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Modernist Literature at the Museum: History, Memory, and Aesthetics in Proust, James, and Joyce.



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Declaration

This thesis has been composed by the undersigned student, Benedict Jones-Williams, and is the student's own work, with references to external sources where due. The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Benedict Jones-Williams

Abstract

This thesis brings together three well-known authors of the early 20th century, Henry James, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce, in order to explore the similarities and divergences in their work when it comes to the treatment and depiction of museums and galleries. Each author differs in their interpretations of such spaces but, significantly, engages with a number of related discourses: the consequence of a rising materialism in society, the risks (and rewards) of collecting, and the importance of history for both societies and individuals. As each of these authors has been extensively studied since rising to renown, the scope of my investigations is broad and spans a number of areas of scholarship in order to draw together what I see as their responses to what Peter McIsaac calls the ‘museum function’. I also make use of their correspondence and nonfiction writings in order to build as comprehensive a picture as possible. The Introduction provides a short history of the development of museums in the Western world, as well as looking at the work of several authors such as H. G. Wells and Edith Wharton, in order to assess the cultural impact of museums throughout their rise and heyday towards the turn of the 20th century. My first chapter looks at the work of Henry James, especially his interest in collectors and their motivations, as well as questions of aesthetics and historicity, as expressed in such signal texts as *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Golden Bowl*. I have endeavoured to engage with ‘minor’ texts of James’s such as *The Spoils of Poynton* and *The Sense of the Past*. My second chapter is concerned with exploring James Joyce’s construction of an aesthetic practice predicated around resistance (in many forms) to the power of institutions such as the National Library of Ireland and, in a more abstract sense, the legacy of colonialism as exemplified in monuments such as the Duke of Wellington’s obelisk which still stands in Dublin’s Phoenix Park. I demonstrate how Joyce uses humour as his main weapon in the dismantling of such spaces and sites in order to argue for the primacy of individual agency. My third chapter deals with Marcel Proust’s multifaceted interest in museums, galleries, and the visual arts, which he makes use of in sometimes contradictory ways throughout his writing, both fictional and otherwise. I contend that Proust believes a ‘Museum of Memory’, built along exacting lines, to be the solution to a wider memory crisis afflicting French society as typified by the upper classes at the end of the 19th century. In my conclusion I discuss the possible legacies of these literary treatments of museums, bringing modern-day writers such as Orhan Pamuk and Daljit Nagra to the fore.

Lay Summary

It is my contention that museums and art galleries have, since their inception, provoked a range of reactions from literary commentators. This thesis is particularly interested in the ways in which these reactions are figured in the work of three canonical authors of the late 19th and early 20th century: James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Henry James. While each differ in their stances towards museums, I believe there are intriguing areas of commonality in their literary treatment of such spaces, as well as illuminating divergences. By employing Peter McIsaac's concept of the 'museum function' – that is, an understanding of museums which is based on analysing their wider cultural impact upon society – I am able to discuss related topics such as collecting and the teaching of history, in order to better perceive how these authors reacted to, and made use of, museums in their writing. Proust, for example, as a young man, wished to work as a curator (if he had to work at all) and an interest in methodologies of curating are evident throughout his later work. Joyce, on the other hand, seems determined to ridicule museums at every opportunity, or at least violently reorient our relationship to them. James is, characteristically, ambivalent on the subject: a frequent visitor to museums, he nevertheless depicts them as having negative effects on the minds of his characters in several of his texts. I believe this to be the first study to combine these authors with such a target in mind, and as such, makes use of established patterns of critical enquiry in order to reorient the focus of such investigations. At the end of the thesis comes a short conclusion which discusses the ways in which contemporary authors have picked up on the legacy of these earlier writers in their own literary depictions of museums: the most obvious case being Orhan Pamuk's 'Museum of Innocence' – both a novel and a real-life location which Pamuk intends to be visited by readers of his text. What remains clear throughout this study, I hope, is that museums have attracted literary attention almost since their inception, in ways which have thus far been mostly neglected in the critical record.

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'Everything that happens is from now on.'

'He never expects to make any better sense of it than it makes now. He knows the whole of the New Testament by heart, but find a text: find a text for this.'

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Introduction

In an essay which details a visit to The Frick Collection in New York — a museum housed in the former home of a Gilded Age magnate — the poet Don Paterson describes being caught in a mixed state of both grief and wonder. As a frequent visitor to the space, Paterson is alert to both people and place, noting that only a certain ‘class of folk’ appear to visit the institution (43). These ‘folk’ are already in possession of a certain degree of art-historical knowledge, and are thus comfortable occupying such a space and behave as if they ‘do not want their own concentration disturbed, and so will not disturb yours’ (43). There is a degree of behavioural complicity between the different members of this museum audience, enforced by the experience of sharing such a space. Paterson, though appreciating the artworks on display, is there for a more personal reason – a deceased friend of his used to ‘stand entranced [...] hour after hour’ in front of one of the paintings, and the poet seeks some measure of contact with the ‘shade’ of his dead friend (47,48). By shifting the focus of his visit to this communion of sorts with a memory which is intensely private, Paterson reorients the museum as a space within which to fulfil his own mnemonic desires – the painting in question is given an extra layer of significance through its linkage with the author’s deceased friend, thus presenting a different set of meanings to Paterson than it might for another visitor. This pursuit of individual memory within the boundaries of an institution which actively seeks to preserve the wider history of society through the collection, ordering, and display of certain prized objects highlights the power of museum spaces to exert their influence on the most personal reaches of an individual’s consciousness. It is precisely this power which renders museums a particularly resonant site for the writerly exploration of discourses surrounding the operations of memory and history at both the individual and societal level. Paterson’s essay, through his description of his fellow visitors as constituting a specific ‘class’, also invites speculation as to the processes by which museums have become a source of cultural capital, which rely on certain internal codes of

display and regulation in order to impress their importance upon the visitor, and thereby maintain their status as sites within which artistic worth is measured and made manifest through certain exhibitionary practices.

The collection of essays within which Paterson's essay features, *Treasure Palaces: Great Writers Visit Great Museums*, is of interest not only for its contents, in which a number of authors provide short though vivid sketches of their favourite museum spaces, but also for the evidence it provides as a whole for the prominence of the museum within certain sections of Western (if not worldwide) culture in the early 21st century. Viewed from a bibliographic perspective, the volume clearly relies upon extant conceptions of what 'Great Museums' look like, and the functions they can be expected to perform. Featured prominently on the volume's dust jacket is a stylised depiction of a neoclassical building's exterior (a style frequently associated with notion of 'Great' museums thanks to the predominance of this design type within the museum sector and the wider cultural imaginary), within the central, ground-level bay of which there is a statue which unmistakably mimics Auguste Rodin's *The Kiss* (see Figure 1). Here, then, we are compelled to draw upon assumed reserves of art-historical knowledge: this cover is telling us that important museums should resemble classical temples, and that they house the best and most instantly recognisable works of art, the mere visual approximation of which is enough to bring to mind their canonical status. Upon the building's pediment is written the volume's subtitle of 'Great Writers Visit Great Museums', literally embedded within the surface of the illustrated structure, leaving the reader in no doubt that the building depicted is supposed to be a 'Great Museum'.

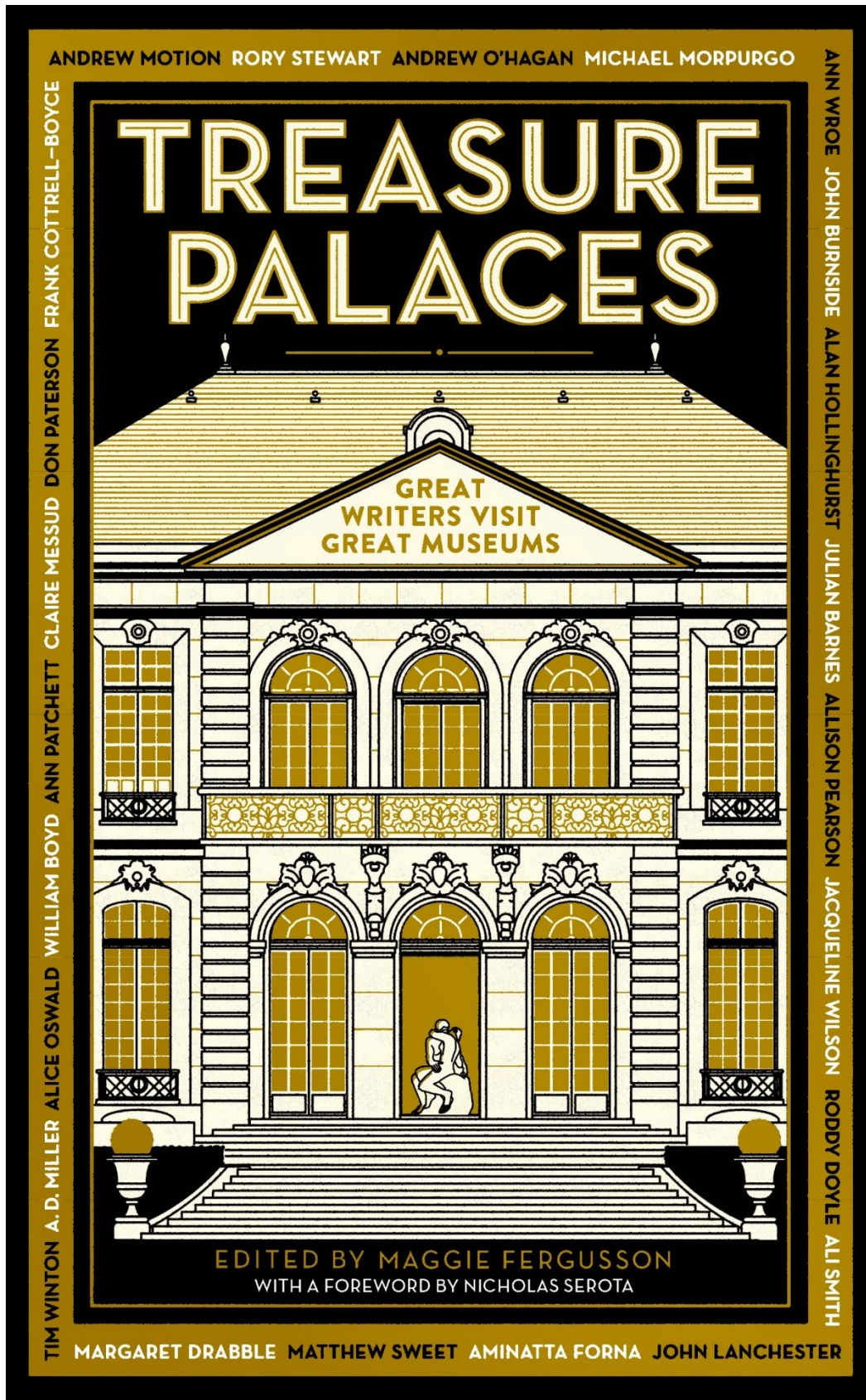


Figure 1: *Treasure Palaces* front cover.

Opening the volume and turning to its foreword (provided by Nicholas Serota, Director of London's Tate galleries), this sense of museums as occupying an indisputably vaunted space within the cultural landscape is continued. Serota writes that in 'a world dominated by commerce and commodity, by fashion and novelty, museums have become places where values endure' – although precisely what these 'values' are is left unsaid (xi). His praise of museums as offering a space of seclusion and shelter from 'a world dominated by commerce and commodity' sounds an old complaint, and is less than completely true, given the sponsorship deals which many leading museums keenly seek out (Pollock 2007, 10). More troubling are his assertions regarding the relationships between objects and viewers:

When I stand in a room before a sculpture made in the fifth century BC, a painting made 500 years ago or a film installation by a living artist, nothing stands between me and the original maker. I feel the form and the weight of the object in a shared space, the vibration of colours on the canvas, the sweep of the brush, or the contour of the line on the sheet of paper. (x)

The claim that 'nothing stands between' exhibited artworks and their viewers is calculatedly deceptive. There are unmentioned processes of judgment and selection by which the artwork came to be there in the first place, being chosen to fill gaps in the narrative of that particular exhibitionary space. Secondly, there is the fact of Serota's access to specialised vocabularies of interpretation and appreciation – these abilities to understand the finer points of artistic form and expression are not widely shared throughout society. Serota is writing of *his* museum experience, rather than that of a non-inductee into the world of professional museology. It is this potentiality for experiential difference which I shall argue makes museums such compelling spaces for late 19th and early 20th century writers to negotiate with in their work.

Any critical investigation of literary engagement with museums would do well to begin with a questioning of the premises upon which *Treasure Palaces: Great Writers Visit Great Museums* rests. Not all museums are neoclassical in appearance or entirely accessible to the general public, and yet the idea that ‘Great’ ones resemble this model can be traced back to the inception of the museum sector as we understand it today, which took place during the 19th century. There is, as Thomas Schlereth has suggested, a ‘history *behind* the history museum’, and it is precisely the constructed nature of this second-order history, much of which is dedicated to maintaining the museum’s institutional authority, which I shall discuss in this opening section of my study (305).

When dealing with an institution as omnipresent in modern society as the museum, it is of great importance that we keep specificity to the fore of our investigations – rather than speaking, unquestioningly, of *the* museum as presenting a uniform space without variation, we must, as Catherine E. Paul and Peter M. McIsaac have valuably asserted, treat museums not as institutions that are always the same but instead as being variously shaped by the socio-historical context in which they are situated (Paul 6, McIsaac 13). When understood in this fashion, museums are revealed to be creations – just as much, in fact, as the displays which we find within them (Spalding 7, Walsh 32). McIsaac’s concept of ‘the museum function’ is one which provides this study with much of its inspiration and theoretical underpinning, and can be summed up as the identification of cultural influences which museums have had in their respective socio-historical situations; influences which, according to McIsaac, extend

beyond institutional walls in important and subtle ways. This means that the prevailing social impulses and exigencies that give rise to museums can also be detected in the behaviour and activities of noninstitutional agents such as private collectors and in a variety of discourses circulating at the time [...] (13)

This ‘variety of discourses’ includes, most prominently, literary responses to museum culture – in line with McIsaac, I believe that studying literary texts alongside museum practices

enables [us] to expand understandings of how museums are situated dialectically within the processes of the creation and preservation, storage, reproduction, and circulation of objects. In turn [we might observe] how literary narratives collect, arrange, and display objects, characters, and other stories [.] (13)

While McIsaac’s study takes as its purview the role of museums within German literary culture since the late 1700s, my own focus will be on the exploration of a variety of modernist writers’ responses to the museum function as they experienced it in a number of geographic contexts at the close of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, in an attempt to answer his call that more texts should be read and analysed in this way (24). A degree of chronological vagueness is unavoidable here, and thus I gladly identify my work as occupying the same intellectual ‘province’ as that named by Ann Ardis as ‘turn-of-the-twentieth-century studies’ (174). Modernism was not ‘an overnight result of post-World War I disillusionment [...] it began long before the 1920s’, and it is only through identifying ‘the nineteenth-century roots of twentieth-century culture’ that we can reach a nuanced understanding of the interplay between historicity and artistic innovation which so marks the cultural sphere of this period (Lears xvi, Daly 11). Raymond Williams stresses the inherent historical elasticity of modernist studies, suggesting that texts from ‘the 1840s onwards’ might be read productively by critics as embodying some of the characteristics of literary modernism (32, 33). In addition to this temporal flexibility, modernism – and museums – must be studied with due regard to the large geographical span of their growth and influence.

This necessarily entails examining a variety of national museum histories, from France to the United States. As Didier Maleuvre has outlined, any sustained critical engagement with

museums must be conducted with regard to their own inescapable historicity: ‘one must’, he writes, ‘look at museums historically not because method dictates it, but because they are *essentially* historical’ (9). Likewise, Elizabeth Mansfield reminds us that ‘any exploration of modernism [...] produces a historiographic echo’ – an echo, I believe, most clearly audible in this historical period (12). My decision to examine the intersections between museum culture and literary modernism aligns with Ardis’s belief that exploring the relationships between the canonical works of literary modernism and other cultural institutions of the time can yield worthwhile results on both sides of the equation (4). The authors whom I have selected for analysis of this kind are certainly canonical: Henry James, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce, but I hope to diverge slightly in my findings from the abundance of well-trodden critical paths which circle around their work. It is my contention that in certain key texts, each of these authors engages with discourses generated by the continued influence of the past on late 19th and early 20th century society, and undertake to explore the effects of this influence in ways which, although stylistically divergent, can be seen to share certain areas of commonality and thematic intersection. Individually, each writer invites a daunting variety of interpretational strategies – my own route tending more towards the historicist than the strictly formalist. My aims in this study align with the notion of the ‘cultural context’ literary critic as described by David Daiches: rather than making value judgments about particular literary works, my primary concern is to show how the wider cultural landscape of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (specifically that part of the landscape identifiable as located within and around museums, galleries and other spaces of exhibition), affected certain authors in the production of their texts (377). The fiction of James and Proust both occupies, and frequently takes as subject matter, the transitional period between 19th and 20th century modes of living and writing (Stevenson 1998 20, 95). Joyce’s work is invaluable for my arguments regarding the operations of history upon both the individual and society at large and the roles which institutions such as

museums play in enforcing these through their very presence in society. As Seamus O'Malley has noted, the 'struggle to depict history in language was central' to many modernist works, and nowhere is this struggle enunciated with greater power than by the authors whom I have chosen to study (11). By focussing on figures understood to occupy positions of centrality in the amorphous literary phenomenon known as modernism I hope to show that museums, exhibitions, and galleries of various sorts were spaces of great interest and importance for writers during this period, due to the wide array of interpretative possibilities which such spaces afforded to literary observers. While not going so far as Jeffrey Perl in his statement that 'every major modernist, at one time or another, used the past as a stick with which to beat the present', I would argue that the writers I have chosen to focus on do actively engage with the troublesome nature of history (13). Astradur Eysteinnsson contends that 'any deliberation of modernism as a literary or aesthetic concept belongs within a broader cultural framework in which modernism is to be seen as a [...] historical project' (5). The value of this study, I believe, lies in its bringing together of museum studies and literary criticism of these texts in such a way as to illuminate the influence of historical pressures on the literature of the early 20th century. As Ardis states, it is when 'we start paying attention to the ways [modernism] intersects with, borrows from, and reacts against other cultural enterprises' that new areas of interest will present themselves – in this case, from within the pages of the text and the hallways of the museum (7).

To that end, this introductory section will seek to present a short history of museum development in the main European powers and North America, with particular emphasis on the 19th century, an era which saw consolidation and huge change (twinned with growth) in the museal sector – as well as almost every other aspect of Western, if not world, civilisation (Osterhammel xviii, xxi). Indeed, it has been posited by a number of historians and critics that the 19th century saw the birth of 'modernity' as we understand it today (Dennis 3). Sweeping

statements of this sort must, of course, be subject to a degree of qualification: Keith Walden's suggestion that there is no single moment in which modernity can be judged to have arrived is, perhaps, as good a place to start as any in this respect (4). Jurgen Osterhammel has also highlighted the difficulty of ascertaining both the nature of modernity and the moment of its inception: there is, he warns, 'no concept' capable of holding all of modernity's constituent aspects in equilibrium (904).

Modernity, then, is as protean a subject as they come – interlinked explosions of industrial, creative, scientific and political activity provided its impetus, while ensuring that it remained irreversible once under way (Geppert 223, Corbett 29). Time itself during this period 'began to seem malleable, changeable [and] uncertain', as a result of which it became subject to regulation and re-definition by government-sponsored institutions, taking on the nature of a tool for the ordering of business and other areas of everyday life (Evans 395, Ogle 8). Stephen Kern argues persuasively that the technological and scientific changes by which these reconfigurations of time were achieved were reflected in the literature and art of the late nineteenth century, which in turn directly affected people's consciousness of themselves and their own temporal presence (1-2). Concordant with these distortions of temporality and its understanding, the study of history became a pressing societal concern during the 19th century, in part because of the increasing rationalisation of time and also due to discoveries in the natural sciences which revealed the true age of the earth and its inhabitants, thus throwing into question held beliefs regarding man's place within the temporal scheme of the universe (Clifford 92-93, Allen 14). This concern is best expressed by Michel Foucault in his memorable claim that

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world. (1986, 22)

History assumed an ‘ubiquitous significance’ in 19th century culture, with museums at the epicentre of the debates surrounding its interpretation – particularly in the sciences where Darwinian thought would go on to form the basis for defining collection policies in museums of natural history (Sheehan 85, Black 143). Archaeology, too, would rely on museums to provide institutional backing for its claims to authority as an academic discipline (Foucault 1994, 7). Museums should thus be understood as spaces ‘both in and of modernity, belonging to and helping to shape its organisation of the relations between past and present’ (Bennett 2004, 187). That museums were thought of as being capable of lending an appearance of officialdom to innovative scientific endeavours is evident at a textual level in Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, where we find that a ‘well-filled museum’ is idealised as the desirable state for collections of data – a state which the great naturalist believed the earth’s crust to fall short of in its disorderliness (Darwin 396). This indicates that museums had gained enough credence as institutions to be invoked figuratively in a way which readers would understand and associate with the work at hand.

In addition to providing inspiration for writers, artists and scientists, museums were a new and exciting space for much of the public during the 19th century, many of whom had never before spent any prolonged amount of time in the presence of prestigious artworks or historical objects (Paul 2). A rise in visitor numbers inevitably led to debates about the policing and care of these new spaces and the valuable objects which they contained, as well as how best to induct these newcomers into the world of high culture and its mysteries and meanings (Prior 54). The study of this sociological aspect of museum culture gave rise in the 1980s to the ‘New Museology’, a critical movement typified by the writings of Carol Duncan, Alan Wallach and, above all, Tony Bennett (Duncan 1995 7-20, Paul 7).¹ Greatly influenced by Michel Foucault, New Museology sought to further a critique of museums predicated along

¹ The name derives from a collection of essays edited by Peter Vergo and first published in 1989.

ideological and political grounds. Analysing museums through these various critical lenses certainly helps to clarify their nature as a ‘distinctive product of modernity’, in addition to bringing museum studies into line with other fields of cultural criticism, yet there are significant biases within New Museology (as with all movements) – not least of which being that it frames the museum as a space which invariably ‘produce[s] more anxiety than it absorbs’ (Boyer 131). Duncan and Wallach’s essay ‘The Universal Survey Museum’ sought to highlight the ways in which museums deliberately substituted representation for actuality, thereby exerting control over the very nature of knowledge which people could access within the museal space. In doing so, however, their analysis of the museum ‘tends to deal only in terms of power’ (Conn 11). Mieke Bal has gone so far as to label New Museology an ‘academic novelty’, which is overly dismissive, although there are certainly grounds to regard its findings with caution (162). Firstly, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet points out, this movement is itself nearly thirty years old – the seminal texts of New Museology have themselves been incorporated into the fields of museum studies and museum practice (147-148). Secondly, the Anglophone bias of Vergo’s volume has been discussed by J. Pedro Lorente in no uncertain terms, who highlights the fact that ‘new’ museology in a broader sense can really be understood to have begun in France in the late 1970s with the advent of the ecomuseum movement – which goes unremarked in the essays gathered by Vergo (115-128).

This is not to say that New Museology should be ignored; this would be to all intents and purposes impossible at this juncture in museological history and severely limit the horizons of further enquiry. Rather, as Steven Conn and Christopher Whitehead have shown, remaining conscious of the inherent biases within this group of critical writings while acknowledging its benefits (bringing the museum within the ambits of cultural, sociological and literary criticism through the application of theory from these disciplines), should impel future work in the field to aspire to a high degree of intellectual rigour without becoming bogged down in interminable

questions of power and agency (Conn 11, Whitehead xvii). Politicising the museum was clearly a necessary step towards the apprehension of its operations and place within society, but we must be wary of adding to the already-significant pile of straw men in the field of cultural analysis. When utilised effectively, New Museology provides valuable theoretical models and approaches for understanding the space of the museum as a historical site where multivalent tensions in different fields of cultural activity become, in a very real sense, visible. This will, in turn, allow for the formulation of 'a museum studies that moves beyond the museum as a physical site and traces its entanglements, and its significance, across space and into other practices' (Macdonald 2006, 95). David Carrier's useful characterisation of these thinkers as 'museum skeptics', drawing as it does on a long philosophical tradition of the close examination of even the terms by which knowledge is assumed to be gathered, is one which (as neatly as possible) conveys both the benefits and drawbacks of the modes of enquiry which much of the New Museology relies upon (Carrier 67). Indeed, we might usefully extend this term to the authors whom I have chosen to study, as we chart the ways in which they subjected the museum function as it operated within their societies to sustained scrutiny, thus acting as 'museum skeptics' in their own ways.

The work of Tony Bennett, in particular, is of great use for the determination and analysis of the interplay between the building, and use, of museums and other cultural practices during the 19th and 20th centuries. Any attempt to situate the museum historically should begin, he believes, by incorporating museal spaces into wider patterns of cultural activity: 'the museum's formation needs [...] to be viewed in relation to the development of a range of collateral cultural institutions, including apparently alien and disconnected ones' (1995, 6). This step towards a wider grasp of the museum's place within societies requires a willingness to conceptualise museums in unexpected ways. Bennett's most significant claim is that we should read museums and popular expositions (also known as World's Fairs and Great

Exhibitions) as twinned manifestations of what he names ‘the exhibitionary complex’, which he believes to have been one of the defining impulses of 19th century Western culture (Bennett 1995, 68). Paul Young elaborates on this idea, declaring both institutions, with their capacity to make apparent the heterogeneity of lived experience and the passage of time through the bringing-together of radically different objects from different historical eras and geographic locations, as being emblematic of ‘modernity’s [...] impressive capacity to flatten [...] temporal separation’ (16). Maintaining an awareness of ‘other realms of presentation [...] can deepen our understanding of the way museums interact with their audiences’ and should, therefore, inform our own considerations of museums as institutions embedded within their socio-historical moment (Noordegraaf 12). By putting the products of culture on display for the entertainment and edification of the masses, museums and expositions inhabited the same sphere of activity yet were also unmistakably different: museums were built in a deliberately grand and historicised manner to suggest the permanence of their collections (and of the apparently noble sentiments behind their establishment), while exposition sites were defined by their ephemerality – although many left material traces in the cities which they inhabited, becoming part of the built environment on a permanent basis, in addition to providing the material basis for several museum collections (Greenhalgh 1, Belk 109). This is not to say that museums are entirely convincing in their architecturally-grounded claims to longevity. Behind their seemingly solid walls, the artefacts themselves can be interpreted as testifying to the historical ‘fragility’ of the cultures which produced them and warning, ominously, of the tenuous nature of all civilisations (Greenblatt 43).

With these links between the museum and expositions in mind, my own work will align itself with Bennett’s notion of the ‘exhibitionary complex’ as forming a necessary theoretical accompaniment to McIsaac’s ‘museum function’ when assessing the impact of these phenomena on the writers whose work provides the focus of this study. Furthermore, both of

these concepts can be understood as complementary to one another in light of Foucault's ideas regarding the existence, and function, of heterotopic sites. Heterotopias are spaces invested with the potential to support multiple meanings according to the needs of the societies which construct them and are linked, in Foucault's formulation, with societies which become dangerously concerned with temporality and its pressures: 'the heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time' (Foucault 1986, 25-26). Although Foucault's delineation of the heterotopic concept is somewhat open-ended, he does name museums as being subject to this method of interpretation: 'there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time, for example museums and libraries. Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit' (Foucault 1986, 26). While clearly a useful concept, we might wish to refine, or qualify, the Foucauldian heterotopia as it applies to both the museum (and, by extension, expositions) before integrating it into the current discussion.

Lloyd Pratt has usefully queried the viability of believing wholeheartedly in 'absolute breaks' with 'traditional time': as he points out, 'the very idea that modernity involves a radical reorganisation of time and an abrupt break with the past is in fact one of modernity's ideological formations' (40). This is echoed by Thomas M. Allen's work regarding the importance of 'the measurement, employment and mastery of time' to a self-generating rhetoric of modernity which many people in the nascent United States subscribed to in the first half of the 19th century (1-2). The claim to perceive temporality differently, rather than constituting an absolute truth, can thus be interpreted as one of many contingent factors which those who desired to be modern came to rely on in their attempts to articulate their particular perceptions of this state of being. This accords with Bruno Latour's interpretation of modernity as a term which inherently posits the existence of a past which has been deliberately overcome or transcended (10). Undoubtedly there were distressing, noticeable changes in the way societies organised their understanding

of time during the 19th century, but claiming (as Foucault does) that an ‘absolute break’ with previous models of temporality was achieved – or possible – is too broad a claim to withstand thorough analysis. It is more accurate, as Vanessa Ogle has shown, to regard the rhetoric surrounding what she terms ‘time reform’ as an institutional tool propagated by elites in Western society in order to drive forward their plans for political, territorial, and economic gain through the standardisation of temporality (5, 208). Rather, we might side with Patrick H. Hutton’s view that it was not the past itself that was lost during the 19th century, but its ‘presence’, giving rise to ‘the paradox that modern society, more future oriented and less dependent on the past for its identity, nonetheless felt obliged to materialize its memory in every possible way’ (4, 151).

This urge to materialize memory and thereby retain some semblance of relation to it is clearly identifiable with Richard Terdiman’s concept of a ‘memory crisis’ affecting Europe (particularly, he stresses, France) during the 19th century, provoked by frequent political and cultural upheavals, and ‘widely visible in the cultural production of this period’ (Terdiman 1993, 3-5). Terdiman’s analysis is rooted in exploring the effects of the French Revolution upon the understanding of history itself as a force capable of exerting a degree of influence on societies which came, over time, to seem positively threatening in its seeming inescapability. As Penelope Corfield suggests, ‘Civil wars [...] as well as religious and/or ideological contests [...] are particularly prone to leave diachronic resentments that are hard to resolve.’ (240). During the Revolution, concepts of time and history were fiercely debated and subject to interpretation along ideological grounds; a disorientating if not destabilising state of affairs (Gillis 7). Terdiman goes on to argue that this crisis was so pronounced that the mnemonic facility itself was thought to have undergone ‘mysterious and unsettling mutations’ (1993, 7). Not only was remembering the past becoming increasingly difficult, but the very means and methods of doing so also became liable to uncertainty – a theme which is clearly detectable in

the modernist literary works which will form the mainstay of this study, indicating that the crisis of memory had no readily definable endpoint or guaranteed solutions. Indeed, as Paul Fussell and Jay Winter have demonstrated, the cataclysmic conflicts which marked the beginning of the 20th century were equally disturbing to societal and individual conceptions of memory as the upheavals of the 19th had been (Fussell 336-362, Winter 5). Museums, with their promises of preservation and mnemonic stability, were clearly of great value during this alarmingly prolonged period as spaces where the dissolution of society's connection with the past could at least be imagined as preventable.

Modernism, which might be loosely defined as the concomitant artistic and literary responses to the temporal and societal upheavals associated with modernity, thus has its roots in the 19th century, specifically in its most definitive space: the city (Berman 36, Bailey 7). Urban landscapes were the location of modernity's most drastic changes, as the fabric of cities was remodelled on a huge scale, and also where these changes were most markedly observable, and in fact became attractions in their own right, acting as 'symbolic condenser[s] of socio-cultural values' and thus becoming identifiable as 'the essential ground of modern existence' (Schorske 6, 49). The phenomenon of expositions and world's fairs drew heavily on representations and reconfigurations of urban spaces as a key part of their appeal to visitors (Geppert 249). The beauties of modernity – along with its horrors – were first articulated by figures such as Charles Baudelaire and Édouard Manet in direct response to their experiences of the modern cityscape (Rabaté 191, Prendergast 33). As the nineteenth century progressed, major cities began to attract increasing numbers of authors and artists, who began to envision urban environments as powerfully stimulating in their own right (Dennis 85, Saisselin 15). Walter Benjamin, perhaps the most influential theorist of urban life in this period, documented the fragmentation of experience in modernity, positing discontinuity and alienation as the inevitable effects of city dwelling (Brigstocke 59). Benjamin's theory, detailed in the essay

‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, regarding the ‘aura’ that attaches to, and becomes a feature of, artworks when encountered in their original locations has proven to be influential in a number of fields. ‘Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art’, he writes, ‘is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.’ (214). As shall be discussed, Benjamin’s sense of the ‘aura’ can be seen to have had clear precursors in the work of certain other writers.

In large part, museums owed their cultural prominence to their locations within major cities, although this relationship, as Michaela Giebelhausen observes, can be seen as a two-way street in which cities also came to derive much of their prestige from the presence of museums and other tangible demonstrations of cultural wealth (2003, 1). Nick Prior identifies the ‘centrality’ which museums occupied in relation to cities as an important reason that they became ‘both a target and a historical resource for cultural practitioners’ (10). Consequently we must, as Daniel J. Sherman argues, study museums within their urban context (8). Museums, modernity, and the city thus form a tripartite crucible within which much of modernist art and literature was forged. Modernism, as Ruth Hoberman contends, emerged from the heyday of museums and frequently engaged with the range of aesthetic, political, and cultural issues which museums made visible (10, 166).

We will thus begin with an outline of the development of museums and exposition activity in Paris, London, Berlin, and the United States (with an emphasis in the latter case on New York and other Eastern seaboard cities). Philippe Hamon describes Paris, London and New York euphemistically as the ‘Three Babylons of the modern age’, while Joachim Schlor and Kenneth McConkey identify Berlin as another of the key sites of artistic and intellectual activity in the 19th century – particularly so, as we shall witness, in the realm of the museum (Hamon 69, Schlor 10-11, McConkey 248). Tracing the rise of the museum in different national contexts across this turbulent historical period will, I hope, allow for a greater understanding

of why the authors upon whom I have focused my analysis reacted in the ways that they did to the museum function as they experienced it, in line with McIsaac's suggestion that rather than viewing

the establishment of a particular museum and a particular literary text as isolated phenomena, the museum function prompts us to look for a confluence of cultural discourses capable of producing a particular museum and a particular literary text.

(13)

As Andrew Thacker has declared, 'Modernist writing [...] is about living and experiencing 'new times', not in the abstracted location of literary history, but in specific spatial histories' (13). There can be few institutions more liable to provoke reflection on the nature of time, and the effects of its passing, than museums which, as I shall demonstrate, were 'centrally important places in the intellectual landscape at the turn of the [19th] century' (Conn 15).

I. The genesis and growth of museums

Ken Arnold locates the beginning of museal activity in Europe to the 16th and 17th centuries, as voyages of discovery opened up new trade routes and networks for the proliferation of material artefacts, which impelled their owners to build ever larger spaces for the display of their newly-acquired treasures (14-15). These displays had importance in the burgeoning social sphere of Renaissance Europe as sites for the cultivation of cultural prestige, and were thus largely associated with ruling elites and the scholarly class whose intellectual work was frequently indebted to their ruler's patronage and support (Seigel 420). Paula Findlen points out that the idea of the museum, in this early stage of its development, was associated with both textual and physical spaces – in short, the museum during the later Renaissance 'was an epistemological structure encompassing a variety of ideas, images, and institutions' (49). Furthermore, museums at this time were a constituent part of a wider 'communications network' in which collectors, princes and scholars alike took part in order to consolidate their own places within the growing field of natural philosophy and its attendant institutional offshoots (Bennett 2004, 171-172). In the 16th century, a printed book was more likely to be described as a museum than was a building (Ernst 18, McIsaac 10). Indeed, as McIsaac has observed, 'literary texts once could lay claim to the idea of the "museum" with just as much efficacy as an object-rich environment' (255). This flexibility in the expected form of a museum, while perhaps impossible to fully replicate once disciplinary and institutional boundaries had been solidified across the corresponding intellectual domains, lies at the centre of my exploration of the museal aspects of certain texts. It is my belief that it is possible for texts of varying genres to embody and replicate certain elements of the museum space. That texts were once imbued with this possibility provides my analysis with a welcome footing on which to base certain arguments – such as reading a section of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as constituting an exercise in contrarian cataloguing.

This sharing of the museal field between texts and physical spaces would, in time, become less pronounced as collections grew in size and cost, requiring ever more elaborate spaces to be built for their containment and display, necessitating a move away from private ‘studios’ to structures more akin to the galleries with which we are familiar today (Findlen 115-117). Asserting possession over exotic objects and the systems of knowledge which they represented was a vital component of Renaissance rulers’ claims to power over their own domains (Greenblatt 50). By putting their treasures on display in elaborate visual assertions of their mastery over the world and its contents, Renaissance collectors ‘imagined that they had indeed come to terms with the crisis of knowledge that the fabrication of the museum was designed to solve’ (Findlen 50). Collecting in this way became another step in the ceaseless dance of rivalry conducted between European rulers, so that by the end of the sixteenth century, ‘establishing a *musaeum* was common across Europe in courtly circles’ (Jenkins 2016, 41).

The shift from Renaissance to Enlightenment intellectual concerns, with their attendant practices, saw a movement away from display for its own sake. Collectors and scholars became increasingly interested in the ordering and classification of the natural world (Bennett 1995, 40-41). This shift in attitudes also applied to the disciplinary procedures by which these factors would be investigated – natural philosophy would begin a slow and irrevocable process of splintering into different branches of science, each with their own intellectual domains and concerns. Consequently a change in the perception of the role of collections within society was apparent, as by the middle of the 18th century museums were increasingly seen as a vital component of national identity (Findlen 396). It is to France that we shall turn initially in our attempt to grasp the potentiality for political and societal influence with which the museum is capable of being invested.

II. Paris

*The more they accumulate revolutions, the more they save; the more they capitalize, the more they put on display in museums.*²

Andrew McLellan begins his comprehensive history of the Louvre's founding and development with the claim that 'in Paris in the latter half of the eighteenth century [...] the central and abiding issues of museum practice [...] were first discussed and articulated' (1). While the Louvre has long been thought of as an institution only founded in the wake of the French Revolution, the reality is less dramatic although still of great consequence for the development of the museum sector. Although the Revolution certainly played a pivotal role in securing the pre-eminence which the Louvre now enjoys amongst the world's museums, there had been (after civil agitation dating back to at least the 1740s), plans made during the previous regime to transform the palace into a gallery of paintings for the French people's enjoyment and edification (McLellan 49-90). So thorough and detailed were the arrangements for this to occur that:

there is little or no evidence to suggest that, during the course of the revolution, the programme envisaged for the Louvre departed appreciably from that which had already been proposed during the pre-revolutionary period [...] (Bennett 1995, 37)

Where the Revolutionaries did affect a break with precedent is in their insistence that the museum be placed at the heart of their plans for the reformation of public life in France. Jean-Marie Roland, Interior minister for the Revolutionary authorities, wrote in 1792 to the painter Jacques-Louis David that France's national museum was to be 'one of the most powerful ways of proclaiming the illustriousness of the French Republic' (Meyer and Savoy 1). Here the glory of the state is directly conflated with the extent and quality of its

² See: Latour 69.

artistic holdings – a bold ambition, and one which politicises the acquisition and possession of artworks in an overtly aggressive manner. Rather than being the private property of the monarch, however, the artistic heritage of France was opened up to the masses (Jenkins 2016, 58-59). By these measures, the Louvre was to act as a ‘crucial instrument’ in the ‘construction of a new set of values that at once discredited the *ancien régime* and celebrated the Republic’ (Hooper-Greenhill 190). This status as political symbol was further cemented when the building was officially opened on the same day as the staging of the ‘Festival of Unity and Indivisibility of the Republic’ (Abt 128).

Public access in the late 18th century was conceived of in a rather different sense than we might understand the term today. The Louvre opened in ten day cycles, with the first five reserved for artists and students, followed by a two-day hiatus for cleaning, only allowing the public full access to the collections for three days (Hooper-Greenhill 183). The didactic potential of the museum’s collections for improving the skills of aspiring artists was prioritised over exposing the paintings and sculpture to an aesthetically untrained (and therefore not properly appreciative) public. Initially, then, the Louvre was understood to be as much a site of artistic production as it was of display. This emphasis on playing an active part in the production of contemporary art is further evinced by the museum’s role as the official host of the Salon, France’s annual state-sponsored art exhibit, until 1849 (Reed 28). The production, display, and critical reception of art in France was thus carried out under the aegis of the state until the middle of the 19th century. The contents and physical structure of the Louvre itself, however, would be subject to the whims of successive rulers and the regimes which they attempted to solidify through the deliberate manipulation of museal spaces as part of a wider network of cultural projects through which the authority and legitimacy of the state could be given visible form (Gildea 181). This politically-inflected use of the museum space (and its contents) would reach its

peak with the second marriage of Napoleon Bonaparte, which took place in the Louvre in 1810 (Gould 103). The fact that this most auspicious of wedding venues had already been renamed to the Musée Napoléon in 1803 can only have added to the sense of overwhelming nationalistic pride which the event was intended to evoke – a pride based upon the acquisition, and display, of cultural wealth (Gould 87). The Emperor was not alone in using museums as stage sets for the acting-out of power in the public eye: as Tiffany Jenkins points out, ‘every important political regime change in France was explicitly tied to a museum project’, suggesting that French museums maintained, if not increased, their level of cultural prominence throughout the 19th century (61).

This is not to say that the Louvre was entirely well thought of by the cognoscenti: Jacques-Louis David frequently attacked the museum’s administrative policies, while the architect Quatremère de Quincy was a vocal opponent of the removal of artworks from their original contexts by Napoleon’s forces (Gould 27, Swenson 38). Indeed, the criticism of de Quincy, which placed great value on the context and historicity of artworks, anticipates to some degree the ideas of Walter Benjamin with regards to the ‘aura’ of artworks. That the Louvre was, from 1803 onwards, engaged in the creation of a ‘museum in book form’ in the shape of its illustrated catalogue, thereby encouraging the reproduction and circulation of artworks to an unprecedented degree, strengthens this apparent similarity between the ideas of the two men (Belting 38, Murawska-Muthesius 107). This questioning by de Quincy of the aesthetic probity of museum-building at the very inception of the enterprise as we understand it today illustrates that museums have never been spaces free of controversy.

Not that the Louvre was the only museum in Paris. The Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle was founded in 1793 on the site of the formerly royal Jardin des Plantes, offering a peaceful space for the contemplation of the natural world which was

ostensibly removed from the harsher realities of the city during the 1790s and 1800s (Outram 250, 258). The Musée des Monuments Français, which operated under the stewardship of Alexandre Lenoir, opened in 1795 and represented an attempt to preserve (in physical form at least) the history of France which was otherwise being effaced by the Revolution. A collection of architectural remnants and sculpture taken from the confiscated estates of the nobility and the church, this museum represented a significant advance in museum practice. Lenoir, as both curator and proprietor, imposed his own interpretation of the nation's past through his creation of display spaces intended to convey a sense of historical continuity, imposing this narrative through the careful placing of objects (Green 112). Each room was intended to evoke the spirit of a specific century, thereby offering 'a walk through French architectural history in one centralized place.' (McIsaac 56-57). McLellan argues that this display strategy represents a clear precursor of today's 'period room' installations, yet for visitors of the time it would sometimes prove a jarring experience (178-179). Sebastian Mercier, a visitor to the museum in 1797, recorded that the different pseudo-historical spaces evoked 'a peculiar but striking sensation of the centuries confused' (McLellan 166). One doubts whether Lenoir would have been entirely pleased with such temporal confusion, yet this is perhaps an inevitable consequence of his display policies: in the Musée des Monuments Français, time still seemed to flow onwards in an orthodox fashion, while outside the Revolution was rewriting history on an almost daily basis. Nor did Lenoir escape more stringent criticism: Quatremère de Quincy's ideas regarding the importance of historical context for the appreciation of art were formed with the Musée des Monuments Français in mind, as well as the ever-growing collections of the Louvre (McLellan 195).

After Napoleon's final defeat in 1815, Lenoir's museum was forced to close down, while several of the Louvre's treasures (although not as many as were requested, thanks

to intransigent French bureaucracy) were returned to their places of origin (McLellan 155). Despite these measures, the cultural landscape of Europe had been changed irrevocably by the museum activity undertaken by the French during their period of military ascendancy. As E. M. Forster would later remark:

After the Treaty of Vienna every progressive government felt it a duty to amass old objects, and to exhibit a fraction of them in a building called a Museum, which was occasionally open free. (278)

Although Forster's comment is clearly intended to be drolly comic, he nevertheless gestures towards several of the underlying tensions which can be seen in museum activity of the sort described. The tension between 'progressive' states and the adherence to historical memory which is inherent in any large-scale collecting of 'old objects' is not an easy one to reconcile, while the difficulties of display which collecting on a truly national level entails are perhaps impossible to overcome, resulting in only a 'fraction' of any given museum's holdings being exhibited according to the imposition of subjective methods of aesthetic or historical categorisation. Finally, Forster also highlights the issues of access which would plague museums throughout the 19th century and into the early years of the 20th – many public museums were indeed only 'occasionally open free' despite the public-spiritedness which they claimed to embody. These limitations make the rapid growth of the museum sector in the post-Revolutionary era that much more worthy of investigation and analysis from a number of disciplinary perspectives.

Spain, which had been heavily plundered by the French forces, was prompted to establish a national gallery in order to safeguard its artistic heritage, while other European states were eager to capitalise on the possible prestige afforded by the sponsoring of museums (Tomlinson 16-38). The Revolution undoubtedly 'transformed the nature of

museum collections within and beyond France, confirming the evolution of the museum as a key institution of the modern state throughout Europe.’ (Jenkins 2016, 57). Within France, as Daniel J. Sherman has shown, a diverse museum culture emerged with many provincial cities building their own in order to cement their identities as places of note and cultural importance (97-120). This increase in museum activity took place against a background of regular political and societal upheaval; no single regime was able to maintain power for more than 20 years until the Third Republic was formed in 1870 (Weber 110). French museums were thus vital spaces where history could be rendered as a comprehensible phenomenon, thanks to the sheer frequency of crises in the political sphere. The Musée de Cluny was one such space. Comprised of the collections of the wealthy antiquarian Alexandre du Sommerard, the museum opened in 1843, and can be best understood as a continuation of sorts of the Musée des Monuments Français. Bringing together a huge number of objects displayed together in different rooms with more attention paid to affective power than historical accuracy, the Musée de Cluny abandoned any principles of analytical regularity in its tableaux for a more total sense of historical reconstruction (Bann 1984, 85). The museum attempted, ‘through a fullness of texture and an absolute degree of integration’ to recreate the atmosphere of France’s past, an atmosphere which was increasingly difficult to navigate as the 19th century progressed (Bann 1990, 139). The Musée de Cluny would serve as inspiration for new modes of interior design, adopted by the French middle and upper classes, which tended increasingly towards the acquisition and display of tastefully historic objects. As Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz have discussed, the museum function in 19th century Paris was predicated on an admixture of private and public space, with interior spaces reflecting the increasing interest in the nation’s heritage (69, 81). Collecting was no longer entirely the preserve of the nobility, and art dealers and auction houses began to proliferate in the

area around the Bourse, in order to benefit from Paris' rapidly increasing wealth (Belk 36). This boom in the purchasing and display of artworks and historical curios soon began to generate discourses of its own in relation to the construction and maintenance of social prestige. Good taste – either truly possessing it, or merely appearing to – became 'an integral component of bourgeois status' (Walton 8). To be considered a 'good' collector meant conducting one's collecting activities in accordance with established patterns of taste and display which were most clearly delineated in museums. Museums were thus beginning to exert pressures of their own on society and the marketplace, acting as the ultimate arbiters of artistic achievement and historical importance in the assessment of an object's worth. Nor were they entirely immune to the demands of private taste; during the years of the July Monarchy, paintings were frequently lent from the Louvre to the King's family and close friends, blurring those lines between national and sovereign property which had only recently been established (Weisberg 182, 185).

This desire to possess, or at least replicate, something of the country's past was linked to the rapid onset of modernity which was most clearly visible in the dramatic changes to the physical fabric and appearance of Paris under the regime of Napoleon III, in power from 1852 until 1870. Not only did this new Emperor complete the rebuilding of the Louvre (begun under the Second Republic) in an attempt to assert the historical continuity of his reign, but he also permanently reshaped Paris through his employment of Georges-Eugene Haussmann as city planner (Truesdell 59, Baguley 195-200). The dramatic changes which the cityscape underwent from the 1850s onwards, with entire districts being redrawn and built over, seemed to represent in unmistakably physical form a shift from old to new. These changes would give rise to aesthetic innovation in both the literary and visual arts, as writers and painters sought to make sense of their surroundings (Rabaté 191). Charles Baudelaire's voice was the loudest in advocating the necessity of

finding beauty and meaning within these new kinds of spaces, urging his fellow aesthetes to embrace ‘the passing moment and [...] the suggestions of eternity’ that they contained (5). Painters from around France, and further afield, gravitated towards Paris as the ground zero of these new developments, inspired by the works of Baudelaire’s friend Édouard Manet (Reed 22).

The very newness of the work being produced by these artists, however, would require equally innovative strategies of display if it was to have any chance of reaching a sizeable public. Private exhibition spaces had been open in the city since the 1830s, but only with the arrival of Manet, Gustave Courbet, and the younger generation of artists which followed would they attract any great notice (Seigel 423). After an outcry regarding the number of works rejected by the Salon committee, it was decided that in 1863 a special ‘Salon des Refusés’ would be held in an adjacent room at the Louvre. This represented a unique circumstance by which artworks decreed to be of insufficient value for official endorsement by the state were nevertheless exhibited under its auspices. Unlike Courbet’s innovative (though poorly-received) solo exhibition of 1855, the ‘Salon des Refusés’ gathered together art deemed to be shocking or poorly executed within an officially-sanctioned display space (Mainardi 95). This could not help but to foreground the fault lines of favouritism and bias which ran through the Salon committee’s decision-making process but also, more troublingly, served to highlight the constructedness which lay at the heart of all that the Louvre’s collections were deemed to stand for. No longer could the art-historical narrative laid down by the gallery’s collection policies be seen as unquestionably correct. Just over a decade later, in 1874, the group of painters now known as the Impressionists would hold their first joint exhibition of work, one which unmistakably set itself against the prevailing aesthetic orthodoxies as represented by the Salon (Reed 68). The site chosen by the group for the event was carefully chosen to reflect

this agenda. By choosing to display their work in a photographer's studio on one of the streets created by Hausmann's building works, they were attempting to move away from the shadow of the museum and what they felt to be its connotations of officialdom and artistic sterility (Rubin 10-11). Additionally, this choice of site signalled the group's movement into new aesthetic territories, as their paintings increasingly explored perspectival arrangements inspired by the possibilities of photography. The Impressionist exhibition thus marked a unique conjunction of venue, arrangement, and artistic content, with the exhibition space itself being imbued with a new degree of meaning.

Contemporaneous to these developments in the art world was the inception of a series of Expositions, of increasingly formidable scale and complexity, which were held in Paris approximately once a decade. The first of these, in 1855, was directly influenced by London's Universal Exhibition of 1851, although there had been a number of smaller industrial fairs held in France during and after the Revolution (Mainardi 18, Walton 11). Tony Bennett's notion of the 'exhibitionary complex' is of great utility in assessing the impact of these events. Fusing past and present together in order to entertain and inform the public, these vast sites are the clearest evidence we have for the fascination of 19th century society with the reproduction and consumption of its own past even as it sought to move further into the future. Beginning in 1867, each Exposition would see the erection of increasing numbers of architecturally idealised 'foreign' dwellings as well as faux-historical structures drawn from the city's own past (Kaufman 230-232). The Exposition of 1889 saw the construction of 'Le Vieux Paris', a street designed to immerse visitors in the perambulatory experience of Paris' now-vanished urban past, with buildings designed in imitation of the styles associated with various different eras. As C. T. Geppert has noted, this ersatz street sacrificed historical fidelity in favour of atemporal atmospherics: visitors to 'Le Vieux Paris' were in fact visiting a 'city that never existed' except in the imagination

(89-90). There was also a replica of the Bastille – a building which, during the Revolution, had been torn down as a symbol of all that was tyrannical and alienating about the French past (Rearick 120). The city itself, during this event, took on the air of a vast museum, in which the past was actively made use of for the sake of entertainment. This appetite for representations of the past only increased as the century reached its end – at the 1900 Exposition (the largest of its kind) the three most popular exhibits were those which promised a chance to experience history (Rearick 139-141).

There was a more sinister side to these exhibitionary extravaganzas. Not only buildings and objects were on display during the Expositions, but people too. After the Exposition of 1889 it became common practice to have colonial and ethnographic displays which consisted not only of pillaged artefacts but also live exhibits of supposedly ‘native’ people in reconstructions of their domestic surroundings (Hinsley 346). By presenting them as uncultured and undeveloped, the Exposition organisers were playing on the popular understanding of native peoples as being historically dislocated from European civilisation. The French past, as depicted in ‘Le Vieux Paris’, was still a place of recognisable cultural achievement, while the people living in such conditions as the colonial village suggested were presented as though stuck at some earlier branch of humanity’s developmental timeline. This discourse of temporal segregation was bolstered by the collection of ethnographic materials which had been housed, since 1878, in the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro, which acted ‘not so much [as] an art museum as a scientific exposition’ of evolutionary thinking (Gluck 173). This museum, although praised by Elizabeth A. Williams as facilitating encounters between a later generation of artists and the material culture of African civilisations, was undoubtedly complicit in the construction of harmful racial stereotypes (146-166).

