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The Knower and the Known: Problems of Epistemology and Social Science
in Popular Detective and Modernist Fiction

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of
Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Kevin Andrew Hart

Committee in charge:

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2018

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2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Vita.....	vii
Abstract of the Dissertation.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1- “Was Anyone Anything?”: Tracking the Born Criminal in Classic Detective Fiction.....	18
Chapter 2- “Theirhisnothis fellowfaces”: The Dynamism of Social Science in Doyle and Joyce.....	42
Chapter 3- “Nondescript Specimens”: Herbert Spencer’s Social Theory in <i>Ulysses</i>	65
Chapter 4- “Words Fail Us”: Beckett, Leacock, and Johnson.....	87
Chapter 5- Graham Greene’s Aesthetics of Design, Sport, and Violence.....	119
Conclusion.....	151
Works Cited.....	161

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Knower and the Known: Problems of Epistemology and Social Science
in Popular Detective and Modernist Fiction

by

Kevin Andrew Hart

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2018

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This dissertation examines the relationship of modernist literary experimentalism to popular detective fiction from 1890-1945 in Britain and Ireland. The project argues that both literary forms grow out of an emerging challenge to questions of knowledge – how it is generated, rhetorically packaged, and socially applied – in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. In particular, classic detective and modernist fiction challenge claims to objective empiricism in the physical and social sciences. Both literary forms suggest that the sciences are enmeshed in cultural methods of analysis, are prone to fall under the influence of presumptions and biases, and tend to work in the service of dominant social groups at the expense of the less powerful.

In both literary forms, human populations are too dynamic to classify with accuracy, and demography is influenced by biases against the lower classes. The biological sciences are misused to support theories of criminal determinism which incriminate individuals based on looks and lineage. Theories of natural selection are misapplied to our understanding of human society and socioeconomics. Lexicography is wrongly employed as a tool for linguistic nationalism. And the rhetorical strategies of modernist architecture, sport, and health culture evoke and reinforce martial values. In all, both forms of literature regard scientific positivism with irony and ground its discursive elaborations in social satire. Arguing for a deeper understanding of modernist experimentalism in its engagements both with mass culture and with theoretical discourses in the sciences, the project reads modernist writers like James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Joseph Conrad, and Graham Greene beside popular writers like Conan Doyle, Stephen Leacock, G. K. Chesterton, and obscurer contributors to popular detective fiction.

Introduction

Writing in *The New Yorker* in 1944, the literary critic Edmund Wilson complains that detective fiction is the stuff of “distasteful parody,” its characters “flat two dimensional...puppets” and its plots formulaic.¹ Of particular interest is not Wilson’s denigration of the popular genre, but his use of the word “parody” to belittle it. In Wilson’s sense, the word is dissociated from its dictionary definition and literary context of farcical, inventive mimicry. Instead, Wilson’s “parody” means merely the crudely derivative, poorly imitative, second-rate counterfeit of good writing. Ironically, this limitation on the meaning of “parody” suggests not only that Wilson’s reading of detective fiction might be similarly reductive, but also points the way to a more profitable approach to the genre, an approach which unlike the famous critic’s considers the genre’s relationship to parody in the literary sense of the word.

In fact, classic detective fiction contains strong elements of parody as well as social satire. With its emphasis on detection, inductive reasoning, and social management, the popular detective fiction of Victorianism functions as a critical venue for the examination of institutions of knowledge, the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the ways in which theoretical disciplines might be pressed into the service of dominant groups at the expense of the less powerful. In effect, classic detective fiction grows out of an emerging challenge to questions of knowledge – how it is generated, rhetorically packaged, and socially applied – in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.

¹ Edmund Wilson, “Why Do People Read Detective Stories?” *The New Yorker*, (October 14, 1944).

In this manner, the classic detective story is analogous to modernist fiction in Britain and Ireland. Both literary forms embrace socio-epistemological satire in similar ways. Both suggest that the theoretical discourses of Victorianism favor and legitimize existing structures of power. And both assert that the sciences are belied by biases deriving, for instance, from nationalism, classism, and dominant cultural values. In these texts, knowledge about people is particularly hard to obtain. For example, both forms of fiction address early theories of demography and suggest that urban populations, dense and protean, defy sociological categorization. Likewise, both literary forms ridicule the nineteenth-century notion that criminal tendencies are coded in and visible on the body, and both challenge the period's idea that evolutionary laws obtain in socio-economics and that indigence is caused or predetermined by natural selection. For both forms of writing, the theorist of human physiognomy, psychology, and culture is enmeshed in the systems he studies, his insights influenced by preconceptions which discredit the sciences' claims to objective empiricism.

My research thus reassesses the critical position that modernist literature and popular fiction are opposed to one another in terms of each literary form's intellectual, aesthetic, and political engagements. My work rethinks the idea that modernist aesthetics are elevated above the ephemeral political concerns of their day, or that classic detective fiction is itself so much cheap ephemera and is thus unworthy of study.² And my research resists dominant strains of criticism which consider the genre a kind of social palliative whose function is to assure readers that the amassed knowledge of the sciences will reduce social problems. Building on recent revisionist work on the genre, I argue that the classic detective story is not, as some scholars maintain, designed to offer "relief and easy reassurance" to readers rife with anxieties that

² "Pointless," in Wilson's words. See Wilson, "Why Do People Read Detective Stories?"

society might fail and give way to disorder.³ And neither does the genre propose that objective empiricism (embodied in the classic detective) will establish systems of social order that are equitable and effective. Instead, the classic detective story caricaturizes the sciences and ridicules theoretical discourses claiming to operate above the influence of personal and social interests. In turn, the modernist novel engages with and builds on the farcical elements, parody and social satire of popular detective fiction.

In making this argument for the intersection of high and low literary genres I implicitly evoke the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. In Bakhtin's theory of genre, species of narrative intermix to form hybrids and no genre remains unmingled. Belief systems, types of speech, styles of writing, and the qualities of literary genres "intersect each other in a variety of ways" in prose fiction.⁴ As "specific points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents characteristic of a given genre" combine with elements of other genres, they enter into conversation with one another.⁵ In this manner, literary genres are dialectic. They contain a conflicting plurality of voices, ways of speaking and thinking. Yet this plurality of voices, styles and values defies any one voice from prevailing over the others and producing a dominant style or ideology for the literary text. Rather, prose fiction "is the expression of a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language – that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world."⁶

³ Michael Holquist, "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Postwar Fiction," in *The Poetics of Murder*, eds. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 163-164.

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 291.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 366.

This refusal to acknowledge any “single and unitary language” disposes prose fiction to treat authoritative discourses ironically. After all, Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony presupposes that no authoritative discourse will appear without a contrary utterance occurring with and working to sabotage it. In other words, because literary prose consists of a chorus of conflicting voices with “different intentions,” each of those voices is liable to comment on, approve of, parody, or deride the others.⁷ Dialogism therefore implies the presence of both authoritative and irreverent voices, for “comic, ironic, or parodic discourse” is concurrent with and subverts the authority of any given form of speech and thought – a narrator’s, a character’s, an entire literary genre’s – and is in turn subverted by other discursive undercurrents.⁸

Bakhtin’s theories are particularly instructive for my approach to this study not only because of his emphasis on the intermixture of high and low genres like modernist and popular detective fiction, but also because Bakhtin proposes that subversive and irreverent styles of art originate in low cultural forms. This second point underscores my own argument that it is the low cultural form of popular detective fiction which introduces new ways of ridiculing and examining the authoritative discourses of the sciences. For Bakhtin, dialogism is the province of popular literature and performance. While official languages seek the “cultural, national and political centralization of the verbal-ideological world,” the languages of “the lower levels,” of “local fairs...buffoon spectacles...of the *fabliaux* and *Schwanke* of street songs, folksayings, anecdotes...play with,” ridicule, and decenter the languages of high culture.⁹ In other words, the low language of popular culture is “parodic and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time.”¹⁰ And although Bakhtin bases his understanding of popular

⁷ Ibid., 324.

⁸ Ibid., 324.

⁹ Ibid., 273.

¹⁰ Ibid., 273.

forms primarily on medieval street culture, his theoretical framework is also applicable to the mass culture of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century popular press.

In fact, Bakhtin explicitly addresses the significance of his theory for the popular print culture of his own time. In Bakhtin's breakdown of genres, he associates the "oratorical, publicist, newspaper and journalistic genres" with "the genres of low literature (penny dreadfuls, for instance)" and opposes them to "the various genres of high literature."¹¹ Here, Bakhtin is addressing the analytical lines drawn by modernist critical discourse, which sought to establish the modernist text as high literature in opposition to the oratorical, journalistic, and popular periodical fiction Bakhtin describes. Of course, Bakhtin discredits the modernist claim that a neat cultural divide separates high from low literature. On the contrary, he suggests that all of these genres are intertextually engaged.

Of particular interest, therefore, is the context in which Bakhtin develops his theory of genre and his appreciation of low popular literary forms. Writing during the 1930s, Bakhtin's theoretical work assumes a pointed position against modernist criticism's disparagement of low genres of fiction. He suggests that modernist criticism is wrong to devalue popular texts, and he asserts that modernist texts incorporate aspects of the popular genres they purport to reject. He criticizes both the Romantic notion that literary art is the product of an isolated genius and the modernist notion that it is produced independently of popular influences, and he denigrates any study of literary style which focuses on "'private craftsmanship' and ignores the social life of discourse outside the artist's study, discourse in the open spaces of the public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations, and epochs."¹² Bakhtin rightly informs us that

¹¹ Ibid., 288-89.

¹² Ibid., 269.

no text occurs in isolation from others. And this pertains, of course, to the high and low literary categories of twentieth-century literary criticism.

In this manner, Bakhtin's notion of entangled genres conflicts with his contemporaries' arguments that popular and serious literary forms belong to wholly separate camps of cultural production. The idea that there are two distinct spheres of culture, one high and one low, is crystallized, for example, in the work of Horkheimer and Adorno. In their analysis of mass culture, the Frankfurt School writers distinguish between those artworks which are original and intellectually challenging, and those artworks which are derivative and designed for facile amusement. Low art is homogeneous, "infect[ed]...with sameness," because it seeks to replicate profitable formulae; and high art, conceived in opposition to such debased business ventures, pursues originality and resists the temptation to repeat the financially successful – if aesthetically limited – models of the past.¹³ Generic and undemanding, art made for mass consumption denies "its audience any dimension in which they might roam freely in imagination," and therefore this type of cultural product creates a consumer who is uncritically and passively entertained.¹⁴

The perception that there exists an unbridgeable gap between high and low art is in keeping with modernist criticism which precedes Adorno's and Horkheimer's influential work. Between the world wars critical discourse sought to distance modernist from popular fiction, associating the modernist text with a high aesthetic and differentiating it from entertainment composed for the masses. As Chene Heady observes, it is "broadly true that the modernist movement, especially in its early stages, defined itself in terms of a binary opposition to Edwardian popular literature...many major modernist thinkers, in fact, went so far as to deem

¹³ Ibid., 94.

¹⁴ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 100.

literature that was written for consumption by a mass audience to be inherently degraded.”¹⁵ And indeed, most modernists consciously attempt to distinguish themselves from what they frame as a vulgar literary populism. Examples abound: James Joyce, for instance, expressing “contempt for...detective writings;”¹⁶ Margaret Anderson’s modernist magazine *The Little Review*, in which *Ulysses* was first serialized, promising to make “No Compromise with the Public Taste;”¹⁷ T. S. Eliot contending that Victorianism enabled and popularized uncritical reading;¹⁸ Graham Greene denigratingly titling his popular novels “entertainments” in order to differentiate them from what he considered his more serious work.

Greene’s contempt for commercial motivation is of a pattern with modernist thinking. Modernist critics observe that, unlike serious literature, popular fiction measures its failure or success financially – and this manner of thinking results in a slackening of standards of literary quality. Q. D. Leavis, for example, links the degradation of art to the rise of popular forms. Like the writers of the Frankfurt School, Leavis argues that popular fiction grows from industrial modes of mass production and from a “business ethos” which approves of conformity and produces a “herd mentality” among readers and writers.¹⁹ A literary text’s popularity, for Leavis, is a discredit. For to be popular is merely to replicate popular forms, to accommodate market demands for uniformity in art and thus to sacrifice uniqueness, integrity, complexity – artistic innovation, in a word.

¹⁵ Chene Heady, “A Tenant in the House of Fiction: G. K. Chesterton’s Attempt to Evict Henry James from British Culture,” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 39 (Spring 2006), 25-26.

¹⁶ William D. Jenkins, *The Adventure of the Detected Detective: Sherlock Holmes in James Joyce’s Finnegans Wake* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 1.

¹⁷ The phrase is the magazine’s subtitle.

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, “Professional, Or...,” *The Egoist*, 5 (April, 1918), 61.

¹⁹ Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1939), 192.

Further, while Adorno and Horkheimer present popular film as the model medium of aesthetic conformity, modernist criticism associates low art with the popular press. Leavis' argument, for example, centers on the popular magazine and asserts that the popular press is responsible for "a new kind of literature...designed to be read in the face of lassitude and nervous fatigue."²⁰ Not only is the popular magazine story intellectually dull, stylistically bland, escapist fiction. It also functions to reaffirm the status quo, subdue the masses, and facilitate the right conditions for consumerism, for "it is in the interest of the advertiser that the public should be kept from any kind of alarm so that it will spend without hesitation, therefore the contents of the newspaper and magazine must create confidence, preserve the status quo, reassure and divert attention from political and economic troubles."²¹

This last claim – that the popular magazine story acts as an opiate on the masses, subdues social anxieties, and upholds conservative values – resembles later criticism directed at detective fiction. In fact, Leavis' claims themselves implicate the genre. After all, it was in part detective writing that popularized the story magazine, the genre's main publication venue, and to disparage the qualities of the story magazine is to disparage its detective fiction. Furthermore, literary modernism's attacks on the genre resound in criticism throughout the twentieth century. Claims that the detective story is morally reassuring, easily consumed, and thus a mere diversion from serious literature and serious social concerns span criticism from the mid- to late twentieth century, and, indeed, similar theses continue to appear in more recent evaluations of the genre. For Wilson, the genre is juvenile and combats moral uncertainty with the jejune suggestion that wrongdoing is easily identified, understood, and corrected.²² In a similar vein, John G. Cawelti

²⁰ Ibid., 49.

²¹ Ibid., 192.

²² Wilson, "Why Do People Read Detective Stories?"

argues that detective fiction reassures the worried reader that society is not to blame for social deviancy or criminal behavior, and, Cawelti adds, the genre presents the problem of crime not as something “dangerous and disturbing” but as an amusing game indicating that all is “completely under control.”²³ Exploring a similar perspective, Michael Holquist views the detective story as a vehicle for positivist reassurances that human reason will overcome social challenges and establish admirable systems of social control.²⁴ More recently, Glenn W. Most argues that “the detective story offers...explanation, resolution, and solace” to combat readers’ dread of modern urban life.²⁵

Criticism arguing that classic detective fiction upholds rather than challenges the social order is commonly framed by Foucaultian theory and the assertion that the genre embodies Foucault’s understanding of social “control through surveillance.”²⁶ Foucault theorizes “the existence of a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising, and correcting the abnormal” members of society.²⁷ For many readers, the classic detective is that instrument of measurement, supervision, and correction. In all, it is easy to see how classic detective fiction might be thought to represent that perfection of panoptic power. After all, the classic detective often appears to be nearly omniscient and could be viewed as the sole force of stability in the world of the story, that all-seeing individual at the center of social surveillance who, Foucault explains, “looms over everything with a single gaze which no detail, however minute, can

²³ John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 105.

²⁴ Holquist, “Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Postwar Fiction,” 163.

²⁵ Glenn W. Most, “Urban Blues: Detective Fiction and the Metropolitan Sublime,” *The Yale Review*, 94 (January, 2006), 68.

²⁶ Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 124.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 199.

escape.”²⁸ In the opinion of many readers, Foucault might as well be talking about the figure of the classic detective here. And indeed, the “gaze” which “no detail...can escape” does seem to evoke, for example, Sherlock Holmes’ penetrative abilities as a social observer. That critics have thought so is evident in arguments like Dennis Porter’s, who asserts that the “Great Detective of fiction had himself the qualities of...[Foucault’s] unseen seer, who stands at the center of the social Pantopicon and employs his ‘science’ to make all things visible on behalf of the forces of order.”²⁹ Such arguments perpetuate the idea, insisted upon by modernist criticism, that there exists an unbridgeable gap between low populism and high literature. If literary modernism confronts institutions of power, popular detective fiction is complicit with and endorses them – or so the argument goes.

However, revisionist readings increasingly show that popular and modernist fiction intersect in significant ways. Andreas Huyssen argues that “the boundaries between high art and mass culture have become increasingly blurred.”³⁰ Nicholas Daly points out that “what we now see as a chasm between two distinct literary cultures, the great divide, was scarcely more than a crack” at the turn-of-the-century.³¹ And, like Huyssen, Robert Scholes observes that this crack never did become a chasm and that the distinction between high and low forms of literary modernism is a false one.³² This revisionist trend has led readers like Kevin Dettmar and Stephen Watt to argue for a “plurality of modernisms,” on the premise that “the modernist

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁹ Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction*, 125.

³⁰ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), ix.

³¹ Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

³² Robert Scholes, *Paradox of Modernism* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2006).

artifact and its tawdry counterpart in popular culture” are far from being rigidly opposed.³³ If the work of popular culture is not in fact tawdry, or if its very tawdriness is reflected in high literature and both literary forms share similar qualities, then, such arguments suggest, we ought not only to reexamine the relationship of modernist to popular fiction, but we should also reappraise popular literary forms in their own right.

Importantly, the shift in criticism on the differences between the two literary forms has indeed led to a reevaluation of popular genres in general and of classic detective fiction in particular. Writers such as Lawrence Frank, Clare Clark, Alice Von Rothkirch, and Christopher Pittard have cogently argued that classic detective fiction does not reassure readers that current social systems are infallible, and that the genre actually contains elements of parody and challenges social preconceptions.³⁴ Such qualities – of parody and social satire – would appeal to modernist calls for the examination of social life in all of its complexity. While the modernist novel was calling for the upheaval of social conventions and the examination of naïve presumptions about progress, the classic detective genre was in many ways already scrutinizing and caricaturing the promise that human reason could conquer social obstacles, overcome its failings, and establish an orderly, prosperous society. Rather than assuring readers that – as Foucauldian criticism asserts – the detective sees all, knows all, and corrects all, the classic

³³ Kevin Dettmar and Stephen Watt, “Introduction,” in *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, Rereading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 6.

³⁴ Lawrence Frank, *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens, and Doyle* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Clare Clark, *Crime Files: Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Alice Von Rothkirch, “‘His Face Was Livid, Dreadful, with a Foam at the Corners of his Mouth’: A Typology of Villains in Classic Detective Stories,” *The Modern Language Review*, 108 (October, 2014), 1042-1063; Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011).

detective genre suggests that the detective is prone to err – in his observations, in his conclusions, and in his actions.

This might in part explain why so many major modernist writers were not wholly contrary but were actually ambivalent toward the genre. On the one hand, as we have seen, modernist critical discourse attempted to constitute itself “through a conscious strategy of exclusion” of popular forms, including detective fiction.³⁵ On the other hand, modernist writers’ fascination with the genre seems to suggest that in their view it did after all possess merits. Eliot, despite his disdain for popular Victorian literature, had a “passion” for detective fiction and “could quote long passages of Sherlock Holmes from memory.”³⁶ Joyce, expressing contempt for the genre, nevertheless draws on it in his fiction. And Greene vacillates over which of his novels to label “entertainments” and which to characterize as serious literature, suggesting that each type of writing is difficult to distinguish from its supposedly distinct counterpart. These waverings of Greene’s are revealing. The author originally considers *Stamboul Train* a serious work, but labels it an “entertainment” in later editions; likewise, he looks on *The Quiet American* as a serious novel at first, but demotes it to an “entertainment” upon publication; and while he designates the first US edition of *Brighton Rock* an “entertainment,” the novel’s first edition in Britain, published one month later, sheds the label.³⁷ Greene’s indecision neatly illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing between modernist and popular fiction.

Like Greene’s thrillers, detective fiction in general resists easy categorization because the genre so often distorts its generic formulae. Todorov views detective fiction as a relatively inflexible form, arguing that in order to be called such detective fiction must remain true to the

³⁵ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, vii.

³⁶ Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Abacus, 1985), 167.

