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Vestures Of The Past: The Other Historicisms Of Victorian Aesthetics

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Abstract

The importance of history to Victorian culture, and to nineteenth-century Europe more generally, is readily apprehended not only from its historiography, but also from its philosophy, art, literature, science, politics, and public institutions. This dissertation argues that the discourse of aesthetics in Victorian Britain constitutes a major area of historical thinking that, in contrast to the scientific and philosophical historicisms that dominated nineteenth-century European intellectual culture, focuses on individual experience. Its starting point is Walter Pater's claim that we are born "clothed in a vesture of the past"—that is, that our relation to ourselves is historical and that our relation to history is aesthetic. Through readings of aesthetic theory and art criticism, along with works of historiography, fiction, poetry, and visual art, this dissertation explores some of the ways in which Victorian aesthetics addresses the problem of the relationship between the sensuous representation and experience of the historical, on the one hand, and the subjects of such representation and experience, on the other. Through these readings, aesthetic modes of historical relation such as memory, revival, contrast, haunting, collection, and displacement are addressed as modes of subjectivation. The dissertation considers a wide range of more and less canonical texts by John Ruskin, George Eliot, Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds, William Morris, Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and Marcus Clarke. While the dissertation focuses on texts written in England, it takes a transnational approach, situating these texts in the broader contexts of the European intellectual discourses with which they engage and of British imperialism, which is addressed in the dissertation's coda through texts created in colonial Australia. By highlighting the role of the aesthetic in the formation of subjectivity as historical, this dissertation revises the image of nineteenth-century aesthetics as either ahistorical, formulating the pleasures of a timeless subject, or, conversely, deterministic, finding in art merely a reflection of larger historical processes. Instead, aesthetics emerges here as a discourse for the problematization of the historicity of subjectivity.

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Timothy Chandler

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VESTURES OF THE PAST:
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Timothy Chandler

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ABSTRACT

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Emily Steinlight

The importance of history to Victorian culture, and to nineteenth-century Europe more generally, is readily apprehended not only from its historiography, but also from its philosophy, art, literature, science, politics, and public institutions. This dissertation argues that the discourse of aesthetics in Victorian Britain constitutes a major area of historical thinking that, in contrast to the scientific and philosophical historicisms that dominated nineteenth-century European intellectual culture, focuses on individual experience. Its starting point is Walter Pater's claim that we are born "clothed in a vesture of the past"—that is, that our relation to ourselves is historical and that our relation to history is aesthetic. Through readings of aesthetic theory and art criticism, along with works of historiography, fiction, poetry, and visual art, this dissertation explores some of the ways in which Victorian aesthetics addresses the problem of the relationship between the sensuous representation and experience of the historical, on the one hand, and the subjects of such representation and experience, on the other. Through these readings, aesthetic modes of historical relation such as memory, revival, contrast, haunting, collection, and displacement are addressed as modes of subjectivation. The dissertation

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List of Abbreviations

The following works will be cited parenthetically using the letter abbreviation, volume number, and page numbers.

M   William Morris. *Collected Works*. Edited by May Morris. 24 vols. London: Longmans, 1910–1915.

R   John Ruskin. *Works*. Edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. 39 vols. London: Allen, 1903–1912.

W   Oscar Wilde. *Complete Works*. Edited by Ian Small. 9 vols. (to date). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000–.

Preface

For in truth we come into the world, each one of us, not in nakedness, but by the natural course of organic development clothed far more completely than even Pythagoras supposed in a vesture of the past, nay, fatally shrouded, it might seem, in those laws or tricks of heredity which we mistake for our volitions; in the language which is more than one half of our thoughts; in the moral and mental habits, the customs, the literature, the very houses, which we did not make for ourselves.

— Walter Pater[1]

A talent for History may be said to be born with us, as our chief inheritance. In a certain sense all men are historians.

— Thomas Carlyle[2]

The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.

— Oscar Wilde[3]

Do we make history, or does it make us? There is, of course, no easy answer to this question. Asking it, however, gets us thinking about a problem at the heart of the historical consciousness by which we define our modernity: the relationship between history as the meaningful representation of temporality and the individuals who are its subjects. The present dissertation treats explorations of this problem in Victorian aesthetic discourse,

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[1] Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, 72.
[2] Carlyle, "On History," in *Historical Essays*, 3.
[3] Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," W4:147.

including literature and art as well as criticism and theory. In contrast to the philosophical and scientific historicisms that dominated nineteenth-century European intellectual culture, aesthetics centers the individual subject of historical consciousness, allowing it to articulate the nature of its historicity in its own terms. Hence "other historicisms." Alluding to the "other Victorians" of Steven Marcus's classic study of Victorian pornography, as well as to Michel Foucault's ironic citation of Marcus in *The Will to Knowledge*, the "other historicisms" in this dissertation's subtitle points to a diversity of positions regarding historical consciousness within the context of a larger cultural discourse whose main tenets they problematize.

The three epigraphs that open this Preface illustrate some of the ways in which history was thought by Victorian writers through the aesthetic. Despite the different positions taken, they all mark the historicity of subjectivity and establish the domain of history in favor of a subjective rather than objective perspective. Their juxtaposition thus tells a story about the relationship between aesthetics, historiography, and self-formation that is central to this dissertation: that we are born already historical also means that we are born historians, with the power to give form to our lives, however "fatally" determined by the past. While Pater appears the most deterministic in this set, the metaphor of *vesture* in the quotation from his *Plato and Platonism*—the metaphor that I have chosen as the title of this dissertation—formulates historicity in aesthetic terms. For Pater, clothing figures the already aesthetic relationship to history into which we are born. A history that is both natural and social, material and ideal, it is that which gives shape to individuality. The metaphor of clothing reminds us that the aesthetic not only marks

social determinations such as gender and class, but that it is also a mode of self-formation and expression. In the nineteenth century, fashion became newly conscious of its historicity, a fact that finds one of its most remarkable articulations in Carlyle's novel *Sartor Resartus* (1836), in which sensible phenomena are figured as the clothing of the ideal: "It is written the Heavens and the Earth shall fade away like a Vesture; which indeed they are: the Time-vesture of the Eternal. Whatsoever sensibly exists, whatsoever represents Spirit to Spirit, is properly a Clothing."[4] Later in the century, in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), clothing and textiles are among the historical curios that Dorian collects, not only because they are exquisite artistic objects, but also because their materiality, unlike Dorian's ageless visage, marks and is marked by time (W3:283–86). That we are "clothed […] in a vesture of the past" accordingly means that the historical is aesthetically mediated and that identity—in both its determinate and volitional nature—is aesthetic: sensuous, formative, relational, and critical.

In the Introduction that follows, I situate my readings of Victorian texts in the context of nineteenth-century historiography and philosophy of history; I also spell out there the currents in contemporary scholarship with which this dissertation is in conversation and the critics and theorists who have influenced my thinking. My purpose in this Preface is to introduce the topic along with the shape and stakes of the argument, as it were, from a high altitude. My central claim does not pertain to a historical development within aesthetic discourse over the six decades of the Victorian period but rather to the capacity of aesthetics to think historical processes and relations in non-linear, non-developmental ways. This seems important to me for what it reveals about the character-

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[4] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 56.

istics and contradictions of the Victorian episteme as we come to know it through our studies of the period. It is now a familiar argument that scientific forms of knowledge (including scientific history), with their aim of a view from nowhere, and the philosophy of history, with its sublimation of violence into narratives of progress, have often been complicit in the history of imperialism, and that this complicity is conditioned by the universalization of a particular subject position. The impulse of aesthetics to detail the mechanics of subjective experience challenges this dispensation by restoring history to the individual and by problematizing the relationship between the individual and the collective. The succeeding chapters will demonstrate some of the ways in which Victorian writers and artists achieved this. Although I think this work is important—precisely because it problematizes an intellectual position that over the course of the century became increasingly naturalized—I do not mean to argue that the regulative ideal of objectivity is always oppressive and moreover wants only a transfer of power to the individual subject in order for the complex political problems of historical consciousness in its European tradition to be resolved. On the contrary, at several points in this dissertation, it will become apparent that the aesthetic subjectivization of the historical reinscribes many of the same political problems associated with the dominant forms of historicism, and, furthermore, often fails to escape those historically associated with the discourse of aesthetics. We will see this most clearly in the Coda, which looks at how Victorian aesthetics addresses the problem of history in the context of settler colonialism.

Is this work, then, of merely "historical" interest? I hope not. Foucault's citation of Steven Marcus in the first chapter of *The Will to Knowledge* invites his readers to

consider their own relationships to the Victorian period: "We 'Other Victorians.'" For *The History of Sexuality*, this means asking why we project the sexual repression that we proclaim so loudly back onto the nineteenth century (if, that is, we still do so, forty-three years after Foucault first claimed as much). In the spirit of the genealogical method, one of my hopes in presenting this dissertation is to bring attention to the power historicism continues to have over our thinking by examining some of its moments of crisis in the nineteenth century, some of which might feel familiar, others of which imagine a time radically different from the one in which we find ourselves. For many of the writers discussed here, the engagement with history is deeply personal. So, the French historian Jules Michelet, whom we will encounter in Chapter Two, repeatedly identifies himself with his text: "Ce livre est plus qu'un livre; c'est moi-même."[5] Indeed, writing this dissertation has at times felt like a strange form of autobiography: it might be coincidental that it begins with a text published in the year of my birth (Foucault's *L'Usage des plaisirs*) and ends with one written over a century earlier in the country of my birth (Marcus Clarke's preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*)—but coincidences are not insignificant. It is strange narratives like this, narratives in which connections across time and space become the materials of an overdetermined yet self-consciously articulated identity, that the authors treated in the present work give so much effort to thinking through, and whose emergence the study of the past makes possible.

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[5] Michelet, *Le Peuple*, 3.

Introduction

"We Are All Historicists Today"[1]

1.

In the introduction to the second volume of *The History of Sexuality, The Use of Pleasure*, Michel Foucault includes the following footnote:

> I am neither a Hellenist nor a Latinist. But it seemed to me that if I gave enough care, patience, modesty, and attention to the task, it would be possible to gain sufficient familiarity with the ancient Greek and Roman texts; that is, a familiarity that would allow me—in keeping with a practice that is doubtless fundamental to Western philosophy—to examine both the difference that keeps us at a remove from a way of thinking in which we recognize the origin of our own, and the proximity that remains in spite of that distance which we never cease to explore.[2]

Here Foucault puts two historical moments—Greco-Roman antiquity and European modernity—into a relationship of close distance. For all that they share, they remain alien to one another; yet, these two moments separated in time establish each other's historicity. They are, respectively, each other's antiquity and modernity, and, as such, will always, so long as each depends upon the other for its concept, recognize themselves in each other, in spite of their otherness. The personification here is not merely rhetorical: Foucault first indicates the close distance through his own desires with respect to the

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[1] Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition*, 26.
[2] Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 7.

historical materials; he will add later that he was motivated by curiosity. He seeks a "familiarity" in spite of his belatedness, and it is this relation—in both its proximity and its distance—that he undertakes to explore. Foucault's surprising claim for Western philosophy's fundamental concern—measuring this close distance—emphasizes the correlation between the personal and the historiographical. This correlation becomes especially evident when we discover, firstly, that philosophy is here conceived as "ascesis," glossed as "an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought"; and, secondly, when Foucault presents the aim of *The History of Sexuality* as a work of philosophy so understood: "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently."[3] "Philosophy" is constituted as work carried out, in a relation of close distance, on two objects simultaneously: the past and the self. The introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* thus presents genealogical historiography as what Foucault would call a "mode of subjectivation": a practice of self-formation.

As striking as Foucault's genealogical definition of philosophy may seem, it addresses a problem at the heart of modern epistemology: What is the relationship between history and subjectivity? This problem is one of the most important and enduring for Foucault as both a philosopher and a historian. In an oft-cited passage from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault makes explicit what is at stake in the writing of history:

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[3] Ibid., 9. In ancient Greek, ἄσκησις signifies an "exercise" or "practice," and was used especially in relation to athletes; however, in a broader sense, it can also mean a "mode of life." Its Latinization as *ascesis* has a long history of use in Christian theology, where it denotes practices of self-discipline with the goal of moral perfection. On Foucault's use of the term, see McGushin, *Foucault's Askēsis*.

> Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject—in the form of historical consciousness—will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought.[4]

In this earlier moment in his career, as a historian of epistemic transformation, Foucault is engaged in a critique of progressive historiographies and philosophies of history. His problem is not that they misrepresent the past but rather that they posit a subject identified with history. Teleology, the search for origins, historical constants, and metahistorical narrative—all are rejected as the correlatives of a unified historical subject. That the problem is not subjectivity as such but rather a subjectivity predicated on totality and identity becomes especially clear in the programmatic essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), with its well-known remarks in favor of "effective" history: "History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being […] 'Effective' history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature."[5] In *The History of Sexuality*, then, the turn to modes of subjectivation represents an attempt to transvalue modern Western subjectivity by inviting comparison with its premodern forms and thereby disrupting identification, while, at the same time, acknowledging the ineluctability of a tradition that prompts "curiosity," the desire for "familiarity," and an ethic of

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4 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 12.
5 Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, 88. See also the interview "An Aesthetics of Existence" in *Foucault Live*, 450–54.

"care, patience, modesty, and attention."[6] Close distance. So it is that the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* imagines philosophy—"the effort to think one's own history"[7]—as the formation of the self as historical, but in opposition to the dominant forms of historical thinking of the past two and a half centuries of European philosophy and science.

This dissertation is also concerned with the relationship between historical knowledge and subjectivity, and, in particular, with modes of establishing this relation other than those afforded by the dominant historiographical and philosophical discourses of the nineteenth century. While most of the texts discussed in the following chapters were composed in Victorian Britain, their authors are responding to a broader shift in European intellectual culture towards more historical ways of thinking about humanity and the world, a shift that had its beginnings in the eighteenth century but which became so foundational in the nineteenth, even as it diversified, that the latter has often been called the age of history.[8] The primary outcomes of this shift are often summed up under the name *historicism*, which has been used to denote a range of intellectual and aesthetic positions.[9] At its broadest, historicism can describe almost any historically conscious discourse or sustained orientation towards the past. Its dominant epistemological forms, both in the nineteenth century and today, are generally characterized by their progressive, or, at least, supersessory, models of time, and by the centrality they give to historicity as a

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[6] On Foucault's archival ethics, see Huffer, *Mad for Foucault*.
[7] Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 9.
[8] Influential accounts of this shift can be found in Collingwood, *The Idea of History*; Foucault, *The Order of Things*; Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*; and Koselleck, *Futures Past*.
[9] This deceptive polysemy is regularly attested in definitions of the term (e.g., Lozek, "Historismus"; Raulet, "Historisme"; Scholtz, "Historismus, Historizismus"; Thornhill, "Historicism").

measure of truth, that is, to historical accuracy in representation and to historical context in interpretation and explanation. As Frederick Beiser points out, intellectual history has had to grapple with two main currents of historicism that are historically contemporaneous but conceptually incompatible: a philosophical discourse that aims "to determine the general laws of history" and a scientific-historiographical one that attempts "to know the unique and singular events and personalities of history."[10] Despite this conceptual tension, however, in the nineteenth century, these two historicisms—philosophical historicism and scientific historicism—regularly occur together.[11] Indeed, both tendencies may be seen in the work of J. G. Herder,[12] who is regularly cited as one of the key early theorists of historicity, and who influenced both philosophers of history such as G. W. F. Hegel and scientific historians such as Leopold von Ranke. The complicity of these two forms of historicism is such that, rather than separate them out prescriptively, as Beiser does, Hans-Georg Gadamer presents the contradiction of empiricism and idealism internal to historicism as one of its key aporias.[13] One reason for the happy coexistence of these two forms of historicism in many nineteenth-century writers is, I suggest, epistemological: both of them situate historical truth outside the individual subject, that is, as the determination of social or environmental conditions.[14]

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[10] Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition*, 1–2. In intellectual history, Beiser associates the first sense with Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* and the second with Friedrich Meinecke's *Die Entstehung des Historismus*.

[11] In Chapter Two, we will witness their proximity in the work of John Addington Symonds.

[12] For example, in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791).

[13] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 222.

[14] That this is a ruse that ends up consolidating the position of the subject of historical knowledge Foucault makes all too clear.

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The "other historicisms" of this dissertation, by contrast, grapple with the problems resulting from scientific historicism's objectifying mission and philosophical historicism's models of progressive time—some of them, in explicit opposition to these dominant discourses. They are not embarrassed by the subjective nature of historical truth but rather explore ways in which knowledge of the past, in a variety of forms, conditions modern subjectivity and techniques of self-formation, and they do so, in most cases, without falling back on what Foucault calls "continuous history." One of the reasons they can do this, I contend, is because the authors treated here are mostly not historians or philosophers in the usual sense. Instead, their concerns are self-consciously and primarily aesthetic. The genres they employ—including art criticism and aesthetic theory, the realist novel, speculative fiction, dramatic monologue—afford representations that generate meaning in excess of that over which scientific and philosophical historicism claim jurisdiction. While the enormous influence on Victorian intellectual culture of the two major forms of nineteenth-century historicism—what I call here philosophical and scientific historicism—cannot be denied, this dissertation shows that the effects of these discourses included forms of historical consciousness that were in many ways incompatible with those demanded by a strict adherence to dogmatic interpretations of the likes of Hegel or Ranke. Accordingly, this dissertation makes the case for aesthetic discourse as an alternative form of historiography in Victorian Britain that explores the fraught relationship between history and subjectivity, consciously centering and problematizing the subject of historical knowledge, at the same time as conventional historiography is increasingly concerned with effecting its disappearance. This turn to aesthetics leads to

the recognition that art is not merely interested in the past as potential subject matter but can also be read as generating forms of historical consciousness—that is, of relating self and society to past, present, and future—and that it does so on its own terms. More than this, however, my argument for Victorian aesthetics as a way of problematizing the historicity of subjectivity challenges two more general, but by no means unwarranted, understandings of aesthetics as, at least until recent decades, either an ahistorical discourse concerned with the formulation of universal laws regarding such dubious categories as taste, genius, beauty, and harmony, or a deterministic one, finding in art merely a reflection of a larger historical narrative. Rather than a historicization of Victorian aesthetics, then, what I provide here is an analysis of it as meta-historiographical theory, a discourse of "other historicisms" concerned (in the fullest affective sense of the word) with the nature of modern subjectivity as simultaneously historical and aesthetic.

This dissertation is in dialogue with recent discussions in Victorian studies about the methodological status of historicism. Just as Victorian authors were consciously engaged in working out the nature of historical epistemology, so literary scholars in recent years have given attention to the legacies of nineteenth-century historicism in their discipline. The appearance in 2015 of the *Manifesto of the V21 Collective* revived a debate about the use of historicism in literary studies, and in Victorian studies, specifically, that has ebbed and flowed in the humanities since the rise of theory in the 1970s.[15] According to the authors of the *Manifesto*, the discipline is dominated by a methodology they call "positivist historicism": "a mode of inquiry that aims to do little more than

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[15] In addition to the *Manifesto*, see the V21 Forum on Strategic Presentism, edited by Coombs and Coriale.

exhaustively describe, preserve, and display the past," and characterized by "a fetishization of the archival; an aspiration to definitively map the DNA of the period; an attempt to reconstruct the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen*; an endless accumulation of mere information."[16] Despite its polemical language, the *Manifesto* does not, as far as I understand it, reject historicism *tout court*, but rather an approach to literary studies that merely presents material instead of interpreting it, a position with which I am firmly in agreement. In this regard, the V21 Collective shares common ground with slightly earlier defenses of historicism that responded to developments in literary studies in the early twenty-first century, such as surface and distant reading, which many deemed problematically depoliticizing.[17] For these critics, historicism is a form of political critique rather than an apolitical antiquarianism, a fact that attests to the slipperiness of the term in current academic discourse. In calling for a "strategic presentism," however, the V21 Collective goes beyond both historicism (whether political or antiquarian) and the new methods critiqued in its name. As the *Manifesto* points out, our world is still, in many respects, that of the Victorians, and so our engagement with the period will be motivated by our concern for the present: "A survey of the Victorian period is a survey of empire, war, and ecological destruction. Insofar as the world we inhabit bears the traces of the nineteenth century, these traces are to be found not only in serial multiplot narrative, but

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[16] *Manifesto of the V21 Collective*, thesis 1. A very similar case is made against academic history by Kleinberg, Scott, and Wilder in their *Theses on Theory and History* (2018).
[17] Within Victorian studies, see Kucich, "The Unfinished Historicist Project" (2011); and Goodlad and Sartori, "The Ends of History" (which is the introduction to a 2013 special issue of *Victorian Studies* on historicism). The influential statement on surface reading to which these authors are in part responding is Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading"; the major formulation of distant reading is Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*.

in income inequality, global warming, and neoliberalism."[18] The V21 Collective's *Manifesto* thus brings attention to the complex ways in which past and present are mutually determined in our attempts to know them, an epistemological claim that this dissertation explores through examples from Victorian aesthetics.

My own interest in the nineteenth century was initially motivated by a longstanding sense, first articulated for me by Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, that we live today amidst that century's rubble. While this decidedly modernist image says much more about twentieth-century relations to the past than nineteenth-century ones, it remains valuable to me for its suggestion that every historical moment has its own historicisms and, moreover, for its insight into the aesthetic dimension to all historical experience.[19] While Benjamin and Foucault remain key influences, my thinking about the relationship between past and present, as both a general theoretical concern and in the specific context of Victorian aesthetics, has also been informed by recent work on queer temporality, such as that of Carolyn Dinshaw, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, and Heather Love.[20] These scholars have argued for non-linear models of time in queer cultural studies and historiography, whose archives are especially submerged and fragmentary, and provided theorizations of the affective relations with the past characteristic of queer subjectivity as a form of historical subjectivity. Moreover, and unlike Benjamin or Foucault, they are concerned with the possibility of transtemporal community, an

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[18] *Manifesto of the V21 Collective*, thesis 8.
[19] "History decays into images, not into stories" (Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 476).
[20] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*; Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*; Freeman, *Time Binds*; Love, *Feeling Backward*. See also Dinshaw et al., "Theorizing Queer Temporalities"; Edelman, *No Future*; McBean, *Feminism's Queer Temporalities*; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Nealon, *Foundlings*.

aspect of historical relation that was of great importance to many of the Victorian writers treated here, in particular George Eliot and William Morris. Freeman's work, for example, "track[s] the ways that nonsequential forms of time […] can also fold subjects into structures of belonging and duration that may be invisible to the historicist eye."[21] In *Getting Medieval*, Dinshaw examines the creation of transtemporal communities through partial connections across time: "using ideas of the past, creating relations with the past, touching in this way the past in our efforts to build selves and communities now and into the future."[22] Bringing psychoanalysis and deconstruction to bear on these discussions, Freccero describes the affective legacy of trauma that characterizes queer relationships to the past as haunting, but an affirmative haunting that is open to the future. Love, finally, examines cases where the past appears to refuse attempts, such as Dinshaw's, to make connections with it. The present study shares with such work an interest in models of temporality that are neither linear nor progressive and an understanding of modern subjectivity as an affectively ambivalent condition determined by its attempts to create collective and individual relationships with the past. Accordingly, my question here is not so much the classic epistemological one—Can we know the past?—as an aesthetic one: What are the imaginative modes of historicization by which we understand ourselves in relation to the past?

As one of the major genres of scientific historicism, the dissertation invites, if not requires, the historical contextualization of its materials; in this case, the historical context includes historicism itself. Accordingly, in the next section, I present a basic

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[21] Freeman, *Time Binds*, xi.
[22] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 206.

outline of the main currents in nineteenth-century historicism, philosophical and scientific, in Europe generally and Britain specifically, as the background against which its more ambivalent or subversive forms can take shape in the succeeding chapters. This will be a necessarily partial sketch of a vast and complex field, but I will endeavor to keep in sight the primary problem of the relationship between historical knowledge and subjectivity, and to anchor these in the Victorian context. If the result is a picture in broad strokes that focuses on a small set of hypercanonical authors, then this is because my aim is not to present an exhaustive overview and original reading of the major figures of historicism, who are in every case the subjects of massive bibliographies and ongoing debate, but rather to provide by way of specific examples a general sense of the historicist episteme that has dominated European intellectual culture over the last two centuries, and to do so, moreover, without falling back on clichés about Victorian scientism.[23] The third section of the Introduction will turn to the discourse of aesthetics, which gathers together the generically diverse texts considered in the dissertation and which, I argue, affords forms of historical knowledge and self-formation different from those associated with conventional philosophy and historiography. The fourth section provides an overview of the chapters—which treat the work of John Ruskin, George Eliot, William Morris, Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds, Oscar Wilde, and Aubrey Beardsley—and the Coda, which, in turning to a text written by Marcus Clarke in colonial Australia, places the arguments of this dissertation in the larger context of British imperialism and discusses some of the problems thereby raised for Victorian aesthetics.

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[23] For a compelling critique of the image of the Victorian as an epistemologically complacent realist, see Anger's Introduction to *Knowing the Past*.

2.

In the infamous conclusion to his collection of essays on the Renaissance, the Victorian art critic, classicist, and novelist Walter Pater provides a philosophically eclectic meditation on the nature and meaning of historical knowledge in which he warns his readers against "acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy, of Comte, or of Hegel."[24] At the time of writing (the text was first published in 1868), Pater's warning was by no means unwarranted: Auguste Comte and G. W. F. Hegel were then arguably the most influential modern philosophers in Europe and their systematic thought seemed, as many of their Victorian readers perceived, particularly susceptible to dogmatic adherence. While the positivism of the one, with its natural laws, and the idealism of the other, with its metaphysical principles, are usually taken to be opposed, as philosophical historicism, their work shares a common aim, in the words of F. A. Hayek: "to construct a universal history of all mankind, understood as a scheme of the necessary development of humanity according to recognisable laws."[25] Not everyone would agree with Hayek, who, like Karl Popper, identified the results of such systems in the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century.[26] Even so, while both Comte and Hegel found their warmest reception in Victorian Britain among political liberals, it was no doubt the search for historical laws that attracted many Victorian readers, including Pater, to these philosophers. While their British reception begins in the 1820s, it was the 1840s that saw the first serious engagements in print, including two popular surveys of modern philosophy published in 1846, J. D. Morell's *An Historical and Critical Review of the Speculative Philosophy of Europe in*

[24] Pater, *Renaissance*, 189.
[25] Hayek, *Studies*, 292.
[26] See Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism.*

the Nineteenth Century and the final volume of George Henry Lewes's *A Biographical History of Philosophy*, both of which include summaries of Comte and Hegel that make clear the historical quality of their philosophies. Later, more systematic presentations, such as Lewes's *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences* (1853) and James Hutchison Stirling's *The Secret of Hegel* (1865), accordingly gave substance to a more or less direct engagement already well underway.

To take an interest in Comte and Hegel in the nineteenth century often meant picking sides (Morell chooses Hegel; Lewes, Comte), and the trajectories of their Victorian reception result in two very different stories. Comtean positivism made its greatest impact on mid-Victorian liberal circles that included writers such as Lewes, John Stuart Mill, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau, Herbert Spencer, and Henry Thomas Buckle.[27] Yet growing, widespread skepticism towards Comte's Religion of Humanity, shared eventually by even once-enthusiastic advocates such as Lewes, meant that his ideas never achieved the success in Britain that they did, for example, in France or Brazil. However, with influential figures as unalike as Mill and John Ruskin rejecting both philosophers, the reception of Hegel was no less controversial than that of Comte. Arguably, the greatest effects of Hegel's work in Victorian Britain are indirect, occurring in the contentious reception of German biblical criticism in the century's middle decades, whose signal event was the publication in 1846 of George Eliot's translation of David Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*, and, later in the century, in the development of British Marxism, espe-

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[27] Wright's excellent *The Religion of Humanity* remains the only general survey of Comte's Victorian reception. The influence of Comte on George Eliot is, however, well studied; see, for example: Hesse, *George Eliot and Auguste Comte*; Scholl, "George Eliot, Harriet Martineau and the Popularisation of Comte's *Positive Philosophy*"; Vogeler, "George Eliot and Positivism."

cially in the writing and activism of William Morris and E. Belfort Bax. Yet the direct

influence is also clear, not only in the widely read work of writers such as Lewes and

Pater, but also, in the final quarter of the century, in the Hegelianism that dominated the

philosophical scene in Britain, especially at Oxford, and at a time when British Comteans

were mostly relegated to the fringes of intellectual culture.[28] While the new analytic

philosophy displaced Hegelianism in Anglophone universities early in the next century,

at around the same time, Comtean positivism experienced a worldwide collapse from

which it never recovered. Since then, there has been no reappraisal of Comte's philoso-

phy comparable to that which Hegel's has enjoyed in the decades since the Second World

War. Comte has yet to find an Alexandre Kojève or Charles Taylor, nor has his work had

anything like the broad reengagement in the humanities that in Hegel's case includes

Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973), Jürgen Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of

Modernity* (1985), Judith Butler's *Subjects of Desire* (1987), Francis Fukuyama's *The

End of History* (1992), Susan Buck-Morss's *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (2009),

Rebecca Comay's *Mourning Sickness* (2011), and Slavoj Žižek's *Less than Nothing*

(2013).[29] While this means that scholarship has probably overstated the importance of

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[28] A thorough overview of Hegel's British reception is provided by Willis in "The
Introduction and Critical Reception of Hegelian Thought in Britain"; a classic account
that still offers much is Muirhead's "How Hegel Came to England." On Pater's
engagement with Hegel, see Andrews, "Walter Pater as Oxford Hegelian"; and Whiteley,
Aestheticism and the Philosophy of Death. For a recent overview of the Victorian
reception of German biblical criticism, see Lincicum, "Fighting Germans with Germans."
On the development of British Marxism, see Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*. On
British Idealism, see Den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, and Sweet (ed.),
The Moral, Social, and Political Philosophy of the British Idealists.

[29] Two recent works should, however, be mentioned: Wernick's *August Comte and the
Religion of Humanity* provides a lucid presentation of the Comtean system, uncovers its
submerged presence in twentieth-century thought and offers an explanation for its neglect

Hegel relative to Comte for late-Victorian writers such as Pater, John Addington Symonds, and Oscar Wilde,[30] it also means that, of the two philosophers, it is Hegel, I suggest, whose thought can better frame for us a general picture of Victorian thinking about the nature of historical knowledge.

To many Victorians, post-Kantian German Idealism—that is, the philosophy of J. G. Fichte, F. W. J. Schelling, and Hegel—appeared in the first instance an abstruse metaphysics ponderously turning about abstract notions of subjectivity and objectivity. Wilkie Collins's sensation novel *The Moonstone* (1868) is surely one of the most unlikely places to register the influence of such philosophy in Victorian England, but there we have it:

> "This question has two sides," he said. "An Objective side, and a Subjective side. Which are we to take?"
> He had had a German education as well as a French. One of the two had been in undisturbed possession of him (as I supposed) up to this time. And now (as well as I could make out) the other was taking its place. It is one of my rules in life, never to notice what I don't understand. I steered a middle course between the Objective side and the Subjective side. In plain English I stared hard, and said nothing.[31]

The cosmopolitan Franklin Blake's subsequent determination of "Subjective-Objective" and "Objective-Subjective" views leaves the commonsensical Gabriel Betteredge flummoxed (and, more importantly, sheds no light on the case of the missing diamond). While

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by both philosophers and intellectual historians. Scharff's *Comte after Positivism* attempts to rescue Comte's philosophy of science from Mill's critique of it.

[30] For example, while Wilde's familiarity with Hegel is obvious in his criticism (see Smith and Helfand, *Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks*), Haley's compelling case in "Wilde's 'Decadence' and the Positivist Tradition" for the influence of Comte on Wilde is not registered in Guy's edition of the criticism for the *Complete Works*.

[31] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 46.

such terminology was inherited by modern philosophy from medieval scholasticism, Collins's association of it with contemporary German philosophy was neither unusual nor unwarranted.[32] It was in no small part thanks to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's presentation of Schelling in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) that the terminology gained wider currency in Britain; Coleridge even takes credit for the modern reintroduction of the words.[33] Moreover, it was precisely the problem of Kantian subject–object dualism that, the history of philosophy tells us, the German Idealists set out to solve. Hegel himself distinguishes the philosophies of Fichte and Schelling from each other and from his own through the question of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity.[34] Hegel's self-serving narrative, though no longer accepted by scholars, has exercised a powerful hold on the history of philosophy.[35] It structures Morell's impressive account of "The German School" in *An Historical and Critical Review*, as well as Lewes's much less

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[32] In deriding the terminology of German Idealism in *Modern Painters III* (1856), Ruskin appears to forget the medieval origins of the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity (R5:424–26). For a reading that originates Hegel's dialectic in medieval philosophy, see Cole, *The Birth of Theory*.

[33] Coleridge, *Collected Works*, vol. 7, bk. 1, 172. In the second edition of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1856; first edition, 1821), Thomas De Quincey adds the following footnote: "*'Objective:'*—This word, so nearly unintelligible in 1821, so intensely scholastic, and, consequently, when surrounded by familiar and vernacular words, so apparently pedantic, yet, on the other hand, so indispensable to accurate thinking, and to *wide* thinking, has since 1821 become too common to need any apology" (De Quincey, *Confessions*, 260). For an overview of Coleridge's engagement with German philosophy, see, from among a large bibliography, Milnes's "Through the Looking-Glass," McFarland's Prolegomena to Coleridge's *Opus Maximum* (Coleridge, *Collected Works*, 15:clxxxi–cxcii), and Wheeler's *Sources, Processes and Methods*.

[34] I am thinking in particular of the *Differenz-Schrift*: see Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 4:62–77. See also Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, 9:148–88.

[35] Horstmann notes the problems of this narrative in "The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling" and *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*. More recent reconstructions of the development of German Idealism are available in Beiser, *German Idealism*; Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*; and Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760–1860.*

sympathetic one in *A Biographical History of Philosophy*.[36] In reproducing this narrative, however, the British writers recognize the great importance given to the problem in German Idealism, especially as it came to be canonized after Hegel's death in 1831. Morell's account, however, also makes clear that Hegel's theory of knowledge as the internal development of the subject–object relation describes, like Comte's classification of the sciences, a progressive development in the history of human societies. For Hegel, the question of the nature of the relation between the subject and object of knowledge is not a question apart from that about the nature of history.

Despite Collins's clichés about German philosophy, then, there was a sense among Victorian intellectuals that the import of such philosophy was to be found in its historical character. In Hegel's case, this meant a theory of history as the development of spirit (*Geist*)—self-conscious (i.e., human) life—towards the full realization of its freedom. Hegel first presented this philosophy in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and it guides all his subsequent work. However, it is perhaps encountered most often by non-philosophers, today as in the Victorian era, in two posthumously published sets of lectures, the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*, on which both Lewes and Pater wrote, and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, which in 1857 became one of the first of Hegel's texts to be translated into English.[37] The lectures, which were collated by

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[36] Morrell, *Historical and Critical Review*, 2:60–181; Lewes, *Biographical History*, 3:137–230.

[37] Most of Hegel's texts were not available in English until the 1890s; *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, only in 1910. Pater's engagement with Hegel's aesthetics takes place in his essay on Winckelmann, first published in the *Westminster Review* in 1867, and included in *The Renaissance* (1873); Lewes's, in his "Hegel's Aesthetics," one of the earliest presentations of Hegel in Britain, which appeared in the *British and Foreign Review* in 1842.

Hegel's students after his death, have a complicated textual history, but they nevertheless remain useful entry-points to the system.[38] The *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* are remembered for their three-part, geographical division of history understood as the rational progress of spirit towards self-conscious freedom within the ethical totality of the state.[39] This may be quickly outlined. To begin with, in the Oriental world, only *one* person, the despot, is free because humanity has not yet attained consciousness of its intrinsic freedom. Such consciousness arises among the Greeks and Romans but is only partially realized, such that only *some* in these societies are free, and their freedom depends upon slavery. In Christian Europe, finally, humanity attains consciousness of its intrinsic freedom, which is realized as a universal principle in the modern (Protestant) nation-state, such that *all* are free. Only in this last stage are subjectivity (the individual) and universality (the state) united. In Hegel's geographical distribution of the historical, Africa, notoriously, lies entirely outside history. The *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art* provide a similar three-part division of history into epochs corresponding to the Orient, the Mediterranean, and Germanic Europe.[40] In *symbolic* art, which is represented by architecture, spirit strives for but is unable to attain ideal meaning beyond sensuous form. With *classical* art, represented by Greek sculpture, the ideal, understood here as the ideal

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[38] On the textual history and its many problems, see, for the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Jaeschke's "*Editorischer Bericht*" in volume 18 of Hegel's *Gesammelte Werke* and Brown and Hodgson's introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*; and, for the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*, Gethmann-Siefert's "*Einleitung*" in volume two of Hegel's *Vorlesungen*, an English translation of which is provided in Brown's edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*.

[39] Hegel summarizes it in *Gesammelte Werke*, 18:152–54; *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 87–89.

[40] Hegel summarizes it in *Vorlesungen*, 2:35–46. See the contributions in Houlgate, *Hegel and the Arts*.

beauty of the human figure, is attained because spirit is now capable of adequating the material of art to the ideal; form and content are thus in harmony. Finally, with *romantic* art, represented by modern lyric poetry, spirit transcends the sensuous and the ideal by turning inward and representing itself to itself. The history of art, like world history more generally, thus narrates the progress of spirit or humanity towards realization of its intrinsic freedom, represented as a process of individual subjectification.[41] A parallel to this narrative occurs, moreover, in the final moment of the master–slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology*, famously read by Jean Hyppolite as a *Bildungsroman*.[42] Here, the unity of subject and object is demonstrated by the slave's attainment of self-consciousness of his freedom through his labor, by which he comes to realize that he has created the world around him, in which he sees himself reflected.[43] This is not the place to go further into the theory of subjectivity outlined in the early sections of the *Phenomenology*; neverthe-less, these few moments suffice to show, I hope, that Hegel's philosophy of history—whether considered, as here, from the perspective of world history or aesthetics—tells the same story as his more strictly metaphysical and epistemological philosophy that aims to show the unity of subject and object, namely, the progressive development of self-consciousness and freedom. Because of Hegel's holism, this path is just as much that of the individual as the collective, even if the former always depends absolutely on the latter. This correlation between individual and universal history is exactly that which Foucault writes against.

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[41] We find similar narratives in Hegel's writings on religion and law.
[42] Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 11.
[43] Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 9:114–16; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 115–16.

However, Foucault is just as critical of those forms of historicism that accumulate empirical data with the aim of objective reconstruction. If the name of Hegel can serve as shorthand for philosophical historicism, then that of Leopold von Ranke, Hegel's younger colleague at the University of Berlin, just as often stands for scientific historicism.[44] This representative usage may be found as early as the two authors' invectives against each other: for example, in Hegel's dismissal of "reflective" history as the mere accumulation of facts without any attempt to grasp the whole, which he associates with Ranke, and in Ranke's objection to the Hegelian a priori deduction of a historical law of progress that cares nothing for individual lives.[45] Even if, as Beiser demonstrates, Hegel and Ranke misread each other to the extent that they only engage with strawmen and, in the process, fail to see some key similarities between their ideas about history, the terms of the debate—universality and particularity—are illustrative of the tensions animating nineteenth-century historicism.[46] While the image of Ranke as a naive realist has been the subject of revision, his practice and advocacy of a scientific method of historiography remains central to appraisals of his work and its influence.[47] This method, founded on archival research and the critical examination of sources, rejects the moral lessons of pragmatic history and the speculative metanarratives of the philosophy of history, proposing instead the careful reconstruction of the past. Yet even a cursory reading of Ranke's

[44] This should not be interpreted to mean that Hegel and Ranke stand at the origin of philosophical and scientific historicism respectively: both understand their work in the context of longer traditions.
[45] Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 18:134–35; *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 74–75. Ranke, *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte*, 53–76.
[46] See Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition*, 258–66.
[47] See, for example, Iggers, *The German Conception of History*; Krieger, *Ranke*; and Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition*.

work reveals that his valorization of objectivity and particularity has more than the accumulation of facts for their own sake as its end. Ranke's understanding of the historian's task is most explicit in the prefaces to his major works.[48] On the one hand, these invariably emphasize the importance of archival work and, moreover, give us the famous quotes about Ranke's desire to "extinguish" himself and to represent the past "as it actually happened," all of which, to be sure, endorse the objectifying aims of a scientific historiography.[49] On the other hand, the prefaces also consistently locate the importance of particular histories—whether it be France during the Reformation, the English Civil War, or the early-modern Papal States—in their relation to "universal" (i.e., European) history and so, by implication, in their contribution to modern Europe's self-understanding. "The history of humanity," he writes, "becomes manifest in the nations themselves."[50]

While Ranke's work did not encounter the extremes of repulsion and enthusiasm that generally characterized Hegel's British reception, his histories were widely read, with all of them being translated into English during his lifetime. Moreover, the methods of scientific historicism that he promulgated (even if he did not invent them) were given careful consideration, ultimately shaping the direction of historiography in Britain, though not without resistance.[51] As many have noted, the nineteenth century saw the

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[48] A selection of these are translated in Ranke, *Theory and Practice of History*, 85–104.
[49] Ranke, *Sämtliche Werke*, 15:103, 33:vii. On Ranke's experience of the archive and his development of a methodology, see Eskildsen, "Location and Evidence in Modern Historiography."
[50] Ranke, *Weltgeschichte*, 1:ix.
[51] For an overview of the mutual influence of British and German historiography, see Stuchtey and Wende's Introduction in *British and German Historiography*. On Ranke's influence and broad popularity in Britain (his *History of the Popes* was translated no less

gradual transformation of historiography from a belletristic practice largely independent of the universities into a professionalized academic science.[52] Mike Goode, for example, situates Ranke's British reception in the context of a shift from Romantic historiography, in which emotion was considered an appropriate element of historical narrative, to scientific historiography, whose proponents made a doctrine of Ranke's desire for impartiality.[53] In the 1840s and 1850s, when this shift was still in its early stages, the two most prominent historians in Britain were Thomas Carlyle, who began his career as a translator, novelist, and social critic, and Thomas Babington Macaulay, who became a household name after the publication of poems he wrote while serving in the colonial government of India. Despite occupying opposed political positions, Macaulay and Carlyle both understand historiography as a literary and moral discourse. For Carlyle, reactionary and pessimistic, the past satisfies a need for heroic figures that the present cannot provide. For Macaulay, the archetypal Whig historian, the history of England is a drama proving the inevitability and goodness of constitutional monarchy and liberal democracy.[54] Both were highly rhetorical writers who relied on published documents, histories, and memoirs rather than archival material and who took the meaning of the past

than four times between 1840 and 1846, and reviewed by Thackeray and Macaulay), see Bahners, "A Place among the English Classics."

[52] See Goldstein, "History at Oxford and Cambridge"; Hesketh, *The Science of History*; Kenyon, *The History Men*; Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional.* Such a professionalization occurred throughout Europe in the nineteenth century; see Gilbert, "The Professionalization of History in the Nineteenth Century"; Lingelbach, "The Institutionalization and Professionalization of History."

[53] Goode, *Sentimental Masculinity*, 152–69.