By the Exposition of 1900, the grandest and most sprawling of them all, visitors were beginning to complain of fatigue and to decry the deleterious effects of so much variety being made available at once. This event was so large in scale that the boundaries between city and Exposition site were no longer clear. The elision of the markers between spectacle and reality was particularly marked in the field of historical replication. Visitors to the Exposition craved to inhabit the sanitised version of the French past which was for sale – thus highlighting the near inescapability of the museum function in Paris towards the end of the 19th century. In the final volume of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the aged Odette de Crécy is likened to 'the spirit of the 1878 Exhibition', a gigantic female figurehead which had been stationed above the main entrance to the exposition grounds, indicating that for people of Proust's generation, at least, the expositions had provided a source of evocative and recognisable imagery (*FTA* 256). This expansion into different areas of cultural practice would prompt literary responses in the shape of direct engagement with issues of historical representation, the ordering of reality according to externally imposed structures of classification, and above all, in the compendious works of Maxime Du Camp, an attempt to capture the lived reality of Paris during the 1860s and 1870s in a textual and photographic approximation of the museum (Wilson 96-97). Du Camp's project has a fictional counterpart in Émile Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* series, the planning of which was completed in the year after the Exposition of 1867 and bears the imprint of the Exposition's representationally totalising influence. However, to uncover the effects of the museum function as it was conceptualised, critiqued, and utilised by writers in late-19th century France, it is more germane to turn our attention to two novels which have been described by Christopher Lloyd as 'the first radical texts of the *fin-de-siècle*' (148). J. K. Huysman's *À rebours*, published in 1884, and Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, left unfinished at the time of the author's death but published

posthumously in 1881, both depict in starkly humorous fashion the unravelling of the individual psyche under the pressures of the drive towards museumification.

A text which deliberately seeks to frustrate the reader in its repetitive narrative structure, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* threatens to collapse the veneer of realism upon which it skates by continually asserting the meaninglessness of the events which it depicts. The titular characters relocate to the countryside from Paris after an unexpected inheritance in order to attempt to master each and every discipline of knowledge formulated by mankind. Each of these attempts goes disastrously wrong, in a farcical manner which tips over into absurdity once the reader realises that – in the shallowest sense of the phrase – this is all that will happen in the novel. It is clear, however, that Flaubert was attempting much more than simply to bore his readers into submission. The novel's structure mimics an index, with each chapter devoted to the study of a particular branch of knowledge, while Flaubert retreats from conventional narrative in order to create a text whose status hovers indeterminately between a novel and an archive of mundanity. Flaubert has Bouvard and Pécuchet enact this not only through their constant perusal of textbooks and manuals, but also by creating a 'museum' of their own in the rooms of their shared dwelling, which they insist on showing to every caller they receive. In their urge to impress, however, they more often than not come across as ill-informed dilettantes: one acts as a guide while the other dons an imitation monk's robe in order to create as convincing a display as possible. Mocking the 'pretensions of their era' in this way, the text depicts the consequences *in extremis* of collecting one's lived reality (Belk 39). The gaps in their collection – and knowledge – fill them with anxiety: with 'so many things to know, so much research [to do]' their quest for accumulation might well continue 'unto infinity' (Flaubert 6, 22). This anxiety is reflected in their lack of ability to fully interpret the phenomena they seek to

understand, as their taking up of antiquarianism leads them further and further into speculation and downright invention:

their guide led them into a wood [...] cluttered with masses of granite [...] The largest one was hollowed out like a basin. One of the edges could be lifted, and from the bottom ran two grooves stretching to the ground. It was for the blood to run off, there could be no doubt! It would be too great a coincidence. (Flaubert 97)

Flaubert is careful not to restrict his critique of this jointly interrogative and acquisitive drive to objects from the distant past. Attempting to comprehend the causes and effects of the Revolution of 1789 (admittedly a formidable task), they reach the conclusion that ‘Ancient history is obscure because there are too few documents. In recent history there are too many.’ (106). Flaubert turns a jaded eye on the profusion of historiography which had come to dominate the intellectual sphere in France during his own lifetime (Rigney 1-5, Winock 19-23). Ultimately, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is a text which reveals the arbitrary nature of historical understanding by ironically putting on display the processes by which this kind of knowledge is generated:

it is impossible to say everything. One has to make choices. But one’s selection of documents is guided by a certain viewpoint; and as this viewpoint varies, depending on the writer’s situation, history will never be a fixed entity. (Flaubert 108)

In many ways, J. K. Huysmans’ *À rebours* carries on this questioning of humanity’s attempts to impose epistemic frameworks on the raw matter of lived experience. Huysmans goes further, however, in depicting the negative psychological effects of a worldview which takes the museum as its principle inspiration. At times the text itself resembles a museal space, as we are given fulsome descriptions of objects collected by the novel’s protagonist, Jean Des Esseintes, a description used by Huysmans himself in an

essay of 1903 in which he describes a chapter dedicated to Des Esseintes' paintings as 'that little museum' (193). Des Esseintes resigns active participation in Parisian life in order to pursue his 'manic collecting of texts and images', which as time wears on, proves to be as close to a depiction of archivally-induced fever as it is possible to imagine (White xxii). Using his private wealth to fuel his status as a consumer *nonpareil*, Des Esseintes collects and exhibits objects in ways clearly influenced by the museum culture of the time: he commissions a hand-made edition of Baudelaire's poems and sets it apart from his other literary treasures, intending to highlight its place as centrepiece of the collection (Huysmans 15). Literature itself is here broken down and brought into the circulatory realm of objects, and in his library at large, Des Esseintes uses his personal taste to construct an alternative literary history, utilising his self-determined power as curator over the canon in a Flaubertian echo of the subjectivity which underlines all such endeavours (Huysmans 26-34).

Des Esseintes' treasure house has a clear precedent in the real-life Musée de Cluny, which relied upon techniques of aggregation to impress upon the visitor a 'historical' ambience to the spaces within. The museum itself features in the text, as Des Esseintes recalls a visit in which he reacts to his environs in such a way as to cement his status as arch-consumer. Rather than being impressed by the totality of the museum's contents, he fixates relentlessly upon one object alone: an astrolabe, which upon leaving, he immediately seeks to buy as faithful a copy of as possible (Huysmans 140-141). Huysmans here collapses the distinction between museum-going and shopping, indirectly anticipating the 21st century museum experience while playing upon the widespread consumer desire for all things historical in French society. Enabled by his superior means, Des Esseintes goes further than most in his proclivity for 'drowning everything beneath the waters of the past' (Huysmans 62). Ultimately forced to return to Paris after his health

breaks down, Des Esseintes' fate serves as a stark warning to those of Huysmans' contemporaries who sought to escape the modern world through the accumulation of historical knowledge and the material remains of the past. Collecting in this fashion – inspired by greed and the mistaken belief in the collector's ability to master his possessions – is clearly depicted in *À rebours* as a fundamentally flawed activity, and one which inhibits the individual subject from dwelling properly within the world.

As the 19th century drew to a close in Paris, an influential museum function was evident in many areas of cultural life. This influence drew pointed critiques from writers such as Flaubert and Huysmans, but also fuelled mass participation in events such as the series of Expositions which occurred every eleven or twelve years and continually increased in size to accommodate a growing desire for the spectacular. History exerted a strong pull on consumers and intellectuals alike, as the country at large sought to come to terms with its congested and contested past. In a later section of this study, I will examine the ways in which Marcel Proust's fiction attempts to negotiate a path through this historical landscape, in ways which inevitably bear signs of the Parisian museum function's influence. Proust's novel compels such a reading, being occupied as it is with the depiction of life in France during the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, and the explication of the mnemonic process by which such a depiction is possible in textual form.

III. Berlin

*Prussia [...] has no historical basis; it consists of an agglomeration of territories, which themselves once had such a basis and then lost them [...] In Prussia [...] we have to create something new.*³

For the ruler of any sovereign nation to state that their own country ‘has no historical basis’, as Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia does in the above quote, is surprising to say the least. The growth of Berlin’s museums, which began during Friedrich Wilhelm’s time as heir apparent to the Prussian throne, is of vital importance for understanding the potentiality for museums to be charged with a role in the creation of history itself – or, more accurately, the projection of historical continuity into the public and political sphere. As Christopher Clark has noted, ‘the Prussian state made up its history as it went along, developing an ever more elaborate account of its trajectory in the past and its purposes in the present’ (xxiv). The museum’s rise to cultural prominence during the 19th century would be incomplete without some account of the growth of museums in Prussia (and subsequently the unified Germany). The work of Friedrich Nietzsche in relation to the operations of history within the cultural sphere will be of great importance for my later chapters and so this section will outline the sociohistorical conditions which led to Nietzsche’s ideas about the use value of history in modern society. These ideas were inextricably linked to the growth of a fervent historicism within Prussian society which found its chief embodiment in the museums of its capital city.

Thanks to a succession of crushing defeats and forced territorial redistribution, during the Napoleonic wars, the German state of Prussia had been reduced to a ‘shell’ by the end of the 19th century’s first decade (Gildea 33). In order to compensate for this

³ King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, in conversation with Prince Klemens von Metternich, 1842. See: Barclay 49-50.

damaging loss of prestige, the Prussian monarchy made a concerted and prolonged attempt to restore pride in the nation's history amongst its people – most notably in the realm of public architecture. During the course of the 19th century, the Prussian capital of Berlin would be transformed from 'a gigantic parade ground' populated mostly by soldiers and court functionaries into a city of social refinement and leisure (Pundt 25). The man charged with overseeing much of this process, Carl Friedrich Schinkel, was an architect with a background in theatre design, and in whose designs a keen sense of drama and spectacle is evident (Boyer 99-102). Schinkel's Altes Museum, which opened in 1830, was to act as a central component in the creation of a Prussian identity steeped in a (largely invented or embroidered) historical tradition, deliberately invoking the spirit of ancient Athens in its design (Lorente 151). His design was ground-breaking in several ways, not least due to its status as the first custom-built space for the public display of art, but also in his choice of site: located near to the royal palace and Berlin's cathedral, the architect sought to cement the place of artistic appreciation as one of the defining markers of a civilised society (Sheehan 73, Ziolkowski 320-321). Indeed, such was Schinkel's confidence in his design that the building was opened for a limited time to the public in 1829 without any paintings, in order to assert for itself a secure place within the life of the city (Giebelhausen 2003, 4). His museum was to be the crowning statement in a wider programme of architectural improvements designed to allay the long-standing insecurities of Prussia's elite regarding the prestige of their capital city (Schlor 56, Evans 316).

In Munich, the capital of Prussia's rival Bavaria, a similar project was underway almost contemporaneously. The Glyptothek, built by command of King Ludwig I and also opened in 1830, was a formidable statement of intent on the part of the Bavarian king, indicating his unwillingness to be outdone in the art-collecting stakes (Sheehan 62-70). These two buildings would define the architectural paradigm of the public museum

throughout the western world for much of the following century, recycling motifs and details from the classical vernacular in such a way as to postulate a link between the ancient world and its would-be successors (Giebelhausen 2006, 230). Following the news of their construction and opening, art galleries and museums became something of a ‘political necessity’ in other German states, with a rapid succession of similar institutions being built in the following decades (Sheehan 83, Green 115). Berlin itself would become a city almost defined by an abundance of museal spaces (see Figure 2). The area in the vicinity of the Altes Museum became known as ‘Museum Island’ thanks to the building of the Neues Museum in 1851 and the opening of the Nationalgalerie in 1876 (Lorente 151). The ability to build and maintain historically important collections was thus located at the centre of the renewed civic pride which was growing throughout the German states from the 1840s onwards – as James Sheehan has noted, demand for a national gallery only increased in fervour after the failure of the 1848 uprisings to secure lasting political change (112).

German museums would prove paradigmatic within the growing field of museum practice for more than just their design and appearance. During the early decades of the 19th century, the market for historical and artistic treasures was dominated by French, Italian and British collectors, leaving the newly-opened German galleries uncertain as to how best to fill these impressive, though empty, structures. Part of the answer to this problem lay close to home – in 1819, a manufactory for plaster casts was opened in Berlin (Schreiter 39). German museums began to incorporate a large number of plaster replicas into their sculpture collections, in order to ‘complete’ their narratives of artistic development within the medium (Joachimides 207). In doing so, they established a precedent for future museums to follow regarding the formation of collections: originality and provenance were still of utmost importance, but replicas became permissible. At the

same time, this widened the circulation of artworks to a considerable degree: copies of the same sculpture could now be viewed in a variety of locations, providing the originals with a widened capacity for reception and influence.

Alongside state-funded institutions there was within Germany a growing number of small to medium-sized historical associations with their own collections and display spaces (Crane 138). This intense appetite for historical objects and texts would only increase following German unification in 1871, and in many ways played a significant role in the German people's acceptance of the new status quo, as this marked the endpoint of a period 'in which Germany's existence as a cultural nation became more than the fantasy of an isolated few.' (Applegate 116). Prussia now took the lead in cultural and political affairs on behalf of the German states, with its museums increasingly serving as joint repositories and symbols of the newly-united German national memory. This led to a large increase in budget for the Berlin museums from the 1870s onwards in an attempt to further improve the prestige and size of their collections (Marchand 71). This was by no means an easy task as, according to Alon Confino, the unification of 1871 had irrevocably 'redefined the spatial and historical dimensions of the nation and the ways Germans remembered their pasts', resulting in what Rudy Koshar describes as a 'tremendous dilation of German collective memory at the inception of the modern German national state.' (Confino 2006 33, Koshar 7).

Determined to capitalise on their victory in the Franco-Prussian war, the newly-minted German emperors funnelled increasing sums into the building of museums and the acquisition of masterpieces, not only to emphasise Germany's political ascendancy within Europe but also to provide the institutional means by which the surfeit of competing German national memories could be absorbed and re-defined in such a way as to provide a politically useful tool in the shaping of the nation's understanding of itself. Such was the

scale of Germany's expenditure in the museum sector that, in 1898, an employee of the British Museum compiled a report complaining of the disparity in state funding between the two nations (Coombes 59).

Towards the end of the century a remarkable groundswell of publicly-organised museum activity would occur. Between 1890 and 1918, 371 'Heimat' museums would be founded across Germany, mostly in the smaller cities and towns (Confino 1997, 134). These museums sought to depict local artefacts and historical remnants as being every bit as worthy of commemoration and study as the great works of art or ancient ruins which could be found in the larger metropolitan museums (Confino 1997, 137). Heimat museums endeavoured to present culture from a non-elite perspective, choosing instead to focus on the history of the immediate civic surroundings within which they were opened, and from which they drew the materials for their collections. Rather than placing existing modes of institutionalised national memory in doubt, however, these small municipal museums would instead actively seek to secure a place for the local within the national – in short, they demonstrate 'the extent to which apparently popular, even democratic, change could serve conservative ends' within the enveloping museum function of the nascent German state (Green 111). The Heimat movement made 'memory into a form of social action', by means of which local memories could be subsumed within a larger Germanic mode of historical understanding, and as such played a pivotal role in a 'definite change in the self-understanding of the German nation around 1890.' (Confino 1997 157, Conrad 17).

This is not to say that a popular interest in German history and traditions was not present before unification. Far from it, in fact, with a large number of amateur historical societies existing in most German states by the 1850s (Green 103-104). There was widespread interest in the notion of a 'historical sublime' among German intellectuals and artists in the early decades of the 19th century (Crane x). Numerous periodicals were

founded which presented themselves as ‘museums’ in which historical objects were depicted and described for the reader (Crane 116-128). The flourishing museum culture of Germany between the 1870s and 1890s can be understood as the result of a coupling between imperial desires to improve Germany’s international standing and the presence of a wide range of historical practices generated by closely linked interest groups within the middle classes, dating back to the educational prioritisation of the study of history along the lines of enquiry pioneered by Leopold von Ranke (Clark 2004, 11).

This overwhelming interest in history, both within the academy and much of the wider public, provided the intellectual backdrop against which Friedrich Nietzsche began his career as a classics scholar. Nietzsche’s 1874 essay ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ should be read as a reaction against the overwhelming number of cultural debates circulating in Germany at the time regarding the nation’s history and finding material expression in the many museums which already existed or were being built across the country. While Mark Salber Phillips regards the essay as a ‘brilliant attack on the smugness of German historicism’, it is not only a rebuttal of certain modes of historical understanding, but contains key insights to Nietzsche’s own philosophy of history (7). Nietzsche neither dismisses nor rejects the importance of history and historical memory for modern society, but argues that these had become distorted in Germany through a combination of intellectual laxity and cultural triumphalism. For Nietzsche, the principal cause of modernity’s discontents was ‘the misuse of history, the use of history in a life-damaging way’ – in his essay of 1874 he would attempt to delineate a corrective solution to this ‘misuse’ (Young 2010, 177). This would involve a re-imagining of the historical impulse and the application of stringently intellectual guidelines to govern it. As Daniel Breazeale has commented, ‘it is not historicism *per se* to which [Nietzsche] objects [...] but rather the unexamined teleology that usually accompanies it’ (xv). Nietzsche

sought to upset the established modes of understanding, interpreting and disseminating historical knowledge in order to enable history to directly serve the purposes of modern society, rather than dictating to it. Michel Foucault highlights the interrogative tone within Nietzsche's thought, arguing that: 'Nietzsche's criticism [...] always questioned the form of history [...] whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development' (Foucault 1977, 152).

'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life' sees Nietzsche railing against what he terms 'the bogus form of culture which has just now become the fashion in Germany' (69). This 'bogus' culture is defined by an excessive adulation for the past, the explication of which sees him draw upon medically-informed metaphors in order to stress the seriousness of the problem: not only is 'it [...] possible to value the study of history to such a degree that life becomes stunted and degenerate', but 'we are all suffering from a consuming fever of history and ought at least to recognize that we are suffering from it' – for Nietzsche, Germany's addiction to the historical is compounded by its continuing failure to comprehend the depth and intensity of the problem (59-60). The chief symptom of this 'consuming fever' might well be identified as Germany's museums, places which above all seemed to represent the consolidation of this particular intellectual attitude. Berlin's museums, as we have seen, formed the main component of the state's attempted 'project of historicizing identity in Prussia' (Toews 439). Above all he characterises museums and galleries as spaces which are only capable of offering the illusion of historical and aesthetic experience without the necessary grounding in life and lived reality which he believed to be crucial to artistic creation. For Nietzsche, this 'crazy method [...] leads our young painters into picture-galleries instead of into [...] nature' (118). This criticism is of course predicated on a Romantic aesthetic, characterised by the belief in nature as an experiential arena for the purification of artistic intent and expression.

Germany's museums as they were administered and used at the time of writing, were, like the historical knowledge which they simultaneously contained and made available for consumption, barring the way towards a more harmonious relationship with the past.

Nietzsche's solution to this problem is first to outline a tripartite framework through which he believes analysis of the past should be attempted, and then to advocate what he believes to be the optimal method of utilising this framework. He divides the study of the past into three different modes: the 'monumental', the 'antiquarian', and the 'critical' (67). The prioritisation of any one of these modes over the others, we are told, leads inherently to falsities and misinterpretations. The monumental and the antiquarian modes are possessed of great dangers: if 'the monumental mode of regarding history *rules* over the other modes [...] the past itself suffers *harm*: whole segments of it are forgotten', while adopting only an antiquarian stance poses the risk of lapsing into 'the repulsive spectacle of a blind rage for collecting, a restless raking together of everything that has ever existed' (70-71, 75). Thus a compromise must be reached. A 'critical' spirit of enquiry must be entered into in order to fully comprehend the importance of the past while guarding against the perils of idolatry and complacency. A balance must be struck between the three modes of understanding in order to reach a point of stability from which the past can be reshaped into a useful resource for scholars, artists and society at large.

This is not to suggest that Nietzsche was unique in his outlining of these concepts. As David Lowenthal has shown, complaints about the potentially 'stultifying effects' of the antiquarian impulse have been a commonplace in many different historical contexts (133). Nor was he the first to complain about the negative effects of museums upon the artistic sphere – French architect Quatremère de Quincy, whose work we have already encountered, comes to mind. The importance of Nietzsche's thoughts for the purpose of the current study regarding the relation of history to modernity lies in the fact that he was

writing within a culture committed to museum-building as a civic project of great importance, as well as in his outlining of different intellectual modes for the understanding of history. Nietzsche was born into a society in which the museum function was strongly present not only in the official architectural and collecting policies of the state, but also throughout the social spectrum, hence his refusal to completely reject historical endeavours. Rather, he sought to delineate a way in which history could be made compatible with the demands of modern society: by carefully combining modes of historical understanding in order to reach something of a middle way between the clashing poles of the monumental and the antiquarian. It is my belief that this proved to be a profoundly influential attitude on other writers, particularly some of those we now think of as constituting key members of the Modernist movement. In later chapters Nietzsche's ideas will be used as a tool in the analysis of several texts with regards to the functioning of history and memory at both national and individual levels.



Figure 2: the Altgalerie, Berlin, opened 1876.

IV. London

*We live in the era of Omnum-Gatherum; all the world is a museum. To design any building in England nowadays is therefore to work under the eye, so to speak, of the Society of Antiquaries.*⁴

The architect Robert Kerr was a successful designer of both public and domestic buildings during the latter half of the 19th century in England. As such, he was sensitive to changes in client's demands and expectations with regards to the layout and styling of their houses – changes which, as the quote which begins this section indicates, were mostly dictated by an increasing demand for historicity and antiquity. This demand for aesthetic adherence to the styles of the past is perhaps best exemplified by the fervent acquisition of trinkets, artworks and furnishings by many members of the wealthier classes in Victorian society (Levine 14-15). So pronounced was this collecting urge that Kerr believed that a room for gentlemen to house their collections was something of a necessity in houses of a certain size (130). This accords with Nicholas Daly's belief that during the 19th century in Britain 'the bourgeois home was becoming itself museum-like' (99). Although, as a sensible man of business, Kerr was happy to provide designs which mixed the museal with the domestic, he was evidently perturbed by the implications of this trend, writing that:

The character of the nineteenth century in English architectural history will be simply this; - An inconceivable appetite for relics of the Past was at once its virtue and its vice. (Kerr 342)

Lyric poet Austin Dobson depicts such collectors in a manner clearly indebted to Robert Browning, seeking to unveil the psychological compulsions which drive such a

⁴ See: Kerr 342.

pursuit. His ‘The Collector to his Library’ depicts such a figure praying for the continued wellbeing of his books, placing objects above people in the collector’s affections:

Brown Books of mine, who never yet
 Have caused me anguish or regret,
 Save when some fiend in human shape
 Has set your tender sides agape (286).

Furthermore, he confesses ‘I love you’ to his volumes, introducing a note of emotional unbalance to the poem (286). In ‘A Virtuoso’, Dobson portrays the figure of a collector in a way which chimes with Nietzsche’s denunciation of the antiquarian impulse. The collector, entreated by a visitor to his house to donate money to a charitable cause, instead takes the opportunity to show off the highlights of his collection:

I see you look
 At yonder dish, a priceless bit;
 You’ll find it eched in Jacquemart’s book,
 They say that Raphael painted it (118)

The money is being raised for war veterans, yet for the collector, it is ‘we connoisseurs’ who are most troubled by the outbreak of conflict, as it often results in ‘Collections shattered at a blow’ and ‘Museums turned to hospitals!’ (116). The apparent lightness of Dobson’s verse only partially obscures his attack on the behaviour of those who would prioritise collecting remnants of the past over aiding others in the present.

Yet, as Ruth Guilding has shown, collecting had been a favoured pastime of the wealthy in English society since at least the 17th century (2-20). Dobson’s exploration of

the theme is perhaps better understood when linked with the explosion in consumer demand and collecting activity which resulted from the Universal Exhibition of 1851, otherwise known as the Crystal Palace. This structure best represents the ‘simultaneous adulation of their own age and [...] reverent fascination for the past’ which Philippa Levine has identified as one of the defining paradoxes of Victorian society (1). Combining the latest innovations in technology and design with faux-historical tableaux, acting as both museum and marketplace, the Crystal Palace was instrumental in the creation of an economic substratum based on desire rather than need (Hoberman 10, Belk 13). Moreover, although there had previously been industrial exhibitions elsewhere, the sheer number and variety of objects on display in the Hyde Park site represented an unmistakable step forward in the ascendancy of commodity culture (Edwards 43, Purbrick 16). As Andrew Miller has noted, the sheer scale of the event enabled visitors to ignore, or combine, the official categories separating the objects, and to construct their own interpretations of the space according to their pre-existing interests (52). This interpretative freedom is echoed in the large body of historiography surrounding the event, with historians making use of the Crystal Palace as a kind of ‘projection screen’ over which a multitude of discursive schemes have been laid (Auerbach and Hoffenberg xi). What remains clear is that the Universal Exhibition proved successful enough to engender an appetite for the staging of similar events in a number of other nations – not least, as we have seen, in France – while changing the architectural vocabulary of display by incorporating the principles of flexibility and impermanence into its design (Giebelhausen 2006, 232). There were, however, several notable voices raised in protest against the endeavour. William Morris, John Ruskin, and the painter Edward Burne-Jones all expressed a dislike of the Crystal Palace, believing it to be the product not only of bad design, but potentially a corrupting

influence on the development of the aesthetic sensibilities of their contemporaries (Corbett 26-27, Hamon 57).

In addition to the effects the structure and its contents had on its own visitors, the Crystal Palace represented a significant advance in the admittance of large numbers of the general public to other spaces of display (Auerbach 151-154). The British Museum, regarded today as an exemplar of the museum space, was until the latter half of the 19th century ‘practically comatose [...] so far as service to the public was concerned’, with minimal opportunity for visitors and opening times which prohibited poorer members of society from entering (Altick 241). A surge in visitor numbers in 1851 – thanks to large numbers of tourists in London for the Universal Exhibition – led to British Museum authorities gradually relaxing their regulations, thus opening their collections to a wider audience (Bennett 1995, 72). This increased footfall made funding and maintenance of the collections a priority: in 1860 the institution’s funding was increased to nearly tenfold the figure that it had received in 1835 (Daunton 11). This growth in financial support was also necessary due to the sponsoring of larger numbers of expeditions and surveys spanning a number of disciplines from archaeology to entomology. These in turn resulted in the museum’s collections swelling to nigh-unmanageable proportions, on top of the fact that it operated as a copyright library and depository of manuscripts (Jenkins 1992, 16). Britain’s increasingly aggressive imperial policies also added to the amount of objects being brought to the museum for categorisation and storage (Hoberman 136-137). This process of classification, storage, and display was itself fraught with practical and epistemological stumbling blocks, as Mirjam Brusius has demonstrated in her analysis of the British Museum’s Assyrian collections (19-30). The majority of the Assyrian artefacts were not only physically challenging to house due to their size, requiring structural work to the museum buildings, but also presented a challenge in terms of the historical narrative

presented by the existing collections of Greek and Roman artefacts. Where to display them was as much a theoretical question as a practical one, requiring much historiographic work. The case of the Assyrian objects has deep implications in as much as it unveils the subjectivity behind the ordering of history in museums according to the knowledge and interests of the curatorial staff. There is an implicit degree of narrativity to the arrangement of history in any schematic which either encourages, or draws upon, linear interpretations of historical progress. As Henry Forbes, director of Liverpool's museums, commented in 1894, visitors should be encouraged to experience 'the Museum [as] a book with its pages open and its narrative so clearly set out, that they are unawares following a connected story' (Bennett 2004, 72). This overlapping between textual and museal spheres was thus consciously exploited by museum staff in order to impress upon the visiting public the desired meanings which had been decided according to extant disciplinary interpretations of the raw material provided by the collections themselves.

This applies not only to the formation of the art-historical canon, but also to the construction of history itself as a representable phenomenon within the space of the museum. As Hayden White has commented, interpretative strategies of this nature are indispensable for the circulation of any historical knowledge, whether in written or exhibitionary form:

Historical accounts purport to be [...] models [...] of specific segments of the historical process [...] such models are needed because the documentary record does not figure forth an unambiguous image of the structure of events attested in them.

(30)

Attempts to recreate the essence or structure of the past are necessarily tempered by the beliefs and desires of the agent attempting the act of reconstruction. This is no less true in

textual spaces than in the museum. Despite the best efforts of its staff, the British Museum thus often found itself fighting a battle for epistemological unity at the level of individual objects. An attempt was made to lessen the burden of the increasing collections by moving the zoological specimens to South Kensington, where the Natural History Museum was opened in 1881. Although inarguably intended to bolster the reputation of the natural sciences through its impressive size and elaborate architecture, the Natural History Museum's interior decoration presented a further complication of the capability for narrative manipulation within the museum space. Intricate tiling was used by the builders and craftsmen to represent a wide number of species, though they were divided according to 'living' and 'extinct' – which has been interpreted by modern-day museum staff as an attempt on the part of Richard Owen, first director of the museum, to refute the widespread acceptance of Darwinian thought.⁵ Although a large statue of Darwin now sits, as if enthroned, within the museum's central hall, the walls of the building itself offer a glimpse of a time when his theories were subject to fierce contestation, and also to the capabilities of museum spaces to tell stories of their own which counter larger prevailing narratives.

The Crystal Palace was closed, taken down, and rebuilt on an even larger scale at Sydenham, opening again to the public in 1854. With this move came a pronounced shift in purpose: entertainment rather than edification became the primary motive for maintaining the structure, as it was now entirely privately-owned and run for profit. Despite this change in emphasis on the part of the proprietors, exhibitions continued in an innovative fashion – as Charlotte Schreier and Amy Von Lintel have observed, the sculpture collection was unique in Britain at the time as it was arranged according to historical precedence rather than notions of artistic quality, offering 'an art-walk through the ages' (Schreier 37, Von Lintel 139). Furthermore, a succession of period rooms

⁵ See: <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/history-and-architecture.html>.

intended to recreate historical interiors – within a larger structure so visually defined by its very modernity – offered visitors the chance to indulge in the kind of faux-historical experience which so many later exposition sites would utilise as a key part of their appeal.

John Davidson's poem 'The Crystal Palace' casts a cynical eye on the nature of the attractions to be found at the Sydenham site, combining black comedy with urban grotesquerie:

But come: here's crowd; here's mob; a gala day!

The walks are black with people; no one hastes;

They all pursue their purpose business-like –

The polo-ground, the cycle-track; but most

Invade the palace glumly once again.

It is 'again'; you feel it in the air –

Resigned habitués on every hand (428)

Although obviously popular in terms of visitor numbers – 'the walks [...] black with people', there is disappointment 'in the air'. A place of entertainment and relaxation has instead, through the sheer repetitiveness of the experience, become enfolded into the routines of everyday life: 'all pursue their purpose business-like'. Davidson guides the reader over to a bandstand where we find 'Music and Dancing! People by themselves/Attempting happiness!' (429). This telling enjambment between 'themselves' and 'Attempting happiness!', combined with the shrill tone of the repeated exclamation marks, signals the desperation which Davidson feels underpins both the mindset of the visitors and the venue itself.

As the day wears on, this desperation is replaced with a sense of horror:

Heard in the billiard-room the sound of Mob;

Occult and ominous, besets the mind;

Something gigantic, something terrible

Passes without, repasses; lingers; goes;

Returns and on the threshold pants in doubt

Whether to knock and enter, or burst the door,

In hope of treasure and a living prey. (432)

Capitalising ‘Mob’ in such a way as to signal the groups’ coming to life as an entity in its own right, detached from the norms of individual behaviour, Davidson transfigures the movements of the crowd into ‘something terrible’, in search of ‘treasure and [...] living prey’, thus foregrounding the rapacious greed of the visiting ‘Mob’. The crowd’s search for enjoyment and sustenance has robbed it of reason and morality, encouraged by the variegated experiences on offer. As night draws in, the Crystal Palace is turned into a ‘place/Phantasmal like a beach in hell where souls/Are ground together by an unseen sea.’ (433). The bleakness of Davidson’s interpretation of Victorian England’s premier space of display and entertainment serves as a potent reminder that the experience of exhibitions was, despite the best efforts of curators and staff, ultimately a matter of subjectivity. For Davidson, the culture of display which the Crystal Palace embodied and encouraged was more identifiable with the purgatorial than the paradisiacal.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of the original Crystal Palace of 1851 was its bequeathing of the funds raised to found the South Kensington Museum – known now as the Victoria and Albert Museum (Heyck 92). Opening in 1857, under the leadership of

Henry Cole (who had also headed up the committee of the Universal Exhibition), the South Kensington represented a distinct step away from the reigning orthodoxy of the museum sector. Explicitly linked to the improvement of British design industries through the exhibiting of fine examples, this was a museum defined by a drive for education rather than elegance. To this end, Cole encouraged the circulation of objects to provincial museums and galleries, in order to maximise the potential for exposure to the collections for those living outside London. Christopher Whitehead describes the South Kensington museum as having combined elements of the National Gallery and British Museum, while stressing the difference in outlook which Cole brought to the institution (80, 96). With expanded opening hours, expressly intended to encourage the working classes, the South Kensington Museum attracted 15 million visitors between 1857 and 1883 (Taylor 75, Bennett 1995 70). No longer the exclusive preserve of scholars or the wealthy, museum-going was on its way to becoming a national pastime. This new spirit of flexibility was mirrored in the makeup of the institution itself, combining art-historical collections alongside working scientific laboratories. Under Cole's stewardship, the South Kensington Museum embodied a spirit of institutional hybridity, right down to the building itself – a group of Italian photographers were commissioned to supply architectural images for the building's designers to draw inspiration from (Whitehead 47). By opening his arms to the public, Cole altered the perceptions and working practices of museums, ensuring their status as key institutions of modernity.

Much like Germany, there was a boom in museum building in Britain towards the end of the 19th century and the onset of the 20th, with 215 museums opening between 1890 and 1914 (Hoberman 13). This period of sustained growth in the museum sector provides evidence for David Lowenthal's belief that during 'the turn of the twentieth century all Britain seemed bent on nostalgic quest' – a quest inspired by a cultural landscape

increasingly dominated by museums and the routes into historical experience which they seemed to offer (44). It is not surprising then that museums would feature in literary imaginings of humanity's future in the work of H. G. Wells, William Morris and Samuel Butler.

H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* presents a pessimistic vision of future times. Humanity is divided into two subspecies, one possessed of elfin beauty yet mentally incapable of all but the most basic tasks, while the other dwells underground and pursues dark industries of an unknown nature, preying on the surface-dwellers at will. The novella's protagonist arrives into this future and explores his surroundings, equally fascinated and aghast at the strangeness of his experience. Wells disconcertingly superimposes the future landscape on top of that of Victorian London, with Wandsworth and Battersea giving way to 'a large estuary' (Wells 64). The explorer's past is effaced by the topography of the future, with no traces left of the Victorian built environment in an unsettling reversal of landscape's palimpsestic functions. This overwriting of the landscape is not undertaken by man, but by time itself. Coming across a large structure named only as 'the Palace of Green Porcelain', the time-traveller is 'reminded of a museum' by the size and layout of the structure, with its arrangement of windows clearly following the established template of the public museum (64). His suspicions are confirmed when he comes across the remnants of the museum's collections: dinosaur skeletons still dominate the main gallery, while the vitrines of his own time remain, some even intact (65). Drawing a direct parallel with the South Kensington Museum, Wells appeals to his readers' assumed knowledge of the institution for his evocation of the time-traveller's surroundings. Wells thus plays upon the contrast between the Victorian experience of the museum – a place visited by crowds of people, full of life amidst the historical remains – and its direct opposite in the future, an abandoned cadaver of a

building, to invoke an effective eeriness. Here there are no crowds, no feet to disturb the ‘thick dust’ which has accumulated (65). This is a space which no longer serves any purpose for the denizens of this future London. The time-traveller is unable to interpret the objects which he comes across, despite his near-recognition of their material form:

on either side of me were the huge bulks of big machines [...] I was inclined to linger amongst these; the more so as for the most part they had the interest of puzzles, and I could make only the vaguest guesses at what they were for. (66)

This represents a total breakdown of the relationship between object and viewer, not least because of the disparity in time between witness and witnessed. Humanity’s future inventions are bewildering to the time-traveller, despite his ‘weakness for mechanism’ (66). In *The Time Machine*, the museum space is subject to interrogation by the passing of time itself. The interpretative leap required for understanding is too great, with the objects unable to explain themselves to an audience unfamiliar with the required visual vocabulary. Wells here conducts an act of sabotage from inside the museum itself, confronting his readers with ‘the fragility of the museum’s claims to represent anything coherent at all’ (Crimp 55).

This uncovering of an essential fragility within museum spaces is also present in William Morris’ *News from Nowhere*, an exercise in utopian fiction in many other ways at odds with the vision of humanity’s future presented by Wells. Morris’ time traveller William Guest is transported to the 22nd century, where he meets the denizens of a future London which has more in common with the Middle Ages than the traveller’s own time. As in *The Time Machine*, much of London has been reclaimed by nature, in a rewriting of the familiar topography imposed by humanity’s endeavours: most of South Kensington has become a ‘beautiful wood’ (64). Unlike *The Time Machine*, however, the inhabitants

of Morris' future remain at least conscious of London's past, preserved as it is in street names and monuments – Guest muses on this process, wondering aloud at 'How curious it is that places change so, and yet keep their old names!' (83). The precise meanings and connotations of these 'old names', however, have slipped from popular memory as the workings of historical memory have become less of a pressing need for the inhabitants of this future world: 'the nineteenth century, of which such big words have been said, counted for nothing in the memory of this man' (84). Morris here attempts to step aside from the prevailing historical attitudes of 'the nineteenth century' in order to explore how an era so set on the institutionalisation of memory would itself be remembered – in this scenario, it amounts to little more than 'nothing', having become part of the flow of history itself.

This willingness to probe the weaknesses of 19th century historicism pervades Morris' other ventures. In a speech given before the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1889, Morris indicated his belief in the need for 'a true conception of history, a power of making the past part of the present' (1936, 148). By endorsing a relativistic approach to the workings and interpretation of historical discourse, Morris echoes Friedrich Nietzsche's attempts to define a correct method for 'making the past part of the present'. For Morris, as for Nietzsche, the reigning modes of historical understanding which increasingly permeated numerous areas of culture were, as his fictional time-traveller is made to discover, misguided at best and intrinsically damaging at worst. As Matthew Beaumont suggests, *News from Nowhere* represents

more than an attempt to grasp the present of capitalist modernity as history. It is also an attempt to imagine a [...] society in which it is possible to grasp history as the present, that is, in which history is simply being. (43)

Morris goes so far as to stage a dialogue within the British Museum in which the very need for museums is brought into question. Before this scene, Morris subtly points towards this interrogation of Victorian society's museal impulses, as Guest and his guide pass the National Gallery on their way through what was once Trafalgar Square. The guide reveals that 'nowadays wherever there is a place where pictures are kept as curiosities permanently it is called a National Gallery', in a humorously pointed undercutting of the institution's carefully-maintained prestige (80). In this future society, spaces are evaluated and named according only to the purposes which they can be seen to serve – utility rules over all.

Arriving at the British Museum, Guest is introduced to his guide's great-grandfather, who previously held the position of librarian, but now lives there without employ, acting as an embodiment of those sensibilities which the museum itself once embodied. As with the National Gallery, the museum's original purpose has been effaced and transformed over time: it has only been left standing as a record of the tastes of ages past, rather than as a site which actively plays a part in the cultural sphere (85). This museumification of the museum itself is an unsettling proposition for Morris' time-traveller – rather than being understood to represent, if not define, the understanding of history, museums have instead been consigned to it, dropping out of the public consciousness. Morris also reflects on the perceived need for historical knowledge which was, as we have seen, so prevalent during the 19th century, linking the proliferation of historical discourse to the irruption of crises in the present, as the ex-librarian ruefully explains:

I don't think my tales of the past interest them much. The last harvest, the last baby, the last knot of carving in the market-place, is history enough for them. It was different [...] when I was a lad, when we were not so assured of peace and continuous plenty [...] (89)

In this future, historical understanding has been fundamentally transformed in nature and scope, according to the needs which it is now recognised as fulfilling. Morris' commitment to shedding the epistemic burdens of 19th century historicism are clearly enunciated in *News from Nowhere*, a text which delights in the imagined end of the British Museum as a symbol for a liberating shift in society's intellectual engagements with the past.

Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* presents the reader with a museum space which is, unlike those in the fictions of Wells and Morris, still operational, although not in the ways which the British public were increasingly becoming familiar with. Upon entering the land of Erewhon Butler's traveller is forced to give up his wrist-watch, as it makes the native population 'concerned and uneasy', and it is subsequently placed alongside other technological objects within the local museum (63-65). The traveller's intellectual sensibilities lead him to distinguish between the 'curiosities' on display and the machinery, much of which is familiar to him, although it is clear that his existing interpretive strategies are of limited use in Erewhon: the technology which he defines by use value is kept intact 'not for instruction, but for curiosity' (65). Butler here imagines a different crisis of interpretation than the one which awaited the time-traveller in *The Time Machine*: his explorer is perfectly capable of recognising the objects before him, but not the system of classification and description into which they have been made to fit. Eliding the categories of curiosity and utility in this way reveals the arbitrary nature of these interpretational categories. The people of Erewhon still use their museum, but not in the manner to which the Victorians had become accustomed. Butler lays bare the museum's capacity for strangeness and alterity, in a way which indirectly presages much of late 20th century museum practice, in which 'effects of disembodiment' and estrangement between viewer and object are frequently produced (Bishop 5).

Most significantly for the purposes of the current study, these three Victorian fictions present visions of future societies which have moved away from the cultural norms of their time of writing – a separation of past and future models of civic society most clearly demonstrated in their respective understandings of, and interactions with, the space of the museum. Wells, Butler and Morris all present the museum as a location of central importance for citizens of the 19th century, but one which fades in meaning with the passing of time as societies reorient themselves and their accompanying conceptions of the material world. Most chilling of all is Wells' vision of a future where, in forgetting the purpose of the museum, humanity forgets itself at the same time. All knowledge, Wells suggests, fades and diminishes, no matter how high the walls and how thick the glass within which our attempts at preservation are encased.

V. The United States

After all not to create only, or found only,

But to bring perhaps from afar what is already founded

To give it our own identity [.]⁶

Walt Whitman's poem 'Song of the Exposition', quoted above, was written and recited for the 1871 National Industrial Exposition, held in New York, and expresses within its otherwise sweeping optimism several of the concerns which would mark the growth of museums in the United States. The 'youngest' country in the developed world in terms of shared cultural heritage, museums and expositions would provide vital staging grounds for the delineation and expression of the nation's identity. While seemingly freed from the fetters of the past, American culture was continually measured against the existing traditions of European nations and their artistic output – a process which Whitman's poem seeks to depict as being essentially beneficial to the youthful America:

Come Muse migrate from Greece and Ionia,

Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts [...]

Placard 'Removed' and 'To let' on the rocks of your snowy

Parnassus,

Repeat at Jerusalem, place the notice high on Jaffa's gate

and on Mount Moriah,

The same on the walls of your German, French and Spanish

castles, and Italian collections,

⁶ See: Whitman 225.

For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, untried

domain awaits, demands you. (226)

Whitman is here attempting to make a virtue out of the United States' dearth of cultural institutions – rather than being empty, the American cultural sphere is 'fresher', 'untried' and 'busier', described in such a way as to present would-be artists with greater scope for expression and innovation. Where he is most prescient, however, is in the invocation of the fiscal dominance which American collectors were soon to exert upon the world's art market. From the 1870s onwards, as we shall see at the end of this section, Whitman's wished-for placards stating 'Removed' would soon actualise upon the walls of Europe's great collecting institutions, not necessarily as a sign of the transplantation of the Muses to American shores, but as unmistakable tokens of the power of the dollar, the 'demands' of which were not easily ignored.

The growth of museums in the United States during the 19th century is a narrative which progresses in fits and starts. That a country whose very inception in the 18th century promised a sweeping-away of historical impediments to the abstract, though deeply held, concept of liberty, should eventually experience a boom in museum-building greater than that of either Germany or Britain, unmistakably signals a profound change in the American understanding of history as a cultural force during the 1800s. Michael Kammen identifies this change in cultural perceptions as taking hold during the 1870s, the first decade after the Civil War, noting an increase in artistic engagement with the themes of memory and history (93-100). Museum spaces were invested with multiple meanings during the period known as Reconstruction, acting as unifying receptacles for the nation's different memories of the recent trauma, as well as (in a manner much like their purpose in Imperial Germany) serving as focus points for a new conception of the country's past: one defined

not by schismatic politics, but by civic unity. The reality of their operation was somewhat different. Issues of public access and the lack of any recognisably *American* tradition of artistic achievement meant that museums in the United States faced problems familiar to their counterparts in Europe but also somewhat unique to their historical situation.

These problems are identifiable at the very onset of museum activity in the United States. The Charleston Museum, opened in South Carolina in 1773 (although only to the wealthy members of the institution which controlled it), represents the first instance of a self-declared 'museum' within American culture (Orosz 22-24). Due to its nature as a members-only institution, however, this is not where the history of publicly accessible collections in the United States is deemed by historians to have begun. That accolade is usually given to the collections of the polymath Charles Willson Peale, who opened his first display space to a paying public in Philadelphia in 1786, combining his own paintings with curiosities and artefacts, thus providing the space with the air of an expanded curiosity cabinet. Portraits of contemporary American political figures were mounted above stuffed birds, in a space where eclecticism and classification were linked as part of a display strategy aimed principally at attracting paying customers (Stewart 1994, 206). Peale was also attempting to delineate, through this layout, his adherence to the belief in a 'Great Chain of Being', using the separation of object categories and their vertical subdivision along the walls of the gallery to visually represent this theory for his visitors. That Peale was attempting such an endeavour in a cultural landscape notable for its lack of museums, and therefore dealing with a public unused to these kinds of display techniques, is a marker of his ambition and faith in the strength of his collections to withstand the epistemological pressures to which they were subjected within his museum.

In 1802 Peale put the skeleton of a mammoth on display, in a move designed not only to increase the reputation of his own collection, but also, as Les Harrison has

discussed, to bolster the position of the natural sciences in the United States. By exhibiting such a prestigious specimen, Peale hoped to refute European scientists' belief in hemispheric degeneracy (the idea that natural specimens in the 'new world' were smaller and less fully formed due to their supposed geographical isolation), and thereby to increase the legitimacy of American natural historians' claim to a place within the scientific community (Harrison 11). Here we see Peale's museum being pressed into a kind of national service, where the act of exhibition becomes invested with more than just the representation of the natural world and is made to bear the weight of the nascent nation's claims to validity in the intellectual realm. This fear of being overshadowed by the cultural authority of European institutions would surface again later in the 19th century.

After Peale's death in 1827 his collections were gradually dispersed. The next figure to dominate the museal sphere in the United States is more widely known as a showman and carnival proprietor than as a curator, but P. T. Barnum's American Museum deserves consideration as a defining museum space in the pre-Civil War era, open as it was to any member of the public willing to pay the admittance fee. Opening in New York in 1842, its combination of conventional display areas with a performance theatre and a menagerie ensured that Barnum was able to attract a large number of patrons seeking a variety of experiences. By 1849, the American Museum was the nation's leading place of amusement, as evidenced by the fact that there were more paid visits into the building than there were people in the United States during the time it was open until its closure due to fire in 1865 (Jacknis 88, Harrison 19). Barnum's frequent recourse to advertising – in print form and by staging a succession of stunts – ensured that his museum's institutional persona was notably different to that cultivated by other museum spaces, actively presenting itself as a place of leisure and entertainment rather than one of hushed contemplation. This ability of Barnum's to blur the lines between amusement and

edification anticipated the spectacular series of expositions which were held across the United States during the latter half of the 19th century, and points to a flexibility in the definition of museums in America which would prove problematic for successive generations of curators and museum directors eager to establish their professional standing. Barnum's museum lives on in the spectral form of a website maintained by the City University of New York – in an embrace of innovative display tactics of which he would doubtless approve.⁷

Between 1861 and 1865, the Civil War had shattered the youthful country's image of itself as a haven of personal liberties. In a bid to recover from the traumas of a conflict which was industrial in scale and execution, the United States engaged in a protracted 'referendum on the meaning and memory' of the conflict through a variety of cultural enterprises designed to promote unity and uphold the newly-established political order (Blight 31). These enterprises have been collectively termed the Reconstruction, and are defined by a turn towards a largely imagined past, the images of which were to define the nation's present conception of itself (Lowenthal 202). The building of museums would play a central role in this process. The relative youth of these institutions – many of which were built in the 1870s by cities eager to bolster their own reputation – meant that there was significant pressure placed on the governing boards and staff to acquire collections of proven historical worth and importance (Lears 186). This new wave of museums would be utilised by newly-wealthy industrial barons in order to justify their material gains, seeking to redeem the seemingly crass nature of their wealth by investing in artistic treasures, notionally for the good of the public. Sponsoring museums and art galleries allowed 'industrialists and professionals [...] to associate corporate capitalism with enduring traditions of Western art and learning', thereby placing themselves within a

⁷ See: <http://lostmuseum.cuny.edu/>.

historical continuum of great collectors and public benefactors (Bentley 2009, 27). A tour of Europe's great museums was seen as essential for the education of the younger members of this wealthy class, although these often functioned more as extended shopping trips than achieving the desired aim of inculcating respect for antiquity among the gilded youth (Adam 104).

New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art opened in 1872, although frequently had to move sites to accommodate its growing collections, and was administered by a board of governors drawn exclusively from the city's elite (Adam 110, Conn 29). Despite official proclamations to the contrary, the Metropolitan remained the preserve of the wealthy and socially ambitious well into the 20th century, with restricted opening hours that were ill-suited to the working classes. As Carol Duncan has observed, 'decisions made by museum trustees behind closed doors often contradicted their public rhetoric about the museum's mission to serve the entire community' (56). This rhetoric of accessibility was derived in large part from that of Henry Cole, chief administrator of London's South Kensington Museum, whose philosophy regarding the opening of museum spaces to the widest possible user demographics was a decisive influence on the first wave of museum professionals across the United States (Wallach 2015, 30). The ideological disparity between museum staff and their patrons was most visible in the nation's natural history museums, which were mostly staffed by scientists but run by businessmen, leading perhaps inevitably to clashes over budgets and display techniques (Brinkman 169). Despite these conflicts, curators in the United States were responsible for the promotion of several innovative ideas regarding museums' ability to disseminate knowledge.

At the forefront of these new professional strategies was George Brown Goode, a member of staff at the Smithsonian Institution, who pushed for a decluttering of display spaces in order for the visual experience of visitors to be as conducive to interpretation as

possible: ‘An efficient museum, from one point of view, may be described as a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well-selected specimen’ (Alexander 290). By providing ‘instructive labels’, Goode hoped to democratise access to knowledge, as museum visitors would no longer necessarily require pre-existing expertise before encountering objects and displays. In a speech of 1888, Goode acknowledged the Crystal Palace as an important space for thinking about techniques of display, further emphasising his belief in visuality as the key tool for the interpretive act (Alexander 295). Too young to have visited the Universal Exhibition himself (having been born in 1851), Goode’s appraisal of its success ignores the fact that many visitors had in fact found the experience confusing (Richards 27). He would, however, be heavily involved in the staging of the Columbian Exhibition of 1893, held in Chicago, organising the ordering and delivery of many exhibits (Rydell 278). This participation in an event which was explicitly populist in its aims indicates Goode’s canniness in regards to the opening up of museum spaces to the public consciousness – the Columbian Exhibition attracted 27 million visits during its six-month span, and many of its exhibits were transferred to Chicago’s Field Museum which was opened in the following year, and housed in the exposition’s Fine Arts building as a ‘permanent memorial’ to the fair and its cultural legacy (Rydell 274, Brinkman 170). This commingling of exposition and museal space was not the first of its kind in the United States as Philadelphia’s Centennial Exhibition of 1876 had also led directly to the founding of a museum (Conn 201). These museums thus owed their existence to funds raised by massively popular events, and attempted to maintain a public-oriented philosophy.

The great art galleries of Eastern cities like Boston and New York, however, would remain under the sway of the wealthier classes well into the 20th century, as exemplified by the influence exerted over New York’s Metropolitan Museum by the financier J. P. Morgan (Duncan 63). In a bid to rival the museums of Europe, Morgan and his peers began

to invest heavily in European art and sculpture (Duncan 60). These claims for cultural parity would even influence the design of certain American museums; the Art Institute of Chicago installed a staircase directly modelled on one in the Louvre – an architectural echo designed more to increase the prestige of the imitator than to praise the imitated (Duncan 51, Siegel 2000 xxiii). The builders of American museums can thus be seen to have taken selective advantage of an existing European architectural vernacular to assert their own buildings' claims to cultural authority. This acquisitive urge was also manifested in changes made to extant collections. For most of the 19th century American museums had been filled with plaster casts of statuary due to the near-impossibility of obtaining originals, whereas the increased purchasing power of Gilded Age collectors led to these collections being devalued and, gradually, disposed of as the concept of 'the masterpiece' took hold and only original works were deemed suitable for display (Paul 8, Wallach 1998 4). The desire to own objects with proven historical provenance was a constituent part of a wider concern with the prioritisation of historicity, embodied in the turn towards Colonial-era architecture and home furnishings towards the end of the 19th century (Fritzsche 193). Americans increasingly attempted to reclaim the past for themselves, as the museum function spilled over increasingly between the public and private spheres. Several wealthy collectors such as Isabella Stewart Gardner, Henry Clay Frick, and the aforementioned J. P. Morgan constructed homes for themselves which consciously doubled up as display spaces for their collections. Not that this appetite for history was solely the preserve of the wealthy. Thomas Denenberg's study of the 'Old America' furnishing company, demonstrates that many American families purchased an extensive range of products which were expressly designed to evoke a feeling of 'pastness' within their own homes (3).

