

SENSATION FICTION AND MODERNITY:
NARRATIVES OF ORDER AND AMBIVALENCE IN MID-VICTORIAN BRITAIN

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as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

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ABSTRACT

The mid-nineteenth-century genre of sensation fiction is primarily conceived of as articulating modernity through its depiction of sensory experience, especially as such is produced by technologically-generated mobility. Distinctly, this thesis proposes that sensation fiction can be read through an alternative, 'cultural discontinuity' sense of modernity, particularly as this is formulated by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (in *Modernity and Ambivalence* [1991]), to reveal its engagements with a variety of mid-century contexts heretofore neglected or omitted in criticism; moreover, doing so broadens our ideas about the texts that can be considered to articulate modernity. The thesis evidences this by historicist readings of four sensation novels, acting as a representative series of case studies (a heuristic) for considering the genre as a whole: Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent* (1860); Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Wylder's Hand* (1864); Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* (1867); and Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866). Expanding from Bauman's ideas about the role of modern culture, I claim that sensation fiction performs crucial ideological work in acclimatizing readers to the discontinuities of modern existence; even, at its height, tracing a nascent postmodern consciousness, in which ambivalence is no longer a cause for concern. Since scholarship has reserved such a polemical potential for realist novels, this thesis broaches a new understanding of the purpose and function of sensation fiction, with implications for the study of other popular genres.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am hugely grateful for the guidance and wisdom offered by Corinna Wagner and Andrew Mangham throughout this project, to say nothing of the unfailingly good humour and patience with which it was given; both personally and professionally, I hold them in great esteem.

I gratefully acknowledge funding from the South, West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (SWW DTP) that made this research possible, and the additional support that the DTP provided throughout this project.

The Department of English at the University of Exeter has been a supportive environment to me for a long time, and I appreciate various colleagues both past and present for making it so, but particularly, in recent years, those of the Centre for Victorian Studies (CVS). I also wish to thank the organizers and delegates of numerous conferences at which portions of this thesis were presented, but particularly those of the Victorian Popular Fiction Association (VPFA) and the British Association for Victorian Studies (BAVS).

To various friends I give thanks; whether it was after-work conviviality, get-togethers, or simply the humble lunch break, they made a potentially isolating and anti-social experience a joyous one. For contributing to my thoughts about this thesis, though, special mention must be given to Scott, Briony, and Rosie, and to Henry, Teresa, Ben, and Imogene; as well to Rebekah, Harry, and Sarah-Jayne who lent their discerning eye to portions of this thesis in draft or article form.

Lastly, thank you to my parents, Paul and Anne. They maintained that remarkable ability to be interested without being overbearing, and encouraging without being pressuring, for over three years. More essentially, and although they are too modest to admit it, they encouraged the discipline and perseverance that enabled me to be writing these words. This is for them.

INTRODUCTION

The conclusion to Thomas Hardy's second, late foray into sensation fiction, *A Laodicean* (1881),¹ gives an insight into the ambiguities that inhabit 'the modern' and the anxieties that emerge from this inhabitation. George Somerset and Paula Power are debating their next steps in the wake of a fire that has entirely devastated Paula's home, Castle Stancy:

[George:] 'We will build a new house from the ground, eclectic in style. We will remove the ashes, charred wood, and so on from the ruin, and plant more ivy [...] You, Paula, will be yourself again, and recover, if you have not already, from the warp given to your mind [...] by the mediævalism of that place.'

'And be a perfect representation of "the modern spirit"?' [...]

'Yes, for since it is rather in your line you may as well keep straight on.'

'Very well, I'll keep straight on; and we'll build a new house beside the ruin, and show the modern spirit evermore. ... But, George, I wish—'
And Paula repressed a sigh.

'Well?'

'I wish my castle wasn't burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancy!'²

There is a tendency to see sensation fiction as articulating modernity through its depiction of sensory experience, especially as such is created by technologically-generated mobility (in *A Laodicean's* case via the telegraph and railway³). But Hardy's closing vignette expresses an alternative idea of modernity. The 'modern

¹ On classifying *A Laodicean* as sensation fiction, see Chapter 4 of Richard Nemesvari, *Thomas Hardy, Sensationalism, and the Melodramatic Mode* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Hardy's first published novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1871), is also sensation fiction; see Patricia Ingham, 'Introduction', in *Desperate Remedies*, ed. by Patricia Ingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. xiii–xviii.

² Thomas Hardy, *A Laodicean*, ed. by John Chad (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 378–79.

³ 'Paula's private telegraph apparatus [...] is the most striking manifestation of her modernity'; Karin Koehler, *Thomas Hardy and Victorian Communication: Letters, Telegrams and Postal Systems* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 143; Nemesvari, pp. 129, 146.

spirit' is not merely identifiable in Matthew's Arnold's terms,⁴ but also in George's imagining of a future radically removed from the past (a hinterland that is invested with haunting potential; the narrator describes his wish to be 'unencumbered with the ghosts of an unfortunate line [the de Stancys]'). His desire manifests as an ambition to erase the unruly remains of the ancestral property (to 'remove the ashes [&c.]') and is metaphorized as an unwavering forward trajectory ('keep straight on'). The conditions for success seem propitious, for the ambiguous Stancy Castle (a source of 'doubt' for Paula⁵) is almost entirely gone—and the fire's instigator, the equally uncertain William Dare (a bastard of the de Stancys), is presumed dead. Yet Paula's commitment to the 'new' proves uncertain, held in abeyance by an emotive wish for its impossible antithesis. Normative social arrangements having thus apparently been reclaimed by this ending, some things (like the psychical state of the novel's heroine) seem beyond 'recover[y]'. Hardy wrote that his intent with *A Laodicean* was a 'predetermined cheerful ending', and yet, as Richard Nemesvari notes, the conclusion 'remains as ambiguous as possible'.⁶ This attention to the apparent ineluctability of ambivalence—resisting attempts to expiate it—is taken by this thesis to be the defining quality of sensation fiction's engagement with modernity.

SITUATING THE RESEARCH

If 'most critics recognize the modernity of sensation fiction', as Eva Badowska claims,⁷ there has been a tendency to interpret that 'inherently broad and ambiguous term [modernity]' in a narrow sense.⁸ Specifically, modernity is understood

⁴ The term is from Arnold's 'Pagan and Medieval Religious Sentiment' (1864) and refers to 'imaginative reason'; see Hardy, p. 416n3.

⁵ John Schad, 'Introduction', in *A Laodicean*, ed. by John Schad (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. xx–xxi.

⁶ Hardy, p. 380; Nemesvari, p. 147.

⁷ Eva Badowska, 'On the Track of Things: Sensation and Modernity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37.01 (2009), 157–75 (p. 172n1). Cf. the notices from Anne-Marie Beller: 'modernity has proved a fruitful area for criticism of the genre [in recent years]', and Andrew Mangham: 'sensation fiction was uniquely modern and of its time'; Anne-Marie Beller, "'The Fashions of the Current Season': Recent Critical Work on Victorian Sensation Fiction', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45.2 (2017), 461–73 (p. 469). Andrew Mangham, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1–6 (p. 4).

⁸ Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 19.

to entail distinct sensory-perceptual dynamics—a sensory experience of unprecedented intensity and complexity, encountered especially in such modern spaces as the train and the metropolis.⁹ Claims for sensation fiction’s interaction with the modern nervous subject unites two influential early studies of the genre, otherwise disparate in methodology: D. A. Miller’s *The Novel and the Police* (a Foucauldian, queer-theory-inspired reading) and Jenny Bourne Taylor’s *In the Secret Theatre of Home* (historicist psychological theory),¹⁰ both published in 1988. The modern sensory experience is specified by Bourne Taylor in the following terms: ‘when critics self-consciously referred to the 1860s as the “age of sensation” they meant, in an obvious way, that the word [sensation] encapsulated the experience of modernity itself – the sense of continuous and rapid change, of shocks, thrills, intensity, excitement’.¹¹ This ‘dominant paradigm’ is traceable to Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, who drew upon numerous contemporary attestations about the same experience.¹² In turn, Benjamin’s influence is evident in Nicholas Daly’s 1999 essay and 2004 monograph, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000*,¹³ which show how the genre acclimatized readers to the sensory impact of modernity, engendered especially via technology. The sensation novel, he writes,

provides a species of temporal training: through its deployment of suspense and nervousness the sensation novel synchronizes its readers with industrial modernity. Characters and readers alike experience a

⁹ Singer, pp. 34–35.

¹⁰ D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (London: University of California Press, 1988); Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988). For a brief overview of critical treatments of sensation fiction and modernity, see Lyn Pykett, *The Nineteenth Century Sensation Novel* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2011), pp. 18–20. For more recent overviews see, Andrew Maunder, ‘Mapping the Victorian Sensation Novel: Some Recent and Future Trends’, *Literature Compass*, 2.1 (2005), 1–33; Mark Knight, ‘Figuring Out the Fascination: Recent Trends in Criticism on Victorian Sensation and Crime Fiction’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37.01 (2009), 323–33; Beller, “‘The Fashions of the Current Season’: Recent Critical Work on Victorian Sensation Fiction’.

¹¹ Bourne Taylor, p. 153.

¹² Alberto Gabriele, ‘Introduction’, in *Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity: A Global Nineteenth-Century Perspective*, ed. by Alberto Gabriele (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 8.

¹³ Nicholas Daly, ‘Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses’, *ELH*, 66.2 (1999), 461–87; Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

feeling of being relentlessly driven along that maps not just the human/machine encounter, but also the broader experience of modernity's iron cage.¹⁴

Taking an historicist approach, Daly explains these novels' depiction of 'nerves-without-a-cause, and their readerly attractions' by posing them in relation to contemporary medical accounts, which warned of the physiological dangers of the railway and the rigorous punctuality it manifested. (The ubiquity of time-keeping devices was the most visible consequence of this punctuality).¹⁵ Such an emphasis brings prior readings of the genre's resonances with medical discourse (notably those by Sally Shuttleworth and Bourne Taylor¹⁶) into relation with the sensory and experiential impact of modernity.

Recent criticism on the relationship between sensation fiction and modernity is conspicuously influenced by this sensory interpretation.¹⁷ Such accounts give sophisticated insights into the genre's engagements with contemporary contexts, yet risk the uncritical tendency of assuming that the somatic implications of technology ('shocks, thrills, intensity, excitement') describe the 'experience of modernity' *tout court*.¹⁸ Michael Tondre cautions against this, observing that the 'trope

¹⁴ Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000*, p. 37. An earlier version of this argument appeared in his essay 'Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses', *ELH*, 66.2 (1999), 461–87.

¹⁵ Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000*, pp. 41, 49.

¹⁶ Sally Shuttleworth, "'Preaching to the Nerves": Psychological Disorder in Sensation Fiction', in *A Question of Identity: Women, Science, and Literature*, ed. by Marina Benjamin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), pp. 192–222.

¹⁷ Daniel Martin, 'Railway Fatigue and the Coming-of-Age Narrative in Lady Audley's Secret', *Victorian Review*, 34.1 (2008), 131–53; Louise Lee, 'Lady Audley's Secret: How Does She Do It? Sensation Fiction's Technologically Minded Villainesses', in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 134–46; Anna Despotopoulou, 'Trains of Thought: The Challenges of Mobility in the Work of Rhoda Broughton', *Critical Survey*, 23.1 (2011), 90–106; Dehn Gilmore, *The Victorian Novel and the Space of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Karen M. Odden, '25 August 1861: The Clayton Tunnel Rail Crash, the Medical Profession, and the Sensation Novel', *Victorian Review*, 40.2 (2014), 30–34. Nicholas Dames's *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) proffers the same conclusions about sensation fiction in relation to modernity's speed, but does not cite Daly.

¹⁸ Beth Palmer, 'Are the Victorians Still with Us?: Victorian Sensation Fiction and Its Legacies in the Twenty-First Century', *Victorian Studies*, 52.1 (2009), 86–94 (p. 87); Anne-Marie Beller, 'Popularity and Proliferation: Shifting Modes of Authorship in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) and *Vixen* (1879)', *Women's Writing*, 23.2 (2016), 245–61 (p. 249); Pamela K Gilbert, 'Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 182–95 (pp. 184–85).

of textual speed' appears to have 'obscured compelling questions' about the sensation novel's interaction with other mid-century contexts.¹⁹ The privileging of the 'sensory complexity and intensity' facet of modernity is understandable, given the genre's (definitional) focus on physiology and temporality,²⁰ but many questions are unaddressed by it (to say nothing of how its fictional examples are, perhaps unavoidably, concentrated on novels in which technologies of mobility are significant, notably Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* [1862]²¹). In fact, though many recent studies position themselves as addressing this critical focus on sensory experience, they explicate its limitations. Beth Seltzer's recent contribution offers an illustrative example; her intent is to appraise the 'punctual, time-centred nature of the sensation novel' observed by Daly through significations of the railway timetable in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Focusing on technology, mobility, and Robert Audley's 'training' through experiences of such,²² Seltzer's reading seems to corroborate the sensory understanding of modernity (as highlighted by its resemblances to Daniel Martin's study of the same novel). Discernible throughout, however, are various aspects that belong to a quite separate understanding of that phenomenon, and Seltzer concludes that

reading the novel [*Lady Audley's Secret*] alongside the timetable reveals the sensation novel's skepticism about whether the timetable's epistemology can really bring us meaning [...] in guidebooks, stories, and novels of people using the timetable [...] we discover, underneath the orderly rows and columns, an irrational wildness.²³

The technological remains only as the springboard for a conclusion that reaches beyond it, implicating entirely disparate critical approaches to the genre. In fact, I propose that Seltzer is indexing here what Brian Singer has labelled the 'cultural discontinuity' facet of (or approach to) modernity: the 'moral and ideological in-

¹⁹ Michael Tondre, "The Interval of Expectation: Delay, Delusion, and the Psychology of Suspense in *Armada*", *ELH*, 78.3 (2011), 585–608 (p. 585).

²⁰ Singer, p. 34. See for instance Laurie Garrison, *Science, Sexuality and Sensation Novels: Pleasures of the Senses* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²¹ Martin, p. 135.

²² Beth Seltzer, 'Fictions of Order in the Timetable: Railway Guides, Comic Spoofs, and *Lady Audley's Secret*', *Victorian Review*, 41.1 (2015), 47–65 (pp. 48, 49–50).

²³ Seltzer, pp. 62, 63 Emphasis added.

stability of a postsacred, postfeudal world in which all norms, authorities are fragile and open to question'.²⁴ These characteristics hark back to the passage from *A Laodicean* which opened this Introduction, and its foregrounding of ambiguity and instability as concerns reflected upon self-consciously by the modern individual. But the depiction of this experience is not limited to Hardy's novel and *Lady Audley's Secret*. Rather, as I shall be arguing, it features recurrently in sensation fiction.

ANOTHER MODERNITY: ORDER AND AMBIVALENCE

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that sensation fiction can be read through a sense of modernity as 'cultural discontinuity' to reveal its engagements with various mid-century contexts hitherto omitted or neglected in criticism. This approach accords with Deborah Wynne's recognition that 'the links between the discourses characteristic of Victorian society and the sensation novel can only be explicated satisfactorily by interdisciplinary approaches and theoretically informed criticism'.²⁵ No less than that interpretation which privileges its sensory impact, the cultural discontinuity sense of modernity has received long-standing and diverse critical interest from such figures as Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, and, more recently, Jean Baudrillard and Anthony Giddens (amongst others).²⁶ This thesis draws particularly, however, on Zygmunt Bauman's sociological concept of modernity, as given in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991).²⁷ It does so in the spirit of Frederic Jameson's judgment as to the impossibility of conceiving of a "correct" theory' of modernity, 'since what we have to do with here are *narrative options and alternate storytelling possibilities*'. Thus, he advocates, it becomes a case of deploying a 'narrative of modernity' that can best elucidate the 'historical event or problem' at hand.²⁸ Bauman's ideas regarding modernity, as I show, do not simply apply to the particular conditions of mid-nineteenth-century Britain, but

²⁴ Singer, p. 24.

²⁵ Deborah Wynne, 'Critical Responses to Sensation Fiction', in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 389–400 (p. 398).

²⁶ Jean Baudrillard, 'Modernity', *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 11.1 (1987), 63–72; Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

²⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

²⁸ Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 32, 33. Emphasis added.

they help elucidate the broader resonances of sensation fiction's interaction with its historical conditions.

For Bauman, modernity is defined fundamentally by the 'task of order (more precisely and most importantly, [...] *order as a task*): to classify and organize so as to avoid confrontation with contingency and randomness (experienced as either discomfort or danger). Catalyzing this enterprise is a reflexive awareness of the *alternative* between order and chaos at every scale (individual, societal, and global). Modernity is 'wary of the void it would leave' if this task of order were to cease or even slow. To avoid this, it stages a 'struggle of determination against ambiguity, precision against ambivalence, transparency against obscurity'; modern existence is effected and sustained by '*design, manipulation, management, [and] engineering*'.²⁹ These diverse phenomena against which modernity arrays itself are aggregated by Bauman using the term 'ambivalence', following previous social theorists.³⁰ But the expiation of ambivalence and the imposition of order—the essential objectives of modernity—are found to be impossible; the world does not naturally conform to order, and the creation of further classificatory divisions simply heightens the potential for anomalous and unequivocal cases. This is not incidental to modernity's purpose, however, as Bauman notes, for 'the endemic inconclusivity of effort [...] makes the life of continuous restlessness both feasible and inescapable, and effectively precludes the possibility that the effort may ever come to rest'.³¹ (Baudrillard is recalled here on two points: modernity is paradoxical and it '*is itself only a vast ideological process*'.³²)

Modernity and Ambivalence is frequently ahistorical, and, when not, sources its examples largely from the twentieth century. But Bauman's formulation of modernity is found highly relevant for describing the cultural discontinuities experienced in mid-nineteenth-century Britain (as scholars have found³³). The expiation of ambivalence and the imposition of order gained not simply an unprecedented urgency during this period, but spread geographically (as British economic and

²⁹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 4–7. Emphasis in original.

³⁰ See Singer, p. 35.

³¹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 10.

³² Baudrillard, p. 70. Emphasis in original.

³³ See for instance, Peter Lamont, 'Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence', *The Historical Journal*, 47.4 (2004), 897–920; Alana Fletcher, 'No Clocks in His Castle: The Threat of the *Durée* in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', *Victorian Review*, 39.1 (2013), 55–69.

cultural values were exported on a global scale) and intellectually (as new scientific disciplines such as anthropology, philology, and sociology were formalized). The period provided a ready-made symbol of its ambitions in the form of the Great Exhibition of 1851, a metonym of Britain's 'new world order'—the globe's diversity could be catalogued and made non-threatening within its walls.³⁴ (These associations were preserved in a different form in the Exhibition's successor, the Crystal Palace at Sydenham.) Only a few of many possible examples must suffice to offer a sense of the contemporary consciousness of order and chaos (the subsequent chapters give more).

In his influential *Self-Help* (1859), Samuel Smiles writes that

all have contributed towards the grand result, one generation building upon another's labours, and carrying them forward to still higher stages. This constant succession of noble works—the artisans of civilization—has served to *create order out of chaos* in industry, science, and art.³⁵

Smiles articulates Bauman's classifying imperative in terms of a 'grand narrative' in which individual contributions are decisive.³⁶ In the following year, similar sentiments were expressed by George Henry Lewes in respect of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). Declaring the central concern in zoology as the 'task of classification', he analogizes the difficulty of organizing species using the example of producing a 'classified catalogue of the books in the British Museum':

a gigantic task; but imagine what that task would be if all the title-pages and other external indications were destroyed! The first attempts would necessarily be of a rough approximate kind, merely endeavouring to make a sort of provisional order amid the chaos, after which succeeding labours might introduce better and better arrangements.³⁷

³⁴ Kate Flint, *Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 13, 46, 121, 172, 185. See especially the Introduction of Paul Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

³⁵ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, ed. by Peter S. Sinnema (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 20. Emphasis added.

³⁶ This term gained prominence from Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), in which he argues that postmodernity is defined by a mistrust of such. See also Jameson, p. 5.

³⁷ George Henry Lewes, 'Studies in Animal Life', *Cornhill Magazine*, 1.4 (1860), 438–47 (p. 438).

Even as they become increasingly precise, however, Lewes notes that such efforts would fail to incorporate every case: ‘some works would defy classification’, whether judged by internal or external ‘characters’. In revealing language, Lewes determines that success will instead rely on devising ‘some artificial method [... for] arranging the immense mass of details’—if the classification ‘expresses the *real order* of nature’ then ‘something more than resemblance’ will be being indicated: ‘some deeper cause’.³⁸ Present-day understanding enables us to see that Bauman’s ideas apply even more absolutely to Lewes’s explication: Darwin ‘fostered rather than settled questions’ about the definition of species, and a universal sense of this concept continues to elude science.³⁹

SENSATION FICTION AND THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN MODERNITY

For Bauman, the role of culture is to query exactly the prospect raised by Lewes: advancing beyond a ‘provisional’ order and instead obtaining a method to express the enduring and definite qualities that exist in the real world. (This is to be considered among the *foci imaginarii* that define modernity’s impossible task: ‘absolute truth, pure art, [...] order, certainty, harmony, the end of history’.⁴⁰) This modern ‘struggle for artificial order’, Bauman determines,

needs culture that explores the limits and the limitations of the power of artifice. The struggle for order informs that exploration and is in turned informed by its findings. [... The struggle] learns, instead [of its initial pugnacity], to live with its own impermanence, inconclusiveness – and prospectlessness.⁴¹

Culture is therefore pushed, Bauman suggests, into a ‘*hate-love*’ relationship with ‘modern existence’; it is the necessary antagonism that enables it (not dissimilar to the role of Her Majesty’s Opposition). But, just as importantly (and yet strangely unacknowledged in the excerpt above), culture is also an agent for inducing the

³⁸ Lewes, ‘Studies in Animal Life’, pp. 439, 441. Emphasis added.

³⁹ Jody Hey, ‘The Mind of the Species Problem’, *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, 16.7 (2001), 326–29.

⁴⁰ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 10.

⁴¹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 9.

conditions of *postmodernity*, which Bauman defines elsewhere as the acceptance (without anxiety) of ambivalence as an insoluble aspect of the world.⁴²

This thesis claims that sensation fiction performs such a cultural role in mid-Victorian Britain: the genre's renowned subversiveness reveals the alternatives to the ordering imperative of modernity, and draws readers into recognizing ambivalence as an inescapable facet of modern existence; at its height, this amounts to an anticipation of the postmodern consciousness. In arguing that the genre has such a polemical function, this thesis sits in a tangential relationship to Caroline Levine's *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (2003). In that book, Levine argues (contrary to accusations that suspense fosters obedience to regulatory forces) that 'the experience of suspense [...] was a rigorous political and epistemological training, a way to foster energetic scepticism and uncertainty rather than closure and complacency'.⁴³ Inexplicably, however, given the association of suspense and sensation fiction, Levine is almost entirely concerned with literary realism. This is curious because, as Peter Garrett notes, the 'typical "plot"' traced in *Serious Pleasures* ('moving from an initial hypothesis, [...] passing through a phase of doubt, suspended judgment, and testing, and reaching the provisional conclusion of a revised view') is a 'strictly cognitive plot' that does not rely on realism.⁴⁴ (Indeed, such a plot matches the typical narrative trajectory in the sensation novel already elaborated by Ann Cvetkovich and others—subversion that gives way to containment by the novels' ends.⁴⁵ This thesis proffers a modified version of this, influenced by Bauman.) This restriction forces Levine into the curious position of claiming Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) as a realist text (against the critical consensus).⁴⁶ Otherwise (and never

⁴² Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 244.

⁴³ Caroline Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p. 2. This is a more specific sort of claim to that made by George Levine, who draws notice to the 'oddly necessary interaction of narrative and epistemology, that is, on how philosophy behaves when it is embodied and its ideas take on the life of metaphor and mean something in the lived experience of people located in particular times and places'; *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 8.

⁴⁴ Peter Garrett, 'Review of *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt*, by Caroline Levine', *The Modern Language Review*, 100.2 (2005), 490–91 (p. 491).

⁴⁵ See particularly Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); it is most summarily expressed in relation to *Lady Audley's Secret*, in which Cvetkovich claims that 'control, surveillance, and power' subsumes 'rebellion'; p. 55. Cf.

Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), p. 149.

⁴⁶ Caroline Levine, pp. 43, 207n7.

'knowingly'), she does not include sensation fiction among her examples.⁴⁷ This omission is more curious given that the genre was understood by contemporaries (and Levine writes that 'the nineteenth century was not wrong about suspense'⁴⁸) to enact a potentially powerful 'training' effect on readers; according to the author Alfred Austin, writing in 1870:

Having prepared us by these well-known arts not to be surprised at anything, our sensational novelists then introduce us to domestic relations of an exceedingly peculiar character. The means are various, [...] but the end invariably one—to make the reader very tolerant of whatever strange thing may happen beneath the roof of the home to whose secrets he is introduced.⁴⁹

Beneath Austin's satirical tone (and if his judgment is considered in the context of a critical climate nearly always negative toward the genre's effects) it is possible to see a 'serious purpose' here: sensation fiction acclimatizes readers to uncertainty in their everyday lives.⁵⁰ It must additionally be noted that debate about the very generic category of 'sensation' reproduced the sorts of indeterminacy and uncertainty that are discussed in *Serious Pleasures*; the 'genre question', as Susan Bernstein terms it, pointed towards the 'porous[ness of] discursive boundaries'.⁵¹ In other words, there are enticing reasons for considering sensation fiction as engaged in the kinds of epistemological training that Levine reserves for realist fiction. My aim is not only to evidence this capacity, but to assert its emergence as a consequence of the genre's deep imbrication with contemporary contexts jointly constitutive of modernity.

By arguing for 'The Serious Work of Sensationalism', this thesis is therefore closer to the priorities of Anna Maria Jones's *Problem Novels: Victorian Fiction Theorizes the Sensational Self* (2007). Yet, Jones's study is 'invested in exploring not just a literary genre, but the close relationship between what we study and

⁴⁷ *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations* are less egregious examples of the same silence, since these texts are only seldom categorized as sensation novels.

⁴⁸ Caroline Levine, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Alfred Austin, 'Our Novels: The Sensation School', *Temple Bar*, 29 (1870), 410–24 (p. 414).

⁵⁰ See the contemporary criticism gathered in *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction: 1855-1890*, ed. by Andrew Maunder (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), 1.⁵¹ Susan D. Bernstein, 'Ape Anxiety: Sensation Fiction, Evolution, and the Genre Question', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 6.2 (2001), 250–71 (p. 265).

⁵¹ Susan D. Bernstein, 'Ape Anxiety: Sensation Fiction, Evolution, and the Genre Question', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 6.2 (2001), 250–71 (p. 265).

how we study it'.⁵² Precisely, Jones considers questions of agency and reading practices from a Foucauldian perspective, seeking to elucidate connections between readers/critics of the present and of the Victorian period.⁵³

These novels pose problems for their readers by inviting them to consider the process of their own subject formation. [...] In turn [...] these moments of fictional self-consciousness might offer ways of imagining our own critical endeavours as both affectively invested and critically engaged.⁵⁴

This thesis differs from Jones's work in other ways: the methodology of *Problem Novels* is decidedly transhistorical, as Bryan B. Rasmussen has noted, with 'history' (that is, non-literary sources) appearing 'impressionistic';⁵⁵ explicit links between the historical and fictional cases are rarely made. Meanwhile, of those textual cases Jones admits that 'only Collins can be said to be a sensation novelist proper'.⁵⁶ Hence, *Problem Novels* reproduces the inattention given to sensation fiction in Levine's study, and the genre's potential to offer 'rigorous political and epistemological training' remains unexplored; its training potential remains almost exclusively associated with the somatic, due to the sensory effects of modernity being foremost in the relevant scholarship.⁵⁷ In this capacity, I aim to consider in more detail Ann-Marie Dunbar's proposal that sensation fiction was 'deeply engaged in some of the most important *epistemological questions* of the day'.⁵⁸

This thesis breaks new ground by arguing that sensation fiction was engaged in important ideological work via its depiction of and training for modernity as cultural discontinuity, particularly as that approach/aspect is formulated by Bauman.

⁵² Bryan B. Rasmussen, 'Review of *Problem Novels: Victorian Fiction Theorizes the Sensational Self*, by Anna Maria Jones', *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 53 (2009), n.p.

⁵³ Anna Maria Jones, *Problem Novels: Victorian Fiction Theorizes the Sensational Self* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2007), p. 4.

⁵⁴ Anna Maria Jones, *Problem Novels: Victorian Fiction Theorizes the Sensational Self*, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Rasmussen.

⁵⁶ Jones, *Problem Novels: Victorian Fiction Theorizes the Sensational Self*, p. 6.

⁵⁷ See again Palmer, p. 87. Eva Badowska offers the distinctive (though not precisely equivalent) claim that sensation fiction 'also trains [the subject] to apprehend [the modern's] inevitable historical passage and incipient obsolescence'; p. 158.

⁵⁸ Ann-Marie Dunbar, 'Making the Case: Detection and Confession in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Woman in White*', *Victorian Review*, 40.1 (2014), 97–116 (p. 113). Emphasis added. Cf. Patrick Bratlinger's suggestion that 'shocks or thrills can have epistemological implications'; *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literary in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 143.

It pursues this objective through comparative (historicist) readings of four sensation novels, one per chapter, which are intended to act as a representative series of case studies (a heuristic) for its argument about the genre. In the process it shows the relevancy of various interdisciplinary contexts that have either not previously been considered in relation to the genre, or which have received limited attention (evolutionary science being the most obvious example of this⁵⁹). Given these contexts' unfamiliarity, and that they are united only by being among the 'concomitant social phenomena' of modernity (making synthesis in this Introduction impossible, and only viable across the thesis as a whole),⁶⁰ considerable space is devoted at the beginning of each chapter to outlining them. The selection of novels also meets the recent critical aim of 'extend[ing] the [genre's] parameters, with a view to ascertaining a fuller picture of sensation writing' by including both lesser-known authors (Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Rhoda Broughton) and lesser-known works by more 'canonical' authors (Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent* and Collins's *Armada*).⁶¹ The approach is therefore *synchronic* rather than *diachronic*, reflecting the formal 'varieties' of the genre above its chronological limits.⁶² Since this thesis broaches a distinct way of reading sensation fiction, I concentrate on examples from the period in which it became formally recognized as a distinct trend (the early 1860s); this should not be construed as support for the erroneous idea that sensation fiction was a phenomenon confined to this decade—indeed, as my opening example of Hardy's *A Laodicean* seeks to show, the cultural discontinuity approach to modernity (especially in Bauman's formulation) offers scope for considering the genre's ongoing appeal in the later century.⁶³

⁵⁹ Susan Bernstein broached analogous aspects of this topic and sensation fiction in a 2001 essay, but there has been almost no follow-up to this; see page 144n13.

⁶⁰ Singer, p. 21.

⁶¹ Anne-Marie Beller, "'The Fashions of the Current Season': Recent Critical Work on Victorian Sensation Fiction', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45.2 (2017), 461–73 (p. 463).

⁶² *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction: 1850-1890*, ed. by Andrew Maunder (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), I, p. xxxv.

⁶³ Cf. Daly's argument regarding Oscar Wilde and the obsolescence of sensation fiction as training for *industrial* modernity: 'the railway/sensation phase of modernity is over [...] the play [*The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)] consigns the sensation novel to the past, and with it the problem that it responded to'; *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000*, p. 54.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 begins by accounting the uncertain epistemological status of vision in mid-century Britain, as a result of physiological optics having problematized the sureties of Cartesian perspectivalism. The so-called ‘dream of transparency’ endured, however, despite this assault, notably in the form of physiognomy, a ‘science of bodily reading’ that implied the subject’s interior qualities were readable on the body’s surface. I appraise Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *The Trail of the Serpent* (1860) as a novel that stages such uncertainties. It maps the ambiguities surrounding visuality onto its transgressive, criminal antagonist Jabez North. Not only does his body deny physiognomic correspondences, but his exploits reveal the fallacy of trusting to ‘ocular demonstration’. These concerns become transposed to the paradigmatically modern settings of Paris and London, raising fears about the visual obfuscation of criminality as a consequence of urbanization. Yet metropolitan vision—its spaces, technologies, and practices—creates a provisional order, allowing (amateur) forces of detection to identify and assess Jabez. The imposition of order and removal of ambivalence is apotheosized with Jabez’s capture and death. Yet, spotlighting the impossibility of resolving the uncertainties of mid-century visuality, Jabez is made a permanent source of visual incoherency in his posthumous state as a waxwork display of Madame Tussaud’s.

Chapter 2 considers ambivalence as it emerges from modernity’s dream of a ‘radical rupture’ between past and present. In Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Wylder’s Hand* (1864), the possibility and desirability of such a temporal separation is explored principally through the theme of *inheritance*, understood in its dual sense: both the transmission of property and biology (heredity). Avoiding a repetition of the direful past (wherein hereditary madness accompanies property ownership) is the instigating action of *Wylder’s Hand*. But the past proves irrepressible; events tend inexorably toward repetition of all that has gone before, with inheritance as the conduit for this process. With similar intentions, the novel depicts the disquieting relevancy and perseverance of customs that England deemed to be anachronistic in respect of its ‘modern’ attitudes (it believed otherwise of Ireland). Modernity’s teleological assumptions are also destabilized by the re-enactments of discrete episodes from the family’s past, characterized by the presence of the supernatural uncanny. The ending of *Wylder’s Hand*, however, develops a

novel sense of the past as an agent of its own exhumation. Thus, I contend (and contrary to most criticism) that the novel aims for a satisfactory end by signalling a final 'rupture' with the past, though it does so on unexpected terms, and with recognition of the mixed repercussions of doing so.

The past as a source of ambivalence remains a focus of Chapter 3, but it is not that of the family but of the species—the evolutionary, rather than the genealogical, past. The teleological assumptions of mid-Victorian Britain depended on applying scientific assumptions and methods to human development, and it ran into problems, consequently, in doing similar for the concept of entropy and theory of natural selection. In Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* (1867), I argue, the evolutionary (but particularly Darwinian) perspective is utilized in order to query the inevitability and universality of progress, and the role of the individual in achieving such. This perspective inflects the status of Broughton's transitional protagonist, Kate Chester, as she strives to obtain fulfilment and stability. But she embodies the intense flux and uncertainties of a modern, Darwinian world. These challenges to the sureties of modernity find fullest expression in her transgressive journey through the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. But evolutionary perspectives, even as they challenged the progressive assumptions of modernity, provided no escape from its deleterious psychical conditions, and Kate finds reprieve in what I term the 'sensational present' (an embodied attachment to the immediate moment). This proves an untenable refuge from the unstable experience of modernity, however, and the deaths of Kate's mentor and suitor throws her into uncertainty again. The novel's ending marshals religious purpose as a way to expiate this ambivalence, but it cannot expel the sense of fundamental flux implied by the Darwinian vision.

Origin was one of several publications that intensified the 'difficulties of decision' in such areas as politics, religion, and identity. Chapter 4 begins by focusing on scientific culture's response to the increased attention being given to ideas of hesitation, doubt, and action that resulted from this. It observes that culture's valorization of what I term 'critical hesitation': the incorporation of pauses and reflection into productive decision-making that can successfully face the uncertainties of the modern world (as against 'pathological hesitation': doubt's potential to debilitate and impede action). In Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866), these polarities become mapped onto its two eponymous protagonists, Allan Armadale and Ozias

Midwinter. Through this focus, I reconsider Alan's significance, and argue that his *constitutional* impulsivity is censured as a mode of being that leads him into danger, and one which contradicts mid-century proscriptions; it is contrasted by the equally, though differently, ineffectual mode of being that Ozias initially embodies: pathological hesitation. Ambivalence is generated primarily by a dream that Allan experiences, and over which opinion becomes divided between supernatural and material (physiological) interpretations. I frame the dream in the context of spiritualist tracts that advocated critical hesitation (paralleling non-'pseudo' scientific culture), and as a case of 'the fantastic'. Ultimately, Ozias's uncertainty about the cause and purpose of the dream does not preclude his effective reaction to Lydia Gwilt's plot against Allan, and he develops a critical hesitation that overcomes the 'difficulties of decision' imposed by modernity. Furthermore, this enduring ambivalence is no longer troubling, or inconsistent with the novel's harmonious conclusion. Thus, I claim that *Armada* moves its readers toward a nascent postmodern consciousness.

CHAPTER 1

‘Straight through those clear blue eyes into his soul’: Dreams of Transparency
in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *The Trail of the Serpent* (1860)

In 1869, the Bishop of York, William Thompson, inveighed against what he saw as the injurious influence of sensation fiction. Demonstrating the shallowness of the genre’s claim to artistic status, in his opinion, were these novels’ use of caricature and physical descriptions in the depiction of ‘character’; rarely did they venture beyond this, into an ‘analysis of human sentiment’:

There is nothing so easy as descriptions of the human form. The full eyes, the marble brow, the auburn or raven hair, the temples with their blue veins, the flushing throat, the lips laid upon the heated hair, the perpetual comparison of wicked beauty to the snake, — all this, however largely done, is poor stuff and not quite new. Such writers mistake the body for the soul.¹

Complaints of weak characterization were recurrently levelled at sensation fiction, but Thompson’s is notable for its conception of how physical indicators visible on the body’s surface function in these novels as indicators of the emotional and moral realities lying beneath, playing up the importance of striking characteristics. This concern for the correlation of the outer body with the inner soul is remarkably similar to the foundational principle of physiognomy. This ‘science’ of bodily reading was defined by the influential physiognomist Johann Caspar Lavater as being ‘[a knowledge of the] correspondence between the external and internal man, the visible superficies and the invisible contents’.² The publication of Lavater’s *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-78),³ a guide to ‘reading’ individuals, caused an immediate sensation, and it was enduringly fascinating to the Victorian imagination; it occasioned a debate in the mid-century over whether (and to what extent) aspects of a person’s interior might be readable from visual signs displayed on

¹ *Varieties of Women’s Sensation Fiction: 1850-1890*, ed. by Andrew Maunder (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), I, p. 268.

² Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, trans. by Thomas Holcroft, Eighth (London: William Tegg and Co., 1853), p. 11.

³ The first English translation, by the radical Thomas Holcroft, appeared in 1789 as *Essays on Physiognomy* (London: G. G. J. Robinson).

the body's surface. Physiognomy was only one expression, however, of what Richard T. Gray accounts as 'one of the most persistent fantasies held by the human intellect—the notion of developing a kind of penetrating interior vision that would infallibly reveal the psychological constitution of any human being at which it is directed'.⁴ Phrenology, in which moral and intellectual faculties were mapped to cranial morphology, and physiology also promised to render the complexities of the human subject transparent. Whilst William Thompson's notice of the body and soul corresponds most closely to physiognomy, the 'marble brow' and 'flushing throat' also feature as important physical signs in these last two sciences—physiognomy, phrenology, and physiology jointly figure as methods by which to render the modern subject transparent.

From its outset, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's first novel, *The Trail of the Serpent* (1860) (hereafter *Trail*),⁵ proclaims a fascination with the decisive comingling of 'body [and] soul' that Thompson identified as a defining aspect of sensation fiction. Atomizing the physical features of the antagonist, Jabez North, the narrator instructs readers to 'look at the eyes [...] at the face, the determined mouth, the thin lips' and to judge from this visual assemblage the prospect that the 'Good Schoolmaster' will remain content with his 'life of dreary and obscure monotony' (10). Whereas Thompson's complaint concerned the uncomplicated symmetry between the internal and the external, Braddon's narrator wryly declares that the 'answers to these questions' are unreachable without the ability to 'look into his heart' (10). Taking such instances as a cue, this chapter argues that *Trail* is concerned fundamentally with the dream of transparency, a dream that is attendant on modernity's desire to eradicate ambivalence through order.⁶ (Jeremy Bentham's famed concept of the panopticon is instructive of the inseparability of these two aims.⁷) Mid-century commentators such as E. S. Dallas and Herbert Spencer were greatly concerned with questions about the prospect, limits, and methods of achieving transparency—questions that also featured in much contemporaneous fiction. In fact, Braddon's novel displays, to an unprecedented degree, how

⁴ Richard T. Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004), p. xvii.

⁵ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Trail of the Serpent*, ed. by Chris Willis (New York: Modern Library, 2003). Subsequent parenthetical citations refer to this edition.

⁶ This phrasing of 'dream' is influenced by Gray's equivalent wording ('fantasy') and by Corinna Wagner, 'The Dream of a Transparent Body: Identity, Science and the Gothic Novel', *Gothic Studies*, 14.1 (2012), 74–92.

⁷ See Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 174.

sensation fiction intervened in this debate; *Trail* is notable for the self-conscious uncertainties it raises in respect of transparency and the ordering efforts, and by its complex re-working of theories of visuality. By staging the criminal career of Jabez in the paradigmatically modern cities of Paris and London—and in ocular conditions created by new, material transformations in those spaces—the novel interrogates the prospect of transparency in societies defined increasingly by urbanization.

As part of the ongoing revival of interest in Braddon, there has been a recent ‘surge of interest’ in her first novel.⁸ Scholars are increasingly aware not only of how *Trail* ‘occupies a fascinating place in relation both to Braddon’s sensational oeuvre and to the criticism that greeted it’, but of its dense imbrication with such contemporary concerns as madness and toxicology.⁹ This chapter extends Christine Ferguson and Saverio Tomaiuolo’s assessments about the novel’s concern for ‘visuality’,¹⁰ understanding that term in the following sense:

The difference [between vision and visuality] signals a difference within the visual – between the mechanism of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations – a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein.¹¹

Whilst Ferguson and Tomaiuolo take a disability studies perspective on this facet of *Trail*, this chapter focuses on how modernization transformed visuality, creating social, material, and epistemological change; the effects of this are evident in phenomena as diverse as physiological understandings of the body and material

⁸ Andrew Mangham, “‘Drink It up Dear, It Will Do You Good’: Crime, Toxicology and *The Trail of the Serpent*”, in *New Perspectives on Mary Elizabeth Braddon (DQR Studies in Literature)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 95–112 (p. 95).

⁹ Sarah Waters, ‘Introduction’, in *The Trail of the Serpent* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), pp. xv–xxiv (pp. xv–xvi). See Valerie Pedlar, *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2006); Lillian Nayder, ‘Science and Sensation’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, pp. 154–67 (pp. 159–61); Mangham, “‘Drink It up Dear, It Will Do You Good’: Crime, Toxicology and *The Trail of the Serpent*”.

¹⁰ Christine Ferguson, ‘Sensational Dependence: Prosthesis and Affect in Dickens and Braddon’, *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 19.1 (2008), 1–25 (p. 14); Saverio Tomaiuolo, ‘Perception, Abduction, Disability: Eleanor’s Victory and *The Trail of the Serpent*’, in *In Lady Audley’s Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 97–118.

¹¹ Hal Foster, ‘Introduction’, in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. by Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), p. ix. See also Nicholas Mirzoeff, ‘On Visuality’, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5.1 (2006), 53–79.

alterations such as gaslight. Accordingly, Jonathan Crary and Chris Otter's work is a considerable influence on this chapter,¹² but I bring their studies into dialogue with histories of physiognomy in particular.¹³ The chapter seeks to demonstrate how, by acting as a locus for these diverse aspects of visibility, *Trail* is an example that helps to further our understanding of the ambivalences inherent to 'visual modernity'.

'PROFESSED INDUCTION' OR 'LIVING CONVICTION'? THE UNCERTAINTIES OF VISUALITY

'Vision', no less its capacity to establish the 'legible body',¹⁴ was a contested subject when Braddon's *Trail* was first published in 1860.¹⁵ To understand why this was, and the intervention that the novel makes in these contestations, notice must first be given to the 'dominant scopic regime of the modern era',¹⁶ Cartesian perspectivalism, and the homology used to describe it, the *camera obscura*.¹⁷

Cartesian perspectivalism refers to the model of vision developed by the philosopher René Descartes in *La Dioptrique* (*Optics* [1637]).¹⁸ Descartes asserted a strict separation of the mind and body in vision and deprecated the eye's role, writing 'it is the soul that sees, and not the eye'.¹⁹ He explained his theory using the *camera obscura*, an enclosed interior (a room or device) in which light enters

¹² Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992); Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Regrettably, Jonathan Potter's, *Discourses of Vision in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Seeing, Thinking, Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) was published too late for me to engage fully with its findings in this chapter.

¹³ An example of these studies of physiognomy is Sharrona Pearl, *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁴ The term 'legible body' has had a long history, and is most notable in Michel Foucault's work and in Foucauldian studies; see, for example, Michael Shortland, 'Skin Deep: Barthes, Lavater and the Legible Body', *Economy and Society*, 14.3 (1985), 273–312.

¹⁵ It was first published in 1860 as *Three Times Dead; or, The Secret of the Heath* (London: W&M Clark) before being reworked and released under its present title in 1861 (London: Ward, Lock). It was then serialized in the *Half-Penny Journal* during 1864.

¹⁶ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 70.

¹⁷ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 27.

¹⁸ The coinage is Martin Jay's; *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, p. 69. 'Perspectivalism' (or 'perspectivism') is the philosophical view, developed chiefly by Friedrich Nietzsche, that ideation takes place from particular *perspectives*; hence, nothing can be known absolutely or in abstraction from perception. Given their mutual reinforcement, the terms 'camera obscura model [of vision]' and 'Cartesian perspectivalism' are largely interchangeable in this discussion.

¹⁹ Robert S. Nelson, 'Introduction: Descartes's Cow and Other Domestications of the Visual', in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–20 (p. 7).

via a small, lens-covered hole to produce an inverted image of the outside world. By suggesting the replacement of the *camera* lens with an actual eye ('of a newly dead person [or animal]'), Descartes analogized how vision occurred in the living subject; the eye, accordingly, became only an 'unfeeling machine, a viewing apparatus'²⁰—whether it belonged to the dead or living was immaterial, since vision proper occurred in the mind. Such a theory suggested various qualities of vision, such as 'disembodied rationality, quantifiable realities, and linear causality';²¹ the eye of Cartesian perspectivalism was, according to Martin Jay,

static, unblinking, and fixated, rather than dynamic, moving with what later scientists would call 'saccadic' jumps from one focal point to another. [...] It followed the logic of the Gaze rather than the Glance, thus producing a visual take that was eternalized, [and] reduced to one 'point of view,'²²

Further to this, Peter de Bolla gives the following account of the 'Gaze' theorized by Jay, and its relationship to the creation of meaning:

The eye fixes on an object [...] and in so doing it organizes the visual field; this penetrating gaze structures both the field of vision and the spectator's position within physical space. [It is] a readerly or semiotic practice: the gaze penetrates and organizes the visual field in order to arrive at 'meaning'.²³

Cartesian perspectivalism was (as these accounts' choice of verbs indicate) concomitant with the aims of modernity, as Zygmunt Bauman formulates it: a 'fight of determination against ambiguity, [...] transparency against obscurity, clarity against fuzziness'.²⁴ The relationship between modernity and the nature of vision implied by the Cartesian model may even be construed inversely; the Enlightenment was when modernity achieved its maturity as a 'cultural project' (to become,

²⁰ Nelson, pp. 3–4.

²¹ Kristie S. Fleckenstein, 'A Matter of Perspective: Cartesian Perspectivalism and the Testing of English Studies', *JAC*, 28.1 (2008), 85–121 (p. 86).

²² Martin Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. by Hal Foster, *Discussions in Contemporary Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), pp. 2–23 (p. 7).

²³ Peter de Bolla, 'The Visibility of Visuality: Vauxhall Gardens and the Siting of the Viewer', in *Vision and Textuality*, ed. by Stephen Melville and Bill Readings (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1995), pp. 282–95 (pp. 284–85).

²⁴ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 7.

in the Victorian period, a 'form of life'),²⁵ and sight was not merely the sense 'most often privileged' during that period but definitional to it:²⁶ *to enlighten* is to offer a figurative restoration of sight. Hence, it is possible to claim that the *foci imaginarii* of modernity ('absolute truth, [...] order, certainty, [and] harmony') were aimed at first and foremost through vision.²⁷ Such *ocularcentrism* continued to define mid-Victorian epistemology, as I shall consider.

The certainties suggested by Cartesian perspectivalism was already attracting scepticism by the end of the eighteenth century,²⁸ but critiques intensified from the beginning of the following century. In *Theory of Colours (Zur Farbenlehre* [1810]), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe proffered a speculative theory of 'physiological colour', emphasizing how the perception of light is determined within the body (is corporeally subjective).²⁹ Goethe's treatise appeared in English translation alongside another study on the physiological bases for vision, Johannes Müller's *Elements of Physiology* (1840-43). In contradistinction from Goethe's philosophical approach, Müller's conclusions derived from extensive experimental research and comparative anatomy. His discovery that the same stimuli could produce different sensations depending on the nerve involved, and, conversely, that the same sensation could derive from multiple causes, produced what has been described as an 'epistemological scandal';³⁰ it not only broached an arbitrary relation between stimulus and sensation, but, for this reason, it also problematized the supposedly direct relation between truth and vision.

Müller's divergence from Cartesian perspectivalism was underscored by his foregrounding of the living body. Whereas Cartesian perspectivalism had relied on an *a priori* obfuscation of the body ('it is the soul that sees, and not the eye' as Descartes claimed), the German physiologist (and in this respect he accorded with his compatriot, Goethe) figured the body centrally in all its anatomical particulars:

²⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 4n1.

²⁶ Corinna Wagner, 'The Dream of a Transparent Body: Identity, Science and the Gothic Novel', *Gothic Studies*, 14.1 (2012), 74–92 (p. 77). On the history of ocularcentrism, see Martin Jay, 'The Noblest of the Senses: Vision from Plato to Descartes', in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, pp. 21–82.

²⁷ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 10. For more on these links, see *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. by David Michael Levin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁸ See Otter, p. 27.

²⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. by Charles Lock Eastlake (London: John Murray, 1840).

³⁰ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 90.

The sensation of light is then produced at a determinate part of the eye, and we think to see the body, which, however, merely reflects into the eye the principle capable of exciting the sensation of light, which it has received from elsewhere.³¹

The challenge that such ideas posed to the Cartesian model of vision is robustly evident in an 1834 account by the optical physicist David Brewster:

The ‘mind’s eye’ is actually the body’s eye, and [...] the retina is the common tablet on which both classes of impressions are painted, and by means of which they receive their visual existence according to the same optic laws.³²

The context in which Brewster restores vision to the ‘*body’s eye*’ is also important; that he does so within a discussion of ‘spectral illusions’ is insightful in regards to the incipient visual modernity that Crary raises with reference to Müller: a defining feature of this modernity is its exposure of the ‘referential illusion’³³ (that things with *visual existence* do not require a referent in the objective, material world, but can ‘exist’ only within the body). The ‘sensations of light and colour’, Müller writes, may derive from causes other than radiant light: ‘whenever aliquot parts of the retina are excited by any internal stimulus, such as the blood, or by any external stimulus, such as mechanical pressure, electricity, &c.’³⁴ (Such ideas were circulating in the British popular press at least as early as 1850, when an article in the *Athenaeum* accounted the case of a man who sensed light after receiving a blow to the head.³⁵)

Crary describes *Elements* as an ‘account of a body with an innate capacity, one might even say a transcendental faculty, to *misperceive*’.³⁶ Müller’s most sophisticated contemporaries, such as Brewster, were already alert to this capacity,

³¹ Johannes Müller, *Elements of Physiology*, trans. by William Baly (London: Taylor and Walton, 1842), II, p. 1089.

³² David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic* (London: John Murray, 1834), p. 49. Emphasis added.

³³ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 91.

³⁴ Müller, II, p. 1088. On mechanical pressure and referential illusion, another contemporary source: ‘In such a case there are not, in reality, sparks or other luminous objects, yet the impression is just as vivid as if there were’; ‘The Nervous System; Or, the Physiology of Sensation’, *The Juvenile Companion and Sunday School Hive* (London, January 1855), p. 12.

³⁵ Referring to ‘Professor Muller [*sic*], of Berlin’, it notes that ‘sensations’ may be created by ‘various external agencies’; ‘Untitled’, *The Athenaeum*, 1179 (1850), 587–88 (p. 588).

³⁶ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 90. Emphasis in original.

but by the end of the 1860s this same understanding might be found in popular treatments of vision; F. Marion's *The Wonders of Optics* (1868), for instance, devotes an entire section to 'The Errors of the Eye', which the author prefaces with a description of

that wonderful and important organ of our body [the eye] which we are apt to look upon as sure and infallible, but which we shall find is deceiving us constantly, and hourly proving the fallacy of the popular saying, that 'every one must believe his own eyes'.³⁷

That Marion could ascribe qualities of *deception* to vision is a striking departure from Cartesian perspectivalism, which held it as the privileged means of accessing truth. Yet such an apparently emphatic departure from Enlightenment thought belies a more complex negotiation of the promises behind vision; Marion affirms, shortly afterward, a faith in the *corrective powers of reason*—of the mind's capacity to overcome 'The Errors of the Eye' and maintain vision's ability to determine reality.³⁸ Such internally-conflicted ideas about vision resonate with the situation in Braddon's *Trail*, in which questions of deception become a vital aspect of plot.

Crary accounts for the impact of physiological optics, or the discoveries made by Müller and others, as irreversible and profound: 'the visible escapes from the timeless order of the camera obscura and becomes lodged in another apparatus [, namely,] the unstable physiology and temporality of the body'.³⁹ Yet even the single case of Marion suggests that this is too neat a description of the contested and complex beliefs concerning visuality in the mid-Victorian period. One incisive example of these ambivalent attitudes is the continued use of the *camera obscura* as an analogy for the eye, despite the recognition (developed from physiological optics) that vision's access to truth was limited by that organ's inefficacies. Hence, in 1871 the physicist John Tyndall made the ambivalent declaration that 'the eye is a camera obscura', yet also 'by no means a perfect optical instrument'.⁴⁰ Most powerfully demonstrating the persistence of older, seemingly outmoded, models of vision, however, was the fact that 'the body' itself continued to receive visual

³⁷ F. Marion, *The Wonders of Optics*, trans. by Charles W. Quin (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1868), p. 16.

³⁸ Marion, p. 16.

³⁹ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 70.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Otter, p. 277n11.

scrutiny via methods that appealed to a supposed ‘timeless order’. Central, here, is the enduring popularity of physiognomy in mid-Victorian Britain, seventy years after Lavater’s *Essays* formulated it. Physiognomy’s aims—to ‘observe, estimate, compare and judge according to appearances’⁴¹—did not originate in *Essays*, as Lavater himself admitted, but the manner of its expression there (and the motivation for doing so) was inextricable from the tenets of Cartesian perspectivalism.⁴² As Evelyn K. Moore discerns in her comparison of the *camera obscura* with the portraits used in *Essays* (to demonstrate physiognomic principles): ‘the camera obscura and the concomitant craze for silhouettes reflected [a] desire to “fix” the image’.⁴³ Lavater’s ‘science of reading’ aspired to ‘freeze the face’s state of constant flux into a state of immutability’,⁴⁴ just as Cartesian perspectivalism obfuscated the ‘flux’ of the unstable, physiological body. Underlying both, furthermore, was an ambition that exemplifies modernity: the desire to construct a world that is ‘classified without a residue, [thus making it] prostrate awaiting command; *it will be transparent* – like the deeds and intentions of the inmates in Bentham’s Panopticon’.⁴⁵ This dream of absolute classification is readily discerned in both physiognomy and Cartesian perspectivalism; as *camera obscurae* (so integral to Descartes’s model) were

congruent with [a] quest to found human knowledge on a purely objective view of the world [its aperture corresponding to a point] from which the world can be logically deduced by a progressive accumulation and combination of signs⁴⁶

so physiognomy’s objective would be to ‘give entire the immense alphabet necessary to decipher the original language of nature written on the face of man and the whole of his exterior’.⁴⁷ Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a more archetypal statement of the totalizing ambitions behind modernity’s ‘order as a task’ than this

⁴¹ Lavater, p. 17.

⁴² Wagner, p. 77.

⁴³ Evelyn K. Moore, *The Eye and the Gaze: Goethe and the Autobiographical Subject* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), p. 99.

⁴⁴ Patrizia Magli, ‘The Face and the Soul’, in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. by Michael Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone, 1989), II, 86–128 (p. 90). Such figures as Giovanni Battista della Porta, who studied both the *camera obscura* and physiognomy, further suggest the interconnection.

⁴⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 174. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁶ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 48.

⁴⁷ ‘Lavater and Physiognomy’, *Chambers’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, 434 (1862), 257–59 (p. 258).

ambition to render the world transparent by unveiling the true (divine) design behind it.

Physiognomy did not merely survive the onset of physiological optics but rose in popularity in mid-Victorian Britain,⁴⁸ proliferating in two ways: firstly, formal sciences co-opted its belief that internal qualities could be manifested in the external; secondly, such assumptions permeated popular discourse (sensation fiction being one such locus, as *Trail* exemplifies).⁴⁹ Yet, if Lavater's science exemplified the ordering ambitions of modernity, it also expressed the 'endemic inconclusivity' of that effort;⁵⁰ commentators in the 1860s were keenly aware that its promise of transparency (the absolute classification of the body's visual signs) remained unrealized. In 1861 (the year in which Braddon's novel was reissued under its present title) E. S. Dallas noted that physiognomy 'has advanced not a step beyond the point at which Lavater left it fourscore years ago'; the Swiss pastor had proven the existence of a 'language of the human form', but had not been able to give its 'grammar'.⁵¹ Similarly, an 1866 article in the *Dublin University Magazine* detailed how

physiognomy has not received the seal of modern science, or been classed among the legitimate pursuits of scientific research; for its character has remained doubtful, varying, like the chameleon, with the hues of surrounding objects, now brightening with information and certainty, now fading into delusion and imposture.⁵²

Quintessentially modern, again, was the enduring belief that, despite the lack of 'advance[ment]' so far, it was nonetheless possible for a 'science' of bodily reading to be established in the future—and on the basis of technology. Photography attracted especial attention in this regard, because of its ever-growing capabilities (greater fidelity to nature, easier reproduction, and so forth). Thus, Dallas writes of this prospect: 'it may be that the faithful register of the camera, supplying us

⁴⁸ If judged by the editions of Lavater's *Essays* and the appearances of 'physiognomy' in the popular press, interest in the practice peaked during the middle decades of the century. (Search performed for the term 'physiognomy' on the ProQuest *British Periodicals* database, using the date range '1830 to 1900'.)

⁴⁹ Otter, p. 52.

⁵⁰ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 10.

⁵¹ E. S. Dallas, 'On Physiognomy', *Cornhill Magazine*, 4 (1861), 472–81 (p. 472).

⁵² 'Phases of Physiognomy', *Dublin University Magazine*, 68.406 (1866), 466–80 (p. 466).

with countless numbers of accurate observations, will now render that [physiognomy] an actual science which has hitherto only been a possible one'.⁵³ Equivalently, even as an 1862 *Chambers's Journal* article disdains the particular system of signs developed by Lavater, it argues that 'valuable results' might be obtained from applying a scientific perspective to the same phenomena, allied to new visual technologies (in particular photography):

None will deny that character is expressed in the face and body; the only doubt is as to the possibility of the skill that can read its complex and intertwined signs with any certainty. [...] Now we have photography we can not only study the living at our leisure as they are, but can obtain faithful transcripts of the best pictures of men famous and infamous who have passed from earth.⁵⁴

Expressed in this passage, I suggest, are the two varieties of doubt that Bauman argues are constitutive of the 'modern mentality'. The first is evoked by the denial of its presence; it is the haunting doubt about the legitimacy of the endeavour to read character 'in the face and body'—uncertainty, in another way, about the ordered status of the world (as Bauman terms it, a concern about the "unfoundedness" of certainty).⁵⁵ The second, and the 'only doubt' countenanced by this author, surrounds the best means of reading this language of the body; this type of uncertainty is permissible because it catalyzes action and justifies the ordering imperative of modernity: in this case, it prompts the cataloguing ('transcript[ions]') of historical figures, with the ultimate objective of elucidating the 'grammar' behind the body's language. (The more disturbing doubt that this passage strives to suppress (but which it, ironically, therefore provides 'vivid testimony' of⁵⁶) is returned to in chapters 3 and 4.) This *Chambers's Journal* excerpt indicates physiognomy as a crucial locus for the ambivalences of modern visibility—it evidences the survival of the so-called 'classical episteme' into the nineteenth century,⁵⁷ but it also demonstrates that this older, more certain attitude toward visibility now

⁵³ Dallas, p. 475.

⁵⁴ 'Lavater and Physiognomy', p. 259.

⁵⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 243.

⁵⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 243.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 2000), p. 12n1.

found expression in the very latest technologies. That is to say, ruptured by physiological optics, the sureties of the *camera obscura* model promised to re-emerge through the modern, technological capabilities of the new, photographic *camera*,⁵⁸ which might finally realize the ambitions of physiognomy. These conflicting associations of physiognomy function vitally in terms of *Trail's* depiction of visual modernity as a 'contested terrain', I will be arguing.

Ambivalence surrounded not merely the signs of the body, however, but also their reception by the viewing subject. Even if the body spoke the incontrovertible truth of a person's interior qualities, was this correspondence certain to be picked up on by everyone? Such questions spoke to broader concerns about deception and how 'truth' could be confirmed. In his 1854 essay, 'Personal Beauty', Herbert Spencer captured the tenor of this debate when he figured bodily legibility as an issue that brought intellectual and instinctual feelings into conflict:

It is a common opinion that beauty of character and beauty of aspect are unrelated. I have never been able to reconcile myself to this opinion. Indeed, even those who hold it do so in an incomplete sense; for notwithstanding their theory they continue to manifest surprise when they find a mean deed committed by one of noble countenance—a fact implying that underneath their professed induction lies a still living conviction at variance with it.⁵⁹

If Marion later ascribes the deceptive potential of vision to the physiological (deriving from the eye-as-organ), then Spencer situates it around appearances: the failure of correspondence between a beautiful aspect and an ignoble interior. But deceptive potential does not inhere to the external world; rather, it emerges from people's erroneous reading of it: their concealment of instinctual feelings 'underneath' (the term resonating with the sense of visible surfaces) a visage of rational judgment. For Spencer, such persons are essentially *deceiving themselves* as to the truth accessible by vision: instinctually able to see a correspondence between outer forms and inner character, reason directs them to deny it. This sentiment

⁵⁸ The homonym is not accidental; Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, a pioneer of photography, 'produced a method of chemically fixing an image from a camera obscura on a highly polished silver plate [the "daguerreotype"]'; Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 125.

⁵⁹ Herbert Spencer, 'Personal Beauty', in *Essays: Scientific, Political and Speculative* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891 [1854]), II, p. 387.

accords with Lavater's advice that 'we must, [...] after repeated deception, reject reasoning, and be guided by the deep sensation, the disregarded conviction, we first feel of insincerity'.⁶⁰ The aim of physiognomy—as the '[s]cience of discovering the relation between [...] the apparent effect, and the *concealed* cause which produces it'—is to combat this duplicity; as Corinna Wagner elaborates:

That Lavater describes what is imperceptible about the human as 'concealed' conveys not only an anxiety about the opacity that otherwise surrounds human character, but also betrays a deep disquiet about the human capacity for deception (intentional or unintentional). The body – unlike the person – speaks truths.⁶¹

Finally, Spencer's account is of interest in the context of the idea that 'artifice' (an 'artificial order') underpins modernity⁶²—as a project it relies upon making natural what is actually a contrivance (the world does not *naturally* correspond to order). Sensation fiction interrogates such artifice, as I asserted in the Introduction to this thesis; *Trail* does so in terms of the manifold deceptions that appear around visibility: in the 'failure' of correspondence between appearances; in the self-deluding denial that such correspondence exists (Spencer); and in the physiological deficiencies of the eye itself (Marion).

From the start of her career, Braddon revealed herself as a writer conscious of the same tensions and concerns raised by Spencer and Marion; aware, moreover, of the potential applications to fiction of the 'surprise' elicited by a failure of correspondence between exterior and interior realities. In *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862),⁶³ the work that established her success, Braddon's eponymous character exploits the physiognomic expectations raised by her appearance as a 'childish, helpless, babyfied little creature'.⁶⁴ Lady Audley's (Lucy Graham) exterior proves significant as a misdirection to her murderous propensities, especially in the context of Robert Audley's investigation of her past. Braddon not only arrays her protagonist in *general* physiognomic terms, but also deploys exact visual signifiers; notably, by giving Lucy 'golden hair', Braddon was aiming to subvert specifically

⁶⁰ Lavater, p. 90.

⁶¹ Wagner, p. 76.

⁶² Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 9.

⁶³ There was an unfinished serialization of the novel in *Robin Goodfellow* (July-September 1861).

⁶⁴ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 141.

the equation of this hair colour with ‘angelic femininity’.⁶⁵ (The use was in fact so iconic as to temporarily establish blonde as the favoured hair colour for villains.⁶⁶) Her subsequent novel, *Aurora Floyd* (1862), is perhaps even more reflexive and subversive in its engagement with physiognomy and the legible body. In reference to the depraved nature of the beautiful James Conyers, its narrator cites George Eliot’s pithy remark (in *Adam Bede* [1859]) that ‘there may be no direct correlation between eyelashes and morals’. Braddon’s reference proves not to be a simplistic condoning of anti-physiognomic sentiment, however; it precedes a more sophisticated engagement with questions of correspondence between the internal and external. The narrator of *Aurora Floyd* elaborates:

It must be that there is something anomalous in this outward beauty and inward ugliness; for, in spite of all experience, we revolt against it, and are incredulous to the last, believing that the palace which is outwardly so splendid can scarcely be ill furnished within.⁶⁷

This citation of Eliot may in fact situate Braddon within a more expansive debate on bodily legibility. Jeanne Fahnestock proposes, for instance, that Eliot’s remark in *Adam Bede* may have been directed at Spencer (who, as I noted of his essay ‘Personal Beauty’, tended toward a belief in the correspondence of appearance and interior).⁶⁸ But the debate implicates other figures. In 1861, Dallas had vociferously rebuked Eliot’s statement about the relations between appearances and internal truths; her ‘instincts contradict her reasoning’, he wrote:

She cannot help the expectation of certain mental qualities when she perceives certain physiognomical signs. That expectation, she tells us, has often been deceived. But on what has it been founded at all that it should exist and continually recur? It is founded on facts—on the great fact that a language there is, whether we can interpret it or not. [...] If

⁶⁵ Galia Ofek, ‘Sensational Hair: Gender, Genre, and Fetishism in the Sensational Decade’, in *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. 103. Ofek admits that Braddon’s subversion was preceded by two earlier pieces, but insists on her significance in establishing the change.

⁶⁶ In 1867, Margaret Oliphant complained that Braddon had initiated a trend for villains with blonde hair; ‘Novels’, in *Varieties of Women’s Sensation Fiction: 1850-1890*, ed. by Andrew Maunder (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), I, 171–90 (p. 178).

⁶⁷ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Aurora Floyd*, ed. by P. D. Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 181, 468n181.

⁶⁸ Jeanne Fahnestock, ‘The Heroine of Irregular Features: Physiognomy and Conventions of Heroine Description’, *Victorian Studies*, 24.3 (1981), 325–50 (p. 350).

we fail to read a face, the fault is not in physiognomy, but in our own want of penetration.⁶⁹

Dallas's effectively brings the dialogue full circle by evoking, and applying to Eliot, Spencer's accusation that there are some whose 'still living conviction' is at odds with their 'professed induction'; for Dallas, Eliot is deceiving herself and others by refusing to admit that there is a language to the body's signs.

If Dallas, Braddon, and Spencer retained a belief in the idea that truths about the person might be gained by a visual inspection of the body, they nonetheless admitted a multitude of questions. Was the 'power of penetrating character' open to all (as physiognomy originally suggested)?⁷⁰ What was the optimal method for developing it? What were its limitations? Such questions were at once incendiary and mystifying; as the author of one contribution noted, on the subject of whether 'physiognomy or phrenology be true or untrue', it was 'a controversy' that he was unwilling to be 'led into [debating]'.⁷¹ Dallas, equally, whilst forthcoming in his 'opposition to the sceptics' of physiognomy, resists proposing how its remaining uncertainties can be resolved; 'in the present paper', he writes, 'all I have attempted is to vindicate the possibility of the science and to account for its non-appearance'.⁷²

These, and other questions, are interrogated in *Trail*, as I demonstrate in the rest of this chapter. Braddon's imbrication within the aforementioned discussions over bodily legibility and transparency, strongly evident in her novels of the early 1860s (and remaining so throughout her career), already finds expression in her debut.⁷³ The ambivalences over visibility are articulated not only in bodies whose appearances mislead, but also in the physiologically-defined deficiencies of sight (indexing those differences between Marion and Spencer). As noted previously, such concerns modernity in an essential sense because it is a 'task of order (more precisely and most importantly, [...] order as a task)'; in terms of visibility, it holds the belief that the world could be rendered transparent if only it could be ordered

⁶⁹ E. S. Dallas, 'On Physiognomy', *Cornhill Magazine*, 4 (1861), 472–81 (p. 477).