[54] The classic formulation is Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History*; more recent and less polemical analysis is provided in Burrow, *A Liberal Descent*; Brundage and Cosgrove, *British Historians and National Identity*; Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History.*

for the present to be its most important meaning. While Carlyle was an influential figure among Victorian intellectuals, his work never achieved the enormous popularity of Macaulay's *History of England* (1848–1861), whose five volumes sold 267,000 copies by 1863.[55] Nevertheless, beginning in the 1860s, a new generation of historians—most notably, William Stubbs, J. R. Seeley, Edward A. Freeman, and John Dalberg-Acton (Lord Acton)—began to take Ranke's methods seriously, even as they continued to write histories invested in the ideology of national progress. By the end of the century, scientific historicism dominated academic history just as philosophical historicism dominated academic philosophy, not only in Britain but across Europe. In 1903, in his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of History at Cambridge (a position that in the 1860s had been held by the novelist Charles Kingsley), the Rankean J. B. Bury tersely concludes that history is "simply a science, no more and no less."[56]

In his presentation of scientific historiography, Bury also notes the "strange and fortunate coincidence" that the rise of historicism in nineteenth-century Germany occurred at the same time as the development of German national consciousness.[57] This is a connection that has been made many times since.[58] While Ranke is notable for his eclectic and cosmopolitan interests, it is also the case that, as a historian of early modernity, he understood Europe as a collection of nations with their own specificity. Notwithstanding such cosmopolitanism, national histories written by members of the nation in

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[55] Brundage and Cosgrove, *British Historians and National Identity*, 70. No subsequent Victorian history would outsell Macaulay's.
[56] Bury, *Inaugural Lecture*, 42.
[57] Ibid., 13.
[58] See, for example, Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Crane, *Collecting and Historical Consciousness*; Iggers, *The German Conception of History*; Nagle, *Histories of Nationalism*; Toews, *Becoming Historical*.

question became the dominant form of historiography in nineteenth-century Europe.[59] This is certainly the case in England.[60] After Macaulay's successful history, the landmarks of Victorian historiography include the Comtean H. T. Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* (1857–1861), the Carlylean J. A. Froude's *History of England* (1856–1870), the Whig histories of Stubbs (*Constitutional History of England*, 1874–1878), Freeman (*The History of the Norman Conquest of England*, 1867–1879), and Seeley (*The Expansion of England*, 1883), and the radical J. R. Green's *Short History of England* (1874). Reviewing the first volume of Ranke's *History of England* (1859), the utilitarian philosopher Henry Sidgwick suggests that the very nature of English history as it is conceived—namely, as political continuity—makes its impartial representation by an English historian unlikely and, accordingly, the contribution of a suitably qualified "cosmopolitan" German such as Ranke welcome.[61] Yet the British Rankeans whose English histories would be published in the 1870s took impartiality as an iron law, and so saw themselves as distinct from the histories that they wrote. A quick look at the *opera magna* of Macaulay and Stubbs (perhaps the most preeminent of Ranke's British advocates) will demonstrate the enormity of the change effected by scientific historicism, even as the parameters of progressive, continuous history remain firm.

Here is the opening paragraph of Macaulay's *History of England*:

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[59] Berger, "The Invention of European National Traditions." See also the individual essays in Part II: Historical Scholarship and National Traditions of *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 4, edited by Macintyre et al.

[60] Bentley, "Shape and Pattern in British Historical Writing"; however, for a longer view of British historians' engagements with Continental Europe, see Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders*.

[61] Sidgwick, "Ranke's History of England," 85–86.

I purpose to write the history of England from the accession of King James the Second down to a time which is within the memory of men still living. I shall recount the errors which, in a few months, alienated a loyal gentry and priesthood from the House of Stuart. I shall trace the course of that revolution which terminated the long struggle between our sovereigns and their parliaments, and bound up together the rights of the people and the title of the reigning dynasty. I shall relate how the new settlement was, during many troubled years, successfully defended against foreign and domestic enemies; how, under that settlement, the authority of law and the security of property were found to be compatible with a liberty of discussion and of individual action never before known; how, from the auspicious union of order and freedom, sprang a prosperity of which the annals of human affairs had furnished no example; how our country, from a state of ignominious vassalage, rapidly rose to the place of umpire among European powers; how her opulence and her martial glory grew together; how, by wise and resolute good faith, was gradually established a public credit fruitful of marvels which to the statesmen of any former age would have seemed incredible; how a gigantic commerce gave birth to a maritime power, compared with which every other maritime power, ancient or modern, sinks into insignificance; how Scotland, after ages of enmity, was at length united to England, not merely by legal bonds, but by indissoluble ties of interest and affection; how, in America, the British colonies rapidly became far mightier and wealthier than the realms which Cortes and Pizarro had added to the dominions of Charles the Fifth; how in Asia, British adventurers founded an empire not less splendid and more durable than that of Alexander.[62]

The breathless superlatives and escalating anaphoras of Macaulay's purple chauvinism may read as bathos today, but for the author and his many contemporary readers such rhetoric provided a fitting vehicle for communicating a vision of historical grandeur in which all are invited to participate.[63] The immediately established strong authorial voice not only makes a promise to its readership (I shall, I shall, I shall) but quickly makes

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[62] Macaulay, *Works*, 1:1–2.

[63] On Macaulay's "voluptuous" style, see Gay, *Style in History*, 97–138. Of course, even before the establishment of scientific history, not everyone enjoyed Macaulay's writing. Matthew Arnold called him "the great apostle of the Philistines" (Arnold, *Complete Prose*, 3:210); Carlyle is supposed to have compared his writing style to living under Niagara Falls (quoted in Gay, *Style in History*, 115).

itself identical with that readership through the first-person plural: "our sovereigns," "our country." By invoking "the memory of men still living," Macaulay moreover establishes history as an aspect of lived experience rather than scholarly research.[64] Compare the preface to Stubbs's *Constitutional History*:

> The History of Institutions cannot be mastered,—can scarcely by approached,—without an effort. It affords little of the romantic incident or of the picturesque grouping which constituted the charm of History in general, and holds out small temptation to the mind that requires to be tempted to study of the Truth. But is has a deep value and an abiding interest to those who have courage to work upon it. It presents, in every branch, a regularly developed series of causes and consequences, and abounds in examples of that continuity of life, the realization of which is necessary to give the reader a personal hold on the past and a right judgment of the present. For the roots of the present lie deep in the past, and nothing in the past is dead to the man who would learn how the present comes to be what it is. It is true Constitutional History has a point of view, an insight, and a language of its own; it reads the exploits and characters of men by a different light from that shed by the false glare of arms, and interprets positions and facts in words that are voiceless to those who have only listened to the trumpet of fame. The world's heroes are no heroes to it, and it has an equitable consideration to give to many whom the verdict of ignorant posterity and the condemning sentence of events have consigned to the obscurity of reproach.[65]

If it is excitement and romance that are sought, the reader is advised to look elsewhere. The hard work of Truth makes no accommodations for those accustomed to the sweeteners of the old school. In distancing his text from "the charm of History in general," Stubbs's defensive opening also refuses the collective identification of Macaulay's first-person plural. Yes, Stubbs asserts continuity; however, this appears no longer in the collective experience of a living history, but rather through the patient work of "the man

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[64] Macaulay would, however, die before completing the *History* as planned; the final volume, published posthumously, ends with the death of William III in 1702.
[65] Stubbs, *Constitutional History*, 1:iii.

who would learn." Strangest of all, Stubbs alienates even himself from the text, ascribing authorial perspective to the academic discipline of Constitutional History. This disciplinary personification continues throughout the three volumes. While Macaulay's swashbuckling entry makes clear that his is a boys-own history of England, Stubbs's dry statements on the acquisition of historical knowledge go even further in restricting historiography's franchise. One consequence of the simultaneous professionalization and nationalization of English history was the exclusion not only of non-scientific methods and modes of presentation, such as we find in Macaulay and Carlyle, but also of perspectives and topics other than those which told the story of a great nation: "When history took root in nineteenth-century universities, it was built on a dismissal of so-called amateur history associated particularly with women writers, and it celebrated both masculine conquest in the archives and manly dispassion in historical writing."[66] This brings us, finally, to the central problem of scientific historicism for this dissertation: its goal of extinguishing the subject.

"Do not imagine you are listening to me; it is history itself that speaks."[67] Acton quotes this memorable sentence from the nineteenth-century French historian Fustel de Coulanges. It captures, for him, one of the most important tenets of scientific historiography, which he attributes to his "own master" Ranke—the regulative ideal of objectivity.[68] Despite the epistemic centrality of objectivity in the late-nineteenth century,

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[66] Bennett, *History Matters*, 28–29. But see also, Mitchell, "The Busy Daughters of Clio," and the essays in Felber, *Clio's Daughters*, for studies of Victorian women writers of history.
[67] Acton, *Lecture*, 31.
[68] Ibid., 28.

however, it did not go without challenge.[69] While it went largely unnoticed when first published in 1874, Friedrich Nietzsche's essay *On the Use and Disadvantages of History for Life* is now recognized as an important critique of nineteenth-century historicism, both scientific and philosophical. For Nietzsche, the problem with such approaches to history is that they subordinate life to knowledge. We moderns are "walking encyclopaedias" alienated from the past as a result of knowing too much about it.[70] Rather than taking the objectivity esteemed by contemporary historians as a scientific view from nowhere, Nietzsche identifies it with its opposite: "These naive historians call the assessment of the opinions and deeds of the past according to the everyday standards of the present moment 'objectivity': it is here they discover the canon of all truth; their task is to adapt the past to contemporary triviality."[71] Seeing themselves as coming at the end of history, these historians imagine that they have transcended it, when, in fact, they simply cannot see beyond their present moment. So-called objectivity turns out to be a subjectivity blind to itself. When Acton writes that "a historian is seen at his best when he does not appear,"[72] he exemplifies Nietzsche's problem with scientific history precisely. Rather than simply know facts about the past, Nietzsche's history "for life," by contrast, inspires action, fosters care and contentment, and allows for judgment and transformation.[73] It is a way of relating to the past that, rather than aim for the extinguishing or disappearance of the subject, actively engages in the formation of that subject. Foucault, for whom Nie-

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[69] On the rise of objectivity in the nineteenth century, see Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*.

[70] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 79.

[71] Ibid., 90.

[72] Acton, *Lecture*, 31.

[73] These are respectively what Nietzsche calls "monumental," "antiquarian," and "critical" history (Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 67–77).

tzsche's essay was a major influence, imagines a similarly anti-scientific historiography in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* with which we began: "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently."[74] In a similar spirit, this dissertation brings attention to a particular area of Victorian cultural discourse—aesthetics—and argues that it provided Victorian writers and artists with a context in which to explore historical meaning, not for history itself, as scientific historicism proposes, but rather as providing the materials from which the self, as the situated subject of historical knowledge, is produced.

3.

In the nineteenth century, the professionalization of history and its discourse of objectivity did not entail a reduction in the modes of historical relation or the forms of historical representation. Notwithstanding Nietzsche's critique, this should not be a controversial statement. In addition to historiography (whether popular or academic) and the philosophy of history, the century was also one in which artistic forms such as the historical novel, historical opera, and historical painting gained in popularity, and, moreover, one in which national museums and monuments proliferated, and collective acts of commemoration were established.[75] Scholars of European Romanticism have demonstrated that the historicism long acknowledged as characteristic of the period found expression across a

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[74] Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, 9.
[75] For an overview, see Burke, "Lay History." On the development of national traditions, see Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition.*

range of cultural forms.[76] Two of these forms lay claim to particularly strong associations with Romanticism: the public museum and the historical novel. While both have their roots in earlier periods and, moreover, were prominent components of the cultural sphere throughout the nineteenth century (and, indeed, remain so today), the association stands to reason. In the case of the former, the few decades following the French Revolution witnessed the creation of the modern museum as we know it, with the opening of the Louvre in 1793, the precursor to the Rijksmuseum in 1800, the Prado in 1819, the National Gallery in 1824, the Prussian Königliches Museum in 1830, and, most importantly in our context, the transformation of the British Museum (opened 1759) from a library and cabinet of curiosities into a museum of antiquities, a process that culminated in the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles in 1816.[77] The transition from private (noble or royal) collection to public (national) museum that occurred during the period came with a major aesthetic shift, from the admiration of complete works of classical statuary, in many cases creatively restored and arranged for aesthetic effect, to the appreciation of isolated and increasingly historicized fragments.[78] That the establishment of these new museums

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[76] See, for example, Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History*; Chandler, *England in 1819*; Crane, *Collecting and Historical Consciousness*; Goode, *Sentimental Masculinity*; Rigney, *Imperfect Histories*; Toews, *Becoming Historical.*

[77] Matheson, "Viewing." Tony Bennett situates the emergence of the modern museum in the development in the eighteenth century of the bourgeois public sphere, which, in Habermas's account, saw high culture removed from its historic home among the aristocracy and in the royal courts (Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 25–33; see also Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 31–43). Ultimately, however, Bennett is more interested in the transformation of the museum over the course of the nineteenth century into an institution of governmentality. On the history of the major British institutions, see Hamilton, *The British Museum*; Smith, *The National Gallery*; and the collection of primary sources in Siegel, *The Emergence of the Modern Museum.*

[78] Siegel, "Art, Aesthetics, and Archaeological Poetics," 204. As the prototype of the modern museum, the Louvre was the first major institution to undergo this shift; it has

required wrenching works of art out of their historical life-worlds—as Byron wrote of the Elgin Marbles, "And snatch'd thy shrinking Gods to northern climes abhorr'd"—was an irony lamented from the start, preempting Nietzsche's more general critique of historicism later in the century.[79] As "a place of all times that is itself outside of time,"[80] the museum provides the archetypal aesthetic form of historicism as described in the previous section: torn between the scientific presentation of particular contexts and the grand narrative of civilizational progression, apprehended from a position of timelessness.[81]

Much like the public museum, the historical novel became a prominent part of the cultural sphere during the Romantic period and remained a major literary form for the remainder of the nineteenth century. In the well-known Marxist-Hegelian account of Georg Lukács, the properly historical novel arises in the early nineteenth century as a result of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, when world-historical events appear to be happening in quick succession, such that history becomes a mass experience for all of Europe; it is only at this moment, according to Lukács, that a novel such as Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), in which the individuality of characters is historically derived, becomes possible.[82] While few would now accept Lukács's argument in its

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accordingly received considerable treatment: see Duncan, *Civilising Rituals*; Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*; and McLellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. On the British context, see Siegel, *Desire and Excess*, in addition to Duncan.

[79] Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 2.15.135. A particularly pessimistic articulation of the irony of the museum is found in Martin Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art": "World-withdrawal and world-decay can never be undone" (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 41).

[80] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 26.

[81] While the museum is not an object of inquiry for this dissertation, Chapter Four discusses responses to the antiquities of the British Museum.

[82] Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 19, 23.

entirety,[83] the historical novel, understood as a hybrid genre of history and romance, and the work of Scott in particular, has become an important field for the exploration of the relationship between fiction and non-fiction, and between aesthetics and historical consciousness.[84] Like the museum, it is one of historicism's most important aesthetic forms, presenting in imaginative literature the experience of historicity.

Despite this importance, my aim in this dissertation is to look beyond these more obvious examples. Their absence from this dissertation—if not entirely, then at least as theoretical objects—is justified by the fact that, in comparison to the cultural forms considered here, the public museum and the historical novel are understood to have a closer and more veridical relationship to the experience of historicity, even if they fall short of the standards of scientific and philosophical historicism (for Lukács, the historical novel is the example *par excellence* of historical consciousness in literary form).[85] The authors whose texts are considered in the following chapters explore alternative forms of historical consciousness, relation, and representation to those usually associated with these two canonical forms and the philosophical and scientific historicisms described above. Even authors like Ruskin and Eliot, whose investments in the dominant

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[83] For alternative accounts, see in particular Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, and Maxwell, *The Historical Novel in Europe.*

[84] See, for example, Kerr, *Fiction against History*; Jones, *Lost Causes*; and Rigney, *Imperfect Histories.*

[85] I do not mean by this to elide the significant differences between the Romantic historicism of Scott and the scientific historicism of Stubbs, which, as Goode demonstrates, became important in the Victorian period. But I would like to suggest that the reason why these differences are so important is precisely because the historical novel and narrative historiography share so much, that is not shared, for example, by the aesthetic treatise, the utopian novel, or the lyric poem. Despite Scott's irony, it is not uncommon in the nineteenth century for historians to dismiss their academic rivals as mere romancers after the style of Scott—and this would not be an effective insult if there were no acknowledged common ground between the two genres.

modes of historicism seem obvious, theorize historicity and representation in terms that are incompatible, at least in the texts treated here, with those same dominant modes. A further point that unites the generically diverse texts gathered in this dissertation is the fact that all of the authors treated, with the exception of Beardsley, published texts that explicitly theorize artistic representation and aesthetic experience. Aesthetics is, accordingly, the super-generic concept organizing the texts of this dissertation.

The attempt of scientific historicism to dispossess the subject—both individually and collectively—of historiography is at the same time an attempt to remove historiography from the domain of aesthetics.[86] Aesthetics, however, cannot do without a subject. Whether in its historical meanings as the critique of taste or the philosophy of fine art, or according to one recent, broad definition of it, as "critical reflection on art, culture, and nature,"[87] the modern European tradition of aesthetics has always been concerned with explaining the experience of an individual embodied subject in relation to a community. In this regard, aesthetics retains an important element from its origins in Enlightenment philosophy—the Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, Alexander Baumgarten, David Hume, Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant—that finds its canonical articulation in Kant's definition of a judgment of taste as a subjective judgment with universal validity, and as a bridge connecting reason and morality.[88] Aesthetics remains, moreover, not merely

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[86] That both of these attempts are made in vain is now well known; see White's *Metahistory*.

[87] Kelly, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 1:ix.

[88] On the origins of modern aesthetics, see the first volume of Guyer's *History of Modern Aesthetics*; for the British context, see additionally Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition*; for a convincing revisionist account that argues for the centrality of Christian moral thought to the early development of modern aesthetics, see Grote, *The Emergence of Modern Aesthetic Theory*. The meaning of the word "aesthetic," which was coined by

theoretical but a practice by which individuals are formed, either autonomously or under the guidance or compulsion of others. This thread in the history of aesthetics, historically associated with Friedrich Schiller, received renewed attention in the late work of Foucault, who once asked in an interview, "But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?"[89] Though articulated in the terms of a Wildean aestheticism, Foucault understands the problematic addressed by his question as a much older one, arising, for example, in classical Athens and Renaissance Italy, and implicit even in Kant.[90] Ian Hunter provides a usefully succinct definition of such an aesthetics: "an autonomous set of techniques and practices by which individuals continuously problematize their experience and conduct themselves as the subjects of an aesthetic existence."[91] He notes, moreover, that this mode of aesthetics, theorized by Schiller, Coleridge, and Matthew Arnold, was incorporated into the governmental sphere through the new mass education systems developed in Europe over the course of the nineteenth century, thereby integrating the aesthetic techniques of self-discipline into the lives of the many.[92]

In light of such formulations of the function of aesthetics, it should not be surprising if, in the Victorian period, the ethical-political dimension of aesthetic experience

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Baumgarten in 1735 (from αἴσθησις, "perception"), shifted over the course of the eighteenth century and the word itself did not become current in English until well into the nineteenth: Coleridge uses it apologetically in 1821, though in the hope that it will gain greater currency (Coleridge, *Collected Works*, 11:938). Ruskin, fully aware of the word's etymology, rejects it in *Modern Painters II* (1846) in favor of "*theoria*" (R4:35).

[89] Foucault, *Foucault Reader*, 350.

[90] Much has been written on Foucault's late turn to ethics/aesthetics, but see in particular O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*.

[91] Hunter, "Aesthetics and Cultural Studies," 358.

[92] Ibid., 363.

became its most important dimension, finding expression across a range of positions: the reactionary conservatism of Ruskin, the liberal organicism of Eliot, the socialism of Morris, the intellectual hedonism of Pater, and the antinomianism of Wilde. Scholars of Victorian aesthetics have consequently tended to emphasize the social concerns of these authors and aligned changes in aesthetic discourse with developments in other fields of knowledge, in particular, natural science, philology, and anthropology, or broader social and economic changes, such as democratization. This is the approach taken, for example, by important studies of Victorian aesthetics such as Linda Dowling's *The Vulgarization of Art*, Regenia Gagnier's *The Insatiability of Human Wants*, and Rachel Teukolsky's *The Literate Eye*. By contrast, I approach aesthetics as itself a form of historical theory. Even though aesthetics is, in the Victorian period, a discourse that attempts, first and foremost, to describe the ways in which art mediates between individual and collective subjectivities, this mediation often intersects with another transtemporal one that appropriates history for aesthetics. For the Victorian writers considered here, the questions of representation and aesthetic experience are questions of historical epistemology. We will see this, for example, in Ruskin's analysis of the aesthetic experience of nature as determined by personal memory, in Morris's vision of the Gothic as a way in which the future haunts the present, and in the inverted historicism of Wilde's appropriation of antiquity for the articulation of lyric desire. My contention, accordingly, is that, if aesthetics provides the concepts for thinking about the relationship between individual and collective and the techniques for forming the self and problematizing subjectivity, then, for these Victorian authors, it does so most conspicuously and most effectively at those moments in which

the subject feels its own historicity and relation to the past. Far from being an ahistorical discourse about universal judgment, Victorian aesthetics explores the complex historical determinations of subjectivity.

While I believe that modern aesthetics generally affords a theorization of historicity and of the modes of mediation between history and subjectivity, Victorian aesthetics is an especially rich field in which to explore this question. The importance of history to Victorian aesthetic discourse has long been recognized. Classic studies by Peter Allan Dale, A. Dwight Culler, Richard Jenkyns, Linda Dowling, and Carolyn Williams have shown the variety of ways in which Victorian writers—in particular, Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, and Pater—turned to the past in order to better understand the present, and through aesthetic experience rather than historical knowledge.[93] The present study goes beyond such work in two regards. Firstly, while it is true that my focus gathers many of the same sages and aesthetes that typically constitute the canon of Victorian aesthetics—Ruskin, Eliot, Pater, Morris, Wilde—my concern lies just as much with works of fiction and poetry as with works of criticism and aesthetic theory. Indeed, in every case, the turn to fiction or poetry illuminates something previously obscure in the aesthetic writing. In considering multiple genres together, moreover, I am not concerned with the traditional question of whether a literary work succeeds or fails at meeting the criteria of a supposedly programmatic essay that preceded it. Of every text I ask the same questions: How

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[93] Dale, *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History*; Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History*; Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*; Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality*; Williams, *Transfigured World*. More recently, Victorian literature, and especially aestheticism, has received a large amount of attention in classical reception studies; see, for example, Prins, *Victorian Sappho*; Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece*; Martindale et al., *Pater the Classicist*; Riley et al., *Oscar Wilde and Classical Antiquity*.

does it conceive historical relation? and What does this mean for subjectivity? This brings me to the second difference. While, as already noted, studies both old and new of Victorian aesthetics have emphasized the role of historical knowledge in self-understanding at both the individual and the collective levels, less attention has been paid to the role of history in self-formation. The dissimilar examples, already discussed, of Hegel and Nietzsche show, however, that subjectivity was being thought in the nineteenth century in historical terms. Through figures such as memory, dreaming, revival, revolution, and collection, the texts considered here produce not only an image of the past but also an image of the self.

In *Homo aestheticus*, Luc Ferry argues that modern subjectivity *is* aesthetic subjectivity: to be modern is to exercise a judgment of taste in a world of sensible phenomena in which the human rather than the divine perspective arbitrates meaning.[94] The contemplation of a work of art becomes in modernity a moment of self-consciousness. Aesthetics is thus the realization of the process of the subjectification of being, as diagnosed by Heidegger, that began with Descartes.[95] The problem with this definition of subjectivity, however, is that, according to a now familiar critique, the universal aesthetic subject that it describes turns out to have a limited range of attributes—white, male, middle-class, and so on. According to such critiques, not only is taste the means by which individuals present themselves as belonging to a certain class, as Pierre Bourdieu has shown—"Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier"—but furthermore, as in Terry

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[94] Ferry, *Homo aestheticus*, 46.
[95] Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 9. Bowie's argument resembles Ferry's in several respects. See, moreover, Agamben's *Taste*, for an exploration of the relationship between knowledge and taste as an unresolved split within the subject.

Eagleton's analysis, aesthetics furnishes the ideology that grounds and reproduces bourgeois hegemony.[96] Furthermore, that the canonical values of aesthetics comprise a patriarchal apparatus for the regulation of women's bodies and lives is one of the foundational critiques of feminism, put forward, for example, by Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir.[97] More recently, feminist critics such as Carolyn Korsmeyer, Rita Felski, and Christine Battersby have shown how the male attribution of concepts such as genius, taste, and disinterestedness has not only excluded women from the discourse of aesthetics but also devalued women's creativity.[98] Finally, classic work by postcolonial theorists, such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, and by critical race theorists, such as Cornell West, bell hooks, and Rey Chow, has demonstrated the white supremacy inherent in classical aesthetics, not only in its consistent valorization of whiteness and its often explicit racism, but also through its proximity to other forms of knowledge such as natural science, ethnography, and orientalism.[99] Such analyses present aesthetics, at least in its classical form, as an oppressive mode of subjectivation, a form of what Judith Butler would call "the regulation of identificatory practices," that depends

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[96] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 6; Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic.* See also the essays in Mattick, *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art.*

[97] For example, Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 109; Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 505–07.

[98] Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics*; Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*; Battersby, *Gender and Genius*. See also the essays in two collections: Brand and Korsmeyer, *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*; Schott, *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant.*

[99] Said, *Orientalism*; Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; West, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism"; hooks, *Black Looks*; Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic*. See also Armstrong, "The Effects of Blackness"; Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*; Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic.*

upon the abjection of the other in the name of a universal subject.[100] However, Butler, like Foucault, is also interested in alternative modes of subjectivation that disrupt the interpellations of the modern state, and many of the same feminist, black, and postcolonial scholars cited above are committed to the development of an aesthetics that leaves behind the problematic universalism of its canonical European forms, even as they affirm the desirability of what they understand aesthetics to have promised.[101] Responding to the critique of Bourdieu, moreover, Jacques Rancière has contended that the political power of the aesthetic lies in its ability to determine who and what can be perceived, and that in the nineteenth century this entailed a radical democratization which, though only partially realized in bourgeois political systems, completely transformed the way the world was perceived.[102] Whether or not we accept that aesthetics can be disentangled from its historical origins in a universalization of a narrowly defined subject position, it remains the case that, for both the theorists just cited and the Victorian authors discussed in the following chapters, aesthetics is first and foremost about forming and understanding the self rather than representing and understanding the other.

4.

Each of the following four chapters takes a different context in Victorian culture and explores one of its characteristic modes of relating to the past as a mode of self-formation: memory as both a help and challenge to natural-historical forms of representation in Ruskin and Eliot; the revival of antiquity as the origin of the modern individual in

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[100] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.
[101] I borrow this formulation from Roelofs, *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic.*
[102] Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes."

reflections on the meaning of the Renaissance by Pater and Symonds; haunting as a way of connecting with the past and future in the context of the Gothic Revival and in the work of Ruskin (again) and Morris, in particular; and, finally, Decadent forms of the collection and display of antiquities as liberation from hegemonic historicisms in Wilde and Beardsley. Each chapter accordingly addresses a major area of Victorian aesthetics— realism, renaissance, medievalism, and decadence—from the perspective of a particular moment in its theorization in relation to history. While this dissertation does not provide an exhaustive survey of Victorian aesthetics, either at the level of the chapter or of the whole, this set of interrelated discursive currents allows me to address modes of historical relation—memory, revival, haunting, collection—that are among the most important for literature and art in the period. While the chapters are roughly chronological in order (Ruskin and Eliot, Morris and Pater, and Wilde represent three successive generations), it is not my intention to tell a historical narrative about Victorian aesthetics, as each of these cultural moments has a longer pre- and post-history that are not fully treated here. The chapters should rather be approached as different aspects of a single, though by no means unanimous or unchanging, discourse in Victorian culture, combining main currents, countercurrents and undercurrents, eddies and backwaters, whose internal relationships and ongoing transformations can only be glimpsed among this set of close readings of a small number of texts.

In Chapter One, I consider the uses of memory by John Ruskin and George Eliot in the context of aesthetic engagements with natural-historical forms of knowledge. Over the course of the five volumes of *Modern Painters* (1843–1860), Ruskin attempts to bring

a Romantic aesthetics of nature and a Linnaean natural history into alignment with the historicist episteme of his time. His aesthetics are thus to be understood as an alternative to the new natural sciences represented by Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin. Ruskin's antagonism to such science comes down to its erasure of the human individual and so he aims for a temporalized natural history that preserves the position of the human as the subject of meaning. Memory provides Ruskin with the solution to this problem because nostalgia is the characteristic disposition of modern subjectivity. Accordingly, knowledge of nature will always be mediated by memory, which can be articulated in both individual and collective terms. Ruskin thereby questions the assumption of scientific historicism, common to both historiography and natural science, that historical and natural truth lie outside the subject. The analysis of personal memory connects the individual subject to a larger transtemporal collective through nature. His contemporary George Eliot was also concerned with the relationship between knowledge and memory in art, specifically in its capacity to underpin readerly sympathy in novelistic realism. In her celebrated review of the German sociologist W. H. Riehl, "The Natural History of German Life" (1856), Eliot endorses the project of a "natural history of the people" and suggests the realist novel as a suitable means of achieving it. Eliot's rhetorical use of memory in the review establishes a personal relationship to a speculative collective experience. In her novel *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), however, memory appears in the form of two different affective orientations to the past: one aesthetic (that of the narrator), which persistently ironizes the attempt at apprehending a community as, in Riehl's phrase, "incarnate history," and one ascetic (that of the principal character, Maggie Tulliver), which continually fails in its

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attempts to withdraw from life in the present. Neither satisfies the desideratum of a natural history of the people. Eliot's novel demonstrates the incompatibility of historical representation and personal memory—not, however, in the name of a scientific or philosophical historicism, but rather in a way that returns human experience to a natural world of arbitrary disaster and a metaphysics of becoming. Despite the very different places in which they end up, both Ruskin and Eliot are concerned with the various ways in which memory attempts to compensate for the loss of Providence from the natural world and thereby provide the ground on which a modern subject may form itself as an ethical being.

In Chapter Two, I turn to the complex temporality of aesthetic revival in the context of Victorian engagements with the art of the Renaissance. The historiographical concept of the Renaissance took shape in the work of two major nineteenth-century historians—Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt—both of whom employed the methods of scientific historicism. Their work cemented the idea of the Renaissance as the time in which Europe emerged from the darkness of the Middle Ages and became modern. Particularly important here is Burckhardt's claim that the Renaissance saw the birth of the modern individual as such. This emphasis on individuality proved hugely influential for the Renaissance revival that occurred across Europe in the late nineteenth century. In John Addington Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy* (1875–1886), the most comprehensive study of the period in English, Renaissance individualism is in tension with the scientific historicism and philosophy of history that he espouses. Despite his personal investments in the Renaissance, finding there an affirmation of same-sex love that will help him

understand his own sexuality, Symonds scorns the idea of revival, disavowing the possibility that a reconsideration of the past could have any significant effect on the present given changed historical conditions. The irony of Symonds's position arises from the challenge that the historiographical concept of "Renaissance" presents to his historicism: it defines an early-modern Italian golden age as a moment of cultural rebirth and revival, that is, in relation to an earlier historical moment. To think history with a concept like Renaissance means to think the affinity of disparate moments in time outside of linear narratives—a model of temporality fundamentally at odds with scientific historicism. In contrast to the work of Symonds, the essays in Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* (1873) take the concept of renaissance seriously, exploring the idea of life in the present in connection with that of the past. At its limit, the Renaissance becomes in Pater's text any moment in history in which the cultivation of aesthetic experience is taken to be the highest good. Writing about Renaissance culture becomes a way for the male aesthete to understand himself as historical, through his affinity with a history that cannot be narrated chronologically but which appears in moments of experience. For Pater, whose book was criticized for its hedonistic aestheticism, the present is saturated with the past and the best way to deal with this fact is to find that part of it which gives us the most pleasure and then to give all of our attention to it: the engagement with the past is essentially aesthetic. Yet the overwhelming life of the present stands in contrast to the mortification of history that Pater consistently registers in his considerations of Renaissance art. The tension between a vibrant and an undead past, between a past that comes offering pleasure and one that turns its back and slips away, captures an ambivalence in historical

consciousness that challenges not only the intellectual foundations of scientific and philosophical historicisms but also its affective dispensation.

Chapter Three considers another (sometimes opposed) aesthetic revival of the Victorian period, the Gothic Revival. Victorian medievalism, as we find it in Augustus Welby Pugin, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and William Morris, is generally understood as a reactionary and nostalgic idealization of medieval society that draws its political power from the rhetorical strategy of contrast with the present. As such, medievalism's view onto the past appears to be essentially retrograde. Yet for Ruskin and Morris, Gothic architecture provides the occasion for a critique of the present attuned to the ways in which the past informs aesthetic experience and artistic creation. While Ruskin was critical of the sensationalized modes of encountering Gothic popularized by Romantic art and literature, he nevertheless begrudges some value to sentimental forms of admiration because they enable a collective experience of historicity that is both aesthetic and affective. Ruskin's theorization of Gothic architecture in *The Stones of Venice* (1851–1853), moreover, provides a theoretical basis for this observation in its identification of the experience of the grotesque as the key attribute of Gothic subjectivity. Ruskin's association of the Gothic subject with obscurity, uncertainty, and partiality can be felt in Morris's wistful and temporally complex portrayals of Gothic across his diverse work, both before and after his reading of Marx and conversion to revolutionary socialism. In the early short story "The Story of the Unknown Church" (1856) and in the utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1890), history moves from memory to vision and the Gothic subject becomes a ghost among ghosts. While Morris theorizes Gothic architecture as the most

historical of styles, his representation of it in both fiction and non-fiction focuses on its transtemporal reach and suggests it may be the only cultural form capable of surviving the great change attendant upon political revolution. Gothic thus becomes a site of transtemporal haunting, involving not only the past and the present but also the future.

In Chapter Four, I consider the work of two major figures of British Decadence, Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, who repurpose the forms of collecting and display associated with antiquities museums. While the dialogues in Wilde's *Intentions* (1891) provide canonical statements of Decadent aesthetics that reject the tenets of scientific historicism and the norms of realist aesthetics, I focus here on his museum ode cum love elegy *The Sphinx* (1894), which was first published in an *edition de luxe* designed by Charles Ricketts. The speaker of this dramatic monologue imaginatively accumulates fragments of ancient history and mythology and arranges them according to aesthetic and erotic principles rather than those of a historicist museology. The result is historical atmosphere rather than historical knowledge. As the objective form of the collector's desire, the collection that is *The Sphinx* generates not only an antiquity but also a lyric subject whose desires drive the text's formal poetic structure (a revised version of Tenny-son's *In Memoriam* stanza) in addition to its narrative of erotic excitement, exhaustion, and disgust. Beardsley, in his illustrations to Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, similarly juxtapos-es eclectic cultural and historical elements in flagrant disregard to historicist conventions of representation, and moreover overturns classicist ideals of a pristine and timeless antiquity. A reader of Nietzsche, Beardsley's unashamed presentation of sexual autono-my ridicules the Victorians' idealized images of the past that serve only to endorse their

own morality. Both Wilde and Beardsley practice history-in-jest, but at the same time their outrageous reappropriations of the past have an important result: they liberate it from the oppressive domain of tradition and thereby open the gates to forms of historical self-understanding that make no apology to those historicisms invested in determining truth outside the subject.

The principal texts read in the following chapters collectively present an image of Victorian aesthetics that is, on the one hand, focused on and addressed to a British context, and, on the other hand, consistently international in its intellectual and cultural engagements. While their authors mostly occupy a highly canonical position in Victorian studies, with their statements on aesthetics often taken to define the major currents and, indeed, the parameters of the discourse in Victorian Britain,[103] in common with much recent work in the field, I understand my objects as products of transnational encounters and forces.[104] In the present project, this involves situating the discourse of Victorian aesthetics in two broader contexts: that of European intellectual culture and that of the British Empire. It is certainly true, and will become evident in the next chapter, that the authors worked within or against a tradition of aesthetics and historiography particular to Britain, one characterized by a valorization of rural life and an identification of Gothic architecture and supposedly Anglo-Saxon institutions as emblems of national continuity. Yet it will be equally evident that most of the authors were also cosmopolitan, with

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[103] For a defense of the Victorian period as a historiographical period, see Hewitt, "Why the Notion of Victorian Britain *Does* Make Sense"; for a questioning of it, see Flint, "Why 'Victorian'?"

[104] See especially, Goodlad, *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic*; and Hensley, *Forms of Empire*. For further context, see Joshi, "Globalizing Victorian Studies"; and Marcus, "Same Difference?"

strong personal ties in Continental Europe, and avid readers of French and German literature in particular. Given the nature of intellectual and cultural exchange in nineteenth-century Europe, this is no surprise. What it means is that the particularity of British aesthetics sits at the confluence of both national and international discursive currents. In contrast to the context of European intellectual culture, however, that of the British Empire is deeply submerged in canonical Victorian aesthetic discourse, rarely coming to the surface. We will nevertheless encounter its moments at various points in the chapters and will see it most fully in the Coda, which moves to the still essentially Victorian context of colonial Australia.

In the Coda, I consider the attempt by Marcus Clarke to theorize and produce an Australian aesthetics in colonial Melbourne. This antipodean shift, as the Coda will make clear, is not comparative but rather a movement internal to Victorian aesthetics. While the texts considered in the chapters bear the traces of empire—whether in Ruskin's primeval American forest, Symonds's racialization of Progress, Morris's anti-imperialism, or Wilde's Egyptology—the addition of Clarke's programmatic statement on colonial literature to the canon of Victorian aesthetics is a reminder, and one that bears repeating, of Victorian culture's complicity, even in its more Europhilic, cosmopolitan instances, in the project of the British Empire. If Victorian aesthetics is a discourse about the formation of the self as historical, then it is more concerned with the fate of the European as the subject of history than with that of the non-European other who remains outside of it. Foucault's curiosity in the ethics of ancient Greece and Rome was repelled by the injustice of those societies, even as it found there the promise of something other

than that which the present seemed to offer.[105] So, the "other historicisms" of the Victorians, while they allow us to reimagine what counts as history and to reconceptualize aesthetics as itself a field of historical knowledge, will be most effective now not as models but as perspectives from which to think our own historicity and the sense in which, if Beiser's claim is true, "we are all historicists today."

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[105] See, in particular, the interview "On the Genealogy of Ethics" in *The Foucault Reader*, 340–72.

Chapter One

The Aesthetic and the Ascetic: Natural History and Memory

in John Ruskin and George Eliot

1.

That the natural world was an obsession of the Victorians is readily apprehended from both their art and their science.[1] That history was "the common coin of the nineteenth century" is even farther beyond doubt.[2] In aesthetics, we have perhaps no better contemporary diagnosis of these cultural conditions than Oscar Wilde's dialogue against the representational norms of Victorian art, "The Decay of Lying" (1889). In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will pursue the alternatives to these norms that Wilde and others of the Decadent movement practiced. For the present, however, Wilde's antinomian critique is useful for its delineation, however polemical, of the dominant aesthetic framework against which he is writing and in whose development John Ruskin and George Eliot—the authors whose work is most important to this chapter—decisively participated. Vivian (the dialogue's principal speaker) denounces the call to "return to

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[1] "The preoccupation of the Victorians with Romantic nature poetry and contemporaneous versions of it, with nature as an 'aesthetic norm,' and with nature as a perennial source of beauty and delight can hardly be overstated" (Merrill, *Romance of Victorian Natural History*, 6).

[2] Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History*, xi.

Life and Nature," dismisses realist novels as improbable and unreadable, argues that life and nature imitate art, and insists that art reveals nothing of either the age in which it was created or that in which it is set (W4:83, 80, 90, 96). While Vivian takes aim at his targets seriatim, the overarching argument is that the combined aesthetic imperatives of historical accuracy, and adherence to nature and to social reality are the mantras of a single, worn-out aesthetics that misguidedly aligns mimetic accuracy with truth and moral goodness. Hence the occasion for and final revelation of Vivian's diatribe: "Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art" (W4:103). Interestingly, however, in positing this monolithic regime of truth, Vivian's protest attributes to it a universal mode of representation that establishes the aesthetic substitutability and therefore, ultimately, aesthetic identity of historical, natural, and social objects. To be sure, Vivian's own aesthetic of *l'art pour l'art* also affords such substitutability.[3] His target, therefore, is not so much the use of certain subject matter—landscape, everyday life of the past or present—as a particular form of representation and interpretation, a way of relating to truth that we are accustomed to call realism. What interests me about Wilde's characterization of Victorian mimetic criteria is its alignment of three truths: social truth, historical truth, and natural truth. The implication is that these three truths can be realized in the same object. Vivian denounces all such truth-telling. In this chapter, I am concerned with the theory and practice of just such representation, which I call, on the basis of the two premises at the head of this paragraph, and following George Eliot's famous discussion of it, natural history.

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[3] In this respect, they are both representative of Jacques Rancière's aesthetic regime of the arts (Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 14).

While "natural history" as a genre of texts describing worldly phenomena dates back to antiquity, modern scholarship has come to associate the term predominantly with European science of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a science that reached its highpoint in the systematic taxonomy of Linnaeus, whose *Systema Naturae* was first published in 1735.[4] In Foucault's well-known account in *The Order of Things*, natural history names the form taken by knowledge of the phenomenal world before the epistemic break at the end of the eighteenth century that opened the way for the new sciences of biology and geology. Natural history was the practice of recording visible phenomena through precise description and, key for Foucault, naming: "Natural history," writes Foucault, "is nothing more than the nomination of the visible."[5] Rather than narrating a series of events over time, classical natural history orders that which exists; its concerns are synchronic rather than diachronic.[6] The systematic nomenclature of Linnaeus is Foucault's prime example. It also provides Mary Louise Pratt with a starting point for the analysis of what she calls European planetary consciousness.[7] With his system, Linnaeus created a framework for the classification of all species, known and unknown. Such a universalizing natural history, Pratt shows, "extracted specimens not only from their organic or ecological relations with each other, but also from their places in other peoples' economies, histories, social and symbolic systems," a development attributable to

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[4] The English term originates in the title of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*, an encyclopedia written in the first century CE, which itself translates Aristotelian φυσικὴ ἱστορία, "inquiry into nature." In neither case does it denote historical study in the modern sense of the word, that is, an account of events over time.

[5] Foucault, *Order of Things*, 144.

[6] More precisely, the historical (in the sense of chronological time) does not account for the way beings are but rather explains the disordered nature of natural communities. In short, historical events may modify environments but not species (ibid., 164).

[7] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 15.

the gap between words and things in the European episteme, whose opening Foucault tracks in *The Order of Things*.[8] That such an ahistorical natural history was largely superseded by the new, truly historical sciences of the nineteenth century was already recognized by Friedrich Engels in *The Dialectic of Nature*.[9] More recently, Wolf Lepenies's *Das Ende der Naturgeschichte* similarly asserts the absence of history from earlier sciences of nature: "The notion of a history of nature is unthinkable for classical natural history."[10] However, Lepenies also recognizes the persistence of natural-historical forms of knowledge (especially in literature) and even posits moments of reactionary "dehistoricization" (*Enthistorisierung*) in already "temporalized" (*verzeitlichten*) scientific disciplines.[11] According to this argument, if natural history persists as a way of organizing knowledge about the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then it does so alongside—sometimes oppositionally, sometimes collaboratively, but always in epistemological tension with—sciences such as geology, evolutionary theory and developmental biology.

Persistent or not, such a natural history—or, according to a more tentative orthography, natural "history"—might seem to be antithetical to the present project. If my aim is to examine ways of relating the present and the past to one another, then surely such examination can only be undertaken upon forms of knowledge that make chronological distinctions, that are, to use Lepenies's terminology, temporalized. While, as the Intro-

[8] Ibid., 31; Foucault, *Order of Things*, 141.
[9] Engels writes of classical natural history: "All change, all development in nature was denied" (Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 74; my translation). For Engels, the decisive moment comes with Kant's natural philosophy, in which the earth is first understood to be dynamic rather than static (ibid., 75).
[10] Lepenies, *Das Ende der Naturgeschichte*, 30 (my translation).
[11] Ibid., 20.

duction has already made clear, I accept the general claim that European sciences underwent a transformation in the decades around 1800 that can be characterized epistemologically as temporalization, in contrast to Lepenies and notwithstanding Pratt's argument for the universalizing role of natural history in European imperialism, I do not see the survival or recurrence of natural history—the systematic description of phenomena—in the Victorian period as necessarily the result of a dehistoricization of knowledge or of the untimely persistence of an ahistorical science.[12] While the nineteenth century witnessed the acceleration of the division between the human and natural sciences, for many Victorian writers, the maintenance of a connection between cultural and natural representations was of tremendous importance. Despite their differences, Ruskin and Eliot are two such authors: they both understand human culture in relation to nature and nature in relation to history; they both see aesthetic representation as a potentially truthful way of representing knowledge about the human and nonhuman world; and they are both concerned to elucidate the historicity of experience through aesthetics. In the texts examined

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[12] In this chapter, I am concerned with natural history as a form of knowledge about the phenomenal world rather than a set of practices centered on the collection of specimens in the field. It should be noted, however, that the nineteenth century was a period in which practical natural history achieved widespread popularity in Britain in conjunction with other recreational forms of nation-building. In *Sciences of Antiquity*, for example, Noah Heringman argues for an intimate relationship between antiquarianism and natural history in the Romantic period, that they were both part of a "prehistoric turn" in the sciences that supported the creation of new disciplines as well as cultural movements such as neoclassicism, medievalism, and popular natural history (Heringman, *Sciences of Antiquity*, 2–3). Furthermore, as Lynn Merrill has shown, Victorian natural history provided a way in which nature remained accessible and popular as an object of study for non-specialists, a study that, as Mary Ellen Bellanca adds, often involved the recording of both temporal change and constancy (Merrill, *Romance of Victorian Natural History*, 12; Bellanca, *Daybooks of Discovery*, 105). While Ruskin and Eliot also practiced this kind of natural history, which is, of course, continuous with its scientific forms, the texts which I discuss here are concerned instead with the possibility of a natural history informed by cultural history, rather than the reverse.

here—Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *Modern Painters*, Eliot's "The Natural History of German Life" and *The Mill on the Floss*—they continually turn to the question of memory—both the representation and analysis of individual memories and the theorization of memory as a mental process that relates the present to the past—as the conceptual site for developing a natural-historical aesthetics.