³⁷ For a thorough reading of Greene’s process of labelling his novels, see Brian Diemert, *Graham Greene’s Thrillers and the 1930s*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University press, 1996), 5-14.

genre's conventions. For Todorov, "the masterpiece of popular literature is precisely the book which best fits its genre. Detective fiction has its norms; to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them; to 'improve upon' detective fiction is to write 'literature,' not detective fiction."³⁸ Yet, as Robert Scholes observes, the basic structure of the genre, consisting of two overlapping stories – the story of the crime and the story of its detection – "offers a formula with plenty of room for creative variation."³⁹ One of the genre's most detailed anatomists, John G. Cawelti, similarly recognizes that the detective formula ramifies in innumerable ways.⁴⁰ And, as Franco Moretti has shown, the classic detective story is an especially nascent narrative form, eclectic in style and lacking definitive rules.⁴¹ That eclecticism remains throughout the genre's early development, as evidenced by the many conflicting guides, rules, and "commandments" for the genre written, for example, by G. K. Chesterton, Raymond Chandler, T. S. Eliot, and S. S. Van Dine, to name just some of the many famous contributors to the debate. The fact that the genre's prominent writers and critics sought to efface one another's formal rules suggests that detective fiction actively resisted its own generic strictures, each author conforming to their own conception of the genre's best form.⁴²

At the same time, Todorov's basic formula for the detective story – the story of the crime, revealed through the story of its detection – is telling, as it indicates the way in which the genre's formal structure is interwoven with questions of epistemology. Because the fundamental form of

³⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, "The Typology of Detective Fiction," in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Ithaca University Press, 1971), 43.

³⁹ Scholes, *Paradoxy of Modernism*, 201-202.

⁴⁰ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, 82.

⁴¹ Franco Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61 (March, 2000), 207-227.

⁴² For more on the trouble of defining the rules of the genre, see Victoria Stewart's two recent studies: "Defining Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain," *The Space Between*, 9.1 (2013), 101-118; and *Crime Writing in Interwar Britain: Fact and Fiction in The Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

the detective story concerns a quest for a specific set of facts – who committed the crime, and how, and why, and so on – the genre’s manipulations of form comment on questions of knowledge. A narrative form premised on the examination of how people know, decide, and understand, the detective story is thus well-suited to investigations, satires, and parodies of the sciences, social sciences, and theoretical discourses. In all, both classic detective fiction and modernist manipulations of the genre suggest that the sciences – like all modes of discourse – are also refracted by Bakhtinian dialogism, by the conflicting ideas, interests, and voices of differing discursive regimes.

Surprisingly, in Bakhtin’s view the sciences function on a plane beyond the distortions of divergent and competing voices. Bakhtin maintains that in the sciences

The significance of discourse as such is comparatively weak. Mathematical and natural sciences do not acknowledge discourse as a subject in its own right. In scientific study one must, of course, deal with another’s discourse – the words of predecessors, the judgment of critics, majority opinion and so forth; one must deal with various forms for transmitting and interpreting another’s word – the struggle with authoritative discourse, overcoming polemics, references, quotations, and so forth – but all this remains a mere operational necessity and does not affect the subject matter itself of the science, into whose composition the speaker and his discourse do not, of course, enter.⁴³

This claim that the sciences are beyond discursive influence is unexpected from Bakhtin. Indeed, we might question whether Bakhtin himself agrees with his own argument here. After all, the argument runs contrary to his broader assertions that all communication is altered by its engagements with other articles of speech and writing. And the claim at the end of the passage – that in the sciences the “speaker and his discourse do not” affect “the subject matter itself of the science” – is dragged back, questioned, and almost negated by the long list of potential discursive influences preceding it. Attentive to Bakhtin’s broader thesis that all which enters

⁴³ Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 351.

into discourse is affected by it, we might well wonder how the work of the researcher can possibly remain unshaped by the swirl of discourse surrounding it – “the words of predecessors, the judgments of critics, majority opinion...influences, polemics, references, quotations.” In this instance, classic detective and modernist fiction offers a corrective to Bakhtin.

Ultimately, that “discourse...does not affect the subject matter itself of the science” is an assertion which classic detective and modernist fiction finds unconvincing. For both literary forms, disciplines of learning – including the natural sciences – are fraught with the very types of influences Bakhtin identifies. The researcher “and his discourse,” opinions, and experiences, the voices of scientific authorities and political debates all play a role in shaping the way that knowledge is produced, received, and applied in society. Because both literary forms presuppose that social and scientific disciplines are discursive, both literary forms question and parody the conceit that scientific empiricism precludes the imposition of other discourses, influences, methods, and ways of thinking. And both examine, criticize, and ridicule the way in which the apparatus of the sciences are used to validate those cultural institutions, laws, and procedures which perpetuate existing social conditions.

With the foregoing in mind, each chapter to follow will read a modernist text for its engagements with a form of popular detective fiction. And each chapter will treat both literary forms’ responses to theories in the natural and social sciences. In each case, I will argue that a work of popular detection helps to illuminate a modernist text’s methods of parodying a particular form of theoretical discourse. And I will argue that both literary forms’ critiques of the sciences are politically grounded.

Chapter one, for example, will look at Victorian conversations around criminal determinism and will read the popular detective stories of *The Strand Magazine*, Joseph

Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, and G. K. Chesterton's *Man Who Was Thursday* in order to show that the two experimental novels, like the popular stories preceding them, challenge the theory that criminal tendencies are hereditary and physically legible in the body. The second chapter will examine an early case of demography – the Victorian social reformer Charles Booth's efforts to map poverty in London – and will compare the social science of *Sherlock Holmes* to that of *Ulysses* in order to argue that both texts suggest that human populations are unknowable and that social research on the whole is refracted by the perceptions of the researcher. Chapter three continues in this vein, and reads Herbert Spencer's theory of social evolution in the work of Conan Doyle and Joyce's *Ulysses*. In Spencer's view, the laws of natural selection determine social class and the poor are poor due to evolutionary inferiority – a notion which Doyle and Joyce play on and parody.

In all, these first three chapters address theoretical disciplines which viewed the lower class body as an object of study and proposed to understand the behavior and psychology of the lower class by understanding its members in terms of physical types and statistical measures. And each chapter suggests that popular Victorian detective and high modernist fiction take aim at such theories for operating under the sway of dominant cultural ideologies which further disenfranchise powerless groups such as the poor. Moving from the body to the word, the final two chapters focus on the rhetorical strategies of cultural movements and disciplines including lexicography and architectural theory. Chapter four looks at Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, the detective story parodies of Stephen Leacock, and Samuel Johnson's *Plan for a Dictionary of the English Language* in order to argue that Beckett's early novel challenges calls for the English language to be standardized and enforced as a tool of nation and empire. The fifth chapter reads Graham Greene's early mysteries and thrillers for their engagements with the rhetoric of

modernist architectural theory, recreation, and sport, and contends that Greene's novels perceive an element of social control and militarism in the language and design of the new architecture and interwar leisure and athleticism.

Chapter 1

“Was Anyone Anything?": Tracking the Born Criminal in Classic Detective Fiction

Abstract

The classic or late Victorian detective story has long been considered a champion of positivist empiricism. In particular, detective fiction from this period is supposed to mirror the positivist theory that criminality is biologically determined and criminals physically marked and, therefore, identifiable. The first point of this chapter is to challenge that position.

Drawing on stories from the first fourteen years of *The Strand Magazine* (1891-1904), I will argue that the period's theories of criminal anthropology and hereditary criminality are consistently called into question in the popular magazine, suggesting late Victorian detective fiction did not reassure that positivist criminology can restore law and order, but questioned its ability to do so.

Moving from the popular press to the canon, I will then make a claim for reading high literary works like G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* alongside low fiction which was popular in late Victorian and Edwardian England but is obscure today. The correlation between high and low texts suggests that both literary forms were engaged in similar methods of questioning and parodying the period's theories of biological determinism as a constituent of crime.

“There are some trees, Watson, which grow to a certain height and then suddenly develop some unsightly eccentricity. You will see it often in humans. I have a theory that the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his ancestors, and that such a sudden turn to good or evil stands for some strong influence which came into the line of his pedigree. The person becomes, as it were, the epitome of the history of his own family.”

“It is surely rather fanciful.”

“Well, I don’t insist upon it.”

-“The Return of Sherlock Holmes: The Adventure of the Empty House”⁴⁴

During the late Victorian period, theories of criminal determinism drew on biometrics in order to argue that criminal tendencies are discernible in biological features. Measuring the anatomy of convicts, physicians connected bodily to criminal types and established taxonomical systems by which to diagnose criminal inclinations in, for example, the width of the brow or the shape of the nose. Of interest is the reaction of the period’s popular crime fiction – in particular, its detective fiction – to such theories. For some, the classic detective story reinforces notions that physical characteristics can indicate predispositions to crime.⁴⁵ These readers observe the emphasis on physical malformation and abnormality among the genre’s villains in order to claim

⁴⁴ Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Empty House,” in *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XXVI, July to December, 1903* (London: George Newnes Ltd), 363.

⁴⁵ Franco Moretti says that the criminal in a detective story must by definition betray some abnormality. Heather Worthington observes that in late Victorian detective fiction “unpleasant or evil characters are often ugly or deformed.” Others analyze Conan Doyle’s well-known stories to make similar claims. Ronald R. Thomas asserts that the legible bodies of Holmes’ adversaries bear out Francis Galton’s and Havelock Ellis’ contentions that criminal tendencies can be viewed on the body. Rosemary Jann sees in Holmes a hero of positivist empiricism, a champion of Victorianism’s faith in progress and in science’s ability to classify criminals. Michael Holquist summarizes the main idea here: that the late Victorian detective story is supposed to reassure its readers that criminals can be detected and that “reason can conquer chaos.” See Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (Thetford, England: The Thetford Press, Ltd., 1983); Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 73; Ronald R. Thomas, “The Fingerprint on the Foreigner: Colonizing the Criminal Body in 1890s Detective Fiction and Criminal Anthropology,” *English Literary History* 61.3 (1994), 655-683; Rosemary Jann, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: Detecting Social Order* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); and Holquist, “Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Postwar Fiction,” 149.

that the precedence of such physical markings reinforces the idea that biology determines criminal behavior. By contrast, recent readings suggest that classic detective fiction was not complicit with but critical of determinist criminology.⁴⁶ In these opposing readers' views, the popular genre challenges theories which argue that criminal tendencies are acquired at birth and visible on the body.

The question is important for our understanding of late Victorianism, its popular fiction, and its relationship to biological and social sciences. If the classic genre supports theories of born criminality, then it might also serve to reassure its readers and pacify fears of social disorder. After all, to assert that criminal tendencies are visible on the body is to assuage readers' fears with the comforting thought that social surveillance can detect and eradicate crime. And to assert that criminal behavior is congenital is to imply that society is not responsible for crime in the first place, but only for the correction of criminal acts once they occur. Such a reading of classic detective fiction falls in line with arguments that the popular literary form is designed to entertain and not to challenge the status quo, unlike the modernist text which subverts both popular fiction and social norms.

Taking a revisionist approach to this line of criticism, this chapter will follow the lead of scholars like Alice Von Rothkirk and will argue for a broader understanding of the classic genre.⁴⁷ Often, readers who identify classic detective fiction with criminal determinism single

⁴⁶ For example, see Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011); and Clare Clark, *Crime Files: Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock*. Clark identifies late Victorian "stories where detectives are criminals and murderers, where criminals are heroes, or where crimes go unsolved," exposing the "often wholly overlooked formal and moral diversity of late Victorian crime writing" (2).

⁴⁷ Like me, Von Rothkirk samples a great number (140) of classic detective stories and finds a marked absence of abnormal physiognomy in criminal characters. Rothkirk reasonably concludes that authors did not want to spoil the mystery by betraying the criminal too soon. But this does not account for the numbers of stories that actively contradict biological determinants of crime – stories portraying criminals who are intelligent, beautiful, dignified and, indeed, moral. See Alice Von Rothkirk, "His Face Was

out just one or two stories to support the claim that the genre reinforces determinist criminology. However, a wider reading of once popular but now obscure detective stories reveals a genre of nuance and play, a popular literary form which does not support or even eschew but which examines the social and intellectual problems of criminal determinism and ultimately ridicules and disputes the theory. In order to argue this point, this chapter will first provide context by reviewing the claims of Victorian and Edwardian theorists of criminal determinism. The chapter will then turn to *The Strand Magazine* for a broad reading of its detective stories and the ways in which they present challenges to theories of criminal biology. In its closing analysis the chapter will read G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* for their own parodies of determinist theories of crime. In this manner, I will argue that the classic detective story not only questions criminal determinism but also anticipates later "serious" literature's similar subversions of the theory.

Like Conrad and Chesterton, the contributors to *The Strand* would certainly have been acquainted with the theories of criminal determinism popularized by the physician and founder of the Italian School of Criminal Positivism, Cesare Lombroso. For Lombroso, criminal types are quite distinct: thieves have "small wandering eyes" and "squashed noses;" rapists have "jug ears" and "swollen lips and eyelids;" habitual murderers have "hawklike" noses, thin lips, and large canines, while arsonists have a certain "softness of skin."⁴⁸ However, these varieties of criminal do share a family resemblance, as "nearly all criminals have jug ears, thick hair, thin beards, pronounced sinuses, protruding chins, and broad cheekbones."⁴⁹ And they also exhibit

Livid, Dreadful, with a Foam at the Corners of his Mouth: A Typology of Villains in Classic Detective Stories," *The Modern Language Review*, 108 (October, 2014), 1042-1063.

⁴⁸ Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, trans. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 51.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

abnormalities in the brain and skull, signifying below average intelligence.⁵⁰ Although Lombroso is perhaps the most famous theorist of biological determinism as a cause of crime, others were forwarding similar arguments in Britain, as Lombroso was well aware.⁵¹ Henry Mayhew and John Binny, for example, cite the opinion that convicts possess an innate “disposition” toward criminal behavior, compelling the authors to call for a shift in focus from the criminal act to the criminal himself, and to the causes, in his personality, of criminal behavior.⁵²

One result of this shift is the creation of the anthropological criminal in Britain. In an essay published in *The Journal of Mental Science* in 1870 Bruce Thomson, surgeon at the General Prison at Perth, announces that criminals are perceptibly “puny, sickly, scrofulous, often deformed, with shabby heads unnaturally developed.”⁵³ In “The Hereditary Nature of Crime,” also published in *The Journal of Mental Science*, Thomson includes other “abnormal states—such as spinal deformities, stammering, imperfect organs of speech, club foot, cleft-palate, hare-lip, deafness, congenital blindness, paralysis, epilepsy, scrofula, &c.”⁵⁴ The physician Havelock Ellis’ *The Criminal* agrees, though less strongly. For Ellis, the criminal is “by no means an

⁵⁰ Ibid., 49.

⁵¹ In *Criminal Man*, Lombroso cites Bruce Thomson (51) and Henry Maudsley (108). In *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*, he praises England’s recognition that some criminals are incurable, saying that “while the less advanced peoples are lingering over the utopias of the old jurists and, believing that reform is possible for all criminals, are taking no measures against the continually rising tide of crime, the English, more provident, have recognized that although they have been able by their efforts to eliminate the accidental criminal almost entirely, the born criminal still persists. They are the only nation to admit the existence of criminals who resist all cure, the ‘professional criminals,’ as they call them, and the ‘criminal classes.’” See *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*, trans. Henry P. Horton (Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith Publishing Corporation, 1968), 432.

⁵² Henry Mayhew and John Binny, *The Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of Prison Life* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), 84-88.

⁵³ Bruce Thomson, “The Psychology of Criminals,” *The Journal of Mental Science*, 17 (October, 1870), 328-329.

⁵⁴ Bruce Thomson, “The Hereditary Nature of Crime,” *The Journal of Mental Science*, 15 (January, 1870), 490.

idiot” and anatomical irregularities by no means uniform;⁵⁵ however, Ellis concurs with Thomson that criminals tend to exhibit more “anatomical abnormalities” than the law-abiding;⁵⁶ and he offers his own list of abnormalities, from protruding jaws⁵⁷ and “prominent ears”⁵⁸ to faces scored with wrinkles⁵⁹ and thick, wooly hair.⁶⁰ William Douglas Morrison, prison chaplain at Wandsworth, would get at the pith of these claims the following year in *Crime and Its Causes* and again in 1899 by concluding that criminal behavior springs from the criminal’s “physical or mental constitution. It is accordingly not immediately social; it is anthropological.”⁶¹

This notion that criminal dispositions are biologically determined and observable in the body can also be found in the disciplines of mental and social development. In an 1894 essay, the psychiatrist T. S. Clouston claims that criminality is caused by low cerebral development which is *perceptible in the eye and the face*, and adds that “there can be no doubt” of criminals’ physical inferiority.⁶² Although many British physicians consciously seek to distance themselves from criminal anthropology, many of them tend to remain dubious not because they recognize a flaw in methodology (the theory’s implicit biases concerning race, class, and ability), but rather because they await clinical evidence.⁶³ Indeed, the pull of the theory is strong enough to influence even its avowed detractors. The prison physician Charles Goring cites biometric data

⁵⁵ Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal* (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1890), 223-229.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶¹ William Douglas Morrison, “Reflections on the Theories of Criminality,” *Journal of Mental Science*, 35 (April, 1899), 15. See also: *Crime and its Causes* (London: Swan, Sonnenschein & Co, 1902).

⁶² T. S. Clouston, “The Developmental Aspects of Criminal Anthropology,” *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 23 (1894), 219-220.

⁶³ For example, David Garland and Neil Davie both argue that British physicians required empirical evidence of the anthropological criminal concerning which they were more skeptical than criminologists on the Continent. See David Garland, “British Criminology Before 1935,” *The British Journal of Criminology*, 28 (Spring, 1988), 1-17; and Neil Davie, “The Impact of Criminal Anthropology in Britain, 1880-1918,” *Criminocorpus*, (November, 2010).

to prove that “there is no such thing as an anthropological criminal type.”⁶⁴ However, he goes on to contradict his claim, conceding that the English convict has a “defective physique” and “defective mental capacity.”⁶⁵ Less obviously, Henry Maudsley in an essay arguing against biological determinism suggests that what he calls “natural or essential” criminality might be passed from parent to child, and also proposes a scientific examination of criminals’ “bodily characters.”⁶⁶

If arguments for criminal anthropology are cropping up in arguments against it, that is in part because many theorists who might refute criminal anthropology endorse theories of hereditary criminality, generally neglecting to consider how hereditary criminality and anthropological criminality, two subsets of biological determinism, are linked through their emphasis on congenital causes of crime. For Maudsley, the “natural or essential” criminal is the product of heredity.⁶⁷ Drawing on theories of degeneration, Maudsley maintains that the existence of a criminal indicates an immoral strain in the parents, asserting that “the fathers have sown guile, and the children have reaped crime.”⁶⁸ Such arguments echo Bruce Thomson, who unequivocally asserts that “in by far the greatest proportion of offenses *Crime is Hereditary*.”⁶⁹ An early eugenicist, Thomson argues that criminals should be barred from having children, anticipating Francis Galton’s agenda of selective breeding.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Charles Goring, *The English Convict: A Statistical Study* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1913), 370.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 370. For analysis of Goring’s unintentional defense of criminal anthropology, see Nicole Rafter, *The Criminal Brain: Understanding Biological Theories of Crime* (New York: NYU Press, 2008), 126. As Rafter aptly puts it, this is one of those rare books that actually “says the opposite of what the author claims to have said.”

⁶⁶ Henry Maudsley, “Remarks on Crime and Criminals,” *Journal of Mental Science*, 34 (July, 1888), 163-165.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁶⁹ Thomson, “The Hereditary Nature of Crime,” 488.

⁷⁰ Thomson, “The Psychology of Criminals,” 331. Like Thomson, Galton asserts (in *Inquiries Into Human Faculty and its Development*) that a “criminal nature tends to be inherited.” Therefore, society

It's easy to see how the anthropological and hereditary criminal applies to police work. If criminality is inherited, then criminals are detectable by pedigree. If the criminal bears physical abnormalities, he is detectable on sight. Many of the foregoing authors foreground the importance of their findings for criminal detection. Morrison asserts that a detective is able to pick out a criminal by look alone.⁷¹ Thomson says that it is "singular...how the detective knows" an offender on sight.⁷² Clouston likens the physician to the detective, saying that "what were 'symptoms of disease' to me would certainly have been to the policeman and the magistrate evident proofs of 'criminality.'"⁷³

But how does detective *fiction* view all of this? Some scholars think the esteem is mutual: criminal anthropologists have great faith in detection, and detection's popular representative, the detective story, supports theories of criminal anthropology. In order to question this line of criticism, I will turn to *The Strand Magazine*. As the platform for and beneficiary of Sherlock Holmes' fame, *The Strand* was both immensely popular and a mainstay of the classic detective genre. The magazine achieved a circulation of nearly 400,000 by the mid-1890s, in part because its founder George Newnes consciously targeted a middle-class readership.⁷⁴ Newnes' goal was to turn out fiction for amusement, fiction that was wholesome

ought to forbid known criminals from reproducing. In "Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims," Galton goes on to say that such a society will free itself from "criminals" and "others whom it rates as undesirable." By the same logic, Galton's *English Men of Science* argues that a community should encourage the coupling of its most desirable members so as to maximize those members' good qualities in generations to come. See Francis Galton's *Inquiries Into Human Faculty and Its Development* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc, 1907), 43; "Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 10 (July, 1904), 2; and *English Men of Science* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1874), 18, 69.

