – not only in Germany, but in Western Europe – was extremely rare before the middle of the eighteenth century (mostly because of prohibitive cost), and essentially abandoned after 1810.¹³⁸ The dates, of course, are, if nothing else, suggestive: Austen and

¹³⁶ Levinson, *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997), 23-4.

¹³⁷ Some recent accounts of novel-reading – and here I am thinking in particular of Elaine Scarry’s convincing discussion of “dreaming by the book” – complicate this opposition. In Scarry’s view, the kind of precise description practiced by Proust and others involves a temporal *following* of the kind Adorno has in mind; and Scarry’s translation of a description in Hardy into a series of imperatives closely tracks, in some ways, Adorno’s discussion of the musical score as requiring “acts of execution” rather than understanding. See Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001). At a minimum, Scarry suggests that some language-reading is more act-like than other language-reading; *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* mostly lacks the kind of description Scarry is interested in, and indeed the quick succession of discrete images in “Kennst du das Land” seems about as far from Proust as one could get.

¹³⁸ Margaret Mahony Stoljar, *Poetry and Song in Late Eighteenth Century Germany: A Study in the Musical Sturm und Drang* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 33-35.

Scott came of age in decades in which novels might have songs printed in them; their own novels, however, were published in decades when they virtually never did.¹³⁹

As Stoljar and other critics focused primarily on the German case have demonstrated, the practice grows out of the printing of musical drama – out of the craze for ballad-operas and *Singspiele* beginning in the 1730s. If readers – and here, supplementing Stoljar’s account, I focus on the English scene – came across music while reading a printed narrative, that narrative was most likely to be one of the many volumes of Covent Garden ballad-operas, comedies, and farces produced and printed, mostly by John Watts, in the 1730s, in the aftermath of the stunning success of the *Beggar’s Opera*. Watts began his run of musical editions printing the music from copper plates, but quickly switched to a cheaper process of printing from wood-blocks, which, as L.J. Morrissey notes, allowed for the placement of music directly alongside its lyrics, and in its proper place within a scene, thus permitting “the reader to read the music and then mentally [or, of course, actually] set the lyrics to it.”¹⁴⁰ These editions circulated widely, serving as advertisement and vicarious experience for those who had never seen the play in question, and as “mnemonic prompts to London’s favorite farces,” as Berta Joncus puts it, for those who had.¹⁴¹ Making public music available in private, the ballad opera edition was a kind of forerunner of that central and still overlooked nineteenth-century form of bourgeois musical experience, the two- or four-hand piano reduction of operatic and symphonic scores – which, as Richard Leppert

¹³⁹ The few exceptions are mostly either moments in which novels adopt an ethnographic pose, as in George Washington Cable’s *The Grandissimes*, or explicitly self-conscious allusions to eighteenth-century practice, as in Balzac’s *Modeste Mignon*. See George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life* (New York: Sagamore, 1957), and Balzac, *Modeste Mignon*, ed. Maurice Regard, in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. 1, *Études de mœurs: scènes de la vie privée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

¹⁴⁰ Morrissey, “Henry Fielding and the Ballad Opera,” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 4 (1971), 382-402.

¹⁴¹ Berta Joncus, “Handel at Drury Lane: Ballad Opera and the Production of Kitty Clive,” in *JRMA* 131:2 (2006), 179-226.

writes, simultaneously allow for the repetition of a symphony or opera within the home, while at the same time “preserving allusion to the communal circumstances upon which the music depends.”¹⁴²

When music appeared in print non-dramatic narrative, it tended to maintain that same structure, at once alluding to an absent public occasion and repeating it. The dominant form of music in non-dramatic narrative was the short musical interlude without words. John Kidgell’s satiric novel *The Card*, for example, prints in its second volume the Minuet that opened a ball and “was thus danced by [the] brilliant Assembly”; by including it, the novel enables the reader to hear the music too.¹⁴³ The musical score inserted into travel narratives forms an ethnographic variation of this basic class: Georg Forster’s record of his journey with Cook, for example, includes a wordless tune heard in Tahiti at the point at the narrative in which the narrator hears it sung, an insertion that appeals both to repetition (what I heard you can hear) and to the creation of an enduring record (the tune is a “little specimen”).¹⁴⁴ Beyond repetition, however, inserted music served as a self-conscious interruption in reading – a true interlude. So, in his 1762 *Something New*, a kind of philosophical miscellany modeled after Shaftesbury but stitched into semi-narrative form, Richard Griffith periodically supplies brief keyboard pieces as deliberate narrative punctuation. He introduces the first, inserted into chapter 33, “A Voluntary,” by means of a

¹⁴² “Four Hands, Three Hearts’: A Commentary,” in *Cultural Critique* 60 (2005), 5-22. Leppert is glossing Adorno’s short and suggestive essay-memoir “Four Hands, Once Again,” trans. Jonathan Wipplinger, in *Cultural Critique* 60 (Spring 2005), 1-4.

¹⁴³ John Kidgell, *The Card*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: Newbery, 1760), 295-6.

¹⁴⁴ *A Voyage Round the World*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: White, 1777), 42.

comparison: “After a Sermon generally follows a Voluntary on the Organ; for fear, I suppose, that the discourse might make too great an impression on the congregation.”¹⁴⁵

From this range of examples, which make up the bulk of eighteenth century practice, it is possible to generalize. In both the Covent Garden song, printed on the page, and the instrumental interlude, the inserted musical score serves two overlapping functions: firstly, the score interrupts the time of reading – which is only to say the obvious, that while I am reading music, whether to myself or by performing it, I am doing something other than reading text. Like the Broadway musical before *Oklahoma!*, the eighteenth century musical insert does not adhere to what D.A. Miller calls the tedium of “narrative naturalism”: that is, these books never unfold their narrative *in* song.¹⁴⁶ Secondly, the score offers a repetition of prior – chiefly public – experience, allowing readers the opportunity to recreate that experience in their homes, while simultaneously referring to a public original. Like Mignon’s questions, the musical insert plays upon the interrelationship of presence and absence in reading: precisely where the page is most present to me, where it requires “acts of execution” of me in order to be read, it is also most deliberately allusive to the communal, commercial performance that I would only recreate.

It is in a third category of musical insert – the song, or brief portion of song, placed within non-dramatic narrative – that this basic structure undergoes self-reflexive variations. Full-length songs, like Mignon’s, are extremely rare – in the four hundred literary works with musical inserts listed in Eighteenth Century Collections Online, for example, there are only three instances of this kind. More commonly, writers and printers deployed a very brief phrase of music – often merely a few notes – next to a few words of text, activating the

¹⁴⁵ *Something New*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Dilly, 1762), 242.

¹⁴⁶ Miller, *Place For Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1998), 2.

reader's memory of a tune so that it operated alongside the words. A variety of effects – especially comic ones – were possible in such moments, as such brief snippets allowed for reading-as-understanding and reading-as-execution to collide on the page. I supply a single example here, a page from the parodic “Canterbury Tale” of John Wolcot (“Peter Pindar”), late in the century:

In one of these excursions of renown—
 I think historians say at Canterbury,
 Or at some other town—
 As I'm not now before a judge or jury,
 Methinks I need not swear
 Where 'twas exactly—but somewhere
 He met a fellow traveller—“ Sir,” says he,
 Right full of glee,
 “ We'll crack a bottle, if you please,
 “ And sing a song:
 “ The time may yet be long,
 “ Before we meet again, so much at ease;
 “ Come, Here's the King!—



“ God—save—great—Sing, Sir, sing!—

 “ Here's my card,
 “ You know St. Paul's Church Yard,
 (We'll say St. Paul's Church Yard,
 To make a rhyme to *card*—)
 “ I should be glad to see you there,
 “ Or any where;

Fig. 4: “Peter Pindar” [John Wolcot], “A Canterbury Tale,” in *The Works of Peter Pindar*, new edition (3 vols.), vol. 3 (Dublin: Williams, 1792), 33. Via Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

In Wolcot's poem, as the two travelers prepare to toast the king before they take their leave of each other, the page provides the first three notes of "God Save the King." The juxtaposition immediately sets the reader's memory of the tune running – but then leaves the reader holding the bag, as it were, alone with a song she never asked for. By replacing "George our King" with the (rhyming) command to sing (itself sung or spoken?), Wolcot plays on the extreme, and politically charged form of any score's "demand for imitation" found in the coercive force of anthems: to command *playing* in the head.

Wolcot's poem – or other similar cases, such as the third chapter of John Carr's spurious second volume of *Tristram Shandy*¹⁴⁷ – makes a kind of game out of what it means to read. The page represents something absent to me: I understand an exchange taking place between two travelers. At the same time, the page enforces an imitation on me: I do what it says; I sing along with the national anthem; I *execute* the page as a set of instructions. What is striking about "Kennst du das Land" in this context, then, is that while it visibly participates in this same reflection on reading as an embodied practice, it does so without citation (to a tune that I already know; to a social scene of reception which can be authenticated by a visible nod towards the social circulation of texts). It is this particular force of Mignon's questions, then, that is lost in the opposition between re-readings, de- and re-mystified, that is set up in the closing book of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*.

Forgetting Mignon

What happens to Mignon? She dies, and in death is transformed into an image – her body wrapped in "its angel costume," changed into a "semblance of life," a "beauteous image of the past" (353-4). Paul de Man famously, and puzzlingly, claims that "[d]eath is a

¹⁴⁷ John Carr, *Tristram Shandy* (London: [n.p.], 1760).

displaced name for a linguistic predicament,” its silence that of language itself, “mute as pictures are mute.”¹⁴⁸ Marc Redfield makes a similar claim about Mignon’s death and subsequent aestheticization: that in giving her meaning, the novel “divert[s] attention from the linguistic predicament” she “personifie[s],” namely that *Bildung* is not an autotelic procedure but instead “depends on language’s rhetorical power to generate effects.”¹⁴⁹ I have been making a similar claim here, except that I have a particular set of effects in mind – namely, that in re-classifying “Kennst du das Land” as a document, the novel not only generates “the reader,” but creates that reader in the place of one who, confronted with songs, reflects on his particularity as *this* reader.

One might object that – precisely to the extent that it is positivistic – this argument requires a historical basis that it cannot meet, particularly as I have repeatedly turned to the first edition of the novel which, admittedly, almost no one read.¹⁵⁰ There is at least a single trace of a contemporary reading of this edition, in a letter of Karl Morgenstern’s:

Where does a song breathe such intimate longing as Mignon’s song on the zither at the beginning of the second volume, whose sweetness and richness of feeling has been further elevated by *Reichardt’s* soulful composition. I know it by heart:

Know you the land?

etc.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Paul de Man, “Autobiography As De-Facement,” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 80-1.

¹⁴⁹ Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1996), 73.

¹⁵⁰ Goethe and Reichardt fell out largely over the latter’s continued commitment to republican ideals; in June of 1796 Goethe writes to Schiller that he would prefer to take the Mignon songs back from Reichardt, and allow Unger to instead give the song to Carl Zelter. See Goethe to Schiller, 22 June 1796, in *Correspondence between Goethe and Schiller*, 115.

¹⁵¹ In Klaus F. Gille ed., *Goethes Wilhelm Meister: Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte der Lehr- und Wanderjahre* (Königstein: Athenäum, 1979), 15; my translation. The emphasis is original.

This is a rather oddly unambitious display of memory – the song contracts to a single question, “etc.” Morgenstern preserves in it, however, what I have been reading as the song’s essential gesture, the question, and indeed suggestively repeats it to his interlocutor (do you know the land, but also: do you know this song?). Yet when Morgenstern, twenty-five years later, revisits the novel in order to define the *Bildungsroman*, he seems to have forgotten the song entirely and the question it asks. Instead, Morgenstern writes that the novel by definition possesses an audience that reads silently, rather than an audience that sings and listens, and a readership that knows precisely what it is: “us Germans,” in our development towards the “purely human.”¹⁵² Mignon’s song – its reflection on the discordance between myself as a reader and “the reader” – seems to have left precisely no effect on this statement of novel theory.

The remainder of this dissertation is in a way a discussion of the effects Mignon *does* have on the nineteenth-century novel in practice: of the recurring use of music in the hands of Walter Scott and George Eliot to reflect on the slippages between myself as reader, and the reader of the book – producing a kind of stable layering in Scott’s style, and then deployed by Eliot to query her readers’ interest in plot and its implications. And certainly, as I have been suggesting throughout, Mignon’s questions are perhaps most forcefully posed in the novel’s first edition, but by no means *only* there: “Kennst du das Land” still puts on the appearance of an epigraph, even if the third book of the novel appears at the end of a first volume; though Mignon’s songs may not be inserted into later editions of the work, they nonetheless shadow it as the real (if external) twins of the fictional (but internal) songs in the text of the novel itself.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Morgenstern, “On the Nature of the *Bildungsroman*,” trans. Tobias Boes, in *PMLA* 124:2 (2009), 650-659, at 655.

¹⁵³ On this point, see Cave, 199.

In this spirit, a late reading of Mignon from a writer for whom Mignon is ultimately, as she is for Morgenstern, the source of questions that keep playing in the head, but who almost certainly never saw the first edition of the novel. Of Mignon, and “Kennst du das Land,” H.D. writes this:

She asks the question. Each verse of the lyric is a question or a series of questions.

Do you know the Land? Do you know the House? Do you know the Mountain? ...

Do you actually know this and all these things?

The passage comes at the end of H.D.’s extraordinary memoir of Freud, “Writing on the Wall.”¹⁵⁴ Why Mignon? In part, the logic is one of identification with Mignon’s biographical case: surprised by Freud’s gift to her, after one of their analytic sessions in Vienna in 1934, of a “box of oranges, and some branches with leaves of them,” H.D. finds herself thinking of Mignon’s song, with its mention of leaves and fruit (90). Increasingly, this association comes to structure H.D.’s account of herself, and of Freud. H.D. uses elements of Mignon’s biography to access her own: “One of these souls was called Mignon, though its body did not fit it very well... It was a girl between two boys” (106), she writes, thinking of Gilbert and Harold Doolittle.

But Mignon matters to H.D. also because, as she puts it, “she asks the question,” questions that H.D. repeatedly revoices, or rather, re-writes, with increasing density as the memoir comes to a close. H.D., after all, is writing here both a tribute and a response to Freud’s particular technique for producing cases out of utterances.¹⁵⁵ She came to see Freud for a great many reasons, but the event that she places at the center of her memoir is the moment when, on Corfu in 1920, she saw projected on the wall of her hotel bedroom a

¹⁵⁴ In *Tribute to Freud* (New York: New Directions, 2012), 108.

¹⁵⁵ The crucial discussion of H.D.’s *response* to Freud is Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Susan Stanford Friedman, ““Woman Is Perfect”: H.D.’s Debate with Freud,” in *Feminist Studies* 7:3 (Autumn 1981), 417-430.

series of images that she recalls – there are two acts of recollection here, one to Freud in 1933-4, and one in writing the book in 1944 – in extraordinary detail, as the “writing” of the memoir’s title:

I may say that never before and never since have I had an experience of this kind. I saw a dim shape forming on the wall between the foot of the bed and the wash-stand. It was late afternoon; the wall was a dull, mat ochre. I thought, at first, it was sunlight flickering from the shadows cast from or across the orange trees in full leaf and fruit. But I realized instantly that our side of the house was already in early shadow. The pictures on the wall were like colorless transfers or ‘calcomanias,’ as we pretentiously called them as children. The first was head and shoulders, three-quarter face, no marked features... (44)

The second is a goblet; the third, a tripod; then, finally, an image of Niké, surrounded by a series of inverted, half-S marks: “a series of question marks,” H.D. writes, “the questions that have been asked through the ages, that the ages will go on asking” (54). She did not know where the writing came from – “[w]hether that hand or person” that wrote these signs was herself, “projecting the images as a sign... or whether they are projected from outside” (46). Freud, says H.D., picked out this writing, of all of her memories, as “the only actually dangerous ‘symptom’” she presented (41) – a judgment, she writes, that puzzled her then and that continued to afterward.

Because for H.D., what matters about this writing is not, ultimately, where it came from but that it is: “[S]ymptom or inspiration, the writing continues to write itself or be written” (51). “Kennst du das Land” is another form of that writing which continues to write itself, which appears unprompted in H.D.’s head, “singing like an echo of an echo in a shell”: as she puts it, “I did not have to recall the words, I had not written them” (90). Susan Bernstein writes of H.D.’s appropriation of Mignon that while “the inclusion of Goethe’s

lyric provides a stabilizing frame in H.D.'s text, the context" of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* "in fact shows the dissolution, rather than the becoming whole, of Mignon, the speaker position with which H.D. identifies."¹⁵⁶ One might say, also, that it is the particular strength of H.D.'s memory of Mignon that she knows two things about her at once: that Mignon is a case, a biography that one can know or even identify with. But also that Mignon is a speaker of questions that, for all their suggestiveness, may not therefore have to be read as symptoms, but could instead speak to *us*, however puzzlingly:

It is all there; the lyrical interrogation and the implication that the answer is given with it. It is: do you know the Land – but you do know it, don't you? (110)

¹⁵⁶ Bernstein, *Housing Problems: Writing and Architecture in Goethe, Walpole, Freud, and Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008), 114.

Interchapter 1: Scott reads Goethe

The fundamental claim of the next chapter of this dissertation will be that in the style of Walter Scott, the disorienting oscillation set up in Mignon's songs is transformed into a stably layered reading. The reader of "Kennst du das Land" is faced with a song that speaks to him, and in two quite different ways: as a reader made purely in the moment of reading, and as one who shares – or doesn't – with the song itself a horizon of cultural knowledge. Scott's style will in effect introject that displacement between a purely formal and a culturally located reader and give it a name: history. My argument is thus an articulation of how Scott's style forms an audience for his books that understands itself as such, and the aim of the next chapter will therefore be one that links a particular formal feature of Scott's novels – the stylistic means by which he hails his readers' attention – to what Scott understood as his historical situation. Before making this argument, however, I offer a description of that situation via a reading of Goethe's play 1773 *Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand* and Scott's translation of it, which he published in 1799, at the very beginning of his career, as *Goetz of Berlichingen with the Iron Hand*.¹⁵⁷

Based loosely on an historical figure of the sixteenth century, the play's title character is the last of an old order of relatively lawless nobility; the plot pits Goetz against a newly powerful imperial state – a fight that the play represents as a hopeless action against an inevitably progressive history. As Herbert Lindenberger writes, the play depicts the passing away of a way of life, the "sense of time passing, of one set of human values gradually,

¹⁵⁷ Goethe, *Götz von Berlichingen*, in the fifty-five volume Weimarer Ausgabe (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1887-1918), vol. 8; and *Goetz of Berlichingen, with the Iron Hand; a Tragedy*, trans. "William Scott" (London: Bell, 1799).

though inevitably, giving away to another.”¹⁵⁸ Implicit in this style of representation, of course, is the claim that there exists something called a “way of life,” that human life is made up of discrete *sets* of values that operate as a system, coming to being and passing away in historical time as an ensemble.¹⁵⁹ The play takes this position quite explicitly: as Goetz’s friend Weislingen puts it, “Those times are over” (32) – a statement that Weislingen means to make only about private life and friendship, and one that Goetz initially rejects. By the end of the play, however, Goetz repeats this judgment in sweeping historical terms: “The age of frankness and freedom is past” (201). As Bianca Theisen has recently argued, Goethe’s play stages the passage of the older age as a confrontation between the concrete and the abstract – between Goetz’s “natural, blunt, and physical expression of emotions” and the “new social structures based on the adoption of the more abstract Roman codex.”¹⁶⁰

In Goethe’s play, this passing of an age is made manifest in Goetz’s attempt to secure an heir: an age passes, in other words, when the past fails to transmit itself. There are two potential heirs in this play, Goetz’s son Karl and his childhood friend Adelbert Weislingen. Each character represents a different model, each associated with a different organ of the body, for the possibility of cultural inheritance: in Weislingen, the “new man,” a modern form of inheritance via actions of the *hand* is shown to be impossible; in Karl, on the other hand, an older kind of inheritance via the *ear* is shown to be no longer available.

¹⁵⁸ Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relationship of Literature and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 114.

¹⁵⁹ The classic account of this way of viewing culture in history, as it relates to Scott, is Georg Lukács’s *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). For an account of this structure that emphasizes its roots in the stadialism of the Scottish Enlightenment rather than Hegel, see instead George Dekker’s *The American Historical Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁶⁰ Theisen, “The Drama in Rags: Shakespeare Reception in Eighteenth-Century Germany,” in *MLN* 121:3 (April 2006), 505-513, at 512 and 510.

The play is tightly structured around these two figures, particularly that of the hand, and thus demands a rhetorical reading. Goethe's play is ultimately an anti-literary work of nostalgia, whose rhetorical argument suggests that cultural belonging cannot be satisfactorily transmitted through the hand-based circulatory processes of print and must instead rely, impossibly, on naturally lived belonging. Scott's translation, however, attempts to finesse this argument and create space for literature – an action of the hand – to work in the propagation of culture.

The hand appears in two guises in the play. Firstly, it is at the center of both the rituals and metaphors of loyalty. Characters in this play are constantly shaking hands, in moments of sociability – “There's my hand, man,” Karl says to Weislingen (31) – but also, more crucially, to perform acts of pledging. This is how Weislingen declares his love for Maria:

GOETZ Pledge me your hand, that you will neither give open or under-hand assistance to my avowed enemies.

WEISLINGEN Here I grasp thy hand. From this moment be our union and friendship as firm and unalterable as a primary law of nature! – Let me take this hand also [*Takes Maria's hand*] – and with it the possession of this lovely lady... (51)

Pledges are acts performed by hands to guarantee future acts performed by hands. As Weislingen suggests, the hand thus works a figure for loyalty arising from an act of choice – the pledging of hands – that then obscures that act and re-describes loyalty on the model of a natural fact. The pledging of hands, in other words, is not merely a contract but an identification, for when one pledges one's hand, one *becomes* a hand: Weislingen's entire

choice between service to the new imperial regime or loyalty to Goetz is figured as a determination of whose “right hand” he will be (2, 34).

The hand, however, is not only that which performs the process of identification; it is also a sign of established personal identity. Well before the events represented in the play, Goetz’s hand was shot off in military service, and his prosthesis serves as a public marker of that event: thus, in the play’s opening, the monk Martin recognizes Goetz by attempting to shake his “knightly right hand” (15), and then kisses it once he sees that it is made of iron, “one with its mail’d gauntlet” (16). Nor is it only Goetz’s hand that identifies or marks out the individual: in his first lines, Karl recounts to his aunt Maria the “story of the good child” (18), a boy who was rewarded for an act of charity by being granted a magical power in his hand – “It was the right hand, I think,” as Karl specifies (20) – to cure the sick. In both accounts, the hand is linked to a past moment in which a character trait was revealed (bravery, charity), and then transforms that moment of revelation into a permanent sign of character: Goetz with the iron hand; the good child with the magical hand. The difficulty for Goetz, however, is that his identity is thus not in fact a natural, present part of him, but is rather a prosthetic. As Barbara Johnson writes, the prosthesis takes up a troubling relationship to bodily wholeness: precisely by returning the body to wholeness, the prosthesis emphasizes “that the body *has* parts.”¹⁶¹ Similarly, as “Goetz, with the iron hand,” Goetz is who he is only by virtue of his loss of wholeness – this, surely, is the only way to gloss this exchange, late in the play, after Goetz has been imprisoned by imperial forces:

ELIZABETH In this moody melancholy I know thee no longer.

GOETZ If thou seekest Goetz, he is long since gone! – One by one have they

¹⁶¹ Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 87.

robbed me of all I held dear – my hand, my property, my freedom,
my renown! (197)

Goetz's line is a strange one, and it is not difficult to imagine why Rose d'Aguilar, whose translation *Gortz of Berlingen* was also published in 1799, chose to translate the first object Goetz names – in Goethe's German, "meine Hand" – less literally, as "my sword."¹⁶² For in lamenting his missing hand, Goetz claims that paramount among those things whose absence make Goetz no longer Goetz – that would make him any seeking after him futile – is his hand; yet of course it had all along been precisely that absence that had made Goetz himself, and that allowed him to be recognized.

Goetz's hand, then, seems to be a version of what Jacques Lacan refers to in a famous phrase as "the structuring function of a lack" in his account of the subject: constituted by its lack, Lacan writes, the subject is thus of necessity both desiring and social.¹⁶³ And indeed the play brings the two functions of the hand – as identity and identification – into relation in precisely this way. This is how Goetz interprets a dream that he has had when Weislingen and Maria have pledged hands and declared their intention to marry:

GOETZ Well, then, Weislingen, join hands, and I say *Amen!* – My friend and
 brother! ... *I* am fully happy. What I but hoped in a dream, I now
 see with my eyes, and feel as if I still dreamed. Now my vision is out
 – I thought to-night, that, in token of reconciliation, I gave thee this

¹⁶² *Gortz of Berlingen, with the iron hand* (Dublin: Stockdale, 1799), 151. For (a very little) more on this translation and its author, see "Eine amerikanische Übersetzung von Goethes *Götz*," in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 16:4 (October 1917), 541-550, which provides a survey of translations of the play on pages 541-2; and Marilyn Bonnell, "The unidentified recipient of a Wordsworth letter," in *Notes & Queries* 37:1 (March 1990), 22.

¹⁶³ *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1981), 29.

iron hand; and that you held it so fast that it broke away from my arm: – I started, and awoke. Had I but dreamed a little longer, I should have seen how thou didst make me a new living hand. (51-2)

In Goetz's dream, identification – as the process by which a pledge of hands makes one into the hand of another – works to stabilize the dynamics of identity, its basis in constitutive lack: in successful identification, detaching the right hand (as Weislingen both takes it and becomes it) paradoxically creates a “new living hand” (no longer an artificial prosthesis) and reconstitutes the body as whole. This vision of marriage is of a successful transmission of an identity, one that retrospectively affirms its original stability by duplicating it.

Weislingen swiftly reneges on his pledge of hands, however, abandoning Maria for the beautiful widow Adela von Walldorf, and Goetz for the pro-imperial Bishop of Bamberg. After the betrayal, Goetz is on the verge of open combat against the Empire – a chain of events that will lead to his imprisonment and, eventually, to his death. At this point, he thinks again of his strange dream, prompted by the seemingly accidental use of a figure of speech by his ally Seckingen:

SECKINGEN ...The towns of Triers and Pfalz as soon expect that the sky should fall, as that I should come down upon their heads – But I will come like a storm of hail on the unsuspecting traveler; and if I am successful, thou shalt soon be brother to a prince. – I had hoped for thy hand in this undertaking.

GOETZ [*Looks at his hand.*] O! that explains to me the dream I had the morning that I promised Maria to Weislingen. – I thought he professed eternal fidelity, and held my iron hand so fast that it loosened from the arm. – Alas! I am at this moment more helpless,

and senseless, than when it was shot from me. – Weislingen!

Weislingen! (152)

If identity can be secured only in its transmission, then it is always subject to going awry, as transmission is a loss rather than a gain – or is rather *first* a loss before it potentially returns as gain. And indeed, at this moment Goetz is not so much *reinterpreting* his dream of giving away or breaking off his iron hand as he is simply reiterating its literal level: by losing a hand, he has lost a hand; he is himself, handless, and Weislingen remains Weislingen.

The detachable hand that should guarantee, in its circulation, the recuperating return of an original identity, but is instead always subject to being revealed as mere loss: there will surely be little surprise in suggesting that, at this point, Goethe's play is building towards an account of the necessary failures of writing as a mode of transmitting identity, or culture. Locked away in his castle, physically defeated, Goetz turns towards autobiography to achieve what he could not with Weislingen: his self-perpetuation. But as a labor of the hand, writing is subject to a now-predictable set of problems. Goetz is attempting, as his wife Elizabeth says, to create "evidence under [his] hand" which will make others "acquainted with [his] real character" (159). But for Goetz the process of representing his character means that he no longer *is* his character: "When I *write* what I have done, I lament the misspent time in which I might *do* more" (160, emphasis mine). Writing appears to threaten being, and Goetz's fear proves well-founded: having attempted to pass over into writing, Goetz at this point does fade away from the play, whose final act unfolds mostly without him.

Moreover, this attempted trade – of doing for writing – is in fact no trade at all. As Kenneth D. Weisinger notes, Goetz's final scene "is constituted in words not his own" – as

he dies, Goetz speaks entirely in “a pastiche of literary allusions, mostly from the Bible.”¹⁶⁴ Weisinger notes five lines in the play’s two brief closing scenes that have direct biblical sources, and Wilhelm Große’s commentary to the recent Suhrkamp edition adds four more: Goetz’s dialogue is a patchwork of citation.¹⁶⁵ (Scott clearly understood the effect, on multiple occasions borrowing phrases directly from the King James Bible in his translation.) Here, precisely where Goetz appears to be making the most effort to speak in a memorable and rhetorically organized fashion, he loses himself; to enter into writing, Goetz must repeat what has already been written in, as it were, another hand.

In its extended play with the hand, then, *Götz von Berlichingen* both works through and ultimately rejects the possibilities for successful cultural inheritance offered by techniques of circulation and identification. Scott’s extends this thread of the play’s rhetoric, twice adding references to hands where Goethe’s German alludes to more innocuous body parts.