The novels of Edith Wharton evoke this world of privilege in a way which itself is distinctly museum-like. Her depictions of the mannerisms and mores of a dwindling class of landed elites in New York are themselves shot through with discourses drawn from the realm of art history; characters discuss certain artworks and use them as framing references for the assertion of their right to cultural superiority. As Emily Orlando suggests, journeying through Wharton's 'fiction, poetry, and prose seasoned with carefully-placed allusions to the visual arts is to wander through [...] a picture gallery' (187). In *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton's characters inhabit spaces in which the shadow of the museum is rarely absent, with interiors which are so full as to almost overwhelm their inhabitants: 'the ormolu clock surmounted by a helmeted Minerva, [...] throned on the chimney-piece between two malachite vases' (*HOM* 96). Such environments, Wharton suggests, are inimical to the healthy expression of the emotions – one character's collection of books is housed in 'a fireproof annexe that looked like a mausoleum' (*HOM* 19). Moreover, Wharton dissects and complicates the gendered norms which attach themselves to the practices of collecting, which is depicted as a male-dominated activity. Where the men of this elite class are free to collect whatever obscurities attract their attention, the women are reduced to the status of objects, as Lily Bart recognises: 'a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame' (*HOM* 11). This alignment of the female form with the physical details of an artwork – 'the frame' – makes it clear that Wharton's museum-world is one conducted along uneven lines of deportment. Women may try, as Lily does, to empower themselves through the conscious manipulation of such painterly references – posing as she does at one party as a painting by Joshua Reynolds – but they are ultimately subject to the approval of their male audiences. Men inhabit stable spaces which are built around, and for, their collections: at both the beginning and conclusion of *The House of*

Mirth, Lily and Lawrence Selden have conversations (in which their true intentions are concealed beneath platitudes or by mutual incomprehension) which take place in the library of the latter, where he stores his first editions. During the interval between these interactions, Lily has descended several rungs of the social ladder, and is on the verge of being discarded by society altogether, whereas Selden's library (and by extension his place in the world) remains 'unchanged' (*HOM* 267).

Wharton also explores the possible psychological causes of this collecting urge, describing the book-collector Gryce (he whose prized possessions are stored in the aforementioned 'mausoleum') as being fundamentally ill at ease with the world unless capable of exercising a measure of control through acquisition. His purchases are:

the one subject which enabled him to forget himself, or [...] rather, to remember himself without constraint, because he was at home in it, and could assert a superiority that there were few to dispute. (*HOM* 18)

This passage predates Walter Benjamin's essay 'Unpacking my Library' by some time, although reveals a similar thinking-through of the collecting process by Wharton. Gryce's urge to 'forget himself' and to feel 'at home in' his collection mirror almost directly Benjamin's claim that 'for a collector [...] ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him, it is he who lives in them' (69). Wharton's treatment of this emotional aspect of collecting is both intriguingly prescient of Benjamin's later, more famous, exploration of the same theme and identifiably rooted in her own experiences of 19th century New York.

In *The Age of Innocence*, published in 1920, Wharton revisits New York during the 1870s – the first decade in which America's museums first rose to prominence. Newland Archer is engaged to be married, but meets Ellen, Countess Olenska, whose

vivacity captures his true affections. Olenska's allure derives not only from her beauty but also her unconventional way of living – she dwells, alone, in a house filled with objects of her own choosing. This troubles the homosocial realm of art-historical knowledge and consumption which is present elsewhere in society – her ‘funny house’, as she puts it, represents a real threat to the established order (*AOI* 47). Archer's powers of interpretation are defeated by the very fact of the collection's assemblage having been dictated by a woman whose tastes are unknown, and incomprehensible to him:

Newland Archer prided himself on his knowledge of Italian art. His boyhood had been saturated with Ruskin [...] He talked easily of Botticelli, and spoke of Fra Angelico with a faint condescension. But these pictures bewildered him, for they were like nothing that he was accustomed to look at (and therefore able to see) when he travelled in Italy [...] (45)

Olenska's possessions clearly reflect the fact that she has been excluded from the canonical education which Archer has benefited from, yet this has resulted in a freedom of choice and taste which proves unsettling yet alluring.

Due to his engagement, they are rarely able to spend time alone, and so they meet in the newly-opened Metropolitan Museum, the built reality of which Wharton depicts with a deceptive accuracy given the timeline of the novel: at the time of their visit it is a ‘queer wilderness of cast-iron and encaustic tiles’ whose future as a ‘great Museum’ lies ahead of them in time (195). While the interior of the museum is thus portrayed realistically, its siting within the city is not. As Karin Roffman has shown, Wharton moves the museum to the Central Park site which it would only occupy several years after the events of the novel, thus manipulating the realities of the museum space in order to increase its power as a resonant site for the creation of memories (227-228). Rather than

delighting in the exhibits, Olenska is troubled by the museum's capacity to impose meaning on its collections:

It seems cruel [...] that after a while, nothing matters...any more than these little things, that used to be necessary and important to forgotten people, and now have to be guessed at under a magnifying glass and labelled: "Use unknown." (195)

Her refusal to accept the 'labelled' narrative of the museum display further enforces her status as an outlier of the cultural establishment and its overarching regulatory codes. After the end of their affair, Wharton jumps thirty years to the 1900s, and another visit by Archer to the now 'great' Metropolitan:

the spectacle of those great spaces crowded with the spoils of the ages, where the throng of fashion circulated through a series of scientifically catalogued treasures, had suddenly pressed on a rusted spring of memory [...] instantly everything about him vanished, and he was sitting alone on a hard leather divan against a radiator, while a slight figure in a long sealskin cloak moved away down the meagrely-fitted vista of the old Museum. (217)

Wharton's Proust-like depiction of the operations of memory, in which a past scene is brought to mind with enough force to displace the events of the present, is paired with a quiet poignancy beneath the coolness of the language. Shari Benstock has described how Wharton 'greatly admired' the Frenchman, and the metaphor of 'a rusted spring of memory' could almost be drawn directly from his work. There is real pathos in the image of the 'slight figure' moving away, forever, to be swallowed up by the passage of time, for which the 'meagrely-fitted vista of the old Museum' stands in as a visual representation. That it was Olenska's refusal to adhere to the codes of behaviour implicit in the Metropolitan's structure that undermined their prospective relationship only

compounds the force of the scene. Locating Archer's emotional reckoning within the space of the museum allows Wharton to further question its status as a place of temporal fixity – it is not the present experience of the museum, 'those great spaces crowded with the spoils of the ages', which provides him with meaning, but rather a solitary image from his own past, one which he alone is capable of commemorating.

These two novels by Wharton study the impact of an overly-acquisitive attitude towards the past, one which was present in the nation's growing museums but also in its grandest private homes by the turn of the 20th century. The museum function in the United States during the 19th century is one defined by its place within a culture seeking to find and express a workable model of its own history. Turning towards Europe and the museums which already existed there was inevitable, although this did not prevent individual museum staff from carrying out their own innovations within a rapidly-professionalising field. By the turn of the 20th century, American society was more interested than ever before in exploring its own past – and that of other countries – which led to writers like Wharton and her close friend Henry James to use this interest as a major theme in their works. My first chapter will take a number of James's novels as its focus, and investigate the ways in which he engaged with museal spaces and their implications for living in the modern world.

Introduction summary

In these introductory sections I have hoped to set out my working approach to the question of how museums became a subject of interest for various writers seeking to explore the ways in which their societies organised their conceptions of the past. Nicholas Daly has argued that modernist art and literature signals a ‘loss of [...] ability to map the historical totality’ which is certainly not for a lack of trying within European and American society at around the time which these movements began to emerge (9). We might counter Daly’s statement with the idea that modernism was in fact a response to exactly these attempts; that mapping the totality of history was clearly an aim for those societies which supported the seemingly inexorable growth of museums. Modernist authors’ treatment of history and its place within the present is not one which can be reduced to a binary formulation of acceptance or rejection; rather, as Nietzsche had shown, there were different modes of utilising the past, each of which must be set against the other in order to prevent a collapse into the fevered historicism which seemed to define much of the 19th century. In this context, museums should be understood as ‘not just an institution or site but a resonant, organizing idea with a profound influence on cultural perception itself’, and as spaces which actively invited literary responses which drew on and explored their place within the historical framework of a given society; a framework within which they were the lynchpins (Bentley 2005, 65). Museums acted as condensatory sites for a variety of discourses ranging from the art-historical to the scientific, and as such held a distinct appeal for writers wishing to formulate their own responses to these concerns, the analysis of which is my aim in the succeeding chapters.

Chapter 1

Object lessons: People, Power, and Things in Henry James

An enquiry into the influence of the museum and its impact on literature during the late 19th and early 20th centuries finds an apposite starting point in the work of Henry James. Born in 1843 and dying in 1916, his life spans almost exactly the period with which this study concerns itself, while in his writing (both fictional and otherwise) James evinces an ever-evolving fascination with modes of display, both of people and objects. A great number of his texts are concerned with exploring the psychological and emotional consequences of living in the museum age — where certain practices of looking, and the increasing primacy of objects in determining social relations, provide a complexly evolving context for his characters' attempts at living harmoniously with each other and within their wider milieu. From his early novel *The American*, through to the unfinished novella *The Sense of the Past*, James was fascinated by the idea of interposing American subjects (defined by a naïvety derived from their supposed historical newness) onto European settings, where the chase for historical knowledge or cultural fulfilment amongst the latter continent's rich heritage often end in disappointment, heartbreak, or worse. James's work displays the influence of deep anxieties within the nation of his birth regarding the United States' place in world history, particularly within the realms of high culture. What Alan Wallach has described as 'the anxious business of comparing America with Europe' finds its clearest literary expression in James's fiction, as his characters cross the Atlantic in search of forms of understanding to which they are rarely granted access (Wallach 2010, 249).

The course of James's own life — during which he moved permanently to England after a year in Paris during the 1870s, eventually becoming a British subject during the

First World War — provides a mirror of sorts for his writing. A privileged child of wealthy but unorthodox parents, his early years were defined by travel and impermanence as the family moved frequently between countries. His early experiences while travelling around Europe visiting galleries and museums would have a lasting impact on his creative work. James's engagement with these spaces in his writing is multifaceted, and can be used to reflect on a variety of contemporary developments and conflicts in the cultural sphere — he was keenly aware, for example, of the rampant commercialism driving much of American museum activity. As Sarah Burns has noted, 'the status of art as commodity became too obvious to ignore and too threatening to discount' during the later years of the 19th century, and it is precisely this commodification of objects previously considered priceless, or even sacred, which provides James with much of his material when it comes to considering his contemporaries' attitudes towards the acquisition and appreciation of art (49).

Inextricably linked with these processes of acquisition was the question of collecting, and the figure of the collector. In James's fiction 'the collector' can be seen as a label for persons displaying a variety of behaviours with an even wider variety of causes and consequences; his treatment of such figures encompasses the scale from the comedic register to the tragic (often relying for effect on the shortness of the distance between these two poles). While Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* might be seen as a prototype for other fictional collectors in terms of his callous disregard for anything but the objects he desires, James refuses to allow any one view of collecting to dominate his texts. Indeed, in *The Spoils of Poynton* the act of collecting is revealed to be a deeply significant creative outlet for women who remain excluded from other spheres of action, and one which is capable of engendering and sustaining deep bonds of sympathy and comradeship between otherwise isolated individuals.

On occasion, as in *The Golden Bowl* and the aforementioned *The Spoils of Poynton*, James delves deeper into the question of human-object relations — taking as his focus of interest what Pierre Bourdieu names as ‘the social relations objectified in things’ (Bourdieu 77). James’s characters are trained, through their accumulated experience as museum visitors, gallery goers, and shoppers for high-end goods to endow objects with great power — which, as in *The Golden Bowl*, can prove disrupting to other facets of their lives, not least the question of their relations to one another. While never as stringently moralistic in tone as his contemporary, sociologist Thorstein Veblen, it is true that James shares with Veblen a common target: the lives and habits of the affluent classes. The ‘conspicuous consumption’ of all manner of goods and services became increasingly a hallmark of late-19th century high society, and the transmutation of money into cultural influence through the acquisition of artistic treasures is a process to which both authors paid close attention (Veblen 191). James’s own social milieu was one of considerable affluence, thus affording him a ringside seat to the lives of the titled and influential.

Nevertheless, he insisted on distinguishing between the proper and the improper when it came to the exercise of monetary privilege: we need only look at two different letters which he wrote to Edith Wharton in 1905 to begin to understand his criteria for propriety. The first letter, written while a guest at George Washington Vanderbilt’s Biltmore estate in North Carolina, sees James decrying ‘the extraordinary impenitent madness (of millions) which led to the erection in this [...] wilderness, of so gigantic & elaborate a monument to all that *isn’t* socially possible there.’ (Powers 48). Although filtered through his usual elegant prose, James’s distaste is evident. This contrasts greatly with a missal written in November of the same year in which he is effulgent in his praise of English country house life, declaring ‘the visitation of beautiful old buried houses [to be] a refinement of bliss’ (Powers 50-51). The ‘old’ and the ‘buried’ are clearly constituent

parts of the ‘beautiful’ in James’s estimation of his experiences; American mansions (and by extension American social life) are doomed to insignificance due to their inescapable lack of history.

This lack of historicity behind the public life of the United States was (in)famously described by James in his 1879 biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne. While there is clearly an element of humour in the following passage, it would have made hard reading for his immediate audience, especially in light of James’s recent move to England — a step that seemed to confirm his abandonment of his homeland in favour of pastures older. In the America that Hawthorne inhabited there was, James writes,

No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages or ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools — no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class — no Epsom nor Ascot!
(34).

While clearly exaggerated, this list lays bare cultural deficiencies which many Americans of James’s class were aware of, and felt increasingly desirous to make up for. One method open to wealthy American families of closing the gap between themselves and their European counterparts was to exchange their daughters (aided by substantial dowries and other financial benefits) for the supposed privilege of a title; Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl* is just such a figure, marrying into the Italian aristocracy and thus securing a historic bloodline to act as the crowning glory of her father’s collection. Such was the popularity of this method of acquiring prestige through wedlock that ‘by 1915 there were forty-two

American princesses [...] and one hundred and thirty-six countesses.’ (Beckert 260). Not that these marriages were guaranteed to be happy. In *The American*, James enacts a similar scenario but with the gender roles reversed: the wealthy Christopher Newman attempts to secure a French noblewoman as his wife but finds that there are insurmountable obstacles between his world and hers. In placing these alliances under close scrutiny in his texts, James makes apparent ‘the way that private relations, particularly those involving women and children, always involve the transmission of property.’ (Freedman 5).

By focussing on the wealthier classes, James left himself open to critics – both of his day and latterly — who believed his fiction to be too much concerned with questions only asked of, and by, people of excessive means. Arnold Bennett, reviewing *The Spoils of Poynton*, complained that ‘Mr. Henry James writes for the few, and belongs to the very few.’ (Bennett 270). It is hard to argue completely convincingly against this view, but it is important to note that James wrote not only from personal experience but also as an observer of contemporary phenomena such as the unmistakable rise in consumer activity across all levels of society during his lifetime — a rise most acutely evident in the lives of the wealthy. Deeply interested in ‘the way[s] in which consumption was reordering norms, relations and identities’, James was in prime position to observe, and describe, these changes as they became visible in the lives of those who consumed most in terms of variety and expense (Trentmann 147). His novels are peopled by characters who simultaneously seem ‘to have everything and nothing’ — a state of being which produces the kind of emotional conflicts which provide James with the material from which he crafts his narratives (McKee 31).

James never loses sight of the precarious relationship between wealth and the garnering of cultural capital; although uneasy about the fact that ‘an alternate sphere of aesthetic value somehow isolated from the demands of the cultural marketplace’ became

increasingly difficult to believe in as the 19th century drew to a close, he is able to derive inspiration from the questions that this situation posed for artists across all domains of formal production (Latham 56). His own financial travails as a professional author made him well aware of the fluctuations of a marketplace which proved, at best, lukewarm to his attempts to secure adequate monetary reward for his labour with the pen and, later, the typewriter (Kaplan 1999, 409-411). The getting-and-spending which powered modern life also fuels James's investigations into its effects on the psyche. Rather than presenting museums and galleries as spaces of sanctuary for the appreciation of art, somehow suspended above the concerns of the masses, James remains acutely aware of how great collections were formed. Museums occupied a prominent role in the formation of his own tastes and his conception of the role of art in people's lives. In the first volume of his memoirs, *A Small Boy and Others*, published in 1913, he recounts his experiences as a visitor to spaces of display in both the United States and Europe. Describing a visit to the Crystal Palace of New York (a close replica of the original structure in London) in 1853, James points to the creative power of such places in terms of their ability to restructure reality through the exhibitory process:

I was somehow in Europe, since everything about me had been "brought over" [...]
 If this was Europe then Europe was beautiful indeed, and we rose to it on wings of wonder [...] The Crystal Palace was vast and various and dense, which was what Europe was going to be[.] (139)

There is both confusion and delight in James's response to the displays — 'Europe' has somehow been transplanted to the streets of New York through the building of representative panoramas and scenes. In this passage we see the Foucauldian heterotopia in action, as an entirely 'other' space is impossibly yet convincingly recreated for the young boy's viewing pleasure, inspiring a sense of 'wonder' as he takes it in. This ersatz

Europe, which comes to symbolise the real thing in the imagination of the young James, serves as an ‘idea or effect that precedes the place itself’ (Bentley 2005, 72). As we have seen, this tendency — to idealise European life with its attendant cultural forms and institutions — was widespread amongst members of James’s class in the United States, for whom the continent served as ‘the original source of refinement and tradition’ (Beckert 43).

The James family moved to Paris in 1856, as documented in *A Small Boy and Others*, thus enacting a shift from the imagined to the real for the young Henry in terms of encountering European culture. His experiences there would prove to be central to his development as a writer, as he makes clear through his description of several incidents which he posits as altering his patterns of thought irrevocably. Bearing in mind that his descriptions of the city itself — and his comprehension of its development — were no doubt influenced by his frequent stays there as an adult over several decades, James describes his younger self as having been sensitive to the existence of different temporal zones within the city. Arriving three years after the sweeping rebuilding projects led by Baron Haussmann had begun in earnest, James depicts himself as being precociously aware of the deeper consequences of such dramatic changes to the city’s built environment:

Old Paris then even there considerably lingered; I recapture much of its presence, for that matter, within our odd relic of a house [...] What association could have breathed more from the queer graces and the queer incommodities alike, from the diffused glassy polish of floor and perilous staircase, from the redundancy of mirror and clock and ormolu vase [...] from that merciless elegance of tense red damask [...] (256-257)

‘Old Paris’ remained visible during the James family’s visit, although as the phrase suggests was increasingly being left behind by the march of time — represented on the literal plane by Haussmann’s army of workers and the streets they were tearing down and building back up with remarkable speed, which James would have seen as he traversed the city.

Where the above passage proves of real import for the present study is in its suggestion of the ‘presence’ of the past as a detectable phenomenon linked to the material world, observable by those equipped with a suitable fineness of perception. James describes this ‘presence’ as existing not in some ethereal sense, but rather as being an element of his immediate environment — the ‘odd relic of a house’ which the family rent for the duration of their stay. Furthermore, it is not just the architecture of the place which suggests a vanished era of history, but also its furnishings, ‘the redundancy of mirror and clock and ormolu vase’ and the ‘merciless elegance of tense red damask’. The trappings of the house, described thus, retain some element of the people who have lived among them, and furthermore are endowed with meaning beyond their decorative function: the damask wall coverings are ‘tense’ with latent expression, waiting for a perceptive audience to whom they can divulge their story. History is inscribed into the house and its objects, which themselves are capable of voicing the sum of their experience through time if only one had the requisite sense to decipher the language in which they are spoken. Whether or not we are convinced that James, at the age of thirteen, was quite capable of this kind of extra-sensory acuity, it is of considerable interest that he would utilise similar descriptions in his fiction regarding the potentiality of places and objects to impact the lives of the people who occupy and (seemingly) possess them. Ralph Pendrel, in *The Sense of the Past*, echoes his creator somewhat in his belief that he can ‘penetrate the past because it is codified and therefore subject to mastery.’ (Goodman 55). Pendrel’s desire to achieve

‘mastery’ of the past is soon revealed to be an ill-fated one, as he becomes trapped in the year 1820 while remaining distinctly ‘modern’ in his very being. In James’s notes for completing the story, published alongside the main body of the text, he makes clear that it is ‘the uncontrollability of [Ralph’s] modernism’ which sets him irreparably apart from the inhabitants of the era into which he ventures (*TSOTP* 334).

It is the subsequent existential unease of Pendrel’s situation that James wished to explore for effect in this story, which points towards his deeper interest in such a scenario — the possibility of demonstrating, in narrative form, his conviction that ‘history is never, in any rich sense, the immediate crudity of what “happens”, but the much finer complexity of what we read into it and think of in connection with it.’ (*CTW* 506). His purported childhood ability to distinguish ‘Old Paris’ from the new is but one manifestation of that ‘rich sense’ of the past which James believed was possible to achieve through contemplating the ‘finer complexity’ of historical experience as it acts upon the human mind — ‘what we read into it and think of in connection with it.’ It is precisely this element of James’s work which T. S. Eliot, in an essay of 1918 in which he discussed both James and Hawthorne, identifies as a marker of the later author’s talent, writing that: ‘Both men had the sense of the past which is peculiarly American [...] in James, it is a sense of the sense.’ (Dupee 129). Eliot’s phrasing is appropriately Jamesian in its blending of ambiguity with exactitude — ‘a sense of the sense’ of how humanity and the structures it creates register and experience the passage of time is, I would contend, an aim towards which much of James’s writing is bent, and goes partly towards explaining his repeated use of museums in his fiction, as spaces where the progress of temporality is simultaneously displayed and arrested.

Another episode in *A Small Boy and Others*, which is assigned a position of primacy in his account of personal and creative growth, is useful for illuminating the

complexity of his engagement with museal spaces. Describing his first visit to the Louvre in 1857, James consciously depicts it as a formative experience:

in those beginnings I felt myself most happily cross that bridge over to Style constituted by the wondrous Galerie d'Apollon, drawn out for me as a long but assured initiation and seeming to form with its supreme coved ceiling and inordinately shining parquet a prodigious tube or tunnel through which I inhaled little by little, that is again and again, a general sense of *glory*. The glory meant ever so many things at once, not only beauty and art and supreme design, but history and fame and power, the world in fine raised to the richest and noblest expression. (275)

Thanks to the language of revelation which James employs in this passage, the reader is to be left in no doubt as to both the significance of the occasion and the writer's conception of himself as having been duly receptive to the lessons provided for him by not only the artworks but the architectural setting within which they are displayed: the 'supreme coved ceiling' seeming to mirror the heights towards which the young James is raised by his dawning appreciation of the 'glory' of art, a glory which consists of more than simply the operation of the aesthetic sense. There is 'not only beauty and [...] supreme design' at work in this space, but also 'history and fame and power'. As with other passages in the memoir, we would do well to remember that the mature James — the James who recasts these experiences from memory to text — is making careful use of his subsequent knowledge in order to magnify these childhood moments of realisation as they pertain to the construction of his life's story as he wishes it to be understood. Without doubting that he frequently visited the Louvre as a youngster, it is probable that James makes use of this particular museum due to its perceived status as the exemplar of its type, thus rendering the Louvre as the most apt of settings for such epiphanic experiences, the force of which are increased due to the splendour of the environment within which they are said to occur.

Following on from this is a darker reflection upon the effect of the museum on James's imagination. As an adult, we are told, the Louvre would provide the location for 'the most appalling yet most admirable nightmare of my life.' (277). The nightmare, as James retells it, consists of a

sudden pursuit, through an open door, along a huge high saloon, of a just dimly-described figure that retreated in terror before my rush and dash [...] The lucidity, not to say the sublimity, of the crisis had consisted of the great thought that I, in my appalled state, was probably still more appalling than the awful agent, creature or presence, whatever he was [...] (277)

James wishes to present this dream as a signal event in his own understanding of the growth of his artistic gifts, placing his childhood memories of the Louvre at the centre of his creative drive thanks to their remaining buried, though potentially accessible, throughout his maturation. That 'wondrous place [...] the sense of which, deep within me, had kept it whole, preserved it to this thrilling use [was] the Galerie d'Apollon of my childhood', is figured as a locale of the utmost significance — his adult self only becoming aware of this, he posits, through his recognition of the dream's setting. Whether we accept his account of the dream at face value or as a later, strategic construction intended to reinforce the impact of his earlier anecdote, it is clear that for James 'the museum [...] functions [...] as a place within which is enacted, again and again, the anxious intersection of desire [...] and aesthetic appreciation.' (Hoberman 51). As he comments slightly later in the text, describing his experiences within the museum as merely 'an excursion to look at pictures would have but half expressed' the functions which he would later make such a space serve in his writing (*ASBAO* 280). The 'anxious intersection of desire [...] and aesthetic appreciation' lies at the heart of many of his characters' treatment of each other — for

James, the loving gaze is never a simple matter, as we shall see in *The Golden Bowl* and *The Portrait of a Lady*.

The American, first published in 1877, provides us with a prominent early example of this repurposing of extant museum spaces for fictional purposes. This novel represents one of James's first attempts at dramatizing the clash of cultures between European society — understood as being, in every sense, 'old' — and those denizens of the New World anxious (and wealthy enough) to partake in its supposedly more complex and historically-rooted pleasures. James chooses to locate his narrative in the recent, yet unmistakably vanished, past — the events depicted take place in the late 1860s, just prior to the collapse of the Second Empire. James himself spent an unsatisfactory year as a resident of Paris between 1875 and 1876, immediately before publishing *The American*, during which he made the acquaintance of writers such as Zola, Flaubert and Maupassant. While he approved of these writers' commitment to pursuing a programmatic form of literature, one which served a definite aesthetic purpose in terms of advancing the limits of fiction, James was uneasy about their choices of subject matter. He objected to the rawness of the French writers' mode of realism, ultimately seeking to avoid what he saw as 'the purely documentary in literature' in his own work (Wrenn 7). As he wrote in a later preface to *The American* he found Zola to be simultaneously 'coarse' yet 'comprehensive' and 'prodigious' in his understanding of the 'human scene' (*TAOTN* 31). This choice of words to reveal the difference he felt to exist between himself and the French author is revealing in its use of a term redolent of the sensory world: Zola's writing was 'coarse' — a word which we would be hard put to use in any description of James's fiction. There is very little coarseness to James's own writing, which he acknowledged in his preface to *The Golden Bowl*, where he admits to being more concerned with 'the process and the effect of representation', resulting in 'a certain indirect and oblique view of [...] presented

action' becoming a common thread throughout his oeuvre (*TAOTN* 327). This tendency towards the 'oblique' and 'indirect' becomes most discernible in his later works. Having experienced life in Paris during the nascent years of both the Second Empire and the Third Republic, he was particularly well placed to incorporate something of the atmosphere of the city into his writing.

The American is a story about a marriage pact which never happens, one contracted between an American millionaire, Christopher Newman, and the daughter of an ancient French noble house, Claire De Cintré. James presents the reader with characters who conform, broadly, to their expected archetypes — Newman is naïve in his encounters with the aristocracy, while they are exposed as dangerously self-centred in their dealings with him, concerned only with securing the continuance of their family's status. *The American's* significance for the present study lies in its status as an early example of James's fictional utilisation of museum spaces. Newman is defined by his acquisitive prowess — indeed, before being spurned by the Bellegarde family it is his commercial instincts which seem to govern his actions. Furthermore, his choice of habitation embodies the progressivist principles driving the march of modernity through Paris at his time of residency. As John Carlos Rowe has observed, Newman's place of residence — a newly-constructed apartment in one of Haussmann's new blocks — acts as a symbol of his fundamental difference from the family whose daughter he seeks to marry (78). The Bellegardes dwell behind the ominously impenetrable facades of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, their pedigree evidenced by, and protected within, the thick stone walls which guard against the encroachment of the new.

Newman's lack of the necessary knowledge to succeed in his endeavours is signalled to the reader in the novel's opening scene, in which we encounter him 'reclining at ease [...] his head thrown back and his legs outstretched' on a sofa in the Salon Carré of the

Louvre (*TA* 33). Far from assuming a formal or respectfully disinterested pose, Newman's confidence is literally bodied forth in the 'ease' with which he is seated. There is, however, more than insouciance in Newman's decision to rest — he is suffering from 'an aesthetic headache' brought on by the length of time it takes to see the paintings recommended by his guidebook, and the sheer abundance of visual stimulation on display has proven too much for his untrained faculties (*TA* 33). The implications of this ailment allow us to define Newman by what he is *not* as pertaining to the museum. James is signposting Newman's lack of *a priori* knowledge regarding the world of aesthetics; he, like many of his contemporaries in the United States, is a novice in the museal arena, bereft of that store of knowledge that insiders such as James himself possessed from an early age, and which allowed them to enjoy such spaces on their own terms. The museums of Europe were an almost compulsory stopping-point during wealthy Americans' quest to improve themselves, yet, as this passage suggests, the knowledge they sought was not automatically granted by simply walking into, and around, the halls of such establishments. Adding to this sense of his being out of place, Newman's artistic preferences run towards the inauthentic; having passed several students copying the paintings on his way round the galleries, he finds 'he had often admired the copy much more than the original' (*TA* 34). This preference for replicas acts as another marker of Newman's inexperience in the world of high culture — an innocence which is, shortly afterwards, relied upon by one of the copyists in extracting a higher price than her work deserves during their negotiations. He might well have enjoyed the museum experience of the present day, where major museums offer an experience more predicated towards the commercially-minded visitor than in the 1860s through the presence of the near-ubiquitous museum shop.

The intrusion of the commercial instinct into the temple of the arts is a running theme throughout the novel. Each episode of the novel which takes place in the Louvre involves

some element of the pecuniary and little mention of the purely aesthetic, as we might expect. Newman negotiates firstly to buy a painting from Noémie, then in a later scene, they tour the galleries in order for him to choose, as if browsing a catalogue, the works he wishes to commission from her in the future — this ‘desire to stretch out and haul in’ is foregrounded by James as his creation’s chief characteristic (*TA* 68). There is undoubtedly something of the tragic (however small) in Noémie’s later statement that ‘Everything I have is for sale’ (*TA* 199). She begins by selling paintings and ends in the sale of herself to the highest bidder, as James hints at the morally corrosive power of the market.

Newman’s friend, Tom Tristram, is a further development of the commercial type, played purely for comedy. Having chanced upon each other in the Louvre, Tristram is initially confused by Newman’s having ‘just bought a picture’ — he responds, after ‘looking vaguely’ at his surroundings, ‘Why, do they sell them?’ (*TA* 47). Tristram’s dearth of cultural awareness is captured by his inability to practice the correct mode of visuality within the museum; capable only of ‘looking vaguely’, without, it is implied, comprehending the treasures around him, he represents the uncivilised American citizen at their most blasé. That James selects the Louvre for these encounters to play out in suggests another aspect of museal space with which he was interested: the increasing use of museums as social venues, where different manners and modes of comportment were learned and trialled by the visitors, and subsequently incorporated into other aspects of their lives. As Nancy Bentley has commented, ‘The realism of James is [...] situated at the intersection where private social life becomes the province of institutions of cultural knowledge.’ (1995, 100). While James himself may have been, as Dennis Porter writes, the archetypal ‘cultural pilgrim’, seeking throughout his travels to enrich his store of knowledge regarding the finer productions of civilisation, his characters in *The American* are content to treat the world as ‘a great bazaar, where one might stroll about and purchase

handsome things' (Porter 202-203, *TA* 103). This compulsion to purchase, and to understand the world in purely transactional terms, extends into all areas of Newman's consciousness; he begins to feel that acquiring a wife would be a suitable way to cap off his European experience, and expresses this wish in the language of the marketplace, rather than that of romance: 'I want to possess, in a word, the best article in the market.' (*TA* 71). Little does he realise, however, that there are some limits to his powers of purchase.

In some respects (besides, of course, the plot which manages to encompass a duel, a murder, and a flight to a convent) James's story is fundamentally unrealistic in its subsequent depiction of Newman's failed courtship – as the historical record suggests, marriages between titled Europeans and moneyed Americans were increasingly common towards the end of the 19th century (Montgomery 36). The Bellegardes' rejection of Newman's suit is something of an anomaly, given their real-life counterparts' willingness to accept fiscal compensation for marrying outside of their caste. The incompatibility of Newman's American, thus ahistorical, self with the Bellegardes' conscious proprietorship of their family history should instead be read on the level of allegory. Where the head of the family, the Marquis, is a proponent of the *ancien regime* and mourns the rise of the Napoleonic dynasty with its attendant levelling of the social field, Newman is frequently described as a 'democrat', as if this were a fundamental part of his nature (*TA* 228). James makes use of this political difference to signify a deeper gulf between the two men, and the societies from which they derive. This clash of cultures, within which James finds no convincing possibilities of lasting union, is a theme which dominates much of his writing and finds its earliest adumbration in *The American*.

James also uses the novel to putatively explore another of his abiding interests: the figure of the collector, and the potential for objects to play a disruptive role in the lives of

those that acquire them. Having completed his first purchase — a copy, therefore an item suspect value at its very root — Newman is struck by a uniquely alluring sense of power:

Suddenly he became conscious of the germ of the mania of the “collector”; he had taken the first step; why should he not go on? It was only twenty minutes before that he had bought the first picture of his life, and now he was already thinking of art-patronage as a fascinating pursuit. (*TA* 45)

By having Newman buy a copy, rather than an original work, James was building upon an existing trope in American travel literature, one previously used by Mark Twain and William Dean Howells to satirise the good-natured ignorance of their countrymen (Anderson 46-47). There is, however, more at stake in Newman’s purchase than simply the extension of a literary joke. James wishes to introduce ‘the mania of “the collector”’ as an element of characterisation, but far from settling for collectors as an ‘easy target’ for humour or criticism, as Neil Harris suggests was something of a commonplace for writers during this period, he is careful to depict a number of individuals as engaged in the practice without seeming to condemn them (Harris 255). Detectable within Newman’s internal conversation with himself, quoted above, is a flavour of the charm which collecting appeared to possess for those able to indulge in it on a meaningful scale — ‘why should he not go on?’ indeed. However, by only offering us Newman’s view of his delight in the process of spending and acquiring, James places the reader in an uncomfortable position, where our proximity to his thoughts threatens to shade over into complicity with his pleasure in the act of acquisition. As his later novels would go on to explore, this pleasure often ran the risk of developing into a ‘mania’ such as Newman begins to feel.

This ‘mania’ not only affects Newman, but also Valentin de Bellegarde, younger son of the family into which he desires to gain entry. Valentin,

penniless patrician as he was, was an insatiable collector, and his walls were covered with rusty arms and ancient panels and platters, his doorways draped in faded tapestries, his floors muffled in the skins of beasts. (*TA* 144)

Collecting neither for investment nor functionality, Valentin's 'rusty', 'ancient', and 'faded' items act as external markers of the antiquity which he himself embodies in his very person. Valentin's collecting is denoted as differing from Newman's in that it seemingly inheres to his status as 'penniless patrician'. His lack of ready funds proves no barrier to his 'insatiable' appetite. They share, however, a tendency to view the animate and inanimate as being alike — as evidenced in their viewing of Noémie as an exhibit to be admired and appraised as one would a painting or statue (*TA* 195). Eyeing her from a distance in a gallery of the Louvre, while she herself gazes at a handful of wealthier women, James stages a drama played out on the ocular plane, as the men view a woman looking at other women, explicitly differencing their modes of seeing according to their respective levels of privilege: 'While she was looking at the ladies she was seeing Valentin de Bellegarde. He, at all events, was seeing her.' (*TA* 197). It is their collector's eye which allows the men to believe themselves to be engaging in a form of 'seeing' which is somehow more conducive to discernment than that available to the women in the scene.

I.

A great respect for things: exploring the modalities of collecting in *The Spoils of Poynton*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *The Golden Bowl*

James would utilise collectors, and the act of collecting itself, as focal points for several of his texts. His exploration of this character type is revealing more for its fluidity than its fixity and is linked to wider patterns of consumption and materiality in the society amongst which James dwelt. The characters who collect in James's fiction do so with a variety of changeable motives; Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* seeks to secure an elevated position within the social hierarchy by collecting, and displaying, works of the highest quality, while for Mrs. Gereth in *The Spoils of Poynton*, her treasured possessions function as an external marker of her identity, one which is revealed to be dangerously fragile. In his Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, James outlines his motivation for writing the piece as a desire to explore 'that most modern of our current passions, the fierce appetite for the upholsterer's and joiner's and brazier's work, the chairs and tables, the cabinets and presses, the material odds and ends' (xliiii). As Ian Hodder's work has made clear, humanity has, throughout the span of recorded history, had a complicated relationship with the material goods it produces, yet there is still merit in James's description of 'that most modern of our current passions' — the late 19th century saw an unprecedented boom in the production, consumption, and valuation of goods of all varieties, from luxury furniture to canned foods (Hodder 1-13). Things were everywhere in James's world. From museums to market stalls, the appeal of the commodity was becoming nigh on irresistible, a phenomena which James was intensely interested in exploring through his writing. *The Golden Bowl*, for example, opens with Prince Amerigo eyeing 'massive and lumpish' objects through the shop windows of London's Bond Street (3). Nor was James's interest in the subject of human-object relations limited to 'mere commercial austerity'; in the

works under discussion, characters conceive of each other in terms that are undoubtedly influenced by their experiences as consumers (*TSOP* xlv). Their relations towards each other are figured through the lens of the material, as they evaluate and comprehend other individuals in ways which show, equally, the influences of the museum and the shopfront. The difficulty — if not impossibility — of breaking these modes of thinking provides James with rich material for his narratives.

The Spoils of Poynton reads as the obverse side of a conventional marriage plot; the marriage which occurs is detestable to all involved and robs the central characters of their happiness. At stake in the marriage of Owen Gereth to Mona Brigstock are the titular objets d'art, collected by his mother and her deceased husband, and famed for both their rarity and the quality of their execution. Mrs. Gereth, a woman whose aesthetic sensibilities are so highly-tuned and central to her psychological wellbeing, that she is 'kept awake for hours by the wall-paper in her room' while staying at the Brigstocks' decidedly ugly country house, is a character who might have been played for straightforward comic effect as an inconsequential pedant by another author, but in James's hands becomes a case study for the human effects of the fundamentally unfair orthodoxy of male primogeniture in Victorian society (*TSOP* 1). Not that Mrs. Gereth was alone in her decoration-inspired hypochondria: Mary Eliza Haweis, an author who died in 1898, was known to take ill when confronted with 'badly decorated dwellings' (Cohen 77). After the death of her husband, Mrs. Gereth faces the eventual possibility of being forced to leave Poynton, and its collections, to live in the family's dower house. Enlisting the help of Fleda Vetch, a young woman of her acquaintance, she attempts to marry her son to Fleda in order that the family treasures should not pass to Mona Brigstock, a woman of insufficient taste to appreciate them. Mrs. Gereth has become hypersensitive in her response to the ugly and the tasteless — 'thanks to the rare perfection of Poynton, she was

condemned to wince wherever she turned' when staying elsewhere (*TSOP* 8). Her plight, however, is rendered somewhat sympathetic by James in his careful delineation of her 'personal gift, the genius, the passion, the patience of the collector'; collecting has been one of the few areas of her life in which she has enjoyed any personal agency (*TSOP* 8). While this has turned her, unmistakably, into a snob, a woman for whom 'the sum of the world was rare French furniture and oriental china. She could at a stretch imagine people's not 'having', but she couldn't imagine their not wanting and missing', James encourages the reader to view her with at least some degree of pity (*TSOP* 16).

Speaking to her son, Mrs. Gereth makes plain the extent of her emotional commitment to the collections: 'there are things in the house that we almost starved for! They were our religion, they were our life, they were *us!*' (*TSOP* 20). This short passage of speech is revealing in the way that it builds in intensity, leading to an elision between the animate and inanimate: the objects were 'our religion [...] our life, they were *us!*' — Mrs. Gereth's ardour for her objects is clearly not completely predicated along the lines of financial, or even aesthetic, value. They represent something more powerful than those categories are capable of implying — in short, they share something of their owner's life and identity, providing her with emotional and spiritual sustenance. As David Carrier has noted, people 'who make collecting their ruling passion may define themselves in terms of the objects they gather', and Mrs. Gereth clearly fits this mould (124). Her success in acquiring her possessions, at a time when collecting at this elite level of attainment remained 'a male preserve', has no doubt involved great personal sacrifice, hinted at in her claim that she 'starved' for the objects (Levenstein 116). In her son's inheriting, and subsequently displacing her from the house, she risks more than losing her possessions — she will lose a part of herself, reliant as she is on the objects to sustain her sense of identity. According to Dianne Sachko MacLeod, 'women's assigned domestic role threw them into

a narrowly defined world where lambent objects assumed a value that surpassed their worth in the marketplace', and it is the endpoint of this process that the reader sees at work in *The Spoils of Poynton* (113-114). Mrs. Gereth's loss is twofold — her son remarrying and thus setting up a household of his own in which her place within the family hierarchy is shifted sideways, if not downwards, is coupled with the very real loss of the artworks, furniture, and jewellery which constituted the chief happiness of her married life. James thus endows the practice of collecting with a moral vitality which it is usually considered to lack — the 'spoils' of the title represent not only Mrs. Gereth's life's work but also constitute one of her only avenues of participation in a world designed, and controlled, by men like her son.

By turning to Fleda Vetch for help, Mrs. Gereth draws another female figure into her connectedness with the treasures at Poynton. Fleda is a promising student for the older woman's demanding programme of aesthetic appreciation, having previously spent a year training under an artist in Paris, and is described as possessing an innate sense of taste for the beautiful and the rare, in addition to having imbibed the knowledge available to those of a certain temperament within the halls of the great public museums: 'the museums had done something for her, but nature had done more.' (*TSOP* 15). She is thus Mrs. Gereth's ideal candidate upon which to devolve Poynton's spoils. James's depiction of her, however, is shot through with caution regarding the effect of so high a dependency on the aesthetic as a source of value, and it is by giving us access to Fleda's thoughts that the tell-tale note of Jamesian ambiguity is sounded in the text.

Fleda spends an increasing amount of time with Mrs. Gereth (and her spoils) during the course of which it becomes clear to the reader that the kind of collecting consciousness which the objects have instilled in the older woman and, increasingly, Fleda herself is a two-edged sword: it leaves them incapable of relating to other, apparently

simpler, people. James's technique of advancing his narrative through the operations of consciousness leaves us with a sense of their limited empathy; Owen and Mona's conversations and interactions with each other are mostly given to us as imagined scenarios of either Mrs. Gereth's or Fleda's invention, and thus are always inflected with their disapproving tone: 'Yes, I'll have you, but I won't go *there!*' Mona would have said with a vicious nod at the southern horizon' (*TSOP* 25). Her reaction to Mrs. Gereth's desire to gift to her the collections is at first one of awestruck gratitude, but gradually she becomes aware of the potential risks of resembling her benefactress: visiting the Gereths' dower house, she wonders if 'it didn't work more for happiness not to have tasted, as she herself had done, of knowledge.' (*TSOP* 36). Observing the older woman's behaviour as they come to occupy a position of uncomfortably close proximity to one another, it becomes clear to both Fleda and the reader that Mrs. Gereth's collecting impulse extends beyond the objects themselves. Towards the end of the text, once Owen has married Mona, they are abandoned to each other, and Mrs. Gereth utters the chilling declaration that:

with nothing else but my four walls, you'll at any rate be a bit of furniture. For that, a little, you know, I've always taken you — quite one of my best finds. (*TSOP* 169)

The objects become an end in themselves, removed utterly from the human world of action and emotion, and Mrs. Gereth's plans come to nothing. Fleda and Owen never marry, while the spoils perish in a fire which consumes the house and its contents. This bonfire of the vanity chests serves as notice that James understood 'that collecting can turn transgressive', a notion which is never entirely absent from *The Spoils of Poynton*, despite his willingness to portray the positive aspects of collecting as a source of meaning for those otherwise denied creative and personal agency (Black 78).

James's relationship with the famed collector Isabella Stewart Gardner, whose Fenway Court house-museum remains open to visitors in Boston today, is also important to consider when analysing *The Spoils of Poynton*. In *The American Scene*, his travel memoir of a visit to his homeland between 1904 and 1905, James only mentions Gardner's museum briefly, yet the friendship between the two was of considerable depth (CTW 564). For Ruth Hoberman, the level of sympathy which James was willing to grant to his fictional collectors was a direct result of his interactions with Gardner (Hoberman 70-71). Indeed, in a letter of 1880, he made the jestful promise that: 'some day, I will immortalize you.' (Edel 1978, 265-266). In 1886, he introduced Gardner to John Singer Sargent, who went on to paint notable portraits of both the wealthy collector and James himself. Whether Mrs. Gereth is intended to fully resemble Gardner or not, the creative faculties which James was willing to grant her as collector and arranger of her objects have a clear parallel in the unorthodox approach which Gardner took to her objects and their modes of display. Gardner's will stipulated that no objects were to be removed, or have their position changed within the house, after her death, emphasising that the space was 'to remain her creation' (Goldfarb vii). Gardner collected widely across different media, combining several kinds of objects in the rooms of her museum to build totalised displays which emphasised a chosen theme or the splendour of the objects themselves as they created a material harmony through their interrelation with each other — a methodology which emphasised her own creative impulses. Dianne Sachko MacLeod has highlighted the differences between male collectors and their female counterparts at this historical juncture; for MacLeod, the emphasis on personal creativity and autonomy displayed by Gardner is emblematic of fundamental differences in the appreciation and use of objects between the genders. Male collectors made use of their acquisitions to boost their prestige in the world at large, while women — only a small number of whom were capable of this

kind of expenditure — were more likely to use them as markers of identity and crucial tools for self-expression (MacLeod 14, 89). This description certainly fits both Gardner and Mrs. Gereth, who, we are told, possesses a ‘genius for composition’ (*TSOP* 53).

In *The Spoils of Poynton*, James certainly seems to point towards this gendered disparity. Not only is Owen Gereth unconcerned with the aesthetic value of his mother’s collection, he is also blind to its emotional importance to her, while the question of collecting (and its different modalities) lies between Fleda and her father as the most obvious source and symbol of their disconnect from each other. He collects things that are of no interest or value to her, such as ‘old brandy-flasks and match-boxes’, while her silent disregard for these is interpreted, in turn, by him as ignorance, believing as he does that he has ‘a taste for fine things which his children had unfortunately not inherited.’ (*TSOP* 99). Not only are the objects he collects the wrong sort, in Fleda’s eyes, but his conception of the activity itself is predicated as a compulsion carried out for its own sake without any sort of aesthetic or moral motivation: ‘Why didn’t she try collecting something? — it didn’t matter what.’ (*TSOP* 99). The bluntness of this declaration, with all that it implies regarding the differences between father and daughter, is expertly conveyed by James down to the monadic level, with that telling dash in the phrase ‘– it didn’t matter what’ acting as a (typo)graphic symbol of the ineradicable divide which separates them. James’s text suggests that for every Isabella Stewart Gardner in the world — a woman able to command her own fortune and in the course of doing so, create a lasting legacy of achievement in the world of fine arts — there were countless other Mrs. Gereths, left dispossessed and disillusioned by inheritance laws and societal custom.

The transgressive potentiality of collecting is also explored in James’s earlier novel *The Portrait of a Lady*. The tale of an intelligent, free-spirited young American woman’s education (both intellectual and emotional), the text develops that clash of cultures first

outlined in *The American* as its lead character, Isabel Archer, attempts to navigate her way through European society. Thanks to inheriting a significant fortune, Isabel enjoys a degree of freedom unusual for a woman of her young years, yet will fall prey to the machinations of Gilbert Osmond and his former lover, Madame Merle, as they attempt to secure her fortune for themselves. The novel's very title captures something of the essentially unsolvable dilemma which Isabel finds herself in — a well-executed portrait was, for James, the 'highest of wonders' of which an artist was capable, and yet the form itself might also be reckoned to threaten its subjects with containment, binding them within the frame of the picture (Simpson 74). James's *Portrait* is propelled by this antinomy; Isabel is defined, for other characters, by exactly that quantity of freedom which both her wealth, and personality, have afforded her, but is in turn captured and held fast by Osmond, who desires her for precisely this reason. Furthermore, the novel abounds with characters who view each other as 'specimens' — Henrietta Stackpole describes Ralph Touchett as a specimen of the 'alienated American' while, earlier, Isabel herself uses this word in her conversation with Ralph about her suitor, Lord Warburton (*TPOAL* 89, 73). Within the Touchetts' home there is a picture gallery, which provides both backdrop and model for the characters' interactions with each other; these are people, like James, who have grown up with the museum as a defining space of their personal lives. They are conscious, too, of this tendency to aestheticize each other's being: Ralph, in describing his happiness at belatedly making Isabel's acquaintance, cannot help but liken the situation to the serendipitous acquisition of artworks: 'Suddenly I receive a Titian, by the post, to hang on my wall — a Greek bas-relief to stick over my chimney.' (*TPOAL* 65). Nor is he alone in this tendency: while walking with Henrietta along the gallery of the house, she 'turned and looked at him as if he himself had been a picture.' (*TPOAL* 92). The fact that Henrietta has previously worked as an art critic for a newspaper serves as

James's reminder to the reader that these creations of his inhabit a recognisable world of public museums and art institutions, within which such sensibilities could be formed. *The Portrait of a Lady* functions as a record of the impact of the museum on the sensibilities of those fortunate enough to be habitual visitors (or indeed to maintain their own collections), magnifying their impressions of each other through such aestheticizing – and aestheticized – modes of looking as the characters practice on each other.

This tendency to treat people as though they were objects reaches a dark peak in the triangular relationship between Gilbert Osmond, Madame Merle, and Isabel. In a conversation between the two women, James uses Merle as a mouthpiece for the materialist urges clearly present in upper class society at the time of writing:

What do you call one's self? Where does it begin? where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us – and then it flows back again. I know that a large part of myself is in the dresses I choose to wear. I have a great respect for *things!* (TPOAL 211)

This speech encapsulates a common quandary for several of James's characters, from the aforementioned Mrs. Gereth to the Ververs in *The Golden Bowl*; living in a world increasingly defined by, and oriented towards, the consumption of high-status goods, this 'great respect for *things*' threatens to overshadow interpersonal relationships, or at least reshape them in some way. The latent transformative power within objects is highlighted by Arjan Appadurai, who describes 'a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person, and personality' as one of the key attributes driving the consumption of 'luxury' goods, alongside their perceived scarcity and 'capacity to signal fairly complex social messages' (38). Although Madame Merle herself seems to revel in this state of affairs, the seemingly unanswerable questions with which this speech begins point towards James's

sense of the ontologically unsettling aspects of her proposed model of (inter)subjectivity — ‘What do you call one’s self? Where does it begin?’. While enquiries of this nature were perhaps more common in his brother William’s work as a philosopher, James shows himself to be equally reflective through his willingness to incorporate subject matter of this sort into his fiction. *The Portrait of a Lady*, which occupies a relatively early position in the James oeuvre, thus clearly anticipates his late phase, in which such questions would come to the fore both thematically and in the very operation of his writing style.

It is the confusion which these questions engender that Gilbert Osmond uses to his advantage in order to secure Isabel’s hand in marriage. Unlike her other suitors and acquaintances, Osmond ‘was a specimen apart’ — his outward presentation of himself owes much to his talents as a collector and curator of his possessions; able to present himself in a variety of modes, he escapes easy definition, while Isabel lacks the necessary knowledge to identify his type (*TPOAL* 274). Osmond is able to manipulate his collection in order to impress upon his visitors the sense of himself which would be of greatest benefit for his plans; taking in both the man and his objects *in situ* is an experience of rare persuasive power, a fact of which he is only too aware. As Madame Merle comments, ‘As a cicerone in your own museum you appear to particular advantage.’ (*TPOAL* 254). Isabel’s first visit to Osmond’s home sees him exercise this particular advantage to lasting effect: ‘she was oppressed [...] with the accumulation of beauty and knowledge to which she found herself introduced.’ (*TPOAL* 276). Overwhelming the young woman with the visible proof of his aesthetic discernment, Osmond benefits socially from his store of carefully-accumulated cultural capital. As in *The American*, James also places his characters within real-world museum spaces: on a visit to the Capitoline museum in Rome, Isabel decisively turns down Lord Warburton’s suit in front of the statue of the Dying Gaul (*TPOAL* 315). While this reads initially as proof of her independence and desire to control

her own destiny, James makes careful use of the different vantage points offered by the space to blur this sense of achieved autonomy, rendering her freedom only temporary.