⁷⁰ 'Signs of Character', *Sharpe's London Magazine*, 4 (1854), 371–74 (p. 374).

⁷¹ 'Signs of Character', p. 374.

⁷² Dallas, pp. 481, 480.

⁷³ The 1862 publication of *Lady Audley's Secret* (after an unfinished 1861 serialization) belies the fact that the two novels were composed almost contemporaneously; Braddon notes that the 'germ of "Lady Audley's Secret"' was in a 'certain short story which I had lately written' as she was working on *Trail* (then *Three Times Dead*); 'Appendix: "My First Novel"', in *The Trail of the Serpent*, ed. by Chris Willis (New York: Modern Library), pp. 415–27 (p. 423).

without exception. But *Trail* takes this connection further by staging such uncertainties in settings that most conspicuously exhibited the ongoing effects of modernization, Paris and London. Braddon's novel, this chapter argues, offers a crucial demonstration of Martin Jay's claim that the 'scopic regime of modernity may best be understood as a contested terrain, rather than as a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices'.⁷⁴ That 'contested terrain' of visual modernity is the staging ground for Braddon's sensational plot.

'IF WE COULD LOOK INTO HIS HEART': FICTIONALIZING THE UNCERTAINTIES OF VISUALITY

Trail centres on the schemes of the orphan Jabez North to obtain a fortune and aristocratic title. The novel opens in the provincial town of Slopperton, in which Jabez is a schoolmaster, as he murders both the wealthy Montague Harding and a schoolboy. The first of these murders leads to the false indictment of the victim's nephew, Richard Marwood, whose eventual sentence is commuted to life imprisonment in a lunatic asylum after intervention by the mute detective Joseph Peters. Upon Marwood's eventual escape, he resolves, with the help of his friends and Peters, to find the real culprit and exonerate himself. Jabez, meanwhile, has fled to Paris after leaving behind the body of his twin brother as evidence of his own suicide; in Paris he blackmails the Spanish heiress Valerie de Cevennes into marrying him and poisoning her betrothed. Holidaying in the British capital, Peters chances upon Count Raymond de Marolles (as Jabez is now known), who has relocated there. Marwood's group investigates further, and obtains the necessary evidence; Jabez is eventually apprehended and put on trial in Slopperton, the site of the original murders. Pronounced guilty, he takes his own life before the sentence can be carried out.

This synopsis demonstrates my previous point regarding the structuring function of visual uncertainty in *Trail*, and it informs the discussion, made in the Introduction, about the typical 'plot' in sensation fiction: Braddon's novel is structured around (and generates suspense from) questions and anxieties over bodily legibility and the fallibility of vision. Jabez's criminal career grants an urgency to their

⁷⁴ Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', p. 4.

resolution. He dextrously manipulates the shortcomings of vision to mislead his dupes and is protected by his deceptive appearance (outward beauty concealing immorality); frustrating him hinges upon utilizing such consciousness about visibility to *uncover* the truth, rather than to dissimulate. Ambivalence is disclosed by the actions of Braddon's socially-transgressive antagonist, and order is reinstated by his eventual capture/death.

Uncertainties are reflexively and intensively produced from the outset of *Trail*, when Jabez is introduced as the 'Good Schoolmaster' of Slopperton and a 'Respectable Young Man' (4, 5). Having proclaimed his rectitude, Braddon's narrator ostensibly aims to justify them by pointing to the evidence of Jabez's appearance. In fact, their readings of Jabez's exterior not only bring his beneficence into question, but they spotlight larger uncertainties about the prospect of the legible body. (The narrator maintains, throughout, a wry detachment from confirming or denying the 'truth' of the readings, to which their authorial status (omniscience) grants them unique access.) The first description of the 'Good Schoolmaster' is proliferated by physiognomic significations:

He was not only a good young man, [...] but he was rather a handsome young man also. He had delicate features, a pale fair complexion, and, as young women said, very beautiful blue eyes; only it was unfortunate that these eyes, being, according to report, such a very beautiful colour, had a shifting way with them, and never looked at you long enough for you to find out their exact hue, or their exact expression either. He had also what was called a very fine head of fair curly hair. (7)

The elision of 'good[ness]' with 'handsome[ness]' in the first line teases the idea that the principle of 'Harmony [between] Physical and Moral Beauty', a mainstay of physiognomic thought,⁷⁵ will be adhered to. It is the disruption of this unity that Spencer had hailed as liable to produce 'surprise', and thus the visual signs seem poised to consolidate Jabez's rectitude. The prospect appears to find further support in the superlative quality of his eyes ('very beautiful blue'); yet blue eyes are a physiognomic signifier specifically for 'weakness, effeminacy, and yielding', and so this detail disarms expectations about his future murderous criminal career.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Lavater, p. 95.

⁷⁶ Lavater, p. 383. The case of Robert Crawley's blue eyes in W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) was a notable counter to physiognomic assumptions of the feature; Braddon, being familiar

As significant, however, is what the detail omits; indeterminacies remain about the 'exact hue' and 'exact expression' of the eyes—indeterminacies that are self-consciously disclosed as troubling ('unfortunate') by the wry narrative voice. The omission is decisive: since the smallest details could lead to widely divergent readings in physiognomy, conclusions about Jabez's morality and gentle nature must remain contingent. (His eyes prove to be light blue. 'Extremely clear' (almost transparent) blue eyes denote 'a character [...] suspicious, jealous, and easily excited against others':⁷⁷ an apt description of Jabez's character; thus, his eyes seemingly *do* correspond to his nature, albeit in terms entirely at odds with his reputation.) The notice of the eyes' 'shifting way[s]' is vital, for it resonates with what Wagner proposes is Lavater's attention to the 'human capacity for deception (intentional or unintentional)'.⁷⁸ Jabez is saved from censure only due to the fact that his deceitfulness might be *unintentional* (an innate aspect of his appearance), yet the use of the word 'unfortunate' indicates that the damaging aspersions of *intentional* deceit remain latent.

Even as this physiognomic reading of Jabez aims to pin down his character, and to corroborate the high regard in which he is already held, it only increases ambivalence. Seemingly conscious of the remaining uncertainties, and as if seeking to settle them from another angle, Jabez is then made subject to a phrenological reading:

[He had] what some people considered a very fine head—though it was a pity it shelved off on either side in the locality where prejudiced people place the organ of conscientiousness. A professor of phrenology, lecturing at Slopperton, had declared Jabez North to be singularly wanting in that small virtue; and had even gone so far as to hint that he had never met with a parallel case of deficiency in the entire moral region, except in the skull of a very distinguished criminal, who invited

with Thackeray's work (see Jennifer Carnell, *The Literary Lives of Mary Elizabeth Braddon: A Survey of Her Life and Work* (Hastings: Sensation Press, 2000), p. 90.) may have intended to recreate the disarming effect. The 'gentle' reading is affirmed by Jabez's 'fair hair', which Graeme Tytler writes of being 'often assigned [in novels of this time] to characters of an essentially gentle nature'; *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 212, 214.

⁷⁷ Lavater, p. 467.

⁷⁸ Wagner, p. 76.

a friend to dinner and murdered him on the kitchen stairs while the first course was being dished. (7)

Physiognomy and phrenology constituted systems of knowledge distinct from one another,⁷⁹ and they ought not to be idly conflated. Yet, neither should their differences be overstated; both of these sciences of bodily reading aimed at ‘penetrat[ing] external defences to disclose a concealed domain of inner selfhood’, and, in doing so, created moral and aesthetic interpretations (that is, in both sciences individuals could be assessed, and these assessments visualized; phrenological ‘heads’ and physiognomic manuals are the clearest examples of this).⁸⁰ Resemblances were also perceived by contemporaries—as much as Franz Joseph Gall, the founder of phrenology, aimed to establish his field in contradistinction from physiognomy,⁸¹ it was swiftly and persistently conflated with Lavater’s ‘science’.⁸² Despite Gall’s assertions of its scientific bases, phrenology also became the target of vocal aspersions about its veracity (exceeding those around physiognomy); the magazine *Punch* ironically referred to phrenology as a ‘subject on which the opinions of scientific men have always been so *unanimous*, and upon which so *little has been said*’.⁸³ The science was persistently associated with the criminological (to use an anachronism),⁸⁴ the most renowned treatment of this connection being by George Combe, in his 1854 essay ‘Criminal Legislation and Prison

⁷⁹ ‘Physiognomy was essentialist, idealist, and open of access; phrenology was rational, materialist, and closed of access to the uninitiated. [...] operating upon different social and intellectual axes, they presented quite distinct models of character interpretation’; Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 61.

⁸⁰ *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts, 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 3; Tytler, p. 88.

⁸¹ ‘Others imagine, that my researches [...] are of the same nature as those of the physiognomists. There is [...] absolutely no relation between the two’; Franz Joseph Gall, *On the Functions of the Brain*, trans. by Winslow Lewis (Boston, Mass.: Marsh, Capen, & Lyon, 1835), v, pp. 261–62.

⁸² Graeme Tytler offers an extensive list of titles that did such; p. 88n21. One notable omission is Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, *Phrenology in Connection with the Study of Physiognomy* (Boston: Marsh, Capen, & Lyon, 1833).

⁸³ ‘Punch’s Phrenology’, *Punch*, 115. Date Unknown. Emphasis added.

⁸⁴ In a satirical article of 1837, the criminal ‘Greenacre’ is visited by a phrenologist after admitting to his crimes; his hope is that the ‘measurement of his head should coincide with his confessions’; ‘Phrenology’, *The Penny Satirist*, 1837, 4.

Discipline'.⁸⁵ *Trail's* phrenological description of Jabez is plausibly a parodic treatment of how Combe equates criminal tendencies with the morphology of cerebral 'region[s]'.⁸⁶

Readers' expectations and responses to this passage would no doubt have been shaped by the depiction of phrenology in contemporaneous fiction. Only the year prior to *Trail's* publication, Eliot's novella *The Lifted Veil* (1859) had warned of the devastating consequences of trusting to the 'science' as a way to predict future conduct—its protagonist, Latimer, suffers under its predictions for his entire life.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, readers of the re-released *Trail* (the majority⁸⁸) may have been guided by Braddon's own intervention on the subject in another of her novels; in *Henry Dunbar* (1863-64), the practice is derided when Clement Austin, to escape embarrassment, delivers the absurd claim of Margaret Wentworth that her 'organs of time and tune' (she is playing a musical instrument) are unusually developed.⁸⁹ Such readers may also have interpreted Jabez's phrenological reading in light of Dallas's 1861 critique in *Cornhill Magazine*: he declared that the practice 'makes a pretence of science where there is none at all, *affects precision*, and *leaps to conclusion*';⁹⁰ the comparison made by Braddon's phrenologist between Jabez and the murderous criminal, on the basis of a minute cranial idiosyncrasy, certainly constitutes such a 'leap' as Dallas criticizes. Hence, though the 'Slopertonians' react defensively to the phrenologist's reading (because it contradicts their own, biased interpretation of Jabez), their dismissal of the science is warranted: they 'pronounced this professor to be an impostor, and his art a piece of charlatanism' (7). The 'truth' behind not simply these phrenological judgements of Jabez, but also the correspondence of interior and exterior qualities, is made powerfully uncertain in *Trail*; the novel raises several possibilities without endorsing any of them, and readers' judgment is suspended between the equally dubious verdicts of the phrenologist and the townsfolk. Phrenology does not remedy

⁸⁵ It is incisive of the shared intellectual climate from which physiognomy and phrenology emerged that this is also the publication date of Spencer's essay 'Personal Beauty'.

⁸⁶ [George Combe], 'Criminal Legislation and Prison Discipline', *Westminster Review*, 61.120 (1854), 409–45.

⁸⁷ George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob*, ed. by Helen Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁸⁸ Braddon herself opined: 'that one living creature ever bought a number of "Three Times Dead" [*The Trail of the Serpent*] I greatly doubt'; 'Appendix: "My First Novel"', p. 423.

⁸⁹ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Henry Dunbar*, Volume 2 (London: John Maxwell, 1864), p. 45.

⁹⁰ Dallas, p. 476. Emphasis added.

the deficiencies of physiognomy (whose conclusions must remain contingent because of a lack of detail), but introduces further uncertainties. Neither of the two ‘sciences’ proves sufficient to the task that Braddon’s narrator deploys them for—to access the truth about his moral character by appraising the signs of his body.

The ambivalence raised by these readings of Jabez stems not only from their ‘contents’ (*what* they assert about him), but also the method of their delivery (*how* they assert it). By this I aim to call notice to the obsessive foregrounding of others in interpreting Braddon’s antagonist; nearly every physical detail is ascribed to a second party, either in general or specific terms: ‘as young women said’, ‘according to report’, ‘what was called’, ‘what some people considered’ (7). These details not only gesture to the ubiquity of judging by appearances, but they figure vitally in terms of whether these readings are trustworthy. As Sharrona Pearl points out, experiential proximity was a primary concern in the endeavour to render bodies legible: ‘secondhand vision, the sight of others, was inadequate [in the nineteenth century]; people trusted what they experienced personally’.⁹¹ Personal access to appearances is of course impossible in novel reading, yet, rather than obscure this essential facet of the novel form, Braddon emphasizes it through references to external parties. The most formative mediator is of course the third-person narrator, who wryly reflects upon what is said about Jabez; given their omniscience, there is an abrogation from the narrator on the question of whether these readings are justifiable or prejudiced (and readers are helpless to resolve it for themselves at this stage). Thus, ‘concealment (intentional or unintentional)’ resonates in *Trail* at the level of narration, as it does in many sensation novels.⁹² But *Trail* locates it specifically around visibility—the narrator neither denies nor confirms whether the visual signs of Jabez’s body correspond to the interior qualities beneath, giving instead only elusive (suspenseful) hints at varying possibilities. The outcome is a radical uncertainty around the prospect of achieving transparency.

As if striving to rectify the epistemological shortcomings that Pearl discerns of second-hand readings, *Trail*’s first chapter ends by staging a more proximate

⁹¹ Sharrona Pearl, *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 15.

⁹² Lyn Pykett provides a lucid summary of and addition to the scholarship on sensation fiction’s ‘unreliable’ narration in ‘*The Woman in White* and the Secrets of the Sensation Novel’, *Connotations*, 21.1 (2011), 37–45.

encounter with Jabez; the emphasis is not on how *others* have read him, but on the need for readers to now do so *for themselves*:

[It is] not so dark by the head assistant's desk, at which Jabez sits, his face ineffably calm, [...] *Look at the eyes*, which are steady now, for he does not dream that any one is watching him—steady and luminous with a subdued fire, which might blaze out some day into a deadly flame. *Look at the face*, the determined mouth, the thin lips, which form almost an arch—and say, is that the face of a man to be content with a life of dreary and obscure monotony? [...] If we could *look into his heart*, we might find the answers to these questions. (10; emphases added)

This tableau frames Jabez in conditions evocative of those sought after in physiognomy. Lavater privileged readings that occurred without the subject being able to dissimulate: 'the hypocrite is never less capable of dissimulation than at the first moment, when he remains *perfectly himself*, and before his powers of deception are excited'.⁹³ Moore elaborates on the desire for these conditions: 'true knowledge can only be ascertained when the body is not being guided by the will and the emotions of the living being'; hence the 'voyeur' is the paradigmatic viewing subject for physiognomy (the corpse is the exemplary viewing *object*, as considered below).⁹⁴ In this long passage, the voyeuristic position of readers is made plain by the detail that Jabez 'does not dream that any one is watching him' (10), and enhanced by the notice of his hyperbolic fixity ('ineffabl[e] calm[ness]' [10]). The scene also resonates with Cartesian perspectivalism: the 'eye' is 'static, unblinking, and fixated, rather than dynamic' and, atomizing Jabez's physical features in succession, it 'jumps from one focal point to another'. It produces a visual take that is 'eternalized'⁹⁵—the description is shorn of any reference to the passing of time.

Portraits had long been the favoured means of achieving the ineffability that lent itself to physiognomic readings (hence numbers of them were reproduced in Lavater's *Essays*). But I would contend that this scene gestures toward photog-

⁹³ Lavater, p. 88. Emphasis added.

⁹⁴ Moore, p. 106.

⁹⁵ Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', p. 7.

raphy: the medium that was poised to supplant portraiture as the means of faithfully rendering physiognomic subjects. It promised to fulfil this role because of its alleged objectivity: its capacity to reproduce reality absent of human intervention.⁹⁶ Thus, represented through that medium, physiognomy could shore up its scientific status (and hence acquire greater legitimacy)—a prospect that, as was considered, Dallas and *Chambers's Journal* were to hail in 1861/62. Yet contemporaries also recognized that photography was as much an art as a science, that is, a practice dependent on human creativity; the 'realities' shown through it were achieved only by deliberate and skilful intervention. Such a character was in fact essential if it were to achieve physiognomic application, as Pearl describes: 'the strength of photographs was precisely that they were [...] *productions* made by photographers, who could and did emphasize physiognomically meaningful symbols. The likenesses produced by the camera were highly mediated'.⁹⁷ Physiognomy based upon this technology would therefore need to contend with the paradox identified by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison: 'scientific photography held out a promise of automaticity [judgment-free representation]' and yet, of course, it 'clearly could not do without real human hands and heads'. That 'longing for the perfect, "pure" image' of Cartesian perspectivalism,⁹⁸ a prospect tainted by physiological optics, did not, therefore, seem achievable through photography either.

Braddon's scene pulls apart these paradoxical associations that arose in the reception of photography. The objective promises made of it are aped by the hyperbolic stillness of the observation—the flux of the living subject, Jabez, is distilled into a moment that is endlessly reproducible, and over which readers can pore at their leisure. Its result aspires to the promises made about 'daguerreotype' photographs, as Ronald R. Thomas characterizes them: they 'seemed even more natural and true than what was visible to the naked eye when viewing the living subject'.⁹⁹ Yet the description is also clearly 'manipulated': recurrent injunctions ('*Look at the face*') guide readers' attention to sites and features that possess physiognomic significance, and plain description is intermixed with interpretation ('the *determined* mouth'). Significant, however, is the fact that even as this scene

⁹⁶ Daston and Galison, pp. 130–31. Emphasis added.

⁹⁷ Pearl, *About Faces*, p. 149. Emphasis added.

⁹⁸ Daston and Galison, pp. 138, 139.

⁹⁹ Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 152.

offers the most optimal conditions under which to order the unruly signs of the body (framed by light, held in perfect stillness), it creates further ambiguity; such is registered by the artificiality of the scene's conditions, a contrivance of narrative omniscience—voyeurism is only possible here because '[no] one is watching him [Jabez]'. And ambivalence is categorical in the way that this description ends by posing *questions* rather than answers. The prospect of achieving transparency is assigned to a dream of quasi-anatomic insight ('if we could *look into his heart*, we might find the answers to these questions'): a form of vision that penetrates the body's surface.

This final statement of the first chapter, and especially that word 'if', both propels the subsequent narrative of *Trail* and expresses its aims—to interrogate the prospect of transparency. It is led by the promise of that 'perfect, "pure" image'—a promise symbolized by the 'cameras' of photography and the *obscura*, and expressed in those injunctions to find the truth through vision ('*Look at the face* [...] and say'). It is haunted by the conclusions of physiological optics: what can be gleaned from vision is contingent and fleeting, and the eyes can deceive as much as inform.

'POWERLESS TO PENETRATE THE INTERIOR': RESISTING AND REALIZING THE DREAM OF TRANSPARENCY

The ambivalence toward the legible body in *Trail* is, as I have accounted, manifest in the first chapter's indeterminate physiognomic and phrenological readings. In subsequent chapters, this ambivalence is registered as a more active contest between resisting and realizing the prospect of transparency, in the form of Richard Marwood's efforts to exonerate himself and prove Jabez's guilt. He is accompanied in the process by the mute detective Joseph Peters and his friends ('the Cherokees'). In turn, Jabez strives to confound these aims by obfuscating visuality. The culmination of the second book of the novel offers an exemplary instance: Jabez leaves the dead body of his twin, Jim Lomax, on a heath for the police to discover. Peters recovers the body and hears later that the 'dead man had been recognized as the principal usher of a great school [...] and that his name was, or had been, Jabez North' (111). The *actual* Jabez uses the opportunity to flee to Paris, where he adopts a new identity as Raymond de Marolles (later to become

the ‘Count de Marolles’ on his marriage to Valerie de Cevennes). Such dissimulation plays, as I consider in this section, on contemporary beliefs about the transparency of the dead to visual scrutiny—a belief that derived from, and served to reinforce, the prospect of achieving certainty through vision.

By the 1800s it has become a ‘fairly established idea’ that corpses might possess a ‘number of details about life, death, and everything in between’.¹⁰⁰ Inspired by the (often public-facing) work of the surgeon John Hunter and others, gothic novels such as Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) and Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya; or, The Moor* (1806) depict the corpse as sources of evidence which become vital to criminal investigations; in such novels the ‘bare, open, and vulnerable faces of the dead’ serve as examples of the “unveiled individual” that, ‘unlike the hidden faces of monks, speaks volumes’.¹⁰¹ The exemplary value of the dead in this regard derived from the same belief (shared by physiognomy and Cartesian perspectivalism) that afforded photography such promise, namely, that vision’s access to truth depended upon fixity. Accordingly, Lavater highlighted the corpse as offering privileged access to physiognomic signifiers; whereas living subjects were prone to dissimulate, death rendered them as an index or ‘open book’. He therefore asked, rhetorically, ‘may there not be an *original* physiognomy, subject to be disturbed by the ebb and flow of accident, and passion, and is not this restored by the calm of death[?]’.¹⁰²

Such a belief in the openness of the corpse to visual scrutiny, and in its incapacity to deceive or mislead, explains why Jabez stages the dead body of his twin as a means of signifying his own death; its truths will be taken as self-evident and persuasive. The moment of ‘identification’ by Jabez’s former schoolmaster is insightful of this context, despite (because of) its brevity, for it impresses upon certain temporal and physiological aspects of vision; the ‘bewildered schoolmaster, hastening to the [police] station, *recognises, at a glance, the features* of his late assistant’ (115; emphasis added). The action is rapid, as shown by the absence of terminal punctuation, and it creates a distinct type of vision, a ‘glance’ (as distinct from ‘gaze’). This ‘glance’ precisely matches modern understandings of this type of vision—not a prolonged, stationary act that separates object from subject,

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Mangham, *Dickens’s Forensic Realism: Truth, Bodies, Evidence* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2017), p. 134.

¹⁰¹ Wagner, pp. 82–83.

¹⁰² Lavater, p. 371.

but one that is momentary and partial.¹⁰³ The schoolmaster's glance, enacted during a moment of psychic disorder, begins and ends his visual scrutiny of the body—no wonder, then, that it only '*recognises* [...] the features'. Such hasty and superficial reading of the dead as performed in this scene was, in fact, explicitly cautioned against in a lecture of 1836 by the physician Alexander Thomson; as the corpse's 'morbid appearances' can be a misnomer, he warned, experts must 'be more than usually cautious in conducting his inspections' and 'not be hurried away in forming his conclusions'.¹⁰⁴ (The necessity for pausing in order to ascertain the right conclusions is a more substantial feature of Collins's *Armada*, as I consider in Chapter 4.)

Yet *Trail* does not show a preference for that alternative to the 'glance' either. The 'gaze' proves equally incapable of revealing the truth about the corpse. Peters (who will elsewhere prove one of the novel's most astute readers) casts an extended look at the body, but does not interrogate the conclusion pointed to by the evidence that Jabez has planted on the body (which suggests suicide). His failure is recorded in terms that gesture ironically to the subversion of the corpse's supposed openness and to the type of vision that should extract its secrets: of the 'shadowy land' of death, Peters is said to be 'powerless to penetrate the interior' (111). As in de Bolla's description cited above, the idealized gaze of Cartesian perspectivalism supposedly '*penetrates* and organizes the visual field in order to arrive at "meaning"'.¹⁰⁵ Here such a result proves chimeric: in place of truth there remains an irresolvable 'mystery' (111). Christine Ferguson writes, pertinently, of Braddon's novel: 'the meaning of visual signs is never self-evident, *nor can such signs be read statically*. It is only when [Jabez's], and [...] Richard Marwood's, body is set in motion that its meaning begins to emerge for the detecting eye'.¹⁰⁶ The corpse provides the hyperbolic case of this unanimated body, and it is no wonder, therefore, that it proves so misleading. In *Trail*, then, the fixity that was valorized by physiognomy and Cartesian perspectivalism is subverted; it facilitates deception, rather than the accessing of the truth.

¹⁰³ On the differences between the 'gaze' and 'glance', see de Bolla, pp. 284–185.

¹⁰⁴ Alexander Thomson, 'Lectures on Medical Jurisprudence. Lecture I', *The Lancet*, 1 (1836), 65–70 (p. 70).

¹⁰⁵ de Bolla, pp. 284–85. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁶ Christine Ferguson, p. 10. Emphasis added.

This same tension between the ‘dream’ of bodily legibility and the realities of visuality implied by physiological optics—that unfettered access to the truth is not possible—is intensified in another of Jabez’s tricks. It emerges from his need to persuade the heiress Valerie that her husband, the opera singer Gaston de Lancy, is adulterous. Jabez recognizes that to influence her he must offer more substantive evidence than slander. The method he hits upon is rationalized with a precise restatement of ocularcentrism: ‘I must find a way to convince her; she must be thoroughly convinced before she will be induced to act. [...] But how to convince her—words alone will not satisfy her long; there must be ocular demonstration’ (139). To achieve visual proof, he arranges for an actor to mimic Gaston in a staged scene involving a young actress; set in motion, Valerie accompanies Jabez into woods outside Paris where she sees the two in conversation:

The trees are very young as yet, but all is obscure to-night. [...] ‘Now,’ he says, ‘now listen.’ [...] She hears a voice whose every tone she knows [...] her eyes grow somewhat accustomed to the gloom; and she sees a few paces from her the dim outline of a tall figure, familiar to her. It is Gaston de Lancy. (143)

The trickery acts as Jabez intended. To his question of whether she is sure that the man whose infidelity she has been observing is her husband, Valerie replies: ‘sure [it is him]! [...] Am I myself?’ (145).

As with the deceptive corpse, however, close attention to this scene discloses how its function as incorrigible proof relies more on belief in ocularcentrism—that the evidence of the eyes cannot deceive—than on what is actually witnessed. In fact, the description above emphasizes the physiologically-compromised state of Valerie’s vision at the moment of identification of her ‘husband’. Her perception is of a ‘dim outline’ only, conveying how incompletely her eyes have met the ocular impediment of the ‘gloom’—a point underlined by the notice of these eyes growing ‘*somewhat* accustomed’ to their environment. There is a significant shortfall between this and the idealized visual act of Cartesian perspectivalism, which obfuscated the physiological body as a determining factor. It is measurable insofar as, in contrast to the near total physical likeness between Jabez and his deceased twin (78), the person mimicking Gaston bears only a *superficial* likeness to him: he ‘can assume his manner, voice, and walk’ but not much else. Eminently

conscious of this fact, Jabez opts to stage the trickery in conditions that impede observation (141); in other words, he is attentive to (and manipulative of) the inefficacies and limitations of vision.

The 'ocular demonstration' in the woods validates, more than the case of the corpse on the heath, how '[Jabez's] crimes are all staged in areas of half-light and visual impairment', as Christine Ferguson observes. Whilst broadly in agreement, I wish to modify and enlarge, with reference to this scene in the woods, the claim that Ferguson puts forward from such a basis: 'vision alone, as the novel's plot twists regularly demonstrate, is an inadequate epistemological tool and requires constant supplementation from other sources'.¹⁰⁷ It is vital to note that, as Jabez's explanation of the motive behind his trickery makes clear, deception relies on exploiting the belief that vision is not merely an adequate epistemological tool, but the superlative one (that is, a belief in ocularcentrism)—for Valerie to be 'thoroughly convinced', only visual evidence will suffice.

Yet the actual deception implies something more complex than Jabez admits to. Instructive is his claim that '*words alone* will not satisfy her'. In light of this, Ferguson's argument must be re-examined, for not merely is visual evidence misleading, but so is audial evidence. Indeed, the scene foregrounds the significance of hearing: 'it is the voice of Gaston de Lancy. Who should better know those tones than his wife? [...] Again the familiar voice speaks' (144). 'Familiar' appears in relation to both what Valerie sees *and* what she hears of the imposter Gaston, indicating the equivalence of these senses as means of 'thoroughly convinc[ing]' her. Accordingly, the conclusion of the deception oscillates between both senses: 'Have you heard enough?' Jabez asks Valerie, only to then request that she have 'one last look' (144). Far from the audial acting to correct the false visual impressions, then, the two senses *mutually confirm* the trickery. If vision is deprecated (made 'inadequate', as Ferguson writes), then this occurs only insofar as it is brought down from the high regard in which Cartesian perspectivalism and phys-

¹⁰⁷ Christine Ferguson, pp. 10, 13. 'Crime thrives through both the difficulty of identifying the correct register of physical deviance and through the persistent and pervasive environmental impediments to clear vision', p. 11.

iognomy held it ('the most comprehensive and noblest of these [senses]', as Descartes wrote).¹⁰⁸ Contrarily, *Trail* gives an ironic rendering of 'ocular demonstration', informed, I contend, by the conclusions of physiological optics; Valerie's act of observation is an explicitly embodied one (emanating from 'her eyes'), and the faulty conclusions she draws from it suggest the type of body that Crary describes as emerging from Müller's *Elements*: 'a body with an innate capacity, one might even say a transcendental faculty, to *misperceive*'.¹⁰⁹ Vision does not provide her with access to the truth but perpetuates a subjective, and damaging, reality. The success of the trick depends upon the fallacy outlined by Marion, that 'every one must believe his own eyes', but it prefigures what that author identifies as those organs' innate capacity for 'deceiving us constantly'.¹¹⁰

This chapter has so far demonstrated the ambivalence inherent to the incipient visual modernity depicted in *Trail*, in which the dream of a legible body is both distanced and entertained, by recourse to the novel's 'plot twists'—situations in which the aspects of that vision implied by physiological optics (fragmentary, contingent, fleeting) are placed *in extremis* by Jabez's scheming. But the tension is also manifest in the novel's other characters, notably in the Parisian chemist Laurent Blurosset. This figure has received almost no scholarly attention (and is even absent from Tomaiuolo and Ferguson's studies), which is remiss given his significance in terms of the novel's concern for visual modernity.¹¹¹ Blurosset first appears directly after Valerie is deceived by 'ocular demonstration', and therefore also subsequently to the trickery involving the corpse. The juxtaposition is insightful, for, contrary to the allegedly readable body of the dead, Blurosset's physicality is entirely opaque; he is

a gentlemanly-looking man, of some forty years of age. He has a very pale face, a broad forehead, from which the hair is brushed away behind the ears: he wears blue spectacles, which entirely conceal his eyes, and in a manner shade his face. You cannot tell what he is thinking of; for it is a peculiarity of this man that the mouth, which with other

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 21. On the belief in vision's supremacy to the auidial, see Moore, p. 114.

¹⁰⁹ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 90. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁰ Marion, p. 16.

¹¹¹ Lillian Nayder analyzes him in terms of his role as a chemist; pp. 159–61.

people is generally the most expressive feature, has with him no expression whatever. It is a thin, straight line, which opens and shuts as he speaks, but which never curves into a smile, or contracts when he frowns. (147)

This description anticipates what Eliot would describe in *Middlemarch* (1872) as a 'neutral physiognomy'.¹¹² Blurosset's face defies the attempts to deduce mental states ('what he is thinking of') from reading it, and it evokes the expressionless quality of a non-human entity, such as a machine or waxwork: the mouth's movements, 'open[ing] and shut[ing]', seem purely mechanical. Despite this, Blurosset's description does not deprecate the prospect of bodily legibility in any simplistic sense; in this regard he recalls another 'unreadable' character of sensation fiction, Robert Mannion in Wilkie Collins's *Basil* (1852). Mannion's countenance is described in terms which prefigure those that categorize Blurosset: 'impenetrable [and] wholly inexpressive'.¹¹³ Lucy Hartley makes the shrewd argument that the description of Mannion would seem to '[betray] a nervousness about the powers of perception and comprehension',¹¹⁴ as if the prospect of the legible body threatens to be undone by this anomalous figure.

Blurosset's physicality inscribes a more ambivalent message. The account of the Parisian chemist dwells on the idiosyncrasy of his appearance; his mouth is worthy of notice precisely because it contrasts with what, in others, is a 'significant' feature (in the sense of signifying). Likewise, while the 'blue spectacles' occlude the chance to read his eyes, this is not an innate physical aspect; Mannion's face is analogized as a 'mask' without any such embellishment,¹¹⁵ but Blurosset gains this characteristic only by donning a literal, mask-like apparatus. The concealing effects of these eyewear are such that the actual organs of vision behind them are almost entirely substituted for them, as Braddon articulates through personification:

¹¹² Josh Epstein, "'Neutral Physiognomy': The Unreadable Faces of *Middlemarch*", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36 (2008), 131–48.

¹¹³ Wilkie Collins, *Basil*, ed. by Dorothy Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 110–11.

¹¹⁴ Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 136.

¹¹⁵ Collins, *Basil*, p. 110.

The blue spectacles of Monsieur Laurent Blurosset look at [Valerie] attentively for two or three minutes. As for the eyes behind the spectacles, she cannot even guess what might be revealed in their light. The man seems to have a strange advantage in looking at everyone as from behind a screen. His own face, with hidden eyes and inflexible mouth, is like a blank wall. (147)

The description is acutely ambivalent, for even as it registers the unreadability of Blurosset's body, it articulates also the sense that readings of the body (and physiognomy especially) can 'act[] as a way to turn visual observation into a source of information and power' able to be leveraged over others.¹¹⁶ Blurosset, it seems implied, wears these spectacles because he believes that the body's features can be read to one's (dis)advantage. Such usage would anticipate (and exceed) the function of 'blue spectacles' in Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), one of the formative works of sensation fiction. Together with her veil, blue spectacles allow the protagonist of that novel, Isabel Vane, to slip unsuspected into her former household; when they become damaged in a 'mishap', her false identity is almost revealed.¹¹⁷

The usage of blue spectacles exceeds that in *East Lynne* because Blurosset seeks to avoid something other than detection of identity. Precisely what he seeks to conceal is informed, I claim, by an earlier description of eyes—those belonging to Jabez. Of his scheming to separate Valier from her husband, Gaston, the narrator remarks:

If the worst man who looked at him could have seen straight through those clear blue eyes into his soul, would there have been something revealed which might have shocked and revolted even this worst man? Perhaps. (130)

The statement reformulates that fantasy expressed earlier in respect of Jabez: 'If we could look into his heart, we might find the answers to these questions' (10). Ambivalence was registered in that initial statement by the 'if'; this modifier reappears here, but it is reinforced by that emphatic (end-stopped) 'perhaps'. It is important to recognize the larger significance of this repetition: ambivalence around

¹¹⁶ Pearl, *About Faces*, pp. 26–27.

¹¹⁷ Ellen Wood, *East Lynne* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1954), pp. 428, 431.

the prospect of bodily legibility (transparency) has not been resolved, but is only more entrenched. Blurosset's glasses might therefore be considered a mode of addressing this uncertainty, insofar as they protect against even the *chance* that the eyes could act as a window onto his soul.

The notice of Blurosset's having acquired an 'advantage' by the concealment of his face gestures to the fact that he is not only being read *by others*, but actively involved in the same reading process himself. Such is evident in Valerie's second meeting with him, when, to and fro his apartment, she travels through the Parisian streets 'thickly veiled' (182, 185). This attempt to deny facial identification through disguise recalls contemporary accounts of how, at the height of the physiognomic craze inspired by Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-1778), 'in many places, where the study of human character from the face became an epidemic, the people went masked through the streets'.¹¹⁸ *Trail* indexes this historical episode only to subvert it; although Blurosset cannot see Valerie's face under the disguise, he uses an alternative means to identify her: 'Raise your veil if you will [Valerie ...] I perfectly remember you; I never forget voices' (182). The audial is found here to be at least as consequential a sense as the visual, and, as if symbolizing the latter's deprecated status, Valerie discards her veil. The third encounter between Blurosset and Valerie, three years later, reinforces the idea that the uses of audial information might exceed the simple identification of someone, and in fact disclose truths about the inner self (even as the individual tries to conceal them through means of visual disguise):

[Blurosset] has so many fair visitors that he thinks this one, whose face he cannot see, may be one of his old clients.

'It is eight years since you have seen me, monsieur,' she replies. 'You have most likely forgotten me?'

'Forgotten you, madame, perhaps, but not your voice. That is not to be forgotten.'

'Indeed monsieur—and why not?'

¹¹⁸ The description is from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1853-60); see John Graham quoted in Richard Twine, 'Physiognomy, Phrenology and the Temporality of the Body', *Body & Society*, 8.1 (2002), 67–88 (p. 70).

'Because, madame, it has a peculiarity of its own, which, *as a physiologist*, I cannot mistake. It is the voice of one who has suffered?'
 'It is!—it is!' (305; emphasis added)

Audial signifiers do more on this occasion than they do in the previous encounter; they collapse temporal distances and possess a unique quality that can be used to define and uncover their subject.

Blurosset's self-identification as a 'physiologist' merits further attention, and not only for how it recalls the description of Jabez as 'something of a physiologist' and someone who, we are told, 'can tell what she [Valerie] has suffered since last night by the change in her voice alone' (143). This label is more significant for the fact that it enhances Blurosset's profound ambivalence, by reinforcing two distinct sides to his character (his recognition as both a chemist and a fortune teller, adept 'with the pasteboard [and] the crucible' (147), already alerts readers to an approximate duality). This is because Blurosset's other statements are liable to construe him as a *physiognomist*. When discussing the prospect of Richard Marwood having killed his uncle, for instance, he gives a remarkably close account of physiognomic orthodoxy:

'Should you know [Richard] again?' inquired the student [Blurosset].
 [Mujeebez:] 'Anywhere, sahib. He was a handsome young man, with dark hazel eyes and a bright smile. He did not look like a murderer.'
 'That is scarcely a sure rule to go by, is it, Laurent?' asks the Captain, with a bitter smile.
 'I don't know. A black heart will make strange lines in the handsomest face, which are translatable to the close observer.' (277)

This exact relation between expression and feature is articulated by Lavater, who argues that 'frequent repetitions of the same state of mind, impress upon every part of the countenance, durable traits of deformity or beauty'.¹¹⁹ More contemporaneously, there are echoes of Spencer's essay 'Personal Beauty' (1854), referred to earlier, which identifies a similar correspondence, but also uncertainty about its form:

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Hartley, p. 40.

May we not say that the transitory forms, by perpetual repetition, register themselves on the face, and produce permanent forms? Does not an habitual frown by-and-by leave ineffaceable marks on the brow? In brief, may we not say that expression is feature in the making; and that if expression means something, the form of feature produced by it means something?¹²⁰

The operative word is *something*; it expresses what Georg Simmel would call ‘the typical problematic situation of modern man [...] his sense of being surrounded by an immeasurable number of cultural elements [...] neither meaningless [nor] meaningful’.¹²¹ Braddon’s description resonates with this; even the most pleasing countenance cannot prevent repeated expressions becoming manifest, yet these ‘lines’ are not plainly comprehensible—they are ‘strange’ (in the sense of *inexplicable*). The prospect of bodily legibility remains alive, but its fulfilment is far from assured.

Blurosset’s *physiognomic* associations are further enunciated in a description that, by its repetition of ‘black heart’, seems to directly develop the previous passage. Valerie is the prompt on this occasion, asking the chemist whether he knew Jabez’s immorality in their first encounter; he answers:

To the very bottom of his black heart. Science would indeed have been a lie, wisdom would indeed have been a chimera, if I could not have read through the low cunning of the superficial showy adventurer, as well as I can read the words written in yonder book through the thin veil of a foreign character. (308)

Lavater’s intention to create a universal language of visual signification (‘the immense alphabet [of nature]’¹²²) resonates in Blurosset’s assertion that the body is readable to the same extent as the written word. John B. Lyon identifies, pertinently, that ‘the Enlightenment semiotic ideal of natural signs is readable only to the physiognomist; for those who lack his insight, signs appear arbitrary’.¹²³ Braddon makes these signs not arbitrary but *foreign*, an analogy that more powerfully

¹²⁰ Spencer, II, p. 388.

¹²¹ Quoted in Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 188–89.

¹²² ‘Lavater and Physiognomy’, p. 258.

¹²³ John B. Lyon, “‘The Science of Sciences’: Replication and Reproduction in Lavater’s Physiognomics’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40.2 (2007), 257–74 (p. 267).

develops the suggestion that reading bodies is a learned process. (It also echoes the ‘translatable’ detail given previously.) The description of Jabez’s ‘black heart’ builds, of course, on the prior use of that same detail (‘a black heart will [...]’), but now it gives it a direct referent, where before it was indeterminate. It also evokes (and answers in the affirmative), that initial comment on the prospect of transparency as Jabez is scrutinized under candlelight: ‘If we could look into his heart, we might find the answers to these questions’ (10).

The sensation novel’s traditional structure—ambivalence subsumed by order¹²⁴—is manifested in *Trail* through its developing attitude toward the prospect of bodily legibility (transparency); Blurosset’s declaration is among the first indications that, as Sarah Waters describes it, ‘Braddon’s message is a reassuring one; there are some signs [...] which speak an incontrovertible truth’¹²⁵ (further indications are given in Jabez’s pursuit through London, as discussed in the following section). This ‘message’ affirms the tenets of physiognomy, yet it is ‘science’ and ‘wisdom’ that Blurosset says would be ‘a lie’ if he could not read Jabez. Such phrasing becomes more significant if we compare it with an almost parallel statement from *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Referring to its eponymous antagonist (allegedly mad by this point), Dr Mosgrave declares: ‘physiology is a lie if the woman I saw ten minutes ago is a woman to be trusted at large’.¹²⁶ The two scenarios both involve perceptions of interiority based upon external signs, and therefore it may seem surprising that Blurosset implicates ‘science’ and ‘wisdom’ rather than physiognomy. The implication, I claim, is that achieving transparency (or accessing truth via vision) depends upon what might be called a ‘composite method’ that relies upon both dynamic and static aspects of the body.

If the method is composite, what are its constituents? Before answering this question it is necessary to observe that the same terms have been defined variously in previous and current scholarship, so that the process is beset by difficulties. Lavater’s use of ‘physiognomy’ belies his appreciation of how this term could refer specifically to ‘character *in a state of tranquillity*’—distinct from pathognomy, which referred to ‘character *in action*’. Despite this, Lavater continued to deploy the first term to refer to character in its entirety, that is, ‘the exterior, or superficies

¹²⁴ Cvetkovich, p. 55; Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, p. 149.

¹²⁵ Waters, p. xxi.

¹²⁶ Braddon, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, p. 374.

of man, *in motion or at rest*.¹²⁷ Michael Shortland introduces further distinctions by suggesting ‘scientific physiognomy’ refer to the study of ‘stable features’ (Lavater’s restricted sense of physiognomy) while ‘philosophical physiognomy’, he adds, ‘is what we would today term the physiology of expression’.¹²⁸ (Those same terms are used in an alternative sense by Lavater.) Hartley rejects the distinction made by Shortland *and* the differences between pathognomy and physiognomy (citing their equivalent underlying principle).¹²⁹ Her rejection belies, however, Lavater’s disapproval of the former and his privileging of the latter, for reasons explained in this chapter; the cessation of movement was the optimal state for reading bodies. Amidst this diverse lexicon used to describe the dynamic and static aspects of the physical form, it is perhaps clearest to use the terminology given in Spencer’s account—‘expression’ and ‘feature’—and to follow his understanding of their fundamental link. Indeed, *Trail* affirms that neither the dynamic nor the static can be read in isolation to give a full picture of the individual. Notably, Richard Marwood’s ‘utterly hopeless *expression* of wonder’ (27; emphasis added) on being apprehended by Peters and told of his uncle’s murder serves as the decisive sign of his innocence. The detective recounts how this dynamic detail gave him insight into the truth of the then-suspect’s character:

If they [the guilty] keeps the colour in their face [... then] the perspiration breaks out wet and cold upon their foreheads, and that blows ‘em. But this young gent—he was took aback, he was surprised [...] but his colour never changed, (243)

No such description is possible in Lavater’s *Essays*, because it is intensely *physiological*, but a comparable situation appears in Charles Bell’s 1844 *The Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression*. Citing a description of the appearance of fear in a man, Bell describes ‘the sweat breaking out on his bent and contracted brow’.¹³⁰ Peters puts even more weight on physiological details (‘colour’ and ‘perspiration’ being emphasized as crucial), and his account intervenes vitally in terms of mid-century debates over how to read character through the body: the body ‘in action’

¹²⁷ Lavater, p. 11. Emphasis added.

¹²⁸ Shortland, p. 285.

¹²⁹ Hartley, p. 36.

¹³⁰ Charles Bell, *The Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression* (London: John Murray, 1844), p. 167.

proves to be an informative site for obtaining such information, contrary to physiognomy's singular focus on the body 'at rest'. In fact, the same dynamic evidence is sought and found in Marwood's criminal counterpart; the 'look' (245) that Peters sees in Jabez's face helps to produce a sense of his guilt. Yet, *Trail* is elsewhere more obtuse about what types of reading can be used to obtain information about the subject. Isabel Darley, the sister of Marwood's friend, Gus, uses the evidence of the body to determine innocence, but she omits to give her reasoning as Peters does; she says to Marwood that 'it needs but to look into your face, or hear your voice, to know how little you deserve the imputation that has been cast upon you' (241). There is no *ambivalence* as to the 'truth' of the body's language, but much surrounding the means by which Isabel obtains it: do Marwood's 'features' or 'expression' produce the truth about his character? Moreover, does Isabel's insight emerge from the 'operations of the reasoning power' (as seems true of Peters's observation), or is it an 'instinctive perception of expression'?¹³¹

Blurosset functions, I suggest, to apotheosize these uncertain and composite methods for reading the body; he is a means by which *Trail* posits the ineluctable ambivalence that surrounds the dream of transparency, and the means of achieving it. There are, in fact, seemingly *two* Blurossets: one is an occult fortune-teller who validates the tenets of physiognomy and Cartesian perspectivalism (committed to Lavater's 'immense alphabet'); the other is a chemist and self-proclaimed 'physiologist' who deprivileges ocularcentrism through his interpretation of *audial* evidence.¹³² To consider Blurosset in such terms is to extrapolate an ambivalence that *Trail* itself foregrounds, notably in the reactions to him once he relocates to the British capital:

Blurosset, after becoming the fashion in Paris, is now the rage in London. [...] His presence is eagerly sought for in scientific coteries, where opinion is still, however, divided as to whether he is a charlatan or a great man. The materialists sneer—the spiritualists believe. His disinterestedness, at any rate, speaks in favour of his truth. (278)

¹³¹ 'Signs of Character', p. 374.

¹³² While *Trail* suggests these pursuits as antithetical ('the pasteboard or the crucible' [147]), figures like Henry Maudsley saw 'astronomy, physics, [...] chemistry' and 'physiology' as having only recently emerged as modern enterprises, free from the 'metaphysical spirit'; *On the Method of the Study of Mind: An Introductory Chapter to A Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (London: John Churchill and Sons, 1865), p. 24.

Blurosset's relationship to visuality is irreconcilable to any of the polarities he expresses, whether Cartesian perspectivalism or physiological optics, physiognomy or physiology, even anti- or pro-Enlightenment. In this respect, I suggest, he embodies the contemporaneous debates about the legible body considered earlier, and particularly that surrounding the relevance of physiognomy to mid-Victorian Britain. Spencer's notice of the 'still living conviction' lying underneath 'professed induction' resonates with how Blurosset is sought after by the 'scientific coteries', even as they remain uncertain about the veracity of his methods; the 'truth' of his approach is perpetually suspended. (This divided opinion over materialist or spiritualist interpretations is considered more fully in Chapter 4 in respect of Collins's *Armada*.) Furthermore, of course, his unequivocal—his *ambivalence*—posits him as a direct challenge to modernity's ordering imperative. The notice of opinion as being 'still divided' about Blurosset indicates that the impulse to properly classify him and his methods remains alive, despite the challenge, but readers might be led to question whether Braddon's chemist is 'not just *unclassified*, but *unclassifiable*'.¹³³ Significantly, Blurosset's radical uncertainty is juxtaposed by notices of his geographic location, first Paris and then London. This ambivalent figure is thus associated with two of the most paradigmatic metropolises in the nineteenth-century imagination. Such, I contend, gestures to how modernity—which through urbanization was producing, and expanding, such metropolises—is constituted by just such incongruities as Blurosset embodies.

'LOST IN A CROWD'? TRANSPARENCY IN THE MODERN CITY

In the cultural consciousness of mid-Victorian Britain, urbanization seemed to offer a remarkable challenge and opportunity to the dream of transparency. As Walter Benjamin accounts, fears arose about the occlusion of criminality as a result of the city's unprecedented demographic density, and the 'original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual's traces in the big-city crowd'.¹³⁴ *Trail*, which has some claim to be the first of these detective stories,¹³⁵ threatens an adherence to this formula by transposing its ambivalent antagonist,

¹³³ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 58.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Pearl, *About Faces*, pp. 33–34.

¹³⁵ See, for instance, Waters, p. xxii; Chris Willis, 'Afterword', in *The Trail of the Serpent* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), p. 408.

Jabez, from the provincial town of Slopperton into the metropolis of Paris, shortly after committing murder. As I will elaborate, such anxieties do not transpire, but are subverted to create a more nuanced take on the intersections between visibility, criminality, and modernity. Yet, the metropolis was not only associated with fears, but, as Anthony Vidler hints at, these urban environments also seemed to afford a grander scope for realizing the dream of transparency:

Modernity has been haunted [...] by a myth of transparency: transparency of the self to nature, of the self to the other, of all selves to society, and all this represented, if not constructed, from Jeremy Bentham to Le Corbusier, by a universal transparency of building materials, spatial penetration, and the ubiquitous flow of air, light, and physical movement.¹³⁶

The nineteenth century stands out as the period in which these prerogatives were systematically pursued for the first time. Cities became subject to a confluence of forces that sought to open them up to greater inspection, in a quest to improve the ‘social body’—a category that aggregated the entire populace and, inexorably, mapped it onto the built environment.¹³⁷ Characterized by ‘*design, manipulation, management, engineering*’, this was a definitional instance of modernity’s ‘*order as a task*’.¹³⁸ Undesirable aspects of the city like vice, pathogens, criminality (aspects that might be construed as the ‘waste’ of the ordering process) were to be expiated through an opening up of the city to new social authorities.

Paris offers the most dramatic example of this in the renovations led by Baron Haussmann, which reshaped the French capital from 1853-1870. London also fell into these tailwinds (the Metropolitan Board of Works was established in 1855 to oversee similar reshaping), but the result was vastly more piecemeal; as Lynda Nead accounts ‘whereas urban space in Paris was treated as a totality, in London modernity took the form of a collection of partial and unrelated projects for street building and land reclamation’.¹³⁹ Immense as its impact was, even Haussmann’s

¹³⁶ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1992), p. 217.

¹³⁷ See for example Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Pamela K. Gilbert, *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* (New York: State University of New York, 2004).

¹³⁸ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 7, 4. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁹ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 55–56.

renovation of Paris corroborates Bauman's verdict on the impossibility of modernity's task of order; the transformation of material spaces did not ameliorate the social issues that had created them, and though the 'scandalous alleys and lanes' might seem to 'disappear', as Friedrich Engels observed in 1872, deprivation was in fact only being shifted: '[the alleys and their residents]', he noticed, 'appear at once somewhere else, and often in the immediate neighbourhood'.¹⁴⁰ In fact, Engels's use of 'appear[ance]' accrues a further resonance in terms of how the renovations, by forcing marginalized persons to re-locate, made them visible to the other classes as never before. An ironic result of the renovations, therefore, was that whilst they aimed to homogenize the city and render it transparent, they elucidated the deep, seemingly insurmountable, divisions within French society.¹⁴¹ As noted elsewhere, such an awareness was an essential catalyst for modernity (there must always be a *somewhere else* to be renovated), yet, looked at closely, it also pointed to the limits of transparency, at least as that aim was mapped onto the built environment of the city. Ultimately, then, London's less totalizing efforts to change the city's social body through material transformations did not produce a radically different outcome to that in Paris; *Trail's* portrayal of the British capital discerns similar ambivalences to those outlined above, particularly in terms of the social dimensions of visibility.

The visual experience of the modern city was ambivalent not only because it was cast over an incomplete or contradictory urban geography (transparency being constantly deferred), but also because it gave renewed prominence to a system of visual judgment—physiognomy—that expressed both those qualities. The incongruous appearance of this 'science' in such urban spaces is noticed by Chris Otter, who writes that 'the *ancient* art of physiognomy thrived anew' in the acutely modern conditions of mid-century London.¹⁴² Yet Otter does not delve further into what this renewed interest in physiognomy suggests about the character of visual modernity. Sharonna Pearl offers a more extensive investigation of how the 'science' was reworked to become a crucial aspect of navigating the modern city;¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Verso, 1983), p. 153. Berman offers an extended account of Hausmann's renovations in the context of modernity.

¹⁴¹ Berman, p. 153. I consider in Chapter 3 how this same incommensurability between the classes is figured in evolutionary terms in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well*.

¹⁴² Otter, p. 50. Emphasis added.

¹⁴³ Pearl, *About Faces*, p. 4.

if physiognomy had originally been opposed to movement and flux, she recounts, then in mid-century London it was used precisely to fight the dizzying haste of the urban environment and to rapidly judge character based on sight alone. Such utility figures physiognomy as a way to contend with some of the foremost effects of modernity—the atomization of societies through processes of functional separation and the end of ‘dense sociability’.¹⁴⁴ Precisely, it enabled a foregoing of the need to establish trust via personal encounters, which the impersonability of London’s urban environment had made impracticable.¹⁴⁵ The resurgence of this ‘ancient art’ in the nineteenth-century city is a telling reminder of how modernity and its visual dimensions are beset by contradictions; *Trail* interrogates these contradictions in its metropolitan scenes, which are not reducible to either ‘surveillance’ or ‘spectacle’ (long the mainstay of scholarship in this area¹⁴⁶). The modern visual experience depicted by *Trail* is unstable and contested.

Jabez’s first appearance in London foregrounds both the ordering enterprises noted above as defining the modern city: the association of vice, pathogens, criminality, and so on with the non-visible, and the proliferation of physiognomic judgments. Now known as the Count de Marolles, Jabez poses as a South American banker ‘lately come over to England with his wife and son’ and someone who is ‘respected and trusted throughout the continent’ (255). The notion of ‘respect’, and its cognate ‘reputation’, prove formative in determining the actions that Jabez takes after his arrival; as he explains to Valerie (now his wife), in order to maintain his reputable persona they must place themselves under increased visual scrutiny:

We are rarely seen to address each other, and we are not often seen in public together. Very well this in South America, [...] here it will not do. To say the least it is mysterious. The fashionable world is scandalous. People draw inferences. [...] A banker must be respectable, or

¹⁴⁴ See Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 57, 61. These mean, respectively, the separation of persons into discrete (non-overlapping) roles and the decline of communities where reputation was established through personal contact (‘dense’ therefore in the sense of close-knit, not in terms of demographics). These processes were discerned with alarm by figures such as Thomas Carlyle: ‘We call it a Society; and go about professing openly the totallest [*sic*] separation, isolation. Our life is not mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named “fair competition” and so forth, it is a mutual hostility’; *Selected Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2015), p. 248.

¹⁴⁵ Pearl, *About Faces*, pp. 4, 10.

¹⁴⁶ For a summary of this binary and its dominance in scholarship on nineteenth-century visuality, see Otter, p. 2.

people may be afraid to trust him. [...] I must be universally trusted.
(257)

Jabez's appeal is for none other than 'ocular demonstration', but this time (contrary to its deployment for deceptive purposes previously) it is intended to demonstrate his trustworthiness (as opposed to Gaston's falsity). That the appeal dwells on the distinctive demands of London vis-à-vis South America is insightful, moreover, of the particular visual contexts considered previously—'it will not do' to hide from view here because, according to the logic of the 'social body', this is only a shortcut to the worst moral associations.¹⁴⁷ The surest course for avoiding such aspersions is that they 'should be seen oftener together in public' (257), as Jabez goes on to affirm. Superficially, then, the strictures of the social body seem to be working as intended, forcing the criminal element to modify its own behaviour and subject itself to public scrutiny.

Yet, insofar as Jabez seems poised to remain a criminal element that exists beyond the reach of law enforcement, his injunction to Valerie spotlights the limitations of this ordering principle, particularly in its deployment of visual signifiers; the criminal element is concealed not by ocular impediments to vision (that is, by the blockage of 'air, light, and physical movement' in Vidler's formulation¹⁴⁸) but by a subversion of the expected visual signifiers for criminality; masquerading as a member of the upper class (later 'legitimized' as such through the discovery of his real father), and with an 'anomalous' physiognomy that masks his moral qualities, Jabez 'does not look like a murderer'.¹⁴⁹ Hence, while Christine Ferguson is surely right in her observation that Jabez's crimes are all 'staged in areas of half-light and visual impairment', the culmination of his criminal career (the point of his entrance into *respectable* society) is correlated to areas of acute visibility that are equally as sought after as the more obfuscated locales. Jabez, once more, proves eminently conscious of visibility—of the expectations that constitute it, and how

¹⁴⁷ This is to modify what Pearl claims is this result created by a desire to avoid the physiognomic gaze; *About Faces*, p. 28. I consider that this insistence from Jabez relies upon *extra-physiognomic* associations that have more to do with the social body.

¹⁴⁸ Vidler, p. 217.

¹⁴⁹ John C. Waller observes that 'as early as 1853, Francis Galton referred to the criminal classes as exhibiting a distinctive physiognomy or "felon face"'; 'Ideas of Heredity, Reproduction and Eugenics in Britain, 1800-1875', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 32.3 (2001), 457–89 (p. 472).

they might be subverted for personal gain. In what becomes something of a refrain in *Trail's* metropolitan scenes, visibility proves to be constructed as much by social factors as by ocular ones.

Acting on this desire to be 'seen oftener' proves the catalyst for Jabez's identification by the detective Joseph Peters, and ultimately his undoing. Significantly, however, Peters does not alight upon Jabez during an investigatory process, but as he occupies himself in the wake of Richard's escape from an asylum; he is in London to 'enjoy the *otium cum dignitate* [leisure with dignity]' (259) earned by his involvement in the escape. That '*otium* [leisure]' is soon found to possess a singular meaning: tourism. Peters and his adopted son, Slosby, embark on a tour of 'St. Paul's [Cathedral], the Monument, Punch and Judy, and other intellectual exhibitions' (261). The ensuing description underlines the decidedly *visual* nature of the pair's tour (despite its designation as 'intellectual'):

[The Punch and Judy] was not so sublime a sight, perhaps, as the outside of St. Paul's; but, on the other hand, it was a great deal cleaner; and the 'fondling' [Slosby] would have liked to have seen Sir Christopher Wren's masterpiece picked out with a little fresh paint before he was called upon to admire it. The Monument, no doubt, was very charming in the abstract; but unless he could have been perpetually on the top of it [...] it wasn't very much in his way. But Punch [...] indeed, was an exhibition to be seen continually, and to be more admired the more continually seen. (262)

The sites listed in this description and the emphasis on visual experience (on their being *seen*) evoke the travel guides to London being produced during this time.¹⁵⁰ These publications aspired to achieve the same ends as the building projects that were opening up the city to inspective forces, namely, to render the urban environment legible and transparent;¹⁵¹ as it was put in the opening to Murray's guide, *Modern London; or, London as it is* (1851): '[my aim is] to point out those features

¹⁵⁰ Two notable examples first published in the decade before *Trail* appeared are Peter Cunningham, *Modern London; or, London as It Is* (London: John Murray, 1851) and John Timbs, *Curiosities of London* (London: John Camden, 1867 [1855]). All the sites in this account are described by Timbs; pp. 16, 107–17, 570–71.

¹⁵¹ On these guides as attempts to 'rationalize the [modern] city', see Paul Dobraszczyk, 'City Reading: The Design and Use of Nineteenth-Century London Guidebooks', *Journal of Design History*, 25.2 (2012), 123–44 (p. 140) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/eps015>>.

of the metropolis best worth seeing, with the way in which they may be seen to the best advantage'.¹⁵² Tourist guides differed insofar as they tried to make London legible not to its inhabitants, but to the influx of new visitors to the city, which by the 1860s were making it a 'modern tourist centre'.¹⁵³ Directing visitors' gazes to features of visual significance, the guides can be compared to physiognomic photography which, as noted earlier, performed a similar mediation in respect of *bodily* features (emphasizing those that 'told more' about the subject).¹⁵⁴ Such connections are in fact made explicit in the guides; Murray's guide compares visitors' consultation of a city map with 'scan[ning] narrowly the face of a new acquaintance'.¹⁵⁵ This link between the reading of places and persons is latent also in *Trail*.

Having initially proclaimed a desire to let Slosby see 'the outside' of the 'exhibitions' (261), the later actions of Peters and his son show how easily the touristic gaze might wander indiscriminately—experiencing 'tourist sites' in transgressive ways. Slosby not only examines the façade of the Bank of England, but he 'peer[s] in[side ...] in the fond hope of seeing the money' (262). This detail is insightful of what is shortly to be stated categorically, when the pair identify Jabez: although Peters and Slosby are not in London on professional business, the touristic experience encompasses a form of visual practice that bears comparison to it. It is a financial body (the Bank) rather than a criminal body that becomes the subject of a 'gaze [which] penetrates and organizes the visual field in order to arrive at "meaning"'.¹⁵⁶ The two types of gaze—those of tourist and detective—dovetail with the sighting of Jabez. His identification is brought about when Peters indulges Slosby's fancy to watch a gentleman 'get on horseback' outside a 'handsome building' (263, 262). The gentleman is thus converted into a tourist spectacle, and read with the increased visual awareness that characterizes the tourist gaze.¹⁵⁷ In fact, he proves to be none other than the Count de Marolles (Jabez)—the intended target not of the tourist's leisurely gaze, but of the detective's professional gaze. The transition spotlights, I contend, the elision that *Trail* performs between the spectacular and the disciplinary (and their attendant symbols, the

¹⁵² Cunningham, p. iii.

¹⁵³ Pearl, *About Faces*, pp. 28–29; Nead, p. 58.

¹⁵⁴ Pearl, *About Faces*, p. 149. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁵ Cunningham, p. viii.

¹⁵⁶ de Bolla, pp. 284–85.

¹⁵⁷ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: SAGE Publications, 2011), p. 4.

flâneur and panopticon).¹⁵⁸ Peters and Slosby are figures that embody detection and surveillance, navigating London for purposes of leisure, engaged in a visual practice that inadvertently ends with the detection of criminality (and which, contrary to *flânerie*, as an ‘exclusive [and] elitist’ practice,¹⁵⁹ is performed by a large, egalitarian group (tourists)). Things come full circle, as it were, when Slosby, accompanying Peters in pursuit of Jabez, derives spectacular pleasure from detective business; he is said to believe that ‘the outside of St. Paul’s, and the performance [Punch and Judy ...] were mild dissipations [...] compared to the delight of following a ghost’ (265). *Trail* encourages a sense of the mutual underpinnings of these forms of vision, I suggest, in the manner espoused by Otter:

Both [panopticism and *flânerie* ...] are fantasies [...] And their fantasy is of total knowledge of a subject population, be it of a body of criminals or of an urban crowd. The *flâneur* moves everywhere and sees everything, while the prisoner of the panopticon is permanently seen and known. A fantasy of omniscience underlies both models.¹⁶⁰

Such a ‘fantasy’ as Otter identifies here has been this chapter’s focus (the ‘dream of transparency’), and, more broadly, it is amenable to this thesis’s understanding of modernity as an enterprise that strives to establish order (amenable insofar as it is one manifestation of that enterprise). Before that ‘fantasy’ is achieved in *Trail* (the identification of Jabez by Peters marks a turning point), the novel threatens its alternative—ambivalence; it does so by placing the body of the criminal within the urban crowd in this scene by Bank Junction. In depicting such, Braddon fictionalizes a pervasive contemporary fear. A *Saturday Review* article of 1860, for instance, correlates such masses as feature in this scene—the most conspicuous product of urbanization—with an increased potential for criminals to escape identification; its sensational conclusion is that ‘the fusion of society gives a murderer every chance of being lost in a crowd’.¹⁶¹ During Peters and Slosby’s pursuit of Jabez, this peril is constantly foregrounded—the detective is said to look as if ‘he thought the horseman they are following would melt into thin air’ (263). Sustaining

¹⁵⁸ Chris Otter offers an astute summary of scholarship as it is structured by these paradigms, critiquing their applicability to visual practice in nineteenth-century Britain; pp. 2–8.

¹⁵⁹ Otter, p. 7.

¹⁶⁰ Otter, p. 7.

¹⁶¹ ‘Hanging No Murder’, *The Saturday Review*, 10.254 (1860), 302–3 (p. 303).

their intense visual focus, however, the pair eventually pursue Jabez to his house near Park Lane and avert (for the time being) the possibility that he could evade them.

Whilst it seems at first to entertain them, then, *Trail* ultimately subverts alarmist accounts about the visual obfuscation that comes from the ‘big-city crowd’.¹⁶² The reverse situation is hailed as equally plausible: visual identification is indeed unilateral in the Bank Junction scene, but it is Peters and Slosby (the forces of detection) that are concealed by the crowds, whereas the criminal (Jabez) is portrayed as conspicuous; these visual dynamics are further complicated by the role of tourism, which seems to create a heightened awareness of otherwise innocuous aspects of the city. Crucially, obfuscation derives not only from ocular impediments (the crowds’ density) but also from a *social blindness*: the ‘Count’ (Jabez’s aristocratic title is emphasized in this scene) fails to see that he is being watched, and one detail is incisive of its cause: he ‘had better occupation for his bright blue eyes than the observation of such *small deer* as Mr. Peters and the “fondling”’ (263; emphasis added). Appearing as members of an inferior class (‘small deer’), Slosby and Peters feature only as an undifferentiated mass from which Jabez, now elevated far beyond them in social terms, does not deign to distinguish individuals. A palpable sense emerges in this scene of how vision is constructed both by social and ocular factors.

Key facets of Jabez’s identification are repeated in a subsequent encounter with the criminal, as Richard and his friends (‘the Cherokees’) aim to identify him for themselves. The circumstance designated for this is an evening opera at Her Majesty’s Theatre, Haymarket. The Haymarket area has specific resonances with the visual experiences of mid-century London, as are considered below. But there is a more general connection; the choice of an interior location, the theatre, indexes what Otter accounts as a contemporary belief that ‘perceptual control was vastly simpler when undertaken within the walls of institutions than outside in the more unruly streets’.¹⁶³ He means this strictly in the sense of *institutionalized* visuality (such as within the factory), yet Otter’s observation helps to elucidate the events in *Trail*—the identification of Jabez at Bank Junction, being proceeded by a high-stakes chase, has proven how dangerous it is to control the criminal in the

¹⁶² Benjmain quoted in Pearl, *About Faces*, pp. 33–34.

¹⁶³ Otter, p. 97.

streets. By contrast, the theatre is a site in which prolonged visual scrutiny inheres to its purpose. As the architect T. Roger Smith expressed in a work of 1878: '[important] to the entertainment is that the audience should see each other, so as to allow all who wish it an opportunity for public display, and for scrutinising the appearance of others'.¹⁶⁴ Smith outlines a site whose appeal lies in 'autovoyeurism',¹⁶⁵ the ability to see and be seen; this is a place in which vision is not unilinear—the audience members observing the performers—but rhizomatic (one cannot say 'democratic' for reasons shortly to be discussed).

The opera scenes in *Trail* (in Paris and in London) pre-figure Smith's characterization of the theatre space, but they problematize its coherency. Specifically, they interrogate the disciplinary potential of autovoyeurism, latent in Smith's cautioning that visual scrutiny must be consensual ('all who wish it'). Contrarily, in the Paris opera *Valerie* is observed by Jabez without wishing or being conscious of it. Thus, *voyeurism*, privileged in physiognomic practice, is substituted for *autovoyeurism* with Jabez's non-reciprocal scrutiny of *Valerie*'s face. Such analysis enables him (in a seeming confirmation of physiognomic ambitions) to obtain a faithful register of her feelings. He detects 'one faint quiver, [...] a firmer compression of the thin lips' (122): visual signifiers that, being provoked by Gaston's appearance, disclose her true feelings for him (and make Jabez cognisant of their secret marriage). In the London opera, this voyeurism is practised in the opposite direction; Jabez is subjected to a 'deliberate inspection' by the Cherokees, as each of them, in succession, takes a 'long look' (270) at his face.