I have chosen these texts for two reasons: firstly, they are highly canonical mid-Victorian texts that theorize and exemplify a post-Romantic natural-historical aesthetic combining realist techniques of representation, historicist conceptualizations of temporality, and an in interest in history and the natural world—the aesthetic nexus against which Wilde is writing and which provides the background for the positions taken in the subsequent chapters of the dissertation; secondly, these texts personalize this aesthetic through an exploration of the power of memory to mediate between individual and collective subjectivity, thereby developing natural history as an aesthetic form of knowledge and representation that is emphatically subjective. While memory and what I am calling here a natural-historical aesthetic are both common elements in nineteenth-century British literature, it is the conscious and sustained exploration of their relation in these texts that makes them so apt for this chapter. What distinguishes these texts, moreover, from earlier Romantic instances of this combination—Wordsworth is an unmistakable precedent—is the more explicit, persistent, and expansive social-historical situation of aesthetic experience, which is never allowed to transcend its conditions.[13] Given its particular focus, the

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[13] I have in mind here Jerome McGann's influential but controversial account in *The Romantic Ideology*, according to which early British Romanticism is marked by its belief in the ability of poetry to transcend its worldly conditions, a belief that is the object of steady disillusionment over the course of Romanticism's development. Within such a

present chapter does not (indeed, cannot) engage the entire domain in which the literary and the natural-historical intersect in Victorian culture, and so does not contribute to the already extensive scholarship on the rhetoric of scientific writing, the influence of contemporary science on the arts, the widespread practices of collection and identification, nor even scientific-materialist approaches to aesthetics.[14] My goal is twofold and quite specific: to establish the contours of mainstream Victorian aesthetics in its commitment to natural and historical truth, and, at the same time, to show how—through its insistence on personal memory—this aesthetics already centers the subject of historical knowledge as an aesthetic subject.

As should already be apparent, what I mean by "natural history" in this chapter diverges somewhat from the usual sense historicized in the paragraphs above. This stems from my desire, following the work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, to think natural history more literally and more dialectically, not simply as pre-scientific, ahistorical and imperialist knowledge of the world in the senses of Foucault, Pratt, and Lepenies, but as a mode of representation that sees nature in history and history in nature. Benjamin's and Adorno's dialectical theories of natural history, though engaging different

schema, Ruskin and Eliot begin where the Romantics end off: one of their primary concerns is accounting for the historical and cultural conditions of aesthetic experience.

[14] These are all now well-trodden fields. Literary studies of scientific writing, which has naturally focused on Darwin, include the influential work of Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, and Levine, *Darwin the Writer*. Studies of the influence of science on Victorian writers are legion, and include Shuttleworth's study of Eliot, *George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Science*, Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists*, and Dale's *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture*. Likewise, the influence of literature on scientific writing is explored in Lansley, *Darwin's Debt.* The engagement of writers (including Eliot and Lewes) in popular natural history has been studied by Merrill, *Romance of Victorian Natural History*, and Bellanca, *Daybooks of Discovery*. Finally, Morgan's *Outward Mind* provides a thorough study of scientific aesthetics in Victorian Britain.

cultural contexts—in Benjamin's case, baroque drama, in Adorno's, the critique of phenomenology—articulate a relationship between nature and history that illuminates nicely the concerns for which I argue among the Victorians discussed here. In Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, natural history undergirds allegorical representation, which consists in the accumulation of fragments and ruins. Such ruins provide the stage-sets for the German mourning plays under consideration in his book, and it is in the analysis of the ruin—allegory's correlative in the realm of things—that what Benjamin means by natural history becomes clear: "In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting."[15] Natural history accordingly describes a spatial representation of corrosive and dispersive historical processes. In Adorno's reading of Benjamin, at stake is the dissolution of the concept of nature as "substance in history."[16] Adorno takes the concept to its dialectical extreme: the historical, even at its most historical, must be seen as natural, and the natural, even at its most natural, must be seen as historical.[17] The goal is to break down not only the concept of nature as totality but also that of history as continuity. The result: nature is transient and history is material; not only a critique of Heideggerian phenomenology, then, but an image of revolutionary potential. Certainly, just such a dialectical natural history will not be found in the Victorian writers discussed here. However, it is precisely the epistemological problems of the relationship between totality and continuity, spatialization and temporalization, synchrony and diachrony that are being grappled with in their texts. Moreover, they approach these problems as problems of artistic representation. For all that the work of Ruskin and Eliot is informed by

[15] Benjamin, *Origin*, 177–78.
[16] Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," 111.
[17] Ibid., 117.

classical natural history, it also goes beyond it in ways that anticipate, even if only faintly, the dialectical models of Benjamin and Adorno. They achieve this, as the ensuing discussion will show, through their attempts to align an aesthetics of nature with a historicist epistemology.

2.

As the most prominent aesthetician of Victorian Britain, an especially loud voice in the chorus advocating the artistic return to nature, and the practitioner of a historicist criticism, Ruskin is no doubt among the unnamed targets of "The Decay of Lying." Over the course of the five volumes of *Modern Painters* (1843–1860), he provides not only a defense of the landscape painter J. M. W. Turner (his stated aim) but moreover a systematic aesthetics of nature and a history of art that periodizes on the basis of broad social characteristics interpreted from the work of individual artists. However, whether *Modern Painters* can be rightly considered a unified work is a long-standing question in Ruskin's reception.[18] Written over two decades that also saw the publication of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851–1853), as well as the author's loss of faith and the death of Turner, it is not surprising that the work should reflect changes in Ruskin's interests and thought. Even so, a common concern for the accurate perception and representation of nature runs throughout the five sprawling volumes.[19] That this

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[18] Of the more important studies, lumpers include Landow (*The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*), Sawyer (*Ruskin's Poetic Argument*), and Hewison (*The Argument of the Eye*); splitters include Helsinger (*Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder*), Wihl (*Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility*), and Teukolsky (*The Literate Eye*).
[19] Caroline Levine goes further and argues for a unity of concern in all of Ruskin's work of the 1840s and 1850s, linking the realism of *Modern Painters* with the socialism of *The*

concern engages both aesthetic and scientific discourse is well established. Most scholarship on Ruskin's relation to science has focused on his engagement with Darwin, beginning with *Modern Painters V* and culminating in the more explicitly anti-Darwinian works of the 1870s: *Love's Meinie* (1873–1881) on ornithology, *Deucalion* (1875–1883) on geology, and *Proserpina* (1875–1886) on botany.[20] In *The Literate Eye*, however, Rachel Teukolsky reads the first two volumes of *Modern Painters* as works of natural history informed by early-nineteenth-century natural theology and an empiricist epistemology taken over from Locke. Ruskin's goal at this early stage of the project, she argues, is "to categorize the features of landscape painting in the mode of a natural history treatise."[21] The result is informed as much by an Enlightenment impulse towards rational classification as by a Romantic sensibility of individual *Bildung*, as evidenced by Ruskin's frequent citation of personal memory.[22] In the terms of this chapter, the tension between classification and *Bildung* identified by Teukolsky is the tension named by natural history. In this section, though I begin with an example from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, I focus on *Modern Painters III*, the volume that most explicitly engages in a theorization of modernity, since it brings the dialectical relationship between observation

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Stones of Venice. Together, she argues, these books present the work of accurately representing nature's infinite variety as an ongoing struggle with important political results: "realism, which demands our resolute attention to nature's infinite variety, is a revolutionary aesthetic" (Levine, "Visual Labor," 81).

[20] See, principally, Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture*; as well as Frost, "Circles of Vitality"; Krieg, "Ruskin, Darwin, and Looking Beneath Surfaces"; Leng, "Ruskin's Rewriting of Darwin"; Levine, "Ruskin, Darwin, and the Matter of Matter"; and Weltman, *Performing the Victorian*, ch. 2. Such scholarship is in general agreement that Ruskin, who took an active interest in scientific developments, found Darwin's theories particularly offensive because of their naturalization of the aesthetic in purely materialist terms and, more broadly, their decentering of the human.

[21] Teukolsky, *Literate Eye*, 35.

[22] Ibid., 48.

and memory into contact with collective history. I then turn to the botany of *Modern Painters V* to consider Ruskin's first published response to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. My point in doing so is to reconnect the earlier work on the conditions of the perception and representation of nature in modernity with the later more reactionary work, and thereby show how it extends the theorization of historical relation into taxonomy. Where, in *Modern Painters III*, the aesthetic project of refining perception becomes a way of relating to the past, in *Modern Painters V*, the allegorization of the natural world provides a theory of knowledge that collapses all historicization into memorialization. Ruskin thus moves from the analysis of individual memories into a theorization of remembrance.

Ruskin begins the sixth chapter of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, "The Lamp of Memory," with a recollection of a blooming spring meadow in the French Jura, set amongst pine forests and perched on a ravine.[23] With this scene, Ruskin recounts not just any memory but a moment, in his words, "marked by more than ordinary fulness of joy or clearness of teaching" (R8:221). The passage begins with the detailed and loving description of the spot, naming ten different species of flower, and follows the author as he moves through the forest and out onto the edge of the ravine, where he watches a hawk flying past. "It would be difficult," he writes, "to conceive a scene less dependent upon any other interest than that of its own secluded and serious beauty" (R8:223). However, he immediately recoils from this Kantian conclusion. He continues:

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[23] The occasion, including the revelation about the role of history in the aesthetic experience of nature, is recorded in Ruskin's diary for 19 April 1846 (R8:221, fn. 1).

[…] but the writer well remembers the sudden blankness and chill which were cast upon it when he endeavoured, in order more strictly to arrive at the sources of its impressiveness, to imagine it, for a moment, a scene in some aboriginal forest of the New Continent. The flowers in an instant lost their light, the river its music; the hills became oppressively desolate; a heaviness in the boughs of the darkened forest showed how much of their former power had been dependent upon a life which was not theirs, how much of the glory of the imperishable, or continually renewed, creation is reflected from things more precious in their memories than it, in its renewing. Those ever springing flowers and ever flowing streams had been dyed by the deep colours of human endurance, valour, and virtue; and the crests of the sable hills that rose against the evening sky received a deeper worship, because their far shadows fell eastward over the iron walls of Joux, and the four-square keep of Granson. (R8:223–24)

This Wordsworthian anecdote serves to introduce the main argument of the chapter, namely, that architecture should embody history and so serve as a collective reminder of human (or rather, as the invocation of a history-less America implies, *European*) achievement. More specifically, Ruskin argues for the capacity of human artifacts to embody the entire history of the culture that created them, that is, the congealing of history into substance, and accordingly positions history as essential to any concept of the aesthetic. The remarkable implication of the anecdote's placement in a book about architecture, and in a chapter about architecture's memorializing capacity, is that this capacity is projected onto nature. The passage is often cited, however, as a key moment in Ruskin's changing relationship with associationist aesthetics.[24] Natural beauty is here

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[24] Associationist aesthetics, which had been influentially espoused by Archibald Alison in his *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790), holds that aesthetic pleasure and displeasure are the results of mental associations; it was vigorously rejected by Ruskin in *Modern Painters II* (R4:66). Landow claims that Ruskin had a change of heart with respect to associationism sometime in between the publication of *Modern Painters II* in 1846 and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* in 1849 (Landow, *Aesthetic and Critical Theories*, 105–10). Teukolsky, however, argues that Ruskin's relationship to associationism was more complicated, with his early rejection in *Modern Painters II*

presented as an effect of history rather than an inherent property. It follows that a world outside of human history (here, disturbingly, but conventionally, located in the Americas) would be experienced (at least by a European) as a less beautiful one. Such a conclusion may seem surprising from the author who once wrote that "everything in nature is more or less beautiful" (R3:111), the author who repeatedly insists on nature's infinite variety as the greatest source of aesthetic pleasure. It fits, however, with the historicist hermeneutics that Ruskin would paradigmatically practice in *The Stones of Venice*, the kind of criticism that Wilde ridicules in "The Decay of Lying." Here, crucially, it is not just art that is interpreted as the expression of time and place, but even the experience and memory of the "imperishable creation" that is nature.

Ruskin returns to the problem of natural beauty's historical determination in *Modern Painters III*, where it is repositioned as a defining aspect of aesthetic experience in modernity, whose diagnosis, in broad outline, is as follows. Modernity, according to Ruskin, is the outcome of an epochal loss of faith whose primary symptom is widespread melancholia (R5:321). Combined with the disdain of human bodily beauty, this melancholy faithlessness turns perception outward onto two objects: nature and history (R5:325–26). No longer able to find beauty in the human figure (as in Greco-Roman antiquity) or in the contemplation of the divine (as in the European Middle Ages), the members of a modern European society look instead to external nature, which they know through science rather than lore, and the imagined past, which they know through history rather than tradition. Much of Ruskin's evidence is literary: it is "the love of natural

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belying his dependence on associationist arguments from the start of his career (Teukolsky, *Literate Eye*, 49–57).

history" that distinguishes Scott's poetry from that of Homer and Dante (R5:350). But it also includes analysis of his own earliest memories, in which these two modern objects—nature and history—are not only dominant but intertwined. His memories include glens, hills, lakes, icy rocks, and mossy tree roots—all, from the beginning, infused with history, whether from facts imparted by his parents or the novels of Scott (R5:365–67). In these childhood encounters, natural objects become aesthetic objects through history: "mountains, in particular, were always partly confused with those of my favourite book, Scott's *Monastery*" (R5:366). In other words, history mediates nature. Unlike the painful revelation experienced in the Alpine meadow, however, these memories celebrate the historicization of nature as the restoration, however partial and melancholic, of wonder to a personal subject in a profane world. History provides nature with its auratic residue. Ruskin is now comfortable with the earlier revelation that the experience of natural beauty depends as much on association as on natural form itself.

Modern Painters shows, moreover, that not only the aesthetic object but also aesthetic experience is natural-historical. The examples discussed so far are recollections in which history determines the experience of the perceptual objects provided by nature; in short, the emphasis has been on natural objects. An example of Ruskin's literary criticism from *Modern Painters III* will demonstrate one way in which the lessons about history and nature gleaned from memory translate into the aesthetic experience of art objects and to the register of perception in general. In his appraisal of Dante's description of the color of apple blossoms ("less than that of roses, but more than that of violets"),

Ruskin presents four floral scenes—"principal among the gifts of the northern earth"—with which this color is associated in his mind:

> 1st. Bell gentians growing close together, mixed with lilies of the valley, on the Jura pastures.
> 2nd. Alpine roses with dew upon them, under low rays of morning sunshine, touching the tops of the flowers.
> 3rd. Bell heather in mass, in full light, at sunset.
> 4th. White narcissus (red-centred) in mass, on the Vevay pastures, in sunshine after rain. (R5:283–84)

The most obvious point about these four almost photographic images is that, as the incredible specificity of circumstance and detail indicate, they are all memories (the first, second, and fourth explicitly located in the Alps, the third probably in Britain). Ruskin's passionate campaign to improve perception is glimpsed here in this heuristic practice of memory-layering, in which memory not only provides the materials for reflection but informs aesthetic experience in the present. Here, Dante's representation of apple blossoms is measured not for its accuracy (which Ruskin simply asserts) but for its ability to contain associations that are both personal and cultural. Like Freud's image of Rome with all the buildings of its palimpsestic history simultaneously present to the eye, Ruskin's analysis of perception theorizes it as the synchronized actualization of discrete events from the past. Although Freud admits his fantastical image of the Eternal City is an imperfect metaphor for the psyche, it still goes some way in illustrating his claim that the past is as a rule preserved in mental life.[25] Ruskin's associationist heuristic is no psychoanalysis *avant la lettre*, but it precedes Freud in attempting to represent the historical in accumulative, spatial terms and in understanding experience as always overdetermined

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[25] Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 17–19.

by the past. Ruskin's reflective aesthetics (what he calls *theoria*) lead not only to the revelation of the historical as the condition of natural beauty—as in the examples of the Alpine meadow and the childhood memories—but also to the discovery that perception and reflection more generally are themselves so conditioned.

Ruskin's historicization of perception is not limited to the sphere of aesthetic representation but is also registered in natural science. My final example from Ruskin comes from the sections on botany in *Modern Painters V*. In translating his natural-historical aesthetics into scientific knowledge, Ruskin makes the case for the unity of all kinds of experience. The shared capacity of plants and buildings to point to history that sets up the argument of "The Lamp of Memory" provides him with the foundations for an alternative taxonomy. In *Modern Painters V*, Ruskin presents his own systematic classification of plants, in which there are two divisions: "tented plants," also called "resting plants," which "live in encampments, on the ground, as lilies; or on surfaces of rock, or stems of other plants, as lichens and mosses. They live—some for a year, some for many years, some for myriads of years; but, perishing, they pass as the tented Arab passes; *they leave no memorials of themselves*"; and "building plants," which "will *not* live on the ground, but eagerly raise edifices above it. Each works hard with solemn forethought all its life. Perishing, it leaves its work in the form which will be most useful to its successors—its own monument, and their inheritance. These architectural edifices we call 'Trees'" (R7:21; Ruskin's emphasis). The difference is civilizational: Does a plant memorialize itself architecturally or does it not? Ruskin's natural history is not simply "the nomination of the visible" but, rather, draws on an earlier form of knowledge—

namely, *allegoresis*—through which he is able to analytically present the plant kingdom as typologically parallel to aspects of human society.[26] This practice is carried further in the division of building plants into classes: "builders with the shield" (i.e., broadleaf trees) and "builders with the sword" (i.e., coniferous trees). The point is, Ruskin's typological allegoresis does not abstract the natural world outside of history in the way that, as Pratt argues, colonial natural history does. This does not mean that Ruskin's alternative is any less imperialistic, as its militarized and racialized terminology makes clear. It does mean, however, that Ruskin's science is a self-consciously culturally situated one that goes beyond associationism—it is no longer a matter of personal experience—by conflating memory with history and nature with culture. Botany thus becomes a theory of historical knowledge, a way of perceiving and explaining forms of transience and persistence, a science of memory. Nature memorializes human history—no metaphor.

The opening anecdote of "The Lamp of Memory," like the childhood memories of *Modern Painters III*, contains two instances of temporal relation: the ideal present in which the author writes (and in which the reader reads) is related through remembrance to the particular moment of the spring day in the Alps (the memory), which is in turn related through association to European history. These are different forms of relation: the first is remembrance of a discrete event, the second, evocation of much larger and less clearly defined (by no means universal or abstract) spatial and temporal spheres. Nature

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[26] On the importance of typological interpretation for Ruskin, see Landow, *Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*; Sawyer, *Ruskin's Poetic Argument*; Sussman, *Fact into Figure*; Wihl, *Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility*; and, for Victorian critics more broadly, Landow, *Victorian Types*.

is the node where the two relations meet: it is the hinge that articulates individual memory and that of the larger cultural collective ("Europe" as a racial-civilizational unity of shared history). In the case of the taxonomy, however, the relation is different. Allegoresis establishes a relation of equivalence: now individual memorialization is equivalent to historiography because nature is equivalent to culture. The self-formation of the European individual—the plant that builds its own monument (let us not forget the racialized division of the plant kingdom into historical and unhistorical classes)—is the memorialization of culture at the level of the individual. Taxonomy thereby becomes yet another attempt on Ruskin's part to overcome the alienation of European modernity by restoring a racialized subject to its ancestral culture.

In all the examples discussed in this section, the equivalence of memory and history is a way of reconciling nature and culture within the framework of a general theory of perception. One of the goals of *Modern Painters* was to refute the widely held belief, influentially expressed by both Kant and Mill, that scientific knowledge and aesthetic experience belong to separate spheres.[27] Ironically, such a refutation is also implicit in the work of Darwin, Ruskin's greatest enemy. But where Darwin's materialist explanation of beauty as the result of natural selection constitutes, via a radically non-anthropocentric historicization, a total naturalization of aesthetics, Ruskin's memorializing historicism, by insisting on an anthropocentric cosmology, effects a total aestheticization of nature. If Ruskin's natural history reverts to its premodern forms, then it does so not by detemporalizing its object, which it sees as historical through and through, but,

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[27] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 114; Mill, "What Is Poetry?" 1215.

rather, by returning to the culturally situated human individual the prerogative of deter-

mining meaning.

3.

George Eliot reviewed volumes three and (very briefly) four of *Modern Painters* shortly

after their publication in 1856. In her review of *Modern Painters III*, she makes the

following remark: "The truth of infinite value that he teaches is *realism*—the doctrine

that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and

not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of

definite, substantial reality."[28] It is because of such remarks that Eliot's critical work, and

especially that published in the *Westminster Review* in 1856, is taken as a patchwork

formulation of the artistic and intellectual principles that she would put into practice

when she turned to fiction.[29] The long review essay "The Natural History of German

Life" has taken on particular importance in this critical narrative, in which it is often read

alongside Eliot's first novel, *Adam Bede* (1859). Suzanne Graver summarizes the consen-

sus well when she identifies the crux of the essay in its desire for "a renewal of communi-

ty based on a more accurate and complex understanding of social life in both the past and

the present."[30] In one of the most influential and sustained paired readings of essay and

novel, Sally Shuttleworth not only notes their many similarities but also identifies the

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[28] Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 368 (Eliot's emphasis).
[29] David Carroll, for example, finds in Eliot's essays and reviews an engagement with contemporary European hermeneutic theory that informs the narrative importance of interpretation in her novels (Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*, 9–22).
[30] Graver, *George Eliot and Community*, 29.

essay as a "programmatic statement for [Eliot's] theory of fiction" and an engagement

with the issues of an organic model of society that provides the foundation for *Adam

Bede*.[31] Caroline Levine goes so far as to identify Eliot's and Ruskin's combined publica-

tions of 1856 as a watershed in the formulation of a theory of realism in England.[32]

However, questioning this commonplace of Victorian studies, Fionnuala Dillane points to

the conventionality of Eliot's comments on novelistic representation in the context of

progressive periodicals like the *Westminster Review*, in which the piece was published. In

Dillane's reading, the review essay is too strongly determined by the conditions of its

appearance in such a publication to be convincingly read as a sincere declaration of

artistic principles. Analyzing both the context of the review and its rhetoric, she finds that

Eliot's "position never emerges but her equivocations are obvious."[33] Yet even if the

question of the relationship between Eliot's journalism and novels warrants greater

circumspection, as Dillane convincingly argues, it is still the case that, through both her

unsigned journalism and her fiction, Eliot participated in a mid-century European dis-

course about art, society, and modernity that was accorded great political importance by

those in her circle, as the work of Shuttleworth and others has shown. In Britain, the

influence of Ruskin in this discourse, as Levine argues, was immense: in *Modern Paint-

ers* and *The Stones of Venice*, he created the theoretical and political framework for a

mode of naturalistic representation and historical interpretation that would determine the

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[31] Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, 24. For a comprehensive list of citations, see Dillane, "Re-reading George Eliot's 'Natural History,'" 261–62, n. 3. Dillane originates the reading in Gordon Haight's 1968 biography of Eliot (ibid., 244), but it is already apparent in Richard Stang's 1957 essay "The Literary Criticism of George Eliot."
[32] Levine, "Visual Labor," 75–76.
[33] Dillane, "Re-reading George Eliot's 'Natural History,'" 256.

dominant forms of aesthetic discourse in Britain for decades—as Wilde no doubt saw. In the previous section, I examined one small aspect of this framework, in which the mutual mediation of nature and culture becomes a way of articulating the various forms of relation between cultural history and personal memory. Despite developing a form of social criticism in *The Stones of Venice*, curiously, Ruskin never provides us with an image of social collectivity: his buildings and meadows are usually empty of any other human presence save himself or a lone imagined figure, such as his Gothic stonemason (whom we will meet in Chapter Three). In this section, the natural-historical representation of the social will come into focus with the work of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, the German ethnologist and novelist reviewed by Eliot in "The Natural History of German Life." While readings of this essay usually focus on its engagement in a theory of realism, I want to draw out its reliance on a rhetoric of memory, in order to lay the groundwork for the next section's discussion of Eliot's uses of memory as a way of relating to the past in her second novel, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). In doing so, I show the ways in which memory works to naturalize history.

"The Natural History of German Life" is a long review of the first two volumes of W. H. Riehl's *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Socialpolitik* (*The Natural History of the People as Foundation of a German Social Policy*): *Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (*The Bourgeois Society*, 1851), which theorizes historical change in society as the result of the interplay of two forces—inertia (*Beharren*), associated with the peasantry and the aristocracy, and movement (*Bewegung*), associated with the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; and *Land und Leute* (*Land and People*, 1854), which

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provides a cultural-geographical survey of the German states and expounds a theory of culture as environmentally determined.[34] Riehl, considered the founder of folklore (*Volkskunde*) as an academic discipline, was a nationalist and a conservative who lamented the destruction of Germany's diverse traditional cultures by the processes of modernization. An adviser to King Maximillian II of Bavaria, Riehl developed *Volkskunde* as a historically grounded empirical alternative to both statistical methods of social analysis and abstract theories of society.[35] It was, in Stein's words, "a conservative cultural science in the service of the state,"[36] and *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes* is accordingly addressed to social policy makers. Eliot appears unconvinced by Riehl's political agenda, which is either ignored or subjected to wry apophasis, and becomes apologetic to her liberal readership when discussing his conservatism. Nonetheless, Riehl interests Eliot for his scientific approach to the representation of social classes, his insistence on cultural particularity rather than universality, and his conception of European society as, in Eliot's translation, "incarnate history" (*leibhaftige Geschichte*). Before considering "The Natural History of German Life" any further, it is worth pausing a little with Riehl, since scholarship on Eliot almost never engages his work directly and, moreover, it provides for an interesting comparison with Ruskin's art-historical diagnosis of modernity in *Modern Painters*.

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[34] The other volumes are *Die Familie* (*The Family*, 1855), which presents the family unit as the building block of society, and *Wanderbuch* (*Traveling Book*, 1869), a guide to ethnographic fieldwork. For a more thorough overview and contextualization of Riehl's work, see Altenbockum, *Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl*, and Stein, "Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl and the Scientific-Literary Formation of *Volkskunde*."

[35] As Altenbockum points out, Riehl's concept of natural history is drawn from the German Romantic tradition of *Naturphilosophie* (Altenbockum, *Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl*, 116).

[36] Stein, "Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl," 493.

As it happens, Riehl's *Land und Leute* begins with a discussion of art history and a diagnosis of modernity. He looks back to the dawn of European modernity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—"the great restructuring of society whose end is still not come"—and notices the sudden appearance of the people (*das Volk*), "in its rudest reality," as an aesthetic object in art and literature.[37] While it was forgotten again in the following two centuries, the artistic interest in the people has returned with new urgency in the nineteenth century:

> In poetry and the fine arts, a remarkable push to extend the sphere of representable subject matter is apparent. […] Where earlier the people as a collective personality was at most just a vaguely hinted staffage, just a decoration in the background, now, more and more, it is becoming an independent character—indeed, a main character—who is placed with broad individualization in the foreground of pictures and works of poetry. *In an entirely different way than any earlier period, the present is seeking to grasp the people as an aesthetic object.*[38]

Riehl registers this development both in popular literature—in village tales and urban working-class literature—and in the desire of an effete bourgeoisie to overcome its alienation from the "raw life of the people." In either case, the development results from the loss of a naive relation to social conditions, just as, Riehl writes, the poetic longing for nature only arises once humanity has alienated itself from nature.[39] Like Ruskin, then, Riehl interprets modern landscape art as the symptom of alienation and its attendant

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[37] Riehl, *Land und Leute*, 3 (my translation). While Riehl revised the volumes of *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes* many times during his lifetime, I have consulted the third edition, as this is the edition reviewed by Eliot.

[38] Ibid., 3 (my translation; Riehl's emphasis). Riehl repeatedly returns to art history as an ethnographic research method throughout his career; see especially the essays in his *Culturstudien* (1862).

[39] Riehl, *Land und Leute*, 5–6.

melancholia, and combines this with a critique of modernity informed by a reactionary nostalgia for certain aspects of feudal society. Also like Ruskin, he insists upon the necessity of preserving a cultural relation to landscape as historicized and aestheticized nature in the face of its increasing dehumanization by modern science.[40] Finally, though with entirely different motives, he reconnects this artistic interest and social critique with knowledge, insisting that the natural-historical analysis of the life of the people (i.e., European ethnography) produces a representation like that of a harmonious work of art.[41] It is true that Riehl's natural history comes with a rationalization of art by the bureaucratic state that would horrify Ruskin: "What the poet intuits and depicts is what the social policy maker should analyze and apply."[42] Despite this important difference, however, there is a shared belief that natural-historical knowledge and artistic production are compatible and moreover require each other for either to succeed.

For Eliot, however, it is the ability of the social to mediate history, rather than a diagnosis of modernity, that is of greatest interest in Riehl's work. That this mediation has aesthetic importance is made clear by the fact that she begins her review with a critique of contemporary British literature, in particular, of its representation of the working classes. As Riehl points out, one form of modern alienation, additional to the alienation from nature that is so important in *Modern Painters III*, is bourgeois estrangement from the life of the people. Eliot's critique of literature identifies the results of this estrangement in bourgeois writers' general inability to sympathize with peasants and

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[40] On Riehl's use of the concept of landscape as aestheticized nature, a nature both shaping and shaped by human history, see Altenbockum, *Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl*, 126–36.
[41] Riehl, *Land und Leute*, 23.
[42] Ibid., 6 (my translation).

laborers and, therefore, to represent them truthfully, a state of affairs in which Dickens's "preternaturally virtuous poor children and artisans" are exemplary.[43] Eliot's introduction of Riehl through the question of literary representation is no doubt the reason why the review has been considered so important and why the "natural history" of the text's title is so often read as a figuration of *realism*, the term Eliot had recently used, as we saw above, in her review of *Modern Painters III*. Certainly, Eliot invites such a reading with the slippage between novelistic representation and ethnographic study that opens the review of Riehl and which is revealed explicitly towards its end, when she writes that *Land und Leute* "would be fascinating as literature if it were not important for its facts and philosophy."[44] Given the prominent place accorded the review by scholars, the quick transition from the opening discussion of the shortcomings of a contemporary literature that fails to generate sympathy to the assertion of the desirability of a "natural history of our social classes" remains curiously unexplained.

Eliot's first gloss of what is meant in the review by natural history includes the study of "the degree in which [the social classes] are influenced by local conditions" and "the tendencies in their position towards disintegration or towards development."[45] Her

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[43] Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 111. Dentith identifies this discussion of sympathy as the key to the review's relationship to the novels (Dentith, *George Eliot*, ch. 2). Sympathy is one of the keywords of Eliot criticism, often discussed in relation to *The Mill on the Floss*, and more generally an important concept in theories of Victorian realism; amongst a large bibliography, see Ablow, *Marriage of Minds*; Doyle, *Sympathetic Response*; Ermarth, "George Eliot's Conception of Sympathy"; Guth, *George Eliot and Schiller*; Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy*.

[44] Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 134.

[45] Ibid., 112. Cf. Eliot's characterization of natural history in her essay on the poet Edward Young from 1857: "The study of men, as they have appeared in different ages, and under various social condition, may be considered as the natural history of the race" (ibid., 164).

second gloss positions natural history as the science of the particular (rather than general) conditions of life, and it is here that she finds the value of Riehl's books to non-German readers.[46] Though, at first glance, these two glosses may seem spatial and classificatory, combined, they present history as the ecology of human societies. Graver identifies this natural history as exemplary of a new philosophy of history, at stake in which was "nothing less than a major redefinition of social values."[47] For Riehl, as Eliot well sees, particularity—distinct from individuality—is the index of the historical. The principal object of this deterministic, conservative natural history is the peasant as embodied history—a collective, racialized subject whose specific characteristics are historically and geographically determined; the individualization brought about in modern bourgeois societies is, by contrast, the sign of historical transcendence, deracination.[48] That such a natural history can measure historical change is made clearest by Eliot's need to explain to her readers the difference between the contemporary condition of the peasantry in Germany as compared to England, where "it is only in the most primitive districts, as in Wales, for example, that farmers are included under the term." In order that her readers understand Riehl's ethnography of rural Germany, Eliot invites them to undertake an act of historical imagination:

> […] we must remember what the tenant-farmers and small proprietors were in England half a century ago, when the master helped to milk his

[46] Ibid., 130.

[47] Graver, *George Eliot and Community*, 43.

[48] Riehl, *Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, 42–43; discussed by Eliot, *Selected Essays,* 114–15. The distinction corresponds to the terminology later canonized by Ferdinand Tönnies (who, despite political differences, was influenced by Riehl) in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), terminology that several Eliot scholars have found useful (e.g., Graver, *George Eliot and Community*; Li, *Memory and History in George Eliot*).

own cows, and the daughters got up at one o'clock in the morning to brew,—when the family dined in the kitchen with the servants, and sat with them round the kitchen fire in the evening. In those days, the quarried parlour was innocent of a carpet, and its only specimens of art were a framed sampler and the best tea-board; the daughters even of substantial farmers had often no greater accomplishment in writing and spelling than they could procure at a dame-school; and, instead of carrying on sentimental correspondence, they were spinning their future table-linen, and looking after every saving in butter and eggs that might enable them to add to the little stock of plate and china which they were laying in against their marriage.[49]

For most of Eliot's readers, as well as herself (she was born in 1819), rural life in England at the turn of the century will not be the subject of personal memory. In this review, she is already writing fiction. Yet her imaginary vista onto a lost way of life exemplifies, in miniature, an image of the people that is both aesthetic and natural historical. Eliot here presents a world through the arrangement of carefully selected, particular metonymic roles and practices determined by natural rhythms and organized by tradition. The nostalgia informing this exhortation to remember country life from fifty years ago is made clear by the ensuing cynical characterization of that life in the present: "we can hardly enter the least imposing farm-house without finding a bad piano in the 'drawing-room', and some old annuals, disposed with a symmetrical imitation of negligence, on the table."[50] The particular details of both scenes—contemporary and retrospective—belie the fact that they are both generalizations. A natural history, in so far as it finds history embodied in material practices, but one whose data are not gleaned from folkloric field-work but rather imaginatively reconstructed: now and then, England and Germany. On the one hand, a life naively historical in its "laying in" of tradition; on the other, a life so

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[49] Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 113.
[50] Ibid., 113.

sentimental and alienated that it measures itself by the disingenuous arrangement of old annuals. Natural history—for Ruskin, Eliot, and Riehl—provides a way of overcoming this lived disparity of historical time. But where Ruskin's thought continually splinters into ever more particular and personal associations, and where Riehl, in his quest for a German polity, fixes on the body of the peasantry as the site of historical continuity, Eliot here invokes a more literary form of shared memory that is dreamlike in its subjective reconstruction of space as historical.

Discussions of "The Natural History of German Life" usually connect the review's comments about literature and representation to the portrayal of country life in England in *Adam Bede*, the novel often taken as Eliot's answer to the desideratum of an unidealized representation of the people. The connection stands to reason, as *Adam Bede* portrays imperfect individuals with a seemingly organic relation to a small rural community of "half a century ago"; moreover, its celebrated seventeenth chapter elaborates Eliot's earlier ad-hoc theorizations of realism, which is now compared to Dutch genre painting, with its "precious quality of truthfulness."[51] Shuttleworth, for example, in considering "The Natural History of German Life" and *Adam Bede* together, identifies a common natural-historical element in the texts' classificatory impulse and so reads Eliot's early experiments with natural history as evidence of a relatively static worldview that would be revised in her subsequent novels.[52] To take a specific example, the racialized descriptions of the physical appearance of Adam Bede and his brother Seth in the novel's opening pages invite comparison with Eliot's discussion of Riehl's characteriza-

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[51] Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 195.
[52] Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, 30.

tion of peasant physiognomy as conservative in *Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*.[53] The suggestion of a natural history whose remit includes racial genealogy thus reimagines the static science of classification as a form of historical knowledge—"incarnate history" in its most literal sense. This is one way in which the review's slippage between the scientific study of society and the writing of fiction plays out in Eliot's early novels. What interests me about "The Natural History of German Life," however, is its dependence on an imperative of recollection in order to situate the details of its subject matter and thereby elicit readerly interest: "we must remember what the tenant-farmers and small proprietors were in England half a century ago." Here is an invitation to sympathy that is simultaneously a reminder of everyone in England's historical determination and alienation, couched in the terms of personal experience. Accordingly, and in keeping with the emphasis in this chapter on memory, I want to look at the aestheticization of memory in relation to Eliot's understanding of natural history in her second novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, which has been described as both "Wordsworthian" and "anthropological."[54] As we shall see, the novel ironizes the imperative to remember that underpins the natural history of the people, thereby canceling the identification of memory and natural history implicit in Eliot's review and undermining their marriage in Ruskin's aesthetics.

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[53] Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 10; Riehl, *Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, 43; discussed in Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 114.

[54] Knoepflmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels*, 175; Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*, 107. The novel has, moreover, been connected with classical natural history on account of its attention to non-human species (Gray, "Animated Nature," 145).

4.

Most readers of *The Mill on the Floss* would quickly recognize its two obsessions: water and heredity. They sit at the center of its natural-historical novelistic world and underpin its dreamlike representation of necessity. After all, heredity is a naturalization of history, a more individualized and patriarchal instance of "incarnate history," and water is a natural metaphor for temporality as old as Heraclitus. These obsessions accordingly figure two aspects of temporalized nature in its inescapable determinacy: the past in the form of the material genealogy conditioning each individual, and the ungraspable present as the temporal moment in which the possibility of action arises and recedes. These two figures of necessity are often in contention with the attempts of the novel's central character, Maggie Tulliver, to assert her desires, in her repeated missteps in the eyes of her family and the distress caused by the determinations of oppressive gender norms and the social attribution of a wayward and willful character.[55] Early in the novel, for example, Mr. Tulliver reflects on the "the crossing o' breeds" and its results with respect to the characters of his children, Maggie and Tom; he is answered by Mrs. Tulliver's immediate concern about her daughter: "I don't know where she is now, an' it's pretty nigh tea-time. Ah, I thought so—wanderin' up and down the water, like a wild thing: she'll tumble in some day."[56] Thence, over the course of the novel, heredity becomes a metaphor for the complicated temporality of social responsibility,[57] and so provides a way of grounding morality via a naturalization of history in the face of the relentless flux of existence. This

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[55] See Ahmed, "Willful Parts"; and Beer, *George Eliot*, ch. 4.
[56] Eliot, *Mill on the Floss*, bk. I, ch. ii, p. 12. Further citations will be made parenthetically with book, chapter, and page number.
[57] Thale, *Novels of George Eliot*, 45.

flux is figured by the mighty River Floss, which provides the ancient town of St. Ogg's with both its mythology and its prosperity, but which also blindly sweeps Maggie away from her family with Stephen Guest, away from the past, against her will, a tragedy that is only exceeded when the same river drowns her and her brother at the book's end. As Emily Steinlight writes, "Nature and history are not either/or propositions" in this novel.[58] If *The Mill on the Floss* is dominated by figures of natural-historical necessity, what room is there for autonomous relationships with the past? In this section, I explore two such relationships, that of Maggie Tulliver and that of the novel's narrator.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, the dialectical relation between individual and collective is consistently referred to the realms of memory and history. Hao Li has argued that, for Eliot, personal memory is the internalization of collective memory, which thereby becomes a source of the self.[59] With respect to *The Mill on the Floss*, she writes, "almost every major character is relentlessly pursued by memory," to the extent that memory drives the plot.[60] Each character in the novel, however, models a different relationship to the past, with Dorlcote Mill often standing as the lost object either to be recovered or mourned. The two most prominent relationships—namely, those of Maggie and the narrator—are also the two most unalike. One of the ironies of *The Mill on the Floss* is that the narrator is the only person who is allowed to cultivate a pleasurable relationship to the past. The Tullivers are tragically incapable of doing so. The Dodsons are much more interested in the future (to their benefit). Philip Wakem's nostalgia is only ever a source of anguish. By contrast, the narrator's relationship to the past is characterized

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[58] Steinlight, "Why Maggie Tulliver Had to be Killed," 179.
[59] Li, *Memory and History in George Eliot*, 40.
[60] Ibid., 58.

either by a wistful nostalgia or an easy irony: wistful when invoking personal memory, ironic when discussing collective history. In either case, the past is an indulgence with little real bearing on the present because the narrator seems to be living in a private study rather than society. For the adult Maggie, however, every engagement with the past raises the question of how one is to act in the present. A closer examination of these two relationships with the past will show the conflicting ways in which memory works in the novel to naturalize history in the present.

The Mill on the Floss begins with a dream that establishes both setting and atmosphere:

> A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships—laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal—are borne along to the town of St. Ogg's, which shows its aged, fluted red roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river-brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun. Far away on each hand stretch the rich pastures, and the patches of dark earth made ready for the seed of broad-leaved green crops, or touched already with the tint of the tender-bladed autumn-sown corn. There is a remnant still of the last year's golden clusters of beehive-ricks rising at intervals beyond the hedgerows; and everywhere the hedgerows are studded with trees: the distant ships seem to be lifting their masts and stretching their red-brown sails close among the branches of the spreading ash. Just by the red-roofed town the tributary Ripple flows with a lively current into the Floss. How lovely the little river is, with its dark, changing wavelets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to its low placid voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving. I remember those large dipping willows. I remember the stone bridge. (I, i, 7)

With its lucid, detailed description of appearances and its eschewal of narrative cause and effect, this opening scene is less like a dream or a memory than an ecphrasis, at least until

the intrusion of the narrator near the end of the paragraph. Eliot presents a seasonal landscape drawn together by human activity—namely, trade and farming—and one in which history only comes to view through everyday life and everyday life through nature: the town whose roofs and wharves emerge from between the wooded hills, the ships' sails spread among tree branches. That the image described is not a landscape by Pieter Bruegel the Elder but rather the reconstruction of personal memory is revealed by the sudden appearance of the narrator—"How lovely!"—"I remember…" It is someone's memory, though one manifestly shaped by the history of fine art. As the chapter goes on, the narrator's position and view condense and focus, and we are provided with a description of another painterly scene: of a mill, a wagon, a young girl and her dog. And now, it turns out, this is all actually a dream, but one that is being described as it is taking place. What we have, then, I think, is less a representation of dreaming, despite what Eliot has the narrator write, than a reconstruction of a past experience and the pleasure taken in that reconstruction. *The Mill on the Floss* thus opens by presenting remembrance as self-consciously aesthetic work: the production of images. Where for Ruskin memories are revealed to be aesthetic in analysis, Eliot here presents them as aesthetic in their production.