We know that [Osmond] was fond of originals, of rarities, of the superior, the exquisite; and now that he had seen Lord Warburton, whom he thought a very fine example of his race and order, he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by rejecting the splendid offer of a British aristocrat. (317)

Isabel's rejection of Warburton, far from sealing her independence, acts as the final seal on Osmond's interest in her as a desirable rarity — he makes up his mind, decisively, that she must be added to 'his collection of choice objects'. James presents the reader with the museum-as-prison, as Isabel is swallowed by the circle of statues within which she stands.

James is careful, however, to maintain a balance between the aesthetic sense as purely negative and possibly redemptive. Isabel's ability to decipher visual information, gleaned from many hours staring at canvasses, presents her with the possibility of escape. After marrying Osmond and enduring existence under his controlling gaze, she uncovers the truth of his relationship with Madame Merle by stumbling across them in a position not of impropriety but of visual incongruity: 'Their relative position, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected.' (*TPOAL* 429). This single moment of captured visual information proves unforgettable — 'the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light', the briefness of its duration belying its illuminative power (*TPOAL* 429). Borrowing both from the painter's arsenal and the photographer's studio in order to create this scene — describing the 'relative position' of his characters in such a way as to evoke models arranged for subsequent depiction on canvas or capture by photographic means (that 'sudden flicker of light') — we have a sense of the debt which

James owed to the visual arts both old and new. Such moments of revelation are reliant on the reader's visual imagination as much as James's powers of description; indeed, this significant interaction between Merle and Osmond is noteworthy for its absence of detail rather than the abundance of it. James thus co-opts the reader into performing the imaginative labour necessary to conjure the scene into being, the printed page being somewhat less of a conducive medium for illustration than the canvas or photographic plate. *The Portrait of a Lady* is a text reliant on its readers' knowledge of the visual arts for the delineation of its characters' psychological motivations but also its effectiveness as a narrative, a knowledge gleaned from gallery-going and considered contemplation of the import of such visual stimulus.

In *The Golden Bowl* James raises the themes of his earlier works to an almost unbearable pitch, creating a text which manages to feel at once claustrophobic and limitlessly expansive in its depiction of characters operating under the sway of the early 20th century American museum function. In this novel, as Jonah Siegel notes, the museum is depicted as offering 'no place of rest or safety', but rather as a disruptive space within which human relations are reordered, or broken down, to the merely acquisitive (Siegel 2002, 243). James's novel dramatizes the ways in which American museums and their benefactors were stripping the old world of its treasures in order to create their own spaces of aesthetic reification and worship, using character types drawn up to fit this exact scenario. Adam Verver is a billionaire, tired of the commercial life, who seeks to buy whatever he can, including a husband for his daughter Maggie — the husband in question being Prince Amerigo, an Italian nobleman of slender means. Maggie's attraction to the Prince is compounded by his status as the living representative of an ancient bloodline, one whose provenance is attested to by 'a whole immense room, or recess, or department, or whatever, filled with books about *his* family alone' within the British Museum (*TGB*

60-61). Acutely conscious of his status as a walking curiosity, of ‘how little one of his race, after all, could escape from history’ the Prince nevertheless believes himself capable of exercising his individuality:

There are two parts of me [...] One is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes [...] of other people [...] But there’s another part, which [...] represents my single self, the unknown [...] personal quantity. About this you’ve found out nothing. (*TGB* 7-8)

Maggie’s attempt to reassure him of his value falls flat, drawn as it is from the vocabulary of the museum, precisely that space which he wishes to escape:

You’re a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You’re not perhaps absolutely unique, but you’re so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you — you belong to a class about which everything is known. You’re what they call a *morceau de musée*. (10)

This blinkered view of the Prince’s being, derived from Maggie and her father’s seemingly limitless ability to purchase whatever they deem worthy of investment, results in his being able to reignite an affair with Charlotte Stant, a friend of Maggie’s who marries her father. It is precisely Maggie’s objectifying tendency which blinds her to the Prince’s ‘unknown [...] personal quantity’ — that is to say, his personhood itself. This habit is also present in her father, who, similarly to Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady*, desires to round out his collections with the perfect human pieces. He approves Maggie’s match with the Prince due to ‘the aspirant to his daughter’s hand show[ing] [...] the great marks and signs [...] he had learned to look for in pieces of the first order.’ (*TGB* 103). Furthermore, he views his own daughter with spectatorial delight in her fineness of bearing:

the quality, the perfect felicity of the statue; the blurred, absent eyes, the smoothed, elegant, nameless head, the impersonal flit of a creature lost in an alien age and passing as an image in worn relief round and round a precious vase. She had always had odd moments of striking him, daughter of his very own though she was, as a figure thus simplified [...] a figure with which his human connection was fairly interrupted by some vague analogy of turn and attitude (139)

To Verver's gaze, conditioned by the constant appraisal of artworks, his own daughter's eyes are 'blurred' and 'absent' — their 'human connection' is 'interrupted' by his constant reference to the realm of the aesthetic in comprehending the world around him: 'It was all, at bottom, in him, the aesthetic principle, planted where it could burn with a cold, still flame' (*TGB* 146).

In *The Golden Bowl*, we are presented with a fictionalised representative of the uppermost tier of the collecting class — Verver is an American of untold wealth, whose desire to endow a museum is 'the work of his life and the motive of everything he does.' (*TGB* 9). James here transfigures a small number of real-life exemplars, men like J. P. Morgan and Henry Clay Frick, into fiction, in order to examine the effect of their massive expenditure on not only the art world — which, by the early years of the 1900s, could truly be said to resemble a market thanks to the purchasing habits of such individuals — but also the sphere of human relations. Verver's ambition to build, and stock, a grand museum in the archly-named American City is proof of his desire to act out what Bourdieu terms 'the rights and duties' of the wealthy classes; his wealth is, he feels, justifiable through its investment in objects of preordained cultural value (Bourdieu 1984, 23). This was equally true of his real-world counterparts; both Morgan and Frick created institutions of their own such as Verver wishes to do (Belk 50). This exchange of raw monetary power for sociocultural gain was frequently acknowledged, and even relied upon, by pioneering

museum advocates in the United States. When New York's Metropolitan Museum was opened in 1880, its commencement speech, given by the lawyer Joseph H. Choate, featured the following explicit plea for wealthy donors to consider using the museum as a clearing-house for rendering their material gains morally acceptable:

Think of it, ye millionaires of many markets, what glory may yet be yours if you only listen to our advice, to convert pork into porcelain, grain and produce into priceless pottery, the rude ores of commerce into sculptured marble, and railroad shares and mining stocks [...] into the glorified canvasses of the world's master's, that shall adorn these walls for centuries. (Howe 200)

Such unsightly processes — the conversion of 'pork into porcelain, grain and produce into priceless pottery' underpin Adam Verver's spending and acquisition, which, while enabling the newly-built museums of the United States to fill their galleries with previously undreamt-of treasures, was simultaneously threatening not only to denude their native provinces of such artefacts but also to render the realm of aesthetic production as irrecoverably subject to the power of the chequebook. Verver's dream is to build 'a museum of museums', an unrivalled space for the storing and appreciation of his purchases (*TGB* 107). As Igor Kopytoff comments, 'anything that can be bought for money is at that point a commodity, whatever the fate that is reserved for it after the transaction has been made' — while Verver's purchases are made in good faith, the very act of buying and selling such objects reduces them to the status of 'thing'; a process which is presented in *The Golden Bowl* as being irreversible (Kopytoff 69). His daughter takes a mercenary pleasure in their activities, boasting to the Prince about the

things that father puts away — the bigger and more cumbrous of course [...] which he stores, has already stored in masses, here and in Paris, in Italy, in Spain, in

warehouses, banks, vaults, safes, wonderful secret places. We've been like a pair of pirates [...] (*TGB* 10-11)

Although undoubtedly intended by Maggie for comic effect, her likening of her father and herself to 'a pair of pirates' evokes violent parallels for their fiscally-driven adventuring.

In this most capacious of his novels, James also develops the question of subject-object relations touched on throughout the works previously discussed, foregrounding the titular object's power to act as a disruptive element upon the lives of his characters. Indeed, one could advocate reading *The Golden Bowl* as an object biography with anthropocentric interludes, such is its sway over their existence. The thread of James's narrative runs counter to Philip Fisher's belief that museums invariably 'silence' the objects which they contain; rather, it is the ability of objects to refuse to surrender their enunciatory power that James exploits for dramatic gain (Fisher 19-21). The bowl in question is a gilded, crystalline drinking vessel, which Charlotte, the Prince, and Maggie encounter in an overlapping sequence — the bowl itself serves a palimpsestic function in the novel, absorbing the traces of each encounter, only to divulge them towards the climax of the story. Far from being empty, this particular vessel is endowed with a strange power, which manifests in a subtle yet unmistakably potent manner. Charlotte and the Prince encounter it together in an antique shop near the British Museum, where it stands enigmatically yet attractively amongst

small florid ancientries, ornaments, pendants, locketts, brooches, buckles, pretexts for dim brilliants, bloodless rubies, pearls either too large or too opaque for value; miniatures mounted with diamonds that had ceased to dazzle; snuffboxes presented to – or by – the too-questionable great; cups, trays, taper-stands, suggestive of pawn-tickets, archaic and brown, that would themselves, if preserved, have been prized

curiosities. A few commemorative medals, of neat outline but dull reference; a classic monument or two, things of the first years of the century; things consular, Napoleonic, temples, obelisks, arches, tinily re-embodied, completed the discreet cluster [...] several quaint rings, intaglios, amethysts, carbuncles (80)

This cavalcade of described objects is reminiscent not of the increasingly-ordered museum displays of the early 20th century but rather harks back to an older form of collecting: the wunderkammer, or cabinet of curiosities. James here evokes this older mode of assembling and storing mismatched treasures as if to reinforce the strangeness of the golden bowl — it is not an object which can be catalogued easily, nor will it render up its secrets to any that handle it; it belongs, if anywhere, amongst this strangeness, this profusion of the unassimilable. The shopkeeper's careful, almost ritualistic, presentation of the bowl adds to this air of mystery:

He handled it with tenderness, with ceremony, making a place for it on a small satin mat. 'My Golden Bowl', he observed — and it sounded, on his lips, as if it said everything. He left the important object — for as 'important' it did somehow present itself — to produce its certain effect. (84)

This is an 'important object' which is able to 'produce' its own meaning and is thus simultaneously alluring and threatening — Charlotte is entranced by it, while the Prince is dismissive. The bowl's provenance is unknown (if not unknowable) as it was crafted by means of a 'lost art' in a 'lost time' (*TGB* 85). Here, in this small shop in the shadow of the British Museum, James depicts the outer limits of that emblematic institution's analytic power — the golden bowl is an object whose appeal, and meaning, are indecipherable. The Prince's misguided belief in his ability to interpret the bowl hints at its later, extra-material significance: 'I did look. I saw the object itself. It told its story. No wonder it's

cheap.’ (*TGB* 89). This notion, that objects automatically reveal their ‘story’ to the witnessing subject, is echoed in Maggie’s preference for knowledge which can be accessed (and objects which can be codified) without conscious cost to herself. This tendency is made apparent in her seeking refuge in the British Museum when unhappy — in ‘the supreme exhibitory temple [...] she had felt [...] more at her ease than for months and months before; she didn’t know why, but her time at the Museum, oddly, had done it’ (*TGB* 407, 413). Here James figures the museum as a therapeutic space, one which provides at least some answers to the large range of questions afflicting his character’s mind. The British Museum represents, for Maggie, a possibility of understanding and a fixity of meaning which she finds to be lacking in her own life.

After this visit to the British Museum, Maggie visits the shop and purchases the bowl, upon which she discovers its true history (at least as pertains to the Prince and herself). Before even meeting Maggie, the Prince had been the lover of Charlotte, and the shopkeeper remembers their visit. Maggie’s purchase of it, despite its hidden flaw, prompts the shopkeeper to reveal this fact, thus inadvertently opening Maggie’s eyes to the continued deception undercutting her marriage. The bowl, ‘that complicating object’, acts as a material marker of these secrets, thus altering Maggie’s perception of her husband and her friend, forcibly inverting her understanding of the life she has made for herself (*TGB* 428). In some respects, we might regard ‘that complicating object’ as possessing a degree of agency of its own — able to exert influence on those around it, the bowl acts as a focal point of the narrative, containing and condensing the characters’ behaviour towards each other. Annette Weiner’s concept of ‘inalienable possessions’ proves useful when considering the bowl; ‘certain things’, she writes, ‘assume a subjective value that place them above exchange value’ — this is certainly true in this instance, as the shopkeeper insists on refunding Maggie’s expenditure due to the concealed fault in the bowl, yet it

retains power despite its removal from the economic field of exchange (6). Furthermore, ‘Inalienable possessions do not just control the dimensions of giving, but their historicities retain for the future, memories, either fabricated or not, of the past’ (Weiner 7). This ability to ‘retain [...] memories’ is clearly evident in the bowl, acting as it does as a concrete symbol of the Prince’s hidden past. Indeed, such is the deleterious effect of the bowl’s acquisition upon their situation that we might modify Weiner’s phrase to reflect this negative power; the golden bowl is not just inalienable, but *alienating* in its effect on the human world of feeling and action.

In *The Golden Bowl*, James places the transatlantic museum function of the early 20th century (as understood and perpetuated by the elites powering such institutions) under close scrutiny, with his characters’ tendency to treat one another as objects while ignoring the hidden potency of objects themselves suggesting that the behavioural practices learned in museums are, at best, only partly assimilable with the private sphere. The domestic spaces of the Ververs function as prototypes of the museum which Adam seeks to build: they dwell ‘amongst so many precious objects’ that their ability to relate to one another is eroded to a crisis point defined more by the mutedness of its realisation than any sudden, dramatic shift in tone (*TGB* 415). Ending with Charlotte and the Prince separated and immured in different places by the Ververs, we see the father and daughter duo exercise their acquisitive powers with fatalistic finality. Standing together for presumably the last time, the Prince and Charlotte are described thus:

The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though, to a lingering view, a view more penetrating [...] they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. There was much indeed in the tone in which Adam Verver spoke again, and who shall say where his thought stopped? ‘*Le compte y est*. You’ve got

some good things.’ Maggie met it afresh — ‘Ah, don’t they look well?’ Their companions [were] sitting as still, to be thus appraised, as a pair of effigies of the contemporary great on one of the platforms of Madame Tussaud. (*TGB* 560-561)

It is the Ververs’ ‘rare power of purchase’ which allows them, ultimately, to triumph over Charlotte and the Prince, whose affair represents the presence of a vitality otherwise absent in their lives as specimens, but a vitality which is, at the last, dimmed by their submission to the will of their owners. They are, to the Ververs, ‘good things’ which can be repositioned at will. The fusion of subject/object hinted at throughout the narrative is given its final realisation in the image James summons of ‘effigies’ at Madame Tussaud’s waxworks, a comparison charged with a certain horrific quality as we picture Charlotte and the Prince as frozen, eyes and mouths open, yet deprived of individual agency.

II.

Displayed (and displaced) selves: people on show in *The Sense of the Past*, and Henry James the living portrait

This is not the only instance of James' critique of the museum function leading to a sense of the uncanny in his fiction; in *The Sense of the Past*, he pushes the underlying historicism of the museum enterprise to a dark extreme. The central character of the story, Ralph Pendrel, is a historical enthusiast whose only interest in life seem to be the garnering of knowledge related to the (supposedly) vanished lives of the denizens of the past — 'the love of old things, of the scrutable, palpable past' is his governing passion (*TSOTP* 41). For Pendrel, the purview of the historian falls short of 'his desire to remount the stream of time'; he wishes, rather, to experience

the hour of the day at which this and that had happened, and the temperature and the weather and the sound, and yet more the stillness, from the street, and the exact look-out, with the corresponding look-in, through the window and the slant on the walls of the light of afternoons that had been. (*TSOTP* 48)

Rather than contenting himself to those aspects of the historical which can be recorded through the historian's conventional methods, Pendrel desires to achieve a degree of proximity to the past such that it becomes 'palpable'. By dint of some careful narrative manoeuvring on James's part, he is given the chance to do just this. Having inherited a historic townhouse in London, Pendrel travels across the Atlantic to take up residency. As with Christopher Newman before him, he will find himself fatefully unprepared for the events which unfold. He exchanges places with his ancestor, stepping into the life of a previous inhabitant of the house, but finds himself unable to return.

The Sense of the Past was grouped by James with *The Turn of the Screw* and his other supernatural fictions as a ‘ghost story’ (Kaplan 1999, 431). The text itself, however, evades this easy categorisation, as the principal action of the narrative reverses the expected patterns of hauntings conducted by revenant spirits — it is Pendrel himself who, on returning to the 1820s, disturbs the rightful occupants of the house. James’s notes for the story, published alongside the main body of the text, go some way towards elucidating his idea:

it’s as if the man of 1820, the Pendrel of that age, is having so much better a time in the modern, that is in the Future, than he is having in the Present, *his* Present, which is the Past[.] (*TSOTP* 300-301)

The tangled syntax of this note goes some way to illustrating the complexity of the conceit which James is attempting to craft with *The Sense of the Past*. Rather than presenting this opportunity for a truly historical experience as providing the solace that Pendrel seeks, it is his very status as a non-historical personage which threatens to disrupt the setting into which he has stumbled — as James puts it in his notes, it is ‘the uncontrollability of [Ralph’s] modernism’ which sets him apart from the world of 1820 (*TSOTP* 334). There are, James suggests, insurmountable differences between those who occupy different eras of history; we, as moderns, are cut off from the past by the very fact of our being modern. Pendrel’s plight represents a putting into motion of Nietzsche’s concept of the ‘antiquarian’ sensibility⁸— his occupation as historian having led him to an attitude of unthinking reverence for the past, a reverence which soon dissolves when he slips out of his own time and into that historical ‘stillness’ which he had so strenuously desired to experience.

⁸ See pages 45-46 of this study.

Nor, despite his wish to do so, is he able to interact with the people of the past in a truly fulfilling manner. In his imagination, while speaking to his (truly) distant cousins, they begin to resemble, ‘an artful, a wonderful trio, some mechanic but consummate imitation of ancient life, staring through the vast plate of a museum.’ (*TSOTP* 210). Here James relies on the contemporary reader’s assumed knowledge of evolving display practices in historical and natural-historical museums for the effectiveness of his image. James began writing *The Sense of the Past* in 1900, less than a decade after Franz Boas had instituted such group displays of replica persons at Chicago’s Columbian Exposition, after which the materials were reused as the basis of the Field Columbian Museum, housed in the same structure, and at which Boas would work until 1894 (Conn 77-78). By the time James returned to the story in an attempt to finish it during the First World War, Boas’ display techniques for the illustration of human development — so-called life group displays — had become commonplace throughout museums in both the United States and Europe. James draws upon the inherent paradox of the life group — these representations of people, no matter how ‘consummate’, are undoubtedly ‘mechanical’ and remain mere imitations of the truly alive — in which the closer the approximation to life, the greater the artificiality of effect. That James introduces this image as a product of Pendrel’s imagination suggests that he is a seasoned museum-goer, as we might expect of someone determined to breach the gap between past and present, to the extent that he has interiorised such display techniques. Furthermore, the specificity of this image implies that it is the interpretative habits of viewership which Pendrel has learned by visiting museums which creates this gap between himself and the people he encounters in the past — he cannot help but distance himself. The ‘vast plate’ behind which he examines his ancestors is of his own making, acting as another sign of his status as a product of the modern age. James

had previously used a similar metaphor in *What Maisie Knew*, in which the titular character also experiences a sense of distance from her own past:

It gave her often an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass. (90-91)

In both instances, the ‘vast plate’ and ‘pane of glass’ prove to be barriers to the reality of experience. James exploits the supposed transparency of the image to position his characters as modern-day heirs to Tantalus, trapped not in pools of water but behind seemingly impenetrable glass.

The question of James’s timing of his return to the incomplete story is also worth consideration. After more than a decade, his decision to add further detail to Pendrel’s plight as his adopted homeland plunged into the abyss of the First World War is suggestive of a renewed interest in the operations of history at the personal level. Lyall Powers sees in James’s return to the story a desire to ‘escape’ his surroundings, yet what actually happens in the text seems to contradict this reading (291). In a letter of 1901 James had written sardonically of his dislike of the historical novel as a form:

The “historic” novel is, for me, condemned [...] to a fatal *cheapness*, for the simple reason that the difficulty of the job is inordinate and that a mere *escamotage*, in the interest of ease, and of the abysmal public *naïveté* becomes inevitable. You may multiply the little facts that can be got from pictures and documents, relics and prints, as much as you like – *the real thing* is almost impossible to do, and in its essence the whole effect is as nought: I mean the invention, the representation of the old CONSCIOUSNESS, the soul, the sense, the horizon, the vision of individuals in

whose minds half the things that make ours, that make the modern world were non-existent. (Edel 1984, 208)

His central character in *The Sense of the Past* is a figure who begins the story believing in the possibility of experiencing the past yet goes on to be disillusioned when he is given the chance to do so precisely for the reasons James outlines in the above letter: ‘the modern world [is] non-existent’ for those who dwell in history. Pendrel realises, too late, that the chasm between past and present is too large to be bridged securely, and that even the attempt to do so is doomed from the outset. Rather than serving an escapist purpose, *The Sense of the Past* acts as a sign of its authors’ increasing cognizance of the impossibility of retreating into history, no matter how sincere the wish to do so. The ‘vast plate’ which separates Pendrel from interacting significantly with his ancestors ultimately stands between all who would wish to cross the ontological divide between museum-goer and exhibit.

Drawing on his readers’ assumed knowledge of such spaces, James creates characters throughout his texts for whom it seems natural that the museum and the art gallery should act as intermediary spaces for the interpretation and delineation of the external world. That these habits of viewing, and thinking about, objects and other people often result in miscommunication (at best) or, more often than not, profound alienation between his characters suggests that James viewed museums as spaces of great complexity — in many ways he is the prototypical literary museum skeptic.⁹ As he made clear in *A Small Boy and Others*, museums occupied a central place in his creative life, acting as the spur for his thinking about the interrelated discourses which he detected within the echoing hallways of Europe’s museums. On his return visit to the United States in 1904, chronicled

⁹ See page 13 for a discussion of this term.

in *The American Scene*, he detected ‘money in the air, ever so much money’ while visiting New York’s Metropolitan Museum (CTW 514). Ever alert to the hidden processes by which the necessary capital was raised and secured for the creation of such places, he is clear-sighted about the troubling aspects of such cultural projects:

The Museum, in short, was going to be great, and in the geniality of the life to come such sacrifices, though resembling those of the funeral-pile of Sardanapalus, dwindled to nothing [...] (CTW 514)

These ‘sacrifices’ — the traditional, inherited notions of taste and cultural achievement which the Metropolitan (and other American museums) were to disrupt through the exercise of their unmatched financial heft — are simultaneously mourned and celebrated by James in this passage with his characteristic ambiguity. They must be made for the sake of ‘the life to come’ — that oncoming tide of modernity which museums themselves belonged to.

I’d like to end this chapter by reflecting on more current developments in the museum sector as they relate directly to James. While planning this chapter, I found out that the Morgan Library and Museum, in New York, was about to open an exhibition dedicated to James’s interactions with American artists. After two months at the Morgan Library, the exhibition moved on, fittingly enough, to Isabella Stewart Gardner’s Fenway Court, where it closed in January 2018. Although unable to attend, I was able to conduct an interview by telephone with one of the exhibition’s co-curators, Dr. Declan Kiely.¹⁰ As Dr. Kiely made clear, he and his collaborator Colm Toibín (a novelist who has previously not only written a fictional account of James’s life but also edited a special issue of the *Henry James Review*) believed that James

¹⁰ See Appendix A for a full transcript of the interview.

took something from painting, which is an idea of a ‘framed image’ of, say, in his novels, an important scene or a dramatic moment or the way, say, a character’s face betrays emotion or reflects a certain sensibility, and so James seems to have really liked and enjoyed using the gaze and the glance [.]

As demonstrated in this chapter, James certainly ‘took something from painting’ when constructing his novels — the fateful moment of recognition between Isabel Archer, Gilbert Osmond, and Madame Merle being one of the most significant examples. This connection runs deeper than simply the formalistic modelling of key moments in James’s narratives — a point agreed with by Dr. Kiely, when talking about the mix of forms present in the exhibition: ‘the approach we’ve taken about the exhibition — it’s not really a ‘paintings’ exhibition outright but it’s not really a ‘literary’ exhibition either — it’s both.’ The exhibition itself spans across different mediums in an attempt to define, or at least productively highlight, the deep interrelationships between James’s writing and his wider aesthetic sense, honed by visits to galleries and private collections throughout his career. This poses special difficulties for curators as well as critics, as Kiely conceded: ‘we’re tying James to a place and to a time [...] and trying to be evocative as much as anything else.’

One of the exhibition’s highlights is John Singer Sargent’s late portrait of James, painted in 1913, a work which has a unique prehistory of public display. The painting was paid for by subscription by several of James’s friends, and so pleased was he with the finished article that they

were invited to view it at Sargent’s studio in Tite Street in London. James also put himself on view, so that those who had paid for the portrait could compare painting

and sitter. He wrote to Sargent's sister: "Sitting for it was a bliss, but this standing *by* it has been an even richer experience." (Toibín 43)

In this instance, although no doubt played for jollity, James acted as both curator and exhibited object in a way which was doubtless a rich experience indeed for an author who had spent much of his life wondering about, and exploring, such relationships in his writing. For Kiely, the inclusion of this work was important to the success of the exhibition as a whole:

one of the first things visitors see when they come into the hall is the guest-book from Morgan's library, that was kept by his librarian until 1948 and was maintained by successive directors until 1996. If you look at the entry on page four of January 1911, you can see that on the 18th of January, Henry James came to visit [...] James was, of course, quite familiar with Pierpont Morgan's father, and often went to see his art collection, so there are these curious interconnections between them [...] it's good for visitors to see, and to think 'ah, look, James was here' — and now is here again, albeit in a portrait of him. It's a sort of coming home in a sense [.]

James's presence in the exhibition is thus multi-layered — the man himself once stood in the same space, as evinced by the proof of his signature, while he is there again, in portrait form, this time not as a visitor but as an exhibited object, thus completing the lifecycle of the painting set in motion by his standing beside it in Sargent's London studio. The apparent similarities between Sargent and James in terms of their subject matter and execution are now almost a commonplace: as Patrick McCaughey noted in his *Times Literary Supplement* review of the James exhibition, Sargent's paintings often 'have the suggestiveness, ambiguity and mysteriousness of James's fiction.' (26). McCaughey's point is well-made however, when one looks at a work of Sargent's such as *The Daughters*

of *Edward Darley Boit*, which enacts in paint that near-elision of difference between personal subjectivity and material object which is present in James's writing (see Figure 4). As Meaghan Clarke has discussed, James was a vocal supporter of this work, and there is a discernible echo of Sargent's painting in James's description of Adam Verver 'caring for special vases only less than for precious daughters.' (Clarke 249, *TGB* 139).

This overlap of artistic sensibilities is signalled most clearly for today's readers by the decision of several of James's modern-day publishers to use reproductions of Sargent's paintings as their front covers. By way of example, the Penguin Classics edition of *The American* has Sargent's 1879 work *Luxembourg Gardens at Twilight* on its front, while Oxford World's Classics' *The Spoils of Poynton* bears the artist's *An Interior in Venice*, painted in 1899. That Sargent's portrait of the author was recently on display in the home of his former friend, Isabella Stewart Gardner, represents something of a triumphant return of the author's presence, lending a new and more widely-applicable significance to his description of the Pendrel house in *The Sense of the Past*: 'A museum the place on this occasion more than ever became, but a museum of held reverberations still more than of kept specimens.' (*TSOTP* 66). Those works of James which I have discussed in this chapter fit this description as well, constituting textual spaces where the museum is revealed to be a site which contains not only 'kept specimens' but the 'held reverberations' of those who visit and leave with its combinations of governing rationales impressed upon their hearts and minds.



Figure 3: Sargent's portrait of James, 1913.



Figure 4: Sargent's *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*, 1882.

Chapter 2

Walking through (and around) history with James Joyce

In July 1906, James Joyce entered into a state of voluntary exile from his usual habitation, leaving his job as a teacher in the Austrian-administered city of Trieste for employment in a bank in Rome. Life in the financial sector proved unrewarding, as he left his position in just under a year, returning to Trieste by April of the next year. Shortly before these circular relocations, Joyce had begun to be embroiled in a contentious correspondence with the London publisher Grant Richards, regarding the eventual (non)publication of his short story collection *Dubliners*. Such was Joyce's anger at Richards' refusal to publish the manuscript of the stories as originally submitted that in a letter of June 1906 he accused the Englishman of potentially 'retard[ing] the course of civilisation in Ireland' (*LOJJ* 64). The personal and professional disappointments underpinning Joyce's time in Rome no doubt informed his unfavourable feelings towards the city, yet as his correspondence of the time demonstrates, there were deeper and more complex factors at play in his negative reaction to his new surroundings.

What Joyce found most distasteful — if not downright disturbing — about the city and its people was the nature of their relationship to their own past, as expressed through the seemingly never-ending commercial exploitation of the city's ancient history. Writing to his brother Stanislaus in September 1906, Joyce complained that 'Rome reminds me of a man who lives by exhibiting his grandmother's corpse' (*LOJJ II*, 165). The power of this image derives from its intermingling of several taboos: firstly, that Rome of all places should have sunk to such ghoulish and desperate depths as to rely on the 'corpse' of its own past to generate revenue (thereby suggesting a moribund present without vitality). Secondly, the crassly commercial nature of such acts which render cultural heritage as

merely a commodity like any other to be bought for the right amount, and thirdly the horror of violating one's own historical predecessors: the specificity of 'grandmother's corpse' suggests just how disgusted Joyce was with the city and its residents for having become dependent on their past in this fashion.

Drawing again on this corporeal vocabulary of complaint in another letter to his brother of October 1906, Joyce's anger and disgust have to mutate into a sort of chagrined resignation: 'I wish I knew something of Latin or Roman History. But it's not worth while beginning now. So let the ruins rot.' (*LOJJ II*, 171). Rather than dedicate his own time to learning 'something of Latin or Roman History', Joyce rejects such knowledge as being essentially useless for his own advancement. His dismissal of the city's historical remnants — 'let the ruins rot' — is suggestive of a rejection of not only his immediate built surroundings but also those historiographical and memorial practices as had been (and were still being) promulgated by other commentators and visitors to the city. J. C. Stobart's lavishly illustrated history of the Roman civilisation, *The Grandeur that was Rome*, published in 1912, provides an illuminating counterpoint to Joyce's attitudes towards the city: 'Standing in the Colosseum', Stobart writes, 'one has seemed to come far closer to the heart of the essential Roman than ever in reading Virgil or Horace.' (ix). This sense of historical affirmation could hardly be more different to Joyce's depiction of the Colosseum as being full of idle English tourists in another of his Roman epistles to his brother:

I heard a voice from London on one of the lowest gallery say: -The Colisseum-
 Almost at once two young men in serge suits and straw hats appeared in an embrasure.
 They leaned on the parapet and then a second voice from the same city clove the calm evening, saying: -Whowail stands the Colisseum Rawhm shall stand [/] When falls the Colisseum Rawhm sh'll fall [/] And when Rawhm falls the world sh'll fall – but adding cheerfully: -Kemlong, 'ere's the way aht- (*LOJJ II*, 146)

Stobart justifies such visitors' activities as instead providing some essential and undeniable link to their imperial predecessors: 'To the Englishman of today Rome is in some ways far more familiar than Greece [with] obvious resemblances in history and in character' (3). One can almost hear Joyce's snorted response. His use of 'rot' in the later letter to his brother brings us back to the image of the 'grandmother's corpse' in his previous letter — foreshadowing the frequent evocations of Stephen Dedalus's visceral horror of his mother's body as a revenant symbol of his past failings in the early chapters of *Ulysses*. Aware that his reaction to life in Rome was atypical amongst the literary classes which he desired to join, Joyce also took umbrage against other writers' depictions of the city in another letter to his brother, written in December 1906:

Of course, your prosy old friend H. J. and other respectables like to write about Italy and Italians and subtle Romans [...] If the word vulgar has any meaning I think the European palm must go to Italy. (*LOJJ II*, 198)

Evoking the 'prosy' Henry James (the 'H. J.' of Joyce's letter) in such fashion allows for an interesting exercise in contrasts between the two writers when it comes to the evaluation of such a place as Rome, where the material remains of the past were given great cultural prominence both within the city's museums and galleries and its wider public environs. While the exiled American author savoured 'the languor of Italy', he was also suspicious of 'the hideous cockneyfications that are going on', as detailed in a letter written to his sister almost 30 years before Joyce's stay in the city (Edel 1978, 141). It is certainly true that, as James himself admits in this letter, he 'appropriated' the city and its spaces for his fiction — as evinced by the scenes in *The Portrait of a Lady* which are set in the Capitoline Museum and the Colosseum — but there is a note of wilful disingenuousness about Joyce's lumping the older writer in with the un-named 'respectables'. What is clear from this letter is that Joyce felt himself to be different in some important way from writers like Henry

James, even at this early stage of his as-yet-unlaunched career, when it came to questions of how to interpret and represent the past as manifested in the treatment of space and place in their writing.

A passage such as this, taken from James's 1873 travel essay 'A Roman Holiday', suggests where we might identify such a difference:

Nothing in Rome helps your fancy to a more vigorous backward flight than to lounge on a sunny day over the railing which guards the great central recesses. It "says" more things to you than you can repeat to see the past, the ancient world, as you stand there, bodily turned up with the spade and transformed from an immaterial, inaccessible fact of time into a matter of soils and surfaces. (*TAOT* 324)

Where James clearly delights in 'see[ing] the past [...] bodily turned up with the spade and transformed' from something 'inaccessible' into something tangible, for Joyce such an endeavour has more of the graverobber's enterprise about it than of the amateur antiquarian. The spade which James credits as being the miraculously mundane instrument for transforming the past from the realm of the 'immaterial' and 'inaccessible' into something reachable from the present would more likely be associated in the younger author's imagination with midnight raids into the graveyard of history, where instead of untold treasures lie only the rotting corpses of one's own ancestors.

Joyce's distrust of such reverential modes of thinking about history as he believed figures like 'prosy old [...] H. J.' to display in their writing extends throughout his own career. Indebted to Nietzsche, Joyce's engagement with history was predicated upon a desire to delineate through his writing a mode of historical understanding which did not hinder the present and the lives of those within it. As Jerome McGann has asserted, Nietzsche argued that the primary goal of historical analysis 'ought to be self-

understanding' (12). This, too, might be said to represent Joyce's own ultimate desire in creating characters like Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, both of whom are engaged in struggles with events in both their own pasts and that of the nation in which (begrudgingly and against the wishes of others, respectively) they make their home: Ireland. This chapter will examine the ways in which Joyce's distrust of contemporary historiographical and cultural practices regarding the understanding of the past is manifested in his fictional works. These works then become textual engines for the drawing-up of alternative methods of evaluating the past and its relevance to the present day. For Joyce's fictional creations, museums and other public spaces constructed with ultimately mnemonic purposes in mind, such as public monuments and the National Library of Ireland, form the backdrop for their explorations of what it means to be alive in the immediate wake of a past as troubled as that of Joyce's home country. Joyce's fiction interrogates the leading institutions in Irish cultural life — not just Dublin's museum and National Library but also the country's schools — as representing the constituent parts of an interlocking nexus of officialdom which sought to control and determine the ways in which the country's citizens were allowed to access and make sense of their past. This focus on disputing the established narratives of history is at its sharpest in the frequent instances where Joyce satirically queries the reception of Dublin's public monuments by his characters in *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Joyce utilises satire as a means of rewriting history, or at least its effects on his characters' lives — by consciously viewing askance public symbols of the historical record such as Dublin's monuments, institutional buildings, and statues, Joyce offers us a model of living which is predicated on the needs and instincts of the present instead of the patterns and routines of the past. The question of how to negotiate Ireland's past suffuses the lives of Joyce's characters and the spaces which they inhabit — from the teenage narrator of 'Araby', who

overhears the singing of ‘a ballad about the troubles in our native land’ and the ‘soldiers’ slugs in the wood of the door’ of Stephen Dedalus’ boarding school to the Martello tower which Stephen shares as living quarters with his friend-turned-enemy Malachi Mulligan in *Ulysses* (*Dubliners* 23, *POTA* 6). For Robert Spoo, ‘History is more than just a theme in *Ulysses*; it is to an exceptional degree a condition of the novel’s aesthetic production’, and we might usefully extend this to include all of Joyce’s fictional output (4). Joyce interrogates the ways in which not only his contemporaries, but also his future readers, seek to understand history, to represent it, and how to feel about it. For Stephen Dedalus, famously, ‘History [...] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake’ (*Ulysses*, 34). While pleasingly evocative as an apothegm in its own right — Stephen, after all, has notebooks full of this sort of thing, and has probably mentally rehearsed several variations on the theme — this statement has been argued over by critics almost since its first publication. Its continued relevance is located in the ‘trying’ — that endless process which represents the Joycean model of historical understanding. History, Joyce’s writing ultimately tells us, cannot be definitively awoken from and cast aside but rather must be incorporated into our waking lives, usefully and in a fashion which does not weigh too heavily on other parts of our existence.

How we do this, Joyce suggests, is by freeing ourselves as best we can from those institutions and external controlling agents which attempt to limit the ways in which we understand and frame our lives. Such institutions at Joyce’s time of writing included not only concrete, tangible structures like museums, galleries and universities but also intellectual and religious bodies and movements such as the Catholic Church and the Celtic Revival — each of which represented the attempts of interested political agents to control the ways in which the people of Ireland understood their place in the world through control of the discourses and means by which they accessed their past. Irish society during

much of Joyce's life was riven by debates and sustained outbursts of violence centred on the question of how to understand the country's difficult past, a question which was at the heart of public projects such as museum building and the construction of national monuments, as well as the teaching of history and the ways in which historical knowledge was approved and circulated by competing authorities. Joyce's aim of individual emancipation from the controlling influence of external orthodoxies is clearly enunciated by Stephen in his confrontation with those of his friends who wish to bring him into the Irish nationalist fold towards the conclusion of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets. (220)

Achieving this flight is a task which preoccupied Joyce and was handed down to his characters. Joyce depicts them making use of museal spaces for their own purposes in a way which uses humour as a weapon against the assumed seriousness of such locations and the messages which they sought to transmit. Furthermore, Joyce is interested, as Henry James was, in the ways in which such spaces and the objects contained within them can influence or reflect their visitor's personalities. Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* derives an uneasy erotic pleasure from his encounters with a particular statue in the sculpture gallery of Dublin's National Museum, a pleasure which adds another layer of complication to his already dysfunctional sexuality in the novel. In a scene which occurs parallel to Bloom's episode of sculptural voyeurism, Joyce has Stephen declaim his overly-wordy explanation of *Hamlet* in the office of the National Library, a space which is dominated by the accepted canon of Anglophone literary masters. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce takes a further step in his parodic refusal to allow such spaces the dignity they seem to demand from their users and society as a whole. A scene towards the beginning of the text is set within the

‘Willingdone Museyroom’, a composite space which seems to blend the Wellington Monument in Dublin’s Phoenix Park with the museum dedicated to the eponymous general’s memory and possessions at his former home in London’s Hyde Park. In this scene Joyce places the whole enterprise of collecting, displaying and codifying history into question through his refusal to take seriously — at even the monadic level, as continuous puns and lexical play pile up on the page — the claims which such a space makes for its own meaningfulness and ability to represent anything truthful and useful about the past. Joyce’s varied employment of the museum in his fiction lends credence to Ruth Hoberman’s belief that modernist authors

saw the museum encounter as an opportunity to think about issues that interested them: to dramatize moments of introspection in the life of a character; to explore the nature of aesthetic experience; and to explore the relation between individuals and such larger forces as the state [and] the past. (7)

It is to this last issue that Hoberman raises, that of the relation between individuals and ‘larger forces’ like the state and the past, which we shall turn first in this chapter and its consideration of Joyce’s treatment of the museum function as he understood it to operate.

At the time of Joyce’s birth in 1882, and for several decades after, Ireland occupied a uniquely unsettled position within the wider sphere of British imperial control. Closest amongst British overseas possessions in terms of distance to the governing metropolitan powers in London, yet also separated by an impermeable cultural barrier which had grown up in no small part as a reaction to successive British regime’s mishandling of the native population and their needs, Ireland was an unhappily subordinate nation in the empire, subdued into quiescence through a strong military presence and the imposition of a governing framework which derived authority from London. The question of British-Irish

relations was one defined by a repeated willingness to resort to bloodshed and political intransigence on both sides, as John Darwin attests: ‘the 1590s, the 1640s, the 1680s, the 1770s, 1780s and 1790s’ had all been defined by this fractiousness reaching a seemingly unsustainable level, only to be temporarily quelled by yet more violence (297). This festering unhappiness spilled over into organised violence on several occasions throughout the 19th century — most notably in the 1848 insurrection led by the so-called Young Irelanders but also in several smaller-scale events such as the Phoenix Park murders in May 1882. More lasting than these bloody outbursts were the roots of a nationalist movement which sought both cultural and political emancipation from direct rule by the British. Joyce came of age at a time when this movement was coming to dominate the Irish cultural sphere yet was never truly comfortable with the views espoused by its leading figures. For Joyce, as Brian Caraher has argued, it was imperative that ‘the public narratives and political imaginary [of nationalism]’ should always remain open to ‘playful scrutiny and provocative critique’ (287). This kind of scrutiny is most apparent in *Ulysses*, where Bloom fruitlessly attempts to defend himself from the violent attacks of his fellow pub-goers, spurred on by ‘The Citizen’:

the citizen was only waiting for the wink of the word and he starts gassing out of him about the invincibles and the old guard and the men of sixtyseven and who fears to speak of ninety-eight [...] and [...] about all the fellows that were hanged, drawn and transported for the cause [...] and a new Ireland and a new this, that and the other.
(292)

The anger and intolerance of the nationalists towards Bloom, an outsider (in their eyes), in this scene mirrors those attitudes of the colonising powers which they attempt to declaim. For Bloom this internalisation of Ireland’s bloody history has no value: ‘it’s no use [...] Force, hatred, history, all that. That’s not life for men and women, insult and

hatred.’ (319) Dogmatism and blind adherence to extraneously dictated principles do not interest Bloom or his creator, precisely for their tendency to lead towards further conflict.

One political disappointment loomed above all others in Joyce’s early years, affecting both his home life and future conceptions about Ireland’s domestic troubles. The rise and fall of Charles Stewart Parnell, a Protestant landowner who nevertheless tirelessly campaigned for Irish Home Rule, is a topic which occurs repeatedly in Joyce’s fiction, and was perhaps the defining shock of his early life. Parnell’s determined campaigning seemed to have brought Ireland as close as it had ever been to some measure of political liberty from Westminster, yet was thwarted by his ousting as a correspondent in a divorce case as the lover of a fellow party member’s wife. Publicly condemned as immoral by both opposing politicians and the Catholic authorities in Ireland, Parnell died in 1891, just over a year after the scandal had broken (Gibney 166). Joyce’s father, John Stanislaus, had relied on his contacts within Parnell’s supporters for his career and thereafter the family’s financial situation declined rapidly; the older man never recovered from this abrupt change in circumstance and thereafter drank heavily while continuing to vociferously lament his fallen leader. This family tragedy of sorts played out in a domestic setting the morale sapping effect which the affair had on Ireland’s polity as a whole — for Frank Callanan, the ‘Parnell split tore Ireland apart.’ (12). The aftershocks of this event are tangible in Joyce’s fiction as well as the political essays which he wrote while in Trieste. An article entitled ‘The Shade of Parnell’, published in an Italian newspaper in 1912, saw Joyce attacking those he felt to be most responsible for the nationalist leader’s fate in imagery as violent as it is direct: ‘They did not throw him to the English wolves: they tore him apart themselves.’ (OCPW 196). More well-known is the incident in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* when the family’s festive dinner descends into drunken anarchy.

Mr. Casey, a friend of Stephen's father, angrily declaims his continued belief in the injustice of Parnell's fate:

Let him remember [...] the language with which the priests and the priests' pawns broke Parnell's heart and hounded him into his grave. Let him remember that too when he grows up. (33)

After the scene turns into a near-violent fracas, 'Stephen, raising his terrorstricken face, saw that his father's eyes were full of tears.' (*POTA* 39) Anger and sadness, then, were the informing emotions which Joyce chose to associate with Ireland's political fate in the post-Parnell years. For Dominic Mangianello, the Parnell crisis 'was the pivot from which Joyce viewed the rest of Irish history', and certainly it does provide a vivid example of individual will being crushed by institutional power, against which Joyce would be so opposed in his writing (8).

Joyce was not alone in his distrust of conventional party politics after this. While Parnell himself had advocated for Home Rule as the first achievable step towards Irish political emancipation, his death meant that this cause would be without a convincing champion in Westminster and thus be left susceptible to postponement and dilution by opposing parties (Bew 171). Many Irish nationalists of the younger generation — of which, ostensibly, Joyce was a member — began to support more wide-ranging policies. Fearghal McGarry has noted that this generation, 'which reached adulthood after the fall of Parnell', soon began to look beyond 'conventional politics' in their quest to reshape the Irish nation (18). Ireland's status as a British colony was felt by many, not least Joyce himself, to have had a stultifying effect on the development of native culture and industries. Led by figures such as W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, a literary movement began to emerge in the later decades of the 19th century, often referred to as the Celtic

Revival or the Irish Literary revival. By 1905, the notion of an Irish revival, or renaissance, was ‘a well-established phenomenon’, attracting frequent notice in newspapers and literary journals (Foster 1997, 334). The writers associated with this movement advocated a return to Irish mythology and modes of expression thought of as being ‘native’ in origin. Like all such claims, of course, these modes were themselves constructed out of a variety of literary and historical sources, with an emphasis on the primacy of rurality over the urban experience and underlaid by a strongly nationalist sentiment which, at times, glorified the violence of the past as being somehow essential to the national character.

There was a particular tendency to valorise the West of Ireland as constituting a space where the ‘true’ past of the country could still be encountered in unadulterated form. Seamus Deane has noted how this geographic area was represented, by a succession of writers and painters, as somehow being ‘historical’ in essence in a way which the rest of the country was not (1997, 53). Joyce’s suspicion of this rhetoric is clear in his short story ‘The Dead’, in which the protagonist Gabriel Conroy is subjected to repeated questioning of his status as an Irish citizen by members of his own social circle: after being described as a ‘West Briton’ by another attendee at his aunts’ party, he is unable to express his view that ‘literature was above politics’, restricted as he is by the narrowness of his interlocutor’s own opinions (188). Seemingly light-hearted enquiries about his favouring of European holidays over visits to Ireland’s western districts are laced with disapproval: ‘And why do you go to France and Belgium [...] instead of visiting your own land? [...] And haven’t you your own language to keep in touch with — Irish?’ (189). Gabriel’s answer reveals the disconnect that he knows to be extant between himself and those who subscribe to the ideologies governing the Irish cultural revival: ‘Well, said Gabriel, if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language.’ (189) As Clare Hutton has discussed, Joyce’s engagement with revivalism was one of complexity rather than straightforward

disavowal 'due to the fact that he held conflicting views contemporaneously' (2009, 203). Like Gabriel Conroy, he was unwilling to pledge himself to the cause, yet was also deeply resentful of the ways in which British rule had undeniably stunted the development of his national culture. Joyce's work is markedly different in style and aim than that of his peers, with, particularly, the starkness of *Dubliners* and the cacophonous bricolage of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* marking him out as being interested in other forms of literary expression than those most commonly practiced by the revivalists. His meeting with Yeats while still in his twenties has been interpreted as symbolic of this rift in sensibilities between the younger writer and those who belonged to the revivalist camp (Foster 1997, 276-277).

At the heart of this distancing from his contemporaries was a dislike of the revival movement's tendency to treat the Irish past as being not only praiseworthy but also fixable and interpretable along only those lines dictated by the demands of the movement. Gregory Castle's description of the revival movement as being 'a specifically Irish form of anthropological modernism that [sought] to transform indigenous materials into new cultural texts' is useful for thinking through Joyce's own lack of enthusiasm for this model of literary creation (3). The 'anthropological' means by which the literary revivalists sought to rediscover a distinctly Irish literary heritage verged too closely for Joyce with those employed by the colonial authorities in their treatment of the Irish people as being somehow exotic and other, thus reducing their status as citizens. The project of colony building, as Nicholas Thomas has argued, is dependent on 'a will to define, collect and map the cultures' of the occupied countries (3). Ireland had long been subject to such projects, dating back to the Ordnance Survey's attempt to map the country in pinpoint detail, which began in the late 1820s (Parsons 26). By the end of the 19th century, Ireland's rural people were themselves being subjected to the inquisitive gaze of not only their compatriots, but also external interested parties. Anthropology's original disciplinary

status as an external arm of the museum sector, which gathered in objects and knowledge alike for storing and sorting, lies only partially obscured behind such enterprises. In *Ulysses*, Joyce provides an example of just such a colonising outsider, in the figure of Haines, the Englishman who lodges with Stephen and Mulligan. We can read Stephen and Haines' antagonistic cohabitation as an enactment, on the domestic scale, of the disjunction between coloniser and colonised in Ireland itself — made worse, for Stephen, by the presence of his fellow countryman, Mulligan, who aids and abets the Englishman's condescension in a way which feels, to Stephen, like a betrayal of their shared nationality. For Richard Begam, this uncomfortably conjoined triumvirate represent a 'configuration that is familiar from Irish history: Haines, the imperial Englishman, Mulligan, the complicitous Anglo-Irish landlord; Stephen, the usurped Irishman' (202).

Haines, a university friend of Mulligan, is visiting Ireland to write an anthropological volume, collecting Irish folk traditions and appending his scholarly explanations of their derivations and meanings. As Mulligan dryly describes it, Haines seeks such subject matter as 'Five lines of text and ten pages of notes about the folk and the fishgods of Dundrum' (*Ulysses* 13). Implicit in this enterprise is Haines' self-granted status as an authority on such matters, derived from his place amongst the ruling classes, which legitimates his enterprise as a worthwhile extension of the imperial project. Joyce here is also poking fun at the kinds of publications which had become commonplace during the 1880s and 1890s, with the Irish Literary Revival in full swing. In a newspaper article written during his time in Trieste, entitled 'The Soul of Ireland', Joyce ambivalently reviewed just such a text, Lady Gregory's *Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish*:

Half of her book is an account of old men and old women in the West of Ireland. These old people are full of stories about giants and witches [...] and they tell their stories one after another and at great length and with many repetitions [...] (*OCPW* 74)

While not being totally condemnatory, Joyce's description of the stories within the book as being told in a seemingly perfunctory manner, 'with many repetitions', suggests that he saw such literary productions as being of limited value at best. Haines' desire to compile such a volume, then, is not only driven by a sinister compulsion to collect and fetishize Irish culture, but will also perpetuate a rapidly-ossifying literary trend. When an old local woman arrives at the tower to deliver the milk round, the Englishman engages her in conversation, supposing her to be a fluent speaker of Gaelic, and thus of considerable interest for his work. Her baffled, deadpan response undercuts the earnestness of his enquiries: 'Is it French you are talking, sir?' (*Ulysses* 14). Mulligan, in amusement, joins in:

He's English, Buck Mulligan said, and he thinks we ought to speak Irish in Ireland.
 –Sure we ought to, the old woman said, and I'm ashamed I don't speak the language myself. (14)

Joyce thus comically skewers the Englishman's intended goal of preserving the old woman's habits of speech and vocabulary, revealing the pomposity behind such attempts. He is, in Emer Nolan's phrase, 'the local representative of imperial England' and as such remains excluded from the true lives of the people whom he wishes to subject to his taxonomic ambitions, as signalled by the old woman's polite incomprehension when faced with his questioning (60). His idealisation of the old woman, by which he seeks to transform her from a truly living subject into 'a museum piece that can stand in for the comfortable stereotypes of Irish peasant folksiness', is undermined by Joyce's comic

reveal of her bafflement at his entreaties (Cheng 2006, 224). Haines, far from being shaken by this development, is undeterred in his goal of collecting something of native provenance for his notes during his time at the tower. Turning to Stephen, he declares that ‘I intend to make a collection of your sayings if you will let me.’ (*Ulysses* 16) Now targeting Stephen’s own speech as being somehow indicative of his Irishness, and thereby worthy of collecting, Haines’ seemingly polite request masks an attempt at containing and defining Stephen as a specimen for consumption. Even at the basic level of utterance, he is not safe from outside interference from the imperial machine, hence his justifiable bitterness at being ‘the servant of two masters [...] The imperial British state [...] and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church.’ (*Ulysses* 20). Haines’ response to this complaint further illustrates the difference between them:

I can quite understand that, [Haines] said calmly. An Irishman must think like that, I daresay. We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame. (20)

In one respect, of course, he is correct — history really is to blame for the gulf between the Englishman and the Irishman, and yet by having him speak of this matter ‘calmly’, Joyce makes clear that Haines is unaware of just how ‘unfairly’ the historical record has proven to be in its long and violent process of unfurling. Haines’ unwittingly offensive remark is reminiscent, in its glib elision of historical trauma, of a speech given by the 7th Earl of Carlisle at the opening of the National Gallery of Ireland forty years prior to the events of *Ulysses*:

The previous course of Irish history has scarcely been smooth enough to foster the growth of galleries or museums of the fine arts [...] It is my earnest wish that the

institution which we now inaugurate may by the display of foreign excellence supply a fresh incentive and starting point to your own. (Bourke 237)

While Joyce may not have been aware of this particular misguided peroration, the similarities between the two Englishmen in their verbal glossing of historical violence and discord certainly lend credence to Charles Townshend's view that 'British attitudes to Ireland were an odd mixture of bafflement, arrogance and ignorance.' (26). Irish history, for Haines and others of his class, is something to be discussed politely and with scholarly interest, rather than being a source of repeated and painful reminders of societal turmoil, as it is for Stephen. In a later scene in which the characters converge for a meal in a pub, Haines' desire to experience 'real' Ireland is shown to extend to the gustatory realm: 'This is real Irish cream I take it, he said with forbearance. I don't want to be imposed upon.' (*Ulysses* 239). In his concern to only eat 'real Irish cream', presaged by asking permission to collect Stephen's sayings and politely interrogating the aged milkmaid, Joyce portrays Haines as the representative of a force capable of consuming the nation through the capture of its language and the digestion of its natural produce.