In Goetz’s relationship to Karl, his son, however, the play offers a quite different model for inheritance, one predicated not on the circulation of signs of identity, but instead on a specifically *pre*-linguistic belonging to a place, a connection based upon everyday familiarity that the play registers as a form of hearing. This model is expressed most clearly – albeit as failed – early on in the play, in a conversation in which Goetz quizzes Karl on what he knows about the family castle. As I will argue, Scott modifies this passage in subtle but important ways in his translation, and I therefore first quote Goethe’s German (Scott’s translation may be found below, on pages 94-95):

KARL Ich hab viel gelernt... Ich weiß noch was.

GÖTZ Was wird das sein?

¹⁶⁴ “*Götz von Berlichingen: History Writing Itself?*” in *German Studies Review* 9:2 (May 1986), 211-232, at 231.

¹⁶⁵ *Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand*, ed. Wilhelm Große (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 241-243.

- KARL Jaxthausen ist ein Dorf und Schloß an der Jaxt, gehört seit
zweihundert Jahren den Herrn von Berlichingen erb- und
eigenthümlich zu.
- GÖTZ Kennst du den Herrn von Berlichingen?
- KARL *(Siebt ihn starr an).*
- GÖTZ *(vor sich)* Er kennt wohl vor lauter Gelehrsamkeit seinen Vater nicht. –
Wem gehört Jaxthausen?
- KARL Jaxthausen ist ein Dorf und Schloß an der Jaxt.
- GÖTZ Das frag' ich nicht. – Ich kannte alle Pfade, Weg und Furten, eh ich
wußte wie Fluß, Dorf und Burg hieß.¹⁶⁶

In this conversation, two kinds of knowledge face off against each other: on the one hand, abstract knowledge; on the other, knowledge tied to experience. Goetz has learned “all the trails, roads, and fords” as things rather than as names; Karl, however, possesses only a set of facts that he has learned from his aunt Maria, whose primary pedagogical method – as we have seen in an earlier scene – is the repetitive training of memory. Karl’s memory, however, is precisely the problem: he knows that Jaxthausen belongs to the Lord of Berlichingen, but he knows that as a fact equally meaningful to all; Karl lacks the sense of his own situatedness in the place he describes that would enable him to link that name to his own father. And, as later developments suggest, Karl’s merely factual knowledge *of* Jaxthausen cannot become attachment *to* Jaxthausen: three acts later, Karl will abandon the castle for a monastery, leaving Goetz to die without an heir. James Chandler writes that in Scott’s later fiction, “the medium where cultural difference is registered tends to be the conversation” – specifically, that in pauses and gaps in conversation, Scott’s novels register

¹⁶⁶ *Götz von Berlichingen*, in the fifty-five volume Weimarer Ausgabe (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1887-1918), vol. 8, 27.

the uneven development of cultures as moments of mutual incomprehension.¹⁶⁷ This moment in *Götze* is an extreme example of the same technique: a moment in which the basic rhythm of conversation breaks down entirely into silence and repetition.

Cultural difference here appears specifically as a split in what it means to belong: Karl knows all about one kind of belonging, the “belonging” of property and law, but has no knowledge of the other: the belonging of what is proper, of what fits together naturally. Both forms of belonging, in Goethe’s German, are senses of *gehören*, a verb that is also linked etymologically to the act of hearing (*hören*). Martin Heidegger makes a great deal of this etymology in his extended reflections, in *Being and Time* and elsewhere, on the sense in which Dasein “belongs” in the world; as he puts it, Dasein “obeys and listens to the world.”¹⁶⁸ Heidegger expands upon the same line of thinking in a rather troubling page: that we do not hear “noises and complexes of sound” but instead “initially hear motorcycles and wagons,” he argues, “is ... the phenomenal proof that Dasein, as being-in-the-world, always already maintains itself *together with* innerworldly things at hand and initially not at all with ‘sensations.’” Here Heidegger’s end run around “onto-theology” – around Platonic or Kantian metaphysics – is based on the primariness of hearing: as “essentially understanding,” Heidegger continues, Dasein as it hears the motorcycle engine rather than mere sound is “initially together with what is understood” (§164). Hearing, in other words, is the proof of belonging; or, as Heidegger put it programmatically in his essay on Heraclitus, “We have heard when we *belong to* that which has been spoken.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281-2.

¹⁶⁸ *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), §65fn, emphasis original.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Nicholas Rand, “The Political Truth of Heidegger’s ‘Logos’: Hiding in Translation,” in *PMLA* 105:3 (May 1990), 436-447, at 440.

There is much to resist in Heidegger's etymological thinking here. Yet the etymological connections within *gehören* have a clear hold on Goethe's scene nevertheless, as the scene renders Karl's difficulty with belonging as a kind of hearing problem: he cannot hear the question his father really wants answered ("Do you know the lord of Berlichingen?") but answers a different one; moreover, he does not even hear the *right* answer that Goetz mutters under his breath to himself ("seinen Vater"). Karl does not belong and thus cannot hear.

Taken as a whole, then, *Götz von Berlichingen* rejects writing as a form of cultural transmission, and suggests that true cultural belonging must be rooted in a pre-linguistic (indeed, anti-linguistic) attachment to places rather than names – to places known before and almost in spite of their names. Yet in Karl's apparent deafness, and his repetitions, the play also suggests that the era of the ear is over: belonging as such is no longer possible.

The relationship between hearing and belonging is one that will preoccupy Scott – a ballad collector as well as a poet and novelist – throughout his career. Yet I will argue that Scott in fact does not imagine hearing or the oral in the way suggested in *Götz*: as part of a primordial rootedness in place, fundamentally unrecoverable by writing. Rather, in writing about listening, Scott attempts to create a kind of self-aware belonging that works through – in both senses – its difference from listening. And indeed, even at this earliest moment of his career, Scott's translation of the scene between Goetz and Karl introduces a number of somewhat unlikely readings of Goethe's German that, while maintaining the effect of a broken conversation, subtly shift its cause:

CHARLES I have learned a great deal... And I know something else.

GOETZ What may that be? –

CHARLES “Jaxthausen is a village and castle upon the Jaxt, which has appertained in property and heritage for two hundred years to the Lords of Berlichingen – ”

GOETZ Do you know the Lord of Berlichingen? – [*Charles stares at him.*] With all his extensive learning he does not know his own father. – Whom does Jaxthausen belong to?

CHARLES “Jaxthausen is a village and castle upon the Jaxt – ”

GOETZ I did not ask about that – I knew every path, pass, and ford about the place, before ever I knew the name of a village, castle, or river. (29-30)

The etymological resources of *gehören* are, of course, unavailable to Scott – yet it is still striking how much Scott’s translation has worked to play down the importance of (mis)hearing in the passage. In Scott’s translation, the failure of conversation does not occur because of a hearing problem; rather, Charles fails to answer his father because he mechanically repeats his reading: Scott adds quotation marks around Charles’s repeated line, which appear nowhere in the original, marking his words – particularly – for the reader as coming from elsewhere, as indeed they do.¹⁷⁰ Goetz, also, no longer speaks to himself; Charles’s obtuseness thus seems less a product of mishearing than the result of a sheerly mechanical repetition.

Most importantly, despite the easy availability of the English “belonging,” Scott instead splits *gehören* into two verbs, the colloquial “belong” and the legal jargon of “appertain to.” Goetz asks about belonging, but Charles answers with appertaining – the

¹⁷⁰ Pistorius’s edition of Götz’s autobiography, *Lebensbeschreibung Herrn Goetzens von Berlichingen*, contains a note that begins “Jaxthausen ist ein Dorff an der Jaxt gelegen, so heut zu Tag noch denen Herren von Berlichingen zustehet.” See Wilhelm Friedrich von Pistorius, *Lebensbeschreibung* (Nürnberg: Felsechterischen, 1775), 16n26.

bookish quality of the latter verb suggesting that young Charles may not even understand what he himself is saying, and that, certainly, he has been doing the wrong kind of reading.

A problem that in Goethe's German is an absolute one of medium – one cannot learn belonging from a book – becomes, in Scott's English, a relative problem of style: one cannot learn belonging from *that kind* of book, the book written in a technical language and learned by rote. But what kind of book *could* teach belonging, given the book's necessary participation in the supplementary logic of the prosthetic, in the processes of circulation which prevent the authentic transmission of identity? This will be the question that shapes Scott's career.

Romances for General Circulation: Scott and the structure of reading

I argue in my previous chapter that Friedrich Schlegel's "systematic reader" is created, in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, in the moment at which Wilhelm learns to re-interpret Mignon's songs as documents – as fragmentary but (and, also, therefore) characteristic traces of their singer – rather than as songs. Mignon's questions can no longer speak *to* a reader of this type, but rather can only be interpreted by him.

In his book *Disorienting Fictions*, James Buzard argues that Walter Scott's achievement as a novelist was to have done to Scotland what Goethe's novel does to Mignon: that is, constitute it as "a culture sealed off from history, susceptible to holistic representation."¹⁷¹ Just as, under the doctor's tutelage, Mignon's songs become documents of her case, so too in Scott particular cultural practices become definitely part of a master category: *Scottishness*. In his argument, Buzard draws upon a central claim of twentieth-century anthropology's self-critical turn: that the mode of ethnographic observation works to assure *me*, the writer-reader-observer, of my location in modernity, a cosmopolitan and progressive modernity defined in its observation of – and therefore differentiation from – the cultural fragments it observes.¹⁷² In reading Scott, Buzard claims, I learn to "press diverse and even internally inconsistent elements of a living society into service as symbols for the purported whole of a culture" (86). Like Wilhelm, or like Schlegel's reader of *Wilhelm Meister*, I stop *interacting* with those I see before me, and instead aim at "proper apprehension of the whole" (71).

Buzard's cultural whole is one explicitly conceived on the model of the Romantic artwork, or

¹⁷¹ Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2005), 71.

¹⁷² For a perspicuous version of this argument, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983).

at least on Romanticism as it was received in the middle of the twentieth century: the traditional culture in Scott is “[l]ike a poem as understood by the New Criticism” (87), a whole made up of “interrupted” fragments whose “achieved harmony” – here Buzard quotes Cleanth Brooks – can only be recognized through a patient labor of interpretation (98). Schlegel’s “systematic” reader thus becomes, in Buzard’s account of Scott, the “English or *Englished* one” (81): the systematic reading of Scott’s novels, insofar as this reading teaches me to identify with the activity of assembling Scottish fragments, becomes a specific marker of a form of cultural belonging whose cosmopolitanism is created in the act of observing the local.

Buzard’s claims are a late and comprehensive articulation of what critics have long recognized about Scott’s novels: their double perspective. As David Daiches writes, Scott was both “the prudent Briton and the passionate Scot”¹⁷³; for Harry Levin, Scott had “a dual role: the last minstrel and the first best-seller”¹⁷⁴; as George Levine puts it, Scott’s novels articulate a “characteristic doubleness of vision.”¹⁷⁵ The relationship between these doubles – “prudent Briton” and “passionate Scott,” culturally authentic minstrel and brashly entrepreneurial author – is characteristically expressed as one of *framing*, in which a Scottish content is framed within a British (or, for Buzard, English) formal whole and thereby mastered by it. Thus, for Buzard, the culture of a Scotland “sealed off from history” is one that has been “framed in time and space” (74), or “rendered ‘spatial’ ... by being treated as finished and available to the gaze” (85). Katie Trumpener has influentially read Scott’s editorial frames – his proliferation of endless explanatory notes and prefatory essays – as

¹⁷³ Daiches, “Scott’s Achievement as a Novelist, Part One,” in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 6:2 (Sept. 1951), 81-95, at 85.

¹⁷⁴ Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1963), 45.

¹⁷⁵ Levine, *The Realistic Imagination* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981), 104.

treating Scotland in much the same way: as Trumpener argues, Scott's editorial frames work to consolidate his own voice into an "unobtrusive" one, both "magisterial" and "politically quietistic," by isolating and distancing the Scottish materials they relay.¹⁷⁶

That the vocabulary for this gesture – framing – is insistently visual is hardly accidental. The chief example for Scott criticism of this vein is a painting viewed at the close of Scott's first novel, *Waverley*, in which realism appears quite literally as a successful framing of romance. The painting appears in Tully-Veolan, the estate of the Jacobite Baron Bradwardine, which – as restored by the novel's hero – represents the compromises required by a stable, modern, British future. Waverley has by this point given up the temptations of life amongst the Highlanders and rebellion against the Hanoverian crown, and learned, as the novel's narrator puts it, that "the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced."¹⁷⁷ That this decision involves not a *rejection* but rather a dialectical preservation of romance, however, is made clear in the painting itself:

There was one new addition to this fine old apartment... 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... Beside this painting hung the arms which Waverley had borne in the unfortunate civil war. The whole piece was beheld with admiration, and deeper feelings. (489)

¹⁷⁶ Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 151 and 156.

¹⁷⁷ *Waverley: or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Andrew Hook (London and New York: Penguin, 1985), 415.

Understandably – given its position on nearly the last page of Scott’s first novel – the passage has struck many commentators as a self-conscious reflection of Scott’s own representational practice. Rendered into art, the past (and for *Waverley* at least, the extremely recent past) is separated off from the world of causes and effects and made into an object of aesthetic contemplation (“admiration”) and sentiment (“deeper feelings”).

George Levine writes that this scene of looking is thus perfectly representative of Scott’s double perspective. In the painting, as in Scott’s novels, “experience has been removed from practical reality into a past that can now be safely admired and that can bring satisfying feelings to the breast” (105). The message seems clear: as Homer Obed Brown claims, “[w]hile the novels preserve romance on another level or in another form, what they represent is its death.”¹⁷⁸ For Levine, as for Brown, this framing gesture is a way of achieving a comfortable relationship to a dangerous past: hung on the wall, romance can be safely “beheld” while never threatening to overtake the modern “fine old apartment” in which, as the novel’s narrator then continues, “Men must, however, eat, in spite of both sentiment and virtue” (489). The marked cordoning-off of the picture frame, in this account, is precisely what makes the real space apparently natural – by looking at romance, I assure myself of the familiar reality of my own everyday, one filled with the comforting commonplace, as Levine puts it, that come what may, at least “dinner is dinner” (105).

This is a powerful reading of Scott, in part because it rhymes conceptually with highly influential accounts of the operations of the novel – or, indeed, of bourgeois modernity in general. In *Waverley*’s placement of Fergus and Waverley on the wall, we seem to have a classic instance of why “the novel gets on poorly with other genres,” as Bakhtin

¹⁷⁸ *Institutions of the English Novel: From Defoe to Scott* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997), 167.

puts it, by parodying them “precisely in their role as genres.”¹⁷⁹ Realism becomes itself and establishes its claim to the real by framing romance; by placing the mark of genre upon a now-romantic history, the novel allows us to enjoy its glamorous appeal safely as a realm outside the “practical reality” that we, and the novel itself, now share. This gesture is also a characteristic technique of what Barthes refers to as the “anonymity” of bourgeois ideology, or its “ex-nominating” function: “the process through which the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature.”¹⁸⁰ After 1789, as Barthes sees it, class dominance takes the form of invisibility, and spreads by marking others – originally the aristocracy; later, communists – as unnatural or, even, merely *noticeable* (138). For Barthes, the success of bourgeois ideology lies in its ability to disappear, to become the unmarked, natural norm: so, as in the painting at Tully-Veolan, Scott’s novel *as a whole* in effect tells the reader, “*Look over there!*” – and as we are distracted invisibly builds up the self-evident everyday of the real around us, in which dinner is dinner. Following Bakhtin and Barthes, one might see – and the received understanding of Scott has seen – in this gesture of self-obscuring framing *the* ideological practice of novelistic modernity.

The essentially visual terms of this account of Scott’s – and the novel’s – doubleness, however, seems to have difficulty accounting for the strange persistence of the oral in Scott’s Waverley novels: song in Scott’s fiction is paradigmatically what cannot be securely framed by the novel that surrounds it. Take, for example, Elspeth Mucklebackit (of his 1816 *The*

¹⁷⁹ “Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 5.

¹⁸⁰ Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 141.

Antiquary) and Madge Wildfire (of the 1818 *Heart of Mid-Lothian*).¹⁸¹ Each of these women is a figure of mystery from the novel's periphery; each represents a shadowy past; and each possesses a voice that seems to outrun her visual presence. So Madge Wildfire can be heard singing before she enters visually into the novel she inhabits, while Elspeth Mucklebackit is "like a mummy animated by some wandering spirit into a temporary resurrection" (*Antiquary*, 266): a voice who sings folk songs to an empty room (377). At first glance, these singing women invite interpretation along Buzard's lines: as representing "genuine Scottishness," they immerse "the protagonist and reader in traditional Scottish folk culture and dialect," as Tom Bragg argues¹⁸²; they are, as Kathryn Sutherland suggests, the "unreadable core" of the *Waverley* novels, reliant upon "the myth of an unlettered, pre-contractual golden age" which is wrapped in a "framework of explanatory notes."¹⁸³

Yet in each case, the strong opposition this style of reading sets up – between the touristic vehicle of the novel's narration and the "genuine Scottishness" of the singing eccentrics it surveys, or between the readable novel and its unreadable core – ignores the extent to which each of these characters behave in ways that cannot be captured in the visual language of framing. Madge Wildfire, it is true, appears in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* as a disembodied voice singing "one of those wild and monotonous strains... to which the natives of [Scotland] chaunt their old ballads" (161). Yet we soon learn that her singing is no "genuine" folk culture, but rather a maneuver carefully stage-managed by the convict Ratcliffe to alert, through its sheer noisiness, the criminal known as Robertson to the

¹⁸¹ *The Antiquary*, ed. Nicola J. Watson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002); *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, ed. Tony Inglis (London and New York: Penguin, 1994).

¹⁸² Bragg, "Scott's Elementals: Vanishing Points Between Space and Narrative in the *Waverley* Novels," in *Studies in the Novel* 42:3 (Fall 2010), 205-226, at 205.

¹⁸³ Sutherland, "Fictional Economies: Adam Smith, Walter Scott and the Nineteenth-Century Novel," in *ELH* 54:1 (Spring 1987), 97-127, at 123 and 121.

impending approach of a search party; Ratcliffe prompts Madge to sing by humming “in a very low and suppressed tone” the “first stanza of a favorite ballad,” and “trusting [in] the power of association”(181) – a kick-starting of the memory that recalls nothing so much as Charles of Berlichingen’s mechanical repetition of words from books. And while Elspeth Mucklebackit can be heard in *The Antiquary* singing an old song, this moment is part of a strange joke on the novel’s title character, who attempts to transcribe her song as an “undoubted fragment of minstrelsy” – apparently unaware that, as the beggar Edie Ochiltree observes, when Elspeth is “hersell, or ony thing like hersell... [she] gets to her English, and speaks as if she were a prent book” (375, 374). In each case Scott seems to be after not the nostalgic representation of the fragments of a bygone community, but rather an expression of the mediations of modernity, a movement whose very endlessness is perhaps best captured in the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s note on this usage of “print” or “prent” (to mean the adjective printed): “chiefly in similitive expressions as the type of something authoritative.”¹⁸⁴ Complexities like these suggest that song, in Scott, cannot quite be understood as the fragments of a culture, framed and sealed off from history. Song keeps turning into print, the outburst of authentic tradition into the manufactured response of modernity.

I will argue here that Scott’s novels – and I too will ultimately turn to *Waverley* to make this case – turn to singing, not to cordon off the print observer from the fragmentary culture he observes, but rather to create an experience of reading in which the reader is displaced, imagines himself to exist virtually in two places at once. In making this argument, I join a set of scholars who, seeking after more flexible historical or theoretical models to

¹⁸⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. “print, adj.”

account for Scott, have sought to actively connect Scott's work as a ballad-collector to later developments in his career. Penny Fielding argues in *Writing and Orality* that the oral, in the era of Scott, is not merely the object of a Rousseauvian "nostalgia for a lost primitive" culture, but also a resource for the voice of self-avowedly modern works.¹⁸⁵ As Fielding sees it, Scottish literature around 1800 balanced "a sense of the difficulties of entering into the oral word" with "the possibilities of modifying oral transmission for print circulation" (15). Celeste Langan and Maureen McLane have recently focused attention on the complex roles the oral minstrel plays in the immensely popular verse romances Scott published mostly before his career as a novelist.¹⁸⁶ The key words – and in some ways the key disciplinary turn – for Langan and McLane both are *media* and *mediation*. Langan draws upon an oft-quoted dictum of Marshall McLuhan's: that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium."¹⁸⁷ McLane, meanwhile, turns to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's discussion of the "double logic of *remediation*," in which media function in "a constant dialectic with earlier media."¹⁸⁸ But for both McLane and Langan, what media theory offers to the interpretation of Scott is a resistance to the totalizing force of the gesture of framing – in particular the suggestion that, in framing the figure of the Scottish minstrel, Scott was thereby making his *own* forms invisible, or natural. As Langan sees it, thinking through Scott's romances as exercises in mediation reveals that in them "the medium of print

¹⁸⁵ Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Print Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 3.

¹⁸⁶ Langan, "Understanding Media in 1805: Audiovisual Hallucination in 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel,'" in *Studies in Romanticism* 40:1, Scott, Scotland, and Romantic Nationalism (Spring 2001), 49-70; McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008).

¹⁸⁷ McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw, 1964), 23.

¹⁸⁸ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 2000), 50.

becomes recognizable *as* a medium... by its attempt to ‘deliver’ audiovisual information” (70); as McLane argues, the ballad collection in fact attempted “to bridge [the] chasm, the split between observing, theorizing, writing subjects and the objects of their cultural and historical inquiry” (75).

My aim here is to extend this account of Scott to his novels, and in particular to his techniques for hailing the reader’s attention. I proceed in three stages. I begin with an examination of the resolutely visual language of Scott’s verse romances, focusing on his under-read 1808 poem *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field*. The verse romances typically hail the reader’s interest by insistently demanding a *visual* attention. In doing so, however, they run afoul of Coleridgean critiques of mass reading; more specifically, both *Marmion*’s harshest critic, Francis Jeffrey, and the poem itself suggest that these insistent attempts to blot out the *real* visual field of the reader amount to a self-deluding forgetting. I then articulate Scott’s alternative model for readerly interest, one that he practiced as a ballad-collector, in which the reading of *song* is imagined as a layered experience, one rooted both in the real world and in the imagined one of the represented minstrel. What song offers to Scott that the visual could not, I argue, is precisely a way of imagining reading as it interacts with cultural belonging in ways that resist description in terms of the schematic oppositions of framing.

This argument closes with an account of Scott’s style in the Waverley novels, and of his representation of musical listening in *Waverley* itself. I turn to a specifically stylistic question here because Scott’s style remains one of the weakest points of the received account of him – as a writer who enforces the *naturalness* of the everyday. Scott’s style is above all clunky, noticeable, unnatural – everything that Barthes’ bourgeois ideology should not be. I do not believe that any amount of revisionary criticism can entirely displace the exemplary force of the painting at Tully-Veolan. But in focusing on Scott’s style, and in

linking that style to his practices as a ballad collector, I hope to put alongside that moment of framing another way in which generic spaces interact with each other in Scott.

Attention!: *Marmion*, verse romance, and the impossibility of visual enchantment

Garrett Stewart argues, in *Dear Reader*, that in the “laboratories of his verse narratives,” Scott develops the techniques for the “stationing... of the audience which his historical novels would shortly help orchestrate for the evolving genre of prose fiction.”¹⁸⁹ With specific reference to *Marmion*, Stewart claims that Scott’s apostrophes to his reader work to “place the new readership just where the Victorian novel will want it: alert and on call, always potentially *at attention*” (46). I argue here almost exactly the reverse of this. *Marmion* does indeed represent the most explicit form of Scott’s attempt, in the verse romances generally, at a direct hailing of attention – a practice that was mocked in parodies, roundly attacked in the Edinburgh press, and undermined by the work’s own internal dynamics. Yet this is precisely the kind of direct appeal for attention that Scott’s prose fiction rejects. After all, if the verse romances are forever asking for our attention, Scott’s novels are far more likely – as in the epigraph to *Pevevil of the Peak* – to ostentatiously proclaim how little they deserve it: “If my readers should at any time remark that I am particularly dull, they may be assured there is a design under it.”¹⁹⁰ *Marmion*’s significance, and that of Scott’s verse romances in general, for a narrative about Scott’s novels is as an object lesson in how *not* to ask readers to read; it was from the always-excited *Marmion*, I suggest, that Scott learned the virtues of being boring.

¹⁸⁹ Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 45.

¹⁹⁰ *Pevevil of the Peak*, ed. Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007), 1.

Scott's first verse romance, the 1805 *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, begins by representing a mode of absorptive attention.¹⁹¹ The work consists of the six-canto lay of the title, set during a border dispute on the Scottish-English border around 1550, and the frame story of the "last minstrel" who sings that lay, set around 1700. In his original introductory note to the poem, Scott provides a one-sentence summary of the work's aim as a whole: "The poem now offered to the Public is intended to illustrate the customs and manners which anciently prevailed on the Borders of England and Scotland" (i). Scott further positions the frame, in which "the last of all the bards" sings for the Duchess of Buccleuch and her ladies-in-waiting at the beginning and end of each canto, as an accessory to this ethnographic purpose; Scott writes that he has inserted the frame in order to encourage the reader's interest in "the description of scenery and manners" rather than "a combined and regular narrative" (3).¹⁹² As we will find out, the minstrel is transmitting an oral tradition, "recal[ling] an ancient strain" (7) as he was taught it by his own master, "the jovial Harper" (121); because he is not a modern poet, Scott suggests, he is (or should be) given "greater latitude" in the construction of his plots than Scott would receive in his own voice (i). For these reasons, Scott will refer to this last minstrel in his 1830 introduction as his "appropriate prolocutor," a "sort of pitch-pipe" through whom Scott could speak more effectively than he could in his own poetic voice.¹⁹³

Within the frame, the minstrel repeatedly demonstrates a concern for his audience which (for both eighteenth-century antiquaries and modern scholars) is a hallmark of oral

¹⁹¹ *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1805).

¹⁹² For more on the "last minstrel" figure, see Fiona Stafford's *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

¹⁹³ *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, in *The Poetical Works* vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1830), xxvii.

poetry. As Scott would write in his “Essay on Romance” twenty years later, the minstrel sought above all to “request [the] attention” of his audience and hold it: “hence, the perpetual ‘Lythe and listen, lordings free.’”¹⁹⁴ Thus, the last minstrel introduces his lay as one especially suited to the noble audience in front of him – “It was not framed for village churls, / But for high dames and mighty earls” (7) – and regularly checks on the reception of his work through the techniques available to him as an oral performer: at the end of the first canto, “He seemed to seek, in every eye, / If they approved his minstrelsy” (30); later on, at various points, he will explicitly tailor his tale to his all-female audience. The minstrel thus serves as a kind of double pivot for the relationship between audience and work: within the frame, he manages that relationship through an improvisatory practice that directly shapes the work in its audience’s image, both promising and attempting to actually create a work made, like Goldilocks’ porridge, just right for those who consume it in person; outside of the frame, he is used to mark and mediate the ways in which the work at hand – fixed in print – was (allegedly) *not* “framed for” those who read.

Despite this double gesture, however, the minstrel in one crucial way nevertheless works upon both his audience and Scott’s readers in precisely the same fashion – as an exemplar of absorbed attention. As he begins his narrative, the minstrel at first sings only hesitantly, producing an “uncertain warbling,” but then achieves “all a poet’s ecstasy”:

The present scene, the future lot;
His toils, his wants, were all forgot:
Cold diffidence, and age’s frost,
In the full tide of song were lost;
Each blank, in faithless memory void,

¹⁹⁴ In *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1827), 187.

The poet's glowing thought supplied... (8)

The effect of these lines, at the gateway of the romance proper, is much like that of those ostentatiously self-forgetting figures of Greuze's that Michael Fried discusses in *Absorption and Theatricality*.¹⁹⁵ In Fried's account of eighteenth-century French painting, Greuze plays the sentimental to Chardin's naïve artist. Chardin's figures of absorption – the boy blowing soap bubbles, or the one building a castle out of cards – belong to a world in which “the most ordinary states and activities” can become an object of an absorptive state of mind (51), or in which “the persuasive representation of absorption is the result simply of an objective representation of ordinary absorptive states and activities” (61); Chardin's genre paintings thereby persuade us, standing before the canvas, to be absorbed viewers of art precisely as those absorptive figures are absorbed: *in the world*. In Greuze, however, people must make an effort to become absorbed in something apart from the everyday. He paints figures who convey the impression “of not being at home” in the world (61), and who seem uncannily aware of the beholder lurking on the other side of the picture frame. Fried's most striking example is Greuze's 1765 painting *Le baiser envoyée* (*Blowing a Kiss*), in which a young girl, apparently lost in the self-abandonment of longing, appears to blow a kiss to her lover precisely *through* the canvas's observer. As Fried argues, Greuze's paintings take “whatever measures proved necessary to absorb, or reabsorb, those personae in the world of the painting” (68), thus enacting a fall away from Chardin's absorption in the everyday that represents “one of the first in the series of losses that together constitute the ontological basis of modern art” (61). Scott's singer, like Greuze's figures of absorption, is not at home in the world, and like them he must laboriously forget his surroundings in order to enter into the tale. In doing so, the last minstrel is also demonstrating precisely what the poem

¹⁹⁵ Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1980).

requires of its readers: as Scott would write in his 1830 introduction to the Magnum Opus edition, the framing device was required “to place the mind of the hearers in the situation” – in other words, it appeared in order to efface itself all the more fully.¹⁹⁶

This precise situation – in which the “full presence” of a heightened fictional mode depends upon a forgetting of the present scene – becomes an explicit topic in *Marmion*, a poem that explicitly addresses itself to its readers’ contemporary political reality (the Napoleonic Wars, in this case) as does no other of Scott’s works. Herbert Tucker has recently read *Marmion* as a considerable poetico-ideological achievement, one that succeeds in creating “a tone and an ethos addressing the national trouble” of the times.¹⁹⁷ The poem succeeds, Tucker claims, because it manages to incorporate the reader in the production of its own fiction, setting up a “narrative economy of loss and again” in which “reader’s speculative investment in such a narrative economy might redound to the national interest” (137). As Tucker sees it, *Marmion* ushered in a new era of European epic – one that no longer imagined poetic narrative to have a role in correcting political reality in the aftermath of the Revolution, but instead viewed the long poem as a way of coming to terms with historical guilt: by fashioning “a progress narrative painstakingly aware of, and responsible for, the pains that progress takes” (146), as he puts it. *Marmion* is thus the poem of *getting used to* bad historical conditions, and one’s involvement in them, representing “the guilty way we believe now” (144).