Such aestheticization continues in the narrator's longer intrusions. Whether dozing off again into personal reminiscence (a habit constrained to the first two books) (I, v, 39–40; II, i, 142–43), discoursing on the history of St. Ogg's (I, xii, 109–12), or reflecting on the progress of the novel (IV, i, 251–53, containing the much-discussed comparison of the Rhine and the Rhône), the narrator signals the importance of collective

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or imagined history to the imaginative representation of the past. As the story progresses, these intrusions also reveal the difference between Maggie's and the narrator's ways of relating to the past: "Life did change for Tom and Maggie; and yet they were not wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of these first years would always make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it" (I, v, 39). Here the ominous suggestion of change segues into a celebration of childhood memories by way of a cryptic allusion to a future made by the past. Eventually, Maggie and Tom are shut out from taking pleasure in the past by their father's bankruptcy: "They had gone forth into their new life of sorrow, and they would never more see the sunshine undimmed by remembered cares. They had entered the thorny wilderness, and the golden gates of their childhood had for ever closed behind them" (II, vii, 180). But not so for the narrator, or, it is assumed, the readership interpellated by those dreamy intrusions, a readership ready to take intense pleasure in personal memory and moreover to connect it with national history, both because of and despite the cosmopolitan alienation hinted at by the narration. "These familiar flowers, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows—such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them" (I, v, 39–40). Here personal memory is radically collectivized and the experience of nature becomes one of the foundations of an imagined community of readers, looking back nostalgically to an earlier England, one on the cusp of industrialization and social and political reform.

The collective act of memorialization is further nationalized in the account of St. Ogg's that begins the first book's twelfth chapter and that serves to introduce the domestic scene of Mr. and Mrs. Glegg at home. Romans, Vikings, Anglo-Saxons and Normans, Catholics and Protestants, Puritans and Loyalists—St. Ogg's is a comprehensive English synecdoche. Yet, through its ironic displacement of personal memory onto the material fabric of the unremarkable town, this cute history undermines, albeit gently, the earnestness of the narrator's invocation of a national childhood. Now the same red-fluted roofs and black ships, so evocatively traced in the opening panorama, become hackneyed by their association with "the well-crushed cheese and the soft fleeces, which my readers have doubtless become acquainted with through the medium of the best classic pastorals" (I, xii, 109). Rather than drawing readers in through the invocation of a shared formal foundation for sympathy—"the mother-tongue of our imagination"—that universalizes the intensely personal experience of childhood, the narrator forces a collective irony by reducing experience to generic convention, deploying the codes of a common middle-class curriculum as the markers of historical transcendence: we, dear readers, are alienated together. As a result, the ghost-filled town becomes a pastiche:

> It is one of those old, old towns which impress one as a continuation and outgrowth of nature, as much as the nests of the bower-birds or the winding galleries of the white ants: a town which carries the traces of its long growth and history like a millennial tree, and has sprung up and developed in the same spot between the river and the low hill from the time when the Roman legions turned their backs on it from the camp on the hill-side, and the long-haired sea-kings came up the river and looked with fierce eager eyes at the fatness of the land. It is a town "familiar with forgotten years." (I, xii, 109)

The citation of a commonplace from Wordsworth's *Excursion* is the inscription that completes the picture of the organic community in which the familiar and the forgotten are, uncannily, equated. The result, as the narrator's history will explain, is that town-life goes on in ignorance of its history: "The mind of St. Ogg's did not look extensively before or after. It inherited a long past without thinking of it" (I, xii, 112).[61] Collectively, according to the narrator, the past is simply there, forgotten and familiar. It requires the aesthetic work of narration or reading in order for that history to become manifest; whether personal memory or national history, the results are similar, even when the relationship with the past is ironized. When we look at the novel's characters, however, we get something entirely different. The past is neither a source of pleasure nor an effective way for an individual to be reconciled with the social body. Despite her stated position of duty to the past, this is least of all the case for Maggie.

While several critics have noted the formal similarity between Maggie's habits of absorption and the narrator's indulgence in tangential reverie, which, especially as the narration moves closer to Maggie's perspective in book six, together model the experience of reading novels, much more striking to me is the disparity between their affective relationships to the past.[62] The narrator's, which is all pleasure, whether serious or playful, stands in stark contrast to Maggie's earnest moralizations. Where, for the narrator, medieval Christianity is merely the object of antiquarianism, providing in "several manuscript versions" the fairly stereotypical hagiography of St. Ogg, for Maggie, it

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[61] There is in this an echo of Riehl: "Der Bauer hat keine Geschichte gelernt, aber er ist historisch" (Riehl, *Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, 42).

[62] See, for example, Ablow, *Marriage of Minds*, 80–81; Doyle, *Sympathetic Response,* 85.

provides ethical guidance in the form of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*: on the one hand, the positive pleasure of amusement and the ideologically productive work of the imagined community; on the other, the social estrangement and libidinal mortification of asceticism. In heeding medieval Christianity's "voice from the past," Maggie's relation to history becomes sacramental and eschatological; her reading of the Bible and devotional literature "filled her mind with a continual stream of rhythmic memories" (IV, iii, 272). Not only does Maggie take up a form of medieval culture anathema to the narrator's aesthetic nationalism, she even refuses outright the pleasures of the latter, turning down the Walter Scott that Philip offers to lend her, once read with such enjoyment, and which, as we have already seen, played such a central role in Ruskin's historicization of his experience of nature.

> "Do keep it, Maggie," said Philip, entreatingly; "it will give you pleasure."
>   "No, thank you," said Maggie, putting it aside with her hand and walking on. "It would make me in love with this world again, as I used to be—it would make me long to see and know many things—it would make me long for a full life." (V, i, 284)

Here, pleasure taken in the imaginative representation of the past is explicitly connected with earthly life. Maggie thus inadvertently affirms the truth of the narrator's relationship to the past, even as she renounces it. Later, when she is trying to escape elopement with Stephen Guest, she gives her own position its clearest statement: "If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie?" (VI, xiv, 440). Unlike the narrator, who vacillates between more or less serious forms of nostalgia, Maggie has internalized a theory of historical determination as a moral principle. She has already told Philip, "I desire no future that

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will break the ties of the past" (VI, x, 411). While Maggie delivers this "with grave sadness," it contains a sentiment with which the narrator can heartily agree: it is an essentially nostalgic orientation towards the future. Taken out of its context and held under a different light—say, that of the narrator's early, wistful intrusions—and with its implicitly organic understanding of history and its kernel of hope ("That book will never be closed"), it has much in common with contemporary historiography and could almost be whiggish.[63] Of course, things do not get better for Maggie Tulliver, and, ultimately, the theory of history contained in the novel's plot—in contrast to its narration—is not one of progressive continuity but one of arbitrary disaster. The effect for the individual—and especially for Maggie—is that the past is an ambivalent burden that repeatedly intrudes on any pleasure: her duty to her family interrupting her love of Philip, her duty to Philip in turn interrupting her fascination with Stephen.

"The happiest women, like the happiest nations, have no history" (VI, iii, 355). Maggie's story consistently undermines the narrator's happy historiography. Even so, the two have this much in common: they both desire a present oriented towards the past. For the narrator, inhabiting their alienation, this provides for the collation of personal and national history (though not their equation, as the ironic history of St. Ogg's makes clear). For Maggie, subject to patriarchy, life turns out to be much more complicated; her rationally considered position of moral fidelity to the past proves too difficult to maintain. The narrator's hedonism and Maggie's asceticism represent the two deficient aesthetic attitudes to be overcome in the Ruskinian ideal of *theoria*—the fusion in aesthetics of

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[63] In *George Eliot and Victorian Historiography*, Neil McCaw tracks Eliot's ambivalent relationship to the Whig interpretation of history and her engagement with contemporary historiography more broadly.

sensuous representation and moral value. More pointedly, however, by questioning the compatibility of personal memory and historical representation, they suggest an ambivalence at the heart of the aesthetic and social theory of both Ruskin and Eliot. The desire for the past encoded in these memories, whether of Ruskin or Eliot or their readers, of Maggie Tulliver or the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss*, cannot be the basis for a way of life in a natural and historical world no longer governed by Providence.

5.

In this chapter, I have looked at two instances of aesthetic theory and practice from the middle of the nineteenth century that consider the natural and the historical together. In John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, along with Eliot's engagement with W. H. Riehl's *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes*, we have seen some of the various ways in which memory can be figured as a historicization of nature and a naturalization of history. Despite their differences, Ruskin's and Eliot's use of memory serve a similar function. In neither case is memory merely a personal relationship to one's own lived past. Rather, both authors present memorialization as aesthetic work that aims to connect individual consciousness to a larger human collective, namely, with Ruskin, to European civilization, with Eliot, to the English nation. While the focus has been British, the example of Riehl shows that this was a project with a wider European currency in the nineteenth century. With their discernible roots in the Romanticism of Wordsworth and Scott, and their studious engagement, whether hostile or friendly, with contemporary science, the "natural histories" of Ruskin and Eliot, though but two in-

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stances from a large and diverse cultural field, demonstrate the importance given in mid-Victorian intellectual culture to the task of aligning an aesthetics of nature with the dominant historicist episteme.

This importance can be registered in many aesthetic departments, beyond the art theory, social criticism and fiction considered here. A couple of examples briefly considered will serve to illustrate its pervasiveness. In design, for example, Owen Jones's monumental *Grammar of Ornament* (1856) presents a historical survey of world culture, from the "Ornament of Savage Tribes" to Italian neo-classicism. The book's final chapter, moreover, presents Jones's vision for the future of design: a return to nature that remains faithful to the past. "I have endeavoured to show," he writes, "that the future progress of Ornamental Art may be best secured by engrafting on the experience of the past the knowledge we may obtain by a return to Nature for fresh inspiration."[64] Note the abstract nouns: progress, experience, past, knowledge, return, Nature, inspiration. Jones collects in one sentence the key signifiers of an aesthetics that is simultaneously post-Romantic (in the sense of having incorporated and normalized the tenets of Romanticism) and mid-Victorian in its commitment to a historiography of progress and the epistemological alignment of knowledge with nature. The very next sentence reads: "To attempt to build up theories of art, or to form a style, independently of the past would be an act of supreme folly."[65] For Jones, ultimately, the "return to nature" is the surest way to remain faithful to history. While Jones cannot contribute directly to the discussion of personal memory that has occupied me here, he nevertheless provides an example of how the

[64] Jones, *Grammar of Ornament*, 2.
[65] Ibid., 2.

aesthetic problem of nature and history was thought about in the Victorian period, and how this problem flowed out into everyday life: Jones's designs were enormously popular among Victorian middle-class householders.[66]

Gerard Manley Hopkins, by contrast, provides an example from poetics that is well outside the mainstream but which nevertheless speaks to the same aesthetic problem. While still concerned with the question of how memory traces history in nature, Hopkins in several respects represents a break from the Wordsworthian tradition of "the real language of men" and "spots of time." His theological-aesthetic concepts of inscape (natural pattern) and instress (its effect on the imagination), which he began using in the 1860s, turn the lyric memory of nature into an eschatological meditation on God's glory and Jesus Christ's salvation of a fallen humanity.[67] Many of Hopkins's most well-known poems—"As kingfishers catch fire," "The Windhover," "Pied Beauty," "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection"—move from a highly wrought description of natural phenomena through lyrical self-doubt and onto an affirmation of faith in the holy trinity. Moreover, his experiments with sprung rhythm, developed from his studies of Anglo-Saxon and Welsh verse forms, connect modern English lyric to ancient cultural forms at the level of metrical temporality. As Meredith Martin shows, the implications for both language and historical knowledge are enormous: Hopkins's interest in Anglo-Saxon verse was an interest in the capacity of language to capture "the

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[66] Eliot favorably reviewed the second edition of *The Grammar of Ornament* in 1865. She and Lewes were friends with Jones, who in 1863 designed the wallpaper for their new house, the Priory (see Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, 4:111). On Jones and his influence, see Hrvol Flores, *Owen Jones*.

[67] According to Catherine Phillips, the earliest record of the terms is in notes made by Hopkins in 1868, where their usage suggests they were already established parts of his vocabulary (Hopkins, *Major Works*, xx).

instress of an entire people."[68] Poetic form is thus historicized as a way of seeing and internalizing natural form.

As tempting as it would be to undertake more sustained readings of Hopkins and Jones or to explore further examples from Victorian culture of a natural-historical aesthetics (such as the novels of the Brontës, the various work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, or the writings of Darwin himself), my goal has not been to provide with this chapter a comprehensive survey of mainstream Victorian aesthetics; furthermore, in introducing these two additional examples here, I hope only to indicate something of the diversity and pervasiveness of the project to think nature and history together through aesthetics. For this is the very same project that Vivian rails against in "The Decay of Lying": the return to nature and the commitment to historicism. By 1889, when Wilde wrote the dialogue, both of these mid-century natural-historical tenets had come under serious attack across the arts, from Walter Pater's aesthetic criticism to James McNeill Whistler's impressionistic "nocturnes." Even so, these attacks were controversial: as is well known, Ruskin's outraged response in *Fors Clavigera* to Whistler's pictures—"two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face" (R29:160)—was found libelous in court in 1878; Eliot, meanwhile, deemed Pater's *Renaissance* "poisonous."[69] Wilde's diatribe, despite its hyperbole, has a clearly identifiable object in sight, one which must have been recognizable to his readers in order for the text to have had its intended effect. The other three chapters in this dissertation treat aesthetic approaches to the problems of historical representation that are, to a greater or lesser extent, responses

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[68] Martin, *Rise and Fall of Meter*, 74.
[69] Quoted in Seilor, *Walter Pater*, 92.

to the natural-historical consensus that prevailed mid-century. The authors treated there are less concerned with truth to nature (no matter how historicized) than they are with the truth in aesthetic experience per se; they are more interested in the power of the present to determine the historical for itself and for the future than in the tendency of memory to drag us back into a past in which history and nature only reflect one another.

Chapter Two

Renaissance Now: Historical Experience and the Modern Individual in John Addington Symonds and Walter Pater

1.

While, from antiquity down to the present, natural history has usually been understood as a universalizing discourse, Ruskin and Eliot, as we have just seen, look to reposition it as culturally situated and aesthetic. The implication is that the subjects of natural-historical knowledge are just as diverse as its objects. Such a move matters for this dissertation because it demonstrates some of the ways in which Victorian aesthetic discourse attempts to restore historical knowledge to subjectivity. In the case of both authors, however, social determinations remain strong, even, as in *The Mill on the Floss*, overwhelming. Accordingly, despite their unwavering commitment to particularity, neither Ruskin nor Eliot would endorse the more decisive turn towards personal experience signaled, in the British context, by the publication of Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* (1873). If Ruskin and Eliot are concerned with how individual experience relates to a collective sense of history, Pater's aesthetics, especially as articulated in his book's preface and conclusion, focuses on the experience of an individual subject overdetermined by the historical yet seemingly without social ties: "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality

presented in life or in a book, to *me*?"[1] Such an individualism is clearly opposed to the conservative and organic models of society expounded by Ruskin and Eliot. While Pater's understanding of the relationship between individual and collective is more complex than this brief citation suggests, its location in the preface to a book about the Renaissance points us to one of the major claims of nineteenth-century historicism: modern individuality—always coded as male and distinguished by its relative individualism, that is, by its relative freedom from community and society—originates in Renaissance Italy.

This chapter examines some of the contradictions about the relationship between individual and collective in the nineteenth-century discourse of the Renaissance, moving from the work of the period's major European historians, Jacob Burckhardt and Jules Michelet, onto that of two English critics, John Addington Symonds and Walter Pater. Together, these four very different authors provide a genealogy of Renaissance historiography as the exploration of a desire for the past that is also a desire for a different way of living in the present. I begin with Burckhardt and Michelet, who, despite their opposed visions of history, establish the period-concept as the moment of Europe's transition to modernity and the birth of the modern individual. I then turn to Symonds, who combines Burckhardt's cosmopolitan individualism and Michelet's optimistic nationalism with Spencerian biologism to produce the Renaissance as the sign of European racial superiority. In contrast to these three historians, but in consonance with other writers of British Aestheticism such as Oscar Wilde and Vernon Lee, Pater understands the Renaissance as an ethical-aesthetic concept rather than a strictly historiographical one, a mode of histori-

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[1] Pater, *Renaissance*, xix (emphasis in original).

cal relation that aims at pleasure and transformation. Pater's writings on the Renaissance are particularly worth introducing here because they explore the investments of individuality in historical consciousness rather than obscuring them, either through objectification, as in Burckhardt and Symonds, or mystification, as in Michelet. In this regard, Pater's Renaissance has more in common with Ruskin's or Eliot's natural history than any of them would have cared to admit. Unlike Ruskin or Eliot, however, Pater valorizes the pleasures of aesthetic experience without apprehension or qualification; moreover, his attention to the grotesqueness of the figure of renaissance, its blurring of the boundaries between life and death, not only explores the limits to historical consciousness as the consciousness of what is living and dead in history, but also aestheticizes those limits as attributes of the subject of Renaissance history. Before I get to these nineteenth-century writers, however, I would like to introduce a twentieth-century example that illustrates what has always been at stake, at least since Michelet and Burckhardt, in the image of the Renaissance.

Edmund Husserl's last great work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1937), opens with a surprising (for the philosopher of the phenomenological reduction) historicization. Husserl begins by diagnosing the crisis named in his title as the alienation of all science—historiography as much as physics—from human life, a crisis caused, and here we hear an echo of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, by its commitment to a positivism that refuses to grant ethical meaning to knowledge. The mathematization of nature has caused us to forget the lifeworld which precedes and determines it. But it was not always so:

In the Renaissance, as is well known, European humanity brings about a revolutionary change. It turns against its previous way of existing—the medieval—and disowns it, seeking to shape itself anew in freedom. Its admired model is ancient humanity. This mode of existence is what it wishes to reproduce in itself.

What does it hold to be essential to ancient man? After some hesitation, nothing less than the "philosophical" form of existence: freely giving oneself, one's whole life, its rule through pure reason or through philosophy. […] According to the guiding ideal of the Renaissance, ancient man forms himself with insight through free reason. For this renewed "Platonism" this means not only that man should be changed ethically [but that] the whole human surrounding world, the political and social existence of mankind, must be fashioned anew through free reason, through the insights of a universal philosophy.[2]

Husserl thus provides an image of the Renaissance as the birth of European modernity that is simultaneously a radical break with the past and a return to and revival of antiquity, here reduced to Greek philosophy, in which is found the promise of a free and rational life. This is not merely an opening vignette for Husserl, but an image to which he continually returns throughout the book. The Renaissance determines modernity as such, and yet the promise that it finds in ancient culture is one that modernity has never been able to realize itself. For Husserl, this is an ontological, rather than merely ethical or epistemological, problem:

Only then [i.e., if the promise of a philosophical life were fully realized] could it be decided whether European humanity bears within itself an absolute idea, rather than being merely an empirical anthropological type like "China" or "India"; it could be decided whether the spectacle of the Europeanization of all other civilizations bears witness to the rule of an absolute meaning, one which is proper to the sense, rather than to a historical non-sense, of the world.[3]

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[2] Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*, 8.
[3] Ibid., 16.

The stakes could not be higher: Is European humanity universal or is it just another culture? Of course, the specific conditions of the 1930s will always inform how we read Husserl's text. Accordingly, it would not be a stretch to explain the urgency of the crisis he identifies with the fascism that two other German-Jewish philosophers writing only slightly later, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, understand as an outcome of a not-dissimilar, though much more pessimistically formulated, process of alienation they famously call the dialectic of Enlightenment. For Husserl, then, the Renaissance itself presents an image of a cosmopolitan Europe in place of one divided by nationalisms, but a Europe, moreover, whose global hegemony is the path towards the realization of its universality. Nothing like Husserl's urgency will be found in the nineteenth-century discourse of the Renaissance; the concerns will, nonetheless, be much the same, and the questions of imperialism, European chauvinism, and Eurocentric historiography will become, perhaps surprisingly, given the period's historical basis in pre-Columbian Italy, of central concern.

What then is the genealogy of this image of the Renaissance and of this mode of historical consciousness that looks to a particular moment in the past in order to refound European humanity in the present? While "the Renaissance" is a historiographical term whose meaning we can now, to a certain extent, take for granted, for much of the nineteenth century, when it first gained currency as a proper noun with a definite article, its concept was undergoing formation and was subject to contention. In most accounts of Renaissance historiography, two works from the middle of the nineteenth century are given particular importance: the seventh volume of Michelet's *Histoire de France* (1855),

which gives the name to the period of Europe's transition to modernity; and Burckhardt's

Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien (1860), which consolidates many of the ideas

associated with the period, especially that of the birth of the modern individual. Despite

the undeniable importance of Michelet and Burckhardt in the genealogy of the period

concept, it nevertheless has a longer history. While in the 1950s Erwin Panofsky argued

for a strong awareness of cultural rebirth among fifteenth-century Italian scholars and

artists themselves,[4] J. B. Bullen has more recently contended that, in order for the Renais-

sance to be established as a discrete period, there was needed not only historical distance

but a coherent concept of the medieval from which to differentiate it.[5] Bullen attributes

the coinage to the late-eighteenth-century French art historian Jean Baptiste Seroux

d'Agincourt, who, influenced by the Enlightenment histories of Voltaire and Edward

Gibbon, and the art history of J. J. Winckelmann, first applied the name of *Renaissance*

to the period between the Middle Ages and modernity.[6] However, "the Renaissance"

really gained traction, first in France and then in England, in the context of the Romantic

revival of Gothic architecture, wherein, for a writer such as Ruskin, it represented a

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[4] Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, 8–41. The case is also made by Ferguson, who notes that the argument for an early-modern invention of the Renaissance is "commonplace" (Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought*, 1).
[5] Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, 8, 59.
[6] Ibid., 9, 27. Bullen's text, which supersedes the earlier work of John Hale and W. K. Ferguson, is a comparative study of French and British sources that concludes with Pater. A comprehensive survey of the period-concept in German sources is provided by Martin Ruehl in *The Making of Modernity*. A comparative study of British and German sources of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which also demonstrates the value of such comparison in this area, is provided by Yvonne Ivory in *The Homosexual Revival of Renaissance Style*.

lamentable revival of paganism and a fall from grace.[7] It was then through the work of (among others) Michelet, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Pater that the Renaissance underwent a transvaluation, still characterized as a period of secularization but now valorized as the moment of the individual's freedom from medieval oppression. In Nietzsche's words, the Renaissance signaled the "unfettering of the individual."[8] Despite the concordance of their positive assessment, however, the details of the historical image presented by each of these authors differ substantially. It is only towards the end of the nineteenth century, in the work of Symonds, that Bullen finds the Renaissance referring to "an established historical fact that needs no defence."[9]

While the Renaissance may no longer exert the same moral force it did for Husserl, his image of it as a moment of intense classical revival is certainly one that remains widely current. If this is so, however, it is the result of a transformation of the period's associations in the early twentieth century.[10] As Bullen explains, the period no longer has quite the same connotations of unconventional morality, for example, that it did throughout the nineteenth century.[11] A fuller image is provided by Yvonne Ivory, who identifies five topoi that characterize most representations, fictional and non-

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[7] See especially *The Stones of Venice*, wherein the Renaissance is routinely denounced as the destroyer of all that was good in European culture.

[8] Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 113.

[9] Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, 297. It would be incorrect, however, to conclude that the Renaissance was no longer a topic of debate in the twentieth century. Panofsky and Ferguson both attest to the controverted nature of academic discourse on the subject at mid-century.

[10] It was interwar art historians such as Erwin Panofsky, Claire Farago argues, who dissociated the Renaissance from the nationalism, ethnocentrism and masculinism in which it had become entangled, reinvested it with the values of humanism and cosmopolitanism, and reinstated the central concept of *Bildung* understood as self-cultivation (Farago, "Vision Itself Has its History," 73).

[11] Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, 10.

fictional, of the Renaissance around the turn of the century: "The aestheticization of all aspects of life; the celebration of the body; the tolerance of crime, especially in its incarnations of vice and excess; the proliferation of illicit sexual practices; and the rise of individualism and its attendant cults of personality."[12] Having identified these five topoi, Ivory examines one of the most common uses, in the specific contexts of her study (Britain and Germany in the period from 1850 to 1930), of the image of the Renaissance that these topoi constitute: homosexual writers' use of the Renaissance to legitimate their desires, for themselves and for their societies, at a time when the concept of homosexuality as we know it was only just beginning to take shape.[13] This usage, as Ivory makes clear, is related to a broader movement of individualism and self-culture, that, in Renaissance historiography, is strongly associated with Burckhardt and has its most well-known recent articulation in Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. There is, however, a second strand in Renaissance historiography, one that establishes the historical and geographical primacy of Europe. This strand runs from Michelet's French nationalism and his triumphalist view of the Renaissance as the overcoming of medieval darkness, through to idealizing rehabilitations of Renaissance humanism, such as Husserl's and Panofsky's, as the promise of European cosmopolitanism and philosophical life.

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[12] Ivory, *Homosexual Revival of Renaissance Style*, 17.
[13] See also Fisher, "A Hundred Years of Queering the Renaissance" and "The Sexual Politics of Victorian Historiographical Writing about the 'Renaissance.'"

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Despite the cosmopolitan aspirations of much Renaissance historiography, we find in its earliest popularizer a baldly nationalistic tenor. Most discussions of Michelet's development of the Renaissance concept focus on volume seven (1855) of his *Histoire de France*, which takes *Renaissance* as its title and contains Michelet's most developed characterization of the period. Here, the word denotes broadly Europe's rediscovery of antiquity and transition to modernity and more narrowly a specifically French engagement with the culture and society of fifteenth-century Italy. However, Michelet's first discussion of the Renaissance in the *Histoire de France* occurs in volume four (1840), in the chapters on Louis of Orléans (1372–1407), who embodies "the amiable and brilliant spirit, the light, hardly severe, but rather gracious and sweet, spirit of the Renaissance" and in whose time France emerged from the Middle Ages and realized itself.[14] In this context, the Renaissance spirit becomes the spirit of France itself, transhistorical but finding its expression at a specific historical moment. In its narrowest sense, in volume four, Michelet's Renaissance is the moment at which France assumes its rightful place as the leading nation of Europe. At its broadest, in volume seven, it is a heroic all-Europe effort, its greatest figures Columbus, Copernicus and Luther, and its two great achievements the discovery of the world and the discovery of man.[15] While Michelet's *Histoire de France* is, in many respects, a history of great men, and moreover, as we shall see, his understanding of history is intensely personal, his image of the Renaissance presents it as the collective achievement of European modernity.

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[14] Michelet, *Histoire de France*, 4:94–95 (my translation).
[15] Ibid., 7:ii.

In *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*, Burckhardt translates Michelet's summation of the period's achievements and includes it as the title of the book's fourth part, "Die Entdeckung der Welt und des Menschen." In the course of the book, however, what emerges as the most historically significant aspect of the Renaissance is the creation of the modern individual as such.[16] In the volatile political conditions of the Italian states, where each strove to further his or her own interests, the veil of "belief, childish prejudice and delusion" was first lifted, and people started to see themselves as more than members of a "race, people, party, corporation, family or some other form of the universal." Now, "man becomes a spiritual individual and recognizes himself as such."[17] These first individuals worked towards the formation of their own personalities (*Ausbildung der Persönlichkeit*) by expanding both their practical and emotional capabilities and recognizing the resources (both internal and external) available to them for the enjoyment of life. Where for Michelet the mortification of the old medieval order frees the human spirit to discover itself and the world (that is, to realize its potential), for Burckhardt, by

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[16] Unsurprisingly, academic historians no longer accept Burckhardt's Renaissance as a true representation of the period. For example, the editors of a book of scholarly essays write in their introduction: "Jacob Burckhardt's classic claim that the Renaissance effected the discovery of Man in his full individuality can no longer be accepted without severe qualification" (Porter and Teich, "Introduction," 5). Similarly, in *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*, John Jeffries Martin provides a strong historicist critique of Burckhardt's individualism and Stephen Greenblatt's self-fashioning, finding that neither of these analyses are true to the ways in which Renaissance individuals understood their subjectivity. It is not my concern here to assess the accuracy of the claims made by historians and critics of the Renaissance or of any other period.
[17] "Der Mensch wird geistiges *Individuum* und erkennt sich als solches" (Burckhardt, *Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*, 92). Weintraub glosses this important sentence as follows: "the modern person 'in its mind' has self-consciously begun to separate itself out from what that mind perceives as its social context," that is, in contrast to the more socially embedded consciousness of medieval humanity (Weintraub, "Jacob Burckhardt and Self-Conception," 331).

contrast, it is the particular—politically volatile and undemocratic—social conditions of fourteenth-century Italy that allow for the development of an individualistic way of life. Where for Michelet the discovery of the human begins with Luther's breaking the bonds of dogmatism, for Burckhardt, the locus of this discovering is the accomplished, cosmopolitan courtier (*cortigiano*), who is identified as the ideal social individual (*der gesellschaftliche Idealmensch*).[18] Moreover, where Michelet refers the discovery of the world to the colonization of the Americas and the Copernican revolution, the chief form it takes in Burckhardt is not colonial or scientific (though these are discussed) but aesthetic: it is the discovery of beauty in the outward world and the development of the capacity for its description and enjoyment.[19]

Ultimately, Renaissance individualism represents, for Burckhardt, an argument against the cultural mediocrity that he associates, in common with many other bourgeois intellectuals of the time, with democracy.[20] According to Burckhardt's historicist analysis (he was a student of Ranke's), despotism goes hand-in-hand with the cultural and social achievements of the Renaissance—the revival of antiquity as much as the self-cultivation of the *cortigiano*. Not only does the presence at court of scholars and artists legitimate the despot's regime, based as it is on an unlawful seizure of the state, but these "many-sided men" also share a deeper affinity: despot and artist alike rely on their personality and talent in order to maintain their precarious positions.[21] Accordingly, Michelet and Burckhardt represent not only two different images of the Renaissance but also two different

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[18] Burckhardt, *Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*, 262.
[19] Ibid., 200. Cf. Ruskin's discussion of modernity and landscape in ch. 1, §2 above.
[20] On Burckhardt's hostility to democracy, see Flaig, "Jacob Burckhardt, Greek Culture, and Modernity."
[21] Burckhardt, *Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*, 9, 149.

approaches to historiography: while Burckhardt's study is synchronic and his vision of history pessimistic, Michelet's *Histoire* is both diachronic and optimistic.[22] We have, then, two seemingly incompatible strands of Renaissance historiography: on the one hand, the triumphalism of Michelet and, on the other, the individualism of Burckhardt. Might it be possible, however, to look past these differences to find a relationship between Burckhardt's self-producing individual and Michelet's supreme France? As it happens, Michelet himself suggests so.

In the preface to the 1869 edition of the *Histoire de France*, Michelet provides reflections upon his monumental project, thirty-six years after the publication of the first volume. His comments on the object and subject of history are remarkably convergent. Of France, Michelet writes: "It is the powerful *labor of oneself on oneself*, whereby France, by her own progress, transforms all her raw elements. […] France itself has formed France. […] France is the daughter of her freedom."[23] Michelet claims "to have established France as a person,"[24] who, like Burckhardt's *cortigiano*, is realized in the Renaissance as the result of self-creation. The process of history is mirrored in that of historiography. On the next page, Michelet posits the identity of author and text, in the very process of their production: "My life was in this book, it has been transformed into it. […] It is a fact that history, in the progress of time, makes the historian much more than it is made by him. My book has created me." This mode of historical writing is made possible by nothing other than the "modern personality" itself, "so powerful and en-

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[22] In *Metahistory*, White characterizes Michelet's historiography as romance and Burckhardt's as satire.
[23] Michelet, "Preface," 142 (emphasis in original).
[24] Ibid., 150.

larged." Its affective form is a love that results in identification: "In penetrating an object more and more deeply, we come to love it, and henceforth we examine it with growing interest. The heart touched with emotion has second sight; it sees a multitude of things invisible to those who are indifferent. History and the historian merge in this view."[25] As above, so below. It is worth recalling that this untempered reverse constructivism is being pushed by the self-proclaimed founder of the archival method, who desired above all to purify history of its fictive element and accurately represent the life of the past.[26] Even so, Michelet provides us with an instance of one of the hallmarks of Renaissance historiography: the resurfacing of the past is personally transformative for the one who studies it. Accordingly, Michelet's excess serves to illustrate the kernel of historiographical ascesis in the tradition of Renaissance thinking as the work of the self-producing subject, whether that subject be a fifteenth-century *cortigiano*, a nineteenth-century historian, or Europe itself. In Michelet, even more than in Burckhardt, the formation of the self and the emergence of European modernity are understood in relation to one another, not merely coeval or causal but basically the same. As we know, however, in contrast to the nationalist Michelet, Renaissance historiography, from Burckhardt to Panofsky, has generally presented its object as not just any but the supreme historical locus for European cosmopolitanism, often in explicit opposition to the nationalisms of recent centuries. Reading Burckhardt and Michelet together, despite the great differences in their historio-

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[25] Ibid., 143. Michelet was fond of the analogy: the lengthy dedication of *Le Peuple* (1846) begins, "Ce livre est plus qu'un livre; c'est moi-même" (Michelet, *Le Peuple*, 3). Barthes reads Michelet's overly intimate relation to history as dietetic: he literally lives off history (Barthes, *Michelet*, 18).
[26] Throughout the 1869 preface, Michelet repeatedly reminds readers of his decades spent in the archives and his pioneering use of unpublished documents.

graphical method, reveals that this cosmopolitanism is not really a universalism but a particularity defined by European modernity as the capacity for individualization. Or, perhaps more accurately, it is a universalism in the same (paradoxical) way that, as Étienne Balibar has argued, racism and nationalism are universalisms, namely, because they formulate an ideal humanity.[27] This universalism, implicit in Burckhardt and Michelet, becomes much more obvious in the historical work of the British critic, poet, and theorist of sexual inversion, John Addington Symonds.

3.

Symonds's seven-volume *Renaissance in Italy* (1875–1886), which remains the most comprehensive study of the period written in English, is explicitly indebted to the histories of Michelet and Burckhardt. Taken as foundational are "the discovery of the world and the discovery of man"—the period's "greatest achievements"—and the central role of self-culture and personality for the emergence of modern subjectivity in the courtier and the "many-sided genius."[28] Symonds likewise aligns these aspects of the Renaissance with its status as the moment of Europe's transition to modernity.[29] With Symonds, however, the move from the national context to a pan-European one is accompanied by an explicitly racialized discourse of global progress that is lacking in Michelet and Burckhardt. While the Eurocentrism of our French and Swiss historians cannot be

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[27] See Balibar, "Racism as Universalism."
[28] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 1:12, 143–48; 2:1–7. Ferguson writes, "Symonds' Renaissance was in all essentials the same as Burckhardt's" (Ferguson, *Renaissance in Historical Thought*, 204). Hale, however, notes that Symonds's main ideas had already been presented in an undergraduate essay of 1863, long before he read Burckhardt (Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance*, 141–43).
[29] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 1:1.

decoupled from an implicit white supremacy, race as such is not a central concept in either's philosophy of history: Michelet locates the collective force of history in class ("the people") and Burckhardt in high culture. For Symonds, whose philosophy of history incorporates the discourse of evolutionary science, race is the motor of history.[30] True, the majority of *Renaissance in Italy* is given to descriptions of social conditions and to detailed, erudite criticism of art and literature.[31] Yet these studies are framed by a theory of history that frequently invokes the language of race, whether in explanations of particular historical phenomena or in more general reflections on the nature of historical progress. The Renaissance is thus described as the Italian rediscovery of an ancestral Roman culture, as though by a kind of racial instinct.[32] Or, as in the opening definition of the period, as a moment in the onward progress of Europe:

> By the term Renaissance, or new birth, is indicated a natural movement, not to be explained by this or that characteristic, but to be accepted as an effort of humanity for which at length the time had come, and in the onward progress of which we still participate. The history of the

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[30] The question of the relationship between race and history has a long pedigree in European thought. Yet even though the European idea of race has been traced back to antiquity (see Isaac, *Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*), it appears not to have been invested in history until the Enlightenment, where the association can be found, for example, in the philology of Monboddo, the political theory of Montesquieu, and the natural history of Buffon. The relationship was strengthened in the historicisms of Herder, Hegel, and Comte, reaching its logical conclusion in the scientific racism of Gobineau, whose *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* appeared in 1853.

[31] This might explain why the racial elements of Symonds's work have mostly been overlooked by critics. While Hale censures the uncritical deployment of racial climatology and Ivory notes the frequent use of the language of degeneration, neither author draws out the implications of this discourse (Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance*, 147; *Homosexual Revival of Renaissance Style,* 26–27, 32, 57). While Orrells provides a welcome analysis of the role of race in Symonds's sexological writings, he does not consider *Renaissance in Italy* (Orrells, "Greek Love, Orientalism and Race").

[32] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 5:444.

> Renaissance is not the history of arts, or of sciences, or of literature, or even of nations. It is the history of the attainment of self-conscious freedom by the human spirit manifested in the European races.[33]

For all his tribute to Burckhardt and Michelet, Symonds implicitly rejects their conceptualizations of the Renaissance as, respectively, a cultural or national achievement marking the end of the Middle Ages. The distinctly Hegelian formulation—"the attainment of self-conscious freedom by the human spirit"—turns the Renaissance into history itself, "a natural movement […] in the onward progress of which we still participate." Where Burckhardt presents Renaissance individualism as the overcoming of race, Symonds takes it as a sign of the racial superiority of Europeans, the most historical of races. The modern subject's freedom to produce himself is, then, the prerogative of his race as much as it is the outcome of historical conditions.[34]

Symonds's Hegelian Renaissance not only narrates what Europe has already achieved in its self-realization—including "the appropriation by civilized humanity of all corners of the habitable globe"[35]—but also anticipates the future. The second volume of *Renaissance in Italy*, which was published in 1877, the year after Queen Victoria was first styled Empress of India, concludes with the classic image of the torch-race of nations: "Greece stretches forth her hand to Italy; Italy consigns the sacred fire to Northern Europe; the people of the North pass on the flame to America, to India, and the

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[33] Ibid., 1:3; see also 5:427.

[34] In Symonds's other work, the determinations of race and historical moment are frequently invoked to explain the relationship between the universal and the particular. The following is typical: "no human being stands alone in this world. His own particular mental quality is influenced by the thought of his race and epoch" (Symonds, *Essays*, 1:181).

[35] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 1:13.

Australasian isles."[36] Fraser cites this passage as an indication of Symonds's "liberal humanist view of history," but what is told here is not simply a history of culture in Europe but a global one of invasion and colonization.[37] To be sure, we are not surprised to find a racialization of history and an apology for imperialism in nineteenth-century history books. Symonds's incorporation of an evolutionary concept of race as the collective subject of history is not remarkable in itself, even if it is a departure from the earlier accounts of Michelet and Burckhardt. What I want to focus on here is, rather, the way in which Symonds constitutes himself as a historical subject in the writing of his text. In bringing together Burckhardt's theory of the individual and synchronic, cultural-studies methodology with Michelet's chauvinism and strangely personalized historicism, and then putting all this alongside late-nineteenth-century evolutionary theory and its anxieties about race, Symonds's text becomes the site of an unresolvable conflict between a scientific approach to history and the historian's sublimated personal investments.

In *Renaissance in Italy*, Symonds's self-positioning is legible in a number of places, but I will start with his explicit comments on the work of the historian and the critic. Symonds expounds a positivist theory of historical knowledge and a conservative approach to art appreciation, repudiating the aestheticism that achieved notoriety with the publication of Pater's *Renaissance* in 1873. In a "Digression on Criticism" buried in a chapter about Bolognese painting in *Renaissance in Italy*'s seventh volume, Symonds asserts that the question of pleasure has no place in criticism, that the critic must be a "healthy person who has made himself acquainted with the laws of evolution in art and in

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36 Ibid., 2:399.
37 Fraser, *Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, 218.

society," and that aesthetic judgment is not a question of art's effect on the individual but the consensus of "enlightened intelligence."[38] He had already, in the conclusion to volume five, derided the aesthetic cult of the Renaissance, which, at the time of publication (1881), could have been read as a coded attack on Pater. Ironically, despite the importance of the humanist revival to his work, Symonds insists that the Renaissance should not itself be imitated: "We cannot extract from the Renaissance a body of ethical teaching, an ideal of conduct, or a discipline of manners, applicable to the altered conditions of the nineteenth century." Such a warning would be "impertinent," he writes, "were we not from time to time admonished from the chair of criticism that a new Gospel, founded on the principles of the Renaissance, has been or is being preached in England."[39] Given his investments in Renaissance culture, both here and elsewhere, including in his homoerotic poetry, Symonds's disavowal of aestheticism's appropriation of the past is curious, even if his characterization of it is flimsy.[40] It can be explained, however, by the program of scientific historicism that informs and frames *Renaissance in Italy*: the historian represents "the simple truth."[41]

Historical truth, however, even as Symonds presents it, is never so simple. John Hale argues that *Renaissance in Italy* is hamstrung by a contradiction in its philosophy of history: on the one hand, Symonds presents a Hegelian theory of history as progress in which individuals have little agency; on the other hand, he remains beholden, in spite of

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[38] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 7:230–31. In his review of the volume, Wilde dismissed this chapter as "too polemical to be pleasant" (W6:107).
[39] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 5:459.
[40] For a reading of Symonds's poetry informed by his studies of the Renaissance, see Ballam, "Renaissance Erotic."
[41] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 5:459.

this, to a Carlylean vision of history as the domain of heroic men, whose lives are cele-brated, at times eroticized, throughout the text.[42] This conflict is evident in his methodo-logical remarks, which use the language of biography as well as that of progressive history and evolutionary theory, sometimes in the same sentence. In volume one, for example, Symonds's writes that "the true object of the historian is to set forth the life of a commonwealth as a continuous whole, to draw the portrait of a state with due regard to its especial physiognomy."[43] In the conclusion to the fifth volume (originally intended as the last in the series), Symonds expounds his vision of progressive history as "the biog-raphy of man." The historian-biographer "trace[s] the continuity of civilization," a continuity that was first intuited in the Renaissance but has now "assumed the dignity of organized speculation in the German philosophies of history, and in the positive philoso-phy of Auguste Comte." "It has," moreover, "received its most powerful corroboration from recent physical discoveries, and has acquired firmer consistency in the Darwinian speculation."[44] To conceive history according to the human life-cycle was commonplace in philosophy by Symonds's time and can be found in both Hegel and Comte, though I suspect not in Darwin. Whereas Michelet's metaphorically personalized France provides for the historian's confessed identification with his subject matter, Symonds's metonymy makes history into a biologized person knowable to the scientific historian, even as he insists upon a general temporal process (evolution or progress) in which Symonds himself, by implication, participates. The historian Symonds accordingly writes the biography of his own race.

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[42] Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance*, 147.
[43] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 1:216.
[44] Ibid., 5:461.

What is at stake for Symonds—personally—in this "biography"? Hale claims that Symonds's "interest in history was above all personal," having already characterized this interest as the symptom of closeted homosexuality.[45] "Convinced that he was repulsive," writes Hale of the young Symonds, "he dreamed of the ideal beauty of Greek youth."[46] While Hale's psychological reading of Symonds borders on homophobic, more recent scholarship has also made a strong connection between Symonds's studies of antiquity and the Renaissance and his work on the history of sexual inversion.[47] Yvonne Ivory, Heike Bauer, and Will Fisher all understand *Renaissance in Italy* as, at least in part, a way for Symonds to conceptualize and historicize same-sex desire. Accordingly, the "objective persona" (as Roland Barthes would call it) of Symonds's historical narration, with its discourse of positivism and progress, belies a deep personal investment in his materials.[48] This investment can be detected in the recurrent enthusiasm for the bodies of Italian men, of which the following is typical:

> The Italians of the new age were a noble nation, gifted with physical, emotional, and mental faculties in splendid harmony. In some districts, notably in Florence, circumstance and climate had been singularly favourable to the production of such glorious human beings as the world has rarely seen. Beauty of person, strength of body, and civility of manners were combined in the men of that favoured region with intellectual endowments of the highest order.[49]

[45] Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance*, 138, 132.
[46] Ibid., 130.
[47] Symonds co-wrote the first edition of *Sexual Inversion* (1896) with Havelock Ellis, contributing the historical section. While during his lifetime he was known chiefly as a critic, his writing on homosexuality, which includes reflections on his own experience, has in recent decades generally been of greater interest to scholars (Brady, *John Addington Symonds*, 32).
[48] Barthes, "The Discourse of History," 132.
[49] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 2:19. See also the discussion of sculpture in vol. 3, ch. 3.