Joyce is at his most Swiftian here — the smallness of the means by which Haines will literally eat up Ireland serves as a parodic counterpoint to the very real threat posed by the colonising class to which the Englishman belongs, a threat whose entrenchment within the political systems of the island renders his seeking of consent from Stephen to be merely a way of disguising the implicit imbalance of power between the two in the name of civility. Much later in the text Haines is depicted as a cross between pantomime villain and a spectre with evil intentions:

The secret panel beside the chimney slid back and in a recess appeared...Haines!
Which of us did not feel his flesh creep! He had a portfolio full of Celtic literature in

one hand, in the other a phial marked *Poison*. Surprise, horror, loathing were depicted on all faces while he eyed them with a ghastly grin. I anticipated some such reception, he began with an eldritch laugh, for which, it seems, history is to blame. (*Ulysses* 392)

Joyce's adoption of a faux-Gothic style ('Which of us did not feel his flesh creep!'), while clearly intended to be comedic in effect, reminds us again of Stephen's deep distrust of the Englishman. Armed with 'a portfolio full of Celtic literature in one hand, in the other a phial marked *Poison*', Joyce here channels something of fellow Irishman Bram Stoker's style to depict Haines as a truly horrifying figure, one who delights in the dread which he invokes. Here the return of the unwanted colonial outsider is figured as being threatening and frightening in equal parts, in an effective reversal of late-Victorian narratives (like Stoker's *Dracula*) which often depicted the colonised peoples and immigrants of the world as bringing danger and instability with them to the imperial metropole (Glover 92). In Stephen's mind it is Haines, the coloniser, who becomes a 'Black panther vampire', draining the life from both himself and his country (*Ulysses* 564).

I.

It seems history is to blame: disrupting institutional power in Ireland

Colonial influence over native Irish culture and the interpretation of Irish history took more direct forms during the 19th and early 20th centuries, beginning with the teaching of history as part of the compulsory, state-controlled education introduced in the 1830s (Parsons 26). Much of the Irish historiography available during these years was written by, and from the perspective of, the ‘dominant but threatened class’ of the imperial Protestant elite and thus sought to inculcate acquiescence to the official ways of interpreting Irish history which emphasised the importance of imperial unity (Gibson 113). Stephen’s early education is defined by this kind of teaching by way of official diktats: as a schoolboy he is made to believe, *pace* Thomas Carlyle’s work with its emphasis on the deeds of (supposedly) great men, that ‘History was all about those [great] men and what they did’ (*POTA* 55). Carlyle, as Simon Goldhill has described, provided a ‘paradigmatic’ model of historical understanding in late-Victorian society which was frequently employed in order to entrench ideas of loyalty to the state and its various institutions (Goldhill 2016, 80). Stephen is only able to renounce the effects of this ideology after much conscious and painful effort — a struggle which, played out on an individual level, suggests Joyce’s belief in the importance of being able to detach oneself from the orthodoxies of the past. There was no greater target on this front than Carlyle, whose status as one of the great sages of late Victorian culture had long been assured by the time Stephen encounters this model of history in a Dublin classroom (Kaplan 1983, 412). By the time he himself becomes a teacher, he reflects critically not only on the pedagogical methods to which he was subjected, but also their deeper consequences for the formation of understanding and knowledge: thinking of the boys in his charge, he regretfully considers that ‘For them too history was a tale like any other too often heard’ (*Ulysses* 25).

The repetitive nature of the boys' lessons will, he feels, blunt their abilities to truly acquire knowledge of the past. Furthermore, he considers the nature of historical knowledge itself: 'And yet it was not in some way as memory fabled it.' (*Ulysses* 24). This sentence, concise though it is, is laden with a charged ambivalence by Joyce: the vagueness of the subject at hand, expressed by the phrase 'it was not in some way', indicates Stephen's own doubtfulness regarding the status of the knowledge he is supposedly imparting. The capacity of memory to record and express historical truth is undercut by the focus on the process by which it does so — 'fabled' connotes some degree of invention, embellishment and omission. While doubting the material on his syllabus in this way might make Stephen a haphazard teacher, it also functions as a reminder that his deep-seated unease is rooted in a sense of historical dislocation and mnemonic turmoil, traceable to his own education and experiences as a young man. This dislocation, which he feels so keenly — while looking out on a beach after leaving the school, all he can imagine are 'Famine, plague and slaughters' — is not one which can be easily overcome, and is perhaps the defining factor in Stephen's fierce refusals to subscribe to the dogmas promoted by his friends, family and professional superiors (*Ulysses* 45).

Asked light-heartedly by a friend whether he would have taken Holy Communion in a past century, his answer indicates his desire to move away from such considerations and into a future of his own making: 'I cannot answer for the past' (*POTA* 265). While his father is content to remain 'a praiser of his own past', Stephen's determined refusal to linger in the realm of memory can be seen as a direct refutation of this paternal example: 'The past is consumed in the present and the present is living only because it brings forth the future.' (*POTA* 262, 273). His employer at the school, Mr. Deasy, prides himself on an understanding of history which is deeply flawed, as revealed unwittingly in his conversation with the younger man: 'You fenians forget some things [...] We are all Irish,

all kings' sons.' (*Ulysses* 31). This confused grasp of Irish history produces a strange version where 'We are all Irish' despite the very obvious chasm between 'fenians' like Stephen and Northerners like the schoolmaster. Deasy draws a smug comfort from his belief that 'All history moves towards one great goal', while for Stephen, of course, history is characterised as a 'nightmare' and one from which he is desperate to awake (*Ulysses* 34). While Stephen is inescapably conscious of what Joe Cleary has described as the 'catastrophic dimension of nineteenth-century Irish history', Deasy, like Haines the Englishman before him, is able to brush this off, secure as they are in their places as the erstwhile victors of the progress of Irish history (41). Stephen's experiences, as both schoolboy and teacher, bear out Michael Bentley's assertion that

what counts as historical knowledge within a given culture is not determined by the past itself, presenting itself as a story waiting to be read, but rather by those who are entrusted with modulating that past for particular audiences. (187)

Troubled by the memories of his own past — the frequent irruption of ghoulish images of his mother's form into his thoughts being the chief means by which Joyce conveys this personal disquiet — as well as a profound discontent with his national heritage (or, thanks to figures like Haines, lack of it), it is not surprising that Stephen prioritises an uncertain belief in futurity for its own sake over adherence to a past which he only experiences as an oft-recurring nightmare.

The nation's schools were not the only public institutions where questions of control over precisely who was allowed to define and write the Irish historical record were contested. Museums initially appeared in Ireland under the auspices of such bastions of the established imperial order as Trinity College — which had an accessible collection of artefacts from the 1780s, culminating in the opening of a grand museum building on the

university's campus in 1857 — as well as the Royal Irish Academy, where antiquarian collections were housed for study and display by approved scholars (Bourke 111, 156). As a nation for which, according to Ian McBride, 'the interpretation of the past has always been at the heart of national conflict', Ireland's museums (and their collections) were to play a significant role in the staging of such conflicts — a role which has only diminished slightly in the present day (1). The proliferation of museums and galleries in Dublin during the middle decades of the 19th century has been interpreted by Yvonne Whelan as an attempt by the colonial authorities to assert an unmistakably physical presence in the eyes and minds of Dublin's native citizens: the imperial state, thanks to its approval of such projects as the National Gallery, Natural History Museum, National Library and National Museum, was thus positioned as a benefactor rather than exploiter of the country's population, thereby (it was hoped) securing their continued loyalty (111). The fact that these buildings were clustered together in a visually recognisable cultural complex was to add to the sense of officialdom which the buildings were intended to evoke through their classical frontages and dimensions. If the people of Ireland were to be given access to the physical remnants of their nation's past, it was of utmost importance that they be reminded at every opportunity of who it was that ultimately gave them permission to do so.

The decision to begin the construction of what was to become the National Museum in Dublin, initiated by a Parliamentary Committee in 1864, would prove to be laborious to execute as imperial officials sought to impose their agenda on the building and its supporters. Despite several interviewees expressing their concerns about any resulting institution being beholden to policies set in London, these were ignored by the Committee, and eight years lapsed between the passage of the Bill for the building's construction and funding in 1877 and the first brick actually being laid while 'competing definitions of the purpose of a public museum in Dublin' were argued over in a series of

consultations (Crooke 107-115). By having the Prince of Wales — the future Edward VII — lay the foundation stone for the building, the imperial authorities made sure ‘the event was an affirmation of the links between London and Dublin’, thus using the pomp and symbolism of a royal pageant to cement (in this instance quite literally) their control of the institution and the message it was understood to embody — that Ireland’s past was one of several constituent strands which made up a wider imperial polity, controlled from London for the apparent greater good of all (Crooke 121-122). After finally opening in 1890, the museum was named the Dublin Museum of Science and Art, thus eliding any mention of its status as a ‘National’ institution (indeed its name was only changed to incorporate this wording in 1908) and would have been known as such to Joyce’s characters at the time of their fictional visits (Crooke 137). This desire on the part of the authorities in London to maintain control over their Irish subordinates was exercised down to the level of collections management: a hoard of Iron Age treasure found at Broighter, County Derry, became something of a central point of contention in the debate over who had the right to keep Irish historical artefacts, having been purchased and moved to London by 1898 by the British Museum, and only returned to Dublin after royal intervention by Edward VII in 1903 (Bourke 169-170). Such attempts to maintain the right to physically display and interpret Ireland’s history were clearly motivated by a determination to restrict access to the country’s heritage in the name of shoring up the imperial status quo, a determination hinted at in a speech given by Sir John Robinson, a Fellow of London’s Society of Antiquaries, at an 1898 hearing of a Parliamentary Commission investigating the links between museums in Ireland and Scotland and the British Museum in London, in which he declared that ‘I take an Imperial view of this Museum. I regard the British Museum as the Central Imperial Museum.’ (Crooke 131). The material traces of Ireland’s past, then, were liable to being held hostage in the name

of imperial unity. Small wonder that Stephen Dedalus should react with such opprobrium to the presence of the Englishman Haines, who serves as a walking reminder of Ireland's subordinate status within the wider imperial sphere, as expressed through his intentions to collect and catalogue Irish heritage along the same lines as those practiced by museum officials in London.

Joyce, as indicated by his letters from Rome, was highly sensitive to questions regarding the utilisation of national heritage and its value in the present. Troubled — if not disgusted — by the ways in which he saw modern-day Italians to be commercially exploiting their country's past for short-term gain, he opted for an understanding of history which emphasised the ability of the individual to make use of it in ways which tend more towards the liberatory and the ludic than the ceremonious, reverent, or commercial. Stephen's speech in the National Library provides a notable example of Joyce exploring the consequences of individual expression within an institutional setting. As the final, completing piece in what Brendan Grimes has termed Dublin's 'cultural hub' centred around Kildare Street, the National Library was a symbolically important constituent part of Dublin's still-new collection of high-cultural institutions; in an architectural arrangement unmistakably intended to convey the importance of the buildings the National Library faces directly onto the National Museum, with the two frontages forming a mirror image of the other (189). As such the building was (and remains) one of the key sites where 'Irish history is laid down', with the very building itself being visibly redolent of this process by which present events become part of the nation's past by being recorded and transmitted for storage through the sternly-managed channels of officialdom (Foster 2014, 149). As a student at University College Dublin during the years in which it was based in a smattering of buildings across the city centre, Joyce and his classmates were frequent users of the National Library's facilities due to the poor provision of books and

learning space at the still-new university (Hutton 2006, 135). After returning to Dublin from Paris due to his mother's death in 1903, he spent much of his time reading in the familiar surrounds of the National Library, becoming acquainted with the staff during these visits (Spinks 20, Ellmann 118). It was thus a space with which he was intimately familiar, and would make its way into *Ulysses* as the setting for Stephen's flawed, though brave, attempt at individual expression by means of his lecture on *Hamlet*. Stephen gives his lecture in the librarians' office behind the desk in the main reading room — he has been allowed backstage, as it were, suggesting (initially at least) an admittance into the space where the question of which kinds of literary discourse constitute high culture are decided (Hutton 2006, 131). Stephen's internal monologue throughout the scene highlights his awareness of the symbolic weight expressed by, and contained within, the walls of the building in which he is to declaim his theories: 'Coffined thoughts around me in mummycases, embalmed in spice of words.' (*Ulysses* 186). Drawing on a vocabulary of Egyptology in this comparison, which also evokes the thoughts of his mother's corpse and grave which lurk, unresolved, in the recesses of his memory, it is clear that for Stephen, the National Library has become a place where tradition stands triumphant over innovation. The books are transfigured in his mind into 'mummycases' — one can almost see the dust on the spines. This is not the place, Stephen's thoughts tell us, for new ideas. Not that his lecture is particularly distinguished. Lacking in clarity, as he himself inwardly confesses, it is more a 'mixture of theologicophilological' ruminations than a reasoned piece of criticism (*Ulysses* 196). Interrupted by Mulligan, the discussion descends into farce, and is drawn to a premature conclusion, leaving Stephen bitterly wondering 'What have I learned? Of them? Of me?' (*Ulysses* 206). Far from the vindication which he sought, Stephen finds himself unable to assert his individuality within the walls of 'The

constant readers' room.' (*Ulysses* 206). In this instance, the might of the institution mutes the individual's powers of expression.

Prior to these events, however, the text's other protagonist, Leopold Bloom, is providing an example of just the opposite. Bloom makes use of the Museum of Science and Art's collections for his own idiosyncratic purposes, thus quietly demonstrating the power of the individual to subvert such spaces. Having aided a blind man to cross the street, Bloom draws near to the Museum and the thought of a visit pops, like so many other ideas in Joyce's text, seemingly innocuously into his head: 'To the right. Museum. Goddesses.' (*Ulysses* 174). Like Stephen, although with less overt choler, Bloom is troubled by his memories: of his dead son, Rudy, of his dead father, Virag, and (more recent in origin) of the marital troubles which are brewing at home between himself and his wife Molly. This impromptu visit to the Museum thus provides the possibility of some respite from these recurring worries: 'Making for the museum gate with long windy strides he lifted his eyes. Handsome building. Sir Thomas Deane designed [...] Cold statues: quiet there. Safe in a minute.' (*Ulysses* 175). Unlike Stephen's wariness of the National Library, Bloom seems to take a distinct pleasure in the design of the building and its accompanying calmness — the 'Handsome building' holds out to him the promise of quietude and safety. Where Stephen felt himself to be weighed down by the collective presence of so many mummified thoughts in the National Library, Bloom sees the Museum as offering the chance to indulge in some welcome individual recreation, a respite from the bustle of the streets and of his own thoughts. However, Joyce denies us the chance to observe Bloom as he wanders the halls of the museum — his activities are instead relayed to us by Mulligan with characteristically malicious relish:

I found him over in the museum when I went to hail the foamborn Aphrodite. The Greek mouth that has never been twisted in prayer. Every day we must do homage to her [...] His pale Galilean eyes were upon her mesial groove. (*Ulysses* 192)

Mulligan's visit to the Museum is conducted along different lines to that of Bloom's, who is actively seeking to avoid contact with other people — Mulligan is just as interested in the activities of the older man as he is in the statue of Aphrodite, true to his character as a gossipmonger but also signalling towards the prominence of museums as venues for social encounters within the wider fabric of the modern city. A significant part of the appeal of such spaces was that visitors could 'look at each other as well as at the pictures.' (Goldhill 2011, 13). Mulligan's apparently daily visits to the Museum — 'Every day we must do homage to her' — suggest that it had become a space which was habitually used by Dublin's intellectual classes. Bloom's presence there also denotes that the Museum was used by citizens of slightly lower rank — and indeed the Museum was assiduous in its courting of the city's populace, running regular guided tours and lectures, with over 2600 people attending the twenty-four such events held in 1898 (Bourke 202).

While Mulligan's admiration of the statue of Aphrodite in the Museum is predicated upon his implied knowledge of its cultural importance, there is a more personal element to Bloom's visit, as hinted at in conversation with Stephen:

I just happened to be in the Kildare Street Museum today, shortly prior to our meeting [...] and I was just looking at those antique statues there. The splendid proportions of hips, bosom. You simply don't knock against those kind of women here. An exception here and there. Handsome, yes, pretty in a way you find, but what I'm talking about is the female form. (*Ulysses* 592)

Joyce commingles the myth of Pygmalion, as originally told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with another story derived from Pliny the Elder, telling of the sculptor Praxiteles' statue of Aphrodite being molested by an unknown admirer, updating them to contribute to Bloom's complex of sexual urges. Deeply enamoured with the statues as being exemplars of 'the female form', it is perhaps not surprising that one doesn't 'simply [...] knock against those kind of women' on the streets of Dublin, as the statues represent an unattainable aesthetic ideal. Strangely, for a man who takes so much pleasure from the sensory world (his enjoyment of the smell and taste of kidneys being a case in point), Bloom is here depicted as preferring the 'splendid proportions' of the statues to the women he encounters on the streets of the city.

This appreciation of the idealised female form is perhaps a coping strategy to cover up the less than ideal state of his own confused sexual urges — as evinced by his earlier actions on the beach, engaging a younger woman's gaze for his own satisfaction, while at home his wife Molly seeks other suitors to meet her own needs, with Bloom's tacit (though not total) approval. Joyce's rewriting of the Pygmalion myth — a subversion of a narrative which, as Kate Nichols has observed, enjoyed a great resurgence in popularity during the latter years of the 19th century — sees the act of statue-worship incorporated as one of several overlapping signs of sexual dysfunction in Bloom's temperament (186). In doing so, Joyce is careful to weave strands of similarity between the original myth and his updated treatment: Pygmalion, like Bloom, prefers 'image[s] of perfect/feminine beauty' to the real thing, and the two men find their 'marvelling soul[s] inflamed with desire for a/semblance of body.' (Ovid 394). By positioning Bloom in a tradition of statue-worshippers which began with the story of Pygmalion, Joyce invokes the long historical chain of eroticised reactions to statuary. As George Hersey has discussed, classical-era reports and poetic descriptions of such reactions were used to lend weight to the reputation

of the statue(s) in question as masterpieces (73-74). Bloom's engaged viewership thus represents a modern example in a narrative tradition of mortal men being overwhelmed by such objects. Unlike his ancient counterpart, Bloom's search for the ideal form serves to further separate him from the woman who already shares his home: his wife, Molly.

During the extended soliloquy which constitutes the final chapter of the text, Molly reflects not only on her own sexual habits and preferences, but also those of her husband: he repeatedly talks 'on about the monuments and he tired me out with statues' (*Ulysses* 692). That she is 'tired out' by her husband's talk of the statues implies that — although the comparison would possibly displease Joyce — like certain of Henry James's characters, Bloom's experiences in the museum have affected him deeply and changed his ability to relate to the person who should be his most direct link to the human world of affection. This source of division between them resurfaces later in her musings:

theyre supposed to represent beauty placed up there like those statues in the museum one of them pretending to hide it with her hand are they so beautiful of course compared with what a man looks like with his two bags full and his other thing hanging down [...] no wonder they hide it with a cabbageleaf [...] (*Ulysses* 704)

Unlike her husband, Molly seems comfortable with the distance between the idealised and the actual, recognising that this is an essential fact of existence; unbridled by those demands of late-Victorian morality which insisted on covering up the nudity of statues for the sake of preserving the decency of visitors, she playfully references this trend while acknowledging its essentially ludicrous nature in her choice of imagery: 'no wonder they hide it with a cabbageleaf'. Men's bodies, with their 'two bags full and [...] other thing hanging down' are treated by Molly as being possessed of an inherently comic aspect, but not one which she would wish to replace with the impersonality of 'statues in the

museum'. Molly's more lax attitudes towards sexuality, her evident interest in matters of the flesh, place her beyond those 'repressive Victorian moralities' with which Edwardian society still struggled, particularly in Ireland, where the influence of the Catholic Church loomed large in questions of sexual conduct (Smith 7). Bloom's visit to the museum, charged with quietly disruptive eroticism, serves as one example of the ways in which Joyce sought to undercut, and overturn, the institutional prerogatives embodied in such a space. It is not a straightforwardly aesthetic edification which he seeks in the Museum's collection of casts (see Figure 5), but rather a more intimate pleasure. Joyce's decision to use the Museum as a space in which individual pleasure is the goal sought (and attained) from his characters' visits is indicative of his overriding concern with the ability of the individual to not only survive, but thrive on their own terms, under the auspices of such institutions. If, as Elizabeth Crooke posits, Dublin's museum 'was a stage, a place where different perspectives on the political history of Ireland met and were acted out', then we can see in Joyce's incorporation of it into his novel a refusal to adhere to the established rules of this particular socio-historical dramaturgy (100). While Bloom, and Mulligan, clearly appreciate the chance to view the statues in the Museum, Joyce himself displayed a lifelong preoccupation with public statuary of a different sort.

II.

Statues, catalogues, and obelisks: resisting and rewriting the monumental

Throughout his writings, both fictional and epistolary, Joyce repeatedly refers to public monuments in ways which are far from flattering and indicate his determined refusal to allow them to stand unquestioned as official emblems of history. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen's friend Lynch smilingly declares that 'one day I wrote my name in pencil on the backside of the Venus of Praxiteles in the Museum.' (222). Although only a fleeting reference in the text, this act, of inscribing one's own name onto a revered artwork (and thus disrupting its established, and intended, modes of reception), serves as a wittily pertinent synecdoche of Joyce's own attitude towards such objects. Numerous anecdotal accounts of his student years suggest that Joyce greatly enjoyed rewriting and reworking inscriptions for Dublin's statues, signalling an early refusal to accept the interpretive limits such monumental structures seem to voice and represent (Ellmann 1982, 92). As ever, Joyce would utilise the subversive possibilities of humour as his chief weapons in this protracted battle with these physical manifestations of officialdom.

As with the National Museum, Dublin's cityscape, with its numerous memorial structures, had evolved slowly through much debate and public contention to reflect the country's troubled historical story. By the end of the 1890s, Dublin's public statuary 'betrayed the fractured and contested nature of politics in the country at large' — public projects which commemorated both imperial mainstays and local figures of importance had been commissioned and completed with increasing frequency, as both sides of the political divide strove for symbolic control of the city's public spaces in order to impose visible testaments to the veracity of their particular interpretation of the country's history (Whelan 75). Nor was this politically-motivated variegation limited to individual statues; Paula

Murphy has described the rise of a distinctly, and deliberately, ‘Irish’ public sculpture during the late 19th century, employed on behalf of private and public patrons alike (388). Memorial stones in graveyards boasting Celtic imagery, and public buildings with statue groups drawn from Irish legend, all began to compete visibly in the public arena for their version of Ireland’s iconography to be seen and thus gain prominence in the minds of the public. The Dublin of Joyce’s formative years had seen a rapid proliferation of public commemorative works — most notably the construction of Daniel O’Connell’s statue and the public funeral of Parnell (McBride 30). Joyce nods towards this in *Ulysses* when, en route to another funeral, Bloom’s carriage passes ‘Farrell’s statue [...] Gray’s statue [...] the hugecloaked Liberator’s form [...] Nelson’s pillar [...] Foundation stone for Parnell’ (90-91). The ideological differences which the statues represent are left unspoken in the text yet are unignorable — ‘Nelson’s pillar’ acting as a disruptive reminder, in between the O’Connell statue and the foundation stone for the Parnell monument, of the knots preventing Irish history from assuming a straightforward, flowing narrative structure. In such a contested space, then, the struggle for individuality against the forces of institutional control is undoubtedly played out in large part on the streets of the city. Liam Lanigan’s assertion that ‘the conflict and interaction of [...] multiple histories is vital to understanding the type of city [*Ulysses*] depicts’ provides a useful starting point for investigating the ways in which Joyce has his characters walk both through, and around, Dublin’s historical landscape as manifested in the city’s increasingly congested (and contested) statuary (154).

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen, while on one of his characteristic walks, passes by a memorial slab for the revolutionary leader Wolfe Tone. Rather than bowing his head respectfully, or at least stopping to gaze upon it with some degree of reverence — as befitting its intended purpose — he is instead reminded of

having been present with his father at its laying. He remembered with bitterness that scene of tawdry tribute. There were four French delegates in a brake and one, a plump smiling young man, held, wedged on a stick, a card on which were printed the words:

Vive l'Irlande! (199)

Instead of evoking a sense of national pride, or sympathy with the dead man's political aims, the slab brings the 'bitterness' of the past event into Stephen's mind. The ceremony's 'tawdry' elements fatally undercut the possibility of its message being received with any favour by the young man; the whole thing is depicted by Joyce with a cold humour as having been rather more embarrassing than inspirational. It is not only the act of commemoration through stone that Joyce pillories here but also the rhetoric and sloganeering which underpins such gestures; the 'card on which were printed the words: *Vive l'Irlande!*' irreparably deflates the intended gravity of the event, by means of the gap which exists between its material reality as a piece of cheaply printed card and its ill-expressed symbolic weight. Such events were often heavily ritualistic in nature, and Joyce's decision to portray the solemnity of the occasion as instead tending towards the farcical, provides another instance of his unwillingness to subscribe to the tenets of communality (Jones 134-136). Shortly before his sighting of the Wolfe Tone memorial, Stephen's walk had taken him past a statue dedicated to Thomas Moore, Ireland's preeminent Romantic poet, which provokes a similarly sardonic reaction: 'he came upon the droll statue of the national poet of Ireland [...] the servile head [...] seemed humbly conscious of its indignity.' (194). Stephen's reaction to the statue is clearly different to that which its creators and sponsors intended; rather than agreeing with the rectitude of granting Moore a place in posterity by such means, Stephen sees it as being defined by a discernible 'indignity'. To be commemorated in such a fashion, Joyce suggests, is to have one's self be assimilated into the cultural and political agendas of those arbitrary tastemakers whom the true artist should scorn rather than prove agreeable to. For Leith Davis,

the ‘case of Thomas Moore exemplifies how the English patronage and market system determined the fate of an Irish writer and subsequently the Irish national image he helped to create.’ (13). The ‘indignity’ which the statue evokes for Stephen derives from this unseemly entanglement between ‘the national poet of Ireland’ and the ‘servile’ ways by which his legacy is perpetuated. As Seamus Deane has commented, ‘Stephen is constantly reading the history of his city’s monuments in the light of his own preoccupations, making it, so to say, ‘personal’’ — Stephen’s determined refusal to accept the intended meanings of the city’s statues is not simply an expression of churlishness, but is instead a representative gesture of the Joycean impulse towards self-definition (Deane 2000, xiv). Gabriel Conroy’s friendly greeting of Daniel O’Connell’s statue after leaving his aunts’ party in ‘The Dead’ suggests a way of personally incorporating such structures into one’s everyday life so as to imbue them with a meaning which is derived, again, from one’s internal comprehension of the object, not its officially intended purpose, but which fundamentally differs from Stephen’s anger and suspicion: ‘Gabriel pointed to the statue, on which lay patches of snow. Then he nodded familiarly to it, and waved his hand. — Good night, Dan, he said gaily.’ (*Dubliners* 216).

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen also objects to the art of statuary itself, suggesting in a heated discussion with Lynch that ‘Lessing [...] should not have taken a group of statues to write of.’ (232). While the reader might feel that he is picking one fight too many by dismissing a ‘celebrated’ work of aesthetic theory – Gotthold Lessing’s extended essay on the statue of Laocoön and his sons — in such fashion, there is more to Stephen’s objection than mere obstreperousness (Seeba 327). There is, in fact, a degree of commonality between Stephen’s free-wheeling critical technique and that of the German philosopher. For the younger man, statuary is not an art form that allows for the clear enunciation of ‘forms’ (*POTA* 232). For Lessing, too, despite the title of his essay, poetry was ‘the more comprehensive art’ than sculpture (59). Like Stephen, Lessing was unafraid of

taking on more illustrious predecessors: he criticises Homer for being unable to expound a fully realised aesthetic theory of beauty, complaining: ‘How a more modern poet would have dilated upon it!’ (116). While Stephen’s musings on aesthetic theory are meant half in jest, as in the case of his notebook of seemingly unanswerable questions, he nevertheless echoes those discussions about the nature of artistic expression with which Joyce himself would have been familiar. One of his questions, in fact, seems to directly anticipate such experimental pieces as Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* of 1917: ‘*Can excrement or a child or a louse be a work of art? If not, why not?*’ (POTA 232). That it is classical sculpture which provokes such dissatisfaction with the established limits of creative production is another sign of Joyce’s willingness to interrogate tradition rather than accept it. Beneath Stephen’s youthful facetiousness there is a determination to set one’s own agenda for both the creation, and appreciation, of art.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce presents Stephen as not only reading the history of the city’s monuments in different ways but also repurposing them through their utilisation in his own narratives: he tells the assembled men in the newspaper office a scabrous story about ‘Two old Dublin women on the top of Nelson’s pillar.’ (141). Stephen’s story is told in such a way as to calculatedly deprive both the structure and its users of dignity, as he describes the women ‘peering up at the statue of the onehanded adulterer.’ (142). This wilfully disrespectful relabelling of Lord Nelson, hero of the empire, as ‘the onehanded adulterer’ acts as a clear signal of Stephen’s disregard for the officially-sanctioned narrative of imperial glory which the statue is meant to convey to the citizenry of Dublin. Furthermore, the women in his story behave in a way which further erodes the sanctity of the structure:

It gives them a crick in their necks, Stephen said, and they are too tired to look up or down or to speak. They put the bag of plums between them and eat the plums out of it, one after another, wiping off with their handkerchiefs the plumjuice that dribbles out of

their mouths and spitting the plumstones slowly out between the railings. He gave a sudden young loud laugh as a close. (142)

By incorporating the pillar into his grubbily comic narrative, Stephen simultaneously asserts his own right to interpretation while denying the structure's importance — rather than paying their respects to Nelson and his ultimately fatal endeavours, conducted in the name of expanding and securing Britain's colonial interests, the old women simply use it as a place of truly mundane recreation. As with Bloom's sojourn in the museum — although conducted with rather less decorum — the old women make use of this grand memorial structure for their own purposes, rooted in the body's urges rather than the mind's edification. Stephen's telling of the story indicates that the imperial authorities' wished-for ability to control the public's grasp of Ireland's historical narrative is capable of being subverted not only by such methods as raising statues of Irish nationalist historical figures (as favoured by the political and cultural nationalist groups) but also through the exercise of individual agency. By such means as Bloom's erotic perusal of the statues in the Museum and Stephen's satirical reimagining and repurposing of the city's monuments, as Paul Stasi has argued, 'Joyce illustrates [...] through his characters [...] the construction of counter-hegemonic agency within the very structures that condition the colonial subject.' (13). Nelson was not the only imperial grandee to be targeted by Joyce, as in *Finnegans Wake* he turns his eye upon the legacy of the first Duke of Wellington.

In *Finnegans Wake* Joyce extends his critique of memorial spaces and structures in a short episode of the text set within the 'Willingdone Museyroom', an unorthodox hybrid space which exists only in his writing, combining Dublin's Wellington Monument and the Wellington Museum located in the ducal family residence at Apsley House in London. By choosing to create such a space, Joyce signals his continued interest in the dynamics of the museum as an arena for the representation of historical narratives. Indeed, this episode

represents Joyce's most sustained textual engagement with a museal space, unorthodox (and unreal) as it is. His naming of it as a 'Museyroom', in the elusive and, at times, nonsensical 'slanguage' which he adopted for the writing of his last major work, serves to alert the reader immediately to the subversive mood and style which provides the governing aesthetic mode of the text (*FW* 421). The determination of Stephen Dedalus, in Joyce's earlier texts, to rewrite the meaning and reception of such spaces — demonstrated by his frequent mockery of Dublin's statues and monuments — is modulated to its highest key in this section of *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce's exaggerated demotic, which relies on the elision of expected grammatical and syntactical structure to produce newly resonant meanings for the reader while they attempt to follow his words as they 'arabesque the page', functions as a constant visual reminder of his subversive authorial intentions (*FW* 115). By reading the 'Museyroom' section of the text alongside official accounts of the Wellington Museum, such as a descriptive catalogue from 1901, and a later guidebook from 1984, we gain an enlarged appreciation of Joyce's radical intentions as he destabilises not just one extant museal space, but exposes the tenuousness of the logic which underpins such enterprises.

Why single out the Duke of Wellington for the treatment which he receives within the 'Museyroom' episode? Born in 1769 and dying in 1852, Arthur Valerian Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington (amongst numerous other titles) became a living legend for leading the military coalition which defeated Napoleon Bonaparte at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, an event which led to 'an overriding nationalism [seemingly] embodied by Wellington himself' sweeping through much of British political and public culture in the years immediately following the victory (Eastlake 64). Even before Waterloo, Wellington's achievements and image were known to millions across the British empire, and, as Belinda Beaton has discussed, a 'cult of Wellington' sprang up during the Duke's lifetime, which ascended to fever pitch in the years immediately after

his death, lasting until well into the early 20th century (102). Wellington's memory in popular culture provided a focal point for various discourses such as the proper performance of manliness, the importance of service to the nation and, beyond that, the imperial project (Eastlake 65). Early editions of the *Dictionary of National Biography* described Wellington's character as combining 'manliness and public spirit' (Muir 584). By the 1920s, Wellington had come to stand for many of the ideas and ideals regarding nationalism and subservience to a questionably glorified past that, as we have seen, caused Joyce so much consternation. Wellington's London residence was suitably grand, with paintings displayed throughout — the not-quite-subtly named Waterloo Gallery home to the most spectacular — while a downstairs room was allocated as the Museum, containing an assortment of material from his long career. From a guidebook written in 1984, we get a sense of the objects kept in this space:

In 1854 the room, sometimes called the Museum, contained, as well as many of the objects on show now, the Portuguese centre-piece, bronze busts of Turenne and Condé [...] two Indian drums, and a Wax Bust of the Duke on japan'd pedestal stand and glass shade [...] The sixty-four plates of [the] Prussian service depict the Duke's life and campaigns [...] and white biscuit porcelain river gods appropriate to his career [...] the Portuguese service [...] originally consisted of some thousand pieces [...] The central ornament of the centrepiece shows the Four Continents paying tribute to the united armies of Britain, Portugal and Spain. The dancing figures which surround the plateau were originally linked by garlands of silk flowers. (Jervis and Tomlin 17, 18-21, 64-66)

Joyce became sufficiently interested in the Duke's life and career to embark on a coach trip to the site of Waterloo, as reported to a correspondent by American novelist

Thomas Wolfe, who happened to be on the same bus and seems to have greatly enjoyed observing the older, infamous writer. While at the battlefield, they visited

a huge circular building that had a panorama of the battle painted around the sides; then we ascended the several hundred steps up the great mound which supports the lion and looks out over the field. (56)

This ‘great mound which supports the lion’ is a large, artificial hill which marks the spot at which the youthful Prince of Orange, a commander of Wellington’s allies, was wounded during the battle (Barbero 267). Furthermore, Wolfe noted that Joyce took a great interest in the words of the tour guide, and sat next to the driver on the way back, asking ‘a great many questions’ (57). While there is, unfortunately, no such evidence that Joyce ever visited Apsley House — open to visitors by appointment only until administration of the house was given over to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1947 — there is, as we shall see, sufficient detail in the ‘Museyroom’ passages to indicate that he was at least aware of the Wellington Museum’s existence and the nature of the collections held there. What is clear, from Wolfe’s account and from the text of *Finnegans Wake* itself, is that Joyce was deeply interested in exploring the material legacy of Wellington’s career and the ideological undercurrents which the Wellington Museum — as well as the various monuments to the Duke, most pertinently the obelisk in Dublin’s Phoenix Park — seemed to bolster and embody. Vincent J. Cheng has argued that we ought to read the ‘Willingdone Museyroom’ as ‘a site, and a case study, of colonial power dynamics’, which is a valuable reminder that beneath the levity of the passage, Joyce is unspooling several complex discursive threads (1995, 278).

Joyce’s was by no means the first voice to be raised in order to critique or satirise the Duke of Wellington. A bronze statue of Achilles, dedicated to the Duke’s

achievements, was unveiled in London's Hyde Park (which Apsley House stands directly adjacent to) in 1822, and, as Henk de Smaele has described, almost immediately 'became the object of laughter and ridicule. The image of masculine heroism simply did not work, and the statue turned into a weapon in the hands of Wellington's political opponents' (78). Being the first nude statue to be newly commissioned and displayed in London cannot have helped (Shaw 197). Cartoons depicting the statue, in addition to Wellington, soon became commonplace in the periodical press of the time, often scabrous in tone and intent. As not only the 'country's most famous soldier', but also Prime Minister from 1828 until 1830, Wellington left himself open to such attacks, with this satirical tradition finding a late successor in Joyce (Jupp 66, 33). It is possible to see, in the linkage of Wellington and Achilles, the greatest warrior of classical mythology, one of the ways in which Joyce would utilise the Duke's name and entrenched reputation in *Finnegans Wake* to differentiate his writing from more conventional literary means of memorialisation. Achilles' shield, famously represented by Homer in *The Iliad* in sufficiently grandiloquent terms as to lead Bill Brown to name it 'Western literature's most magnificent object', provides a marked counterpoint to Joyce's descriptions of Wellington's relics in *Finnegans Wake* (1). W. H. Auden's later poetic recasting of the shield deliberately shies away from his ancient predecessor's descriptive tendencies, stressing the ambiguous worth of the classical hero's deeds, as well as the consequences of such violent delights: 'Iron-hearted, man-slaying Achilles/Who would not live long.' (37). Even so, the shield itself is given an added dimension of significance through Auden's act of rewriting. By providing the title not only of a poem but of the collection within which it appeared in 1955, the shield retains its status as a noteworthy object, even if the terms of its import have been radically altered in Auden's representation. Joyce would do no such thing for his latter-day Achilles. Instead, the objects in the

‘Museyroom’ become subject to a descriptive style which is gleefully obfuscating in its execution. Joyce enacts this decline from the Homeric style in order to undercut not only Wellington’s personal mythos but also those larger institutional forces which his memory had come to represent. Rather than burnishing Wellington’s martial artifacts in his prose, Joyce transmutes them into new and difficult to recognise objects, a process we see at work from the outset of the passage in which the reader is invited into the ‘Museyroom’:

This the way to the museyroom. Mind your hats goan in! Now yiz are in the Willingdone Museyroom. This is a Prooshius gunn [...] This is the Willingdone on his same white harse, the Cokenhape. This is the big Sraughter Willingdone, grand and magentic in his goldtin spurs and his ironed dux and his quarterbrass woodyshoes amd his magnate’s gharters and his bangkok’s best and goliar’s goloshes and his pullupon-easyan wartrews.
(FW 8)

From the off, our assumptions are confounded — Joyce’s punning nomenclature seems to deny that this is even a museum at all; it is instead a ‘museyroom’. Exposing the word museum itself to our gaze by elongating the central syllable, Joyce’s verbal clowning serves an ultimately disruptive purpose. By continually misnaming the objects which we encounter on our tour of the Museyroom’s contents, our expectations of such a space are unsettled. Nullifying, or at least muddying, the linguistic link between object and descriptor, Joyce lays bare the tenuous nature of museum-style taxonomy, thus providing ample evidence for Eric Gidal’s warning against assuming any ‘absolute compatibility of material exhibition and verbal mimesis’ in museums (25). The objects we encounter here — the ‘Prooshius gunn’ and ‘goliar’s goloshes’ are estranged from our immediate understanding. There is an implied mockery, too, of the imperial culture which the Duke of Wellington was honoured for helping to uphold — and in many ways, was seen to define, as ‘the living embodiment of a nascent

sense of national character' (Shaw 2). The high esteem with which the Duke's martial feats were regarded is subjected to ridicule: is the 'gunn' preserved because it is Prussian, or precious as an efficient means by which death is dealt out on the battlefield, or as the word 'Prooshius' suggests, a mixture of both? By placing this fictive passage alongside the text of official publications which described the same space and its contents, we can read the 'Museum' section of *Finnegans Wake* as an exercise in what we might term contrarian cataloguing, lending further depth to Joyce's burlesque.

In 1901, Evelyn, then-Duchess of Wellington, decided to comprehensively catalogue the family treasures kept in Apsley House. The end result was a sumptuous, limited edition, folio publication, lavishly bound and laid-out across two substantial volumes, listing the family's art collection with impressive detail (see Figure 6). The Duchess, one imagines, must have been pleased with the results. In many ways her book serves as an exemplar of descriptive comprehensibility: before the main body of the text has even begun, there is a page entitled 'Notes and Explanations' which gives us the key to the methodology used, and leaves little room for interpretive ambiguity. It reads as follows:

The dimensions of the pictures are given in inches, the first figures denoting the height and the second the width of the canvas, panel or copper *within* the frames. The words "right" and "left" denote the right and left of the pictures as seen by a spectator facing them.

We, as readers, are told exactly what each term will mean, even down to directional clues.

The contents of the house are listed in such a way as to be immediately understandable.

Evelyn Wellington's publication provides individual descriptions of each painting along with the name of the artist, their life dates, the material each work is painted on, and their physical measurements as well as some limited provenance information. Furthermore, the descriptions

are sorted into sections according to which room of the house they are located in, thus providing something of a textual tour around the collection. In this particular textual model of the Apsley House collections, everything is in its right place, with the catalogue acting itself as a representamen of the order and regulation according to which the paintings are laid out around the house. The following description of a head-and-shoulders bust of the Duke (one of nine sculptures which were in the Museum room at the time of writing, we are told) is typical of the descriptive style to which the Duchess subscribed:

Head and shoulders. Life size. Body and face to the front. The hair is short and thin, and brushed forward towards forehead and temples. The forehead is high. The eyebrows are thick, and the brows protrude. The nose is large and aquiline. The upper lip is long. The mouth is straight, and the chin protrudes. He has very short whiskers. The neck and chest are bare. (455)

There are glaring differences between this particularised, careful and — above all — systematic method of description, which proceeds feature by feature in order to evoke the material reality of the object it describes, and Joyce's deliberately manic style: 'This is the flag of the Prooshious, the Cap and the Soracer. This is the bullet that byng the flag of the Prooshious.' (*FW* 8) By troubling the boundaries of the museum space through this particularly unorthodox object-oriented approach, Joyce exploits what Susan Stewart has highlighted as the essential tenuousness which underlies all descriptive acts. When language, she writes,

attempts to describe the concrete, [it becomes] caught in an infinitely self-effacing gesture of inadequacy, a gesture which speaks to the gaps in our cognition — those gaps between the sensual, the visual, and the linguistic. (1984, 52)

By electing to foreground precisely this ‘inadequacy’ of language, Joyce contradicts expected linguistic practice in both the fictive and museal realms. In museums, Louise J. Ravelli asserts, it is vitally important that ‘the flow of meanings’ operates ‘smoothly’, in order that both objects and the texts which accompany them present a unified and coherent interpretive experience for visitors (38, 39). For Ravelli, the end goal of any museum’s communicative strategies should be to achieve ‘intersemiosis, as opposed to a meaningless jumble of effects’ (153). Joyce reverses this formula: that ‘jumble’ which Ravelli sees as ‘meaningless’ is in fact the justificatory locus of his writerly praxis in the ‘Museyroom’, a space where new meanings can be found and remade again and again with each encounter between the reader — for whom we can substitute the term ‘visitor’ — and the text. In this way, as John Pedro Schwartz notes, Joyce disputes the capacity of such spaces as the real life Museum room to ‘objectify history’; any official narrative of the Duke’s career as expressed through the objects on display becomes just one of many possible stories which the visitor takes away from their experience (88). Reverence thus becomes displaced by irreverence as the governing mode by which the space is understood through Joyce’s creative dismantling of the relationship between objects and their capacity to be properly described.

When we read the official literature of the Wellington Museum alongside *Finnegans Wake* it is possible to interpret Joyce’s comedic estrangement of the contents of the ‘Museyroom’ as relying more on an extraction of the objects’ inherent strangeness than any authorial imposition. Referring back to the guidebook of 1984 which describes the ‘sixty-four plates of [the] Prussian service’ that ‘depict the Duke’s life and campaigns’, decorated by ‘white biscuit porcelain river gods’ which, we are told, are ‘appropriate’ to the grandeur of Wellington’s career, we might be forgiven for experiencing a similar sense of confusion as that which pervades the ‘Museyroom’

episode. Despite a more orthodox method of description, the objects presented to us through the text of the guidebook are, it is plain, possessed of a baroque strangeness of their own. Joyce, one feels, would be pleased to have come up with as incongruous a descriptive phrase as ‘white biscuit porcelain river gods’. No matter the intentions behind such descriptive acts of writing — whether derived from museum employees intent on faithfully recording the details of the contents in their care, or an author, like Joyce, determined on satirising such an enterprise — the ‘sheer heterogeneity of things and meanings’ asserts itself eventually (Jacobus 5). For Robert Harbison,

The further a catalogue pursues its objects the more impalpable they become [...] catalogues make their users obsessive porers over experience, but always end in talking to themselves in a language so intimate they are nearly impossible to follow [...] (161)

When read with this perspective in mind, we can see an unmistakable if unlikely kinship between Joyce’s presentation of the Museyroom’s contents and that of the official literature. Where Joyce’s descriptive heterodoxy is deliberately misleading, the language of the guidebooks is no less strange and ‘obsessive’ in its pursuit of detail in ‘a language so intimate’ that the mechanisms of description break down under the burden of accurately representing objects that are revealed to be inherently incomprehensible. According to a guidebook published in 1952 — five years after the Wellington Museum was taken over by the V & A after being gifted by the family — the striped drawing-room in the house contained

the SAXON SERVICE [...] made up of 117 pieces [...] includes 105 dessert plates, painted in colours and gilt, showing battle scenes and topographical views connected with the Duke’s campaigns, and other scenes, etc. (30)

While in the muniment room — which was the real Museum Room for most of its history — visitors could find a modern-day equivalent to the shield of Achilles:

The silver-gilt WELLINGTON SHIELD, presented to the Duke by the merchants and bankers of the City of London [...] In the centre is a group of officers surrounding the Duke above whom is the figure of Victory with a laurel wreath. The ten compartments of the shield show scenes of the Duke's campaigns, etc., i.e. Badajoz, Torres Vedras, the Douro, Vimeiro, Assaye, Conferring of the Dukedom by the Prince Regent, Toulouse, Pyrenees, Vittoria and Salamanca. (25)

The manner in which the objects are described relies on a logic of representation which has been discredited by Joyce's mockery. Joyce's descriptive method, when paired against that of the Duchess or the authors of the later guidebooks, allows the objects he describes an unsettling articulacy which is denied them in the official accounts: as Jonathan Lamb has noted, 'the more a thing is described, the less it is supposed to speak.' (45).

As the tour of the Museyroom continues, we find ourselves straying further away from the orthodoxies of display. Each new exhibit and object we encounter is given no more ceremony on its introduction into the text than the mundane construction of 'This is', as in the case of what we take to be a painted display of various locales: 'This is Delian alps. This is Mont Tivel, this is Mont Tipsey, this is the Grand Mons Injun.' (*FW* 8). Joyce here exposes the fragility of museum spaces in their attempts to visually recreate disparate parts of the world: these locations can't possibly coexist in the same space yet are, in the tour guide's blunt manner, somehow treated as though they are present, or at least viewable. This raises complex questions of representability and comprehension — how are we to understand this space when the thinness of its representational logic is repeatedly laid bare by Joyce's

satirical eye? It is possible that he had in mind the panorama display that he had seen at Waterloo; the sweeping viscosity of such a display is hinted at in the flow of locations, which seem to meld together into one great, impossible, view: ‘Mont Tivel [...] Mont Tipsey [...] Grand Mons Injun.’ Where we might anticipate, in this evocation of three mountains (one of which, ‘Mont Tipsey’, is non-existent, while the other two are real locations, although misspelled in true ‘slanguage’ fashion), some measure of the sublime in any description attached to their names, Joyce presents us with the ridiculous by refusing to provide any description whatsoever. Decades before Michael Foucault outlined the concept of the heterotopia, Joyce conjures such a space in the ‘Museyroom’, while simultaneously denying its plausibility.¹¹

This next passage sees Joyce interrogate, once more, the possibility of creatively (mis)interpreting objects which a more typical museum space would encourage its visitors not to query or dwell upon:

This is me Belchum’s tinkyou tankyou silvoor plate for citchin the crapes in the cool of his canister. Poor the pay! This is the bissmark of the marathon merry of the jinnies they left behind them. (*FW* 9)

The ceremonial gilt trophies commissioned to mark Wellington’s various triumphs are denied any descriptive splendour, instead described with comical meanness as ‘Belchum’s tinkyou tankyou silvoor plate’. Rather than investing the dead general’s belongings with any sense of importance and sacral grandeur — as the museum dedicated to his memory in London sought to — Joyce’s adoption of such a low register to describe them renders them as merely ‘the ephemerides of profane history’ (*FW* 87). Not only the objects on display but the names of places and people are transformed by Joyce’s ‘slanguage’. Belgium becomes ‘Belchum’, a

¹¹ See page 14 of this study.

name more evocative of the gustatory than the dignified affairs of state, while Otto Von Bismarck becomes ‘bissmark’ — a wink to the reader, perhaps, that we are somehow missing the mark, but also allowing Joyce to incorporate his name and its evocations of a past age into his pan-historical collage. The careers of the German politician and Wellington overlap each other in a way which is both tangential and somehow seems to link them together through that loose kind of association which Joyce’s relaxing of lingual boundaries seems to invite — Bismarck was born in 1815, the year of Wellington’s triumph at Waterloo, the event which prompted the eventual construction of his monument in Dublin. The ironic dismissal of Bismarck’s importance, through his rendering of ‘bissmark’ in both misspelled and lower-case letters, is suggestive of a final rejection of the Carlylean model of understanding history, which had proved a source of misery and miscomprehension for Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s earlier works.¹² The supposedly great men of European history — of which ‘bissmark’ and Wellington provide two prominent examples — are only as great, Joyce suggests here, as the reception given to them by future generations. When the narrative thread which seeks to impress their greatness upon an audience is disrupted, the ability of memorials and monuments to communicate the desired message of remembrance and respect is nullified and ‘Things are not as they were.’ (*FW* 540).

Even ‘the grandest [...] histories’ are subject to distortion when the traditional means (both rhetorical and actual) by which they are commemorated and understood become untrustworthy in the hands (and texts) of an intermediary like Joyce (389). This is nowhere more apparent than in Joyce’s conscious withholding of the word ‘Waterloo’, which does not feature in the passage. The closest we get to a direct reference to the Duke’s signal achievement is the misspelled ‘Grand Mons Injun’ — an awkward phonetic rendering of Mont Saint Jean, a topographical feature of the battlefield, and by which the battle itself was

¹² See page 142 of this study.

known for several years afterwards in France (Barbero 313). In choosing not to refer to the battle by its most commonly repeated moniker, but opting for this ironic alternative, Joyce ignores the conventions of historiography. Furthermore, and pointing towards the darker truths underlying Wellington's public legacy, Joyce places the Duke's colonial career into the limelight — 'Injun' crudely evokes Wellington's early career in India.