Yet Tucker’s view is hampered by a clear mis-reading: in arguing that the epic is a masterpiece of acknowledgement, a taking-on of historical guilt, Tucker identifies the reader entirely with a particular character in the work, Clara de Clare, who (as he imagines) has

¹⁹⁶ In *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1830), xxvi.

¹⁹⁷ Herbert F. Tucker, *Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse, 1790-1910* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

played a role in betraying her lover (138), and who therefore views the battle of Flodden Field with “divided loyalties” and a consciousness of overcoming her own shadowed past (146). Tucker has, however, conflated two characters, for there are in fact two nuns in the work: Clare and Constance de Beverley. Constance is the “perjured nun” who has betrayed the good Ralph De Wilton, Clare’s lover and Marmion’s rival; Clare, who does indeed view Flodden from a hilltop, and over whose shoulder the reader observes the climactic events of the poem, is entirely guiltless and quite uncomplicatedly loyal.¹⁹⁸ Scott’s poem is in fact quite far from being interested in (or capable of) creating the kind of resiliently national self-consciousness which would acknowledge guilt, allow for lapses, and even admit to bad faith; rather, it is almost the opposite of what Tucker considers it to be: a work of and about avoidance in which past and present are each continually being used – futilely – to suppress consciousness of the other. In *Marmion*, the necessity of effacing the “present scene” is not the prerequisite but rather the explicit goal of both writing and reading romance: specifically, *Marmion* argues that only in forgetting one’s surroundings by deliberately absorbing oneself in visual fictions can political faction be overcome.

Unlike virtually all of Scott’s other works, *Marmion* includes a narrative frame delivered not by a pitch-pipe or prolocutor, but rather by Scott himself, in the form of a series of verse epistles written in his own voice, and addressed to his friends. The effect is unsettling, as each of the epistles suggests, in different ways, that the narrative Scott has written has been produced at a moment of national crisis, both as a means of coming to terms with that crisis but also – more importantly – as a means of simply avoiding it.

The first of these epistles is addressed to William Stewart Rose, a translator of romance who had prefaced his *Amadis de Gaul* with a promise to the reader of “wonder and

¹⁹⁸ This is a startling error, but an easy one to forgive in a six-hundred-page book that treats a veritable deluge of under-read long poems.

delight.”¹⁹⁹ Instead of wonder, though, Scott instead begins with by setting a rather bleak scene: the valley of the Tweed, as autumn (presumably autumn 1806) passes into winter, as viewed from the Scott family’s residence at Ashestiel. In another poem, the scene might prompt conventional reflections on the reassuring cycle of the seasons, but instead the poem deliberately considers that potential response – “The daisy’s flower / Again shall paint your summer bower” – as a set of clichés worthy only for quieting the fears of the speaker’s “prattl[ing]” children.²⁰⁰ These commonplaces are empty for the speaker’s more mature sensibilities because the comforts of cyclical time cannot respond to the historical catastrophe that, as it turns out, that the visual scene recalls – the recent deaths of Horatio Nelson, the Tory William Pitt, and the Whig Charles James Fox, and the impending threat of French invasion: “To mute and to material things / New life revolving summer brings... / But Oh! my country’s wintry state / What second spring shall renovate?” (6). The thin

¹⁹⁹ *Amadis de Gaul: A Poem* (London: Cadell, 1803), vii. It comes as something of a surprise that even the very works favored by Quixote were being lovingly translated around 1800 (though it should be noted – certainly the translators tended to – that *Amadis* itself is specifically spared by Cervantes’ priest). Both Rose and Southey translated *Amadis* in 1803. Interestingly, the prefaces to both these translations leave the larger questions of quixotism to the side; neither Rose nor Southey take up the legitimacy of romance-reading as a worthy topic, or directly address the nature and appeal of the genre. Scott’s review of the two translations of *Amadis*, though, makes an interesting historical argument about the falling-off of prose romance from its verse forebear that takes as its basis a hypothetical transformation of style as wrought by a change of taste, itself shaped by a change in medium. As metrical romances were performed in small narrative units to “convivial” audiences – the lord’s hall, the travelling hunting party – their “narration was therefore rambling and desultory,” joining one adventure to another “without much visible connexion, the only object of the author being, to produce such detached pieces as might interest during the time of recitation.” Prose romances were read, often in private, however, which meant that “the student might turn back to resume the connexions which had escaped him.” Newly confronted with a reading audience interested in – and capable of noticing – continuity, the prose romancer was forced to create newly unified narratives out of the materials he had ready to hand, and thus turned to “endless continuations” and “studied and affected ornaments” on pre-existing themes. In his desire to create connections, therefore, the prose romancer dropped a valuable resource for narrative interest: the rhythmic alternation between scene (of main narrative action) and digressive “descriptive sketch” which had structured metrical romance. A neatly ironic parable, then: the prose romancer, in the effort to secure readerly interest, chokes it off. See “*Amadis de Gaul*,” in *Edinburgh Review* 3:5 (Oct. 1803), 109-136, at 116-7.

²⁰⁰ *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Constable, 1808), 6.

abstraction of the pathetic fallacy here – there is no attempt to link winter any more meaningfully to history than this – is itself symptomatic: the speaker’s mind is in a state where *any* involvement in the real present leads to this over-arching anxiety.

In then turning to this figurative national winter, the speaker deliberately attempts to cast aside party feeling. The speaker imagines both politicians (somewhat implausibly) as magicians of nationalist rhetoric, able to “soar above” the “common party race” and join the entire “British world” with “Spells of such force no wizard grave / E’er framed in dark Thessalian cave” (12). Their deaths therefore appear as both national losses and losses to the language of nationalism, one that must be overcome by this Tory poet:

Here, where the fretted aisles prolong
The distant notes of holy song,
As if some angel spoke agen,
All peace on earth, good-will to men;
If ever from an English heart,
O *here* let prejudice depart,
And, partial feeling cast aside,
Record, that Fox a Briton died! (11)²⁰¹

Yet how might this simultaneous acknowledgment of political faction and transcendence of it in nationalism be achieved? One approach might be the composition of a poem on the recent past – an epic accounting of English heroism – yet this possibility is something Scott rejects again and again in these epistles. Though the task of putting “our later time” into “classic rhyme” is obviously of great import, Scott nevertheless disclaims the poetic

²⁰¹ For the inverted echoes of Gray’s “Elegy” here (which go some way to explain the otherwise puzzling “fretted aisles,” as a compression of Gray’s “long-drawn aisles and fretted vault”), see Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, “Echoes of Gray in Scott’s *Marmion*,” in *ANQ* 22:4 (2010), 16-19.

“powers” necessary to do so: as he puts it in a later epistle, in a wonderfully appropriate bit of doggerel, he has “no elegiac verse / For Brunswick’s venerable hearse” (119, 123).

The very language in which the speaker imagines the funeral at Westminster suggests a different solution: the insistent deixis of the repeated *here*, as well as the intrusion of specifically romance features like minstrel and harp at the center of this imagined funeral, suggests that while Pitt and Fox can be mourned and memorialized at Westminster, they can also be simply *forgotten* for a period in the time of reading.²⁰² Thus the speaker attempts to conjure up a visual presence, a “vision of enchantment” (14), to replace the too-resonant real space around the poet, the “lonely down” and “silent pastures bleak and brown” (15); instead of facing reminders of loss, the speaker’s imagination will instead buildup a “Gothic arch, memorial stone, / And long, dim, lofty aisle” (15). Here again, as in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a fictive experience blots out the visual field and requires that the “present scene” be forgotten. In *Marmion*, however, this forgetting is explicitly posed as a response to the historical situation of the speaker and the reader alike: visual reality threateningly reminds the speaker of a national trauma; this abstract loss can only be successfully memorialized in Gothic trappings if, in turn, the visual reminder of it in what is actually present is forgotten. In perhaps surprisingly explicit terms, the poem claims that instead of solving the problem of political faction by crafting a language of transcendent nationalism, we can instead merely put aside those problems by concentrating on enchanted visions of the past. The poem is an attempt to prove the speaker’s – and the reader’s – ability to forget: to demonstrate that despite the pressure of the present, “still the legendary lay / O’er poet’s bosom holds its sway” (16).

²⁰² See also Richard Cronin, “Walter Scott and Anti-Gallican Minstrelsy,” in *ELH* 66:4 (1999), 863-883.

Marmion is thus less a *case* of what Susan Stewart terms the “distressed genre” – her term for the epics, ballads and folk tales that proliferated in the late eighteenth century – than a deliberate working-through of what Stewart calls the genre’s “mode of production in conflict with itself”:

The rejection of the present in the distressed genre operates on the level of form, theme, and intention, yet it can never surmount the present’s control over the influence of context... [T]he distressed genre is characterized by a struggle against history as it impinges upon the thematics of meaning.²⁰³

Marmion is crystal clear about what that struggle against history means: paying attention to fiction. Reading romance means lending the speaker our full attention, as he reminds us at the end of each verse epistle: “Hear then, attentive to my lay” (20); “[L]ist to me” (73); “as is thy wont, attend” (129); “Come, listen!” (236), etc. Yet though these are all verbs of hearing, our attention within the poem proper is actually drawn to the visual conjuring-up of page after page of sixteenth-century objects. The poem provides a full accounting of the various weapons carried by the soldiers of James IV; it also describes the minutiae of how each of the characters is dressed. And indeed, we are often explicitly held to attention before these catalogues: in one remarkable passage, the poem’s speaker introduces pages of description of precisely how Marmion’s soldiers stood at attention while waiting for him to arrive with a disclaimer that is almost a protest: “’Tis meet that I should tell you now, / How fairly armed, and ordered how, / The soldiers of the guard...” (30). Just as in the opening epistle, new scenes are constantly conjured up for us in this poem so that we may forget the present.

Scott’s insistence upon a reading experience in which we attend – and in which the visual present is thereby forgotten – depends upon a phenomenological description of

²⁰³ Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP), 1991.

reading as a kind of total experience, one that blots out the visual field. In his 1762 *Elements of Criticism*, Kames supplies a perspicuous outline of that description in his account of reading as an encounter with “ideal presence”:

The reader’s passions are never sensibly moved, till he is thrown into a kind of reverie; in which state, losing the consciousness of self, and of reading, his present occupation, he conceives every incident as passing in his presence, precisely as if he were an eye-witness.²⁰⁴

Reading and reality are in a zero-sum relation: to be involved in reading is to “lose the consciousness of self, and of reading.” This is a not uncommon account of reading, and one with a transhistorical appeal – it is one that Plotinus supplies in the *Enneads* (“A reader will often be quite unconscious when he is most intent”), and one that Georges Poulet rehearses in similar terms two centuries later: “the extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of the barriers between you and it.”²⁰⁵ What Kames brings out in particularly clear relief, however, is the antagonism this position implies within the visual field between the reverie of reading and what he calls “reflection”: when involved in reading, “the mind, totally occupied with an interesting event, finds no leisure for reflection of any sort” – reflection thus of necessity “comes afterward, when we have the scene no longer before our eyes” (114).

For many of Scott’s contemporaries, however, this kind of wholly absorptive reading threatened to subject the reader to the phantasmagoric visual control so memorably depicted in a footnote to the *Biographia Literaria*:

²⁰⁴ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism* (3 vols.), vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Bell, 1762), 112.

²⁰⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber, 1956), 255; Poulet, “Phenomenology of Reading,” in *New Literary History* 1:1 (October 1969), 53-68, at 54.

For as to the devotees of the circulating libraries, I dare not compliment their *pass-time*, or rather *kill-time*, with the name of *reading*. Call it rather a sort of beggarly daydreaming, during which the mind of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness and a little mawkish sensibility; while the whole *materiel* and imagery of the doze is supplied *ab extra* by a sort of mental *camera obscura* manufactured at the printing office, which *pro tempore* fixes, reflects and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium, so as to people the barrenness of an hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose...²⁰⁶

The *Biographia* was, of course, published a decade after *Marmion* – but as Jochen Schulte-Sasse and Jon Klancher, among others, have observed, the post-Revolutionary era in British cultural theory generally saw a turn towards an intellectualized private reading of a newly self-promoting set of literary works.²⁰⁷ Coleridge's footnote is in fact a belated – and particularly exaggerated – entry of an entire literature condemning mass reading as passive consumption; as Margaret Russett puts it, Coleridge's image of the phantasmagoric *camera obscura* voices “a tropology now standard for critiques of mass culture,” and widespread in Scott's own time.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), 48fn. This footnote has received a great deal of critical attention; see especially the volume in the Romantic Circles Praxis Series titled *Gothic Technologies: Visuality in the Romantic Era* (Dec. 2005), ed. Robert Miles, at <http://romantic.arhu.umd.edu/praxis/gothic/>.

²⁰⁷ Schulte-Sasse, “Can the Disempowered Read Mass-Produced Narratives in Their Own Voice?” in *Cultural Critique* 10, Popular Narrative, Popular Images (Autumn 1988), 171-199, at 192; Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1830* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

²⁰⁸ Russett, “Narrative as Enchantment in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,” in *ELH* 65:1 (Spring 1998), 159-186, at 161.

Marmion – like all of Scott’s verse romances – was quite successful, in terms of sales. But it quickly came under attack for its incessant demands upon the reader’s visual attention. The poem’s almost unbearable richness of descriptive detail provoked a great deal of amusement from its reviewers, particularly the narrator’s self-justificatory “‘Tis meet that I should tell you...” “Peter Pry, Esq.” made good work of the lines in his parody *Marmion Travestied: A Tale of Modern Times*:

‘Tis meet that I should tell you now
How richly stor’d and order’d how
The house at Gloucester Place:
Magnificent, superb the plate,
Displaying more than usual state,
Which did the sideboard grace;
E’en the wine-glasses that were there
Cost each two guineas, they declare,
In none was there a flaw:
And the pier glasses too were such,
(They cost, oh, heaven knows how much)
No mortal ever saw!²⁰⁹

It fell to Francis Jeffrey, however, the editor of the Whig *Edinburgh Review*, to link the excessiveness of the poem’s demand for visual attention – “our patience is really exhausted,

²⁰⁹ *Marmion Travestied: A Tale of Modern Times* (London: Tegg, 1809), 11. The work is primarily a misogynist attack on Frederick, Duke of York’s relationship with Mary Anne Clarke, who had just told the Commons that she had been using her influence with the duke to sell military commissions. Tegg published Clarke’s *Authentic Memoirs* that same year. See Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), and Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

when we are forced to attend to the black stockings and blue jerkins of the inferior persons in the train,” as he put it – to a critique of the poem’s aims as a whole.²¹⁰ Jeffrey seems to speak both for himself and Pry’s parody, as yet unwritten, when he comments that “Nobody, we believe, would be bold enough to introduce into a serious poem a description of the hussar boots and gold epaulets of a commander in chief” (30). As Jeffrey saw it, *Marmion* represented a dishonest attempt to interest the reader in antiquarian details precisely *because* they were antiquarian. Scott had therefore learned precisely the wrong lesson from the old romances that had formed his models: the “little details in *old* books... are there authentic and valuable documents,” speaking not only of the “usages and modes of life of our ancestors,” but also of the “familiarity and naiveté” of their literary style: the bards of old “transcribed with a slovenly and hasty hand from what they saw daily before them” (30-1). If Scott truly wished to “sincerely follow [the] example” of medieval romance, “he should describe the manners of his own time, and not of theirs” (31).

Most damningly, Jeffrey argued that such incessant interest in the old detail *as* old detail necessarily cut off Scott’s poem from any attachment to Scottish reality; moreover, the poem thereby acted to transform Scotland itself into an archaism. The terms of Jeffrey’s criticisms thus look forward to Levine and Buzard:

[W]e nowhere find any adequate expressions of those melancholy and patriotic sentiments which are still all over Scotland the accompaniment of those... recollections [of the battle of Flodden Field]. No picture is drawn of the national feelings before or after that fatal encounter; and the day that broke for ever the pride and splendor of his country, is only commemorated by a Scottish poet as the period when an English warrior was beaten to the ground. There is scarcely one trait of

²¹⁰ “Scott’s *Marmion: A Poem*,” in *Edinburgh Review* 12:23 (April 1808) 1-35, at 29.

true Scottish nationality or patriotism introduced into the whole poem; and Mr. Scott's only expression of admiration or love for the beautiful country to which he belongs, is put, if we rightly remember, into the mouth of one of his Southern favourites. (13)

For Jeffrey, Scott's *Marmion* was guilty of effacing actually existing Scottish national feeling – “those melancholy and patriotic sentiments which are *still all over Scotland*” – in favor of representing a vanished Scottish past for an English audience. To Jeffrey, the attempt to forget the present scene by attending to past events was only another way of acting – despicably – in the present; and indeed, Jeffrey read the poem's deliberate attempt at transcendence of party politics as a partisan attack on Fox (35).

Most interestingly, Jeffrey's argument – that the effort to become visually absorbed in fiction is a way of remaining mired in the real present – is something *Marmion* already knows. If there is one clear lesson in the poem's narrative, it is that the project of escapist forgetting is always subject to collapse. The plot of the romance, revealed in fits and starts, is in itself a poor fit for the creation of the “vision of enchantment,” being a rather sordid tale of betrayal and forgery: the title character is an English knight who, long before the poem starts, seduced a nun, Constance de Beverley. Marmion then falls in love with Clara de Clare, who is engaged to Ralph de Wilton; to eliminate him as a rival, Marmion forges a letter implicating de Wilton in treason and uses Constance to plant the letter. When accused of treason, de Wilton denies the charge, and fights Marmion in judicial combat; de Wilton loses and is left for dead on the field. Constance, having realized that her actions have lost her her lover, then hires a monk to assassinate Clara, but her plot is cut short when Marmion betrays her; Clara, meanwhile, has hidden herself away in the convent of St. Hilda at Whitby, while de Wilton, who – surprise! – isn't dead after all, has taken on the guise of a palmer.

The story opens as both Marmion stops at Norham castle on his way to the court of James IV of Scotland, where he has been sent by Henry VIII to attempt to prevent the Scottish invasion of Northumberland. This rather bewildering story of plots and counter-plots – all of which have taken place before the poem even opens – is hardly an obvious topic for a poet-citizen who is attempting to overcome differences of faction in the present.

The only clear link, in fact, between the romance narrative and the outside reality of the Napoleonic Wars that it is meant to annul is a decidedly unhelpful one: within the narrative, absorption in either a visual scene or in recalling relics of bygone eras turns out to be a distraction from the hidden, real action of the poem. When the nuns of St. Hilda's view the coast from on board ship, everything they see, even the "rippling surge" of the waves, is "strange and new," and they respond with "wonderment" (79). Clare, however, only

... seemed to mark the waves below;
Nay seemed, so fixed her look and eye,
To count them as they glided by.
She saw them not – 'twas seeming all –
Far other scene her thoughts recal –
A sun-scorched desart, waste and bare,
Nor wave, nor breezes murmured there;
There saw she, where some careless hand
O'er a dead corpse had heaped the sand... (83)

The enchantment of the a visual scene cannot suppress, for Clare, the memory of the past and her anxious imaginings of what might be happening to Marmion in the moment. A few pages later, a similar opposition presents itself: the nuns are passing time by telling each other stories of glorious sainthood; literally beneath them, however, Clare and the abbess are

conducting a “council... of life and death” (95). And still later, Marmion, after being questioned about his strange behavior by his squire, claims that he had been lost in a reverie inspired by intense attention to a Gothic tale; the truth is rather different, as the narrator informs us:

Nought of the Palmer says he there,
And nought of Constance, or of Clare:
The thoughts, which broke his sleep, he seems
To mention but as feverish dreams. (206)

Again and again, visual or verbal wonder is unable to cover up a swiftly moving plot lying beneath it; the attempt to blot out the historical situation of the present with “dreams” only hides the “thoughts” of reality which continue to run.

But this hard lesson is not one that the speaker of the verse epistles learns. Even as the poem is nearing its conclusion, he attempts the same kind of deliberate visual fantasizing with which he began. This time the ekphrasis is of Edinburgh – “So thou, fair City!” – and the passage begins promisingly enough, noting when contemplating the town that “Not here need my desponding rhyme/ Lament the ravages of time” (229). Yet as though compelled, the speaker finds himself contemplating the city’s role in more recent dynastic struggles, as a refuge for “great Bourbon’s reliques” (233). Here, again, the speaker must interrupt himself:

Truce to these thoughts! – for, as they rise,
How gladly I avert mine eyes,
Bodings, or true or false, to change,
For Fiction’s fair romantic range,
Or for Tradition’s dubious light,
That hovers ‘twixt the day and night... (233-4)

“Dubious” indeed: the speaker is caught in a hopeless cycle of repetition, for both in the epistles and in the narrative poem he produces, every visual escape from a history of violent conflict turns out to open out again onto history. Yet even his attempt to interrupt this oscillation only begins it all over again. For Jeffrey, this endless cycle of re- and disenchantment resembled the exhaustion of the literary Gothic, which “puzzles the reader instead of interesting him, and fatigues instead of excit[es] his curiosity” (8-9).

As can be seen in his letters, Scott took Jeffrey’s criticisms seriously – he protested repeatedly, to several correspondents, that he bore his antagonist no ill will; at the same time, however, he complained to his publisher Ballantyne of his “very sharp” treatment; Scott also wrote to his brother Thomas that he owed “Jeffrey a flap with a fox-tail on account of his review,” and to Joanna Baillie that the review “contained needless asperities.”²¹¹ And though it would be false to claim that Scott’s role in creating the *Quarterly Review* as the *Edinburgh’s* Tory rival came about merely as a response to this personal quarrel, it is nonetheless striking how often Scott discussed plans for the new journal and Jeffrey’s hostile review of *Marmion* in the same letters.²¹² Scott wrote to George Ellis in November 1808, asking him to join the *Quarterly*, adding that while the *Edinburgh* had brought “plenty of acid” to reviewing, one of the tasks of the *Quarterly* would be to teach “men not to abuse books only but to read and judge them” (L 128). And even as he was telling Thomas Scott that he owed Jeffrey a

²¹¹ Letters of April 22, 19 November, and 23 November 1810; all in *The Letters of Walter Scott*, ed. Herbert Grierson (London: Constable, 1932-37), vol. 2, at 48, 131, and 116. Cited hereafter by page as *L*.

²¹² The immediate cause was the *Edinburgh Review’s* article (written mostly by Jeffrey) on Spain in October of 1808, in which the *Edinburgh* attacked the Spanish aristocracy in terms that seemed, to many Tories, to recall the anathematized *Common Sense*. The *Quarterly’s* founding, however, seems to have had as much to do with a perceived hole in the periodical market as with either politics or poetic pride.

“flap,” he was also suggesting that his brother could play a role in the plot “to countermine the *Edinburgh Review*” by reviewing novels (L 130).

Scott’s response to the failure of enchantment in *Marmion* took two forms. The first – a properly escapist theory and practice of literature – can be seen in the verse romances written after *Marmion*, and in the editorial stance of the *Quarterly Review*. Ian Duncan suggests that the *Edinburgh* was founded, in part, to grapple with what it might mean to review literature in the aftermath of the political crisis of the 1790s.²¹³ The *Quarterly*’s approach, however, as Scott envisioned it, would be to pretend that literature could continue as a blithely apolitical affair. The *Quarterly* would need to work on “the literary articles with as much pains as the political,” he suggested to William Gifford (who was to be its first editor), in order to “give to the review a decided character independent of the latter department,” thereby impressing the public with “the impartiality of our criticism” (L 109); he wrote to his antiquarian friend George Ellis in almost precisely the same terms, suggesting that it could only be the *Quarterly*’s “maintenance of a high reputation in literature” that could grant the review a “character of impartiality” – something, he added conspiratorially, “of as great consequence to such of our friends as are in the Ministry, as our more direct efforts in their favour” (L 127). *Marmion* had attempted to antagonistically conjoin present politics and fictional enchantments; Scott’s primary contribution to the founding of the *Quarterly* was to suggest that the two realms could be persuasively and absolutely divorced.

And the same gesture can be read in the verse romances that Scott published after *Marmion*, which lose the mediating devices of both that work and the *Lay*, and in turn introject the demands for enchanted attention that both formed and disrupted *Marmion*’s link to the historical present. *The Lady of the Lake*, Scott’s next romance, was a spectacularly

²¹³ Duncan, *Scott’s Shadow* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 51.

popular work, even by Scott's standards, and sets the pattern for what follows.²¹⁴ And it was one that Jeffrey himself found intensely absorptive: in it, he wrote, Scott "seems, indeed, never to think, either of himself or his reader, but to be completely identified and lost in the personages with whom he is occupied; and the attention of the reader is consequently... transferred, unbroken, to their adventures."²¹⁵ Deprived of outside narrators, the poem proceeds to model both visual and auditory absorption for the reader inside the narrative itself, especially in the poem's opening encounter between the as-yet-unnamed Huntsman and Lady (characters who turn out to be "James Fitz-James," i.e. James V of Scotland, and Ellen Douglas). The first action of the poem – in which James, having lost his companions and ridden his horse to death, walks over a hill near Stirling Castle and views the sunset – sets the pattern for what follows:

And on the hunter hied his way,
To join some comrades of the day;
Yet often paused, so strange the road,
So wondrous were the scenes it show'd. (13)

Six pages of description are then followed by this couplet: "From the steep promontory gazed/ The Stranger, raptured and amazed" (19). (Little wonder that *The Lady of the Lake* started a tourism craze to the Scottish Highlands.) But couplets pairing "gazed" with "amazed" return repeatedly in this poem: so the speaker describes Ellen as she pauses to look at James – "safe, though fluttered and amazed, / She paused, and on the Stranger gazed" (24); near the end of the poem, James's mercenary guards will view Ellen in precisely the same way: "The savage soldiery, amazed / As on descended angel gazed" (252); and so

²¹⁴ *The Lady of the Lake: A Poem* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1810).

²¹⁵ "The Lady of the Lake: A Poem," in *Edinburgh Review* 16:32 (August 1810), at 263-293, at 272.

will Ellen look on the court in wonder: “On many a splendid garb she gazed, —/ Then turned bewildered and amazed” (283). Similar moments appear in other words: when James blows his hunting horn, Ellen “paused... / With head up-raised, and look intent, / And eye and ear attentive bent” (22) to listen. This is, in fact, the template for major moments in this poem: characters stop their activity and stand, wide-eyed and stock-still, as the narrator describes events.

The reader of *Marmion*, like the speaker of *Marmion*, lives in history and must turn to fiction as a response to historical events that have come to overwhelm the everyday; the reader of the *Lady of the Lake*, however, has no particular history, or any particular reason to read. The painful dissonance between literature and life that *Marmion* attempts to address is silently passed over. The *Lady of the Lake* abandons the attempt to speak into a historical situation of any kind; instead, it models for its readers the passivity of awe-struck looking that it requires from them. The poem has in a sense responded to Jeffrey’s criticism – that visual absorption in fiction cannot be meaningfully linked to the present moment – by entirely dropping *any* claim, even *Marmion*’s negative one, to a connection between the two. Instead, *The Lady of the Lake* is happy to invite readers to gaze, “bewildered and amazed,” on wonders that no longer have anything at all to do with us.

Scott’s other response to the failures of *Marmion* can be seen in a series of essays he published in the years immediately following the work’s publication – also the years in which he completed much of the work on *Waverley*²¹⁶ – which directly address the Gothic and the

²¹⁶ On the composition of *Waverley*, see Peter Garside, “Popular Fiction and National Tale: Hidden Origins of Scott’s *Waverley*,” in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46:1 (June 1991), 30-53.

exhaustion of readerly interest.²¹⁷ In 1810, Scott wrote for the *Quarterly* an essay on Maturin's *Fatal Revenge* that disdained its Radcliffean "machinery" and compared the effect of horrifying events to "the cruel punishment of breaking alive upon the wheel": "the sufferer's nerves are so much jarred by the first blow, that he feels comparatively little pain from those which follow."²¹⁸ Scott's anxiety about the exhaustion of the reader's nerves extend beyond fear and pain: "the finest and deepest feelings," as he says, "are those which are most easily exhausted" (346). The next year, Scott's "Introduction" to the Ballantyne *Castle of Otranto* made a related point about repetition: "The apparition of the skeleton hermit to the prince of Vicenza was long accounted a master-piece of the horrible; but of late the valley of Jehosophat [sic] could hardly supply the dry bones necessary for the exhibition of similar spectres, so that injudicious and repeated imitation has, in some degree, injured the effect of its original model."²¹⁹

Even Scott's famous essay on Austen's *Emma*, from 1814, sees Austen's technical advances as a novelist as primarily a solution to the problem of maintaining readerly interest in a market saturated with novels, and novelistic conventions.²²⁰ Older novels – "more nearly nearly assimilated to the old romances," Scott writes – elicited the reader's interest precisely by directing his attention to the spectacular: "In all these dread contingencies the mind of the reader was expected to sympathize, since by incidents so much beyond the bounds of his ordinary experience, his wonder and interest ought at once to be excited."