As in the Bank Junction scene, Jabez does not return this visual scrutiny, but is profoundly unaware he is being watched. Once again, the sense is given that social factors are at least as vital as ocular ones in contributing to this imbalance. In this case, however, they are aligned to the particular conditions of the theatre. If Smith encouraged *mutual* oversight between audience members, this was determinedly not the same as *equal* oversight; he stressed, 'it is essential that a

¹⁶⁴ T. Roger Smith, *Acoustics in Relation to Architecture and Building: The Laws of Sound as Applied to the Arrangement of Buildings*, New (New York: Virtue, 1878), p. 115. Emphasis added. 1878 is the probable, though not entirely certain, date of this edition.

¹⁶⁵ This concept appears in Peter de Bolla, 'The Visibility of Visuality: Vauxhall Gardens and the Siting of the Viewer', in *Vision and Textuality*, ed. by Stephen Melville and Bill Readings (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1995), pp. 282–95, and is 're-visited' in the same sense by Jonathan Conlin, 'Vauxhall Revisited: The Afterlife of a London Pleasure Garden, 1770-1859', *Journal of British Studies*, 45.4 (2006), 718–43. It overlaps with Bruno Latour's 'oligoptic space'—a space of mutual oversight; quoted in Otter, p. 74.

variety of classes of accommodation should be preserved, and *conspicuously separated from one another*.¹⁶⁶ In practice, upper-class patrons occupied the elevated seats: a privileged position for observing the performance and audience; lower-class patrons were given the opposite.¹⁶⁷ It is possible to trace the progression of Jabez's criminal career (and, concurrently, his social elevation) in terms of where he sits during the opera scenes. In Paris, early in his criminal career, he occupies the lowest seats (the 'front row of the stalls' [120]). In London, having gained a fortune and aristocratic title, he acquires an elevated seat: 'a box on the grand tier' (269). The difference corresponds to distinct visual relations: in Jabez's new position he is able to 'take a leisurely survey of the audience' (270); yet he also *receives* visual scrutiny from the Cherokees stood in the 'pit' (268). Implied here by the undifferentiated category of 'the audience' is that Jabez is unable to distinguish the individuals within this group—to discern that he is being observed by Marwood and his friends. In an echo of the scene involving Peters and Slosby, the Cherokees' indiscernibility comes not only from the fact they are surrounded by other persons, and at a distance from their target; the 'aristocratic' Jabez, occupying the 'grand tier', is also *socially disinclined* to overcome these ocular impediments and to observe those persons 'crammed' (270) into the pit below.

These scenes profoundly invert both expectations and intentions (inscribed in the spatial arrangements) regarding the visual relations between classes. The upper-class patrons, Valerie then Jabez, are made the visual *object*, as opposed to its privileged subject. Sharonna Pearl's suggestion of the benefits to studying physiognomy seem highly applicable to these opera scenes from *Trail*, insofar as examination of them 'helps reveal the tension between democracy and hierarchy that the Victorian city represented in both its layout and its modes of interaction. The urban experience was one of space and enclosure, freedom and limitation'.¹⁶⁸ The fact that *Trail* was serialized during 1864 in the *Half-Penny Journal*, a publication with a primarily lower-class readership,¹⁶⁹ is instructive of the intent

¹⁶⁶ T. Roger Smith, p. 115.

¹⁶⁷ This leisurely institution hence parallels the productive space of the factory, where owners could supervise their workers from a similarly unequal viewing position; Otter, p. 75.

¹⁶⁸ Pearl, *About Faces*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁹ Kate Watson, *Women Writing Crime Fiction, 1860-1880: Fourteen American, British and Australian Authors* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2012), p. 57.

behind its subversive depiction of the visual relations between the classes; Bradon appeals to readers' fantasies of inverted social relations and of being able to glimpse the inner lives of their social superiors.

One further aspect to note of the opera scenes is the conspicuous presence of the opera glass. The minute physiological cues that disclose Valerie's feelings and the identification of Jabez are only made possible by the amplificatory properties of this device. Notable in *Trail's* portrayal of opera glasses is the effacement of the interaction between body and machine; either the 'glass' is personified (recalling the description of Blurosset's blue spectacles), or the eyes are described separately from the device:

The powerful glass of the loungeur in the stalls records the minutest change in the face of Valerie de Cevennes. It records [physiological details]; and the eyes of the loungeur fasten more intently, if possible, than before upon the face of the Spanish beauty. (122)

The elision of difference between the properties of the body and the technology of the visual continues in the following passage, as agency is variably assigned to 'the loungeur's glass' and 'the loungeur [Jabez]', which 'record' and 'see' (122) respectively, the performance. Only the end of the visual act establishes a separation of the observer and the technology he deploys: 'after one last contemplative look at the proud brow and set lips of Valerie [...], he lowers his glass' (122). The conflation here of the machine and the bodily organ owes clearly to the ideas of vision (and the eye) espoused by physiological optics. Crary writes of how, as a result of that science: 'the relation between the eye and optical apparatus becomes one of metonymy: both were now contiguous instruments on the same plane of operation, with varying capabilities and features'.¹⁷⁰ The second opera scene, in London, gives further evidence for the type of visual relation described by Crary. During the performance, the Cherokees observe Jabez from a distance that ought to prevent the accurate reading of his face, but the opera glass is noted to extend the capabilities of the eye: 'the thin arched lips are not discernible from this distance; but through the glass the general effect of the face is very plainly seen' (270).

¹⁷⁰ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 129.

The use of this device for surveillance rather than leisure raises, once again, the unstable boundary between spectacle and discipline in *Trail*. In this, the novel evokes contemporary anxieties about the consequences of magnified vision, including in theatrical settings. A satirical article from *Fun* (1864), for example, cautions that, due to the opera glass, performers must now be ‘conscious of vigilant microscopic observation’ and cease behaviours that would reveal the artifice of the production—a playful wink at an audience member is one such example.¹⁷¹ *Trail* maps this dichotomy of truth and falsity, readable on the body, to life outside the theatre; when Valerie declares that the ‘De Cevennes do not lie’, Jabez gives a damning reply:

Have you acted no lies, though you may not have spoken them? Have you never lied with your face, when you have worn a look of calm indifference, while the mental effort with which you stopped the violent beating of your heart produced a dull physical torture in your breast; when, in the crowded opera-house, you heard *his* [Gaston’s] step upon the stage? (137; emphasis in original)

This rebuke is a sensational re-reading of that old adage ‘all the world’s a stage’ through a physiognomic lens, recalling as it does Lavater’s attention to ‘concealment (intentional or unintentional)’. The *stage* in Braddon’s *Trail*, however, is one being transformed by visual technologies, where spatial distances are collapsed and the differences between surveillance and spectacle are blurred.

The Cherokees’ observation of Jabez exploits the visual opportunities of the theatre, provided both by its spatial arrangements and the technologies that can be used inside. Yet one of the group, ‘the Smasher’, opts to scrutinize him *outside* the building, in the ‘unruly streets’ of the Haymarket. In fact, the distinction is less emphatic than at first sight, for the proliferation of gas lighting across London and other metropolitan spaces in the early decades of the nineteenth-century brought the theatre ‘outside’. (Gas lighting became an integral means by which the aim of improving the city’s ‘social body’ was realized.) By the 1860s, these changes had rendered certain areas of London so bright as to warrant comparisons to the theatre (the visibility in which had been similarly altered by the installation of gas).¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ ‘At the Play’, *Fun*, 7 (1864), 9.

¹⁷² Gaslight was attracting particular attention at this time with the passing of the Metropolitan Gas Act 1859 and the Sale of Gas Act 1860. The comparison was apt because visibility in the theatre

As the site of both the Opera House and Her Majesty's Theatre,¹⁷³ the Haymarket was a locus for such comparisons. In his novel *Paved with Gold* (1858), Augustus Mayhew revels in the intermingling of the opera's fashionable clientele with the licentious underclass frequenting the Haymarket—a 'great republic of vice'¹⁷⁴—a mixture thrown into symbolic relief by the 'chiaroscuro of gaslight', its creation of gradients between light and dark.¹⁷⁵ 'The entire street is lit up as a stage', writes Mayhew, and yet that same street is later said to possess 'two natures: one moral, and the other immoral'.¹⁷⁶ Gaslight has not, in other words, expiated the ambivalent aspects of London; as Nead expounds, 'gaslight never fully conquered the night city' in the way that electric lighting was about to—it was too fitful and partial a technology to eradicate darkness altogether.¹⁷⁷

Braddon may not have been consciously writing with Mayhew's depiction of the Haymarket in mind,¹⁷⁸ but her treatment of visibility has enticing parallels with it. The violent contrast of the classes is captured through the literal collision of the Smasher with Jabez as he exits the opera:

As the Count and Countess crossed from the doors of the opera-house to their carriage, a drunken man came reeling past, and before the servants or policemen standing by could interfere, stumbled against Raymond de Marolles and knocked his hat off. He picked it up immediately, and, muttering some unintelligible apology, returned it to Raymond, looking, as he did so, very steadily in the face of M. de Marolles. The occurrence did not occupy a moment, and the Count was too finished a gentleman to make any disturbance. (272)

Foregoing the amplificatory powers of the opera glass, the Smasher nevertheless carries out an equivalent act of visual identification by making himself proximate

had itself become profoundly transformed by gaslight; for the history of this, see Sharrona Pearl, 'Building Beauty: Physiognomy on the Gas-Lit Stage', *Endeavour*, 30.3 (2006), 84–89. Regrettably, Richard Leahy's *Literary Illumination: The Evolution of Artificial Light in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018) was published too late for me to engage fully with its findings in this thesis.

¹⁷³ 'A Looking-Glass for London', *The Penny Magazine*, 6.365 (1837), 473–75 (p. 474).

¹⁷⁴ Augustus Mayhew, *Paved with Gold; Or, the Romance and Reality of the London Streets* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858), p. 106.

¹⁷⁵ Nead, p. 83.

¹⁷⁶ Augustus Mayhew, p. 106.

¹⁷⁷ Nead, p. 83.

¹⁷⁸ It is possible that Augustus's novel is referenced when, on Peters' arrival in London, he finds that '[this city] is not paved with gold certainly' (260).

to his target (the ‘close observer’ [277] noted by Blurosset). The encounter facilitates a ‘jolly good look at him [Jabez]’, to the extent that the Smasher identifies a facial scar documented by Peters: ‘I see the cut upon his forehead, [...], as you told me to take notice of’ (273). The analogy between stage and street is raised by Braddon, I claim, through the identical practices occurring in each: readings of Jabez’s face by members of the Cherokees. Curiously, Braddon does not provide explicit mention of the gaslight upon which the Smasher’s reading must depend, and which appears as a conspicuous presence in both historical and fictional accounts of the Haymarket.¹⁷⁹ In *Paved with Gold*, for example, these are the same streets in which the protagonist, Phil Merton, ‘read[s] by gas-lamp’ the sides of a coin he is holding.¹⁸⁰ In an ironic modification, the Smasher reads not a coin but a face scarred by one: Slosby’s mother, whom Jabez jilted, throws this object at him in an altercation, and hence it becomes a physical sign of his falsity (38), as well as a visual distinction from his deceased twin. The absence of gaslight in this scene is curious, therefore. It might be accounted, however, by recalling, as Nead writes, that many metropolitan persons were ‘no longer amazed by gaslight illumination’ in the mid-century:¹⁸¹ it had become such a vital and *naturalized* aspect of visual modernity that it no longer necessitated specific mention, and both Braddon and her readers could infer its presence.

As a site in which Jabez remains under continued inspection, the Haymarket in *Trail* appears amenable to what Otter identifies as the ‘zones of visibility’ created by illumination technologies, where criminality was ‘made vulnerable to public perception’ in addition to institutional scrutiny of law enforcement.¹⁸² In actuality, though ‘policemen’ are acknowledged in the Smasher’s encounter with Jabez, they are cast as a force that (like the servants) upholds the separation of disparate classes in the ‘unruly streets’. (The role alluded to by Otter more closely applies to Richard’s ‘amateur band of police’ (270), the Cherokees.) This apparently incidental detail speaks considerably in respect of *Trail*’s engagement with modernity as ‘a task of order’. As Bauman recounts, the creation of police forces was inextricable from an ordering of public space and expulsion of those ‘tropes of the

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, the illustration of the Haymarket area at midnight in Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, ed. by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 337.

¹⁸⁰ Augustus Mayhew, p. 114.

¹⁸¹ Nead, p. 83.

¹⁸² Otter, p. 194.

“other” of order’—persons who spoilt the harmony and design of public spaces, connoting ambivalence.¹⁸³ (The ‘crippled and the maimed [...] lunatics and idiots [...] the indolent, the vagrant, the professional mendicant, and the criminal’ that Henry Mayhew designates in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) as ‘Those That Will Not Work’ would have been recognized as such persons.¹⁸⁴) Bauman uses Derby as an illustrative example; the city’s streets had traditionally hosted (mob) football matches, but from the beginning of the nineteenth century this activity became construed as threatening to ‘public health and order’. Such a reaction is revealing, he claims, of

the struggle for public space, now increasingly understood as the policed space, *an orderly space*, a secure system of moats and ramparts guarding the fortresses of new social power. When in 1835 a police force was set up in Derby, it was given an unambiguous instruction: ‘Persons standing or loitering on the footway without a sufficient cause, so as to prevent the free passage of such a footway ... may be apprehended and taken before a magistrate’.¹⁸⁵

Although Bauman considers the ordering prerogative to be ‘unambiguous’ in the case of Derby, *Trail* draws notice to its potential inefficacies—and to the fact that ‘ambivalence’ seems irradicable—through the case of Jabez.

Jabez’s appearance as a beneficent aristocrat (a status that is visually signified by his willing subjection to the public gaze; that deceiving desire to be ‘seen oftener’) occludes him from being recognized as the very criminal element whose presence disrupts order. Instead, the Smasher is identified as that disruptive force because he masquerades as a ‘drunken man’ in order to get close to Jabez, and the police are poised to ‘interfere’ (remove him from the vicinity, presumably) before he voluntarily leaves (272). By its use of dramatic irony, therefore, Braddon encourages readers to see the difference between superficial details and interior

¹⁸³ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 7, 40.

¹⁸⁴ Henry Mayhew, p. 330.

¹⁸⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 65. Emphasis added. This same year saw the Highways Act 1835 (the first of several Highway Acts over the next fifty years), which established highways as what Michel Foucault terms a ‘disciplinary space’—aiming ‘to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals [etc.]. [Creating such spaces] was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering and using’; *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 143.

realities—here in the ongoing attempt to impose order and remove ambivalence from the city streets. That task of order is shown to be myopic insofar as it equates criminality with a limited number of visual signs, or, even more dangerously, with what cannot be seen. Recognizing the presence of gas-light in this encounter (as implied by intertextual readings of the same space), *Trail* also interrogates modernity's effort to achieve transparency through, as Vidler writes, 'building materials, spatial penetration, and the ubiquitous flow of air, light, and physical movement'.¹⁸⁶ Vidler hails Jeremy Bentham as the originator of that endeavour, and it is appropriate therefore to note how Braddon intercedes on the teleological argument established by Bentham through his idea that illumination would 'extend to the night the security of the day'.¹⁸⁷ Such a prospect is not completely rejected in *Trail*, but its 'pugnacity' is dented.¹⁸⁸ Social factors prove equally formative in the construction of 'visibility' as ocular factors, as the encounters between criminality (Jabez) and the detective forces (Peters, the Cherokees) attest to. The proliferation of illumination technologies will not, in and of itself, improve the 'social body', Braddon's novel seems to say, but it must be aligned to methods of reading that penetrate beyond superficialities.

As if imitating the visual iconography of its serpentine namesake, the conclusion to *The Trail of the Serpent* brings things full circle, in both a geographic and temporal sense: Jabez, having been captured attempting to flee aboard a cruiser bound for New York, is taken back to Slopperton and put on trial. During the court proceedings, his criminal career is traced to its start and his sophistry unravelled: witnesses attest that the 'Count de Marolles' and the missing schoolmaster are the same person, Jabez North; that the dead body recovered on the heath is that of his twin brother (and that Jabez is responsible for placing it there); and that the accused was nearby the residence of Montague Harding before he was murdered (387, 391). A 'very complicated mass of evidence' is distilled by the prosecution counsel into an unambiguous conclusion: 'to the mind of every spectator in that crowded court he succeed[s] in proving' (393) that the prisoner at the bar is Jabez and that this man murdered Harding. The prosecution's case is duly recognized

¹⁸⁶ Vidler, p. 217.

¹⁸⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticon* (Dublin and London: Thomas Payne, 1791), p. 8.

¹⁸⁸ See Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 9.

and Jabez is sentenced to death by hanging. After giving a final, defiant speech, however, the criminal evades punishment by taking his own life.

Such an outcome, which simultaneously renders sensible the entire preceding narrative and nullifies the ambiguous potential of Jabez, seems to constitute one of those ‘conservative solutions’ that typically conclude sensation novels;¹⁸⁹ if not resolved by the emphatic decision of the court, questions of transparency and bodily legibility would seem to have no urgency after his demise (his criminal career having been the catalyst for interrogating them). In fact (and it is to indicate their role as an ineluctable quality of modernity itself, I think), questions of transparency *do not* expire with Jabez. They are perpetuated through the posthumous uses that are made of Jabez’s body—‘casts’ are taken of his head, ‘masks’ of his face (396). The focal areas of phrenology and physiognomy thus recognized, the Sloppertonian phrenologist who ‘ten years before’ read murderous potential in Jabez’s cranium is then re-introduced; he is ‘in the highest spirits’ about the trial’s result, and afterwards ‘introduced the whole story into a series of lectures’ (396). The body is then sent back to London to be displayed at the ‘Chamber of Horrors’ within an ‘eminent wax-work exhibition [Madame Tussaud’s]’ (396); in this space it becomes subject to visual scrutiny in perpetuity:

Young ladies fell in love with him, and vowed that a being—they called him a being—with such dear blue glass eyes, with beautiful curly eye-lashes, and specks of lovely vermilion in each corner, could never have committed a horrid murder, but was, no doubt, the innocent victim of that cruel circumstantial evidence. (396-97)

The trial proceedings have already dredged up the moments that began Jabez’s criminal career, and these details excavate even deeper—they reconvene on his innate potential for criminality and those original questions (discussed in the first section of this chapter) about correspondences between appearance and interior. The phrenologist’s reading, which at the time seemed dubious, is apparently condoned; and the ‘young ladies’ who admire Jabez’s displayed body, if not the same ‘young women’ who identified his ‘beautiful blue eyes’ (7) ten years prior, form a deliberate echo of them by the use of the identical adjective.

¹⁸⁹ See Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, p. 149.

Trail's conclusion enacts, then, not only a spatial return (from Paris and London to Slopperton), but a temporal return (a cycle): it annuls the intervening span of a decade, and problematizes the sense of progression that might be read into it. The ambivalence that originally attached to the prospect of transparency (which Braddon's narrator so wryly teased) is resurrected; these 'returning' figures of the phrenologist and young ladies effectively perform a rewriting of the prior narrative events (and therefore *Trail* itself). The former interprets the 'whole story' as validating his 'science', while the latter group exonerate Jabez of murder (overturning the trial verdict). These explanations are not, of course, sufficiently compelling to produce epistemological uncertainty for readers: Jabez's guilt remains assured. (In Collins's *Armadale*, as considered in Chapter 4, the case is very different; the interpretation of the dream poses genuine interpretative problems.) Nevertheless, these *alternative* versions of Braddon's story do recognize the irremovable presence of ambivalence; the 'story' validated by the narrative is not the only interpretation of the preceding events, and it 'masks (or [writes] over)' other possible stories.¹⁹⁰

The place in which the 'young ladies' view Jabez, 'The Chamber of Horrors', reinforces this sense of ambivalence, and goes same way toward accounting for their fatal misreading of him. In fact, upon the novel's publication in 1860, this title was archaic: it had been renamed 'The Chamber of Comparative Physiognomy' in 1855. Since its establishment, Tussaud's had always aimed 'to blend utility with amusement',¹⁹¹ but the change was intended to prioritize its educational function over its titillating potential, and hence to give the exhibition some legitimacy. The popular press responded to the change in exactly this vein; *Punch* posited it within a teleological frame, opining in 1861 that 'people have supped full of horrors, and, it may be hoped, have got sick of them'; the alteration was, to them, an 'improvement' that allowed visitors to intellectually 'profit' from study of the exhibitions.¹⁹² By using the Chamber's outmoded title, then, *Trail* inverts the progress connoted by the change; conversely, it suggests a sense of stasis in terms of development (thus intensifying an implication already raised by the spatial and temporal 'return' to the Slopperton of a decade prior). Progressive suggestions are substituted for

¹⁹⁰ Pykett, 'The Woman in White and the Secrets of the Sensation Novel', p. 44.

¹⁹¹ Lela Graybill, 'A Proximate Violence: Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, 9.2 (2010), 1–28 (p. 12).

¹⁹² 'Comparative Physiognomy', *Punch*, 1861, 9.

the violent, anachronistic connotations of the pre-1855 exhibition. (This subversive take on visual learning parallels the portrayal of the Crystal Palace in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well*, as detailed in Chapter 3; the didactic intent of these modern sites—aiming to respond to the 'problem of order', as Tony Bennett writes¹⁹³—serve instead to underscore how classification only creates more equivocal cases.)

'Horrors' is an accurate description of the pre-1855 Chamber, comprised as it was of manifold, atomized body parts (famously the severed head of Maximilien Robespierre). Unlike the wax tableaux displayed elsewhere in Tussaud's, these fragmentary exhibits were shown without context; the setup proffered an acutely ambivalent visual experience, as Lela Graybill explains:

The Chamber of Horrors neither offered nor depended on that kind of coherence [of the tableaux]. Its effectiveness grew instead out of nagging doubt—from the blurring of the line between the representational and the real [...] The pleasures of Madame Tussaud's display did not hinge on the sublimation of such tensions into feelings of coherence, stability, and mastery.¹⁹⁴

This ambivalence around the 'representational' and the 'real' came from the uncanny verisimilitude of the waxwork exhibits; their pleasure being the suspenseful judgment as to whether a body was alive or not (confirmed eventually by an absence of expression or movement).¹⁹⁵ The subject was indeed 'almost alive', to use the phrase of Uta Kornmeier, for the waxwork process (the taking of 'casts' and 'masks' [396]) implied that they 'had also impressed, via the face, part of their personality into the wet plaster'; they could be read like the living subject, indeed with greater accuracy (for there was the cessation of movement so keenly sought by Lavater). Tussaud herself belied the artistry of the process so as to augment its claims to verisimilitude; as Kornmeier writes, 'the mask was "taken" rather than "made". The waxwork thus gained an unmatched documentary status'.¹⁹⁶ The

¹⁹³ Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. by Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 123–54 (p. 126).

¹⁹⁴ Graybill, pp. 19, 22.

¹⁹⁵ Uta Kornmeier, 'Almost Alive: The Spectacle of Verisimilitude in Madame Tussaud's Waxworks', in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. by Roberta Panzanelli (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), pp. 67–82 (p. 68).

¹⁹⁶ Kornmeier, p. 76.

parallels are manifold to photography (as accounted earlier, a technology caught in a similar bind over its artistic or scientific status), and situating Jabez within the Chamber is the logical culmination of attempts to fix his body so as to accurately read it. The tableau that was discussed earlier, in which he is read by candlelight, is created on a permanent basis within Tussaud's.

These details, it might be objected, more accurately describe the exhibits that constituted the majority of Tussaud's, that is, those not in the Chamber of Horrors (in which the lifeless status of the exhibits could not be doubted). It nonetheless applies to *Trail*, for Jabez displayed as a complete (that is, a non-atomized) figure, as indicated by the mention of his dress: 'boots [and an] evening costume' (396). Arrayed as such, Jabez more closely resembles a waxwork figure from the ordinary exhibits, such as Voltaire, than he does Robespierre. Kornmeier writes, pertinently, that contemporaries responded to Voltaire as if he were poised to resume life, 'so "real" as to almost speak to the viewer'.¹⁹⁷ The emphasis on Jabez's appearance therefore spotlights the ambivalence of the conclusion. Braddon's criminal antagonist is positioned in the Chamber of Horrors even though he takes the form of the 'full figure compositions of the main exhibition'—figures that, as Graybill highlights, 'should be viewed with sympathy'.¹⁹⁸ Displayed erroneously within the Chamber, and absent of the living details that attested to his brutality,¹⁹⁹ continual *misreading* of Jabez seems inevitable.

CONCLUSION

Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors apotheosises the character of visual modernity as it is depicted in *Trail*. The experience of Tussaud's was framed by the belief that defined Cartesian perspectivalism: access through vision to an 'objective and authentic truth'.²⁰⁰ Yet, the ambivalent staging of Jabez there, as an object of horror portrayed sympathetically, imparts the need to be conscious of the circumstances in which vision occurs, lest it mislead. Such awareness is informed by the findings of physiological optics, and it anticipates the popular warnings that would be given

¹⁹⁷ Kornmeier, p. 73.

¹⁹⁸ Graybill, p. 15.

¹⁹⁹ See again Christine Ferguson's emphasis (p. 27.) on the inability for signs to be read statically in *Trail*.

²⁰⁰ Kornmeier, p. 73.

by F. Marion later in the decade. The tension between these two models of vision is one that appears throughout *Trail*, and forms its structuring principle: it explores the anxieties of correspondence that emerge from the contest between these two conflicting perspectives on visibility. This exploration can be seen, I have argued, as a staging of modernity's desire for order—specifically, its aim to achieve transparency through absolute classification.²⁰¹

Persistently disrupting 'politically and socially enforced categories',²⁰² Jabez North is a superlative embodiment of ambivalence (though Laurent Blurosset also evokes it to a lesser extent). Accordingly, he represents an existential threat to the ordering impulse, at the same time as he gives it an unprecedented urgency. Both his anomalous physiognomy (exhibiting 'outward beauty and inward ugliness'²⁰³) and his schemes underscore the limits to transparency and the inefficacies of obtaining truth via vision, suggesting instead that simple appearances belie more complicated realities. Enacting such within the paradigmatically modern cities of Paris and London, it appears initially that contemporary concerns about the criminal element hidden from view by the dense, urban populace will become realized. Yet the situation proves more complicated: material and social changes transforming particularly this last city enable Richard's amateur detective force to identify and then interpret Jabez; leisurely visual practices and technologies like tourism and opera glasses are shown to increase surveilling opportunities; and gaslighting extends the zones of visibility in which observation can occur.

Through Jabez, *Trail* suggests not simply that criminality is ambivalence, but that *ambivalence is criminal*—a practice warranting punishment; Braddon's antagonist, threatening to the coherency of visibility, must be expiated from society. The investigation undertaken by Peters, Marwood, and the Cherokees strives for this outcome, and seems to be fulfilled with Jabez's apprehension and (self-)punishment. Yet, aptly expressing the impossible (but formative) task that modernity set itself, the absolute removal of ambivalence proves untenable; Jabez's permanent situation within Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors ensures that the ambiguities he connoted while alive (and he is 'almost alive') persist in his waxwork form. This

²⁰¹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 10.

²⁰² Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 105.

²⁰³ Braddon, *Aurora Floyd*, pp. 181, 468n181.

outcome for Braddon's antagonist figures ambivalence not merely as an ineluctable part of modernity, but also, recognizing that Tussaud's was located in London's Baker Street, as a frighteningly proximate issue for many of *Trail's* readers. To modify Graybill's remark about the affective appeal of Tussaud's, the 'pleasures' of reading *Trail* do not depend on sublimating its ambivalence about visuality into 'feelings of coherence, stability, and mastery'; they arise instead from the way that it endlessly suspends modernity's dream of transparency.

CHAPTER 2

'The Curse That Has Always Followed Us': (Dis)inheriting the Past in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Wylder's Hand* (1864)

The parable of Dives and Lazarus appears often in social fiction of the 1840s and 1850s as a means to express the gulf between the rich and poor.¹ But an article of October 1863 in *Chambers's Journal*, 'The Dead Hand', invests it with different associations, and stages a mock resurrection of the Rich Man:

From the grave itself, Dives stretches out a Hand, a Dead Hand, it is true, but potent yet, to grasp and rule his beloved property. [...] The Dead Head keeps its clutch on the dear gold, the cherished acres, and will not unloose its hold.

In the image of a cadaverous appendage emerging from its burial site, the parable is mixed with another Biblical namesake, Lazarus of Bethany, and with the determinedly gothic motif of an inheritance that haunts the present. But, in an unmasking reminiscent of Ann Radcliffe, the conceit is revealed: 'in more prosaic language Dives has made his will'.² The supernatural Dead Hand thus becomes understood in its quotidian sense (deriving from *mortmain* (French: 'dead hand')) and denoting the posthumous control of a property by its testator.³ Yet the supernatural register is sustained, even after the analogy's contemporary, material basis is given:

That [a person's] possession should continue for centuries after his bones have dropped to dust; that he should control the living during ages yet to come, and exercise authority over unborn generations, is certainly a wonderful thing. Yet the talisman by which these prodigies are effected is merely a dusty deed, written on parchment or paper

¹ Sheila M. Smith, *The Other Nation: The Poor in English Novels of the 1840s and 1850s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 15–16.

² 'The Dead Hand', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, 509 (1863), 209–11 (p. 209).

³ Oxford University Press, 'Mortmain, N.', *OED Online*.

yellowed by age, but signed, sealed, delivered, proved, and registered as the law demands.⁴

For this author, property and its transmission are paramount cases of what Stanley Cavell terms the ‘uncanniness of the ordinary’;⁵ their chief instrument, the will, is figured as quasi-magical, able to compel and coerce without temporal limitations. The article demonstrates that tendency in Victorian Britain for offering social criticism through the gothic supernatural⁶—here, it is a mode that expresses the damaging anachronism of modern life, whose social arrangements continue to be vitally determined by that ‘old superstition’ wherein ‘a dead man’s wishes were supposed to be so sacred as to override every plea of mercy, justice, or usefulness’. However, this supernatural inheritance plot, in which the Dead Hand acts as a vengeful antagonist, concludes optimistically, for its author detects that this superstition is ‘waning and paling away, like a ghost at cockcrow’ with every ‘fresh change in the law’, so that the desires of ‘the living’ should finally triumph over those of the dead.⁷

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Wylder’s Hand* (1864) proffers a similar sense of how property and its inheritance might act as conduits for an anachronistic and destructive past, and how these ‘prosaic’ affairs are nonetheless powerfully expressible by gothic imagery.⁸ The wills concerning its central property, Brandon Hall, are said to be ‘spiced with the devilment of the “testators”’, and to abound ‘in insinuations and even language which were scandalous’ (5). Such supernatural inflections multiply as the novel progresses, and as the conflicts over property escalate. Superficially, its protracted concern for the past (inflected by Irish ideas of history) seems to contradict the prescription from Le Fanu’s publisher, Richard Bentley, that he write ‘a story of an English subject and in modern times’.⁹ This chapter argues, however, that the novel is in fact fundamentally concerned by the

⁴ ‘The Dead Hand’, p. 209.

⁵ Stanley Cavell, *The Uncanniness of the Ordinary*, The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, 1986 <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/c/cavell88.pdf>.

⁶ Eve M. Lynch, ‘Spectral Politics: The Victorian Ghost Story and the Domestic Servant’, in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 67–86 (p. 70).

⁷ ‘The Dead Hand’, p. 211.

⁸ Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Wylder’s Hand* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009). Subsequent parenthetical references refer to this edition.

⁹ W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 140.

relational nature of modernity; it demonstrates how, as Andrew Billing and Juliette Cherbuliez outline,

modernity must always be seen to define itself structurally in relationship to an other, a pre-modern or 'antiquated' past. Despite this attempt to mark a radical rupture with this past, the past instead always inhabits the modern, constitutes it, persists in it or is 'residual'.¹⁰

Henri LeFebvre declares, similarly, that 'this period [the modern] which sees and calls itself entirely new is overcome by an obsession with the past: memory, history'.¹¹ If modernity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent* is manifested as the 'dream of transparency', as argued in the previous chapter, then in Le Fanu's novel the dream concerns this 'radical rupture' between past and present. Through an exploration of inheritance, both biological and material, and by portraying such allegedly anachronistic practices as duelling and slavery as disquietingly relevant to 'modern' social arrangements, *Wylder's Hand* attends not only to how the past continues to 'inhabit' or 'constitute' the modern and the likelihood of its effacement; it also queries the desirability of such a break, and asks what might be lost by entering absolutely into the new.

Scholars have long identified several distinguishing facets of Le Fanu's oeuvre vis-à-vis those of his contemporaries. In 1980, W. J. McCormack determined that the author's best fiction is amenable to stylistic and formal analysis to a degree remarkable for 'sensationalism', citing the density of recurring imagery, symmetrical patterns, and female narrators as notable features.¹² Yet, sixteen years later, Tamar Heller could still write that there had been 'puzzlingly little [scholarship] on Le Fanu', particularly given that, in her view, his 'innovative synthesis of [the gothic] with the historical novel makes him an ideal candidate for historicizing approaches'.¹³ The formal approach advocated by McCormack has since been fulfilled in Victor Sage's meticulous study *Le Fanu's Gothic* (2004),¹⁴ but Heller's

¹⁰ Andrew Billing and Juliette Cherbuliez, 'Paris as Capital, Capital in Paris', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 55.3 (2015), 1–14 (p. 8). 'Residual' is Raymond Williams's phrasing.

¹¹ Henri LeFebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, trans. by John Moore (London: Verso, 1995), p. 224.

¹² W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, p. 144.

¹³ Quoted in Anna Maria Jones, 'Sheridan Le Fanu', in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 271.

¹⁴ Victor Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic: The Rhetoric of Darkness* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

recognition of an absence of historicist scholarship remains valid. Further omissions are conspicuous. As Anna Jones observes (and as evidenced by the title of Sage's work), 'most [...] scholarship on Le Fanu, even that which reads him in conjunction with other sensation novelists, has tended to place him in the [category of the gothic,] rather than [sensation]'.¹⁵ Meanwhile, James Walton identifies the need for 'a wider acquaintance with [Le Fanu's] work and indeed a broader range of reference [beyond *Uncle Silas* and "Carmilla"]'.¹⁶ Through a historicist reading of *Wylder's Hand*, and by signalling its commonality with the ambitions of sensation fiction, this chapter aims to enlarge the critical discussion and help rectify the omissions outlined above. Doing so illuminates the integral position occupied by Le Fanu, and *Wylder's Hand* especially, in respect of sensation fiction's engagement with the ambivalences of modernity.

PROPERTY AND HEREDITY: IDEAS OF INHERITANCE IN ENGLAND AND IRELAND

The enduring influence of the past is a common theme in Le Fanu's fiction, and of its representation Terry Eagleton observes that

it is always a matter of discovering within the living present a criminal history which refuses to be repressed, but which continues in the form of property, mortgage and inheritance to determine the behaviour of those deluded enough to believe they are free.¹⁷

These 'forms' by which the past continues to make itself felt in the present are, as I shall account, significant in the context of Ireland's history, and in the construction of its identity in mid-Victorian Britain. *Wylder's Hand* is concerned with 'property, mortgage and inheritance', but is distinguished by the attention it gives to the other sense of *inheritance*: heredity. Whilst the inheritance of property was a concerning topic in England, the transmission of (injurious) physical and moral features generated more controversy. By depicting these two forms of inheritance

¹⁵ Anna Maria Jones, 'Sheridan Le Fanu', p. 271. An exception is Devin P. Zuber, 'Swedenborg and the Disintegration of Language in Sheridan Le Fanu's Sensation Fiction', in *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*, ed. by Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 74–84.

¹⁶ James Walton, *Vision and Vacancy: The Fictions of J. S. Le Fanu* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), p. 8.

¹⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), p. 199.

as inextricable, *Wylder's Hand* pinpoints a commonality between the two nations (and markets) within which it was embedded, the English and the Irish. My argument takes further McCormack's observation of the novel's hybridity: 'the realism which *Wylder's Hand* ironically achieves is that of neither English manners nor Irish; [it] moves between these two terms and unwittingly explores the metaphorical ground of their union'.¹⁸ Distinctly, I contend that by recognizing how *Wylder's Hand* engages with concepts of inheritance in England and Ireland, it is possible to perceive a more purposeful 'explor[ation]'; Le Fanu's novel suggests that the potentially haunting quality of the past is not peculiar to Ireland, but is inherent to 'modern times', even if it is imaginatively manifested in distinctive forms. As Julian Wolfreys declares, 'a spectre haunts modernity, and the spectral is at the heart of any narrative of the modern'.¹⁹

Throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth-century, property and its (illegitimate) transmission figured vitally within the turbulent issue of Irish identity, which was inevitably constructed through the lens of the past. "Land" in Ireland is a political rallying cry as well as a badge of cultural belonging, a question of rents as well as roots',²⁰ as Eagleton explains. For Irish nationalists, it manifested the injustices wrought by Britain on the native (Catholic) population; they 'framed the Irish experience as one of having had rights to the land, of having been robbed of them by the British state, and of still experiencing them, nonetheless as a palpable attachment'.²¹ Among the most self-conscious members of the Anglo-Irish, meanwhile, property connoted the inverse of this nationalist experience: 'Anglo-Ireland was haunted by its past corruptions, [and] its roots in conquest'.²² The peaceful circumstances in which Le Fanu composed *Wylder's Hand* in 1863, having established himself as a member of Dublin's literary elite through his purchase of the *Dublin University Magazine*, belies his earlier experiences with the explo-

¹⁸ W. J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 63.

¹⁹ Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 3.

²⁰ Eagleton, p. 7.

²¹ Sara L. Maurer, *The Dispossessed State: Narratives of Ownership in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 9. 'England' and 'Britain' were often used interchangeably during this period, owing to the dominant status of the former country within the larger polity. I favour using England in cases where this is evidently meant by the source, as it aids in stressing the comparative aspect of this analysis.

²² W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, p. 85.

sive significations of property and its manifestation of the past. The Le Fanu family's relocation to Abington, County Limerick in 1826 placed them centrally within a social and political climate becoming incendiary by (renewed) questions about Catholic emancipation,²³ for which the ownership of land was a focal point. They were deeply implicated in this, not only as Anglo-Irish Protestants, but as a family that derived their income from tithes levied on Catholic tenants (Joseph's father was parish rector). Tensions escalated during what became known as the Tithe War of 1831-36, when Catholic landholders refused to pay these tithes, reacting with non-cooperation and, occasionally, outright violence.²⁴ It represented an existential crisis for a worldview that had been carefully cultivated over hundreds of years, in which Protestants came to dominate Irish social and political life (the so-called 'Protestant Ascendancy'). As McCormack explains, in terms highly evocative of Bauman's modernity, 'the all-pervading control of a Protestant, Tory God had failed, and chaos was imminent. Not simply the chaos of empty coffers and brawling in the lanes, but the spiritual chaos of a directionless world'; Joseph and his father experienced these troubles not only as individuals, but as 'symbols or embodiments of a [...] once vital but now collapsing historical coherence'.²⁵ The same shift might be identified of the so-called 'big houses' of the Anglo-Irish land-owning class; although their physical integrity remained largely intact (in contrast to the period 1919-23), their symbolism of control over the Irish countryside had been challenged.²⁶

The Great Famine of 1845-49 constituted a further, more profound rupture of Ireland, and its sense of identity that was rooted in its past. Contemporaries and modern scholars have understood it as 'representing a crisis in the very notion of temporality and logical causality',²⁷ challenging the 'narrative cohesion [...] of Irish history' to the extent that teleology might 'only ever be retrospective, constructed backwards after the unspeakable has already happened'.²⁸ Certain commentators seized on it for alternative narrative purposes, however; they saw it as

²³ W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, p. 26.

²⁴ A good overview of this conflict is Stephen McCormack, 'The Tithe War: Reports by Church of England Clergymen to Dublin Castle', *History Ireland*, 13.4 (2005), 40-44.

²⁵ W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, pp. 45, 46.

²⁶ Terence Dooley, *The Big Houses and Landed Estates of Ireland: A Research Guide* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), p. 9.

²⁷ Patrick R. O'Malley, *Liffey and Lethe: Paramnesiac History in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 106.

²⁸ Eagleton, pp. 13, 14.

an opportunity for Ireland to dissolve its ties to the past and undertake a radical entry into modernity:

In many ways [... the Famine] was viewed as an instrument of cure, a form of social prophylaxis, that would finally regenerate what was perceived to be a diseased body politic. [...] Objectified as a 'redundant' people, Irish peasants were thought to be preventing the long-term modernization of Irish society. [...] to be civilized Irish society must be anglicised, and for this to happen the soil must be swept of its *human encumbrances*.²⁹

David P. Nally's final phrase here references the status of property in post-Famine Ireland—a situation that, ironically, ensured the past could not be distanced. As their tenants were devastated by the Famine, many Anglo-Irish estates proved unable to support their financial obligations and so became 'encumbered'; property and inheritance were henceforth to be feared not only as haunting reminders of Ireland's past, but the 'true nightmare' for this class was that their estates might become 'deadweight'—a trap for future generations, because they were unsellable.³⁰ Conservative voices in the British press ascribed this decline less to the economic realities of post-Famine Ireland than to pre-destined mismanagement. An 1854 article in the English periodical *Ainsworth's Magazine* appraised the phenomenon in these terms:

For long they [the owners] battled manfully against their fate—[...] Men came and asked for their daughters in marriage—younger sons had to be provided for. The marriage portions and the younger sons' fortunes were left by will exceeding what in those times the property could bear. Sons followed the examples their fathers set them, and overburdened the estates.³¹

It is interesting to observe the paradoxical explanation given here, by which encumbrance is read as both a fated outcome (that is, impossible to resist) and the result of wilful negligence on behalf of successive landowners. These conflicting

²⁹ David P. Nally, *Human Encumbrances: Political Violence and the Great Irish Famine* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), p. x.

³⁰ Eagleton, p. 194. As Terence Dooley accounts, the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849? tried to alleviate some of this predicament; p. 31.

³¹ 'Ireland and the Irish', *Ainsworth's Magazine*, 25 (1854), 395–410 (p. 408).

senses as to the individual's agency in terms of the past—specifically the chance of averting its repetition—feature vitally in *Wylder's Hand*.

The passage above appeared the year after Parliament passed the Encumbered Estates Act 1853. These responses, rhetorical and legal, give some insight into the close engagement of England with the 'land question' of Ireland, and into the ideas it had regarding the Irish national character. Based upon the Tithe War and other cases of civil unrest, the *Ainsworth's Magazine* article describes Ireland as having become thoroughly divided [...] from the prosperity of Old England'; 'we [the English] beheld Munster and Connaught as barbarous and uncivilised as the centre of Africa or Timbuctoo'.³² (Notice Nally's point affirmed: anglicization is synonymous with civilization.) But the most concise expression of the polarized English perspectives on Ireland, and the significance of property and inheritance to that nation, is given in John Stuart Mill's *England and Ireland* (1868) and the responses it occasioned. Irish history, in Mill's account, is the story of repeated land conquests and confiscations by the English, 'from motives of different degrees of unworthiness'.³³ The position was supported by the liberal periodical *The Athenaeum*,³⁴ but censured by the more conservative *Saturday Review*. Intriguingly, although *Ireland's* land question is ostensibly the focus of the latter's review, a mirror is held up to *England's* construction of its national identity through property:

There may be men who hate property, without hating England; while there are others who hate England, without hating property. But it seems to be the mission of Mr. Mill, and the effect of his work, to unite in an offensive alliance two different antipathies, otherwise possessing no affinity to each other.³⁵

The *Review* objected especially to Mill's alleged suggestion that 'the great doctrine of Irish social politics is reducible to the phrase "La propriété, c'est le vol [property is theft]"'.³⁶ The radical stance embodied by this phrase (it comes from

³² 'Ireland and the Irish', pp. 404, 398.

³³ John Stuart Mill, *England and Ireland*, Second (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1868), p. 3.

³⁴ 'England and Ireland', *The Athenaeum*, 2104 (1868), 279–81.

³⁵ 'Mr. Mill on England and Ireland', *The Saturday Review*, 25.644 (1868), 282–83 (pp. 282, 283).

³⁶ 'Mr. Mill on England and Ireland', pp. 282, 283.

the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's 1840 treatise, *What is Property?*) is nascent in *Wylder's Hand's* depiction of property as the cause of violence and illegitimacy, as shall be seen.

Whether objecting to or affirming the idea of Ireland's appropriation by England, it was indisputably the case, as Mill wrote, that 'the question, "What is to be done with Ireland?"' seemed to constantly recur, and in each case to perplex [...] and trouble the conscience of the British nation'.³⁷ Eagleton observes, pertinently, that Ireland was 'the monstrous unconscious of the metropolitan society, the secret materialist history of endemically idealist England'.³⁸ Geographical proximity undoubtedly aided such fears (the barbarity of 'Africa or Timbuctoo' was at least distant),³⁹ but it also derived from Britain's direct interventions in such events as the Tithe War. The management of Ireland required the British to 'betray their own principles, in a kind of negation or inversion of their conscious beliefs'; amongst other things, they had to countenance state intervention, political movements acting via physical force, and custom-bound (instead of contractual) land ownership.⁴⁰ The disquieting symbolisms they associated with such policies (uncivilized, anti-modern, anachronistic) were only tolerable through the idea that a 'special taint or infirmity in the Irish character' rendered them necessary.⁴¹ By transposing Irish ideas of property and inheritance to an *English* setting, *Wylder's Hand* necessarily unsettles this proposition and forces self-scrutiny about ideas of national character.

These symbolic associations of Ireland within the English mind-set should be familiar, for they are also those of sensation fiction: the genre figured as a 'monstrous unconscious' in its subversive depiction of attitudes and ideas which simmered below the surface of everyday life: madness, criminality, violence, and incarceration (to say nothing of how monstrous *doppelgängers* are replete in these

³⁷ Mill, *England and Ireland*, p. 3.

³⁸ Eagleton, pp. 8–9.

³⁹ 'Since we can neither moor the island [of Ireland] out in the middle of the Atlantic, as many would like to do, nor sink it for six hours in a tempest, [...] we must deal with it where it is, and as it is'; 'England and Ireland', p. 279.

⁴⁰ Eagleton, p. 9. These and other policies are accounted in Kyle Hughes and Donald M. MacRaild, 'Introduction', in *Crime, Violence, and the Irish in the Nineteenth-Century: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. by Kyle Hughes and Donald M. MacRaild (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), pp. 1–18 (pp. 3–9).

⁴¹ Mill, *England and Ireland*, p. 3.

novels⁴²). These shared associations are vital in the context of reading *Wylder's Hand*, for it was the first of Le Fanu's 'English novels', written after Bentley's prescription that his next novel must be 'the story of an English subject and in modern times'. Bentley's 'formula' has been hailed as tantamount to sensation fiction,⁴³ and Le Fanu's move into this genre is thus often implicitly construed as something of an imposition on the author.⁴⁴ The shallowness of his adherence to what Bentley asked is, according to this view, evidenced by the persistence of Irish themes in these novels (such that the English setting is superficial), and by his resistance to the term 'sensation'.⁴⁵ The result, as I noted before, is that sensationalism has been deemed an incidental context in Le Fanu criticism.⁴⁶ Yet, apart from the fact that distancing oneself from 'sensation' was a strategy used by several proponents of the genre,⁴⁷ scholars must account for the fact that *all* of Le Fanu's subsequent novels (including those not published by Bentley) continue in the same vein.⁴⁸ By suggesting the imaginative correspondences between Ireland and sensation fiction, I wish to propose that the genre acted as something of a symbolic surrogate for the nation he had moved away from directly depicting. This is not to assert that Irish contexts are displaced—in fact, Irish ideas of ownership and inheritance proliferate *Wylder's Hand*. Rather, Le Fanu embraced sensation fiction because it enabled him to continue writing about Ireland by proxy, *and* in connection with England. Sensation fiction offered a means, in other words, of narrativizing the 'double and divided loyalty to England and to Ireland' that characterized the author's Anglo-Irish class.⁴⁹

⁴² See for instance, Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 202.

⁴³ W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, pp. 140–41.

⁴⁴ Le Fanu had previously written three historical novels set in Ireland: *The Cock and Anchor* (1845), *The Fortunes of Torlogh O'Brien* (1847) and *The House by the Churchyard* (1863).

⁴⁵ See McCormack, *Dissolute*, p. 64. Elizabeth Bowen was perhaps the first critic to detect Irish themes in the English novels; *Victorian Ireland*, p. 141. Le Fanu objected to the 'degrading term' sensation being applied to *Uncle Silas* (1864); *Uncle Silas*, ed. by Victor Sage (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 4.

⁴⁶ See Anna Maria Jones, 'Sheridan Le Fanu', p. 271.

⁴⁷ See for instance Charles Reade, *Hard Cash* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1867), p. i. See also Patrick Bratlinger quoted in Zuber, p. 74.

⁴⁸ Excluding *Morley Court* (1873), as McCormack highlights; *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, p. 140. As Anne-Marie Beller points out, Le Fanu's short fiction of the 1850s 'contains sensational techniques'; 'Sensation Fiction in the 1850s', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 7–20 (p. 18).

⁴⁹ Jean Lozes, 'Le Fanu's Houses', in *The Big House in Ireland: Reality and Representation*, ed. by Jacqueline Genet (Dingle: Brandon, 1991), p. 103.

Indeed, *Wylder's Hand's* concern for English issues is appreciable in its depiction of 'inheritance' as heredity. The 'land question' was not altogether absent from the mid-Victorian English consciousness, but it had none of the immediacy or associations that it did in Ireland. It might be seen to perpetuate the past (be anachronistic), yet there was no threat of violence behind it.⁵⁰ The legal status of (especially married) women was a locus for this argument,⁵¹ and is important in *Wylder's Hand*. More troubling, it is perhaps fair to say, was the transmission not of property but of traits between generations. The medical discourse of hereditary disease transmission 'grew in scale and application during the nineteenth century', such that 'by the mid-Victorian years the heritability of "mental aberrations" was as fully taken for granted as the inheritance of bodily diseases and infirmities'.⁵² Sensation fiction both responded to and perpetuated these conversations. In Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), matrilineal madness is the suspected cause of Lucy Graham's behaviour; she explains, 'the only inheritance I had to expect from my mother was – insanity!'⁵³ In Ellen Wood's *St Martin's Eve* (1866), the fear of more patrilineal madness motivates an attempt to prevent Charlotte St John's marriage.⁵⁴ Even earlier, and an influential precursor to both these novels, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) showed hereditary madness in the form of Bertha Rochester, whose condition manifests as a bestial violence. In these and other cases, the frightful influence of the past is manifested through hereditary disease. So, sensation fiction enlarged on a widespread anxiety about hereditary disposition to madness; John C. Waller recounts that 'the prospect of entailing on progeny a similarly gloomy inheritance, and exposure to the same stigmas, [gave]

⁵⁰ See the article from *Chambers's Journal* that opened this chapter. Henry Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861) expressed the anachronism of English property law, including as it related to women:

The land-law of England, 'the Herculaneum of Feudalism,' is certainly much more closely allied to the land-law of the Middle Ages than that of any Continental county, and Wills with us are frequently used to aid or imitate that preference of the eldest son and his line which is a nearly universal feature in marriage settlements of real property. (Henry Maine, *Ancient Law* (London: John Murray, 1861), p. 226.)

⁵¹ See Jill Rappoport, 'Wives and Sons: Coverture, Primogeniture, and Married Women's Property', *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. [Accessed 08 August 2018]

⁵² John C. Waller, 'Ideas of Heredity, Reproduction and Eugenics in Britain, 1800-1875', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 32.3 (2001), 457–89 (pp. 459, 460).

⁵³ Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, p. 345.

⁵⁴ Foregrounded particularly at the novel's end; Ellen Wood, *St. Martin's Eve* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1922), pp. 499–502.

considerable pause for thought', referring, as evidence, to the case of a man who reportedly 'refrained' from having children due to fears of propagating hereditary madness.⁵⁵

One particular facet of this topic, highly relevant to *Wylder's Hand*, is consanguineous unions (the marriage of blood relations, but practically almost always marriage between cousins). Increased attention to 'bad heredity' led to a flurry of discussion about the desirability of such matches. In *Observations on Mental Derangement* (1831), Andrew Combe cautioned against such unions because of the hereditary causation of madness:

The first condition of health [...] is a sound original constitution of brain, free from any hereditary predisposition to derangement. To prevent the future development of insanity from this cause, alliance by marriage between the members of predisposed families ought to be religiously avoided;⁵⁶

The years prior to and around the publication of Le Fanu's novel saw the subject debated intensely, as in S. M. Bemiss's *On Marriages of Consanguinity* (1857), Gilbert Child's papers of the same name (1862-63), and, in a tangential context, Charles Darwin's *Fertilisation of Orchids* (1862).⁵⁷ It was not confined to scientific circles, however, but being as one author described it, both 'a question of scientific physiology' and 'a matter affecting practical life' (that is, affecting a person's choice of marriage partner),⁵⁸ it was considered by those contemplating such unions; Darwin encapsulates the duality of the question insofar as it was of scientific, but also personal, concern—Darwin married his first cousin, Emma Wedgwood, after grappling with his anxieties.

If Braddon's protagonist seems to play on the polysemy of 'inheritance'—for instead of property she only receives insanity from her mother—this would not be an isolated case. Whether inadvertently or deliberately, the dual senses of inheritance often became comingled. A *Westminster Review* article (1863), for exam-

⁵⁵ Waller, pp. 466, 466n18.

⁵⁶ Andrew Combe, *Observations on Mental Derangement* (Edinburgh and London: John Anderson and Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, & Green, 1831), p. 317.

⁵⁷ Likewise, the subject was intensely debated in French medical circles; see Francis Devay, *Traite Spécial d'hygiène Des Familles* (Paris, 1858); M. M. Boudin, *Comptus Redus*, 1852.

⁵⁸ 'Art. V.-Marriages of Consanguinity', *Westminster Review*, 24.1 (1863), 88–109 (p. 94).

ple, notes that biological and material inheritance are analogous in their conspicuousness in genealogies: 'hereditary gout and hereditary insanity are as clearly traceable through many generations in the families in which they are inherent as is the succession to the family estate, and very often much more so'.⁵⁹ Later, in *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (1867), Henry Maudsley develops this analogy into an extended metaphor of hereditary taint as dilapidated property:

When [a person's 'inborn nature'] is radically defective, no amount of systematic labour will avail to counterbalance entirely the defect; it were as hopeless to attempt to rear the massive structure of a royal palace upon foundations dug only for a cottage as to impose the superstructure of a large, vigorous, and complete culture upon the rotten foundations which an inherited taint of nervous element implies; something will always be wanting, some crack in the building will show the instability of the foundations.⁶⁰

This passage recalls that the polysemy of 'inheritance' is approximated by that of 'house', denoting as it does both a lineage *and* a residence. Notable here is how Maudsley transplants into his physiological tract a gothic symbiosis of body and property that evokes, for instance, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) (in which the Usher dynasty proves coterminous with its ancestral home). The image of the past evoked in these two accounts of heredity is of a haunting presence that forcefully determines the present, and against which resistance is 'hopeless'. Furthermore, the prospect of atavism (the re-appearance of a 'less-civilized' trait after generations of its absence), implied that these 'rotten foundations' of Maudsley's might run deep; insanity, as an article of 1856 expressed it, 'seems to lie dormant for a generation, and in the next flashes out with the same fury as of old'.⁶¹ Even its absence in the immediate family was therefore no surety of being protected from hereditary taint—the peaceable present could

⁵⁹ 'Art. V.-Marriages of Consanguinity', p. 96.

⁶⁰ Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1867), p. 225.

⁶¹ 'Art. V.-Hereditary Influence, Animal and Human', *Westminster Review*, 66.129 (1856), 135–62 (p. 154). In the 1860s, *atavism* or *reversion* was yet to be strongly associated with criminality and regression to the animalistic as it would be toward the end of the century.

become fatefully disrupted by the heredity of ‘even more distant ancestor[s]’ than two generations away.⁶²

Having outlined these contexts in turn, it is not implausible, I claim, to recognize similarities between English fears of hereditary ‘taint’ (‘an unfortunate inheritance, the curse of a bad descent’⁶³) and how, for the Irish, property might produce a similarly direful sense of the past. The ‘fury’ of hereditary madness might emerge from the constitutions of distant ancestors, just as the forcible seizure of land by prior generations had created the conditions for political violence to break out in the present (as Le Fanu had experienced in County Limerick). This chapter contends that such a connection is made in *Wylder’s Hand* as a primary means of displaying the pervasive and often deleterious influence of the past, in a manner that was resonant for readers in both England and Ireland.

‘DOOMED [...] TO RE-ENACT ITSELF’: THE PERSISTENT PAST IN *WYLDER’S HAND*

Wylder’s Hand begins with the arrival in Gylingden of Charles de Cresseron, the story’s narrator, to advise his former acquaintance Mark Wylder on Mark’s upcoming marriage to Dorcas Brandon. The union is intended to resolve the inter-generational feuding between the families of Wylder, Brandon, and Lake. Rachel Lake lives near Brandon Hall, the ancestral home of the Wylders and Brandons, and the site of much conflict. Before the ceremony is due to take place, however, and soon after the arrival into Gylingden of Rachel’s brother, Stanley, Mark abruptly leaves. Shortly thereafter, letters by him arrive from the Continent, hinting at reasons for his departure. In his absence, Mark’s brother, the Reverend William Wylder, falls into financial troubles and is dogged by the lawyer Josiah Larkin, who aims to obtain William’s reversion on a portion of the Brandon estate. To Rachel’s consternation, Stanley Lake weds Dorcas in lieu of Mark, while Larkin’s investigations hint that the absent Wylder is in serious difficulties. Stanley begins electioneering to become the local MP but is then fatally injured in a riding accident—his horse balks at a corpse, which proves to be that of Mark. It is revealed that he was unintentionally killed by Stanley in an altercation on the night of his

⁶² ‘Art. V.-Marriages of Consanguinity’, p. 89.

⁶³ Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1867), p. 76.

presumed departure; the letters have been forgeries. William then becomes the master of Brandon Hall after the lawyer Larkin fails to dispossess him. Rachel is exonerated for her part in helping Stanley conceal the crime and leaves England with the widowed Dorcas; the pair are sighted in Venice years later by the narrator, de Cresseron.

The opening moments of *Wylder's Hand* seem to display a clear adherence to Bentley's formula, with de Cresseron situating himself in a resolutely contemporary scene: 'skimming along [in a postchaise], through a rich English county' (1). The picturesque, harmonious landscape forms a pastoral idyll with pacifying effects, and de Cresseron experiences a 'semi-narcotic excitement, silent but delightful' (1). And yet, contemplating the 'old park of Brandon' that 'still lies there', a disquieting alterity creeps in:

My eyes wandered over them all [Brandon's trees] with that strange sense of unreality, and that mingling of sweet and bitter fancy, with which we revisit a scene familiar in very remote and early childhood, and which has haunted a long interval of maturity and absence, like a romantic reverie (1)

The past is registered, unmistakably, as a disturbing ('haunt[ing]') force, and it is immediately destabilizing to the realist tone of the opening, as evidenced by the use of 'unreality', 'roman[ce]', and 'fancy'. In fact, as becomes apparent, there are *many pasts* being 'revisit[ed]' via de Cresseron's narration. His 'childhood' recollection of Brandon is itself being narrated many decades later:

The whole thing seemed like yesterday; and as I write, I open my eyes and start and cry, 'can it be twenty, five-and-twenty, aye, by Jove! five-and-thirty, years since then?' How my days have flown! And I think when another such yesterday shall have arrived, where shall I be? (2)

A description such as this, of which there are many in *Wylder's Hand*, throws into question McCormack's argument that de Cresseron 'aligns himself against history, with an earnest yet unassertive present normality'.⁶⁴ True, de Cresseron does not compile a chronologically precise narrative, as he does for *The House by the Churchyard* (1863), Le Fanu's previous novel (in which the character also

⁶⁴ W. J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters*, p. 60.

serves as the narrator), but de Cresseron nonetheless retains a historicist *consciousness*—he is an important medium for conveying the sense of ‘the trauma of the past persisting into the present; [... of] history refusing to release its grip’.⁶⁵ This is vital, since the ambivalence deriving from temporal incoherence is a potent source of the novel’s sensational effect, as the following passage demonstrates:

I have often thought since upon the odd sensation with which I hesitated over his [Mark’s] unopened letter; and now, remembering how the breaking of that seal resembled, in my life, the breaking open of a portal through which I entered a labyrinth, or rather a catacomb [...] a sad sort of superstition steals over me. (3-4)

Invoked in both of the passages above is a disorientating array of temporalities, from which it becomes difficult to disentangle the past, present, and future; temporal ‘order’ loses its meaning, and foregrounded instead is what Michael Levenson’s notes to be the way that events within novels are ‘perpetually engaged in a pattern of [temporal] intersections, overlappings, and embeddings’.⁶⁶

The dense appearance of temporalities might be attributed, I propose, to the devastating impact of the Famine on narrative coherency, in the manner argued by Terry Eagleton. As in the understanding of that tragedy, de Cresseron’s narration is enabled only ‘after the unspeakable has already happened’.⁶⁷ Moreover, and significantly, this recital of the opening of Mark’s letter indexes the possibility that this story of ‘modern times’ might in fact only be comprehensible through means radically opposed to modernity—that is, through an irrational (‘superstitio[us]’) belief in premonition.⁶⁸ De Cresseron, it should be emphasized, is overcome by these irrational feelings *in the present*—long after their occurrence, he remains ‘haunted’ by his past experiences. But his *personal* experience acquires *general* relevancy as the narrative progresses—our sense grows throughout that, as Lynda Nead writes, modernity ‘leans upon and is haunted by the figure of the past’.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ O’Malley, p. 123.

⁶⁶ Michael Levenson, ‘Reading Time’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 42.3 (2009), 511–16 (p. 514).

⁶⁷ Eagleton, pp. 13, 14.

⁶⁸ See Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 32.

The persistence of the past manifests in the more concrete form of heredity upon the narrator's arrival in Gylingden. In phrasing co-opted from the medical discourse on the hereditary transmission of disease, but adorned by the register of the supernatural, de Cresseron suspects that the families' outrageous behaviour is attributable to 'some damnable taint in the blood of the common ancestor – a spice of the insane and diabolical' (4).⁷⁰ This use of 'taint' with reference to heredity had recently appeared in Forbes Winslow's *On Obscure Diseases of the Brain* (1860).⁷¹ It would appear again in Maudsley's *Physiology*, with entropic associations that are anticipated by this passage. The 'progress of organic development', Maudsley notes, 'will plainly be destroyed [...] by that inherent defect of nervous element which an [*sic*] hereditary taint implies'.⁷² But the taint described in *Wylder's Hand* is also decidedly atavistic, in the sense of absent characteristics re-emerging: it is expressly observed that the 'old Brandon type' does not appear with every generation but 'every now and then' (4). When it does re-appear, moreover, its intensity echoes the 'fury' that the popular press ascribed to atavistic insanity. (The case of Sir Jonathan Brandon, a family ancestor, involves the murder of at least three persons.) The context of atavistic traits re-emerging suggests an additional meaning to the Wylder motto that is first mentioned during this genealogy: 'resurgam' ('I shall rise again' [4]). Whilst scholars have often interpreted this as referring to the mock-resurrections of various persons in *Wylder's Hand*,⁷³ the motto's first-person mode, I argue, makes it plausibly a personification of hereditary taint (as if the taint is declaring its irrepressible character). The past persists as a direful force in the present, this passage makes clear, because of bad heredity.

This engagement with the hereditary transmission of disease as a conduit for the persistent past implicates an additional context: consanguinity, as mentions of 'complicated cousinships', 'inextricable intermarriages', and 'frequent intermar-

⁷⁰ It is plausible to read an evolutionary reference in this description; yet, whereas this register predominates in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* (1865-66) (see Chapter Four), here it is an isolated reference—*Wylder's Hand* is more concerned with histories of the *family* than of the species.

⁷¹ Forbes Winslow, *On Obscure Diseases of the Brain, and Disorders of the Mind* (London: John Churchill, 1860), p. 18.

⁷² Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind*, p. 289.

⁷³ Alison Milbank, 'The Haunted House: Sheridan Le Fanu', in *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 158–73 (p. 172); Sage, p. 81.

riages' (4) within the genealogy make clear. By the 1860s, increased understanding of hereditary influences led physicians to 'impel their patients to avoid hereditary taints', and complaints about 'the iniquity of perpetuating constitutional or diathetical ailments' were recurrent; thus, 'virtually all commentators on the issue of hereditary disease condemned cousin marriage with particular fervour'.⁷⁴ John C. Waller's characterization here is true beyond purely medical discourse, but was held more widely (it was a practical and scientific concern, as noted before). In 1863, just as *Wylder's Hand* began its serialization, one commentator from the popular press observed 'a "feeling" against the intermarriage of blood relations' which has 'existed, at least in all modern times'.⁷⁵ This last phrase is to emphasize the symbolism behind these family relations; it is not merely that the families' hereditary taint is retrogressive (as Maudsley would say, opposed to 'progress [and] development'), but its consanguineous *cause* renders it emphatically so—the taint is perpetuated by an *antiquated* practice, antithetical to modernity. The significations of consanguinity being appreciated, it is clear that the attempt to resolve the family feuding through the marriage of Mark Wylder to 'Dorcas Brandon, *his own cousin*' (4; emphasis added) is a highly flawed means of annulling the past. De Cresseron, often unalert to these contexts, describes it (apparently without irony) as 'the splendid matrimonial compromise which was about to reconcile a feud, and avert a possible lawsuit, and, for one generation, at least, to tranquilize the troubled annals of the Brandons and Wylders' (8). The marriage may, indeed, bring *temporary* cessation to the feuding, but it does so at the risk of further misfortune in the future; the past is distanced in a manner that guarantees its repetition.⁷⁶

Heredity as a manifestation of the past's enduring presence is interwoven, as I have hinted at, with the other sense of 'inheritance': transmission of property. If the presentation of the former is particularly attuned to English fears, then that of the latter is indebted to the Anglo-Irish sense of property ownership as a haunting reminder of past wrongs, and a source of potential conflict in the present. These

⁷⁴ Waller, pp. 464–65.

⁷⁵ 'Art. V.—Marriages of Consanguinity', p. 89.

⁷⁶ Another potential consanguineous marriage, of Rachel Lake and Lord Chelford, is considered in the later discussion of the novel's ending.

associations are disclosed in a cursive manner from the outset; Mark's introduction to the novel, via a letter to de Cresseron, indicates that his accession to Brandon Hall has come through the *dispossession* of his cousin Dorcas:

The old brute [the Viscount] meant to leave her a life estate; but it does not amount to that, [...] Miss Dorcas must pack, and turn out whenever I die [...] the Viscount seeing it, agreed the best thing for her as well as me would be, we should marry. (6)

In its representation of the issue, *Wylder's Hand* manifests the sense of how the 'ownership [of property] is inaugurated by an act of appropriation'.⁷⁷ In this short explanation, Dorcas is consecutively made subject to disinheritance, the threat of forced removal, and a relegation of her legal status; currently *feme sole* (an independent legal entity), upon marriage to Mark she would become *feme covert* (her identity subsumed by that of her husband).⁷⁸ (This change will be considered further in the discussion of the novel's slavery motif.) It is ironic, then, that the male participants involved in this venture conspire to suggest that marriage is the 'best thing for her [Dorcas]', given its denigration of her legal position vis-à-vis this and other property.⁷⁹

As in so many respects, Dorcas and her cousin Rachel Lake are mirrored by their dispossessed status; on observing the latter, de Cresseron exhumes a family history of irreversible decline:

There rose before me an image of an old General Lake, and a dim recollection of some reverse of fortune. He was [...] connected with the Brandon family; and was, with the usual fatality, a bit of a *mauvais sujet*. He had made away with his children's money, or squandered his own; or somehow or another impoverished his family not creditably. (13)

⁷⁷ Jeff Nunokawa, 'Introduction', in *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 19.

⁷⁸ These topics are cogently explored in Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁷⁹ *Wylder's Hand* appeared amid a period of particular interest in marriage: 'during this time [between 1857 and 1870] there was intense public discussion of women's lack of autonomy in marriage and women's vulnerability to exploitative husbands'; Talia Schaffer, *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 15.