It is also present in Symonds's claim that the *cortigiano* represents the prototype of the modern gentleman. Indeed, his qualities comprise a near perfect set of aristocratic values: nobility, courage, manliness, modesty, grace, culture, scholarship, artistic skill.[50] Even though Symonds rejects the subjectivism of aesthetic criticism, the nature of his personal investments in the Renaissance become evident upon closer inspection. The concern for the future of the European races, the desire for virile masculinity, the contempt for middle-class philistinism—these reveal that the historicist critic Symonds, no less than the unnamed aesthetic critics that he repudiates or the wildly confessional Michelet that he endorses, engages the Renaissance to produce himself as the subject of its history. Where Symonds's work follows Michelet's in suggesting that there is something to celebrate in the fact of this historical subjectivity, Walter Pater's reflections are marked by an ambivalence and a focus on present experience that put into doubt both progressive history and the form of subjectivity that finds itself therein.

4.

In contrast to those nineteenth-century writers on the Renaissance whose work we have just explored, Pater is less concerned with discovering the origin of modernity and its institutions than he is with finding ways of living in it. While his work confirms the centrality of early-modern Italy and is concerned with the individual in history, the Renaissance, for Pater, is more epistemological and affective than historiographical, becoming a mode of representing and relating to the past that is not necessarily limited to

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[50] Ibid., 1:145–50.

the Renaissance as usually understood. This reconceptualization takes place in Pater's collection of essays entitled *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*.[51] When Pater first presents his project in the preface to this book, what we find is an aesthetic hedonism. It is a hedonism because it takes pleasure as the highest good, and it is aesthetic because this pleasure is attained from the perception and contemplation of beauty in art, nature, and human life. This aesthetic hedonism concerns particular instances of beauty in the personal experience of a cultivated individual, the "aesthetic critic." Hence the proper questions of criticism: "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?"[52] This is precisely the aesthetic subjectivism to which Symonds so strongly objected.

Pleasure—which for Pater is never mere voluptuousness—lies at the core of his concept of the Renaissance. In contrast to the aesthetic hedonism of the preface, however, when Pater presents his definition of the Renaissance in the first chapter ("Two Early French Stories"), what we get is something less sensuous and more cerebral. "For us," he writes,

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[51] In the book's first edition (1873), the title was *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. For the second edition (1877), the title was changed to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, and this was the title used for every subsequent edition, each of which contained many revisions. The last edition published during Pater's lifetime was the fourth edition (1893), which is the text (edited by Hill) used here. Hill provides an overview of the book's publication history and early reception (Pater, *Renaissance*, 280–89).

[52] Pater, *Renaissance*, xix–xx. Further citations will be provided parenthetically in text.

> the Renaissance is the name of a many-sided but yet united movement, in which the love of the things of the intellect and the imagination for their own sake, the desire for a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life, make themselves felt, urging those who experience this desire to search out first one and then another means of intellectual or imaginative enjoyment, and directing them not only to the discovery of old and forgotten sources of this enjoyment, but to the divination of fresh sources thereof—new experiences, new subjects of poetry, new forms of art. (1–2)

We are, nevertheless, still talking about pleasure, even if its object has become immaterial. Key here is the fact that Pater's Renaissance is thoroughly erotic, a movement propelled by love and desire. The object of these feelings is a way of life that appears here as a spiritual hedonism. It is spiritual in a sense that Pater, as a student of German philosophy, would recognize: the pleasures sought are those of the intellect and imagination. But elsewhere, throughout the book, Pater emphasizes the love of sensually apprehended corporeal beauty rather than the desire for spiritual pleasure. For Pater, these two forms of pleasure are two sides of the same coin, and so the various forms of beauty are not to be separated into a Platonic hierarchy. In any case, pleasure is the overarching concept that brings together the three related tendencies that Pater calls upon to characterize the Renaissance throughout his book, namely: the liberation of the senses and the imagination, the worship of the body and the love of physical beauty, and the Renaissance as a way of life embodied in both individual lives and works of art.[53] These tendencies, which are to be found already in Burckhardt, coalesce emphatically in the book's infamous conclusion, which, with its call for a life of aestheticism, dehistoricizes the Renaissance and presents it as a practice of existence. Here, the Renaissance is celebrated not because

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[53] Compare Ivory's five topoi of Renaissance representation, quoted above, with which these three elements partially overlap (Ivory, *Homosexual Revival of Renaissance Style*, 17).

it represents a change for the better in the course of history—the utopian element in Michelet and Symonds—but because, as a transhistorical concept, it promises to make one's life more meaningful and pleasurable now.[54]

The conclusion, which Pater adapted from an unsigned review of William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* (1870)*,* begins with a meditation on a fragment of Heraclitus, πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει (186), which Pater translates elsewhere as, "All things give way: nothing remaineth."[55] In this famous aphorism lie the foundations for Pater's philosophy of history and aesthetic ethics. By Pater's estimation, all historical thinking in the European tradition, right up to Hegelian dialectics and Darwinian evolution, is a variation on this Heraclitean insight.[56] Such a reading rejects the progressive, teleological modes of historical thinking prevalent in mid-Victorian Britain, and which, as we have seen, underpin Symonds's Hegelian–evolutionary vision of history. Pater presents instead a philosophy of history that undoes the unity of the subject and its normative claim to history: as a metaphysical principle, Heraclitean flux—"that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves" (188)—describes equally the world and the consciousness that experiences it. Carolyn Williams accordingly reads the conclusion as primarily concerned with reconciling objective knowledge and subjective experience,[57] a worry that animates much post-Kantian European philosophy, as

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[54] Such an approach to criticism is characteristic of Pater. In the "Postscript" to *Appreciations*, he defines the classical and the romantic as, respectively, the familiar and the unusual elements in art (Pater, *Selected Writings*, 208–23).
[55] Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, 14. The aphorism originates in Plato's *Cratylus* (Plato, *Complete Works*, 120 [402a]).
[56] Pater will later make this reading of Hegel and Darwin explicit (Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, 19).
[57] Williams, *Transfigured World*, 12.

noted above in the Introduction. Pater's solution is a life of constant attentiveness to the phenomena encountered in the world and the development of perceptual capacities. As the text progresses, this grows into an ethical imperative:

> Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us,—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. […] To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. […] Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliance of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. (188–89)

This passage reads like a Baudelairean insistence on attentiveness to the present moment and, in this regard, belongs to the discourse of nineteenth-century aestheticism. Pater's combination of Stoic vigilance and Epicurean hedonism redirects the questions of aesthetic judgment onto life itself. However, when read in either of its published contexts—as the conclusion to a book about the Renaissance or to a review of a contemporary poem that tells of an encounter between a medieval and a classical culture—we are reminded that this insistence upon present experience is coupled with a recognition that we are ourselves historically determined—"clothed […] in a vesture of the past"—and born into an already historical world.[58] That the original location of this aesthetic imperative was not in *The Renaissance* itself but in Pater's engagement with the poetry of his contemporary Morris reveals the extent to which Pater's understanding of the Renaissance depends upon his aestheticism. Moreover, the rehash inscribes Pater's review of Morris as the hidden final chapter of the book, reinforcing Pater's definition of the Renaissance as a

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[58] Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, 72.

form of life not limited to a particular time and affirming it as a crucial concept for his aestheticism.

Pater's review of Morris provides us with his strongest statements on the aesthetic relation to history in the work of the aesthetic critic, who "vitalizes his subject by keeping it always close to himself."[59] In a passage not carried over into the conclusion of *The Renaissance*, Pater theorizes an embodied relation to history: "The composite experience of all the ages is part of each one of us; to deduct from that experience, to obliterate any part of it, to come face to face with the people of a past age, as if the Middle Age, the Renaissance, the eighteenth century had not been, is as impossible as to become a little child, or enter again into the womb and be born."[60] This means both that we cannot escape history and that we cannot isolate a historical moment and know it as it really was. Revival is not impossible because progress has alienated us from the past, as Symonds argues, it is impossible because our implication in history is already so layered and intimate that we cannot see around it. Historical representation is, then, necessarily partial, on the side of both the object of representation, which can never appear complete, and that of the subject, whose representation always reveals a partiality. And this partiality is affective, the location of aesthetic pleasure. Pater continues:

> But though it is not possible to repress a single phase of that humanity, which, because we live and move and have our being in the life of humanity, makes us what we are; it is possible to isolate such a phase, to throw it into relief, to be divided against ourselves in zeal for it, as we may hark back to some choice space of our own individual life.[61]

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[59] Pater, "Poems by William Morris," 85.
[60] Ibid., 86.
[61] Ibid., 86–87.

In contrast to the historians discussed above, Pater rejects as impossible direct access to the past and its objective representation. Instead, Renaissance is something done in a relation of intimacy with the past that recognizes its inaccessibility, while still holding onto the desire for it. The result is not only aesthetic pleasure but the revelation of one's entanglement in history. Transposed into *The Renaissance*, the text draws out the ethical implications of the readings of Renaissance figures that make up the book's chapters. Yet the urgent, if wistful, tone of its preface and conclusion belies *The Renaissance*'s prevailing melancholia and the morbid tenor of many of Pater's readings. Two essays from the book that have proved of particular interest to critics are those on Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci. Here Pater's Renaissance becomes ambivalent. Botticelli's shrinking Madonnas, his sad Venus, and Leonardo's vampiric Mona Lisa attest to the difficulty of the historical relation as the recognition of history's saturation and inaccessibility, despite the aesthetic critic's zeal.

Pater's reading of Botticelli's withdrawn figures focuses on two works: *Madonna of the Magnificat* (c. 1481) and *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1486), both of which Pater would have seen, along with other works by Botticelli, in the Uffizi when he visited Florence in 1865. In searching for what makes the work unique (the primary aim of criticism in Pater's opinion), he finds in Botticelli's subjects a combination of "loveliness and energy" with a melancholy resulting from "the shadow upon them of the great things from which they shrink" (43). In Pater's reading, Botticelli's Madonnas are cold, dejected and listless, uncertain of what to do with the unasked-for child in their arms; but their detachment and shrinking is precisely the source of their charm. Botticelli's Venus has the

same "sentiment" as his Madonnas: sad, cold, withdrawn. She is beautiful—Pater insists that the painting is pleasurable—but cadaverous. Unlike the Madonnas, however, this painting is the site of a revelation: "in pictures like this of Botticelli's you have a record of the first impression made by ["the Hellenic spirit"] on minds turned back towards it, in almost painful aspiration, from a world in which it has been ignored so long" (46). *The Birth of Venus* accordingly represents a key moment in the history of the Renaissance, which occurs under the auspices of love: antiquity in the form of love itself is the object of desire. Yet as much as one might want to bring this love closer, it remains cold and distant, shrinking away in sadness from the future. The encounter, then, takes the form of a desire for a love that cannot be reciprocated but which nonetheless yields aesthetic pleasure.[62]

Pater's description of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, or *La Gioconda* (Pater's preferred name for the painting), is one of the most striking passages in art criticism:

> All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. (98–99)

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[62] Pater's reading of Botticelli exemplifies what Heather Love calls his "politics of refusal" (Love, *Feeling Backward*, 58).

Unlike Botticelli's subjects, Leonardo's Lisa does not shrink from the weight of history but seems to carry it easily: all of European history is readable in her face as "the sound of lyres and flutes." She nevertheless appears in the same cadaverous light as Venus. Here, however, this light is not the correlative of Greek antiquity's inaccessibility but of Europe's undeadness. Lisa is not the mere observer of European history but has lived and died with it through the centuries and bears its marks on her body; she embodies the partiality of historical experience. Pater is quick to draw out the implications for historical understanding:

> The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea. (99)

Here, again, Pater reveals the importance of philosophies of history to the art criticism of *The Renaissance*, presaging his assimilation, in the conclusion, of nineteenth-century philosophy to Heraclitean metaphysics. Despite the ambiguity of the "old fancy" and the "modern idea," the context directs us to take them as floating signifiers for old and new ideas about the possibility of temporal persistence, recurrence, and transformation: transmigration, anamnesis, dialectics, evolution, and so on. The point of Pater's comparison is that "the fancy of a perpetual life" (the desire for earthly immortality), like "the old fancy" of reincarnation, has found in the nineteenth century metaphysical and scientific expression, though each form of knowledge understands the meaning of such a life differently. Unlike Symonds, then, Pater does not see the theories of Hegel, Comte, and

Darwin as modern discoveries conditioned by the Renaissance's emancipation of reason and all pointing to an ultimate truth of history, but rather as rearticulations of the most ancient intuitions and desires. This, Pater suggests, is what renaissance really means if it is to name a theory of history.

The ambivalent figure of the smiling, undead Mona Lisa shows us the extent to which we already participate in history. In the lives of individuals, Europe itself dies and comes back to life again and again. When Michelet resurrects the dead and assimilates himself to a personal France, there is no apparent ambivalence or uncanniness. By contrast, Pater's identification of Europe in the person of Lisa is more melancholic than triumphant, and the desire catalyzed remains unfulfilled. While Symonds is more reticent about his personal investments, his commitment to positivism and progress means that Europe will always be figured as the torch-bearer of history. Rather than emerging once and for all from medieval darkness into the light of modernity—as Symonds's put it, "The Renaissance was the liberation of the reason from a dungeon"[63]—Pater's Europe is bathed perpetually in the necrotic light of history. In *The Renaissance*, Pater theorizes a personal relationship with history that is ambivalent in its combination of desire and detachment, intimacy and estrangement, ineluctability and inaccessibility, proximity and distance. Pater shows that no matter how close we get to the past, it remains at a remove; no matter how saturated by it we feel, it is never fully present. At the same time, when we desire the past, we desire something that is already with us, for better or worse. This messy vision of history presents a strong challenge to the scientific historicism of Symonds, a challenge of which Pater seems to have been aware.

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[63] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 1:11.

The stakes of Pater's intervention in Renaissance historiography are at their clearest in his review of the first volume of Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy*, *The Age of the Despots*, which he wrote shortly after the book's publication in 1875.[64] While the review is favorable, two moments of tension stand out. Firstly, Pater recognizes that Symonds's goal is historicist: "to set the art and literature of Italy on that background of general social and historical conditions to which they belong, and apart from which they cannot really be understood" (196). But he also suggests that the "spirit of the Renaissance proper" is not to be found in these "general social and historical conditions," whose history is characterized by political oppression and cruelty. As far as Pater sees it, this poses a problem for scientific historicism:

> That sense of the complex interdependence on each other of all historical conditions is one of the guiding lights of the modern historical method, and Mr. Symonds abundantly shows how thoroughly he has mastered this idea. And yet on the same background, out of the same general conditions, products emerge, the unlikeness of which is the chief thing to be noticed. (198)

Perhaps Pater's representation of historicism here is a little simplistic; even so, a major historiographical difference is thus signaled. The argument is delicately put but the implications are vast: the Renaissance is historical but its meaning exceeds what historicism can tell us about it; the historical therefore cannot be absolutely historicized. Burckhardt's claim for an affinity between despotism and aestheticism thereby loses its necessity, along with its explanatory power. The second moment of tension comes in the form of a backhanded compliment: "The imagination in historical composition works

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[64] The review is reprinted in Pater, *Renaissance*, 196–202.

most legitimately when it approaches dramatic effects. In this volume there is a high degree of dramatic imagination; here all is objective, and the writer is hardly seen behind his work" (201). But these sentences come immediately before Pater's assessment of the book's only major shortcoming, its lack of "reserve" (201).[65] Pater's valorization of reserve stands out because this quality is often understood as the key technique of his own queerly self-effacing style.[66] Where Pater's reticence makes him, in Henry James's memorable phrase, "the mask without the face,"[67] Symonds's copiousness means that he can hardly be seen.

Pater's implicit correlations of epistemology and style—aestheticism and reserve, on the one hand, historicism and excess, on the other—gets to the crux of the difference between his and Symonds's visions of the Renaissance. The conclusion to *The Renaissance* creates the impression of a world chaotically overflowing with stimuli, to which the most viable response is not to attempt a record of everything but rather to concentrate the attention upon the present moment in order to select and enjoy that which is most pleasurable amidst the flux of becoming: "strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hand, or the face of one's friend" (189). History is the light in which these objects of experience appear—we cannot see them without it—rather than

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[65] This critique of Symonds's dramatic style was repeated by Wilde in his review of the final two volumes of *Renaissance in Italy* (W6:105–07).

[66] Reviewing Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, Wilde writes, "Asceticism is the keynote of Mr. Pater's prose" (W6:180). While James Eli Adams sees Pater's reserve as a technique of bourgeois self-fashioning (Adams, *Dandies*, 194), more recent work has reread it as, in Heather Love's words, "a specifically queer response to the politics of social exclusion" (Love, *Feeling Backward*, 58), which Rachel O'Connell characterizes as "retreat" and Matthew Burroughs Price as "detachment." Kate Hext links Pater's reserve with his discussions of ascesis (Hext, *Walter Pater*, 103).

[67] James, *Letters*, 3:492.

the granular conditions of their appearance. The Renaissance is accordingly of interest not for its particular social conditions but for what it gives to life in the present: "the picture, the landscape, the engaging personality in life or in a book, *La Gioconda*, the hills of Carrara, Pico of Mirandola, are valuable for the virtues, as we say, in speaking of a herb, a wine, a gem; for the property each has of affecting one with a special, a unique impression of pleasure" (xx). The contrast with Eliot and Ruskin could not be stronger. But it is also remarkable how far Pater is from other nineteenth-century critics and historians of the Renaissance. In Pater, the past refuses resurrection and assimilation à la Michelet, and a call like Symonds's for the objective representation of the simple truth makes no sense. Where Michelet's work glorifies France and Burckhardt's presents a proto-fascist endorsement of despotism, where Symonds celebrates individuality as the destiny of the European races, and Husserl attempts to rescue Europe through a logocentric universalization of the humanist rediscovery of antiquity, Pater sees the Renaissance as a reminder of history's inescapable cycle of life, death, and rebirth that flows through and constitutes subjectivity, "that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves" (188).

Chapter Three

Blurred Contrast: Gothic Architecture and the Haunted Future in John Ruskin and William Morris

1.

While the art and history of the Renaissance provide Pater with the material for exploring the potential of aesthetics to bring two or more disparate moments in time together, the nineteenth century's other major aesthetic revival—the Gothic Revival—drew much of its energy from demonstrating the enormous difference between the present and the past. Its central concept, therefore, is not so much *revival* as *contrast*. To be sure, contrast is one of the most powerful topoi of historical consciousness and so is commonly encountered in reflections on historicity. In 1831, Mill identified it as definitive of the spirit of the age.[1] Contrast underpins the periodization of history that characterizes philosophies such as Hegel's and Comte's, and which also, as Ted Underwood has shown, determined the institutionalization of literary studies.[2] It is a characteristic gesture of the historical novel, especially in the nineteenth century, where narratorial reflection on the differences between past and present could almost be said to define the genre. In Chapter One, we saw how George Eliot uses historical contrast to illustrate the difference between Germa-

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[1] Mill, "The Spirit of the Age," 3.
[2] Underwood, *Why Literary Periods Mattered.*

ny and England by exhorting her readers to "remember" rural life of fifty years ago, despite the fact that few of them would have personally experienced such a life. While contrast is of general importance for scientific and philosophical historicisms, which invariably express skepticism towards the notion of revival, it plays an especially important role for those Romantic and Victorian writers who reacted against modernity and turned with nostalgia towards the Middle Ages. One of the first sustained uses of the rhetoric of contrast in this context occurs in Robert Southey's *Colloquies* (1829), which, in a scathing review, Macaulay dismissed for its reactionary historiography, in particular, the suggestion that people were happier in the early sixteenth century than at any other time in English history.[3] The bluntest use of the trope is to be found in the plates of Augustus Welby Pugin's *Contrasts* (1836) (Figure 3.1), which juxtaposes images of "Catholic excellence" with those of "modern degeneracy."[4] Perhaps its most influential Victorian deployments, however, occur in Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1843) and in the second volume of Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1853). For all these authors, the ugliness, meanness, and alienation of modern capitalist society contrasts with the beauty, piety, and communal life of medieval feudal society. Inspired doubly by these classics of Victorian medievalism and the equally contrastive, periodizing thinking of Karl Marx, William Morris, in the second half of the century, adds a vision of a better future to those of the past and present. Dependent as it is upon a strong sense of modern discontinuity with the past, the Gothic Revival, no matter what its politics, would appear to be

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[3] Macaulay, *Works*, 7:490. Southey: "Those hundred years were the happiest which England has ever known" (Southey, *Colloquies*, 1:55).
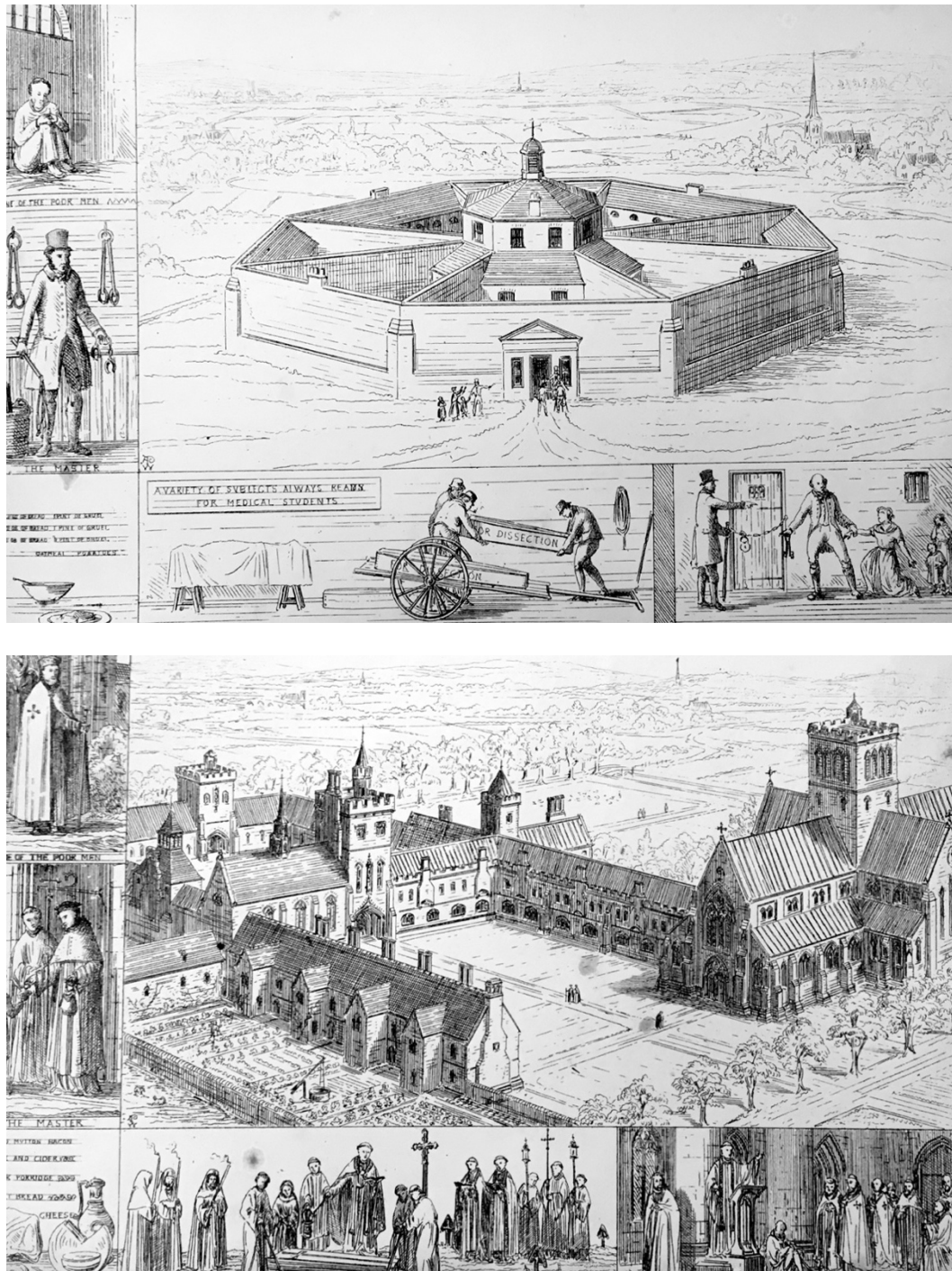[4] Pugin, *Contrasts*, v.

Figure 3.1.
Detail from "Contrasted Residences for the Poor"
Augustus Welby Pugin, *Contrasts*, 2nd edition, 1841
Kunstbibliothek, Berlin

a prime example of aesthetics informed by the dominant modes of nineteenth-century historicism.

A closer look, however, will reveal that the Gothic Revival, as a discourse of revival, does more than just contrast. To begin with, it invents continuities even as it attempts to revive extinct cultural forms, then gets snagged on its own ambivalence when confronted with the reality of past injustices. When we consider the diverse manifestations of Gothic in the nineteenth-century—Walter Scott's poetry, Charles Barry's Palace of Westminster, a Morris and Co. drawing-room, Edward Burne-Jones's series paintings, Richard Wagner's operas, or the Transylvania of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*—it becomes obvious that, even where contrast is invoked, it is in tension with other forms of temporal relation and is accompanied by a wider range of feelings than disgust with the present and nostalgia for the past. In this chapter, I explore some of the ways in which literature of the Gothic Revival breaks down the logic of contrast central to historical consciousness. I will begin with a brief history of the term "Gothic," then move onto the work of Ruskin, whose famous rhetoric of contrast in "The Nature of Gothic" is undermined by his theory of Gothic experience as distorted. I then turn to Morris, whose essays, short fiction and novels exemplify the ambivalence of Gothic by presenting it as a way in which past and future simultaneously haunt the present.

In most modern European languages, "Gothic" and "medieval" are synonyms and their coextension thus exemplifies a certain kind of historical-geographical thinking characteristic of European modernity and which we have already encountered in the Introduction through the philosophy of Hegel. While the sense of there having been a

"middle age" originates in Renaissance humanism, the term "medieval" is a nineteenth-century coinage; "Gothic," however, has a longer history.[5] The people known to the Romans as the *gothi* originated in Scandinavia and invaded parts of the Roman Empire in late antiquity; during the Middle Ages, the Latin adjective *gothicus* and its cognates in the vernacular languages became generic terms for the Germanic or northern. In the Italian Renaissance, the semantic field constituted by these terms acquired a negative valence and *gotico* came to signify northern barbarity. In particular, the term became useful to distinguish the art and architecture of the Middle Ages from that of classical antiquity to the detriment of the former.[6] Ultimately, however, in aesthetic discourse, it was more useful for its descriptive rather than evaluative function, and, by the late seventeenth century, the English word "gothic," like its cognates throughout Europe, was in use to describe medieval pointed architecture, specifically, or, more generally, the culture of the Middle Ages. In England, where the Middle Ages were identified as a point of cultural origin as early as the Elizabethan period,[7] "Gothic" gained currency in the context of eighteenth-century nationalism, in which modern political institutions were traced back to (supposed) Gothic ones, and antiquarians developed the idea of a native Gothic aesthetic in opposition to a classical Mediterranean one.[8] This movement was so

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[5] On the relationship between the two terms, see Alexander, *Medievalism*, xxv–xxvi.

[6] The first known association of the Goths with the architecture that came to be known as Gothic occurs in Vasari's *Lives* (1550), where it is used disparagingly (de Beer, "Gothic," 147–48). In "The Myth of 'the Myth of the Medieval'," Anne-Marie Sankovitch, however, questions whether Vasari was in fact writing about the pointed style. For an overview of the ancient Goths, see Sowerby, "The Goths in History and Pre-Gothic Gothic."

[7] Jones, "Medievalism in British Poetry," 15; Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 28.

[8] The *locus classicus* for the affirmative presentation of an anti-classical Gothic aesthetic incorporating both literature and architecture is Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and*

successful that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is possible to speak of British culture generally as a "Gothic" culture, defined, among other things, by its relation to the Middle Ages.[9] It was in this political–aesthetic context that both the revival of Gothic architecture took place and Gothic romances first appeared.[10] This genealogy is recapitulated in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where we see, looking over the quotations gathered there, that, historically, "Gothic" has been used in English in one of four main ways: (1) in a geographical sense, describing the ancient Goths, or metonymically, synonymous with Germanic or Teutonic; (2) in a pejorative sense, denoting the barbarous; (3) in a broad historical sense, synonymous with medieval; and (4) in a narrow aesthetic sense, describing medieval design, especially in architecture and book production.[11] It is only later that Gothic denotes "a genre of fiction characterized by suspenseful, sensational plots involving supernatural or macabre elements," a sense that emerged from

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Romance (1762). See Townshend's introduction to *The Gothic World* (xxix–xxxv) for an overview of the British appropriation of Gothic identity in the eighteenth century. See Miles, *Gothic Writing* (30–49) and "Eighteenth-century Gothic" (12–16), for the eighteenth-century Gothic aesthetic that preceded the first Gothic romances, and Duggett, *Gothic Romanticism*, for this aesthetic's role in conditioning British Romanticism. Martin Arnold provides an overview of the influence of Nordic antiquarianism on the first Gothic novels in "On the Origins of the Gothic Novel." A more detailed study of the political context is provided by Samuel Kliger in *The Goths in England* and by Edward Jacobs in *Accidental Migrations*.

[9] Duggett, *Gothic Romanticism*, 8; Jones, "Medievalism in British Poetry," 15.

[10] The proliferation of Gothic romances at the end of the eighteenth century is, it should be noted, overdetermined. For the origins of the genre, see especially Clery, "The Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction," and *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*; Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*; Miles, *Gothic Writing*, and "The 1790s"; and Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*. As these scholars make clear, a genre concept with the name of Gothic took form later than the first texts of this kind appeared, despite the word's early occurrence in the subtitle to the second edition of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1765).

[11] My division of the senses does not correspondent exactly with that of the *OED*. I have combined related senses to arrive at the groupings outlined here.

its established use as a synonym for the medieval.[12] What we see is that, from its begin-

nings, in addition to being a term of historical and geographical knowledge, "Gothic" is

also one of moral and aesthetic judgment.

While the history of the word shows us how it came to refer to both a style of

architecture and a genre of fiction, the two artforms are generally considered separately.

Moreover, even within literary studies, a distinction is typically made between the Gothic

of Ann Radcliffe and Bram Stoker, and the medievalism of Walter Scott and Alfred

Tennyson. While there is certainly a high–low cultural distinction operating here,[13] the

primary difference between Gothic Revival and Gothic fiction would appear to be

affective. Where the Gothic Revival nostalgically contrasts an idealized Middle Ages

with a degraded modern world, Gothic fiction presents a traumatic encounter of the past

by the present, whether in the psychoanalytic terms of the uncanny (the return of the

repressed) or as a confrontation between the forces of modernity and the relics of premo-

dernity.[14] There is a strong case, however, for considering this diverse collection of

literary and artistic genres, forms, and movements as moments in a larger medievalizing,

Gothic tendency within modern British culture that seeks to understand itself as deter-

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[12] "Gothic," *OED*. "The Gothic novel" as we now know it (i.e., as a transhistorical rather than specifically Romantic genre) emerged as a literary critical concept only in the twentieth century.

[13] See Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic.*

[14] Most introductions to the genre will cite its preoccupation with history and present both psychoanalytic and historicist accounts of this preoccupation. See, for example, the editor's introduction in Hogle, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Townshend's in *The Gothic World*, and Watt's entry on "Gothic" for *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740–1830*. More extended recent studies focusing on history include Smith, *Gothic Radicalism*, and Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, which take a psychoanalytic approach; and Dent, *Sinister Histories*, which takes a historicist approach.

mined in a variety of ways by its relation to premodernity and specifically the Middle Ages.[15] So defined, this field, though large, would probably exclude some texts that are now considered classics of Gothic fiction; my main purpose, however, is not to offer a general definition of Gothic as a transhistorical literary genre but rather to formulate a perspective on Victorian culture as a Gothic culture. Nevertheless, while Ruskin and Morris are generally taken as representatives of the Gothic Revival (i.e., medievalism) rather than Gothic fiction, my discussion of them aims to show some of the ways in which their work participated in the conventions of the popular literary genre, as it is through such conventions—in particular, the use of the grotesque—that the rhetoric of contrast is undermined.

2.

The chronotope of the Gothic ruin, whether it is in a landscape by Caspar David Friedrich, a romance by Scott, a short story by Morris, a novel by Stoker, or the countless follies built throughout Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, exemplifies the aesthetic and affective representation of the Gothic relation to the past as one characterized by loss, obscurity, and spectrality. While John Ruskin is recognized as the most important Victorian theorist of Gothic architecture, his theory's bearing on the experience of its ruined form is less well appreciated. "The Nature of Gothic," the central chapter of the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*, is probably Ruskin's most influential piece of writing. As already noted, it comes in a line of nineteenth-century British texts that use an

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[15] Recent scholarship has begun to make this case; see, for example, Duggett, *Gothic Romanticism*; Jacobs, *Accidental Migrations*; and the contributions in Byron and Townshend, *The Gothic World*.

image of the Middle Ages in order to critique the present. Ruskin contrasts the perfection of modern design, which he sees as a sign of slavery, with the imperfection of medieval craftsmanship, a sign of life and liberty. Unlike modern architecture, Gothic both affords self-expression for the worker and accommodates imperfection. Ruskin's historicist understanding of culture means that he identifies architectural form as the index of social structure: just as the modern worker is immiserated by industrial production, which produces only ugliness, so the medieval one was made happy by the work of Gothic craft. As the occasion for Ruskin's first overt political intervention in middle-class culture, and a trope to which he would consistently return over the course of his long writing career, the contrast between the modern and medieval worker is the primary argument for which *The Stones of Venice*, and perhaps even Ruskin himself, is remembered. However, Ruskin's theory of Gothic provides us with much more than just a contrast of past and present: he also provides a theory of Gothic subjectivity that relates artistic production and aesthetic experience through the category of the grotesque. As the location of an encounter with the historical whose imperfect nature means that it can never transparently mediate the past, Gothic also provides Ruskin with the vehicle for describing experience that is obscure and ambivalent rather than self-evident and decisive.

Before taking a closer look at "The Nature of Gothic," I want to go over some of Ruskin's other descriptions of Gothic architecture, since, through their engagement with the work of Scott and Turner, they will indicate how his architectural theory relates to artistic representation and aesthetic experience more broadly. In the preface to the second edition of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Ruskin provides an analysis of emotional

responses to architecture, which come in four forms: (1) sentimental admiration, (2) proud admiration, (3) workmanly admiration, (4) artistical and rational admiration. The fourth response is celebrated as by far the best, and the second and third are dismissed as uncritical and vain. Interestingly, the first response, sentimental admiration, though insufficiently critical, is not entirely valueless, finding "its highest manifestation in the great mind of Scott" (R8:8). Ruskin illustrates this response with a pastiche: "The kind of feeling which most travellers experience on first entering a cathedral by torchlight, and hearing a chant from concealed choristers; or in visiting a ruined abbey by moonlight, or any building with which interesting associations are connected, at any time when they can hardly see it" (R8:7–8). The ironic tone here is disparaging. To be sure, by 1855, when the preface was written—fifty years after the publication of Scott's wildly success-ful *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, to whose famous description of the ruins of Melrose Abbey in the Scottish Borders Ruskin alludes—such forms of Gothic Romanticism had long felt hackneyed. Indeed, Ruskin could be parodying the very text which he praises:

> If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,
> Go visit it by the pale moonlight;
> For the gay beams of lightsome day
> Gild, but to flout, the ruins grey.
> Where the broken arches are black in night,
> And each shafted oriel glimmers white;
> When the cold light's uncertain shower
> Streams on the ruin'd central tower;
> When buttress and buttress, alternately,
> Seem fram'd of ebon and ivory;
> When silver edges the imagery,
> And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die;
> When distant Tweed is heard to rave
> And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave
> Then go—but go alone the while—

> Then view St. David's ruin'd pile;
> And, home returning, soothly swear,
> Was never scene so sad and fair![16]

After Scott, what could be more Gothic than, in Ruskin's words, "visiting a ruined abbey by moonlight"?[17] That Ruskin admired Scott's poetry and novels is well known: in *Modern Painters III*, he singles Scott out as the most representative artist of modernity and his letters from Scotland, which he visited many times throughout his life, often refer to Scott's work. In his Edinburgh lecture on Turner, Ruskin praises Scott's representations of Melrose Abbey as "*exactly expressing that degree of feeling with which most men in this century can sympathise*" (R12:121). In a later lecture, he deems them "faultless and intensely perceptive," not just in their capturing of the buildings' characteristic structural feature ("interweaving") but also of their spiritual character and their sadness (R19:261). Ruskin's appraisal of Scott's Melrose does nothing to disprove the diagnosis of sentimental admiration.

The intertextuality of Ruskin's and Scott's texts lies not merely in the former's ironic pastiche; more to the point, Ruskin theorizes precisely the aesthetic atmosphere conjured by Scott's poem. In contrast to the three other forms of emotional response to

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[16] Scott, *Poetical Works*, 14.

[17] Ruskin notes the popularity of the Melrose ruins for readers of Scott in one of his *Oxford Museum* letters (R16:230). This popularity is generally regarded as a direct outcome of the *Lay*'s success, as Ruskin also implies. Queen Victoria herself visited Melrose along with several other locations associated with Scott in the summer of 1867. A discussion of Scott's influence on tourism is provided in Watson, "Holiday Excursions to Scott Country"; and Durie, "Scotland is Scott-Land." Broader discussion of the development of Gothic tourism out of picturesque aesthetics is provided in Townshend, "Ruins, Romance and the Rise of Gothic Tourism." On Ruskin's own ambivalent role in the development of cultural tourism, see Hanley and Walton, *Constructing Cultural Tourism*. Tourists' enthusiasm for Gothic ruins remains strong: on twenty-first-century Gothic tourism and its eighteenth-century origins, see McEvoy, *Gothic Tourism*.

architecture, and especially to the artistic and rational admiration that Ruskin values most highly, sentimental admiration comes close to universality. Being "excitable in nearly all persons," it is the *sensus communis* of a Gothic culture, intuitive and common to all classes (R8:8). That the kind of feeling we are talking about here circulates socially rather than being an individual psychological response is confirmed by Ruskin's comments on Scott's ability to express a "*feeling with which most men in this century can sympathise*." *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* not only gives us instructions on the best time to visit Gothic ruins, but it also tells us how to feel when we do so: "And, home returning, soothly swear, | Was never scene so sad and fair!" Ruskin reproduces this when he writes that Scott's poem "will make memorable to you the sadness, the foreboding of death, and the feverish and unconsoling superstition which haunted, as they vanished, the last of the Gothic spires" (R19:261). This last reading of Scott gives us the most comprehensive enumeration yet of the affective qualities that make up the experience here under consideration: sadness, foreboding, haunting. These name three different forms of temporal relation—retrospection, prolepsis, vestigial persistence—to the same bad object, namely, as both Ruskin and Scott imply, death—individual and collective—whose signs are read not only in the decay of the abbey and its ancient tombs, but also in its surviving ornamentation: "the scrolls that teach thee to live and die." Key to each of these affective forms of temporal relation is an element of aesthetic obscurity. As Ruskin writes, if you want to feel sentimental admiration, you should visit a building at a time when you "can hardly see it," or, in Scott's verse, "Where the broken arches are black in night." Daylight

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allows us to forget death, but it is through relation to death, as we shall see, that we begin to feel Gothic.

First, however, I want to look at some further representations of Melrose Abbey so that we are really sure of our aesthetic object. As it happens, this very passage from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* was illustrated by Turner in one of a series of watercolors commissioned by Walter Fawkes in the early 1820s (Figure 3.2).[18] I do not know if Ruskin was familiar with this picture, but it nevertheless instantiates—almost too well— the Gothic feeling that he writes about with respect to Scott. Turner reminds us that what the moonlight reveals is just as important as what the night obscures. While the shadows are deep, hiding parts of the structure, the scene is dramatically backlit, with the light from the rising moon flooding through the enormous east window and outlining the well-preserved details of its tracery. This is, of course, how Gothic window tracery—and, indeed, all Gothic interiors—are meant to be experienced: illuminated from the outside. It may very well be the case, then, that, in order for a ruin to be experienced as affectively Gothic, opened up to the elements as it is, at least, that is to say, for it to excite Ruskin's sentimental admiration, it must be experienced by moonlight: "For the gay beams of lightsome day | Gild, but to flout, the ruins grey." By night, amidst the gloom of the abbey, Turner's moonlight illuminates two things in particular. The lone male figure standing in the ruined choir, a typical instance of Romantic sublimity, represents the reader who has followed Scott's instructions to the letter and thus dramatizes the reading

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[18] Wilton, *The Life and Work of J. M. W. Turner*, 425 (no. 1056).

Figure 3.2.
J. M. W. Turner, *Melrose Abbey*, c. 1822
Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts

experience itself: experienced alone but shared by thousands.[19] Moreover, the inscription of two lines from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* in the foreground, though conventional in an illustration such as this, incorporates Scott's poem into the very rubble of the abbey. In telling us how and when to experience Melrose, the *Lay* has made it what it is. And it can do this, as Ruskin so astutely observes, through a common Gothic feeling.

While, as I have already noted, Ruskin seems to be denigrating, in his description of sentimental admiration, exactly the kind of popular Romanticism that Scott and Turner dish up in their portrayals of Melrose by moonlight, it is also the case that Ruskin was himself a master of such representation. While he does not condescend to moonlight, his architectural studies are usually partial and unfinished, and it is not uncommon that his drawings of buildings stage a dramatic encounter that rests at least partly on the distortion of perspective and the obscurity of details. Just so, for example, in his depiction of Mont Saint Michel of 1848, in which the object of representation seems to be more a sublime effect than any particulars.[20] More germane to my discussion here is Ruskin's own early drawing of Melrose Abbey, undertaken on a family tour of Scotland in the summer of 1838 (Figure 3.3). Ruskin's pencil study of the south transept's exterior differs markedly from Turner's dramatic watercolor, and yet its apparent realism is deceptive. Ruskin exaggerates the vertical dimension (the perspective on the belfry is particularly forced) and renders ornament with considerably more emphasis, though not necessarily precision,

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[19] In his introduction to the 1830 edition of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Scott claims that the book sold upwards of thirty thousand copies (Scott, *Poetical Works*, 6). Such a figure was unprecedented in Britain for poetry.
[20] Hewison, *Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites*, 158 (no. 139).
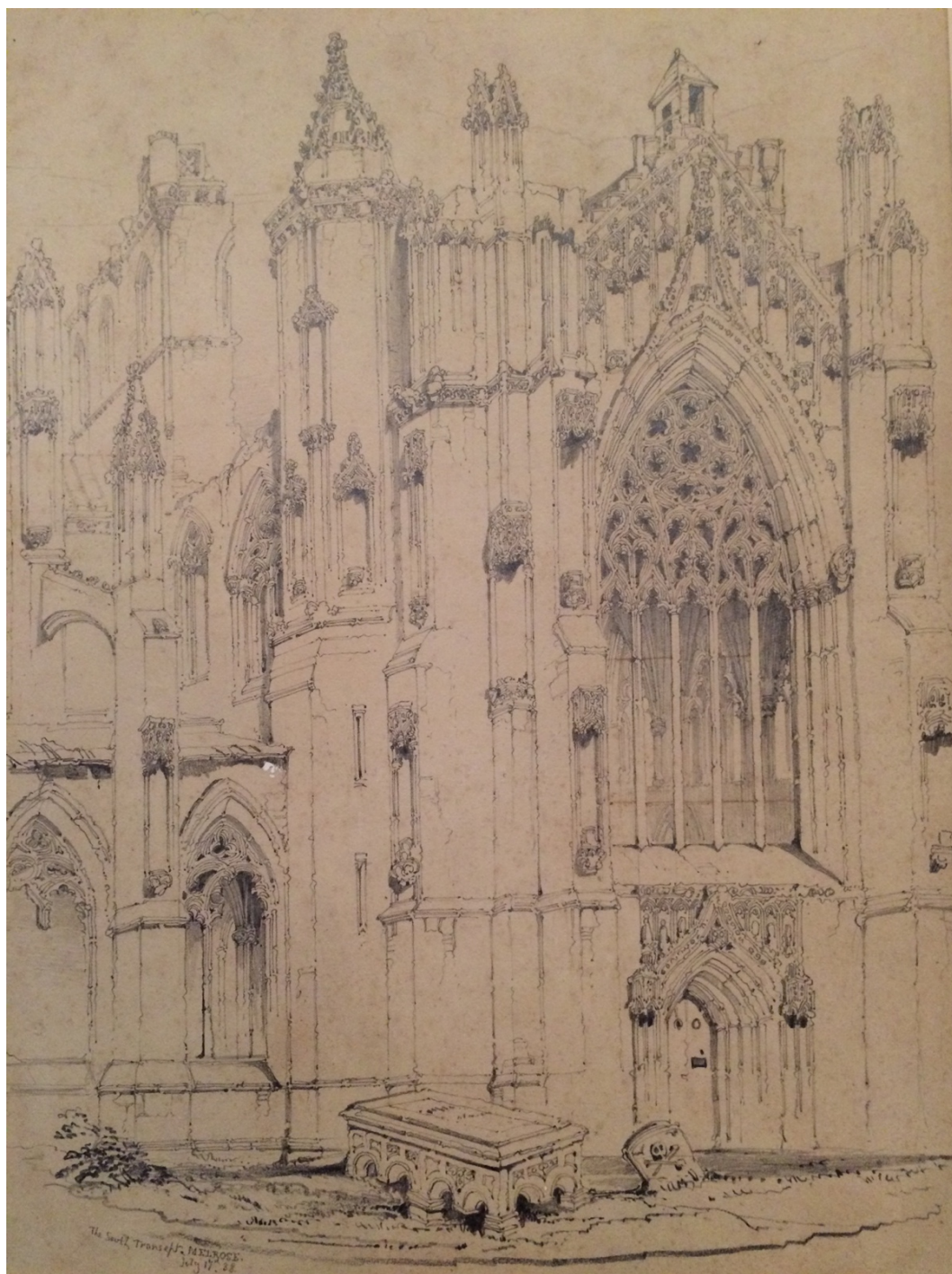
Figure 3.3.
John Ruskin, *The South Transept, Melrose*, 1838
Ruskin Library, Lancaster University

than he does structural lines, which are without shadow; indeed, the ornamentation appears more intricate in Ruskin's drawing than it is in reality. Ruskin would later express dissatisfaction with the slapdash approach of his early "Proutesque" drawings and in a passage excised from *Praeterita* confesses to having drawn the outlines *in situ* and squiggled the ornament in later (R35:622–23). In this case, moreover, he adds to the foreground a gravestone with skull and crossbones and a large Romanesque tomb, neither of which are identifiable in other drawings or photographs representing this view of the abbey. The point is not to upbraid the nineteen-year-old Ruskin for the accuracy or liberty of his draftsmanship but rather to draw attention to the techniques by which Gothic feeling is heightened: here, in particular, the grotesque exaggeration of verticality and ornamentation, and the addition of a *memento mori* that directs interpretation towards mortality and historical loss.