²¹⁷ Fiona Robertson argues persuasively about the formative impact of Scott's engagement with the Gothic upon his novels. See Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

²¹⁸ In *Quarterly Review* 3:6 (May 1810), 339-347, 344 and 346.

²¹⁹ "Introduction" to *The Castle of Otranto; A Gothic Story* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1811), xxix-xxx.

²²⁰ "Emma," in *Quarterly Review* 14: 27 (October 1815), 188-201.

But over time – as more and more fictions of this type were written and read – the reader “became familiar with the land of fiction, the adventures of which he assimilated not with those of real life, but with each other” (190). “Curiosity,” Scott continued, is “capable of being exhausted by habit”; its materials “become stale and familiar” (192). The question for Scott was thus one of yoking interest to the everyday in a way that did not demand the direct appeal for visual attention found in his own verse romances.

The anthology and layered reading

Scott had already explored a quite different model for the role reading could play in life, however, in his work as a ballad collector, and it would be this model – rather than that of *The Lady of the Lake* – to which he would return in the Waverley novels. Scott’s collection *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* was published in 1802, but it was in an 1806 review of his friend George Ellis’s *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances* that he most fully articulated a phenomenology of the anthology.²²¹ In this review, Scott praised Ellis’s book for adapting its strange, old materials, gleaned from manuscript copies, “for general circulation.”²²² Scott’s review positioned Ellis’s editorial style – in particular, his willingness to abridge the narrative – against the editorial practice of Joseph Ritson, who was first and foremost concerned with authenticity, taking every step to ensure that “the poems published are most strictly and literally genuine” (390). What Scott found noteworthy about Ellis’s approach is

²²¹ My thinking in this section has benefited greatly from engagement with that of Sarah Kerman, whose dissertation *Speaking for Americans: Modernist Voices and Political Representation, 1910-1940* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2010) includes a sustained discussion of the song anthologies of Alan Lomax.

²²² Scott, “Ellis’s *Specimens of English Romance*,” in *Edinburgh Review* 7:14 (Jan. 1806), 387-413, at 396. (The page is incorrectly numbered as 496, but follows 395.)

that he had avoided “literal transcription,” and had been willing to sacrifice the authenticity of his fourteenth-century poems to the “general interest”:

With this view, the editor has analyzed each romance in prose, introducing, at the same time, occasionally, as a continuation of the narrative, such parts of the original as seemed to possess either peculiarities of expression or poetical beauty, sufficient to render their preservation desirable, as fair or favourable specimens of the whole composition. (396)

As Scott noted, the result of this mixture of “analysis” (that is, paraphrase) and quotation was a decidedly heterogeneous page: Ellis’s own English prose formed the bulk of the text, but interspersed in it were also fragments of Ellis’s verse sources; these Ellis had kept largely unchanged, apart from “discard[ing] the antique orthography, preserving, however, carefully, every ancient word.” Ellis’s mixed practice, Scott wrote, would likely cause antiquarians of Ritson’s type to “censure the liberties which Mr. Ellis has taken with his materials, and deprecate his scouring the shield of ancient chivalry” (396).²²³

In his own collection of metrical romances, Ritson had been careful to justify his editorial emphasis on authenticity by hypothesizing that the romances themselves were more likely than not “actually composed by writers at their desk [or] by a *priest* in his *closet*.”²²⁴ In an important discussion of the origins of romance, Ritson carefully separated out the composition of his materials from their subsequent transmission, insisting that the “minstrels were too ignorant, and too vulgar” to have either composed or translated such

²²³ The reference here is to a passage early on in the story of Martinus Scriblerus: see *The Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*, ed. Charles Kerby-Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 102-4.

²²⁴ Joseph Ritson, *Ancient English Metrical Romanceës*, vol 1 (London: Nicol, 1802), cvi; emphasis original. In Ellisian rather than Ritsonian style, I have standardized Ritson’s spelling in my quotations (e.g., “composed” and “writers” for Ritson’s “compose’d” and “writeërs”).

works but were rather mere performers (cvi). Where manuscript copies did need emendation, this was to eliminate the mistakes of an inattentive copyist, or the ignorance of generations of minstrels.

For Scott, however, this entire approach was a fundamental misapprehension of both the value and the nature of the materials themselves. Ritson's treatment of minstrels, in particular, seemed to have been motivated by "a special malice": as minstrels depended on having a "stock of tales and songs," Scott wrote, "it must have been as natural for them to have composed the romances which they sung, as for a modern musician to compose the pieces which he performs" (394). Ellis had gone even further, envisioning the minstrel composing *as* he performed in a discussion that looks forward to Milman Parry on Homer: the minstrels, Ellis found, were talented "in extemporaneous compositions... like the *improvisatori* of Italy" (22); the romances these minstrels performed were not likely to have been composed at desks, but rather were the result of a bricolage-like practice in which minstrels formed "a variety of new combinations [made] from the numerous materials in their possession," thereby bringing "our most popular romances ... to the state in which we now see them" (22).²²⁵ And this improvisational practice, rooted in an attempt to speak to the "public at large" (21), was precisely what made minstrelsy valuable to Ellis: minstrels were "everywhere welcomed" and could perform to all levels of society; they were thus "superior to more learned writers [as] judges of the public taste"; their improvisations thus spoke to all, and spoke out of "nearly all the knowledge of the age, which was committed to their memory" (22).

²²⁵ It should be noted that Scott's own statements on the subject are never quite as sanguine about improvisation as Ellis's, and become far less so later in his career. In the "Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry" which Scott appended to the 1830 edition of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, he describes the passing-down of ballads and romances not as a gradual process of accretion, but as a process of degradation: the "rugged sense" of the original has been "generally smoothed down and destroyed by a process similar to that by which a coin, passing from hand to hand, loses in circulation all the finer marks of the impress." In *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ed. TF Henderson (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1902), vol. 1, at 12.

The standard accounts of the orality/literacy binary would perhaps suggest that, under the sway of a fetishized orality, it would be Ellis, rather than Ritson, who would emphasize authenticity in his editorial practice. But the case was exactly the reverse: Ritson positioned himself as both the advocate of “the original text” (cix) and its author and as the defender of the concerned purchaser of the modern edition: he protected the former from “unfairness and dishonesty,” and the latter from being “deceived and imposed upon” when seeking after “[a]uthenticity” (cxli-cxlii). Ellis, meanwhile, implicitly modeled himself after what he imagined as the practices of his originals:

The mode of translation adopted by these early romancers was indeed rather licentious, as they were satisfied with giving the substance of the story as intelligibly as they could, reserving to themselves the liberty of contracting what they thought too diffuse, of omitting what they considered as unnecessary, and of enlarging such passages as appeared most important. But they were generally attentive to the style of their original, and seldom lost an opportunity of enriching their work by an exact imitation... (25)

Like his “romancers,” Ellis aimed first and foremost at intelligibility, but also precisely reproduced passages that “appeared to him worth preserving” (iv). For these reasons, Scott praised the “wit and elegance with which [Ellis] abridged and analyzed” his sources: like the minstrels themselves, Ellis was engaged in a “popular labor” (396).

Yet this popular editorial voice was not – as Katie Trumpener and others have argued– a consolidating one, effacing the work that had been done in synthesizing materials, but rather a deliberately obtrusive one, full of “liberties” that enforced a separation between reader and the original romance material.²²⁶ In preferring this form of editing, Scott departs

²²⁶ Katie Trumpener’s *Bardic Nationalism*, despite its involvement in an anti-Lukácsian polemic, nevertheless reads Scott’s work as a ballad collector along highly Lukácsian lines: as a period in which he trained himself in modes of synthetic, retrospective representation. This style, Trumpener argues, would then be employed in his historical fiction, which consolidated its sources into an “unobtrusive” narrative unity, as discussed above, tending towards both the “magisterial historical survey” and a politically “quietistic realism” (151, 156-7).

significantly from established models of antiquarian practice, particularly that of Thomas Percy's 1765 *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, which along with Macpherson's Ossian poems of the 1760s and Herder's 1778 *Volkslieder*, is widely understood to have played a key role in forming the concept of a natural literature. In the frontispiece to the work and the vignette on the facing title page, both by Samuel Wale, Percy's *Reliques* also attempted to imagine how old songs might circulate in a modern society – but offered an account of the role of the book that seemed to imagine it as the complete disappearance of a scene of reception²²⁷:



*These venerable ancient Song-enditers
Soar'd many a pitch above our modern writers:
With rough majestic force they mov'd the heart,
And strength and nature made amends for Art.*
Rowe.

R E L I Q U E S
O F
A N C I E N T E N G L I S H P O E T R Y :
C O N S I S T I N G O F
O l d H e r o i c B A L L A D S , S O N G S , a n d o t h e r
P I E C E S o f o u r e a r l i e r P O E T S ,
(C h i e f l y o f t h e L Y R I C k i n d .)
T o g e t h e r w i t h s o m e f e w o f l a t e r D a t e .
V O L U M E T H E F I R S T .



L O N D O N :
P r i n t e d f o r J . D O D S L E Y i n P a l l - M a l l .
M D C C L X V .

Fig. 1: *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, frontispiece.

Fig. 2: *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, title page.

These two illustrations are provocative enough to have been the subject of multiple interpretations; one recent commentator has even used them as a case study to demonstrate

²²⁷ Thomas [later Bishop] Percy, ed., *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London: Dodsley, 1765).

that, without a rigorous examination of a synchronic cross-section of title-page paratextual illustrations, any attempt at an interpretation of stylistic meaning (e.g., are these illustrations in a “Gothic” style?) will of necessity beg the question, as any detail that might be used as evidence for an answer could only find meaning “within some *grand récit* of literary history.”²²⁸ Yet these illustrations themselves emphatically do supply a *petit récit*, a brief but pointed narrative whose main character is the minstrel’s harp. Percy famously writes in his dedication to Elizabeth of Northumberland that these songs are not “labors of art, but [rather] effusions of nature” (vi); the work’s first pages suggest that as natural, the songs are directly available to any reader. Faithful to the illustrations’ Latin tags from Horace and Ovid, the harp endures through time: the structures around it may lie in ruins, but its form persists virtually unchanged. There is no bard, of course, to play that harp (can the wind play it? does it await an unseen human player?); more strikingly, there is no audience gathered around to hear it. Instead, there is only writing: a large codex lies in front of the harp, opened in such a way as to invite perusal, and various sheets are scattered nearby. The harp is waiting to be stumbled upon, it seems – as are books, ready to be accessed. Percy’s own editorial practice is, at times, as deliberately mediating as Ellis’s – but Percy certainly never reflects on his mediations as Ellis does, asking the reader to consider his distance from the songs’ “proper” audience. That neither the harp nor the books of Percy’s title vignette have any obvious audience is thus in a way precisely the point: *we* are that audience.

Compared to the disappearance of reception in Percy, then, what seems remarkable in the editorial style Scott championed in Ellis is not its consolidating unobtrusiveness and

²²⁸ Joseph A. Dane, *On Typography and Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 73-76. See also Christine Baatz, “‘A Strange Collection of Trash?’: The Re-Evaluation of Medieval Literature in Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), in *Anthologies of British Poetry: Critical Perspectives from Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Barbara Korte, Ralf Schneider and Stefanie Lethbridge (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001).

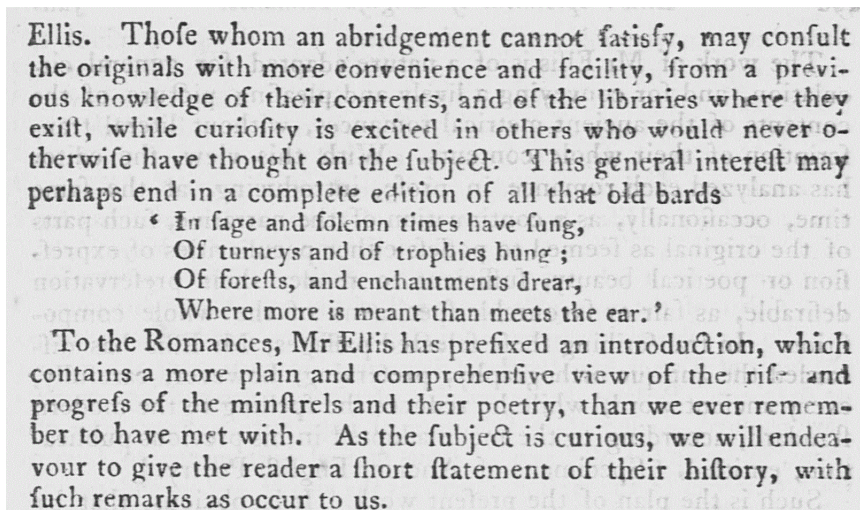
the unified view of history that it offers, but rather its insistence on marking its own mediations of its sources. Simon Dentith has recently argued that Scott, if anything, grew only more enthusiastic about the role of an active editor throughout his career: Scott's 1830 preface to *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* emphasizes the role of Pisistratus, not Homer, in producing the *Iliad*.²²⁹ Andrew Piper, in his *Dreaming in Books*, points to Scott's account of Ellis's *Specimens* as an articulation of a set of editorial values, widely held in both English and German writing around 1800, in which the antiquary did not simply consolidate his materials, but consciously interposed himself between them and his readers. In these years, Piper writes, works like Ludwig Tieck's 1803 collection of *Minnelieder* consciously attempted to reach as many readers as possible, and therefore altered the originals freely to give them what Piper calls a "more universal feel"; Tieck asked only "that the reader should meet him halfway, just as he too approaches the reader halfway as well."²³⁰ These collections and anthologies, known in German as *Erneuungen*, attempted to make the old new through a process that "hovered between the various modes of translation, paraphrase, and imitation" (89).

The distinction between Trumpener's image of Scott (as "foregrounding" the consolidation of a "myriad" into a single "magisterial" voice) and Piper's (as attempting to "meet the reader halfway" by interposing himself between them and his materials) may at first glance appear a distinction without a difference. Yet these two accounts in fact describe different authors producing quite different kinds of pages, and resulting in different reading experiences – something Scott was always aware of, and keen to structure. An edited collection like Ellis's *Specimens* presented its readers with a composite work and a composite

²²⁹ Dentith, *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 32.

²³⁰ Quoted in Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 90.

authorial voice. By alternately paraphrasing and quoting, the book did much the same work to a pre-existing manuscript (in Ellis's case, for example, a manuscript about Merlin held in the library of Lincoln's Inn) that Leah Price suggests the nineteenth-century periodical press tended to do to the works it discussed: both the Price's review and Piper's *Erneuerung* "encourage readers and writers to think of texts as accumulations of self-contained anthology-pieces connected by longer passages of information or padding."²³¹ Yet the fact of excerpting is less interesting in this case than the mixture of techniques the two authors use in quoting: on the one hand, both Scott and Ellis cite selected passages via the colon, that scholarly mark of distanced examination. But both also incorporate verse into their own syntax, weaving centuries-old poetry into their own prose in a manner common in antiquity and widely practiced well into the nineteenth century. Particularly of note are the multiple occasions on which Scott and Ellis both use the latter practice to reflect on their procedures, by incorporating quotations at moments when writing itself is under discussion:



Ellis. Those whom an abridgement cannot satisfy, may consult the originals with more convenience and facility, from a previous knowledge of their contents, and of the libraries where they exist, while curiosity is excited in others who would never otherwise have thought on the subject. This general interest may perhaps end in a complete edition of all that old bards
 ‘ In sage and solemn times have sung,
 Of turneys and of trophies hung;
 Of forests, and enchantments drear,
 Where more is meant than meets the ear.’
 To the Romances, Mr Ellis has prefixed an introduction, which contains a more plain and comprehensive view of the rise and progress of the minstrels and their poetry, than we ever remember to have met with. As the subject is curious, we will endeavour to give the reader a short statement of their history, with such remarks as occur to us.

Fig. 3: From page 397 of Scott's review of Ellis's *Specimens*. Scott's quotation is of Milton's *Il Penseroso*, ll. 117-120.

²³¹ Leah Price, "George Eliot and the Production of Consumers," in *NOVEL: A Form on Fiction* 30:2 (Winter 1997), 145-169, at 158.

In Scott's quotation of Milton (Fig. 3), two centuries of English-language letters collapse into a single musing on the possibility of a book that does not yet exist, a universal edition of bardic romance; an actual conflation of authorial voices contemplates a possible collection of voices. Ellis creates similar effects of textual layering repeatedly in his *Specimens*, typically at moments of narrative transition. So, at the conclusion of a section of the narrative of Merlin in which the magician dictates a "book of prophecies" to the scribe Blaise (Fig. 4 below), Ellis caps the passage with an incorporated phrase referring to the opacity of Blaise's book.²³² By moving to the "concluding events of Vortigern's reign" in this way, Ellis creates a brief moment in which three possible authors and three possible books are layered atop each other: who is it that "now passes," who marks his decision to address a new topic – Blaise, the author of the romance, or Ellis?

tion. During his abode with this holy man he compiled his book of prophecies, comprising all the past and future history of his country. Posterity will long regret that this invaluable repertory is so obscure

That few men, withouten ween,
Can understand what it may mean.

Our author now passes to the concluding events of Vortigern's reign, which are thus introduced :

A merry time it is in May,
When springeth the summers day,

Fig. 4: From page 230 of Ellis's *Specimens of early English Metrical Romances*, volume 1.

was able to carry him. In the mean time, Merlin had pursued a party of the flying enemy to a considerable distance, and had cast an enchantment on them, by means of which they mistook a valley which lay before them for a deep and spacious lake, into which they declined to venture—

Hereafter sone, in this write,
Why he it did ye shal it wite.

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But unfortunately this important piece of information is lost to posterity, because the whole remainder of the poem, as it now exists, is employed in describing the confused scene of slaughter which followed the wound and flight of king Ryance.

Fig. 5: From pages 304-5 of Ellis's *Specimens*, vol. 1.

²³² George Ellis, *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1805).

Similarly, near the conclusion of the entire narrative (Fig. 5 above), Ellis apparently interrupts himself in order to quote the *original's* promise to tell more. Ellis's is a highly self-conscious editorial practice: here his quotation interrupts narrative momentum with a promise to continue the story; at the same time, the lines both seem to refer to the book we have in our hands ("this write") while also bearing the markers of an oral storytelling. Confusions like these were not merely accidental, but for Ellis and Scott alike were a vital part of a larger cultural project that took place both within and outside the book's limits. As Piper argues, the goal of the editorial practice of the *Erneuerungen* was a kind of literal translation: the "mutual crossing over (*über-setzen*) between languages and time by both reader and writer" (90).

Ellis's interpolated quotations were a vital means of such crossing over, because they brought the reader into contact with the minstrel tradition precisely *without* forcing him to encounter it as a self-enclosed whole: that is, the ballad collection was a way of relaying a tradition without framing it as such. Such techniques, Scott wrote in his review, might not be to the taste of the "severe student of our national antiquities." But, on the other hand, even he who would "before have as soon thought of wearing the dress, as of studying the poems of his ancestors" would, by reading Ellis's mixed form, find himself doing exactly that – and without needing to play dress-up. Metrical romances, presented through paraphrase and quotation, would no longer seem alienatingly foreign, marked by either the "cobwebs and rust" of historical distance, or the cultural barriers signaled by ancient "dress." Yet the book was not important merely as a single work, or a single reading experience – for Scott and Ellis alike, the aim of the *Specimens* was to point readers to other books. "We doubt not," Scott wrote, that "the wit and elegance with which [Ellis] has abridged and analyzed" his materials "will encourage many a gentle reader to attempt the originals" (396).

Ellis, similarly, wrote in his prefatory “Advertisement” that while he hoped his work had “been instrumental in rendering accessible to common readers no inconsiderable portion of our early national literature,” there was still much work left for the reader to do. Specifically, his preface encourages its readers to consider themselves potential correspondents, as there were no doubt more manuscripts “both of the miscellaneous and romantic kind... remain[ing] in various libraries” (iv), waiting to be found. The book thus becomes a means of transport – not of ecstatic transport, but rather literal movement, sending the reader to libraries and archives in search of manuscripts.

This kind of communal sharing of materials had been an important part of antiquarian song-collecting for some time, particularly in the long-running project the *Scots Musical Museum*, published between 1787 and 1803 under the guidance of the Edinburgh publisher James Johnson and Robert Burns. The first volume of James Johnson’s *Scots Musical Museum* asked the “true lovers of Caledonian music and song” to whom it was addressed to assist in the project of collection:

[I]t is humbly requested, if any Lady or Gentleman have any Song of Merit with the Music (never hitherto Published) of the Ancient Caledonian strain, that they would be pleased to transmit the same to the Publishers, that it may be submitted to the proper Judges, and so be preserved in this Repository of our National Music and Song...²³³

Antiquarianism and ballad collecting in the eighteenth century is often imagined as a kind of coterie activity: an endless series of disputes about authenticity, fought in footnotes and prefaces, between a confined number of gentleman scholars. In the *Museum*, however, as in Ellis’s implicit call for his readers to seek out more manuscripts, the activity of song

²³³ *Scots Musical Museum*, ed. James Johnson, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Blackwood: Edinburgh, 1853), iii. Originally published as *Scots Musical Museum* (Edinburgh: Johnson, 1787).

collecting is deliberately pushed towards a more democratic mode. In a different context, Jon Klancher writes of the capacity of certain parts of the pre-Revolutionary periodical press to function like a print form of the Habermasian coffee house: by collectively corresponding with a monthly miscellany like the *Gentleman's Magazine*, readers constituted themselves as “a tightly knit community of readers and writers who revolve between reading roles and writing roles.”²³⁴ Johnson's project aims at a similar collaboration: the readership Ellis's *Specimens*, like that of the *Scots Musical Museum*, is a collective on the basis of a shared, hobbyistic activity, one routed through a central organizing agency of “proper Judges,” certainly, but nevertheless an activity in which hidden materials – the manuscript in the attic or the library – are uncovered, authenticated, and placed into the public sphere.

Even as it sent readers to the library, however, Ellis's volume brought strangers into the house: “Mr. Ellis,” Scott wrote, “has brought the minstrels of old into the *boudoirs* and drawing rooms, which have replaced the sounding halls and tapestried bowers in which they were once familiar” (396). Scott captures the strangeness of the reading experience he finds in Ellis's *Specimens* in the twists and turns of this rather extraordinary sentence. The minstrel appears in the drawing room, and surprises us there: the “old” in a new place. Yet the next clause does not stick with that surprise by emphasizing the minstrel's strangeness in this environment, but instead turns the encounter around: it is not the minstrel who is out of place (imagine a sentence continuing with “... into the drawing room, standing his harp where we had left the fortepiano”). Instead, the drawing room and boudoir itself now appear – as though from the minstrel's eyes – as an unlikely replacement for hall and bower, as though our present were only one possible future of the past. But again the sentence does not stay there, enforcing a second change in perspective: “...bowers in which they were once

²³⁴ In *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, 22.

familiar.” Not “*with* which,” the preposition we might have expected, and that would have continued to view the room with the minstrel’s eyes, but “*in* which”: we are now again viewers of the minstrel, but instead of seeing him as our nineteenth-century selves, we are instead implicitly taking the place of a hypothetical fourteenth-century viewer for whom the minstrel in the tapestried bower is an everyday sight.²³⁵ To read Ellis’s *Specimens*, then, is to suddenly have access to “our early national literature” – but it is not simply to let that literature speak directly to oneself, as Percy’s *Reliques* seemed to imagine: I remain an *audience* for the minstrel; to the extent that I have taken on a role in reading that is not simply my own, it is the role of a past listener to the bard. The work thus brings the minstrel into the drawing-room, while still preserving a sense of his dislocation there; just as the book itself is layered (Ellis’s prosaic paraphrase enveloping the verse which I know is a modification of an original), so too my experience of it involves holding *both* the drawing room in which I sit *and* the sounding hall in which the minstrel once sang together in my head.

In Ellis, Scott finds a way past the conceptual impasse set up by *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*. The former work had set up a relentlessly repetitive scenario, in which fictions – most importantly for the poet, the fiction of a unified national audience – are continually being created for escapist purposes and then dissolving under the pressure of interpretation; the latter had attempted to duck the problems of a real audience altogether.

²³⁵ Scott’s sentence could, arguably, also be registering that the minstrels were formerly *familiars* of the house – that is, attached to the aristocratic household for which they sang. Yet the *OED* lists no adjectival form in this sense, and Scott’s “familiar” is singular.

Scott’s reading of Ellis’s *Romances* is, as I have suggested above, one that accords both with Ellis’s techniques and with Ellis’s statement of his intentions in his preface. But his emphasis on what I am calling the layered permeability of the book was by no means universal. The *Gentleman’s Magazine*, for example, noted – approvingly – in writing Ellis’s obituary that “[i]n the Abridgement of the old Romances, these prolix tales are rendered more amusing by a gentle sneer, which is constantly visible through the serious narrative, and which enlivens the perusal without destroying the interest” (“Memoir of George Ellis,” in *Gentleman’s Magazine* (Apr. 1815), 372.

What opens up in the anthology – precisely because it implicitly represents a scene of sung poetry that it cannot possibly replicate – is the possibility of an account of reading as a shared fantasy that does not disappear into the everyday, but remains clearly grounded in the medium of the book itself, and which can therefore coordinate the hallucination of reading together with a kind of critical self-consciousness.

The mediation of national music in *Waverley* and the style of the *Waverley* novels

What might this account of Scott's aims as a ballad collector mean about his novels? As I have suggested, the received account of the work of Scott's fiction finds its major stumbling-block in the notable thickness of Scott's style. Katie Trumpener's description of Scott's "unobtrusive" voice, or James Chandler's remark that his style "means to be invisible," seems ill-equipped to grapple with the insistent *presence* of Scott's narratorial voice in the act of description: Scott's page *never* seems to want to go away.²³⁶ I argue here that Scott's novelistic style is rooted in the layered experience of reading that the ballad collector strives for – an experience entirely distinct from the simpler, absorbed wonder demanded by Scott's verse romances. Specifically, this style relays musical listening and national to the readers of *Waverley* in a way that closely resembles the experience of Ellis's reader, situated at once in the drawing room and the sounding hall. And, as I will suggest in closing, this same layered reading experience can be found in the *Waverley* novels more generally.

I will keep my comments about *Waverley* confined to a single chapter, the twentieth, entitled "A Highland Feast." The chapter comes roughly a third of the way through the novel, and represents the furthest point of *Waverley*'s (and the novel's own) journey from England into Highland Scotland. It comes as part of a sequence in which *Waverley* crosses

²³⁶ Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 336.

into the Highlands, stays at Glennaquoich, attends a Highland banquet, and meets both Fergus Mac-Ivor and Flora Mac-Ivor. At the beginning of the sequence, Waverley is a captain in the British army, and by the end of it he has resigned his commission and finds himself considering taking up the Jacobite cause, a movement that “the majority of the kingdom esteemed rebellion” (207). These chapters, then, narrate a loss – or a temporary change – in belonging; in their description of Highland life, these chapters are also *about* belonging. How does this change come about? What does it mean to be a Highlander in *Waverley*, and what is appealing (to Waverley, to us) about it?

Yoon Sun Lee’s book *Nationalism and Irony* provides one answer in her reading of the Highland feast in the first half of the chapter.²³⁷ At the opening of the feast, the narrator describes how the banquet maintains a sense of order and plenty for all, even though the food offered to those present is determined entirely by their social standing:

Excellent claret and champagne were liberally distributed among the Chief’s immediate neighbours; whisky, plain or diluted, and strong beer, refreshed those who sat near the lower end. Nor did this inequality of distribution appear to give the least offense. Every one present understood that his taste was to be formed according to the rank which he held at table; and, consequently, the tacksmen and their dependents always professed the wine was too cold for their stomachs, and called, apparently out of choice, for the liquor which was assigned to them from economy. (164)²³⁸

²³⁷ *Nationalism and Irony*: Burke, Scott, Carlyle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²³⁸ This scene has received an extraordinary amount of patient and intelligent critical attention. In addition to Lee’s account, see Buzard’s – almost directly opposed to hers – in *Disorienting Fiction* (87-8), and also Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991), 65-67.

This scene, Lee writes, suggests “how Scott lays the groundwork of an ironic nationalism” (20). As Lee notes, the banquet scene is a model of a community in which the fulfillment of taste assures social harmony: everybody gets what he wants. That the taste is artificial – that each individual knows how his taste “was to be formed” – is hardly disruptive to that harmony: this artificiality is *already* known, and each subject plays a role in creating an “illusion of free and equal fellowship” (22). The illusions of social unity are formed here neither through an immediate, spontaneous sentiment of national belonging, nor through ideological obfuscation, but as consciously generated fictions: “[The] illusion of having chosen,” as Lee puts it, “is indeed all that they have in common, all being equally under the command of prescribed roles and straitened circumstances” (22).