⁷¹ Morrison, *Crime and Its Causes*, 189.

⁷² Thomson, "The Psychology of Criminals," 328.

⁷³ Clouston, "The Developmental Aspects of Criminal Anthropology," 223.

⁷⁴ Kate Jackson, *George Newnes and the New Journalism in Britain, 1880-1910* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2001), 94-95. Remarking on the popularity of the magazine, Conan Doyle joked that "foreigners used to recognize the English by their check suits. I think they will soon learn to do it by their *Strand Magazines*. Everybody on the Channel boat, except the man at the wheel, was

and harmless.⁷⁵ Undoubtedly this avowed conservatism has led many to presume that the content of the magazine was politically unchallenging and receptive to theories like criminal anthropology. For example, Kate Jackson affirms that *The Strand Magazine* “was comforting to a middle-class audience who, beset by anxiety, change and uncertainty, sought reassurance in its pages,” suggesting that it would be in keeping with the magazine’s agenda of ‘comfort-reading’ for *The Strand* to reinforce positivist claims that science could identify and contain criminal types.⁷⁶

And, indeed, some of *The Strand’s* detective stories do bear out criminal anthropology. In L. T. Meade’s “The Red Bracelet,” a blind girl being seduced by a villain breaks his hold on her when she regains her sight, since simply to see him is to know he is wicked.⁷⁷ In Doyle’s “The Adventure of the Norwood Builder” the hereditary and anthropological criminals are conflated, as the villain “was more like a malignant and cunning ape than a human being,” and he was that way “ever since he was a young man,” hinting that he is possibly a born criminal.⁷⁸ And in “The Adventure of the Six Napoleons” the criminal is a “sharp-featured simian man with thick eyebrows, and a very peculiar projection of the lower part of the face like the muzzle of a baboon,” signaling both physical and moral degeneracy.⁷⁹

clutching one.” Quoted in Reginald Pound’s *The Mirror of the Century: The Strand Magazine, 1891-1950* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1966), 63.

⁷⁵ Pound, *The Mirror of the Century: The Strand Magazine, 1891-1950*, 25, 29.

⁷⁶ Jackson, *George Newnes and the New Journalism in Britain, 1880-1910*, 92.

⁷⁷ L. T. Meade and Clifford Halifax, “The Red Bracelet,” *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume IX, January to June, 1895* (London: George Newnes Ltd), 545-561.

⁷⁸ Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Norwood Builder,” *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XXVI, July to December, 1903* (London: George Newnes Ltd), 489.

⁷⁹ Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Six Napoleons,” *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XXVII, January to June, 1904* (London: George Newnes Ltd), 487.

But a larger sample of *The Strand's* stories shows a very different pattern.⁸⁰ The magazine published 177 detective stories in its first fourteen years (1891-1904), and most of these do not support criminal anthropology;⁸¹ instead, they represent an index of doubts about the new science, a catalog of the many ways it might possibly, or will probably, introduce error to the work of detection. In the above epigraph Watson's lack of confidence in biological determinism as a source of crime reflects the general attitude of *The Strand Magazine's* detective stories. Holmes' half-hearted suggestion that people can be born criminals is deflated with a single word, "fanciful," and Holmes, uncommitted to the theory, swiftly retracts it. Far from receiving theories of born criminality with credulity and faith, *The Strand* consistently expresses misgivings about them, beginning with the magazine's hesitation to credit criminal deviancy's supposed visibility on the body.

The Strand's stories are reluctant to believe that the body betrays criminal tendencies. The stories exhibit a high incidence of criminals who are able-bodied, physically attractive and mentally astute. According to the tenets of positivist criminology, such individuals should be less likely to commit crimes; yet *The Strand* features 'normal,' healthy, intellectually competent or even superior criminals in 53% of its stories, while anthropological criminals appear in only 27% of *The Strand's* first fourteen years of detective fiction.

⁸⁰ I make this claim having read the first fourteen years (1891-1904) of *The Strand Magazine*, from its first year of publication to the year that concluded *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* series. I found 177 detective stories. I call a story a detective story if it, first, presents a mystery to be solved, second, alludes to possible foul play, and third, focalizes on the viewpoint of the (often amateur) detective or detective's assistant. For a thorough breakdown of the components of the classic detective story, see John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

⁸¹ In 1891, 8/9 stories challenge born criminality. In 1892: 8/13 stories. 1893: 8/12 stories. 1894: 10/13 stories. 1895: 6/10 stories. 1896: 12/15 stories. 1897: 7/7 stories. 1898: 17/19 stories. 1899: 17/19 stories. 1900: 8/12 stories. 1901: 11/14 stories. 1902: 10/12 stories. 1903: 6/8 stories. 1904: 11/14 stories.

Stories often contain multiple types – both anthropological and non-anthropological criminals, playing notions of criminal determinism against each other.

The legible body, these stories tell us, might not be so legible after all. Confidence in causal relationships between physical abnormality and crime is stretched past the point of breaking in the popular magazine. In Doyle's "Adventure of the Crooked Man," the deformed hunchback, a suspect of murder, turns out to be the victim of the respected Colonel.⁸² Another hunchbacked suspect, this time from Doyle's "Story of the Lost Special," again turns out to be the victim, in this case, fatally.⁸³ To confuse not a random innocent *but the actual victim* for the criminal makes the point that much more poignant: "spinal deformity," one of the born criminal's tells according to Thomson, could turn out to be an invalid measure of the criminal's supposed weak will and morals, and so, by extension, could anatomy in general.

Other stories push this inability to tell the victim from the criminal further still, demonstrating doubts that criminals are physically identifiable. In Meade's "The Bloodhound," the criminal mastermind Madame Koluchy uses a doppelganger to fake her own death, baffling detectives because the criminal and the victim look so alike.⁸⁴ In Doyle's "Story of the Black Doctor" the dead villain resembles his living brother so well that he can pass as his double.⁸⁵ In both stories, the detectives are fooled by the body swap and only discover the truth through the voluntary confession of the survivor. These stories present uncertainties about criminal anthropology. Meade's is especially cynical. If a detective cannot even distinguish a murderer from her victim, how can he know a criminal on sight? Doyle's poses a similar problem: if one

⁸² Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Crooked Man," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume VI, July to December, 1893* (London: George Newnes Ltd), 22-32.

⁸³ Conan Doyle, "The Story of the Lost Special," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XVI, July to December, 1898* (London: George Newnes Ltd), 153-162.

⁸⁴ L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace, "The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings, IX: The Bloodhound," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XVI, July to December, 1898*, (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 304-317.

⁸⁵ Conan Doyle, "The Story of the Black Doctor," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XVI, July to December, 1898* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 372-382.

man is lawful and another is not, why isn't the difference visible? Because they are brothers? But that just shifts the challenge from anthropological to hereditary criminality.

In fact, many of *The Strand's* stories distrust claims that criminality follows family lines. The commonest disparity settles on an upstanding father and an unaccountably ignoble son. In "Why He Failed," an upstanding detective discovers that the criminal he is tracking is his own son.⁸⁶ In Joyce Muddock's "The Jewelled Skull" the renowned colonel's son is an opium-smoking thief.⁸⁷ Doyle's "Story of the Latin Tutor" features a retiring school teacher whose son is a murderous brute.⁸⁸ Meade's "Eyes of Terror" and, with Robert Eustace, "A Visible Sound" feature similarly wayward children.⁸⁹ These stories suggest that criminal inclination is not hereditary, as even a community's most celebrated and incorruptible members can sire corrupt scions.

The Strand's contributors also resist the theory that criminals beget criminals. Meade's and Eustace's "The Blood-Red Cross" centers on an orphan, Antonia, whose father murdered her mother.⁹⁰ The story's villain, Madame Sara, writes the girl's family history on her neck in nitrate. The words will remain invisible until exposed to direct sunlight and then the chemical will burn the skin, indelibly marking the girl with a murderous heritage. The detective's ability

⁸⁶ Anonymous, "Why He Failed," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume II, July to December, 1891* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 26-30.

⁸⁷ Joyce Muddock, "The Jeweled Skull," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume IV, July to December, 1892* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 70-82.

⁸⁸ Conan Doyle, "The Story of the Latin Tutor," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XVII, January to June, 1899* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 365-374.

⁸⁹ L. T. Meade, "Eyes of Terror," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XXVI, July to December, 1903* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 698-710; L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace, "Stories of the Sanctuary Club, II: A Visible Sound," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XVIII, June to December, 1899* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 134-147.

⁹⁰ L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace, "The Sorceress of the Strand, II: The Blood-Red Cross," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XXIV, July to December, 1902* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 505-518.

to neutralize the nitrate and wipe out the bodily inscription, maintaining Antonia's innocence, suggests she was innocent to begin with: the crimes of her father have not been passed on to her, and neither has a criminal disposition. The story might stand as a proclamation to the period's criminal theorists that the threat of physical marking is not natural, but artificial, that what we read on the body is what we ourselves write there, and that this has no correlation to the character of the individual who is branded.

Other *Strand* stories push beyond mere resistance against biological determinism to question whether the laws that define criminality are right in the first place. Doyle's "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" presents a potentially justifiable murder of a blackmailer, and Holmes decides not to arrest the man.⁹¹ In Robert Barr's "Transformation" the victim of a dynamiter becomes an amateur detective, hunts down his assailants, and mercilessly murders them.⁹² In both stories, there is no question of legal guilt: Holmes' man confesses to murdering his blackmailer, and in Barr's story we witness the murder. So the men are legally guilty, but (the stories explicitly ask) are they morally wrong? The answer is more ambivalent than most present-day readings of classic detective fiction would presume. Questioning the moral legitimacy of the law, these stories imply that even a crime as severe as cold-blooded murder might under the right conditions be justified. In all, 33% of *The Strand's* first fourteen years of detective fiction feature morally upright criminals, characters who become criminals out of an understandable necessity or who become criminals unwittingly or who wittingly and justifiably defy the law.

⁹¹ Conan Doyle, "The Boscombe Valley Mystery," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume II, July to December, 1891* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 401-416.

⁹² Robert Barr, "Transformation," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XI, January to June, 1896* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 634-640.

Such justification also undermines forensic science's new innovations. New technologies of detection and surveillance are being tested during the turn of the century: Galton is developing composite photography of criminal types during this period, and fingerprinting and the Bertillon system are contending for the primary position as the method for identifying recidivists. But what good is it to detect a criminal if we are not certain the crime merits correction? In Arthur Morrison's "Case of Mr. Foggatt" the detective Martin Hewitt uses Bertillon's system to identify a murderer.⁹³ However, judging the murderer justified in his act, Hewitt decides not to pursue the case. The ability to identify a criminal is useless here; what is needed is the insight to tell what should and should not be a crime. Neither are these new systems of detection infallible in these stories: in Doyle's "Adventurer of the Norwood Builder" fingerprinting is proven manipulable by criminals when a murderer plants fingerprints to frame a young man and get him executed.

Moreover, crimes that a given narrative designates morally unjust can come from the unlikeliest sources, from detectives themselves, the champions of law and order, and from those who commit crimes unintentionally. Rather than a physically marked criminal, the criminal might be the detective. In Farjeon's "Three Birds on a Stile," the "gentleman" detective turns out to be a conman who frames his marks and then accepts bribes not to arrest them.⁹⁴ In Grant Allen's "The Great Ruby Robbery" the detective is an actual detective, and he finds the missing jewelry; but rather than turning it over to its rightful owner, the detective steals it for himself and uses theories of criminal anthropology to cast suspicion on two types of people that resemble

⁹³ Arthur Morrison, "Martin Hewitt, Investigator, III: The Case of Mr. Foggatt," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume VII, January to June, 1894* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 526-537.

⁹⁴ B. L. Farjeon, "Three Birds on a Stile," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume I, January to June, 1891* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 612-623.

born criminals: a cold servant woman and an enterprising Irishman.⁹⁵ In this story the law's keepers are capable of breaking the law, and criminal detection's anthropological methods can be used to deflect criminal detection.

Still more doubtful of criminal anthropology are *The Strand's* stories that put forth the idea that good people who do not want to commit crimes can be compelled to do so without their knowledge and against their will. In Meade's and Halifax's "The Panelled Bedroom" an innocent heiress falls under the influence of a mesmerist who causes the girl to try to murder a man.⁹⁶ The heiress remains unconscious of the murder attempt which, had she been master of her will, she would never have perpetrated. The message that anyone can become an unwitting murderer promotes the position that crime might owe more to circumstance than to birth. This position is repeated by Grant Allen's *Hilda Wade*. "The Episode of the Wife Who Did Her Duty" is a story about a caring husband who unaccountably murders his wife. As Hilda Wade explains, "there are murderers who become so by accident;" "all kinds, good and bad, quick and slow, can be driven to it at last."⁹⁷ It is not a predetermined type that is prone to crime; given the right conditions, anyone can and will commit a crime. This is why *everyone* avoids the detective in Florence Warden's farcical "The Nine-Fifteen" – because *everyone* is guilty of some crime. As the young woman of the story puts it, "everybody is a wrong-doer, more or less, at some time or other, and very often it is more by misfortune or by weakness than by wickedness."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Grant Allen, "The Great Ruby Robbery: A Detective Story," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume IV, July to December, 1892* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 376-387.

⁹⁶ L. T. Meade Clifford Halifax, "The Adventures of a Man of Science, VI: The Panelled Bedroom," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XII, July to December, 1896* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 664-677.

⁹⁷ Grant Allen, "Hilda Wade, III: The Episode of the Wife Who Did Her Duty," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XVII, January to June, 1899* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 520, 522.

⁹⁸ Florence Warden, "The Nine-Fifteen," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XXIV, July to December, 1902* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 690.

These stories respond to criminal classification by asking *what if all people are prone to commit crimes?* Then all bodies are potentially criminal bodies, are capable of reform,⁹⁹ and the anthropological classification of the criminal is impossible. More to the point, even *known* criminal's bodies are immeasurable in *The Strand*. If criminal anthropology proceeds under the assumption that bodies are fixed and stable, betraying natural tendencies, *The Strand* contends that they are fluid, changeable, and, given to artifice, impossible to fix and detect. In *The Strand's* very first Holmes story, "A Scandal in Bohemia," the world's finest detective fails to identify the woman he is investigating when she follows him home disguised as a young man.¹⁰⁰ In John Arthur Barry's "A Bird of Prey" the police arrest a man named Brown, thinking he is the criminal known as *the Toff*, so *the Toff* decides to impersonate Brown, since that identity is now available.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the series that stands best for the popular press' representation of the criminal body as a body capable of assuming variable forms is Grant Allen's *An African Millionaire* (1896-1897). In this series of loosely connected episodes Sir Charles, a millionaire who has made his fortune from African diamonds and other morally questionable speculations, is repeatedly taken in and relieved of his fortune by the confidence trickster known as Colonel Clay. Clay is a master of disguise, impersonating a Mexican seer, a young clergyman, an Austrian nobleman, a venture capitalist, a German scientist, a detective, a doctor, a famous poet, and Sir Charles himself. The French police say that no one knows his nationality or age, that he is such a master of disguise that he can even change his pupils to suggest dull-wittedness or

⁹⁹ One-fifth of *The Strand's* stories present criminals capable of changing for the good.

¹⁰⁰ Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume II, July to December, 1891* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 61-75.

¹⁰¹ John Arthur Barry, "A Bird of Prey," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XX, July to December, 1900* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 380-393.

intelligence, and that some suspect that he is not one single man, but a band of thieves—all of which is to preface the detectives' declaration that the man is undetectable and that it would be a waste of time to try to track him.¹⁰²

Facing a criminal who can impersonate anyone, Sir Charles decides that the safest way to proceed is to disown all claims to knowledge and to adopt the attitude that nothing is knowable: “We should disbelieve as well as distrust everybody. That’s the road to success; and I mean to pursue it.”¹⁰³ Seymour, Sir Charles’ brother-in-law and secretary, reiterates their position, saying that he has learned to “discount appearances” and to assume the disorienting logical premise that those who look the least like thieves are the most suspect.¹⁰⁴ Their universal distrust and inability to detect their antagonist result in more than one wrongful arrest and a string of lawsuits from the wrongfully accused. New technologies of criminal detection are devalued here, too. In “The Episode of the Bertillon Method,” Clay is exposed by a method of photography “not unlike those composite photographs [by] Mr. Galton.”¹⁰⁵ In the following episode, however, he convinces a jury not to credit the photos. Criminal detection is decidedly impotent here. Far from being “entirely innocuous,”¹⁰⁶ Allen’s *African Millionaire* presents a world in which it is impossible to identify criminals.

¹⁰² Grant Allen, “An African Millionaire, I: The Episode of the Mexican Seer,” *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XI, January to June, 1896* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 667.

¹⁰³ Grant Allen, “An African Millionaire, VIII: The Episode of the Seldon Gold-Mine,” *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XIII, January to June, 1897* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 32.

¹⁰⁴ Grant Allen, “An African Millionaire, III: The Episode of the Old Master,” *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XII, July to December, 1896* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 205.

¹⁰⁵ Grant Allen, “An African Millionaire, XI: The Episode of the Bertillon Method,” *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XIII, January to June, 1897* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 421.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Morton, “*The Busiest Man in England*”: *Grant Allen and the Writing trade, 1875-1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., 2005), 175.

The incompetence of detection is driven home by the stories' affirmation of the moral superiority of the criminal. As Colonel Clay makes clear, Sir Charles' form of capitalism is more parasitic than plain robbery, for Colonel Clay, a Robin Hood figure, only preys on the rich Sir Charles, while Sir Charles preys on everyone, including his family and the share-holders in his company.¹⁰⁷ The criminal teaches the capitalist how to be good to people: when Sir Charles exhibits sincere compassion for others, Clay refrains from robbing him, a reward for his "good behavior."¹⁰⁸ And when Clay is finally caught and proclaims he is only sorry that he, the lesser of two rogues, should be the defendant, while Sir Charles, the greater of two rogues, should be the prosecutor, all of the courthouse and all of London agree.¹⁰⁹ The inability of the law to detect criminals is compounded by its greater failure to be guided by equitable standards of ethics.¹¹⁰

All of these stories counter the scholarly stance that the classic detective story reinforces confidence theories of criminal determinism. Far from reassuring readers that law and order can identify and regulate crime, *The Strand's* detective stories suggest that crime and criminals defy identification and regulation. The implicit argument here is for reading with a wide lens. Taken alone, a story might or might not contest criminal science's efficacy. But taken together, a clear trend appears. Early detective fiction is not easily consumed comfort-reading. Designed to entertain, it simultaneously demonstrates doubts about biological origins of crime and about the legitimacy of the law itself. These obscure 'lowbrow' stories parallel the complex

¹⁰⁷ Grant Allen, "An African Millionaire, V: Episode of the Brawn Game," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XII, July to December, 1896* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 449-457.

¹⁰⁸ Grant Allen, "An African Millionaire, IX: The Episode of the Japanned Dispatch-Box," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XIII, January to June, 1897* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 175.

¹⁰⁹ Grant Allen, "An African Millionaire, XII: The Episode of the Old Bailey," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XIII, January to June, 1897* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 512-520.

¹¹⁰ For a fuller discussion of Clay's moral superiority, see Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction*, 119-127.

representations of the criminal body for which some of the better-known texts of the canon are celebrated.

For example, the morphing bodies in G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* are part of the larger conversation on mutable bodies that we find in *The Strand*.¹¹¹ Chesterton's novel centers on Syme, an undercover detective who infiltrates an inner circle of anarchists. Each anarchist uses for his alias a day of the week, and each bears the physical stamp of the anthropological criminal: "each man was subtly and differently wrong," one with a "twisted smile" and "emaciated" face, another with "almond eyes," a "blue-black beard," and "cruel, crimson lips," and a third, the Professor de Worms, sunk in "senile decay," a "corpse" whose "decrepitude" expresses some inner "corruption" which is "indefinably" horrible.¹¹² As it turns out, each of these hideous born criminals is actually a detective in disguise: "there never was any Supreme Anarchist Council...we were all a lot of silly policeman looking at each other."¹¹³ The main action of the novel consists of Syme (and his growing band of fellow detectives) tracking down the next inner circle anarchist, only to unmask him and discover that he too is an undercover detective.