Ruskin's enlistment of sentimental admiration persists beyond his juvenilia. In *The Stones of Venice*, for example, Ruskin narrates an architectural encounter much like those he describes in the preface to *The Seven Lamps*. His wonderfully evocative description of entering St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, though admittedly depicting a Byzantine rather than Gothic building,[21] is complete with flickering torchlight and shadowy recesses:

> Through the heavy door […] let us enter the church itself. It is lost in still deeper twilight, to which the eye must be accustomed for some moments before the form of the building can be traced; and then there opens before us a vast cave, hewn out into the form of a Cross, and divided into shadowy aisles by many pillars. Round the domes of its roof the light

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[21] In my defense, I quote from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*: "I use the word Gothic in the most extended sense as broadly opposed to classical" (R8:229).

enters only through narrow apertures like large stars; and here and there a ray or two from some far-away casement wanders into the darkness, and casts a narrow phosphoric stream upon the waves of marble that heave and fall in a thousand colours along the floor. What else there is of light is from torches, or silver lamps, burning ceaselessly in the recesses of the chapels; the roof sheeted with gold, and the polished walls covered with alabaster, give back at every curve and angle some feeble gleaming to the flames; and the glories round the heads of the sculptured saints flash out upon us as we pass them, and sink again into the gloom. (R10:88)

Revealing how easily the atmospheric apparatus can cross the boundary of temperance, Ruskin also describes disapprovingly the more theatrical (i.e., Catholic) installations of St. Mark's, intended, as he suggests, to heighten the affective response of worshippers:

Darkness and mystery; confused recesses of building; artificial light employed in small quantity, but maintained with a constancy which seems to give it a kind of sacredness; preciousness of material easily comprehended by the vulgar eye; close air loaded with a sweet and peculiar odour associated only with religious services, solemn music, and tangible idols or images having popular legends attached to them,—these, the stage properties of superstition, which have been from the beginning of the world, and must be to the end of it, employed by all nations, whether openly savage or nominally civilized, to produce a false awe in minds incapable of apprehending the true nature of the Deity, are assembled in St. Mark's to a degree, as far as I know, unexampled in any other European church. (R10:90)

Faced with such self-ironizing passages, and in light of the proximity of Ruskin's criticism to the Gothic work of two of his most favorite artists, we see the pervasiveness of Ruskin's ambivalence regarding affective responses to architecture. But in spite of this ambivalence—despite his celebration of Scott and Turner, and his insistence on the importance of feeling, despite his disparagement of a fitted-out St. Mark's, and his sneering characterization of sentimental admiration—Ruskin knows very well how

ecclesiastical architecture, and, in particular, Gothic churches, whether intact or ruined, is often experienced. Specifically, such experience is marked neither by an expansion nor a refinement of perception, which we would associate with the sublime or the beautiful respectively, but by its restriction and obfuscation. What is more, the atmosphere of such buildings—consisting in obscurity, darkness and partiality, along with the affective correlatives of sadness, haunting and foreboding—is not left aside in Ruskin's sustained theorization of Gothic in *The Stones of Venice* but indeed recurs there as one of its key elements.

3.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about "The Nature of Gothic" is that its author gives greater consideration to the creator of Gothic architecture than he does either to the buildings themselves or to the experience of those who inhabit or use them. In contrast to the sentimental admirer of tourist Gothic that we encountered in the previous section, the feeling subject of the most famous chapter of *The Stones of Venice* is that of Gothic *poiesis* rather than Gothic *aisthesis*. This section will accordingly focus on the experience of the one who makes Gothic architecture rather than its beholder. In the analysis of this figure, however, Ruskin also provides description of a kind of Gothic feeling that he can fully endorse, leaving behind the ambivalence he felt for sentimental admiration. Moreover, as we shall see, this Gothic feeling turns out to be one that the viewer of Gothic has the possibility of sharing through the aesthetic category of the grotesque. As Ruskin openly admits, his object of analysis in "The Nature of Gothic" is not Gothic architecture

per se, but rather the "grey, shadowy, many-pinnacled image of the Gothic spirit within us" (R10:182).

Though Ruskin's medieval stonemason is one of the most familiar elements of his aesthetic theory, I invite my readers to reacquaint themselves with him here from the perspective of Gothic feeling. Let us first quickly situate him in Ruskin's analytic of the Gothic. Recall that, in *The Stones of Venice*, Gothic architecture is defined twice: according to its aesthetic form (what Ruskin calls "external or material form") and according to its affective character (variously called "internal elements," "mental power or expression," "moral elements") (R10:183). Ruskin treats the form succinctly, providing a gloss towards the end of the chapter: "Foliated architecture, which uses the pointed arch for the roof proper, and the gable for the roof-mask" (R10:260). Much more important is expression, for which Ruskin lists six elements, qualified as attributes of what I call here the Gothic object (the building) or the Gothic subject (the builder) (R10:184; reproduced in Table 3.1).[22] Here Ruskin's image of Gothic man (women are entirely absent from "The Nature of Gothic") emerges most clearly. A savage lover of variety and nature, with a

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[22] It should be noted that Ruskin's account of Gothic architecture, while hugely influential in Victorian Britain, remains just one among many theories of the style. Twentieth-century European art historians, who share very few concerns with Ruskin, have generally focused on other aspects in their attempts to understand the style. From a formal perspective, Paul Frankl identifies the rib-vault ahead of the pointed arch as the distinguishing element (Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 41), a suggestion that Ruskin expressly rejects (R10:245). From a cultural perspective, Erwin Panofsky provides an account that is antithetical to Ruskin's in almost every way, exploring at length the relationship between Gothic cathedrals and the contemporaneous philosophical developments of scholasticism, in the process describing the Gothic's insistence on totality, uniformity, logic, order, and symmetry (Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, 44–52), and writing of its professionalized, worldly architect (ibid., 25).

Table 3.1. The Internal Elements of Gothic Architecture

Order of importance	Of the building	Of the builder
1.	Savageness	Savageness or Rudeness
2.	Changefulness or Variety	Love of Change
3.	Naturalism	Love of Nature
4.	Grotesqueness	Disturbed Imagination
5.	Rigidity	Obstinacy
6.	Redundance	Generosity

wild imagination, independent and generous, one is tempted to read this portrait as yet another instance of the public self-fashioning that culminated in *Praeterita*.[23] In any case, we are well aware that Ruskin's medieval craftsman is an ahistorical fantasy based on racialized environmental determinism.[24] This becomes even clearer when we add to Ruskin's keywords one of the more evocative descriptions of Gothic man:

> But not with less reverence let us stand by him, when, with rough strength
> and hurried stroke, he smites an uncouth animation out of the rocks which
> he has torn from among the moss of the moorland, and heaves into the
> darkened air the pile of iron buttress and rugged wall, instinct with work
> of an imagination as wild and wayward as the northern sea; creatures of

[23] Francis O'Gorman explains Ruskin's theory of the Gothic in relation to events in Ruskin's life in "Ruskin's Aesthetic of Failure." Analysis of the relationship of the six internal elements of Gothic architecture in *The Stones of Venice* is provided in chapter seven of Patrick Conner's *Savage Ruskin* and more recently in Lars Spuybroek's *The Sympathy of Things*.

[24] The classic study is Unrau, "Ruskin, the Workman and the Savageness of Gothic"; see also Connelly, "John Ruskin and the Savage Gothic," and Ogden, "The Architecture of Empire."

> ungainly shape and rigid limb, but full of wolfish life; fierce as the winds
> that beat, and changeful as the clouds that shade them. (R10:187–88)

The person here imagined is so thoroughly conditioned by his environment as to be almost indistinguishable from it. Indeed, Gothic hereby takes the rhetorical form of an inverted pathetic fallacy. Human emotions are not projected onto nature but, rather, it is through nature that human affect attains shape and expression: "fierce as the winds that beat." One supposes there was a piquancy for Ruskin's middle-class readers in such a hypermasculine, Germanic primitivism, a piquancy that we now, I would think, register with distaste. Nevertheless, Ruskin reproduces here once again the perceptual obscurity—in this piece of impressionistic prose, the outlines are indistinct—and atmospheric darkness that characterize his earlier descriptions of medieval architecture, only now they are the qualities of an entire lifeworld and its enmeshed subject. Even so, we cannot yet say what it feels like to occupy the subject position of the Gothic artist as envisioned by Ruskin. Though, in one of his most anti-Arnoldian arguments, Ruskin emphasizes savageness as the sign of the individuality, freedom, and imperfection of the Christian soul, this pre-eminent characteristic of Gothic architecture provides the occasion for a critique of industrial capitalism (the critique that was so important to Morris), and so focuses on the material rather than affective or aesthetic conditions of artistic labor. The most we can say at this point is that Gothic man is an empowered individual unharried by modern concerns. It would be incorrect, however, to conclude that he is without cares. We learn more about these cares, and therefore what Gothic subjectivity feels like, only in the third volume of *The Stones of Venice*, in the often-overlooked discussion of the

grotesque—the fourth internal element of Gothic—that Ruskin defers from "The Nature of Gothic."

In "Grotesque Renaissance," Ruskin echoes earlier definitions of the grotesque in seeing it as a kind of ridiculous or failed sublime.[25] The grotesque combines the "ludicrous" with the "fearful" (R11:151).[26] Much like Gothic, the grotesque can only take imperfect form, perfection being a quality proper to the beautiful and the sublime, but not to the grotesque. This is true not only for the work of art but also for the imagination as a faculty of representation. When truth is represented clearly in the imagination, the representation is sublime; but when it is distorted, it is grotesque (R11:181): "if the mind be imperfect and ill trained"—as is the case with most of us—"the vision is seen as in a broken mirror, with strange distortions and discrepancies, all the passions of the heart breathing upon it in cross ripples, till hardly a trace of it remains unbroken" (R11:179). So, while the images of dreams, superstition and myth are all categorically grotesque, it is ultimately a question of how one sees the world rather than what one imagines. Ruskin is quite explicit on this point: "It is not as the creating, but as the *seeing* man, that we are here contemplating the master of the true grotesque" (R11:169; Ruskin's emphasis). The surprise here is that the grotesque is, despite all its distortions, a form of naturalistic

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[25] Burke and Kant define the grotesque in exactly these terms: Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry,* 59; Kant, *Observations*, 55. For Ruskin, however, failure is not a sign of the inferiority of the grotesque.

[26] While twentieth-century literary theory has tended to define the grotesque in terms of excess and embodiment (e.g., Bakhtin, *Rabelais*; Russo, *Female Grotesque*; Stallybrass and White, *Poetics and Politics of Transgression*), Ruskin's theory of it as involving conventionally incongruous feelings accords with a second major strand in its twentieth-century formulations (e.g., Harpham, *On the Grotesque*; Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*; Thomson, *The Grotesque*). An overview is provided in Edwards and Grauland, *Grotesque*.

representation true to experience, "a terribleness taken from the life; a spectre which the workman indeed saw" (R11:169); however, an experience obscured by passion. Accordingly, the question of the legitimacy of the grotesque—whether it is "true" and "noble" (i.e., Gothic) or "false" and "ignoble" (i.e., neoclassical)—comes down to feeling.[27] The creator of the true grotesque feels the terror of experience even while jesting with it: "the dreadfulness of the universe around him weighs upon his heart" (R11:169). The mind "*plays* with *terror*" (R11:166; Ruskin's emphasis). By contrast, the creator of the false grotesque plays cynically, without reference to experience, obscured or otherwise, and "feels and understands nothing" (R11:167). Taken from life, the true grotesque is the imperfect representation of an experience that was itself obscure. Its pleasure arises from the willful play of a disturbed imagination with this obscure, partial perception of something terrible, which will be, according to Ruskin, either death or sin. Neither a pure positive pleasure nor the negative pleasure of relief (as Burke defines the beautiful and the sublime, respectively), the grotesque is an essentially ambivalent aesthetic category—but its ambivalence is one that Ruskin affirms.

In focusing on the lived experience of the worker, Ruskin conflates *poiesis* and *aisthesis*; this conflation is important. Isobel Armstrong has noted the key position occupied by the grotesque in Ruskin's theory of the Gothic, as it moves his medieval stonemason from the realm of fantasy into the nineteenth century. In Armstrong's reading, the grotesque does nothing less than provide the conditions of possibility for a truly democratic art; in other words, it makes working-class art possible by giving form to the

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[27] Ruskin illustrates the difference between the two forms of the grotesque with an engraving in *The Stones of Venice III* (R11, plate 3).

experience of the oppressed.[28] Lucy Hartley, by contrast, has shown how important the aesthetic category of the grotesque is for Ruskin as a test of moral and critical judgment.[29] One reason why the grotesque poses such a significant problem for Ruskin is because it is an aesthetic category that crosses and obscures the boundary, so important to nineteenth-century historicist aesthetics, and to medievalism in particular, between the Gothic and the Classical. But the grotesque also provides the bridge between Gothic *poiesis* and Gothic *aisthesis*, and this is where its importance for this chapter lies. With the grotesque we discover that the Gothic subject is not just the one who makes Gothic art but one who experiences the world as Gothic, one who has seen the specter of death and played with fear. Ruskin's class prejudice (and probably also his racism) prevents him from prescribing savageness—the most important element of Gothic according to *The Stones of Venice II*—as a necessary precondition for the appreciation of Gothic in addition to its production; this moral element of Gothic remains on the side of *poiesis*. By contrast, the grotesque provides the occasion for testing not only the feeling of the Gothic craftsman but also that of the critic, or, as the case may be, the tourist.[30] The universality of the fear of death and the pleasure of play means that the grotesque, when carefully managed, provides the place for affective identification with Gothic art. We may well love nature and change, and enjoy seeing these expressed in Gothic, but it is only through the grotesque that the other elements of Gothic are related to our emotional life. It allows

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[28] Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 231–35.

[29] Hartley, "Griffinism, Grace and All."

[30] It is true that some of the other internal elements, such as the love of nature, could also fulfil this bridging role between artist and critic. However, I do not think that any of the other concepts contain within them the same codification of a specifically Gothic feeling that makes the grotesque so eminently suitable for such a role.

us to identify with our ugly feelings and perhaps even enjoy them. Thus, Ruskin's theory of Gothic architecture, with its emphasis on the experience of death and sin, comes very close to being a theory of Gothic in general.

4.

Perhaps no-one took Ruskin's theory of Gothic more seriously than William Morris, who made no secret of his admiration for it. In his lectures and essays, his references to Ruskin are always enthusiastic, unqualified, and often superlative: "ART IS MAN'S EXPRESSION OF HIS JOY IN LABOUR. If those are not Professor Ruskin's words, they embody at least his teaching on the subject. Nor has any truth more important ever been stated" (M23:173). For Morris, following Ruskin, capitalism produces not only misery but ugliness. The hope of both writers is that the restoration of pleasure to work will result in both happy workers and beautiful things. For the Ruskin of *Unto This Last* (1860), the achievement of this aim involves the ruling classes paternalistically taking on greater responsibility for the care of the working classes, including the setting of a livable minimum wage and the provision by the state of universal free primary education, but without extending any measure of political self-determination. While this would entail a limited redistribution of wealth, Ruskin is nevertheless in favor of leaving the class system essentially intact. Early in his career, Morris, by his own admission, despaired of the possibility of real social change and had little idea as to the content of a positive political program beyond the rebellious aestheticism of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, with which he was closely associated in the 1850s. Following his political awakening in

the late 1870s and subsequent shift towards socialism, which he publicly declared after reading Marx's *Capital* in 1883, Morris's revolutionary politics positioned him far from the reactionary conservatism of Carlyle and Ruskin, yet his enthusiasm for "The Nature of Gothic" never waned.[31]

It is obvious that for Ruskin the most important thing about Gothic is neither its structural and ornamental conventions nor even the kinds of aesthetic experiences that it offers, though these are certainly important; rather, the value of Gothic as an aesthetic form lies in its implicit critique of the present, and this is where Ruskin shares the contrastive rhetoric of Carlyle and Pugin. For Morris, however, this critique by itself is not enough. Morris shares Ruskin's sense of Gothic as both a narrowly defined historical style (medieval pointed architecture) but also, and much more importantly, as a broadly anti-classical feeling that finds expression in a range of artistic forms and styles characterized by their freedom from "academical pedantry."[32] In a lecture from 1884 on the Gothic Revival, Morris defines the characteristics of historical Gothic art in social rather than formal terms: "It was common to the whole people; it was free, progressive, hopeful, full of human sentiment and humour."[33] Then, in the text "Gothic Architecture" (1889), Gothic finds its simplest and most utopian formulation: *organic art*.[34] While all art is historically symptomatic in Morris's materialist understanding of history, Gothic art is

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[31] The story of Morris's conversion is told by E. P. Thompson in the chapter "The River of Fire" in his biography, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (243–74). Morris's own reflections were published as "How I Became a Socialist" (M23:277–81); see also his "Whigs, Democrats, and Socialists" (M23:27–38). While Thompson's is the classic account, a more recent and more nuanced assessment of Morris's intellectual formation as a revolutionary socialist is provided in Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, ch. 5.

[32] Morris, *Unpublished Lectures*, 55; *Artist, Writer, Socialist*, 1:276–77.

[33] Morris, *Unpublished Lectures*, 65.

[34] Morris, *Artist, Writer, Socialist*, 1:273.

the only art capable of articulating an organic relationship between past, present and future. After the revolution, which will inaugurate a change as great as that which destroyed feudalism, architecture will need to be "historic in the true sense," meaning that it will be both traditional and in "sympathy with the needs and aspirations of its own time," which will be radically different from those of any time previously; moreover, "it will remember the history of the past, make history in the present, and teach history in the future."[35] Gothic thus becomes a way of relating different historical moments. And it finds in the past not an image of the future, but a promise of revolutionary change.

Looking over Morris's creative work—from the Oxford Union murals painted with members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the poems, such as "The Defence of Guenevere," for which he first achieved fame in the 1850s, through his extensive research into medieval dyes, patterns and techniques in the 1870s, his historical romances and translations of Icelandic epic, and, finally, to the Kelmscott Press edition of Chaucer published a few months before his death in 1896—Morris's Gothic bears all the hallmarks of aesthetic medievalism.[36] Yet Morris's apprehension of the Middle Ages is far from the rosy spectacle presented by the Catholic-convert Pugin. In many lectures and essays from the 1880s, he reflects on medieval society and its meaning for the nineteenth century. Sometimes, in "Feudal England" (1887), for example, the Middle Ages are characterized by a constant state of "open war," the society, "an army fed by slaves." (M23:53–54). At other times, as in "Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century" (1890), the guilds and the free cities, before their corruption into organs of bourgeois power,

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[35] Ibid., 1:285.

[36] The range of Morris's work is represented in Coote, *William Morris: His Life and Work*; Parry (ed.), *William Morris*; and Thompson, *The Work of William Morris*.

provide positive examples of workers' self-organization in the face of an oppressively hierarchical society and the growing forces of commercialism and bureaucracy (M22:382–85). Most often, Morris's presentation of medieval society in his lectures and essays reveals an uncomfortable ambivalence. In this regard, the ironically titled lecture "The Hopes of Civilization" (1885) is a typical text. Here Morris relates the history of modernity as the gradual development of the capitalist system out of medieval feudal-ism.[37] He confesses to feeling "a strange emotion" when reflecting on the Middle Ages and admits to taking pleasure, "not seldom," in imagining the appearance of premodern England, free of environmental degradation and dotted with beautiful buildings (M23:61). This strange emotion takes a number of turns. To begin with, this England would be unrecognizable to its nineteenth-century inhabitants, a source of both wonder and estrangement. A closer look at the conditions of the "rigidly ordered caste society," however, would show them to be no more just than those of the nineteenth century, that the struggle between classes was already underway (M23:62).

The imaginative reconstruction of the Middle Ages that precipitates this ambiva-lence is not, for Morris, the daydreaming of an armchair antiquary, such as the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss*, but rather a result of living in a world in which the relics of that past are still to be encountered. The essay "Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century"

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[37] Morris elaborates a more extended historical narrative elsewhere, for example, in "Architecture and History" (M22:296–317), wherein an overview of the social conditions for European architecture is provided from antiquity to modernity; in "Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century" (M22:375–90), which focuses on the particular conditions of the late Middle Ages in England; and *Socialism from the Root Up* (co-authored with E. Belfort Bax), which gives a detailed but fairly standard overview of Marxist historiography. Further historical accounts, focusing more on the history of invasion and migration in Britain rather than changing modes of production, are provided in "Early England" (Morris, *Unpublished Lectures*, 158–79) and "Feudal England" (M23:39–58).

begins with a long, second-person recollection of Peterborough in which the encounter with the town's medieval cathedral, "so beautiful and majestic in itself," defamiliarizes both past and present (M22:375). The political effect of this defamiliarized image of the past—continuity and disjuncture, identity and difference—is the realization that things can and must change again and that historical knowledge is accordingly ground for hope rather than despair. The image of the past can help us both to understand our present situation and to envision the future. Morris's "strange emotion" is, then, a complicated ambivalence, articulating past, present and future, through an imaginative experience in which the alterity of the past appears as the conditions of possibility for the future.

It is clear that Morris's political awakening and reading of Marx, while it gave him hope for the future and hardened his sense of the injustice of modern society, also forced him to revise the nostalgic medievalism of his youth. Yet, even in some of his earliest work, we find a complicated temporality that prefigures the revolutionary thinking of his later work. "The Story of the Unknown Church" (1856) renders a peculiarly Pre-Raphaelite image of commitment to historical transformation. "I was the master-mason of a church that was built more than six hundred years ago," begins this short story, the first-person narrative of Walter, a medieval stonemason, who tells his story from beyond the grave (M1:149). Walter recalls the world in which he lived, centered on the abbey church of the title, and its subsequent destruction. The text's red thread is the narrative of work, which Walter carries out with his sister, Margaret, who is also a stonemason, and who is betrothed to Walter's best friend, Amyot. Carving a relief over the church's western portal, Walter has a vision of the patriarch Abraham, which gives

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way to a prophetic dream about Amyot. He wakes from the dream to find that his friend has returned from the Crusades, but within days the two lovers—Amyot and Margaret— are dead. Walter becomes a monk and spends the rest of his life carving the lovers' tomb in the church, upon completion of which he dies.

The text is Gothic in several senses: the setting of a medieval abbey and the story of a church's construction makes it a classic example of Victorian medievalism; as a tale of death and destruction told by a ghost, it is both macabre and supernatural enough to qualify as Gothic fiction; finally, the grotesquerie of the narrator's disturbed imagination, in particular, his inscrutably allegorical dream-prophesies, along with the fact that he is a stonemason, make the story Gothic in a Ruskinian sense. Dreams and visions are a favorite narrative device of Morris's, framing several of his early short stories and later political novels. Especially in the later texts, dreams often provide the means of time travel, either to the past (*A Dream of John Ball*) or to the future (*News from Nowhere*), that enables a historical vision of social transformation.[38] In earlier texts, however, they often disrupt and confuse the passage of linear time.[39] So, in "The Story of the Unknown Church," rather than framing the story, the narrator's dream-vision comes in the middle, and, rather than providing a clear picture of events, the images are obscure, disjointed and left uninterpreted. In collapsing spatial and temporal perspective, it is as though Morris is attempting to represent in prose the aesthetic conventions of a medieval tapestry. The dream weaves together the present time of the narrative with its future and a mythic (biblical) past. The vision of death—"a spectre which the workman indeed saw"—

[38] See Goode, "William Morris and the Dream of Revolution."
[39] Hodgson identifies the disorienting effect of Morris's early romances as one of their characteristic features (Hodgson, *The Romances of William Morris*, 23).

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enables Walter to complete his work on the west portal. The most disarming specter represented in the text, however, is the narrator himself, the ghost of organic art haunting modernity.

Walter is a ghost, and ghosts often remember that which has been destroyed. The destruction of the abbey takes place at the start of the text, just as the completion of the tomb and the narrator's death finish it:

> I was the master-mason of a church that was built more than six hundred years ago; it is now two hundred years since that church vanished from the face of the earth; it was destroyed utterly,—no fragment of it was left; not even the great pillars that bore up the tower at the cross, where the choir used to join the nave. No one knows now even where it stood, only in this very autumn-tide, if you knew the place, you would see the heaps made by the earth-covered ruins heaving the yellow corn into glorious waves, so that the place where my church used to be is as beautiful now as when it stood in all its splendour. (M1:149)

Nothing is left of the church—not even its name—nothing but the testament of a ghost and some barely perceptible traces on the landscape. The text opens by razing its central object to the ground and insisting on its near total negation, just as the title already marks it as unknown. And yet, the story, in spite of its nostalgia, is not an elegy for the destroyed church: there may be a prevailing atmosphere of tristesse here, but there is no regret in the fact of the church's destruction. Neither is there any sense of personal discontent or unfinished business, as might be expected from a ghost. With its focus on personal memory, its acknowledged partiality, rambling asides, and conversational tone—including the frequent use of "so" and "now" as discourse markers and one case of

self-correction[40]—the text reads like the transcript of an oral history. Even so, Walter's homely narration is at odds with the uncanniness of his position outside of life and therefore history. The story of Walter's life is one of historical affirmation— remembering the past, envisioning the future and working in the present are the three primary activities described—but his death and the destruction of the church negate historical consciousness as contrast (you cannot compare something with nothing). In some ways, Walter is a Pre-Raphaelite caricature, aestheticizing an imaginary memory of an impossibly distant past. But, ultimately, all this past tells about the future is that it must contain destruction. The present alone is the time of production. Even in his early, more nostalgic, work, then, Morris represents the inevitability of death and destruction even as he narrates the creation of a lifeworld through work.

To be sure, Morris shares the nineteenth-century European obsession with production that finds its most important theorist in Marx; as already noted, Morris's citation of Ruskin is generally limited to the latter's theory of the necessity of creative work, a philosophical anthropology of creative labor. Despite the emphasis on production and his own staggering output, Morris's Gothic is as destructive as it is creative. In "How I Became a Socialist," Morris writes, "Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization […] hope of its destruction" (M23:279). The dialectic of hope and despair is a driving force in Mor-

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[40] "I said that nothing grew on the trellises by the poplars but crimson roses, but I was not quite right, for in many places the wild flowers had crept into the garden from without" (M1:151).

ris's work, as E. P. Thompson has noted.[41] This dialectic is driven to its logical conclusion in "Dawn of a New Epoch" (1886), whose title takes on a chilling tone with the final words of the lecture:

> It may be hoped that we of this generation may be able to prove that [the slavery of capitalism] is unnecessary; but it will, doubt it not, take many generations yet to prove that it is necessary for such degradation to last as long as humanity does; and when that is finally proved we shall at least have one hope left—that humanity will not last long. (M23:140)

Arguably, nothing is more Gothic than the image of the destruction of civilization or the extinction of the human species itself, whether by barbarian invasion, proletarian revolution, deadly pandemic, swarming zombies, or, as Morris suggests here and as global climate change renders increasingly likely, the capitalist system itself. The wistful record of the unknown church's destruction and the unflinching expression of the hope of extinction in the case of revolutionary failure add a decisive element to the theory of the Gothic subject as outlined by Ruskin. The Gothic subject becomes a ghost, a subject already partially destroyed and looking toward its full destruction, that unsettles by recalling the destruction of the past and promising destruction in the future—the destruction of both itself and its world. But as Morris makes clear, some things need to be destroyed.

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[41] Thompson, *William Morris*, 126. Florence Boos has noted further narratological similarities across Morris's fiction, poetry, and essays, from the early short stories to the late prose romances; these features include "sensuous identification with romantic experience," "historical redemption," the dialectic of "intense sympathy and narrative distance," and "the restlessly emotive, non-possessive, trans-historical quality of the 'I' and 'we'" (Boos, "The Structure of Morris's Tales," 11).

5.

Morris's turn to socialism provided him with a figure that combines hope with destruction: revolution. As a reader of Marx and Engels, Morris understood revolution to be the historically necessary and imminent event that would end capitalism and inaugurate communism. While Marx was famously reticent about what a communist society might actually look like, Morris had no such qualms, providing an image of a post-revolutionary society in his utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1890), in which a nineteenth-century socialist going by the name of William Guest wakes up in twenty-first-century London. Morris had already shared something of this vision in lectures such as "The Society of the Future" (1888), which presents the overcoming of capitalism as the overcoming of civilization: not only will it be "a society which does not know the meaning of the words rich and poor, or the rights of property, or law or legality, or nationality," but also one "conscious of a wish to keep life simple," and one "founded on the free exercise of the senses and passions of a healthy human animal."[42] Morris had also reviewed the most popular utopian novel of the day, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), rejecting its technological state communism and criticizing its insufficiently historical vision of the future as merely modern middle-class life purified of its injustices.[43]

Since Patrick Brantlinger's influential reading of *News from Nowhere* as an "anti-novel" that looks forward to a world in which art is no longer the expression of bourgeois individualism but has rather become so universal as to inhere in communal life itself,

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[42] Morris, *Artist, Writer, Socialist*, 2:466.
[43] Ibid., 2:501–07.

much criticism of the text has addressed the surprisingly ambivalent status of art, and especially the novel, in Morris's communist society, along with its relationship to work and pleasure.[44] Less attention has been given to the equally ambivalent status in Morris's novel of historical consciousness. In some ways, Morris's society of the future appears to realize the end of history infamously predicted by the teleology of historical materialism. As one of the characters remarks, "I have heard my great-grandfather say that it is mostly in periods of turmoil and strife and confusion that people care much about history; and you know […] we are not like that now" (M16:30). This has led some critics to conclude that historical consciousness has become extinct in the society: "In this perfectly cultivated world, life itself becomes pure form, an eternal present with no need for history or change."[45] Matthew Beaumont, however, makes a compelling case for the communist society's reduced historical sense being a key part of Morris's critique of capitalism. Connecting Morris's work with a longer (subsequent) history of Marxist theory, Beaumont shows how reification makes the present in industrial capitalist societies both empty and opaque, and that *News from Nowhere*'s vision of a communist society is one wherein

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[44] Brantlinger, "*News from Nowhere*: Morris's Socialist Anti-Novel." Plotz reads *News from Nowhere* as a rejection of the realist values of sympathy and individualism in favor of solidarity (Plotz, *Portable Property*, 144–69). Lesjak reads it as an inversion of the realist novel, centering work rather than banishing it to the periphery (Lesjak, *Working Fictions*, 164–76). Buzard, by contrast, sees it as intensifying and radicalizing the features of the realist novel (particularly, self-interruption) in a way that looks forward to modernism (Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction*, 299–313). Morgan argues that *News from Nowhere* "mounts a wholesale attack on the category of 'art' itself" but nevertheless imagines life aesthetically as a shared corporeality (Morgan, *Outward Mind*, 206–14). Vaninskaya puts Morris's rejection of realism in the context of the contemporary debates about romance (Vaninskaya, *William Morris and the Idea of Community*, esp. 65–69), and Miller connects it with Morris's low opinion of contemporary print culture and technology (Miller, *Slow Print*, 58–81). See also Hodgson, *Romances of William Morris*, 127–33.
[45] Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye*, 178.

"the present is finally present to itself," and so one wherein "history is simply being."[46] Beaumont also points out the many moments of uncanniness, in tension with this world of pure presence, brought about by Guest's unexplained appearance in the future—that is, as a ghost—which indicate "the impossibility of complete utopian plenitude."[47] However, even if Morris's society of the future is one of reduced historical consciousness—a situation that suggests a correlation between capitalism and historicism that Morris never unpacks—it nonetheless remains the case that this society has a complicated relationship with the past, attested by Ellen's grandfather's discontent with the present and by the repeated jokes about "reactionary novelists." Moreover, despite the enormous transformations that led to it, the society is also, as we shall see, a society of active preservation. It cannot therefore be characterized with precision as a world of pure presence that is only undermined by Guest's ghostly apparition from the past. In considering Morris's utopian novel, then, I would like to bring together some elements of Gothic discussed earlier in this chapter and focus on the primary form by which the communist society of *News from Nowhere* remains a historical society: buildings.

Guest's first impressions of the society of the future are mainly impressions of its architecture; the clue that finally pushes him into the realization that he is no longer in nineteenth-century London is a bridge over the Thames: "I had perhaps dreamed of such a bridge, but never seen such an one out of an illuminated manuscript; for not even the Ponte Vecchio at Florence came anywhere near it. It was of stone arches, splendidly

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[46] Beaumont, "*News from Nowhere* and the Here and Now," 36, 43.
[47] Ibid., 49. Despite their near homophony, I cannot find any support for Beaumont's claim that "ghost" and "guest" are etymologically cognate; the standard authorities describe distinct origins.

solid, and as graceful as they were strong" (M16:8). A few times, Guest fancies he is in the fourteenth century, but he also notes the stylistic freedom that characterizes the architecture:

> Above this lower building rose the steep lead-covered roof and the buttresses and higher part of the wall of a great hall, of a splendid and exuberant style of architecture, of which one can say little more than that it seemed to me to embrace the best qualities of the Gothic of northern Europe with those of the Saracenic and Byzantine, though there was no copying of any one of these styles. (M16:24)

What delights him, moreover, is the life that the buildings contain and express:

> This whole mass of architecture which we had come upon so suddenly from amidst the pleasant fields was not only exquisitely beautiful in itself, but it bore upon it the expression of such generosity and abundance of life that I was exhilarated to a pitch that I had never yet reached. I fairly chuckled for pleasure. (M16:24)

Nothing in the future gives Guest greater pleasure than beholding these buildings. His joy in the architecture of the future is a moment of delight in what Beaumont would call a present that is fully present to itself.

However, the revelation of the present often involves contrast with the past, drawing Guest back from full presence. Ernst Bloch disapproved of the luddite destructiveness of the revolution in *News from Nowhere*,[48] yet the entire narrative is structured around buildings preserved from prior ages. The novel consists of three parts: two journeys to special old buildings, separated by the long history-lesson of the book's

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[48] "Revolution thus appears to this machine-wrecker as a pure reversal of history or as demolition [*Abtragung*]" (Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 2:717).

Figure 3.4.
Frontispiece and first page
William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, Kelmscott edition, 1893
Kunstbibliothek, Berlin

didactic middle. The first journey is a wagon-ride through West London to the British

Museum ("an old friend"), where Guest learns the history of the society from Old Ham-

mond, who, the book hints, may be Guest's descendent. The second is a boat-trip up-river

to Kelmscott Manor, a sixteenth-century house in Oxfordshire that was Morris's home

from 1871 until his death, and which provided the frontispiece for the Kelmscott Press

edition of the novel (Figure 3.4). These journeys afford Guest a vista onto the life of the

society and the chance to get to know two of its members, Dick and Ellen. But they also present Guest with some familiar London landmarks that survived the Great Change. The first journey passes by Westminster Abbey, cleared of its "beastly monuments to fools and knaves," and the Houses of Parliament, preserved at the behest of a "queer antiquarian society" but now the Dung Market (M16:32). The second goes by way of Hampton Court Palace, another "old friend," which has retained its status as a popular leisure spot (M16:146); Windsor Castle, now a communal dwelling and a "well-arranged store of antiquities" (M16:161); and the former bastions of inherited privilege, Eton and Oxford, which remain places of learning and knowledge but are now accessible to all (M16:160, 70, 185).[49] Since there is no longer any education as such, let alone a class system, Eton and Oxford operate under completely different conditions, yet their historical associations are nevertheless preserved, as are those of the royal residences as leisure gardens and cabinets of art and curiosities. Accordingly, the conversion of Parliament into a Dung Market is not simply the sensible adaptive re-use that the people of the future, who have neither state nor politics, understand it to be, but, rather, in the book's funniest irony, the best way for the buildings to preserve continuity of purpose and thereby illustrate the truth of this purpose. In each case, the preservation of the buildings also preserves historical function as though it were baked into the bricks.

One of the remarkable features of Morris's Gothic utopia as Gothic is that it contains no ruins, "no tumble-down picturesque" (M16:73). The Romantic Gothic of Scott and Turner would appear to have no place in this society, nor the sentimental

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[49] Queen Victoria opened Hampton Court to the public in 1838 and it quickly became a popular weekend locality for Londoners (Worsley and Souden, *Hampton Court Palace*, 107).

admiration described by Ruskin. Gothic is now a stonemason's Gothic, as the example of the "Obstinate Refusers" illustrates: this insatiable group of masons builds a whole house out of ashlar so that they may carve its entire surface, skipping their lunch breaks and refusing other work in their desire to continue carving (M16:172–76). Yet, even if all the buildings are kept "trim and clean, and orderly and bright" (M16:73), there is an affective response to architectural antiquity that goes beyond workmanly admiration. This is most evident in the novel's climax: the arrival of the characters at Kelmscott Manor, which, Guest observes, the people intuitively venerate:

> The extravagant love of ornament which I had noted in this people elsewhere seemed here to have given place to the feeling that the house itself and its associations was the ornament of the country life amidst which it had been left stranded from old times, and that to re-ornament it would but take away its use as a piece of natural beauty. (M16:202–03)

Standing before the house, Ellen exclaims:

> "Yes, friend, this is what I came out for to see; this many gabled house built by simple country-folk of the long-past times, regardless of all the turmoil that was going on in cities and courts, is lovely still amidst all the beauty which these latter days have created; and I do not wonder at our friends tending it carefully and making much of it. It seems to me as if it had waited for these happy days, and held in it the gathering crumbs of happiness of the confused and turbulent past." (M16:201)

For Ellen, the most disconcerting character in the novel, the Gothic remains historical in a way that it should not be for someone living after the end of history, in a society of pure presence, unalienated labor, and universal liberty. The old house may very well gather the "crumbs of happiness," but at the same time it points to the "turbulent past." Ellen has

already expressed her opinion that history should not be left to antiquaries like Old

Hammond and her understanding that time may yet change her world again for the worse

(M16:194). The Gothic of Kelmscott Manor, however well maintained, is, for both Ellen

and Guest alike, a bitter-sweet *memento mori*, like the ruined Melrose Abbey of Scott,

Turner, and Ruskin.

For Guest, the arrival at Kelmscott is the dreamiest part of his sojourn in the

future. And no wonder. The wagon-ride through London provides a concatenation of

impressions of a fully realized communist society, through which the past nonetheless

juts in the form of antique buildings, all of which will soon be explained by Old Ham-

mond in the British Museum. By contrast, the journey up the Thames is a slow journey

home and so one back to the source of the self. Toiling against the flow of natural time,

William Guest achieves what Maggie Tulliver cannot. Where, in *The Mill on the Floss*,

Maggie is twice carried away by the river and repeatedly fails in her attempts to return to

an earlier moment, Guest succeeds in his passage upstream, his journey to the future

arriving in the past. But the place is eerily deserted:

> We went in, and found no soul in any room as we wandered from room to
> room,—from the rose-covered porch to the strange and quaint garrets
> amongst the great timbers of the roof, where of old time the tillers and
> herdsmen of the manor slept, but which a-nights seemed now, by the small
> size of the beds, and the litter of useless and disregarded matters—bunches
> of dying flowers, feathers of birds, shells of starling's eggs, caddis worms
> in mugs, and the like—seemed to be inhabited for the time by children.
> (M16:202)

The warped scale effected by the small beds, the discarded "matters" of a *nature morte*,

and the vacation of the old house by the representatives of futurity combine with Morris's

strained syntax and awkward repetitions to increase the sense, slowly building on the journey upstream, that spacetime is breaking apart. Ellen has already worked out that she is speaking to a ghost who will soon disappear. On their way to Kelmscott's repurposed medieval church, where the harvest feast is taking place, Dick says to Guest ("the guest of guests"), "Come along; they will be glad to see you" (M16:208). Ironically, these turn out to be the last words we hear from the future. In the midst of the feast, Guest fades from everyone's view. When he runs outside, he encounters a worn-out figure dressed in rags, the sure sign that he has returned to the nineteenth century.

Since Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, we have been aware that communism is only the most famous specter in the work of Marx and Engels; ideology, money, the commodity, and capitalism also are spectral. In Derrida's reading of Marx and Marxism, the ghost is "the hidden figure of all figures."[50] Importantly, spectrality undoes not only the opposition between presence and absence, as one might expect, but also that of past and future: "one can never distinguish between the future to-come and the coming-back of a specter."[51] If, as Derrida suggests, this makes Marxism a kind of proto-deconstruction, then we should not be surprised to find Morris's vision of a communist society to be shot through with temporal inconsistencies. Any present is as much haunted by its past as by its future. In *News from Nowhere*, a communist future, too, becomes "a spectre which the workman indeed saw," and no less ambivalently historical than the present. Accordingly, Morris's work fits with neither of the modes of recurrence conven-tionally associated with Gothic: the willed reanimation of the past by the Gothic Revival

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[50] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 150.
[51] Ibid., 46.

(which, as the example of the Dung Market shows, Morris was generally unimpressed by) and the past's unexpected, unwanted return in Gothic fiction.[52] Following Ruskin, Morris identifies haunting and foreboding as essential to the aesthetic experience of Gothic, but moves beyond him by affectively transvaluing them, turning them into feelings of hope.

The most radical moment in *News from Nowhere* occurs in its final sentence: "Yes, surely!" exclaims Guest, "and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream" (M16:211). Morris's proselytization of perception— "if others can see it as I have seen it"—looks forward to a collectivization of the narratorial function; he invites us all to proleptically haunt the future even as it haunts us: "Come along; they will be glad to see you." At the same time, the empty house with its transtemporal, ghostly lovers (Guest and Ellen), rather than provide the comfort of historical continuity anticipated by the return to the source of the self, or a respite from historicism's endless contrasting, pierces the bubble of the present and places prophetic vision in the sensuous, though by no means self-transparent, rather than supersensuous world. It is an actual house, as the frontispiece of the Kelmscott edition points out:

> THIS IS THE PICTURE OF THE OLD
> HOUSE BY THE THAMES TO WHICH
> THE PEOPLE OF THIS STORY WENT
> HEREAFTER FOLLOWS THE BOOK IT-
> SELF WHICH IS CALLED NEWS FROM

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[52] Morris addresses the failure of the Gothic Revival at length in "The Revival of Architecture" (M22:318–30). Even Ruskin came to have his doubts (R9:11–15). Kenneth Clark, whose *The Gothic Revival* was first published in 1928, attests to the low regard in which the Gothic Revival was held during the modernist period; he refers to the Houses of Parliament as "a great necropolis of style" (Clark, *Gothic Revival*, 7, 119).