McCormack is right, I think, to suggest that there is an ‘implicat[ion of] an earlier Irish historical action’ with this story;⁸⁰ yet it seems to me less a biographical one (as he proposes) than a nod toward the legacy of encumbered estates, particularly as this was interpreted by English commentators: a contradictory mix of fate and wilful mismanagement. (The two contexts, the English and Irish, are again united by the nod toward the Brandon ‘fatality’; Lake’s behaviour may be symptomatic of hereditary taint.) This trajectory, shared by the Brandons, is entropic, and it mirrors Le Fanu’s personal and symbolic experiences of declining Anglo-Irish fortunes both pre- and post-Famine—that sense of enduring, but of not being able to recover the ‘spiritual purpose’ that propelled the Protestant Ascendancy (as Dorcas notes, ‘meaner houses have grown up into dukedoms; ours never prospers’ [29]).⁸¹ Significantly, neither cousin responds to their declining fortunes (and stolen inheritances) by attempting to ‘reclaim’ them, as do so many sensational protagonists.⁸² Dorcas resigns herself to fate; Rachel retreats into a prelapsarian vision: the ‘little Eden’ (33) of Redman’s Farm; she disdains the materialist ambitions of her brother Stanley, wants only for simple pleasures, and retains the housekeeper of her childhood, Tamar. The Farm is clearly intended as a symbolic Other to Brandon Hall (which it borders), and it offers the first sense of a possible escape from the past as it is expressed in the form of property and heredity. Yet the dream of a ‘radical rupture’ with the past, which the Farm appears to manifest, proves illusory; Stanley’s intrusion (leading Rachel to become a co-conspirator in Mark’s murder) poisons it with the same direful associations, and it thereafter fails to protect her.

It has already been noted that de Cresseron gives a veiled indication of hereditary taint as the original cause for the families’ misfortunes. Yet it is possible to detect property ownership as a compounding or alternative explanation. The genealogy traces, alongside the Brandon/Wylder ancestry, the history of Brandon Hall and its estates; hence, it avers the inextricability of the two forms of inheritance—of property and moral/physical characteristics—in a way that is commensurate with contemporary understanding. As if proving the *Westminster Review’s*

⁸⁰ W. J. McCormack, *Dissolute Characters*, p. 61.

⁸¹ Le Fanu’s class experienced an ‘inexorable decline in the nineteenth century’; Lozes, p. 103.

⁸² One precursor is Wilkie Collins’s *No Name* (1862-63), whose Magdalen Vanstone embarks on a fateful quest to regain her lost inheritance from its illegitimate possessors. Le Fanu uses a similar story for his novel *Guy Deverell* (1865).

(1863) statement that ‘hereditary insanity [is] as clearly traceable [...] as is the succession to the family estate’,⁸³ the outbreaks of madness in the families coincide with (and are evidenced by) the (dis)possession of the estate:

In one generation, a Wylder ill-using his wife and hating his children, would cut them all off, and send the estate bounding back again to the Brandons. The next generation or two would amuse themselves with a lawsuit, until the old Brandon type reappeared [...] and presto! the estates were back again with the Wylders. (4)

It is against this backdrop that the instigating action of *Wylder’s Hand* marks an attempted break from the past; the marriage between Dorcas and Mark terminates the latest ‘lawsuit’, known five years before the narrative present as ‘Wylder v. Trustees of Brandon, minor’ (4). This litigation against a minor of his family (his ‘own cousin’) is to underscore the representation of property, from the outset of the novel, as an incitement to injustice and violence: the locus for ‘lawsuits, frequent, disinheritings, and even worse doings’:

a ‘statement of title’ is usually a dry affair. But that of the dynasty of Brandon Hall was a truculent romance. Their very ‘wills’ were spiced with the devilment of the ‘testators,’ and abounded in insinuations and even language which were scandalous. (4)

The associations made of property here multiply as the novel progresses; even if it were judged on the basis of the genealogy description, however, it becomes clear that it is made an almost literal manifestation of what the literary historian Alan Hepburn writes about property in another context:

Legacies bear a taint that cannot be expiated; it can only be passed along in a genealogy of fatalities, as if property itself mortally afflicts its possessor. Heritable property harms or destroys consecutive generations even as that property remains, however precariously, within the

⁸³ ‘Art. V.-Marriages of Consanguinity’, p. 96.

family. The will to possess property, inseparable from the necessity of transmitting property, consumes those who live by its principles.⁸⁴

Considering Hepburn's description in the context of the literal 'genealogy of fatal-ities' described by de Cresseron, the corrosive desire for property is readable as an alternative explanation for the families' misfortunes.

In fact, the 'taint' of property ambitions and hereditary insanity are not mutually exclusive explanations: the inheritance of property was deemed a potential cause of insanity in persons hereditarily predisposed to the condition. Maudsley gives cases of monomania arising in those who acquire inheritance, and associates an anticipated loss of property with melancholia and delusions.⁸⁵ Hence, the question arises whether the 'damnable taint' (4) of the Brandons, Wylders, and Lakes is a case of heredity, or whether it derives from their ambitions to maintain ownership of Brandon Hall (which is a constant presence throughout the genealogy). Of course, *Le Fanu* leaves the reader in suspense about which of the two it is (thereby also cementing their inextricability); the vital details, de Cresseron explains, have 'relapsed into haze' (4). Hepburn does not contextualize his ideas of destructive inheritance, but such views can be traced at least as far back as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *A Discourse on Inequality* (1755), in which he posits ownership as the cause of effusive violence; he accounts amongst the 'main effects of property' as being a 'devouring ambition, the burning passion to enlarge one's relative fortune [and] a dark propensity to injure one another', often carried out under the guise of benevolence.⁸⁶ Such a sentiment had been elaborated more contemporaneously with *Wylder's Hand* in Proudhon's *What Is Property?* (1840), which coined that phrase 'la propriété, c'est le vol' (property is theft). As appraised previously, the *Saturday Review* located similar sentiments in Mill's reflections on Irish property.

This corrosive potential of the 'will to possess' is evident beyond the families of Brandon, Wylder, and Lake, in the attempts by the lawyer Josiah (Jos) Larkin to defraud William Wylder of the Five Oaks property (which should come to him

⁸⁴ Allan Hepburn, 'Introduction: Inheritance and Disinheritance in the Novel', in *Troubled Legacies: Narrative and Inheritance*, ed. by Allan Hepburn (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 5.

⁸⁵ Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind*, pp. 256, 334.

⁸⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, ed. by Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 119. The 'sentimental Jean Jacques Rousseau' (259) is mentioned during William's spiritual crisis.

on Mark's death by a legal device known as a 'reversion'). Indeed, it would seem that this sub-plot is thematically relevant in emphasizing the damaging desire for property, regardless of who holds it. Near its completion, Larkin's plot is revealed as the first step in founding a dynasty, so that 'he and his, with clever management, would be anything but *novi homines* [new men] in the county' (437). He asserts the legitimacy of his claim by evoking his ancestral roots in the Howard family, therefore painting it as a reclamation of rightful ownership as opposed to a conquest. But his aspirations would not only deprive the Wylder family of their inheritance; they are also poised to perpetuate the violent feuding of the past, as an image of the future makes clear: 'with a grand sort of prescience, [Larkin] foresaw a county feud between the Houses of Five Oaks and Brandon' (462). The substitution here of the properties for the families that occupy them (it is not *the Brandons* or *the Wylders* being referred to) explicates, I argue, how it is the entire system, rather than specific persons, that are being indicted in this scene—it does not matter whether the occupants are Brandons or Larkins (Howards) if they are all consumed by the 'will to possess' (and Larkin's avarice is matched by Stanley's).

Central to the portrayal of property as a direful embodiment of the past in the novel is the recurrence of the supernatural. The families' wills being 'spiced with [...] devilment' (4), for instance, denaturalizes the symbolism of property, investing them with supernatural and superstitious portent—values radically opposed to modernity.⁸⁷ This characterization may derive from William Blackstone's acclaimed *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69), the second volume of which opens with a similar attempt to defamiliarize property:

There is no foundation in nature or in natural law, why a set of words upon parchment should convey the dominion of land; why the son should have a right to exclude his fellow-creatures from a determinate spot of ground, because his father had done so before him.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 24.

⁸⁸ William Blackstone, *The Commentaries on the Laws of England* (London: John Murray, 1876), II, p. 2. *Commentaries* remained the authority on legal rights and responsibilities until at least the 1870s, and served as a metonym for such; in Collins's *Armada* (1865–66), when Allan and 'Neelie' want to learn about marriage without her parents' consent, they turn to Blackstone; *Armada*, ed. by Catherine Peters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 549.

Blackstone's observation emerges from the same impetus that prompted Rousseau; the basis of modern society was founded upon an injustice that was thought deeply unnatural,⁸⁹ and which continues to be perpetrated.

As I showed in the opening of this chapter, using the article from *Chambers's Journal*, by 1863 the *unnatural* associations of property were being rendered as *supernatural* to achieve a similar critical purpose. If that article concludes with the supernatural, anti-modern associations of inheritance becoming effaced—acceding to their antithesis, 'mercy, justice, [and utility]'—then *Wylder's Hand* shows, by contrast, that the 'old superstition' is alive and well. The disinheritance of Dorcas illustrates a 'dead man's wishes' (those of the Viscount [5]) superseding the justice that would enable her to remain unmolested in her ancestral home. Instead she is subjected to the dual threats of eviction and an acquisitive marriage proposal.

De Cresseron finds recourse in the supernatural in chronicling the violence that emerges from the family feuds:

there has always been something inexpressibly awful in family feuds. Mortal hatred seems to deepen and dilate into something *diabolical* in these perverted animosities. The mystery of their origin – their capacity for evolving latent faculties of crime – and the steady vitality with which they survive the hearse, and speak their deep-mouthed malignities in every new-born generation, have associated them somehow in my mind with a spell of life exceeding and distinct from human and a *special Satanic action*. (59; emphasis added)

Although de Cresseron's claims ignorance about the feuds' origin, *Wylder's Hand* repeatedly develops the sense that it can be ascribed to contestations over property; and one way it does so by deploying the supernatural as a leitmotif for property's violent potential. The primary manipulator of the legal devices that transfer property (wills and reversions), Josiah Larkin's designs on William's future estate are described as being practiced 'most *cruelly* and artfully' (330). But they are aligned specifically to the satanic by a reference, shortly afterwards, to the Gospel of Luke, in which 'the Devil' tempts Jesus (it cites from the verse "All the power

⁸⁹ Maurer, p. 2.

will I give thee” [331]). The ‘power’ being referenced is dominion over the world,⁹⁰ thus construing Larkin’s aspirations for property (Hepburn’s ‘the will to possess’) as a form of devilish pact. This association of property with the satanic continues. Later, the lawyer propagates his own temptation by offering to purchase William’s reversion; now acting as instigator, *Larkin* assumes the role of Satan (or his agent Mephistopheles). Rachel arrives to disrupt the signing of the pact, however, and the ensuing debate over the ownership of property is transformed into a supernatural contest; whereas ‘The Dead Hand’ describes the ‘dusty deed’ (the will) as a ‘talismán’, Rachel’s jewellery becomes this in *Wylder’s Hand*: ‘the ring that glittered on her finger looked like a talismán interposing between the poor Vicar and the momentous act he was meditating’ (369). (Another ring, Mark’s Persian one, is also invested with mystic potential, as I consider below.) After Rachel destroys the offending document, she is said to be loath to ‘abandon [the Wylders ...] to the arts of that abominable magician [Larkin]’ (419).

Yet *Wylder’s Hand* is conspicuously ambivalent as to whether the past, persisting in the form of property, ought to be effaced entirely, despite the dire associations ascribed to it. Alongside its demonstration of the corrosive effects of the ‘will to possess’ (Hepburn) and of property as potentially the original source of the families’ misfortune, a major aspect of Rachel’s story is her attempt to stop William selling his reversion to Mark’s estate (ensuring that it will be preserved for him and his son). It occasions Rachel’s passionate defence of property ownership in terms of its benefits to the family, and particularly William’s son; she declares that ‘the reversion under the will is a great *fortune*’, the ‘splendid provision of your dear little boy’ (386, 374; emphasis added). Larkin’s attempted appropriation of the property is critiqued in equally vociferous terms: selling to him, she declares, would be ‘stripping yourselves of a splendid inheritance, and robbing your poor little boy’ (422).

It is important to observe, however, that while Rachel is intent upon preserving the past by maintaining the integrity of the Wylder estate, she is also signalling a rupture from it in another sense—she aims to avoid a repetition of the dispossession that has affected her (seeking, in other words, to right the wrongs of the

⁹⁰ N.B. the same phraseology, ‘dominion’, is used by Blackstone; ‘The New Testament’, in *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. by Stephen Prickett and Robert Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 76. Luke is also the Book containing the story of Dives and Lazarus.

past). Thus, Rachel *does* enact a variety of the lost inheritance narrative (pursued in other sensation fiction), but she does so *before* it is lost, and by proxy (declining to reap the benefits of property ownership herself). Her defence of the Wylders is a repudiation of her own fatalist philosophy: ‘the past is, indeed, immutable and the future is equally fixed, and more dreadful’ (140), and, at the same time, what Oliver MacDonagh notes as a ‘typically Irish view of history’: ‘once perpetrated [a wrong] can never be undone by chronological succession but is doomed ceaselessly to re-enact itself’.⁹¹

Dorcas, similarly, resists the efforts by Stanley to break up the estate through selling the Five Oaks property: ‘I shall protect the property of my family, sir, from your folly or your machinations’ (354). Dorcas’s association of the land with her kin is insightful. The desire to preserve the integrity of the property not only ensures that her ancestral past will be maintained through it, but it aims to preserve an idea of property ownership that was itself being jeopardized by modern economic conditions. As Sara L. Maurer explains:

The new world of capitalism was one of endlessly circulating objects, all primed for exchange rather than ownership. All its inhabitants could do was hanker nostalgically for a lost world in which property was inalienable, permanently attached to them in a way that secured and reinforced a stable identity.

The contest between Stanley and Dorcas over Brandon Hall (and to a lesser extent between Rachel and Lake) stages the Victorian debate over whether ownership should be understood (as in its primitive sense) as synonymous with kinship or (as in its modern conceptualizing) a free contract.⁹² These differences were manifested in international politics, as the British state sought to replace Ireland’s custom-bound relations with contractual arrangements;⁹³ *Wylder’s Hand* generates a highly conflicted picture over which of these ideas of property, the modern versus what Maurer terms the ‘primitiv[e]’, is most beneficent (not least because the unsympathetic Stanley embodies the contractual, Dorcas the custom-bound). On the one hand, the sale of the Brandon estates is metaphorized as a violent

⁹¹ Quoted in Eagleton, p. 190.

⁹² Maurer, p. 3.

⁹³ Eagleton, p. 9.

attack upon its 'body' (which, being a *life* estate associated with Dorcas, is therefore a symbolic attack on her body as well): the sale is a 'dismember[ment]' (403). Yet the alternative offers no better prospects; Dorcas and Rachel, with good reason, dream repeatedly of escape from the claustrophobic and violent potential of the families' estate. Jean Lozes describes Le Fanu's houses as 'fantastic expressions of a homesickness and discomfort related both to the past and to the present, highly paradoxical places in which the occupants are almost strangers to themselves, constantly threatened by the unknown, madness and death',⁹⁴ and *Wylder's Hand* is acutely concerned by this ambivalence of property—an ambivalence, in essence, about the relation of the past to the present.

'MONSTROUS CONTRADICTION[S... TO] THE MODERN WORLD': SLAVERY, DUELLING, AND THE RE-ENACTMENT OF THE PAST

This chapter has thus far been concerned by how the past persists in the forms of property and heredity: in diachronic processes that ensure continuity between what has happened and what will happen. They do not give a full picture, though, of the past's representation in *Wylder's Hand*. In particular, it remains to account for the relational facet of modernity ('modern times') and how it understands itself by opposition to the practices or systems of earlier times, often in ways that imply a value judgment. Bauman explains this oppositionality as follows:

Modernization was also a *cultural* crusade; a powerful and relentless drive to extirpate differences in values and life-styles, customs and speech, beliefs and public demeanour. It was, first and foremost, a drive to redefine all cultural values and styles except those endorsed by the modernizing elite [...] as inferior.⁹⁵

To suggest, as *Wylder's Hand* does, that these divisions are less than clear—that allegedly archaic 'customs' persist or remain relevant—is thus to challenge modernity by foregrounding the limit to its ordering ambitions; the 'cultural crusade' is either ineffectual, or it never properly began. I consider slavery and duelling to be the two customs that primarily create such an effect in the novel; they not only

⁹⁴ Lozes, p. 103.

⁹⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 111. Emphasis in original.

appear either recurrently or in detail, but they re-inscribe the Anglo-Irish hybridity expressed via property and heredity. Beyond these two customs, this section attends to a tangential aspect of *Wylder's Hand* documented by McCormack: Le Fanu's novels contain 'not simply an exposure of past crimes and guilty consciences, but the historical past acted out in the present, sometimes with ironical mimicry, sometimes metaphysical frisson'.⁹⁶ These 're-enactments', as I will term them, problematize modern temporality, because, as Jean Baudrillard accounts, that temporality 'develops according to a past-present-future line, according to a supposed origin and end'. Conversely, re-enactments signify a *cyclical* temporality that is antithetical to modernity's image of itself: the relic of a past that it aims to distance itself from ('"modern" time is no longer cyclical', Baudrillard notes⁹⁷). By portraying these continuities between past and present, *Wylder's Hand* offers a challenge to modernity's sense of temporality, agency, and progress.

A two-piece perspective on 'Duelling' (in 'Olden Times' and 'Modern Times') published in 1861 in the *New Monthly Magazine*, indicates how the practice was used to demarcate the modern from the pre-modern. The first contribution ('Olden Times') maintains that 'there are few questions upon which such conflicting opinions have been brought to bear as upon the practice of duelling'. Yet it concludes that in the context of a 'modern legal and social system', duelling must be deemed 'absurd'—thus, in 'this country [Britain]' it has rightly been 'put down' by the press and public opinion.⁹⁸ The absence of duelling serves as evidence, for this writer, of the modern status of British society. The *Chambers's Encyclopaedia* (third volume, 1862) similarly accounts how,

partly in consequence of these regulations [new Articles of War], but still more as a result of the *increasing reason and humanity of English society*, the practice of duelling has become almost as entirely *obsolete* in the British army as it has in the country generally.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, p. 145.

⁹⁷ Baudrillard, p. 67.

⁹⁸ 'Duelling in Olden Times', *The New Monthly Magazine*, 122.488 (1861), 476–86 (p. 476); 'Duelling in Modern Times', *The New Monthly Magazine*, 123.489 (1861), 116–26.

⁹⁹ *Chambers's Encyclopaedia: A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge for the People* (London: W. and R. Chambers, 1862), III, p. 692. Emphasis added. See also, from the following year, 'Friends and Pistols over the Water', *The London Review*, 7.157 (1863), 4–5.

These are later examples of what Margery Masterson describes as the belief ‘that the abolition of dueling in Britain was a fixed historical event rather than a contingent conclusion’.¹⁰⁰ Contemporaries could not know that 1852 would be the year of the last documented completed duel between Englishmen in England,¹⁰¹ but, as these accounts demonstrate, they did insist that the country’s exceptional advance into the ‘modern’ accounted for its non-appearance.

However, in the same year that *Chambers’s Encyclopedia* announced its obsolescence by virtue of Britain’s moral development (and the year before *Wylder’s Hand* began its serialization), two cases came to widespread public interest that seemed to question this verdict. An anonymous contributor to *All the Year Round* recounts how

not very long since [1862], a military tribunal at Dublin was investigating serious charges involving the character of an officer and a gentleman, one of which had reference to the prisoner’s having failed to vindicate his honour in the manner customary among gentlemen fifty years ago. Almost at the same moment, but ‘in another place,’ an Irish chieftain was pursuing the same antiquated mode of obtaining redress for an insult, to be frustrated by a comic premier, who, with infinite address, turned this grave bit of chivalry into a political pantomime.¹⁰²

Referred to in this account are, first, the court-martial of Captain Arthur Robertson for his failure to challenge, by means of a duel, slander he received from a fellow officer; and second, an aborted duel between Daniel O’Donoghue MP and Sir Robert Peel, for disparaging remarks made by the latter about the former’s role in Irish politics. By its repeated insistence on the practice’s anachronism (a practice of ‘fifty years ago’, an ‘antiquated mode’¹⁰³) the article belies, I argue, its disquiet about duelling’s ongoing *relevance* as a way of redressing offences against ‘gentlemanly’ character.

¹⁰⁰ Margery Masterson, ‘Dueling, Conflicting Masculinities, and the Victorian Gentleman’, *Journal of British Studies*, 56.3 (2017), 605–28 (p. 614).

¹⁰¹ Masterson, p. 621. ‘Duelling’ is used here specifically in the sense of ‘duelling for honour’, defined as ‘a fight between two or several individuals (but always equal numbers on either side), equally armed, for the purpose of proving either the truth of a disputed question or the valor, courage and honor of each combatant’; François Billacois quoted in Behrooz Hassani Mahmooei and Mehrdad Vahabi, *Dueling for Honor and Identity Economics*, Munich Personal RePEc Archive, 2012, p. 4.

¹⁰² ‘Dead (and Gone) Shots’, *All the Year Round*, 7.159 (1862), 212–16 (p. 212).

¹⁰³ N.B. a reluctance to even name it specifically.

Offering a similar verdict on the Robertson affair, the *Examiner* declared emphatically that ‘the days of duelling are gone’.¹⁰⁴ Yet, simultaneously, it was forced to account for the pressure on the officer, applied by those accusing him, to settle the slander through a duel. The broader question looming large over these pieces was whether the ‘modern legal and social system’ provided an alternative means to duelling for defending one’s honour. During the Robertson trial, the commanding officer of the accused admitted that incitement to a duel was a ‘strong measure’, but added ‘there was nothing else to be done’.¹⁰⁵ The seeming lack of alternative suggested that the return of duelling was a possibility. Thinking in this vein, undoubtedly, the magazine *Punch* (1862) criticized these apparent efforts to ‘revive the custom’, cautioning that ‘the formation of public opinion in favour of duelling ought to be checked at once’.¹⁰⁶ Such a warning contradicted the sense that England’s ‘increasing reason and humanity’ had inexorably led to the decline of duelling, by making it redundant.¹⁰⁷ Rather, duelling figures as a practice that might re-appear without active suppression.

The indexing of English temperament in *Chambers’s Encyclopedia* indicates how duelling was seen to implicate nothing less than the national character. Such self-fashioning by means of duelling required, additionally, the displacement of the practice onto the colonies and especially ‘England’s oldest colony’, Ireland.¹⁰⁸ According to deterministic ideas about race, geography, and so on, these places were propitious for the practice in a way that England could not be.¹⁰⁹ It was fortuitous that both the ‘near-misses’ of 1862 were connected in some way to Ireland,¹¹⁰ but it reinforced a popular connection in the English imagination between Ireland and duelling. The association was explained in an article from *All the Year Round* from that year: ‘the English [...] fail egregiously in this elegant accomplishment’ of duelling, it notes, whereas ‘in no country [as Ireland] has [it] enjoyed so healthy a vitality’; its recent decline in Ireland owes only, the article claims, to the

¹⁰⁴ ‘Court-Martial on Captain Robertson’, *The Examiner*, 1862, 194.

¹⁰⁵ *Authentic Report of the Trial (by Court Martial) of Captain A. M. Robertson* (Dublin: M’Glashan & Gill, 1862), p. 68.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Discouragement for Duellists’, *Punch*, 1862, 94.

¹⁰⁷ *Chambers’s Encyclopaedia: A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge for the People*, III, p. 692.

¹⁰⁸ *Victorian Literature: A Sourcebook*, ed. by John Plunkett and others (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 236.

¹⁰⁹ For instance ‘The History of Duelling: Including Narratives of the Most Remarkable ...’, *The Athenaeum*, 705 (1841), 333–34 (p. 334).

¹¹⁰ These Irish connections being that O’Donoghue was an Irish MP and that Robertson’s court martial took place in Dublin, the Irish capital and site of the UK administration.

introduction of ‘Saxon’ blood into the country.¹¹¹ Research has found that the real rates of violence in Ireland did not differ from those of Western Europe, but England had a strong inducement to perpetuate the myth of the ‘fighting Irish’, since it justified intervention in their affairs and helped the English to develop a sense of supremacy.¹¹² Yet, as evident in *Punch*’s warning, this displacement of duelling onto Ireland belied its disquieting relevance to England’s social arrangements; by playing such a role, Ireland was once more, then, the ‘monstrous unconscious’ of that country—expressing what it feared most about itself.

Given this debate, only the year before publication of *Wylder’s Hand*, Le Fanu is provocative to foreground duelling as part of the family genealogy:

[One such miscreant] was Sir Jonathan Brandon [...] who ran his own nephew through the lungs in a duel fought in a paroxysm of Cencian jealousy; and afterwards shot his coachman dead upon the box through his coach-window, and finally died in Vienna, whither he had absconded, of a pike-thrust received from a sentry in a brawl. (4)

This bloody history is preceded by de Cresseron’s description of the pastoral idyll that his postchaise is travelling through, whose placement is explicitly given as ‘a rich *English* county’, festooned with innocuous details: ‘a homely farmstead here and there’ and a ‘pretty mill-road’ (1; emphasis added). The harmonious English countryside conceals, in other words, a recent past characterized by the violence of duelling. Further, stereotypes of national temperament become problematized in this description: the assignment of ‘Cencian jealousy’ as Brandon’s motive destabilizes the separation of Protestant England from Catholic Italy. (The latter being, of course, the favoured setting for the gothic.) In a profound inversion of fears regarding *external* barbarism invading the country, it is the Englishman, Sir Jonathan, who exports violence to the Continent. Crucially, the duel is the instigating act for these atrocities, and its temporal proximity to the present time of the narration (the 1850s, when de Cresseron is writing) is left ambiguous; such raises a more disturbing uncertainty regarding the degree of separation between ‘modern’ England and the pre-modern violence connoted by duelling, which was supposedly obsolete.

¹¹¹ ‘Dead (and Gone) Shots’, p. 212.

¹¹² See Hughes and MacRaid, p. 6; Masterson, p. 613.

Indeed, later in the novel, the occurrence of a ‘wicked duel’ (231) between Sir Harry Bracton and Stanley locates the practice even more frightfully close to the present. This duel is initiated by jealousy over their joint love interest, Dorcas, in an exact reproduction of what contemporaries believed was a frequent trigger for such violence.¹¹³ The pair fight during a ball, and are separated. The description of Stanley’s injuries are the first indication that a duel has taken place the following morning; he is borne to Brandon Hall

upon a shutter, with glassy eyes, that did not seem to see, sunken face, and a very blue tinge about his mouth. [... He was] shot somewhere in the shoulder or breast [...] A good deal of blood had flowed from him, upon the arm and side of one of the men who supported his head. (225-26)

As if to dispel the suggestion of Britain’s moral improvement, or that the past has been renounced, this duel echoes key aspects of the duel practised by Sir Jonathan: both entail severe bodily harm (in approximately the same region), and both begin from ‘jealousy’ (235). In what I claim is a narrativizing of duelling’s *unspeakable* horror, and public censure of the practice, neither the invitation to undertake it nor the event itself are depicted. In fact, the county newspaper later describes it, erroneously, as a ‘misadventure’ and ‘accident’ (248), thus preserving the veneer of harmony in Gyligden. The combination of silence and false reporting of the duel between Stanley and Harry posits the disconcerting idea that the practice continues to exist; neither obsolete nor eradicated, it has only been removed from the public’s sight.

Duelling’s inflection upon national temperament (first raised during the case of Sir Jonathan) becomes even more pronounced in the reaction to this later duel. Several members of Gyligden’s gentry either help to arrange, or are indifferent to stopping, the duel; Dorcas is scandalized particularly by the suggestion that Lord Chelford has allowed it to proceed:

You knew quite well last night there was to be this wicked duel in the morning – and you – a magistrate – a lord-lieutenant – what are you? – you connived at this bloody conspiracy – and *he* – your own cousin,

¹¹³ ‘Duelling in Olden Times’, p. 477.

Chelford – your cousin! [...] Yes; you are worse than Sir Harry Bracton – for you're no fool; and worse than that wicked old man, Major Jackson [who was] trusted in their brutal plans; but you had no excuse and every opportunity – and you have allowed your cousin Stanley to be murdered. (231; emphasis in original)

Dorcas's censure is worth consideration for what it suggests is the symbolism of duelling, and the reason for its extended depiction in *Wylder's Hand*. The practice contravenes the 'modern legal and social system', which Chelford is supposedly at the head of (as lord lieutenant). Dorcas's use of judicial language, 'conspiracy' and 'murder[]', supports the sense that the social meaning of duelling in England was 'undesired anarchy'.¹¹⁴ Such an understanding proliferates when Rachel resolves that 'if Stanley dies, [...] Sir Harry Bracton shall hear of it. I'll lose my life, but he shall pay the forfeit of his crime' (235). The vengeful overtones here are portentous of further bloodshed, and they create continuity with the feuding accounted in the novel's opening; far from being isolated within a distant past, then, the violent duel committed by Sir Jonathan is poised to resound in the families' futures as well (if not for Stanley's miraculous recovery). 'Anarchy' is also detectable in its sense of *confusion* or *disorder* via the question that Dorcas puts to Chelford: 'what are you?' (231). Given that duelling buttressed ideas of national identity, Chelford's proximity to the barbarous practice might be read as making him alien to her, especially as his roles of 'magistrate' and 'lord lieutenant' ought to make him the embodiment of law and order (qualities that defined England's ideas of itself). If Chelford denies involvement in helping to arrange the duel, the omission of the event itself leaves the answer an insoluble mystery. Through duelling's uncertain proximity to even the most respectable characters in *Wylder's Hand*, Le Fanu's novel problematizes the assumption that England had made a 'radical rupture' between past and present, for which the practice's obsolescence was a striking symbol.

Like duelling, slavery is introduced in *Wylder's Hand* at an uncertain temporal and geographic distance from the narrative setting. Its first reference, as part of Mark's introductory letter to de Cresseron, situates it at the geographic margins; Mark writes of having spent 'six months, last year, on the African coast, watching

¹¹⁴ Mahmooei and Vahabi, p. 22. This is opposed to what the authors claim was duelling's status as 'desired anarchy' and 'military order' in France and Germany, respectively.

slavers' (5). This detail figures him as an agent of Britain's attempts to quash the international slave trade (enforcing the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act); in another way, he connotes Britain's attempts to forge a decisive rupture with its past—its involvement in a violent system which renders persons as property. Yet the context of this detail raises alternative suggestions. Mark's anti-slavery role is stated within a letter that fixates on property (Brandon Hall), and which announces his intention to dispossess Dorcas from her ancestral home. There is, then, a curious conflict between Mark's rejection of injurious property relations (through his role in Africa) and his desire to acquire English property at all costs (even if it deprives others of their liberty). Moreover, the imprecise label of the 'African coast' indexes another, equally problematic context; this location proves to be the *East African coast* (around the Persian Gulf¹¹⁵), but until this is established the *West African Coast* is just as possible. This side of the continent (the west) is important in terms of British involvement in the slave trade, since Britain's Gold Coast Colony continued to practice slavery until 1874 (forty years after its 'abolition'). British readers were alert to this ongoing injustice through such publications as the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, which brought the colony to public attention during the time of *Wylder's Hand's* publication. The *Reporter* highlighted the 'general evil [of] domestic slavery and pawnage of men' in the colony and appealed specifically for English action to quell it.¹¹⁶ Hence, Mark's seemingly incidental notice of his recent history indexes not only the past atrocities of Britain and its empire, but its ongoing complicity with the practice.

These disturbing continuities are entrenched when Mark expounds on his experiences in Africa to de Cresseron. He details how his party picked up a group of Persians stranded out at sea:

As we were lying off – I forget the cursed name of it – he [a Persian merchant] begged me to put him ashore. He could not speak a word of English, but one of the fellows with him interpreted, and they were all anxious to get ashore. Poor devils, they had a notion, I believe, we

¹¹⁵ On the early nineteenth-century British involvement in the Persian Gulf, see Jerzy Zdanowski, *Slavery in the Gulf in the First Half of the 20th Century: A Study Based on Records from the British Archives* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2008), p. 12.

¹¹⁶ 'Domestic Slavery and Pawnage on the Gold Coast', *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 12.10 (1864), p. 240.

were going to sell them for slaves, and he made me a present of a ring,
and he told me a long yarn about it. (48)

The Persians' misunderstanding about the intentions of Mark and his party, and their anxiety to escape them, reveals how England's historic associations with slavery remain viscerally felt in the present. Mark's reaction, meanwhile, suggests that the exploitative relationship between his countrymen and other (non-white) nationalities remains essentially unchanged. Seeming not to correct the Persians' misapprehension, Mark instead exploits it by acquiring the merchant's ring. The transaction amounts, upon closer inspection, to a perverse substitution of slavery; the man's property is obtained in exchange for the man *as property* (in his mind the merchant has bought his freedom by relinquishing the ring). Even as Wylder travels under the auspices of defeating slavery, therefore, he literally capitalizes on the frightful memories elicited by the practice and by English involvement with it.

De Cresseron and Mark are oblivious to these significations, and the former expands on the slavery motif by proposing that the supposedly beneficent powers of the ring are reminiscent of the genie (*jinn*); the difference, he observes, is that, in contrast to that supernatural entity, 'the slave of your ring works unseen' (49). Mark not only corroborates the analogy, but goes further; evoking the initial mention of slavery (which, it should be remembered, was given amid his self-declared ambition to financially benefit from owning Brandon Hall), he says:

So he [the slave] does [work unseen ...] and he's not done working yet,
I can tell you. When the estates are joined in one, they'll be good eleven
thousand a year; [...] with smart management[,] I shall have a rental of
thirteen thousand before three years! (49)

The supernatural veiling of this parable cannot elide the real, contemporaneous comparison that would be registered by this image of slave labour being used to maximise an estate's profits. *Wylder's Hand* appeared in serial and volume form (1863/64 and 1864) during the final years of the American Civil War (1861-65). This British press conceived of this conflict as principally fought over the question of slavery, or whether Southern landowners should continue to exploit slave labour. The latter suggestion was roundly condemned; the press construed slavery

as the antithesis to modernity in the most forceful terms—one commentator described the ‘slave power’ that was the Confederacy as the ‘common enemy of all true order, of all true freedom, of all true progress’.¹¹⁷ Mark’s aspiration of becoming enriched from the Brandon estate resonates with the situation of the Southern plantation owners, pulling the frightful symbolisms of slavery—the antithesis to order, freedom, progress, and so forth—into the heart of England. The comparison indicts him, of course, but it goes further than Mark—de Cresseron voluntarily participates in the same discourse, while Stanley perpetuates the same ambition as Mark (to maximise the estate’s profits). Rather, the slavery motif stresses Allan Hepburn’s statement about the corrosive effects of the ‘will to possess’ property—the transfiguration of persons *into property* is a logical corollary of this will. The broader target of censure is surely, then, the modern economic system that sustains and encourages these relations. As Eagleton perceptively reminds us, ‘evil would seem an aberrant, untypical condition and yet, in an exploitative society, part of the stuff of everyday relations’.¹¹⁸

As duelling moves from the near past into the narrative present, so slavery becomes transplanted from the geographic peripheries of Africa and North America into England itself. It is first raised in respect of Rachel, after Stanley murders Mark. Beholden to keep his actions secret, she describes herself as ‘a slave; only think – a slave! Oh frightful, frightful! Is it a dream? Oh frightful, frightful! Stanley, Stanley, it would be *mercy* to kill me’ (97; emphasis in original). It is striking to contrast Rachel’s use of slavery to express her emotional turmoil and subjugation with its use by de Cresseron and Mark, who delight in contemplating its pecuniary benefits. Her plea clearly signals its adjacency to violence by comparing, favourably, manumission at the expense of even her own life (*‘mercy to kill me’*). Even though Stanley is characterized as the slave master in this instance (able to grant manumission), he is not the only person suggested to occupy this role; neither is Rachel the only person to be posited as a slave. Chapter 18, for instance, is entitled ‘Mark Wylder’s Slave’, but this label variously applies to the *jinn*, Stanley, and/or Rachel. The exact referent is somewhat beside the point, for it is the system itself, and not the specific actors, that are being indicted by the slavery motif;

¹¹⁷ J. M. L., ‘The Slave Power: Its Character, Career, and Probable Designs, Being ...’, *The Reader*, 11 (1863), 258–59 (p. 259). See also, ‘Art. VIII.-(1.) Causes of the Civil War in America. ...’, *The British Quarterly Review*, 34.67 (1861), 203–18.

¹¹⁸ Eagleton, p. 197.

many of the interpersonal relationships in *Wylder's Hand* are predatory and violent, and pursued for material gains—it is not the ‘slave of [the] ring’ that works ‘unseen’, but slavery itself that lurks intangibly behind these attempts to restrict autonomy and possess someone. Like duelling, slavery threatens to become a contaminating anarchy. Even as Rachel reacts with horror to its symbolism, she herself co-opts its fearful associations to combat Stanley: ‘I’ll never be your slave; though, if I please, I might make you mine’ (177). Not merely becoming Stanley, then, she also echoes Mark in drawing upon the fearful associations of Britain’s violent past to wield power (just as he exploited such associations to gain the Persian’s ring). In *Wylder's Hand*, slavery and duelling feature as practices that, despite allegedly being archaic, prove disquietingly applicable to the everyday social arrangements of modern Britain.

While the American Civil War refocused public attention on slavery, the practice never ceased to be a relevant means of analogizing the conditions of various dispossessed social groups in Britain, including the working-class labourer and married women. In Elizabeth Gaskell’s industrial novel *Mary Barton* (1848), for instance, the relationship of workers to ‘the rich’ is articulated in this way: ‘we’re their slaves as long as we can work’.¹¹⁹ But the case of the married woman is the more pertinent case in *Wylder's Hand*. Comparisons between the married woman and the slave were evoked before the end of the 1850s, when Henry Drummond MP, during a Commons debate on the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Bill, identified parallels between those vested interests that opposed the abolition of slavery and those who now sought to deny legislation to protect married women.¹²⁰ In the following decade, Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869) took the analogy further:¹²¹

The law of servitude in marriage is a monstrous contradiction to all the principles of the modern world, [...]. It is the sole case, now that negro slavery has been abolished, in which a human being in the plenitude of every faculty is delivered up to the tender mercies of another human

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. by Shirley Foster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 11.

¹²⁰ Henry Drummond, ‘Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Bill - Committee’ (House of Commons, 1857), 1569-1605 (col. 1587).

¹²¹ Mill developed the ideas in *Subjection* alongside his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill, although he is usually credited as its sole author (he himself acknowledged her co-authorship).

being, in the hope, forsooth, that this other will use the power solely for the good of the person subjected to it. Marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves except the mistress of every house.¹²²

The status of the married woman reveals, for Mill, the shallowness of modernity's claim to represent a 'radical rupture' between past and present, for the extreme violence and objectification of slavery persists, in a different guise, through it. (No mention is made by him of slavery's *actual persistence* in the Gold Coast Colony.) As the figure of the married woman was so essential to (indeed, the embodiment of) the orderly home in mid-Victorian Britain, analogizing her as a slave was to radically subvert the symbolisms of this space and the society it underpinned; as Eric Hobsbawm notes, the home functioned as a sanctuary from the ambivalence of modernity: the home was 'the quintessential bourgeois world, for in it, and only in it, could the problems and contradictions of his society be forgotten or artificially eliminated'.¹²³ Analogies of the married woman to the slave thus gained a more unsettling potential for this reason: they aimed to make modernity's uncertainties inescapable.

Wylder's Hand engages with this analogy through the marriage of Dorcas and Stanley after Mark's 'disappearance'. Crucially, the slave and the married woman were comparable not only in their status as property, but also by their relation to property. As an 1856 article in *Household Words* details, the slave may 'not only be bought, sold, and mortgaged, seized for his master's debts, and transmitted by inheritance or will, but, being property, can possess of himself no property whatever'.¹²⁴ Similar denigration defined the status of married women: an independent legal entity before marriage (*feme sole*), she was thereafter subsumed into her husband's legal identity (*feme covert*). Due to the oddities that surround ownership of the Brandon estate, Dorcas's marriage does not diminish her to this status, but the *threat* of such is latent throughout Stanley's attempts to

¹²² John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, ed. by Mark Philp and Frederick Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 484.

¹²³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital* (London: Abacus, 1997), p. 270. Lyn Pykett similarly notes: 'chief of these anxieties [explored by sensation fiction] concerned the nature and status of the family, generally considered to be the cornerstone of Victorian society, perhaps even of civilization itself'; *The Nineteenth Century Sensation Novel*, p. 13.

¹²⁴ 'Slaves and Their Masters', *Household Words*, 14.335 (1856), p. 134.

wrest control of the estate from her (so he can sell Five Oaks). The threat is expressed not by the outcome of the contest (she forcefully resists, and Stanley has to forge her signature), but through his disbelief that his wife's peculiar legal status denies him the 'virtually despotic powers' he would be expected to exercise over her within the English legal system ('power' is similarly emphasized by Mill).¹²⁵ Having first tried persuasion, he resorts to the threat of force: 'I tell you / won't mortgage, and *you shall sell*' (354; emphasis in original). The analogy to the slave, and the physical violence upon which the practice was predicated, is latent in the corporeal register in which the property sale is discussed; it is repeatedly construed, both by Dorcas and Stanley, as an 'impair[ment]' and 'dismember[ment]' (403) to the property. Such visceral atomization of the property is only understandable, I propose, through the context of slavery as a personification of property's incitement to violence; this violent language targets a 'life estate' (403), and so Dorcas is threatened at a symbolic remove by such discussions. This, of course, intensifies the suggestion of the slavery motif, since, as the slave master, Stanley can be expected to exercise unlimited control over her body. Once more, it is crucial to observe that this is not a specific castigation of Stanley, but of the entire system of property ownership and economic relations in Britain; Dorcas's marriage to Stanley is, after all, only the substitute for her intended union with Mark, whose associations with slavery are equally problematic. Instead, *Wylder's Hand* expresses the disconcerting sense that slavery, far from being effaced by modernity and belonging to a violent, pre-modern past (or to the present of other places, yet to embark on modernization), remains of considerable relevance in describing the social arrangements of mid-Victorian Britain.

Le Fanu's novel depicts the persistence of the past not only through allegedly archaic customs, such as duelling and slavery, but also via the 're-enactment' of discrete instances from the past; McCormack's recognition of how the 'historical past acted [is] out in the present' with 'ironical mimicry, sometimes metaphysical frisson' in the author's fictions is especially true of *Wylder's Hand*.¹²⁶ The motivation for the marriage between Dorcas and Mark, which instigates the novel's ensuing action, is a realization of the past's tendency to be re-enacted, and the dire consequences of such (that is, a fear that the fateful genealogy described by de

¹²⁵ Shanley, p. 8.

¹²⁶ W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, p. 145.

Cresseron will reappear in the future). The union is explained by de Cresseron in terms that strongly emphasize the presence of the past: a 'splendid matrimonial compromise which was about to reconcile a feud, and avert a possible lawsuit, and, for one generation, at least, to tranquilize the troubled annals of the Brandons and Wylders' (8). The past is construed during these marriage discussions as a metaphorically living entity that must be pacified by sacrificing present desires; De Cresseron's explanation is only a partial account of the motivations behind the union, though the others are no less conscious of the past; Dorcas accedes to it because, as she explains to him, it has been a 'fatality' of the Brandon women to have made 'wild love-matches' (29). By marrying Mark, whom she does not love, Dorcas therefore also attempts to avoid a re-enactment of the past. This calculated move is endorsed by de Cresseron, in a description that reinforces the historicist consciousness of the protagonists: 'like other representatives of a dynasty, she has studied the history of her race, to profit by its errors and misfortunes. There was to be no weakness or passion in her reign' (30). Typically naïve, the narrator finds no irony in the fact that *passion* is indeed being sacrificed by Dorcas for the purposes of warding off the past—only by a wholesale suppression of her feelings can a 'radical rupture' of past and present be established.

Thereafter, however, the past is increasingly repeated in both ironic and disturbing ways, despite efforts to avoid this outcome. Stanley repeats the patrilineal violence enacted by the families' ancestors through his duelling with Harry Bracton and murder of his love rival, Mark (hence evoking the case of Sir Jonathan). Dorcas, meanwhile, re-enacts the fatality of her matrilineal forebears by marrying Stanley after Mark's death. Opting to pursue another of these 'wild love-matches', despite being aware of its probable consequences, Dorcas seems to exchange passion for weakness; as she explains to Rachel (responding to her declaration that the past cannot be undone), the decision was literally irresistible:

I know what you mean, Radie; and you warned me, with a strange second-sight, before the evil was known to either of us. It was an irrevocable step [marrying Stanley], and I took it, not seeing all that has happened it is true; but forewarned. And this I will say, Radie, if I *had* known the worst, I think even that would not have deterred me. It was madness – it *is* madness, for I love him still. (430; emphasis in original)

Dorcas has been warned in a double sense, not only by Rachel's prior admonition of Stanley's character, but also by her intimate consciousness of her matrilineal past. Readers know, as Dorcas does not, that her cousin's 'strange second sight' is in fact an entirely prosaic knowledge of Stanley's involvement with Mark's murder (or, at least, in some heinous crime), but metaphysical frisson is nonetheless generated through the apparently fateful repetition of the past. The 'fatality' of the Brandon women emerges in a dual sense therefore: not only *fatal* to their wellbeing, but *fated* to occur.

The supernaturalism that Dorcas erroneously ascribes to Rachel's foresight is nonetheless manifested in other instances of re-enactment in *Wylder's Hand*. One such is the 'old tale of wonder' concerning 'Lady Ringdove, that lived in Epping Forest' (184), which Rachel's housekeeper Tamar tells to her. The lady, as Tamar recounts, is given awful secrets by a ghost in the forest and forced to never reveal them during her life; upon her death, though, her 'frightful words' are finally released:

Whenever afterwards they opened the door of the vault, the wind entering in, made such moanings in her hollow mouth, and declared things so horrible that they built up the door of the vault, and entered it no more. (184)

The tale is a parable about the horrors of the past, which can return to haunt even after death. (The story literalizes de Cresseron's own observation about the longevity of family feuds 'surviv[ing] the hearse, and speak[ing] their deep-mouthed malignities in every new-born generation' [59].) It presents an uncanny mirror to Rachel's own situation, beholden as she is to keep the secrets of her brother (who is repeatedly described as spectral). Her interpretation of the story is significant:

It is true – a true allegory, I mean. Death will close the eyes and ears against the sights and sounds of earth; but even the tomb secure no secrecy. The dead themselves declare their dreadful secrets, open-mouthed, to the winds. Oh Tamar! turn over the pages, and try to find some part which says where safety and peace may be found at any price; for sometimes I think I am almost bereft of – reason. (184)

Lady Ringdove's tale, and Rachel's response to it, encapsulate McCormack's notice of how Le Fanu's novels characterize the past in two senses: as the site of 'past crimes and guilty consciences', but also as a living force through its relentless re-enactment.

In this passage, I argue, Rachel's struggle to comprehend this re-enactment is palpable. It appears in her parapraxis—her proposal, immediately overturned, that Ringdove's story is 'true'. Yet, rather than affirming its absolute *unreality*, she chooses an oxymoron: 'true allegory'. The phrase captures her experience of metaphysical frisson: such a supernatural story cannot be *literally* true; yet neither is she able to accept that it is purely figurative. Lady Ringdove's story of a mythic past sits in an unsettling and unresolvable relation to the present. The tale also evokes another uncertainty about the past's relationship with the present: what is to be done with it? The story is disturbing and mystifying, profoundly absent of a moral or justification for Ringdove's fate, yet Rachel looks to it for guidance about her present (allegedly remote) circumstances, and the possibility of finding 'safety and peace'. (Whether it offers such the reader is never told; Le Fanu gives only this teasing excerpt.) Does Rachel search it in a fatalistic sense, for its indication of what *must* happen, or because it might guide her future actions—showing her how to *avoid* her fate? Ringdove's story shows, I suggest, that modernity cannot fully remove itself even from a mythic, supernatural past—nor, in fact, that doing so would be beneficial; Rachel's willingness to countenance the past as a source of guidance for the present seems beneficially contrasted with the actions of de Cresseron and others, as I attend to below.

The figure of Uncle Lorne is a more sustained instance of how a potentially supernatural past—contrary to modernity's image of itself—becomes re-enacted in the present in *Wylder's Hand*. The 'long-chinned old man' (64) first appears as a spectral presence who haunts de Cresseron during his nightly stays at Brandon Hall. During the second time, he explains himself as one who 'died in [that bed] a great many years ago', and gives his name as 'Uncle Lorne' (64)—an uncanny echo of one of the 'family devils' (55), Lorne Brandon, whose portrait and history de Cresseron has experienced. Lorne is posed not only in an ambivalent relation to the past, however, but also the future, upon which he delivers various prophecies; he predicts a terrible fate for Mark if the marriage with Dorcas is not terminated and, having allegedly witnessed Mark journeying through Hell, his eventual

return from the afterlife. Lorne's predictions would have been recognizable as an exceptional clairvoyance, or, as one contemporary explained it, the 'occult power' of 'knowing things distant and [...] past, and sometimes, though rarely, events to come'.¹²⁷ The old man's temporal elision is integral to his apparent supernaturalism, I argue, and to the sensational affect he generates in his encounters with de Cresseron. Notably, the narrator experiences 'sudden horror' (84) on seeing that Lorne's prediction of 'blood upon his forehead' has been fulfilled (a sunset highlights this colour in Lorne Brandon's portrait). This moment is so shocking to de Cresseron, I suggest, because the temporal cohesion of modernity—its development according to a 'past-present-future line', as Baudrillard notes¹²⁸—breaks down in the face of Lorne. The spectral figure is irreducible to past, present, or future, as someone who combines the roles of prophet and revenant. (Comparisons are replete with Laurent Blurosset from *The Trail of the Serpent*, considered in Chapter 1, who also expresses apparently contradictory roles.) Thus, the horror of indeterminateness, which Bauman deems a chief concern of modernity, arises in this instance from Lorne's ambiguous temporal placement.¹²⁹

De Cresseron's emphatic assertion of a natural explanation for Lorne is understandable, therefore, because it would restore modernity's temporal cohesion. From the outset, the narrator tries to ward off the impression that he has accepted a superstitious explanation of Lorne; he concludes his account of their first, terrifying encounter by claiming that he 'felt convinced [...] the apparition was a living man' (65). Events come to his assistance in the form of a revelation about Lorne's mundane origins (or perhaps de Cresseron, writing from later, retrospectively applies this knowledge to his original encounters); a family friend tells de Cresseron that the 'gentleman, Julius [...] fancies that he's a prophet; and says he's that old Sir Lorne Brandon that shot himself in his bedroom' (296-97), whereas, actually, he is only a mad relation, endured in sufferance upon the stipulation of a will. This explanation substitutes psychopathological causality for the supernatural, and figures his prophecies within what Jane Wood recounts as the way that 'in medical

¹²⁷ Edward Smedley and others, *The Occult Sciences: Sketches of the Traditions and Superstitions of Past Times, and the Marvels of the Present Day* (London and Glasgow: Richard Griffin and Company, 1855), p. 236. The invocation of the spiritualist perspective is also made in reference to Laurent Blurosset of *The Trail of the Serpent*, as detailed in Chapter 1; its veracity, as regards a scientific episteme and its emphasis on 'critical hesitation', is discussed in Chapter 4.

¹²⁸ Baudrillard, p. 67.

¹²⁹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 56.

and fictional accounts of [...] “superadded consciousness”, the experience of perceiving beyond the veil of present material reality is routinely linked to episodes of illness’.¹³⁰ Such an explanation is firmly grasped by de Cresseron and others, however, because it serves to delegitimize Lorne’s statements, and ultimately to pacify his threatening potential. Stanley and Mark both inscribe this sense in their threats to relocate the old man to an asylum (‘he ought to be in a madhouse’ [295] says the first), proposing a fate shared by so many ambivalent sensational figures who are a threat to order (notably Braddon’s Lady Audley). If, as Sharon Marcus notes, ‘ghosts represented a drag on modernity’,¹³¹ then naturalizing Lorne (explaining away his claim to be a revenant of the family) allows modernity to proceed unimpeded—or, *unhaunted*, if we extend the analogy. Concurrently, the natural explanation also upholds the proper generic ‘boundaries’, for the undead appear rhetorically but never actually in sensation fiction (as Andrew Mangham observes, conditions such as apoplexy give an appearance of ‘life after death’, but ‘the undead’ never truly feature¹³²).

Yet Lorne impresses the fact that the expulsion of ambivalence is rarely total in sensation fiction, as unanswered questions continue to proliferate and explanations prove insufficient. Significantly, of course, de Cresseron rationalizes the status of Lorne at a considerable distance from the narrated present, in which, as I have hinted at, the old man produces a profound sense of ‘metaphysical frisson’ in the narrator. Moreover, curious aspects remain unaccounted for by the natural explanation; as the ‘beloved brother’ (296) of Mark, Lorne ought to be a Wylder, yet he re-enacts a *Brandon* ancestor, and it is Stanley *Lake* who becomes subject to many of his prophecies; Lorne sits curiously within the family’s genealogy, expressing a sort of shared spirit not peculiar to any member. Additionally, the family friend’s remark about Lorne being ‘very quiet’ (295) before the events of the novel unfold is highly suggestive of supernaturalism, figuring him in the role of revenant; as Ann Gaylan says of such a figure, it ‘represent[s] a return of prior events that must be acknowledged and accounted for before they and their spectral remains

¹³⁰ Jane Wood, *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 100.

¹³¹ Quoted in Pamela K. Gilbert, *Mapping the Victorian Social Body*, p. 67.

¹³² See Andrew Mangham, ‘Life After Death: Apoplexy, Medical Ethics and the Female Undead’, *Women’s Writing*, 15.3 (2008), 282–99.

can be put to rest'.¹³³ Crucially, I suggest, in terms of what *Wylder's Hand* has to say about the desirability of separation from the past, those around Lorne are utterly derisive of his predictions (for reasons given above); he says of his derided role, 'a prophet is never honoured. We live in solitude and privations – the world hates us – they stone us – they cut us asunder, even when we are dead' (295). This imagery opens a panorama onto Lorne's re-enactment not only of the families' ancestor, but of the New Testament prophet.¹³⁴ Hence, even as others attempt to posit him within the modern asylum system (the 'madhouse'), these Biblical allusions frame Lorne's behaviour as the 'divine madness' of distant epochs, when 'speaking prophetically or hearing voices from Beyond' was treated sympathetically.¹³⁵ Metaphysical frisson necessarily proceeds from his re-enactment of this role, given that society had fundamentally reconceived of the function and right location of madness.¹³⁶ The irony, which de Cresseron fails to appreciate, is that his pervasive inattention to Lorne's prophecies leads to them being fulfilled in oblique forms; he does not act upon the warning about harm coming to Mark, and it transpires. (In his inattention to this fact, de Cresseron is profoundly silent about his own culpability in reproducing the past.)

Through this dismissal of Lorne's predictions, *Wylder's Hand* intervenes upon what Bauman determines as modernity's delegitimizing of 'common sense', that is, beliefs, prejudices, superstitions and so forth that are not provable by empirical methods.¹³⁷ Thus, even as de Cresseron sub-consciously (or, instinctually) admits that the first prophecy has come true (the blood on the forehead), his inability to explain *why* it has done so leads him to ignore Lorne's later predictions—or even to examine their epistemological basis. (This moment recalls Herbert Spencer's sense that persons deceive themselves as to their 'instinctual feelings' (originally in terms of visual correspondences), as I noted in Chapter 1 of *The Trail of the Serpent*. Meanwhile, as is to be explored in Chapter 4, Collins's *Armadale* is

¹³³ Ann Gaylan, 'Troubled Legacies and Ghostly Dispossessions: The Gothic Properties of Uncle Silas', in *Troubled Legacies: Narrative and Inheritance* (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 93.

¹³⁴ Since it corresponds to other situations in *Wylder's Hand* (the temptation of Jesus and Larkin's aspirations for 'dominion'), the Gospel of Luke (13:34) is a likely source: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee'; Prickett and Carroll, p. 96.

¹³⁵ Roy Porter, *Mind Forg'd Manacles* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 19.

¹³⁶ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. by Richard Howard (New Haven and London: Routledge, 2001).

¹³⁷ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 24–25.

attentive to this same question of how to proceed when faced by epistemological uncertainty.) A contrast is established with Rachel's sympathetic response to the idea that present-day actions could be guided by 'common sense'—in that case, the experiences related in the supernatural, mythic past of Lady Ringdove's story.

Finally, and demanding a brief comment, is the fact that Lorne's transferral between the owners of Brandon Hall is by means of a will. This document is said to impose 'absurd conditions' and contain 'very odd provisions [... such as ...] no one but a Wylder or a Brandon would have dreamed of' (296), corroborating the supernatural sense of his character. (Again, the document itself is not given directly, so that readers must speculate as to what is so 'odd' about it.) Moreover, the strangeness of the will intensifies the uncanniness that the novel (and other contemporary accounts) associated with property ownership. Lorne manifests not only the haunting effects of the historical past acted out in the present, therefore, but also, being transferred by means of a will, the primacy of property as a means of perpetuating this haunting.

'IT WILL NOT STAY BURIED': THE DEAD HAND AND THE UNCOVERED PAST

In this chapter I have argued that the past figures in *Wylder's Hand* as a 'knowing, active, and retributive' agent, shaping the present through forces such as property and heredity; persisting in allegedly anachronistic practices such as slavery and duelling; and becoming re-enacted with 'ironical mimicry [and] metaphysical frisson'.¹³⁸ Jointly, it establishes the idea that the past 'inhabits [...], constitutes [... and] persists in' the modernity of the narrative and narrated present. The previous section concluded by observing the novel's apparent suggestion that the past, for all its frightening appearance, may offer the prospect of a more beneficent future; the story of Lady Ringdove could, as Rachel hopes, provide a guide to finding the 'safety and peace' absent in the present; an appreciation of Lorne's prophecies, evoking a pre-modern sense of madness that is hence derided, point to a means of averting the crises to come. The novel contains a further form of the past, typical to sensation fiction, that embodies this same sense of the past's ambivalent potential: in *Wylder*' the past is also the site of an isolated, 'secret

¹³⁸ W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, pp. 194, 145.

transgression [...] murder'.¹³⁹ This is, of course, the murder of Mark by Stanley—the discovery of his body, buried in Redman's Dell after the altercation, elicits a complete transformation of the novel's dynamics; its consequences have already been detailed in the previous chapter's reading of *The Trail of the Serpent*: ambivalence is expelled and order is (allegedly) re-established. Yet, as I argued in respect of Braddon's novel, but which is also true of Le Fanu's, ambivalence remains palpably present at the novel's end; the effect is to circumscribe the limits to modernity as a 'task of order'. This section attends to how *Wylder's Hand* establishes such a sense through its two-fold modification of the genre's 'discovery' trope, relating first to the means of discovery and second to the social dynamics that emerge in its wake. These atypical aspects bear vitally upon *Wylder's Hand's* idea of the past and modernity's relationship to it, both its proximity (continuity) and its desirability.

Firstly, the means by which the discovery of Mark's body is effected. The discovery of the secret transgressions located in the past usually occurs in sensation fiction by the efforts of a detective (either amateur or professional), and/or by the confession of the person(s) implicated in them. Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent* and Collins's *The Woman in White* both exhibit the former case. In Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*, meanwhile, Isabel Vane's confession discloses to her former household that she has been living disguised in their midst since her presumed death. *Lady Audley's Secret* portrays confession proceeding and supplementing detection; Robert Audley uncovers enough of Lucy Graham's past to force a confession of the remaining details.¹⁴⁰ This detection-confession formula appears in another of Le Fanu's sensation novels, *A Lost Name* (1868), in which the Reverend Richard Temple exhumes the past events surrounding Carmel Sherlock, and extracts a confession (of innocence) from him. Manifested in various ways, these novels jointly insist that, as Richard Albright terms it, 'the past will not stay buried'.¹⁴¹ (Collins calls it, more grandiosely, the 'inevitable law of revelation'.¹⁴²) Instead the secret transgressions of the past are inexorably brought to the recognition of the present, with consequences that are initially disruptive but ultimately

¹³⁹ Richard S. Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future: Time and Narrative in Gothic and Sensation Fiction* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2009), p. 169.

¹⁴⁰ On these forms of discovery, see Dunbar.

¹⁴¹ Albright, p. 169.

¹⁴² Wilkie Collins, *No Name*, ed. by Mark Ford (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 25.

restorative of normative social arrangements—ambivalence, as it is embodied in such figures as Sir Percival Glyde and Lucy Graham, is expiated from the narrative. It is substituted by a peaceable (normative) order, almost always male and middle-class, and exhibited by the classic examples of Walter Hartright or Robert Audley.

Wylder's Hand teases an adherence to this formula, but proceeds ultimately to subvert many of its tenets. From an early stage, Josiah Larkin enacts the role of detective, undertaking (privately) his own 'inquisition into the whereabouts of Mark Wylder' (154). To that end, he gathers (evoking Hartright's method) 'Statements' from witnesses and 'methodically' (157; 309) collates the letters supposedly sent by Mark. The conniving lawyer is far from the image of the beneficent detective (amateur or professional) that usually performs such an investigation, and, underscoring such atypicality, Larkin's case notes are described in a register of the supernatural; the completed document is compared to 'Cornelius Agrippa's "bloody book" – a thing to conjure with', and Larkin himself is described as a 'priest or magician' (308) in his interaction with it. His feelings towards the case notes are of significance as well: Larkin is said to experience 'a shade of guilt in his tamperings with it [the book]' (308). *Guilt* is most often experienced by those persons whom the secret past implicates, and so its ascription to *Larkin* is an incisive remark upon the atypicality of this detective process. This incongruent response portends the lawyer's most emphatic subversion, as is revealed in his dialogue with Rachel:

It may become my duty [...] to prosecute a searching enquiry, madam [Rachel], into the circumstances of Mr Mark Wylder's disappearance. If you have the slightest regard for your own honour, you will not precipitate that measure, Miss Lake; and so sure as you persist in your unwarrantable design of residing in that unsuspecting family, I will publish what I shall then feel called upon by my position to make known.
(390)

This threat makes clear that Larkin's intention, rather than uncovering the secret of the past, is to keep it hidden; the ambivalent status of Mark Wylder is a situation from which he aims to profit by underpaying for William's reversion. (Such a use

of the frightful past for material gains is to be compared with Mark's actions aboard the Persian vessel.)

Larkin's enactment of the detective role, never entirely convincing, is fatally deconstructed by this revelation; if detection is analogized as an exhumation of the 'buried' past (as Albright declares), then the lawyer effects a kind of *re-internment* by his efforts to deny its secrets emerging. Far from resolving the threatening influence of the past by revealing the secret transgressions therein, the lawyer appears to subsume it—he seems to Rachel 'an evil spirit incarnate' (389) in the wake of this moment. *Wylder's Hand*, then, destabilizes the teleological assumption, common to sensation fiction, that the knowledge of the criminal past, once uncovered, will necessarily be disseminated and acted upon to restore order in the present.¹⁴³ Rather, it discloses the unsettling possibility of detection's (intentional) failure and an entropic tendency towards burial.

Larkin's 'subversive detection' poses something of a crisis for the expected trajectory of *Wylder's Hand*, because it seems to fatally jeopardize the prospect of discovering Mark's fate and of a reorganization in which sources of ambivalence become expiated; no-one else, excepting the lawyer, has begun to investigate Mark's disappearance, and the claustrophobic stasis that suffuses Brandon Hall seems entirely occluded from outside forces (that is, the presence of the police or other authorities). In fact, the secret, criminal past is exhumed in a most literal sense by the discovery of Wylder's hand (revealing an additional meaning to the novel's title). Yet, contrary to generic expectations, it is not revealed by human agency, but by a confluence of forces that, I claim, embody the irrepressible past itself. The ascription of verbs upon the narrative discovery of the hand is cogent of the ineffectualness and passivity of the group that accompanies Stanley, who are the first persons to make the discovery: 'a human hand and arm, *disclosed* by the slipping of the bank, *undermined* by the brook, [...] *swollen* by the recent rains' (469; emphasis added). The cumulative efforts that raise the appendage to the surface are all natural; the only presence of the human is in the form of a lifeless (and atomized) 'hand and arm'. This is a sly inversion of contemporary symbolism; accounts figured the hand as a clear indication of 'Man[']s'

¹⁴³ Miller; Thomas. Miller makes claims about detective fiction, but the generic similarities between this and sensation fiction mean that his point is of relevance here.

separation from Nature, and indicative of humanity's proximity to the divine.¹⁴⁴ In this scene, by contrast, human hands are impotent; they are entirely at the mercy of the natural elements.

That Stanley and his group are even in the vicinity of the hand, disclosed by natural forces, is due to the intervention of another non-human agent, Stanley's horse. The animal, carrying its rider along a path above the burial site, balks at the smell of Mark's corpse below and careers down a ravine. Consolidating my argument for the non-human or natural forces as personifying the irrepressible past, Stanley proves powerless to contravene the animal's trajectory; 'it would not do' (468) is de Cresseron's emphatic dismissal of his attempt. (Rachel's fatalistic expression 'the future is equally fixed' springs to mind again.) The fall of the horse not only brings Stanley into literal confrontation with his criminal past, but, insofar as the fall injures him, it can, I claim, be seen to perform a retributive function as well; Stanley will, in fact, die of the wounds he sustains during the fall, and never be brought to trial. Justice, therefore, is seemingly enacted in the form of *lex talionis* ('an eye for an eye'): equivalent physical violence (death) is inflicted upon the criminal in nearly the precise location of the crime.

Two contemporary accounts of *lex talionis* suggest how this scene might relate to the novel's sense of modernity and its proximity to the past. In 'Hanging No Murder' (*The Saturday Review*, 1860) the author claims that this Biblical principle 'survives' because of its appeal to 'natural instinct'; moreover, that capital punishment enacted on the basis of this ancient practice allows law enforcement to rise to the challenges of modernity—a period when 'railways facilitate the escape of a criminal, and where a stranger in a village is no longer a novelty, the fusion of society gives a murderer every chance of being lost in a crowd'.¹⁴⁵ (This article was excerpted in a different context in the previous chapter). But an 1875 account gives an entirely contrary sense of *lex talionis*'s amenability to 'modern times'; in a summary acutely pertinent to *Wylder's Hand*, it explains that

the *lex talionis*, or law of blood revenge, was one of the principal reasons why the South Sea Islanders were rapidly degenerating when

¹⁴⁴ See for instance, Camilla Toulmin, 'The Hand', *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 83 (1843), 80; Charles Bell, *The Hand; Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments as Evincing Design* (London: William Pickering, 1833).

¹⁴⁵ 'Hanging No Murder', p. 303. *The Trail of the Serpent*, as accounted in the previous chapter, raises this fearful prospect; capital punishment is obviated in that case by Jabez's suicide.

Christianity arrested their downward progress. [...] If the person or persons escaped during the offended man's lifetime, he gave the same injunctions to his children at his death: thus it was handed down from generation to generation, until the lust of revenge was satisfied.¹⁴⁶

Comparisons are replete, I suggest, with slavery and duelling—all are characterized as incompatible with modern Britain, by virtue of its '*increasing reason and humanity*',¹⁴⁷ but apposite for its less civilized Other, whether that is Ireland or the South Sea Islands. Thus, by staging *lex talionis* as the ultimate means of redress in *Wylder's Hand* (in lieu of modern justice), Le Fanu underlines how modernity is inhabited by the past—allegedly anachronistic practices/principles remain relevant, or 'survive[]', within it.

The ambivalence connoted by the manner of Stanley's violent injury (precipitating his death) is intensified in the aftermath of the incident. Not only does the pre-modern past (acting through natural forces) appear frightfully bellicose, but the modern justice system is, to the same extent, passive and inconsequential. The hand's discovery brings together all the symbolic agents of such a system: 'the two policemen who constituted the civil force of Gylingden, two justices of the peace, the Doctor [, and so on]' (472). But de Cresseron astutely perceives their ineffectualness: '*fate* had brought to light [the dead body]' (472; emphasis added). Neither, as I have hinted at, do they enforce the law upon Stanley; he dies of his injuries, evading a trial. As a co-conspirator in concealing the criminal past (and hence transgressive), readers might also expect Rachel to be punished (even if, as with Magdalen Vanstone in Collins's *No Name* [1863], only in some minor and temporary way). But she too escapes a courtroom appearance; de Cresseron's explanation for why this occurs acts to further problematize the modern legal system:

'Now, Joseph, being a just man, was minded to put her away privily'. The *law* being what? That she was to be publicly stigmatized and punished. His *justice* being what? Simply that he would have her to be neither – but screened and parted with 'privily'. Let the Pharisees who

¹⁴⁶ W. Wyatt Gill, 'Missionary Incidents', *The Sunday at Home*, 1124 (1875), 727–28 (p. 727).

¹⁴⁷ *Chambers's Encyclopaedia: A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge for the People*, III, p. 692. Emphasis added.

would *summon jus* against their neighbours, remember that God regards the tender and compassionate, who forebears, on occasion, to put the law into motion, as the *just* man. (488; emphases in original.)