The protean bodies of *The Strand* presage the protean bodies of Chesterton's novel. Like many of *The Strand*'s stories above, *The Man Who Was Thursday* presents a world of performed

¹¹¹ In his essay "Detectives' Domesticity," Chesterton argues that good detective stories shun conspiracies, cabals, "diabolical diplomatists" and other foreign terrors in favor of homegrown criminals, since "an Englishman's house is his castle; even if, like other castles, it is the scene of a few quiet tortures or assassinations." In other words, the menace of a detective story should turn on something familiar, domestic, normal. Chesterton is arguing about foreign menaces, but his case can be extended to include the strange and unfamiliar physiognomy of the anthropological criminal. That puppet theatre of hunchbacks, the homeless, the one-eyed, scar-faced, beetle-browed, and hideous has no place in Chesterton's higher order detective story, as *The Man Who Was Thursday*, a parody of criminal abnormality, exhibits. For the quote above, see Chesterton's "Detectives' Domesticity," *The Uses of Diversity*, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1921), 39.

¹¹² G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (Watchmaker Publishing, 2010), 42.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 110.

identity and impersonation, a world in which the positive identification of a subject is always to be doubted. As more and more anarchists turn out to be fellow detectives, Syme's system of identification deteriorates and his response could be Sir Charles' when Sir Charles decides that nothing is knowable. After unmasking his latest ally, Syme wonders whether the man is still "wearing a mask? Was anyone wearing a mask? Was anyone anything?"¹¹⁴ Syme's utter irresolution signals the breakdown of empiricism. The data that can be gleaned from unstable bodies cannot be counted on to correspond to those bodies from one moment to the next. As Syme puts it, "was there anything apart from what it seemed. The Marquis has taken off his nose and turned out to be a detective. Might he not just as well take off his head and turn out to be a hobgoblin?"¹¹⁵

The body's resistance to fixed meaning comes near to shattering reason itself in the novel. Sunday's actions defy reason (he is the head of the Anarchist Council who is actually also the head policeman who hired the detectives to infiltrate the Anarchist Council) just as his body defies description. One detective cannot decide how Sunday's grotesque obesity can seem not heavy, but light. Another says that he is like some "final form of matter," "sea lumps and protoplasm."¹¹⁶ A third disagrees, maintaining that he is not a "freak physically."¹¹⁷ Another cannot even conceive of him, and yet another admits that his "face escaped me...made me, somehow, doubt whether there are any faces."¹¹⁸ By the time these baffled policemen hunt down Sunday, their questions have changed. No longer are they asking where to find and arrest anarchists. Instead, their questions are ontological: bewildered by a world in which identity is

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 93.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 93.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 121.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 122.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 123.

indefinite, they want only to ask Sunday “what they mean”; that is, who they are, what he is, and what the world is.¹¹⁹

Like Chesterton’s novel, Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* advances an illegible criminal body that resembles those of *The Strand*. In Conrad’s novel Mr. Verloc, agent provocateur and member of an ineffectual band of anarchists, grooms and enlists his mentally disabled brother-in-law to deliver a bomb. When Stevie stumbles and explodes, he is reduced to a mess of human pulp that has to be gathered with a shovel, “nameless fragments” making up “a sort of mound—a heap of rags, scorched and bloodstained...[combined with] a sprinkling of small gravel, tiny brown bits of bark, and particles of splintered wood as fine as needles.”¹²⁰ Resembling the “by-products of a butcher’s shop,” Stevie’s body is not only “nameless” but un-nameable, unclassifiable, obviating inspection.¹²¹

In spite of the illegibility of Stevie’s remains, some would argue that *The Secret Agent* dramatizes how Lombrosian discourse constitutes bodies. For M. Kellen Williams, in *The Secret Agent* the body is recreated through representational practices.¹²² I see the novel differently. To me, the centerpiece around which the novel revolves—Stevie’s death and the obliteration of his body—asserts the body as ineffable. Although discourse *attempts* to label the body, it ultimately fails. This body cannot be represented. It cannot even be adequately distinguished from inorganic matter. And the narrative itself cannot describe the body’s disintegration. In the inspector’s report the moment of violence is merely referred to, not represented (the inspector “stated the bare fact”).¹²³

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 112-113.

¹²⁰ Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (Haddonfield, New Jersey: J. P. Piper, 2013), 59-60.

¹²¹ Ibid., 59-60.

¹²² M. Kellen Williams, “Where All Things Sacred and Profane Are Turned into Copy’: Flesh, Fact, and Fiction in Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*,” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 32 (Winter, 2002), 32-51.

¹²³ Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*, 139.

The body that undergoes dissolution escapes the labeling effects of discourse as well as those of scientific identification through biometrics. This resistance to criminal classification in detective fiction is not new in Edwardian England; *The Strand's* stories have been propping up similar problems for years. In fact, in some ways Stevie's death is not unlike the death of *The Strand's* master-criminal Madame Koluchy, who incinerates herself in order to deprive prying private-eyes of a corpse and deny criminal science its specimen.¹²⁴

But still more reminiscent of the stories in *The Strand* is *The Secret Agent's* position that a criminal can be a victim and a policeman can be a criminal. This novel conveys doubts about pre-determined criminality in much the same way as *The Strand's* fiction: by skewing the line between criminals and non-criminals. The bomber Stevie is more victim than criminal. Winnie, who murders her husband Verloc for destroying her brother, is also more victim than criminal. And the police look guiltier than the bomber and the murderess.

As in Florence Warden's farcical story in which everyone is guilty of some crime, all of the supposedly upright characters of *The Secret Agent* possess criminal qualities. What many of *The Strand's* stories demonstrate in scene, *The Secret Agent* states in exposition: that "the mind and instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and instincts of a police officer."¹²⁵ London's Chief Inspector Heat moves like "a member of the criminal classes."¹²⁶ The Assistant Commissioner, bored with desk work, turns his skill in detection to his subordinates, uncovering "incriminating" truths about his inspectors.¹²⁷ He himself is not above corruption: wishing to stay in the good graces of a lady who looks fondly on a suspect of the bombing, he does his best

¹²⁴ L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace, "The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings, X: The Doom," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume XVI, July to December, 1898* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 304-317.

¹²⁵ Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*, 63.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

to deflect suspicion from that suspect. The impossibility of distinguishing between victim, lawman, and criminal bears out the opinion of the novel's Karl Yundt for whom "Lombroso is an ass" whose methodology fails to account for socio-political causes of crime.¹²⁸

Such sentiments are familiar to readers of *The Strand*. Thus Conrad is right to state that *The Secret Agent* is not "unsuitable for general reading."¹²⁹ Indeed, the novel's ironic treatment of crime and detection corresponds to the popular press that the public generally read. However, there is a scholarly tendency to presume that Conrad's detective novel breaks from the conventions of the genre. Stephen Skinner argues that "the unsettling disturbance of the detective story formula in *The Secret Agent* is the crucial element in its exposure of underlying social and existential disorder."¹³⁰ Skinner takes for granted what so many of us have also wrongfully assumed: the argument that traditional detective fiction was a "source of reassurance, resolution, and security" for its readers.¹³¹ Yet the stories of *The Strand* suggest otherwise. If *The Strand*, a monthly geared toward middle-class interests and its editor's taste for wholesome fiction, so frequently exposes social disorder, we must reconsider this assumption. The assumption that the early detective story reinforces social order does not hold up against scrutiny of the popular press: Conrad is not the only writer to expose the instability of social disorder; actually, he is expanding on a convention of the genre's formula, namely, the early detective story's penchant for parodying the naivety of social discourses claiming to stabilize society's flux. The detective story formula is hardly "disturbed" by *The Secret Agent*; in many ways, it is replicated.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹²⁹ Joseph Conrad, "Letter to J. B. Pinker, October 11, 1906," *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Volume 3, 1903-1907* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 364-365.

¹³⁰ Stephen Skinner, "'A Benevolent Institution for the Suppression of Evil': Joseph Conrad's 'The Secret Agent' and the Limits of Policing," *Journal of Law and Society*, 30 (September, 2003), 435.

¹³¹ Ibid., 436.

The congruity of these stories when it comes to complicating criminal science attests to Foucault's claim that literary works are less the products of a single individual laboring in isolation than they are the products of collective cultural phenomena.¹³² Hilary Fraser has noted that Foucault's premise "seems a particularly apt model for the nineteenth-century periodical."¹³³ Doyle himself views his literary coterie as a collective, not a disassociated group.¹³⁴ And insofar as they engage with similar concerns and techniques as the popular detective stories, Conrad's and Chesterton's experimental novels also belong to this group. Like Conrad's and Chesterton's novels, *The Strand's* fiction does not support theories arguing for biological determinants of crime. Instead, the magazine that sets the standard for the genre of detective fiction begins from the very start by demonstrating the genre's capacity for expressing doubts about the very tenets of detection.

¹³² Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), 205-224.

¹³³ Hilary Fraser, "Periodicals and Reviewing," *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 66.

¹³⁴ Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures: An Autobiography* (London: Wordsworth Editions, Ltd., 2007), 100.

Chapter 2

“Theirhisnothis fellowfaces”: The Dynamism of Social Science in Doyle and Joyce

Abstract

This chapter reads Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories beside James Joyce's "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses*. The chapter argues that both authors critique the social sciences as practiced by demographers like Charles Booth. For Doyle and Joyce, knowledge about people is unreliable, the knower is always implicated in the production of the known, and the 'facts' are prone to cultural distortions. The stories engage the "culture versus science" debates of Matthew Arnold and Thomas Huxley and suggest that these two modes of knowledge production, the scientific and the cultural, are interrelated or, indeed, inseparable. The high modernist literary experimentalism of the 1920s has, in this respect, an antecedent in popular detective fiction. Both genres parody social science's claims to encyclopedic knowledge of people, and both imply that human beings defy stable categorization.

It is generally acknowledged that during the Victorian period social inquiry adopted the epistemological techniques of the physical sciences, emphasizing objective observation, experimentation, and the careful analysis of demonstrable evidence.¹³⁵ This emphasis on method and empiricism leads many, like Clarice Swisher, to view the Victorian era as a period of “faith in...scientifically discerned facts.”¹³⁶ But just how confident in scientific methods and objective empiricism were the Victorians? After completing an exhaustive statistical analysis of London’s poor and working classes, the social statistician Charles Booth acknowledged that there are different “ways of looking even at mere figures” and that “very different impressions may be produced by the same facts.”¹³⁷ Booth’s awareness of the malleability of data indicates his awareness that the knower plays a role in the constitution of knowledge and that facts, understood in the context of their interpretation, are created as much as discovered. That such doubts about scientific certainty should originate from a member of The Royal Society suggests that to talk of Victorianism’s “faith” in scientific discernment is to underestimate the complexity of the period’s apprehensions about the sciences, their methods, and claims to objective knowledge.¹³⁸

More particularly, the period’s ambivalence toward *social* science can be traced in literary artefacts which exhibit a lineage of parody linking the high literature of modernity to the popular fiction of the late Victorian era. The parodies of social science that occur in Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes* stories inform similar slants on social science in the “Ithaca” episode

¹³⁵ Maureen Moran, *Victorian Literature and Culture* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 60.

¹³⁶ Clarice Swisher, “Introduction,” *Victorian Literature* (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 2000), 9.

¹³⁷ Charles Booth, *Life and Labor in London, First Series, Volume 1: Poverty* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1970), 177.

¹³⁸ For a strong study on Victorian awareness of the role of hermeneutics in knowledge production, see Suzy Anger, *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In both texts science, when it attempts to classify *social* behavior, runs amok of narrative methods of producing knowledge. The observer of social phenomena is not objectively but culturally situated, and facts are inflected by interpretive practices. The stories evoke the debates of Thomas Huxley and Matthew Arnold, who pitted scientific against cultural means of knowledge production, and suggest that the argument is asinine: for science is culture.

But many readers today tend to miss the parody of sociology in Doyle's *Holmes* stories. Today, most scholars view the classic detective as a representative of panoptic power, a kind of social statistician par excellence. Glenn W. Most, for example, argues that the classic detective is "an unsurpassed expert in all the tiniest details of the big city: he knows its streets and neighborhoods, its rules and exceptions, its language and customs; give him an address, and he can tell you exactly where it is—but also exactly what kind of people live there, how they earn their money, and what their most secret dreams and vices are."¹³⁹ For Most, the classic detective comprehends and can exert order on the terrific puzzle of the city, offering the reader "solace" and "reassurance" that urban chaos can be recorded, organized, regulated and controlled.¹⁴⁰ This conception of the stabilizing detective exemplifies Michel Foucault's conception of panopticism, a system of control based on perfect knowledge derived from perfect surveillance. From his position in the center of the city the detective sees all, knows all, and can therefore impose order on the urban sphere.

However, the classic detective is neither as all-seeing nor as all-powerful as the panoptic model suggests. The classic detective often misreads the city and its system of signs, and a

¹³⁹ Glenn W. Most, "Urban Blues: Detective Fiction and the Metropolitan Sublime," *The Yale Review*, 94 (January, 2006), 68.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

better theoretical framework for conceptualizing the classic detective's position in regard to dense social space comes from Michel de Certeau, for whom the urban sphere resists panopticism:

The city is subjected to contradictory movements that offset each other and interact outside the purview of panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme of political epic but it is no longer a theatre for programmed, controlled operations. Beneath the discourses ideologizing it, there is a proliferation of tricks and fusions of power that are devoid of legible identity, that lack any perceptible access and that are without rational clarity—impossible to manage.¹⁴¹

For de Certeau, those who are immersed in the city are incorporated into its system of signs and lack the distance and distinction needed to read them. In the urban mayhem, the panoptic model is improbable; the city is too much in flux, too prone to movement and change, and the urban observer occupies not the fixed position of panopticism, but an unsteady position that is always altering in relation to all that surrounds it.

De Certeau's theory illuminates the fallibility of the classic detective. The classic detective is immersed in his urban environment; he is as Walter Benjamin says a city-stroller or *flâneur*, living in the city, watching and walking its streets.¹⁴² It is precisely because of his position as *flâneur*, precisely because he functions within the urban system he investigates, that the classic detective might misread or lose control of social phenomena in the city. He uses some elements of the city to study others, and because the urban means of inquiry change as irregularly as the urban object of inquiry, his methods of information-gathering are unreliable.

A case in point: at the opening of "The Man with the Twisted Lip," Sherlock Holmes has failed to detect (for some time, apparently, and despite his best efforts) the double life of Hugh Boone, a beggar who is actually a middle-class journalist and family man named Neville St.

¹⁴¹ Michel de Certeau, "Practices of Space," *On Signs*, ed. M. Blonksy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 128.

¹⁴² Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), 41.

Clair, but who disguises himself in order to beg because begging proves more lucrative than journalism. Although Holmes reports that Boone's face "is familiar to every man who goes much to the city," and although Holmes himself has "watched the fellow more than once," the detective has failed to penetrate the disguise of the mendicant.¹⁴³ Here Holmes fails as a demographer: the long-undetected double life of Boone suggests that Holmes' knowledge of Londoners, "how they earn their money, and what their most secret dreams and vices are,"¹⁴⁴ is imperfect. Holmes studies the man, takes note of his clothes, features, manner, and speech, remarks the nook he uses for begging and the East End room he rents, yet finds nothing spurious in any of this, nothing to prevent him from erroneously adding an inhabitant to the population of London.

An error of technique is also implied. Holmes famously employs a homeless network of spies, a gang of street youths who can "go everywhere and hear everything,"¹⁴⁵ but in this case, it is a homeless man who eludes him. Holmes' very method of obtaining information—through homeless informants—has become superabundant with the addition of Boone, suggesting an inherent flaw in the detective's methodology. The homeless population that Holmes uses to gather information is itself unknown, and although Holmes is confident that he can introduce "organization" to the ranks of the homeless, the case of Hugh Boone suggests otherwise.¹⁴⁶ The homeless Hugh Boones of London (and the ostensible Neville St. Clairs, for that matter) defy the investigator.

¹⁴³ Conan Doyle, "The Man with the Twisted Lip," *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1927), 235.

¹⁴⁴ Most, "Urban Blues: Detective Fiction and the Metropolitan Sublime," 68.

¹⁴⁵ Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Doubleday & Company: New York, 1953), 35.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

In other words, Doyle's story addresses what demographers of his day knew very well: that certain knowledge of a population is unattainable. Sociologists like Doyle's contemporary Charles Booth announced that there is a wide margin of error when it comes to collecting data on people. Booth, whose *Life and Labor in London* (1886-1903) coincided with the birth and rise of Doyle's famous detective, undertook what at the time may well have been the most ambitious attempt to map London demographically. His final product amounts to seventeen volumes providing statistics and analysis on London's poor and working classes, their conditions of living, occupations, and relationships with social institutions like schools, churches, and the police force. The project includes comments and inventories on everything from the size of families and the numbers of rooms per household to rates of alcoholism, the condition or absence of furniture, and the types of food consumed by the poor, complete with a weekly expenditure.

Despite Booth's meticulous attention to detail and his monumental acquisition of data, in the final (seventeenth) volume the demographer expresses doubts concerning the reliability of his information. Even as he asserts that he "may be able to set forth the bare facts" about living conditions in London, Booth owns that such an attempt is in some measure quixotic.¹⁴⁷ After all, the boundaries separating one district from another are "very vague," as are the definitions determining class, and even "if we succeed in eliminating these sources of misunderstanding, and know just what portion of the people or what districts are referred to, other and very subtle possibilities of misconception may be found, according to the way in which the facts are regarded."¹⁴⁸ In other words, Booth acknowledges that data consists of interpretable signs, that the absolute meaning of social statistics is impossible to come by, and that differences of opinion

¹⁴⁷ Charles Booth, *Life and Labor in London, Third Series, Volume 4: Religious Influences* (New York: AMS Press, Inc, 1970) 101.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

will arise given one's perception of and position in relation to an individual or population. The person who studies people is never merely an observer; the sociologist is always already in the exchange of signification with the object he studies, and by studying, interprets, alters.

As if to illustrate the point that facts can be made to suit existing narratives, Booth himself uses narrative means to explain, or explain away, some of his figures. When he takes an inventory of marriage rates among homeless men in central London, the majority self-report as "single" or "widowed." Booth effaces and imposes his own interpretation onto this data. He assumes that the marriage rates must be higher, that it is "too much to suppose that these figures are correct."¹⁴⁹ Then he does his best to conceive of why these men would misreport their marital status and concludes that "married men in trouble [for they are homeless] will very often deny wife and children for the time."¹⁵⁰ Booth collects information, calls it inauthentic, and rather than change his methods or premises, contrives explanations for the inaccuracy.

The facts are made to conform to an interpretation of the facts, are deranged by the processes of artifice, and this tendency to impose narrative onto a bare set of social data is parodied in Doyle's "The Adventure of the Yellow Face," a story which suggests that the Holmes series was as prepared to complicate epistemological processes as sociologists like Booth were. Here, again, the mystery hinges on a newcomer to the community. Holmes' client Grant Munroe has new neighbors whom his wife Effie is visiting in secret. Effie is a widow from a previous marriage in America. She behaves suspiciously, pleads with her husband not to visit the neighbors, one of whom has an abnormal face and appears to be sickly, and she asks her husband for money which she transfers to the neighbors. From these spare facts (italicized in the

¹⁴⁹ Booth, *Life and Labor in London, First Series, Volume 1: Poverty*, 225.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

passage below) Holmes spins an intricate tale, telling Watson that his theory is provisional but that he:

“Shall be surprised if it does not turn out to be correct. This woman’s first husband is in that cottage [the cottage of the new neighbors].”

“Why do you think so?”

“How else can we explain her frenzied anxiety that her second one should not enter it? The facts, as I read them, are something like this: *This woman was married in America*. Her husband developed some hateful qualities, or shall we say he contracted some loathsome disease and became a leper or an imbecile? She flies from him at last, *returns to England*, changes her name, and starts her life, as she thinks, afresh. *She has been married three years* and thinks that her position is quite secure, having shown her husband the death certificate of some man whose name she has assumed, when suddenly her whereabouts is discovered by her first husband, or, we may suppose, by some unscrupulous woman who has attached herself to the invalid. They write to the wife and threaten to come and expose her. *She asks for a hundred pounds* and tries to buy them off. They come in spite of it, and when the husband mentions casually to the wife that there are newcomers in the cottage, she knows in some way that they are her pursuers. She waits until her husband is asleep, and then she rushes down to endeavor to persuade them to leave her in peace...[my emphasis].”¹⁵¹

The facts in this passage are minimal, the fictions numerous. Notice how quickly Holmes departs from the evidence to entertain his own embellishments. He sets out to establish the “facts as...[he reads] them,” states *one fact* (“this woman was married in America”), and then swiftly builds one assumption from another (“her husband developed some hateful qualities, or shall we say he contracted some loathsome disease and became a leper or an imbecile?”). Like the good student of “sensational” fiction that he is,¹⁵² the detective even creates an “accomplice” for the first husband, some “unscrupulous woman who has attached herself” to the “invalid.” This loathsome, diseased villain and his vamp are the stock stuff of popular crime fiction.