Lee’s is a persuasive reading. And it comes as part of a wave of commentary on Scott that has turned, explicitly or otherwise, to Slavoj Žižek’s account of the operation of ideology – as contained in the knowing wink of the subject who says “I know very well, but still”²³⁹ – in order to come to terms with Scott’s strange ability to demystify without undoing. Lee’s book quite literally gives Žižek the last word, and in it she finds in Scott an exemplary instance of Tory irony in the nineteenth century to create a “Romantic Britain” that could “conceive of itself less as a perfect unity than as a tense, tactful convergence of opposing tendencies” (7). Writers like Scott, Lee argues, saw the “ironic production of feeling as a necessary supplement to and sometimes even substitute for spontaneous emotion” (9).

Lee’s reading of this scene in *Waverley* is, as she herself admits, a partial one, and it is striking that though her reading ends with a strong claim about the novel’s aims and effects – “Scott *promotes* the fellowship of incompatible things and unequal entities” (24) – it is difficult to know what model of ideological capture or rhetorical suasion allows for the shift

²³⁹ *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 18. Tucker and Buzard both find in this stance a version of Scott.

in her account from a novel that describes an illusion to one that promotes it. For if we think about the novel as a persuasive structure, our first, and surely more obvious, answer to the question of what it means to be a Highlander in the novel is likely to be a scene more closely related to orality and even something like “spontaneous emotion” than to self-conscious irony. This scene arrives later in the same chapter, immediately following the feast; it is, as P.D. Garside suggests, a moment of ideological “temptation” for both Waverley and for us²⁴⁰:

Mac-Murrough, the family *bhairdh*, an aged man, immediately took the hint, and began to chant, with low and rapid utterance, a profusion of Celtic verses, which were received by the audience with all the applause of enthusiasm. As he advanced in his declamation, his ardour seemed to increase. He had at first spoken with his eyes fixed on the ground; he now cast them around as if beseeching, and anon as if commanding, and his tones rose into wild and impassioned notes, accompanied with appropriate gestures. He seemed to Edward, who attended him with much interest, to recite many proper names, to lament the dead, to apostrophize the absent, to exhort, and entreat, and animate those who were present. Waverley thought he even discerned his own name, and was convinced he was right, from the eyes of the company being at that moment turned towards him simultaneously. The ardour of the poet appeared to communicate itself to the audience. Their wind and sun-burnt countenances assumed a fiercer and more animated expression; all bent forward towards the reciter, many sprung up and waved their arms in ecstasy, and some laid their hands on their swords. When the song ceased, there was a deep pause, while

²⁴⁰ P.D. Garside, “*Waverley’s* Pictures of the Past,” in *ELH* 44:4 (Winter 1977), 659-682, at 666.

the aroused feelings of the poet and of the hearers gradually subsided into their usual channel. (165-6)

If the collectivity of the nation is figured in the feast scene as based on “an illusion of having chosen,” here it appears instead the product of a joint aesthetic experience that produces shared feeling (communicated ardor), which in turn prompts shared action (facial expressions, changes in bodily posture, etc.). And the passage pulls out all the rhetorical stops to create feeling in the reader too: it is a description of a powerfully affecting musical performance that mimes those effects in a grand style. The sentences here are rich in anaphora, particularly in that lengthy catalogue of infinitive verbs that list the actions the bard *seems* to be taking – anaphora being, conventionally, a figure of force that (as Scott’s classical and legal studies at Edinburgh would likely have informed him) was best suited in the more psychologically-interested classical and Renaissance rhetorical manuals for the creation of vividness: one repeats words for “emotional impact,” as Demetrius puts it; to create “a disturbance and movement of the mind,” as Longinus says: to bully one’s hearers, “hitting the jury in the mind with blow after blow.”²⁴¹ Or, in the words of the sixteenth-century rhetorician John Hoskins, a writer “beats upon one thing to cause the quicker feeling in the audience.”²⁴²

Being a Highlander, then, means two quite different things in chapter twenty of *Waverley*: the ironic self-creation of desire after the image of convention, and the production

²⁴¹ Demetrius, *On Style*, trans D. C. Innes, in *Ancient Literary Criticism*, ed. D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 209; Longinus, *On Sublimity*, in *Ancient Literary Criticism*, 483.

²⁴² John Hoskins, *Directions for Speech and Style* (c. 1599), quoted in Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 110. For a broad perspective on the place of rhetoric in the legal education Scott received, see John W. Cairns, “Rhetoric, Language, and Roman Law: Legal Education and Improvement in Eighteenth-Century Scotland,” in *Law and History Review* 9:1 (Spring 1991), 31-58.

of feeling in collective aesthetic experience. And these two forms of belonging receive quite different forms of narration: on the one hand, the key moment of ironic self-consciousness – “Every one present understood that his taste was to be formed...” – is rendered by an omniscient narrator who fully comprehends the interior states of others, and who can not only account for the scene at hand but place it within a context of repeated action: “consequently, the tacksmen and their dependents *always* professed...” Collective aesthetic experience, on the other hand, is rendered in a rhetorically suasive style, but one that lacks an ability to fully *know* the effects that it attempts to mime: both the meaning and the effects of Mac-Murrough’s song are placed behind a scrim of inference, rendered in two seemings, two as ifs, and one appearing. Reading song is *like* listening to song: this is reading as metonym rather than metaphor.

To be sure, there is no actual enigma here – all of the narrator’s inferences are the right ones. When Flora Mac-Ivor later describes Mac-Murrough’s song, her account of its contents will echo *Waverley*’s in virtually every detail: “The song is little more than a catalogue of names of the Highland clans under their distinctive peculiarities, and an exhortation to them to remember and to emulate the actions of their forefathers” (173). And though the enthusiasm of the *bhairdh* only *appears* to infect the audience, the very next paragraph in chapter twenty – surveying the now completed performance with an eye located elsewhere – confirms the fact of that “communication”: “The Chieftain, who during this scene had appeared rather to watch the emotions which were excited, than to partake their high tone of enthusiasm, filled with claret a small silver cup which stood by him” (166). No more are the emotions merely *apparently* excited; from the retrospective and detached view of Fergus Mac-Ivor, the causal link is clear.

It will be noted, from the cool retrospective view of the scene afforded by Fergus, that Mac-Murrough's singing appears to be precisely the kind of ironically framed aesthetic experience that will later get placed on the wall of Tully-Veolan: here, too, the claims of national feeling are placed within a social setting. Yet Scott makes it spectacularly difficult to know that Fergus's view should be the final one, or that it should be assimilated to the novel's own: the song, after all, is then repeated in Flora's translation. To determine whether the emphasis should be placed on Fergus's view of the scene or Flora's is to be placed in what James Chandler calls the dialectical relationship in Scott between the scene and the captioning, exterior "explanatory word" that gives it shape – a motion of thought that, as Chandler writes, is always potentially endless: Scott "recognized... that the effort to capture a scene can always be construed as occurring in the setting of another scene" (*England in 1819*, 329-30).

I would like to leave this potentially infinite regress suspended, then, and instead note how much the language of uncertain inference and tentative interpretation – deployed to such great effect in the narration of Mac-Murrough's song – pops up around the effects of song generally in *Waverley*, even when they are far more mundane: "The party preserved silence, interrupted only by the monotonous and murmured chant of a Gaelic song, sung in a kind of low recitative by the steersman, and by the dash of the oars, which the notes seemed to regulate" (139). Song's effect on the world, we might say, is always only indirect. And in much the same way, Scott's prose style works to serve as a noticeable, visible analogue of what it represents. In the near-apophasis of its account of Mac-Murrough's song, *Waverley* reminds us that we are not present in the scene and could not understand it if we were, while simultaneously using its own rhetorical means to make us feel "as if" we were. Reading Mac-Murrough's singing, I, like the reader of Ellis's condensed metrical

romances, encounter the page as present in its own right, and am thereby reminded that I am a *particular* audience for this old song of national belonging – an audience that does not listen, that is not located in a (linguistic, cultural, historical) position *to* listen. Scott’s style, of course, is hardly an invisible one; nor is it one that points to itself in service to detached irony as its own end. Rather, his style works to bring reader and represented experience into convergence – but this convergence is always explicitly mediated through the form of the novel’s page itself.

And this same mediated, separate-but-similar style runs throughout the Waverley novels. Consider, first, a brief look at Fenella, Scott’s reworking of Mignon in the 1823 novel *Peveiril of the Peak*.²⁴³ Fenella enters *Peveiril* as a deaf-mute in whom “the expression of her passion, unable to display itself in language” (163) instead takes alternate, strangely charismatic forms. Critics, especially after the publication of Carlyle’s translation of *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* in 1824, noted the extent to which Fenella seemed modeled upon Mignon – the *Edinburgh Review* found that Fenella “is borrowed almost entire from... Mignon,” while *Blackwood’s* suggested that both fit the pattern of a “silent, mysterious, infantine thing, with... passions so much beyond her years and stature.”²⁴⁴ And just as Mignon impresses herself on Wilhelm and the novel’s readers alike in “Kennst du das Land,” so too does Fenella enter Scott’s novel with a series of questions:

On the present occasion, planting herself in the very midst of the narrow descent, so as to make it impossible for Peveiril to pass by her, [Fenella] proceeded to put him to the question by a series of gestures, which we will endeavor to describe. She

²⁴³ *Peveiril of the Peak*, ed. Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007).

²⁴⁴ “German genius and taste: Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*,” in *Edinburgh Review* 42: 84 (Aug. 1825), 409-449 at 428; [J.G. Lockhart,] “*Wilhelm Meister – Memoirs of Goethe*,” in *Blackwood’s* 15:89 (June 1824), 621-632, at 624.

commenced by extending her hand slightly, accompanied with a sharp inquisitive look which served her as a note of interrogation. This was meant as an inquiry if he was going to a distance. Julian, in reply, extended his arm more than half, to intimate that the distance was considerable. Fenella looked grave, shook her head, and pointed to the Countess's window, which was visible from the spot where they stood. Peveril smiled, and nodded, to intimate there was no danger in quitting her mistress for a short space. The little maiden next touched an eagle's feather which she wore in her hair, a sign which she usually employed to designate the Earl, and then looked inquisitively at Julian once more, as if to say, "Goes he with you?" Peveril shook his head, and, somewhat wearied by these interrogatories, smiled, and made an effort to pass... (164-5)

If this is a translation of sorts out of Goethe, it is translation as reversal: the questions of "Kennst du das Land" seem to speak *out* of the page directly, to me. Here, though, Fenella's questions establish a rhythm of reading and re-reading: the narrator first supplies a gesture, and then its meaning, enforcing on the reader a forward-and-back motion of the eye. This motion of explanatory interpretation seems, at times, almost to overwhelm its reason for existence: Fenella's opening look is initially "inquisitive," then "a note of interrogation," and then finally "an inquiry." A tiresome process, then – Peveril's weariness might seem to double our own – but as the novel's epigraph suggests, boredom has a function. Here we might say, borrowing a phrase from Clement Greenberg, that this style emphasizes the flatness of the narrative's material support; "Kennst du das Land" points out from the page, while Fenella's "series of gestures" operates like a network of arrows criss-crossing the page

itself.²⁴⁵ Greenberg claims that “one sees a Modernist picture as a picture first” (87); in Scott, we read less Fenella’s questions than the “endeavor to describe” them.

Why write like this? Consider a second example, a single sentence drawn from *The Antiquary*. The sentence arrives at the height of one of the few moments of genuine narrative suspense in the novel, in which Isabella and Arthur Wardour, stuck between a cliff and the sea at high tide, are in danger of drowning:

As they thus pressed forward, longing doubtless to exchange the easy curving line, which the sinuosities of the bay compelled them to adopt, for a straighter and more expeditious path, though less conformable to the line of beauty, Sir Arthur observed a human figure on the beach advancing to meet them. (72)

Reader and character both long for a straighter path here: the Wardours are frustrated by the curve of the bay, while the reader is hemmed in by commas and an ostentatiously ill-timed, jokey reference to William Hogarth’s aesthetico-philosophical reflections on the “line of beauty.”

Ian Duncan, in a perceptive account of Scott’s style, has suggested that readers after 1900 reject Scott in large part because they have become accustomed to a “naturalization at the level of style.” Such naturalization, Duncan writes, is made normative in Austen’s free indirect discourse, which creates a “homological bonding of speaking, writing, and consciousness” (*Scott’s Shadow* 278). The comparison is particularly apt in the face of a sentence like this one – which, though hardly pursuing a homologically naturalized bond, obviously does aim at a kind of *analogical* modeling of written style on represented experience. Here, like Austen, Scott seeks to model his readers’ thoughts on those of his characters, writing in a style that is deliberately mimetic of the state of consciousness it

²⁴⁵ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993).

describes. Unlike Austen, though, Scott does not combine the two on the page. If, in the paradigmatic examples of free indirect discourse, the “wrong” deictic markers stretch syntax to fuse reader and characters, to make (in Dorrit Cohn’s phrase) the thinking of a represented mind effortlessly transparent to reading (e.g., Elizabeth Bennet about to interrupt Mr. Collins: “It *was* absolutely necessary to interrupt him *now*”), Scott in fact goes out of his way here – “longing *doubtless*” suggesting, by denying, the necessary intervention of a process of inference between knower and known – to signal the inaccessibility of his characters’ consciousnesses.²⁴⁶ Instead of merging the reading with the represented consciousness, then, Scott leaves the two states of “longing” separated but parallel, isomorphic but causally unrelated: the characters’ frustration with the curves of the bay, and the reader’s frustration with the sinuosities of the sentence.

To take this sentence in Kames’s terms, the *presence* of incidents or things is hardly at stake here; rather, the book at every point insists upon my “consciousness of self, and of reading, [my] present occupation.” Scott’s sentence insists upon the reader’s reflection in the moment of reading (rather than after it). Yet, strangest of all, the reader’s mental state comes to converge on the characters’ precisely because of the thickness of the novel’s style: the novel’s reminders that I am, after all, a reader – faced with a book made up of commas and clauses rather than bay, cliffs, and tide – are what make my experience like the experience I read about. In Scott’s style, then, the book neither becomes an invisible relay of a represented experience, nor frames it: instead, Scott’s style asks its reader to behave much like the reader of Ellis’s romance, simultaneously conscious of his reading while recognizing in that reading a metonymic resemblance to what he reads about.

²⁴⁶ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 82. Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

Interchapter 2: The Victorians read Scott

I have stressed, in the previous chapter, that Scott's novelistic style enforces upon its reader a double awareness: Scott deploys in his novels a model for layered reading that he first developed in his work as an antiquarian. Through a style that emphasizes its own opacity, Scott's style works to create a resemblance between the experience of reading and what is represented – one that presupposes a distance between the two, rather than attempts to collapse it.

Consider, however, Maggie Tulliver's reading, in George Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss*, published in 1860:

Sometimes Maggie thought she could have been contented with absorbing fancies: if she could have had all Scott's novels and all Byron's poems! – then perhaps she might have found happiness enough to dull her sensibility to her actual daily life. And yet... they were hardly what she wanted. She could make dream-worlds of her own – but no dream-world would satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life.²⁴⁷

This is Eliot the realist at perhaps her most doctrinaire. Scott's novels and Byron's poems take Maggie out of the "actual": they can only cover over, rather than explain, the "hard, real life" – a near repetition of the situation *Marmion* fails to address. Scott has become where you go to run away from the real – as though Scott had not affirmed that one also had to come back home: "her brain would be busy with wild romances of a flight from home in search of something less sordid and dreary: – she would go to some great man – Walter Scott, perhaps..." (300).

²⁴⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. A.S. Byatt (London: Penguin, 2003), 298. Ellipsis original.

As Fiona Robertson puts it in her *Legitimate Histories*, Scott was transformed after his death “into the Victorian icon of normality.”²⁴⁸ Maggie’s reading suggests that by the 1850s, the experience of reading Scott – and, I will suggest, that of listening to the minstrel – this normality had taken a specific form, as a kind of invisibility. Reading Scott, to Eliot narrating Maggie, is described in those totalizing terms which Scott himself worked to avoid: as a way of denying any separation between the reading subject and the book, and by implication offering an escapist fantasy of pre-critical cultural belonging. And indeed this image of Scott extended far beyond such explicitly anti-Romantic moments as this one.

There is a wide range of support for the claim of Scott’s huge influence upon nineteenth-century fiction. William St. Clair has persuasively argued that Scott’s readership so far outstripped other authors in the Victorian period that if “there are links between texts, books, reading, cultural formation, and mentalities, then Scott is the author to whom, above all, we should look.”²⁴⁹ The case has also been bolstered by recent quantitative work in the digital humanities: so Matthew Jockers has claimed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that stylistic analysis shows Scott and Austen to have been the century’s most influential authors – the nineteenth-century novel’s “equivalent of *Homo erectus*.”²⁵⁰ That these quantifiable facts

²⁴⁸ Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 27.

²⁴⁹ St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 420. St. Clair’s summary of the figures is striking enough to quote in full: “With novels as with poems, by sales as well as by reputation, the dominant author of the romantic period, and indeed of the Victorian period which followed, was Walter Scott. During the romantic period, the ‘Author of Waverley’ sold more novels than all the other novelists of the time put together. Even by about 1850... no novel by another recent novelist, including Austen, had achieved cumulative sales of 8000, a number which several Waverley novels reached in the first week” (221).

²⁵⁰ Jockers, “Computing and Visualizing the 19th-Century Literary Genome,” (presentation, Digital Humanities, Hamburg, June 16-20, 2012); available at <http://www.dh2012.uni-hamburg.de/conference/programme/abstracts/computing-and-visualizing-the-19th-century-literary-genome>. I thank Nicholas Dames for this reference.

produced a qualitative “normality” is of course trickier to demonstrate – but certainly there is no shortage of contemporary report to attest to exactly this claim. For David Masson it was perfectly evident, in speaking of the *Waverley* novels in 1859, that “[w]e all know them, and we all enjoy them”²⁵¹; for Julia Wedgwood in 1878, Scott’s achievement as “the interpreter of English life” was unparalleled – a plant perfectly “characteristic of the soil.”²⁵²

Like Robertson, I am struck by this achievement of normality precisely because it seems to fly in the face of stylistic facts that are recognizable to us now and were also apparent to Scott’s own contemporaries. Robertson provides an account of Scott’s Victorian normality as a carefully crafted forgetting – already begun in Lockhart’s *Life of Scott* – of the Wizard of the North’s engagement with the Gothic. I would like to focus here on another aspect of the Victorian reception of Scott: the unlikely forgetting of the thickness of his style.

Scott’s own contemporaries recognized his heavy style. Maria Edgeworth, for example, wrote to Scott in 1814 that

[w]e have this moment finished *Waverley*... the interest is kept up to the last moment. We were so possessed with the belief that the whole story and every character in it was real, that we could not endure the occasional addresses from the author to the reader. They are like Fielding; but for that reason we cannot bear them, we cannot bear that an author of such high powers, of such original genius, should for a

²⁵¹ *British Novelists and Their Styles* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1859), 194.

²⁵² “Sir Walter Scott and the Romantic Reaction,” in *Contemporary Review* 33 (October 1878), 514-539.

moment stoop to imitation. This is the only thing we dislike, these are the only passages we wish omitted in the whole work...²⁵³

Harriet Martineau, writing shortly after his death, found a similarly lamentable feature in Scott's ill-timed jokes and his clumsiness: they broke the texture of reading and signaled an unfortunate aristocratic distaste for the serious labor of writing. This habit of speaking "lightly of literature," Martineau continued, was a basically Tory tendency, one that would age very poorly now that "the serious temper of the times requires a new direction."²⁵⁴ In both Edgeworth and Martineau, Scott appears much as he does now, to us – as a writer whose signature stylistic trait was an incessant interposition of the page between reader and the fiction of story and character.

It can seem jarring, then, to recall that by the beginning of the twentieth century, Scott could be attacked by E.M. Forster as the very image of the natural storyteller. The transformation in the image of Scott can be seen in William Hazlitt's remarkable 1824 essay on the author.²⁵⁵ Hazlitt claims that Scott in effect trains his reader to forget the book he reads, to forget that he is reading: Scott's turn from verse romance to novels is, for Hazlitt, a turn away from a style of narrative that marks itself as written into a new "natural" mode of representation, in which the agency of representation effaces itself. Writing three decades before "realism" had much currency as a theoretical term, Hazlitt writes of Scott's novels as therefore able to produce readerly absorption in a way his metrical romances had not been. The reader of Scott's metrical romances, Hazlitt observed, was constantly aware that he was

²⁵³In *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John O. Hayden (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970),75. Hereafter *SCH*.

²⁵⁴ "Characteristics of the Genius of Scott," in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 2:9 (December 1832), 301-314, at 310, and "The Achievements of the Genius of Scott," in *Tait's* 2:10 (January 1833) , 445-460, at 459.

²⁵⁵ William Hazlitt, "Sir Walter Scott," in *The Spirit of the Age*, 2nd ed. (London: Colburn, 1825).

reading because of Scott's (poor) style: the poetry was a compound of "the tagging of rhymes, the eking out of syllables, the supplying of epithets, the colors of style" (129-130). In the novels, however, Scott "has completely got rid of the trammels of authorship" (130) to the extent that the writtenness of the novels is entirely invisible: "It is impossible to say how fine his writing in consequence are, unless we could describe how fine nature is" (134). Or, as Hazlitt put it in another essay,

His style is clear, flowing, and transparent: his sentiments, of which his style is an easy and natural medium, are common to him with his readers... He never obtrudes himself on your notice to prevent your seeing the object... The author has little or nothing to do with it.²⁵⁶

And, indeed, this is how the Victorians largely read Scott – as an author whom it was virtually impossible to notice.

In part this account of Scott as "natural medium" relied upon a certain image of the man himself as merely one of the crowd. Late in his career, Scott described himself – inaccurately, of course – as a writer who had decided to eschew "what is called literary society" and instead maintain a "place in general company" and a "general interest in what was going on around [him]."²⁵⁷ Scott sets up here an opposition here between the specifically, narrowly literary and the reiterated adjective *general* – one that he lends a class valence by analogizing the rarefied pleasures of literary company to drinking "cordial and luscious draughts," and the wholesome pleasures of general company to quaffing "wholesome bitters." This opposition is picked up on by many mid-Victorian retrospective

²⁵⁶ Hazlitt, "On the Living Poets," in *Lectures on the English Poets, delivered at the Surrey Institution*, 2nd ed. (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1819), 306-7.

²⁵⁷ "Introduction" to *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1830), xii.

essays. In his 1859 *British Novelists* David Masson described Scott as “a modest, hearty man, with as little of the cant of authorship about him as any author that ever lived” (194). Five years later Henry James would name him “the inventor of a new style” by virtue of his being “the first fictitious writer who addressed the public from its own level”; ten years after that, Julia Wedgwood portrayed him as one who “moves unencumbered by his own personality.”²⁵⁸

This image of Scott as the “general” or “public” man went hand in hand with a description of his narration as exemplary in its natural, unnoticeable storytelling. Again, Scott’s comments on himself, here in the form of an anonymous self-review published in the *Quarterly Review* in 1817, helped establish the image, painting a picture of Scott as an author who “errs chiefly from carelessness” – whose lack of skill in plotting, therefore, made the individual parts of his works all the more immediate:

[H]e has avoided the common language of narrative, and thrown his story, as much as possible, into a dramatic shape. In many cases this has added greatly to the effect, by keeping both the actors and the action continually before the reader, and placing him, in some measure, in the situation of the audience at a theatre, who are compelled to gather the meaning of the scene from what the dramatis personae say to each other, and not from any explanation addressed immediately to themselves. But though the author gain this advantage, and thereby compel the reader to think of the personages of the novel and not of the writer, yet the practice, especially pushed to the extent we have noticed, is a principle cause of the flimsiness and incoherent texture... (*SCH* 115)

²⁵⁸ Henry James, review of Nassau Senior’s *Essays on Fiction*, in *North American Review* 99:205 (October 1864), 580-8, at 585-6; Wedgwood, “Sir Walter Scott and the Romantic Reaction,” 515.

The Scott novel here is a drama, but precisely an anti-theatrical one. This drama “compels” the close attention of its viewers and entirely absorbs them into the fiction, forcing them “to think of the personages” rather than the performance of the writer, or indeed of the writing itself.

The disappearance of the writer in Scott would become a Victorian critical cliché. Walter Bagehot – writing in 1858, for the self-consciously moderate *National Review*, what is often called the best and most representative Victorian essay on Scott – closed his consideration of the *Waverley* novels with the observation that

[t]he style of Scott would deserve the highest praise if M. Thiers could establish his theory of narrative language. He maintains that an historian’s language approaches perfection in proportion as it aptly communicates what is meant to be narrated without drawing any attention to itself. Scott’s style fulfills this condition. Nobody rises from his works without a most vivid idea of what is related, and no one is able to quote a single phrase in which it has been narrated. (*SCH* 420)²⁵⁹

As a written presence, Scott is, at least in memory, entirely transparent: a perfect lens precisely because he is never seen, at least not consciously or in ways that could be remembered. The words on the pages of his novels were merely “the first sufficient words which came uppermost,” Bagehot continued (421) – not perhaps providing the greatest “excitement,” but never, he repeats, “attract[ing] our attention” (420).

Bagehot, it is true, had at this point made a habit of advocating for the bland: his essay in the first number of the *National Review* was a defense of Cowper as English national poet precisely because of his specialization in “the trivial course of slowly-moving

²⁵⁹ The essay was originally published in R.H. Hutton and Bagehot’s *National Review* 6:12 (April 1858), 444-72. For discussions of Bagehot’s exemplarity, see Hayden’s introductory note (394) and John Henry Raleigh, “What Scott Meant to the Victorians,” in *Victorian Studies* 7:1 (Sept. 1963), 7-34, at 20.

pleasures,” ideally suited for a “settled and practical people... distinctly in favour of heavy relaxations.”²⁶⁰ Yet Bagehot was hardly alone in praising Scott for how easy it was to forget his words; two years later, “M—M” writes for *Fraser’s* a surprisingly similar evaluation of Scott’s style:

Digressions and illustrations may be permitted in a novel or essay, which would be out of place in a scientific or logical treatise. But such digressions should never be allowed to carry the author out of sight of his original goal. The universally acknowledged beauty of Sir Walter Scott’s style is mainly owing to its perfect simplicity and directness; his illustrations arise naturally out of the subject before him, and he condenses into a few sentences, descriptions of scenes and events which in the hands of our novelists would occupy many pages.²⁶¹

Again, Scott as a storyteller is above all *not noticeable*: simple, direct, natural, to the point. Similar observations, linking Scott’s public persona to the naturalness – or praiseworthy invisibility – of his style, are made throughout the Victorian periodical press, with only slight variations. Writing of the “Liberal Movement in English Literature” in 1885, W. J. Courthope virtually repeats Hazlitt’s sixty-year-old understanding of Scott’s career. Courthope, too, finds that Scott’s verse romances bore the marks of their making – the reader of *Marmion*, particularly, “cannot help feeling that it has been put together”; Courthope, too, finds that in the novels, however, we “breathe in the story” as it flits past “in the language of real life.”²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Walter Bagehot, “William Cowper,” in *National Review* 1:1 (July 1855), 31-72, at 59.

²⁶¹ “Novels of the Day: Their Writers and Readers,” in *Fraser’s* 62:368 (August 1860), 205-217.

²⁶² In *National Review* 5:26 (April 1885), 220-237, at 227.

Perhaps most strikingly, in the late Victorian essays in which the decline of Scott's reputation is readily apparent, the basic account of Scott's style remains unchanged. E.M. Forster's famous assault on Scott in *Aspects of the Novel* – as a novelist who, more than any other, is merely the nineteenth-century's version of the cave-dwelling storyteller who pacified “an audience of shock-heads” through the spell of “wondering what would happen next”²⁶³ – is merely a repetition of Victorian commonplaces with a new set of evaluations attached, the development of Leslie Stephen's description of Scott's storytelling, “as natural as the talk by firesides” (284).²⁶⁴ Forster condemns Scott as creating in the audience nothing more than the desire “to know what happens next”; in reading Scott, we learn to submit to mere succession: when something different happens, the reader's “attention reawakens... then his attention is diverted to something else, and the time-sequences goes on.” Our interest, Forster claims, is held only locally, point-to-point, through the simplistic logic implied by the questions “And then? ... And then?” (131). Mere consecution must be rejected by the novelist in part for reasons of mimetic faithfulness – as Virginia Woolf claimed that “life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged,” so Forster too insists that life, at least as it is remembered, is no mere sequence but rather forms itself into “a few notable pinnacles.”²⁶⁵ The logic of the series must also be set aside in order to draw the novel closer to less “atavistic” forms of expression that can be remembered, that remain themselves in the mind – like “melody, or perception of truth.” Yet, again, Forster's discussion of Scott as the consummate storyteller is remarkable only as a newly negative version of Victorian commonplaces. Forster's principal observations – that Scott's readers are absorbed into

²⁶³ Forster, *The Art of Fiction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1927), 46.

²⁶⁴ Stephen, “Some Words about Sir Water Scott,” in *Cornhill* 24:141 (Sept. 1871), 278-293, at 284.

²⁶⁵ Woolf, “Modern Fiction,” in *The Common Reader*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (San Diego: Harvest, 1994).

following a chain of events in sequence; that Scott's works are "instinctive" rather than artificial; even that Scott novels cannot be remembered *as novels* apart from the events they describe: these are precisely the qualities that Scott's Victorian critics found praiseworthy.