Before being granted his titles, Arthur Wellesley spent eight years fighting in India (Muir 56). He was a senior officer at the battle of Seringapatam, during which the last Sultan of Mysore, Tipu, was killed, with Wellesley himself being one of the search party which eventually found the Sultan's body 'in a gateway under a pile of corpses' (Muir 85, 86.) Scattered throughout the 'Museyroom' passage are multiple instances of the word 'Tip.', an abbreviated form of 'Tipu', which occur between longer phrases without seeming to be directly related to the words on either side, mirroring the way in which the bloody reality of Wellington's early career is disguised by his later achievements. This repeated near-irruption of Wellesley's colonial past into the museum space is a reminder of the gloss which such spaces tend to apply to the historical record. After the battle at Seringapatam, Wellesley received £4,000 of prize money — his first step to financial independence, as one biographer relates (Muir 89). Violence had its rewards for men like Wellesley, as Joyce goes on to highlight: roughly halfway through the Museyroom episode we come across the word 'Looted.', situated just after the title 'his most Awful Grimmett Sunshat Cromwelly.' (FW 9). This comparison to Oliver Cromwell is not, we assume, intended to be a flattering one. We are reminded, too, of the single word with which the first chapter of *Ulysses* finishes: 'Usurper.' (23). Just as *Ulysses'* Haines the Englishman is in Ireland to devour its traditions and thereby grow his own store of knowledge, so Wellesley was in India to become wealthy and advance his career, one of many such figures by whom 'the systematic expropriation of India's wealth by Britain' was carried out and enabled (Tharoor 22). There is a further irony

to this particular word — ‘Looted’ — of which Joyce was surely aware: the term itself is an English mistranslation of a Hindustani term (Tharoor 10). Those acts of lexical larceny, which Haines takes such pleasure in, reach an apogee here, with the very word for the rewards of theft being itself stolen. Thus Haines and Wellesley are figured as being closely related in their endeavours. One steals the language of the Irish, and the other the material possessions — and, by extension, the political independence — of the Indian people. The Museyroom’s collections represent the material benefits of participating in the violent and exploitative operations of Empire, with Joyce refusing to submerge the truth of Wellington’s career beneath a placid language of display.

Thus far we have explored the (impossible) interior of the Museyroom and its unsettlingly vocal collections. What of the outside? Dublin’s Wellington Monument (under, or within which, Joyce places the Museyroom) was the largest memorial obelisk of its kind in Europe (see Figure 8). Along with the pillar dedicated to Lord Nelson which sat, until the 1960s, in the very heart of the city, the Wellington Monument stood as one of the most visible emblems of British rule in Dublin. The structure, with large stone steps leading up to the central column on all four sides, was emblazoned with the following inscription (written by Wellington’s older brother): ‘Asia and Europe, sav’d by thee, proclaim/Invincible in war thy deathless name/Now round thy brow the civic oak we twin/That every earthly glory may be thine.’ (Muir 470). On the three other sides of the pedestal were placed large bronze relief sculptures, intended to evoke dramatic scenes from the Duke’s career in a suitably heroic mode. We have seen how this stage-managed version of Wellington’s career is subverted by Joyce in his invocation of the gory truth behind the looted treasures of the Museyroom. What Françoise Choay describes as the ‘semantic weight’ of monuments is difficult to resist without resorting to such drastic measures as Joyce, especially so in the case of such a gargantuan example of the type as Wellington’s, the overwhelming physical presence of

which is intended to impress the viewer with the continued historical importance of its dedicatee (114). Susan Stewart's interpretation of such structures and their inscriptions is clearly applicable in this instance:

The reduction of the individual viewer in the face of the public monument is all the more evident in the function of the inscription; one is expected to read the instructions for perception of the work – to acknowledge the fallen, the victorious, the heroic, and be taken up in the history of place. All public monuments of this type are monuments to death and the individual's prostration before history and authority. (90).

As one moves within reading distance of the monument and its claims of 'Invincib[ility] in war', the combination of place, design and sheer size act with the force of an imperial edict to impress upon the viewer the significance not only of Wellington as an individual but the system of governance for which he stood as representative.

This effect was deliberate on the part of the monument's planners, as the papers of John Wilson Croker (an MP and longtime crony of Wellington) make apparent. In a letter to the Secretary of the monument committee, Croker declared that:

Great height is the cheapest way and one of the most certain of obtaining sublimity [...] Whatever you do be at least sure to make it *stupendously* high; let it be of all columns in the world the most lofty. Nelson's [...] London monument is 202 [feet], Trajan's about 150, Antoninus' 122 [...] Buonaparte's in the Place Vendôme is, I think, near 200. I wish therefore that you should not fall short of 250 feet, and I should prefer to have it exactly from the first layer of the base to the crown of the statue 300 feet. (21-22)

Croker's invocation to 'let it be of all columns in the world most lofty', coupled with the desire that it should outstrip Trajan's Column in Rome, clearly shows that the monument's planners were aware of the symbolic importance of making the structure as physically intimidating as possible. As with Stephen Dedalus' earlier crude depiction of Nelson's pillar in *Ulysses*, Joyce refuses to allow the Wellington Monument its intended solemnity and grandeur, instead combining it for his own purposes with an imagined museum space in order to place the conventions of literary description and historical memory on trial. Although less violently expressed than the real-life destruction of Nelson's pillar by IRA members in 1966,¹³ Joyce's depiction of the Wellington Monument is no more flattering.

By such means — comic in application, but momentous in intent — does Joyce expose the constructedness of structures like the Wellington monument, the elision, or at least hiding, of which they rely on for the continued respect of the public. The officially-approved memory of Wellington as leading light of the imperial system was fundamentally out of place in an Ireland moving towards self-determination, yet its existence threatened to stymie the writing of new, dynamic historical narratives. Deborah Cherry notes that in 'their afterlives monuments emerge as extraordinarily mobile, marked by material change, put to new uses and interpretations, and travelling through collections of texts, images, and objects', and certainly we can read the monument's distorted presence in *Finnegans Wake* as an example of it being 'put to new uses' via the medium of the text (4). Joyce's innovative critique of the Wellington monument is evocative of Nietzsche's conception of the monumental mode of historical understanding, which as he writes in 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', can cause great 'harm' to 'the past itself' if given precedence over other methods of comprehending the past (70-71). Joyce goes further than Nietzsche, however, in

¹³ See this BBC article from 2016 for more details: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35787116>.

demonstrating how this monumental mode might be left behind by an aesthetics of creative anarchy. By taking on such a formidable target as Wellington — a man to the monument born — Joyce makes clear the seriousness which undergirds the comic chaos of *Finnegans Wake*. Once we leave the ‘Museyroom’, we begin to see all such spaces, and the commemorative practices they both embody and emanate, as being susceptible to such purposive rewriting.

To better illustrate this departure from established modes of historical understanding, it is instructive to enlist the aid of visual examples. One is taken from Herbert Gorman’s biography of Joyce, first published in 1941, while the other is taken from J. C. Stobart’s *The Grandeur that was Rome*, published in 1912 and discussed earlier in the chapter. The image taken from Gorman’s book, one of a series commissioned for the volume from the artist G. R. Morris, is labelled ‘corridor of Classics’ and shows several examples of classical statuary arranged in a seemingly endless corridor, along with an abstract mathematical shape and the leg and pelvis bones of a human skeleton, as if the reader has opened a door into some secret museum. In its seemingly illogical arrangement of objects, as well as the irreverence with which they have been brought together in the picture, the illustration seems to mirror the confusion which we find in the ‘Willingdone Museyroom’ — there are no labels, no text beyond the gnomic caption ‘corridor of Classics’, and the interpretation of the space and its contents is left to the viewer. Gorman may well have intended it to demonstrate his understanding of Joyce’s imagination, but it also serves as a neat contrast to those orderly methods of display which Stobart’s text seems to advocate in its illustrations: the statues and artworks are isolated from the text and each other, numbered and labelled in such a way as to signal that the information regarding their origin and meaning will be made apparent. In this way Stobart’s arrangement of his illustrations mimics the strategies used in spaces like Dublin’s museum; there is consolation in order. The proscription of meaning is always possible within such an arrangement, unlike the anarchy of the ‘Willingdone Museyroom’, or

Gorman's 'corridor of Classics'. Joyce takes the opposite stance, employing language itself to unmoor the objects he presents us with from not just their surroundings, but also from any readily-ascertainable schema of knowledge. (see Figures 9 and 10). In combining museum and monument into one fictive structure, Joyce shows the way towards resisting their overtures according to his understanding: we must radically remake the ways in which we interpret their contents and the messages which they seek to impart. In the instance of the Wellington Monument, this threatens to destabilise its ability to signify anything at all. As we are escorted out of the Museyroom — 'Mind your boots goan out. Phew!' — our guide emits a sigh of relief, one which the reader can be forgiven for echoing (*FW* 9).

Joyce retained a lifelong interest in, and resistance to, monuments. Beginning with his verbal rewriting of Dublin's statues as a student and continuing into his fictional works, he makes use of them in varied ways which tend towards the iconoclastic. Writing to his brother from Rome in August 1906, he expressed his deep exasperation with the city: 'enough now of stupid monuments.' (*LOJJ II* 146). Shortly after *Ulysses* was finally published, he asked the sculptor August Suter 'What sort of a monument would you make for me?', with tongue identifiably in cheek and yet, perhaps, already sure of his place in literary history thanks to *Ulysses*' almost-instant notoriety (Ellmann 1982, 56). Even before the book had securely appeared in print, Joyce was toying with notions of his own monumentality and importance, writing to Alessandro Francini Burni in June 1921 that he had, thanks to the book's subscribers, 'become a monument — no, a Vespasian.' (*LOJJ III*, 45). There is a characteristically obscene note to this joke: the emperor Vespasian, builder of Joyce's much-maligned Colosseum in Rome, lent his name to the French slang for urinals (Ellmann 1982, 513). For Joyce, the bigger the monument, the bigger the target. This Vespasian of modern literature would find himself, in 1937, living just around the corner from the Exposition Internationale, an exposition gigantic not only in size but in import for world politics. Writing

to Frank Budgen in September 1937, Joyce mentions the exposition as taking place annoyingly close to his apartment, and says that if he were to visit it would be with ‘edificidal thoughts’ (*LOJJ* 397). In this particular instance, his truculence is understandable: the 1937 exposition is most notable for the huge monuments built by Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, which stood facing each other, flanking the Eiffel Tower (see Figure 11). These unmistakable and brutal symbols of totalitarian authority would have been anathema to Joyce’s convictions that individual liberty should be prized above all. There can have been no more stark reminder to the aging writer that, although he had managed to win some measure of freedom from the ‘nets’ of ideology which had once sought to entrap him, the rest of the world still had some measure to go before the same could be said of them. In this light, Joyce’s lifelong conflict with the monumental mode of understanding history can be seen as one of utmost seriousness, although frequently conducted in humorous tones.

There is an additional, final, irony in the story of Joyce versus monumentalism: the ongoing phenomena that Victor Luftig has described as ‘the hijacking of Joyce’ by successive Irish governments and tourism executives (144). Dublin’s modern-day cityscape is one in which statues of Joyce and quotes from his books can be stumbled upon without trying — he has become assimilated into a version of Irish history which seeks to overwrite the nation’s previous treatment of its exiled literary star. Rónán MacDonald sees this institutionalisation of Joyce as ‘self-sustaining, deriving from inherited cultural capital rather than renewed canonical interrogation.’ (59). As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, ‘canonical interrogation’ is one of Joyce’s defining prerogatives as a writer; whether it be by having Stephen Dedalus rewrite *Hamlet* or Leopold Bloom looking at statues for his own pleasure, Joyce’s fiction refuses to allow the institutions which supposedly guard and preserve culture to carry on their business unchecked. In *Finnegans Wake*, this interrogative drive reaches its conclusion in the Willingdone Museyroom: a museum devoted to

meaninglessness, where the visitor seems to be responsible for determining both what, and how, the objects contained within ultimately signify, if they can be said to do so at all.

Monuments and museums thus function in Joyce's fiction as objects and spaces which must be used and understood on the individual's own terms. By doing so his characters not only begin the process of emancipating themselves from the diktats of both the imperial state and its nationalist would-be successors, but teach us as readers a valuable lesson. If 'history is to blame' for society's ills, then it is up to us to find our own way out, not by ignoring the lessons of the past but by incorporating them in a way which is useful for our own present-day way of living. This directive has taken on fresh relevance in recent years, with the question of public monuments at the forefront of issues regarding race relations in the United States and the legacies of Empire in the United Kingdom. Sanford Levinson's *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies*, originally published in 1998, was reissued in 2018 due to this re-emergence of what might be termed the monument question in public discourse, and takes as its subject the numerous

politics roiled in controversies attached to deciding who within a particular society should be counted as a hero worth honoring with the erection of a monument or the naming of a public space. (4)

Joyce's admittedly freewheeling, rather than systematic, critique of the Wellington Monument in *Finnegans Wake* can be read productively as a clear literary precursor to such debates, thus acquiring a renewed relevance eighty years after publication, in a damning sign that we still have some distance yet to travel before we learn to live with our histories.



Figure 5: Dublin Museum of Science and Arts as known to Leopold Bloom



Figure 6: Evelyn Wellington's catalogue, front cover

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DAVID TENIERS, 1610-1694.

LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES AND ANIMALS.

Canvas. 17½ × 37 in.

In the right foreground is a pool of water with rushes, and on it are four ducks. At the edge of the pool, right, is a dead tree, and beyond it the ground rises abruptly and forms a mound, on the summit of which two cows, one brown and the other grey, approach from right. Beyond the sloping side of the mound, right centre, stand two more cows, the nearest with a white face. Beyond the pool, and at the foot of the mound, centre, sits a man in a felt hat, lilac jacket with yellow sleeves, grey breeches, bare legs, white socks and black boots. He holds a flageolet in his hands, and a staff lies across his body. In front of him lies a small brown and white dog close to a sack and gourd. The man's face is turned left towards another man who stands near him, left centre. The latter wears a black hat, blue jacket, red shirt, dark breeches and stockings, and black boots. In his left hand he holds a staff, and his right is uplifted. In the left foreground stand seven sheep in different positions. On the ground in front of them is a large round metal vessel and a smaller wooden one. On higher ground beyond are nine other sheep and a lamb. The background from left to right centre is occupied by a wood with a cottage, left, and another, centre. The sky is blue, with grey clouds.

Signed "D. Teniers ft." on a stone in the left lower corner.

"791" is painted in red in the left centre foreground.

This picture (captured at Vitoria) is the painting by Teniers of the same subject, with the same number and of similar dimensions, mentioned in a MS. Inventory of 1772* as then forming part of the Royal Spanish Collections, whence it has since disappeared. In the Inventory referred to, the picture is entered as "791. Landscape with cottage, and a shepherd playing a flute. Above him is seen a cow behind a hillock," and as then hanging in the "Green Cabinet Room" in the Royal Palace, Madrid.

Collection—Royal Palace, Madrid, 1772.

Captured at Vitoria, 1813. See INTRODUCTION.

Figure 7: Evelyn Wellington's cataloguing style



Figure 8: Wellington Monument, Dublin (with author for scale)

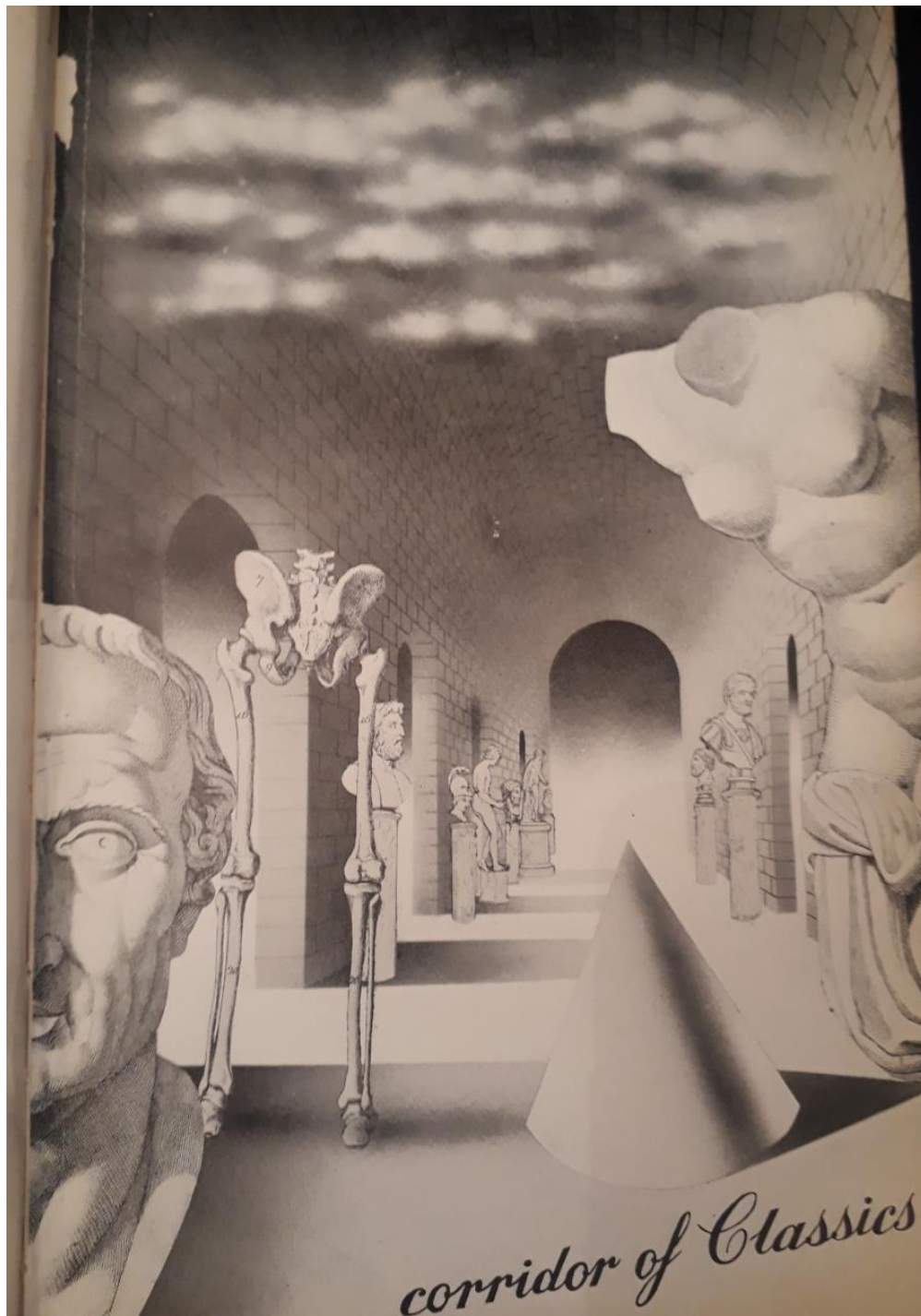


Figure 9: Herbert Gorman's 'corridor of Classics': intended to evoke Joyce's approach to historical understanding?

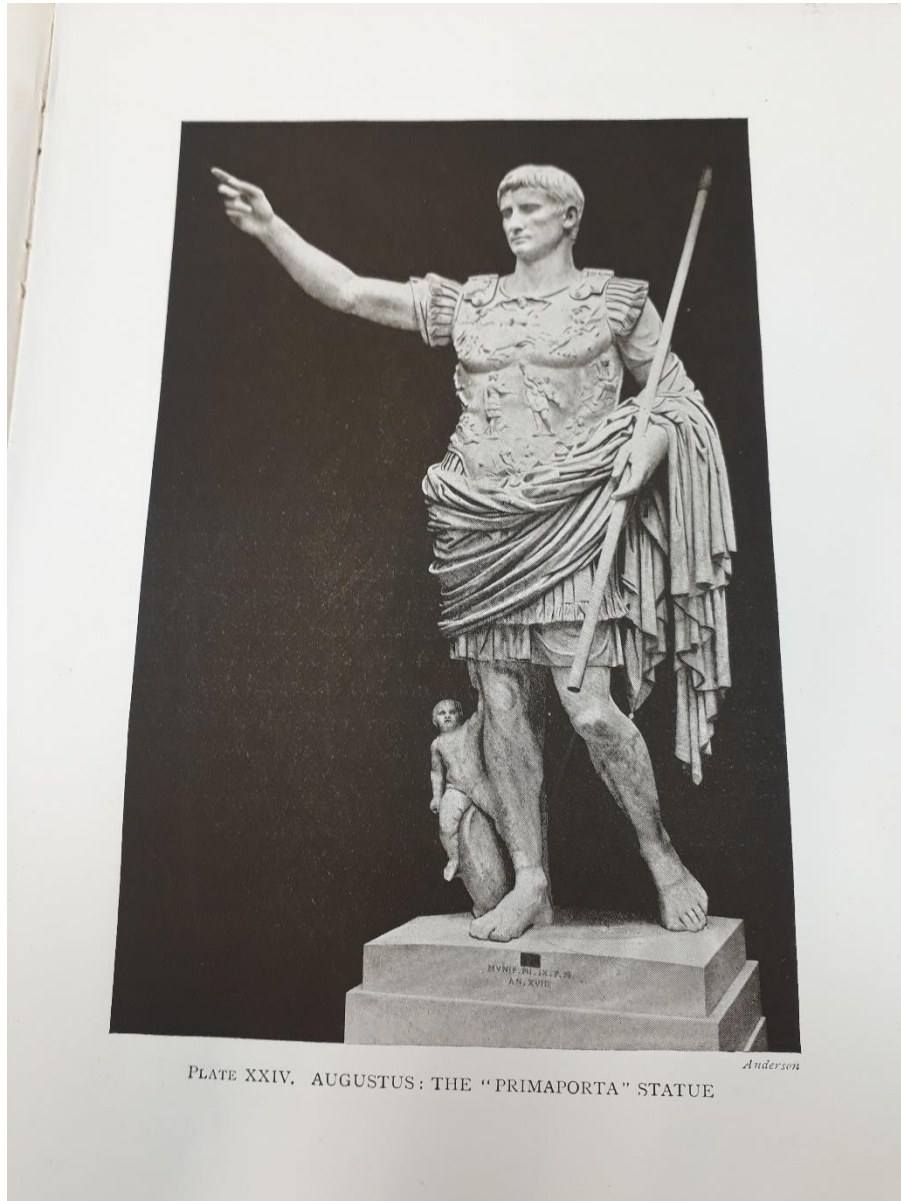


Figure 10: J. C. Stobart's more orthodox method of illustration



Figure 11: edificidal thoughts — the Paris ‘monuments’ of 1937

Chapter 3

Constructing a museum of memory: Proust and the work of time

Writing to his on-again, off-again friend Robert de Montesquiou in June 1911, Marcel Proust wished first and foremost to congratulate his irascible correspondent on an article he had recently published in which every pictorial representation of Saint Sebastian, as held in the leading museums of Europe at that time, had been painstakingly described (*SL III*, 41). This hyper-focused exercise in descriptive cataloguing was just one of many quixotic (and questionable) achievements which de Montesquiou — who, despite Proust's frequent protestations to the latter, has often been taken as a model for the Baron de Charlus in *À la recherche du temps perdu* — was in the habit of chiding the younger man for not being more outspoken in his support. Echoing Gilles Deleuze's masterful understatement that the 'least we can say is that Charlus is complicated' the least we can say about the relationship between the two is that it was fragile at best (30). While de Montesquiou's contributions to the field of art history remain mostly neglected, this letter in particular is of great interest for the present study, as it contains a tantalising phrase which will provide inspiration for much of my argument regarding Proust's reaction to, and use of, museum spaces and museal discourse in his works.

Wishing to placate de Montesquiou's ego, Proust writes the following in adulatory tones: 'the Museum of your recollections (what a pretty poem Gautier might have written on the subject: 'The Museum of Memory')' (*SL III*, 41). Proust is doing more here than sidestepping de Montesquiou's expectations of praise. Indeed, although only a brief line within a letter, he seems to gesture towards that deeper, and at times contradictory, understanding of museum spaces which, I will endeavour to show, we can find throughout his literary work, reaching its culmination in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Raising the

possibility of a ‘Museum of Memory’ as he does allows us — while acknowledging that a certain degree of latitude is being taken — to utilise this as a convenient figural rubric through which to discuss certain aspects of his texts. While Théophile Gautier may well have been capable of composing a ‘pretty poem’ about this subject, I will argue in this chapter that for Proust (as with Joyce and James) museums provided a space for the serious exploration of several overlapping discourses, not least of which being the operations of memory as experienced in his particular historical moment, as suggested by the yoking together of the ‘Museum’ and ‘Memory’ in this letter. In doing so I will build upon an extensive body of criticism; the work of Gabrielle Townsend and Richard Terdiman has been particularly valuable for providing a framework within which to carry out my own investigations — the former by explicitly linking Proust with museums (albeit in a different fashion to that intended here) and the latter by insisting on the examination of French history and its repeated crises as presenting a key facet in the understanding of texts by Proust and his immediate predecessors in the French literary tradition.¹⁴ Townsend’s discussion of the ways in which Proust conducted research into the visual arts, as well as his possible motivations for incorporating art-historical discourse into his fiction, points the way forward for discussions of the function of painting in Proust’s fiction, revealing him to have been a voracious consumer of illustrated periodicals, which he mined for details about certain artworks and artists (2005, 31).

Proust’s own extensive use of such materials works its way into his writing; while several of his characters actively acquire original works of art and seem, at times, to prize them above all else, the Narrator of *À la recherche* is the happy recipient of several gifts of photographic or engraved reproductions of famous artworks, which in turn provide him with a ready stock of metaphorical figures on which he repeatedly draws in his descriptions of the

¹⁴ See page 16 of this study.

people and places he encounters (*TWBS*, 39). Proust deliberately marks his Narrator out as differing from those figures of previous generations to which he is beholden for the acquisition of such images (and the sphere of aesthetic knowledge which they represent). While Charles Swann, a gentleman of similar age to his parents, dabbles in the world of mixed media through his own collection of photographs, although still buying ‘original’ works of art, thus fitting one model of the collector (indeed, as shall be discussed further, Swann’s collecting proves to be symptomatic of deeper concerns). The Narrator’s grandmother, who also gifts him with photographs, does so much more reluctantly — believing that they are vulgar, if not inauthentic, in their representational modes. If she must buy photographs of places, she insists on buying photographs of paintings of them, thus increasing the gifts’ apparent respectability. She even goes so far as to seek out photos of engravings of the original place which are no longer matched by the reality of the place itself (*TWBS* 43). Swann is widely assumed by the Narrator’s family to be a man of limited taste, as demonstrated by the following exchange:

‘But are you a connoisseur? I ask for your own sake, because you’re likely to let the dealers unload some awful daubs on you,’ my great-aunt would say to him; in fact she did not assume he had any competence and [...] had no very high opinion of a man who in conversation avoided serious subjects [...] even when my grandmother’s sisters talked about artistic subjects. Challenged by them to give his opinion, to express his admiration for a painting, he maintained an almost ungracious silence and, on the other hand, redeemed himself if he could provide about the museum in which it was to be found, about the date at which it had been painted, a material piece of information. (*TWBS* 20)

His ability to provide, from memory, information about the museums in which certain artworks can be found marks Swann out as possessing an easy familiarity with the institutions

of the art world, and sticks in the young Narrator's mind as proof of those sociocultural networks (still vaguely defined at this early point in the novel) in which he is revealed to play an integral part. We soon learn that Swann's cultural stock is such that a reproduction of a painting owned by him is featured on the front page of *Le Figaro* — an early nod to the importance this paper will hold in the Narrator's own quest for cultural capital and literary recognition (*TWBS* 25). Such details allow us to conceive of Proust's novel as a *Künstlerroman* in which the various institutional and social means by which notions of artistic worthiness are determined provide an additional narrative focus besides the main journey towards the realisation of the Narrator's own talent. Additionally, Proust is careful to highlight the ways in which these criteria change across, and between, generations. Where the Narrator's grandmother believes in the power of reproductions to preserve, in some way, the traces of a material world now lost, her grandson makes use of the same images as fuel for his imagination and the metaphors by which his consciousness frequently refigures the world around him, refashioning them for his own aesthetic purposes.

By differentiating between multiple generations' notions of artworks and their representations and reproductions in this fashion, Proust demonstrates one of the many ways in which he will use the passing of time as a reagent in the unfolding of his narrative. Differences in the interpretation of aesthetic verity are thus linked to wider historical processes. In the unpublished novel *Jean Santeuil*, Proust voices exactly this idea, writing that: 'history in the making [consists of] a transformation in the human species stretching over a period of two generations.' (735). Proust's own willingness to make use of photographic reproductions — to make up, perhaps, for being unable to travel widely — signals his ready acceptance of the innovations and conveniences incipient to modernity. Indeed, by embracing the technologies which enabled works of art to be seen outside of their original contexts, he anticipates the work of both Walter Benjamin and André Malraux in

recognising the radical potentiality of such changes. Malraux's advocacy for a 'Museum without Walls' — achieved by the proliferation of photographic reproduction of artworks across differing media types — finds an earlier proponent in Proust (16-17). Benjamin openly acknowledged the extent of Proust's influence on his own work, writing in a letter to Gershom Scholem that 'Whenever I read anything [Proust] wrote, I felt we were kindred souls.' (Scholem and Adorno 278). We might surmise that the German writer had Proust's own habits of utilising photographs in mind when writing the following to evoke the ability of images to apparently stand in for reality after the advent of photography: 'The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art' (214-215).

As well as collecting and making frequent use of photographs and engravings of artworks, in his younger years Proust was an avid frequenter of museums, thereby encountering works of art in the more expected sense — as Townsend has noted, he was an inveterate visitor of the Louvre and other galleries, both public and commercial, throughout much of his early life (2013, 84). Jean-Yves Tadié goes so far as to say that the Louvre was 'a place whose importance in Proust's formative development it would be hard to exaggerate' (347). In his early twenties, while attempting (although not with an enormous amount of exertion) to arrive at a choice of career, he wrote to Charles Grandjean, the librarian of the French Senate, to outline his possible intentions:

From the standpoint of reflection and literature, Versailles and Saint-Germain strike me as more suitable, but possibly the Louvre or Cluny would be more interesting and offer more future (for curators), meaning, I suppose, that they contain more of the past. (*SL* 64)

Although tempting to imagine Proust as having pursued these tentative ambitions — becoming the compiler, perhaps, of a catalogue without end — he would remain a visitor

rather than an employee of the French state's museal institutions. There is, too, a pleasing if serendipitous foreshadowing in this letter. The young Proust could not have guessed that a recreation of his own bedroom would later become one of the pivotal displays in the Musée Carnavelet (Emery 203).

In later years, with the onset of severe health problems, the few trips that he did make abroad were undertaken with the express purpose of visiting museums and other sites where art was displayed (Townsend 2013, 84). These visits were undertaken for social reasons as well as providing him with the opportunity to consider those aspects of aesthetic theory which he would take forward into his own work. From his correspondence, it is obvious that throughout his life he kept track of developments in the museum world, taking note of exhibitions of particular interest, and, furthermore, thinking deeply about the ways in which certain museums displayed their collections. Writing in early 1920 to Jean-Louis Vaudoyer in response to a questionnaire which asked its respondents to choose their eight favourite works in the Louvre, Proust briefly tries his hand at curation:

I'm not really in favour of Art going out of its way to meet the art-lover rather than the other way round [...] While praising its management, I would advise against turning the Museum into a sort of Hôtel Porgès. (*SL IV*, 129)

Proust opted for three paintings by Chardin, a Millet, a Manet, a Monet, a Renoir or alternatively a work of Corot's, and finally one by Watteau. In a more detailed consideration of which paintings in particular to hang in this notional display, he goes on:

supposing we were to ask the Austro-Germans for pictures, that, rather than a second Watteau, I would prefer the Vermeer from Dresden or the Vermeer from Vienna?. And [...] on the subject of Vermeer, I would like to ask that his *La Dentellière* be hung as a masterpiece in its own right, instead of with other Dutch

pictures. (This doesn't mean that I prefer Vermeer to Watteau, as I would explain.)

(*SL IV*, 129)

It is unclear what his correspondent made of this detailed reply, but it is noteworthy that, despite beginning the letter with a confession that 'it's over fifteen years since I went to the Louvre', Proust's interest in not only the appreciation of artworks, but also the ways in which they could be combined for display, remained critically sharp at this late stage of his life. In many ways, according to the orthodoxies of the time, as a well-educated male member of the upper bourgeoisie Proust represented the ideal museum visitor in the late 19th century, with enough leisure time to ensure that he never rushed these visits or felt uncomfortable while there. Another questionnaire, answered in jest in 1922 (the year of his death), saw Proust answer the question 'if the world were coming to an end...what would you do?' with, among other suggestions, the declaration that he 'should not fail to visit the new galleries at the Louvre' (Tadié 769).

We can sense a deep though informally-acquired expertise in his essay *Chardin and Rembrandt*, written in 1895, in which the reader is asked to imagine 'a young man of modest means and artistic inclinations', with an 'imagination full of the glory of museums [and] cathedrals', who feels besieged by 'unease and ennui' as he gazes round the furnishing and decorations of his parental home, a place defined by 'domestic mediocrity' (11). This opposition between the domestic setting, which seems to encumber the young man's mind with its all-too-visible 'mediocrity', and the 'glory' of museums and their contents, is suggestive of the influence of museums on individual notions of aesthetic achievement. Proust's young man of modest means has, in simple terms, had his head turned by the treasures he has seen, and is unable to dwell happily among the more mundane contents of his home. Rather than advocating a total break from museum-going, the suggested cure is that of considered immersion rather than abstinence:

If I were acquainted with this young man, I would not put him off going to the Louvre — indeed, I would accompany him; but leading him through the La Caze room and the gallery of eighteenth-century French painters, or any of the French galleries, I would make him stop in front of the works of Chardin. (12)

Here we see Proust deploying his own knowledge of the Louvre's collections and layout — a reminder of the author's own cultural capital, as it were — in the service of solving the (fictive) young man's plight. Chardin's still lifes, with their emphasis on exploring the stark beauty of the commonplace, provide a careful viewer with the means by which to undergo a 'journey of initiation', at the end of which, 'metals and stoneware will come to life, and fruits will speak.' (17, 14). Indeed, Chardin's power is presented as such that 'having understood the life within his painting, you will have mastered the beauty of life itself.' (14). In contrast to James Joyce's gleeful deconstruction of the logic of the museum space, as seen in *Finnegans Wake*, in this essay Proust seems to place great faith in the potential of the viewing experience to reveal fundamental truths which point outwards from the aesthetic object, and allowing those initiated into such matters to appreciate the most mundane phenomena in their everyday life. Joyce's deliberately breathless, garbled descriptions of the 'Willingdone Museyroom' and its contents could not be any further apart in tone or intention than Proust's easy and assured guiding of the reader through the 'French galleries' of the Louvre. In this way, Proust seems to promise, 'metals [...] will come to life' under the pressure of a properly informed gaze. *Chardin and Rembrandt* represents Proust's first real attempt to sketch out what would become, by the time of writing *À la recherche*, what we might term a soteriology of aesthetics: art, for Proust, held very real possibilities for salvation from the numbing effects of reality and the deadening repetition of everyday life. The means by which the 'metals and stoneware' of Chardin's paintings are instilled with new life is

no less a miracle than the turning of water into wine. It is clear that the essay was written under the influence of contemporary aestheticism; Marion Schmid has described the ‘importance of decadence for Proust’, particularly in these early years of his career (2008, 235). Given the immediate context of this essay — written at the midpoint of the 1890s — it is easy to dismiss it as an overly eager attempt by Proust to craft a decadent writerly persona for himself yet it is clear that, with some modifications, a faith in the restorative and transcendent power of art remained a core part of his own beliefs until his death nearly thirty years later.

Proust was far from alone in French literature in using museums as a means for discoursing upon a variety of topics. Aside from the minor compositions of de Montesquiou, a number of French writers throughout the 19th century addressed the workings of museums, galleries and paintings in their work — a fact attested to by Proust’s sardonic declaration in his *Chardin and Rembrandt* that ‘men of letters are always being accused of talking nonsense about paintings, of putting in them things that had never occurred to the artists themselves.’ (23). Careful to distinguish himself, and his opinions, from those of these unnamed ‘men of letters’, he goes on to say that ‘for me, what they did put in suffices.’ (23). Affecting this distance from his peers and predecessors allows Proust to deflect the antipathy of those ‘painters who always claim that men of letters are incapable of talking about painting’ (24). As Peter Collier and Robert Lethbridge have shown, writing about art in 19th century France was an ever-expanding and increasingly complex activity, spanning multiple genres (7-12). Proust’s faux-defensiveness on this point in *Chardin and Rembrandt* allows him to position his own writings on the subject as belonging to no one school in particular. There is a detectable falsity to this modesty, of course — after providing the reader with several pages of close artistic analysis, he denies having acted thus, declaring that ‘what [the

artists] did put in suffices' as material for discussion. There is a youthful playfulness in this writerly trip around the Louvre which, in one sense, differentiates it entirely from Henry James's account of his nightmares about the museum in *A Small Boy and Others*,¹⁵ yet each account serves a similar purpose: to position the author as an informed and expert museum-goer, for whom the consideration of art (and the spaces within which it is displayed) has proven crucial for the development of an artistic sensibility of their own. The interpretive model forwarded in *Chardin and Rembrandt* is one based on a close familiarity not only with the contents and style of the two artists' paintings, but also an awareness of the extensive critical heritage which, by 1895, surrounded the reception of their work and of a wider — and rapidly burgeoning — corpus of museographical texts.

In *Plaisirs et jours*, published in 1896, Proust experiments further with what might be deemed more direct forms of art writing: the volume contains a sequence of short poems collectively entitled 'Portraits of Painters and Composers'. The painters chosen for this poetic tribute are Cuyp, Paulus Potter, Watteau and van Dyck, with Proust blending specific details from several different works in each poem in the attempt to recreate, textually, the sensibility of each artist. There is more than a hint of the Decadent about the poems, as, perhaps, befits such pieces written during the 1890s. Watteau is praised in the following terms: 'Twilight putting makeup on faces and trees/With its blue mantle, under its uncertain mask', while Proust's effusive description of van Dyck's depiction of the Duke of Richmond strikes an unmistakably sensual note: 'sapphire at your neck/Has fires as sweet as your tranquil gaze.' (CSS 84-85). The reader is left in no doubt that the author of such profusions has spent hours contemplating the works of the artists thus described, as Proust again cements his aesthetic qualifications

¹⁵ See page 88 of this study.

— we are thus encouraged to see these poems as the result of many ‘profound minutes’ such as Cuyp’s paintings are described as evoking (CSS 83). Slender and ephemeral by design, these textual portraits serve as evidence that Proust’s literary apprenticeship spanned not only different genres but also sensibilities. *Plaisirs et jours* as a whole bespeaks the era of its publication, as the preface, provided by Anatole France, signals with its telltale references to the ‘hothouse atmosphere’ and ‘strange and morbid beauty’ of the pieces within (4).

A later section of *Plaisirs et jours*, entitled ‘Regrets, Reveries the Colour of Time’, which is formed out of several short pieces (the beginnings of short stories and other textual remnants), features an extract entitled ‘Memory’s Genre Paintings’. This provides us with an intriguing example of Proust intermixing what would become two of his central concerns in *À la recherche* — the workings of memory and the possibility of expressing them through art. The memories in question are those of Proust’s short spell on national service, which although scant in detail due to the length of the piece, provide the inspiration for a discussion of the ways in which memories become transmuted into something more than mere recollection, in this instance through their enfolding into an existing conceptual model which has been derived from extensive viewing of a certain kind of painting. There are, Proust tells us,

certain reminiscences that are like the Dutch paintings in our minds, genre pictures in which the people, often of a modest station, are caught at a very simple moment of their lives, with no special events, at times with no events whatsoever, in a framework that is anything but grand and extraordinary. The charm lies in the naturalness of the figures and the simplicity of the scene, whereby the gap between picture and spectator is suffused with a soft light that bathes the scene in beauty.

(CSS 134)

Here we see Proust mapping the act of remembering onto an existing descriptive model, one presumably derived from his frequent study of such works, namely ‘the Dutch paintings in our minds’. His aesthetic credentials are once more on show — how many people conceive of memories in terms of Dutch genre paintings, after all — but he attempts to move away from the ‘grand and extraordinary’, in a reiteration of his belief in *Chardin and Rembrandt* that great paintings are great precisely for granting us the ability to illuminate the rest of our lives. By using the vocabulary of art history to express his nascent conceptions of memory in this way, Proust gestures towards his increasing interest in the idea of memory as a subject for aesthetic exploration and consideration, which will, later in his career, provide much of the impetus for writing the novel that would determine his legacy. *Chardin and Rembrandt* is best understood as a philosophical exercise in the educational potential of aesthetics — how can one improve one’s sense and apprehension of the world through the studious examination of certain artworks and artists? The finest works contain elements which we can — as Proust’s fictional novelist Bergotte would wish to do, too late, with the Vermeer painting in front of which he dies — incorporate into our own understanding of life and its many elements, both profound and mundane. Chardin’s still lifes, after all, depict vegetables and kitchen utensils, yet, for Proust, they have been lifted to a higher realm of signification through the application of the artist’s skill. This is perhaps an attitude which only an idealistic museum-goer could fully believe in. The ‘untold hours’ spent by Proust ‘in the museums, galleries and private collections of late 19th century Paris’ are readily discernible in their effect on not only his choice of subject matter at this early stage of his career, but also in his delineation of conceptual models through which to understand the experiences of life (Karpeles 11-12). For Eric Karpeles, paintings provided Proust with more than the means of expanding his descriptive powers, also clearly influencing the ways in which he sought to delineate and express his shifting intellectual stances: ‘the paintings selected by Proust to

animate and expand the imaginative world of *In Search of Lost Time* function in significant ways — as descriptive analogies, as metaphors and symbols’ for a wide range of other objects and experiences (Karpeles 10-11). It is my belief that Karpeles does not go far enough in this analysis; Proust not only makes use of paintings to ‘animate and expand’ his imaginative vision, but also the idea of museums and galleries themselves. Proust uses the concept of the museum in shifting and multifaceted ways throughout his work, and, like Henry James and James Joyce, is interested in the psychological effects of thinking museologically. As we shall discuss, his Narrator in *À la recherche* demonstrates a collector’s instinct which could only have been learned from frequent exposure to different and mutually reinforcing aspects of the museum function as it existed in France during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whether that be by making frequent recourse to specific artworks for the purposes of metaphor, or in the ways in which he conceives of other people by thinking of them as pieces to be collected, analysed, and gathered together for preservation.

I.

Decorative words: translating Ruskin and defending cathedrals

Proust's interest in the philosophy of aesthetics would dominate his thoughts and writing for much of the decade after the appearance of *Plaisirs et jours*. Rather than producing further volumes of short stories or poetry, however, he turned down an unlikely path: translating certain works of the British art historian John Ruskin. Rachel Teukolsky has discussed Ruskin's legacy in terms of his treatment by other British authors, for whom he initially proved something of a bugbear, 'taken to be representative of the sins of Victorian critics', yet Proust seemed, initially at least, to subscribe wholeheartedly to the lessons of this last of the Victorian sages (5). David Ellison sees this period of Proust's career as one of great importance for allowing him to define his own aesthetic sense, borrowing from Ruskin's influence but eventually diverging in certain key ways (9-10). Ruskin's conviction that the city of Venice should stand, for art lovers, as a particularly redolent site for the appreciation of the fine arts and architecture was absorbed by Proust, who visited the city twice, as well as making the wish to visit it a frequent feature of his Narrator's frustrated desires in *À la recherche* (Townsend 2013, 84). Certainly the two authors shared a reverence for select examples of architectural style: cathedrals built in the Gothic style most particularly. Proust's translations of two of Ruskin's texts (*La Bible d'Amiens* and *Sésame et les Lys*) are accompanied by lengthy introductions in which Proust goes further in his duties than most translators might be expected to, outlining not only his own responses to Ruskin's work but also, in a style familiar from the earlier *Chardin and Rembrandt*, guiding his readers towards certain conclusions and lessons which are to be taken from the work. In this passage Proust explains in a circuitous fashion how we are to read Ruskin on architecture, mistakes and all:

He who enveloped the old cathedrals in more love and more joy than even the sun bestows on them when it adds its fleeting smile to their centuries-old beauty cannot, if well understood, have been mistaken. It is the same with the world of spirits as with the physical universe, where a jet of water cannot rise above the height of the place from which the water first descended. Things of great literary beauty correspond to something, and it is perhaps enthusiasm in art that is the criterion of truth. Supposing that Ruskin sometimes made mistakes, as a critic, in the exact appraisal of the value of a work; the beauty of his erroneous judgment is often more interesting than the beauty of the work being judged and corresponds to something which, in spite of being something other than the work, is no less precious. (*ORR* 48)

Here, then, we are urged to place our faith in Ruskin's overall intentionality: he who loves and celebrates 'the old cathedrals' in such ways cannot, we are told, ever be truly mistaken. There are perhaps some flaws in the great writer's reasoning, but these can be excused due to their leading to even more fruitful avenues of analysis. Proust's devotion to Ruskin's works at this point is evident in this wilful overlooking of potential errors in the latter's writing. *La Bible d'Amiens* was published in 1904, four years after Ruskin's death, while *Sésame et les Lys* would appear in 1906.

Publication of these volumes overlapped with one of the defining events in early 20th century French social history, one about which Proust himself would write in no uncertain terms: the legal separation of Church and state, enacted by a law passed in December 1905. Jessica Berman has noted that the 'turmoil surrounding the Dreyfus Affair' brought into focus a range of issues in French society regarding the place of organised religion in politics as well as wider concerns about France's place in the world order as a military and economic power (78). These multifaceted questions about French

identity informed government policy as the Third Republic sought to strengthen itself and move away from previous regimes' close ties with the Catholic church, with 'a final break' between the two institutions being enshrined into law after several years of public debate (Ellis 128). Pierre Rosanvallon has discussed the rise of anticlericalism as a salient feature of French leftist politics for several decades after the events of 1870 (194). Proust's own stance on the matter was by no means straightforward. Although not religious by any conventional measure, his letters and an essay written at the time display a deep discomfort with the idea of the Church being totally cut off from its established place in French civic life. His deep immersion in Ruskin's writings evidently influenced the tack along which he would direct his response, as he singled out France's cathedrals as the primary victims of the new law. In August 1904, Proust had an essay published in *Le Figaro*, entitled 'La Mort des cathédrales', in which he lamented the looming passage of the Act. Reading this essay alongside his other literary output from this year — in his letters and the Preface to *La Bible d'Amiens* — allows us to construct a model for Proust's understanding of the importance of history in the present day, as well as identify what was an expanding and more critically nuanced view of museums, markedly different in kind to that previously displayed in *Chardin and Rembrandt*.

La Bible d'Amiens was published in February 1904, and was well-received ultimately running for several printings (Tadié 432-434). In his preface to the work, Proust took the opportunity to outline the grounds for his unease at the cathedrals' fate, writing that:

if the cathedrals, as has been said, are the museums of the religious art of the Middle Ages, they are living museums [...] They were not constructed for the purposes of housing works of art, but it is the works of art — however individual they may be —

that were made for them and could not without sacrilege (I am speaking only of aesthetic sacrilege) be placed anywhere else. (*ORR* 15)

Here, Proust attempts to mount a defence of the cathedrals along aesthetic lines, adapting criticisms of existing museums — namely that it would be ‘sacrilege’ to remove their unique artworks — to do so, while also advocating for an understanding of them as ‘living museums’. Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz support this idea, arguing that cathedrals can be envisioned as ‘*ur*-museum [s], in which different media, presented in the context for which they were originally designed, [fuse] into a unique experience.’ (86). It is precisely this ‘unique’ quality of the cathedral-going experience which Proust sought to highlight as constituting the core of their continued importance. By arguing for the inviolability of such spaces, Proust presents us with a complex and by no means completely convincing argument: in this formulation, cathedrals are already ‘living museums’ by virtue of their continued use, which were ‘not constructed for the purposes of housing works of art’, but now must be seen as irrevocably linked to their contents with a force equally sacrosanct to that of their expected functions. Presumably, then, there are ‘dead museums’ against which the cathedrals can be measured — and, if so, where are they? This idea, that removing artworks from their original contexts results in a loss of some intangible yet real quality, has been passed down through generations of critics, informing such present-day writers as Donald Preziosi in their critiques of museum spaces (2006, 54). Although in this preface he insists that he is speaking only of ‘aesthetic sacrilege’, in a newspaper article published later that year, Proust would lay out his thoughts in greater detail, in a fashion which makes it clear that he was also considering the historical dimension of cathedrals and their use. Writing to Paul Grunebaum-Ballin in early 1905, he bemoans the possible effects of the impending legislation on cathedrals (in this instance, the cathedral at Chartres): ‘The day when it

becomes an archaeological museum! — dear friend, I prefer not to think about it.’ (*SL II*, 131). The very idea that the cathedral should be transformed from a space of active worship into one of purely ‘archaeological’ interest was clearly met with resistance by Proust. He goes on to clarify his stance: ‘I have never been to Greece but I know how eloquent a ruined monument can be. But a ruined monument isn’t a desecrated monument.’ (*SL II*, 132). Ruination, then, is no barrier to the appreciation of a building or site, but it must not be brought about suddenly or through what Proust felt to be capricious means – namely, the passing of the law separating Church and state. To do so, he suggests, would be a desecration of the nation’s past. This is a step beyond what he had earlier termed ‘aesthetic sacrilege’, moving into the realm of the temporal, and shows a real concern for the subject of how society should respond to the passing of time as manifested through the treatment of certain historical sites.

Proust’s article on the subject appeared in *Le Figaro* on August 16th 1904. Entitled ‘La Mort des Cathédrales’, it is written in unconventional fashion, almost verging on science fiction in its conjuring of an alternative present where ‘Catholicism has been extinguished for centuries’.¹⁶ We are then invited to ‘suppose that one day, scholars, with the aid of documents, manage to recreate the ceremonies that were formerly celebrated there, for which they had been built, and which gave them their proper meaning and life’. This idea, that the function of the buildings is too imbued with their ‘life’ to change, is then married to their aesthetic value, as Proust considers ‘these cathedrals [to be] probably the most original expression of the genius of France’. Thus, we are told, ‘the cathedrals are not only the most beautiful monuments of our art, but the only ones who still live their integral lives’. Ruskin’s influence is clear in these early passages; establishing links between art, architecture and the morality of society had

¹⁶ Translation my own from a web-based source. See: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k286706d.item>.

long been recognised as the British writer's *modus operandi*, as Robert Hewison has noted, and indeed, Proust cites him directly midway through the essay (16). Proust's article attempts the same — condemning the government's actions as not only potentially despoiling treasured aesthetic sites but also as striking at the very heart of French society. His decision to attack museums as part of his strategy for defending the cathedrals is redolent of his intellectual fluidity — happy to make use of them, and their contents, when it suits his writerly purpose, but capable, in the next breath, of decrying them: 'the government not only no longer subsidizes the celebration of ritual ceremonies in churches, but can turn them into anything it likes: a museum, a conference room or a casino.' This list of alternative uses is not, one feels, overly flattering — 'a museum, a conference room or a casino', all would be equally inappropriate, Proust suggests, as choices for the repurposed naves and transepts of France's great spaces of worship.

Returning to the idea, first broached in his preface for *La Bible d'Amiens*, that altering the cathedrals' use would somehow impact the status of the art contained within, Proust goes on to say that 'a piece of furniture that becomes a trinket [bibelot] and a palace that becomes a museum freezes, cannot talk to our heart, and end[s] up dying'. His use of the word 'bibelot' in the original is no coincidence — Guy de Maupassant had used this term as the title for an article in *Le Gaulois*, in the 1880s, to lament the rising tide in French society of over-consumption and the resultant decline of aesthetic values (187). The cheapening of art is thus figured as having potentially fatal consequences for its reception — 'a palace that becomes a museum freezes [...] and end[s] up dying'. Government policies which encourage such practices are, Proust stresses, akin to murder, and will result in the incense of the cathedral being replaced by 'the sepulchral smell of [...] museums'. Singling out the tendency of 19th century museum collections to rely on plaster cast copies of great works — such as the choir stalls of Amiens cathedral

— Proust asks if the experience of viewing a replica can ever be like that of visiting and circulating closely to the original. In this sense, Proust is revealed to be in touch with much contemporary museological criticism. The propriety of casts in collections had long been debated, and he would have seen such replica objects in the collection of the Musée des Monuments Français, which had reopened in 1882 in Paris (McIsaac 56-57). We can see from the strident tone of the article (and the pungency of the imagery within) that Proust was truly concerned by the prospect of his country's built heritage being modified or interfered with, and that his concerns were fuelled not only by his readings of Ruskin but also a deeper conviction in the importance of a proper understanding of history's continued place in the present. The cathedrals were, for him at least, alive precisely because of their accumulated historicity, which was daily added to by their continued use. Any attempts to alter this, from his perspective, risked turning these vital sites of continued interaction with the past into 'desecrated' monuments. Although framed in more lyrical terms, Proust's resistance to this monumentalisation of history is akin to that of James Joyce — both authors expressed grave doubts about the viability of this particular mode of historical understanding, which had been previously outlined by Friedrich Nietzsche.¹⁷ There is one passage in the essay which seems to directly mimic the German philosopher's tone, as Proust declares, with no small degree of chagrin, that:

if we would know what a thirteenth century cathedral was really like when it was a living entity in the full exercise of its function, there is no need for us to have recourse to the reconstructions of a frozen antiquarianism. (*SMW* 99)

¹⁷ See page 46 of this study.

In *À la recherche du temps perdu* Proust proposes his own model by which personal memory could be correctly understood and implemented in order to orient the individual harmoniously within the wider experience of history.