¹⁵¹ Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Yellow Face,” *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1927), 359.

¹⁵² Conan Doyle, “The Five Orange Pips,” *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1927), 25.

Holmes' renowned capacity for deduction is here no more than an inclination to view the world through the distorted lens of literary populism, pointing up the possibility that knowledge is generated through cultural, rather than objective, means.

Beyond this popular context, Holmes' speculations parody knowledge mediated by discourse even as they suggest that all knowledge is, to some degree, the product of discursive practices. What passes for knowledge is reified through repetition. The original husband who begins conditionally ("shall we say...") as a "leper or an imbecile" quickly becomes unquestionably "the invalid," his illness a given based on nothing more than the earlier conditional assertion, as though each speech act were a performative utterance and the man could be made to exist, and to exist as an invalid, simply by saying as much. This parody of knowledge production through narrative speaks to a distrust of discourses claiming detached observation and reaches its apotheosis when all of Holmes' hunches turn out to be wrong.

The case is solved (not by Holmes' famous deduction, but by breaking and entering) when the men storm the house, burst into the neighbor's bedroom and ascertain the truth. In the end, Munroe's wife Effie adored her first husband with whom she had a daughter. The "yellow-faced" neighbor is that daughter (wearing a mask). Effie's first husband is deceased. He was of African descent, and *that* is the secret she has been trying to hide. Holmes' inability to detect marginalized populations categorized according to race and poverty is compounded by his proclivity for reading too far into the information he has. The story stages Booth's acknowledgement that social phenomena cannot be studied in isolation. The investigator is always implicated in the final analysis, the 'facts' glossed and subject to resignification.

Far from regulating social meaning, the detective himself becomes an object of scrutiny. As Watson walks down Baker Street in “A Scandal in Bohemia,” he gazes up at Holmes’ windows and observes that:

His rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. To me, who knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their own story. He was at work again. He had risen out of his drug-created dreams and was hot upon the scent of some new problem.¹⁵³

The scene is reminiscent of Bentham’s panopticon in which the convict occupies a transparent cell under observation. But here the usually all-seeing observer Holmes is the one being framed in a window, the one being exposed to surveillance, and the one who cannot control his appearance under another’s gaze. The theory that the scene dramatizes is not Foucault’s, but de Certeau’s response to Foucault. The classic detective story complicates the Foucauldian social space that is reducible to a perfect sphere of control through central surveillance. It suggests a better metaphor for the social hub: a honeycomb, each cell observable by, permeable and in communion with its neighbors. Surveillance is reversed: Holmes, the watchman at the center of the panopticon, turns out to be in one of its windowed cells, his silhouette yielding the “story” of his manner and movements. That that “story” contains its own sensational details (the drug-induced dreams) and diction (“hot upon the scent”) reminds us that at each remove of observation (here, observing the observer) we remain not in the presence of plain facts but in the presence of ‘facts’ that signal the processes of cultural mediation by which they come into being and are communicated.

¹⁵³ Conan Doyle, “A Scandal in Bohemia,” *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1927), 161-162.

As Watson's methods of circumscribing his friend become increasingly scientific, they also become increasingly vulnerable to narrative methods of manufacturing knowledge. In his attempts to quantify Holmes' qualities Watson uses the tool of the social scientist, the inventory. Following the cue of those great lovers of lists, social statisticians like Booth, Watson enumerates Holmes' strengths and weaknesses and even organizes his inventory under a title claiming total delineation:

Sherlock Holmes—his limits

1. Knowledge of Literature.—Nil.
2. “ ” Philosophy.—Nil.
3. “ ” Astronomy.—Nil.
4. “ ” Politics.—Feeble.
5. “ ” Botany. Variable. Well up in belladonna, opium, and Poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening.
6. “ ” Geology.—Practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.
7. “ ” Chemistry.—Profound.
8. “ ” Anatomy.—Accurate, but unsystematic.
9. “ ” Sensational Literature.—Immense. He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century.
10. Plays the violin well.
11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.
12. Has a good practical knowledge of British law.¹⁵⁴

Taken alone, this inventory of Holmes' knowhow would appear to support the idea that social data is precise and stable. But the Holmes stories parody the social scientist's claims to statistical precision when in "The Five Orange Pips" Watson repeats and significantly distorts the inventory, saying that it was "a singular document. Philosophy, astronomy, and politics were marked at zero, I remember. Botany variable, geology profound as regards the mud-stains from any region within fifty miles of town, chemistry eccentric, anatomy unsystematic, sensational

¹⁵⁴ Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 11.

literature and crime records unique, violin-player, boxer, swordsman, lawyer and self-poisoner by cocaine and tobacco.”¹⁵⁵

Taken together, the two lists burlesque the belief that social categories are stable and individuals’ traits containable in catalogues. There are some significant changes from one list to the next. For one, the second inventory is not just an inventory: it is an account of an inventory, related in dialogue. In other words, the second list performs a reconstruction of social data. What happens as this data is reconstructed? In “The Five Orange Pips,” we’re told that “Holmes grinned at the last item” (“self-poisoner by cocaine and tobacco”).¹⁵⁶ Perhaps Holmes recognizes that Watson’s list, which is related in the exact order in which it was first recorded, contains this one addition about “self-poisoning.” The point? Lists are unstable. They change, lose and accumulate data. The addition of a drug habit is, moreover, immaterial in a list concerning Holmes’ knowledge and skills. The fact is extraneous, suggesting that social categories have weak boundaries and can be made to admit foreign items. The inventory also becomes more sensational in the retelling. The category of “literature” is dropped from the first list. “Sensational Literature” is repeated. And we get the sensational addition of Holmes’ self-poisoning. The second list presents sensational literature as the only kind of literature, and it enacts its own sensational gesture by adding the irrelevant detail of drug use.

Doyle’s parodies of sociology prefigure Joyce’s farcical exercises in the discipline in the “Ithaca” chapter of *Ulysses*. Readers such as Andrew Gibson and Brian Cosgrove have pointed out the pitfalls of the physical sciences and their methodologies in “Ithaca.”¹⁵⁷ But no one has

¹⁵⁵ Doyle, “The Five Orange Pips,” 25.

¹⁵⁶ Doyle, “The Five Orange Pips,” 25.

¹⁵⁷ In *Joyce’s Revenge: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in Joyce’s Ulysses*, Gibson thoroughly reads scientific errors in “Ithaca” in order to argue that “Ithacan science is erratic, untrustworthy, delusive. If the rigor of scientific discourse is sedulously maintained, it is also gleefully corrupted.” In *James Joyce’s Negations*, Cosgrove argues that in “Ithaca” the quasi-scientific over-accumulation of facts and over-

treated the chapter's relationship to Holmes, the social sciences, or the imposition of culture and narrative on sociological methods of research. Yet Holmes' presence in the novel cues us to read in "Ithaca" the very epistemological hitches that we find in Doyle's slant on sociology.

With its nods to Doyle, *Ulysses* offers several hints that the reader should see in Bloom a pastiche of the Baker Street legend. In "Circe," Bloom enters the scene like a flâneur-detective, tails Stephen Dedalus through Dublin's red-light district, and his face contracts "to resemble many historical personages," among them "Sherlock Holmes."¹⁵⁸ In "Eumaeus" Bloom meets a mendacious seaman and takes "stock of the individual...[by] Sherlockholmesing him up" (*U* 16.830-831). Doyle's "Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" is referenced in "Ithaca," and Bloom's bookshelf holds another work by Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters* (*U* 17.1679-87, 1375).

Yet few critical works have addressed Holmes' presence in *Ulysses*. Among the few that have, the most rigorous and well-known is Hugh Kenner's argument that Joyce's mode of narration is a send-up of the mental powerhouse represented by Holmesian ratiocination.¹⁵⁹ For Kenner, *Ulysses*' narrator represents Holmes' omniscience without Holmes' reason. The narrator is incapable of deduction and merely records information without registering it in any meaningful way. But like many readers, Kenner disregards the presence of parody in the Holmes stories. Ithacan detection and social science is not deriding the Holmes stories, but building upon that series' own parodies of social research's ambitions for encyclopedic knowledge of people.

precision of language results in a "surfeit of knowledge" which distances rather than bringing one closer to intimate knowledge of subjects of study. See Andrew Gibson, *Joyce's Revenge: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in Joyce's Ulysses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 244; and Brian Cosgrove, *James Joyce's Negations* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), 148.

¹⁵⁸ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, The Gabler Edition (New York: Random House, 1986), episode 15, lines 1844-1849. Further references to *Ulysses* will be cited in the text and will cite this edition by episode and line number in the following format: *U* 15.1844-1849.

¹⁵⁹ Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

Like the Holmes stories, “Ithaca” delegitimizes categorical knowledge about people and their conditions of living. Readings of the chapter as a satire on religious catechism, rote learning, and taxonomy in general have tended to overlook the chapter’s satirical emphasis on the methods of social study employed by Booth and problematized by Doyle and by Booth himself.¹⁶⁰ The episode models a social empiricism which is perverted by inconsistencies and the impositions of cultural epistemes.

Plot-wise, the episode is simple. After spending the day on the streets of Dublin, Bloom returns home with Stephen, the two chat, have some cocoa for a nightcap, urinate in the garden, and Stephen leaves, and Bloom joins his wife in their bed. But this noncomplex diegesis is woven into an intricate series of questions and answers concerning everything from meditations on the cosmos to meditations on urban plumbing and the men’s dissimilar arcs of urine, all broken down with such a semblance of categorical precision that, as Joyce himself said, the reader will feel that the chapter’s excess of information has rendered Bloom’s world in full.¹⁶¹

The overreaching taxonomies of “Ithaca” often originate from a focalization on Bloom as a man of science. Such categorical knowledge would appeal to Bloom and his “scientific” temperament (*U* 17.560). Moreover, his mind tends towards “applied, rather than towards pure, science,” and he is most interested in applying his science to “an improved scheme for kindergarten” (*U* 17.561-562, 569-571). He is, then, a social scientist and positivist. Like

¹⁶⁰ For example, Copland and Turner argue that “Ithaca” mocks schoolroom methods of inquiry through stale catechism. Karen R. Lawrence argues that “it is the idea of a taxonomic system itself, not any particular system, which is parodied” in “Ithaca.” See R. A. Copland and G. W. Turner, “The Nature of James Joyce’s Parody in ‘Ithaca,’” *Modern Language Review*, 64 (October, 1969), 759-76; and Karen R. Lawrence, “Style and Narrative in the ‘Ithaca’ Chapter of Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” *ELH*, 47 (Autumn, 1980), 569.

¹⁶¹ In a letter to Frank Budgen, Joyce reported that he was “writing *Ithaca* in the form of a mathematical catechism...so that the reader will know everything and know it in the baldest and coldest way” (159-160). See James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce, Volume I*, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 159-160.

Charles Booth and Sherlock Holmes, Bloom wants to apply scientific methods to problems of social welfare.

But Bloom's conceptions of community service are reduced to a comedy as he imagines himself, like Holmes, discussing "unsolved" "criminal problems" in the "tepid security" of some future estate and advancing from armchair detective to superman of security (*U* 17.1599-1600). He conceives of himself as a pillar of his projected community ("Bloomville") where he will serve as a "magistrate or justice of the peace," maintaining "public order," redressing wrongs and "abuses," and "upholding...the letter of the law" (*U* 17.1623-27). Bloom's plans and methods of social development are full of misinformation, the misapplication of facts, the influence of bias, and disorganization. He plans to apply "venville rights," grazing rights geographically linked to Dartmoor Forest in the south of England, to policies of twig-gathering (*U* 17.1627-30) outside Dublin (*U* 17.1514-18). And although he proposes to embody an unbiased form of justice, his projected "strict maintenance of public order" takes on a personal note when it leaps from conspirators ("traversers in covin") to adulterers like Molly and Boylan ("violators of domestic connubiality") (*U* 17.1617-33).

Bias, "Ithaca" suggests, is as present in society as disorder. Bloom can only imagine a community in flux, "a heterogeneous society of arbitrary classes, incessantly rearranged in terms of greater and lesser social inequality" (*U* 17.1617-20). Bloom's society, 'organized' hierarchically yet arbitrarily, recognizes no real standard of social organization. The implication is that the only society imaginable is, in de Certeau's words, a society "subjected to contradictory movements," illegible, imperceptible, irrational.¹⁶² An "arbitrary" system which "incessantly" shifts defies the classificatory schema of the social sciences. Bloom's impulse to manage the

¹⁶² De Certeau, "Practices of Space," 128.

unmanageable community is further undermined by his presumption that the incidents of human congress are brought about less by intelligent design than by coincidence (*U* 17.633-635).

Bloom's private meditations themselves bear this out: for even to dream of managing a population of innumerable inconsistencies is itself on some level irrational, as Charles Booth conceded.¹⁶³

Far from being able to organize a society, Bloom cannot even keep his own home in order. The social statistician's enumeration of people per household, their material conditions and furnishings is obliquely ridiculed in the Ithacan homecoming, which features Bloom misplacing his house key and breaking into his own home only to find that someone has rearranged all of the furniture and been sleeping (with his wife) in his bed. Bloom's domestic situation is so changeable that it's no wonder that he does not always recognize his own bedroom when he wakes (*U* 17.852-853) and whacks his head on an unexpected sideboard (*U* 17.1274-78). In "Ithaca," domestic space is not fixed or enduring. It is more in line with Charles Booth's baffled conclusion that "change proceeds so fast that what was already is not, and much of what still is, will perhaps no longer be before these lines are print."¹⁶⁴

Bloom's attempts to put his home in order are Lilliputian in scope and, even so, fail. Bloom represents the rational categorization of the scientist when he reflects on "the necessity of order, a place for everything and everything in its place" while reorganizing his bookshelves (*U* 17.1410-11). At least one of these books, however, is quite out of place, "13 days overdue" to the Dublin Public Library; significantly, the book is Doyle's *Stark Munro Letters* (*U* 17.1375-78). In the book's forward, Doyle claims to have done away with the conventions of plot and

¹⁶³ As explained above, Booth was clever enough to own and frank enough to admit that the prospects of his project to map the unstable city were quite dubious.

¹⁶⁴ Booth, *Life and Labor in London, First Series, Volume 1: Poverty*, 184.

written a novel of disjointed events which neither connect nor progress in the usual manner of a narrative.¹⁶⁵ The presence of this book on Bloom's shelf points up the impossibility of such a claim. In "Ithaca," nothing, neither people and things nor events, can be isolated, disjointed, or liberated from discourse; all is "contingent, partial, and open to transformation"¹⁶⁶ – including the analyst of that volatile material.

The material world acts on and influences the observer, altering how he perceives the world. As Bloom contemplates a lampshade, an embalmed owl regards him with a "motionless compassionate gaze," and he in turn assumes a "motionless compassionated gaze" (*U* 17.1344-47). The transfer of compassion from a "compassionate" object to a "compassionated" observer signals the porous borders between people and the material world. "Compassionated," a neologism formed from a verb meaning, apparently, "to render compassionate," repeats the point in syntax. In "Ithaca," nothing is inert, not even nouns, which are animated as participles.

The chapter's inventories are not inert or impermeable, either, but are born of cultural interference. Bloom's schemes for social advancement constitute one such list. Related in the point-by-point fashion of an inventory, the list suggests that categorical knowledge is infiltrated by popular fiction and song. Popular culture informs and shapes Bloom's itemization of potential windfalls. When he thinks that he might "break the bank at Monte Carlo" (*U* 17.1694-96), he is citing the title of a popular song by Fred Gilbert. His hope that a "Spanish prisoner" might donate a "distant treasure of valuables" (*U* 17.1687-88) smacks of Edmund Dantes' benefactor in Dumas' *Count of Monte Cristo*. And the "precious stone" that might be found "in the gizzard of a comestible fowl" (*U* 17.1679-87) is a direct reference to the Holmes story "The

¹⁶⁵ Conan Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1903), ix.

¹⁶⁶ Catherine Flynn, "A Brechtian Epic on Eccles Street: Matter, Meaning, and History in 'Ithaca,'" *Éire-Ireland*, 46 (Spring/Summer 2011), 74.

Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle” in which the valuable gem is found in the crop of a goose destined to be Christmas dinner.

If as Karen R. Lawrence argues “Ithaca” “dons the anti-literary mask of science,” then that mask’s anti-literariness is playing on the illusion that the sciences and humanities engage in antithetical modes of knowledge production.¹⁶⁷ Actually, “Ithaca” does something more complicated than a mere pitting of science against literature. “Ithaca” presents science’s categorical knowledge as a narrative medium which popular culture has always already molded. Bloom can conceive of a list of possibilities organized with the meticulous care of the sciences; but that list is generated in cultural terms, songs and stories.

This cultural appropriation of epistemological processes is repeated in the interlocutor’s line of questioning. The interlocutor’s questions include presuppositions derived from narrative. The interlocutor grafts fictional events onto people in the world and interprets those people as though they were the fictional characters who took part in the fictional events. For example, after Stephen sings the legend of Harry Hughes, a “schoolfellow” who is murdered by a “Jew’s daughter,” the interlocutor references Stephen and Milly by the exact same assignations, as a “schoolfellow” and a “Jew’s daughter,” and presumes (although we have no proof that Stephen and Milly have ever met) that they are in need of a “reconciliatory union” (*U* 17.940-942).¹⁶⁸

After Stephen and Milly are referenced as a “schoolfellow” and a “Jew’s daughter,” the process

¹⁶⁷ Lawrence, “Style and Narrative in the ‘Ithaca’ Chapter of Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” 559.

¹⁶⁸ Some readers argue that the “reconciliatory union” concerns Bloom and his wife because a union between Stephen and Milly will draw Bloom and Molly closer together. For example, see Jane M. Ford’s *Patriarchy and Incest from Shakespeare to Joyce* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998). However, it is simultaneously possible that the reconciliation concerns Stephen and Milly. Readers might miss this because they overlook the episode’s process of manufacturing ‘reality’ through cultural means such as songs. Stephen and Milly never met, never fought. But the “schoolfellow” and the “Jew’s daughter” did. If Stephen is the “schoolboy” and Milly the “Jew’s daughter,” then, by “Ithaca’s” illogical constructions, Stephen and Milly met, fought, and need to be reconciled. This reading emphasizes the way culture works on the production of knowledge and therefore falls in with one of the dominant themes of the episode.

of mapping the narrative onto life continues, and Stephen and Milly, conceived as characters from a song, are ascribed the pre-existing relationship of those characters.

But the interlocutor is not dependent on others' narratives for knowledge production since original fictions can be got up for that purpose. Together, the Ithacan interlocutor and addressee fabricate Bloom's reactions in order to interpret them. As Bloom enters his bed and registers signs of Molly's adultery earlier that day, the interlocutor asks, "if he had smiled why would he have smiled?" and the addressee responds that he would have smiled at the thought that "each one who enters" a bed "imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas" in reality he is always just one of a series (U 17.2126-31). This imaginary moment presupposes that we learn more about Bloom through story than we do through empirical observation. At the same time, what we 'learn' about Bloom is shot through with potential for error. After all, he never did smile. Presumably the reflection that would have caused him to smile never took place. The addressee and interlocutor have created a story and interpreted it. This is literary analysis masquerading as science. The implication, though, is that both disciplines tend to fabricate knowledge. In the sciences, facts can be made to suit presumptions just as easily as the interlocutor can concoct a nonexistent smile and its nonexistent cause.

Like Holmes in "Adventure of the Yellow Face," the interlocutor carries out inquiries in the conditional. The possibilities supersede the facts. Rather than ask for what purpose Bloom boils water, the interlocutor asks for what purpose he "could" have boiled water (U 17.275). When the addressee responds that Bloom "could" have used the water to shave, the interlocutor pursues that possibility and asks about the advantages of shaving by night. In fact, Bloom is preparing hot cocoa for Stephen (U 17.355-358). This study of possible rather than actual

circumstances implies that social circumstances are too multivalent to be treated as one would treat a secure entity.

In “Ithaca” people and their conditions are so unstable that, indeed, the conditional tense might be the only way to talk about them. Identities are constantly redefined relative to each other. The addressee cannot always even distinguish between Bloom and Stephen, referring to “theirhisnothis fellowfaces” (*U* 17.1183-84). The word-cluster performs the waffling that attends an attempt to define beings that resist definition. The three possessive pronouns—one plural, one singular, one negated—crush up against the communal noun, playing out the proposition that people least of all can be understood in isolation. As Paul K. Saint-Amour argues, “Ulysses is deeply interested in how things are defined and perceived through their relation to other entities.”¹⁶⁹ People, the most consistently protean of Ithacan “things,” strain and obscure the categories defining them.