It is not my intention here to trace a history of a "natural" or "simple" style in discussions of English-language narrative. Nor do I mean, exactly, to compose a history of these *words* and their shifting uses. My observation here is somewhat more confined and literal-minded. To us, now, Scott's style of storytelling is notably circumlocutory and insistently *written*; for the Victorians it was quite otherwise: direct, natural, simple, and a recollection of oral storytelling. Moreover, "our" Scott is also the Scott of Scott's peers: the mid-Victorian image of Scott as a stylist is the abnormality here, differing from both the criticisms of his contemporaries and those of the present day. During the decades in which Scott was universally read, he was also (as stylist) invisible.

The German motto of the Oldbuck family in *The Antiquary* – whose head, Jonathan Oldbuck, has long been read as a double for Scott himself – is "Kunst macht Gunst": "skill wins favor," as the novel translates it, but also, surely, "art makes favor." Not perhaps *precisely* Wordsworth's motto, that the poet creates his own taste, but surely close enough. This was an ability that Hazlitt denied to Scott, arguing that while "a great mind is one that moulds the minds of others," Scott was "only entertaining" ("On the Living Poets," 308-9). But if we are searching for what Scott gave the nineteenth century, where better to start than here – with how Scott trained the nineteenth century to consider his mode of narration impersonal, simple, and direct where both his contemporaries and ours find it digressive and intrusively jocular?

At the same time as Scott would serve as a figure for the continuity of attention over time, he was also often pressed into duty in discussions of the organization of collective

attention in space. Scott's favored mode – the romance – and his frequent poetic double, the minstrel performer of ballads or romances, was often cited by the Victorian press as epitomizing collective aesthetic experience across social strata. Thus, Dickens's reading tours in the 1850s were often figured as the return of the art of minstrelsy: as a writer in the *Examiner* put it in 1858, Dickens had revived the art of “the old Scalds and bards,” and in doing so, had gained an ability to unite his audience as a feeling body and thus as the object of rhetorical appeal: “Every passage speaks home to the heart, and there is one purpose in all... [W]e have heard the living voice of one who has the right to close his fable, as he does, with a direct appeal to us as workers in the world.”²⁶⁶ W.E. Aytoun made much the same point in an essay on ballads from the same year:

[Listening to ballads] was a pleasant and a wholesome amusement for the people – better, I venture to think, than the perusal of political or sectarian tracts, falsified representations of society as it exists in this world, and bigoted exhortations to the renunciation of Christian charity as a fit preparative for the next. It is curious to remark how ancient customs ever and anon force themselves, despite of what is called progress, into new existence. At the very time when I am preparing these sheets for the press, no entertainments are so popular as those given by Mr. Charles Dickens, who reads or recites his own admirable compositions to delighted audiences. Once again, and in an age when such a contact might have been deemed least likely to occur, the minstrel (for such he truly is who can touch every chord of

²⁶⁶ “Mr. Charles Dickens's Readings,” in *The Examiner* 2628 (June 12 1858), 373.

emotion) and the audience have been brought together face to face, and the charm of delivery has been superadded to that of skilful composition. (xxxiv)²⁶⁷

For Aytoun, Dickens and the minstrel both created a true popular culture, a mass yet “face to face” experience of shared emotion. Helen Small writes of Dickens’s public readings in the 1850s as a liberal fantasy of the power of culture to transcend social (especially, class) difference. As Small describes it, listening to the novelist (at least as Dickens and his friends imagined it) was a “public acknowledgment of a shared private experience”: one went to hear Dickens read scenes that one knew, quite possibly, by heart already – to be moved among other people precisely as one had already been moved by oneself, or in the company of family or a reading society.²⁶⁸ What the joint experience of Dickens’s reading offered, then, was an “authoritative experience of *being* a reading public” (277). As Aytoun saw it, Dickens’s readings resembled the voice of the bard insofar as his readings were unifying experiences, in which audiences are put into “contact,” or “touched.”

Yet the minstrel could also serve in the 1850s as a figure for absolute disruptions of the attention that could make such collectivity possible. So, the *Westminster Review* described modern romance compositions – including Scott’s – as a series of surprising events that shocked readers out of absorbed attention: thus the reader “finds his interest scattered by the feeling of amusement and annoyance with which he listens to some not ungraceful fancy or turn of words, which end, or descend, into a puff direct on Warren’s blacking, or Moses’

²⁶⁷ *The Ballads of Scotland*, ed. William Edmondstone Aytoun, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1858), xxxiv. Dickens’s first public readings were in 1853, in Birmingham. It was only in 1858, however, that he began his paid reading tours. See Small, below, and Susan Ferguson, “Dickens’s Public Readings and the Victorian Author,” in *SEL* 41:4, *The Nineteenth Century* (Autumn 2001), 729-749.

²⁶⁸ Helen Small, “Dickens and a pathology of the mid-Victorian reading public,” in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 278.

vests.”²⁶⁹ Far from uniting an audience in attention, then, the minstrel might instead turn his audience into skeptical individuals, perusing a narrative with the alienated examination with which one reads ad copy: the reader as resistantly self-aware of the rhetorical demands her reading makes.

The two positions on romance effectively place it at opposite ends of the absorption/disruption dyad; both positions assume that the experience of reading *should* be a wholly absorptive one. The development of the Victorian account of Scott thus seems to be a double movement, in which, on the one hand, Scott’s intensely mediated style was increasingly remembered as *immediate* and natural, while on the other, the minstrel music that, I have argued, provided Scott with models for a mediated practice of narration became a conventional way of referring to the collapse of distance between the reader and the book.

Corresponding to this development, I would suggest, is a certain uncanniness to the terms in which mid-Victorian novels think about the effects of reading. Certainly this is true of the *Mill on the Floss*. Maggie Tulliver, of course, eventually does find a book that speaks to her “hard, real life”: Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*. Though the novel’s narration emphasizes the strange control exerted over Maggie by the physical structure of the page – her eye follows the markings of a prior reader, “long since browned by time” (301), for Maggie the book is all sound:

A strange thrill of awe passed through Maggie while she read, as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor. She went on from one brown mark to another, where the quiet hand seemed to point, hardly conscious that she was reading – seeming rather to listen while a low voice said... (302)

²⁶⁹ “Modern Ballad Writers,” in *Westminster Review* 55:1 (April 1851), 1-48, at 8.

Sound – music, the voice – penetrates the interior of the self, but thereby isolates it, promising “a secret of life”; as Neil Hertz observes, “[t]hat the secret is in this case deemed benign... is less important than that a space of secrecy has been hollowed out within the self.”²⁷⁰ And how might one overcome that secrecy of the interior? When Philip Wakem – Maggie’s childhood companion – reappears in the novel (and tries to convince her to give Scott another look), the call both the friendship and Scott make to Maggie, that she “love... this world again” (318), is itself figured as a “voice that... made sweet music, ... like chimes borne onward by a recurrent breeze” (315). Maggie’s choice between Philip and Thomas à Kempis is thus, bizarrely, a choice between the compulsive force of two musics.

“Certain strains of music,” Philip says, “affect me so strangely – I can never hear them without their changing my whole attitude of mind” (317). And no wonder: in *The Mill on the Floss*, reading, like music, isolates the self; reading, like music, connects the self to the world. This is the strangely affecting situation into which Eliot’s final novel, *Daniel Deronda*, speaks.

²⁷⁰ Hertz, *George Eliot’s Pulse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2003), 75.

“Beyond the Occasion”: *Daniel Deronda* after Wagner

Like any conversion experience – any turning, however small, of a cheek, of a mood – the effect is apt to seem out of proportion to what you might think to call its cause.

– Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy*²⁷¹

In the space of a single chapter in its fourth book, *Daniel Deronda* presents its readers with two strikingly similar scenes of musical listening.²⁷² First, in Frankfurt, Daniel attends a synagogue service and is deeply moved by the music of the liturgy, sung in a Hebrew that he does not know; the service has on him something “like the effect of an Allegri’s *Miserere* or a Palestrina’s *Magnificat*” (367). A few pages (and, in the novel’s complex storytelling, months) later, Daniel again hears music whose words he does not understand, this time in a Hebrew hymn sung by Mirah Lapidoth, who learned the hymn from her mother. Mirah does not know any real words to the song, but its “lisped syllables” nevertheless seem to Daniel “very full of meaning” (374). Song is thus twice heard as incomprehensible in this chapter; it also twice offers a kind of ecstasy, absorbing the listening self into a community constituted in shared musical experience: Mirah, reminiscing earlier in the novel, states that hearing her mother sing those Hebrew hymns made her feel their shared “love and happiness”; in the synagogue, Daniel enters into a “sense of communion [with] long generations of struggling fellow-men” (210, 368).

Translating Feuerbach, Eliot had written in 1854 of the “overwhelming power of melody” in human experience: “And what else is the power of melody but the power of

²⁷¹ *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1994), 59.

²⁷² *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Terence Cave (London: Penguin, 1995).

feeling?”²⁷³ Yet it is not melody that is powerful here; neither Daniel nor Mirah experience expressivity as the immediate effect of melody *per se*, or of the materiality of the voice.²⁷⁴ Mirah, remembering how her mother sang to her years before, recalls that “because I never knew the meaning of the words they seemed full of nothing but our love and happiness” (210). In her careful account, the song is full of affect, but that plenitude resides neither in the voice nor in the melody, but instead in the (unknown) words (“*they* seemed full”), and only *because* those words are unknown. What is contingent in Mirah’s listening is Daniel’s choice: he displays a deliberate lack of care for linguistic meaning in Frankfurt, putting aside the “German translation of the Hebrew in the book before him” in order to “g[i]ve himself up to that strongest effect of chanted liturgies which is independent of detailed verbal meaning” (367). This approach to song is, in fact, something like a tic for Daniel: even when, later in the novel, he hears Mirah sing a song whose words he actually knows, Daniel will nonetheless have only “[c]ertain words *not* included within the song... ring within” him (559, my emphasis). What moves in these moments is not a Feuerbachian presence of feeling, but rather an absence of meaning – music is meaning’s trace, or even its negation; as Mladen Dolar argues, “singing is bad communication,” offering “expression which is more than meaning, yet expression which functions only in tension with meaning.”²⁷⁵ As James Sully, the psychologist and acquaintance of both George Eliot and George Henry Lewes, put

²⁷³ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1989), 3.

²⁷⁴ For an elegant essay which argues just this, see Lawrence Kramer, “Beyond Words and Music: An Essay on Songfulness,” in *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002), 51-68. Kramer gives a related, and more comprehensively Lacanian, account of song-without-heard-words (a slightly different phenomenon from song-whose-words-I-hear-but-cannot-understand, of course) in his “Speaking Melody, Melodic Speech,” in *Essays on Music and the Spoken Word*, ed. Suzanne M. Lodato and David Francis Urrows, *Word and Music Studies* vol. 7 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 127-143.

²⁷⁵ Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 30.

it in an essay published three years before *Deronda*, “In enjoying a song by Schubert, one must not care to know all its verbal details.”²⁷⁶ The meaning of a song resides in the words you do not hear – an uneasy structure that gives Daniel himself pause: “He wondered at the strength of his own feeling; it seemed beyond the occasion” (368).

For both Daniel and Mirah, what is at stake in listening to the musical articulation of unknown words is not merely enjoyment but also identification. Mirah’s memory of her mother’s voice gives her the independence to flee from the life her father has planned for her, one of a theatricality so debased it begins to resemble prostitution; years later, her mother’s voice is also what causes her to want to be “a good Jewess” (370).²⁷⁷ As for *Deronda*, one possible explanation for the excessiveness of his response is offered when a then-anonymous Jew approaches him, after the service, to ask after his family: “Excuse me, young gentleman – allow me – what is your parentage – your mother’s family – her maiden name?” (368). When Daniel recounts the story to Mirah, she too wonders about him: “I thought none but our people would feel that” (374). As the novel will eventually reveal, Mirah was right to wonder: *Deronda* does, indeed, turn out to be Jewish. In one reading of the novel, then, responding to song is both what makes one identify – and be identified – as a Jew.

What does *Daniel Deronda* think about this excessiveness in Daniel’s response, about the way in which feeling seems to be independent – or even demand the suppression – of meaning? In surpassing its occasion, *Deronda*’s listening shares in what Stanley Cavell claims is the structure of all conversion experiences – and like Michael Ragussis, I believe

²⁷⁶ “On the Nature and Limits of Musical Expression,” in *Contemporary Review* 23 (Dec. 1873), 572-589, at 588.

²⁷⁷ On theatricality and prostitution in the novel, see Catherine Gallagher, “George Eliot and *Daniel Deronda*: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question,” in *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, ed. Ruth Bernard Yeazell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984).

that indeed “we must read Deronda’s story as a conversion story.”²⁷⁸ The novel, however, does a great deal to suggest the potential inauthenticity of what happens to Daniel in the synagogue, especially through its invocation of Allegri and Palestrina. A bit of historical background is helpful here, and warranted by Eliot’s own careful research into both the music of the synagogue and into Counter-Reformation musical style: Eliot’s choice of these composers, we know, was anything but arbitrary.²⁷⁹ Though critics have generally tended to read Eliot’s musical allusions as a direct attempt to bring the music of the past to bear on the present, making Deronda’s spiritual ecstasy available to Eliot’s non-Jewish readers, those same allusions also emphasize the difficulties of precisely that kind of cultural translation in two ways.²⁸⁰ Firstly, Deronda is attending services at a Frankfurt synagogue – not “the fine new building of the Reformed but the old Rabbinical school of the orthodox” (366) – whose liturgical reforms had included a concerted effort to do away with borrowings from Counter-Reformation Catholic style. Though it is of course not clear that Deronda is aware of the significance of his surroundings, he is attending the services of what was then, in the novel’s 1865 setting, the epicenter of Jewish orthodoxy in Germany: the *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft*, or IRG.²⁸¹ The very features that give rise to Deronda’s rapturous experience – “the chant

²⁷⁸ Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: “The Jewish Question” & English National Identity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995), 286.

²⁷⁹ In her notebooks, Eliot transcribed large chunks of the entry on Palestrina in what was then a leading reference work, François-Joseph Fétis’s *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*; she also reviewed most of John Pyke Hullah’s *History of Modern Music*, a series of lectures covering music history from fourth-century chant to Wagner. Eliot’s notes on Fétis and Hullah are both in Pforzheimer notebook 707; see *George Eliot’s Daniel Deronda notebooks*, especially 440-44 and 477-483.

²⁸⁰ See Gray, 117 and Irwin, 441.

²⁸¹ See Robert Liberles, *Religious Conflict in Social Context: The Resurgence of Orthodox Judaism in Frankfurt am Main, 1838-1877* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985) and Moshe Samet, “The Beginnings of Orthodoxy,” in *Modern Judaism* 8:3 (1988), 249-269. Deronda is visiting the IRG in the fall of 1865, a period in which the IRG was attempting to secede from the Reform community in Frankfurt

of the *Chazan* or Reader's grand wide-ranging voice with its passage from monotony to sudden cries, the sweet boys' voices from the little quire," even the use of Hebrew rather than German texts (367) – were all the product of quite recent reforms on the part of the synagogue's rabbi, Samson Raphael Hirsch, and his choirmaster, Israel Meyer Japhet.

Though Japhet did adopt the style of some German folk-songs, A.Z. Idelsohn writes, he consistently shunned the Catholic style first adopted by many German Jewish congregations in the eighteenth century; for congregations like the IRG, that was a purely "European expression of music" that had to be avoided in favor of more traditionally Jewish forms.²⁸² As Japhet put it, his aim was "to give the traditional tunes as well as his own compositions the impress of *chazzanut*, the character of which is entirely different from that of Church song."²⁸³ Eliot thus places Deronda, hearing an effect like that of Allegri and Palestrina, in perhaps the synagogue in all of Germany where explicit musical references to Counter-Reformation Catholic style would have been least welcome.

Moreover, for English readers in the 1870s, allusions to Palestrina and Allegri would have evoked not only an imaginary experience of musico-religious rapture, but also the self-defeating nature of any attempt to *have* this experience. Nineteenth-century discussions of Palestrina directly addressed the difficulties of how audiences might, as James Garratt puts it, "use... the music of the past."²⁸⁴ Eliot provides a phrase for the central difficulty in the next

– something that would become possible only later, once the Prussian state had (in 1866) annexed Frankfurt, and (a decade later) reformed its tax laws.

²⁸² A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development* (New York: Schocken, 1967), 211.

²⁸³ Quoted in Idelsohn, 284. Would Eliot have known the thinking behind the synagogue's specific liturgical choices? She and Lewes did attend Sabbath services at the IRG in 1873 (see Haight, 472), and Hirsch was a close friend of Abraham Geiger, whose *Judaism and its History* Eliot studied closely in preparation for writing *Daniel Deronda*.

²⁸⁴ Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination: Interpreting Historicism in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 3.

chapter of Book IV, when, in the midst of his search for Mirah's family, Deronda's "attention [is] caught by some fine old clasps in chased silver" displayed in a shop window: "His first thought was that Lady Mallinger, who had a strictly Protestant taste for such Catholic spoils, might like to have these missal-clasps turned into a bracelet" (382). The phrase neatly captures the nineteenth century's difficulty in hearing sixteenth-century Catholic music – an effort that, as Carl Dahlhaus writes, was consistently plagued by "a bad conscience"²⁸⁵ – specifically, the bad conscience of tourism. Palestrina and Allegri were, in the 1870s, closely associated with the Pope's Sistine Chapel choir. Since the late eighteenth century, a visit to the Sistine Chapel during Holy Week had been a standard part of an Englishman's Italian tour and a common literary *topos* in travelers' accounts; the high point of the visit was typically the performance of Allegri and Palestrina during the Good Friday service. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Sistine Chapel visit was an occasion for farce, a stop on what Thackeray's *The Newcomes* refers to as a Rome "all mapped out and arranged for English diversion": "on Wednesday there will be music and Vespers at the Sistine chapel: on Thursday, the Pope will bless the animals..."²⁸⁶ Dickens describes a performance of Allegri's *Miserere* in a virtuosic passage in *Pictures From Italy*, one in which the touristic frame has made any reception of the music itself literally impossible: "hanging in the doorway of the chapel," Dickens can only hear tourists frantically shushing each other and ensuring the stability of a nearby curtain, so "that it might not fall down and stifle the sound of the voices."²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 181.

²⁸⁶ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Newcomes* (London: J.M. Dent, 1919), vol. 2, 5.

²⁸⁷ In *American Notes and Pictures From Italy* (London: Oxford UP, 1957), 398-9.

Yet the problem Dickens encountered in Rome – that the touristic surround of the Sistine Chapel kept getting in way of the real thing – was in a way necessary to any modern encounter with Palestrina or Allegri. In Charles Burney’s 1771 *Present State of Music in France and Italy*, the music of the papal chapel is valuable because it contrasts with the “vanity and folly” of modern operatic practice.²⁸⁸ E.T.A. Hoffmann’s celebrated 1814 essay “Old and New Church Music,” similarly, engaged in an anti-theatrical polemic aimed at modern music which “striv[es] for so-called effect” through ornamentation.²⁸⁹ But at the same time nineteenth century accounts of the music at the Sistine Chapel were plagued by the problem of the music’s liturgical frame, because the significance of the music was understood as dependent upon the music’s highly ornate liturgical setting. Upon returning to England, Burney published transcriptions of the *Miserere* together with three compositions of Palestrina’s; at the same time as he offered the works for domestic consumption, however, he emphasized that the music would likely suffer because it had been transplanted out of the Sistine Chapel: “some of the great effects produced” could “be justly attributed to the time, place, and solemnity of the ceremonials, used during the performance.”²⁹⁰

The problem of Palestrina and Allegri was thus the problem of the *parergon*, the frame around aesthetic experience which Kant describes, in the *Critique of Judgment*, as “what does not belong to the whole presentation of the object as an intrinsic constituent,” but that “does indeed increase our taste’s liking, and yet... only by its form, as in the case of picture

²⁸⁸ Quoted in Richard Boursy, “The Mystique of the Sistine Chapel Choir in the Romantic Era,” in *Journal of Musicology* 11:3 (1993), 277-329, at 280.

²⁸⁹ “Old and New Church Music,” in *E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 353-4.

²⁹⁰ Quoted in Boursy, 280.

frames.”²⁹¹ Or, as Derrida glosses it: “an outside which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute it as an inside.”²⁹² To “really” hear Palestrina was an exercise in impossibility: one heard his music as speaking to the present, as a model of anti-theatrical practice and naïve simplicity; at the same time, one recognized that this naïveté was a product of the highly theatrical ritual that served as the music’s frame. Dickens, in a sharp inversion of Hoffmann’s terms, describes the altar at St. Peter’s as “fitted up with boxes, shaped like those at the Italian Opera in England, but in their decoration much more gaudy” (368), but this reversal was in fact interior to the attempt to hear Palestrina from the beginning. Ragussis claims that Daniel, in the synagogue, stands “in the historical position of the Christian who co-opts Judaism for his own purposes” (276) – yet in fact Daniel’s position is less specific, that described within the novel as “strictly Protestant taste for Catholic spoils”: Daniel stands in the more general historical position of the cosmopolitan tourist, who co-opts religious music for his own purposes.

The strange and provocative thing about *Daniel Deronda*, of course, is that it is perfectly well aware of these difficulties. Daniel’s mother, hearing of his love for Mirah, will dismiss her with a peremptory but not inaccurate judgment: “Ah! like you. She is attached to the Judaism she knows nothing of... That is poetry – fit to last through an opera night” (665). This reading – in which Daniel and Mirah both are ignorant dreamers whose operatic dreams, somehow, are never reprimanded – is not unsupported by the novel itself. Looking back on the novel’s plotting, it becomes apparent that what is decisive in the unfolding of Daniel’s conversion story is not the depth of his response to music, but rather a chance

²⁹¹ *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), §14.

²⁹² *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 63.

event that occurs as Daniel leaves the synagogue: the anonymous Jew with a question about Daniel's parentage turns out to be Joseph Kalonymos, an old friend of his grandfather's, who will eventually arrange to have Daniel's mother reveal the secret of his identity to him. From this retrospective vantage point, it seems that the processes of individual identification figured in musical listening are mere masks that attempt to give meaning to what are in fact the underlying, unalterable facts of identity.²⁹³

The precise nature of the connection Daniel finds to Jewishness – whether and in what way it *matters* that he might “feel Jewish,” as Mirah seems to think, when he listens to Jewish music – has, of course, been a central concern to much recent criticism of the novel. Critics have in recent years read *Daniel Deronda* as both an articulation of the claims of nation, against that of a cosmopolitan modernity, and as itself invested in a form of cosmopolitan ethics.²⁹⁴ Perhaps most influentially, Amanda Anderson argues in *The Powers of Distance* that the novel represents a successful attempt to synthesize the two positions: in *Daniel Deronda*, Anderson claims, Eliot fashions a cosmopolitanism that might be flexible enough to unite the competing claims of cultural belonging and the detachment of modernity. As Anderson writes, Eliot's novel advocates for a “reflective return to the cultural origins that one can no longer inhabit in any unthinking manner.”²⁹⁵ Like Anderson,

²⁹³ See in particular Irene Tucker, *A Probable State: The Novel, the Contract, and the Jews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

²⁹⁴ Thomas Albrecht provides a concise overview of much of this criticism in his recent article “‘The Balance of Separateness and Communication’: Cosmopolitan Ethics in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*,” in *ELH* 79:2 (Summer 2012), 389-416; Helen Small resists its tendency towards didacticism in her “George Eliot and the Cosmopolitan Cynic,” in *Victorian Studies* 55:1 (Autumn 2012), 85-105.

²⁹⁵ Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 120.

I understand Eliot's novel to be advocating something more complex than Deronda's own longing to become an "organic part of social life" (365).

In this chapter, however, I step aside somewhat from the relationship between nation and ethics central to so much of this criticism, and instead focus on music's role in the relationship between nation and novelistic style. Eliot is, of course, an extremely self-aware writer, and part of the role music plays in *Daniel Deronda*, as I have suggested with a brief look at Palestrina and Allegri, is to import wholesale into her fiction the entire problem of a self-consciously cosmopolitan modernity's longing for a cultural rootedness: Heinrich Heine, who provides two of *Deronda's* epigraphs, satirizes that longing in the figure of a narrator who submits to "the mass of Palestrina" for a night, only to awake the next morning and "rub away sleep and Catholicism from [his] eyes."²⁹⁶ Yet the role music plays in *Daniel Deronda* is much like that which it plays, as I have argued, in Scott: in attending to musical listening, Eliot attempts to find a way past the self-enforcing opposition between the touristic, ironizing observer and the fragmentary past that he longs for, precisely at the point at which that opposition seems to be most rigorously enforced.

My argument here is that music in *Daniel Deronda* allows Eliot to think outside the homology between novelistic style and national boundary that tends to pervade much of her earlier fiction. As Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City*, Eliot's Englishness, especially by the time of *Deronda*, is an attachment shared, uneasily, between narrator and reader that works through an achieved stylistic distance – through what Slavoj Žižek calls

²⁹⁶ Heine, *Journey to Italy*, trans. Charles G. Leland, ed. Christopher Johnson (New York: Marsilio, 1998), 286. Eliot reviewed this work: see "German Wit: Heinrich Heine," in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia UP, 1963).

“the self-distance of the dominant culture.”²⁹⁷ For much of her novelistic career, Eliot regards music as a threat to that distance, and thus tends to place it outside the bounds of what the novel can properly represent. In *Daniel Deronda*, however, Eliot explicitly revises her earlier writings on the relationship between novelistic genre and national boundary; specifically, through a discussion of the most accomplished musician in the novel, Julius Klesmer, I argue that music’s force to disrupt the interrelation between Englishness and narration comes about not because music forces an involuntary attachment, but rather because it is always experienced as an intended, importunate claim on the attention.

I then turn to the theoretical writings of Richard Wagner, and to Eliot’s engagement with those writings in a set of essays from the 1850s. Wagner’s operas, of course, were in the latter decades of the nineteenth century the prime contemporary example of how music could hold a listener’s attention; what Eliot rejected in Wagner was the deliberate attempt to give that attention a particular, meaningful content – an argument she makes explicitly in her essays, and that I will argue also underlies her narrative poem of 1870, “The Legend of Jubal.”

I close by returning to the way in which both Mirah and Daniel listen. By resisting Wagnerian aesthetics – that is, by refusing to ground the socially binding feelings music provides in any particular affect or meaning – *Daniel Deronda* articulates a strangely indefinite model of cultural attachment: music’s effects can only operate *outside* knowledge, yet those same effects prompt the listener to seek after the knowledge he or she lacks.

²⁹⁷ ““The Everlasting Irony of the Community,”” in Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera’s Second Death* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 158.

Palpitating life: Eliot's anti-musical fiction

Daniel Deronda, like all of Eliot's later novels, is about the possibility of social belonging; more specifically, it – again, like the novels preceding it – takes as its primary concern the “possibility of human and interior community among men” that Georg Lukács defines as the telos of the novel.²⁹⁸ Where Eliot's final novel departs from both *Romola* and *Middlemarch*, however, is in the role it reserves for music in creating that possibility.

Lukács, it will be recalled, finds in the novel a specifically *modern* attempt at community in which the novel takes an individual alienated from society and educates him to play a role within it: while epic could rely on the “natural solidarity of kinship” to create that union, the *Bildungsroman* instead represents a process by which the liberal subject “comprehends and affirms the structures of social life as necessary forms of human community” (133). Lukács suggests that the novelistic hero's accommodation to the forms of social life is made possible, formally, by the “relativation of [the novel's] central character.” In Hegel's famous quip, the *Bildungsroman* sends its central character off to “quarrel with the world,” only so that it may then make her into “as good a Philistine as others.”²⁹⁹ What Lukács means by relativation is something slightly different: the central character's *recognition* that she is already like the others, and that the others are like her – something like Hegel's negation of the negation by which the isolated self, finding in itself the only opposition to the way of the world, instead realizes that the “dead authority” of

²⁹⁸ *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 133. Lukács is of course writing about the *Bildungsroman* as the type of the novel in general – but for Eliot's later fiction (*Romola*, *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*) the generalization works. Music plays relatively little role in *Felix Holt*, and it thus forms no part of the following discussion.

²⁹⁹ *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. TM Knox, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 593.

convention that rules the world is “animated by the consciousness of all” – that “reality is a vivified ordinance.”³⁰⁰

Romola and *Middlemarch* begin from the eminently Lukácsian problem of life lived after the disappearance of epic. Dorothea Brooke, famously, is one of those who seeks after an epic life, but who lacks the “national idea” – the “coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul.”³⁰¹ Living in the conditions of modernity, however, means that Dorothea’s life must, at least initially, take the form of mistakes. Romola de Bardi, similarly, lives in a society without stable norms, one experiencing “the unrest of a new growth,” and seeks after a way of attaching herself to life.³⁰² E.S. Dallas wrote in a review of *Romola* that for George Eliot “passion and direct action lie strangled in thought, and deeds present themselves to her rather as problems than as facts”;³⁰³ more precisely, one might say that both of these novels are *about* characters for whom action has become a problem. *Daniel Deronda* also takes up this problem, and quite explicitly: Daniel, the narrator tells us, longs to become “an organic part of social life, instead of roaming in it like a yearning disembodied spirit” (365).

Daniel’s musical listening is the first step in that process, and indeed music is, throughout Eliot’s fiction, a figure for forms of social connection.³⁰⁴ Yet a look back at

³⁰⁰ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 224-5.

³⁰¹ *Middlemarch*, ed. Margaret Harris, Judith Johnston, and Beryl Gray (London: Everyman, 1997), 3. Eliot’s essay on W.H. Riehl is her clearest articulation of this theory of the “national idea” as both made up of and allowing for meaningful action. See “The Natural History of German Life,” in *Westminster Review* 66:129 (July 1856), 51-79.