This passage decouples modern *law* from *justice*, which is posed as pre-modern and religious in character (the quotation is from Matthew 1:19), and proffers this second principle as the more effective guide to conduct. Thus, the apparatus of the legal system and law enforcement, so often forefront in the sensation novel, is jettisoned and denigrated in *Wylder's Hand*: the detective is transmogrified into the 'priest or magician'; *lex talionis* is substituted for the courtroom trial; and Biblical justice occupies the place of modern law. The mantra of the genre is enacted in a twisted sense—'the past will not stay buried', as Albright says, but it becomes the agent of its own exhumation.

The second way in which *Wylder's Hand* is atypical in its portrayal of the secret, criminal past coming to light is in the effects of this discovery; in its modification of sensation fiction's typical formula, by which *normative* social arrangements resume upon the expiation of ambivalence. The final parts of Le Fanu's novel, in which this expectation is resisted and transformed (as I shall account), have received by far the majority of critical attention. Yet by omitting to account for the contexts of property and heredity, such readings have not given a full account of how the ending to *Wylder's Hand* modifies its portrayal of the past and modernity's relationship to it. These readings often take as their starting point the emergence of the dead hand, and so it is worth briefly recapping the action that follows: Stanley dies of his injuries; William becomes the owner of Brandon Hall (with Larkin's plot foiled; the lawyer's reputation and fortunes suffer an inexorable decline thereafter); and Dorcas and Rachel depart England for the Continent, where de Cresseron eventually sees them years later.

Scholars have almost invariably concluded that these events initiated by the discovery of the hand fail to 'right the wrongs' of the preceding narrative; the conclusion does not satisfy readerly expectations of a positive narrative resolution (as exhibited by most sensation fiction, in some capacity). Thus, Shane McCorristine interprets the hand as being (as with other hands in Le Fanu's fiction) 'once again configured as an agent of malevolent and inevitable power'.¹⁴⁸ Likewise,

¹⁴⁸ Shane McCorristine, 'Ghost Hands, Hands of Glory, and Manumission in the Fiction of Sheridan Le Fanu', *Irish Studies Review*, 17.3 (2009), 275–95 (p. 283).

Katherine Rowe, considering the hand in the context of post-Romantic re-workings of the Lazarus motif, declares that ‘the hand that reaches from below promises to drag its victim into the pit rather than out it’.¹⁴⁹ By contrast with these two readings (and others that are considered in the section to follow), I contend that the function of the dead hand is in fact to *loosen* the grip that the past has over the present—to enact something of the ‘radical rupture’ dreamt of in the preceding narrative (as representing modernity’s desire for the same¹⁵⁰). The hand’s emergence *does* produce the expected ‘happy ending’, but on radically distinct (that is, *non-normative*) terms.

These scholarly readings focus especially on the novel’s final scene, in which de Cresseron observes Dorcas and Rachel on a moonlit night in Venice, some years after the events of the main narrative; it is hence worth reproducing in full:

Some summers ago I was, for a few days, in the wondrous city of Venice. Everyone knows something of the enchantment of the Italian moon, the expanse of dark and flashing blue, and the phantasmal city rising like a beautiful spirit from the waters. Gliding near the Lido – where so many rings of Doges lie lost beneath the waves – I heard the pleasant sound of female voices upon the water – and then, with a sudden glory, rose a sad, wild hymn, like the musical wail of the forsaken sea: –

The spouseless Adriatic mourns her lord.

The song ceased. The gondola which bore the musicians floated by – a slender hand over the gunwale trailed its fingers in the water. Unseen, I saw. Rachel and Dorcas, beautiful in the sad moonlight, passed so near we could have spoken – passed me like spirits – never more, it may be, to cross my sight in life. (491)

Rowe, writing with particular reference to this scene, opines that the ‘revelation’ of the hand’s discovery

¹⁴⁹ Katherine Rowe, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 118.

¹⁵⁰ Andrew Billing and Juliette Cherbuliez, ‘Paris as Capital, Capital in Paris’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 55.3 (2015), 1–14 (p. 8).

fails [...] to resolve the marriage and inheritance plots suspended by Wylder's absence, and the other central characters depart to a wraith-like existence in Venice, abandoning their English inheritance and property. [...] The figure of Wylder's reaching hand withdraws the progressive promises of the Lazarus motif, dispersing both the narrative and dynastic promises held out in the novel.¹⁵¹

The proposition that Dorcas and Rachel 'abandon[]' their legacies is a point that I return to below, since it reads into their appearance a degree of agency that is worth appraising. Jochen Achilles, meanwhile, deems the hand to have a more integral role, insofar as its discovery quells the social climbing attempted by Jos Larkin and Stanley.¹⁵² As it pertains to the cousins, however, Achilles validates Rowe's sense that its ultimate effect is their dispossession and exile; he reads into the Venice tableau various retrogressive connotations: 'de Cresseron sees both women together in the moonlight in a landscape further characterized by water, the lagoon of Venice, vanishing, where they melancholically mourn that they, and people like them [*ihresgleichen*], are condemned to extinction'.¹⁵³ This final point is to be considered below.

Elizabeth Tilley is the most recent scholar to suggest that the denouement of the novel is a cause for readerly disappointment:

The structure of the average sensation novel is violated [in the Venice scene]; neither Rachel nor Dorcas is a criminal, and neither deserves such isolation at the end [...]. Both women are tainted by their association with criminals and as such have stepped outside the boundary of the commonplace.¹⁵⁴

Such readings are, I argue, too attentive to generic expectations and too focused on the surface details of the Venice scene—its description of the melancholy and ethereal. By incorporating the contexts of *inheritance* (as property and heredity),

¹⁵¹ Rowe, p. 119.

¹⁵² Jochen Achilles, *Sheridan Le Fanu und die Schauerromantische Tradition: Zur Psychologik Funktion der Motivik von Sensationsroman und Geister Geschichte* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1991), p. 226.

¹⁵³ Achilles, p. 227. Translation mine.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Tilley, 'J. S. Le Fanu, Gothic, and the Irish Periodical', in *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes, and Traditions, 1760-1890*, ed. by Christina Morin and Niall Gillespie (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 130–46 (pp. 134–35).

the novel's ending is recognizable as an ambivalent conclusion about the relationship between modernity and the past; whether a 'radical rupture' is possible or even desirable.

The mentions of 'fail[ure]' and 'violat[ion]' by Rowe and Tilley, respectively, indicate how these readings are judging against generic expectations. Guiding them, I propose, is what Franco Moretti terms 'the most typical form of the English happy end [*sic*]: the acquisition of an inheritance, coincidental with the recognition of one's identity.'¹⁵⁵ Sensation fiction, for all its alleged iconoclasm, subscribes almost invariably to this normative view of property and its transmission. Le Fanu's other sensation novel of 1864, *Uncle Silas*, closely adheres to it. The young heroine Maud Ruthyn evades the threat of 'material dispossession' of her rightful inheritance and eventually accedes to a landed title and wealth.¹⁵⁶ As Ann Gaylan asserts, Maud's 'repossession' of her ancestral home coincides with her acquisition of the total (available) knowledge regarding her story, as well as the means to tell it.¹⁵⁷ Only in Maud's extended exile from England (she continues to stay on the Continent with her rescuer, Lady Knollys) is it possible to discern ambivalence; the threats of violence made against Maud in England seem to have left an indelible mark upon her sense of that country. Yet property and its inheritance escape any blemish; their benevolence is expressly stated in Maud's use of her wealth to benefit those who helped her.¹⁵⁸ Slightly more ambivalent on these issues is Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868); bequeathed to the English heiress Rachel Verinder, the eponymous jewel attracts misfortune before being returned to the Indian temple from which it was stolen. By spotlighting the acquisitive and violent potential of property (albeit of a *personal*, as opposed to *private*, kind), *The Moonstone* resonates with *Wylder's Hand*. But the jewel's particularity (its association with colonial plunder and its immense value) make it hard to see Collins's depiction of this item as a censure of ownership broadly—the Moonstone is uncharacteristic of jewellery, let alone of inheritable property.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 205.

¹⁵⁶ Gaylan, p. 90.

¹⁵⁷ Gaylan, p. 101.

¹⁵⁸ Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas*, pp. 440–41.

¹⁵⁹ For more on this issue, see Jennifer A. Swartz, "Personal Property at Her Disposal": Inheritance Law, the Single Woman, and *The Moonstone*, in *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*, ed. by Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 160–69.

The ending of *Wylder's Hand* would, I concede, fail by Moretti's criteria: the acquisition of (inherited) property and the recognition of an identity. But throughout the novel property and inheritance are, as I have argued, hailed as a source of potential (if not actual) violence and tragedy; this vision is attuned to Irish, rather than to English, ideas of property, and dispossession signifies something rather different in such circumstances. Hepburn, who observed the corrosive effects of the 'will to possess', makes the related observation that 'narratives of the dispossessed concern envy and despair, although they sometimes inspire chances for reconciliation'.¹⁶⁰ This potential of dispossession, as Maurer argues, is palpable in some of the formative works of Anglo-Irish fiction; in Maria Edgeworth's novels, notably, dispossession inspires a deeper sense of community and attachment.¹⁶¹

Dorcas and Rachel's conclusion is readable as a variety of this. Abandoning their claims to property in England enables the pair to possess one another (as cousins) in a more substantive way than before; as Victor Sage perceives of the 'slender hand' (491) draped over their gondola, it 'belongs to one or other of [the cousins]; it doesn't matter which, because they have become one "spirit"'.¹⁶² Such a state is variably longed for throughout *Wylder's Hand*; Rachel envisions herself and Dorcas entirely separate from society, 'in some wild and solitary retreat, living together – two recluses' (432). Equivalently, Dorcas says to Rachel: 'I have a plan for you and me: we shall be old maids, you and I, and live together [...] careless and happy recluses' (138); she later follows this by asking, 'shall we escape from the spell and destiny into solitude?' (198). Crucially, overlooked in prior scholarly assessments is the fact that the cousins have actually already suffered dispossession prior to the ending. The nadir of their relationship is figured in terms of thwarted ownership: Rachel says of Dorcas: 'you may be *restored to me* soon – maybe never – but till then, I have *lost* you' (382; emphasis added). If the cousins' reunion in Venice is conceived of as the fulfilment of this first desire, then, a form of 'repossession' does indeed occur at the end of *Wylder's Hand*, just as Gaylan observes happening in *Uncle Silas*.

¹⁶⁰ Hepburn, p. 14.

¹⁶¹ See for instance Maurer, pp. 9, 11 and Chapter One.

¹⁶² Sage, p. 94.

The cousins' recurrent desire for escape validates James Walton's interpretation of the novel's ending as a 'gendered yet ambivalent dream of freedom'.¹⁶³ To continue this assessment, it is freedom not merely from the claustrophobia of Gylingden itself, but also from the strictures of property; Hepburn's notice of what property ownership entails for future generations is pertinent here: 'a will binds inheritors to property, which always involves the future of that property. Inheritance, as a duty, stretches indefinitely forward in time. It does not release the living from the clutch of the dead and the past.'¹⁶⁴ The cousins' dispossession is therefore reformulated as a prerequisite for loosening the grip of the past. This is to say that, far from a lamentable state (as Tilley proposes) or a contradiction of the novel's trajectory, the final status of Dorcas and Rachel is consistent with the logic it has established; it is, moreover, consistent with within Irish fictions' depiction of property, and their ambivalence toward dispossession.

The rupture between past and present is also discernible in that other sense of 'inheritance', heredity. McCormack's sense of the novel's 'inescapable heredity', wherein 'marriages and proposed marriages between blood relations proliferate',¹⁶⁵ requires some modification in light of its ending. The cue is given by de Cresseron's uncertainty regarding Rachel's future. As if conscious of the (here thwarted) expectations for a marriage plot, he concedes: 'I don't know whether Rachel Lake will ever marry. The tragic shadow of her life has not chilled Lord Chelford's strong affection' (489). This comment alerts us to Dorcas's widowed status after Stanley's death, with no prospective husband in sight. Without modification of their status, then, the end of the Brandons and Lakes is certain. Hence, Achilles is led to conclude that 'after the deaths of Wylder and Lake, Dorcas [and Rachel] are left behind in a co-habitation, [...] the last members of the noble families [*sic*] Brandon, Lake and Wylder. [In Venice, the cousins] melancholically mourn that they, and people like them [*ihresgleichen*], are condemned to extinction'.¹⁶⁶ While there is, certainly, a palpable sense of the families' decline, I argue that the suggestion of 'mourn[ing]' reads much into the scene (in which neither of the cousins' feelings is hinted at); it relies on extrapolating the melancholic setting of the Venice scene (and, it is to be remembered, the scene is determined by de

¹⁶³ Walton, p. 123.

¹⁶⁴ Hepburn, p. 10.

¹⁶⁵ W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ Achilles, p. 227. Translation mine.

Cresseron's perspective) and the expectations that a marriage plot is a desirable outcome.

But just as with property, the novel consistently problematizes heredity and marriage—as in its attention to the hereditary transmission of disease, the direful effects of the Brandon marriages, and the comparison between slavery and the married woman. Recognizing these aspects of the novel, the lack of fulfilment of 'dynastic promises' is not to be regretted, as Rowe proposes,¹⁶⁷ but marks a *positive* resolution to the issue. To consider only the latest exploration of 'dynasty' in *Wylder's Hand* before the hand's discovery: the 'promise' of Larkin's prospective house (the Howards) is a repeat of the violent past (a 'feud' between the 'Houses of Five Oaks and Brandon' [437; 462]). One final aspect of heredity at the novel's end deserves attention. The prospective marriage between Rachel and Chelford is precisely a consanguineous one ('we are all cousins' [51], as Chelford has already reminded readers). As appraised earlier, the 'intermarriages' (4) between the families is obsessively noted (and seemingly criticized) during the genealogy provided at the beginning of the novel, consistent with contemporary censure of the practice; consanguinity lurks as a compelling interpretation of the 'taint' that follows the family and entails such misfortune. By opting against a marriage to Chelford, therefore, Rachel evades the possibility that the past might be repeated via hereditary weaknesses.

CONCLUSION

'If I were [Stanley], I think I should fly to the antipodes. I should change my name, sear my features with vitriol, and learn another language. I should obliterate my past self altogether' (429). Rachel formulates something that this chapter has argued remains suspended throughout *Wylder's Hand*: modernity's dream of a 'radical rupture' with the past. Seemingly a remote prospect at this point in the narrative, I contend that an approach toward such a rupture is achieved in the novel's conclusion. The relocation of Rachel and Dorcas is not to the 'antipodes', but it is to an ethereal Venice where their ties to property and heredity, those two conduits for the past, are loosened; were they to remain intact, as in the 'typical happy end'

¹⁶⁷ Rowe, p. 119.

of other English fiction, the reinstatement of order would never be complete: the eruption of violence, perpetuation of the supernatural, and so on, would always be threatened. Instead, extricating his primary protagonists from the site of such malaise, the cousins' future is demarcated from their pasts. This resettlement intensifies the sense of separation given just before by de Cresseron's mentioning of how 'Mark's death is, by this time, a nearly forgotten mystery' (489). That is to say, the *narrative present* (the events of the novel) has become a mythic and ill-defined past, 'relaps[ing] into haze', as de Cresseron wrote at the novel's beginning with reference to the time before his involvement in 'Wylder v. Trustees of Brandon' (4). So too is Brandon Hall—that locus for property and heredity—symbolically distanced as well; its new owner, William, vows 'never [to] enter' it 'during Dorcas Brandon's lifetime' (489). Lastly, Rachel's housekeeper, Tamar, a 'ghost of old times' (37), is noted to have died three years ago; even beneficent spectres must be exorcized, it seems. Collectively, these details construct a sense that the 'radical rupture' between past and present (suspended since the novel's opening, after the failure of Dorcas and Mark's intended union) has finally been achieved.

As in Braddon's *Trail*, however, the apparent reinstatement of order and expulsion of ambivalence at the end of Le Fanu's novel belies a more complex situation. Firstly, this normative conclusion has only been produced by subverting English associations of inheritance; closer to *Irish* expectations, dispossession is made the prerequisite for a 'happy end' that demands the end of inheritance. The cousins' relocation to Venice pinpoints further ambiguities: has the past's haunting potential been exorcized, or have its victims only been extricated from its effects? (In other words, does geographical distancing stand in for temporal separation?) These uncertainties are deepened by considering the status of Brandon Hall, for, while it has been abandoned, it nonetheless remains intact (avoiding the fate of some other gothic and sensational houses¹⁶⁸). In fact, more than this, the property is poised to resume its former role as the families' habitation: it is 'always at [the] disposal' (489) of Dorcas, if she returns to England. Likewise, the fate of the Hall's uncanny occupant, Uncle Lorne, is left mysterious; into whose possession does he now pass, given the property's change of owners? Moreover, whilst

¹⁶⁸ As in Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Thomas Hardy's *A Laodicean* (1881), to give only a few examples; see *The Gothic Other: Racial and Social Constructions in the Literary Imagination*, ed. by Ruth Bienstock Anolik and Douglas L. Howard (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Co., 2014), p. 67.

Rachel and Dorcas are thoroughly removed from inheritance in every sense, William and his family are more than ever implicated within these potentially injurious arrangements: the head of the Wylder family has become a 'great territorial magnate' (488) by the novel's end.

On closer inspection, therefore, the separation of past from present is more tenuous and unsure than it first appears. Le Fanu's novel never ceases to demonstrate how the past 'inhabits [it], constitutes it, persists in it or is "residual"' within modernity.¹⁶⁹ In this respect, *Wylder's Hand*, 'overcome' as it is by 'an obsession with the past' as 'memory [and] history',¹⁷⁰ provides a most appropriate response to Bentley's proscription for a story of 'modern times'.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Andrew Billing and Juliette Cherbuliez, 'Paris as Capital, Capital in Paris', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 55.3 (2015), 1–14 (p. 8).

¹⁷⁰ LeFebvre, p. 224.

¹⁷¹ W. J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, p. 140.

CHAPTER 3

‘Short-Spanned Living Creatures’: Evolutionary Perspectives
and the Idea of Progress in Rhoda Broughton’s *Not Wisely, but Too Well* (1867)

In *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), Thomas Robert Malthus outlined a future threatened by overpopulation and a scarcity of resources. He began by situating humankind as poised between two markedly different trajectories:

The great question is now at issue, whether man shall henceforth start forwards with accelerated velocity towards illimitable, and hitherto unconceived improvement; or be condemned to a perpetual oscillation between happiness and misery, and after every effort remain still at an immeasurable distance from the wished-for goal.¹

Malthus’s statement consecrates the dualistic vision of modernity: its striving for a reorganization of the world by ‘design, manipulation, management, [and so on]’ (applied, in the case of *Principle*, to population) and its consciousness of the ‘void it would leave were [such practice] to halt or merely relent’;² despite confronting ‘fixed laws of our nature’ (food is a necessity, populations will grow), he maintains faith in the ‘perfectability of man and of society’.³ Malthusian ideas were to resurface in a new form half a century later, in the re-conceptions of the natural world proposed by Alfred Russell Wallace and Charles Darwin.⁴ Yet natural selection—a force that, according to Darwin’s theory, directed physical forms toward successful adaptation—posited extinction and retrogression as equal possibilities to ‘progress’; both these former aspects were conspicuous in the geological time-scales in which the human species was now located (as a miniscule presence), and, according to theories of the Sun’s heat retention, extinction was to be the eventual fate of all terrestrial lifeforms. Spotlighting the absolute limits to moder-

¹ Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. by Geoffrey Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 9.

² Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 7, 5.

³ Malthus, pp. 13, 10.

⁴ ‘[The struggle for existence] is the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms’; Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. by Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 51.

nity's 'task of order', these theories posed an existential threat to the 'idea of progress' that had been the intellectual and emotional tenor of Victorian Britain since the 1830s; justified through the transliteration of scientific assumptions and methods into the realm of human development,⁵ the idea of progress faced predictable difficulties as it applied the same principle to these discomforting new theories in biology and physics. By the 1860s, Malthus's 'great question' about whether the future heralded progress or retrogression was becoming scrutinized to an unprecedented degree.

In these contexts, the liminal protagonist of Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* (1867) (hereafter, *Not Wisely*), Kate Chester, embodies this great question in being described as 'in a state of transition, though transition to what remained to be proved'.⁶ This chapter reads Broughton's sensation novel against the aforementioned debates about the inevitability of progress, occasioned by scientific theories. Specifically, it claims that *Not Wisely* is conscious of the apparent irreconcilability of Darwinism and the idea of progress so essential to modernity, and how the diminution of individuals (already foreseen as a corollary to evolutionary perspectives) is intensified by the theory's distinct emphasis on hazardness, randomness, and loss. Darwinism's potentially retrogressive and nihilistic messages act, in Broughton's novel, as a means of expressing the uncertain and estranged status of the individual in mid-century Britain, and, moreover, a way to highlight the unevenness of progress as it applies to certain groups. This reading reframes a distinct feature of Broughton's style, 'erotic sensationalism' ('detailed, ideologically complex depiction of the female body and its desires'⁷), as a way of escaping from this alienating effect. But the particular temporal conditions of modernity ensure that the enjoyment of the present is fleeting and constantly threatened. *Not Wisely* ends, I suggest, with a characteristic attempt to reimpose order and close down the ambivalent suggestions raised by the narrative.

⁵ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 33.

⁶ Rhoda Broughton, *Not Wisely, but Too Well*, ed. by Tamar Heller (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013), p. 303. Subsequent parenthetical references refer to this edition; where necessary to distinguish this 1867 three-volume release from the serialized version that appeared in the *Dublin University Magazine (DUM)* from August 1865 to July 1866, the terms 'book' and 'serial' are used. According to Walter E. Houghton, transition is 'the basic and almost universal conception' of the Victorian period; p. 1.

⁷ Tamar Heller, "That Muddy, Polluted Flood of Earthly Love": Ambivalence about the Body in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely but Too Well*, in *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 87–101 (pp. 87-8).

Yet, though it attempts a syncretic effort to reconcile Christian teleology with Darwinism, it proves unable to contain the sense of how '[that theory] had the potential to destroy the value system within which it had been conceived'.⁸ *Not Wisely* marks an early and sophisticated engagement with the Darwinian world, in which the fluidity, chaos, and ambiguity so antithetical to modernity are recognized as an irreducible feature of the world.

Not Wisely, and Broughton's work more generally, have been absent from the genealogy of sensation fiction, and Victorian women's writing, until the last two decades.⁹ Since then, studies by Helen Debenham and Tamar Heller, among others, have begun to recognize the novel's acute engagement with a variety of contexts.¹⁰ This chapter proceeds from recent work by Laurence Talairach-Vielmas and Anna Despotopoulou, who consider the novel against the backdrop of a modernizing Victorian society.¹¹ (It also contributes to a growing appreciation of the distinctive 'time-consciousness' of sensation fiction.¹²) Yet, whilst these authors look, respectively, at (technologically-generated) mobility and visibility, this chapter attends to the depiction of modernity in the novel as a form of anxiety over boundaries and classification—an anxiety that is embodied by evolutionary (particularly Darwinian) perspectives. In this respect, the chapter revisits a compelling intersection that Susan Bernstein identified some years ago between evo-

⁸ Peter J. Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 176.

⁹ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); Broughton is absent from Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); she is mentioned passingly in Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 66, 201.

¹⁰ For example, Sally Mitchell, 'Sentiment and Suffering: Women's Recreational Reading in the 1860s', *Victorian Studies*, 21.1 (1977), 29–45; Chapter 10 in Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Heller; Helen Debenham, 'Not Wisely but Too Well and the Art of Sensation', in *Victorian Identities: Social and Cultural Formations in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Hampshire: Macmillan's, 1996).

¹¹ Anna Despotopoulou, 'Trains of Thought: The Challenges of Mobility in the Work of Rhoda Broughton', *Critical Survey*, 23 (2011), 90–106; Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, 'A Journey through the Crystal Palace: Rhoda Broughton's Politics of Plate-Glass in *Not Wisely But Too Well*', in *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹² See for example, Eva Badowska, 'On the Track of Things: Sensation and Modernity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37.1 (2009), 157–75; Richard S. Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future: Time and Narrative in Gothic and Sensation Fiction* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2009).

lution and sensation fiction, but which has not received subsequent attention (despite the intensified interest in the genre).¹³ *Not Wisely* is exceptional in terms of Bernstein's proposition, because it not only 'incorporates themes and vocabulary consistent with debates over human descent and biological taxonomy' (as she notes many of these novels do), but it also contains a rarer level of engagement: 'direct allusions to apes and evolutionary theory'.¹⁴ Moreover, the retrogressive nature of these allusions underscores the atypicality of Broughton's novel—at a time when the 'antiteleological aspects of Darwin's thinking [...] were evaded or subverted by the majority of his contemporaries',¹⁵ *Not Wisely* utilizes evolutionary perspectives in order to question the inevitability and universality of progress.

'A CONSIDERATION OF INFERIOR MOMENT': EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES AND THE INDIVIDUAL

As Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent* appeared amid a restructuring of ideas about visuality (after the findings of physiological optics), so *Not Wisely* was published in the wake of two scientific discoveries of profound consequence for ideas of temporality, teleology, and order.¹⁶ The concept of an evolutionary development of natural life over eons had been habituated by a series of publications during the 1840s and 1850s, including Robert Chambers's (then anonymously published) *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850), and the 'Development Hypothesis' (1852) of Herbert Spencer. Like these, Darwin's landmark *On the Origin of Species* (1859) elaborated geological timescales in which humanity was only a tiny, recent presence—he wrote of 'slow changes in progress', occurring after 'lapse[s] of time'

¹³ Susan D. Bernstein, 'Ape Anxiety: Sensation Fiction, Evolution, and the Genre Question', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 6.2 (2001), 250–71. One exception is Gabrielle Ceraldi, 'The Crystal Palace, Imperialism and the "Struggle for Existence"', in *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp. 173–94.

¹⁴ Bernstein, p. 254.

¹⁵ Bowler, p. 5.

¹⁶ The most influential account of the naturalization of scientific concepts is Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012 [1962]); as it pertains to evolution specifically, see Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–2.

that were ‘so great as to be utterly inappreciable by the human intellect’.¹⁷ (Darwin was powerfully influenced by his ‘old honoured guide and master’, the geologist Charles Lyell.¹⁸) Rather, *Origin*’s distinctive aspects were found in the *mechanism* that it proposed to effect these developments in organic life, and the ‘end’ to which it argued these developments were tending.¹⁹ It was possible to see ‘natural selection’ as, on the one hand, reinforcing the teleological ideas with which contemporaries were familiar, such as in Darwin’s claim (near the end of *Origin*) that ‘all corporeal and mental endowments will tend towards perfection’.²⁰ Yet, various—and highly conspicuous—aspects of the theory radically subverted these progressive assumptions; extinction is declared an ‘almost inevitable contingency’, and retrogression is posited at an uncertain distance from the evolutionary process.²¹ Darwin’s account is palpably ambivalent on the idea of progress. As Gillian Beer observes, it proffers a ‘bleaker’ vision of evolution than its forebears, and yet ‘the hope that “improvement” will be the outcome of the process [natural selection ...] still haunts [Darwin’s] vocabulary and argument’.²² The ‘great question’ posed by his influence, Malthus, thus re-appears in a modified guise in the encounter with the implications of natural selection. Darwin could not have ignored what was so apparent to contemporary readers of *Origin*. As Lyell observed of it:

Progression, therefore, is not a necessary accompaniment of variation and natural selection [... Darwin’s theory] will account equally well for what is called degradation, or a retrograde movement towards a simple structure.²³

¹⁷ Darwin, *Origin*, pp. 66, 341.

¹⁸ Charles Darwin, ‘Letter No. 4028’, *Darwin Correspondence Project* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/DCP-LETT-4028>> [accessed 11 April 2019].

¹⁹ The uses of ‘Darwinism’ and ‘Darwinian’ in this chapter should not be mistaken for either the beliefs of the scientist himself (which were much more ambivalent), or as synonymous with evolution; they refer exclusively to the theory of the evolution of species by natural selection.

²⁰ Darwin, *Origin*, p. 360.

²¹ Darwin, *Origin*, pp. 97; 116, 121-2. Retrogression is applied in *Origin* purely to domesticated animals; yet, since domestication was seen to be analogous to evolutionary processes, the possibility for it to apply to the ‘natural’ world (and to humans) was not lost on contemporaries; on retrogressive outlooks in Spencer see T. Gondermann, ‘Progression and Retrogression: Herbert Spencer’s Explanations of Social Inequality’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 20.3 (2007), 21–40.

²² Gillian Beer, ‘Introduction’, in Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. by Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xix.

²³ Charles Lyell, *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man*, First (London: John Murray, 1863), p. 412.

The ambivalence that I suggest is explored within *Not Wisely* is therefore already manifest in the work that it engages with most prominently; that is, Broughton was taking further (teasing apart) the various contradictions that inhabited the Darwinian vision of the world. Peter Bowler proposes that this latent anti-teleology within Darwin's theory explains why the 'developmental model of evolution' (which emphasized improvement in species) 'continu[ed] to dominate late nineteenth-century thought'.²⁴ Thus, the uneasy co-existence of older and newer forms of thinking, which I first appraised in Chapter 1 (around physiological optics, the *camera obscura*, and physiognomy), recurs in the discussions about evolution that took place at the time of *Not Wisely*'s publication.

These tensions were also inflected by a concurrent revolution in physics. In 1850 and 1851, respectively, Rudolf Clausius and William Thomson independently formulated the Second Law of Thermodynamics (as it was termed then, the 'dynamical theory of heat'):²⁵ the inevitable loss of energy in any closed system, or, more simply, an unavoidable descent into disorder (chaos). It became a tangible concern in its bearing upon the Sun's energy, and speculation ensued as to the star's future lifespan.²⁶ In these discussions, the vast geological time-scales that underpinned natural selection collided with the pessimistic prognostications of the physicists. As if seeking to impose his own postscript on the conclusion to *Origin*, Thomson ends his article on solar depletion ('On the Age of the Sun's Heat' [1862]) by looking to a future inevitably curtailed by the physical limitations of the star's energy:

It seems, therefore, on the whole most probable that the sun has not illuminated the earth for 100,000,000 years, and almost certain that he has not so for 500,000,000 years. As for the future, we may say, with equal certainty, that inhabitants of the earth cannot continue to enjoy the light and heat essential to their life, for many million years longer,

²⁴ Peter J. Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 5.

²⁵ Rudolf Clausius, 'Ueber Die Bewegende Kraft Der Wärme Und Die Gesetze, Welche Sich Daraus Für Die Wärmelehre Selbst Ableiten Lassen [On the Moving Force of Heat, and the Laws of Thermo-dynamics which are deducible therefrom]', *Annalen Der Physik*, 155 (1850), 368–97; William Thomson, 'On the Dynamical Theory of Heat, ...', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 1851.

²⁶ Notably, Hermann von Helmholtz, 'Observations on the Sun's Store of Force', in *Early Solar Physics*, ed. by A. J. Meadows (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970 [1854]), pp. 99–102; William Thomson, 'On a Universal Tendency in Nature to the Dissipation of Mechanical Energy', *Philosophical Magazine*, 4.25 (1852), 304–6.

unless sources now unknown to us are prepared in the great store-house of creation.²⁷

Thomson recognized that this dire prediction necessarily portended the extinction of humanity, as one of those ‘inhabitants of the earth’; he attempted to ameliorate this dire prospect by insisting that the existence of an ‘overruling creative power’ could change the outcome: ‘no conclusions of dynamical science regarding the future condition of the earth, can be held to give *dispiriting views* as to the destiny of the race of intelligent beings by which it is at present inhabited’.²⁸

But the Second Law nonetheless unbalanced Darwin’s (already anxious) hopes for ‘improvement’. Ironically, his vision of unceasing mutability had been predicated on the ‘stability of cosmic conditions’.²⁹ Thus it was that he expressed ‘confidence’, at the closing of *Origin*, in a ‘secure future of equally unappreciable length’ to epochs of the past;³⁰ chaos might reign in the smallest interactions of natural selection (between competing lifeforms), but order could still be found at the macro scale. The frightful consequence of the Second Law was that it made chaos unavoidable (a fact of nature) and tangible: life’s duration on Earth was not ‘unappreciable’ but enumerable; extinction not an ‘almost inevitable contingency’ but guaranteed. The pessimism that logically proceeded from the Second Law pervaded mid-Victorian Britain, appearing in, among other places, Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (interwoven with its evolutionary allusions).³¹ This chapter deems *Not Wisely*’s most direful statements about the potential for progress to result from its similar recognition that thermodynamics implies the struggle for order is ‘prospectless[]’.³²

Origin intensified debate about the course of progress, but, significantly, it did not itself devote specific attention to human evolution (only in 1871, with publication of his *The Descent of Man*, did Darwin attend to this subject³³). The applicability of natural selection to the human case was nonetheless instantly discerned

²⁷ William Thomson, ‘On the Age of the Sun’s Heat’, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 5.29 (1862), 388–93 (p. 393).

²⁸ William Thomson, ‘On the Age of the Sun’s Heat’, p. 389. Emphasis added.

²⁹ Gillian Beer, “The Death of the Sun”: Victorian Solar Physics and Solar Myth’, in *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 223, 219n1.

³⁰ Darwin, *Origin*, p. 360.

³¹ For the poem’s links to thermodynamics, see Chapter One of Barri J. Gold’s, *ThermoPoetics: Energy in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010).

³² Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 9.

³³ In *Origin*, there is only the single ambiguous statement towards its conclusion that ‘[in the distant future ...] light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history’; Darwin, *Origin*, p. 359.

by contemporaries.³⁴ Thus, in the 1860s, Malthus's 'great question' was revisited through the lens of this evolutionary perspective. In terms closely echoing those that open the *Principle of Population*, Thomas Henry Huxley begins his contribution to the subject by declaring:

The question of questions for mankind—the problem which underlies all others, and is more deeply interesting than any other—is the ascertainment of the place which Man occupies in nature and of his relations to the universe of things. Whence our race has come [...] to what goal we are tending; are the problems which present themselves anew and with undiminished interest to every man born into the world.³⁵

Huxley's *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*, the source of this passage, was one of two books on human evolution published in February 1863, appearing shortly after Lyell's *The Antiquity of Man*.³⁶ These texts are closely contemporaneous with the proposed composition date of *Not Wisely*, 1862-63, and in fact, I argue, the novel's various textual allusions to them (as well as its more general concern for evolutionary perspectives) make the latter date more probable;³⁷ they are, I think, likely to be the 'books' alluded to when Kate deprecates her cousin George:

Though you call yourselves the superior animals, you men are wretched things, after all [...] I begin to look on you as not much superior to the highest class of apes; minds very often closely approximating to the simian type, as they say *in books*. (236; emphasis added)

Huxley and Lyell's contributions are shot through by the same ambivalence that characterizes *Origin*. Lyell's awareness of the 'equal probability' of retrogression and progress as among Darwin's most important contributions has already been mentioned. Yet, at the close of *Geological Evidences* he reasserts a narrative of

³⁴ The human implications of *Origin* influenced the severity of the criticism it received; see especially *Athenaeum* (Saturday 19 November 1859), 659-60.

³⁵ Thomas Henry Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), pp. 57, 58.

³⁶ Charles Darwin to Charles Lyell, 4 [February 1863]; Charles Darwin to T. H. Huxley, 18 [February 1863] in Burkhardt and Porter, pp. 114, 148.

³⁷ Marilyn Wood proposes the more expansive range of 1862-3; *Rhoda Broughton: Profile of a Novelist* (Stamford, Lincolnshire: Paul Watkins, 1993), p. 10. I gratefully acknowledge correspondence with Tamar Heller on dating the novel's composition.

inevitable progress: the ‘ever-increasing dominion of mind over matter’.³⁸ Meanwhile, Huxley recapitulates the idea that ‘improvement’, having been evident in humanity’s evolutionary history, should therefore continue in future: ‘in [Man’s] long progress through the Past, [there is] a reasonable ground of faith in his attainment of a nobler Future’.³⁹ Such predictions, proceeding even from some of the most stalwart defenders of Darwin’s premise, indicate how entrenched was the ‘idea of progress’ within mid-Victorian Britain. It sat uneasily with the realization, indicated both in physics and evolutionary science, that ‘progress’ was neither inevitable (species were optimized purely for their environment) nor without limits (everything must eventually end).

Darwinism implicated not merely the species, however, but also the individual. As in its uncomfortable relationship with the idea of progress, natural selection was potentially antagonistic to the sense of self-progress that many intellectuals deemed as the basis for a successful society.⁴⁰ In the Introduction I claimed Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help* (1859) as a model illustration of modernity’s ambition to order the world, but his treatise also registers the significance of individuals in this collaborative endeavour:

All have contributed towards the grand result, one generation building upon another’s labours, and carrying them forward to still higher stages. This constant succession of noble works—the artisans of civilization—has served to *create order out of chaos* in industry, science, and art.⁴¹

In Smiles’s moral system, individual effort inevitably creates personal and/or public good, and one might defy their ‘nature’ through the formation of good character.⁴² Yet even *Self-Help* betrays some ambivalence about the role of the individual in helping to create progress; notably, the work recounts the tragic failures of various hard-working inventors (figuring their lives as the ‘price’ for achieving the ‘wonders of civilization’), and it recognizes that ‘genius’ will forever be beyond the

³⁸ Lyell, p. 506.

³⁹ Thomas Henry Huxley, *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), p. 111.

⁴⁰ Houghton, pp. 187-8.

⁴¹ Smiles, p. 20. Emphasis added.

⁴² Smiles, p. 315.

reach of self-development (being instead a *natural* endowment).⁴³ Nevertheless, its vision of the individual's contribution is more optimistic than that of *Origin*; as Bowler states it, 'Darwin's mechanism [natural selection] ignores one of its [this moral system's] most cherished values—the role of individual effort and initiative'.⁴⁴ Beyond its emphasis of retrogression, extinction, and randomness (which could, arbitrarily, make individual efforts void), Darwinism's geological timescales were alienating to and deprecating of the individual. This is perhaps clearest in the section 'Difficulties of Theory', where Darwin turns to the evolutionary development of the eye. He paints a scene of hyperbolic proportions: 'millions of years', during each of which 'millions of individuals' are endowed with incremental advance in the organ.⁴⁵ Contrary to Smiles's vision, in which generations of identifiable persons work toward a defined objective (*Self-Help* is a collection of such 'inspiring' biographies), the individual is deprecated within Darwin's evolutionary timescales; to use, again, a phrase that encapsulates this sense, these 'lapse[s] of time' are 'so great as to be utterly inappreciable by the human intellect'.⁴⁶

It should be noted, however, that Darwinism merely apotheosized a trend for the diminution of individuals by evolutionary perspectives, as well as a generalized anxiety about the encroachment of scientific naturalism on individual faith and subjectivity. These concerns emerged concurrently with the Victorian period, as seen for instance in Thomas Carlyle's, *The French Revolution* (1837), which depicted the revolution's participants as being caught in the grip of 'large, impersonal forces over which a single individual can exert only a limited and temporary influence'.⁴⁷ This was not yet an evolutionary perspective, but a Romantic one; the sudden catastrophism and temporal character ('Time-Spirit') of the work signals a rejection of Lyell's uniformitarianism and geological timescales, which had recently been outlined in *Principles of Geology* (1830-33). But the next decade saw precisely this collision between individuals and Lyell's so-called 'deep time' in the form of Chambers's *Vestiges*. That author writes:

⁴³ Smiles, pp. 52–53, 68; 91.

⁴⁴ Bowler, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Darwin, *Origin*, p. 142.

⁴⁶ Darwin, *Origin*, pp. 66; 341.

⁴⁷ Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1830-1890* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p. 33.

It is clear [...] from the whole scope of the natural laws, that the individual, as far as the present sphere of being is concerned, is to the Author of Nature a consideration of inferior moment. Everywhere we see the arrangements for the species perfect; the individual is left [...] to take his chance amidst the *mâlée* of the various laws affecting him.⁴⁸

This observation of Nature's indifference to the individual (amounting to a relegation of their status, given the religious attitudes of mid-Victorian Britain) is developed by Tennyson into some of *In Memoriam*'s most nihilistic passages; notably, the poem describes Nature as seeming: 'So careful of the type [...], / So careless of the single life'.⁴⁹ And, while not specifying the natural world *per se*, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) sees multiple forces—social, political, and economic—converging to diminish individuality in the modern world. Boldly asserting the necessity for cultivating individuality so as to achieve personal and civilizational development (marking a commonality with Smiles), Mill bemoans the fact that individuals are '[at present] lost in the crowd'.⁵⁰ He might plausibly have substituted this metaphoric language for that which would appear in the same year in *Origin*, the 'tangled bank',⁵¹ for, in the role it afforded individuals, Darwinism marked a decisive shift from Lamarckian evolution. This alternative theory, also known (reductively) as the inheritance of acquired characteristics,⁵² sanctioned individuals' efforts to improve themselves by suggesting that these would be passed down to subsequent generations.⁵³ This quality of Lamarckism made it amenable to, and even supportive of, the ethics of free-market enterprise and self-initiative (as promoted in *Self-Help*), and it continued to find advocates ('neo-Lamarckians') after *Origin*:

⁴⁸ [Robert Chambers], *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London: John Churchill, 1844), p. 377.

⁴⁹ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ed. by Robert H. Ross (New York: Norton, 1973), ll. 55.7-8

⁵⁰ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, ed. by Mark Philip and Frederick Rosen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 65. On Mill's concern for individuality, see C. L. Ten, *Mill On Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), especially Chapter Five.

⁵¹ Robert Douglas-Fairhurst draws a similar comparison; 'Introduction', in Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, ed. by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. xiv.

⁵² This chapter is conscious that the 'soft inheritance' theory did not originate with Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and that this was only a small part of his theory; moreover, that Darwin did not discount Lamarckism, but rather proposed natural selection as the *primary* means of species development. See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History* (New York and London: Norton, 1980), p. 66.

⁵³ Gilmour, p. 121.

One of the most emotionally compelling arguments used by the neo-Lamarckians of the late nineteenth century was the claim that Darwinism was a mechanistic theory which reduced living things to puppets driven by heredity. The selection theory made life into a game of Russian roulette, where life or death was predetermined by the genes one inherited. The individual could do nothing to mitigate bad heredity. Lamarckism, in contrast, allowed the individual to choose a new habit when faced with an environmental challenge⁵⁴

The status of the individual was, then, a question densely woven into evolutionary perspectives, and one that forged a connection between evolution and the inevitability of progress (a *focus imaginarius* of modernity's ambitions).⁵⁵ My reading of *Not Wisely* proposes that it is through this focus on the individual that the novel engages with similar concerns; furthermore, that through such a focus Broughton extends the debate around evolution and its relations to modernity, transliterating its concepts, perspectives, and sentiments into the realm of personal experience. In such a capacity, the novel inculcates its readership to the realities of a Darwinian world.⁵⁶

If, as I argue, *Not Wisely* is an unusually sophisticated and early engagement with evolutionary (but especially Darwinian) perspectives, it must be stressed that popular and literary responses to evolution were by no means unusual; the subject aroused a high degree of interest throughout the Victorian period.⁵⁷ This was unsurprising, not only because scientific issues were dispersed so widely among

⁵⁴ Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, Third (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 367.

⁵⁵ This chapter is not focused on the application of natural selection to society (Social Darwinism), as notably expressed by (its inventor) Herbert Spencer in his 1884 essay series *The Man versus The State*, ed. by Donald MacRae (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); see especially p. 141. Its defining phrase 'survival of the fittest' was coined by Spencer after the composition of *Not Wisely* (in 1864), before becoming adopted in the fifth edition of *Origin* (1869). Hence, ideas of competition and exclusion were not forefront in Darwinism during Broughton's first encounters with it. See Beer, 'Introduction', pp. xix–xx.

⁵⁶ Cf. Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon's conclusion that 'evolution forced Victorians to confront and reinterpret the meaning of their lives – to develop new ways of understanding one another and their relationship to the world they inhabited. The arts helped that understanding by domesticating science, converting complex theoretical abstractions into embodied cultural realities'; 'Evolution and Victorian Fiction', in *Evolution and Victorian Culture*, ed. by Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 14.

⁵⁷ Chambers's *Vestiges*, proffering evolutionary perspectives to a lay audience, was a bestseller; for its reception, see James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

the reading public (through journals and magazines, etc.), but because, like heredity (as I appraised in Chapter 2), evolution had implications for practical life. A *Punch* article of 1862, 'Unnatural Selection and Improvement of Species', for instance, offers a satirical account of Darwinism's application to courtship. It cites a mismatch between the moral and physical characteristics of marriage partners to show the limits of natural selection. This, the author concludes satirically, is a positive outcome: 'were improvement of their species the aim of all the applicants for wedding-rings and licences, we fear that simpletons and snobs would in time become extinct'.⁵⁸ The article indicates an almost immediate and seamless translation of evolutionary perspectives from a question of scientific concern to one of practical (and comic) interest.

Responses to Darwinism also took more imaginative and literary forms. Such reactions, far from being a distortion of *Origin*, were arguably licensed by Darwin's style of communicating his argument, which made heavy use of 'Imaginary Illustrations' and metaphor. As Laura Otis elaborates,

occasionally, Darwin's 'Nature' comes across as a literary character, a conscious being who is making decisions. Considering Darwin's desire to stimulate readers' imaginations, the anthropomorphism may well have been intentional. Like literary writers, nineteenth-century scientists sometimes created characters to embody or personify challenging ideas.⁵⁹

Such is ably demonstrated in Edmund Saul Dixon's 1862 short story 'A Vision of Animal Existences' (*Cornhill Magazine*). Stimulated by reading a newspaper, the story's narrator muses on evolution and teleology, and directs his attention to a woman sat nearby in the Zoological Gardens:

The glimpse into past epochs of the world, which was opened to us by Cuvier and the geologists, has now set us straining our eyes into the future. Not content with examining what we have been and what we are, we are endeavouring to make out what we shall be. The blue-robed lady's green-covered book [*Origin*] teaches that the world of

⁵⁸ 'Unnatural Selection and Improvement of Species', *Punch*, 1860, 182.

⁵⁹ Laura Otis, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology*, ed. by Laura Otis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. xxii.

plants and animals is a world of incessant change; that, in coming ages, every living thing will be only a metamorphosed shadow of its present self⁶⁰

Overhearing him, the lady announces herself as ‘NATURAL SELECTION! ORIGINATOR OF SPECIES!!’, and her child to be ‘STRUGGLE-FOR-LIFE’.⁶¹ They proceed to elaborate on their embodied principles, using various demonstrative examples (the development of the swimming-bladder and tail) to teach the narrator; clarification follows shock: “‘what an inconceivable lapse of time it would take!’”, the narrator declares, “‘Millions of years—hundreds of millions—thousands of millions [...]’” comes the confirmation.⁶² A vicious fight between wolves (the strongest of whom are allowed to propagate) concludes the ‘lecture’, leading the narrator to observe that the lady and her son are ‘cruel and relentless agents [...] the future which you promise is not cheering’.⁶³ The woman affirms its truth, but insists that there is no alternative—she returns to reading *Origin*, and the narrator (suspecting that he has been dreaming) questions her on the veracity of the book.

‘A Vision of Animal Existences’ displays, in embryonic form, various aspects that I argue are given fuller expression in *Not Wisely*: how Darwinism is illuminated through the individual perspective (that is, personal narrative as a means of disseminating and modifying evolutionary knowledge), its aptness for producing affective responses such as shock and melancholy, and how both these features can be articulated in a popular medium (*Cornhill* being a widely circulated magazine intended for a primarily middle-class readership⁶⁴). Apart from the textual evidence I give in the sections to follow, Broughton’s proximity to the evolutionary debate prompted by *Origin* must be judged by circumstantial evidence. (Broughton destroyed her personal correspondence before her death, so that we

⁶⁰ Edmund Saul Dixon, ‘A Vision of Animal Existences’, *Cornhill Magazine*, 5.27 (1862), 311–18 (p. 312).

⁶¹ Dixon, p. 313.

⁶² Dixon, p. 314.

⁶³ Dixon, p. 317.

⁶⁴ On the readership of *Cornhill*, see Alvar Ellegård, ‘The Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian Britain: II. Directory’, *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, 4.13 (1971), 3–22 (p. 18). On the magazine’s dissemination of evolutionary ideas, see David Amigoni, ‘Carving Coconuts, the Philosophy of Drawing Rooms, and the Politics of Dates: Grant Allen, Popular Scientific Journalism, Evolution, and Culture in the *Cornhill Magazine*’, in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, ed. by Louise Henson and others (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 251–62.

lack this potentially informative corpus.⁶⁵) Even if it remained untouched for the following two years (its first publication in 1865-66 is liable to give a poor sense of its immediate contexts),⁶⁶ *Not Wisely* was written, as has been noted, during a time of fervent discussion on Darwinism to which multiple authors, media, and genres contributed; Broughton need not have read *Origin* specifically to have been exposed to its tenets and concerns, for it was considerably reproduced in the popular press—Darwinism, and evolution even more so, were extensively assimilated within the cultural milieu of mid-Victorian Britain.⁶⁷

There is some cause, however, for the more precise assertion that Broughton was a first-hand reader of the text. As the *Edinburgh Review* stated, a ‘far wider intellectual class [than the professed naturalist ...] perused [*Origin*] with avidity’,⁶⁸ and Broughton, as part of an Anglican, upper-middle-class family, belonged exactly to such a group.⁶⁹ Evidence of a more anecdotal nature, meanwhile, can be claimed from the author’s ‘prodigious read[ing habits]’ (fully shown in *Not Wisely*, which is dense with intertextual allusions).⁷⁰ Broughton was evidently conversant with *Origin* by 1883, when the eponymous character from her novel *Belinda* (first published in that year) recites a passage from it; *Belinda* interpolates its conclusions about morphology with her personal circumstances:

‘If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous slight modifications’ (*in how many years am I [Belinda] likely to die?*) ‘my theory would absolutely break down. But I can find out no such case. No doubt many organs exist of which’ (*can the worm that never dies sting more sharply than this?*) ‘we do not know the transitional grades’.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Marilyn Wood, *Rhoda Broughton*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Wood, p. 10.

⁶⁷ On Darwinism’s dissemination in the British press, see Alvar Ellegård, *Darwin and the General Reader: The Reception of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution in the British Periodical Press, 1859-1872* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 24–29.

⁶⁸ Cited in Ellegård, p. 42.

⁶⁹ Michael Sadleir, *Things Past* (London: Constable, 1944), pp. 84–85.

⁷⁰ Broughton, p. 35. A friend said of her, she ‘possessed a mind so richly stored with “the best that has been thought and said in the world”’; Marilyn Wood, *Rhoda Broughton*, p. 9.

⁷¹ Rhoda Broughton, *Belinda* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1883), p. 152. Emphasis in original.

Broughton's use of evolutionary perspectives in *Not Wisely*, I claim, is decidedly in the vein of this *Belinda* passage; the individual's position within modern society is inflected by and articulated through evolutionary perspectives.

Indeed, foregrounding the changes experienced by an individual—whose life is coterminous with the novel—and juxtaposing them with those from prior stages of human history (through its many classical and biblical allusions), *Not Wisely* discerns the tensions and anxieties latent within a Darwinist perspective, as described by Beer:

The optimistic 'progressive' reading of development can never expunge that other insistence that extinction is more probable than progress, that the individual life span is never a sufficient register for change or for the accomplishment of desire.⁷²

'Desire' is apposite in the case of *Not Wisely*, given its emphasis on erotic sensationalism, and Beer's notice points, I suggest, to the potential that evolutionary perspectives gave Broughton in her efforts to advance and subvert the romance plot.⁷³ But even wider resonances are palpable; by focusing on the seeming inefficacy of individual contributions within society, Broughton is also, of course, posing a challenge to modernity's task of order—questioning both its feasibility and its desirability.

'THE DESIRE FOR COMPLETE EXTINCTION': EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES IN *NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL*

Taken from *Othello*, the title of *Not Wisely, but Too Well* identifies Kate as acting a modern-day Desdemona to the roguish military-man Dare Stamer. On the cusp of an illicit liaison with him after they meet in the Welsh seaside town of Pen Dyllas, Kate rejects Dare when he tells her that he is already married. In London, she embarks on a life of charitable work under the tutelage of the ascetic clergyman James Stanley. Visiting the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, however, Kate

⁷² Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 6.

⁷³ On Broughton 're-writing romance', see Shirley Jones, "'LOVE": Rhoda Broughton, Writing and Re-Writing Romance', in *Victorian Popular Women Writers*, ed. by Kay Boardman and Shirley Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 208–36.

encounters Dare and promises to resume their former plans; on the train journey to elope with him, she is intercepted by James and convinced to abandon Dare once again, after which she turns single-mindedly to charitable working. When James dies in an influenza outbreak, Kate resolves to join an Anglican sisterhood, but permits herself to attend the festivities for the wedding of her sister, Margaret. In the serial version of *Not Wisely*, Kate is confronted by Dare, who, consumed with jealous rage, shoots her and himself dead. In the book version, Kate is informed of a fatal carriage accident outside the party in which Dare has been involved; breaching decorum, she stays beside him until he dies the following morning; the novel concludes with a vision of Kate's future good deeds as part of the sisterhood, and her eventual death.

Not Wisely was recognized as sensation fiction upon its release, albeit distinguished by its focus (and, according to some, by its quality⁷⁴). As Pamela K. Gilbert accounts, 'plot, in Broughton's novels, [...] exists primarily as a unifying structure to hold together a succession of crises, often internal, wherein the protagonist gains insight and maturity'.⁷⁵ This focus on emotion led contemporaries and (until the last few decades) modern critics to deem the novel as absent of any engagement with contemporary intellectual concerns. Sally Mitchell, for example, writes of 'women's recreational reading' (in which category she sees *Not Wisely*): '[it is] improper (as well as fruitless) to deal in wholly intellectual terms with novels which were written for an emotional – rather than an intellectual – response'. Seeming to offer an even-handed recognition of these novels' priorities by this assertion, Mitchell nonetheless follows it by suggesting that 'we should see popular novels as emotional analyses, rather than intellectual analyses, of a particular society'.⁷⁶

Such a reading is liable to seem outmoded in a critical landscape in which sensation fiction's analysis from the 'literature and science' perspective is well-established.⁷⁷ This reading of *Not Wisely* proceeds from such critical bases, positing Broughton's novel as a site for 'Darwinian Encounters' that illuminate the

⁷⁴ Alfred Austin ('Our Novels: The Sensational School') wrote: 'while [...] she] may seem to share some of the peculiarities of this school, [...] in many respects she is brilliantly distinguished from those writers'; Maunder, I, p. 248.

⁷⁵ Pamela K. Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 113.

⁷⁶ Mitchell, pp. 31, 34; Marilyn Wood, *Rhoda Broughton*, pp. ix–xi.

⁷⁷ Some examples of this were given in the Introduction.

experiential realities of modernity.⁷⁸ Bernstein, perhaps the only scholar to have attended to the relations of sensation fiction and evolution, hints at such broader resonances in proposing that this ‘textual correspondence’ is

a braided portrayal of a cultural moment which these documents, and those generated alongside them, collectively unfold; a cultural moment which displays an uneasiness about taxonomic distinctions, boundaries that may be conceptual as well as material, social as well as biological, the very borderlines that sensation novels exploit and that evolutionary debates rehearse.⁷⁹

Bernstein’s ‘cultural moment’, I argue, is none other than a modernity defined by the compulsion to strictly police those ‘boundaries’ and expel ambivalence; this thesis contends that sensation fiction stages, and is concerned by, the enactment of this ambition—‘uneasiness’ emerges from the fact that, once elaborated, ambivalence proves ineluctable (even as the novels’ endings typically attempt to expel it).

Not Wisely grapples with the same realization as it was prompted by the Darwinian perspective, which (if its tenets are fully recognized) powerfully highlighted the limitations of order and the ubiquity of ‘chaos’; Dwight Culler describes Darwinism’s relation to purposive change and teleology in this way:

When all is flux, the reversal cannot be distinguished from any other position, and one thing is quite as meaningless as another. [...] But the truth is that this whole Darwinian [...] view is so antithetic to the purposive cast of the human mind that it is very difficult to keep it firmly in focus.⁸⁰

My reading begins in the vein proposed by Bernstein, when she notes that sensation fiction tends to ‘incorporate[] themes and vocabulary consistent with debates over human descent and biological taxonomy’.⁸¹ It draws comparisons between the opening of *Not Wisely* and that of Huxley’s *Man’s Place in Nature*, as

⁷⁸ See Gillian Beer, *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. vii.

⁷⁹ Bernstein, p. 267.

⁸⁰ Quoted in James Krasner, ‘A Chaos of Delight: Perception and Illusion in Darwin’s Scientific Writing’, *Representations*, 1990, 118–41 (p. 118).

⁸¹ Bernstein, p. 254.

a means of illustrating the manner of Broughton's engagement with Darwinism throughout the rest of the novel. I propose that they are joined by a consciousness of the anti-teleological implications of this perspective, particularly as it pertains to the individual, and that they are conscious of recourse through similar rhetorical strategies (such as metaphor). Yet, in a gesture that expresses the nature of *Not Wisely's* contribution to this debate—and, more broadly, sensation fiction's intervention on similar ambivalences—the novel explicitly rejects the consolatory potential that comes from locating the individual within larger processes. Contrarily, such scale only reinforces modernity's alienating effects.

Before delving into his argument for humanity's relations to the 'Lower Animals', Huxley adapts what he terms a 'well-worn metaphor' for his purposes: the 'parallel between the life of man and the metamorphosis of the caterpillar into the butterfly'. The comparison is more apt, he determines, if the species is substituted for the individual: the 'mental progress of the race' instead of the single lifespan; as the grub grows from feeding on biological matter, shedding its skin after sufficient accumulations, so, Huxley accounts, has the human mind fed on knowledge and periodically torn apart its 'theoretical coverings' (here the theoretical foodstuff proffered by Darwin).⁸² This conflation of species and individual (phylogeny and ontogeny) is how Huxley reconciles himself to the fitful nature of progress—by turns rapid and non-existent—and the miniscule contribution that his own work can feasibly make: since 'every moult is a step gained', so his own task if envisaged as being to 'ease the cracking integument' as best he can.⁸³ The analogy to nature is used here as a way of placating the dire implications that the evolutionary, but especially Darwinian, perspective raises in respect of individual contributions (through its emphasis on contingency, randomness, and loss). Indeed, Huxley notes that the appreciation of such evolutionary implications is liable to register a 'certain shock'.⁸⁴ This language is significant, for 'shock' was the affect most popularly associated with sensation fiction (as in *Punch's* satirical accusation, also from 1863, that the genre 'Giv[es] Shocks to the Nervous System'⁸⁵); this implicit link between the reception of evolutionary theory and sensation fiction

⁸² Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*, p. 58.

⁸³ Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*, p. 58.

⁸⁴ Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*, pp. 58-9.

⁸⁵ 'The Sensation Times', *Punch*, 44 (1863), 193.

is not idiosyncratic, either, for the same language appears in a contemporary article on *Origin* (from *All the Year Round*⁸⁶). The literary influences in *Man's Place in Nature* can not only be found in the affective response it produced, however, but are evident as well in its use of metaphor and narrativization (Huxley's attempt to tell his story, amid the operations of the larger world). Thus, seemingly concerned purely with evolutionary biology, the text is (seemingly unavoidably) inflected by a concern for the status of the individual and the readers' (sensational) responses to such. The case of *Man's Place in Nature* provides a further example of the manifold cross-pollination between literature and science in mid-Victorian Britain: their influence upon one another, common social concerns, and their deployment of analogy.⁸⁷

The opening of *Not Wisely* moves in similar semantic circles to that of Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature* as it broaches a contemplation of beauty as a material and spiritual fact. There is the same collocation of individual and species, and of past and present, as evidenced clearest in an appeal for the reader to verify the inevitable decline of beauty from their own experience: 'which of you, O daughters of Eve! has not made this interesting discovery in natural history for yourself, by one or other of the following pleasant processes?' (42). Beauty is, of course, an eminently poetic subject (as signposted by Broughton's citation of Keats's *Endymion* [1818] (41)), but the terminology here, of *process* and *discovery*, posits this commentary as a variety of scientific experiment (in 'natural history', no less), the conclusions of which are empirically (and democratically) observable. These associations suggest that the entropic theme of Broughton's opening—its attention to materiality, 'decay', 'pollu[tion]' (41)—may be informed by scientific contexts as much as poetic interest. In the degree of emotional turmoil it raises, there are echoes, I argue, of both Darwinism and the Second Law in *Not Wisely's* reaction to the 'truth' of fading beauty: 'Of course it is true—tiresomely, provokingly, heart-breakingly true; so true as to be almost a self-evident proposition' (42). In another way, the frightful degeneration of the material world (that, 'dispiriting

⁸⁶ 'Natural Selection', *All the Year Round*, 3.63 (1860), 293–99 (pp. 293, 299). *Man's Place in Nature* was allegedly being sold by railway stalls (at which 'one typically purchased popular fiction'; Bernstein, p. 250.) while *Origin* was reputedly requested at one; Gowan Dawson, *Darwin, Literature, and Victorian Respectability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 117; Bernstein, p. 250.

⁸⁷ This is a common point in studies of 'literature and science', but as it relates to Darwin specifically, see Devin Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy: Science and Literature Between the Darwins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

view', in Thompson's understated phrasing) masquerades here as the decline of female appearances. Suggestions of a comparison are intensified by noticing that both Huxley and Broughton necessarily implicate their readers; the former's acknowledgment of the 'certain shock' that his Darwinian argument may provoke is paralleled in the latter's imagining of the anguish of such a shocked reader, realizing that the 'discovery' of beauty's irreversible decline will affect them: 'Ay, me! Ay, me! indeed' (42).

The beginnings of *Man's Place in Nature* and *Not Wisely* coalesce most decisively, however, in their joint deployment of the butterfly imagery. Yet the different purposes to which it is utilized in each text reveals their distinctive intentions. In Broughton's hands this 'well-worn metaphor' is again adapted to evoke evolutionary perspectives; her narrator poses the question: 'what so frail, so butterfly lived as beauty in the individual? Hardly are we consoled by the reflection that in the species it seems perennial' (42). Explicitly juxtaposing *individual* and *species*, and locating them within the frame of generational change (or, precisely, *stasis*; that is, the persistence of a trait between generations), Broughton's simile generates the same comparison as in Huxley's text—it brings phylogeny (the history of the species) into comparison with ontogeny (the development of the individual). There is a marked difference in sentiments, however; whereas Huxley finds (intimate) consolation from such atomization (the reduction of the enormous process into its smaller components), Broughton emphatically deprecates this potential ('*Hardly are we consoled*'). If not in conversation with Darwin, her phrasing has evident echoes of his attempt in *Origin* to ameliorate the implications of his imagined struggle between individuals by recourse to species' progression:

When we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply.⁸⁸

Broughton simultaneously raises and denies this suggestion, seemingly aware that, as Beer points out, such a plea for consolatory potential 'undermines its own certainty'.⁸⁹ In refusing such, I claim, she signals a concern for how evolutionary

⁸⁸ Darwin, *Origin*, p. 62.

⁸⁹ Beer, 'Introduction', p. xxv.

(particularly Darwinian) perspectives impact on the status of the individual; moreover, that these perspectives offer little consolation in the context of fears about the diminution of the individual's status in a modernizing society.

These first allusions, and the comparisons that can be drawn with the opening to Huxley's text on the subject, illustrate the novel's investment in and particular rendering of evolutionary perspectives; their tenets are reproduced in other instances within *Not Wisely*. To wit, after Kate first rejects her suitor Dare she is said to experience a profound and permanent alteration, becoming forlorn and disconsolate at her future prospects. 'Kate was changed, very much changed' (168). Joining James in his charitable work, she expresses to him a distaste for anything beyond what I shall term (and later give a more extended account of) the 'sensational present', rejecting both the past and future: 'O James, just think of being utterly freed from all responsibility—no remorse for what is gone, no fear of what is to come. I'd be annihilated this minute if I could' (177). Other species having already been indexed through Kate's avowed desire to swap places with her dog, Tip, evolutionary associations are introduced by the narrator's commentary upon her self-destructive wishes: 'he [James] knew compassionately that rawness of heart which prompted the desire for complete extinction' (177).

In *Origin*, 'utterly extinct' was the state that Darwin predicted as the natural outcome for the 'greater number of species', and the concept of extinction was essential to his ideas on natural selection—it is one of the concluding images in his 1859 work.⁹⁰ Darwin, in turn, helped popularize the ecological meaning of the term (to use an anachronism):

the term 'extinction' was mainly linked [before] to the history of landed families: a line becomes extinct and with it the family name and the succession of property and practices. Darwin expanded the idea of family, away from the exclusiveness of 'pedigrees and armorial bearings' [...] to embrace all 'the past and present inhabitants of the world'.⁹¹

It would be remiss not to observe that this shift from the family to the species is the basis for the many differences between *Not Wisely* and *Wylder's Hand*, the

⁹⁰ For only some of the mentions of 'extinct*' in *Origin*, see Darwin, *Origin*, pp. 96, 251, 359.

⁹¹ Beer, 'Uses of Extinction', p. 322.

work of Broughton's uncle Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. It entails a distinct sense of 'the past', which, in Broughton's novel extends much further back than is possible to trace via genealogies. The missing textual documents in Le Fanu's novel (wills and so forth) become the absences of the geological record.⁹² This rendering of 'extinction' in *Not Wisely* exhibits, I claim, a quality that Robert Pasquini identifies of later literary depictions of evolution: 'a lineage's worth of evolutionary development is embodied by the protagonist'.⁹³ Distinctively, whereas 'self-extinction' in Pasquini's study is registered as the human species destroying itself (as in his example, M. P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* [1901]),⁹⁴ in *Not Wisely* it is extinction of *the self*: an evolutionary register conveys Kate's sense that her personal future will be one of interminable decline, hence making destruction an inviting prospect. This use of extinction is nevertheless, in both sentiment and cause, faithful to its original appearance in *Origin*; as there, the prospect of annihilation is not treated with a sense of dismay but instead as a neutral outcome (it is prompted by personal loss, true, but it is also *desired*). So too is its appearance in the novel activated by the sort of conditions that Darwin cites as relevant in causing 'extinction', only they occur at a *personal* (rather than species) level: Kate is experiencing 'changed conditions' at this point, lacking the 'complex interdependen[cy]' of both her family and of Dare (her connection to the latter seeming irrevocably severed at this juncture).⁹⁵

The atomization that I identified as occurring in *Man's Place in Nature* is thus repeated here, but to an alternative end; Huxley uses the expanded, imaginative canvas offered by the evolutionary perspective to enhance the size of his contribution, figuring it in terms of a cascading effect—it becomes a 'step' that is gained for the intellectual development of the species.⁹⁶ Broughton instead presents this perspective as only enhancing Kate's despondency at the seeming hopelessness of finding self-fulfilment. The situation bears much resemblance, I argue, to what

⁹² Darwin 'follow[s] out Lyell's metaphor' of the geological record as an incomplete bibliographic item: 'of this volume, only here and there a short chapter has been preserved; and of each page, only here and there a few lines'; *Origin*, p. 229.

⁹³ Robert Pasquini, 'The Cultural Life of Extinction in Post-Darwinian Print Culture' (McMaster University, 2018), p. 18.

⁹⁴ Pasquini, p. 15.

⁹⁵ Beer, 'Darwin and the Uses of Extinction', p. 323. Cf. the detail of '*habitat*' (190; emphasis in original) identified by Laurence Talairach-Vielmas; p. 104. Kate's search for a fixed and stable identity is articulated in the language of the natural world.

⁹⁶ This imagery of the 'step[ping] stone' reappears, as I explore later, in connection with evolutionary ideas about architecture and progress.

Trish Ferguson identifies as the existential anxiety raised by the Second Law: 'in an era increasingly obsessed by images of decay, decline and degeneration, the Second Law of Thermodynamics far surpassed these fears with the more absolute threat of ultimate extinction'.⁹⁷ (Pertinently, Thompson's predictions about the effects of the Sun's depletion on organic life was published in 1862, as Broughton came to write *Not Wisely*.) Kate's fear at 'what is to come' leads her to pre-empt, as it were, that which she knows to be unavoidable; 'annihilation', in another way, becomes desirable because it annuls the suspenseful wait for an inevitable outcome.