A flexible mind might be able to follow some of these contortions, but the interlocutor’s thinking is too rigid. A caricature of scientific inquiry, the interlocutor betrays a certain literal-mindedness which hinders discernment. When informed that once at a circus a clown “publically declared to an exhilarated audience” that Bloom was his, the clown’s, “papa,” the interlocutor asks, “Was the clown Bloom’s son?” (*U* 17.975-985). The question is hopeless in its naivety and ignorance of culture. Humor, that slipperiest of human creations, escapes the scientific mind.

This cultural ignorance can be read as a reply to and reversal of Thomas Huxley’s stance that cultural studies are ignorant of the sciences. Huxley argues that “the free employment of

¹⁶⁹ Paul K. Saint-Amour, “Symbols and Things,” *The Cambridge Companion to Ulysses*, ed. Sean Latham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 201.

reason, in accordance with scientific method, is the sole method of reaching truth.”¹⁷⁰ Such singularity is belied by the chapter’s proliferating paths to knowledge, its succession of errors and scientific methods colored by cultural influence. Huxley’s contention that “scientific truths” can be “established” is too simple, says “Ithaca.”¹⁷¹ Huxley argues that classicists “betray an ignorance of the first principles of scientific investigation,” and it’s this argument that “Ithaca” turns on its head.¹⁷² In “Ithaca,” scientific empiricism betrays an ignorance of its own manipulation of and by cultural epistemes. It does not understand that its methods of perception are derived from and influenced by cultural origins and biases or that the process of establishing truths is at least as much a process of cultural figuration as of detached reasoning or experimentation.

Huxley’s faith in objectively “established” truths is further ridiculed in the Ithacan performance of the mutability of facts. In Ulysses’ penultimate episode, statements of fact are never just statements; the facts are modified by the way they are stated. “Ithaca” makes this point by piling on the modifiers. When Bloom declines a dinner invitation, he does not simply decline, but “very gratefully, with grateful appreciation, with sincere appreciative gratitude, in appreciatively grateful sincerity of regret, he declined” (*U* 17.473-476). This is less a statement of fact than a joke about obsequious etiquette. Ithacan dissemination of knowledge is inseparable from its style of dissemination. Style is content; the message is not in the matter, but the manner.

And that is just the point in “Ithaca”—that just as the observer of social phenomena is implicated in the observation, so too is speech inseparable from its manner of speech. Once

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Huxley, “Science and Culture,” *Cultures in Conflict*, ed. David K. Cornelius and Edwin St. Vincent (Fair Lawn, NJ: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), 76.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 76.

again, the point serves as a response to Huxley's confidence in objective empiricism. One of Huxley's *Twelve Lectures*, a book Joyce owned,¹⁷³ argues for educational reform in favor of the sciences and ends in an appeal to the audience to consider the facts of the speech stripped of their manner of delivery. If he has spoken "strongly," Huxley says, he would ask the audience "to forget the personality of him who has ventured to address you, and to consider only the truth or error in what has been said."¹⁷⁴ Huxley is trying to circumvent the problem "Ithaca" exploits: the impossibility of the stark or impersonal transference of knowledge. In "Ithaca," the 'facts,' ornamented with invisible scare quotes, are altered a priori, the moment they are uttered, modulated, packaged and contextualized.

But if "Ithaca" scoffs at the claims of Victorian science's outspoken advocate, the chapter also derides the claims of Huxley's intellectual rival, Matthew Arnold. Clashing with Huxley, Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*¹⁷⁵ advocates for cultural as opposed to scientific curriculums in education. Arnold's argument for "humanised knowledge" appears unexamined in "Ithaca," where knowledge bears nothing if not imprints of human mediation.¹⁷⁶ To "humanise" knowledge, Arnold says, is to divest it of all that is "harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive."¹⁷⁷ The joke in "Ithaca" is that the chapter takes a cultural form of knowledge production, fiction, and renders it "harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive," if only to show that a fecund, personal, interactive element is at play even in a seemingly sterile, impersonal, invariable scientific mode. Arnold's call for a cultural infusion

¹⁷³ See Richard Ellman's *The Consciousness of Joyce* (Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 97, for an inventory of Joyce's personal library in Trieste in 1920.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Huxley, "The Educational Value of the Natural History Sciences," *Twelve Lectures and Essays* (London: Watts & Co., 1908), 17.

¹⁷⁵ Also in Joyce's library in Trieste. See Ellman's *The Consciousness of Joyce*, 97-134.

¹⁷⁶ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Indianapolis and New York: The Boobs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1971), 57.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 56

misses the point that culture is already mobilized in and mobilizing what only appears to be a fixed mode of inquiry. “Ithaca” suggests that science and society are not nearly so mechanized as Arnold presumes.

Instead, the chapter stages a farce ridiculing the idea of an easy divide between scientific and cultural ways of thinking. Huxley and Arnold establish the lines which “Ithaca” jauntily blurs. For Huxley, “classification” is the “essence of every science.”¹⁷⁸ For Arnold, classifications “which must stand isolated” are “tiresome” and boring.¹⁷⁹ Ithacan classifications upend both authors’ expectations. If classification is, as Huxley says, “the essence of science,” then for “Ithaca” the essence of science and the tendrils of culture are profoundly enmeshed.

Joyce, Doyle, and Booth each confute the idea that science and culture are unbridgeable islands. For these authors, epistemological modes overlap, and the rationale and language of the sciences are loaded with cultural preconceptions and methods of discursive framing. Joyce’s connection to Doyle props up two more bridges: one spanning the supposed chasm separating Victorianism from late Modernity, the other spanning another apocryphal gap, the supposed split between popular and erudite fiction. The dynamism of Ithacan social science has a companion in the Holmes stories. Like “Ithaca,” Victorianism’s most popular detective stories plant subtle critiques of the conceit that knowledge of human beings can be fixed, unmediated, or constructed categorically.

¹⁷⁸ Huxley, “The Educational Value of the Natural History Sciences,” 11.

¹⁷⁹ Matthew Arnold, “Literature and Science,” *Cultures in Conflict*, ed. David K. Cornelius and Edwin St. Vincent (Fair Lawn, NJ: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), 83.

Chapter 3

“Nondescript Specimens”: Herbert Spencer’s Social Theory in *Ulysses*.

Abstract:

This chapter examines *Ulysses*’ engagements with Herbert Spencer’s synthetic philosophy and theory of social evolution. The chapter’s approach is two-pronged. First, it reads Conan Doyle’s *Stark Munro Letters* as a source of Spencer’s ideas in *Ulysses* and as an instructive parallel to Joyce’s parody of Spencer. Secondly, it reads the manifold parodies of Spencer in *Ulysses*. In all, the chapter argues that in the view of *Ulysses* Spencer’s theories are too loosely conceived and too easily assimilated into conflicting schools of thought. In particular, “Eumaeus” ridicules Victorian social research and progressive reform for its Spencer-like conviction that the poor retain the qualities of an earlier stage of evolution. The chapter ends with a reading of Spencer’s writings on style and with an analysis of the allusions to those writings in “Eumaeus,” where the narrator’s strategic stylistic gaffs associate Spencer with errors in thought deriving from misunderstandings of language.

Although it is tempting to think of two separate Joyces – one commenting on popular art and the other on arcane intellectualism – readings increasingly show that Joyce’s engagements with high and low culture coalesce. Recent print history studies explain that Joyce’s fiction was published, packaged, and marketed in much the same way as popular reading.¹⁸⁰ R. B. Kershner observes that in Joyce’s novels themselves popular genres interpenetrate passages of erudition.¹⁸¹ And in *Ulysses* in particular high and low culture “mingle...and there is no principle of hierarchy to establish them.”¹⁸² In agreement with these views, I will examine an instance in which *Ulysses* channels intellectual theory through popular fiction. Drawing on Conan Doyle’s *Stark Munro Letters*, *Ulysses* evokes the evolutionary theory of the popular philosopher Herbert Spencer. Given the many Spencerian digressions in Doyle’s novel and that novel’s ubiquity in *Ulysses*, it is surprising that scholarship has paid comparatively little attention to Spencer’s influence on *Ulysses*.¹⁸³ Smuggled into the novel by Stark Munro, Spencerian thought in *Ulysses*

¹⁸⁰ See David M. Earle, *Re-covering Modernism: Pulps, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016). As Earle points out, “modernism and the most popular and ephemeral literary forms of the time” were “far from antagonistic” (3-4). See also Lise Jaillant, “Blurring the Boundaries: *Fourteen Great Detective Stories* and Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,” *JJQ*, 50 (Spring 2013), 767-796. Jaillant conducts a remarkable book history study in order to place Joyce’s work within the context of a wider literary culture, arguing that before the Second World War boundaries between modernist and popular fiction were less distinct.

¹⁸¹ R. B. Kershner, *Joyce, Bakhtin, and Popular Culture: Chronicles of Disorder* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

¹⁸² Derek Attridge, “Theoretical Approaches to Popular Culture,” in *Joyce and Popular Culture*, ed. R. B. Kershner (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 1996), 24.

¹⁸³ By contrast, treatments of evolutionary theory in *Ulysses* tend to concentrate on the “Oxen of the Sun” episode’s development of literary styles along evolutionary lines. See, for example, Scarlett Baron, “Joyce, Darwin and Literary Evolution,” in *James Joyce in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Nash (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 183-199. While “Oxen of the Sun” certainly draws on Darwin, the episode might also reflect Spencerian thought. After all, Spencer conceived of language as developing along the same lines as biological evolution, linking “Oxen’s” two great themes of literary and organic adaptation. See Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1878), 333. See also Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Biology*, Volume 1 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864), 357.

touches on everything from laws of physics and biology to the understanding of social phenomena and economics.

Indeed, Spencer's "System of Synthetic Philosophy" is just that – a wide-ranging synthesis – and combines under Darwinian law all manner of phenomena. In particular, Spencer famously extends theories of biological evolution to theories of social development, asserting that the workings of the body correspond to the workings of society and that the "growth, structure, and function" of an individual organism is similar to that of "society as a whole."¹⁸⁴ We can thus understand a primitive society in much the same way as we understand protoplasm: simple states, both begin in "original likeness" or uniformity, with little to differentiate one cell or individual from another, and both evolve into complex hierarchical organizations in which cells and individuals serve specialized functions.¹⁸⁵ However, this movement from simple to complex forms applies not only to living and social units but to "aggregates of all orders, organic and inorganic," all organization "conform[ing] to the same principles" as biology and human society.¹⁸⁶ As John Gordon pithily says, "for Spencer... evolution is a universally applicable process leading to increasing concentration, differentiation, and specialization in everything that changes (which is everything)."¹⁸⁷ Indeed, in Spencer's view even the course of a planet in space is comparable to the course of an individual in a species. And although Spencer is most famous for coining the phrase "survival of the fittest" and applying Darwinian theory to socio-economic conditions, his conception of natural selection extends even to the intellectual development of a people, whose best ideas survive from generation to generation, resulting in an ever better

¹⁸⁴ Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 330.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 331.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 329.

¹⁸⁷ John Gordon, *Joyce and Reality: The Empirical Strikes Back* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 10.

thinking society¹⁸⁸ – a theory of intellectual evolution which Stark Munro, referencing Spencer, calls the “survival of the truest.”¹⁸⁹

This is far from the only idea of Spencer’s to appear in *The Stark Munro Letters*, a semi-autobiographical novel which draws on Doyle’s days as a student, when Spencer was “chief among our philosophers.”¹⁹⁰ Stark Munro is a young medical school graduate who, like Doyle, struggles to establish a practice. In sixteen letters written to a friend, Munro finds ample space to muse on Spencer’s synthetic philosophy. Like Spencer, he believes that the scientific study of nature will lead to “one comprehensive system of thought.”¹⁹¹ And, like Spencer, he suggests that all phenomena are beholden to that synthetic system – that “evolution” is “living and acting” in all things, simple cells, social affairs, and celestial bodies adapting in similar ways.¹⁹²

Joyce was attentive to other authors’ uses (and misuses) of Spencerian thought, and he would not have overlooked Spencer’s influence on Stark Munro.¹⁹³ Joyce’s library at Trieste contained a copy of Spencer’s *Study of Sociology*, and Joyce mobilized Spencer’s theories in his own fiction.¹⁹⁴ Notably, Richard Ellman and, more recently, John Gordon have revealed the

¹⁸⁸ Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 89.

¹⁸⁹ Conan Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1903), 134.

¹⁹⁰ Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures: An Autobiography* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2007), 25. Doyle continues: “even the man in the street felt the strong sweeping current” of Spencer’s thought. For an excellent reading of Doyle and the influence of evolutionary theory in his fiction, see Bernard Lightman, “Conan Doyle’s Ideal Reasoner,” *Journal of Literature and Science*, 7.2 (2014), 19-36.

¹⁹¹ Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, 34.

¹⁹² Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, 37. For example, Munro believes that “every tiny organic cell” contains a perfect “miniature of the individual of which it forms a part” (170). Likewise, each individual organism is a “microcosm” of society (170). And the universe itself, “interplanetary spaces” and “asteroids” are understood in biological terms (117).

¹⁹³ For example, in his 1903 review of F. C. S. Schiller’s *Humanism: Philosophical Essays* Joyce mocks Schiller for employing the same theoretical framework he would dismantle – namely, Spencer’s theory of the “Unknowable.” See James Joyce, “Humanism,” in *The Critical Writings*, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellman (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), 135-136.

¹⁹⁴ For a full list of Joyce’s library in 1920 at Trieste, see Richard Ellman, *The Consciousness of Joyce* (Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 97-134.

presence of Spencer's ideas in Joyce's work.¹⁹⁵ In *Ulysses*, *The Stark Munro Letters* are a vehicle for those ideas. Doyle's novel reappears throughout Bloom's day. Bloom first thinks of the book during breakfast, recalls it again after "Circe," and once more before bed (*U* 17.1375-78; *U* 16.1422; *U* 17.1375-78).¹⁹⁶ Clearly, Bloom has Munro on the mind. And given Munro's Spencerian preoccupations, that amounts to having Spencer on the mind. The irrepressible presence of *The Munro Letters* in *Ulysses* signals the presence of Spencerian theory in Bloom's meditations throughout the day.

Like Munro, Bloom's approach to Darwinism is markedly Spencerian insofar as Bloom brings evolutionary theory to bear on most everything. Bloom compares "celestial...[to] human bodies" and "human serum" to the tissue of space, understanding each – the biological and the non-biological – as the other's analogue in structure and change (*U* 17.1118, *U* 17.1063-64). Following Munro's lead, Bloom repeats Spencer's statement that matter is indestructible and concludes that death must be merely a "change of state" (*U* 17.1955).¹⁹⁷ In other words Bloom like Spencer looks to the inorganic in order to understand human life, death, and decay. In a similarly Spencerian fashion, Bloom looks to evolutionary theory in order to understand social behavior. Most obviously, he uses Spencer's language to describe the ramifications of political

¹⁹⁵ See Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 307-309; and John Gordon, *Joyce and Reality: The Empirical Strikes Back*, 8-15. Ellman observes that in *Portrait* Stephen progresses from foetal to spiritual development: at first, Stephen is "only slightly individualized," an "organism [which] responds only to the most primitive sensory impressions," then begins to move toward "differentiation" until, his "individuality...complete," he throws off "the no longer tolerable conditions of lower existence" and achieves a higher state – that of the artist. Ellman also recognizes that *Ulysses*' "Oxen of the Sun" episode parodies the seriousness of Stephen's evolution in *Portrait*, Stephen emerging "not to life but to Burke's pub." In a more direct reading of Spencer in Joyce, Gordon argues that in *Portrait* Stephen's psychological development corresponds to Spencer's synthetic philosophy, and so too do the cosmic elaborations of "Oxen of the Sun."

¹⁹⁶ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, the Gabler Edition (New York: Random House, 1986). Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁹⁷ Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, 169; Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (London: Watts & Co., 1937), 149.

clashes – “the destruction of the fittest” (*U* 16.1602). Elsewhere, he suggests an equivalence between “political” and “evolutionary theories” (*U* 17.1118). And he also applies the theory of biological evolution to his domestic troubles, framing Molly’s sexual promiscuity as a process of “adaptation to altered conditions of existence” (*U* 17.2191) and envying Boylan’s ostensible status as a superior evolutionary specimen, a “male organism specially adapted for . . . human copulation” (*U* 17.2157-58).

There is already a good deal of parody here – in the rather strained application of Darwinian and Social Darwinian thought to the “natural” selections of an adulterous home. But it is in “The Oxen of the Sun” that the treatment of Spencer is most informed and ironic. The passage on natural selection (*U* 14.1223-1285) contains an extended parody of Spencer’s attempts to reconcile science and religion. In Spencer’s *First Principles* he remarks that science and religion are alike in that they can only speculate about that which is inconceivable. The causes underlying the causes of phenomena remain obscure, and that which eludes human understanding he calls “the Unknowable.” The Unknowable is that “Power” which is beyond measure, “beyond our conception,” and is the cause of “all things.”¹⁹⁸ We might as well call it “God,” as Thomas Huxley wryly observes.¹⁹⁹ Frustrated with Spencer, Huxley complains that the Unknowable introduces an element of theology or superstition into the natural sciences. In Huxley’s view science should not speak “about that of which . . . [it has] no knowledge” and should not worship, personify, or idolize “abstractions.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Spencer, *First Principles*, 138-139.

¹⁹⁹ Edward Clodd, *Thomas Henry Huxley* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1905), 221. Clodd quotes Huxley’s letter of 1889 to F. C. Gould.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

Joyce was aware of similar criticisms of Spencer's metaphysics, and "Oxen" parodies just such a lapse of natural science into something resembling scientific theism.²⁰¹ As Gifford and Seidman point out, the parody begins with the brusque style of Huxley and calls for a stricter adherence to the scientific method (*U* 14.1226-27).²⁰² But Spencer – not Huxley – is the real target here. As the passage shifts from Huxley's style to Spencer's, that strict adherence fails. The shift occurs with the Spencer-like assertion that everything is "subject to" a single law determining all "phenomena of evolution, tidal movements, lunar phases, blood temperatures, diseases in general, everything, in fine" (*U* 14.1268-73). Securely in Spencer's idiom, the narrator goes on to assert that there are "good and cogent reasons" even for the deaths of infants and that "in the long run" such losses are "beneficial to the race in general in securing thereby the survival of the fittest" (*U* 14.1277-85). These "good" "reasons" sound a lot like the workings of a benevolent Providence and suggest that natural selection might be a mechanism of intelligent design.

The parody implies some slippage between Spencer's approaches to the natural sciences and religion. At the least, "Oxen" seems to be saying that Spencer's thinking is imprecise. As Joyce would have known, Spencer proposes to base his theories on scientific methods and does not intend to associate evolution with intelligent design, benevolent or otherwise. Yet here Spencerian thought fails on both counts, drifts into abstract philosophy, and invites misreading. Indeed, many of Spencer's contemporaries venerated "evolution as a manifestation of His (the Unknowable's) power."²⁰³

²⁰¹ Joyce mocks Schiller's own critique of Spencer's Unknowable and suggests that Schiller himself slips into similar religious assumptions. See James Joyce, "Humanism," 135-136.

²⁰² Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988), 436.

²⁰³ Jonathan Conlin, *Evolution and the Victorians: Science, Culture, and Politics in Darwin's Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 171.

Doyle's Munro is among them. Parts of *Stark Munro* move in a vein similar to and might be another source for the parody in "Oxen." To begin with, Munro proclaims his devotion to the natural sciences as eagerly as the narrator in "Oxen" (*U* 14.1229-1230).²⁰⁴ Like that narrator, he then departs from the "provable" and slips into speculative theism, asserting that "evolution" connotes the "solicitude of some intelligent force" and that "nothing is too tiny for that fostering care."²⁰⁵ If "Oxen" suggests that Spencer's thinking is imprecise, Munro shows the outcome: the ease with which Spencer's theories are misinterpreted. In both texts, the evolutionary sciences cannot seem to shake themselves free of received, untested, and untestable ideas.

Spencer's actual attitude toward religion is that it serves to perpetuate a useful system of ethics which has its origin not in divine ordinance but in evolutionary trial and error:

The value of the inherited and theologically-enforced codes [of ethics] is that it formulates, with some approach to truth, the accumulated results of past human experience. It has not arisen rationally but empirically. During past times mankind have eventually gone right after trying all possible ways of going wrong. The wrong-goings have been habitually checked by disaster, and pain, and death; and the right goings have been continued because not checked.²⁰⁶

For Spencer, systems of ethics grow out of evolutionary conditions. What comes to be considered "good" is that behavior which is conducive to the survival of the group and individual; "bad" behavior impedes the perpetuation of the individual and species. To be morally inferior is to be "less adapted" and "unworthy" (in Nature's eyes) of survival.²⁰⁷ The immoral are thus lower on the evolutionary scale. Their ranks include drunkards, "idlers," and "spendthrifts."²⁰⁸ If left to themselves, these will die off naturally – victims of their vice. And though for many this will be a harsh and painful reality, overall the species will benefit

²⁰⁴ Doyle, *Stark Munro Letters*, 34.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁰⁶ Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 279.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 350.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 344-345.