There is a final irony attached to Proust's article of 1904 which is worth briefly considering. Republished after more than a decade, and after the cessation of the First World War, Proust took the opportunity to go over his work and add an ironic commentary. In one footnote, he discusses his original motives for writing the piece, and how, in the light of recent historical events, these have taken on an air of absurdity:

I feared that France was to be transformed into a beach strewn with vast heaps of chiselled shells, emptied of the life that once filled them, and no longer bringing to the listening ear the sounds that formerly they held; mere museum-pieces, frozen and dead. (*SMW* 97)

How, he asks, was he to know that the level of risk posed by Aristide Briand's policies to the cathedrals of France would, ultimately, be minimal in comparison with the vast damage inflicted on them by the infernal machines of Germany's armies? The destruction wrought on France's landscape provides *À la recherche* with one of its most affecting passages, as the now-grown Gilberte informs the Narrator by letter that the fertile gardens and countryside of their youth have been torn asunder by the advancing trenches:

How often I have thought of you, and the walks, which you made so delightful, which we took together through this now devastated countryside, where vast battles were fought just to win possession of one of the paths or slopes you used to love, where we so often walked together! (*FTA* 63-64)

The march of history, in its most violent incarnation, swallows all, as this passage suggests. Proust's fear that the French nation would cut off vital links to its own past by transforming the country's cathedrals into museums was revealed to have been short-sighted all along.

This open-endedness regarding the status of museums as models for understanding the progress of history, or as suitable places for aesthetic instruction, indicates that the idea of the museum itself was one which Proust gradually came to view with a high degree of flexibility. Happy, in his earlier writings, to suggest visiting the Louvre as the best possible cure for ennui, by the early 1900s he had begun to view certain functions of the museum with a degree of suspicion. This, in turn, led to an intriguing changeability in his uses of the term. As early as 1902, while mulling over an offer to translate a miscellany of Ruskin's work, Proust wrote to Alfred Vallette outlining his reasons for rejecting the project: he feared that by isolating certain pieces of text from their original context that the overall effect would be unquestionably deleterious to the integrity of Ruskin's original texts. 'In place of a living cathedral', he writes, would stand 'a cold museum full of odds and ends.' (SL 276). Here we see an early formulation of the manner in which he would frame his objections to the Act of 1905 in 'La Mort des Cathédrales' — the same metaphor is applied, although in this case to Ruskin's writings, objects of a textual nature rather than sculptures or choir stalls. We can adduce from this letter and the early essays which we have looked at that, for Proust, the idea of the museum was one which could be shifted around in his writing along different registers of signification. His time spent in the Louvre and other galleries had led to him conceptualising the museum as an institution — and a model for the interpretation of not just the arts, but of society's relationship with its own past — which was capable of being simultaneously praiseworthy and deserving of condemnation,

according to how he believed it to operate in a particular instance. Theodor Adorno's conviction that Proust's writings demonstrate a 'perverse tolerance of museums' is borne out when we look at the essays and letters in which he outlines the limits of this 'tolerance' (180). A willingness to exclude the contents of such institutions as the Louvre from the objections which he raised about the possible removal of artworks from cathedrals might well be described as 'perverse', but is made more comprehensible when looked at in conjunction with Proust's wider concerns about historicity and the correct methods for interacting with the past. In his writings which focus on the controversy surrounding the relationship between Church and State, Proust demonstrates, again, a certain prescience. Malraux's claim that 'we have begun by converting our cathedrals into museums' — a product, he believed, of a shift in historical sensibilities throughout the later twentieth century — is pre-empted in Proust's complaints about the consequences of the Act of 1905 (65).

II.

(Re)writing Time: Proust's extended fictions

By the end of 1906, Proust had produced several books and essays, including the unfinished *Jean Santeuil*, a long novel written in the third person. Wishing to move on from Ruskin, and to channel his energies into a work which would be all his own, in 1908 he began to compose the series of novels which we now know collectively as *À la recherche du temps perdu*, but was initially more essayistic in shape and tone (Schmid 2013, 54). Massive in scope and size, *À la recherche* was written against the backdrop of what Laura Otis has described as ‘the age of organic memory’ in Western literature and culture, and has been praised by Michael Sprinker as ‘remain[ing] significant precisely to the extent that it illuminates a decisive historical moment in the formation of the modern world.’ (Otis ix, Sprinker 3). In these novels, Proust attempts nothing less than to present a model of individual memory which will allow for a fruitful relationship with one’s past to develop, and thereby repair the relationship between past and present; in short, a cure for the hazards of history as he felt it to be comprehended by society at large. His method for doing so is to present, through a first-person narrative which contours fairly neatly onto his own life, the continual failings of an individual’s intellect to grasp this essential truth; a process which, despite being teased into being in the very first volume of the novel — the now-famous ‘madeleine’ scene whereby the sense-memories embedded in the experience of consumption of that particular foodstuff (in conjunction with some scented tea) awaken memories of the Narrator’s early years — is never truly realised until the last instalment.

In order to highlight the importance of the mnemonic method which he proposes as being humanity’s only truly fixative measure in the face of historical oblivion, Proust

outlines a number of ways by which we might err, using the other characters of his novel to give life to these failed (and failing) methods of living with history. Drawing mostly from the upper echelons of society to populate his pages, Proust responds to contemporary sociopolitical developments in order to illustrate the many types of error which can result in alienation from one's past, or the inability to properly live in the present. For Sprinker, 'the Proustian theme of time was never anything but a means for staging and comprehending the historical transition through which he and his society lived.' (159). In doing so, Proust dwells at length on different aspects of the museum function as it operated in French society at the time of the novel's events, focusing on such themes as the act of collecting and the development of an aesthetic sensibility, in order to fully situate his ideas within their immediate historical context. As in 'La Mort des Cathédrales', museums (and related cultural practices such as collecting and the appreciation of art) provide Proust with the means to highlight his wider concerns with society's understanding, and handling, of history. Just as his essay of 1904 argued for a 'living' connection with the past, *À la recherche* places great importance on a model of historical understanding predicated around vitality and the continued usefulness of the past when understood correctly. By writing this hugely ambitious work in the first person voice, Proust takes advantage of the mode's inherent subjectivity — the Narrator's mistakes feel genuine, and his emotional responses to the stimuli of memory are, if at times over-wrought, granted an exceptional immediacy — but also to affect a 'replacement of the narrative of history with the narrative of the individual subject'; thus welding his wider artistic aims to a more readable and traditional narrative framework, even if he does stretch the limits of the form to the utmost (Stewart 1999, 156). Proust's Narrator acts as a prism in the unfolding of the text, through which the other characters and their actions are glimpsed, and it is worth remembering that each character is only

presented to us at this remove: the act of looking is never less neutral than in *À la recherche*.

If the fictional works of Henry James provide us with characters who look at each other through a gaze already predicated by the influence of the museum,¹⁸ then Proust's novels provide us, through the figure of the Narrator, with a glimpse into the formation of this personality type — *looking* is the primary means by which the Narrator seeks to understand the world, and it is an exercise in visuality which we see being influenced and shaped by such stimuli as paintings, statues, or photographic representations of them. This intense privileging of the gaze leads to complications of its own; time and again the Narrator is defeated by his own miscomprehensions or misreadings of situations and people; the women he falls in love with (having first been looked at from afar) inevitably prove unsuitable or somehow different to his expectations, beginning with the young Gilberte, at whom he looks 'with the sort of gaze that [...] would like to touch the body it is looking at, capture it, take it away and the soul along with it' (*TWBS* 142). Such is the effect of Gilberte's presence on the Narrator that 'I stopped, I could not move, as happens when something we see does not merely address our eyes, but requires a deeper kind of perception and possesses our entire being.' (*TWBS* 141). In order to comprehend this vision of youthful beauty, the Narrator believes that there must be 'a deeper kind of perception' which can be reached, yet as he indicates, the price of this knowledge is that suitably engaging visual stimuli are endowed with the capacity to '[possess] our entire being.' To desire such things is not necessarily to achieve them, and Proust delineates in extensive detail the complications inherent in grasping the world through one's eyes, achieving, through the use of the first-person voice, an intensity which borders at times on the manic. This urge to 'capture' not

¹⁸ See page 106 of this study.

only the body, but the essence, of the desired subject, runs the risk of reducing them to object status – a theme explored by Henry James, most notably in *The Golden Bowl*, and brought to new levels of intensity by Proust in his writing of the story arc involving Albertine — thus enacting a negatively-charged declension in relations between the desirer and the desired. Proust is careful to provide us with a prototype for this model of flawed visual perception: Charles Swann, the gentleman collector whom we have already seen being interrogated by the Narrator’s elderly relatives.

Swann’s love affair with the woman who eventually becomes his wife stands apart for its setting twenty or so years before the Narrator’s childhood and thereby providing a sustained depiction of society life at a different time to that which we are given access in the rest of the novel. In this way, as William C. Carter has observed, the historical sweep of Proust’s narrative is deepened (495). The story of his prolonged courtship of the woman we come to know as Odette acts as a precursor, in miniature, of several themes which will later coalesce in the Narrator’s own story. It is in ‘A love of Swann’s’ that we first begin to comprehend what Jonathan Paul Murphy has described as ‘the natural movement of the Proustian lover’ as constituting ‘an isolation, an attempt to freeze and objectify the object of desire.’ (37). Swann’s interest in Odette moves from attraction to desire to compulsion, powered along in this movement by his aesthetic convictions — his collecting of art, as he himself acknowledges, spreads a fateful pall over his other faculties. We have already seen that by the time the Narrator meets him as a child, Swann has established a reputation for himself as one of the foremost men of taste in France — a status underlined by his lending of a painting to be reproduced on the front cover of *Le Figaro*. A seasoned museum-goer, Swann’s wealth allows him the freedom to carry out seemingly endless research into his interests, as well as the ability to acquire original works of art. He is thus a representative of the moneyed classes for

whom, as Alain Corbin and Russell W. Belk have discussed, the collecting of art became a ubiquitous habit during the late 19th century (Corbin 545, Belk 40). Jules and Edmond de Goncourt — best remembered today for their journals, which Proust read often and published pastiches of — provide a real-life example of Swann's type. They lived together, until the premature death of Jules in 1879, in a self-described 'artistic treasure-house, on whose decoration [...] much care, imagination, and money [was] lavished' (208). Edmond described himself as 'the most passionate of all the collectors', indicating that there was something more than the exercise of aesthetic preferences behind his avid purchasing of art, books and furnishings — locating the instinct to collect in the realm of emotions and desires (Gluck 121).

Proust uses Charles Swann in his narrative to examine the obverse side of this collecting tendency. For Susan M. Pearce, there are three 'modes' of collecting: the souvenir, the fetishistic and the systematic (32). We can place Swann's tendencies as lying between the first and the second in Pearce's schema, and it is through his idealisation of Odette that we can see these tendencies in action, as well as trace their emotionally dire consequences. An admirer of Renaissance art, Swann takes pleasure in imaginatively transposing the features of people he knows into certain artworks:

Swann had always had this peculiar penchant for liking to rediscover in the paintings of the masters not only the general characteristics of the real world that surrounds us, but [also] the individual features of the faces we know [...] (*TWBS* 225)

This 'peculiar penchant' is suggestive of not only a deep engagement, and familiarity, with 'the paintings of the masters' (gleaned from years of visiting museums and building up his own collection) but also of a desire to reshape, or at least alter, one's envisioning of 'the real world that surrounds us' — the viewing of art is clearly not a passive

experience for Swann. This model of viewership has much in common with that advocated by Proust in *Chardin and Rembrandt*, even surpassing it in the belief that one can ‘rediscover’ elements of the material world within the canvases of ‘the masters’. His aesthetic sensibilities interpose themselves between Swann and the woman he desires, a state of affairs which he initially believes to be unproblematic, even adding to his pleasure; convinced that Odette resembles the figure of Zipporah in one of Botticelli’s Sistine Chapel frescoes, he delights in those moments where she most resembles the painted figure, beginning to prize them above other aspects of her appearance and personality:

He looked at her; a fragment of the fresco appeared in her face and in her body and from then on he would always try to find it in her again [...] he felt happy that his pleasure in seeing Odette could be justified by his own aesthetic culture. (*TWBS* 227)

As with the correct methods of appraising a painting or statue, Proust shares Swann’s evaluative techniques with us:

He no longer appraised Odette’s face according to the finer or poorer quality of her cheeks and the purely flesh-coloured softness he supposed he must find when he touched them with his lips [...] but as a skein of subtle and beautiful lines that his eyes reeled off, following the curve of their winding, joining the cadence of her nape to the effusion of her hair and the flexion of her eyelids, as in a portrait of her in which her type became intelligible and clear. (*TWBS* 227)

The timbre of the language here is that of a museum professional: Odette’s face is ‘appraised’ while her features are ‘reeled off’ until ‘her type [becomes] intelligible and clear.’ There are echoes here of the relationship between Gilbert Osmond and Isabel

Archer in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* — both Swann and Osmond evaluate the young women they desire in ways that speak more of the auction house than the bedchamber.¹⁹

Furthermore, Odette's resemblance to her painted counterpart becomes almost more important to Swann than her presence in reality, and certainly plays the dominant role in his attraction to her:

while the purely fleshly view he had had of this woman, by perpetually renewing his doubts about the quality of her face, her body, her whole beauty, had weakened his love, these doubts were vanquished, that love confirmed when he had instead, for a foundation, the principles of an unquestionable aesthetic; while the kiss and the possession that would seem natural and ordinary if they had been granted to him by damaged flesh, if they came to crown the adoration of a museum piece, appeared to him necessarily supernatural and delicious. (*TWBS* 227)

Swann's aversion to 'the purely fleshly' aspects of Odette's person strikes us as unfortunate, to say the least, and his reliance on 'the principles of an unquestionable aesthetic' to persuade him that her 'damaged flesh' is instead worthy of the 'adoration' only granted to 'museum piece[s]' is indicative that his aesthetic tastes have become over-developed, dominating his emotional responses to not only things but people. Proust's use of religious language — 'adoration' and 'supernatural' — reinforces the sense that, for Swann, aesthetic judgments rule over all. When thinking of Odette, it becomes clear that her personhood falters and declines in its importance to him:

he said to himself that it was reasonable to give a good deal of his time to an inestimable masterpiece, cast for once in a different and particularly savoury

¹⁹ See page 109 of this study.

material, in a most rare exemplar that he contemplated sometimes with the humility, spirituality and disinterestedness of an artist, and sometimes with the pride, egotism and sensuality of a collector. (*TWBS* 227)

She becomes ‘an inestimable masterpiece’; mentions of her ‘damaged flesh’ have disappeared as she is ‘cast [...] in a different and particularly savoury material’. For the non-aesthete there is little truly savoury about this tendency, but Proust makes clear that, at this point in his life at least, Swann’s ‘pride, egotism and sensuality’ — those facets of his personality that Proust posits as the marks of a collector — have triumphed over his more commendable qualities. While his initial responses to Odette are reminiscent of Gilbert Osmond in James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*, there is more than a touch of *The Golden Bowl*’s Adam Verver in this particular passage. Compare Proust’s description of Odette as being an ‘inestimable masterpiece, cast for once in a different and particularly savoury material’ to James’s

the perfect felicity of the statue; the blurred, absent eyes, the smoothed, elegant, nameless head, the impersonal flit of a creature lost in an alien age and passing as an image in worn relief round and round a precious vase (*TGB* 139)

The similarities are striking; it is clear that both authors were interested in the idea that over-exposure to artworks was detrimental to the conduct of proper relationships between people. There are, for Proust and James alike, inevitable consequences when a character surrenders to this particular form of idolatry. As with Leopold Bloom and the statue of Aphrodite upon which he gazes with desirous eyes in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Odette’s resemblance to Botticelli’s painted figure begins to dominate her erotic life with Swann; he is unable to see beyond her resemblance to the painting, becoming reliant on its evocation to feel truly attracted to her:

once again he would see before him a face worthy of appearing in Botticelli's *Life of Moses*, he would place her in it, he would give Odette's neck the necessary inclination; and when he had well and truly painted her in distemper, in the fifteenth century, on the wall of the Sistine Chapel, the idea that she had nevertheless remained here, by the piano, in the present moment, ready to be [...] possessed, the idea of her materiality and her life would intoxicate him with such force that [...] his jaw tensed as though to devour her, he would swoop down upon that Botticelli virgin and begin pinching her cheeks. (*TWBS* 241)

Townsend has described Swann as having a 'need to see Odette as a Botticelli', such is his reliance on the comparison for the maintaining of his attraction to her, and in the above passage Proust details, with a pathologist's lingering attentiveness, each stage of this 'need' as it is enacted in the collector's mind (2005, 57). We see Swann take on some of the characteristics of an artist himself, mediating the reality of her presence through his existing storehouse of visual information: he 'place[s]' her in the painting, removing her from the actual surroundings in which they interact, until she seems to be absorbed into the 'wall of the Sistine Chapel', as the original painting is. Only then, once she is 'ready to be [...] possessed', does she become suitably desirable for him to make the move into an active amorousness. There is something distinctly predatory about his instincts — 'his jaw tensed as though to devour her' — with undertones of a violence barely held in check, and by the end of this transformative process, Odette has disappeared, becoming 'that Botticelli virgin' in Swann's mind. Proust's depiction of Swann's collecting as it impacts his erotic life is comparable to the effect of a certain statue on Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*.²⁰ Both men, although differing greatly in their respective stores of cultural capital, find themselves unable to fully relate to the women

²⁰ See page 154 of this study.

in their lives, as the artworks which they prize as representing an unattainable beauty overwhelm their senses and come to act as models against which they measure their actual lovers, with inevitable disappointment. Swann exceeds Bloom in the intensity of his jealousy, and the depth of his near-addiction to art. His ‘partiality for collections’ leads, in time, to a worrying difficulty in apprehending material reality:

The particular tendency he had always had to look for analogies between living people and portraits in museums was still active but in a more constant and general way; it was society as a whole, now that he was detached from it, which presented itself to him as a series of pictures. (*TWBS* 325-326)

As the Narrator describes, Swann’s habit of finding artistic resemblances for the people he meets becomes a ‘constant’ of his mental life. As he courts Odette — a relationship fraught with indeterminacy and jealousy — he begins to identify himself with painted subjects, in a manner not entirely reassuring:

Swann felt very close in his heart to Mohammed II, whose portrait by Bellini he liked so much, who, realizing that he had fallen madly in love with one of his wives, stabbed her in order, as his Venetian biographer ingenuously says, to recover his independence of mind. (*TWBS* 357)

Proust holds up Swann as a model for collecting gone wrong; his love for art has irremediably affected the ways in which he interacts, conceives of, and behaves towards other people. With Swann, we are rather far from the healing powers of the museum that Proust had previously outlined in *Chardin and Rembrandt*. Clearly, then, the question of how to properly interpret art and its lessons is one of utmost importance. Swann’s mistakes are delineated in such excruciating fashion so as to serve a salutary purpose for the reader.

Swann's attempts to recast Odette as Botticelli's Zipporah meet with resistance. She is not a woman who relinquishes her identity easily, much to her husband's quiet despair. As they grow older, Swann's attempts to fix her in place as she was when they first met become increasingly desperate, as the balance of power between the couple shifts:

In Swann's own bedroom, instead of the grand photographs taken nowadays of his wife [...] he kept a modest little old daguerreotype dating from the days before [...] no doubt he clung, or had reverted, to a different conception of her, doting for ever on the Botticellian graces of a slender young woman with pensive eyes and a forlorn look, caught in a posture between stride and stillness. The fact was he could still see her as a Botticelli. Odette herself, who always tried to conceal things she did not like about her own person [...] had no time for Botticelli. Swann owned a wonderful Oriental stole, in blue and pink, which he had bought because it was exactly the one worn by the Virgin in the *Magnificat*. Mme Swann would not wear it. (*ITSOYGIF* 193-194)

This passage reveals the depths of Swann's inability to maintain the vitality of his relationship with his wife — he clings to an image (as with the Narrator's grandmother, Swann seems even to prefer an outdated form within which to gaze at the images of his past, the daguerreotype) of his wife as she no longer is: 'the Botticellian graces of a slender young woman with pensive eyes and a forlorn look, caught in a posture between stride and stillness.' Swann's reverence of this vanished aspect of his wife's existence mirrors Susan Sontag's declaration that 'photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal' (9). Despite the passing of time, it is still her past resemblance to Botticelli's female figures that commands his attraction and devotion; Odette herself, as the Narrator tells us, 'enjoyed better health, looked calmer, cooler,

more relaxed' than she had in the past (*ITSOYGIF* 193). Yet this increase in vitality is precisely what drives them apart; Swann prefers his image of her as a young woman 'with [...] a forlorn look' to her headstrong, mature self. Odette refuses to allow herself to be caught in his fantasies — she may be transfixed 'between stride and stillness' in the daguerreotype which he keeps, but in reality, she has begun to assert control over not only how she moves and dresses, but in how she should be seen and interpreted by others. Swann's attempts to dress her in the 'wonderful Oriental stole', wrapped up in which she would evoke the Maddona figure in Botticelli's *Magnificat*, are met with steadfast refusal: 'Mme Swann would not wear it.' Swann's choice of this particular painting is laden with meaning: Botticelli's work depicts the Virgin Mary in the act of writing out the 'Magnificat', a 'canticle of praise' used in Catholic ritual (Olson 187). Here Proust again mixes the imagery of the religious with the aesthetic; Swann's adoration of Odette's perceived resemblance to the work is thus given the force of religious worship. She has become his idol — but only when she agrees to let him arrange her appearance so that the desired effect is achieved. We might also note the form of Botticelli's work: the holy Mother and child are literally encircled (the 'Magnificat' is a *tondo* painting, i.e. contained within a literally circular form). She represents the ideal mother, devoted to the raising of her child, and is thus pure in motive and action. Odette, we discover, is a different kind of woman. She refuses to be encircled within the domestic sphere, evading Swann's efforts at containment. The original painting hangs in the Uffizzi in Florence, with a copy in the Louvre — these alone, we are left to feel, will provide Swann with the solace he seeks (See Figure 12). His hold over Odette has crumbled as she moves out of the canvas and into the world.

Proust's interest in collecting and its effects on the personality and psychology of individuals are not limited to his depiction of Swann. Odette provides a counterpoint to

her husband's methodology, tastes, and motivations. She proves to be adept at self-fashioning, placing great importance on not only her furnishings and objets d'art but also her clothing for her social advancement — her refusal to wear the 'Oriental stole' bought for her by Swann providing an instance of her assertiveness. As with Edith Wharton's Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence*²¹ (published, incidentally, a year after Proust's second volume appeared, suggesting at least some degree of overlap between the authors in their treatment of this subject), Odette's chief means of distinguishing herself from other women in the eyes of her suitors is her taste, which she revels in displaying through not only the purchasing of luxury goods but also the careful arranging (and wearing) thereof. As Anne Anderson has noted, the idea of feminine taste was subjected to harsh criticism in the late 19th century, often 'deemed to be uninformed and verging on the vulgar.' (43). With obscure origins, Odette's ability to climb the social ladder is predicated not only on her beauty, but her knowledge of how best to integrate her attractiveness within a wider, cohesive display of charm. She has always been astute regarding the power of dress. Her (chronologically) earliest appearance in the novel, as a subject in a painting of Elstir's, in which she is depicted wearing male clothes and posed in a sexualised manner, suggests that she has long relied on the ability to reorient and reposition herself according to the desires of others (*ITSOYGIF* 439). This talent is further demonstrated in her role as sometime-mistress to the Narrator's elderly great uncle. While her name is unknown to the youthful Narrator at the time of their first meeting, he is left with an unmistakeable sense of her attractiveness: in the child's mind she is the 'lady in pink', and will be known as such until he becomes aware, much later, of her other identities (*TWBS* 78).

²¹ See page 73 of this study.

When Swann first begins to court her, she utilises the interior of her otherwise quite undistinguished home to radiate a sense of herself: entering the house, he is confronted with ‘immense palm trees contained in china flowerpot-holders [...] screens festooned with photographs, bows of ribbon and fans.’ (*TWBS* 223). Stefan Muthesius has described the prevailing orthodoxy of interior design until the 1890s as expressing the belief that ‘The more décor, the better.’ (107). This philosophy is borne out in the decorative scheme of the home of Odette’s great rival, Mme Verdurin, with its ‘collection of foot-warmers, cushions, clocks, screens, barometers and urns’ (*TWBS* 208). Odette’s ‘immense palm-trees’ also seem to fit this description, but she proves herself to be more than just an acquirer of things for their own sake. As Proust goes on to show, she has a purpose in mind when decorating her home, and strives to realise it:

the valet came bringing one after another the many lamps [...] enclosed in Chinese vases [...] she [...] watched the servant severely from the corner of her eye to see whether he was setting them down properly in their consecrated places. She thought that, if even one were put where it should not be, the overall effect of her drawing-room would be ruined, and her portrait, placed on a sloping stand draped in plush, poorly lit. And so she fervently followed the movements of the ungainly man [...] (*TWBS* 223-224)

In yet another instance of Proust commingling the language of religion with that of aesthetics, the correct placing of a lamp takes on the importance of the setting of the altar: each of the objects must be placed ‘properly in their consecrated places.’ Odette is conscious of the entire interior as forming a tableau upon which to enact her identity: ‘the overall effect of her drawing-room’ depends on the interplay of several elements to produce a fitting backdrop to her romances. Above all, the painted representation of herself, chosen to be the centrepiece, must never be allowed to become ‘poorly lit.’ This

attention to detail bears out Muthesius's belief that '[t]he way in which [...] smaller objects could be arranged was [...] more important than their meaning or value'; seen this way, every material article in the room becomes part of an interlinked whole upon which the total effect of the space depends (119). For many women in the late 19th century, barred from expressing their opinions about the arts through public means such as essay writing, such methods of domestic curation constituted a chance to give material form to their tastes. Proust's treatment of Odette shows him to have been alert to the ways in which 'women engaged in meaning making, identity formation, and commemoration through their [...] manipulation of material artifacts.' (Goggin and Tobin 1). In this way, what Cynthia Sundberg Wall has described as 'the intensely personal and private possibilities for self-description and self-creation in the choice and care and arrangement of things' is not limited in Proust's fiction to the sphere of elite collectors alone (4). As with Mrs. Gereth in Henry James's *The Spoils of Poynton*, Odette is remarkably sensitive to the effects of décor on her sense of wellbeing, declaring with a hint of affectation that 'I couldn't live among unfriendly things, you see, ugly-pretentious sorts of things.' (*ITSOYGIF* 192).²² She quite literally embodies her taste, dressing with the utmost care:

One could sense that, for her, dressing was not just a matter of comfort or adornment of the body: whatever she wore encompassed her like the delicate and etherealized epitome of a civilization. (*ITSOYGIF* 196)

With this in mind, we can see her refusal to dress up as a replica of Botticelli's Madonna as an important statement of independence: Swann's taste, derived from the time he has

²² See page 100 of this study.

spent in the museums of Europe, is thus refuted by his wife in favour of one derived from her own preferences and interests.

Proust's interest in the importance of interior decoration extends beyond the sphere of gender politics. As early as *Jean Santeuil*, he evinces a desire to investigate the potential of objects to act as secular reliquaries within which the history, not only of individuals, but of entire historical epochs, can be stored, awaiting interpretation:

A house was merely another form of dress which the individual moulded to his own shape [...] Furniture was a sort of tangible history in which, side by side, the individual, the profession which he exercised, the social class to which he belonged, were, as it might be, frozen, and perpetuated. It was the expression of its owner's dreams, and spread about him its accumulated memories. (*JS* 176)

In such places, Proust suggests, 'every wallpaper, every picture, every comfit-box might have something to tell' (*JS* 178). Museums are directly evoked as a model for understanding those domestic spaces which are given over almost entirely to the preservation of previous styles:

Madame Desroche's house [...] was like [...] a museum for the use of those who are unfamiliar with museums, or so thoroughly familiar with them, that only private collections have anything new to show them. (*JS* 178)

We can imagine the cautious step of the visitor to such a house: treading anxiously through the 'tangible history' of the place in search of somewhere to sit without fear of destroying some precious object or other.

Proust also gestures in *Jean Santeuil* towards the ways in which historicity was being prized and held up for admiration across different sectors of culture in the late 19th century. At the Marquis de Réveillon's house 'objects which formerly were loved for

their own sakes, are enjoyed by a later generation as symbols of the past' in a kind of 'imaginative caprice [...] modern [...] in a very special sense' (*JS* 702). By singling out the 'imaginative caprice' of later generations with regards to the objects of the past as being somehow 'modern [...] in a very special sense', Proust suggests that late 19th century methods of understanding the past and its material legacy differ from those of previous generations. This 'aestheticized past', as Christine Boyer has termed it, was on show everywhere in Paris during Proust's lifetime, from its civic architecture to the great Expositions which transformed large swathes of Paris into faux-medieval streetscapes (136).²³ By purchasing, as we see Odette do, works of art and furnishings which draw on this craze for the past, 'the extension of the museum into the bourgeois salon' was enacted by those with enough money to replicate the effect of museum interiors (Watson 23). Where, Proust asks, does such acquisitiveness end? The purchasing power of the Verdurins, for whom 'it was enough to know that the setting sun was here in their drawing-room or their dining-room, like a magnificent painting, or a precious Japanese enamel', seems to extend endlessly outwards (*SAG* 303). Their need to root themselves in history has its origins in this acquisitive power; renting the Cambremers' country home, La Raspaliere, provides them with a base from which to plant themselves into the world of the aristocracy and the history of the region:

M. de Cambremer [...] may, however, have felt disoriented, for Mme. Verdurin had brought in any amount of fine old things that she owned. From which point of view, Mme Verdurin, though regarded by the Cambremers as having turned everything upside down, was not a revolutionary but intelligently conservative, in a sense which they could not understand. (*SAG* 314-315)

²³ See page 32 of this study.

By occupying the Cambremers' home, the Verdurins alter its relation to the history of the owner's family, bringing its decorative scheme back into line with the age of the place, thus changing it 'in a sense which they could not understand.' In his writing, from *Jean Santeuil* to *À la recherche*, Proust would attempt to delineate a methodology through which a relationship with the past could be mediated, while outlining the negative effects of clinging to history in a misguided way. Attempting to map the historical onto the present day, when executed improperly, leads to an unmooring of one's grip on present reality, as when, in *Jean Santeuil*, the Marquis de Réveillon dwells on the sight of his guests

silently seated in chairs of a bygone fashion [...] it sometimes seemed to him that this was indeed the life of the past, life as it once had been, life now restored to him, though at other times these playful quirks of life seemed no more than funeral games[.] (*JS* 704)

Far from unifying the present with the past in their intended fashion, Réveillon's guests become participants in 'funeral games' by which the dead weight of history threatens to settle over the present day. Proust intensifies his focus on the relationship between the aristocracy and their history in *À la recherche*, identifying them as suffering acutely from an inability to separate themselves from the past, a plight which binds them together. The Comtesse d'Arjapon, for instance, attempts to invite the Narrator to visit her chateau in a way which proves perhaps more revealing than she intends:

The archives [...] would be of interest to you. There is some absolutely fascinating correspondence between all the most prominent figures in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I spend many very happy hours there, living in the past [.] (*TGW* 487)

Furthermore, the Prince de Guermantes, who represents the pinnacle of society, is described by his cousin the Duchesse de Guermantes as a ‘living gravestone’ who should be allowed to ‘stay in his medieval world.’ (*TGW* 523).

The Guermantes family, from whom we are introduced to members spanning several generations, provide the Narrator with much of the material for his ruminations upon the subject of history and its relationship to the present. So ensconced are they in their particular imagining of the function of history that, while discussing family news

important historical event[s] appeared only in passing, masked, distorted, curtailed, in the name of a property, in the first names of a woman, chosen for her because she was the granddaughter of Louis-Philippe and Marie-Amélie, considered no longer as King and Queen [...] but only in their capacity as grandparents for bequeathing a heritage. (*TGW* 537)

Proust here points towards the dangers of proximity: despite being related to the major figures of French and European history, the Guermantes have allowed their venerated status to become the primary lens through which they view the world: they are, Proust suggests, no closer to a real understanding of history than anyone else. Rather, it is ‘masked, distorted, curtailed’ by their endless conversations. Two members of the family, the Baron de Charlus and his nephew Robert Saint-Loup, provide contrasting models by which we can see how the family’s adherence to vanished historical codes of conduct impacts the lives of those in the present day. The Baron is Proust’s most memorable creation — a demented, hideously manipulative man who is nevertheless capable of great charm and delicacy, his personality has been indelibly shaped by his status as a Guermantes, and he represents the culmination of a character type previously outlined by J. K. Huysmans in *À rebours*:

the men who gathered round the whist table revealed themselves as fossilized nonentities; these descendants of valiant knights of yore, these scions of feudal families seemed [...] a group of asthmatic, finicky old men, endlessly repeating the same pointless remarks, the same age-old phrases. (6)

Obsessed with questions of precedence and genealogy, he considers only ‘a certain number of preponderant families’ to be worthy of respect or attention; in a memorably deranged speech, he claims that the French throne may once have been passed to his family, citing historical precedents which are laughably obscure (*SAG* 482). There is a serious side to his speculative attempts at historiography — for Charlus, history provides him with an invaluable source of social capital, and this attempt at rewriting the historical record demonstrates the lengths he will go in order to preserve his place within his wished-for continuum of historical progress which diverges sharply from reality. When the Narrator encounters him in Paris during the First World War, Charlus denies the idea that the conflict has changed societal understandings of history: ‘the war-philosophers have added their weight to the idea that all links with the past have been broken’, he scoffs (*FTA* 94). For the Baron, it is impossible to break ‘all links with the past’ so long as men and women of his status are still alive — in his understanding, their existence constitutes the only grounds for historical continuity. As described by Malcolm Bowie, Charlus sees himself as ‘a walking archive, a historical record in human form’ (164). He subsequently declares that the idea of the Austrian Emperor being led into supporting ‘Wilhelm of Hohenzollern [...] is not the least of the many shocking anomalies of this war.’ (*FTA* 94). By reducing the then-largest conflict in humanity’s history to a question of dynastic precedence, Charlus’ mania is revealed to its fullest extent. His attitude to history conforms to that which Nietzsche decried as leading to ‘life becom[ing] stunted and degenerate’ (59).

The Baron represents an extreme figuration of the curious state of the aristocracy during Proust's lifetime. The political relevancy of the titled classes had dwindled significantly by the time that Proust was a young man, and gradually those that David Higgs describes as 'still [clinging] to Old Regime genealogical concerns' became more concerned with throwing parties than effecting political change (28). Concerning themselves with 'the eternal badinage of the drawing-room' rather than the affairs of state, the French aristocracy remained socially dominant but politically irrelevant, with only a few exceptions (*FTA* 142). Proust explores the impact of this socio-political upheaval by tracing its effects on the personal and social lives of his characters in such a way that his writing continually highlights the effects of 'the shackles of history, class and personal obsession.' (Azérad 65). He explores the existence of tensions between different echelons of the aristocracy; those who owe their titles to the Bonaparte dynasty are looked down upon by the apparently more ancient families — witness Saint-Loup's unseemly 'contempt for the nobility created by the Empire.' (*TGW* 76). This breach between representatives of the different eras of French history extends even into the realm of the decorative arts, as when the Duchesse de Guermantes' professed admiration for certain examples of furniture made in the Empire style is branded as shocking by those who hear it (*TGW* 518-519). As a young woman, while conversing with a General, she had knowingly dismissed the importance of the material traces of recent history, using the language of taste to demarcate the historical boundaries which she clearly felt to exist between herself as a Guermantes and the claims of contemporary history:

they must have that famous mosaic table that was used for the signing of the Treaty of... [said the General] 'Oh, I'm not saying they don't have things that are interesting from a historical point of view. But things like that can't ever be beautiful...because they're simply horrible! I've got things like that myself that

Basin inherited from the Montesquious. Only they're in the attics of Guermantes where no one can see them. (*TWBS* 341)

We cannot help but imagine that 'the attics of Guermantes' constitute an endless space which contains material traces of every epoch in French history, with only those objects deemed sufficiently important by the family themselves being allowed to stand in the light of day. Charlus' rewriting of the historical record is, it appears, something of a family trait, the essential function of which is to endlessly consolidate their accrued prestige while denying the irruptions of modernity.

Charlus' nephew, Robert Saint-Loup, seems to offer another model of aristocratic behaviour. Proust's depiction of the dashing young cavalryman is shot through, as Matt Matsuda has observed, with the influence of contemporary scientific theories regarding genetic memory (8-10). As the youngest member of the Guermantes family, Saint-Loup treats his aristocratic heritage as more of a hindrance than a help — declaring genealogies to be 'boring out-of-date nonsense' — seemingly rejecting his family's adherence to an outmoded vision of society which prizes the supposed purity of one's blood over all other concerns (*ITSOYGIF* 336). Yet, as we have seen in his contempt for members of the nobility who are only able to trace their elevated status to the years of the Empire, this rejection of his family legacy is only partial. Saint-Loup clings to notions of honour and chivalry which ultimately lead to his death in the First World War, a casualty of the first truly modern conflict, his feudal grandeur trampled into the mud. In addition to this symbolic demise, he serves a greater purpose in the novel — it is Saint-Loup, along with Albertine, upon whom the Narrator will most strenuously enact his own form of collector's covetousness.

III.

A mutual torture: Proust's Narrator as collector

Although he denies the influence of Swann, and 'the collector's life which [he] urged on me', it is clear from an early stage in the narrative that the Narrator's consciousness has been shaped by an instinct to collect and preserve the traces of the people he has known (SAG 358). In the case of his relationship with Albertine, this instinct spills over into his conduct towards her, resulting in those sinister attempts to control her every move which ultimately impel her to flee his presence. It is through the detailed analysis of this mode of collecting, predicated around the desire to somehow capture the personhood of those he professes to love, by which we can see the full extent of Proust's thinking about the possible consequences of importing museal tendencies into one's own mentality. Swann is identified by the Narrator as a practitioner of this mode of thinking, which is, we are encouraged to believe, a natural offshoot of his other collecting interests:

I noticed that his choice among his former acquaintances was influenced by the same semi-artistic, semi-historical sense which informed his taste as a collector. When I realized that the reason why he was particularly fond of this or that great lady who had come down in the world was that she had been Lizst's mistress, or that Balzac had dedicated a novel to her grandmother, just as he would buy a drawing if it was mentioned in Chateaubriand [it became apparent that] the pleasure Swann derived from his social contacts was not just the straightforward kind enjoyed by the cultivated man with an artistic bent who restricts himself to society as it is constituted [...] He also took a rather vulgar enjoyment in making as it were composite posies out of disparate elements, bringing together people from very different backgrounds. (*ITSOYGIF* 95-96)

As an arranger of his acquaintances, Swann applies the logic and rationale of collecting to the people that he meets and circulates with in society. The Narrator, who spends many afternoons in the Swann household at an impressionable age, clearly falls under the influence of the older man. Even before he had become intimate with the family, and could only wonder at Swann's daughter from afar, he expresses his belief in 'the sort of gaze that [...] would like to touch the body it is looking at, capture it, take it away and the soul along with it', indicating that the urge to 'capture' and thereby possess people as though they were objects has long been latent within his personality (*TWBS* 142). It is as a teenager, on his first visit to the seaside resort of Balbec, that this urge becomes activated by his encounters with Saint-Loup and Albertine, the twin objects of his affection and interest. The speed with which the Narrator's consciousness seeks to place Saint-Loup within a different frame than that in which he is actually encountered bears testimony to the primacy of the collecting instinct within his mind when exposed to a suitably desirable object:

He strode right through the hotel, seeming to be in pursuit of his monocle, which fluttered in front of him like a butterfly [...] the sea, which filled the lower half of the plate-glass in the vestibule, was a background against which his whole figure stood out, as in those portraits in which the painter [...] chooses to put his model in an apt setting [...] making a modern equivalent of the old masters' canvasses in which a human figure stands in the foreground of a landscape. (*ITSOYGIF* 309)

The natural world becomes merely the 'background against which' Saint-Loup can be framed by the Narrator's desiring mind; seeking a respectable provenance for this action, he compares the operation of his aestheticizing instinct to that of the old masters. Within the course of their first few meetings, Saint-Loup's true subjectivity is reduced, or

transformed, by the Narrator, who sees in his new friend's body and behaviour, evidence of his belonging to a specific genus:

there were [...] moments when my mind could detect in Saint-Loup a creature of wider generality than himself, the 'nobleman' [...] at such times [...] He had become an object for my thoughts to toy with in an idle moment. (*ITSOYGIF* 316)

A change in register is evident here; the 'nobleman' is no longer the subject of a comparison to the subject of a painting, but has become 'a creature' in the Narrator's reckoning, until finally he is reduced to 'an object for my thoughts to toy with'.

Signalling to the metatextual element of Saint-Loup's depiction, wherein the young aristocrat has become, in this fictive remembrance, just one element among many of which the Narrator's life story has been constructed, Proust draws our attention to the worrying levels of abstraction at which the Narrator's mind works when conceiving of certain other individuals. Much later in their friendship, after Saint-Loup, in a physical feat which commands the respect of all who witness it, hurdles several electric cables in order to bring the Narrator a coat to warm himself with, his movements are described as being 'intelligible and charming as those of horsemen on a marble frieze.' (*TGW* 412).

Although intended as a compliment — the young Frenchman assuming the aspect of some great figure of antiquity — it is notable that the Narrator still feels compelled to represent Saint-Loup with the language of objecthood. This tendency to conceive of people along typological lines is extended not only to Saint-Loup, but encompasses other individuals of particular interest to the Narrator. His family's servant, Françoise, is prized by him for her supposed authenticity (derived from her background as a member of the rural peasantry), especially those which he detects in her patterns of speech:

Like the glass cases of a local museum with their exhibits of curious handiwork, still crafted [...] by peasant-women of certain parts of the country, our Paris flat was decorated with Françoise's words [...] (*TGW* 61)

Françoise is thus treated as an object of curiosity; the peculiarities of her speech laid out for examination by the Narrator like the 'curious handiwork' made by her compatriots in rural France — there is a similarity here to the opening chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which the Englishman Haines seeks to catalogue the language of the peasant woman who attempts to sell him milk.²⁴ Nor is this the only instance of the Narrator expressing an interest in the modalities of speech as being worthy of collecting and examining. He describes the conversation of the Marquis de Norpois as providing

a complete catalogue of outmoded speech-forms belonging to the style of a particular career, class and period — a period which, for that career and class, may not have quite ended yet [...] I sometimes regret not having simply written down statements which I heard him utter. (*ITSOYGIF* 11)

Similarly, the Duchesse de Guermantes' manner of speaking is described as 'a real oral museum of French history.' (*TP* 28). The malleability of Proust's conception of museums is present in these descriptive passages; the Narrator's flat becomes a museum space thanks to its playing host to his servant's enunciations, while it is the speech itself of both Norpois and the Duchesse that takes on the museal role, becoming, in Proust's formulation, 'oral' museums. Drawing on the existence of a pervasive museum function in French culture, he is able to adopt the idea of the museum for his own metaphorical purposes, confident that readers will grant him sufficient licence to do so despite the disparate ways in which it is utilised as a figurative device. This flexibility is present

²⁴ See page 141 of this study.

again in the concluding set-piece of *À la recherche*, in which the Narrator attends a masked ball at the Prince de Guermantes' home. Figures from his past have been transformed into monsters by the passing of time, rendered almost unrecognisable in their old age. He describes the alienation that results from attempting to identify the people he meets in a way that reverses the expected metaphorical function of the image he summons: 'I had a sense that I was looking through the plate glass of a natural history museum display at an example of what the speediest and surest insect may turn into' — in this context, the 'plate glass' of the 'museum display' does not aid his attempts to interpret what he is seeing, but rather acts as a barrier between viewer and viewed (*FTA* 231). Similarly to Henry James's *The Sense of the Past*, we see the metaphor of 'plate glass' acting as an obscurant, one which belies its transparency to add a further layer of distance between characters.²⁵ In this particular ideation, Proust and James turn the viewing technologies of the period on their head in terms of effectiveness — looking at other people is never neutral, they suggest, and those practices of visuality which museums depend upon are in fact equally capable of estranging people from one another as they are at making their (rightful) exhibits intelligible.

As the Narrator's interest in these unique patterns of speech crosses the boundaries of class — it is hard to think of a more unequal pair, socially speaking, than Françoise and the Duchesse — we can see that his fascination with this particular aspect of expression is tied to its supposedly historical qualities. Only, he suggests, in the living speech of certain people are the voices of the past kept alive. The Duchesse not only embodies her family's history, but she enunciates it as well, with every sound she utters

²⁵ See page 120 of this study.

having its counterpart in the historical record. Her husband, too, is described as possessing

a command of memories which gave his conversation the fine feel of an ancient mansion, lacking in real masterpieces but still full of authentic pictures, of middling interest and imposing, giving an overall impression of grandeur. (*TGW* 536)

The Guermantes unconsciously draw on ‘the facets and deposits of a family history’ every time they speak; their accent and mannerisms combine to reveal the depth of their historical embeddedness, thus drawing the attention of the Narrator and his urge to collect noteworthy specimens (*Piette* 110-111). The Duchesse, of course, has long been fetishized by the narrator along similar lines: as a child, we are told,

when I thought of Mme de Guermantes [I pictured] her to myself in the colours of a tapestry or a stained-glass window, in another century, of a material different from that of other living people. (*TWBS* 175)

Her presence in the Narrator’s consciousness is thus always linked with an awareness of the historical dimension which both surrounds her and seems to emanate from her very person.

The woman towards whom the Narrator will dedicate the most mental energy in his attempts to contain, Albertine Simonet, has none of the Duchesse’s historical glamour, yet inspires the Narrator’s most obsessive behaviour. Proust uses Albertine’s presence in the novel as a means to explore the damaging aspects of a mind given over to collecting; the story of Swann and Odette having served as a direct precursor from which, we are left to feel, the Narrator has not learned the required lessons. As with Swann before him, the Narrator desires to arrest the movements of his beloved — the daguerreotype of a younger Odette which Swann treasures is tellingly described as

depicting her ‘caught in a posture between stride and stillness’, directly anticipating the state of suspended motion into which the Narrator continually seeks to place Albertine (*ITSOYGIF* 193). Meeting her for the first time in Balbec, during the same holiday in which he first encounters Saint-Loup, the Narrator first spies her from afar, walking and cycling with her group of friends, the defining characteristic of whom is their constant movement:

the girls I had seen, with the confidence of gesture that comes from the perfect mastery of a supple body [...] strode straight on, without hesitation or stiffness, making exactly the movements they wished to make, each of their limbs in complete independence from all the others, while most of their body retained the poise which is so remarkable in good waltzers. (*ITSOYGIF* 370)

It is the bold ‘independence’ of their movements which first attracts the Narrator’s eye; these young women epitomise the spirit of youthful mobility, seemingly carefree and resolutely themselves, with a confidence derived from ‘the perfect mastery’ of their bodies. As will later happen with his description of Saint-Loup’s actions in the hurdling of the cables, the Narrator seemingly cannot help but immediately attempt to demobilise them in his mind. Applying his imagination to the sight of the girls, they become ‘statues in the sun along a shore in Greece.’ (*ITSOYGIF* 371). It is only after he is able to aestheticize them in this fashion that the girls become ‘individualized’; from an eccentrically moving mass, they become differentiated and identifiable by their individual features (*ITSOYGIF* 374). Later, having become acquainted with them, he still thinks in terms primarily dictated by this need to objectify the girls, expressed in a manner directly reminiscent of Swann’s thoughts about Odette during their courtship:

I could only stand amazed at the range of different sculptures produced, as in a wonderful workshop, by the French middle classes — so many unexpected patterns [...] such freshness and simplicity in the features! (*ITSOYGIF* 424)

Here we see just how vital a function this aestheticizing urge performs in the narrator's mind; it is crucial to how he interprets and responds to the actions of others. This is a tendency, which as we have seen, is applied to numerous other characters in the text, but it is Albertine upon whom the Narrator will exercise his collector's instincts most forcefully. For Antoine Compagnon, she serves a pivotal function in the novel: 'Proust doesn't really come into his own until he invents Albertine; from that moment on he rids the novel of its fin-de-siècle characters.' (13). While it is debatable whether or not Proust truly 'rids' *À la recherche* of its 'fin-de-siècle characters' after Albertine's insertion — the Baron de Charlus' increasing prominence in the narrative might suggest otherwise, for a start — it is clear, from a structural level upwards, that Albertine's character is one of central importance for the working through of Proust's theories regarding jealousy, memory, and possession, which were given their first exploratory treatment in the examination of Swann and Odette's relationship. Both the Narrator's attempts at confining Albertine to their shared living quarters, and his extended exploration of the mechanics of grief after her death, form the majority of the latter half of *À la recherche*. He is both fascinated and infuriated at the mobility which remains her defining characteristic — going so far as to imagine that she is capable of inhabiting multiple selves: 'each of these Albertines was unlike the others' (*ITSOYGIF* 523). This idea proves to be rather more deleterious than placatory in its effects upon the Narrator's mind and behaviour:

It may be because the personalities I perceived in her at that time were so various that I later took to turning into a different person, depending on which Albertine

was in my mind: I became a jealous man, an indifferent man, a voluptuary, a melancholic, a madman [...] (*ITSOYGIF* 523)

Thus we see the multiplicity of Albertine's selfhood become refracted through that of the Narrator — he feels his own personality begin to split asunder when faced with these multiple presences, remarking that 'I should really give a separate name for each of the selves in me which was to harbour a future thought of Albertine' (*ITSOYGIF* 524). In order to halt this process, it becomes essential that Albertine herself be brought to bear and contained somehow. He is unable, otherwise, to deal with the threat that she poses to his notions of himself.

After leaving Balbec, the Narrator takes up residence again in Paris, and begins to pursue other women. On being reintroduced to Albertine, he finds her as intriguing as ever: 'I was always surprised when I caught sight of her; she changed so much from day to day.' (*TGW* 350). Reflecting on the consequences of this meeting, which lays the ground for their destructive future, he reaches again for the lexicon of the collector in order to express his feelings:

it is more reasonable to devote one's life to women than to postage stamps, old snuff-boxes, or even to paintings and statues [...] The charming associations between a young girl and the sea-shore or the braided hair of a church statue, an old print or anything that makes one love her, become rather unstable the moment she steps into the room like a delightful picture. (*TGW* 350)

This passage delineates exactly the nature of the Narrator's trouble with Albertine: her presence, in actuality, is disruptive to his sense of reality. The 'associations' by means of which she can be placed within a wider schematic of experience are forever at risk of becoming 'unstable the moment she steps into the room'. Her inconsistency, that habit of

changing ‘from day to day’, renders his classificatory instincts as useless. Adding to this crisis is his inability to think of her (and the other women he desires) in terms other than those of objecthood:

I need only voice my regret that I did not have the sense simply to keep my collection of women as someone might keep a collection of antique opera-glasses, never so complete, behind the glass of their cabinet, that there is not always room for another pair, rarer still. (*TGW* 351)

In this respect he follows the example of Swann, who, even when dying, valorises the act of collecting as a source of meaning and consolation:

I’ve loved life and have loved the arts. Well, now that I’m a bit too tired to live with other people, these old feelings that I’ve had, so personal to myself, seem very precious to me, which is the obsession of every collector. I open up my heart to myself like a sort of showcase, and I look one by one at so many loves that other people won’t have known. (*SAG* 107)

There are similarities here with Henry James’s Mrs. Gereth in *The Spoils of Poynton*, both characters having decided to prioritise the world of objects over that of personhood, due to the great disappointments in their respective personal lives.²⁶ Mrs. Gereth’s son and daughter-in-law are, she believes, unfit to inherit her carefully-assembled collection, while Swann’s relationship with his wife has never lived up to the romantic ideal of his younger years — an ideal, as we have seen, which rested on his need to perceive Odette through the lens of his aesthetic sensibility. In each instance, of course, this decision proves to have unfortunate consequences, and yet Proust, like James before him, grants Swann’s plight a measure of pathos through this confessional moment. The collections

²⁶ See page 100 of this study.

and knowledge that he has acquired throughout his life act as a consolatory force in the face of his imminent death and prior regrets. By having Swann enunciate these feelings using the terminology of collecting itself, Proust indicates the extent to which Swann conceives of his selfhood as revolving around this act : ‘I open up my heart to myself like a sort of showcase’ he tells us. Swann’s ‘heart’ — the receptacle of his emotions and most treasured memories — has become itself a display space, a ‘showcase’ even, within which he can restore some semblance of order to his life. As with the Duchesse de Guermantes’ manner of speaking, in which her speech patterns function as an audible reminder of the historicity with which her person is endowed, Proust’s metaphorical distension of the concept of the museum is used in this instance to suggest a deep, if not unbreakable, affinity between the collector and that which is collected. Although we feel sympathy for Swann, he is perhaps not the best role model, and yet the Narrator seems intent on following in his footsteps with his desire to transfix the perennially-active Albertine.