The conflation of phylogeny and ontogeny continues as Kate, with Dare still absent, becomes courted by her cousin George Chester. Repeatedly spurning his overtures, her most decisive rejection is provoked by his admission to playing billiards. This denunciation targets much more than George's perceived personal deficiencies, but instead becomes a critique of men's evolutionary shortcomings; the quotation below appeared earlier to show *Not Wisely*'s immediacy in respect of Huxley and Lyell's contributions to evolutionary debate, but it bears repeating:

Though you call yourselves the superior animals, you men are wretched things, after all [...] I begin to look on you as not much superior to the highest class of apes; minds very often closely approximating to the simian type, as they say in books. (236)

This appraisal echoes fairly precisely the sentiment expressed by a passage in *Man's Place in Nature* (the 'books' referred to being, as noted, most plausibly this and *Geological Evidences*). Having outlined the morphological links between humans and gorillas, Huxley marshals 'Darwin's hypothesis' to his argument (which is that a shared evolutionary path exists between the two species). But he imagines the response that such an argument will elicit:

On all sides I shall hear the cry—'We are men and women, not a mere *better sort of apes* [...]. The power of knowledge—the conscience of good and evil—the pitiful tenderness of human affections raise us out

⁹⁷ Trish Ferguson, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Time: Technologies, Standardizations, Catastrophes*, ed. by Trish Ferguson (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 12.

of all real fellowship with the brutes, however closely they may seem to *approximate us*⁹⁸

Kate's rebuke of George echoes this. To rationalize her statement from this vantage point, it appears as if the absence of a 'pitiful tenderness', prompted by George's admission to playing billiards, is what leads to the gender specificity of the rejection: it causes the removal, as it were, of the 'women' from Huxley's imaginary audience, leaving only the proximity of the 'men' and 'brutes' at stake. On the surface, Kate's denunciation of her cousin in these terms seems hyperbolic. Yet recognition of the evolutionary inflections on her choice of partner is revealing of what is at stake in George's proposal. Cannon Schmitt's argument about sexual selection, a subject brought to the fore by evolutionary discussions, reframes Kate's predicament:

Sexual selection breathed new life into the marriage plot that had long been a staple of the British novel, recasting the protagonist's search for a mate as both shaped by evolutionary imperatives and destined to bolster or impair not only that protagonist's happiness but the vigour of her or his descendants.⁹⁹

In the discussion of *Wylder's Hand* I explored a tangential fear to this: that hereditarily-transmitted insanity might be worsened by a poor choice of marriage partner—a consanguineous union. Here, inflected by Darwinian ideas about sexual selection, that localized concern becomes a generalized anxiety—not only those with hereditary ailments, or those contemplating consanguineous unions (Darwin himself before 1839) needed to be conscious of heredity. In addition, the concern for sexual selection becomes of greater consequence, for at stake is the futurity of not merely the family, but also the species.¹⁰⁰ In nascent form, then, a concern for degeneration, which was to become so fervent by the *fin-de-siècle*, is already perceptible in Broughton's work of 1867.

Kate's statement about simian men also registers how evolutionary debates unsettled the boundaries between the human and animal. George describes her

⁹⁸ Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*, p. 109. Emphases added.

⁹⁹ Schmitt, p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ This context also explains Kate's equally vociferous rebuke at the prospect of marrying James Stanley, when this is broached by her cousins ('Detestable, revolting idea! She almost loathed him as she thought of it' [405]). This passage appears only in the serial.

words as ‘uncomplimentary reflections’ and he does ‘not much relish[] the idea of his similitude to a baboon’ (236). This exchange performs a vital function in terms of Broughton’s ideas about the nature of progress, I assert, impressing upon the fact that humanity cannot be strictly separated from its evolutionary antecedents. (The prospect of a ‘radical rupture’ between past and present, which was argued in Chapter 3 to be the central concern of *Wylder’s Hand*, is therefore reconsidered from an evolutionary rather than a historical perspective). Comparing Broughton’s treatment of this subject with Huxley’s intervention illuminates crucial differences, and it underlines the subversiveness of *Not Wisely*. Although, Huxley stressed a continuum between the *physical* forms of humans and the ‘apes’, he nonetheless reinforced their absolute separation in terms of moral and intellectual capabilities:

No one is more strongly convinced than I am of the vastness of the gulf between civilized man and the brutes; or is more certain that whether *from* them or not, he is assuredly not *of* them. No one is less disposed to think lightly of the present dignity, or despairingly of the future hopes, of the only consciously intelligent denizen of this world.¹⁰¹

Contrarily, Kate’s rebuke of George teases a proximity between humans and animals in exactly these terms, implying that the ‘gulf’ is traversable; the individual is liable to regress to the animalistic, if they are not already semi-bestial, because of social actions and qualities. What Bernstein terms the ‘anxiety of simianation’ is therefore made, by Broughton, resonant with George’s abortive marriage plot, and Kate’s response to his overtures.¹⁰²

Not Wisely’s classification as sensation fiction ensures that the disconcerting mutability raised by this discussion is doubly apparent. Bernstein argues that the genre and evolution were united insofar as both raised an ‘anxiety about ambiguous boundaries’,¹⁰³ and contemporaries were alert to the commensurability of the two discourses. In April of 1863 (the same year that the novel was likely composed), the critic H. L. Mansel characterized sensation fiction’s appearance as a strange, evolutionary transmogrification:

¹⁰¹ Huxley, *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature*, p. 110. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰² Bernstein, p. 265.

¹⁰³ Bernstein, p. 251.

[... Penny publications] are the original germ, the primitive monad, to which all varieties of sensational literature may be referred, as to their source, by a law of generation at least as worthy of the attention of the scientific student as that by which Mr. Darwin's bear may be supposed to have developed into a whale. Fortunately in this case the rudimental forms have been continued down to the epoch of the mature development. In them we have sensationism [*sic*] pure and undisguised, exhibited in its naked simplicity, stripped of the rich dross which conceals while it adorns the figure of the more ambitious varieties of the species.¹⁰⁴

Mansel refers to the most controversial of the 'Imaginative Illustrations' given in *Origin*—the bear and the whale—to convey his sense of the sensation novel's inexplicable development from prior fictional 'species'. Continuing in this register, he hopes that a form of natural selection working within the publishing market (a 'struggle for existence') might lead to the extinction of the 'weaker writers'.¹⁰⁵ As Bernstein notes, the bear/whale illustration 'covers for the more troubling bond of ape and human',¹⁰⁶ thus raising an apparent anxiety of retrogression that Mansel seeks to delimit by insisting on the evolutionary unfitness of the genre—it cannot compete with the more *developed* forms. (He omits to recognize that, by the truest interpretation of Darwin's theory, sensation fiction's popularity would attest to its successful adaptation.) Meanwhile, though Broughton could not have known it at the time of writing, the 'baboon' itself (which George is so displeased to be associated with) was to become specifically equated with sensation fiction's lurid content via the story of 'Richardson, the showman'; an 1866 *Westminster Review* article recounted how among this man's 'menagerie' was

a big black baboon, whose habits were so filthy, and whose behaviour was so disgusting, that respectable people constantly remonstrated with him for exhibiting such an animal. Richardson's answer invariably was, '[...] if it wasn't for that big black baboon I should be ruined; it attracts all the young girls in the country.' Now bigamy has been Miss Braddon's big black baboon [...] And now Mr. Wilkie Collins has set up

¹⁰⁴ H. L. Mansel quoted in Maunder, I, pp. 51–52.

¹⁰⁵ H. L. Mansel quoted in Maunder, I, p. 52.

¹⁰⁶ Bernstein, p. 265.

a big black baboon on his own account [Lydia Gwilt ...]. But besides [this] there are a number of small baboons and monkeys, for by no stretch of language can they be called human creatures.¹⁰⁷

Not Wisely portrays its own 'baboon' (the Braddon variety) through Dare's attempt to commit bigamy with Kate. Moreover, the language used to describe their interactions reinforces the 'ape-like' connotations; the critic Geraldine Jewsbury complained of its 'hot blooded passion' and that it was 'ill calculated for the reading of decent people'.¹⁰⁸

But, of course, Broughton is distinct from Collins and Braddon (the authors cited by the *Westminster Review*) in her inclusion of a direct allusion to apes; *Not Wisely* thus moves the brutish associations of this species into a more literal, and more disquieting, alignment with her human characters. Kate's aspersion against George is not the only instance of this, however, but it is reinforced by an earlier notice from Broughton's narrator that 'women have decidedly less of the brute, less of the "ape and tiger" [...] than men' (84). Tennyson's epithet for humanity's bestial nature (the 'ape and tiger'¹⁰⁹) is developed by Broughton into a gendered statement, and later (in application to George) wreathed in the Darwinian associations that Tennyson could not have drawn on. Not only George is implicated by this evolutionary allusion, however, but Kate's other suitor Dare is readable as a hybrid embodiment of both the ape and tiger; his prodigious strength, explosive temper, and physical features (notably his 'dark hairy face' [147]) contribute to this sense. Humanity's evolutionary proximity to the apes—a haunting absence in *Origin*, but developed openly in *Man's Place in Nature*—is brought, in Broughton's novel, to inflect on the social aspects of mid-Victorian Britain and to question the inevitability of progress.

Positing males and females as distinct evolutionary types in this manner, and seeming to privilege women within this dichotomy, *Not Wisely* anticipates a vein of feminist responses that was increasingly vocal as the century progressed. The

¹⁰⁷ 'Belles Lettres', *Westminster Review*, 30.1 (1866), 268–80 (p. 270).

¹⁰⁸ Lewis C. Roberts, "'The Production of a Female Hand': Professional Writing and the Career of Geraldine Jewsbury", *Women's Writing*, 12.3 (2005), 399–418 (p. 411); Elisabetta Marino, 'Subverting Traditional Models, While Exploring Women's Sexuality, in *Not Wisely But Too Well* (1867) by Rhoda Broughton', *De Gruyter*, 2017, 1–12 (p. 4).

¹⁰⁹ Lord Tennyson, l. 118.28.

novel can, I contend, be figured as a forerunner to such works as Eliza Burt Gamble's *The Evolution of Woman* (1894), in which gender hierarchies become similarly inverted along evolutionary lines. 'The female', Burt Gamble writes, 'among all the orders of life, man included, represents a higher stage of development than the male'.¹¹⁰ This rejoinder, making explicit what Broughton leaves implicit, followed two decades in which the 'woman question' (women's social and intellectual status in society) was inflected by evolution.¹¹¹ Counterintuitively, given its emphasis on change and mutability, evolution was utilized in arguments against a modification of women's marginalized position and for a preservation of their inferior standing. Their reasoning was that if British society represented the apogee of human development, change was not merely unnecessary but could only be in one direction.¹¹² At least as early as 1871, social evolutionary theorists were cautioning that any alteration of the existing gender relations would lead to retrogression of the species as a whole. That this concern was voiced in the popular press reveals the extent of evolution's assimilation within the popular consciousness of mid-Victorian Britain. A *Saturday Review* article issued the following caution:

Slight checks may seriously affect the prospects of a race in the severe struggle of humanity, and if our better halves alter the conditions which have raised us from the condition of orang-outangs [*sic*], a relapse into savagery is quite possible. [...] To discourage subordination in women, to countenance their competition in masculine careers by way of their enfranchisement, is probably among the shortest methods of barbarizing our race.¹¹³

The deployment here of the ape as a symbol for evolutionary retrogression echoes the fearful connotations raised in Kate's remark. But her implicit assumption of women's higher standing in evolutionary terms reverse these social Darwinists'

¹¹⁰ Eliza Burt Gamble, *The Evolution of Woman: An Inquiry into the Dogma of Her Inferiority to Man* (New York and London: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1894).

¹¹¹ Lorna Duffin, 'Prisoners of Progress: Women and Evolution', in *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, ed. by Lorna Duffin and Sarah Delamont (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 57.

¹¹² Duffin, p. 57.

¹¹³ 'From "The Probable Retrogression of Women," *Saturday Review* 32 (July 1871): 10-11', in *The Sorceress of the Strand*, ed. by Janis Dawson (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2016), pp. 279-82.

tendency to posit women as exterior to biological development (cranial sizes were marshalled by them to support the view that ‘man has advanced somewhat alone in the intellectual evolution of the race’¹¹⁴). Given that the past was looked upon to provide indications of the future (as displayed by both Huxley and Darwin¹¹⁵), this implied that a gendered divergence of the species had every likelihood of continuing in the future—intensifying divergence. Of course, theorizations about woman’s evolutionary imprisonment (‘prisoners of progress’, to use Lorna Duffin’s evocative wording) remained nascent when Broughton wrote *Not Wisely*—the formative influence on pro- and anti-feminist perspectives, Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*, was not yet published. Nonetheless, the novel anticipates the direction of such debates and is already aware of how evolutionary perspectives could apply to the gender inequalities of mid-Victorian Britain (and would apply to those of the later period and *fin-de-siècle*), both as a means of reinforcement and resistance.

Broughton’s use of evolutionary discourse for social purposes—to spotlight the precarity of progress—also applies to class issues. The crucial scene for this occurs during one of Kate’s charitable visits to help the poor of Queenstown. Travelling into a reclusive and impoverished district, she enters the home of one of its residents; the woman she meets there seems barely human, a ‘forlorn, draggled creature’:

one felt disposed to suspect her of being a walking hoax, a bundle of rags made up into a faint resemblance of the female shape [...] How impossible it seemed to believe that she was of the very same genus and species as the gracious being with the melting eyes and the coiled chestnut hair that confronted her now so unexpectedly, (200)

The use of ‘creature’ raises obvious animalistic associations, establishing a link with the apparently bestial natures of George and Dare. There are further evolutionary significations, however. ‘Resemblance’ is a recurring term in Huxley and

¹¹⁴ W. L. Distant, ‘On the Mental Differences Between the Sexes’, *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 4 (1875), 78–87 (p. 80).

¹¹⁵ Huxley, *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature*, p. 111; Darwin, *Origin*, p. 360.

Darwin, used to communicate changes in morphology occurring between generations;¹¹⁶ for its ‘faint[ness]’ to be highlighted here is to thereby raise, I propose, the spectre of retrogression—there seems to have been a failure to imprint the expected female type. This sense is consecrated by the inclusion of Kate’s body as a comparison; the stark difference in their class status (creating differences in morphology) is conveyed as biological incommensurability: Kate and the woman seem to belong not only to distinct ‘species’ but even ‘gen[era]’ (a higher order of taxonomic classification). Pamela Gilbert’s argument that Kate represents a ‘link between the middle classes and the lower class’ through her charitable errands finds additional relevance in light of this context. Initially depicted as an absolute evolutionary opposite, the latent fear must surely be that Kate (‘permeable to external conditions’) might adapt to this injurious environment by prolonged contact with it.¹¹⁷

Not Wisely’s depiction of class difference in evolutionary terms extends the debate in mid-Victorian Britain about social stratification. (This atomization of society as a consequence of modernity was considered in Chapter 1 in the context of the metropolis.) Specifically, the disbelief at any sense of unity between Kate and the poor woman seems to modify Benjamin Disraeli’s metaphor of the ‘two nations’, as explored in his 1845 novel *Sybil*. The protagonist, Charles Egremont, ventures into the lower-class neighbourhoods from a position of social privilege, just as Kate does. A person he encounters there, Walter Gerard, explains to him the enormity of the differences between the classes:

‘Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.’ ‘You speak of —’ said Egremont, hesitantly. ‘The Rich and the Poor.’¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ For instance, Darwin, *Origin*, pp. 190-2, 323; Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*, pp. 64-8, 86.

¹¹⁷ Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*, p. 118.

¹¹⁸ Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil; or, the Two Nations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 96.

Broughton uses evolutionary perspectives to recast, and make starker, Disraeli's analogized 'differen[ces]' between the social classes in Britain. Rather than 'Two Nations', she discerns two *species*. The 'different zones [...] breeding [...] food', and so forth, are literalized in this new evolutionary context; Disraeli's assertion of a 'struggle for existence' is reframed in Darwinian, as opposed to Malthusian, terms;¹¹⁹ and dismal social straits are figured as liable to engender retrogression.

Disraeli's warning that 'great bodies of the working class of this country [are] nearer the condition of brutes' than they have been for some time, ever-closer approximating the 'lower animals' therefore finds new relevance through Broughton's deployment of species (specifically ape) imagery.¹²⁰ In *Not Wisely*, Kate's empathetic visit to the poor forges an implicit dialogue with Huxley's effort to affix the differences between 'us' and the 'brutes', which depended less on physical differences than on 'the pitiful tenderness of human affections'.¹²¹ The brutalized status of the lower-class that Kate visits becomes, therefore, not a critique of that denigrated group, but an indictment of the upper echelons—they have permitted their fellow humans to appear as if they belong to a different species. Moreover, of course, the visit spotlights the unevenness of progress and modernity's ambition to produce order in society's arrangements. The quest to improve the social body is articulated through the challenge of affirming species boundaries.

As discussed during this section, *Not Wisely* hints if not at how retrogression to the animal has already happened, then at how permeable and liable to transgression are the boundaries and identities in a Darwinian world. The 'vision' found in *Origin*, as James Krasner elaborates, is that 'things are unfocused, fluid, without specific design or fixity [...] they continually slip away from an ever-changing norm'.¹²² Broughton's novel identifies how this essential chaos poses a challenge to the idea of progress, and that it resonates with the status of modern individuals as they navigate society and establish relations with one another.

¹¹⁹ Disraeli, p. 95.

¹²⁰ Disraeli, p. 213.

¹²¹ Huxley, *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature*, p. 109. Emphases added.

¹²² James Krasner, 'A Chaos of Delight: Perception and Illusion in Darwin's Scientific Writing', *Representations*, 1990, 118–41 (p. 118).

'MERE FLESH-AND-BLOOD CREATURES': EVOLUTIONARY SPECULATIONS IN THE CRYSTAL PALACE

Not Wisely's direct allusions to evolution and its perspectives form recur throughout, as this last section has shown. But arguably their densest exploration occurs in a long section devoted to Kate's sojourn to the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. Before attending to the novel's exploration of this site, I will elaborate the manifold evolutionary significations of the Palace itself, and how these allowed it to express and promote the imperatives of modernity. Although the intention was for the site to instruct on the inevitability of progress and order, nevertheless ambiguity and alternative messages were latent from the outset, and became more apparent by the turn of the 1860s. My argument is that *Not Wisely* foregrounds these subversive possibilities, with Kate's transgressive experiences and reflections within the Palace acting to challenge the sureties of modernity.

The Palace began life as the host to the Great Exhibition of 1851, a 'world's fair' of international culture and industry. The vast iron and glass structure was enlarged and relocated in the following year to a site near Sydenham Hill; in 1854 it opened again to visitors. The new Palace bore an equally teleological purpose to its previous incarnation: its 'chief object', in the words of the accompanying *Guide*,¹²³ was the 'advancement of civilization'.¹²⁴ Differently, though, this didactic function was instantiated through the display of art and architecture from around the world (global industry and technology had been the focus of the Great Exhibition). These exhibits were arranged so that visitors could discern a diachronic development of form—culminating, naturally, with Britain and her Empire.¹²⁵ This was a type of visual learning whose lesson was unambiguous: it instructed on the inevitability of progress and the triumph of modernity.¹²⁶

Owen Jones, the exhibitor of many of the Palace's fine art courts, articulates such a sense in his introduction to the Alhambra Court. But he also captures the

¹²³ Cf. in Chapter 1 the echoes of travel guides in Peters and Slosky's experiences of London. Whether they described the museum space or that of the urban metropolis, these guides manifested the taxonomic agenda of modernity, attempting to order the spaces they depicted.

¹²⁴ Samuel Phillips, *Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park* (London: Crystal Palace Library and Bradbury & Evans, 1854), p. 21.

¹²⁵ For more on the polemic functions of visibility, particularly in the Palace's fine art Courts, see Grazia Zaffuto, "'Visual Education" as the Alternative Mode of Learning at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham', *Victorian Network*, 5.1 (2013), 9–27.

¹²⁶ For more on the polemic aspect of visibility, particularly in the fine art courts, see Zaffuto.

way in which a generalist evolutionary perspective was used to impress the site's message:

When the British public shall have had time to study and profit by the marvellous art-collections here gathered under one roof, with the history of the civilisation of the world before them [...] they will more readily be convinced of the folly of attempting to adapt to *new* wants styles of architecture which have *ever been* the expression of the wants, faculties, and sentiments of the age in which they were produced, instead of seeking in every style for those general principles which *survive* from *generation to generation* to become stepping-stones for *future progress*. They will more clearly discern the absolute necessity of rejecting that which is *local* or *temporary*, holding fast only to that which is *eternal*.¹²⁷

Jones's rejection of *the transient* is important, for reasons that are appraised later, but his statement foremost evidences the extent to which the theory and practice of architecture had become permeated by evolutionary perspectives. In particular Robert Chambers's *Vestiges* was the most authoritative scientific account for this discourse; corresponding to its first eleven editions (1844 to c. 1859), there grew a vogue for the idea of 'development' and the notion of 'gradual progression over time, grounded in material causes, but set within a Providential schema'.¹²⁸ The fullest and most famed embodiment of this is John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53), which traces a parallel narrative to Jones's in its insistence upon development; its third volume, on the gothic (by far the most widely read), opens by bringing Britain into direct comparison with civilizations of the past.¹²⁹ The Palace embodied this two-fold inflection of evolutionary perspectives on architectural theory and practice: it was intended not merely to serve as a testament to the pro-

¹²⁷ Owen Jones, *The Alhambra Court in the Crystal Palace* (London: Crystal Palace Library and Bradbury & Evans, 1854), p. 7. Emphases added.

¹²⁸ Carla Yanni, 'Development and Display: Progressive Evolution in British Victorian Architecture and Architectural Theory', in *Evolution and Victorian Culture*, ed. by Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹²⁹ John Ruskin, 'The Quarry', in *The Stones of Venice*, ed. by Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17–59 (pp. 35-9; 17).

gressive evolution of architectural form (a stand-in for civilization), but also to assist in that process by means of the visual learning that was to take place within it.

Since it articulated the same essential message as its forebear, and by similar means (the aggregation of metonymic, globally-sourced exhibits), I contend that the Palace ought to be seen as a successor to the Great Exhibition in terms of its embodiment of modernity. There are clear parallels between Jones' sense of the Alhambra Court's purpose and a description from the *Times* (1851) of the Exhibition's value:

The orderly arrangement of every contribution and the subordination of each part and object to the idea of one great and systematic display forces upon the mind a deep interest in that combined operation by which, when each exhibitor has his allotment completely furnished, the Crystal Palace will at once become a perfect epitome of the world's industry – a Daguerrotype likeness, struck off in one moment, with mathematical precision, of the true '*organization de travail*'¹³⁰

Drawing from this account, Paul Young identifies how the Exhibition provided an emotional salve for the 'confusion and anxiety' of modernity as it was expressed in the frantic and fragmentary experience of metropolitan life: 'at the Palace it [a fragmentary aesthetic] would be pinned down, systematized and rendered whole again. The display was therefore a comforting rationalization of the complex processes and interactions that made life in the Victorian metropolis what it was'.¹³¹ In another way (and drawing on Bauman), the Exhibition manifested modernity's effort to expel ambivalence and to order the world (and since, as per the project's longer title, it claimed to exhibit the works of 'All Nations', this truly seemed to be *the world*¹³²). The Palace re-enacted this imperative, but it aligned it with an evolutionary perspective. Accordingly, its attempt to appease the anxieties that surrounded modernity was centred upon temporal lines; it gave the same reassuring message that would appear in evolutionary texts like *Origin*, *Antiquity*, and *Man's*

¹³⁰ Quoted in Young, p. 3. Translation mine.

¹³¹ Young, p. 3.

¹³² Cf. Tony Bennett's claim that the 'exhibitionary complex was [...] a response to the problem of order'; p. 126.

Place in Nature: humanity was tending toward a ‘secure’ or ‘nobler’ future,¹³³ and the past functioned as evidence for this. The often chaotic and apparently senseless events so often evident in human history were reframed as ‘stepping-stones’ (in Jones’s phrasing) that led inexorably toward the modernity of the present.

The documentation of the Palace was a polyvocal enterprise, however, and Jones’s eminently progressive teleology functions curiously when juxtaposed to other contributions—notably, the official *Guide*, authored by the journalist Samuel Phillips. It was generally recognized that progress might proceed fitfully (witness Huxley’s apprehensions), but Phillips’s account promotes, at some length, notions that threaten to exceed this—to disrupt the narrative, proffered by Jones and others, about the inevitability of progress. The transition from Greek to Roman architecture, for instance, is described by Phillips as having been attended by ‘degenerat[ion]’; the superlative quality of Greek architecture ‘already on the decline’, subjection under Rome ‘hastened the descent’ with the result that their works ‘fell further and further from their glorious models’.¹³⁴ The tone is starkly bleak, yet it concludes on an even more profoundly nihilistic tenor: ‘all feeling for the ancient Greek excellence was for ever lost’,¹³⁵ announces Phillips. Greek art does not simply suffer a recoverable loss, then, but is *irredeemably* ruined; if interpreted through the lens of Darwinism, it becomes ‘utterly extinct’, and as a result of altered conditions no less (Greek artists transplanted to Rome are said to have failed to thrive in this new environment).

Yet Phillips’s account of Greek decline exemplifies what S. J. Hales finds to be a persistent theme across the Palace guidebooks, which ‘constantly returned to the theme of the fall of empires. Almost every civilization represented in the courts, but particularly Rome and Nineveh, could be demonstrated to have collapsed from decay within’.¹³⁶ Given that comparisons of these ancient empires to the British case were essential to the Palace’s function (and given that such comparisons were made elsewhere, as in Ruskin’s *Stones*¹³⁷), these exhibits afforded

¹³³ Huxley, *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature*, p. 111; Darwin, *Origin*, p. 360.

¹³⁴ Phillips, p. 51. Emphases added.

¹³⁵ Phillips, p. 51.

¹³⁶ S. J. Hales, ‘Re-Casting Antiquity: Pompeii and the Crystal Palace’, *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 14.1 (2006), 99–134 (p. 102).

¹³⁷ The decline of Venice was a recurrent theme, but it becomes related explicitly to the British case at the opening of volume III; Ruskin, p. 17.

considerable potential for disquieting introspection about the fate of Britain's modernizing project; they can be seen to permanently manifest the question asked in 1851 about the Exhibition:

Whether the [British] nation still retains those energies and talents which have raised it to such an unexampled pitch of greatness, or whether it exhibits any marks of that degeneracy which history records as having been, sooner or later, the fate of all great and powerful empires?¹³⁸

The Pompeii Court, meanwhile, denoted a similar, morally-inflected fate, albeit of a sudden catastrophic character rather than slow collapse.¹³⁹ It was not only possible to read an anti-teleological narrative within the individual exhibits, however, but also from their experience as a collective. That is, while the intended direction of visitor travel within the Palace was to begin with the earliest civilizations and to proceed to the more recent, this was not enforced; visitors were free to traverse the site contrarily (going from the modern to the ancient), and in doing so to trace an anti-developmental (retrogressive) narrative. From its outset, then, there were multiple ways that the Palace could be 'read', allowing for divergent and subversive takes upon the modernity it embodied.

If Jeffrey A. Auerbach has claimed that 'as early as the 1860s [...] the Crystal Palace had, for many writers, come to symbolise not the triumph of progress but its failures',¹⁴⁰ then I suggest that, at least for Broughton, this is because the evolutionary significations that it both expressed and catalyzed had become problematized by *Origin's* publication in 1859. The first impression of the Palace given in *Not Wisely* follows Jones, Ruskin, Philips, and others in seeing its architecture as symbolic of civilizational development; as in their accounts, it too is dense with evolutionary significations. Yet, distinctly, its rendering is determinedly Darwinian:

Marvellous pitch of civilization for us to have attained to, to be able to do such a thing! we must come soon to the highest pinnacle we are to reach, one thinks sometimes, and then begin to retrograde. Well, it is

¹³⁸ Quoted in Young, p. 145.

¹³⁹ The Pompeii Court was almost invariably interpreted through the lens of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1834 novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, the action of which occurs against the backdrop of Rome's decadence.

¹⁴⁰ Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 206.

not much consequence to us personally which we do, advance or retreat; it will not be in our days. (259-60)

The term ‘retrograde’ is replete with evolutionary, and especially Darwinian, significances.¹⁴¹ In his *Geological Evidences*, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, Lyell claimed that it was the equal probability for ‘advance or retreat’ (to use Broughton’s phrasing) that distinguished ‘Darwin’s theory’ from those preceding it: ‘degradation, or a *retrograde* movement towards a simple structure’ was just as probable as ‘progression’.¹⁴²

Moreover, just as in the previous formulations of evolutionary perspectives in *Not Wisely*, there is a juxtaposition in this passage of phylogeny and ontogeny, attendant on a diminution of the latter; within the geological timescales over which retrogression occurs, the individual is inconsequential. There is also, as before, an implication of readers: personal pronouns—*us*, *we*, *our*—vividly reinforce the sense of readerly involvement in these processes. Most notable, however, is this description’s subversion of the logic of mid-century social evolution, and its implications for modernity’s aims; namely, if Britain is the apex of purposive progression, what is left but retrogressive movement? It recalls Culler’s observation of the logical end-point to the Darwinian vision: ‘when all is flux, the reversal cannot be distinguished from any other position, and one thing is quite as meaningless as another’.¹⁴³ Broughton discerns society’s trajectory as *doubly* meaningless, however, through her integration of the individual perspective— notions of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ are imperceptible within the single lifespan, and thus of little consequence.

These Darwinian allusions multiply as Kate enters the Palace and diverges from her accompanying group. The decision to traverse this public space alone, denying the invitation of company from her cousin George, reinforces the modern status of Broughton’s protagonist. As Tamar Heller notes, it represents a ‘growing tendency of late-Victorian young women to explore public space unchaperoned’, which ‘sparked considerable social anxiety’.¹⁴⁴ Her motivations for this subversive

¹⁴¹ It is put to similar use by Henry Maudsley, himself heavily influenced by Darwin, in *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind*: ‘the nature of man [...] by a retrograde descent may [...] pass backwards to a lower stage’; *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1867), p. 288.

¹⁴² Lyell, p. 412.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Krasner, p. 118.

¹⁴⁴ Broughton, p. 263n167.

act, moreover, indicate a historicist consciousness that was reinforced by evolutionary perspectives:

She had sought this state of loneliness in order to have leisure to think her fill of things *past, present, and to come*; and now all these swaying, shifting crowds disturbed her.

She would go to the Exotic Court, she resolved; there at least, among the flora of Africa and South America, she could not well be perished with cold nor rendered blue-fingered and red-nosed. One grievance at least would be done away with. (265; emphasis added).

There are palpable echoes of Saul Dixon's 1862 article 'A Vision of Animal Existences', which declares *Origin* to have sparked exactly the sort of considerations Kate makes—to have 'set us straining our eyes into the future. Not content with examining what we have been and what we are, we are endeavouring to make out what we shall be'. Just as the 'incessant change' found in the Darwinian vision causes great anxiety for Dixon's protagonist,¹⁴⁵ so Kate is similarly 'disturbed' at this same imagery being represented in the 'swaying, shifting crowds'. Her decision to avoid contemplation of 'things past, present, and to come' is, in another way, a rejection of the Palace's didactic intent in favour of indulging physiological wants—an instructive case of how visitors' freedom of movement enabled them to subvert the site's intended message about progress (inscribed in the arrangements of the exhibits) and to produce individualized responses.¹⁴⁶

Kate's privileging of physiological satisfaction above temporal reflection preempts her retrogressive interpretation of the Greek Court, the exhibition she visits after the Exotic Court. Inside, a reproduction of the famous Laocoön prompts an extended reflection on the discrepancies between sculptural and biological forms:

Generation after generation of short-spanned living creatures has ripened and rotted, they [the statues] looking calmly on, superior in their unwithering amaranthine bloom—generation after generation has

¹⁴⁵ Dixon, p. 312.

¹⁴⁶ Comparison can be made with the subversive uses of vision and visual technologies in the opera scenes of Braddon's *Trail*, as accounted in Chapter 1; sensation fiction foregrounds the ambivalences that inhere to these determinedly modern spaces.

gaped open-mouthed, awed by their solemn presence—generation after generation will so gaze until the world is overrun with a new deluge of barbarians from the far West, or till it comes to its final ending. (267)

The refrain of ‘generation after generation’ (itself repetitive) reproduces the dense appearance of this term in discussions of evolutionary change, as in Chapter IV of *Origin* (‘Natural Selection’). There, the quantities given by Darwin escalate until they reach incomprehensible levels: from a ‘thousand’ to a ‘hundred million generations’.¹⁴⁷ Broughton’s description is distinguished by its concern for that implicit corollary to such changes occurring over these timescales: its individual participants must be ‘short-spanned’ by comparison; this perspective—overlooked in evolutionary accounts—is reclaimed in *Not Wisely*.

In categorizing humans as ‘creatures’, moreover, individuals whose lives can be articulated by the basest processes of growth and decomposition, Broughton spotlights the scientific naturalist perspective of which natural selection was seen as the most potent and provocative manifestation.¹⁴⁸ As in the popular perception of scientific naturalism, the description here dispossesses humans of any exceptional status, positing them as disquietingly close to the ‘Lower Animals’ that are discussed in Huxley’s *Man’s Place in Nature*. (Kate’s earlier, gendered claim for *men’s* proximity to apes is therefore escalated with this description, the retrogressive connotations applying now to the species.) Broughton’s narrator continues to emphasize this disconcertingly materialist and evolutionary reading of the human:

One feels inclined—perhaps from aversion to acknowledge that we have degenerated—to doubt whether those god-faces and Titan-frames could have been copied from any mere flesh-and-blood creature that, while in life, drudged away on the earth and had material blood flowing in his veins. [Could such have existed] in our world, where perfection in anything is proverbially unattainable? (267-8)

This notice of ‘degeneration’ asks to be read alongside its cognate ‘retrograde’, considered earlier, for it possesses synonymous evolutionary significations. But, while this passage continues and extends the themes given in the description

¹⁴⁷ Darwin, *Origin*, pp. 91, 96.

¹⁴⁸ Bowler, p. 10.

above—materiality, fixity, ephemerality—there is a marked shift in tone: from a single declarative sentence in the previous to a statement replete with ambivalence, and which culminates in an interrogative question. Uncertainty is increased by the words ‘perhaps’ and ‘doubt’, and intensified by the fact that the description relates an ‘inclinat[ion]’ (the more dubious for being ‘felt’). These details qualify the incendiary claim being made in this passage for the retrogression (or ‘degeneration’) of the human species. They also, I suggest, allude to the status of natural selection as a theory; that is, not an established, or even empirical, fact. Darwin’s proposition demanded imagination (hence his extensive use of analogy throughout *Origin*¹⁴⁹), and much was recognized to remain ambiguous in respect of the processes he was delineating.¹⁵⁰ Through her final question, Broughton deliberately argues herself into an intellectual stalemate, and raises an ambiguity latent in any rendering of evolution as purposeful and progressive (‘the arrangement for the species [being made] perfect’ or the ‘ever-increasing dominion of mind over matter’¹⁵¹): can material forms or social arrangements ever be perfected if this is a condition that, according to Christian ontology, is denied in the physical world, and only obtainable in the spiritual?

Even though Kate had earlier rejected the contemplation of ‘things past, present, and to come’, in favour of gratifying physiological wants, these speculations indicate that such is unavoidable within the historicist consciousness of mid-Victorian Britain. Equally, however, her subversive reading of the evolutionary significations in the Crystal Palace accords with Devin Griffiths’s sense of interpretative freedom in this area, as ‘naturalists and literary authors turned toward each other in their efforts to shape a historical understanding suited to their different ends’.¹⁵² This section has posited Broughton’s novel within such interactions, and argued that it uses evolutionary, but especially Darwinian, perspectives to destabilize and particularize modernity’s imperatives. Specifically, the evolutionary register offers an evocative means through which Broughton is able to articulate the

¹⁴⁹ Griffiths, p. 11.

¹⁵⁰ G. H. Lewes draws attention to the ‘points which it [*Origin*] leaves obscure’; ‘Mr. Darwin’s Hypothesis’, *Fortnightly Review*, 3.16 (1868), 353–73 (p. 372). See the similar notice in Henry Fawcett, ‘A Popular Exposition of Mr. Darwin On the Origin of Species’, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, 3.14 (1860), 81–92 (p. 83).

¹⁵¹ [Robert Chambers], *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London: John Churchill, 1844), p. 377; Lyell, p. 506.

¹⁵² Griffiths, p. 9.

alienating effects of modernity upon both the individual, and on groups left behind or made 'prisoners' of progress.

'THIS HAPPY TRANCE': EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES AND THE SENSATIONAL PRESENT

After the reflections on which the previous section concluded, Kate compares her fellow visitors to the Palace with the 'Venuses and wrestlers and Diskoboloi' (268) depicted in sculpture. Immediately after, she is interrupted by hearing the voice of Dare: the 'one man who she had ever known who could stand a comparison with that deathless athlete [the gladiator]' (268). Recognizing him jolts her into the present and she experiences a powerful physiological reaction. This scene is one of many in which evolutionary allusions, or the appearance of evolutionary perspectives, are preceded by temporal or sensational (physiological) details. Taking such moments as cues, this section delves into the prominence of what I term here the 'sensational present', and which scholarship has only partially accounted for by discussing *Not Wisely's* 'erotic sensationalism'.¹⁵³ This embodied attachment to the present moment exists, I argue, as an alternative to the perspective implicated by evolutionary science, which, as hinted throughout this chapter, was avowedly historical.¹⁵⁴

The 'problem' that I see Broughton addressing by her juxtaposition of these two disparate temporalities is as follows: Darwinism was a challenge to modernity insofar as it suggested that change is non-purposive and does not tend toward a fixed goal, yet it offered no substitute or remedy that might placate the anxious, unstable position of the modern individual—indeed, it only heightened that status in its emphasis of contingency, randomness, and loss, as remarked before. (Anthony Giddens notices, pertinently, that the 'the integral relation between moder-

¹⁵³ Tamar Heller, "'That Muddy, Polluted Flood of Earthly Love": Ambivalence about the Body in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely but Too Well*", in *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 87–101 (pp. 87-8).

¹⁵⁴ See especially Chapter 1 of Griffiths, *The Age of Analogy*. The plainest evidence for this is in Chambers's and Darwin's use of 'natural history' and 'origin' in the titles of their works, respectively.

nity and radical doubt is an issue which [...] is [...] *existentially troubling* for ordinary individuals'.¹⁵⁵) The 'sensational present' is figured in *Not Wisely* as an escape from the relentlessly historicizing tendencies of modernity (which evolutionary perspectives heightened), but it proves untenable—the temporal character of modernity means that the enjoyment of the present cannot be suspended indefinitely and is under constant jeopardy.

'Sensation' was understood, by definition, in temporal terms—as ephemeral, and in opposition to the permanence of 'ideation'. First made in physio-philosophical contexts, this connection had become, by the 1860s, a barometer of literary quality.¹⁵⁶ Upon its formalization around this time, sensation fiction became deprecated through these associations; criticism censured its alleged transience, and pathologized the genre's capacity to sustain itself only by being a constant stimulus ('perpetual cravings' in Mansel's phrasing¹⁵⁷). Sensation fiction, with its physiological impact, could be contrasted against works thought to have an ennobling and enduring effect on readers' intellect and conscience. 'The sensational' was characterized as inexorable from the present, and opposed to (neglecting of) both past and future. (This thesis has, of course, sought to demonstrate that the reality is quite different.) Matthew Arnold's essay series *Culture and Anarchy*, serialized concurrently with *Not Wisely* (during 1867-68), captures this deprecatory attitude toward sensation's temporal character; he writes that '[by discipline] alone is man enabled to rescue his life from thralldom to the *passing moment* and to his *bodily senses*, and to make it eternal'.¹⁵⁸ Such attitudes, circulating contemporaneously with *Not Wisely*'s publication, inform various moments of the novel in which physiological details are given alongside temporal reflections.

The so-called 'sensational present' appears from the outset of *Not Wisely*. In one of the initial erotically-charged encounters between Dare and Kate, the pair embark on a drive together in a carriage. The narrator gives Kate's experience of the journey in terms that simultaneously emphasize physiological and temporal detail:

¹⁵⁵ Giddens, p. 21

¹⁵⁶ See Dames; Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁵⁷ H. L. Mansel, 'Sensation Novels', *Quarterly Review*, 112 (1863), 482–514 (p. 485).

¹⁵⁸ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. by Jane Garnett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 29. Emphasis added.

How supremely pleasant it was being borne swiftly along through the balmy summer evening; the breeze they met, gentle kissing away the distressful redness out of cheeks that much crying has made burning hot! [...] She did not want him to speak, or anything to happen, only that there should be a continuance of this happy trance. She lived entirely in the present (96)

The *entirely* of this last sentence is operative in terms of the insistence, made in mid-century criticism, that the 'sensational present' is incompatible with the past and future. Such a context helps to explain the resistance voiced by those around Kate—her sister, Margaret, brother Bront, and James Stanley—to her continuing relations with Dare. For his part, Dare makes his opposition to the past, and its symbolisms, unambiguous: he damns it as a 'prudish, antiquated code of propriety' (116). Going further, however, I argue that Kate's relentless suitor is readable as an embodiment of the 'stimulant' warned of in discussions of sensation fiction: Broughton's protagonist struggles to escape from his inebriating influence, and his presence seems almost addictive to her. In *Not Wisely's* serial version, in fact, Dare's destructive relation to futurity is put more emphatically: 'the future be hanged' (395), he declares.

The sensational present also appears outside the immediate context of the love plot in *Not Wisely*. I earlier recounted how Kate's encounter with the 'forlorn, draggled creature' (200) during her charitable errands in Queenstown's slums is proliferated with evolutionary allusions. The later part of this encounter finds Kate staying beside the (unconscious) woman, and it leads her seamlessly into a 'long pondering' (207) of her own situation. This reverie anticipates her musings in the Crystal Palace on 'things past, present, and to come', as she analyzes her situation (having just rejected Dare) from the perspective of the future and past; these musings display an especially Darwinian flavour: in light of the inevitability of her own death and decline (becoming, eventually, like the woman lying beside her), she conceives of her past life as meaningless. Her position is inflected, in another way, by the direst associations of the Darwinian perspective, especially its suggestion, as Beer notes, that 'the individual life span is never a sufficient register for change or for the accomplishment of desire'.¹⁵⁹ This suggestion is intensified

¹⁵⁹ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 6.

by the notice given shortly after; Kate concludes a series of philosophical reflections by noting that ‘looked back on from the high mountain-tops of eternity, all life in its length and breadth would seem but a speck, a pin’s point’ (208). So far understood in the sense of Kate’s individual life(span), this notice of ‘*all life*’ signals an enlargement of the frame of reference to include organic, sensate matter quite generally. Such oscillation evokes the situation in *Origin*, which repeatedly contrasts the small periods of time over which species development has occurred with the ‘deep time’ of geology (so vast that Darwin suggests its contemplation is equivalent to the ‘the vain endeavour to grapple with the idea of eternity’¹⁶⁰).

Significantly, given the denigration of the ‘sensational present’ and the valorization of the reverse (the contemplation of past and future), Kate’s ‘long pondering’ continues by raising an alternative: ‘How was it that the tiny bagatelles of time present, from being held so close to the eye, obscured and shut out the huge bulk of things future?’ (208). ‘Bagatelles’, denoting something worthless or throwaway (and hyperbolized, then, by being ‘tiny’), is a telling phrase for Broughton to use here, I argue. Given its association with ‘time present’, it would seem to raise the expectation that Kate will deliver the expected critique of this temporal attitude—reaffirming the harmfulness of the ‘sensational present’ and arguing for the merit of looking to ‘things future’ (as did Matthew Arnold, for instance).¹⁶¹ Yet the exact reverse occurs; Kate asks the following:

Why could not one always feel like this? Why could not one always stay in this state of mind? It was the only right state, the only wholesome state, the only sane state. All other states of mind were nothing but disease and madness. (208)

This is a striking rejoinder to the critical consensus of the period, which so frequently deprecated the sensational present being described here, and, moreover, did so using the language of pathology. By contrast, *Not Wisely* presents such a myopia (obscuring past and future) as protective in its effect; such contemplations by the individual are otherwise liable to be maddening. (Given that doubt, as shall be discussed in Chapter 4, was widely appreciated as a possible incitement to insanity, this warning is more literal than it might first seem.) This yearning for the

¹⁶⁰ Darwin, *Origin*, p. 210.

¹⁶¹ It also strikes a parallel with Darwin’s temporal unit, the ‘Fragment of Time’; Darwin, *Origin*, p. 359.

suspension of the ‘sensational present’, in contradistinction from the past and future, is, I claim, a reaction to the peculiar temporal relations that characterize modernity. Pre-supposed as a denial of or removal from what has gone before,¹⁶² and agitatedly pursuing a future that must always be just out of reach, modernity’s temporal form is that of an ‘obsessive march forward’.¹⁶³ (Walter Benjamin expresses this march using Paul Klee’s monoprint *Angelus Novus*; the depicted figure in Klee’s print is, according to Benjamin, caught in a storm that is ‘propel[ing] him into the future to which his back is turned, [...] this storm is what we call progress’.¹⁶⁴) Overawed by these polarities of past and future (aptly expressed by Broughton as an intimidating physicality, a ‘huge bulk’), the present is experienced as an uneasy staging post, constantly threatened. As Bauman writes, ‘its [the present’s] enjoyment can last but a *fleeting* moment: beyond that (and the beyond begins at the starting point) the joy acquires a necrophilic tinge, achievement turns into sin and immobility into death’.¹⁶⁵ The *fleetingness* of the enjoyable present—the ‘happy trance’ [96] of her ride with Dare, for example—is what Kate rebels against, with a despairing attitude that, I argue, evidences this determinedly modern attitude towards temporality; it is the despair that comes from knowing fully the impermanence of the present’s enjoyment.¹⁶⁶

This is to underscore how the discovery of ‘deep time [...] the aeonic time of geology and evolution’, so integral to modernity’s temporal attitude, had considerable repercussions for the individual psyche; Robert Gilmour appraises the impact of deep time on the Victorian consciousness in the strongest terms: ‘[its] shock waves [were] felt in every area of intellectual life, and out of it [came] the time-hauntedness of the period, seen also in history and its cognate forms of autobiography and anthropology’.¹⁶⁷ This sense of the evolutionary and geological past as a haunting presence is conveyed not merely by this introspective moment from Kate at the poor woman’s bedside (imitating autobiography through its

¹⁶² That dream of a ‘radical rupture’, discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁶³ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 249.

¹⁶⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 11. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶⁶ The etymology of ‘trance’ reveals a further resonance with this interpretation—the Old French *trans* meant ‘great apprehension or dread of coming evil’; Oxford University Press, ‘Trance, n.1.’, *OED Online*. It may be that Broughton, instructed in French (Wood, *Rhoda Broughton*, p. 9), was conscious of this meaning.

¹⁶⁷ Gilmour, p. xiii.

free indirect style), but in other scenes as well. Notably, when Kate's sister Margaret looks out of her window upon a river running nearby, deleterious physiological effects are signposted: the river 'fatigu[es] the senses with the thought of how many centuries it had been rolling along there in its monotonous brownness between its low banks' (222). Far from being a peculiarity of Kate, therefore, it would seem that the injurious results of contemplating the future and past are of general concern—the experience of those modern individuals sensitive to the deep time significations of the landscape. *Not Wisely's* innovation is to highlight physiology (sensation) as both the immediate target of modernity's temporal character, and, in the form of the 'sensational present', the chance to escape its negative consequences.

This sense is given from the novel's outset, when the narrator establishes the setting as the seaside town of Pen Dyllas. Crucially, for reasons to be discussed, Broughton is precise with regards to the temporal location of the scene, specifying the time as the '16th of June 186– [sic]' (47). The focus turns toward the beach, where 'young men' are throwing stones, and besides them

muslin-clad damsels paddled daintily with their fingers in little sea-pools and miniature lagoons, and fished out infinitesimal bits of seaweed, and small green crabs [...]. [Old people] pondered, perhaps, on its [the sea's] ever-lastingness—in its perpetual change, defying change—in contrast to their own short tether. Pondered much, more probably, on their gout, and their port wine, and their knitting and their grandchildren (48).

R. C. Terry rightly recognizes this scene as emblematic of Broughton's 'meticulous observation of seasons, landscapes' and mid-century manners,¹⁶⁸ and I argue that it is, precisely, a complex negotiation of the temporalities evoked by the seaside experience.

The seaside was a popular topic of art and fiction during the 1850s and 60s, as a location that could connote recreation and recuperation (as in the resorts of Brighton or Bournemouth), but also one that could signify the existential problems posed by modernity. This second possibility is most famously captured in Mat-

¹⁶⁸ R. C. Terry, *Victorian Popular Fiction 1860-80* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 111.

threw Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach', first published in 1867 but written in the previous decade, where the epistemological uncertainties facing the modern individual become metaphorized as 'ignorant armies clash[ing] by night' on the Kent coast, and the withdrawal of the sea expresses the retreating consolation of religious faith.¹⁶⁹ Given the dates of publication, the poem would have reinforced the ideas expressed in Broughton's novel, but it could not have influenced them. Rather, *Not Wisely's* portrayal of the seaside recalls William Dyce's famous painting, *Pegwell Bay* (1859-60). As Broughton does, Dyce specifies the painting's scene within a narrow and human-centric temporality: its sub-title is *Recollection of October 5th 1858*. But such a name misleads as to its visual emphasis; the human aspect of the scene—the people wandering on the beach—are insignificant vis-à-vis the cliffs and sky that form the background, which inscribe deep time in two forms (geology and astronomy).¹⁷⁰ Marcia Pointon accounts of their symbolism vis-à-vis the beachgoers: '[astronomy and geology] deny the validity of a single human life and, even more, of a single human day'; and yet, she describes, the gathering of sea shells remains the 'only reality' for these persons.¹⁷¹ Separately, Jonathan Smith and Christiana Payne contend that while Dyce was almost certainly conscious of the threat that these scientific discoveries posed to his faith (and they were to be joined by natural selection, given *Origin's* contemporaneous appearance), *Pegwell Bay* as surely *affirms* religious design as it is sceptical of it.¹⁷² Smith observes that

the study of shells and marine creatures was the study of the handiwork of the Creator. To the extent that astronomy and geology rendered humans insignificant, seaside studies offered reassurance by providing evidence of God's care for even the tiniest and most unlikely creatures.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ For more on this, see Houghton, pp. 86–87.

¹⁷⁰ Donati's Comet appears faintly in the sky.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Jonathan Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 75.

¹⁷² Christiana Payne, 'Seaside Visitors: Idlers, Thinkers and Patriots in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain', in *Water, Leisure & Culture: European Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Susan C. Anderson and Bruce H. Thabb (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002), pp. 87–104 (p. 100).

¹⁷³ Jonathan Smith, pp. 75–77. The key contemporary works on the natural history of the shore are Charles Kingsley's *Glaucus; or, The Wonders of the Shore* (1854-55) and G. H. Lewes's *Seaside Studies* (1858).

Contrary to Dyce's foregrounding of (divine) order, Broughton elucidates a more ambivalent relationship between the beachgoers and the contemplation of deep time as expressed by the physical geography. The sea assumes the role of the sky and cliffs in Dyce's painting by acting as a sign of permanence ('ever-lastingness'), yet the recognition of its contrast with the 'short tether' of those persons nearby is to register the incommensurability between deep time and the individual lifespan. (That introductory phrase from Broughton's narrator, 'hardly are we consoled', is echoed here.) Some of the beachgoers depicted in *Not Wisely*, as in *Pegwell Bay*, are collecting sea creatures; yet, subverting the serious purposes indexed by Smith, Kate's dog Tip is also engaged in a mock-performance of the same activity: 'smelling, *with scientific enjoyment*, at a delicious heap, composed of sea-tangle, rotten wood, and dead starfish' (48; emphasis added). In Broughton's vision, 'seaside studies' are as gratifying to the senses as to the intellect—religious consolation is seemingly absent. Such a purely pleasurable activity parallels the imagined response of the elderly persons, whose focus is on the immediacy of the physiological (the 'sensational present'), in which the pleasures of 'port wine', the pain of 'gout' (48), and so on, are central. Even as it evokes Dyce's melancholic or serious reflections, then (especially in that notice of the individual's 'short tether'), *Not Wisely* also gestures to an alternative tradition of visually representing the seaside: those in which pleasure is forefront.¹⁷⁴ (Such paintings placed beachgoers in the visual foreground.) The liminal position of Broughton's beach scene—conforming to neither 'solemnity' nor 'frivolity'¹⁷⁵—is intensified by the narrator's involvement; clarity about the beachgoers' response to these deep-time symbolisms is withheld through the use of modifiers ('perhaps', 'more probably'). (One is reminded of Braddon's teasing deployment of contingency around the issue of physiognomy, as discussed in Chapter One.) Thus, the possibility of the individual's escape from the harrowing effects of contemplating deep time—the 'time-hauntedness' of the period—remains ambiguous.

Kate's inability to resist the contemplation of deep time, raised as a possibility in this opening scene of *Not Wisely*, has been shown throughout the chapter, and her musings demonstrated to most frequently take the form of evolutionary, par-

¹⁷⁴ For reproductions and analyses of such scenes, see Jonathan Smith, pp. 68–77.

¹⁷⁵ Payne, p. 100.

ticularly Darwinian, perspectives. The beach scene does in fact seem to anticipate this through the temporal nature of the sea: its 'perpetual change, defying change' (48). This is a complicated and seemingly paradoxical image, but it can be understood, I argue, by accounting for the Darwinian idea of natural selection. The endless mutability of the sea becomes, ironically, its one *constant*, just as ceaseless change in morphology becomes (perhaps) the single defining characteristic of the species (and of organic life). Lyell accounts for this Darwinian vision of intense change in *Antiquity*:

[We] are not only more at a loss than ever how to define a species, but even to determine whether it has any real existence in nature, or is a mere abstraction of the human intellect, some contending that it is constant within certain narrow and impassable limits of variability, others that it is capable of indefinite and endless modification¹⁷⁶

Such a description enlarges upon the quandary posed by Darwin in *Origin* when he notes that 'these differences [in morphology] blend into each other in an *insensible series*'.¹⁷⁷

The sense of confusion and uncertainty suggested by Lyell is echoed during Kate's 'long pondering' beside the 'forlorn, draggled creature' (200) who, as noted previously, stands as her evolutionary Other. Kate's desolation at being unable to remain in that 'state of mind' which occludes contemplating the past and future gives way to the following series of agonized questions:

Why is it so hard to distinguish between what will grow bigger and bigger every day, and will last for ever, and what will be gone as if it had never been? Why do things not keep their shapes, but are always mazing and puzzling one by their shiftings and windings? Why, why, why? (208)

This is perhaps the most exact recapitulation in *Not Wisely* of 'Darwin's vision', in which, as Walter F. Cannon accounts, 'a "form" is something unsubstantial, changeable', and which involves 'looking at an apparently rigid structure and imagining it as a plastic one, of "seeing" it flow into another apparently quite different

¹⁷⁶ Lyell, p. 389.

¹⁷⁷ Darwin, *Origin*, p. 42. Emphasis added.

form'.¹⁷⁸ The description speaks to the closing concerns in *Origin*: its attention to processes of enlargement and changing shapes is eminently readable in the context of species morphology (a 'number of species [...] might remain for a long period unchanged', while others 'might become modified'), and its focus on permanence and eradication resonates with the realization of extinction's regularity ('the greater number of species [...] have become utterly extinct'¹⁷⁹).

But Broughton's innovation is to highlight the relevance of the Darwinian vision to the everyday, *experiential* reality of mid-Victorian Britain. She does so by making this apparently scientific prose the language through which Kate articulates her own frightfully liminal position. For there is no doubt that Kate embodies the 'intense flux' of Darwin's vision.¹⁸⁰ George offers the exasperated description of her: 'there's no reckoning on your being the same for ten minutes together; you're a regular weathercock' (253). She not only agrees, but continues: 'I cannot count on myself [either]; not a bit. *I have no stability*' (253; emphasis added). Such an ascription of intense change to Kate occurs throughout *Not Wisely*. As I noted previously in the account of her desire for 'complete extinction', Kate is said to be 'changed, very much changed' (168) by the loss of Dare (after rejecting him). This is not simply rhetorical flourish, but she is recognized as *physically altered* by it—her eyes contain a 'look that used not be there before, a look that would never go away again now. I don't think it was quite confined to the eyes either' (168). But, much later, the modification is ascribed purely to her interior qualities:

The same girl—that is to say, solely as regarded bodily conditions, for as in everything relating to her mental and moral part, it was patent [...] that she was not by any means the same girl that she had been (303; emphasis in original)

This statement of emphatic change precedes an equally intense declaration regarding its direction. In the Darwinian world, change is not directed toward any fixed end (which is to say that change is *non-purposive*), and just so, 'this girl was in a state of transition, though transition to what remained to be proved' (303). Even at such a late stage in the novel's plot, Kate's trajectory remains entirely ambiguous—her final 'form' obscure.

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in Krasner, pp. 118–19.

¹⁷⁹ Darwin, *Origin*, p. 359.

¹⁸⁰ Krasner, p. 118.

This reading of Kate and her body as a cypher for Darwinian indeterminacy is to modify what Pamela K. Gilbert identifies as being how, in Broughton's earlier stories, 'the body of the central character is the site of self-construction, self-betrayal – its openness or closure generates the action of the story'.¹⁸¹ Gilbert reads this permeability around the issue of disease and contamination, but I argue that the Darwinian context permits us to see Kate as only the most hyperbolic case of aspects foregrounded throughout *Not Wisely*: movement, modification, and liminality. Kate's 'transitional' status is thus recognized as signalling the propensity for indefinite and non-purposeful alteration that defines the Darwinian vision. This being a transliteration of concerns first raised in the context of evolutionary biology, *Not Wisely* itself embodies the themes it depicts—the ambivalent implications of unstable categories are themselves proven capable of modification to impinge on new contexts.¹⁸²

Kate's ceaseless mutability and instability, and the Darwinian register used to describe it, speak, I argue, to the potentially uncertain and estranged status of the individual within the modern conditions of mid-century Britain. *Not Wisely* can be read as Kate's search for a coherent identity and role in the manner described by Georg Simmel:

Throughout the modern era, the quest of the individual is for his self, for a fixed and unambiguous point of reference. He needs such a fixed point more and more urgently in view of the unprecedented expansion of theoretical and practical perspectives and the complication of life, and the related fact that he can no longer find it anywhere outside himself. All relations with others are thus ultimately mere stations along the road by which the ego arrives at its self.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*, p. 114.

¹⁸² Cf. Gilbert's observation, raised in the context of her reading of disease, that 'the story itself seems to be an unstable element, threatening to break out of its appointed boundaries and "spill over" into other territories'; *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*, p. 125. See also Bernstein's observation of evolution and sensation fiction as united by their common interest in ambiguous boundaries.

¹⁸³ Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. by Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 223.

Modernity hence creates the need for order at the same time as it withdraws the possibilities for achieving it. This tension has, of course, been explored throughout this thesis.¹⁸⁴ But *Not Wisely* is distinguished by its myopic focus on the individual; as Wood identifies, readers are ‘made to focus totally on Kate and to observe other characters *only in relation to her*’.¹⁸⁵ Broughton’s novel offers, therefore, the most personal and psychological confrontation with the effects of modernity. The evolutionary, but particularly Darwinian, perspective resonates in this quest insofar as it both intensifies the idea of the alienated individual within modernity and underscores the impossibility of them acquiring a ‘fixed and unambiguous point of reference’. This perspective, as I have mentioned, is vital in terms of how *Not Wisely* creates ambivalence, and thus generates its sensational affect. But, for that reason, it becomes increasingly problematic as the novel’s end gets closer.

Kate’s attainment of this most anxiously-sought for variety of order (personal, *existential* understanding of the self) is deferred by the ‘succession of crises’ that form *Not Wisely*’s plot. It encounters failure precisely because (anticipating Simmel’s cautioning) Kate depends upon ‘relations with others’, and these prove decidedly precarious: Kate’s dead mother is a ‘significant moral force’, until she is substituted for Dare;¹⁸⁶ but he, proving duplicitous (having kept secret that he is married already), is replaced by James; yet Kate undergoes a change and commits herself once more to Dare, before being ‘rescued’ by James. When he dies of a fever, Kate decides to join the Sisters of Mercy (an Anglican sisterhood). This is a decisive change because, in lieu of any *individual*, Kate commits herself to the *collective*. Yet, though she attains a ‘fixed and unambiguous point of reference’ in this organization, it comes at the cost of effacing her ‘self’; it is remarkable the extent to which Simmel’s account, given above, is readable in Kate’s explanation of her reasons for becoming a Sister: ‘I have been so unsettled and tossed about in mind for ever so long, that I look forward to this sort of life, in which one learns to *forget self*, and *act as if self were not*, as a kind of haven of rest’ (349; emphasis added).

¹⁸⁴ In Chapter Four, I argue for Collins’s *Armada* as an exploration of how to take action under the modern conditions outlined by Simmel: a growth in the ‘difficulties of decision’ as a result of competing epistemologies and doubt.

¹⁸⁵ Wood, *Rhoda Broughton*, p. 17.

¹⁸⁶ Jones, 213.

This self-imposed exile from society bears striking comparison to the conclusion of *Wylder's Hand*. In Le Fanu's novel, as discussed in the previous chapter, Dorcas and Rachel symbolically follow the path of Kate by removing themselves to an ethereal Venice (in which, excluding de Cresseron, they are the only distinguishable figures). Kate's explanation represents a modified version of Rachel's claim that 'if I were he [Stanley ...] I should obliterate my past self altogether'.¹⁸⁷ The difference, of course (and representing the distinctive reactions to modernity that I have argued are pursued in each novel), is that in *Wylder's Hand* this outcome is motivated by the dream of radical rupture between past and present; in *Not Wisely*, it derives from a dream of securing coherency within a modern world characterized by 'intense flux'—a vision that this chapter has claimed to be prompted by, and explored through, the Darwinian perspective. A further parallel is in the fact that these women either forego, or *seem* to forego (the cousins' futures remain unclear), normative sexuality and the social roles that accompany them: marriage and childbirth.¹⁸⁸ Order is secured, then, by means of the protagonists' extrication from modern society and its normative social arrangements.

Kate's journey to achieve a fixed and coherent identity finds difficulty not only because her attempts hinge too readily upon a shifting and unstable identification with others, but because she seemingly finds no consolation from the roles that society provides for her. Continuing Simmel's ideas, Bauman pertinently claims that the modern search for fixity manifests as the attempt to 'establish a stable and defensible difference between one person and the wider, impersonal and impenetrable social world outside'. Kate struggles to gain these sureties because 'precisely to be stable and reliable, [such a difference] needs social affirmation and must be obtained in a form which also enjoys *social* approval',¹⁸⁹ and Broughton's protagonist, as Shirley Jones observes, is motivated by a desire to 'go beyond the proscribed path'.¹⁹⁰

Her sister Margaret represents this alternative possibility: the achievement of meaning within society's 'proscri[ptions]'. Broughton is at pains to foreground this contrast; Margaret not only opts to marry, but her choice of husband is one that

¹⁸⁷ Le Fanu, *Wylder's Hand*, p. 429.

¹⁸⁸ For an overview of this, see Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, 'The Victorians, Sex, and Gender', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. by Juliet John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 161–77.

¹⁸⁹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 201. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹⁰ Shirley Jones, p. 213.

Kate had violently rejected (and in terms that, as explored earlier, are inflected by evolutionary imperatives): their cousin George. The divergence is further underscored upon Kate's announcement of her intent to join the Sisters of Mercy and embark on a self-enforced alienation from society; to this, Margaret responds with the voice of social normalcy: 'why cannot women keep to their right functions of marrying and being happy?' (351). To be sure, this statement is responded to by Kate with a retort about the varieties of happiness and a rejection of the universality of marriage as a means for achieving this; yet the overall attitude toward that institution is ambivalent—Kate recognizes, with seeming melancholy for her own position, 'how happy they [her sister and George] are!' (351). Anna Despotopoulou's conclusions regarding *Not Wisely's* engagement with these issues deserves to be quoted at length, for it is pertinent to this discussion:

It is as if Broughton is attempting to reflect the effects of modernity on the female consciousness, showing woman particularly affected by its fleeting and transitory aspect. In this way she challenges the normative, socially and culturally constructed view of woman as stable and unchanging. Rather than providing men, through passivity and renunciation, with the stability and comfort lacking in the dehumanised and alienating public sphere of socioeconomic activity, Broughton's female protagonists, being no such homemakers, partake, sometimes with delight and at other times fearfully, of the discontinuity, fragmentation, transitoriness, and incoherence of modernity.¹⁹¹

I concur with Despotopoulou's argument about *Not Wisely's* concern for modernity, and her proposal that Kate's response to it is ambivalent (as indicated by the marriage discussion above¹⁹²). Distinctly, this chapter has elaborated the significations of those key descriptors: 'stable and unchanging', in respect of a context that forcefully brought them to public attention at this time; that is, I have tried to show how the evolutionary, but especially Darwinian, perspective made issues of

¹⁹¹ Despotopoulou, p. 93.

¹⁹² NB. this follows what Tamar Heller has already observed as Broughton's ambivalent narratives, both radical and conservative; quoted in Despotopoulou, pp. 91–92.

‘movement and stasis’, ‘liminal[ity]’, ‘ambivalence’, and ‘transition’ significate beyond the context of the sensorium created by ‘technologically generated’ mobility (Despotopoulou’s focus).¹⁹³

Thus, to retrieve a previous example, Edmund Saul Dixon noted in his popular account of evolutionary science (‘A Vision of Animal Existences’): ‘[that] green-covered book [*Origin*] teaches [...] *a world of incessant change*’.¹⁹⁴ Focusing on the ‘agent’ of modernity—the train—can only partially account for the temporal and existential attitude in *Not Wisely* towards the individual and progress.¹⁹⁵ There is a form of ‘temporal training’ in the novel, but it is not only for the sensory experiences of *industrial* modernity, encapsulated by this vehicle.¹⁹⁶ Kate’s ‘lesson’, if we might call it that, is articulated most emphatically after James’s death, and before Dare dies. Temporal contemplations (particularly relating to change) having previously incited despair and melancholy, this occasion indexes a shift of feeling: ‘the causeless gaiety and light-heartedness of youth and animal spirits were banished, never to return; but there was no hopeless sadness as there used to be. At last she had learned experimentally that time is short’ (343). Gilbert has asserted of Broughton’s novels that their ‘succession of crises’ lead to the protagonist’s gaining ‘insight and maturity’.¹⁹⁷ In *Not Wisely*, I argue, this takes the form of insight into the realities of a modern, Darwinian world: the relative shortness of the individual life vis-à-vis the deep time of geology, and accommodation with fluidity, ambiguity, and disorder as ineluctable aspects of the world.

CONCLUSION

In the book version, Kate’s ‘lesson’ is followed by Dare’s death in a carriage accident. His death marks what I have asserted as the typical attempt at the end of sensation fiction to expiate ambivalence and (re)instate order (that is, *normative* social arrangements). Dare’s problematic status emerges from the sense that he

¹⁹³ Despotopoulou, pp. 90–91, 93.

¹⁹⁴ Dixon, p. 312. Emphasis added.

¹⁹⁵ Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000*, pp. 5, 20.

¹⁹⁶ Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000*, p. 25. See also Dames, p. 7.

¹⁹⁷ Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women’s Popular Novels*, p. 113. *Experimentally* may, of course, simply express the ‘result of experience’; yet, the possibility of reading its scientific meaning, in addition, is suggested by the way that Kate’s lesson evokes the novel’s opening description of the decline in beauty—in particular its notice of ‘discover[ies]’ and ‘processes’ in ‘natural history’ (42).

is a dangerous stimulant to Kate's (also ambivalent) 'erotic sensationalism', as well as an evolutionary hybrid who spotlights humanity's disquieting proximity to the bestial. (One of Dare's last statements is a reminder of this animalism: 'I shall never be able to do you harm any more [Kate]; the lion has had his teeth and claws drawn' [368].) Even with his dying breaths, however, closure and the sense of a 'final purpose' are again denied; Dare raises uncertainty about the destination that awaits him after death, before suggesting that it may not even exist: "to-night I'm going *somewhere*, or—" (with a pause) "who knows?—*nowhere!*" (368).

Dare's doubtful attitude to the afterlife (and to the teleology that underpins it) proves infectious to Kate, and she thereafter experiences that characteristic fear of modernity, the 'horror of indetermination'.¹⁹⁸ She clarifies, to her sister, the extent of her psychical instability: 'I feel the solid earth slipping away from under my feet' (374). In fact, however, Kate avoids the 'behavioural paralysis' that might be feared as the result of such mounting doubts (a risk discussed further in Chapter Four).¹⁹⁹ Instead, she commits herself to the life of a Sister, as she had intended earlier, in order to resolve her uncertainty.²⁰⁰ The last part of *Not Wisely* is a curative summary of her life and eventual death as part of the sisterhood, rendered in language that emphasizes the Christian symbolism Dare had rejected:

Early and late she toiled, giving her days and her nights, her feeble strength, and all her tender woman's heart, to the abating by but a few drops the great ocean of human anguish; [...] Sometimes a faint shaft of light reached her from the great distant fountain-head towards which we have all been struggling, making small progress, as it seems, through six thousand dragging years. And when many days had come and gone, when youth was just beginning to merge into gray beautiful middle age, he who is always reading over the long master-roll of human names came to the name of Kate Chester; and she, hearing, rose up—yea, rose up very gladly; and having ended, whether well or ill, her day's work, passed as we, knowing not, yet hope, 'To where, beyond these voices, there is peace'. (375)

¹⁹⁸ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 56.