³⁰² *Romola*, ed. Dorothea Barrett (London: Penguin, 1997), 6.

³⁰³ “Romola,” in *Westminster Review* 24:2 (Oct 1863), 344-352, at 345.

³⁰⁴ See, in particular, Delia da Sousa Correa, *George Eliot, Music, and Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and Beryl Gray, *George Eliot and Music* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

Eliot's earlier novels suggests the extent to which *Daniel Deronda* represents a departure: in both *Romola* and *Middlemarch*, it is the *disappearance* of music that allows for forms of Lukácsian relativation. When music appears as a force upon its hearers in *Middlemarch* or *Romola*, it tends to produce wrong decisions based on illusion: Lydgate listens to Rosamond Vincy, is "taken possession of" (145), and marries the wrong woman; Romola, under the sway of Girolamo Savonarola's voice, finds that she "care[s] a great deal for [the] music" of the "faint chorus" of religious life (387), and for a time gives herself over to a religious severity of principle she cannot, ultimately, support. Musical performance in these novels may offer the possibility of authentic expression, but *listening* tends to be nearly as dangerous in George Eliot as it is in Plato.³⁰⁵

When *Middlemarch* and *Romola* arrive at a statement of Lukács's "possibility of human and interior community among men" – that is, at their endings, as Dorothea and Romola both find a place for themselves – the novels again turn to sound. But emphatically not to music – to a sound that one is aware of hearing, and of being moved by. Instead, both novels represent the realization that the world is animated by the consciousness of others in a vocabulary of basic pulsation – the same set of words that, as Neil Hertz writes, are generally Eliot's way of effecting "a contraction of lived experience into some more elementary, particle-like form."³⁰⁶ Dorothea, reflecting on having interrupted Rosamond Vincy and Will Ladislaw, asks herself, "Was she alone in that scene? Was it her event only?" (704); having thus relativized herself, conceived of the events of her life as someone else's, she turns to the window and recognizes her "part [in] that involuntary, palpitating life" of

³⁰⁵ Da Sousa Correa, in particular, emphasizes music's expressive potential in Eliot. See also Alison Byerly, "The Language of the Soul?: George Eliot and Music," in *Nineteenth Century Literature* 44 (1989): 1-17.

³⁰⁶ Neil Hertz, *George Eliot's Pulse* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 3.

“labor and endurance” (705). Romola, similarly, finds herself in a fishing village and discovers an “impulse to share the life around her” (560), having been “freed from the burden of choice,” like Dorothea, by the beat: by the, again, “palpitating life” of the stars (503).

In *Narrative and its Discontents*, D. A. Miller describes four “great scenes” – including Dorothea at the window – at the close of *Middlemarch* as that novel’s attempts to close down its own textual energies in favor of a “wholly present word” in which “the moral imagination finds its voice”: the great scene is where author and reader, sign and meaning come together in what Miller calls a “transcendent experience of fellowship whose transparent signs no longer require interpretation.”³⁰⁷ One might say also that for Eliot the “transcendent experience of fellowship” ideally requires *no* words, and no literal voice. Becoming organic, for Dorothea and Romola, is not a musical experience but a rhythmic one: involuntary, palpitating life. The phrase suggests the “steady cadence” of Wordsworth’s *Derwent*. It also brings to mind the “systole and diastole of blissful companionship” that is Eliot’s image of a happy marriage – one like that, within *Daniel Deronda*, between the English heiress Catherine Arrowpoint and the Jewish musician Julius Klesmer, in which the basic requirements of narrative movement have shrunk into a mere oscillation, “raising not only a continual expectation but a continual sense of fulfillment” (240).³⁰⁸ Palpitating life is thus that which needs and supports no narration; as these large novels wind down, they return both their central characters and their readers to a life imagined always as *mere* life – the “unhistoric,” as *Middlemarch* puts it (747); the simple thump-thump of the heart.

³⁰⁷ Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), 170.

³⁰⁸ The *Prelude* of 1805, II.279, in *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, MH Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: Norton, 1979).

Rhythm is for ends, music is for middles: this is the law of Eliot's later fiction. Music is a part of how a character, like Romola, imagines herself to be capable of transcending the everyday. The *work* of the narrative middles, however, is to show that transcendence to be illusory; when Romola and Dorothea return to social life at the close of these novels, this life sounds like a pervasive, constant pulsation. In this context, the strangeness of *Daniel Deronda* is clear, and only more troubling. The novel's ending, of course, lacks the characteristic reduction into mere palpitation – in part because the everyday life that Deronda and Mirah will live is one that they, as Zionists, must build rather than rejoin. But more troublingly, given Eliot's own prior fiction, the novel appears to want Deronda's feeling "beyond the occasion" to be a way of leading to truth rather than the illusion we, as good readers of Eliot, would have expected.

Style and the English gentleman pure

Little wonder, then, that from the beginning of *Deronda's* reception, readers have recognized the chapter in which both Deronda and Mirah respond to music as beginning a new and somehow troubling phase of the novel. The scenes come at almost the precise center of *Deronda*, near the end of its fourth book of eight; this book, menacingly titled "Gwendolen Gets Her Choice," focuses until this point almost entirely on the marriage of the novel's other central character, Gwendolen Harleth, to the aristocrat Henleigh Grandcourt. Immediately before the novel turns to Deronda in the synagogue, Gwendolen has received from Lydia Glasher, Grandcourt's former lover, the Medea-like gift of a necklace, complete with written curse, and has fallen to the floor "shrieking as it seemed with terror, the jewels scattered around her on the floor" (359). A page later, and after an almost shockingly over-written epigraph, complete with archaic diction ("In all ages it hath

been a favourite text that a potent love hath the nature of an isolated fatality...”), we are following Deronda to Frankfurt (360). The transition is a difficult one: “It seemed hard,” John Blackwood wrote to Eliot upon reading the proofs, “to be torn away from [Gwendolen] after she read that ‘horrible’ letter.”³⁰⁹ After the publication of the fourth book, at the end of April of 1876, the public at large seemed to echo Blackwood’s response. The *Athenaeum* found that the “plan of publication in parts” had begun to ruin “the effectiveness of the story, for when the end of the startling scenes of ‘Gwendolen Gets Her Choice’ is reached, the attention of the reader cannot be properly fixed upon the quieter Jewish episode which follows.”³¹⁰ Blackwood himself wrote to his nephew William in the middle of May that Eliot had found the reception of this installment particularly difficult: she “remarked that it was hard upon her that people should be angry with her for not doing what they expected with her characters.”³¹¹

What the fourth book did to its readers, however, was not merely alter their expectations for the book’s characters, but alter the *nature* of their expectant reading. Blackwood wrote to Eliot, “[a]t home we have constant discussions as to what is going to happen and who Deronda is”: his language suggests that the Blackwood family circle had realized that the novel was interested in a fact of identity, rather than in a course of action.³¹² As the *Edinburgh Review* described the effect of the novel’s fourth book, “[t]he reader is more

³⁰⁹ John Blackwood to George Eliot, 30 November 1875, in *George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale UP, 1954-78), 6:195. Hereafter cited as *GEL*.

³¹⁰ *Athenaeum* 2531 (Apr. 29 1876), 593.

³¹¹ John Blackwood to William Blackwood, 18 May 1876, in *GEL* 6:253. Eliot did indeed avoid reading all reviews of *Deronda* during this period, as she affirmed to Alexander Main earlier in the month. See GE to Alexander Main, 20 May 1876, in *GEL* 6: 244.

³¹² John Blackwood to George Eliot, 30 November 1875, in *GEL* 6:196.

quick-witted than Deronda, and sees from the first that he too must have something to do with the mysterious people who are so instantly attracted by him.”³¹³ Later criticisms of the novel, as somehow suspiciously intentional, begin from this very moment: Henry James’s Pulcheria’s claim that the novel displays a “want of tact”; Sidney Colvin’s claim that the novel is written “with too little ease and too much insistence”; F.R. Leavis’s famous association of the novel’s strange “insistence,” its “element of the tacitly *voulu*,” with the novel’s “Jewish part” – these criticisms, centering around the claim that Deronda seems pre-shaped for a destiny, begin from Deronda and Mirah listening to words they cannot understand.³¹⁴

The vocabulary of these statements – tactlessness, over-insistence, the “tacitly *voulu*” – can make them seem uninteresting to us now: worthy of attention only as critical asides. Conceptually, the objections rely upon the wider concern in Victorian criticism with what Richard Stang refers to as “the disappearing author” – that is, the “idea that the novelist should completely efface himself from his creation.”³¹⁵ E.S. Dallas called the principle “the law of unconsciousness” in his *Poetics*, borrowing his dictum from Horace: “the greatest art is to conceal art.”³¹⁶ Yet what makes this strand of writing on *Daniel Deronda* so interesting, however, is precisely what makes them embarrassing: that they are *about* embarrassment – that is, that they rely upon a specifically social, class-based language to make their generic

³¹³ “*Daniel Deronda*,” in *Edinburgh Review* 144:296 (October 1876), 442-470, at 467.

³¹⁴ Henry James, “Daniel Deronda: A Conversation,” in *Literary Criticism I: Essays on Literature: American Writers, English Writers*, 985; Sidney Colvin, “Daniel Deronda,” in *Fortnightly Review* 26:20 (November 1876), 601-616, at 610; Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (New York: New York University Press, 1960), 85. The classic critical treatment of the predestination of Deronda’s identity is Cynthia Chase, “The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-Reading *Daniel Deronda*,” in *PMLA* 93:2 (March 1978), 215-227.

³¹⁵ Stang, *The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-1870* (New York: Columbia UP, 1959), 91.

³¹⁶ Dallas, *Poetics: An Essay on Poetry* (London: Smith, 1852), 67.

arguments. As James's Constantius puts it, Gwendolen "finds Deronda pre-engaged to go to the East and stir up the race-feeling of the Jews": "a wonderfully happy invention" (990). What is striking about this little joke, in which both Daniel's Jewishness and his Zionism are imagined as an inconveniently pre-empting social engagement, is how much the slightly anxious tone of the joke and the social standing from which it speaks are in keeping with Eliot's own.

The most profound comment on this element of Eliot's style – its socially specific irony, and its anxiousness – remains, I believe, Raymond Williams's in *The Country and the City*.³¹⁷ As Williams sees it, Eliot's novels confront what he calls "a contradiction in the form of the novel" (168). The post-Austenian novel, Williams argues, possesses a "technical strategy of unified narrative and analytic tones" (168): that is, the novel's analytic and narrative voice shares, by literary convention, an idiom with its characters. As a result, reader, novelist, and characters all seem to belong to the same group – to a "knowable community" which extends over the entirety of the novel's represented world and its readership as well, but which, as Williams points out, is "as an actual community very precisely selective," allowing for the representation of a very narrow band of social class (166). Naturally the presence of multiple idioms in the novel might not be thought of as a contradiction or a difficulty – Bakhtin certainly would claim the reverse. But Williams's crucial and specific claim is that while Eliot's novels represent a broad range of society – they represent "other kinds of people" (166) than capital-s Society – they are able to represent them only *as other kinds*; that is, as something "'different' from her probable readers," and who must be represented as social and linguistic types. Eliot's difficulty as a novelist is that she attempts to represent social breadth while at the same time preserving a

³¹⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973).

relation to “what seems a dominant image of a particular kind of reader” (172). That reader, Williams, notes, is imagined to rely on the tone of “good society” – one “floated on gossamer wings of light irony,” as *The Mill on the Floss* puts it (quoted in Williams, 171). From within that irony, the reality of other social kinds must necessarily appear as *emphasis* – a nice term that refers both to the too-heavy tread of a laborer at a tea party *and* the too-heavy hand with which a novelist might insert a laborer into a tea party. This self-enforcing problem of emphasis, Williams claims, produces the self-defeating defensiveness with which Eliot typically points her reader to the existence of classes other than “society”: for Eliot, there can be no outside to the stylistic bond between narrator and reader.

Williams is quite right to point out that *Daniel Deronda* is less invested in a range of social class than Eliot’s earlier fiction: as Deirdre David notes, both the rural working class and the urban professional class of Eliot’s earlier fiction have largely disappeared in *Deronda* or become, more complicatedly, English Jews.³¹⁸ Yet I would suggest that *Deronda* is also where Eliot subjects the social limitations of her own ironic style to a wide-ranging critique, and offers in music a figure for how the closures of irony might be productively disrupted.

What is it like to be English in *Daniel Deronda*? Certainly there can be no unmediated attachment, in this novel, to an England understood as something made up of local, significant particulars. Consider the novel’s famous plea precisely for the value of the local – for the “prejudice in favour of milk”:

A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early

³¹⁸ David, *Fictions of Resolution in Three Victorian Novels* (New York: Columbia UP, 1981).

home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge...

At five years old, mortals are not prepared to be citizens of the world, to be stimulated by abstract nouns, to soar above preference into impartiality; and that prejudice in favour of milk with which we blindly begin, is a type of the way body and soul must get nourished at least for a time. (22)

It is not simply that attachment to the local is imagined here chiefly as a propaedeutic, “at least for a time,” to a properly cosmopolitan existence rather than as an aim in itself; after all, in his *Duties of Man* Mazzini understood his conventionally rooted Italian nationalism to be perfectly compatible with a pan-European humanism.³¹⁹ Rather, consider that the passage’s language is resolutely cosmopolitan or post-local in its basic perspective. There can be no primary attachment to the exemplary particular here – “milk,” English strawberries and cream – because this passage imagines the appeal of the local not as a familiar sameness (this place is like me, I belong here) but only as a “familiar unmistakable difference.” A “familiar difference” – family or kinship *as* a difference, yes, but also the familiar feeling *of* difference: I know I belong here because this place – when I come back to it – *feels different* to me. The local particular, in other words, is a byproduct of the general; to feel a sense of belonging necessitates first a generalized experience in the world.

Englishness is not a set of physical particulars, then, but rather a set of behaviors. To ask a question about the behaviors of the English in this novel is, as David notes, necessarily to ask it about the English gentleman; fortunately, about the identification of this figure the novel has a straightforward answer: “The strong point of the English gentleman pure is the easy style of his figure and clothing; he objects to marked ins and outs of his

³¹⁹ See Stefano Recchia and Nadia Urbinati, “Giuseppe Mazzini’s International Political Thought,” in *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations: Giuseppe Mazzini’s Writings on Democracy, Nation Building, and International Relations*, ed. Recchia and Urbinati (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009).

costume, and he also objects to looking inspired” (102). Style is a name here – as in D.A. Miller on Austen – for the work of “*dematerializing* the voice that speaks it.”³²⁰ If, as Miller argues, Austen’s style refuses all particularity, above all that of the personal pronouns, in order to achieve the condition of being tied to no one, so too the gentleman aims at an invisibility of self, the containment of intention: nothing in the Englishman’s “costume” is distinct enough from its surroundings to appear inspired by any particular purpose. That the gentleman can be known by his *style*, and that this style consists of an ease, is, by Eliot’s time, a rather conventional observation.³²¹ Yet Eliot’s sentence emphasizes the tension between the looseness of the Englishman’s dress and the purity it signals (would one judge a not-quite-loose-enough costume to be impure?), a conceptual snag that is not so much smoothed over as given formal equivalent in the slightly *off* or at least socially determined placement of purity itself in the sentence: “the English gentleman pure,” as if the English code had been poorly translated out of an imagined French.

This note on the style of the gentleman is contained within Eliot’s description of the social scene at the Brackenshaw Archery Club (“an institution framed with good taste,” 101) – the novel’s first large social gathering set in England. The passage is itself an exercise in an easy style that is slightly uncharacteristic of Eliot, one more remarkable for what it is not than for what it is. Interestingly, immediately before this passage, Eliot hails her readers for the only time in her entire novelistic career as “We English,” raising to consciousness precisely the novel’s own involvement in the stylistic routines of the gentleman:

³²⁰ Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 6-7.

³²¹ See, for example, William Hazlitt’s “On the Look of a Gentleman,” which begins both by rooting the style in “ease, grace, [and] dignity” before suggesting self-possession as the principle underlying all three. “On the Look of Gentleman,” in *London Magazine* 3:13 (Jan 1821), 39-45. For a discussion of these ideas that brings them forward into the later Victorian period, particularly with an eye on the political importance of the figure of the gentleman, see Shirley Robin Letwin, *The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1982).

Fancy an assemblage where the men had all that ordinary stamp of the well-bred Englishman, watching the entrance of Herr Klesmer – his mane of hair floating backward in massive inconsistency with the chimney-pot hat, which had the look of having been put on for a joke above his pronounced but well-modelled features and powerful clear-shaven mouth and chin; his tall thin figure clad in a way which, not being strictly English, was all the worse for its apparent emphasis of intention. Draped in a loose garment with a Florentine *berretta* on his head, he would have been fit to stand by the side of Leonardo da Vinci; but how when he presented himself in trousers which were not what English feeling demanded about the knees? (102-3)

This is Englishness as what Collette Guillaumin would call an altero-referential category – one that “recognizes only others and not itself.”³²² Englishness appears in this passage only when it is absent, for in a sense Englishness itself consists of an absence of oneself to one’s way of life: to be a well-bred Englishman is to lack “apparent emphasis of intention” – that is, to have so well wedded intention to achieved fact that intention itself disappears: thus, to escape notice, to be able to say that one merely *happens* to be wearing this or that shirt, this or that hat. For this reason, the first sight of Grandcourt himself – “a born gentleman,” as the talk of the village has it, and one “not impeached with foreignness” (442) – inspires in Gwendolen the thought ““He is not ridiculous”” (112). Englishness cannot be said to be exemplified in this passage or indeed in any particular – it lies precisely nowhere – but only by the movement of the passage’s style itself: an activity of near-Austenian irony, strongest where the collective entity of Englishness is referred to, that mocks itself – thereby implicating us – precisely where it mocks others: thus the joking, nearly Wodehousean

³²² “Specific characteristics of racist ideology,” trans. Andrew Rothwell and Max Silverman, in *Racism, sexism, power and ideology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 52.

excess of “what English feeling demanded about the knees” (and *you* know all about that, don’t you?), or the fancy rhetorical flourish of being commanded to fancy a fancy party.

This scene – in which a foreign musician interrupts an English setting, against whose presence Englishness is defined as both what “we” are and what we ironically notice – returns to and revises a structure from much earlier in Eliot’s career, in her essay “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists.” In this case, however, it is not the Englishness of musicians that is at stake, exactly; rather the Englishness of musicians is part of a larger theory of literary genre. The novel under discussion is entitled *The Enigma*:

Here, and throughout the story, we see that confusion of purpose which is so characteristic of silly novels written by women. It is a story of quite modern drawing-room society – a society in which polkas are played and Puseyism discussed; yet we have characters, and incidents, and traits of manner introduced, which are mere shreds from the most heterogeneous romances. We have a blind Irish harper “relic of the picturesque bards of yore,” startling us at a Sunday-school festival of tea and cake in an English village; we have a crazy gipsy, in a scarlet cloak, singing snatches of romantic song...³²³

Twenty years separate the Sunday-school festival of tea and cake from a day of archery at Brackenshaw Hall, yet it is not difficult to suppose that her earlier discussion of the “oracular” species of silly novel would have been much on Eliot’s mind when writing her own prophetically involved *Daniel Deronda*. Both passages are about the insertion into an English – i.e., *our* – realist literary space something that does not belong there: foreign musicians. In a way that seems suspiciously obvious, the Eliot of “Silly Novels” produces

³²³ In *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia UP, 1963), 314. Originally published in the *Westminster Review* LXVI (1856).

our recognition of our own society in the one clause of the passage that does not use the plural first-person pronoun: our society is defined by its unmusicality, or rather by the not-quite-music of the music that is played there. I recognize my own “quite modern drawing-room society” through the humor of alliteration (“*polkas are played and Puseyism...*”), all this attention to the sound of the plosive that reaches a comic climax in Puseyism, and then suddenly dissipates into what really happens in drawing rooms: discussion. The verbal humor doubles and provokes the good-natured chuckle of the reader recognizing himself—the very firmness of that self-recognition depending upon that chuckle: *Yes, I say, that is me, that which I both see and am.*

What I am arguing, then, is that when it comes to thinking through the nature of Englishness, Eliot at the beginning of her career as at the end defines (or, better, performs) the “we” of nationhood as a free-floating, disclaimable ironic self-regard, one that is specifically contrasted to the embarrassingly obvious intentionality of the musician. Benedict Anderson famously ascribes the novel’s ability to create an imagined community to a very particular mode of reading, in which “the clumsiness and literary naivety of the text confirm the unselfconscious ‘sincerity’” of our identification with its first-person plural.³²⁴ The affect which Anderson associates with this textual sincerity is, importantly, a strong one — anger: I read the nationalist novel, and its anger becomes my own. Here, however, we are quite certainly dealing with a different kind of textual attachment, one proper to what Anderson terms the “jocular-sophisticated” voice, typical of the “fiction of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe” (32). In reading Eliot on Englishness, we respond not by adopting the text’s anger, but by being absorbed into its self-distanced irony. To identify our

³²⁴ *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 1991), 32.

society as one in “which polkas are played and Puseyism discussed” is thus to create an imagined community not of naively sincere participants, but rather of participant-observers who take up a particular stance towards the society they recognize as their own. An Irish harper and a singing gipsy, lacking that affably self-aware chuckle that both recognizes and creates the “modern drawing-room,” cannot but appear out of place in it. But, on the other hand, *I* the reader am also a bit out of place; I don’t exactly belong in my own polka-filled drawing room either—rather, I simply recognize it as *what belongs*, as what is popular, as *the way it is*: “In 1845 the polka was danced at Calcutta at a ball given by the governor-general in honor of Queen Victoria. It attained extraordinary popularity, and clothes, hats, streets and even puddings were named after it...”³²⁵

Three things have changed in twenty years between “Silly Novels” and *Daniel Deronda* (or in the ten years between the date of the essay’s publication and the 1865 Brackenshaw Archery Meeting). The first is that the polka is perhaps no longer *quite* in fashion: to the consternation of her mother and her aunt, Gwendolen Harleth declares that she “shall not waltz or polk with any one” (117) – a minor detail that only suggests further how closely these scenes are linked.

The second is that in *Daniel Deronda*, ironic detachment from one’s own social practices has come to seem a far more widely ramified, and more troubling, affair. At its

³²⁵ Gracian Černušák, Andrew Lamb, and John Tyrrell, “Polka,” in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Two recent books make closely related arguments their focus: for a treatment of Romanticism along these lines, see Yoon Sun Lee, *Nationalism and Irony: Burke, Scott, Carlyle* (Oxford: Oxford UP 2004); for a related discussion of nineteenth-century developments, see James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005). The theoretical framework for this argument is in part indebted to Homi Bhabha’s discussion of the nation as the “symptom of an ethnography of the ‘contemporary’ within modern culture”; see “DissemiNation: Time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 211. Yet it seems to me that in some ways the argument is already sketched out in Roland Barthes’s association of irony with a static closure, a textual mastering, of the cultural-referential code – see *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

most benign, this detachment takes the form of Sir Hugo Mallinger's cosmopolitanism. When Mallinger asks Deronda whether he wishes "to be an Englishman to the backbone," Deronda signals that he has doubts; he wishes rather "to understand other points of view" (183). Yet in terms of Sir Hugo's Whig politics – his "liberal-menagerie point of view," as the narrator puts it (321) – Deronda's desires are *precisely* English. When Sir Hugo sends Deronda off for "the education of an English gentleman," it is in the name of a politically valuable transcendence of the particular: as he puts it, "I don't go against our university system: we want a little disinterested culture to make head against cotton and capital" (177).

In the larger context of the Wessex gentry, however, the ethic of disinterest and self-detachment begins to look pathological – particularly as embodied in Grandcourt and Gwendolen. Eliot's characterization of the rather terrifying Grandcourt is in an explicitly political register, borrowing language and concepts freely from later nineteenth-century British critiques of classical liberalism, particularly those, like T.H. Green's, inspired by Hegel.³²⁶ Grandcourt is a portrait of what Eliot calls in an epigraph "fastidious egoism" (278), locked into a particular moment of Hegel's critical account of the liberal right to do and be as one pleases: he is caught up in what Hegel calls the negative freedom of the will that "abstracts from everything" and "flees from every content as a limitation."³²⁷ Thereby robbed of any relation of identity to its own desires, this form of will, Hegel says, resents the impingements of desires upon itself and adopts a pose of "arbitrariness" – that is, "the will as *contradiction*" (47). Thus, on the verge of proposing to Gwendolen, Grandcourt finds

³²⁶ See John Gray, *Liberalism*, second ed. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995), 26-36. For a discussion of *Deronda* – particularly the character of Deronda himself – along these lines, see Mark M. Freed, "Problems of Community and Freedom in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*," in *Journal of the Midwest MLA* 38:2 (Fall 2005), 59-77.

³²⁷ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood and trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 38.

himself holding back for precisely *no cause*: “to desist then, when all expectation was to the contrary, became another gratification of mere will, sublimely independent of definite motive” (150). As Hegel writes, the will as a “pure thinking of oneself” dissolves “every limitation, every content, whether present immediately through nature, through needs, desires, and drives, or given and determined in some other way” (37). To be free – to be “sublimely independent” – is of necessity to do nothing at all; to be mired in a “do-nothing absolutism” (668).

Gwendolen, meanwhile, is sometimes read as the too-active opposite for the passive Grandcourt.³²⁸ Yet her insistently expressed and seemingly direct rule for action – “to do what pleases me,” as she puts it to Rex Gascoigne (69) – is in fact another form of the will as contradiction: “I do what is unlikely,” she adds, clarifying that to do what one likes is a way of not being like other girls, who “never do what they like” (69). Where she most claims a loyalty to impulse, in other words, Gwendolen is in fact most mediated: thus the novel’s interest in Rex’s logical game, one that could have been borrowed from Lewis Carroll:

“Ah, there you tell me a secret. When once I knew what people in general would be likely to do, I should know you would do the opposite. So you would have come round to a likelihood of your own sort. I shall be able to calculate on you. You couldn’t surprise me.”

“Yes, I could. I should turn round and do what was likely to people in general,” said Gwendolen, with a musical laugh.

“You see you can’t escape some sort of likelihood. And contradictoriness makes the strongest likelihood of all.” (69)

³²⁸ See, for example, Stefanie Markovits’s essay “George Eliot’s Problem with Action,” in *SEL* 41:4, *The Nineteenth Century* (Autumn 2001), 785-803, at 796.

Gwendolen's contradictoriness may be directed towards defeating the expectation of others, rather than freeing herself from her own desires, but it nonetheless robs her of the ability to act coherently as surely as Grandcourt's egoism.

Thus she seems prone to an oscillation between passivity and seizure to which the novel frequently recurs; perhaps the most compressed version of this oscillation is the moment in which Gwendolen loses her "gold-handled whip" while speaking to Grandcourt in private:

"Ha! my whip!" said Gwendolen, in a little scream of distress. She had let it go – what could be more natural in a slight agitation? – and – but this seemed less natural in a gold-handled whip which had been left altogether by itself – it had gone with some force over the immediate shrubs, and had lodged itself in the branches of an azalea half-way down the knoll. (136)

The moment could have read as slapstick comedy, immediately following as it does Grandcourt's utterly banal love-talk – "You do care, then..." (136). By "losing" her whip, Gwendolen has interrupted his tiresome inanity and delayed a choice she does not want to make; Harpo Marx might have done the same. Yet Eliot's language here does not suggest a personality that has mastered its impulses and subordinated them to a conscious strategy; nor does it, like Harpo's blank smile, imply one that has somehow cannily capitalized upon its own involuntary acts, following the rule of "Move, then think," as Wayne Koestenbaum puts it.³²⁹ Eliot's rather tortured sentence, in fact, less represents a personality than enacts the nightmarish exposure of one – everything that the style of the gentleman is meant to avoid. By offering first one explanation within em-dashes whose question mark reads like free indirect discourse, like the excuse Gwendolen might have offered if pressed, and then

³²⁹ Koestenbaum, *The Anatomy of Harpo Marx* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 2012), 11.

supplanting it with another, skeptically omniscient one, the sentence sequentially reads through Gwendolen and delivers her up to interpretation – not without considerable cost to its own elegance (“and – but”; “itself – it”). And this scene performs this same gesture of sacrificing privacy to public meaning on a far larger scale, insistently prefiguring in Gwendolen’s lost whip her married subjugation to a man who is, as village wisdom has it, “more whip” (354), and whose psychological attacks on her will often be represented in surprisingly physical language. In Gwendolen’s loss of her whip, abstraction from intention, far from producing a protecting anonymity, instead twice causes an exposure to mechanisms of interpretation operating far above the level of the individual. For all these reasons, then, the national style of the English gentleman – detachment from one’s own everyday desires and actions – seems, in *Daniel Deronda*, prone to transmute into damaging forms of self-alienation: in Gwendolen and in Grandcourt, the desire to occlude intention reaches a deadening or self-defeating excess.

The third shift that has occurred between “Silly Novels” and this novel, accordingly, is that in the person of Julius Klesmer *Deronda* offers a positive account of intention; specifically, the novel deploys *readable* intention, uncontained by the enclosure of style, as one way in which realist representation might accommodate the realities of a multi-national world. Recall that what was silly about *The Enigma* was that it transgressed boundaries that are at once those of realist style and national content: an Irish harper at an English Sunday-school festival belongs somewhere else in two senses – an Ireland of the past (one presumes), and also the genre of the romance. This break in the surface of the form – this collapse of easy style – is what allows us to *see through* the surface of the novel and access the level of misguided artistic intention, i.e. what gives Eliot the means to diagnose *The Enigma* with “that confusion of purpose which is so characteristic of silly novels written by women.”