There are times when Swann’s influence is openly admitted by the Narrator, not least of which, when pondering on the apparent control which the older man is able to exert over his wife through merely saying her name in a certain way, is the ominous anticipatory pleasure with which he observes the married pair’s interactions:

As I pronounced Albertine’s name, I thought of how I had envied Swann when he had said, on the day of the Princesse de Guermantes’s party, ‘You must come and see Odette,’ and I had thought what strength there was in a name which only the eyes of the whole world and in Odette’s own eyes had only in the mouth of Swann this sense of absolute possession. Such control — summed up in a single word — over the whole of a human existence must be [...] delightful [...]’ (TP 87)

This musing over the means by which ‘control’ might be exerted ‘over the whole of a human existence’, thereby leading to ‘absolute possession’ of that other person, provides clear inspiration for the Narrator’s conduct in the ensuing pages. The use of ‘delightful’ to describe this hoped-for state is chillingly effective in conveying the strange glee with which the Narrator plunges himself and Albertine into ‘a kind of mutual torture.’ (*TP* 96). He desires nothing less than to effect ‘Albertine’s removal from the world’, thereby becoming the only person with whom she comes into contact (*TP* 340). Their relationship is defined by what Jean Baudrillard has called ‘the awful pleasures of jealousy’ — Albertine’s essential quality, her desire to move and to always be moving, makes her truly unsuitable for the treatment to which the Narrator subjects her, and this tension provokes his behaviour to become more and more extreme (18). Her attempts to exercise some degree of subjectivity are met with either fury or alarm, and in one pathetic instance, she is revealed to have been working on her own small collection, a development which only serves to illustrate the gulf between the (ostensible) lovers:

[Albertine had] begun a collection of pretty pieces [of silverware] which she arranged charmingly in a glass case, and which I could not look at without feelings of pity and fear, for the art with which she arranged them showed that combination of patience, ingenuity, homesickness and the need to forget which we see in the art of prisoners. (*TP* 340-341)

Describing the items she values as ‘pretty pieces’ is a clear attempt to relegate the importance of not only the silverware but Albertine’s taste; her sensibilities are thus subsumed by the Narrator’s, who benefits from an extensive education in the fine arts. We can interpret the ‘glass case’ within which she ‘charmingly’ arranges this small selection of objects as directly mirroring her own situation, as the Narrator clearly does: with a guilty conscience, he interprets her actions as typifying that of beleaguered

captives rather than as an expression of personal interest, thereby further depriving her of agency. This guilt, of course, is not enough to modify his behaviour. Albertine remains bound to his will until their final break.

There is something disingenuous, then, about the Narrator's disavowal of any similarities between himself and Swann:

Albertine was not at all a work of art for me. I knew what it was to admire a woman from an artistic point of view — I had known Swann. But for my own part I was incapable of seeing any woman, whoever she might be, in this way, having no spirit whatsoever of observation, never knowing what it was I was looking at, and I was full of wonderment when Swann retrospectively bestowed artistic dignity — by comparing her for me, as he liked to do as a compliment to herself, to some portrait by Luini, or finding in her costume the dress or the jewels of a Giorgione — upon a woman who had seemed to me unremarkable. I had no such inclination. Indeed, to tell the truth, when I began to see Albertine as an angel-musician, a wonderfully patinated statue, a prized possession, I soon became indifferent to her [...] There must be something inaccessible in what we love, something to pursue; we love only what we do not possess, and soon I began once more to realize that I did not possess Albertine. (*TP* 354-355)

This is, of course, just one of many frustratingly contradictory statements which we encounter in the novel — we have seen the Narrator's extensive powers of observation at work, yet here they are denied, and we have seen, too, how quick he is to compare Albertine and her friends to statues. His attempted denial of the collector's instinct as a motivating force in his own life is therefore unconvincing, and remains only a partial abrogation of that which has gone before.

Ultimately, of course, Albertine escapes the Narrator's clutches, moving ever onwards until she falls out of the narrative itself, with a death that is announced in perfunctory fashion. Even in death, however, she refuses to stay still. While she lived, he had been cognizant of the fact that 'each of these Albertines was unlike the others', and this realisation is carried over in to his grief (*ITSOYGIF* 523). Albertine proves the ultimate challenge to any fixed notions of memory, as each single memory of her differs from any other, thus pointing the way towards a concept of memory which is imbued with a vitality of its own; it is not only the more famous sensory stimuli which lead to the outlining of involuntary memory as the only correct mnemonic method to follow, but also the incompatibility of existing memorial structures to accommodate the true nature of remembered subjects like Albertine. Collecting one's memories in such a way as not to render them static and deadening thus becomes a task of the utmost moment. If, as the Narrator claims, '[t]he problem with people is that for us they are no more than prints in our mental museum, which fade on exposure', then we must adjust the ways in which this 'mental museum' is planned, constructed, and utilised (*TF* 522). In the final volume of *À la recherche*, the Narrator peruses the Prince de Guermantes' collection of artworks, in a form of active appreciation into which he pours his own thoughts about the ways in which such spaces can lead to the preservation of an individual's memory:

Even to the Elstirs which I saw here hung in positions which were an indication of his fame, I was able to add very old memories of the Verdurins, the Cottards, the conversation in the Rivebelle restaurant, the reception at which I had met Albertine, and numerous other things. In the same way a connoisseur of art, shown one wing of an altarpiece, remembers in which church, what museums, what private collections, the others are dispersed [...] he is able to reconstitute the predella, and the entire altar, in his head. (*FTA* 282)

In this passage we see the outlines of the means by which that ‘Museum of Memory’ — teasingly mentioned by Proust in the letter to Robert de Montesquiou with which we began this chapter — might operate. Contemplating Elstir’s paintings, the Narrator is able to add a personal context to them, drawn from the ‘rich network of memories’ that has been built up across the course of the text as a whole. In doing so, Proust tells us, he acts like ‘a connoisseur of art’ within whose memory the entire context for individual works are capable of being stored and reconstructed in order to add a greater depth for the understanding and interpretation of the works in question. Proust’s great innovation is to aestheticise memory in this fashion; individual moments become linked to one another in order to construct a meaningful narrative of past experience which can be interpreted by the judicious viewer, and it is an innovation which owes a clear debt to the author’s copious visits to the museums of 19th century Europe, which provided him, as we have seen, with the conceptual vocabulary within which he frames his discussions not only of aesthetics but of memory and historicity.

There is one more scene in *À la recherche* which must be addressed in any discussions of Proust and museums: the death of Bergotte, the novelist. In May 1921, Proust had made the trip to the Jeu de Paume gallery in order to see an exhibition of Dutch painting, including Vermeer’s *View of Delft*, a painting he had long idolised as ‘the most beautiful painting in the world’ (Tadié 744-745). Bergotte makes the same journey, although with an unfortunate end:

This is how he died: after a mild uremic attack he had been ordered to rest. But a critic having written that in Vermeer’s *View of Delft* (lent by the museum at the Hague for an exhibition of Dutch painting), a painting he adored and thought he knew perfectly, a little patch of yellow wall (which he could not remember) was so well painted that it was, if one looked at in isolation, like a precious work of

Chinese art, of an entirely self-sufficient beauty, Bergotte ate a few potatoes and went out to the exhibition. As he climbed the first set of steps, his head began to spin. He passed several paintings and had an impression of the sterility and uselessness of such an artificial form, and how inferior it was to the outdoor breezes and sunlight of a palazzo in Venice, or even an ordinary house at the seaside. Finally he stood in front of the Vermeer, which he remembered as having been more brilliant, more different from everything else he knew, but in which, thanks to the critic's article, he now noticed for the first time little figures in blue, the pinkness of the sand, and finally the precious substance of the tiny area of wall. His head spun faster: he fixed his gaze, as a child does on a yellow butterfly he wants to catch, on the precious little patch of wall. 'That is how I should have written, he said to himself. My last books are too dry, I should have applied several layers of colour, made my sentences precious in themselves, like that little patch of yellow wall. He knew how serious his dizziness was. In a heavenly scales he could see, weighing down one of the pans, his own life, while the other contained the little patch of wall so beautifully painted in yellow. He could feel that he had rashly given the first for the second. 'I would really rather not, he thought, be the human interest item in this exhibition for the evening papers.' He was repeating to himself, 'Little patch of yellow wall with a canopy, little patch of yellow wall.' While saying this he collapsed on to a circular sofa; then suddenly, he stopped thinking that his life was in danger and said to himself, 'It's just indigestion: those potatoes were undercooked.' He had a further stroke, rolled off the sofa on to the ground as the visitors and guards came running up. He was dead. Dead for ever? Who can say? [...] They buried him, but all the night before his funeral, in the lighted bookshop windows, his books, set out in threes, kept watch like angels with outspread wings

and seemed, for him who was no more, the symbol of his resurrection. (*TP* 169-170)

There are similarities here to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, in which the aesthete Aschenbach joyously greets his own death, prompted as it is by an aesthetic revelation 'rich with unutterable expectation.' (267). Bergotte's death, however, is tinged with tragedy: the writer's conviction that his own artistic practice is somehow less rich, less fulfilled in its totality than a 'little patch of yellow wall' painted with such skill by the Dutch artist, is truly despairing (see Figure 13). For Bergotte, this trip to the museum offers nothing less than a salutary reminder of his own perceived failings; by working in a linguistic medium, it is suggested, he has no hope of emulating Vermeer's expressiveness and capacity to pack meaning into even the smallest space. Although Proust hints at some measure of an afterlife — the books, arranged in the bookshops of Paris like 'angels with outspread wings', promise to carry on the novelist's legacy for an indeterminate span — it is clear that Bergotte's writing has failed on some fundamental level by not possessing that 'entirely self-sufficient beauty' which is to be found in Vermeer's work. This episode acts as an ironic reversal of the attitude towards painting and aesthetics which we have seen in the early essay *Chardin and Rembrandt*; Proust enacts a shift from the soteriological to the eschatological. There is to be no salvation in the museum for Bergotte, only a tantalising glimpse of a form of aesthetic achievement which lies quite out of his grasp. This, then, is how we can understand the measure and complexity of Proust's engagement with the idea of the museum, which as this chapter has shown, was a relationship defined by fluidity — in Proust's work, museums act simultaneously in a variety of ways. He draws readily on them for his stock of metaphors, but in a manner which itself is prone to shifting around — as in his descriptions of the ways in which the Duchesse and Françoise speak — while also

advocating for their importance as spaces for aesthetic revelation. Furthermore, the 'Museum of Memory', in which memories are transfigured into aesthetic objects to be positioned and interpreted, provides a model for reading his great novel. For Proust, more perhaps than for either Henry James or James Joyce, museums are of central importance for the carrying out of his own aesthetic schemes. That Proust's great novel was included by Pierre Nora in his monumental *Realms of Memory* series, alongside such other national sites as the Pantheon and Versailles, indicates the seriousness with which his aesthetic legacy has been regarded in France since his death, as his work is now understood to represent and express a mode of remembering which can be expanded outwards from the page (Compagnon 1997, 246). For Jean-François Lyotard, museums and exhibition spaces are imbued with a deep temporal importance, which we can read as occurring in Proust's work: according to Lyotard, the 'whole space of exhibition becomes the remains of a time; all the places, here, indices for other, past, times' (145). Proust's novel functions as exactly this kind of textual space; each moment the Narrator recalls is not only linked to others, but becomes their symbol and means of representation; inside his 'Museum of Memory', Proust's Narrator acts forever as curator, guide, and visitor. It is our great privilege to be allowed inside.



Figure 12: Botticelli's 'Magnificat'



Figure 13: Vermeer's 'View of Delft'

Conclusion

Writing a study of the cultural impact of museums in Europe and North America is, in the year 2019 at least, a superficially easy task. Museums are everywhere in what has become an increasingly connected and globalised world — the great European institutions, such as the Louvre, with which the authors I selected for study were familiar, have become truly transnational organisations, not only loaning entire collections overseas but also opening up ancillary sites and engaging in large-scale transmedia projects, with the aid of huge sponsorship deals. As Griselda Pollock has noted, museums today are increasingly ‘bonded into the circuits of capital between entertainment, tourism, heritage, commercial sponsorship and investment.’ (Pollock 2007, 10). The museum function of the 21st century in the Western world (and beyond) is almost inescapable. Pollock’s notion of ‘an extended museum setting that leaks beyond the confines of the gallery and academic art history’ into manifold other areas of culture and consumption is clearly visible from canvas shopping bags imprinted with museum logos to multimillion-dollar film franchises such as the *Night at the Museum* series (2007, 9). It is tempting to see today’s museum landscape as presenting the endpoint of the involvement of millionaires such as Henry James’s Adam Verver in *The Golden Bowl*, published at the beginning of the 20th century towards the end of the first major wave of museum building in the West. Every major museum today will have a donor’s name bolted onto a wall, a corridor, or even a wing. Verver’s purchasing of vast quantities of art and historical material, presented in *The Golden Bowl* as being piratical in its rapacity, make him a clear predecessor of today’s museum funders, who have picked up where their Gilded Age antecedents left off. Major exhibitions now come surrounded by ‘the paraphernalia of sponsorship’ which such funding demands (Waterfield 176). This state of affairs is not without its problems. At the time of writing,

July 2019, the Louvre has recently taken the step of removing all trace of a significant sponsors' name from one of their wings due to unsavoury and damaging allegations that the family in question has profited from the mass sale of opioid drugs.²⁷ The redeeming potentiality of art that found such a vociferous evangelist in the young Marcel Proust clearly has some limits, as museums are forced to impose different conditions on the bearers of potential offerings.

The question of access to museums and their collections has also taken on new contours in this digital age. Increasing numbers of precious and culturally significant objects can be viewed online in exceptional detail thanks to digitisation — leading to what can only be described as the fulfilment of André Malraux's 'Museum without Walls' in hypertrophied form. In the physical realm, there are more museum visitors to more museums than ever. That undemocratic element of the museum experience which led to James Joyce's parodying of such spaces has, in an optimistic reading of attendance figures, been resolved.²⁸ It is hard now to imagine Leopold Bloom having the necessary solitude to perform his frequent erotically-tinged genuflections to the statue of Aphrodite, without being elbowed or jostled by a crowd of other visitors to the same gallery — which is not to say that Joyce could not have found an alternative source of humour and pathos in such an episode. It is true, however, that the conditions of access to museums and their collections has irrevocably changed in the intervening almost-century between *Ulysses* and its impending centenary. Buck Mulligan would have to possess a high degree of skill in navigating large crowds in order to spy on Bloom if this incident were played out in Dublin's National Museum today.

²⁷ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jul/17/louvre-removes-sackler-name-from-museum-wing-amid-protests>.

²⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-46748282> — according to this article, 10 million people visited the Louvre in 2018, while the British Museum saw 5.9 million people through their doors. Two Chinese museums were also in the top ten.

Turning back to the prehistory of this current museum age might allow us to find instructive similarities between previous generations of museum visitors, as expressed and recorded in literature, and our own particular place in the historical record as relating to the ideological expectations placed upon museums. An interest in what might be termed the second-order workings of museums is clearly evident in the literary work of Henry James, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust. While Joyce's work demonstrates the most pronounced scepticism about such spaces, James and Proust also display a marked complexity in their responses to not only the real museums which they visited in their lives, but also the very idea of such institutions. James's positioning, in his autobiography, of a nightmare which takes place in the galleries of the Louvre as being of pivotal importance to his intellectual development, and Proust's vituperative stance regarding the immorality (in his terms) of creating museums from cathedrals, are perhaps the two most obvious examples of this complexity.²⁹ In the work of all three authors there is an evident interest in the consequences of display and the expansion of material culture, phenomena spurred on in part by the rise of the museum in the 19th century. The objects of their critique are frequently objects themselves, as in *The Golden Bowl* and *The Spoils of Poynton* in which the titular things threaten to overwhelm the world of human relations, Joyce's linguistic burlesques inspired by the faux relics housed in the 'Willingdone Museyroom', and the collections of Charles Swann, imbued by their owner with layers of emotional meaning, the reverberations of which can be felt across the pages of Proust's epic. Douglas Mao's belief that 'the object world represented something like the last terrain of the utopian (or prelapsarian)' for modernist authors is hardly borne out by the variety of ways in which James and Joyce make use of the material realm to demonstrate their wider convictions about the impropriety of

²⁹ See pages 89-90 and 195-196 of this study.

investing the material world with too great a significance (Mao 9). There is, too, a shared interest in the consequences of the kind of viewership which became possible after exposure to the museal environment. Leopold Bloom finds himself more attracted to a statue than to real women, Proust's narrator begins increasingly to regard his loved ones as objects rather than people, and many of James's characters scrutinise each other in terms more aligned with the viewing of artwork than the field of interpersonal relations. It would be inaccurate to say that the effect of museums and the modes of spectatorship which they embody and encourage is depicted as being entirely negative in the texts that I have discussed, but there is nevertheless a shared sense across all three authors' work that individuals are liable to be changed in some way when exposed to the museum environment.

Furthermore, each of the authors I have studied demonstrates sustained engagement with discourses of historicity and memory, both public and private — most obviously in the case of Proust, but also present in the work of Joyce and James. The status of museums as embodying twinned 'rhetorics of instruction and memorialization' acts as a referent for each of these authors to develop their own ideas regarding both individual and societal relationships with the past (Luke xxiii). For Joyce, the past must never be allowed to overshadow the present and its multiple potentialities, a conviction given its most memorable elucidation in his satiric demolition of the Duke of Wellington's museum and monument. For James, the question of present/past relations is one fraught with the possibility of alienation and misunderstanding. Ralph Pendrel's time-travel in *The Sense of the Past* only results in further personal uncertainty and an unconquerable sense of historical distance acting as a barrier between past and present. In Proust's novel, we are told that the past is accessible (with significant caveats), while a sense of disillusionment hangs over most of the text's discussion of the ties between

history and the present. The personal ‘Museum of Memory’ which his Narrator constructs can thus be read as a direct response to the deficiencies of established modes of mnemonic and historical understanding which were present in the world around him. Each of these authors’ engagement with the wider museum function of their societies can be seen as directly inspiring a desire to present corrective measures and alternative understandings of such spaces in their fiction. Other writers, too, shared in interest in the workings of museums. As Rebecca Beasley has discussed, Ezra Pound’s critical and creative work demonstrate ‘diverse reactions to the challenge of contemporary art’ and its supporting institutions during the early decades of the 20th century (206). In my introductory chapter I discussed several earlier authors from a variety of national contexts who incorporated museums into their writing, as evidence of museums’ burgeoning presence in the cultural sphere as the 19th century progressed. I believe, however, that this thesis represents the first sustained attempt to trace the influence of museums on the work of Henry James, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust in such a way that highlights the linkages between these authors. In doing so I have, of necessity, responded to the width and breadth of the museum function as it can be understood to have operated within each of these author’s societal and personal contexts. This has resulted, I believe, in the presentation of these canonical authors and their texts in new ways. Within this study we have encountered James the living portrait, Proust the would-be curator and, most surprisingly of all, Joyce the contrarian cataloguer.

Moving forward in time to the later decades of the 20th century, right up to books published in the last ten years, I would like to end my thesis by exploring the possible influences and links between literary modernism’s treatment of museums and that of later authors. In doing so, I follow in the footsteps of a collection edited by David James in 2012, *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*,

which sought to present ‘a series of disciplinary interventions concerning how we compare apparently discrete phases of literary history with one another.’ (2). My task is somewhat easier than James’s contributors, who attempt ‘to reread the politics and aesthetics of later twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction by deliberately foregrounding the reciprocities between writers today and their modernist predecessors’, as I am able to focus on poems, novels, and works of nonfiction which explicitly deal with the museum function in the recent past, thus providing a clear thematic link at the very least with the authors previously discussed (5-6). In doing so, I follow Randall Stevenson’s argument in his contribution to the volume that it is possible to trace ‘the extension into the 1930s, and well beyond’ of several thematic concerns which find their most well-known and influential expression in modernist works (2012, 24).

Moving only slightly forward in time, then, we begin with the poetry of Louis MacNeice, who acts as a transitional figure into late modernism and beyond — he died in 1963, having published his first volume of poetry in 1929. MacNeice’s treatment of museums and galleries is split between a more straightforwardly ekphrastic approach to their contents, and poems which portray the museum spaces themselves. In ‘The National Gallery’, for example, he describes the ‘great Venetian Buttocks, the Dutch bosoms’ of the canvases on display, which present ‘a vital but changeless/world — a day-dream free from doubt.’ (258). A similar sensibility is present in ‘Picture Galleries’, in which the inhabitants of the paintings are described as inhabiting ‘a closed/World whose people live in frames’ (760). Another poem, simply titled ‘Museums’, gives us the more prosaic world of the 20th century museum visitor: ‘Museums offer us, running from among the buses,/A centrally heated refuge, parquet floors and sarcophaguses,/Into whose tall fake porches we hurry without a sound’, which in its concentration of seemingly opposed material objects, evokes the incongruity of the museum in late

modernity: the rhyme of ‘buses’ with ‘sarcophaguses’ yokes together the mundane urban world of everyday experience with the exotic contents of the museum’s halls (29). We are reminded, too, of the constructedness of such environments, suggested by the incisive description of ‘tall fake porches’ past which ‘we hurry without a sound’ — despite their ersatz nature, the faux-Greek or Gothic entrances to museums are, MacNeice suggests, invariably successful in their goal of projecting an air of hushed authority which must be obeyed upon entering. This success is made evident as the poem progresses:

Warmed and cajoled by the silence the cowed cypher revives,
 Mirrors himself in the cases of pots, paces himself by marble lives,
 Makes believe it was he that was the glory of Rome,
 Soft on his cheek the nimbus of other people’s martyrdom,
 And then returns to the street, his mind an arena where sprawls
 Any number of consumptive Keatses and dying Gauls. (29).

The visitor is gradually ‘cajoled’ into a reverence for the ‘pots’ and ‘marble lives’ which signify the ‘glory of Rome’, to such an extent that he begins to believe himself participating in it, vicariously related to the faded grandeur on display despite the temporal gulf between the modern world of ‘buses’ and ‘parquet floors’. MacNeice presents, in this instance, a museum experience which acts in restorative fashion; the very atmosphere — ‘the silence’ — of the museum is endowed with a transformative power.

MacNeice’s poetry finds echoes, both explicit and unremarked, in the work of later writers. David Lodge’s *The British Museum is Falling Down*, a novel which is suffused with references and homages to modernist stylistics, brings to life the

atmosphere of the British Museum's Reading Room before the relocation of its contents to the British Library, as does, in briefer fashion, MacNeice's 'The British Museum Reading Room', in which we encounter the 'Cranks, hacks, poverty-stricken scholars,/In pince-nez, period hats or romantic beards' for whom the space provides a haven of some sort: 'a world which is safe and silent' (172). Given that the poem was written in 1939, however, this respite is only temporary in the face of the imminent disaster about to befall not only London and the British Museum but most of the earth: 'Between the enormous Ionic fluted columns/There seeps from heavily jowled or hawk-like foreign faces/The guttural sorrow of the refugees.' (172). This final vividly threatening image which breaks the peace established in the poem's earlier lines demonstrates MacNeice's awareness that museums are always linked to wider sociopolitical concerns. As Sarah Longair and Jon McAleer declare in their edited volume *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience*, museums 'do not exist in a social, cultural or political vacuum. They cannot stand outside time or removed from historical processes.' (4).

Lodge's novel, first published in 1965, provides a comic counterpoint to MacNeice's sombreness, although displaying an impressive depth of knowledge regarding prior literary depictions of the British Museum's Reading Room; each chapter is given an epigraph drawn from a previous literary visitor, such as the second chapter's, taken from Ruskin: 'As I go to my work at the British Museum I see the faces of the people become daily more corrupt.' (17). In doing so, Lodge hints towards an ideation of the British Museum Reading Room as a lost *topos* of knowledge and research — not only does his protagonist's behaviour in the space lack the expected decorum of such prior weighty company, but the real-life move of collections away from the British Museum into custom-built accommodation at the British Library means that Lodge's novel has become a memorial of sorts to a now vanished space of great cultural import.

There is a persistent irony in this pairing of epigraphs drawn from august individuals with the actual contents of the novel: Adam Appleby, a hapless late-stage PhD candidate at an unnamed university in London, is desperately trying to bring his thesis to completion, which, despite his adoption of the British Museum Reading Room as his venue for work, is hampered by his continual lack of inspiration:

It seemed base, somehow, to come daily to this temple of learning, history, and artistic achievement in the same weary, mechanical spirit as the jaded clerk to his city office. But there it was: not even the British Museum was proof against the sedation of routine. (30)

Appleby's particular brand of ennui is heightened by his self-awareness of the fact that the institutional setting within which he finds himself seems to expect so much more of its members: 'this temple of learning, history, and artistic achievement' has become nothing more than a 'city office' within which the 'sedation of routine' has taken hold. The roll-call of past giants, whose words are perched paratextually at the start of each chapter, is reduced in Appleby's imagination to a list of 'the famous backsides who have polished those seats: Marx, Ruskin, Carlyle' (51). There is something Joycean about this emphasis on 'backsides' — this particular thought would not be out of place in the ruminations of both Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, and is much more akin to MacNeice's bathetic depiction of the museum as a space with 'parquet floors' than to the sensibility that we find, for instance, in the youthful essays of Proust. There are no oracles, let alone gods, in the 'temple' that Lodge describes.

Nor is Appleby particularly reverential in his thinking about the rest of the museum's holdings:

As always, he vowed that one day he would really go and look at the Elgin Marbles, which could be glimpsed to his left, but the vow carried no conviction. The previous

year, he and [a friend] had drawn up an elaborate plan for acquainting themselves with the whole Museum by inspecting one gallery a day in their lunch hour. If he remembered rightly, they had given up after looking at only Japanese armour and Egyptian vases. (30)

A charitable reader might interpret this failure to have visited ‘the whole Museum’ as a consequence of the British Museum’s vast size and munificence, although Lodge makes clear that it has rather more to do with Appleby’s particular failings. After a series of mishaps, Appleby meets a mysterious American, Bernie Schnitz, lurking in the Reading Room stores, who is eventually revealed to be something of a latter-day Adam Verver:

I had this great idea, a vision, you might call it. I was going to buy the British Museum and transport it stone by stone to Colorado, clean it up and resurrect it.
(154)

This fantastically crude image of ‘transport[ing]’ the entire British Museum (and contents) to Colorado indicates that the image of moneyed Americans preying on the Old World’s heritage retained its veracity into the 1960s, although it is pushed to absurdity by Lodge. Fortunately for Appleby, he is able to secure a post as a seeker of manuscripts for his American benefactor, and thus earn a comfortable living by acting as an agent for the removal of European cultural treasures — a Jamesian situation if ever there was one. While Lodge’s most obvious homages to his modernist predecessors is his adoption of their style for several segments of the novel — including a Kafkaesque attempt to renew Appleby’s reader’s ticket in which the process of securing access to the reader’s room becomes an exercise in labyrinthine bureaucratic procedure — as well as finishing the text with an overt pastiche of the final chapter of *Ulysses*, we can see in his ironic deployment of the British Museum’s literary heritage a comedic instinct which

draws on an irreverence towards such spaces and their assumed prestige which is unmistakably Joycean in origin.

To turn to a more recent text which is explicitly influenced by MacNeice's work — indeed, invites us to read it as an answer to the poem 'Museums' — we must jump from the 1960s to the much more recent past: Daljit Nagra's collection of poems *British Museum*, published in 2017. Nagra's heritage as a second-generation British Indian is reflected in his poetry, much of which addresses the issues of race relations and questions of national heritage as they relate to literature. In the provocatively-titled 'GET OFF MY POEM WHITEY', for example, he asks, sardonically, 'do you think I could think in the same old English/you keep to your standard my standard's bastarded' (38). He is capable, too, of more subtle forms of linguistic interrogation; by eliding the expected 'The' from the title of his collection, Nagra alerts us to his subversive intentions within the text. Removing the definite article from the name of the British Museum acts to open it up as a discursive space where the notion of exactly what it means to be 'British' can be debated and expanded indefinitely. From the outset, then, Nagra problematizes our expectations of fixity from such a space. The poem from which the collection takes its title, 'Meditations on the British Museum', begins with a quotation from MacNeice's 'Museums': 'Mirrors himself in the cases of pots, paces himself by marble lives,/Makes believe it was he that was the glory that was Rome...' (Nagra 49). This suggests that we ought to read Nagra's poem as an answering text while remaining attentive to the differences between the authors and their responses to the space of the museum. 'I stand dead centre at the treasure core of our crowning jewels,/our Great Court', Nagra begins, siting himself physically within the Great Court of the British Museum, one of the grandest such spaces in the world (49). As with Joyce before him, however, Nagra's intentions in the writing of this museum experience are

inflected with a humorous cynicism: in the very next line the museum is described as ‘a back street open-ended Bloomsbury bazaar’. As Gary R. Dyer has noted, the term ‘bazaar’ has a long history of being associated by Westerners with stereotypical Eastern exoticism and notions of forbidden behaviours and transactions (197). Employing the language of Orientalism to describe a metropolitan space — perhaps the definitive metropolitan space, the British Museum — Nagra upends our expectations, signalling that his interpretation of a day in the museum is going to differ significantly from that of MacNeice’s anonymous visitor (49).

Surveying the museum’s contents, Nagra presents us with an image of an omnivorous acquisitive urge which lies behind the neatness of the display cases: ‘Each allegorical/or tantric form shorn of its origin and tribal worship lauds/itself/before its mild god, the British Museum.’ (50). Formerly sacred objects have become themselves subjected to a greater power: the ‘mild god’ that is ‘the British Museum’, omnipotent and all-devouring in its need to gather up trophies from the different corners of the world. He makes plain, too, his interpretation of the British Museum as one of the last outposts of the imperial project:

A museum as nation,
 as a fragment of varnished Britannica: here are our classrooms
 from Bermuda to
 Burma; here’s Rhodes plotting red train lines to froth in steam
 a cheek of Africa;
 or here, the peoples in shell ornaments, chiefs, rajahs, mounties,
 every parrot and howdah’d elephant stooped before Victoria. (50).

Here we see a poetic manifestation of Thomas Schlereth's notion of a 'history *behind* the history museum'.³⁰ The British Museum is being itself read by Nagra as a site upon which a previous history of imperial conquest and rule was formerly centred, and is still visible when looked at in the properly interrogative manner: 'varnished Britannica' has by no means vanished within the walls of the British Museum but, instead, is buffed to a presentable sheen. Nagra's poetry successfully brings into focus and angrily probes the pall of forgetfulness and obscurantism that Corinna MacLeod has termed 'the safety of imperial amnesia' which hangs over many great European museums today (39). By doing so, he shows himself to be alert and in synchronisation with a wider trend of questioning the imperial roots of many of Britain and Europe's museums; as Anne Monjaret and Mélanie Roustan have discussed, the Palais de la Porte Dorée in Paris has a long and continuing history of provoking debate regarding the representation of empire and its consequences for present-day society. From its opening in the 1930s as a Musée permanent des Colonies, to changes of name and institutional purpose in the 1960s and 2000s, the Palais building itself now stands as a reminder of the continuing difficulties of Western societies in assessing and representing their past involvement in imperial exploitation (218-219). In London, at the British Museum and other venues, Alice Procter leads unofficial 'Uncomfortable Art tours' which highlight the unspoken histories behind many of the objects on display and their status as the loot from imperial warfare.³¹ We can see Nagra's poem as responding to these currents of disquiet and adding a vital creative voice to their efforts. Acknowledging that his work owes a debt to 'a canon of post-colonialists', he raises the potentiality of museums to respond to such questions, and to act as agents of change: 'Could the museum help inter our old ideas of

³⁰ See page 4 of this study.

³¹ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/23/museums-imperialist-pasts-uncomfortable-art-tours-slavery-colonialism>.

the outsider breeding amidst/within us terms/such as *infidel, insurgent, vigilance?*' (51, 52). In a final act of rebellion against the strictures of the museum's established messages, he gives the final words of the poem (and thus the collection as a whole) over to a list of names of the previous homes of the objects thus gathered under the museum's roof:

Let's praise

the unconquerable climate of our cultures who find a portion
of their own

safe in this fortress, in our sovereign values where Britain is
guardian

of the legacy to ensure monumental mankind stay immemorial.

We're at home, albeit lost, while roaming among our kind

in Cuerdale, Yarlung, Shang, Ashanti, Aulong, Kush, Ule, Thur. (53).

British Museum represents a considered but fierce blow against the continued hegemony of the West in terms of retaining the material culture of other civilisations, with the violence this implies, and is not Nagra's first statement of this sort. A previous collection, *Tippoo Sultan's Incredible White Man Eating Tiger Toy Machine!!!*, the title of which is taken from a famous mechanical object which was taken as war booty by the soldiers under the future Duke of Wellington's command at the Battle of Seringapatam (the automaton was designed for, and owned by, the same 'Tipoo Sultan' who refuses to be elided in Joyce's account of the 'Willingdone Museyroom', thus providing a link between the two authors). According to the website of the V & A, where it is now housed, it has become one of the museum's most famous objects:

The tiger, an almost life-sized wooden semi-automaton, mauls a European soldier lying on his back. Concealed inside the tiger's body, behind a hinged flap, is an organ which can be operated by turning the handle next to it. This simultaneously makes the man's arm lift up and down and produces noises intended to imitate his dying moans.³²

We can imagine that Joyce would have approved of the choice of object, representing as it does a determined resistance to the imposition of outside authority, and also Nagra's trickery in the final line of the poem which reads: 'rrrrraaaaaaaaaaajjj!!!', as the tiger's noises become blended with the name of the British regime, the Raj (Nagra 2011, 9). Additionally, 'rrrrraaaaaaaaaaajjj' increases in type size as it progresses across the page, visually mimicking the rising, terrible rage of the animal it depicts, a typographical variety of special effect that would look at home in the 'Willingdone Museyroom' section of *Finnegans Wake* (see Figure 14).

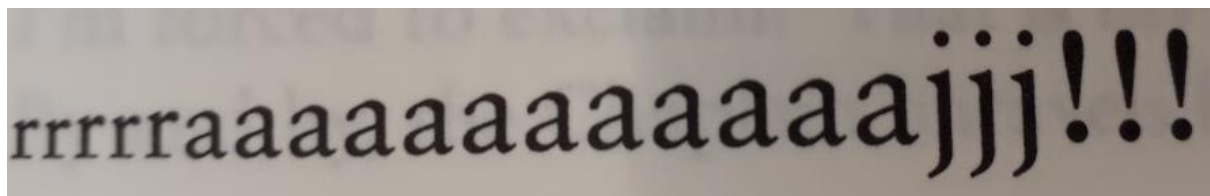


Figure 14: the sound of Tipu's Tiger

Thus far we have seen how an author working today — Nagra — can be read in dialogue with his predecessors in terms of presenting the politics of the museum and their effect on present day society's notions of otherness and cultural representation. Orhan Pamuk, a Nobel laureate in 2006, explores the more elegiac possibilities of such spaces in *The Museum of Innocence*, which deals with such themes as the possibility of salvaging personal loss through the act of collecting and the shoring up of memory with the

³²See: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/tipus-tiger>.

material remnants of personal experience. Strikingly, Pamuk founded a real-world counterpart to the fictive museum of his novel, which can be visited in Istanbul and contains exhibits which blur the boundaries between the fictional world his text describes and the world of lived experience.³³ Pamuk's novel, with its narrative of a young couple falling in and out of love before being separated by an untimely death, owes a clear debt to Proust's account of his narrator's fixation with Albertine, and his conception of the museum as a space within which memory can be fixed and made accessible again through the care of certain objects, is derived from his reading of Proust a debt acknowledged openly in the text:

Proust wrote of how the furnishings of his aunt's house were sold to a brothel after her death, and how every time he saw her chairs and tables in this place he felt as if every object was crying. When the Sunday crowds pour through museums, the collected objects cry. (719)

Pamuk's description of his protagonist's behaviour, who collects as many traces of his lost relationship as possible, down to the meanest of everyday objects, reads similarly to Proust's depiction of his narrator's fevered desire to control and understand Albertine:

I may not have "won" the woman I loved so obsessively, but it cheered me to have broken off a piece of her, however small. To speak of "breaking off" a piece of someone is of course to imply that the piece is part of the worshipped beloved's body. But [...] every object [...] in that house [...] had merged with my mental image of Füsün. (511-512)

³³ See the museum's English-language website here: <https://en.masumiyetmuzesi.org/page/the-museum-of-innocence>.

Travelling the world to visit more than a thousand museums before opening his own, Pamuk's protagonist begins to occupy a truly museal consciousness, one in which the past and its representation supersedes any present concerns:

During my last days in Paris [...] I went to the Musée Gustave Moreau, because Proust had held this painter in such high esteem. I couldn't bring myself to like Moreau's classical, mannered, historical paintings but I liked the museum. In his final years, the painter Moreau had set about changing the family house where he had spent most of his life into a place where his thousands of paintings might be displayed after his death, and this house in due course became a museum, which encompassed as well his large two-story atelier, right next to it. Once converted, the house became a house of memories, a "sentimental museum" in which every object shimmered with meaning. As I walked through empty rooms [...] I was seized by a passion that I might almost call religious. (681-682)

Pamuk's novel, and its accompanying museum, represent a delayed fulfilment of the idea of a 'Museum of Memory', floated tantalisingly by Proust in a letter of 1911.³⁴

Anna Stothard's *The Museum of Cathy*, published in 2016, also explores the phenomena of collecting as an emotional response to personal crisis. The novel begins with a preface taken from a later point in the narrative, as Stothard signposts the central relationship of the text between the eponymous Cathy and her former lover, Daniel, whose violence and controlling tendencies have led to her damaged psychological state. Moreover, in its presentation of a live bird trapped in the corridors of Berlin's Natural History Museum (where Cathy works, alongside her new partner), the preface signals the

³⁴ See page 178 of this thesis.

text's overarching concern with the conflict between the longing for fixity represented by the act of collecting and the need for individuals to be free of constraint:

An elephant skull and a swallow rested on the cabinet of moths, all specimens of natural history that didn't have a place in the museum downstairs. The bird was particularly beautiful, three inches tall, with an ochre neck tapering down into forked blue wings. It had glossy black eyes that Cathy could have sworn just blinked at her. A few corridors over, a gallery [...] contained thousands more stuffed birds so if this one was magically twitching back to life perhaps the matronly pelicans were also preening, the flamingos stretching their legs [...] and the two hundred hummingbirds rustling their feathers ready to seek revenge for the decades in which they'd been prodded and observed. Cathy smiled at the thought and then caught her breath when the swallow chirped twice, its feathered throat vibrating: it was not a specimen, after all. It looped down from the shelf and sailed past a cabinet of dragonflies [...] Cathy was not easily spooked. She would walk first into fairground haunted houses and swear on people's lives without blinking, yet as the swallow looked for an escape route her hands were shaking. Trapped birds, her mother would say, were a warning. (1).

What sounds like superstition is revealed to be true: Daniel has followed her, after being released from prison, and seeks to establish a relationship again, based on his continued dominance — even while locked up, he had been sending her small objects and mementos, secure in the knowledge that they would be added to Cathy's private collection:

Cathy's cabinet [had] drawers full of more than two hundred small memory-objects she'd been collecting since she was a child [...] The collection spanned all the

places she'd lived [...] She did not like the turmoil of memories constantly poised in her mind, synapses and chemicals shifting their weight according to new moods and often threatening to collapse or disband. She could exert control over her memories here, and close the door on them. (9).

Her choice of occupation is mirrored in her need to 'exert control over her memories' by collecting material reminders of past events and arranging them according to her own unique scheme. The collection was only begun in earnest after the death of Daniel's younger brother, an event which has gone unresolved for both Cathy and Daniel, with Cathy's need to master her material environment arising as a clear response to the tragedy:

After Jack died it was as if the fragments of sensory detail she'd experienced had been catalogued so illogically that the bits could not re-form coherently into a recollection. Shards of the day were in her mind's basement, shards in back rooms and north wings and south wings and storage cupboards, or with erroneous labels attached so she could not see the whole in any reliable formation. (142).

Cathy's dilemma is similar to that of Pamuk's protagonist and Proust's narrator as each of them attempt, through acts of collection (both real and literary), to preserve the past according to their liking, for fear of its fundamental instability:

What Cathy hated about memories was how they changed. You'd think that once something had happened, its dimensions would be solid [but the] story of our past is changed by the activity of seeing and recalling. Each time we remember an event it has the capacity to shimmer into something else. We remember the act of remembering. (159-160).

As with Pamuk and Proust, Stothard invests material objects with the power of evoking personal histories:

Seemingly inanimate things have more power than most people wanted to accept. They can consume you or liberate you. They can drag you down for the rest of your life or, if you let them, take on the burden of remembering. (28).

This concern with objecthood — the ‘power’ of ‘inanimate things’ — links Stothard to her literary predecessors: James, Proust, and Joyce, as we have seen, all evinced an interest in the ability (or otherwise, in Joyce’s case) of objects to serve mnemonic and testamentary purposes in the worlds of their fiction.

In this concluding section, I have attempted to show that certain thematic interests link the modernist authors discussed in my previous chapters to writers working throughout the 20th century and down to the present day. Where Orhan Pamuk follows a Proustian path in terms of advocating the possibility of resurrecting one’s memories through a process of selective communion, both Daljit Nagra and Anna Stothard are more studiously ambiguous in their treatment of collections and the motivations behind their accrual, while David Lodge follows Joyce in turning the museum into an arena for the playing of farces. This difference can be seen as further proof that the products of the intersection of museums and creative literature will continue to be as varied in the future as they have been in the past, and furthermore, that the influence of the authors I have studied will continue to make itself felt in unpredictable yet compelling ways. As we approach the centenary year of 2022, there will be a spate of exhibits and events to mark the anniversary of Proust’s death and the publication of *Ulysses*, occasions in which the relationship between their work and the museum will perhaps come full circle, a process already begun, of course, by the numerous heritage sites linked to their names already (in James’s case, as detailed earlier in this work, there has already been an exhibition exploring his relationship to the visual arts at several venues in the United States). It is tempting to imagine their reaction to such phenomena as following broadly along the

lines of Bob Dylan's wry observation on the curious state of objects preserved in museums: 'Inside the museums, Infinity goes up on trial/Voices echo this is what salvation must be like after a while' (223).



Figure 15: 'Infinity goes up on trial'

Bibliography

Below is a list of abbreviations used to make referencing in the body of the thesis more concise. Unless stated otherwise below, collections of letters have been referred to by citing the name of the Editor and date of collection when needed. In the case of Joyce and Proust's letters I felt there was scope for unnecessary confusion and these were hence abbreviated. Information about illustrations can be found in Appendix B.

Edith Wharton –

HOM: The House of Mirth

AOI: The Age of Innocence

Henry James –

ASBAO: A Small Boy and Others

TSOTP: The Sense of the Past

TGB: The Golden Bowl

TA: The American

TPOAL: The Portrait of a Lady

TSOP: The Sense of the Past

CTW: Collected Travel Writings: Britain and America

TAOT: The Art of Travel: Scenes and Journeys in America, England, France and Italy from the Travel Writings of Henry James

TAOTN: The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces

WMK: What Maisie Knew.

James Joyce –

FW: Finnegans Wake

APOTA: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

OCPW: Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing

LOJJ: Letters of James Joyce

LOJJ II: Letters of James Joyce Volume II

LOJJ III: Letters of James Joyce Volume III

Marcel Proust –

TWBS: The Way by Swann's

ITSOYGIF: In the Shadow of Young Girls in Bloom

TGW: The Guermantes Way

SAG: Sodom and Gomorrah

TP: The Prisoner

TF: The Fugitive

FTA: Finding Time Again

SL: Selected Letters, 1880 - 1903

SL II: Selected Letters, Volume 2: 1904-1909.

SL III: Selected Letters, Volume 3: 1910-1917

SL IV: Selected Letters, Volume 4: 1918-1922

CSS: The Complete Short Stories Of Marcel Proust

ORR: On Reading Ruskin

JS: Jean Santeuil

SMW: Marcel Proust: A Selection from his Miscellaneous Writings

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Appendix A: Interview with Dr. Declan Kiely

This is a direct transcription from an audio file of an interview I conducted over the phone with Dr. Declan Kiely on June 13th, 2017. Dr. Kiely was the co-curator of the Morgan Library's exhibit 'Henry James and American Painting', which I reference in my second chapter. 'B' in the transcript denotes my questions while 'K' denotes his answers. The punctuation represents my attempts to make what was a 30-minute conversational phone call into a more readily-readable document, and to this end I have left out the preliminary greetings and the farewells.

B: Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today. To keep it simple and to keep it quick for you, I have five questions about the exhibition, if that's ok? Firstly I want to ask about the timing of the exhibition – it's been about a year since the centenary of James's death, is that why you've chosen to do it at this point, or is there something else?

K: Yes, originally when Colm Toibín and I began to talk about doing a James exhibition, we had thought that the year 2016 would be a fitting time to do it, but our schedule here at the Morgan didn't work out that way. We plan our shows two or three years in advance here, sometimes longer, and the way it worked out was I had a couple of exhibitions in 2015 on Lincoln and Hemingway, and because the Lincoln was a sort of somewhat late decision, that *had* to go in '15, the big anniversary of his death and the end of the Civil War and so on. That had a knock-on effect on our calendar. Hemingway got moved around because I think doing those two shows in '15 and James in '16 just wasn't feasible. So it's somewhat accidental that it's a year later but we had originally timed it for '16, although the more we considered it, and the kind of exhibition it is, it doesn't really need to be tied to an anniversary.

B: Of course – thank you for that. Moving on to 'the kind of exhibition it is', as you've just mentioned, does it attempt to deal with James's career as a whole, or are there certain periods

of his writing that you've chosen to prioritise – 'late' phase over 'early' or the 'medium' phase of his travel writing for example?

K: I suppose really it deals with most of his career in as much as, I mean, pictorially, in terms of portraiture, we have portraits of him as a young man – the earliest one is the John La Farge portrait – and then we've portraits, drawings and photographs right up to 1913, culminating in the great Sargent portrait of him. So in terms of depictions of James, it covers most of his working life. And in terms of the art that we're including, it includes work from William Morris Hunt and his generation right through to Sargent and Whistler. In terms of the rationale of the exhibition, Colm [Toibín] thinks that every novelist, and every writer, has another art form which nourishes them and that for James it was painting and sculpture, and the argument is that anyone who reads James can see how much James has used the gallery space and paintings and the figure of the artist, and the ways in which he used artists in his work. But also, James as a novelist took something from painting, which is an idea of a 'framed image' of, say, in his novels, an important scene or a dramatic moment or the way, say, a character's face betrays emotion or reflects a certain sensibility, and so James seems to have really liked and enjoyed using the gaze and the glance, and also the way in which people use their posture to play out these moments of recognition is very important to James. And so an exhibition which highlights the connections between James and American painting is, we think, a way of showing what sort of novelist James is – showing James through the pictorial rather than the legible as it were. So what we've done is highlight the work of certain painters (and one sculptor) who he thought about, because he interacted with them at different periods in his life, and therefore he ended up using in his fiction in several ways. What we're hoping is that visitors to the exhibition will come away with a greater and more intense appreciation of James as a novelist, and also we'd like them to see artworks that James either saw or wrote about and to imagine it as though through his own gaze. That's really what we tried to do. It's

somewhat unusual in that the types of exhibition that I've done in the past have featured predominantly very historical manuscripts whereas this is more like 80 percent artwork and only about 20 or 30 percent manuscript material, so we've got several James letters, none of which, funnily enough, are from the Morgan's collections – we have about a hundred or so here but we do have some important manuscripts and those are on view. That's the approach we've taken about the exhibition – it's not really a 'paintings' exhibition outright but it's not really a 'literary' exhibition either – it's both. We're hoping that'll be a satisfying combination: to have James's manuscripts and to point out connections between the life and the work, in terms of actual people that James knew.

B: Just to pick up on that last theme, of people that James knew, given that J. P. Morgan maybe influenced the depiction of American collectors in some of James's works, is that mentioned in the exhibition at all?

K: Yeah, at the beginning actually, one of the first things visitors see when they come into the hall is the guest-book from Morgan's library, that was kept by his librarian until 1948 and was maintained by successive directors until 1996. If you look at the entry on page four of January 1911, you can see that on the 18th of January, Henry James came to visit. I don't know that James came to see Pierpont Morgan, but I know that he came to see his library. We have no idea what he looked at! James was, of course, quite familiar with Pierpont Morgan's father, and often went to see his art collection, so there are these curious interconnections between them and I wouldn't say it's any more momentous than that. But it's good for visitors to see, and to think 'ah, look, James was here' – and now here is again, albeit in a portrait of him. It's a sort of coming home in a sense, to New York City, and that's the point we make at the outset – tracing James back to his birth in New York and spending time here at a pretty formative age, and of course he ended up calling his collected works 'The New York Edition'. In the audio guide, we use that to start talking about the New York Edition. So

we're tying James to a place and to a time and to artists and their work, and trying to be evocative as much as anything else.

B: To move focus slightly, if I can ask, how was it working with Colm Toibín as a co-curator? Is there something unique that having a literary perspective on things gives to running an exhibition? Did it make you consider things differently?

K: Certainly. I've co-curated exhibitions before but they've always been with curators, so, you know, we're on the same page in that sense and we know how exhibitions work. In this case, Colm had curated an exhibition before, so this is his second exhibition and so I took care of all the practical side of things, in terms of the installation and in terms of writing the loan letters. We selected the materials together, so we spent a lot of time in my office brainstorming, really. He would come in from time to time over the last few years. We really started talking about the exhibition seriously in about 2013 and rolled up our sleeves a year after that and really got to work, submitted a formal proposal and talked to our exhibition planning committee and then we started to hammer out the checklist. On that front, an art historian called Marc Simpson helped us locate works that we wouldn't necessarily have known about, works that aren't in public collections. Marc had written a little bit about James's connections with artists before and so what he did was pull all the threads of that together and drafted an essay called 'Shadow and Substance' about the way in which James drew upon his relationships with artists to people his fiction. That essay really encapsulates best the whole theme of the exhibition and so we plundered his essay for our exhibition-didactic texts when we had a writing session earlier in the year. He came into my office and I remember we sat down and spent twelve hours writing label copy together, which was fun. I typed it and he dictated it, or just looked at the work and in a sense that was a distillation of his essay. My essay in the book [which accompanies the exhibition and is cited in my bibliography] is focused entirely on the James collection at the Morgan, a bit of

bibliographical history and is really for people more bibliographically, or bibliophically-inclined, and about how the collection came here, and to let people know what we have. Coming back to working with Colm, he brought to it a novelist's perceptiveness and aesthetic, and his perceptiveness of James as a novelist, being a novelist himself, really comes through beautifully in his book *The Master* and he can channel James, in a sense, in a way which would be almost impossible for any other writer who hasn't immersed themselves in James's fiction and the biographies and so on. So, if you were going to choose a person to work on a James exhibition with, you'd want to choose Toibín or you'd want to choose David Lodge, who have both written books where James features. Outside that you'd probably be best off working with a James scholar, and in a sense, Toibín is a scholar as he is a professor of literature at Columbia University. He brings to it both the creative writers' feeling and sensitivity for the subject but also the serious scholarly heft, which being a professor of literature who has spent a lot of time working on that area, brings. I don't know that I would have ventured to do this without Toibín's involvement and I first broached this possibility – of a James exhibition – to him back in 2009 when I interviewed him for a short film I made on Jane Austen, and he said 'Sure, let's do that in 2016', which was a long way off that point, and so we sat on it for three or four years without saying much about it until 2013 when we got serious.

B: For my last question, if we could focus back onto the exhibition in close detail. When it comes to the labels and the didactic element of it, are you incorporating any of James's writing into those as a way into understanding the objects?

K: Yes. We have a watercolour and an oil by Frank Duveneck. In one of the labels for those, we quote the passage from *Portrait of a Lady* that describes the view [depicted in the paintings], and it looks, you know, exactly as James describes it, according to other visitors to the place. The other great thing is that Toibín has been to these places – I've been to Florence

but not to all the places [referred to or depicted in the exhibition] – whereas he has been to all these places. He's followed in James's footsteps when he was doing research for that novel [*The Master*]. James wrote very exactly about those places, and almost exactly about those people. We can make the argument, for example, that Gilbert Osmond is drawn from Francis Boott – who didn't recognise himself when he read that novel, but there are many elements of both Boott's persona and the dynamics of the relationship with his daughter that appear in the novel. There are those traceable elements – similarly James drew upon the Bootts in *Washington Square*, and, jumping forward to *The Golden Bowl*, there are elements of the character there. So those are the connections that we've made in our label text, where we've pointed out that James drew upon these real people but wrote at a slant, so you couldn't point to a character and say 'Oh, this is definitely X or Y or Z.' No novelist does that. But I trust, and very much trusted, to Toibín's inferences and I think it sometimes takes a novelist to have that feeling for the way in which novelists work, to recognise that in James or in any other novelist. He's very good at doing that, his antennae are very sharply tuned to that kind of thing. So, yes, we make those points but not too heavy-handedly, but people and places are sort of linked in the exhibition

B: Well thank you very much for your answers and for letting me call you. It's really exciting for me that now, in a leading museum, there is an exhibit about one of the authors I'm focussing on, so everything is – not feeding back – but everything is linked and there is definitely a sense in the museum sector – represented by yourself that there are connections there and it's been really heartening for me to find out that this is happening.

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