In distinguishing the story from "the book itself," Morris characteristically reminds us of the materiality of his text. But he also implies that the story, like the house, exists outside of the book. History, Morris suggests, is an actual empty old house, familiar but inhabited by other people whom we may or may not be able to see, and who, like us, imagine within its walls a happy life.

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[53] See Figure 3.4.

Chapter Four

Decadent Antiquarianism: Lyric Collection and Anti-Classical Display in Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley

1.

All of the four major terms explored in this dissertation—natural history, Renaissance, Gothic, decadence—correlate historiographical and aesthetic knowledge, perhaps none more so, however, than the last of these. As the name of a literary and artistic movement whose characteristics are usually said to include artifice, erudition, sensuality, and deviancy (all in excess), Decadence originates with a simple historicist diagnosis: decadent art in decadent times.[1] As the editors of a volume of essays published at the millennium attest, it was only relatively recently that this pathologizing historicism, with its image of the artist as an effete and impotent consumptive, was put into serious question.[2]

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[1] In this chapter, I distinguish the late-nineteenth-century literary and artistic movement from general historiographical, moralistic, and stylistic uses of "decadence" by capitalizing the name of the former only.

[2] Constable, Denisoff, and Potolsky, *Perennial Decay*, 2. They object, for instance, to Regenia Gagnier's essay "A Critique of Practical Aesthetics" for its presentation of Decadence as a depoliticized form of Aestheticism (ibid., 9). Spivak makes a similar argument against critical treatments of Decadence that, more or less subtly, reinscribe the value judgments of the nineteenth century and historicize Decadence as "the abdication of social commitment after 1848 and 1871" (Spivak, "Decadent Style," 227). While she does not cite any particular works, Swart's *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France* (1964) is representative of this kind of historicism.

Recent scholarship has subsequently recuperated Decadence from its status as an aesthetic dead-end awaiting the rejuvenating force of Modernism and repositioned it as a literary formation with political aims opposed to the prevailing social order and its moralizing discourse of degeneration.[3] A justified suspicion of grand narratives and biological metaphors has led twenty-first-century historicist critics to reject the judgments of their nineteenth-century predecessors in the case of Decadence.[4] Today's Decadence scholarship thus depends upon a careful and sustained distinction of aesthetic Decadence from historiographical decadence. While such a distinction is welcome, it has not led to new assessments of how Decadence itself understands and engages with history. And yet Decadence, I argue, at least in the selection of English works considered here, constitutes a radical intervention in nineteenth-century historical discourse. In contrast to the historiographical narrative of decadence and the medical diagnosis of degeneration—and, moreover, unlike much work in Decadence studies, old and new—Decadence itself is opposed to the dominant scientific and philosophical historicisms. This does not mean,

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[3] The work of David Weir has been especially important in rearticulating the relationship between Romanticism, Decadence, and Modernism (see Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*). Recent monographs that have taken a more political view of Decadence include Kostas Boyiopoulos's *The Decadent Image*, Alex Murray's *Landscapes of Decadence*, and Matthew Potolsky's *The Decadent Republic of Letters*. Kirsten MacLeod's *Fictions of British Decadence* is a self-avowed revisionist history that aims to demythologize Decadence by placing it in a broader (and less sensationalized) literary-historical context.

[4] Nevertheless, at the same time, both within and outside the academy, there has been a resurgent discourse of decline that has not altogether eschewed the terminology of decadence, even if it has left the medical language of the *fin de siècle* behind. This discourse makes itself felt (albeit felt differently) in historiography across the political spectrum, in for example Bernard Stiegler's critique of consumer capitalism in *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies* as much as in a conservative–humanistic history like Jacques Barzun's *From Dawn to Decadence*. Arthur Herman provides a useful, though itself politically tendentious, overview in *The Idea of Decline in Western History*.

however, that it has no interest in history. On the contrary, for all its concern with the life of modernity, Decadence repeatedly, even obsessively, looks to the distant past—typically, Egyptian, Greek, or Roman antiquity—for its artistic materials. In doing so, however, it is concerned neither to produce a true image of that past "as it actually was" nor to cultivate an idealized one serving claims of moral authority. Decadence shatters the image of antiquity provided by a chaste archaeology and ridicules classicism's core concept of a universal gold standard transcending time. In the process, it establishes its own mode of historical relation, that of an aesthetic subjectivity producing itself with the material remains of the past free from the strictures of the more disciplinary forms of historicism and classicism.

This chapter examines anti-classicist engagements with the cultures of antiquity in the work of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. My discussion of Wilde returns to his criticism in *Intentions* (1891)[5] and then to his unusual poem *The Sphinx* (1894), which figures the Decadent engagement with antiquity as a form of collection that produces atmosphere rather than knowledge. As an objectification of desire, moreover, *The Sphinx* exposes the libidinal economy of collecting. The collection has long been recognized as a key topos of Decadent aesthetics, canonized in Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours* (1884) and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).[6] Where the collections in these texts

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[5] See the opening paragraph of Chapter One above.

[6] In addition to the gems of Des Esseintes's infamous jeweled tortoise (Huysmans, *Against Nature*, ch. 4), his collections include works of art (ch. 5), exotic plants (ch. 8), perfumes (ch. 10), and books (ch. 12), including works of literary Decadence, both ancient (ch. 3) and modern (ch. 14). Indeed, collecting provides the basic structure of the book, with even the accounts of Des Esseintes's past lovers (ch. 9) and his aborted trip to London (ch. 11) determined by its logic. Dorian's turn to collecting, in particular gems

highlight the labor and pleasure of obscure systems of knowledge and the aesthetic arrangement of exquisite particulars, my reading of *The Sphinx* treats a specifically historical form of the Decadent collection, and so puts forward a theory of Decadent antiquarianism as the thoroughly eroticized "taste for, or devotion to, antiquities"[7] of a fragmented lyric subjectivity. While *Intentions* and *The Sphinx* contest the truth-claims of archaeological historicism, it is Beardsley's illustrations for Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* that make a mockery of classicism's claim to ownership of antiquity and its vision of classical purity. Just as Wilde reveals the erotic underpinnings of archaeology, so Beardsley's anachronistic illustrations of Greek theater expose the truth of classicism. Both provide alternative visions of antiquity that confront the dominant forms of its representation with what they consciously exclude and unconsciously repress. This chapter thus argues for the value of Wilde's and Beardsley's attempts to prize apart the proprietary relationship between classicism and antiquity.

Where the collection occupies an untroubled position in the canon of Decadence, however, the relationship between Decadence and classicism is rather more complicated. This situation arises with the initial theorizations of literary Decadence by nineteenth-century French critics and poets, who, as we shall see, define Decadence, at the most basic level, as an aesthetic corollary of the historiographical narrative of decline and so explicitly opposed to the classical. My goal in the remainder of this section is to trace the contours of Decadence's conceptual formation in the nineteenth century and then to detemporalize the historical opposition of the classical and the Decadent—a move that is

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and textiles, in chapter eleven of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* follows his reading of the "poisonous book" assumed to be *À rebours* (W3:274, 282–86).

[7] "Antiquarianism," *OED*.

implicit in Wilde's *Intentions*. This is possible because classicism, like Decadence, is a living aesthetic discourse in the nineteenth century, albeit one that by the 1890s had sustained some heavy critique, and is, moreover, a way of engaging with antiquity whose relationship with scientific historicism is itself problematic. Going back over this history not only reveals what is at stake for the partisans on either side of the classicism–Decadence divide, but also underscores the political nature of the Decadent intervention in aesthetics that was also an intervention into the forms of relation to the imagined distant past.

Just as the historical concept of decadence originates in the historiography of antiquity, so the literary-critical concept of "decadence" first emerges within classicism.[8] The long decline and fall of Rome provides the paradigm for modern understandings of decadence, a paradigm established by Enlightenment histories such as Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734) and Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789).[9] Most histories of nineteenth-century Decadence, however, begin with the French

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[8] It is not my purpose to provide a comprehensive history of the concept of decadence in nineteenth-century thought, of which there are already several, but rather to establish a historical foundation for this chapter's admittedly partial emphasis on Decadence as an anti-classical engagement with antiquity. The best overview of the concept is, I think, Freund's *La Décadence*; others include Călinescu's *Five Faces of Modernity*, Gilman's *Decadence*, Pierrot's *L'Imaginaire décadent*, Swart's *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France*, Thornton's *The Decadent Dilemma*, and, most recently, Weir's *Decadence*.

[9] Freund, *Décadence*, 105–19. As Thornton points out, the conceptualization of history as a process of decline rather than progress predominates across European cultures and epochs, making the nineteenth-century belief in progress exceptional. In Thornton's analysis, late-nineteenth-century Decadence is distinguished from other historiographies of decline by its use of biological, and specifically evolutionary, terminology (Thornton, *Decadent Dilemma*, 1–10; see also Swart, *Sense of Decadence*, ch. 1). For a broader

classicist Désiré Nisard, whose study of first-century Roman poetry (chiefly Lucan),

Études de mœurs et de critique sur les poëtes latins de la décadence, was published in

1834. While, in the early nineteenth century, decadence was already in use to characterize

historical moments other than late antiquity (for example, in Carlyle's *French Revolution*,

the *ancien régime*[10]), Nisard is typically identified as the first to make the historicizing

connection between imperial decline, societal decay, and aesthetic inferiority, and to

adduce this connection through the description of a decadent style as the necessary

corollary of decadent times.[11] What is more, Nisard closes his study of Silver Age Latin

poetry with a conclusion that compares the Romanticism of his own time with the literary

Decadence of Imperial Rome and finds the latter's principal stylistic attributes—

excessive erudition and descriptiveness—repeated in the former.[12] Nisard's critique

accordingly establishes three enduring aspects of aesthetic decadence: its historical

conditioning by a dissolute society, its stylistic tendency to focus on the part at the

expense of the whole, and its lamentable return in modernity as the symptom of another

epoch of decline.

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analysis of decline, see Herman, *The Idea of Decline in Western History*. On the role of Roman decadence specifically in nineteenth-century historiography, see Dowling, "Roman Decadence and Victorian Historiography." On the existence of the conscious-ness of not only historical but also aesthetic decadence in antiquity itself, see Fuhrer, "Das Interesse am menschlichen Scheitern."

[10] Carlyle, *French Revolution*, 1:9–14; according to the *OED*, this is the first recorded instance in English of the adjective "decadent."

[11] See, for example, Boyiopoulos, *Decadent Image*, 8; Constable, Denisoff, and Potolsky, *Perennial Decay*, 8; Dowling, *Language and Decadence*, 151; Gagnier, *Individualism*, 176; Potolsky, *Decadent Republic*, 3. I owe the trinity of imperial decline, societal decay, and aesthetic inferiority to David Weir, who identifies these as the three primary senses of "decadence" (Weir, *Decadence*, 1).

[12] Nisard, *Études*, 3:256–59.

Nisard's ideas recur throughout nineteenth-century treatments of Decadence, whether encomium or polemic. Among the more canonical French discussions, Théophile Gautier's preface to the 1868 edition of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* and Paul Bourget's 1881 essay on the same author both invoke the decadence of antiquity as the aesthetic corollary of social decline, oppose it to classical form, and characterize it as artificial and excessively preoccupied with particularity. Gautier:

> In connection with [the decadent style of Baudelaire's poetry], we may recall the language, so corrupted and already marbled by the piquancies of decomposition, of the late Roman Empire, and the complicated refinements of the Byzantine school, the latest form of Greek art fallen into decline. But such is the necessary and fatal idiom of peoples and civilizations in which artificial life has replaced natural life and developed in man unwonted needs. This style—moreover, despised by pedants—is no easy thing, because it expresses new ideas with new forms and words that we have never before heard. Unlike the classical style, it admits shadow and in this shadow confusedly move the larvae of superstitions, the haggard ghosts of insomnia, night terrors, the remorse that shudders and turns at the slightest sound, the monstrous dreams that alone stop impotence, the obscure fantasies that would astonish the day, and all that the soul conceals, in the depths of its deepest and furthermost cave, that is obscure, deformed, and vaguely horrible.[13]

In contrast to Gautier's evocative characterization, Bourget's psychological study makes the decisive move of grounding the stylistic inferiority of decadence in a biologized account of society: "A society may be likened to an organism. […] The individual is the social cell."[14] But, once again, contemporary aesthetic decadence is explained through the historicist analogy of the disintegrating society of the Roman Empire, albeit here analyzed in terms of population changes. Bourget's biologism leads him to see decadence as

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[13] In Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 1:17 (my translation).
[14] Bourget, *Essais*, 14 (my translation).

a problem of individualism, understood as social degeneration.[15] This individualism takes aesthetic form in what has become one of the most frequently cited formulations of Decadent style: "A decadent style is one in which the unity of the book disintegrates and gives way to the independence of the page, in which the page disintegrates and gives way to the independence of the sentence, and the sentence gives way to the independence of the word."[16]

While decadence was a familiar feature of British historiography and criticism, occupying an important place in the work of Gibbon, Carlyle, and Ruskin,[17] it was rather the work of French authors such as Gautier, Baudelaire, Gustave Flaubert, and Huysmans

[15] Bourget's pathologization of Decadence anticipates one of the most notorious works of cultural criticism of the *fin de siècle*, Max Nordau's widely read polemic *Entartung* (1892–1893; English translation: *Degeneration*, 1895). Drawing on the degeneration theory of the psychologist Bénédict Morel and the criminologist Cesare Lombroso, Nordau's book lambasts almost every major European literary and artistic movement of the century. In contrast to the critics who concern me here, he understands Decadence as a specifically modern pathology and dismisses the analogy with antiquity as philologically ungrounded (Nordau, *Entartung*, 302). He does, however, understand Decadent style as an excessive individualism or egomania (*Ich-Sucht*), that is, as a focus on the part rather than the whole, and attests this with quotes from both Gautier and Bourget, as well as discussion of Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Wilde (ibid., 298–322). On degeneration theory and the pathologization of Decadence, see Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*; Hurley, *The Gothic Body*; Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*; and Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies*, which reminds us that in many cases Decadent writers participated in their own pathologization.

[16] Bourget, *Essais*, 14 (my translation). In *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization*, Regenia Gagnier identifies the problem of the relationship of part to whole as one of the most important in aesthetic, economic, and social theory during the period of the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, an importance supported by its consistent citation by the critics I discuss here.

[17] In addition to the works of Gibbon and Carlyle cited above, see the third volume of Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1853), in which the aesthetic decline of Venice as a center of Gothic architecture is correlated with its political decline as a sea-power, its moral intemperance, and the broad historical transformation called the Renaissance, which for Ruskin is the absolute antithesis of what it purports to be—not cultural rebirth but cultural decadence: "the ruin which was begun by scholarship, was completed by sensuality" (R11:131).

that informed the reception and development of the new movement in Britain. The best known of several essays of the late 1880s and early 1890s that sought to introduce French Decadence to a British audience, Arthur Symons's "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893) rehearses many of the characterizations of Decadence already canonized in France.[18] Once again, aesthetic decadence is hitched to historiography, opposed to classicism, and pathologized:

> The most representative literature of the day has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods, the qualities that we find in the Greek, the Latin, decadence: an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity. If what we call the classic is indeed the supreme art—those qualities of perfect simplicity, perfect sanity, perfect proportion, the supreme qualities—then this representative literature of to-day, interesting, beautiful, novel as it is, is really a new and beautiful and interesting disease.[19]

Likewise, in an essay on Bourget written for the *Pioneer* in 1889, Havelock Ellis, a friend of Symons, draws a comparison between Latin literature in late antiquity and literature in nineteenth-century France and England, and provides a precis of Bourget's definition: "A decadent style, in short, is an anarchistic style in which everything is sacrificed to the development of the individual parts."[20] A decade later, however, with Decadence abandoned by many, including Symons, Ellis makes an important critical move in an essay on Huysmans. While he repeats both the analogy between ancient and modern decadence and the negative definition of decadent style as "only such in relation to a classic style,"

[18] For a discussion of the British reception of French Decadence, see MacLeod, *Fictions*, 1–20. On Symons's mercurial relationship with both the movement and the term, see Bristow, "Sterile Ecstasies."
[19] Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature," 858–59.
[20] Ellis, *Views*, 1:52.

he nonetheless refuses to pathologize decadence (an ambivalence in both Gautier and Symons) and insists moreover on the autonomy of aesthetic judgment: "We have to recognise that decadence is an aesthetic and not a moral judgment."[21] It is not that Ellis removes Decadence from historical determination by a formalist reduction, as his insistence on an aesthetic of particularity might suggest. Indeed, he repeats the correlation of social and aesthetic form: "an age of individualism is usually an age of artistic decadence."[22] Rather, Decadence is no longer the corollary of societal decline but simply one end of an aesthetic continuum—the other being the classical—whose rhythms chart the course of art history.[23] But most importantly, and quite typically for this reader of Nietzsche, Ellis's goal is transvaluation: Decadence no more stands for wickedness and degeneration than the classic stands for goodness and health.[24]

While Ellis's essay is an important early intervention in the critical reception of Decadence, breaking the yoke of pessimistic historiography, a much stronger critique of such thinking had already been made from within Decadence itself—in Wilde's collection of essays and dialogues against realist aesthetics, *Intentions* (1891). In the first chapter of the dissertation, I introduced one of this book's texts, "The Decay of Lying" (first published 1889), in order to characterize the dominant aesthetic discourse of

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[21] Ellis, *Affirmations*, 175, 186.

[22] Ibid., 177.

[23] Ibid., 175–76.

[24] A similar argument is made by Robert Ross, Wilde's closest friend and literary executor, in a lecture entitled "There Is No Decay," delivered in 1908: "What is commonly called decay is merely stylistic development […] we must remember that Decadence and Decay have now different meanings, though originally they meant the same sort of thing" (Ross, *Masques*, 284, 309). Hall and Murray discuss Ross's and Ellis's texts as articulating the Decadent remit of transvaluation and its critique of the moral concept of decadence (Hall and Murray, *Decadent Poetics*, 1–2).

Victorian Britain. I want to revisit it now for its theory of history. The first point to make is that the overall position of *Intentions* is not only anti-realist but also anti-historicist, or at least, it is opposed to the scientific and philosophical forms of historicism which I discussed in the Introduction.[25] This position can be summarized in the four antinomian doctrines that conclude "The Decay of Lying": that "Art never expresses anything but itself," that "All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature," that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life," and that, finally, "Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art" (W4:102–03). Vivian's doctrines are derived not only from a sustained critique of realism ("a complete failure"), but also from an equally important critique of a reductive historicism: "To pass from the art of a time to the time itself is the great mistake that all historians make" (W4:102). Wilde's most historical example of such interpretation reveals the stakes of his argument for England's nascent Decadent movement:

> The evil faces of the Roman emperors look out at us from the foul porphyry and spotted jasper in which the realistic artists of the day delighted to work, and we fancy that in those cruel lips and heavy sensual jaws we can find the secret of the ruin of the Empire. But it was not so. The vices of Tiberius could not destroy that supreme civilization, any more than the virtues of the Antonines could save it" (W4:97).

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[25] It is true that in the volume's final piece, "The Truth of Masks" (first published 1885), Wilde derides anachronism and defends the use of archaeology for stage costumes (a topical discussion in the 1880s), even as he values the poet John Keats's antiquity over the philologist Max Müller's. However, it seems this essay was an ambivalent inclusion in *Intentions* and the fact that it sits uneasily with the other pieces was evidently not lost on Wilde, who, for the book version, added an abrupt and unconvincing conclusion undermining most of the essay's claims: "There is much with which I entirely disagree" (W4:228; for the textual history of *Intentions*, see Josephine Guy's critical introduction, esp. W4:liv–lvii). In his early essay "Historical Criticism," by contrast, Wilde's theory of historiography is conventional.

Implicit here in Wilde's rejection of the depth model of historical interpretation (both in general and specifically in the case of decadence) is a rejection, moreover, of the moralization of history and, through the tacit repudiation of phrenology, its medicalization. The hostility towards historicism reappears elsewhere in *Intentions*, for example, in Gilbert's glib dismissal of history as "always wearisome and usually inaccurate" in "The Critic as Artist" (W4:144), as well as in the more sustained critique in "Pen, Pencil and Poison" of the moralizing tendencies of complacent historians (W4:121). Importantly, however, Wilde's position does not amount to a rejection of the historical altogether but rather makes an intervention in aesthetic theory regarding the nature and representational power of historical consciousness. "To us, who live in the nineteenth century," Vivian declares, "any century is a suitable subject for art except our own" (W4:102). The point, then, is not that artists and critics should forget about the past but rather that they should recognize the futility of any historiographical model that aims for either historical accuracy or moral instruction. Wilde thus positions himself against the two dominant modes of appropriating antiquity in the nineteenth century, epistemologically distinct but often overlapping (as in Nisard): the humanistic, transhistoricizing discourse of classicism, with its eternal verities and moral lessons, and the scientific historicism of the new philology and archaeology, with its belief in objective reconstruction, whose famous articulation by Ranke in the preface to his *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker* is directly opposed to didactic historiography.[26] The point Wilde implicitly makes is that the decadent is not opposed to the classical according to a historiography of decline or a binary stylistics; rather, Decadence and classicism are different modes of

26 Ranke, *Sämtliche Werke*, 33:vii.

engaging with and representing the past. It does not matter whether we live in decadent times or not, we have, in any case, a choice as to how we make meaning from the past.

As one of the goals of this chapter is to distinguish classicism and antiquity, it will be helpful here to give greater conceptual definition to these two terms and in particular to the discourse of classicism—the discourse, as we have just seen, that first formulated decadence in opposition to its own claims on ancient culture. As E. R. Curtius noted, the word "classic" originates in antiquity as the name for the highest class of tax-payers in the Roman Republic and was already being used figuratively to describe a superior category of authors by Cicero.[27] Yet Curtius's full account of the concept's role in European canon-formation emphasizes both its retrospection and relativity: the classic always belongs to the past and is defined with respect to the present. Even though "classicism"—the discourse of the classical—is an early nineteenth-century coinage which took several decades to gain much currency,[28] that "classic" brings together an evaluation of the relationship between past and present with a figurative usage of "class" alerts us to its long-held ideological content. James Porter unpacks this content in his essay "Feeling Classical," which conceives classicism as a structure of feeling in Raymond Williams's sense, and one that already existed in antiquity. Classicism, in Porter's analysis, seeks to instill "the feeling of proximity to and identity with what is classical," that is, with "the products of culture that are felt to be exemplary and of the first order."[29] Manifestly ideological, classicism produces a certain kind of subject, one who feels classical and who has a correspondingly classical habitus. It is fundamentally conservative and idealist,

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[27] Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 249.
[28] Ibid., 266. This etymology is supported by the *OED*'s entry for "classicism."
[29] Porter, "Feeling Classical," 307–08.

cultivating a continuity between past and present as a defense against the arbitrariness of history. Classicism is, moreover, as Jonah Siegel points out, an "impossible project" founded on the desire "to make the fragments of a lost antiquity cohere into a whole that would reflect values acceptable to the day."[30] In this light, humanistic claims of Greek universality and timelessness, such as Jacob Burckhardt's assertion that we still see with the eyes of the Greeks and speak with their words, appear at best self-delusional, at worst a dogmatic limitation on the possibilities of experience.[31]

While such accounts of classicism and the classical emphasize its function as a disciplinary apparatus, studies of classical reception in the nineteenth century have demonstrated its broader range of political, affective, and aesthetic possibilities: the role of classics was not limited to the education of future colonial administrators but also provided the basis for the revolutionary politics of Romantic philhellenism and the late-Victorian formation of homosexual identity; moreover, its aesthetic traces are found in popular as well as elite art.[32] Even so, an important conceptual distinction needs to be made between, on the one hand, "classicism" in the Winckelmannian–Arnoldian sense analyzed by Porter and Siegel of "noble simplicity and calm grandeur"[33] and "the best which has been thought and said in the world,"[34] and, on the other hand, "classics" in its

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[30] Siegel, "Art, Aesthetics, and Archaeological Poetics," 219, 213.
[31] Burckhardt, *Griechische Culturgeschichte*, 371.
[32] See Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*; Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*; Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*; Richardson, *Classical Victorians*; Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome*.
[33] The famous "edle Einfalt und stille Größe" of Greek statuary (Winckelmann, *Gedanken*, 24).
[34] Arnold, *Complete Prose Works*, 5:233. In "The Critic as Artist," Wilde has Gilbert quote this phrase inaccurately and without attribution (W4:178). Much like Pater's similarly ironic and unattributed quotation from Arnold's "The Task of Criticism" in the

broad sense as the culture of Greco-Roman antiquity. While Decadence's definition by

Nisard and other French critics as the opposite of the classical is no doubt conditioned by

the particular importance of the latter concept to the history of modern French literature,

the consistent reference of these oppositional definitions to the internal development of

Greek and Roman literature indicates a conceptual distinction between the classical as an

evaluative category and antiquity as a historical period that is worth bringing to the fore.

According to nineteenth-century classicism, antiquity contains both the classical (Virgil)

and the decadent (Petronius). This aesthetic division of antiquity recurs in the French

discourse of decadence from Nisard to Des Esseintes, but for obvious reasons this schema

is no longer current in classical studies. My point here is not to recuperate the schema

but, rather, to show, consonant with Porter's analysis, that its invention in the nineteenth

century constituted a way for classics to identify itself with what it judged best in both

antiquity and modernity, and against what it judged worst. Accordingly, in my discussion

of nineteenth-century Decadence, I insist upon the distinction between "antiquity" as a

ragbag term for the diverse cultures of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, and

"classicism" as the name for the cultivation of certain cultural phenomena identified as

superior and originated in an earlier period (in most cases, pagan Greece and Rome).[35] Of

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preface to *The Renaissance*, Wilde's misappropriation willfully misreads Arnold's intentions. See also Arnold's characterization of Homer's "general effect"—plain, direct, and "eminently noble"—in *On Translating Homer*, which, with its call for translation adequate to the original, attempts to make classicism into a scientific historicism (Arnold, *Complete Prose Works*, 1:119).

[35] Patrick Brantlinger has distinguished between a positive and a negative classicism, the former taking a particular cultural moment in the past as a superior model for the present to emulate, the latter interpreting the present as a disastrous repetition of some earlier irredeemable age (Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses*, 17). While this terminology captures nicely the shared interest in the past, and specifically antiquity, of nineteenth-century

course, as the argument of this dissertation makes clear, this does not mean that "antiqui-ty" is something that can be known objectively, provided only the barnacles of classicism are scraped away. Classicism constructs one image of antiquity; Decadence, another.

2.

As the editors of a recent volume entitled *Oscar Wilde and Classical Antiquity* note, the fact that Wilde's extensive knowledge of and lifelong interest in antiquity was fairly typical for someone of his class and gender should not obscure what was atypical about how he used this knowledge, not only in his art but also in his self-understanding and public self-fashioning.[36] It is not surprising, then, that the relationship between Hellenism and homosexuality should dominate scholarship on Wilde's engagement with antiquity, although recent work has given greater attention to the role of the classics in his intellec-tual and artistic formation.[37] The critique of *Intentions* represents another form of Wilde's engagement with the domain of classical historiography, of particular interest here for its disassociation of historical and aesthetic decadence. As a result of the book's largely negative critique and its emphasis on critical rather than artistic principles, however, *Intentions* does not provide an extended engagement with the materials of antiquity. Accordingly, in this section, I turn to a particular anti-classicist use of antiquity in a

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classicism and Decadence, it ends up reproducing the value judgment of the historiog-raphy of decline, even as it sets out to critique it.

[36] Riley, Blanshard, and Manny, *Oscar Wilde and Classical Antiquity*, 9.

[37] For the former, see Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*; Nisbet, *Greek Epigram in Reception*; Orrells, *Classical Culture and Modern Masculinity*. For the latter, see, in addition to the contributions in *Oscar Wilde and Classical Antiquity*, Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece* (esp. ch. 4); and Ross, *Oscar Wilde and Ancient Greece*.

relatively understudied text by Wilde, his dramatic monologue *The Sphinx*, which he started writing while a student at Oxford, but which was not completed until its publication in 1894 in a deluxe limited edition illustrated by Charles Ricketts that has been called "the quintessentially decadent book of the nineties."[38] Through its aesthetic arrangement of literary fragments from the ancient world within a narrative of frustrated desire, *The Sphinx* exemplifies what I call Decadent antiquarianism.

Readers of *The Sphinx* consistently note its relentless allusiveness, its "jeweled" style, and its turbulent eroticism—the erudition, descriptiveness, and perversity canonized by the classicist Nisard and later French writers as the hallmarks of literary decadence. Much scholarly energy has been spent on identifying the poem's seemingly endless intertexts, mostly in nineteenth-century French and English literature.[39] A second strand of criticism has focused on the poem's erotic content, with critics finding a covert exploration of queer desire coupled with a more explicit presentation of active female

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[38] Kooistra, *Artist as Critic*, 94.

[39] Murray identifies the primary intertexts in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (from which Wilde takes the enclosed rhyme scheme), D. G. Rossetti's "The Burden of Nineveh" (another museum poem), Baudelaire's cat poems in *Les Fleurs du mal*, Gautier's novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and his several poems and short stories featuring sphinxes, and Flaubert's *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, which also features a sphinx (Murray, "Some Problems," 75–78). Fehr provides a detailed and sensitive discussion of the poem's French influences, as well as Swinburne, and also notes some intertexts from Hellenistic poetry (Fehr, *Studien*, 179–95). Ross reads the poem alongside Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (Ross, *Oscar Wilde and Ancient Greece*, 76–80); Lennartz notes the similarities with Poe's "The Raven" (Lennartz, "Oscar Wilde's 'The Sphinx,'" 416–17); Praz and Kooistra read the Sphinx as a *femme fatale* in the lineage of Pater's *Mona Lisa* (Praz, *Romantic Agony*, 246–47; Kooistra, *Artist as Critic*, 106–07); Behrendt identifies a reference to Luc Olivier Merson's painting *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Behrendt, *Oscar Wilde*, 60); and Boyiopoulos compares the poem with a hallucination of ancient Egypt in De Quincey's *Confessions* (Boyiopoulos, *Decadent Image*, 66).

sexuality.[40] More recently, however, Kostas Boyiopoulos has undertaken a sustained reading of the poem that brings together the archaeological and the gemological with the linguistic and the erotic: "Essentially the Sphinx copulates with the omnium-gatherum of fragments, gemstones and names."[41] This reading not only locates the poem's organizing topos in the eroticization of the artifact but also demonstrates the Decadent insight that every object of desire is also an *objet d'art*. Nicholas Frankel takes such an object-oriented reading even further, reading the poem itself as an archaeological relic of "obdurate materiality."[42] My reading of *The Sphinx* differs from such arguments in two ways. Firstly, I read the poem's accumulation of fragments as an aesthetic technique aimed at the production of history as atmosphere. Secondly, through a discussion of *The Sphinx*'s poetic form in relation to the theme of archaeological collection, I shift the focus from the poem's objects onto its subject, whose fragmentation is determined by erotic displacement. In both cases, I read the poem as a critique of archaeology's claim to historical truth and its valorization of objects and objectivity.

Wilde's dramatic monologue begins in the college room of a student, the speaker of the poem: "In a dim corner of my room for longer than my fancy thinks | A beautiful and silent Sphinx has watched me through the shifting gloom" (ll. 1–2).[43] He asks her to tell what she has seen in her life of a thousand centuries: "Fawn at my feet fantastic

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[40] Behrendt, *Oscar Wilde*, 59–61; Ericksen, *Oscar Wilde*, 44–46; Gagnier, *Idylls*, 45; Kooistra, *Artist as Critic*, 106. Critics are, moreover, divided as to whether the poem celebrates or condemns the Sphinx's sexuality, with Pierrot declaring it antifeminist (Pierrot, *L'Imaginaire décadent*, 249) but Kooistra, perhaps as a result of her attention to Ricketts's illustrations, providing a more affirmative assessment (Kooistra, *Artist as Critic*, 106).

[41] Boyiopoulos, *Decadent Image*, 71.

[42] Frankel, *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books*, 165.

[43] The text of *The Sphinx* cited is that in W1:180–94.

Sphinx! and sing me all your memories!" (l. 30). But rather than wait for an answer from his silent feline roommate, he launches into fantasy, imagining her memories as a jumbled cacophony of the historical and the mythological:

> Sing to me of the Jewish maid who wandered with the Holy Child,
> And how you led them through the wild, and how they slept beneath your shade.
>
> Sing to me of that odorous green eve when couching by the marge
> You heard from Adrian's gilded barge the laughter of Antinous
>
> And lapped the stream and fed your drouth and watched with hot and hungry stare
> The ivory mouth of that rare young slave with his pomegranate mouth!
>
> Sing to me of the labyrinth in which the twy-formed Bull was stalled!
> Sing to me of the night you crawled across the Temple's granite plinth
>
> When through the purple corridors the screaming scarlet Ibis flew
> In terror, and a horrid dew dripped from the moaning mandragores (ll. 31–40)

The speaker's heightened arousal is marked by the shift in questioning that sees the Sphinx move from voyeur to participant in the fantasized scenes of Egyptian antiquity; if there was still any doubt, the erotic tenor of his archaeological zeal is made explicit: "Who were your lovers? who were they who wrestled for you in the dust? | Which was the vessel of your lust? what leman had you, every day?" (ll. 45–46). Again, the student answers for the Sphinx, imagining her coupled with all manner of men and women, gods and goddesses, animals real and fabulous, and even revived mummies, before concluding that her lover must have been the great god Ammon. The lengthy description of this divine lover—twenty lines of jeweled panegyrics—exhausts the speaker's libidinal energies and he turns against the figure whom he once found so fascinating, rounding off the poem with a tirade of post-coital misogyny—"Get hence, you loathsome Mystery!

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Hideous animal, get hence! | You wake in me each bestial sense, you make me what I would not be" (ll. 168–69)—and an ambivalent turn to Christ, who "weeps for every soul in vain" (l. 174).[44] While this narrative of frustrated desire provides the dramatic content, its relationship to the poem's engagement with antiquity and to its striking formal characteristics requires unpacking.

If *The Sphinx* is a collection of antiquities, it is unusual not only in its failure to rationally organize them as in a museum but also in its making explicit collecting's libidinal economy. In Susan Stewart's well-known theorization, the collection is a form of the objectification of desire: it removes objects from their original contexts and reorders them not simply to produce knowledge but also to assimilate them to the identity of the individual or institutional collector.[45] In its survey of the ruins of Egyptian civilization, *The Sphinx* exhibits a bewildering array of mythological and historical figures from the ancient Mediterranean yet makes no attempt to order these fragments into a totalizing historical narrative. Here is a part of the description of Ammon:

> On pearl and porphyry pedestalled he was too bright to look upon:
> For on his ivory breast there shone the wondrous ocean-emerald,
>
> That mystic moonlit jewel which some diver of the Colchian caves
> Had found beneath the blackening waves and carried to the Colchian witch.

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[44] San Juan is one of the few critics to have commented on the spitefulness of the sudden turn against the Sphinx, identifying it as the expression of the self-loathing resulting from the student's only partially satisfied desires (San Juan, *Art of Oscar Wilde*, 32).

[45] Stewart, *On Longing*, 151–65. The fact that, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian takes up collecting in order to forget the "terrible portrait" hanging in a locked room of his house (W3:286) underscores the fact that the collection (as Stewart theorizes it) can only provide a partial image of its collector, and, moreover, illustrates the Wildean insight about the truth of masks whose tensions are explored in the novel and elsewhere: "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" (W4:185).

> Before his gilded galiot ran naked vine-wreathed Corybants,
> And lines of swaying elephants knelt down to draw his chariot. (ll. 95–102)

As Boyiopoulos observes, "Wilde unearths archaic and outdated words as if they were historical ruins."[46] The effect of all this erudition is overwhelming and one can scarcely read the poem without the explanatory notes of a modern critical edition.[47] That such explanations are, however, beside the point is made clear by the poem's mythological syncretism, its willful historical inaccuracy, and even the occasional nonsense: a galiot is a small boat (the diminutive of "galley") and so Wilde's "naked vine-wreathed Corybants" presumably walk on water. The result is a history in which Marc Antony has the same status as Adonis, Isis, a nereid, a hippopotamus, or hieroglyphs. Such is the flat ontology of decadent antiquarianism, which collects and arranges objects for their aesthetic effects rather than for their historical meaning. Accordingly, the curios of *The Sphinx* are historical not because they metonymize a lifeworld that can be an object for knowledge in spite of its pastness; rather, they are historical because they are utterly bereft of that lifeworld, which no amount of scientific work can recreate. Even so, while the enumeration of the Sphinx's lovers is not quite a museum catalog in iambs, its glittering surface generates an enchanting atmosphere of ancientness: Gagnier considers

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[46] Boyiopoulos, *Decadent Image*, 64. Fehr notes, however, that many of Wilde's more obscure words are borrowed from Flaubert, who serves "nicht nur als Quellenbuch, sondern auch als Wörterbuch" (Fehr, *Studien*, 185, 190).

[47] One early anonymous reviewer wrote, "How many of us, I wonder, know the nature of 'rods of oreichalch'?—but the phrase serves none the less, but doubtless all the more, to give that sense of mysterious luxury at which Mr. Wilde is aiming" (quoted in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 164).

The Sphinx "the summa of Wilde's art-as-seduction."[48] And, as Fehr perceptively points out, while the erudition is ultimately a sham, its effects are calculated and powerful.[49] The poem thus instantiates its own museology: the production of historical atmosphere rather than historical knowledge.[50]

The Sphinx not only mocks the museum's self-appointed task of producing historical truth but exposes its conditions through the erotic figuration of the archaeological collection of antiquities. The description of the pedestalled Ammon reveals that he is not himself a person but a statue (and so also, one now realizes, might be the Sphinx). There is an inevitability, then, to the speaker's retreat from the fantasized scenes of an ahistorical ancient culture to the *disiecta membra* in which it is revealed to consist, the return of fancy to the galleries of the museum and the real history of their installation.

> Ten hundred shaven priests did bow to Ammon's altar day and night,
> Ten hundred lamps did wave their light through Ammon's carven house—and
> > now
>
> Foul snake and speckled adder with their young ones crawl from stone to stone
> For ruined is the house and prone the great rose-marble monolith! (ll. 107–10)
>
> The god is scattered here and there: deep hidden in the windy sand
> I saw his giant granite hand still clenched in impotent despair (ll. 115–16).

"Go, seek his fragments," the speaker urges the Sphinx: "Go, seek them where they lie alone and from their broken pieces make | Thy bruisèd bedfellow! and wake mad passions in the senseless stone!" (ll. 121–24). Here, the combined allusion to Shelley's

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[48] Gagnier, *Idylls*, 44.
[49] Fehr, *Studien*, 195.
[50] Cf. "The Critic as Artist": "The aim of art is simply to create a mood" (W4:179); and "The Truth of Masks": "Art, and art only, can make archaeology beautiful" (W4:217).

"Ozymandias" and the myth of Osiris eroticizes archaeology as the impotent reassemblage of the lover's lost body. For all its dramatization of the corrosive passage of time, "Ozymandias" is a poem about the creation of historical knowledge out of Romantic orientalism and archaeology: "I met a traveller from an antique land | Who said—'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone / Stand in the desert….'"[51] The body of Osiris, recall, was scattered throughout Egypt by Set then collected, with the exception of the genitals, and reassembled by Isis. A revealing displacement has occurred: when the homosexual desire for the godly/kingly body becomes too intense, it is transferred to the female Sphinx, who also takes over the role of archaeological collector. Not just a displacement but also a castration: Ammon's "impotent despair," Osiris's unrecovered *membrum virile*, Ozymadias's "trunkless legs"—the collected fragments lack the key organ of the phallocentric erotics on which the speaker's fancy is carried away. The poem, though taking the museum as the site for the articulation of male homosexual desire à la Winckelmann, also centers the impotence of that desire in the fragment of "senseless stone." If the collection objectifies the collector's desires, then, in the case of *The Sphinx*, the image it reflects is one of frustration, no matter how scintillating the gems of its surface.

Stewart's theory of the collection as the objectification of desire is intriguingly consonant with her discussion of poetic form in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*. Drawing on thinkers of both history and aesthetics, including Vico, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, Stewart identifies in lyric subjectivity the traces of the mutual conditioning of poetic form and sensuous consciousness. "The self is objectified," she writes, "but not

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[51] Shelley, *Major Works*, 198.

completed, by the presentation of the form."[52] The desire for the pleasure of form is, moreover, motivated by the pain of a lack.[53] Poetic form, like the collection, objectifies desire and in doing so produces an image of its maker (though, in either case, never a complete one). Given that the formal elements of *The Sphinx* are among its most remarkable—in particular, its adaptation of the *In Memoriam* stanza and its outlandish rhymes—it is worth considering how these relate to the Decadent antiquarianism and eroticism already discussed.

When it was pointed out that *The Sphinx* takes its rhyme scheme from Tennyson's popular elegy, Wilde is supposed to have quipped, "No, it is printed quite differently."[54] Indeed, the transformation of Tennyson's tetrameter quatrains into couplets of sixteen-syllable lines, printed entirely in capitals with minimal punctuation, is not without poetic effect. The *abba* rhyme scheme is typographically submerged rather than offset and the text stretches across the page like a monumental inscription.[55] In discussions of *In Memoriam,* its form is often characterized as a series of self-enclosed, slow-moving

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[52] Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 12.

[53] Ibid., 45.

[54] Quoted in Kooistra, *Artist as Critic*, 95. In the earliest manuscripts, the poem is written in quatrains (W1:306). Wilde had already used the *In Memoriam* stanza (unchanged) in the short, impressionistic poem "Impression du Matin" (1881), which describes the Thames at daybreak, the waking city, and a lone woman (W1:153). That *The Sphinx* derives its form from *In Memoriam* was, along with the poem's sonorousness, one of the principal features noted by its first reviewers (see the reviews reprinted in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde*, 164–71).

[55] Ricketts designed not only the illustrations but also the letterpress and later wrote that he decided to print the text entirely in capitals in order to produce "a book marked by surviving classical traits" (Ricketts, *A Defence of the Revival of Printing*, 25).

fragments.[56] The jeweled ornament of *The Sphinx* moves rapidly in spite of the cumbersome verse-length, but *In Memoriam*'s terse syntax and "lapidary"[57] form is more geological than gemological, disclosing a theory of lyric time as the sedimentary record of continuity and disruption.[58] This difference between the poems is observable in both the internal structure of the stanzas and their articulation within the whole.[59] Where Tennyson almost never uses slant or polysyllabic rhymes, Wilde invents some of the most outrageous in the language: "hieroglyphs" and "Hippogriffs" (ll. 19–20), "catafalque" and "Amenalk" (ll. 25–26), "sarcophagus" and "Tragelaphos" (ll. 63–64), and the truly Byronic "cubits' span" and "Kurdistan" (ll. 89–90), among many others. These are always, however, the *a* rhymes, the rhymes that enclose the stanza and delay onward movement. In *The Sphinx*, these elaborate *a* rhymes throw the attention back into the jumble of the previous line, making a mockery of Tennyson's careful stanzaic organization. The rhymes themselves become the *disiecta membra* of ancient literature, awaiting recovery and reassembly, displayed according to aesthetic rather than historical principles: hieroglyphs (Egyptian) *and* hippogriffs (Greek). Rhyme thus figures the sameness in difference of the collection as the concrete image of self-identification. Or, to paraphrase Simon Jarvis, in the lyric collection that is *The Sphinx*, the subject hears itself rhyme.[60]

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[56] For example, Hair, *Tennyson's Language*; Sacks, *English Elegy*; Shaw, *Tennyson's Style*. Cf. T. S. Eliot: "it is a long poem made by putting together lyrics" (quoted in Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 136).
[57] Shaw, *Tennyson's Style*, 132.
[58] On the geological poetics of *In Memoriam*, see Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, ch. 10.
[59] See Gates, "Poetics, Metaphysics, Genre: The Stanza Form of *In Memoriam*."
[60] Jarvis, "Musical Thinking," 63–64.