“physically...morally and intellectually” as the morally “unfit” succumb and leave behind a higher quotient of the morally superior, the “more adapted,” the – to reverse the “bad” qualities above – sober, industrious, financially fit.²⁰⁹

Here again Munro extemporizes on Spencer’s ideas, and this time the effect is bizarrely comic. Munro can hardly contain his awkward joy as he holds forth on the deaths of what he considers the “physically...[and] morally” maladapted, announcing that “Nature, still working along the lines of evolution, strengthens the race...by the killing off and extinction of those who are morally weak. This is accomplished by drink and immorality,” and, indeed, “drunkards,” “debauchee[s],” and “reprobates” are all “either extinct or on the way toward it.”²¹⁰ Munro’s exuberance at the idea of natural selection as an instrument of moral cleansing is such that he bursts into poem, praising the “wisdom” by which nature is so contrived as to punish those who indulge and abase themselves in “drink,” “lust,” and intemperance.²¹¹

The effect is comic because it is so over-the-top. The exaggerated joy (in a novel which elsewhere humanizes the poor and intemperate) verges on a caricature of Spencerian theory. Recent readings of Doyle show a strong strain of humor in his work, and *Munro*’s satire of Spencer’s social theory would appeal to Joyce.²¹² So would its satire of Spencer’s style and methods. Like Spencer’s *Study of Sociology*, *Munro* contains an imaginative essay in which the scientists of the distant future draw inferences about Victorian London. In Spencer’s version, their insights are intended to be profoundly accurate; in Doyle’s, absurdly off-base.²¹³ The satire

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 343, 350.

²¹⁰ Doyle, *Stark Munro Letters*, 77-78.

²¹¹ Ibid., 77-78.

²¹² For a study of social satire in the work of Doyle and his contemporaries, see Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction*, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011).

²¹³ Doyle, *Stark Munro Letters*, 132-133; Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 126-131.

suggests that scientific naturalism like Spencer's is error-prone, a point which amounts to self-parody when we consider that Doyle's other creation, Sherlock Holmes, was conceived with thinkers like Spencer in mind.²¹⁴ In fact Doyle was quite ready to ridicule Holmes²¹⁵ – and *Munro* parodies Holmesian ratiocination when the young doctor tries to mimic the detective and fails miserably.²¹⁶

Like Munro, Bloom is an inept Holmes.²¹⁷ And like *The Stark Munro Letters*, Sherlock Holmes appears repeatedly in *Ulysses*, usually in association with Bloom.²¹⁸ Bloom's thinking about social phenomena is influenced not only by his recent reading of *The Munro Letters*, but also by his familiarity with *Sherlock Holmes*. In particular, "The Adventure of the Blue

²¹⁴ See Lightman, "Conan Doyle's Ideal Reasoner," 24, 29. Lightman explains that "Sherlock Holmes, who was conceived in 1886, was the product of a period during which Conan Doyle had been substantially influenced by scientific naturalism" and by thinkers like Spencer who "put forward new interpretations of humanity, nature, and society derived from the theories, methods, and categories of empirical science, especially evolutionary science."

²¹⁵ For example, composing the first Sherlock Holmes play, the actor William Gillette asked Doyle "May I marry Holmes?" to which Doyle replied: "You may marry or murder or do what you like with him." See Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, 97.

²¹⁶ As we know, the *Holmes* stories showcase the detective's inductive skills in a formula: a client comes to consult Holmes, and Holmes observes, questions, tests, and arrives at a series of astonishingly accurate conclusions about the client's background, habits, recent doings, and reasons for seeking Holmes' services. In a pastiche of this formula, Munro invites in, glances over, and gives a visitor a diagnosis, prognosis, and course of treatment, only to be told that the man is not even seeking a consultation – he is the meter collector. Doyle, *Stark Munro Letters*, 201-202.

²¹⁷ Hugh Kenner notes the comparison of Bloom to Holmes. For Kenner, Bloom is a parody of Holmesian ratiocination. In my reading, Joyce's treatment of Holmes is not dismissive or ironic, but dialogic. *Ulysses* places Doyle's texts in conversation with each other, draws on their own satires and parodies, and uses them to tease out the conflicting ideologies – socialist and Spencerian – that Bloom has imbued from popular fiction. See Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987). For more on Sherlock Holmes in Joyce's oeuvre, see also: Suzanne Ferguson, "A Sherlock at *Dubliners*: Structural and Thematic Analogues in Detective Stories and the Modern Short Story," *JJQ*, 16 (Fall 1978-Winter 1979), 111-121; David J. Hart, "Detecting the Man in the Macintosh: James Joyce and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle," *JJQ*, 49 (Spring-Summer, 2012), 633-641; and William D. Jenkins, *The Adventure of the Detected Detective: Sherlock Holmes in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998).

²¹⁸ In "Circe" Bloom appears on the scene like a detective, tails Stephen Dedalus through Dublin's red-light district, and his face transforms to resemble "Sherlock Holmes" (*U* 15.1849). In "Eumaeus" Bloom meets a mendacious seaman and takes "stock of the individual...[by] Sherlockholmesing him up" (*U* 16.830-831).

Carbuncle” helps to shape Bloom’s belief that social phenomena are ruled not by any natural system of law, but by chance. “The Blue Carbuncle” is a tale of unpredictable accidents: by luck alone, the police discover a precious gem inside a goose, and Holmes uncovers the incredible story of how it got there – a story of flukes and mishaps. As Holmes says,

whimsical little accidents...will happen when you have four million beings all jostling each other within the space of a few square miles. Amid the action and reaction of so dense a swarm of humanity, every possible combination of events may be expected to take place.²¹⁹

Holmes and Spencer might be alike in other ways, but here Holmes departs from Spencer’s theory that evolutionary structures obtain in social life. Where Spencer argues that social life follows natural laws of selection and thus progresses along predictable lines, Holmes suggests that it is contingent, random, and uncertain.²²⁰

The two theories speak to the conflict in Bloom’s own approach to socioeconomics. On the one hand, Bloom thinks of social advancement as a matter of luck (*U* 16.240) – and he even thinks that he might increase his own personal fortune by finding a gem “in the gizzard of a comestible fowl,” clear evidence that he is familiar with and thinking along the lines of “The Blue Carbuncle” (*U* 17.1686-87). Bloom thus takes Holmes’ lesson that all is chance and uses it to shape his understanding of social class. Because Bloom believes that the laws of nature have no analogue in socioeconomics he calls for human controls on resources and a “comfortable tidysized income” for all (*U* 16.1135). Because he believes that the poor are poor due to simple bad luck and not congenital laziness, inability, or improvidence, Bloom promotes welfare

²¹⁹ Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, ed. Leslie S. Klinger (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 198.

²²⁰ For a reading of Holmes’ secular materialism and natural philosophy, see Lawrence Frank, *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens, and Doyle* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

programs and socialist reform, desiring “to amend many social conditions, the product of inequality” (*U* 17.990-991).

At the same time Bloom contradicts his theory of contingency and behaves as though evolutionary laws do determine social conditions and the poor are poor due to moral and mental underdevelopment. That Bloom should be both a philanthropist and a Spencerian is ironic. After all, Spencer would cite this very theory – that the lower classes are naturally substandard – in order to attack programs of philanthropy.²²¹ Nevertheless, Bloom is not alone in arguing for the poor and yet regarding them as evolutionarily stunted. Victorian progressives in Dublin fundamentally agreed that natural selection obtains in social life and that the poor are therefore at least in part born inferiors.²²² Such a belief would reinforce a sense of middleclass superiority, and early sociologists such as Henry Mayhew assume a tone of condescension toward the poor whom they observe, report on, and defend. *Ulysses* parodies this pretense to superiority, and “Eumaeus” especially ridicules the presence of Spencer’s thought in discourses of social reform.

The episode associates Bloom with the methods and preconceptions of Victorian urban poverty studies. Like Bloom, the Victorian sociologist was a type of engaged *flâneur*. He walked the streets and observed the poor in their neighborhoods. But he also went door to door,

²²¹ In Spencer’s view, state welfare programs are inadvisable because they upset the natural order, overburden the well-adapted with the maintenance of others, and cause society to retrogress. For example, Spencer holds that “philanthropists and legislatures” would “hesitate and desist” their well-intentioned calls for social reform if they considered the social organism in light of some “biological truths”; however, “unhappily, philanthropists and legislators [are] busy with schemes which, rather than aiding adaptation, indirectly hinder it.” See *The Study of Sociology*, 339, 350.

²²² Margaret Preston’s research on Victorian Dublin reveals “philanthropists’ belief that sin [what Spencer calls immorality] contributed to poverty...[and] that the poor were inferior but, with the help of their superiors, their status in society could be somewhat improved although never completely changed. The failings of the impoverished, philanthropists believed, were the result of both nature and nurture. This was the age of Darwin, and hypotheses about the evolutionary state of humans bled into theories regarding the characteristics of class...ultimately, what charitable records suggested was that those in the upper class believed that members of the working class were lower on the scale of evolution.” See Margaret H. Preston, *Charitable Words: Women, Philanthropy, and the Language of Nineteenth-Century Dublin* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 4.

entered homes and conducted interviews, published findings, and suggested reforms. In the late-night meanderings of “Eumaeus,” Bloom takes a similar approach to social research when he directs the drunken Stephen into a cabman’s shelter. The shelter is a charitable institution, its customers lower class, and Bloom takes this opportunity to observe and engage with the poor whom he thinks of as the “submerged tenth” (*U* 16.1226). The phrase comes from Salvation Army founder William Booth and reinforces Bloom’s connection to social reform.²²³ Like Booth and other social reformers who studied the poor, Bloom is a good observer of people and is particularly “shrewd” when it comes to detecting “chronic impecuniosity” (*U* 16.230, 16.218-221). Just as he bases his approach on his predecessors’ he also takes into account their success with the public, acknowledging that “the lives of the submerged tenth...were very much under the microscope lately” (*U* 16.1225-27). And considering the popularity of works on poverty, Bloom decides to write his own reflection and call it “*My Experiences...in a Cabman’s Shelter*” (*U* 16.1231). As Hugh Kenner observes, the entire episode might be the realization of Bloom’s social research project.²²⁴

In fact, Bloom has been watching cabmen all day. Earlier in the day he passes the same cabstand twice and marks the movements of cabmen and horses (*U* 5.210-226, *U* 6.171-179). On the second pass he reflects on the life of the cabby and considers it unsettled (“drifting”) and full of hardship (exposure to “all weathers”), which prompts a charitable impulse in Bloom (“like to give them an odd cigarette”) (*U* 5.223-225). Bloom’s solicitude is in keeping with a wider Victorian interest in cabbies. Like Bloom, Victorianism considered the cabman a “curious”

²²³ Booth describes the “submerged tenth” as those “paupers indoor and outdoor, the homeless, the starving, the criminals, the lunatics, the drunkards, and the harlots” whom social welfare projects have failed. See William Booth, *In Darkest England and The Way Out* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1890), 87.

²²⁴ Hugh Kenner, *Joyce’s Voices* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1978), 35.

object of study (*U* 5.223). Of course, the word “curious” suggests more than mere interest; the term connotes a feeling of ambivalence toward cabbies, and accurately so. For to social research the cabman was not merely interesting; he was also bizarre, ill-defined, and associated with social regression.

Research and reports from the period reveal a deep concern that cabmen are a source of crime, contagion, and intemperance. For Mayhew, for example, many cabmen are “regular thieves.”²²⁵ They “number a greater amount of blackguards than any business in London,” are “dirty,” and prone to drinking.²²⁶ Likewise, an 1895 Government White Paper devotes a special section to the discussion of cabbies as vectors of disease with low rates of mortality and a tendency to indulge “in strong drink.”²²⁷ And another report from the same year finds that cabmen are “insanitary,” of a low “standard of character,” and tend to be “loafers.”²²⁸ The report goes on to suggest that cabmen and their shelters should be more strictly regulated by “some public authority.”²²⁹ Actually, the shelters were regulatory insofar as they did not serve alcohol. Supported by the Cabman’s Shelter Fund, the teetotal shelters were designed to reduce what was viewed as widespread drunkenness among cabmen.²³⁰

The cabman’s drunkenness, poor hygiene, health and morals are portrayed as his natural traits in social research studies which draw on elements of Spencer’s social theory to explain

²²⁵ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: Griffin, Bohn, and Company, 1861), 353.

²²⁶ Henry Mayhew, “Opposite a Cabstand,” in *London Characters: The Humour, Pathos, and Peculiarities of London Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1881), 245, 243.

²²⁷ “The Cab and Omnibus Trades,” quoted from Alf Townsend, *The London Cabbie* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2003).

²²⁸ “The Cab Service of the Metropolis: A Report of the Committee of Enquiry Appointed by the Home Secretary” in *Reports from Commissioners, Inspectors, and Others, Volume 22* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1895), 2-3.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, 9.

²³⁰ G. N. Georgano, *A History of the London Taxicab* (New York: Drake Publishers, Inc., 1973), 38.

these failings. For Spencer, cabmen are “idle fellows”²³¹ – and in Spencer’s view to be idle is to be unevolved or “less adapted.”²³² Mayhew also implies that the cabby retains the traces of an earlier stage of human development. In what is only a half-joke Mayhew asserts that the cabby is a “man of extreme animal nature” and “lives out in the open air.”²³³ The cabman is thus atavistic, part animal, part primitive, and this, it is suggested, accounts for his regressive characteristics. As Mayhew tellingly phrases it, the task of the philanthropist is to “humanize” the cabman.²³⁴ The phrase might be taken literally, as though the cabman were less than human and needed to be brought up to speed with the rest of the species.

Joyce is alert to this line of thinking and rejects it in *Ulysses*. In “Oxen” the parody of Spencer mocks middleclass fears of cabbies and ridicules the loose logic that correlates the cabman to an evolutionary throwback. With preposterous hyperbole, the passage contends that “cardrivers” are diseased and degenerative, “scorbutic” and “accountable for any and every fallingoff in the calibre of the race” (*U* 14.1248-1250). This burlesque of an attack on cabmen shows that Joyce was alive to their status as a group whom theories of social evolution marginalized. The passage also prefaces the more complex satire of the influence of Spencerian theory on social research in the cabman’s shelter in “Eumaeus.” In Eumaeian discourse social research forsakes social reform, adopts Spencer’s assumptions and biases, and looks down on and presumes the poor are deficient by nature.

In other words, the Eumaeian joke is that progressive social research has fallen under the sway of conservative social theory. In general, the Bloom of “Eumaeus” is still exhibiting

²³¹ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics, volume II* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), 301.

²³² Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 344-345, 350.

²³³ Mayhew, “Opposite a Cabstand,” 243-244.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

Spencer-like thinking.²³⁵ And, like Spencer, he links indigence to evolutionary causes. In the words of the Eumaean narrator, the denizens of the cabman's shelter are degenerate – a “miscellaneous collection of waifs and strays and other nondescript specimens of the genus *homo*” (*U* 16.327-328, *U* 16.835). The genus *Homo*, of course, includes modern humans' forbears. The species unstated, the designation implies that the men of the shelter might be of primordial stock and possess the baser qualities of human ancestry. And Bloom seems to agree with the broad taxonomy, adopting the narrator's denigrating “specimen” to refer to the men he observes (*U* 16.835).

Such terms in “Eumaeus” are keyed to Spencer's vocabulary for the relationship of social phenomena to processes of natural selection. In the case of “specimen,” for example, the episode's repeated use of the word mirrors and distorts Spencer's use of the term. For Spencer, natural selection weeds out the weak and “produces a perfect specimen of its species.”²³⁶ However, the Eumaean “specimen” is of uncertain species, suggesting a wide margin of error in the classificatory scheme for social theory. In a similar way, much of the language of “Eumaeus” is an ironic appropriation of Spencer's words. For Spencer, the poor are drunks, “imbeciles, idlers, and criminals.”²³⁷ And the poor of “Eumaeus” (as described by Bloom and the narrator) fulfill each quality with such exaggerated embellishment that the point feels overdetermined. In “Eumaeus” the poor cabbies, vagrants, and dockworkers are not just drunks – they are “bibulous,” “bunged up” and red-faced from “boose” (*U* 16.337, 376-377, 662-663). They are imbeciles – “unmistakable mugs” who will believe anything (*U* 16.842). They are idle – “loafer[s]” whom “nothing short of an earthquake” will bestir (*U* 16.695, 1705-1706). They

²³⁵ This is evident in Bloom's phrase for the fallout of political strife – “the destruction of the fittest” (*U* 16.1602).

²³⁶ Herbert Spencer, *Social Statistics* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1892), 238.

²³⁷ Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 344-345.

are criminals – likely to rob one at gunpoint (*U* 16.119-127). And at least one of the group, the mendacious “sailor,” is in Bloom’s view quite probably – “by no violent stretch of the imagination” – on release after serving a sentence for murder (*U* 16.831-841). The sailor is contemptuously called “that worthy,” indicating that he is in fact the opposite (*U* 16.681, 971). And again the term might lead back to Spencer, for whom the “worthy” and “unworthy” are the more and less adapted, fit and unfit, moral and immoral.²³⁸

“Eumaeus” thus caricatures both Spencer’s social theory and the way that that theory emerges even in those discourses that are in favor of progressive reform. In this manner the episode plays on the tension in the social progressive for whom indigence is determined by evolution. The episode reveals a conflict in ideologies and suggests that the simultaneous advocacy for and alienation of the poor is untenable. Increasingly Spencerian in his approach to the poor, Bloom momentarily forswears social reform and assumes a Spencer-like stance against institutions of philanthropy. The cabman’s shelter, he acknowledges, does “a world of good” for the lower orders (*U* 16.794). But similar charities are fronts for profiteers, and these he views with feelings of “acrimony” (*U* 16.792-93) – a sentiment comparable to Spencer’s when he argues that organized charities are corrupt and profit from the burden they impose on the industrious.²³⁹

That Bloom who is a proponent of programs of social reform should end up arguing against them suggests that his thinking is becoming more aligned not only with Spencer’s theory of social evolution but also with his principles of minimal government. On the whole, however, the Bloom of “Eumaeus” endorses systems of regulation which Spencer disagrees with. For Spencer, the social organism (like the bodily one) is largely self-regulatory, and to expand the

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 351.

²³⁹ Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, vol. II, 380.

role of government is to impede on the individual's freedoms. It is with this in mind that Spencer compares teetotal measures to the detention and medical inspection of prostitutes, condemning both as abuses of power and impediments to natural law.²⁴⁰ By contrast, Bloom suggests that temperance in the cabman's shelter ought to be better enforced and that prostitutes ought to be "licensed and medically inspected by the proper authorities" (*U* 16.743).²⁴¹

The narrator, a stricter Spencerian, ridicules Bloom for these departures from the Englishman's philosophy of non-interventionist government. When Bloom in defense of "shelters...run on teetotal lines" disapproves of the sailor's "excessive use of boose, preferably good old Hollands and water" the sentence hinges on the comma, after which the indirect focalization includes the voice of the narrator mockingly mentioning Bloom's own preferred drink (*U* 16.794-95, 376-77).²⁴² And in response to Bloom's argument for the medical examination of prostitutes the narrator disparages Bloom for being "squeamish" (*U* 16.742). These breaks from Bloom are conspicuous insofar as the narrator's more common tack is to "ally himself to" and "embrace union" with Bloom who as the shelter's only member of the middleclass possesses a status that the narrator shares or aspires to share with him.²⁴³ That the

²⁴⁰ See Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 76, where Spencer proclaims that "just as...measures to put down drunkenness" are too "strenuous," so are the measures to "check [the] progress" of venereal disease too "rigorous" and oppressive.

²⁴¹ Here again Bloom might be drawing on the theories of Stark Munro who, misappropriating Spencer, argues that society should imitate nature and "check" the "morally weak," "drunkards and reprobates" (see *The Stark Munro Letters*, 78). Moreover, Bloom's proposal evokes the Contagious Disease Acts of Victorianism. These are the very Acts which Spencer denounces in the preceding note above. As Spencer was aware, the Contagious Disease Acts resulted in extreme abuses of power in the detainment and violation of individuals suspected of prostitution. For more on the Contagious Disease Acts and *Ulysses*, see Tracey Teets Schwarze, *Joyce and the Victorians* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002).

²⁴² Of course, this is the very drink that Boylan offered Bloom in "Circe" ("a gin and splash," *U* 15.3762) and is thus linked to Bloom's other vices in that scene, including his delectation in voyeurism and in being cuckolded.