But Klesmer, of course, *knows* that he is out of place in society; in him the visibility of intention acquires a meaning beyond that of a stylistic mistake. When he berates Gwendolen for being excessively tied to the “drawing-room *standpunkt*” (256), then, it is possible to also hear Eliot’s rebuke to herself, a suggestion that her own earlier thoughts on what was permissible in the representation of “quite modern drawing room society” might have had a certain provinciality to them. On the one hand, Klesmer lives a life filled “with the light of congruous, devoted purpose” (240) that could not be more different from the self-alienation of Grandcourt and Gwendolen, or the self-abstraction of the gentleman – and if, as Catherine Arrowpoint says to her mother, “it was not quite *en règle* to bring one so far out of our own set” into the world of archery meets, Klesmer at least has the conventional excuse of the Romantic artist: “Genius itself is not *en règle*, it comes into the world to make new rules” (104). Yet more interestingly, this purposeful enthusiasm beyond style is not something that – as *Middlemarch* does – *Daniel Deronda* reserves to “certain long-haired German artists” (*Middlemarch* 169), but a privilege that it claims as its own. For Klesmer himself – a Jewish musician named Klesmer! – might be said to embody the novel’s own willingness to break realist style, to make its intentions readable. When Leavis comments on “how good Eliot’s names are” in *The Great Tradition* (118), he cannot have been thinking of Klesmer – for it is precisely here, around a figure of music, that Eliot’s novel shows its commitment not to the tacitly but the quite obviously *voulu*.

“The entranced whole”: Eliot’s response to Wagnerian aesthetics

As *Daniel Deronda* was completing its initial serialized print run in the fall of 1876, Friedrich Nietzsche was also considering the allure of what he called “the idea of the beyond

in art.”³³⁰ He, too, would think of that “beyond” in terms of Palestrina: Palestrina, Nietzsche claimed, was the “[r]eligious origin of modern music” (146). In the immediate aftermath of the first Bayreuth festival, in August 1876, Nietzsche retreated to Italy and began work on *Human, All Too Human* – a book of aphorisms, eventually dedicated to Voltaire, in which Nietzsche attacks modern music as a form of theatricalized reaction, in which “the feeling that has been forced out of the religious sphere by enlightenment throws itself into art” (116). He perceives in Wagner – nowhere named in the published version of the work, but explicitly targeted in the drafts – the latest, and worst, attempt to revive the “old feeling” of religion, and specifically the Catholic Church’s theatrical effects: “A church trembling with deeply resounding tones; the... calls of a priestly troops that transmits its excited tension involuntarily to the congregation” (98). What Palestrina teaches Wagner is a musical-theatrical language which could link “the newly awakened... inner spirit” to a “deeply religious change in mood”: a forcible connection of inner feeling to outer display that Nietzsche renders, antithetically, as a “ringing out of the most inwardly aroused disposition” (146).

I juxtapose Nietzsche with Eliot here, on the one hand, to emphasize their shared concern with, and their shared vocabulary for, music’s apparent promise to ground modern European culture in a new civic experience of art – a promise made most spectacularly, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, by Richard Wagner. Both Nietzsche and Eliot see in that promise of a ground “the effect of an Allegri’s *Miserere* or a Palestrina’s *Magnificat*.” Yet the juxtaposition also suggests the difference in Nietzsche’s and Eliot’s responses to what one might *do* with the knowledge that one’s responses are “beyond the occasion.” As

³³⁰ *Human, All Too Human*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 1995), 147. *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* was published in 1878; in his dedication of the book Nietzsche states that the book was written in the winter of 1876-7.

Paul Franco has recently argued, Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human* rejects Wagner's claim that art could "take over from religion the function of grounding, unifying, and inspiring a people."³³¹ For Nietzsche, the cultural grounding that art claimed to perform was essentially illusory: as Nietzsche puts it, "[h]unger does not prove that the food that would sate it *exists*" (100); to point out Wagner's connection to Palestrina was thus a way of revealing Wagner's commitment to "the religious and philosophical errors of humanity" (147). Nietzsche's response to Bayreuth was an attempt to stop being hungry – to put an end to the vestiges of metaphysical need for the beyond by writing a book for modern, free spirits that would convince us to abandon the mistakes of artists, just as we had abandoned the errors of religion. As part of this, *Human, All Too Human* articulates a cosmopolitan demand that "we should simply present ourselves fearlessly as *good Europeans*" – rejecting an "artificial nationalism" based on art just as we would the "artificial Catholicism" of the Counter-Reformation (257, emphasis original). Nietzsche's rejection of Wagner culminates in an acknowledgment of the inevitability of "a weakening and finally a destruction of nations"; the only response for free spirits is to "work for the melting together of nations" (257).

Eliot, like Nietzsche, perceives the dangers of a culture grounded on musical listening. Yet her response to Wagner suggests a slightly different diagnosis of the disease: for Eliot, the danger of Wagnerian art lay not in its re-awakening of a hunger for the beyond, but rather in its purported *satisfaction* of that hunger; her response to Wagner thus involved not a thorough-going Europeanism but instead a tentative nationalism.

Nicholas Dames and Ruth Solie, among others, have recently articulated the sustained relationship Eliot had with Wagner over the two decades between her encounter with Liszt during a visit to Weimar in 1854 – a meeting that prompted both Eliot's

³³¹ Franco, *Nietzsche's Enlightenment: The Free-Spirit Trilogy of the Middle Period* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011), 54.

translation, for the *Leader*, of Liszt's pro-Wagnerian essay "The Romantic School of Music" and Eliot's own essay "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar."³³² In the twentieth century, and indeed in the twenty-first, Wagner's operas have been omnipresent, but as Thomas S. Grey points out in his *Wagner's Musical Prose*, his theories "succumbed to a state of near-total scholarly disregard."³³³ For Eliot and George Henry Lewes, the case was almost the reverse: as Solie writes, both Eliot and George Henry Lewes were consistently sympathetic to "the [aesthetic] agenda involved" in Wagner's theoretical writings, but found that "after repeated attempts they simply could not like the music" of his operas (164). Lewes himself expressed their distaste in a letter from 1872, written from Homburg as Eliot was just beginning to gather material for *Daniel Deronda*: Wagner's music, he wrote, "remains a language we do not understand."³³⁴

This is an intriguingly specific comment. The heart of Wagner's theory of music drama lay in an attempt to grant music *content*, and to enforce its understanding on listeners. As Jean-Luc Nancy polemically but not inaccurately puts it, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* is the "specific perversion" of a music aesthetics which found in music – as I discuss in the introduction to this dissertation – both a meaningless and a persuasive art, and which could therefore imagine music's social role as one tending towards the sharing of private experience. As Nancy puts it, this aesthetics relies upon "an insurmountable and necessary –

³³² See Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), and Solie, "Tadpole Pleasures": *Daniel Deronda* as Music Historiography," in *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2004), 153-186.

³³³ Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), xi.

³³⁴ Quoted in Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968), 457.

even desirable – *distance* between sound and sense” -- a distance that Wagner’s musical drama was created to eliminate.³³⁵

As Wagner saw it, the essential disease afflicting both 19th-century opera and 19th – century culture was an empty theatricality, a preponderance of show over meaning. Wagner’s anti-Semitic tract “Judaism in Music,” published under the name “K. Freigedank” in 1850, attacked what he termed the “Judaizing” (the *Verjüdung*, a word Wagner likely coined and which the Nazis made famous) of modern culture as both symbol and cause of modernity’s emptiness.³³⁶ The essay deploys a widely familiar set of tropes (Theodor Adorno writes, with good cause, that “Wagner’s anti-Semitism assembles all the ingredients of subsequent varieties”), but central to Wagner’s arguments is the claim that the Jew, as a stranger to European languages, is necessarily exterior to authentic meaning.³³⁷ A Jew, Wagner writes, has always lived “outside the pale” of European national communities; because language is the work “of an historical community,” the Jew encounters “the language of the nation in whose midst he dwells... as an alien.” When the Jew speaks German or Italian, he speaks them “merely as learnt, not as mother tongues” (84). The full richness of intention and association cannot be heard in language “as learnt”; therefore, we – and indeed it is always “we” in this essay – hear the speech of Jews first and foremost as *sound*, “a creaking, squeaking, buzzing snuffle,” rather than as expressed meaning. In listening to Jewish speech, “our attention dwells involuntarily on its repulsive *how*, rather than on any meaning of its intrinsic *what*” (85, emphasis original).

³³⁵ *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham UP, 2007), 55 and 58.

³³⁶ Richard Wagner, “Judaism in Music,” in *Judaism in Music and Other Essays*, trans. W. Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

³³⁷ *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London and New York: Verso, 1981), 16.

The same emptiness pervaded the mid-century musical scene, as Wagner saw it, in the figures of Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer. Wagner contrasted Mendelssohn to Beethoven, who created a form of musical speech that “can be spoken only by a whole, entire, warm-breathed human being”; his works are thus “the clearest, certainest expression of an unsayable content” (95-6). Mendelssohn, in contrast, lacked roots in language and thus preferred Bach to Beethoven: Bach’s contrapuntal style submerges “its *What*” – its “purely human expression” – within a formalistic process of “shaping out the *How*.” Thus Mendelssohn could only create ersatz “shadow-forms” (96) that never touch the “deep and stalwart feelings of the human heart” (94), but instead only attempt to overawe the audience with effects. Such music, in one of Wagner’s most influential formulations, aims to produce “effect without cause.”³³⁸

In his 1852 *Opera and Drama*, Wagner offered his operas as a contrast to such empty forms: in the Wagnerian work, dramatic content would no longer serve as a mere means to produce arias, and the attention of the audience would be focused on an inner, dramatic meaning rather than exterior spectacle. Wagner’s entire artistic project was one of making music speak. As Thomas S. Grey argues, by the middle of the nineteenth century a pivotal turn was taking place against earlier Romantic portrayals of music as ideally open-ended: the “yearnings of most musicians and audiences... seemed to be more and more oriented to ‘content,’ a category construed in predominantly literary or ‘material’ terms” (8). If art music

³³⁸ The phrase is proverbial in German – “*keine Wirkung ohne Ursache*” (i.e. “where there’s smoke, there’s fire”) – but it is Wagner’s application of it to Meyerbeer in *Opera and Drama* that gave the phrase its importance in the back-and-forth between modernism and mass culture (see particularly 94-95). Eliot herself echoes it in her “Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar,” perhaps picking up on her own earlier translation of Liszt on “The Romantic School of Music,” writing of Meyerbeer as “a climax of spectacle, situation, and orchestral effects” without reference to “human character” (101). Perhaps the most obvious echo of Wagner’s phrase in modernist criticism is Clement Greenberg’s statement in “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” that “[w]here Picasso paints *cause*, Repin paints *effect*.” In *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon, 1961), 15.

could actually achieve the presentation of “material” content, it could find a way to stabilize the autonomous development of compositional technique, which to Eduard Hanslick in 1854 seemed every bit as bewildering as capitalist economic change appeared to Marx and Engels in 1848: “There is no art which wears out so many forms so quickly as music. Modulations, cadences, intervallic and harmonic progressions all in this manner go stale in fifty, nay, thirty years, so that the gifted composer can no longer make use of them.”³³⁹ The particular – and immense – appeal of Wagner’s writings, despite their sometimes absurdly speculative prose, was to join what was in a sense a purely *technical* matter of musical meaning to his anti-Semitic account of modernity: as Grey writes, Wagner promised that by adopting a new style, based around content, music could recover its traditional role at the center of culture in general (12).

This was precisely the intended effect of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: in it, poetry and music both would enter into a marriage in which each supported the other; the result, a united and total expressivity, would “redeem” both arts (*Opera and Drama*, 313). Wagner found that, apprehended on its own, each individual art ran the risk of losing any relation to the realization of an object and thus evaporating into a mere form. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe writes, the “dialectical confrontation of the individual arts in the ‘total work of art’ is consequently a means of containing excess and safeguarding meaning.”³⁴⁰ In the total work of art, music and speech would both originate with a single poetic aim: the music of Wagnerian opera communicates something about the text; the text, too, is understood with respect to the music; thus “drama” – Wagner’s name for that which is communicated in this

³³⁹ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), 35.

³⁴⁰ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta: Figures of Wagner*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 12.

circular relationship – would prevent open-ended interpretation and guide the audience “in the direction of [the composer’s] Aim” (340). The resulting total work is a closed system, and would therefore do precisely what Mendelssohn’s mere effects never could: deliver a message. The Wagnerian character would “speak in such a way as to *determine* the emotions roused in us” (340, emphasis original); Wagner’s operas would thus, in the tradition of Beethoven, say the unsayable – and Wagner’s later essay on Beethoven would expressly make this genealogical claim, seeing the choral outburst at the close of Beethoven’s Ninth as the herald of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.³⁴¹ As a result, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* would produce an audience united in its response: our otherwise “vaguely roused” emotions, Wagner writes, could be “determined by their being given a fixed point round which they may gather as human Fellow-feeling” (340) – precisely the fellow-feeling that the empty forms of Mendelssohn could never produce.

In the 1850s, Eliot had found much to admire about Wagner’s cultural criticism: her essay “Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar” freely translates from Liszt’s statements on Wagner, repeating almost verbatim Wagner’s polemical attacks on the bad operas of Meyerbeer as made up of mere “spectacle... and orchestral effects.”³⁴² Eliot further approved of Wagner’s attempt to create a true operatic organism, a drama that “grows up like a palm”

³⁴¹ See Richard Wagner, “Beethoven,” trans. W. Ashton Ellis, in *Actors and Singers* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), especially 102ff. Wagner had already begun to develop this theme in *The Artwork of the Future*. Carl Dahlhaus discusses this aspect of Wagner’s music historiography in his “The Twofold Truth in Wagner’s Aesthetics,” in *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980).

³⁴² George Eliot, “Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar,” in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia UP, 1963), 101. Eliot had already translated Liszt’s “The Romantic School of Music” for the *Leader* in 1854.

(102). But where Eliot was far more skeptical was in considering Wagner's attempt to ground artistic unity in a stably expressive meaning:

So far as music is an art, one would think that the same rule applied to musicians as to other artists. Now, the greatest painters and sculptors have surely not been those who have been inspired through their intellect, who have first thought and then chosen a plastic symbol for their thought; rather, the symbol rushes in on their imagination before their slower reflection has seized any abstract idea embodied in it. Nay, perhaps the artist himself *never* seizes that idea, but his picture or his statue stands there an immortal symbol nevertheless. (103-4)

Eliot's objection to Wagner closely resembles Nancy's: in reversing the relation between the "plastic symbol" and idea, Wagner has in a sense technologized romantic aesthetics. One who listens to Wagner can never simply listen, for the *Gesamtkunstwerk* always communicates something beyond what it says; as Carl Dahlhaus writes, in Wagner "every note has meaning."³⁴³ But as Eliot perceives, this meaning is ultimately not something that the work *conveys*. Rather, the "meaning" of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a factor solely in what the audience understands to have been the work's production: "the composer" of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, "in whom other mental elements outweigh his musical power, will be preoccupied with the idea, the *meaning* he has to convey" (104).

³⁴³ This is Dahlhaus's persuasive gloss on the much-debated Wagnerian principle of "endless melody," which Dahlhaus implies would be better understood as "endless eloquence": a theory of composition which radically discards every phrase that could be read as conventional. "Issues in Composition," in *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 56.

Eliot's fuller response to the political implications of Wagnerian aesthetics would wait, I would suggest, until her rarely read 1870 poem "The Legend of Jubal."³⁴⁴ The poem – an extended riff on Genesis's brief mention of Jubal, the son of Lamech, as "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ" – tells the story of the invention of music and ends, rather brutally, with Jubal being beaten to death by his own people (and first listeners).³⁴⁵ This strange narrative has tended to be read in quite different critical contexts. Scholars interested in Eliot's thinking on music have tended to underplay the poem's ending, instead finding in its first half a version of Herbert Spencer's claim that music worked as an extension of speech, an unproblematic force for social unification; as Delia da Sousa Correa puts it, Jubal's singing "is linked to the development of language and with the expansion of sympathy."³⁴⁶ On the other hand, the poem has been effectively read by those concerned with Eliot's portrait of the writer as a particularly bleak "allegory of the artist's life," as Rosemarie Bodenheimer puts it, doomed to "the separation of the performing body from the impersonal dissemination of the work."³⁴⁷ Both interpretations have their appeal, but neither is able to satisfactorily join the poem's two halves – to explain how a successful

³⁴⁴ *The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems* (Boston: Osgood, 1874). A slightly different version of the work was first published in *Macmillan's* in May of 1870.

³⁴⁵ The Biblical outlines that Eliot elaborates here are exceedingly spare, a mere listing of social roles:
 And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.
 And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle.
 And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.
 And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. (Genesis 4: 19-22, KJV)

³⁴⁶ *George Eliot, Music and Victorian Culture* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 7. See also Ruth Solie, "The Legend of Jubal' and Victorian Musicality," in *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry*, ed. Phyllis Weliver (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2005), 107-131, especially 117-118.

³⁴⁷ Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "Ambition and Its Audiences: George Eliot's Performing Figures," in *Victorian Studies* 34: 1 (Autumn, 1990), 7-33, at 25.

musical performance results in the destruction of a community, or why Eliot should have chosen to give Jubal something closer to Orpheus's fate. I would like to suggest here that "The Legend of Jubal" is an attempt to take Wagnerian aesthetics literally: to imagine music as able to perform a definite and intended "fellow-feeling" to its audience.

In the poem's central scene, Jubal appears in the midst of his society and performs the world's first music. Eliot constructs the physical space of this concert carefully: all the descendants of Cain are gathered together in a "playful ring" of post-prandial ease, having eaten their fill of "juicy fruits," centered on Jubal's brother Jabal (in Genesis, "the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle"). We are told twice that this circle is made up of individuals of "various ages" and generations, but that even the oldest among them – Cain, who is prone to brood – is kept from falling into lonely reverie by a sort of background pastoral hum, a "pretty hubbub" of communal activities: "Tricks, prattles, nods ... / ... barks, bleats, and laughs" (386 and 397). All this pleasant noise, this "health-bred merriment" goes "through the generations circling... / Leaving none sad" (390-392).

In its emphasis on the constitution of community out of the "pretty hubbub" of sound, Eliot's depiction of society in its golden age hews closely to Herbert Spencer's discussion of the sound of the voice in his influential 1857 essay "The Origin and Function of Music."³⁴⁸ As Spencer sees it, the "vocal modifications" we make to our speech simultaneously signal and teach emotion; though each of us has been making such modifications "spontaneously" since infancy, hearing *others* make such sounds reinforces our "established association of ideas between such sound and the feeling which caused it." Indeed, when we hear another's voice raised in anger we "have a certain degree of it aroused in ourselves" (400). Music, for Spencer, is simply a development of these natural "vocal

³⁴⁸ In *Fraser's Magazine* 56 (October 1857), 396-409.

modifications” present in every use of language; it moves us because it is “nothing more than the slightly exaggerated emotional speech natural to [us], which [has grown] by frequent use into an organized form” (404). Thus, by listening to music, we continue the process of mutual modification and sympathetic listening that we begin as infants: music, for Spencer, is like language, only more so: with a telos towards harmony.

In “The Legend of Jubal,” however, music is in fact destructive of the ideal society of sound because it replaces mutual modification with one-way communication. Immediately before Jubal enters the scene, history rears its head within the “health-bred merriment” of this perfect society, waiting to create form out of substance:

Yet with health’s nectar some strange thirst was blent,
The fateful growth, the unnamed discontent,
The inward shaping toward some unborn power,
Some deeper-breathing act, the being’s flower. (404-407)

This is a rather rhapsodically dialectical formulation: a lack lurks within health, but one which is also an “inward shaping” towards development. The society of conversation proves insufficient to what the “soul had... to tell” at this moment – and at this point Jubal arrives with his lyre: the birth of music as the birth of romanticism. His first action is worthy of the Enclosure Acts; with his arrival, he transforms what had been his society’s “common space” (362) into a “blank space” (413), and it is this space which serves as the stage for the world’s first musical concert. The description starts by naming an affect, “Joy,” that takes “each breathing soul” and joins them all together into an “entranced whole” (418-9). And, in the end, the song reproduces the social unity that it initially interrupted: as Jubal finishes his song, the “circling tribe” has been joined back together in a ring-dance, replacing the “pretty hubbub” of sound.

Yet this unity of “joy” is a strangely thin one: instead of narrating a collective joy, the poem instead represents a series of disconnected reveries: the song in fact “thrill[s] each varying frame to various ends” (420). Some listeners feel “rage,” others “tenderness,” a third “strife” (422-3). Why, then, might the poem claim that “Joy took the air” (418)? One is tempted to read the word as a pun, linking joy to *jubilare*, and thence to Jubal in a speculative etymology commonplace among Victorians.³⁴⁹ In other words, to say that “joy took the air” is only another way of saying “Jubal sang” – yet also to imply the false unity that this absorbing song creates. The community had been bound together in a single “health-bred merriment,” but Jubal’s song breaks into that unity and makes possible the isolated reveries which the communal hubbub had prevented. Each individual thinks his own thoughts in silence, listening: the social community formed by the dance, then, does not in any way take up or address the isolating effects of song but is instead simply built on top of it.

As the poem will later make clear, this is not a healthy formalism but rather a pathological one. When Jubal, having traveled the world, returns home as an old man, he finds that “dread Change” (584) has wrought its work in the form of private property: a voice seated like “some strange heir upon the hearth” saying ““This home is mine”” (587). What holds this now fully modern society together remains music: Jubal hears the approach of a celebratory chorus and realizes that it is calling out a single word, a word that is the crowd’s “common soul, / ... that knits them in one whole” (629-30): his own name. The problem, though, is that this unity is empty, nothing “but a name” (691); when Jubal tries to claim that name as his own, the devout of his own cult fall upon him and “beat him with their flutes” (699) – at which point Jubal crawls away to die. Jubal’s tragedy, and that of his

³⁴⁹ Thus, for example, pamphlets entitled “A Missionary Jubilee, By Jubal” (*Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* 1, 1845, 388) or various discussions of the “jubilations... of Jubal” (e.g. *London Quarterly Review* 6, 1856, 359).

community, is that his music unites his audience around a illusorily definite affect: a community coheres around his music, but one that shares nothing other than the insisted-upon fact of this coherence.

Eliot's "Legend of Jubal" is thus a parable of bad musical nationalism, one that can read strangely like Theodor Adorno's critique of Wagner. For Adorno, Wagnerian music drama is a bad response to the conditions of capitalism: it assumes that the artist and his audience are no longer members of a face-to-face exchange, but attempts to overcome that distance "by incorporating the public in the work as an element of its 'effect.'" ³⁵⁰

Mirah's melancholy

It is in this Wagnerian context that the particular force of a listening "beyond the occasion" is apparent: as a way of exploring the possibilities of a community formed in the gap between audience and artwork. For, while Daniel puts away the text of the chanting he hears, Eliot gives it to us:

The whole scene was a coherent strain, its burthen a passionate regret, which, if [Deronda] had known the liturgy for the Day of Reconciliation, he might have clad in its antithetic burthen: "Happy the eye which saw all these things; but verily to hear only of them afflicts our soul. Happy the eye that saw our temple and the joy of our congregation; but verily to hear only of them afflicts our soul. Happy the eye that saw the fingers when tuning every kind of song; but verily to hear only of them afflicts our soul." (368) ³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, 20.

³⁵¹ Eliot's text is taken from *The Festival Prayers, According to the Ritual of the German and Polish Jews*, trans. David Levi, 6 vols (London: Abraham and Sons, 1859 to 1873). See *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda notebooks*, ed. Jane Irwin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 374. For a helpful discussion of the

For Deronda, the music of the synagogue allows him to access history sympathetically – to feel himself one with “long generations of struggling fellow-men” (367). In his listening, “burthen” – the burden of an entire history: that which is borne – is telescoped into burden, the chorus of a song.³⁵²

Consider, by way of contrast, a more obvious response to Wagner’s arguments (and their anti-Semitism) exemplified in Elizabeth Sara Sheppard’s 1853 novel *Charles Auchester*. Though little read today, the novel was wildly popular for about a decade after its publication.³⁵³ The novel follows its title character and narrator to Germany, where he becomes the acolyte of an idealized version of Mendelssohn; the novel grants to Mendelssohn’s most domestic, and most popular, productions – his *Lieder ohne Worte*, or songs without words, for solo piano – the ability to express “unsayable content” in public that Wagner claimed for his own works.³⁵⁴ In a key scene in the narrator’s musical education, Mendelssohn performs the “Volkslied” – the “low and hymn-like melody” of a “holy People’s Song,” as Auchester puts it – from the *Lieder ohne Worte* op. 53 before an audience made up mostly of German youth. Charles Auchester gives his reaction:

[T]hat stealing, creeping People’s Song, that in few and simple chords... held bound,
as it were, and condensed in one voice the voice of myriads... [O]ne chord sounded

Avodah poems, see Michael D. Swartz, “Ritual about Myth about Ritual: Towards an Understanding of the *Avodah* in the Rabbinic Period,” in *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997), 135-55.

³⁵² *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, s.v. “burthen.”

³⁵³ See *Charles Auchester* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1853). Henry James, writing in 1864, referred to it more coolly as “a novel at present languidly circulating in our literature.” In “Emily Chester: A Novel,” in *Literary Criticism I: Essays on Literature, American Writer, English Writers* (New York: Literary Classics, 1984), 591. For an account of its popularity, see R. Larry Todd, “The Unfinished Mendelssohn,” in *Mendelssohn and his World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991).

³⁵⁴ Peter Ward Jones’s “Mendelssohn and his English publishers,” in *Mendelssohn Studies*, edited by R. Larry Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), gives a clear account of the genre’s tremendous popularity.

behind the curtain from one instrument within the orchestra. It continued and spread – it was the People’s Song... It was once played through without vocal illustration, but we all knew the words, and began to sing them. We were singing in a strange sort of roar I can’t describe to you ... (212-3)

The differences between Deronda’s listening and that of Charles Auchester are instructive. Deronda and Charles Auchester share, in their experience of music, a sense of self-dissolution. *Charles Auchester* imagines music as driving towards the spontaneous production of a linguistic meaning that Mendelssohn’s piano pieces are ostentatiously without: the collective voicing of Wagner’s “unsayable content,” a making-present of absent meaning that the actual page before us must always hold at a distance.

Deronda, like Charles Auchester, hears a united voice though he cannot reproduce its words. But as Eliot’s novel quickly reminds us, that is a real lack: the Avodah poem, after all, really exists. But strangely, in *Daniel Deronda*, the text that only *we* read also insists upon a schematic opposition between seeing and hearing: in the liturgical poem, we remember seeing happily what is present, while hearing in the moment, longingly, what is absent. This is what we as readers know, and know only because this *piyyut* is present to us though we are absent from its scene of performance. The structure of the scene, in other words – in which the hiddenness of a text, otherwise present to the eye, allows for the attachment of longing – repeats itself in that hidden text itself.

And much the same shape structures Mirah’s hearing of her mother’s voice. Believing her mother to be dead, Mirah internalizes her singing: “I used to shut my eyes and bury my face and try to see her and to hear her singing. I came to do that at last without shutting my eyes” (212). This is a work of Freudian mourning, but it is not the “normal” mourning of “Mourning and Melancholia,” in which the self, in its attempt to become “free

and uninhibited again,” independent of its loss, repeats to itself its attachments to a lost object.³⁵⁵ This is precisely not how Mirah conceives of herself; when she was about to drown herself, she explains, “I could not hear memories any more: I could only feel what was present in me” (223). If being present to oneself is a name for being dead, or nearly so, then being alive means differing from oneself – and memory, *heard* memory, is the name for that difference. But unlike the self-difference of English irony – which *notices* that which is, and what we do, and thus remains a fundamentally closed structure – Mirah’s self-difference remains open: her re-creation of her mother’s singing voice is thus the properly endless melancholia of the later Freud, in which mourning is not only a threat to the self but a necessity, as the self makes itself up by identifying with its lost objects, thereby “setting [them] up again inside” itself but without ever quite coinciding with them.³⁵⁶

And for Mirah, text is part of what holds open, rather than closes, the longing produced by the voice:

[A]fter Signora left us we went to rooms where our landlady was a Jewess and observed her religion. I asked her to take me with her to the synagogue; and I read in her prayer-books and Bible, and when I had money enough I asked her to buy me books of my own, for these books seemed a closer companionship with my mother: I knew that she must have looked at the very words and said them.

Interestingly, then, for both Mirah and Deronda identification – with one’s mother, with Jews in general – is based upon unknown language. If, as I suggest at the opening of this dissertation, the effect of Mignon’s words seems open to a threat of disenchantment, then

³⁵⁵ “Mourning and Melancholia,” in the *Standard Edition*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth, 1957), 245.

³⁵⁶ *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1960), 23.

surely the songs of Mirah's mother are even more so: to say, like Mirah, that "because I never knew the meaning of the words they seemed full of nothing but our love and happiness" (210) is to suggest that had I known Hebrew, I would have felt differently. For Mirah and Deronda alike, the gap between the meanings of words and their effects when sung is not a threat, but rather opens on a melancholically endless activity of reading.

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