¹⁹⁹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 56.

²⁰⁰ Those with religious doubts were, according to Susan Mumm, 'actively encouraged' to join the sisterhoods; quoted in Broughton, p. 374n135.

This passage attempts, I argue, to impose coherency and order on the preceding narrative and to delimit its ambivalent attitude toward teleology and progress, especially as it surrounds the individual. Thus, contrary to the indefinite and alienating processes expressed by the deep time of the evolutionary perspective (retrogression, for example), the temporal character of this description is anthropocentric and Biblical: ‘days [and] nights’, ‘eighteen hundred summers’, ‘six thousand dragging years’ (375). Contrary, also, to Darwinism’s ambivalence towards purposive change (‘not [its] necessary accompaniment’, as Lyell wrote),²⁰¹ there is a sense that Kate is contributing to the realization of a tangible (if still distant) end—an end for which she was intended.

This emphatically religious coda conceals, but does not expel, the relevancy of evolutionary, but especially Darwinian, perspectives, to Kate’s trajectory. Quite apart from the fact that the passage demonstrates what Cannon Schmitt suggests is the way that evolutionary perspectives enabled novelists to ‘connect their characters’ beliefs and actions to the success of the human species’,²⁰² the abrupt and (arguably) overzealous introduction of Christian ontology is a strategy replicated even by scientific works whose explicit aim was to instruct on either ‘deep time’ or natural selection. Thompson’s articles on solar depletion, Lyell’s *Principles and Antiquity of Man*, and, most notably, *Origin* all coalesce in their conclusions by appealing to divine causality and teleology. Darwin’s own, ambivalent attitude is strikingly similar to that of the conclusion to *Not Wisely*; Peter Bowler claims that he maintained a faith in progress largely detached from any principle of his theory, but deriving instead from a ‘residual belief in divine purpose’. Even though it had this potential, Darwin’s theory did not cause a ‘dramatic rupture’ of teleology;²⁰³ the Victorian idea of progress was not fatally undermined, but Darwinism offered a new vocabulary with which to articulate its disquieting and indelible ambivalence.²⁰⁴ Broughton’s sudden assertion of Christian ontology ought, I propose, to be viewed in this light: as an attempt to ameliorate the more direful implications of the Darwinian perspective. This was a characteristically Victorian

²⁰¹ Charles Lyell, *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man*, First (London: John Murray, 1863), p. 412.

²⁰² Cannon Schmitt, ‘Evolution and Victorian Fiction’, in *Evolution and Victorian Culture*, ed. by Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 18. Kate’s actions within the sisterhood are conceived of as impactful on such a scale: helping to abate the ‘great ocean of human anguish’ (375).

²⁰³ Bowler, p. 33.

²⁰⁴ Houghton, pp. 68–71.

reaction to a controversial topic, as the experience of Esmé Wingfield-Stratford illustrates. Recounting a conversation he had on the existence of God, he writes:

I proceeded to ask: 'But then, who made God?' The result was not the explanation I had expected, but an explosion [...] all unwittingly, I had blundered into what, to every good Victorian, was the unforgivable sin [...] I had pried beneath the surface of a belief, [...] I had not known where to stop short of a logical consequence.²⁰⁵

In *Not Wisely*, I argue, Broughton recognized how to stop short of a logical consequence; yet not before she had elucidated the manifold inflections and ambivalences raised by the evolutionary perspective around that intersection of individualism and progress, so central to the modernity of mid-Victorian Britain. If Gilbert detects a 'strange and deliberate lack of closure' in *Not Wisely's* conclusion then it is the necessary product, I suggest, of Broughton's engagement with modernity via this evolutionary register:²⁰⁶ to fully outline the implications of the Darwinian perspective to their 'end' would be to show their irreconcilability with the Victorian values system, and to prompt further doubts at the moment that the novel is aiming to close them down. Elsewhere, however, Broughton robustly delineates the 'inconclusiveness' and 'prospectlessness' of modernity's task of order by explicating, and enlarging upon (especially as it pertains to individuals), the fluid and chaotic vision detailed in Darwin's work. In such contexts, the description of Kate Chester as 'in a state of transition, though transition to what remained to be proved' is a reminder of the fundamental ambivalence that inheres to the modern, Darwinian world.

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Houghton, p. 136.

²⁰⁶ Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*, p. 126.

CHAPTER 4

‘Can I say I believe in it too?’: Hesitation and the Difficulties of Decision
in Wilkie Collins’s *Armada* (1866)

‘What *is* this Spirit of the Nineteenth Century?’, asks Frances Power Cobbe in an 1864 *Fraser Magazine* article, offering the latest iteration of a question of recurrent interest to the historicist consciousness of the period.¹ Cobbe soon disdains the assumption of a uniform ‘Spirit’, however, discerning a ‘dual[ism]’ to the present moment, appearing in the differences between the young and old, and in religious feeling. In this last area she judges the division to be Manichean: the ‘evil side’ to the current religious feeling is ‘the disposition to accept as a finality that condition of hesitation and uncertainty which in the nature of things should be one of transition’.²

The literary historian Walter E. Houghton views this statement as a sign of the changing nature of doubt, for such a ‘settled state of baffled judgment and a mind empty of beliefs [... had not existed] a generation earlier’.³ For Houghton, as for other scholars, the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin* in 1859, and *Essays and Reviews* in 1860, engendered new questions of religion, politics, and identity, and thus ‘intensified the difficulties of decision’ in these and other areas of life in mid-century Britain.⁴ (We have seen the ambivalence raised by *Origin* in the previous chapter). Cobbe’s declaration, and the historical circumstances that prompted it, are also amenable, however, to Zygmunt Bauman’s identification of the ‘sense of danger’ that uncertainty connotes within modernity. Moreover, and pointedly, it is possible to equate her notice of this unprecedented ‘accept[ance]’ of ambivalence as ‘a finality’ with the postmodern consciousness: an ‘acceptance of the ineradicable plurality of the world; plurality which is not a temporary station

¹ Frances Power Cobbe, ‘The Nineteenth Century’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, 59.409 (1864), 481–94 (pp. 481; 490). Emphasis in original. Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1830-1890* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p. 2.

² Cobbe, p. 491.

³ Houghton, pp. 20-1.

⁴ Houghton, p. 20. See also Sarah Lyons, *Algernon Swinburne and Walter Pater: Victorian Aestheticism, Doubt, and Secularisation* (Abingdon and New York: Modern Humanities Research Association and Routledge, 2015), p. 77; Mariaconcetta Costantini, *Venturing into Unknown Waters: Wilkie Collins and the Challenges of Modernity* (Pescara: Edizioni Tracce, 2008), p. 10.

[...] but the constitutive quality of existence'.⁵ I argue in this chapter that Wilkie Collins's *Armadale's* (1866) moves its readers toward such a position.

Only a few months after Cobbe's identification of endemic doubt in British society, Collins started to write, 'hesitatingly at first',⁶ his novel *Armadale*.⁷ Composing it in the same spirit throughout its elongated serial publication in *Cornhill Magazine* (November 1844 to June 1866), he later described the work as 'neither hastily wrought nor idly meditated' (4). The plot of *Armadale* unfolds principally during the 1850s, but Catherine Peters deems Collins's 'real concerns [to be] with the 1860s', a decade in which the 'concept of the family, and views of the position of women, were changing rapidly'.⁸ This chapter claims likewise that Collins is preoccupied in *Armadale* with conditions peculiar to that decade, but that these are the changed, and changing, statuses of 'hesitation' and 'uncertainty' that Cobbe and others were observing—symptoms of modernity. The complex plot of *Armadale* (a 'lurid labyrinth of improbabilities'⁹) fictionalizes the multitude of competing theories and ideas that confronted mid-Victorian intellectuals, and the 'difficulties of decision' that were their corollary. Thus, though responding to the specific questions raised by Collins's sensational plot, Lydia Gwilt's reflection on the anxious oscillations of Ozias Midwinter captures the mental incoherency faced by various real-life cases: 'After alternately believing and disbelieving in it [the Dream], he has got, by his own confession, to believing in it again. Can I say I believe in it, too?' (512).

Such hesitation between alternate courses is ubiquitous in *Armadale*, and I contend that through this representation the novel interrogates the mode of living most capable of navigating the epistemological uncertainties of the modern world. *Armadale's* principal characters embody a spectrum of relations to action—from heedless impulsivity to enfeebling hesitation—which allows readers to assess the relative merits of each. Thus, the novel fulfils the polemical function that Bertrand Russell ascribes to philosophy under the conditions of modernity: 'to teach how to live without certainty, and yet without being paralyzed by hesitation'.¹⁰ I argue

⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 56, 98.

⁶ Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: Minerva, 1992), pp. 266-7.

⁷ Collins, *Armadale*. Subsequent parenthetical citations refer to this edition.

⁸ Catherine Peters, 'Introduction', in *Armadale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xiii.

⁹ Peters, 'Introduction', p. xi.

¹⁰ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945), p. xiv. Cf. Lev Shestov's suggestion that the purpose of philosophy is to 'teach men to live in uncertainty'

that the novel condones a form of what shall be termed ‘critical hesitation’ modelled on scientific practice (specifically experimentation) as the epistemological model most suited to overcoming the ambivalent status of modernity. (Scientific pursuit could, in fact, still be labelled ‘natural *philosophy*’ at mid-century.¹¹) This chapter thus extends Caroline Levine’s claim in *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense* (2003) that there was a ‘kinship between empirical science and narrative desire’, as the readers of suspenseful plots ‘learn[ed] to doubt and guess, to speculate and hypothesize’ in a way that paralleled scientists’ pursuit of knowledge.¹² Of course, I differ in extending these possibilities to the sensation novel as well as to the realist novel, and in positing them as a reaction to the epistemological uncertainties posed by modernity (its irreducible ambivalence, as observed by Bauman). Furthermore, I claim that *Armada* engages equally with so-called *pseudo*-scientific culture as it does with more ‘mainstream’ discourse, particularly in its depiction of dreaming.

For the past three decades, critical assessment of *Armada* has been shifting ever closer to its early reception, in which it was deemed among the ‘greatest’ of Collins’s novels.¹³ Original acclaim came from the sophisticated engagement that the novel was seen to make with such contemporary concepts as the ‘doctrine of heredity’.¹⁴ Scholarship has since re-appraised *Armada* using various other critical frames, a trajectory apotheosized by *The Dark Threads of Life* (ed. Mariaconcetta Costantini); the sixteen contributions to this collection helped to evidence Jenny Bourne Taylor’s claim for the novel’s palimpsestic quality.¹⁵ Beyond such studies as Levine’s, which attend to the co-mingling of narrative and epistemology, this chapter proceeds most obviously from the psycho-physiological focus pursued in Bourne Taylor’s reading, and as that focus has been developed in Michael Tondre’s closely historicized argument for the vitality of nervous

and ‘to disturb’: to ‘ridicule the most firmly accepted judgements and to state paradoxes’; quoted in Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 82.

¹¹ Notably William Thomson and Peter Guthrie, *Treatise on Natural Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1867).

¹² Caroline Levine, p. 3.

¹³ *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Norman Page (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 244-5. *Vanity Fair* (February 3, 1872), in a caption to its ‘Men of the Day’ series, opined that *Armada* was the greatest of Collins’s novels.

¹⁴ Page, pp. 244-5.

¹⁵ *Armada: Wilkie Collins and the Dark Threads of Life*, ed. by Mariaconcetta Costantini (Rome: Aracne, 2009); Bourne Taylor.

delay.¹⁶ In this regard, the chapter might be seen as contributing to a re-evaluation of the Victorians' relation to (in)action, or what Stefanie Markovits terms the 'crisis of action' in its literary manifestations.¹⁷ Distinctively, however, this chapter claims that 'hesitation'—as a concept that sees psychic states (doubt) incorporated into somatic responses (action)—opens up a productive dialogue between the crises of mid-Victorian Britain: the epistemic 'crisis of faith' (or, indeed, 'crisis of doubt'¹⁸) and the practical 'crisis of action'; the psychosomatic relations depicted in *Armada*, reflecting the manifold effects of modernity on the individual, cannot be fully understood without giving attention to both the contexts expressed by hesitation. Such a focus also invites a re-examination of Allan's (allegedly) prophetic dream, a major focus of criticism. This aspect has, I argue, been misunderstood from the perspective of readerly reception, particularly as it relates to spiritualist or occult contexts. This chapter broaches ideas of 'the fantastic', allied to a close historicism, as a means of appreciating the dream's function, especially in terms of *Armada*'s commentary on modernity.

'THE DANGER OF HASTE', 'THE DEBILITY OF INDECISION': HESITATION AND THE SCIENTIFIC CULTURE OF DOUBT

Cobbe's concern for an endemic and permanent state of 'uncertainty' and 'hesitation' was only the latest in a long line of social commentaries during the early nineteenth century that associated these two conditions with a historic contemporaneity. In a series of essays published in 1831, 'The Spirit of the Age', John Stuart Mill observed that the transitional nature of the time implied the prospect of ground-breaking change and profound instability. The sources of moral and intellectual authority in society were in flux, he asserted, and turbulence was a necessary corollary:

¹⁶ Michael Tondre, "'The Interval of Expectation: Delay, Delusion, and the Psychology of Suspense in *Armada*', *ELH*, 78.3 (2011), 585–608.

¹⁷ Stefanie Markovits, *The Crisis of Action in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Christopher Lane, *The Age of Doubt: Tracing the Roots of Our Religious Uncertainty* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011). Regrettably, J. Jeffrey Franklin, *Spirit Matters: Occult Beliefs, Alternative Religions, and the Crisis of Faith in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018) was published too late for me to respond to its ideas in this thesis.

A violent conflict rages among opposing doctrines, until one or other prevails, or until mankind settle down into a *state of general uncertainty and scepticism*. At present, we are in a *mixed state*; some fight fiercely under their several banners [...] while the others (those few excepted who have strength to stand by themselves) are blown about by every breath, having *no steady opinion*—or at least *no deep-rooted conviction* that their opinion is true.¹⁹

Even in these early essays, Mill shifts uneasily between perceiving of doubt and hesitation as phenomena concomitant with transition—belonging to an age in which ‘mankind have [*sic*] outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, [and] not yet acquired new ones’—and as permanent states that one might ‘settle down into’.²⁰ Hence, what Houghton proposes as the ‘certain[ty]’ of the early century, ‘that truth existed and [that] the mind could discover it’, seemed already to be on shaky ground.²¹ Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 1, discoveries in physiological optics, notably by Johannes Müller (*Elements of Physiology* [1840-43]), would soon problematize the prospect of discovering the truth via sight.

In his essay ‘Characteristics’, also of 1831, Thomas Carlyle chastised that a general neurosis of the kind envisaged by Mill was already well-established. He saw, in addition, that uncertainty and scepticism had not only epistemic consequences, but also practical ones:

Action, in those old days, was easy, was voluntary, for the divine worth of human things lay acknowledged; Speculation was wholesome, for it ranged itself as the handmaid of Action; [...] How changed in these new days! [...] Heroic Action is paralyzed; for what worth now remains unquestionable with him [the youth of these times]? At the fervid period when his whole nature cries aloud for Action, there is nothing sacred under whose banner he can act. [...] Doubt storms in on him through every avenue: inquiries of the deepest, painfullest [*sic*] sort must be

¹⁹ John Stuart Mill, ‘The Spirit of the Age’, *Online Library of Liberty*, 2006. Emphases added.

²⁰ Mill, ‘The Spirit of the Age’.

²¹ Houghton, p. 18.

engaged with; and the invincible energy of young years waste [*sic*] itself in sceptical, suicidal cavillings; in passionate ‘questionings of Destiny,’ whereto no answer will be returned.²²

Stefanie Markovits has elaborated on the connection that Carlyle creates here between mental process and action: ‘without belief in an end [...] to give some kind of narrative intelligibility to effort, the idea of action becomes meaningless’; since action must be incited by a conscious desire to achieve a certain end, she declares, ‘why do any one thing instead of another if you cannot know what is right, or even whether such a thing as “the right” exists?’²³ (This notice of ‘*narrative* intelligibility’ obviously gains additional meaning when these dynamics come to be transplanted into fictional contexts, as I explore in this chapter.) For Carlyle, a permanent ‘condition of hesitation and uncertainty’ is antagonistic to the purposeful action on which his society depends.

Carlyle’s use of medical categories (*paralysis*, *pain*) might be seen as purely rhetorical, and typical of his writing style, but it is plausible to see in his description a reference to psychosomatic realities. As Janet Oppenheim observes, in respect of the contemporary medical consensus, ‘mental strain through prolonged anxiety, fear, grief and disappointment’ was considered a potent causative agent for the decreased state of nervous force that could engender nervous collapse.²⁴ Accordingly, the ‘energy of young years’, in Carlyle’s words, might literally become ‘wasted’ through the accumulation of doubt—with pathological consequences. Such fears find expression in the popular press throughout the century. A *Ladies’ Cabinet* piece entitled ‘Diseases of the Mind’, for instance, recounts the case of a young Cornish woman who fell prey to madness from this cause, but is at pains to assert how the individual is illustrative of a broader malaise:

The instances are numberless in this country, of persons losing their reason in consequence of being affected too strongly by religious fears, doubts, and hopes. [In England we have] the power, every one of us, to manufacture out of the Bible a religion for ourselves, and hence no

²² Thomas Carlyle, ‘Characteristics’, in *The Modern British Essayists* (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1852), 296–309 (p. 305).

²³ Markovits, pp. 50–1.

²⁴ Janet Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves: Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 86.

complete enumeration can be made of the sects that exist amongst us. Hence, too many of us are placed in a condition, which, to ordinary minds, is perilous in the extreme; for having no fixed standard to adhere to, numbers are shaken by every wind of doctrine²⁵

The date of this piece is not certain,²⁶ but it fairly speaks to any time between the appeal by Carlyle (whose sentiment it echoes) and the 1860s. The ‘perilous [condition]’ it identifies as engendered by religious doubts was famously articulated in James Anthony Froude’s semi-autobiographical novel *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849), wherein the protagonist Markham Sutherland’s spiritual crisis assumes the symptoms of nervous exhaustion: ‘his spiritual constitution [became] too shattered to enable him to face successfully the trials of life’.²⁷ Condemned for its depiction of religious ‘infidelity’,²⁸ it seems reasonable to suggest that *The Nemesis of Faith* was also frightening because it apotheosized Carlyle’s fear that epidemic doubt would drain society of its capacity to take action—Sutherland dies at the novel’s end ‘possibly by suicide, perhaps by *just expiring*’.²⁹ The image of a youth terminally exhausted by doubts would have been frighteningly plausible to the readers of Froude’s novel.

Far from simply being rhetorical flourish,³⁰ then, Carlyle’s invocation of ‘spiritual paralysis’ points to how a crisis of ‘spirit’ or mind was thought eminently liable to produce a breakdown of the body by nervous exhaustion. While he treats doubt as an epistemic phenomenon at a societal level, Mill’s 1831 analysis of it is as-

²⁵ ‘Diseases of the Mind’, *The Ladies’ Cabinet of Fashion, Music and Romance* (London), p. 223. Although this case indicates doubt’s potential to incite madness, rather than nervous exhaustion per se, distinctions between mental illness and disorders of the nerves were difficult to make in practice.

²⁶ *The Ladies’ Cabinet of Fashion, Music and Romance* began in 1832, but its format changed after 1852; see Jeffrey A. Auerbach, ‘What They Read: Mid-Nineteenth Century English Women’s Magazines and the Emergence of a Consumer Culture’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 30.2 (1997), 121–40.

²⁷ Don Leggett, ‘William Froude, John Henry Newman and Scientific Practice in the Culture of Victorian Doubt’, 128.532 (2013), 571–95 (p. 580).

²⁸ Rosemary Ashton, ‘Doubting Clerics: From James Anthony Froude to *Robert Elsmere* via George Eliot’, in *The Critical Spirit and the Will to Believe: Essays in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Religion*, ed. by David Jasper and T. R. Wright (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), pp. 69–87 (p. 70).

²⁹ Ashton, p. 71. Emphasis added.

³⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *Selected Writings* ([Harmondsworth, Middlesex]: Penguin, 2015), p. 220. On Carlyle’s (ab)uses of illness metaphors, see C. Schatz-Jakobsen, ‘Thomas Carlyle and the “Characteristics” of Nineteenth-Century English Literature’, *Orbis Litterarum*, 56 (2001), 183–204 (pp. 197–200).

surely inflected by this psychosomatic context, of which he had personal experience; Mill believed that “spiritual or mental” factors had contributed to his mental breakdown in 1826,³¹ during which time he, like Sutherland (and therefore also Froude), was incapable of facing life’s demands. It is insightful to consider Mill’s case further, because its subsequent appraisal by Alexander Bain in 1882 illuminates how the understanding of doubt’s pathological potential, and its cultural signification, changed over the intervening five decades. If Mill had no misgivings, about the role of psychic factors—‘hesitation’ and ‘uncertainty’—in producing his inability to act, Bain was unconvinced; rather, the physiologist construed the episode as being caused by physical factors:

The occurrence is treated as purely spiritual or mental; the physical counterpart being wholly omitted; the only expression used, “a dull state of nerves *such as everybody is liable to,*” is merely to help out the description of the mental side. [...] That the dejection so feelingly depicted was due to physical causes, and that the chief of these causes was over-working the brain, may I think be certified beyond all reasonable doubt.³²

Even as Bain strongly desires to swing the pendulum back in favour of the physical, he later confesses that the ‘morbid symptoms were purely subjective; there was no apparent derangement in any bodily organ’ (that is, this was a *functional* as opposed to a *structural* nervous disorder).³³

Bain’s explanation for the causation of Mill’s crisis is illuminated by what Oppenheim observes as the ‘elusive—almost slippery’ quality of contemporary writing about mental pathology, its ‘constant movement between one layer of meaning and another’: literal, metaphoric, psychological, and somatic. Such interplay, she discerns, was ‘in fact essential to much nineteenth-century medical explanation for the body’s activities’.³⁴ The explanation is equally (and incidentally) illustrative of how mental pathology (absent of physical causes) came to be increasingly stigmatized during the century; Bain is zealous in his effort to substitute

³¹ Oppenheim, p. 156.

³² Alexander Bain, *John Stuart Mill. A Criticism: With Personal Reflections*. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882), pp. 37-8. Emphasis in original.

³³ Bain, p. 38.

³⁴ Oppenheim, p. 86.

‘purely spiritual or mental [causes]’ for physical causation partially, I propose, because this explanation valorizes his friend. In a climate that revered self-help and initiative (as seen most powerfully in Smiles’s 1859 manual, given elsewhere in this thesis), incapacity rendered one a deprecated figure; redemption might be gained for Mill by ascribing such a condition to a too-earnest pursuit of those ideals—conversely, giving in to ‘mental [or] spiritual causes’ such as doubt offered no such possibility.

If Mill prophesized its incipience in 1831, and Carlyle observed it as already established, modern scholarship has tended to cite the 1860s as the decade in which a ‘state of uncertainty and scepticism’ reached terminal proportions. This epidemic of doubt is generally ascribed to the increasingly many, and frequently incompatible, doctrines that were proliferating the intellectual scene (an idea condoned by the *Ladies’ Cabinet*);³⁵ it appeared as if the ‘difficulties of decision’ had never been greater.³⁶ The journalist Frederic Harrison, writing in 1869, offers insight into the unstable intellectual landscape, with its attendant psychic effects, that existed at the decade’s end:

There is abroad a strange consciousness of doubt, instability, and incoherence; and, withal, a secret yearning after certainty and reorganisation in thought and in life. Even the special merits of this time, its candour, tolerance, and spirit of inquiry, exaggerate our consciousness of mental anarchy, and give a strange fascination to anything that promises to end it.³⁷

It is important to again reflect here on the nature of doubt in the 1860s versus that which came before. The vital difference, I argue, is that it begins to lose its teleological impetus (or so contemporaries like Cobbe feared): doubt does not precipitate a decisive conclusion, and thereafter cease (until it becomes required again); rather, modernity makes it into something of a permanent condition, without tending toward a definite result. These conditions are, unsurprisingly, parallel to those that face Kate Chester in *Not Wisely, but Too Well*, as noted in the previous chapter, and which Darwin’s *Origin*, through its emphasis on flux, strengthened. (I am

³⁵ Gilmour, pp. 2–3, 14–16. See also *An Age of Equipoise? Reassessing Mid-Victorian Britain*, ed. by Martin Hewitt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 22–23.

³⁶ Houghton, p. 20.

³⁷ Frederic Harrison, ‘The Positivist Problem’, *Fortnightly Review*, 6.35 (1869), 469–93 (p. 471).

thinking here particularly of the implicit teleology behind that key term ‘transition’.) As observed there in response to Georg Simmel, modernity intensifies the desire for personal and societal order at the same time as it withdraws the prospect of achieving it.

Harrison’s notice of ‘mental anarchy’ in the excerpt above raises, again, the pathological connotations of doubt elaborated earlier, validating *any* alternative that can reinstate teleology (bringing an ‘end’). But, evidencing that an alternative need not be positive (or Positivist, given Harrison’s proclivities), Thomas Henry Huxley coined ‘agnosticism’ in the same year to denote a belief that God was both unknown and, most significantly, *unknowable*.³⁸ Huxley showed that the potentially debilitating effects of doubt and hesitation (which were palpable in the opening of *Man’s Place in Nature*) might be ‘end[ed]’ by accepting them as, in the words of Cobbe, a ‘finality’. Anticipating the postmodern consciousness, uncertainty could be its own sort of resolution.

Harrison’s mention of the time’s ‘special merits’, and particularly the ‘spirit of inquiry’, gestures to an additional understanding of doubt that is critical: concurrent with a growing recognition of its pathological potential, there was also appreciation for the *advantages* of doubt. In religious feeling, for instance, Christopher Lane draws attention to the virtues made of the condition, noting that, beyond the 1840s it ‘would be characterized as an opportunity, a psychology, and even a creative endeavour’.³⁹ (The ‘honest doubt’ that Alfred Lord Tennyson expressed through *In Memoriam* (1849), for instance, was seen to indicate the genuineness of his faith.)⁴⁰ That doubt became essential to *scientific* culture is of greater relevance to the case of *Armadale*, however, and thus the context that requires most consideration. In 1866 (the last year of *Armadale*’s serialization in *Cornhill*), Huxley gave a rousing public lecture in defence of the ‘doubting disposition’. For him, doubt was crucial to the ‘improvement of natural knowledge’. The endemic status of doubt in modern British society should, he implied, be seen as positive, for the

³⁸ This was at a meeting of the Metaphysical Society; his eponymous paper on agnosticism was twenty years away from publication. Bernard Lightman notes that the term was seldom in usage before 1879, and only became more widespread after 1883; nevertheless, it is illustrative of the intellectual uncertainties of the 1860s that it was coined in this decade. ‘Huxley and Scientific Agnosticism’, *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 35.3 (2002), 271–89.

³⁹ Lane, p. 91.

⁴⁰ Lance St John Butler, *Victorian Doubt: Literary and Cultural Discourses* (London, 1990), pp. 1–2.

‘exact reverse’ convictions are ‘held by barbarous and semi-barbarous peoples’, for whom no such improvement was evident.⁴¹

If Huxley’s address is compared to the exhortations given by another commentator, two decades earlier, a remarkably consistent message emerges:

Were the state of doubt and hesitancy, of impartial balancing among various beliefs, less harshly discouraged and condemned (and it is this state that best becomes ignorance or defective knowledge), we should have less of wrong-headed adherence to opinion on the one hand, or of frivolous or interested abandonment of it on the other.⁴²

These words were delivered to the Liverpool Mechanics’ Institution, and this location indexes another figure for whom doubt was indispensable: the mathematician and mechanic William Froude (the brother of James Anthony). Don Leggett notes how, unusually among Victorian intellectuals, Froude required a ‘practical and physical solution, as well as a philosophical one’ to the issues he faced: ‘specific solutions’ in addition to a ‘mental and moral framework for obtaining authoritative knowledge’. The integration of a ‘doubting mentality’ into his working method (what I shall be terming a ‘critical hesitation’) served to overcome these difficulties.⁴³ His situation illustrates what I have highlighted as the epistemic *and* practical facets of uncertainty.

That the two initial cases discussed above were first delivered as public lectures, and then swiftly reprinted in the popular press,⁴⁴ indicates how scientific figures endeavoured to instil what they perceived as the virtues of their approach into the habits of laypersons: moving from its epistemic value to its practical opportunities in everyday life. ‘Doubt in science is in part a function of our practical goal of avoiding harm that might result from premature acceptance of a hypothesis’, Paul Thagard explains,⁴⁵ and it was from such a basis that scientific culture

⁴¹ Thomas Henry Huxley, ‘On the Advisableness of Improving Natural Knowledge’, in *Collected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 18–41 (p. 40). For its origins as a lecture, etc., see Ruth Barton, ‘Sunday Lecture Societies: Naturalistic Scientists, Unitarians, and Secularists Unite against Sabbatarian Legislation’, in *Victorian Scientific Naturalism: Community, Identity, Continuity*, ed. by Gowan Dawson and Bernard Lightman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 189–219 (p. 197).

⁴² W. B. Hodgson, ‘Inquiry, Doubt, Conviction’, *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* (Edinburgh, 4 July 1846), p. 16.

⁴³ Leggett, pp. 571, 594.

⁴⁴ Barton, p. 216.

⁴⁵ Paul Thagard, ‘What Is Doubt and When Is It Reasonable?’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 30 (2004), 391–406 (p. 402).

appeared to offer means of acting despite the uncertainties imposed by modernity (and amid a heightened awareness of ‘risk’).⁴⁶ Such is the aim, for instance, of the physicist John Tyndall in his *Fragments of Science for Unscientific People: A Series of Detached Essays, Lectures, and Reviews*. First published in 1871, the collection was principally composed of Tyndall’s output during the 1860s; hence, it was rigorously concerned with the contexts outlined above. In one essay, ‘An Address to Students’ (1868-9), Tyndall delineates the contours of a scientific epistemology and the potential benefits to his young audience of incorporating it into their everyday lives; a key characteristic, he proclaims (echoing the 1846 lecture in Liverpool), is the integration of hesitation into decision-making:

One very obvious danger besets many of the more earnest spirits of our day—the danger of *haste* in endeavouring to give the feelings repose. [...] There are periods when the judgment ought to remain in suspense, the data on which a decision might be based being absent. This discipline of suspending the judgment is a common one in science, but not so common as it ought to be elsewhere. [...] We ought to learn to wait, and pause [...].⁴⁷

I claim that what Tyndall describes here can reasonably be termed ‘critical hesitation’ (and the same can be said of William Froude),⁴⁸ since it sees doubt incorporated into a somatic response, a *relation to action*: practical, physical decisions are under consideration, not merely epistemic concerns (the same difference appears in Froude’s desire for ‘specific solutions’ as opposed to a ‘mental and moral framework’). In an indication that Tyndall saw himself as working within a critical tradition, he begins his Address by citing Carlyle’s rallying cries for action (“[He] called out “act!””) as the impetus for his own development into a ‘practical scientific worker’;⁴⁹ such a citation makes apparent Tyndall’s awareness of the benefits

⁴⁶ For the increase in writing about risk, see Elaine Freedgood, *Victorian Writing About Risk: Imagining a Safe England in a Dangerous World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁷ John Tyndall, *Fragments of Science for Unscientific People* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1871), pp. 104–5. Added (non-original) emphasis is indicated by underlined italics.

⁴⁸ Rick Rylance terms this ‘scientific hesitation’; ‘The Discourse of Physiology in General Biology’, in *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 92. My preference is for ‘critical hesitation’, as it indicates an epistemological concern extending beyond ‘science’; for its use in the context of medical jurisprudence, e.g., see Mangham, *Dickens’s Forensic Realism: Truth, Bodies, Evidence*, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Tyndall, p. 103.

ascribed to action by Carlyle (as seen in ‘Characteristics’, cited earlier). But Tyndall clearly departs from his influence by emphasizing that action is not, unreservedly, virtuous: *hasty* action, that type of action which strives for emotional satisfaction (‘to give the feelings repose’), will create ‘danger’.⁵⁰ If action is to be beneficial, in his view, haste must be mollified and ‘critical hesitation’ developed.

This chapter has so far tried to demonstrate that two lines of thinking existed at mid-century around the conditions of doubt and hesitation. If it has treated each in turn, this is not to imply that they were thought to be autonomous; some commentators were conscious that the very state of scepticism they were advocating, as a means of avoiding ‘danger’, might itself be considered jeopardous, for reason of its pathological potential described above. Indeed, though *Fragments* purports to be a ‘Detached Series’ of writings, Tyndall’s 1870 essay ‘Scientific Use of the Imagination’ forms something of a dialogue with his earlier ‘Address’ in the same volume; each of the texts comes to focus on the repercussions of hesitation (a link made explicit by the repetition of ‘repose’ in the two passages cited). He is forced to admit that

this period of halting between two investigations is not always one of pure repose. It is often a period of *doubt* and *discomfort*, of *gloom* and *ennui*. ‘The uncertainty where to look for the next opening of discovery brings the *pain* of conflict and the *debility* of indecision.’ Such was my precise condition [...] Mr. Bain has here sketched my mental *diagnosis*.⁵¹

The language here evokes the medical, and it is illustrative of that ‘interplay’ noted before how Tyndall moves seamlessly from mental states (*gloom* and *ennui*) to physical feeling (*discomfort*, *pain*, *debility*) in his delineation of hesitation’s pathological associations in a scientific context. But of course it both is and is not *his* experience, for the ‘diagnosis’ of someone else stands in for his own; Bain’s *Logic* (1870), from which the excerpt is taken, was another attempt to inculcate students to the approach of scientific culture.⁵²

⁵⁰ Precisely which threats Tyndall has in mind is ambiguous, but an obvious referent might be financial speculation (its ruinous potential recently demonstrated in the ‘1866 panic’). In any case, his appeal accords with a period acutely conscious of ‘risk’ and how it might be mitigated; for further on this, see Freedgood.

⁵¹ Tyndall, p. 128. Emphases added.

⁵² Alexander Bain, *Logic* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1870), II, p. 422.

It was noted previously, in relation to Carlyle, that such descriptions exceed the metaphoric, but describe medical realities; indeed, Benjamin Ward Richardson would later substantiate this communal ‘diagnosis’ by noting, in his *Diseases of Modern Life* (1876), that ‘persons engaged in [...] science’ were amongst those predisposed to experiencing ‘Diseases from worry and mental strain’.⁵³ (The importance of Benjamin’s title for indicating contemporary belief in modernity’s psychic impact need hardly be stated.) By inculcating laypersons into a scientific epistemology that sought to protect them from the ‘danger[s]’ of modernity, therefore, Tyndall and Bain were creating conditions from which emerged the period’s signature threats: ‘mental anarchy’ and nervous exhaustion. The Froude brothers represent the same ambivalence: the case of James Anthony attested to the pathological potential of doubt, namely its capacity to ‘shatter’ one’s constitution and produce ‘spiritual paralysis’ that prohibited action (concurrently rendering them a stigmatized figure); conversely, that of William showed how doubt underpinned the scientific epistemology by which society was increasingly defining itself: not only as an epistemic, but also as a practical, imperative.⁵⁴

Fiction at mid-century emphasized the same potentials that existed around doubt and hesitation (enabling a distinction between *critical* and *pathological* varieties). Notably, in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1853), Inspector Bucket offers a polemic of his profession’s approach to evidence and decision-making in terms remarkably prescient of Tyndall’s advocacy of ‘critical hesitation’, and warnings against haste; Bucket ignores a desire to ‘give [his] feelings repose’, conscious that ‘wait[ing and] paus[ing]’ offer him the best chance of completing the case successfully. He explains his methods as follows:

The last point in the case which I am going to mention shews the *necessity of patience* in our business, and *never doing a thing in a hurry*. [...] I had so much to convict [this woman ...] that if I had been a younger hand with less experience, I should have taken her, certain.

⁵³ Benjamin Ward Richardson, *Diseases of Modern Life* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876), p. 123.

⁵⁴ Don Leggett observes a similar dichotomy in respect of the Froudes: ‘William Froude shared in this idea [of doubt as an integral component of moral and ethical systems], although tempered more with a sense of opportunity than the ‘distortion’ and ‘destruction’ that Sutherland—and his brother—experienced’; p. 580.

[...] I felt quite to want to put an end to the job. What should I have lost?

[...] I should have lost the weapon⁵⁵

Of course, the polemical purpose underlying Bucket's address is targeted not only at the fictional characters within *Bleak House*, but also at the novel's readers; the inspector offers an extended instance of how hesitation might be successfully implemented to 'avoid[] [the] harm that might result from premature acceptance of a hypothesis'.⁵⁶

If Dickens was addressing the potential benefits of *critical* hesitation, then his contemporary, Collins, was showing attention to its other potential. His early work *Basil* (1852) (sub-titled, pertinently, *A Story of Modern Life*), a precursor to sensation fiction,⁵⁷ focuses attention on the worst possible combination of 'haste' and 'hesitation' in the form of Mrs Sherwin:

Her pale, sickly, moist-looking skin; her large, mild, watery, light-blue eyes; the restless timidity of her expression; the mixture of useless hesitation and involuntary rapidity in every one of her actions—all furnished the same significant betrayal of a life of incessant fear and restraint.⁵⁸

In light of the aforementioned contexts, it is not hard to see why Mrs Sherwin's relation to action features so prominently in this negative description: it invites the pathological associations of doubt (paralleling her 'sickly' skin) without being recompensed by any criticality (hence it is 'useless'). Notice, by contrast, the associations given to 'hesitation' in Collins's later novel *No Name* (1862), as Captain Wragge is depicted in a situation that exemplifies the 'difficulties of decision' faced in the modern world:

Between these two last alternatives, the wary Wragge hesitated; not from doubt of Magdalen's pecuniary resources, for he was totally ignorant of the circumstances which had deprived the sisters of their inheritance – but from doubt whether an obstacle, in the shape of an undis-

⁵⁵ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853), p. 526. Emphases added.

⁵⁶ Thagard, p. 402.

⁵⁷ See Beller, 'Sensation Fiction in the 1850s', pp. 10–12.

⁵⁸ Wilkie Collins, *Basil*, ed. by Dorothy Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 75.

covered gentleman, might not be privately connected with her disappearance from home. After mature reflection, he determined to pause, and be guided by circumstances.⁵⁹

Wragge's response to uncertainty echoes that of Inspector Bucket by encouraging reflection and pause. The two scenarios differ vitally, however, in the immediacy of their narration: in *No Name*, hesitation is portrayed concurrently with its enactment, instead of retroactively as in *Bleak House*. In the case of *No Name*, readers are forced to share in the same suspense experienced by the characters.

This has important implications for seeing the sensation novel as training for the epistemological uncertainties of modernity. Caroline Levine has argued for the correspondences of narrative suspense and experimentation as modes that relied on the suspension of judgment, and which taught the virtues of critical hesitation; Wragge's method precisely echoes her sense for how 'experiments might mobilize the most convincing hypotheses about the hidden facts of the world, but they were always required to wait to see how the world would respond'. Levine gives the example of Fitzjames Stephen to show contemporary awareness that this same polemical potential could be found in fiction: Stephen hailed novels as the supreme source for presenting such hypotheses about the world.⁶⁰ *Armada*, logically develops the concern for hesitation and doubt shown in both *Basil* and *No Name* according to the growing interest shown for them in the 1860s. If the first of these novels is concerned by their pathological potential, and the last by their critical utility, then *Armada* offers a comparative account of both possibilities. In the character of Allan Armadale, 'involuntary rapidity' serves more than simply metonymic function: it spotlights, by negation, the virtues of critical hesitation; Ozias Midwinter, meanwhile, embodies the problems of action's endless deferral by pathological hesitation.

'TO TEST [...] BY TIME AND ABSENCE': CONFRONTING EPISTEMOLOGICAL UNCERTAINTY

From the moment they are brought together, a dualism emerges between Allan and Ozias, manifested in and associated with the body and its significations. 'Bisexual, introvert, [and] suspicious', Ozias is staged as an obvious foil to Allan, who

⁵⁹ Collins, *No Name*.

⁶⁰ Caroline Levine, pp. 6–7.

is 'blond, muscular, "noisy, rosy, light-haired, good-tempered", with all the attributes of the man of property and "perfect" English squire'.⁶¹ Such depictions appear, at first sight, to condone cultural notions of a decisive correlation between emotional and bodily states. The divergent emotional and physiological constitutions of the pair seem initially to realize Benjamin Ward Richardson's dichotomy, given in the *Diseases of Modern Life*: 'the nervous boys have weak, the valiant boys strong, hearts'.⁶²

But *Armada* is repeatedly subversive of the normalized assumptions that it threatens to establish from these physiological bases. Jenny Bourne Taylor asserts this of the psychological identities represented in the novel, claiming that the Armadale surname acts as a 'stage on which various psychological propensities and dispositions are acted out, though the replications and inversions take on different meanings in different contexts'.⁶³ Drawing on Bourne Taylor, Michael Tondre reads the novel within the cultural formulations of speed that developed before its publication, claiming that it

spins out a series of competing claims which work to intensify and invert its ideas about the nature of nervous delay, in a way which works ultimately to undermine the possibility of any absolute line of demarcation between the normative and the pathological, freedom and determination, representation and the real.⁶⁴

This section aims to add to and complicate these assessment by Bourne Taylor and Tondre by reflecting more fully on the character of Allan; as persuasive as I find their claims about *Armada*'s subversion of physiological and psychological identities (an important basis for my argument), their readings circulate primarily around Ozias (and Lydia Gwilt to a much lesser degree). The absence of Allan from this argument reflects a wider trend in criticism, which tends to deprecate his narrative significance, except as a foil for his more interesting companion, or

⁶¹ Raffaella Antinucci, "Not Another like Him in the World": Wilkie Collins and the Gentleman Within', in *Armada: Wilkie Collins and the Dark Threads of Life*, ed. by Mariaconcetta Costantini (Rome: Aracne, 2009), pp. 133–54 (p. 144). Piya Pal-Lapinski, 'Chemical Seductions, Exoticism, Toxicology, and the Female Poisoner in *Armada* and *The Legacy of Cain*', in *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Maria K. Bradshaw and Don Richard Cox (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp. 94–130 (p. 107).

⁶² Richardson, p. 126.

⁶³ Bourne Taylor, p. 152.

⁶⁴ Tondre, pp. 587, 607n24.

a conduit for other topics (such as the dream); Catherine Peters's claim illustrates this tendency: 'it is obvious that Allan Armadale dreaming is a far more interesting character than Allan Armadale awake'.⁶⁵ But by appraising him in the context of contemporary ideas about hesitation, doubt, and action, Allan emerges as an integral and profoundly subversive component of the novel—an essential aspect of its engagement with the epistemological challenges of modernity. In fact, the validation of Ozias's 'policy of waiting' (798) (as observed by scholars) can only occur, I argue, after the delineation of Allan's antithetical (and much maligned) 'policy' of haste.

The seeming differences between Allan and Ozias in the early part of *Armadale* belie a crucial similarity: both seem determined absolutely by their physiology. Moreover, as Bourne Taylor argues that Ozias's "'sensitive" subjectivity' is 'perceived as pathological and becomes morbid',⁶⁶ so too is Allan's psychologically-defined character recognized as injurious by those around him. But, in addition, such deficiencies are clearly suggested to have an actual basis (that is, they are more than prejudices). To wit, in the first description of Allan, labels relating to an unalterable (essential) nature are employed with obsessive frequency and juxtaposed by indications of their threatening potential:

He [Allan] was certainly slow over his books—but more from a *constitutional* inability to fix his attention on his tasks. [...] His *temperament*, it could not be denied, was heedless to the last degree: he acted recklessly on his first impulses, and rushed blindfold at all his conclusions. On the other hand, it was said to be in his favour that his *disposition* was open as the day. [...] A certain quaint originality of character [...] carried him free of most of the dangers to which his mother's system of education inevitably exposed him (62; emphases added)

Here, Allan appears as one of the 'earnest spirits' that Tyndall was to describe in 1868-9; figures who spotlighted the dangers of 'haste': 'heedless in temperament' and 'reckless' in his actions, Allan proceeds without waiting to obtain the 'data on which a decision might be based'—he rushes 'blindfold' into taking action. This

⁶⁵ Peters, 'Introduction', p. xxii.

⁶⁶ Bourne Taylor, p. 152.

figure is given a fuller description in an 1854 article in *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, which, while spotlighting the inefficacies of this approach, also notes the alternative:

Some people are always in a hurry, yet never accomplish much. Their energies are misdirected, and they bustle about to no effect. They seem to be entirely destitute of that cool, calculating element that seldom fails to ensure its possessor success in whatever is undertaken.⁶⁷

These associations explain the implicit vein of censure to these descriptions of Allan's character ('it could not be denied'); the criticism is moderated only by a compensating openness ('on the other hand'). This same regret at his physiological shortcomings reappears in a description of him after 'five years [... have] passed', which reflects that there was 'little, if any, change in Allan's character': he remains 'as easy and open in his *disposition* as ever [...]; just as *heedless* in following his own *impulses*, lead him where they might' (65; emphasis added). Almost nothing has changed with the passage of half a decade, I suggest, because almost nothing *can* change: the repeated notice of 'temperament', made in respect of his intractable nature, should be understood in its literal (doctrinal) sense of the 'permanent physiological types, in one or more of which human nature asserts itself' (as the *Saturday Review* (1869) defined it).⁶⁸

The figurative sensorial impairment of 'blindfold' acquires a more literal application when Allan's absence of critical hesitation is shown to encompass his visual judgments. (Chapter 1 has already discussed the prioritization of the visual (ocularcentrism) for modernity's task of order, but the increasing awareness of its potential to mislead.) Allan's reluctance to patiently observe is recurrently associated with his impulsivity in taking physical action, and hence implicitly attributed to the same physiological (constitutional) source. Ozias's plea for Allan to wait before he proceeds to engage Pedgift Senior as his lawyer, for instance, is refused on the basis of his (self-proclaimed) capacity to determine character from

⁶⁷ 'The More Haste the Less Speed', *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, 6.9 (1854), 135.

⁶⁸ 'Genius and Temperament', *The Saturday Review*, 28.715 (1869), 41–42 (p. 42). Temperaments are discussed at the beginning of the decade in Thomas Laycock, *Mind and Brain* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1860), II, p. 308. This literal sense is given later in *Armada* when Bashwood and Ozias are said to be 'drawn invisibly one to the other [...] by those magnetic similarities of temperament' (279).

sight. (The damaging potential of Allan's 'heedless' action is forefront during this scene, as his family's traditional lawyer, James Darch, has just refused employment from him, having received a '*rashly-expressed* letter' by Allan [428; emphasis added]; the idea of instantly judging character from sight is of course to index the ideal of physiognomic practice.) The ensuing dialogue is enlightening of the contrasting relations to action that are possible, and the distinctive (dichotomous) values. Ozias appeals to his friend:

'Wait a little before you go to this stranger; wait till we can talk it over together tonight.'

'Wait!' replied Allan. 'Haven't I told you that I always strike while the iron's hot? Trust my eye for character [...] I'll look Pedgift through and through, and act accordingly'.' (232-3)

Recognizing the benefits attributed to critical hesitation in the scientific context, and the dangers associated with heedless haste, this exchange invites censure of Allan's relation to action; to Ozias's reasonable request to pause, he instead strives, above all other considerations, to 'give [his] feelings repose'.

But his failure can be read in relation to a specific, early instance of those appeals for integrating critical hesitation into everyday life, such as were to be given by Tyndall, Bain, and Huxley. In his address to the Royal Society in 1859, Benjamin Brodie detailed how the application of 'strict and minute observation [...] the first thing which the student of the physical sciences has to learn' could benefit ordinary persons:

It is easy to see with what great advantage the habit [of strict and minute observation] thus acquired may be carried into everything else afterwards. Slovenly habits of observation are indeed the source of a large proportion of the evil which mankind bring upon themselves; or blunders in private life by which an individual causes the ruin of himself and his wife and children; [...] It is to these, moreover, that imposters and fanatics of all kinds and in all ages have been indebted for their influence and success.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Benjamin Brodie, *Address of Sir Benjamin C. Brodie ... At the Anniversary Meeting of the Royal Society* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1859), p. 6.

The ‘unusually large’ and variegated audience for Brodie’s address,⁷⁰ as well as subsequent coverage of the event in the popular press, make it tempting to think that Collins might have known of its contents (the physician’s acquaintance with Collins’s father, and the inclusion of Brodie’s *Psychological Inquiries* in the author’s library give this further credence;⁷¹ Collins was, moreover, in London at the same time as the address was given⁷²).

Unquestionably, Collins’s fiction internalizes Brodie’s sense of how critical hesitation around visual judgments (patient observation) determined whether individuals would escape or fall prey to others’ plots. (This continuity between the appeals made by Brodie and Tyndall around ‘danger’ and the scientific approach is not accidental; Tyndall cites Brodie prominently in the later *Fragments* essay, ‘Scientific Uses of the Imagination’.⁷³) Collins’s novels are replete with imposters who benefit, financially and/or socially, from duping others; *The Woman in White*, which began serialization in the same year as Brodie’s Address, speaks strongly to this idea in the characters of Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco. The case of Allan is notable, however, insofar as his failure to patiently observe is endlessly and explicitly remarked upon; so often (as in the passage earlier) tied to his hastiness; and clearly rooted in physiological causes. For instance, upon seeing Thorpe-Ambrose for the first time and noting its un-romantic aspect, his capabilities are damned with faint praise: ‘Allan’s essentially superficial observation had not misled him *for once*’ (201; emphasis added). His ‘slovenly habits of observation’ are doubly ‘essential’, I suggest, insofar as they are both substantial and intrinsic to him (his *essence*)—part of his unchangeable temperament. This instance of the rule proven by exception is repeated when Allan extracts a hysterical Ozias from the presence of the Milroy family, prompting the notice that he was ‘wisely impulsive *for once* in his life’ (271; emphasis added). In repeating the language of the previous quotation (‘*for once*’) a clear association is made, I suggest,

⁷⁰ *John Bull and Britannia* reported that Brodie’s address was delivered to an ‘unusually large attendance of the different scientific, learned, and literary institutions present on the occasion’; ‘Facts in Art, Science, and Literature’, *John Bull and Britannia*, 1859, 252.

⁷¹ Collins’s father received a medical visit from Brodie in 1845, as Wilkie describes in the memoirs of his father; *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1848), II, p. 276. For Wilkie’s library, see William Baker, *Wilkie Collins’s Library: A Reconstruction* (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 65.

⁷² Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins*, p. 210.

⁷³ Tyndall, p. 127.

between these two aspects of Allan, his superficial judgments and his constitutional impulsivity; they jointly attest to his inability to apply hesitation in his everyday life, with regrettable consequences.

Yet even if Allan's hasty judgments are not always 'misle[ading]', but occasionally correct, they are shown to be so when it matters most. Brodie and Tyndall's warnings—that the impulsive and incautious actor is liable to endanger himself—is given embodiment in the schemes to which Allan falls foul. Even before he becomes inveigled in the machinations of Maria Oldershaw and Lydia Gwilt, Allan's impulsivity is expressly acknowledged as jeopardizing his safety. On the prospect of his being left with Mr Hawbury, a doctor, the conclusion is that 'with [Allan's] constitutional imprudence, there was no safely trusting him alone anywhere' (141); prohibited by his temperament from exercising critical hesitation or patient observation, every 'stranger' (141) (as Hawbury is then) is a potential threat. This capacity is also recognized by characters; Ozias is conscious that leaving Allan to his own devices at Thorpe-Ambrose might bring him to harm:

Had he—as his knowledge of his friend's facile character bound him to do—warned Allan to distrust his own hasty impulses, and to test himself by time and absence, before he made sure that the happiness of his whole life was bound up in Miss Gwilt? (365)

Ozias is positioned here as an advocate, à la Tyndall and Brodie, for 'wait[ing] and] paus[ing]' before proceeding with action, and the 'danger of *haste*' is unambiguously stated. It is his failure to impress upon his friend the necessity of these values, and the dangers of their contradiction, that catalyzes the difficulties the pair face in the subsequent narrative. Naturally, *Armadale* withholds this realization until much later, but the difficulties that ensure after Ozias fails to mollify his friend's 'hasty impulses' are already predictable by intertextual reference—notably, as mentioned before, readers might have recalled the case of *Bleak House*'s Inspector Bucket, who cautions about the failures that would have arisen had he given in to his hasty impulses (his 'desire to give [his] feelings repose') instead of exercising critical hesitation.

Such descriptions already reveal the extent to which, though not conforming to a single medical 'type' or category as Ozias does (such as the hypochondriac

or nervous diathetic), Allan is similarly defined and castigated for his physiologically-defined nature, for it predisposes him to dangerously impulsive action. The absence of an obvious 'type' to which he can be assigned perhaps explains why the jeopardizing potential of Allan's character has not been perceived in physiological terms before, as equivalent (if antithetical) to Ozias's. When critics have observed the deficiencies of Allan's character, they have tended to diminish or overlook the extent to which, as the earlier discussion has noted, it exposes him and others to danger. Hence, I cannot, for instance, concur with Raffaella Antinucci's claim that Allan's qualities only become interrogated '[once he] establishes himself at Thorpe-Ambrose, becoming a "landed gentleman[.] [Once there] his assumed superiority, in terms of rank and character, begins to be questioned, undermining the dualism between the two male protagonists'.⁷⁴

Instead, it is clear, by reading the early descriptions of him against the context of mid-century ideas about hesitation and doubt, that Allan's character is suspect from *Armada*'s outset; it is never made 'superior' to Ozias's, but is specifically censured on various occasions. His 'reckless[ness]' is only compensated for, but not wholly redeemed by, his openness. Neither does Michael Tondre seem to adequately capture the extent to which Allan's deficiencies enable the plot of Lydia and Maria Oldershaw. On this Tondre writes that

as the plot proceeds, it becomes clear that Allan's assertiveness simply signals an absence of depths; he emerges as a hollow, 'flighty' example of such standards of social correctness [...]. By portraying the perverse value of Midwinter's irresolution (what the narrator calls his 'sensitive feminine organization' [...]) delay emerges as a new, more potent form of social empowerment.⁷⁵

Far from being purely a case of intellectual shallowness or social standing, I argue that Allan's 'assertiveness' is as concerned with physiological organization as the 'sensitive' nature of Ozias (as descriptors like *temperament*, *disposition*, and *constitutional* indicate); far from being 'simpl[e]', his character is inveigled in the complex significations of haste and hesitation, and the virtues and pitfalls of action (whose extensive pre-history was treated earlier). Within the moralizing system

⁷⁴ Antinucci, p. 146.

⁷⁵ Tondre, p. 598.

that was developing from such bases, Allan patently fails to pursue a relation to action that can be praised.

The period of Ozias's absence from Thorpe-Ambrose foregrounds these issues, together with my argument's distinction from those of Antinucci and Tondre; it highlights the deficiencies of Allan's constitutional impulsivity, and, conversely, the necessity of the critical hesitation that his friend expresses: 'to distrust his hasty impulses [and] test himself by time' in his interactions with Lydia. Left to his own devices, the 'dangers' foreshadowed from the first description of Allan's character are repeatedly and dramatically brought to fulfilment as he falls prey to others' plotting. Mrs Milroy is the first to trick him: she prompts Allan to uncover Lydia's background on her behalf, ostensibly asking that he acquire papers from her (Lydia's) reference in London. Unsurprisingly, Allan is unwilling to 'wait' and 'pause' in order that he can discover anything other than superficial meaning from the communiqué: 'Without a moment's hesitation, Allan followed his impulses as usual, and walked straight into it [the trap]—writing his answer, and pursuing his own reflections simultaneously, in a highly characteristic state of mental confusion' (398-9). The absence of hesitation, and the converse dominance of the 'impuls[ivity]' that defines every action made by Allan, are unambiguously signalled as enabling the trap laid by Mrs Milroy. It is significant that Allan's physiological constitution is construed as pathological, for such a character might be expected to apply to the opposite psychical conditions (as in the hesitation that Mill experienced). This detail brings him into a surprising resemblance with Ozias, for while he does not share the painful doubt of his sensitive friend, Allan's haste engenders a similar kind of pathological outcome: 'mental confusion'.

Allan's constitutional impulsivity makes him an unwitting accomplice to Oldershaw's ploy, but it also conspires to lead him into further problems. Fearful of casting aspersions on Lydia's character, he attempts to conceal the secrets of her past life (which he has garnered by investigating) from disclosure by writing to Mrs Milroy. Describing the letter's preparation, the narrative assumes a distinctly polemic stance on the deficiency of Allan's physiologically-defined character:

A man accustomed to consider consequences and to prepare himself for action by previous thought would, in Allan's present circumstances, have felt some difficulty as to the course which it might now be least

embarrassing and least dangerous to pursue. Accustomed to let his impulses direct him on all other occasions, Allan acted on impulse in the serious emergency that now confronted him. (416)

This passage highlights, as a tragically unrealized potential (almost an inverse of *Bleak House*), the most effective relation to ‘action’ as it bears on Allan’s ‘impuls[ivity]’: action should be combined with a critical hesitation that can reflect dispassionately on a multitude of possible ‘course[s]’; Bucket’s notice of the ‘necessity for patience’, and the ‘los[s]’ that is avoided by achieving this ideal, loom in the backdrop here. (There is also an anticipation of Tyndall’s later appeal for ‘wait[ing]’ and ‘paus[ing]’ before taking action.)

Moreover, the passage provides evidence for my assertion that Allan’s hasty impulses connote more than the dearth of social acumen (‘simply an absence of depths’ in Tondre’s phrasing), but reflect instead on the serious matter of how to proceed when faced with the uncertainties of the modern world. These associations remain forefront as Allan prepares his missive to Mrs Milroy. ‘If he had possessed a higher mental capacity and a clearer mental view, he might have found the letter no easy one to write. As it was, he calculated no consequences, and felt no difficulty’ (417). The collocation here of ‘mental capacity’ and coherence with a complication of physical action might seem paradoxical, but to be faced by the ‘difficulties of decision’, to use Houghton’s phrase, required a consciousness of different outcomes: hesitation as a *critical* exercise was the product of a rigorous, not an addled, mind. As Tyndall perceived, those offering *simple* solutions ‘offer us intellectual peace at the modest cost of intellectual life’.⁷⁶ Appreciation of the significations that haste and hesitation possessed within scientific and popular discourses gives cause to the reproach of the narrative voice against Allan: his reaction to the ‘serious emergency’ that he faces expresses a flawed and injurious manner of being. The consistency of his character is explicated when Major Milroy intercedes in the aforementioned plot orchestrated by his wife; upon Allan’s latest failure to ‘wait’ and ‘pause’, the narrator writes that: ‘in this difficulty [he] acted as usual, without hesitation’ (422).

Tondre concludes that ‘the line [in *Armada*] between normative and abnormal states is charted along a continuum of preoccupation and impulsiveness—

⁷⁶ Tyndall, p. 105.

an opposition that the narrative nonetheless renounces at every turn'.⁷⁷ If the argument of this chapter so far seems to be condone this assessment, by elaborating Allan's 'impulsiveness' as a constitutional and imperilling facet of his character, it should not be thought to validate, in any simplistic way, Tondre's claim that Collins 'turned instead to the positive potentials for nervous "hesitation" as an alternative to modern modes of regulatory order, efficiency, and rational self-control'.⁷⁸ Instead, I propose that Ozias exhibits two, distinct forms of hesitation, corresponding to what I previously accounted as the contemporary understanding of its pathological potential (emphasized in medical discourse) and its epistemological and practical utility (emphasized in scientific culture).

In 'Vacillating Characters', an 1867 *Belgravia* article, these divergent potentials are given succinct expression. On the one hand, they identify 'hypochondria, [or] morbid hesitation': a 'trait of character which approaches more nearly to the nature of a disease than a folly' and which they declare stems from 'over-taxed energies, over-wrought sensibilities, and intense earnestness'. By contrast, they distinguish an alternative possibility:

There is [another] species of perpetual decision[: that] which so often seem[s] inseparably allied with the highest form of intellectual development. It is the characteristic only of the perfectly fair and impartial mind, which refuses to be biased either by tradition or by prejudice, to discern even in conflicting theories and antagonistic views germs of justice and truth.⁷⁹

Contrary to the abstracted thinkers, or those with morbid tendencies, this type of hesitation is allied to decisive action. This virtuous alliance of thought and action is understood by this author as necessary to overcome 'the critical difficulties of life' which, 'so rapidly and unexpectedly present themselves, demanding a decision not a whit less immediate, that it will be found a very serious disadvantage to be unable to resolve off-hand and at once what course is to be pursued'.⁸⁰ It is

⁷⁷ Tondre, p. 598.

⁷⁸ Tondre, p. 589.

⁷⁹ 'Vacillating Characters', *Belgravia*, 1 (1867), 454 (p. 458).

⁸⁰ 'Vacillating Characters', p. 459.

to this question of how to respond to modernity's challenging epistemological climate that *Armadale* seems preoccupied.⁸¹ In the character of Ozias Midwinter, Collins's novel stages the development from the morbid hesitation that imperils action to the critical hesitation that enables it.

The first appearance of Ozias's 'pathological hesitation' occurs as he and Allan are aboard *La Grâce de Dieu*, the ship where Fergus Ingleby (the first Allan Armadale Sr.) was murdered by Matthew Wrentmore (the second Allan Armadale Sr.). The site has already been invested with fatalistic significance by Ozias earlier in the novel, and so, situated on its wreck, he gives in to increasing fatalism at the anticipation of the future:

'I am waiting,' said Midwinter.

'Waiting! What for?' [said Allan]

'For what is to happen to you or to me—or to both of us—before we are out of this ship.' (156)

Ozias has abrogated any intent of taking action, but has become the passive recipient of events. His declaration paves the way for when Allan's enquiries draw him into the 'torturing temptation to reveal the truth' (156) of their shared hereditary past, against which temptation he struggles (it becoming metaphorized as a 'fiend' [157]). The collocation of hesitation with the physical state of pain is intensified as the scene progresses;⁸² when Allan asks Ozias to repeat his ominous prediction of their future separation, he

made no reply. The struggle between the hereditary superstition that was driving him on, and the unconquerable affection for Allan that was holding him back, suspended the next words on his lips. He turned aside his face in speechless suffering (158).

It is difficult not to detect echoes of Carlyle's admonishment of doubt as a force that quells the possibility of 'Heroic Action' ('inquiries of the deepest, painfullest

⁸¹ On these uncertainties see, for instance, Singer, pp. 23–25.

⁸² There are echoes of Robert Browning's similar association in 'The Lost Leader' (1845) of 'doubt, hesitation, and pain'; 'The Lost Leader', in *Robert Browning: The Poems*, ed. by John Pettigrew and Thomas J. Collins (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), I, 410–11.

[sic] sort must be engaged with'⁸³). Ozias's 'suspended' words are indeed metonymic of his whole being at this moment of indecision: he is 'paralyzed' between two alternative courses, unable to choose between them.

Ozias experiences a parallel instance of hesitation after Lydia Gwilt arrives at Thorpe-Ambrose, and once he commits himself to the prospect of leaving Allan. Confronted by the necessity of informing his friend,

he tried again and again, and yet again to write the farewell words. [...] Mercilessly in earnest, his superstition pointed to him to go while the time was his own. Mercilessly in earnest, his love for Allan held him back till the farewell please for pardon and pity was written' (324)

It is crucial to observe the parallels between this instance of hesitation and that given just above: something encourages Ozias to go forward (*driving or pointing him to go*), only for something else to hold him back. In this case, this equipoise manifests as an exact parallel of feelings as well (both resolutions are 'mercilessly in earnest'). Suspended once more between these two courses, a 'sudden resolution' (324) appears to break the deadlock—yet, in the event, it is only to afford him more time for deliberation, and he waits, painfully, in darkness. The narrative shifts at this moment to a brief internal monologue:

'I may go in the early morning; I may go while—' The thought died in him uncompleted; and the sharp agony of the struggle forced to his lips the first cry of suffering that had escaped him yet (324).

The repetition of 'struggle' and 'suffering' between this and the action aboard *La Grâce de Dieu*, and their structural equivalence, builds the sense that these are not discontinuous moments but a uniform type: a pathological reaction to doubt that has become an essential part of Ozias's character. 'There is a certain class of people [...] who are incessantly tormented with agitating perplexities and self-questionings', according to the author of 'Vacillating Characters'.⁸⁴ Distinct from the representation of this same 'tormented' status in *Basil's Mrs Sherwin*—who displayed 'involuntary rapidity' and 'useless hesitation'—*Armada* unfolds these

⁸³ Carlyle, V, p. 305.

⁸⁴ 'Vacillating Characters', p. 455.

qualities into a matter of plot; far from fulfilling a purely metonymic function (indicating the 'nervous diathetic'), Ozias's incapacity to intervene at moments such as these plays a formative role in the developing narrative.

This trajectory arguably culminates in the scene, briefly noted earlier, where Ozias is poised to ameliorate Allan's reckless impulsivity before leaving Thorpe-Ambrose. It should be noted that the 'approach' adopted by Ozias in the novel (and this term is meant to encompass its epistemic and practical components) is frequently treated as a positive force. Daniel Matlock, for instance, claims that his 'liminal mindset, simultaneously fixated on Allan and yet ready to desert him altogether' proves to be 'pragmatically valuable as the narrative progresses'.⁸⁵ I differ, as mentioned, in arguing that Ozias develops from a damaging, pathological hesitation to a more beneficial, critical variety, and such a conclusion is corroborated particularly by this scene. Manifestly conscious that the 'facile character' and 'hasty impulses' of his friend are liable to expose him to danger if left on his own, Ozias entertains the idea of revealing his fears about the future; but, to the question of 'had he [...] warned Allan [...]?' the answer is as follows:

No. The bare doubt whether, in speaking of these things, he could feel that he was speaking disinterestedly, had closed his lips, and would close his lips for the future, till the time for speaking had gone by. (365)

Doubt leads here to a 'hesitat[ion]' (365) that ultimately precludes speech until it is too late—the dire repercussions of which were noted before (Allan becomes inveigled in the plots of Lydia and Oldershaw). Intriguing to note is how the condition itself is made an active agent, rendering Ozias a passive recipient: he (his body) is acted upon by doubt—his lips are 'close[d]' by it. Clearly, doubt deprives him of agency in confronting his difficulties, making him impotent at a crucial juncture (the 'time *for* speaking'). If Allan's 'constitutional imprudence' is *positively* jeopardous, in the sense that his hasty actions lead him into danger, Ozias's hesitation is *negatively* so: his inaction exposes his friend to danger. It is difficult to see this damaging irresolution as categorically similar to his later, and strikingly more effectual, responses to the dangers of the Sanatorium (the culmination of

⁸⁵ Daniel Matlock, "In the Mystery and Terror of a Dream": Sensationalism, Consistency, and Mental Science in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*, *The Wilkie Collins Journal*, 14 (2017), p. 7. Tondre's condoning of Ozias's approach has already been alluded to.

Lydia's plot to kill Allan)—it is more sensible, I argue, to follow contemporary understanding by seeing that an initial, morbid hesitation develops into a critical variety. This first type of hesitation acts as a foil to Allan's impulsivity, and both are shown as *equally deficient* responses to the uncertainties of modernity. The 'difficulties of decision' are met effectively only by the adoption of that critical hesitation advocated by scientific culture.

Suggestive of how Allan's relation to action is inextricable from his temperament, he proves incapable of adopting this relation to action. But Ozias, I contend, manages to do so. (This prompts the question of whether Ozias's 'sensitive nature' is bound up with his temperament to the same extent as Allan's heedless impulsivity; as the *Saturday Review* declared, 'habit and accident may occasion a change in a man's physiological characteristics [...] But a physiological condition so brought on is not temperament'.⁸⁶) The change is perceptible particularly in the final sections of the novel, set in Doctor Downward's sanatorium. Caroline Reitz makes the apposite observation that a 'new, "self-possessed" Midwinter meets Allan' before the pair journey to this institution.⁸⁷ 'Self-possession' understates Ozias's changed status. In a discussion of Downward's invitation to the institution (luring him under the premise of being able to see his love, Neelie), Ozias detects something wrong:

'Allan,' he said, 'I have reasons—' He stopped. Could the reasons be given before he had fairly realized them himself; at that time, too, and under those circumstances? Impossible! 'I have reasons,' he resumed, 'for advising you not to believe too readily what Mr. Bashwood may say. Don't tell him this, but take the warning.' (786)

The 'warning' Ozias gives Allan negates his earlier, aborted attempt to ameliorate his friend's 'facile character'—here he impresses the need for scepticism (though, corroborating my earlier argument about Allan's constitutional impulsivity, it proves 'useless' [786]). Notably, his nascent suspicions form a type of hypothesis, for which 'wait[ing]' and 'paus[ing]' will allow the means to accrue the evidence that could prove or disprove it: 'perhaps I was wrong, Allan, and perhaps you were right. Will you only wait till we can telegraph to Major Milroy and get his

⁸⁶ 'Genius and Temperament', p. 42.