While much has been made of the erotics of *In Memoriam*, with Christopher Craft labelling it a "desiring machine,"[61] Denise Gigante's study of the poem is the first to analyze its eponymous stanza as the mediator between "the hermeneutics of form and the hermeneutics of desire."[62] Gigante reconstructs the *In Memoriam* stanza's invention in the Renaissance by Ben Jonson as the dismemberment of the Petrarchan sonnet, which silently repurposes an erotic genre as elegy and anonymizes homosocial desire by universalizing the individual voice in ballad tetrameter.[63] In this long rhythmic history, we might position *The Sphinx* as the second *a* rhyme of the *In Memoriam* stanza, recalling us to the erotic and lyric origins of the form despite its proximity to the elegiac despair and balladic impersonality of its canonical Jonsonian and Tennysonian forebears. If, as Kooistra argues, "*The Sphinx* parodies *In Memoriam*'s desire for physical connection over time and space with the unattainable love object," then it does so in its very form.[64] The excessively long lines that cannot hide the seams of their reconstruction, their seemingly arbitrary scattering across "the lone and level sands" of the first edition's letterpress, the Alexandrianism of the rhymes, and the performed erudition of the allusions—the "desiring machine" that is *The Sphinx* orders its fragments so that it may obscure its subject. So if, as Ross argues, *The Sphinx* is "a warning against allowing archaeology onto the syllabus,"[65] then it is such because it exposes the erotic tensions at the heart of the discipline. The Sphinx, whose repeated apostrophization in the poem

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[61] Craft, *Another Kind of Love*, 70. See also Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, ch. 1; and Nunokawa, "*In Memoriam* and the Extinction of the Homosexual."

[62] Gigante, "Forming Desire," 483. For *In Memoriam*'s debts to classical poetic forms, see Markley, *Stateliest Measures*, 70–86.

[63] Gigante, "Forming Desire," 483–92.

[64] Kooistra, *Artist as Critic*, 95.

[65] Ross, *Oscar Wilde and Ancient Greece*, 78.

makes her the embodiment of this tension, becomes the floating signifier of antiquity, the collector and the collection.

3.

The Sphinx was the second of Wilde's two illustrated *editions de luxe* published in 1894; preceding it by four months was Alfred Douglas's English translation with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley of Wilde's French play *Salomé*.[66] While both texts are inspired by French Decadence—Salome and sphinxes are among the movement's most canonical feminine figures—and, moreover, create a fantastically stylized image of antiquity, formally, they are very different.[67] Aside from the obvious generic differences between the one-act Symbolist tragedy of *Salomé* and the eclectic dramatic monologue cum museum ode cum love elegy that is *The Sphinx*, the texts exhibit a stark dissimilarity of style. On the one hand, as we have seen, *The Sphinx* piles detail upon detail, creating its alienating historical effect through an excess of accumulation and juxtaposition, the symptom of erotic frustration, which threatens, in the more extreme rhymes discussed above, to fragment and disperse not only its poetic form but language and the lyric subject itself. On the other hand, *Salome* alienates through its repetitive, spare, biblical,

[66] The English *Salome* (without the acute accent) was published by Elkin Mathews and John Lane in February 1894 (5:672), one year after their publication of the French *Salomé* (W5:351); *The Sphinx*, by the same publishers in June 1894 (W1:307).

[67] Pierrot considers the figures of Salomé and the Sphinx to be the most important (along with Orpheus and Narcissus) in Decadence's appropriation of antiquity (Pierrot, *L'Imaginaire décadent*, 245–50). Both feature memorably, for example, in *À rebours*, where they are mediated by contemporary French Decadence: Salomé in the description of Gustave Moreau's paintings of 1876, *Salomé dansant devant Hérode* and *L'Apparition* (Huysmans, *Against Nature*, 44–50), the Sphinx in the performance by Des Esseintes's ventriloquist lover of a passage from Flaubert's *La Tentation de saint Antoine* (1874) (ibid., 88–89).

and ominous language, its syntactical tendency towards "infinite predication,"[68] its enactment of the incommunicability of desire, and its relegation of historical content to accidentals. The characters' recurrent, unheeded attempts at describing the moon in symbolic terms is the leitmotif of this alienation:

> HEROD
> The moon has a strange look to-night. Has she not a strange look? She is like a mad woman, a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe her nakedness, but she will not let them. She shows herself naked in the sky. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman. . . . I am sure she is looking for lovers. . . . Does she not reel like a drunken woman? She is like a mad woman, is she not?
>
> HERODIAS
> No; the moon is like the moon, that is all. (W5:716)

Despite such stylistic and formal differences, however, the texts share not only a common literary ground in French Decadence, but also a common theme in erotic desire. It is no surprise, then, that intertextuality along with gender and sexuality comprise a major part of scholarship on *Salome*, much as *The Sphinx*.[69] The similarities and differences between

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[68] San Juan, *Art of Oscar Wilde*, 114.

[69] Early critics noted the tragedy's debt to nineteenth-century literature, especially to the Belgian Symbolist playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, with Mario Praz reading *Salome* as a parody of Decadence in its entirety (Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 298). In more recent decades, influential readings, such as those by Regenia Gagnier (*Idylls of the Market-place*, 165–70), Elliot Gilbert ("Tumult of Images," 148–53), Elaine Showalter (*Sexual Anarchy*, 151–56) and Linda Zatlin (*Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics*, 94–95), despite their differences, have created a critical consensus in which Salome's assertion of her sexual desire is understood as a challenge to patriarchal authority, a challenge that is decisively punished. For a detailed overview of the play's intertexts and the scholarly attention given to them, see Joseph Donohue's impressive editorial introduction in volume five of the *Complete Works* (esp. W5:351–412). For a critical genealogy of the figure of Salome in nineteenth-century literature, see Saladin, *Fetishism and Fatal Women*. On *Salome* as parody, see Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s*, ch.

Wilde's two illustrated books of 1894 certainly invite comparative study: both represent a more peripheral, less straightforwardly classical antiquity (Egypt, Judaea) along lines established by French Decadence, yet in doing so they draw on different generic conventions and stylistic techniques, producing different aesthetic effects and different historical atmospheres; both, moreover, use historical materials to explore the violence of patriarchy, though in different ways and from different perspectives; finally, as material texts, they are pushed in different directions by the strikingly innovative designs of Beardsley and Ricketts, which add their own creative interpretations of script and poem respectively.[70] Rather than pursue such a comparative reading here, however, I would like to use the remainder of this chapter to consider a different set of texts by Beardsley: his illustrations for a translation of Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata*. The main reason for doing so is that these works engage and subvert the mainstream of Victorian aesthetics, classicism and historicism in a more engaged way than *Salomé*, which, even after its translation, remains, I would suggest, a "French" text. As controversial as were both *The Sphinx* and *Salomé*, not to mention *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, arguably none of Wilde's work up to his trial for gross indecency in 1895 challenges the standards of Victorian decency to quite the same extent as Beardsley's *Lysistrata*. This moral challenge, crucially, takes the form of an equally explicit challenge to classicism as the proprietor of Greek antiquity.

Aristophanes' play was first performed in Athens in 411 BCE but an unbowdlerized English version was not published until Leonard Smithers's 1896 edition of one

3. Kooistra reads Beardsley's illustrations as in turn a parody of Wilde's text (Kooistra, *Artist as Critic*, 134–46).

[70] On Wilde's books as material texts, see in particular Frankel, *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books.*

hundred copies, containing an unattributed prose translation by Samuel Smith and eight illustrations by Beardsley.[71] The anxieties of a Christian classicism repeatedly confronted by ancient Greek culture's seemingly unashamed representation of nudity and sex are well known: the decorous fig leaves of the Vatican Museums, the untranslated passages of the early Loeb editions.[72] A comedy in which the women of Athens and Sparta conspire, under the leadership of Lysistrata, to forego sex in order to force their husbands to end the war between the two cities, a plan that ultimately succeeds, was one such challenging text.[73] But even if publishing an unexpurgated translation of *Lysistrata* was a fraught undertaking in late-Victorian England, the inclusion of Beardsley's illustrations, with their giant phalluses and depictions of masturbation (female and male), made impossible anything other than a very small edition for private circulation. Despite the salacious content of Beardsley's *Lysistrata* drawings, however, Linda Zatlin convincingly argues against their classification as pornography.[74] Unlike the work of contemporaries such as Frederic Leighton or Félicien Rops (who provided a design for the title page of the French *Salomé*), Beardsley not only ridicules masculinity but portrays women as

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[71] Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents*, 330. Smith was referred to Smithers by Ernest Dowson, who declined the commission.

[72] Meier-Graefe, moreover, attests to the British Museum keeping the more interesting sides of its vases turned to the wall and even to the retouching out of "the most delicate little things" by well-meaning "Kunstpastoren" (Meier-Graefe, *Entwickelungsgeschichte*, 2:612)

[73] See Walsh's survey of Aristophanes' nineteenth-century English translators in "The Verbal and the Visual" (esp. 225–26).

[74] Zatlin, "Félicien Rops and Aubrey Beardsley," 183–201; for a broader discussion, see Zatlin, *Beardsley, Japonisme, and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal*, 221–230. Fletcher, by contrast, is unsure, though he also notes the sympathetic portrayal of women in comparison with Rops (Fletcher, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 169–72).

sexually independent and in a way that does not necessarily invite voyeuristic pleasure.[75] This is, of course, in keeping with the content of Aristophanes' play. The question of the pictures' pornographic nature has dominated the very limited critical discussion that they have received, and only recently have they been treated in classical reception studies with anything more than condescension.[76]

While the *Lysistrata* drawings' challenge to Victorian decency is unrivalled, even in Beardsley's work, the focus on their explicit eroticism has obscured their relation to a major cultural current of the time. The illustrations participate, I suggest, in the varied reassessments of classical antiquity, in particular, ancient Greece, that took place in the late nineteenth century. Nietzsche's explosion of Winckelmannian Hellenism in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) may be the most famous of these reassessments, but in England the classical image of the Greeks was put under just as much pressure by Pater's own attempt to recover the Dionysian in *Greek Studies* (1895), Symonds's work on the history of same-sex desire in *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1873) and *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883), and, of course, in Wilde's appropriations of antiquity in *Intentions*, *The Sphinx*, and *Salomé*, among other works, not to mention in his trials.[77] For these authors, to

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[75] "Unlike Rops, Beardsley chooses not to collude with the lewd purchaser" (Zatlin, "Félicien Rops and Aubrey Beardsley," 187).

[76] Walsh's illuminating appraisal of the illustrations in the context of Aristophanes' Victorian reception reveals much about the relationship between text and image (Walsh, "The Verbal and the Visual," 231–38).

[77] For discussion of Pater and Symonds in the context of a classicism largely determined by Winckelmann and Arnold, see Evangelista, "Towards the *Fin de Siècle*." Symonds's *A Problem in Greek Ethics* is reprinted in Brady, *John Addington Symonds and Homosexuality*, 39–121. For Wilde's literary and extra-literary uses of Hellenism, including his invocation of "Greek love" while on trial, see Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece*, ch. 4. For a more general discussion, see Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality*; and Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self* (esp. part 2).

reimagine antiquity as unclassical makes possible a radical break with a repressive cultural tradition that nevertheless maintains a connection with history and, moreover, promises not only sexual liberation but an entirely new form of life. As Zatlin has shown, Beardsley shares several of these concerns; moreover, like Wilde (but unlike Nietzsche, Pater, or Symonds), Beardsley's attack on classicism is all the more devastating for its lightheartedness. My goal in this section is to show the way in which Beardsley achieves this through the *Lysistrata* pictures.

Among the eclectic influences upon Beardsley's distinctive drawing style—most obviously, Pre-Raphaelite design, Japanese woodblock prints, rococo fashion—two of his earliest appraisers, Robert Ross and Julius Meier-Graefe, give particular importance to the collection of Greek vases at the British Museum. Ross attributes the development of Beardsley's style between his first major commission—the designs, clearly influenced by Burne-Jones and Morris, for J. M. Dent's edition of Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (1893–1894)—and his second—the famous drawings for *Salome*—to the careful study of this collection, along with a visit to Whistler's orientalist Peacock Room.[78] Meier-Graefe is even more emphatic, deeming Greece the most decisive influence on Beardsley's style, even if not the most obvious, and detecting in his presentation and arrangement of figures—and, especially, his use of line—the influence of fifth-century-BCE Athenian red-figure painters such as Brygos and Douris, whose work is included in the British Museum; he particularly singles out Douris' psykter depicting the revels of bearded

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[78] Ross, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 45.

satyrs, still housed there (Figure 4.1).[79] In the *Lysistrata* drawings, for example, the influence of Greek vase-painting can be seen in the consistent lack, relatively uncommon in Beardsley's work, of a background to the figures. More recent accounts of Beardsley's artistic formation have tended to stress the strong influence of Japanese art and its reception in *fin-de-siècle* orientalism, even when acknowledging the importance of antiquity.[80] Yet even so, the image of Beardsley among the Grecian urns is indeed an intriguing one. My interest, however, lies not in what Beardsley does *with* the techniques of classical art gleaned in the British Museum but, rather, in what he does *to* the concept of the classical that has its material basis in such collections. In more general terms, I am interested in how the eclectic components of Beardsley's art change each other when incorporated into a work: Beardsley's illustrations stage the encounter between his various influences. The pastiche of red-figure pottery, Japanese prints, rococo fashion, and contemporary French painting may look a lot like "the play of random stylistic allusion,"[81] but I want to suggest that, rather than being blank parody, Beardsley's work has a strong critical motivation.

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[79] Meier-Graefe, *Entwickelungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst*, 2:611–13. Writing slightly later, MacFall, though he does not discuss *Lysistrata*, dubs 1894 Beardsley's "Greek Vase Phase," his account of which appears to be largely plagiarized from Meier-Graefe (MacFall, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 114).

[80] See, for example, Fletcher, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 18; Warren, *Art Nouveau and the Classical Tradition*, 4; Zatlin, *Beardsley, Japonisme, and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal*, 6.

[81] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 18.

Figure 4.1.
Douris, Red-figured psykter, ca. 500–470 BCE
British Museum, London

The drawing from *Lysistrata* in which this eclectic encounter is most manifest is *Cinesias Entreating Myrrhina to Coition* (Figure 4.2).[82] The scene illustrated is from an episode about two thirds of the way through the play in which Cinesias comes to the Athenian Acropolis, which the women have seized, with a conspicuous erection (ἔστυκα, l. 869)—as Lysistrata wryly observes, "writhing in Aphrodite's love-grip [ὀργίοις]" (l. 832)—and desperately begs his wife Myrrhina for sex.[83] Lysistrata instructs Myrrhina to tease Cinesias until he agrees to seek peace with Sparta; she does so then runs back into the Acropolis, leaving him unsatisfied. Beardsley's depiction of the moment at which Myrrhina flees Cinesias departs from the text (his usual practice) in so far as there Cinesias does not pursue his wife but is rather left waiting unwittingly as she sneaks back into the fortress.[84] While, unlike Myrrhina, Cinesias is ridiculous in the drawing, Beardsley's narrative embellishment underscores the violence of the patriarchal institution of conjugal right. Zatlin, however, in keeping with her general interpretation of Beardsley's work, emphasizes the picture's portrayal of Myrrhina's sexual independence: she notes the allusion to Rops in Myrrhina's thigh-high stocking, for example, but argues that Myrrhina is unlike Rops's Parisian sex-workers in being "neither seductive nor yielding."

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[82] Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, vol. 2, no. 1037. Further references to Beardsley's drawings will be made parenthetically in the text, citing the number as provided in Zatlin's *Aubrey Beardsley: A Catologue Raisonné*, which has superseded Reade's *Beardsley*.

[83] Smith, *Lysistrata*, 41. In addition to the Smith translation illustrated by Beardsley, I have consulted the Greek text edited by Henderson and Halliwell's English verse translation, which is generally more accurate than Smith's. Line numbers refer to the Greek text. It should be noted that Victorian conventions for the transliteration of Greek differ from those currently in use: in recent editions, the names of these two characters are usually spelled "Kinesias" and "Myrrhine." Here, I use the names as they appear in Smith's translation.

[84] Warren suggests Beardsley may have been influenced by the 1892 *Lysistrata* of the French playwright Maurice Donnay, with whose work he was familiar (Warren, *Art Nouveau and the Classical Tradition*, 134).

Importantly, for Zatlin, this attitude is also reflected outwards from the picture: "While Aristophanes' Myrrhina denies Cinesias sexual pleasure, Beardsley's Myrrhina refuses to give herself to the viewer. She expresses amusement, not invitation."[85] While I take Zatlin's point, I also think there is more to this picture. To begin with, there is not only the sexual violence mentioned above but also its racialization. Though Cinesias's oversized erect phallus may be influenced more by Japanese erotic prints than Greek vases, his face is that of a satyr and his clothing a parody of *dix-huitième* fashion. Myrrhina, by contrast, wears a Japanesque gown, which Snodgrass rightly identifies as the picture's visual focus,[86] and a vaguely orientalist hairstyle. The picture thus invites an allegorical reading cued by a Saidian theory of orientalism: the violent claim to ownership by a masculinized West of a feminized East. Even so, while I would not want to gloss over the sexual violence of the picture or to reduce Beardsley's orientalism to a matter of form and technique, I also believe that to end the analysis here would be to fail to account for the picture's irony and its relation both to the other drawings in the series and to Aristophanes' text.

I want to think historically about this picture and to keep in mind that it is illustrating a text from classical Athens (remember, Cinesias and Myrrhina are Greeks!) that nevertheless had in the nineteenth century a problematic position in the classical canon, a position which Beardsley illustrates. Cinesias's rococo outfit with its towering headdress parodies a style that is already a self-parody, a style associated in the Victorian period with the moral and aesthetic excesses of a less democratic era, and a style that imagined

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[85] Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 320.
[86] Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 210.

itself in continuity with classical antiquity (hence eighteenth-century French "classicism" and English "neoclassicism") until corrected by Winckelmann and Goethe. Cinesias, whose name in Greek suggests both the sexual act and personal volatility, thus stands for a ridiculous classicism that pursues its object with uncontrollable lust (Myrrhina's name means "myrtle," a plant sacred to Aphrodite and a Greek euphemism for the female genitals). Indeed, the illustration inverts some of the expected binaries: Myrrhina is strong and rational, Cinesias weak and animal. If Cinesias's rococofication brings the bawdiness of the Greek vase closer to the Victorian period, then Myrrhina's Ropsian stocking makes it absolutely contemporary. But, at the same time, the central object of the Japanesque gown constitutes an orientalization of the classical that makes a mockery of classicism's project of historical assimilation. What we have here is not quite the historicism of Teufelsdröckh's "Philosophy of Clothes" in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, even less a *Rezeptionsästhetik* of accumulated interpretations. Yes, the meaning of antiquity changes over time depending on how it is dressed, but, crucially, antiquity does not dress itself. As a way of looking at the past, the eclectic and idiosyncratic dress of Decadence brings difference into focus rather than smoothing it out.

Once attuned to it, we find the problematization of classicism to be a consistent element in the *Lysistrata* illustrations. *Cinesias Entreating Myrrhina to Coition* is slightly unusual in the set because of its conspicuous inclusion of an obviously orientalist object, the gown, and because it is the closest Beardsley gets to portraying sexual intercourse. This combination makes it one of the more challenging pictures to interpret. As Zatlin's work makes clear, the theme from the play that interests Beardsley the most is the sexual

autonomy of the women, which is depicted in *Lysistrata Shielding Her Coynte* (no. 1032), *The Toilet of Lampito* (no. 1033), *Lysistrata Haranguing the Athenian Women* (no. 1034), and *Two Athenian Women in Distress* (no. 1036, Figure 4.3), all of which depict or suggest masturbation. (The first two of these four also treat the play's theme of the relationship between erotic love and peace.) Here the positive representation of masturbation, which at the time was still widely regarded as immoral and unhealthy, not only explicitly figures sexual autonomy in a direct confrontation to mainstream Victorian morals and gender ideals, but also suggests that the serious study of the past (recall Beardsley's hours in the British Museum) can be a pleasure that one gives to oneself, free from the apparatus of classicism. In *Lysistrata Defending the Acropolis* (no. 1035; Figure 4.4), then, antiquity is defended against a curmudgeonly classicism with the excrement of the unruly female bodies that it refuses to countenance. The final two illustrations in the set are also the only ones to focus on male figures. In *The Examination of the Herald* (no. 1038; Figure 4.5), a wizened, half-flaccid Athenian magistrate inspects the enormous genitals of the Spartan herald, who appears indifferent to the magistrate's curiosity.[87] This could be a homophobic caricature of an impotent Hellenism unable to admit the secret of its fascination with what it sees as a virile pagan antiquity unembarrassed by its sexuality. But, if so, the three figures in *The Lacedaemonian Ambassadors* (no. 1039;

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[87] This scene directly follows that of Cinesias and Myrrhina; where Beardsley's illustration follows Smith's translation in representing the magistrate as an unnamed new character—the "Committee-man"—scholars now take him to be Cinesias, still suffering, like the Spartan herald, under the burden of a constant erection (Henderson, *Lysistrata*, 185). The play does suggest, however, that the Spartan's burden is particularly conspicuous: Cinesias asks whether he is Conisalos (l. 982), "A Priapeian deity, with erect mentule" (Smith, *Lysistrata*, 48), and, if not, why he is carrying a large spear (δόρυ) (l. 985; see also Henderson, *Lysistrata*, 186).

Figure 4.6) present the ridiculousness of homosocial homophobia and its affective habitus of frustration and awkwardness, and so reassert the vanity and discomfort of a straight classicism unable to countenance ancient eroticism.

Beyond ridiculing classicism, what do Beardsley's drawings do to our idea of the Greeks? As an aesthetic mode and as a way of relating to the past, classicism simply cannot represent *Lysistrata*'s theatrical sexuality. Beardsley's illustrations, by contrast, allow us to see the Greeks, certainly not as they saw themselves, but in a way that realizes something of the truth of Aristophanes' bawdy comedy and that, more importantly for my purposes, involves both alienation and identification. These Greeks are not Victorians—that much is obvious—they are too foreign, too untimely. Beardsley's pastiche of styles—his rococofication and orientalization of classical Athenian culture—is the source of the illustrations' continued effect, forcing us to see the gulf between us and the Greeks that classicism cannot. In Said's classic definition, orientalism is a form of knowledge/power that produces the Orient as the conceptual other upon which the West depends for its identity.[88] While I do not mean to suggest that Beardsley transcends this discourse, his deployment of an orientalist aesthetic upon the very culture that is supposed to have founded and to continue to guarantee the terms of the West's dominance over the East constitutes a radical critique whose result is an alienation of the West from itself. The rococo works similarly, though in this case the effect is more explicitly historical. It was in the nineteenth century that fashion first gained its incredible power to mark its novelty and thus its historicity through the citation of the old.[89] As Walter Benjamin aphoristical-

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[88] Said, *Orientalism*, 2–3.
[89] See Lehmann's *Tigersprung*, in particular his reflections on *mode* and *modernité*.

ly puts it, "Fashion is the eternal recurrence of the new."[90] Accordingly, it is only a linear historiography that would see Beardsley's rococo Greeks as a simple inversion of Marx's famous picture of the French Revolution draping itself in the clothes of Rome.[91] For Beardsley's purposes, the rococo is "a past charged with the time of the now," just as Rome was for Robespierre,[92] and so contains a revolutionary kernel. In alienating the Greeks from Victorian classicism, Beardsley opens the way for new articulations of the relationship between modernity and antiquity, which, as relational concepts, will themselves be changed in the process. Moreover, the estrangement of the West from itself leads us to a question that has so far only been hinted at in this dissertation: If aesthetics provides the means for reconceiving modes of historical relation as modes of subjectivation, what happens to the European subject when it is separated from what it understands to be its history? For Beardsley, this would be an exciting opportunity to rewrite that history. For those Victorians that left Europe for Britain's colonies, however, it presented an altogether different challenge, but one which aesthetics could nevertheless be called upon to answer.

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[90] Benjamin, "Central Park," 46.
[91] Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire*, 595.
[92] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 261.

Figure 4.2.
Aubrey Beardsley, *Cinesias Entreating Myrrhina to Coition*, 1896
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 4.3.
Aubrey Beardsley, *Two Athenian Women in Distress*, 1896
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 4.4.
Aubrey Beardsley, *Lysistrata Defending the Acropolis*, 1896
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 4.5.
Aubrey Beardsley, *The Examination of the Herald*, 1896
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 4.6.
Aubrey Beardsley, *The Lacedaemonian Ambassadors*, 1896
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Coda

Victorian Aesthetics in the Settler Colony:

Marcus Clarke's Weird Melancholy

When Marcus Clarke arrived in the boom-town of Melbourne in 1863, having been forced by family circumstances to emigrate at the age of seventeen, the city itself was less than thirty years old. And yet, following the discovery of gold in the colony of Victoria in 1851, it had become the largest city in the Australian colonies and reputedly one of the richest in the world; it already had a university, a museum, a public library, an imposing parliament house, railways, telegraph lines, and its own Royal Society. After a failed attempt at becoming a pastoralist, Clarke made a living writing for the stage and the press, to which he contributed reviews, feuilletons, and the occasional poem. He became known, however, for his panoramic descriptions of Melbourne life inspired by Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Honoré de Balzac that presented the colonial city, in phantasmagoric prose, as a metropolis equal to those of modern Europe.[1] In 1870 he took employment as a clerk at the Melbourne Public Library and began reading archival material from the early days of British colonialism in Australia, particularly accounts of the penal colonies in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land (known as Tasmania

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[1] See McCann, *Marcus Clarke's Bohemia*, ch. 1.

from 1855). These researches resulted in short historical pieces, selections of which were gathered in *Old Stories from a Young Country* (1871); a textbook for schools, *History of the Continent of Australia and the Island of Tasmania* (1877); and, most importantly, his historical novel of transportation and penal colonialism, *His Natural Life* (serialized 1870–1872; substantially revised 1874), whose events take place between 1827 and 1846. When these historical writings, both fiction and non-fiction, are juxtaposed with Clarke's evocative descriptions of a metropolitan, colonial modernity seemingly without a past, the former's representation of a regime that was all but over, and which no doubt was barely imaginable to those accustomed to shopping in Melbourne's arcades or socializing in its coffee palaces, marks a difference characteristic of the historical consciousness that conditions historical fiction ('tis so many years since).[2] Clarke concludes his account of the arrival of the first convicts in 1788, for example, with a banal but thoroughly self-conscious reminder of the contrast between past and present: "Looking back—while a boy yells latest Sydney telegrams under my window—from the new story of 1871 to this old story of 1788, it seemed worth the retelling."[3] On the one hand, as Michael Wilding notes, it is his exploration of this consciousness in its international context that makes Clarke so important to Australian literary history, and which differentiates him from the more nationalistic literature of the turn of the century with its insistent Australiana.[4] Yet, on the other hand, as Maya Boutaghou argues, *His Natural Life* is remarkable as a

[2] Transportation peaked in the early 1830s and ceased to New South Wales in 1840 and to Van Diemen's Land in 1853; it took several decades, however, before the system was entirely dismantled in Tasmania (Hughes, *Fatal Shore*, 162, 589). Clarke visited the Tasmanian penal settlement of Port Arthur in 1870, by which time there were only a few convicts remaining; it closed in 1877.
[3] Clarke, *Old Tales of a Young Country*, 7.
[4] Wilding, *Marcus Clarke*, 12.

historical novel of the recent past because it explores what it is like to live in modernity in the absence of history, or more precisely, to inhabit the space between the history of form and the non-history of place, the antinomy that she sees as constitutive of settler Australian identity.[5] Historical consciousness, with all its emphasis on particularity and subject-formation, is thus in tension with the aesthetic experience of an environment that appears to a European subject to be stubbornly unhistorical and so resistant to the practices of identification that we have seen in the foregoing chapters. Much of Clarke's work attempts not only to represent this tension in lived experience but also to theorize it aesthetically.

Nowhere is this theorization more apparent than in the preface Clarke wrote for an 1876 memorial edition of his friend Adam Lindsay Gordon's book of poems *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*.[6] In contrast to Clarke, few now read Gordon; yet he was once regarded as one of Australia's preeminent poets, a fact attested to by the bust installed in Westminster Abbey in 1934. Reviewing a collected edition of Gordon's poems published in London in 1888 (an edition that also includes Clarke's preface), Oscar Wilde made what would become a common criticism of Gordon's work: "There is very little of Australia in Gordon's poetry. His heart and mind and fancy were always preoccupied with memories and dreams of England and such culture as England gave him. He owed nothing to the land of his adoption" (W7:187). Though generally unimpressed by Gordon ("steeped in Swinburne, and bewildered with Browning" (W7:188)), Wilde deems Clarke's preface, from which he quotes liberally, "most curious and suggestive": "Here,

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[5] Boutaghou, *Occidentalismes*, 339.
[6] Gordon emigrated to Australia in 1853 and committed suicide in Melbourne in 1870.

certainly, is new material for the poet, here is a land that is waiting for its singer"
(W7:190, 191). As Wilde saw, the preface, which says little about Gordon's medievalist
and equestrian verse, is remarkable for its exploration of the conditions of an Australian
literature to come. It begins by invoking an aesthetic historicism familiar to us from the
work of Ruskin and Eliot:

> In historic Europe, where every rood of ground is hallowed in legend and
> in song, the least imaginative can find food for sad and sweet reflection.
> […] Soothed, saddened, and cheered by turns, we partake the varied
> moods which belong not so much to ourselves as to the dead men who in
> old days sung, suffered, or conquered in the scenes which we survey. But
> this our native or adopted land has no past, no story. No poet speaks to us.[7]

Unlike Ruskin, however, Clarke believes that it is possible to have a pleasurable aesthetic
experience in a landscape without historical and literary associations. "The dominant note
of Australian scenery," Clarke famously writes, is "that which is the dominant note of
Edgar Allan Poe's poetry—Weird Melancholy" (v). He continues: "The Australian
mountain forests are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation. […] The very
animal life of these frowning hills is either grotesque or ghostly. […] All is fear inspiring
and gloomy" (v). What human presence there is falls into the same aesthetic categories:
"From a corner of the silent forest rises a dismal chant, and around a fire, dance natives
painted like skeletons" (v). Aboriginal society is thus invoked in order to deny it histo-
ricity and project it into the realm of nature. However, this realm, though it does not
appear historical to European historical consciousness, is not, for that consciousness,
absolutely timeless. Australian nature is terrifying because it is primordial:

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[7] Clarke, "Preface," iv–v. Further citations will be made parenthetically.

The lonely horseman riding between the moonlight and the day sees vast shadows creeping across the shelterless and silent plains, hears strange noises in the primeval forest where flourishes a vegetation long dead in other lands, and feels, despite his fortune, that the trim utilitarian civilisation which bred him shrinks into insignificance beside the contemptuous grandeur of forest and ranges coeval with an age in which European scientists have cradled his own race. (vi)

Even without cultural associations, then, Australian nature is able to produce for Clarke the effect of historicity, but only out of its negation—the prehistoric—whose affective-aesthetic corollary is "weird melancholy." Herein lies the particularity of Australia for European historical consciousness: "In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write" (vi). Clarke's aesthetics thus projects human history back into a natural, ahistorical domain where it is ironized and rendered grotesque.

If there is a discrepancy between Clarke's prose poem on the Poesque atmospherics of Australian nature and the poetry of Gordon, whose work is generally more sentimental than grotesque and, as Wilde noted, seems to bear few traces of the place in which it was written, then this may be because a large part of the preface was rehashed from two earlier pieces of writing.[8] In 1875, Clarke edited *Photographs of Pictures in the National Gallery, Melbourne*, a book to which he also contributed the text. About half the text of the preface to Gordon originates in that accompanying two landscapes depicting locations in the colony of Victoria: Nicholas Chevalier's *The Buffalo Ranges* (1864; Figure 5.1)

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[8] Hergenhan, "Marcus Clarke and the Australian Landscape," 32.

Figure 5.1
Nicholas Chevalier, *The Buffalo Ranges* (1864)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

and Louis Buvelot's *Waterpool near Coleraine* (1869; Figure 5.2).[9] In many ways, both works typify the combination of Romanticism and realism characteristic of much mid-nineteenth-century Western painting (the Düsseldorf School, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the Hudson River School). But their similarities end there. Chevalier's painting, typically for him, juxtaposes sublime and picturesque elements (the snow-capped mount-

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[9] Chevalier was born in Russia and worked in Australia and New Zealand during the 1850s and 1860s. Buvelot, considered an important figure in the history of Australian art, emigrated to Melbourne from Switzerland in 1865, where he worked until his death in 1888.

Figure 5.2
Louis Buvelot, *Waterpool near Coleraine* (1869)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

ains, the bullock dray, the mill) using a northern European palette, with only the stand of

eucalyptus trees of the painting's middle ground confirming the Australian setting. But

the sublimity, as Clarke points out, belongs not to the hunched mountains but to the

vastness of the forest whose unfamiliar inhabitants, unlike the family of settlers, elude

representation. Buvelot's painting, by contrast, is both more naturalistic and more pasto-

ral. However, in eschewing the sublime and picturesque motifs of Chevalier, Buvelot

does not substitute the meticulous, almost scientific, naturalism of an Eugen von Guérard

(the most prominent landscape painter then working in Australia) but rather something

akin to the grotesque atmosphere that Clarke attempts to capture in his ecphrasis, achieved by a hypercolor chiaroscuro and the trees' writhing branches. Buvelot's pastoralized Australia is uncanny, its cattle and ducks overwhelmed by the dramatically back-lit eucalyptus trees (probably river red gums). Human presence appears at first marked only by an ax and mallet, apparently abandoned in the middle of chopping a log that lies open and bloody like a slaughtered animal. But if we look across the pond and into the distance, there stands, in a field, a tiny, ghostly human figure, his back to the viewer, arms crossed, watching the sunset. What both paintings finally point to—though Buvelot's to a greater extent, as a result of its eschewal, or, in the case of the human figure, minimization almost to the point of disappearance, of Romantic conventions—is the unsettled and unsettling affect of settler colonialism in Australia.

Andrew McCann has provided a compelling reading of the "colonial uncanny" at work in Clarke's writing, in common with much nineteenth-century Australian literature and, as we have just seen, painting, too. According to this reading, the Aboriginal presence is experienced by Europeans in Australia as uncanny because it represents an atavistic return of the repressed—the "prehistoric." This presence is not erased but rather sublimated into the environment, creating an animistic image of the bush made available to aesthetic experience as a threatening but pleasurable weird melancholy.[10] Clarke's Australian aesthetic is thus conditioned by an encounter with a cultural other assumed, as in the well-known analysis of Johannes Fabian, to belong to a prior moment in time,[11] an other who is then, as postcolonial scholars have long argued, violently appropriated into

[10] McCann, *Marcus Clarke's Bohemia*, 172–74.
[11] This is the "denial of coevalness" that Fabian calls "allochronism" (Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 32).

the essentially Eurocentric realm of historiography.[12] But Clarke's empty bush and dancing skeletons sublimate not just a presence but an absence, or at least a projected one: "The presumed vanishing of Aboriginal peoples and cultures was, more often than not, the precondition for the circulation of uncanny affect."[13] During the first few decades of the colonization of Victoria, which one historian judges to have been "one of the fastest land occupations in the history of empires," thousands of Aborigines were killed by disease or warfare, and by the time Clarke arrived in Melbourne, the colony's Indigenous population was reduced by over eighty per cent.[14] In the second half of the century, the fact of genocide was habitually sublimated into poeticisms about a dying race and quasi-Darwinian claims of evolutionary inevitability.[15] In a passage from the text accompanying Buvelot's painting and not carried over to the Gordon preface, Clarke reads the two large eucalyptus trees as memorializing the country's Aboriginal people:

> The time-worn gums shadowing the melancholy water tinged with the light of fast-dying day seem fit emblems of the departed grandeur of the wilderness, and may appear to poetic fancy to uprear in the still evening a monument of the glories of that barbaric empire upon whose ruins the ever-restless European has founded his new kingdom. Glorified for a last instant by the warm rays of the sinking sun, the lonely trees droop and shiver as though in expectation of the chill night which will soon fall alike

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[12] For example, Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*; Young, *White Mythologies*. Hayden White has made a similar point about history's constitutive distinction between the historical and the unhistorical in the human past (White, *The Content of the Form*, 56).

[13] McCann, *Marcus Clarke's Bohemia*, 180.

[14] Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians*, 54, 90–93. Recent accounts of the colonization of the Port Phillip District (as the area around Melbourne was known) include Attwood's *Possession* and Boyce's *1835*.

[15] As Patrick Brantlinger shows in *Dark Vanishings*, the trope of the dying race is characteristic of Anglophone settler colonies in the second half of the nineteenth century, common to North America, the South Pacific, Australia, and South Africa.

on the land they have surveyed so long and the memory of the savage people who once possessed it.[16]

Here, nature becomes the observer, perhaps even the archive, of a history that Europeans have been unable to fully enjoy and identify with due to their destructive role in it. Clarke could not be more explicit: his aesthetic of weird melancholy inscribes history—specifically, the history of European colonialism—into the Australian landscape, just as Poe's, its citational source, encodes the problems of antebellum U.S. imperialism.[17] According to this reading, then, weird melancholy names an aesthetic of colonial genocide.

How does Clarke's project relate to the aesthetic treatments of historical experience and subjectivity discussed in the chapters above? To begin with, the inclusion here of Clarke and the two paintings he describes alerts us to an obvious point: as a canonical formation, Victorian aesthetics appears to be overwhelmingly concerned with experiences in and of the imperial center. Clarke's work, by contrast, explores the results of its forcible, or, at best, reluctant (exile is a common theme in Clarke's work), transportation to an antipodean settler colony. The expansion of Victorian aesthetics into Australia creates problems both for the representation of landscape, as we have seen, and, more importantly, for the European subject that wishes to understand its historicity in relation

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[16] Quoted in Hergenhan, "Marcus Clarke and the Australian Landscape," 40.

[17] Kennedy, *Strange Nation*, 72. Since Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1992), Poe has occupied an important place in the history of the discourse of race in the United States (see in particular the volume edited by Kennedy and Weissberg, *Romancing the Shadow*). Recent work that addresses the place of U.S. imperialism and Native Americans in Poe's work includes Chacón, "Prosthetic Colonialism"; Karafilis, "American Racial Dystopia"; and Rowe, "Edgar Allan Poe's Imperial Fantasy and the American Frontier."

to that landscape. In Clarke's work, a lack of historical association in aesthetic experience empties the subject of historical content and ironizes habitual forms of historicism, thus challenging the very fundamentals of historical self-formation that aesthetics promises. Clarke was an enthusiastic reader of Ruskin and Pater and we can detect in his work also the attention to the sensuous richness and temporal complexity of experience in the present[18]; but in attempting to make that experience into one of historical identification, form and content are revealed as incommensurate. Where, for Morris, the future promises a return, however uncanny, to the aesthetic forms of the past, for Clarke there will be no return. And, finally, while Wilde and Beardsley's orientalism is clearly a product of European imperialism, forms of aesthetic appropriation like lyric collection struggle to take hold of an object that is experienced as unhistorical. In contrast to the modes of historical relation that we have encountered previously—such as contrast, continuity, revival, recurrence, or juxtaposition—in the Victorian settler colonial context, the relationship to history is one of displacement. This in itself may seem fairly obvious. What is interesting about Clarke, however, is his insistent attempts to transform this historical displacement, along with the encounter of historical consciousness with that which is determined in advance as ahistorical, into an aesthetics equally capable of producing a historical subject.

Accordingly, it is this subjectivity, and not the characterization of landscape, that is crucial. In Clarke's work, the positive relation to a negated object (history/

[18] Cyril Hopkins, the brother of Gerard Manley Hopkins, was a close, lifelong friend of Clarke's, and his only regular English correspondent after his emigration. Hopkins wrote a biography of Clarke after his death and attests there to his wide reading, which ranged from Dickens, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and George Augustus Sala to Kant, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Ernest Renan (Hopkins, *Marcus Clarke*, 29, 88, 138, 208).

colonialism/genocide) produces a subject who bears the traces of that negation. In this case, aesthetics is what makes colonial subjectivity representable and therefore available as a site of identification. Accordingly, as with authors like Pater and Morris, Clarke's problem is ultimately an ethical and a political one about the relation of the self to a historicized world: How is one to live in weird melancholy? This is what Clarke is really asking, though his ambivalent text struggles for an answer. Even so, if the "one" in question here is coterminous with Clarke's subject position—and I think the logic of this relation to history requires that the subject be the one who profits from the history of colonial violence—then my reading of his text already suggests an answer: one can only live in weird melancholy through the erasure and negation that condition it. Clarke's ambivalence stems from the fact that he cannot see beyond imperial ideology. From the perspective of its critique, however, the aesthetic mode of historical relation and self-formation that produces weird melancholy cannot provide its own ethical solution without perpetuating violence. Weird melancholy thereby becomes an aesthetic articulation of the feeling of being unable to be ethical, a salve for its own subject.

The significance of Clarke's work and its context lies not simply in its incorporation of new territory or a new kind of subject into aesthetic discourse—its aesthetic imperialism, as it were. More importantly, turning here to the settler colony changes the way we see Victorian aesthetics: it appears no longer just as a discourse about Europe's relations to itself, but one also about its relations to others. That the formation of modern European identities is constituted by exclusion, whether in aesthetics or historiography, and moreover that these epistemic exclusions are the superstructural corollaries of real

imperialist violence, is now a well-known critique. Yet it strikes me that we do not yet know the full meaning of this critique for the discourse of Victorian aesthetics that is typically located in places like London and Oxford. If Australia seems an unlikely destination for a dissertation about Victorian aesthetics, then this is because the latter's Eurocentrism is so often reflected in our discussions of it. The ultimate context for Victorian aesthetics, I contend, is the British Empire. While Australia cannot stand in for the Empire as a whole, nor even, despite some important discursive continuities, for all of Britain's settler colonies (and, indeed, whether the Australian colonies themselves collectively constitute a unified historical experience in the nineteenth century is itself not assured), even so, these displaced but doubly Victorian texts prompt us to reconceptualize Victorian aesthetics with a wider lens. They moreover reveal the stakes and conditions of possibility for Victorian aesthetics that have thus far been less evident. Accordingly, we are now in a position to ask questions that may not have occurred to us before: To what extent was the Gothic Revival a reaction to colonial, rather than just industrial, modes of production? In what ways do aesthetic practices of memory or of taking pleasure in the experience of the historical present prepare the British subject for colonial contexts? How do Decadent critiques of historicism change the relationship between the imperial center and its periphery? While the answers to these questions will have to wait for another day, I hope that in asking them the image we have of Victorian aesthetics and the ways in which it produces historically conscious subjects will already start to change.

My readers will no doubt be able to see several reasons for why such a transformation might be important. The reason that matters most for present purposes, however,

lies at the heart of what this dissertation is about: it marks the beginning of a different mode of relation between the past and the present. Victorian aesthetics, with its appreciation for non-linear temporalities, invites us to consider what our understanding of Clarke's work and its realignment of Victorian aesthetic discourse means for the present. If aesthetics were simply a question of artistic representation, then it might suffice to read Clarke's weird melancholy as ecphrastic imperialism, the horrifying aestheticization of genocide. That it is so bears repeating. But to finish there would be to leave weird melancholy to the Victorians, as though it were just another fixture in one of their over-decorated drawing rooms. We are concerned here not merely with the question of what kind of currency an aesthetic of weird melancholy might still have for Australians (or, for that matter, Americans), but, rather, with a reappraisal of the conditions of aesthetics and the meaning of Victorian culture more generally. Western aesthetics has for a long time sublimated or simply ignored its history. But I am convinced that the problems of Victorian aesthetics concern the twenty-first century as much as the nineteenth. And so, if aesthetics is still essentially what it was for the Victorians whose work is discussed in this dissertation, from Ruskin through to Wilde and Clarke—namely, a way of problematizing the historicity of subjectivity—then it also provides a way of thinking critically and creatively about historical relation. It reminds us that history should never be easy, and that the feelings of closeness and distance (along with their many affective complications) that we experience in our encounters with the past are not the effects of something external to ourselves but rather the feeling of subjectivity itself.

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