⁸⁷ Caroline Reitz, 'Colonial "Gwilt": In and around Wilkie Collins's "Armadale"', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 33.1 (2000), 92–103 (p. 99).

answer? Will you only wait over the night?' (786). Situated between two possible outcomes—Allan is right, he (Ozias) is wrong—critical hesitation appears as the means to deliver them from the difficulty. Crucially distinguishing this from the earlier instances of hesitation, action is embryonic in the thought process; it adheres to Carlyle's assessment of the right relations of thought and action: 'Speculation was wholesome, for it ranged itself as the handmaid of Action'.⁸⁸

Ozias's suspicions intensify when he joins Allan, who has determined to stay overnight in the sanatorium on the promise of seeing Neelie in the morning. Significantly, the spectre of 'mental confusion' is raised at this point only to be suppressed by his wilful recapitulation of the empirical bases for those misgivings: '[Ozias's] mind, clouded and confused by disturbing influences, instinctively took refuge in its impressions of facts as they had shown themselves, since he had entered the house' (796). Instead of the pathological associations that clung to his earlier doubt, his response now approximates the 'debility of indecision' that Bain was to describe, and Tyndall corroborate, as a necessary by-product of inquiry (emerging when faced by 'the uncertainty [of] where to look for the next opening of discovery'). Significantly, this change in Ozias's epistemological considerations is accompanied by a semantic shift: the 'bare doubt' that he painfully struggled against before has changed (cathartically) to 'one last doubt' (796). It pertains exclusively, moreover, to the *implementation* of action, not to the question of whether it should be taken in the first place (Ozias is uncertain about *how* to swap his cell with Allan's, so that he should experience any dangers in lieu of his friend). Consecrating the sense of alteration is the temporal nature of his reaction: the 'conclusion' is the 'work of an instant' (796) (albeit, of course, this belies the considerable thought that has preceded such action, the first glimpse of which comes in the 'reasons' cited before they even arrive at the sanatorium). This newfound resolution in Ozias is informed by Markovits's explanation of the relation between mental process and action, with reference to Carlyle: 'without belief in an end [...] to give some kind of narrative intelligibility to effort, the idea of action becomes meaningless. [...] why] do any one thing instead of another if

⁸⁸ Carlyle, V, p. 305.

you cannot know what is right, or even whether such a thing as “the right” exists?’⁸⁹ Ozias’s stirring to an uncharacteristic, but purposeful, action is the corollary to his new belief in (self)narrative intelligibility—that his role is to protect Allan from danger.

Such is the degree of transformation in Ozias’s relation to action that the narrative intercedes to offer (another) polemic: ‘Confronted by actual peril, the great nature of the man intuitively freed itself from the *weaknesses that had beset it* in happier and safer times’ (796; emphasis added). This explanation attempts to demarcate Ozias’s initial qualities (*morbid* hesitation) from its present form (*critical* hesitation). Hence, though Ozias’s ‘instant’ conclusion translates to a ‘policy of waiting for events’ (798)—namely, to remain in Allan’s cell and wait for Lydia and Downward’s plot to unfold—it differs markedly from the earlier scene at Thorpe-Ambrose; in that location, a ‘sudden resolution’ led him to remain ‘in the darkness’ (324). The literal absence of light has become the figurative uncertainty about what is about to happen; yet where that earlier difficulty elicits a pathological response, a similar trial in the Sanatorium is responded to with action, Ozias having dwelt critically on the consequences of doing so beforehand.

‘THE INCREDIBLE NOT ALWAYS IMPOSSIBLE’? HESITATION AND THE FANTASTIC

This reading of hesitation in *Armada* has so far considered its representation from the point of view of character: its absence in Allan (who is instead constitutionally hasty), and its initial, pathological repercussions for Ozias, which eventually accede to a critical variety, enabling him to surmount the ‘difficulties of decision’. But hesitation requires exploration in terms of its cause. One source of uncertainty in particular has predominated in critical discussions since the novel’s first publication. The *Saturday Review*, writing upon completion of its serialization (1866), opined that ‘over and above’ *Armada*’s other remarkable aspects it is the ‘wonderful coincidence’ of Allan’s dream aboard *La Grâce de Dieu* that readers must ‘grapple’ with most decisively—it is, in their view, the ‘backbone’ of the novel.⁹⁰ The dream is afforded such a major role in *Armada*, I argue, because

⁸⁹ Markovits, pp. 50–51.

⁹⁰ Page, p. 154.

it offers a hyperbolic (and sensational) instance of ambivalence, seemingly intractable to existing methods of enquiry (and thus evidencing the extent to which ambivalence is an irreducible aspect of modernity). The *Saturday Review*'s notice of readers 'grappl[ing]' with the dream's meaning indexes my claim for the novel's training function: not only must characters come to a 'decision' regarding the interpretation of the dream, but readers are forced to do so as well.

To understand the reason for this consternation at Allan's dream it is necessary, as Bourne Taylor writes, to 'look at the dream, its immediate relationship to contemporary dream theory, and the way that both are manipulated by the workings of the narrative'.⁹¹ Whilst it scarcely occupies a moment in the context of the novel's size, the dream casts a 'Shadow' over the subsequent narrative in the form of a 'bare doubt' (165) over whether a physiological or a spiritualist interpretation can best account for both its contents and their apparent fulfilment during the novel. The dream intersects with and catalyzes the 'Great Doubt' of *Armada*: 'the doubt whether we are, or are not, the masters of our own destinies' (55). The inclusive personal pronouns are significant in suggesting the sense that the arousal of *readerly* uncertainty motivates Collins's use, and particular rendering of, the dream, as a phenomenon about which there continued to be considerable speculation and hesitation. As Jonathan C. Glance explains, dreams were a focal point for working through the uncertainties of the period:

These debates [on dreams] mirror Victorian cultural tensions and uncertainties; dreams become a focus for discussions of the nature of the mind and the soul, matter and spirit, science and religion. Most Victorians, immersed in this debate, *aware of both channels of thought*, considered dreams to be meaningless *and* meaningful, mere physiological artifacts *and* messages from the great beyond.⁹²

Dreams encapsulated, then, what Georg Simmel describes as the problematic situation of modern individuals: 'being surrounded by an immeasurable number of cultural elements which are neither meaningless [...] nor, in the final analysis, meaningful.'⁹³

⁹¹ Bourne Taylor, p. 157.

⁹² Jonathan C. Glance, *Revelation, Nonsense or Dyspepsia: Victorian Dream Theories*, NAVSA Conference, 2001. Emphasis added.

⁹³ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 188.

Collins's fiction persistently exploited the sensational possibilities of such ambivalence as dreams denoted. As Laurence Talairach-Vielmas discerns, his fiction displays a 'wavering between the supernatural and contemporary psychiatric discourse prevail[ing] throughout the second half of the nineteenth century'.⁹⁴ I suggest that in *Armada* 'wavering' resonates with the situation in which Collins places readers by his depiction of the dream: the event offers a case study that spotlights the virtues of critical hesitation, or the means of proceeding when faced by epistemological uncertainty; not only characters, but readers must hesitate. Thus, I begin at the end, as it were, with an addendum to the novel in which Collins expressly states his intentions:

My readers will perceive that I have *purposely left them*, with reference to the Dream in this story, in the position which they would occupy in the case of a dream in real life—they are free to interpret it by the natural or the supernatural theory, as the bent of their own minds may incline them. (817; emphasis added.)

This notice of 'natural or the supernatural theory' could gesture intratextually—to the interpretations offered by Hawbury and Ozias, respectively—or outside the novel: to 'contemporary dream theory', which was was contested, broadly speaking, by these two theories. This is to say, as scholars like Bourne Taylor, Matlock, and Maurizio Ascari have discussed,⁹⁵ that *Armada*'s depiction of the dream (and its subsequent analysis) engages closely, if selectively, with ideas about the phenomena that circulated at the time of the novel's publication and before. Less clearly understood is the position of readers in terms of their navigation *between* these theories; tracing the links between the contexts of dream interpretation and the novel, this section more closely foregrounds the sense of uncertainty that surrounded the topic. In elucidating this facet of the dream, and its function as a means of training readers to handle the ambivalence of modernity, spiritualist accounts of the oneiric are reconsidered in their relation to more 'mainstream' (legitimated) scientific discourse.

⁹⁴ Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins, Medicine and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 39.

⁹⁵ See Bourne Taylor, p. 158; Maurizio Ascari, "The Shadow of the Future": Dreams, Fate and Suspense in *Armada*', in *Armada: Wilkie Collins and the Dark Threads of Life*, ed. by Mariaconcetta Costantini (Rome: Aracne, 2009), pp. 197–215; Matlock, p. 1.

Hawbury's interpretation of Allan's dream is given after he reads a written record of it the morning after it occurs. He expresses his approach as being to 'look at this matter from an essentially practical point of view' (173), in explicit contrast to Ozias's belief (as the doctor states it) 'that this dream is a warning, supernaturally addressed to Mr. Armadale, of dangerous events that are threatening him' (173). His proceeding explanation of the dream would be recognizable to contemporaries as a recapitulation of the physiological (also materialist or 'rational') understanding of dreams, which saw the phenomena as having solely organic bases. Bourne Taylor notes that his explanation 'corresponds closely to the dream analysis of [Robert] MacNish, [John] Abercrombie, [John Addington] Symonds, and other contemporaries'.⁹⁶ It was not merely in physiological treatises that these ideas were being articulated, however, but also in the popular press. In the same year as Symonds's publication *Sleep and Dreams* (1851), a *Westminster Review* article entitled 'Electro-Biology' inveighed against the supposition that any prophetic capabilities claimed of dreams were not accountable to physiological process and sheer chance: 'The laws of suggestion, and the occasional coincidences of a dream with facts, explain all the real phenomena connected with what is called *clairvoyance*, bearing any relation to a supernatural knowledge of events'.⁹⁷ This interpretation is reproduced (in sentiment as much as in tenets) in Hawbury's insistence on a 'materialist interpretation' of the dream:

We [my profession] don't believe that a reasonable man is justified in attaching a supernatural interpretation to any phenomenon which comes within the range of his senses, until he has certainly ascertained that there is no such thing as a natural explanation of it to be found in the first instance. [...] My theory of dreams [is that] accepted by the great mass of my profession. A Dream is the reproduction, in the sleeping state of the brain, of images and impressions produced on it in the waking state; (173-4).

In April 1865, two months after the Dream section was serialized, and as Collins's characters continued to wrestle with its meaning, readers were met by a further

⁹⁶ Bourne Taylor, p. 158.

⁹⁷ 'Electro-Biology', *Westminster Review*, 55 (1851), 161–69 (p. 169). Emphasis in original.

entrant into debates about the interpretation of the phenomena. Henry Maudsley's *On the Method of the Study of the Mind* (1865), later the introductory chapter to *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind* (1867), firmly proclaimed physiology as the only basis on which to study the mind—*The London Review* summarized Maudsley's position as 'opposed to the metaphysical method of theorizing without due regard to facts'.⁹⁸ This perhaps understates the positivism (or, less sympathetically, the *reductionism*) of his position, as he broaches an equivalence between belief in the supernatural and atavism; Maudsley suggests that terror and reverence at irregular events in nature was the response of primitive peoples, before they acceded to the 'spirit of inquiry' whereby the extraordinary is made 'uniform'⁹⁹ (that is, described by scientific laws). Current interpretations of dreams, according to him, fall foul of the same superstition; he relates:

Let any one take careful note of his dreams and he will find that many of the seemingly unfamiliar things with which his mind is then occupied, and which appear to be new and strange productions, are traceable to the unconscious appropriations of the day.¹⁰⁰

Maudsley's invective performs that 'purging [of] ambivalence' inherent to modernity; above all, Bauman explains, 'decrying and invalidating 'common sense' – be it "mere beliefs", "prejudices", "superstitions" or sheer manifestations of "ignorance"'. These must be jettisoned as part of a 'delegitimizing [of] all grounds of knowledge that are philosophically uncontrolled or uncontrollable'.¹⁰¹ Hawbury's procedure in *Armada* anticipates Maudsley's prescription to a tee; he traces the tableaux that form the dream to the 'unconscious appropriations' preceding its occurrence, delineating correspondences between the two that satisfy Allan but not Ozias.

The reception of Hawbury's analysis seldom receives equivalent attention to its content, yet this is the most significant aspect of the scene:

'Wonderful! not a point missed anywhere from beginning to end! By Jupiter!' cried Allan, with the *ready reverence of intense ignorance*.

⁹⁸ 'Short Notices', *The London Review* (London, 15 April 1865), p. 415.

⁹⁹ Maudsley, *On the Method of the Study of Mind*, pp. 3–4.

¹⁰⁰ Maudsley, *On the Method of the Study of Mind*, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 24. There is a clear parallel here with the derision of Uncle Lorne's statements in *Wylder's Hand*, as discussed in Chapter 2; as in the dream, ambivalence circulates around prophetic capabilities—its threat to temporal coherence.

'What a thing science is!

'Not a point missed, as you say,' remarked the doctor, *complacently*.

'And yet I doubt if we have succeeded in convincing your friend.' (181; emphasis added)

In his reading of the failure of the materialist interpretation, Matlock claims that Allan's position is 'overly narrow, marked by omission and ignorance' and that Hawbury's 'hyperbolic limiting of events to one day underlines the narrowness of his viewpoint'.¹⁰² I concur with this identification of narrowness, but would argue that it is the totalizing and reductionist claims of Hawbury's interpretation, rejecting *a priori* everything inconsistent with a materialist approach (and trying to overcome its myopia by exclusion), that are the target of reproach here. Nicola Bown has highlighted the reaction against the 'thoroughgoing materialist theories of mind' such as is represented in *Armada* by Hawbury; many Victorians, she claims, undoubtedly felt that such scientific naturalism 'denuded the world of romance', and, of more concern, humanity of its divine status.¹⁰³ The nod to 'complacenc[cy]' in the passage, juxtaposed against the assertion that his theory is water-tight, corresponds to such a reaction against reductionism—readers were shortly, in Maudsley's *Method*, to find this uncompromising position given renewed potency.

The undercurrent of deprecation intensifies as the exchange goes on. Hawbury demands, 'pugnaciously', that Ozias counter his '*unanswerably* rational explanation' (182-3; emphasis added), only to dismiss his opposing interpretation: that the Dream foreshadows events and persons yet unknown (rather than the 'miserably unromantic' persons already met (181)). Matlock determines that it is the 'generic unsuitability of this [Hawbury's] surmise – made explicit in the adjective "unromantic"' that discredits his analysis (and that of Allan, with whom he shares it). Contrarily, I consider it to be the doctor's deformation of the true principles of science (as Collins sees them) that invites readers' questioning of their interpretation: Hawbury stubbornly refuses to be open-minded, to countenance

¹⁰² Matlock, p. 5.

¹⁰³ Nicola Bown, 'What Is the Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of?', in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 151–72 (p. 164).

other possibilities and to *doubt*. (*Armadale* has a consistently playful attitude toward generic ideas of the 'romantic'.¹⁰⁴) Turning to less reductionist accounts of dreams' material bases (than that of Maudsley, for example), as I shall now do, there is a palpable awareness that considerable uncertainties still attended the subject of dreams; Hawbury's strict attempts to expiate the ambivalence surrounding Allan's dream is out of kilter with the consensus of his profession.

In *Chapters on Mental Physiology* (1858), the physician Henry Holland construes the state of sleep from which dreams came as a fantastic realm in which identity, memory, and reason are all disturbed; only its familiarity with everyday life 'prevents our feeling how vast is the mystery it [sleep] involves', he notes.¹⁰⁵ Mental science does not yet have all the answers regarding 'this curious topic [of dreams], so perplexing to the reason, so exciting to the imagination', Holland concedes (his notice of the imagination is significant for reasons that are considered shortly); thus there are various outstanding questions: 'why [are] some dreams [...] well remembered, others not at all, or very imperfectly?'¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, whereas Maudsley and Hawbury emphasize the transferral of impressions from the waking world to the dream, Holland stresses the liability of the reverse: the images and impressions of dreams are 'frequently carried forwards into waking life, [blending] themselves deeply and strongly with every part of our mental existence'.¹⁰⁷ This is a gothic (and therefore also sensational) motif: ordinary reality is permeated by and adjacent to unreason and chaos; it is also, needless to say, an implicit circumscription on modernity's ambition to regulate and classify: dreams embody the "'other of order": [...] irrationality, ambiguity, confusion, undecidability, ambivalence'.¹⁰⁸

Similar imagery, which stresses the strangeness or romanticism of dreams, appears in various other treatments of the subject: in *Sleep and Dreams* (1851), John Addington Symonds gives a lyric evocation of dreams as inspiration from the gods; and in Charles Ollier's *Fallacy of Ghosts, Dreams and Omens* (1848)

¹⁰⁴ Including the unromantic aspect of Thorpe-Ambrose (201), the unromantic names of Lydia Gwilt (249) and Ozias Midwinter, Maria Oldershaw's adoption of a romantic name in disguise (263), and Lydia's romantic impression of Doctor Downward's poisons (776).

¹⁰⁵ Henry Holland, *Chapters on Mental Physiology*, Second (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1858), p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Holland, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Holland, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 7.

they are compared to magic mirrors.¹⁰⁹ Even more contemporaneously, in August 1866, two months after its serialization of *Armadale* had finished, *Cornhill Magazine* published an article on 'Sleep'. So closely following the end of Collins's novel in the same publication, which finishes with Ozias's contemplation of the dream's significance, it establishes an unavoidable dialogue with his fiction, as well as providing insight into attitudes immediately contemporaneous with its completion. 'Sleep's' contributor highlights how the treatment of the subject remains at the 'metaphysical stage of enquiry', and this being so, 'dreams [not sleep proper] are the phenomena to be investigated'. But whoever wishes to do such confronts a bewildering array of past material: 'who shall exhaust the subject of dreams, or who shall review the treatises thereupon, and the speculations they have called forth?' (The examples above represent only a small selection of such.) Even whilst the article goes on to pursue a 'positive [positivist] view of bodily sleep', the contributor is forced to admit that they are battling against the tide, for 'the supernatural and the mysterious still envelope sleep and dreams'.¹¹⁰ Hence, Hawbury's claim that he speaks for the 'great mass of [his] profession' is only a partial truth; certainly he reproduces the broad tenets of a 'rational explanation', but even other proponents recognized the ambivalence that still permeated dreams, and deployed language and metaphors of the uncanny to describe it.

While the longevity of the metaphysical approach to the subject of dreams was regrettable to the positivists, others admired it.¹¹¹ In an *Englishwoman's Review* article of 1858, the contributor gains wry satisfaction from the persistence of a 'Belief in the Supernatural', despite claims of its incongruity with the rational, scientific approach:

Who could have imagined a resuscitation taking place of what we were assured had been dead and buried centuries ago? [...] After all the wrangling against the existence of these fleshless beings [spirits ...]

¹⁰⁹ See Bown, p. 164.

¹¹⁰ 'Sleep', *Cornhill Magazine*, 14.80 (1866), 226–37 (pp. 226–27).

¹¹¹ Although it cannot be detailed here in full, the involvement of G. H. Lewes, Bain, and Mill in the British reception (and development) of Comte's positivism is a vital context; in works like Lewes' *The Physiology of Common Life* (1860), it intervened directly on dream interpretation; see Martin Francis, 'The Evolutionary Turn in Positivism: G. H. Lewes and Leslie Stephen', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by W. J. Mander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 285–303.

they are still believed in as realities by some who [...] hold fast their faith in the agency of spirit messengers.

This *Englishwoman's Review* contributor is resolutely opposed to the scientific reductionism represented by the likes of Maudsley, Hawbury and the author of 'Sleep': persons who would 'seek to annihilate all belief in the not understandable, the incomprehensible, or the supernatural'. The statement of their own position is far from the simple reverse of that which they dismiss, however (an absolute acceptance of supernatural or spiritualist causes), and equally from contemporary ideas of the spiritualist or occult perspective as 'pseudo-scientific'; instead they conclude as follows:

We would as far as possible retain a mid-way positive between the extremes of over credulity, and of ultra scepticism; not believing all we hear of the marvellous, yet not destroying or doubting all.¹¹²

Maurizio Ascari concludes his analysis of *Armadale's* dream by determining that 'sensation novels often combine traditional and pseudo-scientific beliefs with the *modern* discourse of science'.¹¹³ Yet the passage from 'Belief in the Supernatural' indicates the adjacency of the *pseudo-scientific* to this 'modern discourse of science' (though 'mainstream', or legitimated are better terms); in fact, the author's appeal resonates with the earlier discussion in this chapter on scientific culture's advocacy of 'paus[ing]' and 'wait[ing]' before acting: there is considerable overlap, I argue, between this 'mid-way' and the critical hesitation espoused by Tyn-dall and others. Both approaches insist on doubting, but not dismissing *a priori*, justifications about the existence or nature of things beyond our current knowledge. 'It becomes us not to say such and such things are impossible',¹¹⁴ as the contributor to 'Belief in the Supernatural' declares.

Another instance of this viewpoint, again from the popular press, expresses these issues even more plainly. In a letter to G. H. Lewes, defending Charles Dickens in the pair's ongoing dispute in the *Leader* (over the spontaneous combustion episode in *Bleak House*), George Redford anticipates the 'mid-way positive' declared in the *Englishwoman's Review* five years later:

¹¹² 'Belief in the Supernatural', *The Englishwoman's Review*, 1858, 692.

¹¹³ Ascari, "'The Shadow of the Future": Dreams, Fate and Suspense in *Armadale*', p. 214. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ 'Belief in the Supernatural'.

The universal affection of our race for the supernatural, the love of a miracle, the determination to hunt up mysteries and try to solve them, is not a bad tendency. When not counterpoised by the 'positive' temperament [...] we get all the metaphysical vagaries about 'vital force' [c.]; yet it is the same disposition that leads the most positive of the scientific to be always treading upon the confines of knowledge, hovering between the known and the unknown, led captive by the charm of mystery.¹¹⁵

As Andrew Mangham suggests, 'Redford has an idea of science in which speculation and uncertainty are crucial to the process of knowing; [...] positivist qualities [he believes] must be supplemented with curiosity.'¹¹⁶ I would only add 'imagination' to this and emphasize, once more, that Redford's contribution can be viewed within a lineage of similar appeals extending later into that decade and the next. Notably, there are echoes of it in Benjamin Brodie's 1859 'Address', discussed earlier, as he attends to the scientific uses of the imagination; Brodie declares that

physical investigations more than anything besides help to teach us the actual value and the right use of the imagination; of that wondrous faculty which, left to ramble uncontrolled, leads us astray into a wilderness of perplexities and errors, a land of mists and shadows; but which, properly restrained by experience and reflection; becomes the noblest attribute of man [...] the imagination supplies the hypothesis which bridges over the gulf that separates the known from the unknown. It may only be a phantom; it may prove to be a reality.¹¹⁷

Like Redford, Brodie insists that 'speculation and uncertainty' are crucial to his sense of science: hypotheses are ventures into the unknown, made possible by the imagination. Yet, they must, he is conscious, be tempered by the 'positivist' qualities of 'experience and reflection', for epistemic and practical reasons. Paul Thagard's explanation comes to mind here: 'doubt in science is in part a function

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Mangham, *Dickens's Forensic Realism*, pp. 129–30.

¹¹⁶ Mangham, *Dickens's Forensic Realism*, p. 130.

¹¹⁷ Brodie, p. 7.

of our practical goal of avoiding harm that might result from premature acceptance of a hypothesis'.¹¹⁸ If imagination enables hypotheses, doubt must restrain it from following those hypotheses too earnestly.

It is tantalizing to note how *Armada* literalizes Brodie's gothic imagery for what is unknown, the 'land of mists and shadows' and the 'phantoms', through the dream tableaux: the only identifiable figures within them are the 'Shadow of the Man and the Shadow of the Woman' (172), whom Ozias connects with himself and Lydia. Indeed, the narrative proceeding Allan's dream finds Ozias suspended almost literally between the two polarities that Brodie identifies: 'It may only be a phantom; it may prove to be a reality'. Searching into the meaning of the dream can, I propose, be seen as a variety of scientific enquiry, and this effort embodies that 'mid-way' position between ultra-scepticism and unrestrained imagination, advocated for by Brodie, Redford and the *Englishwoman's Review* contributor. Hawbury, as noted previously, is stridently opposed to uncertainty: 'we have picked up the shadows, exactly as I anticipated; and we have only to account now—which may be done in two words—for the manner of their appearance in the dream' (181). Ozias, by contrast (and as discussed in the previous section), initially speculates *too extensively*, in a way that invites pathological repercussions.

Yet even before the Dream intensifies it, a contest over speculation is played out when Decimus Brock endeavours to restrain Ozias's conjectures around the idea of the past repeating itself. (There are echoes, then, albeit more closely associated with action and epistemology, of the 'metaphysical frisson' that surrounded the past in *Wylder's Hand*.) As the latter determines to shun his initial connection of a figure Brock met in Somerset with the figure who attempted suicide aboard a steamer, this dialogue follows:

'You are vindicating your own better sense,' answered the rector, encouraging him [Ozias] to trample down his own imagination, with an Englishman's ready distrust of the noblest of the human faculties. 'You are paving the way for your own happier life.' (127)

¹¹⁸ Thagard, p. 402.

Not only will Ozias's 'sensitive imagination' (128) be proven right in this case (the figures in question are revealed to be Lydia), but the sanatorium scenes will further prove the fallacy of 'tramp[ing it] down'. The virtues of a 'mid-way positive' are also proven there; his speculations regarding the dangers threatening Allan are proven to have factual basis, despite the fact that they are of a sensational (unreal) nature and hence liable to be dismissed. But, of course, Collins advocates not an abstract use of the imagination but one, as in Brodie's estimation, united to a willingness to act upon it.

Redford's intercession in the *Leader* was presaged to a remarkable degree by a debate in the same publication, only a year before, in which Collins himself was involved. The author's six-part contribution to the publication has been appraised in scholarship before, but it seems only in its connections to *The Moonstone*; its potential influence on *Armadale* has not been considered.¹¹⁹ Yet even the title of its last entry, 'The Incredible Not Always Impossible', indicates its potential relevance to Collins's novel, in which the coincidence of two persons sharing the Armadale name 'seem[s] impossible', and in which news of the consecutive decease of the Armadale family is described as 'simply incredible' (64; 91). In 'Magnetic Evenings at Home', comprising the other five parts, Collins relates an experiment in mesmerism to which he was witness; his appeal to disbelieving readers anticipates *Armadale*'s incredulous characters: 'incredible as this must appear to most people, it is nevertheless true [a woman was magnetized]'.¹²⁰ Importantly, this contribution elicited a characteristic rebuke from G. H. Lewes, 'Fallacy of Clairvoyance', which was published between the aforementioned pieces. It is vital to consider the dynamics of what was created by this: readers experienced a dialogue between open-minded doubt (Collins) and material scepticism (Lewes) over the topic of spiritualist phenomena, serialized over many successive instalments of the magazine. The resemblances to *Armadale* are not difficult to fathom; the *Leader* articles, I argue, are a precursor to the depiction of the dream: though it does not result from 'magnetic forces', the dream is similarly associated with clairvoyant potential, and it is disputed by two perspectives

¹¹⁹ See for example, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, "'My Grave Is Waiting for Me There": Physiological Prisons in *The Moonstone*', in *Wilkie Collins, Medicine and the Gothic* (University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 73–92 (p. 76).

¹²⁰ Wilkie Collins, 'Magnetic Evenings At Home. Letter VI', *The Leader*, 3.103 (1852), 256–57 (p. 257).

broadly corresponding to those of Lewes and Collins. Significantly, even as the latter adopts what could be termed a ‘pseudo-scientific’ idea, he recounts a discourse of scientific orthodoxy: Collins avows that his exploration of clairvoyance was a ‘*genuine* experiment’ that consciously avoided the distortions of personal subjectivity:

My friend and myself were not duped by our own imaginations—not misled by any deception of our own senses—and not unmindful of using every possible caution, as well as of raising every fair difficulty in selecting and prosecuting our test of the merits of *clairvoyance*.¹²¹

‘The Incredible Not Always Impossible’, portraying as it does spiritualist experiences being tested naturalistically, is a case that further validates the new historiography’s challenge to the sharp divisions once drawn between the ‘supernatural’ and ‘natural’. As Richard Noakes notes, while the first is a useful category, it was provisional and contradictory at mid-century.¹²² The *Leader* articles show Collins’s long-standing fascination for such provisionality. Dreams offered him a ready means of interrogating categories of the natural and supernatural through his fiction; *Basil* (1852) was the immediate product of this realization (its eponymous protagonist experiences several dreams),¹²³ but *Armada*, as a story that revolves around a dream, was its culmination.

Collins’s adoption of the mid-way position between credulity and scepticism is traceable, I claim, to his influence by the spiritualist or occult perspective; and this tradition usefully informs the depiction of the dream in *Armada*. It must first be said that this context has, until fairly recently, been neglected. Once believed to be peripheral interests in the period, spiritualism and the occult are, currently, increasingly conceived of as ‘culturally central for many Victorians’.¹²⁴ Sarah C. Alexander argues, however, that literary criticism continues to focus on the scientific naturalists and their empirical subject-matter, excluding more esoteric or

¹²¹ Wilkie Collins, ‘The Incredible Not Always Impossible’, *The Leader*, 3.106 (1852), 328–29 (p. 329). Emphasis in original.

¹²² Richard Noakes, ‘Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain’, in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 23–43.

¹²³ See Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, “‘On the Very Brink of a Precipice’: Landscapes of the Mind in Wilkie Collins’s *Basil*”, *Caliban*, 23 (2008), 183–90.

¹²⁴ Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn, ‘Introduction’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. by Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–16 (p. 1).

'heuristic' models.¹²⁵ Scholarship on *Armadale* follows this trajectory: Bourne Taylor's 1988 study concentrated primarily on the materialist interpretation, giving relatively sparse account of spiritualist or occult contexts; later readings by Ascari and Matlock (2007, 2017) afford greater balance between them; and yet Audrey Jaffe's article (2016) has recently focused almost exclusively on the rational in her reading of the Dream.¹²⁶ Little attention has been given to the way in which, as spotlighted by the interpretation scene involving Ozias and Hawbury, the spiritualist/occult is made a *counterpoint* to the materialist—as I claim, to establish epistemological uncertainty, and the basis for which *Armadale* can offer guidance on how to overcome it by means of critical hesitation. This focus requires an exploration of the likely sources for Collins's ideas about the spiritualist/occult perspective, which, except for Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) (a huge influence generally on occult and spiritualist treatments that followed),¹²⁷ are yet to be appraised. Consideration of the author's library at the time of his death, however, reveals sources that foreground the uncertainty on which hesitation depends.

Researches on Magnetism (1850), an investigation into a vitalist 'odic' force by the polymath Karl Baron von Reichenbach, is proposed by William Baker as a potential influence on Collins's *Leader* articles (he owned a presentation copy of the text).¹²⁸ The Preface by its English translator would seem to validate such a suggestion; his defence of the author's investigation of metaphysical subject-matter strikingly resembles Collins's own position on such:

The Author [von Reichenbach] has shewn that these most obscure natural phenomena, like all others, admit of being studied as part of physical science, and that they will well repay the investigator. [...] Nothing can possibly be more contrary to all scientific rules, than to reject a fact

¹²⁵ Sarah C. Alexander, *Victorian Literature and the Physics of the Imponderable* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 8–10.

¹²⁶ Audrey Jaffe, 'Armadale: Sensation Fiction Dreams of the Real', in *The Victorian Novel Dreams of the Real: Conventions and Ideology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹²⁷ Ascari, "The Shadow of the Future": Dreams, Fate and Suspense in *Armadale*', p. 205; Matlock, p. 5.

¹²⁸ Baker, pp. 64–65.

simply because it appears to us *incredible* or *impossible*, or because we cannot account for it.¹²⁹

This anticipates the frame in which Collins discussed equivalently ‘obscure natural phenomena’ in his *Leader* articles, and which is articulated forcefully in the title ‘The Incredible Not Always Impossible’. Von Reichenbach himself justified his approach in similar terms:

Our first notions [in science] have always been indirect, confused, and hence favourable to the marvellous, to the mysterious, and to superstition, and liable to abuse. But it did not follow from this, that the enigmatical shell did not conceal a solid nucleus of truth.¹³⁰

Contemporaries were keenly aware of Collins’s use of the ‘marvellous’ and ‘superstition’ as an appeal to the interests of his readers; one, writing in 1871, expressed how

all readers of [him] must have been impressed with the importance of the supernatural element in his writings. He appeals skilfully to the public taste for the marvellous [...] he shrewdly suspects that all men have an element of what is scornfully called superstition in their veins, and does not hesitate to cater for it¹³¹

And yet, just as von Reichenbach did, Collins frequently prefaced his novels by asserting the factual basis for their contents. *Armadale* is a good demonstration of this strategy; the preface to the two-volume edition of 1866 acknowledges that the novel ‘oversteps, in more than one direction, the narrow limits within which they [critics] are disposed to restrict the development of modern fiction’; but, Collins asserts, his is ‘a book that is daring enough to speak *the truth*’ (4, emphasis added) Claims to verisimilitude appear again in the appendix (the author proclaims his attention to ‘matters of fact’ [818]), so that *Armadale* is truly book-

¹²⁹ William Gregory, ‘Introduction’, in *Researches on Magnetism*, ed. & trans. by William Gregory (London: Taylor, Walton, and Maberly, 1850), p. xxiv. Emphases added.

¹³⁰ Karl Baron von Reichenbach, *Researches on Magnetism*, ed. & trans. by William Gregory (London: Taylor, Walton, and Maberly, 1850), p. xli.

¹³¹ J. L. Stewart, ‘Wilkie Collins as a Novelist’, in *Rose-Belford’s Canadian Monthly and National Review*, ed. by George Stewart Jr. (Toronto: Rose-Belford Publishing Co., 1878), 586–601 (pp. 595–96).

ended by them. Both Collins and von Reichenbach, therefore, display a consciousness that their incredulous-seeming subjects push the boundaries of what is permissible in their respective fields; and yet, nevertheless, they assert in the openings of their respective works that ‘truth’ lies at their centre—readers need only be open-minded to receive it.

Two other sources seem to be especially influential in terms of the way that *Armadale* elicits hesitation and uncertainty around the phenomena of dreams—whether they should be interpreted as natural or supernatural; both belonged to the author’s personal library.¹³² It was noted before of his *Leader* contributions that Collins positioned his spiritualist subject as interpretable within natural law, thus illustrating a permeability between the natural and supernatural. In *Strange Things Among Us* (1863), Henry Spicer treats the subject of clairvoyant dreams similarly. His discussion of own beliefs about causation seems to hold surprising contiguities with the materialist position, only to abruptly diverge; he notes:

The writer inclines to the opinion that supernatural appearances, occurring in close relation to passing events, have their origin, indeed, in the unhealthy action of the brain, but are used by the Omnipotent for a manifested purpose and a special end.¹³³

Not denying a material, morbid basis for the dream contents, Spicer yet contends that such a change in state can be engendered by an immaterial, spiritual force: ‘God still works wonders, but by natural means’.¹³⁴ Thus, Maudsley’s appeal to ‘trac[e] the unconscious appropriations of the day’ might remain, but in this model it does not comprehensively explain the origin or purpose of dreams. In fact, crucially for narrative purposes, as I shall consider, Spicer’s model suspends the recognition of dreams’ meaning until a later time—a dream’s purpose is realizable only after a series of subsequent events.

The other possible source for Collins’s views similarly countenances materialist explanations. In their revealingly-titled treatise *The Occult Sciences* (1855), Edward Smedley and others relate the same mysterious aspects of dreams as described by Holland. The case of Charles Ollier is exemplary of their study: the Devonshire student dreamt a visit to his mother, only to be later informed that she

¹³² Baker, pp. 64–65.

¹³³ H. Spicer, *Strange Things Among Us* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1863), p. 8.

¹³⁴ Spicer, p. 8.

had had a vision of the same dream acted out before her on that night. The authors declare: ‘such an instance [the dream] might be claimed for the second class of Abercrombie [trains of thought from bodily association], yet how will this account for the coincidence between the vision of the mother and the son?’ Like Spicer, the authors of *The Occult Sciences* accept material causation (here with specific reference to Abercrombie’s *Inquiries*), but contend that these only go so far toward explaining the strangeness of dreams—accounting for Ollier’s dream, but not the seemingly empathic link between mother and son; organic causes are only ‘exciting circumstances’, and further explanation of the phenomena, they conclude, can be found in the ‘influx or actions’ of the spiritual world.¹³⁵ Although Spicer’s order of causality is reversed (Spicer having insisted that spiritual intervention *engendered* material changes), these authors agree that the material can only partially account for dreams, and something more remains beyond present understanding; that *something else* is inveigled in uncertainty.

The perspectives of von Reichenbach, Smedley and others, and Spicer on dreams are manifest in *Armadale* in a section that appears in the manuscript, but which did not feature in the final publication. It concerns an explanation by Ozias given during the exchange between himself, Allan, and Hawbury about the correct interpretation of the dream:

‘It is hard to tell how I reconcile it,’ said Midwinter, ‘but I will try. All supernatural influences which work on mortal creatures, must necessarily work by means of mortal perceptions. Acknowledging as I do that you have clearly traced the events of the dream to my friend’s waking impressions, I go a step farther back when that point has been gained, and I ask next “If the waking impressions account for the dream, what accounts for the waking impressions?” I don’t believe, sir, that Chance took us on the road from Castleton to this place. I don’t believe that Chance has caused our meeting with you. I see in that meeting, and in the events which grew out of it, a supernatural influence working its end with a mortal creature by mortal means, and producing those very working [*sic*] impressions (about which we are all agreed) as the medium through which to convey the warning of the dream’ (821).

¹³⁵ Smedley and others, pp. 256–57.

It seems that Catherine Peters has been the only scholar to treat this deletion, and even then only via an explanatory note. She explains it, following the textual cue, as an attempt to ‘reconcile’ the two explanations of the dream, the ‘rational’ and the supernatural.¹³⁶ But it is also, I argue, a recapitulation of the spiritualist position just outlined—it corresponds as least as closely with it as Hawbury’s does with the ‘materialist’ interpretation (as Bourne Taylor has shown). Exactly like Spicer and Smedley, the Ozias of the deletion ‘agree[s]’ about an organic basis for the Dream but considers it only a *secondary* cause: a comprehensive explanation must ‘go a step farther back’ and discern the cause of the ‘waking impressions’. Meanwhile, there is an irresistible echo of Spicer’s claim that ‘God still works wonders, but by natural means’ in the proposal that ‘a supernatural influence [is] working its end with a mortal creature by mortal means’.

The passage is a substantive intervention on the dream’s interpretation that inflects vitally on the extant parts of the novel (making critical disinterest in it the more inexplicable). Its omission from the final publication is extremely revealing of the affective response that *Armada* is intended to elicit in its readers;¹³⁷ it is, I suggest, precisely the deletion’s substantiveness that accounts for its eventual exclusion—the position advocated by Ozias therein is too assured for this stage of the narrative; he has, as Peters asserts, ‘reconcile[d]’ the two explanations of the dream in his mind (even if, as has been noted, it restates the inherently ambivalent position of the ‘naturalized’ spiritualist), so that there seems scant potential for this version of him to hesitate between alternate interpretations, and, hence for *Armada* to train its readers by showing the development of critical hesitation. The eventual publication repurposes the deletion so that aspects of its position are progressively adopted in the course of the narrative—in other words, its revelations become suspended. In Brock’s final letter to Ozias, for instance, the vague agent of ‘supernatural influence’ is substituted for the orthodoxy of a Divine Plan, so that Spicer’s claim for the supernatural as ‘used by the Omnipotent for a manifested purpose and a special end’ is more closely echoed: ‘You, and no other, may be the man whom the providence of God has appointed to save him [Allan]’ (624) Brock writes. By the novel’s end, Ozias has ‘learnt to view

¹³⁶ Peters, ‘Introduction’, p. xxv.

¹³⁷ See Sally Bushell, *Text as Process: Creative Composition in Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Dickinson* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

the purpose of the Dream with a new mind' (815), thus subscribing fully to the teleological perspective given in the deletion. Ascari correctly observes of the dreams in Collins's fiction that they create a 'set of expectations' in readers, but that their 'ambiguous messages' produce 'tension'.¹³⁸ By omitting the clarification offered with the deletion, the result is greater uncertainty that is only gradually, and incompletely, resolved as the plot progresses.

If Ascari's reading just given seems amenable to Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic, this is no coincidence; he is one of several scholars to have observed the relevance of Todorov's ideas to either Collins's fiction generally, and even *Armada* specifically.¹³⁹ So far, however, this connection has not exceeded simple citation (the observation of Todorov's potential relevancy). Having delineated the context of dream theory as it bears on hesitation, I claim that 'the fantastic' in Todorov's formulation can further our understanding of why the novel depicts the dream in the manner it does. The 'tension' that Ascari describes, which I (together with Todorov), term 'hesitation', is foregrounded in the scene noted at the beginning of this chapter, in which Lydia explains her and Ozias's oscillating mind-sets:

After alternately believing and disbelieving in it [the dream], he has got, by his own confession, to believing in it again. Can I say I believe in it, too? I have better reasons for doing so than he knows of. [Lydia details various prior events in the novel.] These may be coincidences, but they are strange coincidences. I declare I begin to fancy that I believe in the Dream too! (512-13; emphasis in original.)

This passage gives a precise account of the precarious condition of the fantastic: the 'hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event'.¹⁴⁰ The uncanny is negotiated in Lydia's speculation that these are 'coincidences' (that is, explainable by natural laws), only for it to be distanced by recognition of their 'strange[ness]' (thereby

¹³⁸ Ascari, "'The Shadow of the Future': Dreams, Fate and Suspense in *Armada*", p. 206.

¹³⁹ Maurizio Ascari, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 59; Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 125. Bourne Taylor, p. 15.

¹⁴⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 25.

evoking the marvellous). This capability of the passage to, in Todorov's words, 'ke[ep] us in both worlds at once [the marvellous and the real]' is sustained by the ambiguity of modalization:¹⁴¹ *can* and *may* signal how much remains uncertain. The last sentence of the passage so closely matches with what Todorov defines as the 'spirit of the fantastic' that it is practically synonymous: "*I nearly reached the point of believing*".¹⁴² Notice how Lydia's statement of belief in the dream is prolonged by the two previous verb constructions: her psychic difficulties in accepting its clairvoyant capabilities (which would render it wholly marvellous) are expressed via the grammatical extension. Allan's dream as a source of ambivalence is never more concisely expressed than in Lydia's declaration at this moment.

But Todorov's theory of the fantastic relies on readers' participation in such hesitation as Lydia experiences. Collins's prefatory and supplementary notices certainly make clear that the 'integration of the reader into the world of the characters' was the objective (*'I have purposely left them ...'*),¹⁴³ but whether contemporaries reacted in this way is more difficult to gauge. Even the scant examples of reader response that are available, however, in the form of reviews, suggest that Collins achieved his intentions. Perhaps with the aforementioned passage in mind, the *Saturday Review* piece on *Armadale* disdained the prospect of readers oscillating, like Lydia and Ozias, between alternate interpretations of the Dream:

As for the dream [... readers], unless they are singularly simple-minded will not be long in puzzling themselves between natural and supernatural. Being an invention of the author's fancy, it is much more simply accounted for on the theory that it has pleased Mr. Wilkie Collins to invent it. The only philosophical inquiry still possible after this solution is whether or not [Collins] believes that such a train of incidents, *if* it happened in the world, would be referable to a natural or supernatural origin.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Todorov, p. 38.

¹⁴² Todorov, p. 31. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴³ Todorov, p. 31.

¹⁴⁴ Page, p. 154.

Though they strive in this passage to quell the uncertainty that produces hesitation, I propose that the contributor's recourse to intentional fallacy is in fact incidentally revealing of its force. The contexts outlined previously reveal the extent to which, though its details are of course specific to *Armadale's* sensational plot, Allan's dream was far from an 'invention' of Collins's; belief in dreams' clairvoyant potential was countenanced by even the most decidedly materialist voices, such as the author of 'Electro-Biology' in the *Westminster Review* of 1851. This is to say nothing of spiritualist treatises like *The Occult Sciences*; the case of Charles Ollier indicates the belief in the communicative capabilities of dreams, which are gestured to in *Armadale* in the 'mysterious sympathies' (164) between Allan and Ozias during the former's sleep; in fact, the dream evokes the past knowledge of his sensitive friend far more than his own, to the extent that Hawbury initially thinks it was Ozias's. In other words, the contributor's claim for the dream's fictive status (even when we admit its fantastical aspects), is unpersuasive—there is nothing in its depiction that does not accord with mid-century understandings of the phenomena. Rather their intentional fallacy comes, I propose, from a desire to resolve the uncertainties raised by the dream; that is, if the dream's interpretation belongs exclusively to Collins, readers are absolved of the need to determine its meaning for themselves. Bauman's assertion about the modern mindset's reaction to 'unresolved hermeneutical problems' such as this: 'at best, uncertainty is confusing and felt as discomforting. At worst, it carries a sense of danger',¹⁴⁵ perfectly captures the affective response of the *Saturday Review* contributor to the novel. But their apparent need to 'grapple' with the dream's interpretation as an ongoing dilemma, even once *Armadale* ceased serialization, points to 'radical uncertainty' as a substantial feature of its denouement.¹⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

Armadale is arguably the most intense instance of what this thesis has claimed, in respect of its case studies, to be the way that ambivalence continues despite the efforts to expiate it. Its transgressive anti-hero, Lydia Gwilt, goes the way of

¹⁴⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 56.

¹⁴⁶ This is Caroline Levine's description of the conclusions of such texts *Villette* or *Great Expectations*, in which 'suspended questions do not simply give way to soothing answers'; p. 49.

her forebears, Jabez North and Stanley Lake (to say nothing of the many others this applies to), and is killed at the novel's conclusion when her murderous plot against Allan is frustrated by Ozias (by substituting himself for his friend; Lydia, after rescuing him from her mistake, takes her own life from contrition about her past actions and disconsolation at the future). But ambivalence persists through the unanswered questions and doubts raised by the dream; the unresolvedness of this event is raised in an explanation that Ozias offers to Allan:

I can't honestly tell you that I am more willing now than I was when we were in the Isle of Man, to take what is called the rational view of your Dream. Though I know what extraordinary coincidences are perpetually happening in the experience of all of us, still I cannot accept coincidences as explaining the fulfilment of the Visions which our own eyes have seen. All I can sincerely say for myself is [...] that I have learnt to view the purpose of the Dream with a new mind. (815)

This passage intervenes crucially on what I have argued to be *Armadale's* training for the epistemological uncertainties of modernity. An altered Ozias—able to apply critical hesitation as a means of acting in the midst of doubt—is proposing an outlook that does not demand the expiation of ambivalence, nor appear to be disturbed by it. Doubts remain palpable, but they do not possess a 'haunting' quality as far as they concern Ozias; in this sense, he is able to speak of having 'silenc[ed a] doubt which once made my life miserable' and of 'look[ing] on without doubting to the years that are to come' (815-16). These doubts are not, furthermore, displaced onto external forms such as property, heredity, or the waxwork (as in *The Trail of the Serpent* and *Wylder's Hand*), so as to become a continuing, symbolic reminder of ambivalence. Ozias's admission of ambivalence about the dream's nature manages to co-exist with (indeed, to *enable*) the 'harmony' of *Armadale's* conclusion, which involves the reinstatement of normative social arrangements (Allan and Neelie are to be married).¹⁴⁷ The abrogation of the self is not demanded here, as it is in *Wylder's Hand* and *Not Wisely, but Too Well*, in order to resolve uncertainty.

¹⁴⁷ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 243.

Marking a further distinction in terms of the epistemological training I claim of my case studies, *Armada*'s volume release goes a step further: it situates ambivalence as an ineradicable aspect of the *extra-diegetic* world. This is performed via the addendum mentioned previously. With an altered Ozias reconciled to the remaining uncertainties, the onus for confronting the 'difficulties of decision' is put squarely on readers; I have excerpted it earlier, but it is worth considering again *Armada*'s appendix, which begins with a direct address from Collins:

My readers will perceive that I have purposely left them, with reference to the Dream [...], in the position which they would occupy in the case of a dream in real life—they are free to interpret it by the natural or supernatural theory, as the bent of their own minds may incline them (817).

Hence, even as the dream is a 'finished question' for his characters, it is posed as an ongoing dilemma for readers. Vitally, however, Collins does not simply retrace the same uncertainties posed by the plot, but proceeds to intensify them by relating a real-life 'coincidence relating to the present story' (817): a ship called *The Armada*, whose crew died from inhaling poisoned air. This story, of course, exists in an uncanny relation to the denouement of *Armada*, whose murderous plot relies on using poisoned air on Allan.

If the fantastic, in Todorov's understanding, occupies the 'duration of this uncertainty [of whether reality's laws remain in place or must be altered]',¹⁴⁸ then the appendix of *Armada* ensures that it continues beyond the narrative proper. Of the appendix's function, Audrey Jaffe claims that it

has two contradictory effects. On the one hand, it undercuts (or affects, tongue-in-cheek, to undercut) the novel's fantastical quality, insisting on the realist status of its bizarre foundation. On the other, it retrospectively transforms the novel into a predictor of actual events, aligning it with one of its central plot devices—the narrative called 'Armada's Dream'—whose fulfillment, revealing the identities of specific persons

¹⁴⁸ Todorov, p. 25.

to fill the spaces of the dream's 'shadows,' forms the bulk of the novel's task.¹⁴⁹

This recognition of the appendix's dual function, simultaneously reinforcing the novel's fantastical and 'realist' status, is right in my estimation. Yet I cannot agree that they are 'contradictory effects', for the assertion of two divergent (arguably mutually exclusive) positions perpetuates the hesitation that I have been arguing is definitional of *Armadale*. As if directed in response to such persons as the *Saturday Review* contributor, who felt complacent about the dream's interpretation, Collins notes that the case of *The Armadale* will interest those 'disposed to take the rational view', or who claimed it as an "extravagant improbability" (817). In other words, there is an intent to maintain and intensify the ambiguity on which hesitation depends by observing the extra-textual fantastic of the everyday.¹⁵⁰ Given the precise echoes here of characters' responses to the same extraordinary phenomena, it is as if the addendum aims to return readers to the strange world they might be forgiven for thinking they had left behind; the term 'coincidence', applied by Collins to the case of *The Armadale*, illuminates this intent, for it exactly recalls Lydia's oscillation on the prospect of the dream's prophetic capacity: 'these may be coincidences, but they are strange coincidences.'

In this context, the *Saturday Review's* oft-cited description of *Armadale* as a 'literary nightmare' acquires further resonance; Henry Holland's belief in dreams as vehicles for introducing unreason and disorder into the everyday ("frequently carried forwards into waking life, [blending] themselves deeply and strongly with every part of our mental existence"¹⁵¹) is paralleled by the novel, which, through its concluding imagery of *The Armadale's* poisoned crew, leads irrationality and disorder to escape its textual confines and blend itself with readers' reality. The appendix, as Jaffe concludes, 'brings the novel into view as a space of mediation between fantasy, sensation fiction, and dream, on the one hand, and external

¹⁴⁹ Jaffe, p. 116.

¹⁵⁰ Collins was thereby intervening in an extensive and ongoing discussion about sensationalism vis-à-vis realism and the 'real'; see Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 50–52. This destabilizing manoeuvre enacted by the novel's appendix might be seen to anticipate Franz Kafka's production (according to Todorov) of a '*generalized fantastic*' in the early twentieth century: a fantastic that 'swallows up the entire world of the book and the reader along with it'; Todorov, p. 174. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵¹ Holland, p. 19.

reality or the real on the other, even as it suggests the instability of each term'.¹⁵² But it also, I argue, demonstrates the instability (or inefficacy) of endings (the appendix is arguably the second or third of the novel's 'endings'¹⁵³). In particular, it insists upon the impossibility of bringing an end to ambivalence, by extricating it from its fictional frame and transplanting it into the reality of readers.¹⁵⁴

By emphasizing the persistence of ambivalence both within and outside of the narrative, *Armada* inculcates readers toward what Frances Power Cobbe, writing only a few months before its serialization, described as the 'disposition to accept as a finality that condition of hesitation and uncertainty which should in the nature of things be one of transition'.¹⁵⁵ For Cobbe (precisely corresponding to Bauman's ideas about the modern mindset), this was a fearful state. Contrarily, Collins's novel, as has been shown, valorizes hesitation and uncertainty as means of overcoming the epistemological uncertainties (the 'difficulties of decision') that define modernity, which become hyperbolized in the dream; doing so, moreover, in dialogue with mainstream and pseudo-scientific discourses, which were united by an advocacy of this approach. Thus, *Armada*'s oft-cited recalcitrance to criticism, the inability for its variegated aspects to be comprehended according to any single framework, parallels the intent behind the novel.¹⁵⁶ The novel acclimatizes readers to a nascent postmodern consciousness: as Bauman defines it, an 'acceptance of the ineradicable plurality of the world; plurality which is not a temporary station' (or a 'condition of transition', in Cobbe's phrasing) 'but the constitutive quality of existence'.¹⁵⁷ The divergent trajectories of Allan, Lydia, and Ozias stage the troubles of coming to this realization, hedged on either side by the perils of unthinking action and overwrought hesitation.

¹⁵² Jaffe, pp. 117, 117n4. Cf. Bernstein's reading of sensation fiction as indexing the permeability of boundaries; 'Ape Anxiety: Sensation Fiction, Evolution, and the Genre Question', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 6.2 (2001), 250–71.

¹⁵³ Jaffe makes this point. (If one follows Bourne Taylor, this would be the third ending to *Armada*). See Jaffe, pp. 116n3, 136.

¹⁵⁴ This example pushes back against Pamela Gilbert's claim that 'far from bringing the terrifying into the midst of the middle-class neighbourhood [...] the sensation novel's purpose was to remove it and frame it, so that it might be perused safely and at some distance'. *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁵ Cobbe, p. 491.

¹⁵⁶ Jaffe, p. 117n5; Bourne Taylor; Nathan K. Hensley, 'Armada and the Logic of Liberalism', *Victorian Studies*, 51.4 (2009), 607–32.

¹⁵⁷ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, pp. 56, 98.

CONCLUSION

The evidence of this thesis brings us to understand that when Hardy concluded *A Laodicean* (1881) with the dream of a future radically discontinuous from the haunted past, yet thwarted by incoherency and the unclassifiable, he was epitomizing sensation fiction's long-standing engagement with order, chaos, and ambivalence—with dynamics that define a cultural discontinuity sense of modernity. George's insistence that they must 'keep straight on', looking only to the future, encapsulates modernity's status as an 'obsessive march forward',¹ and he proclaims, accordingly, his intent to remove the last vestiges of the ruined castle that had so disturbed Paula's equipoise. But even the erasure of the narrative's most intensely transgressive aspects—not only Stancy Castle, but its would-be heir, William Dare—fail to create a world free of ambiguity. It manifests, instead, as an internalized quality, exhibited in Paula's affirmation of her husband's aim, while at the same time firmly committed to the past he decries. This thesis claims that modernity, or 'the modern spirit', is indeed visible in the conclusion to *A Laodicean*, but not in a form that either George or Paula recognizes: it emerges from the recognition that, despite all efforts to (re)instate artificial order, the end of Hardy's novel 'remains as ambiguous as possible'.²

I have aimed to demonstrate that a sense of modernity as cultural discontinuity, particularly as it is formulated by Zygmunt Bauman, can be leveraged to provide a fuller account of the engagement that sensation fiction makes with its historical moment, and to perceive the important function of such an engagement. The 'moral and intellectual uncertainty' generated by modernity registered across many areas of mid-nineteenth-century British social life,³ and the case studies of this thesis indicate that the various 'varieties' of sensation fiction reflected upon its impact in diverse ways. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent* recognizes that the dream of transparency must be endlessly suspended in the aftermath of physiological optics' conclusions about vision's inherently misleading potential. Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Wylder's Hand* discerns how the vitality of

¹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 10.

² Hardy, p. 380; Nemesvari, p. 147.

³ Singer, p. 24.

inheritance within social relations is to imply the impossibility of a radical rupture with the past, such that 'anachronisms' forever persist as a haunting force in the present. Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* observes how the intense flux broached by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) underscores the individual's anxious search for self-fulfilment and purpose by complicating their sense of contributing to 'progress'. Wilkie Collins's *Armada* comprehends that modernity demands an epistemological model able to overcome the uncertainty it raises, and the novel posits a 'critical hesitation' advocated for in scientific culture as a means of achieving this.

That these novels display a tendency to expiate ambivalence and enforce order (through restoring normative social arrangements) should not belie their priorities. The majority of their narratives are preoccupied by alternatives to the ordering principle of modernity: 'undefinability, incoherence, incongruity, [and] ambivalence'.⁴ If these novels' emphasis on ambivalence has been recognized by scholars like Deborah Wynne,⁵ its cause and function have remained inexplicable. This thesis has accounted for both by positing sensation fiction as explorations of 'the limits and limitations of the power of artifice', that is, they fulfil the function that modernity requires of its culture.⁶ This is not a relationship of subservience, but, as Bauman explains, one of essential antagonism. Fiction's capacity to provide such 'rigorous political and epistemological training', even when argued to depend on suspense, has been reserved for Victorian realism.⁷ This thesis has sought to decouple the two: the evidence of its case studies discerns that sensation fiction's essential plot closely approximates the form of the scientific experiment from which realism's training function has been deduced: 'moving from an initial hypothesis, usually a conventional assumption about the world, passing through a phase of doubt, suspended judgment, and testing, and reaching the provisional conclusion of a revised view'.⁸ Hence, for instance, my reading of *The Trail of the Serpent* argues that it moves from the sureties of Cartesian

⁴ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 7.

⁵ Contrasting the genre with realism, Wynne notes that 'although sensation novelists usually provided conservative solutions at the end of their novels, their complex depictions of subversive possibilities are prominently placed for most of the narrative, suggesting alternatives without necessarily endorsing them'; *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, p. 149.

⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 9.

⁷ Caroline Levine, p. 2; Kristen A. Pond, 'What Do We Know? Reconsideration of Victorian Realism and Epistemological Doubt', *Literature Compass*, 12.9 (2015), 471–81.

⁸ Garrett, p. 491.

perspectivalism into the ambivalent realities of vision in the wake of physiological optics, creating doubt and suspending judgment via Jabez North's schemes. *Armada*, meanwhile, represents the most emphatic instance of this amenability; it stages, on the basis of Allan's intractable dream, a contest between epistemological approaches for confronting uncertainty—advocating, in the end, one influenced by the scientific experimental method.

This thesis has sought to avoid making claims about a trajectory or direction in respect of sensation fiction's depiction of chaos, order, and ambivalence, and the epistemological training that comes from this. I am sceptical about Andrew Maunder's encouragement that scholars reflect upon 'the extent to which these writers [of the sensation novel] displayed what Alison Light calls "a conservative modernity", in that they challenged mid-Victorian conventions but psychologically were unable to progress towards twentieth-century modernity'.⁹ This displays teleological thinking by positioning the near-present as an objective toward which the mid-nineteenth century was striving. In *A Laodicean* (1881) we find that there are, in actuality, as many similarities as differences; despite the seventeen-year interval, it echoes *Wylder's Hand* in recognizing the impossibility of a 'radical rupture' with the past, and the persistent ambivalence that necessarily emerges from this. This said, *Armada* is a suitable end to the thesis because it represents a slight, yet significant, escalation in respect of the genre's training capabilities. The 'struggle for order' is critiqued in the other case studies through a recognition that ambivalence is never truly ended (it remains expressed in objects like the wax-work, or in processes such as property and heredity) and that it can entail deleterious outcomes, such as the abrogation of the self (the ending of *Not Wisely, but Too Well* offering the starkest variety of this).

Such a focus on ambivalence spotlights the 'impermanence, inconclusiveness – and prospectlessness' of modernity's 'task of order', yet it also perpetuates the sense of indeterminacy as haunting.¹⁰ By contrast, *Armada* concludes by explicitly showing a reconciliation with the permanence of doubt and the impossibility of the ordering imperative. In other words, it outlines a nascent *postmodern* consciousness, in Bauman's understanding:

⁹ Andrew Maunder, 'Mapping the Victorian Sensation Novel: Some Recent and Future Trends', *Literature Compass*, 2.1 (2005), 1–33 (p. 18).

¹⁰ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 9.

Modernity reaches that new stage when it is able to face up to the fact that the growth of knowledge expands the field of ignorance, that with each steps towards the horizon new unknown lands appear, and that, to put it most generally, acquisition of knowledge cannot express itself in any other form but awareness of more ignorance. 'To face up' to this fact means to know that the journey has no clear destination – and yet to persevere in the travel.¹¹

Hence, Ozias invokes 'doubt' without contradicting the harmonious sentiments of *Armada*'s conclusion; in reply to Allan's recognition that the future remains indeterminate: "'Who *need* know?" said Midwinter, calmly.'¹²

This thesis responds to the sensory definition of modernity, which, as Michael Tondre asserts, has obscured the relationship between sensation fiction and several mid-century contexts.¹³ My approach is, in truth, complementary: sensation fiction's 'deployment of suspense' acclimatized readers to the modern sensorium as surely as I have argued that it trains them for the 'moral and ideological instability of a postsacred, postfeudal world in which all norms, authorities are fragile and open to question'.¹⁴ Rather, I have aimed to *reorient* the critical discussion of sensation fiction as an articulation of modernity, arguing that more attention ought to be given to the various facets of and approaches to this 'inherently broad and ambiguous term',¹⁵ and that 'shocks, thrills, intensity, excitement' represent only one aspect of it—even 'continuous and rapid change' was experienced cerebrally in addition to sensorily.¹⁶ The cultural discontinuity understanding shifts the focus toward how modernity was experienced outside of the 'human/machine encounter',¹⁷ which, it hardly needs to be said, was not the permanent experience of the modern individual. Contrarily, as Marshall Berman points out, modernity's discontinuity was omnipresent, as something contemporaries 'had to grasp with all their strength, at every moment in their everyday lives, in order to live at all'.¹⁸

¹¹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 244.

¹² Collins, *Armada*, p. 816. Emphasis in original.

¹³ Michael Tondre, "'The Interval of Expectation.'" Delay, Delusion, and the Psychology of Suspense in *Armada*', *ELH*, 78.3 (2011), 585–608 (p. 585).

¹⁴ Singer, p. 24.

¹⁵ Singer, p. 19.

¹⁶ Bourne Taylor, p. 153.

¹⁷ Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000*, p. 37.

¹⁸ Berman, p. 36.

Further research is needed to account for the effects of serialization on sensation fiction's articulation of modernity in the sense of cultural discontinuity; there is no doubt that the reading experience implied by this method of publication resonates with themes of order and chaos. Such overlap is suggestively raised in an 1870 article in the *Victoria Magazine*; on the disparate materials that the reader might confront in journals, its author asks:

What mind is not is not [*sic*] likely to be thrown into a state of nightmare and ferment by this dancing among disconnected items of temporary intelligence, this hurrying at lightning speed from one part of chaos to another, without one interval to arrange one's thoughts or sift all these strange stories into their proper places?¹⁹

Scholars such as Rob Allen have begun to address how this temporal disruption in terms of a serial reading experience paralleled the disorderly contents of these novels,²⁰ but more remains to be considered. Meanwhile, this thesis has concentrated on fictional cases from the formative period of sensation fiction, the 1860s, to demonstrate that one of the original impulses of the new (or, at least, newly recognized) genre was to express and train for epistemological uncertainty. Therefore, I have only hinted at the later situation through the example of *A Laodicean* (1881), and indexed the previous decade via my discussion of Collins's *Basil* (1852). Subsequent studies might consider whether a cultural discontinuity sense of modernity continues to be so evident in earlier and later sensation novels, and whether there is a change in how these novels articulate it.²¹

* * *

From the perspective of the postmodern present (at least in the Western world), what lessons can sensation fiction provide through its articulation of the cultural

¹⁹ Quoted in Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, p. 13.

²⁰ Rob Allen, "Pause You Who Read This": Disruption and the Victorian Serial Novel', in *Serialization in Popular Culture*, ed. by Rob Allen and Thijs van den Berg (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 33–46 (p. 42).

²¹ Of relevance here is Tim Dolin's argument that, in terms of modernity, there are 'subtle and crucial differences between the decades of *Oliver Twist* (1838) to *Dombey and Son* (1846-8) and that of *The Woman in White* (1859-60)'; 'Collins's Career and the Visual Arts', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 7–22 (p. 17).

discontinuity sense of modernity? Although we may be ‘In Modernity’s Wake’,²² the genre’s concerns apply with surprising relevancy to contemporary issues. During the final stages of this thesis, for instance, I was struck by the resonances between my work and the American Statistical Association’s (ASA) warning about the ‘misuse of statistical significance and *P* values’.²³ This amounted, in fact, to a recognition that the prevailing approach in statistics gave a false sense of surety about conclusions and the world they were describing. As one signatory to the ASA’s message expressed it, ‘we must learn to embrace uncertainty’:

The world is inherently an uncertain place. Our models of how it works — whether formal or informal, explicit or implicit — are often only crude approximations of reality. Likewise, our data about the world are subject to both random and systematic errors, even when collected with great care. So, our estimates are often highly uncertain²⁴

It needs hardly to be explained how this realization sits in relation to modernity as a striving for artificial order, and postmodernity as the move beyond this: to an acceptance of uncertainty as an indelible aspect of the world. It is arresting to find that such realizations, so forcefully articulated by sensation fiction and its discursive contexts, are still a topic of contention.

But the present also crystallizes our sense of the potential dangers that result when the restless ambitions and sureties of modernity are abandoned. Political life and the media in the UK, US, and elsewhere are being increasingly confronted by sensational mistruths and ‘fake news’, and forced to answer essential epistemological questions about the origins and relativity of truth and authority, and the ‘reality’ behind the statements.²⁵ Dangerous as it is to democracy, this ‘post-truth politics’ acquires utmost urgency in terms of addressing an unprecedented and truly global danger: climate breakdown. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence

²² This is the title of a 1989 book by Michael Philipson; see Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 270.

²³ Valentin Amrhein, Sander Greenland, and Blake McShane, ‘Scientists Rise up against Statistical Significance’, *Nature*, 567 (2019), 305–7.

²⁴ Ivan Oransky, ‘Time to Say Goodbye to “Statistically Significant” and Embrace Uncertainty, Say Statisticians’, *Retraction Watch*, 2019 <<https://retractionwatch.com/2019/03/21/time-to-say-goodbye-to-statistically-significant-and-embrace-uncertainty-say-statisticians/>> [accessed 28 March 2019].

²⁵ William Davies, ‘The Age of Post-Truth Politics’, *The New York Times*, 2016 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/opinion/campaign-stops/the-age-of-post-truth-politics.html>> [accessed 28 March 2019].

for human causation, uncertainties in the public's awareness of the issue have hindered attempts at taking the necessary action that might mitigate it.²⁶ Thomas Carlyle's admonition of doubt's potential to nullify action, even as there is a requirement for action, gains a disturbing resonance in this new context. Indeed, the realities of this crisis, which have resurrected interest in forms of social engineering (notably evident in the Green New Deal proposals in the US),²⁷ suggest that a rehabilitation is warranted of those mid-Victorian values that might have previously seemed naïve: teleology,²⁸ the idea of progress, and the need for action. If contemporaneous readers gained from sensation fiction's critique of modernity's ordering imperative, then, for present-day readers, its more vital function may be to give the alternative message: that the '*foci imaginarii* of absolute truth, pure art, humanity as such, order, certainty, [and] harmony' will forever be distant,²⁹ but should be strived for all the same.

²⁶ Riley E. Dunlap, 'Climate Change Skepticism and Denial: An Introduction', *American Behavioural Scientist*, 57.6 (2013), 691–98 (p. 691).

²⁷ The question of social engineering's future was posed by Bauman in a pre-climate breakdown era; pp. 269–70.

²⁸ Cf. Devon Griffiths's notice that 'in our current moment, as we grapple with the problem of climate change and collective action, as we struggle to figure out what world we are heading toward, the question of ends has never felt more important'; 'Teleology', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46.3/4 (2018), 905–9 (pp. 905–6).

²⁹ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 10.

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