²⁴³ Margot Norris argues that the Eumaeian narrator has pretenses to middleclass superiority and thus associates himself with Bloom. Karen Lawrence also notes that the narrative discourse of "Eumaeus" mimes "middleclass ideology and bourgeois common sense." See Margot Norris, "The Text as Salvation

narrator should distance himself from Bloom precisely where Bloom diverges from Spencer indicates that unlike Bloom the narrator is a staunch and conscious exponent of Spencer's philosophy.

The narrator is associated with Spencer not only in terms of social and political views, but also, farcically, in terms of writing style. Much has been made of the episode's overgrown verbiage, its stock phrases and stereotypes, run-ons, redundancies, and innumerable breaches of grammar and good form. In general, readers find its style "pretentious, verbose, and clichéd."²⁴⁴ As Andrew Gibson points out, the narration of "Eumaeus" is so consistently bad that "there is a calculation, an exactitude to the wrongness"; "Joyce is writing prose, here, that is the reverse of the conventionally competent, the good and the right, the assured and the skilled."²⁴⁵ In composing the episode's many gaucheries Joyce might well have culled ideas from an actual guidebook or two. In fact, the narrator identifies one likely source, extending his "apologies to [the grammar book writer] Lindley Murray" (*U* 16.1474-75). The narrator owes an apology to Spencer, as well. For "Eumaeus" not only meddles with Spencer's social theory; it also deranges his writings on style. Joyce paid attention to Spencer's ideas about rhetoric and would have known that Spencer's works include numerous comments on good and bad form in writing. In his short essay "Style" Spencer devotes himself to the subject and examines authors' sentences for flaws.²⁴⁶ As the essay makes clear, in Spencer's view writing should be concise and easy to

Army: Abjection and Perception in 'Eumaeus'" in *Virgin and Veteran Readings of Ulysses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 183-198; Karen Lawrence, "'Beggaring Description': Politics and Style in Joyce's 'Eumaeus,'" *Modern Fiction Studies*, 38 (Summer, 1992), 355-376.

²⁴⁴ Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 166. For a reading of the episode as an exercise in verbal counterfeiture and unoriginal prose, see Mark Osteen, *The Economy of Ulysses: Making Both Ends Meet* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

²⁴⁵ Andrew Gibson, *Reading Narrative Discourse* (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd, 1990), 80.

²⁴⁶ Herbert Spencer, "Style," in *Facts and Comments* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1902), 97-105.

understand. It should use no more words than are necessary to convey its meaning. And it should avoid redundancies and vague and indefinite phrasing.

Such suggestions are not uncommon in a work on style. What makes this one unique is Joyce's engagement with it. Joyce read the essay and recorded one of its signature claims - that "from a good style are excluded all words having unsettled connotations, save where indefiniteness is intended."²⁴⁷ On the whole, "Eumaeus" is woven from the prolix language and imprecision Spencer deplors. The narrator's protracted style contains, in nearly every sentence, some pleonasm, lack of variety, irrelevancy, or indirect phrase of the type that Spencer isolates for analysis and criticism. Even the episode's under-punctuation can be related to Spencer, who, according to F. Howard Collins, served as an authority in favor of the Oxford comma.²⁴⁸

Moreover, Spencer's examples of bad writing are used in sentences in "Eumaeus" alluding to his social theory, festooning that philosophy with the faults in style he most objects to. For instance, Spencer objects to the expression "a matter of," calling it vague.²⁴⁹ And "Eumaeus" archly inserts the phrase in a non sequitur which obliquely observes, à la Spencer, that "for the matter of that" society is naturally competitive (*U* 16.222). Likewise, the episode's clearest reference to Spencer (the phrase "destruction of the fittest") appears in a sentence containing a combination of the faults and examples he specifies. Spencer complains of pleonasms like "fixed and settled habit."²⁵⁰ And the "destruction of the fittest" sentence perpetrates a comparable redundancy - "customary habit" (*U* 16.1597). Spencer declaims

²⁴⁷ James Joyce, "Notebook with accounts, quotations, book lists, etc., 1903-1904" (Manuscript, National Library of Ireland, James Joyce Papers, 1903-1928), MS 36,639/2/A.

²⁴⁸ See F. Howard Collins, *Authors' and Printers' Dictionary* (London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, New York, Toronto, Melbourne, and Bombay: Henry Frowde, 1912), 12. For an engaging study of Joyce's excisions of commas in early versions of "Eumaeus," see Fritz Senn, "Inherent Delicacy: Eumaeus Questions," *Studies in the Novel*, 22 (Summer, 1990), 179-186.

²⁴⁹ Spencer, "Style," 102.

²⁵⁰ Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 395.

against “incongruous” figurative pairings.²⁵¹ And that same Eumaeian sentence wantonly mixes metaphors, likening politics to boxing to giving somebody “(metaphorically) one in the gizzard” (*U* 16.1597-98).

This one deliberate metaphor functions as a fulcrum for the episode’s many muddled figures of speech. As language theorist Gerard Steen argues, “at least one deliberate metaphor may be needed for mixed metaphor to be recognized” because an intentional metaphor establishes an expectation of continuity.²⁵² The many clashes of figurative language in “Eumaeus” thus turn around (and are effectively “mixed” by) the narrator’s acknowledgment that the phrase “one in the gizzard” is intended “metaphorically.” In this manner the episode’s most unequivocal allusion to Spencer not only appears beside the errors in style he finds most egregious; that allusion is also located at the episode’s epicenter of mixed metaphors, associating Spencer’s social theory with the “metaphorical inconsistencies” he takes special care to condemn.²⁵³

This association becomes germane when we consider that Spencer’s social theory is in part premised on the study of figurative language. Spencer asserts that he uses the methods of scientific empiricism to study both style and social phenomena. For example, in his analyses of style he proposes to use methods of “testing” and “inductive logic.”²⁵⁴ In fact, the study of style forms a fundamental piece of Spencer’s social theory. According to Spencer, the close study of metaphor can reveal hidden similarities between phenomena that only appear dissimilar, and the phrase “body politic” reveals a real correspondence between a social organism and the body of

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 396.

²⁵² Gerard Steen, “Mixed Metaphor is a Question of Deliberateness,” in *Mixing Metaphor*, ed. Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. (John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2006), 118.

²⁵³ Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 397.

²⁵⁴ Spencer, “Style,” 97.

an individual.²⁵⁵ By yoking Spencer's social theory to a jumble of metaphors, "Eumaeus" mocks that methodology. The implication is that Spencer's straight path of scientific empiricism is refracted by the prism of language, his social theory inflected and sent awry by the false connections of figurative speech.

In "Eumaeus" the accidents of language do indeed reveal theoretical truths, though not the kind Spencer imagined. A mashup of verbal formulae, the episode demonstrates that discursive modes are all too manipulable. Like Doyle's *Stark Munro*, *Ulysses* gives the impression that Spencer's social theory is too pliable. An amateur theorist like Stark Munro is able to manipulate it out of all proportion. Doyle's reader, Bloom, misapplies it to social reform. And the narrators of "Oxen" and "Eumaeus," assuming a Spencer-like voice, betray the theory's own internal fissures, biases, and assumptions, the rudiments of which carry over into the period's studies of the lower class. In all, *Ulysses* suggests that Spencer's synthetic philosophy is belied by its own elasticity, by the ease with which conflicting systems of thought can suit it to differing doctrines.

²⁵⁵ Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, 330.

Chapter 4

“Words Fail Us”: Beckett, Leacock, and Johnson.

Abstract

This chapter will look at political treatments of language in Samuel Beckett’s early novel *Watt* and place the novel’s linguistic skepticism in conversation with three authors, the lexicographer Samuel Johnson, the language theorist Felix Mauthner, and the English-born, Canadian parodist Stephen Leacock. The chapter will argue that Beckett, like Leacock, engages in Mauthnerian critiques of language, destabilizing Johnsonian formulae for language standardization. But while Leacock fails to develop the political implications of his critique of language, Beckett’s understanding of language standardization is implicitly political, informed by Johnson’s conception of speech as the predicate of national identity, a standard for inclusion which *Watt* gleefully antagonizes. Challenging nationalist calls for controls on language, *Watt* interrogates the ways that campaigns for linguistic unity will engender exclusionary attitudes toward the nonconforming and bar access to that speech and identity which falls outside of normative frameworks.

Beckett's early novel *Watt* offers new insights into the author's critique of language and presents a new perspective on Beckett's relationship to the popular fiction he read in his youth. The novel evokes the parodies of Beckett's childhood reading and suggests that Beckett's engagements with popular literary forms are fraught with social concerns. Marshalling the techniques of popular parody for purposes of social satire, *Watt* examines conditions of privilege and subordination under nationalist discursive regimes. In particular, the novel calls to mind Stephen Leacock's jeers at language standardization and its claims to coherence, linking linguistic skepticism to questions of linguistic hegemony. Bringing the lessons of popular parody to bear on problems of literary tradition and lexicographical history, *Watt* evokes Samuel Johnson and his approach to lexicography, examines the political ramifications of language standardization, and suggests that Beckett's desire to "tear apart" and "get...behind" language is in part a desire to dismantle linguistic systems of power.²⁵⁶ Channeling Leacock and also the language theorist Felix Mauthner, *Watt* resists Johnsonian efforts to establish a standard of English as a signifier of national belonging.

In contrast to this line of inquiry, scholarship on Beckett and Johnson tends to focus on Beckett's interest in Johnson's personal life. James Knowlson, for example, claims that Beckett disregarded the public Johnson in order to concentrate on the "private, solitary Johnson."²⁵⁷ While instructive, this distinction can blind us to Beckett's engagements with the ideologies, linguistic and nationalist, embodied in Johnson's public persona. That Beckett was aware of that persona is of little doubt. At the time of *Watt's* composition (1941-1945) Beckett had conducted a lengthy study of the lexicographer in preparation for the abandoned play *Human Wishes*, and

²⁵⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Letters: 1929-1940*, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 518.

²⁵⁷ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 250.

Beckett's research at the National Library of Ireland generated three notebooks and several additional pages of notes on the life of Johnson and his entourage.²⁵⁸ As Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon observe, Beckett "read Johnson intensely, at times even obsessively, especially in the years 1937-1940."²⁵⁹ It is of particular interest to note that as Beckett shifted focus from *Human Wishes* to *Watt* he was still thinking of Johnson and references him in the drafts of the novel.²⁶⁰

During the pre-*Watt* years Beckett was also thinking about the challenges of lexicography, evidenced by his reading of the linguistic sceptic Felix Mauthner's *Critique of Language*.²⁶¹ In a letter to Linda Ben-Zvi, Beckett reports that he "skimmed through Mauthner for Joyce in 1929 or 1930."²⁶² And Beckett's 'Whoroscope' Notebook entries contain "lengthy material from Mauthner" dating from 1938, when Beckett was researching and writing on Johnson.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ See Beckett, *Letters*, 396-397. In a letter of 13 December, 1936 to Mary Manning, Beckett announces his intention to write a play, "perhaps only one long act," on what Beckett speculates was Johnson's love for his boarder Miss Thrale, a desire which Beckett suspects was unconsummated due to impotence.

²⁵⁹ Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 32.

²⁶⁰ For example, the typescript draft of *Watt* references the National Portrait Gallery's portraits and busts of Johnson and also quotes Johnson's dictionary on Swift's use of the word "sanguinity." See *Watt*, Typescript draft with author additions, Carlton Lake Collection of Samuel Beckett Papers at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

²⁶¹ This chapter's references to and quotes from Mauthner will be drawn from Gershon Weiler's translations of the *Critique of Language*. See Gershon Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

²⁶² Beckett, *Letters*, 509. See also Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language*, 142. Gershon Weiler reports that in his personal correspondence with Beckett the latter confirmed having read Mauthner's work to Joyce. It is worth noting that Joyce, too, had a role in shaping Beckett's political interrogation of linguistic unity.

²⁶³ John Pilling, "Beckett and Mauthner Revisited," *Beckett after Beckett*, ed. S. E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 164. It will be noted that Beckett was not yet reading that other, more famous philosopher of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein. For a reading of *Watt's* engagements with Mauthner rather than Wittgenstein, see Jennie Skerl, "'Critique of Language' in Samuel Beckett's 'Watt,'" *Contemporary Literature* 15, no. 4 (Autumn, 1974), 474-487.

But Beckett had an even earlier introduction to linguistic skepticism in the work of Stephen Leacock, whom Beckett read as a schoolboy.²⁶⁴ In their parodies of genre and speech, *Watt* and Leacock's "Gertrude the Governess" share multiple points of convergence. John P. Harrington places *Watt* in the Irish Big House tradition which, like Leacock's story, the novel borrows from and distorts. As Harrington observes, Irish Big House stories characterize their large country estates as enigmas for a newcomer, often a servant, who attempts to penetrate the mystery hanging over the house. Leacock's "Gertrude," like *Watt*, concerns just such a country estate which intrigues and mystifies a new servant, and, in the tradition of the Irish Big House novel, chronicles the establishment's decline due to "mismanagement."²⁶⁵ Beckett's novel centers on the vagrant Watt during his indeterminate period of service at a house in the country. Leacock's governess obtains a position at a country mansion and immediately senses that there is some "mystery... here."²⁶⁶ In both stories, the main agent of mystery is the owner of the house, the servants' employer: Watt's Mr. Knott, Gertrude's Lord Knotacent. This remarkable correlation of names, playing on negation (knot/not) and proliferations (knot/not/not a cent) of meaning, signals the stories' mutual interest in the knotty problems of language and its many ways of resisting coherency.

Leacock's story makes a special mockery of attempts to standardize speech and spelling. The narrator provides a facetious parenthetical lesson on spelling and pronunciation while relaying that the story is set in the "South of England and takes place in and around Knotacentium Towers (pronounced as if written Nosham Taws), the seat of Lord Knotacent

²⁶⁴ See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 57-58. Knowlson points out that in his youth Beckett was reading Leacock and would have been drawn to the Canadian parodist's "playful wit, somewhat unsubtle games with the reader, amusing parodies, wordplay, and interest in unusual words."

²⁶⁵ John P. Harrington, *The Irish Beckett* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 123.

²⁶⁶ Stephen Leacock, "Gertrude the Governess; or, Simple Seventeen," *Nonsense Novels* (San Bernadino, CA: Free River Community Project, 2016), 24.

(pronounced as if written Nosh).²⁶⁷ Yet in a short space the story stops playing the pedant and gives precedence to pronunciation over orthography, spelling the words phonetically, “Lord Nosh” and “Nosham Taws.”²⁶⁸ The joke here, that language is changeable and too volatile to control, might have been specifically designed for Samuel Johnson and his mission to regulate speech and spelling in English.

In his *Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* the lexicographer explicitly warns that variant pronunciations can result in variant spellings and meanings for words. For Johnson, the “stability” of “pronunciation is of great importance” because the spoken word is prone to change in form and meaning.²⁶⁹ Leacock’s “Knotacentium Towers,” pronounced “Nosham Taws” and then written that way, is a case in point, its altered orthography suggesting less the seat of an English lord than a fraudulent (“sham”) game of marbles (“taws”). The words’ transformation in sound and substance paints language as an unstable social phenomenon, receptive to change and resistant to codification, and Leacock’s parody seems to laugh with language’s caprices. By contrast Johnson, who scorns language’s enthusiasm for change, organizes a system of standardization to limit that change, calling “all change [to a language]...of itself an evil,” “inconstancy...in every case a mark of weakness.”²⁷⁰

In composing his dictionary, Johnson’s goal is to defend English against the variance which he says devalues it. His dictionary promises to render the language as stable and durable as possible; indeed, it is only with the profoundest regret that he admits that although human effort

may sometimes prolong..[the] duration [of languages], it will rarely give them perpetuity, and their changes will be almost always informing us, that language is

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 21.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 22.

²⁶⁹ Samuel Johnson, *The Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1747), 11.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 10.

the work of man, of a being from whom permanence and stability cannot be achieved.²⁷¹

Johnson's dictionary is a response to what he considers the threat of language's impermanence and susceptibility to corruption. His dictionary's chief purpose is to classify, cleanse, and maintain English in its purest form. His lexical classification proposes to distinguish "words of general use" from "words impure and barbarous."²⁷² Impure words will be "branded with some note of infamy...[and] eradicated wherever they are found," preventing further "depravation of the language."²⁷³ For Johnson, these impure words come from foreign idioms and what he considers inferior dialects and slang. To guard against these disorderly elements, the *Plan* proposes to establish the etymology of words and to enact a conscious denial of what it considers rootless colloquial vulgarisms:

By tracing in this manner every word to its original, and not admitting, but with great caution, any of which no original can be found, we shall secure our language from being over-run with *cant*, from being crowded with low terms, the spawn of folly or affectation, which arise from no just principles of speech, and of which no legitimate derivation can be shewn.²⁷⁴

The *Plan's* emphasis on "legitimate derivation" presupposes a linguistic origin unpolluted by foreign and low culture contaminants. While the dictionary will determine the English vocabulary by etymological standards, it will also fix proper usage through references to other, literary, authorities, such as Shakespeare and Milton, whose use of terms will be quoted as guides for the dictionary's readers. In this way Johnson hopes to compose a "dictionary by which the pronunciation of our language may be fixed, and its attainment facilitated; by which its purity may be preserved, its use ascertained, and its duration lengthened."²⁷⁵ The dictionary's

²⁷¹ Ibid., 18.

²⁷² Ibid., 28.

²⁷³ Ibid., 29.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 16.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 32.

categories of standardization include the speech, spelling, syntax, and purity of English, and each category must be secured if it is to remain stable enough to support the others and maintain the language into the future.

Leacock's critique of these categories bears a resemblance to Beckett's response. Beckett's linguistic skepticism jeers at each category in turn when we are told that Watt (though "a very fair linguist"²⁷⁶) "spoke...with scant regard for grammar, for syntax, for pronunciation, for enunciation, and very likely, if the truth were known, for spelling too."²⁷⁷ Ticking off each Johnsonian standard in succession, *Watt* suggests that if the rules of grammar, speech, and spelling so easily fail, language is too mutable to be sustained in a state of Johnsonian purity. Beckett's reaction to this 'failure' is akin to Leacock's and contrary to Johnson's: rather than railing against language's "inconstancy," Beckett's linguistic skepticism embraces the shifting novelties of a language in flux.

Moreover, Beckett's critique of language is *consciously* a critique of Johnsonian methods of language standardization. In his *Human Wishes* notebook Beckett even records Johnson's own inconsistencies, his Staffordshire way of saying "*woonse* for *once*, *poonsh* for *punch* and *fear* for *fair*."²⁷⁸ A comparable series occurs in *Watt* where the gardener Mr. Graves says "turd and fart...for third and fourth."²⁷⁹ Watt's opinion that Mr. Graves "pronounced his *th* charmingly" might apply to Johnson's own mispronunciations and to mispronunciation in general. Mauthner argues that "the so-called mistakes in language...[such] as mispronunciation" are only mistakes when they hinder communication.²⁸⁰ Beckett goes one further and suggests

²⁷⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1953), 171.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁷⁸ N. F. Löwe, "Sam's Love for Sam: Samuel Beckett, Dr. Johnson and 'Human Wishes,'" *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 8 (1999), 191.

²⁷⁹ Beckett, *Watt*, 116.

²⁸⁰ Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language*, 99.

that there are new discoveries, new meanings, in linguistic error, a possibility which is humorously brought home when Mr. Graves, “drinking...his afternoon stout,” explains “tis only me turd or fart.”²⁸¹

Mr. Graves’ inability to say what he means corresponds to Mauthner’s theory that “language neither incorporates nor is capable of expressing truth.”²⁸² Mauthner’s *Critique of Language* informs Leacock’s and Beckett’s parodies of Johnsonian lexicography. Indeed, Beckett’s first encounters with linguistic skepticism would have come not from Mauthner’s own work but from Leacock’s Mauthnerian critique of language. The traces of Mauthnerian theory in Leacock’s parodies would have provided the young Beckett with a model of how to mobilize linguistic theory in farcical fiction. When as a young man Beckett encountered Johnson and Mauthner first-hand, he had already seen from Leacock how the two opposing theories of language might be explored and exploited in comedy. Just as scholarship has taken scant notice of Beckett’s debt to Leacock, it has also neglected to read Beckett’s Mauthnerian critique of language in a Johnsonian context.

Yet Mauthner’s theory of language fundamentally opposes Johnson’s faith in the human ability to classify and use language coherently. For Mauthner, it is impossible to remove “uncertainties in classification or definition so that words represent correctly what they are used to talk about.”²⁸³ While Johnson contends that on some level words can be made stable in meaning and usage, for Mauthner words defy stable definition and are given to shifts in meaning depending on the way they are used: “just as there is no absolutely correct way of using

²⁸¹ Beckett, *Watt*, 116. Watt’s opinion that these are “venerable saxon words” might be a direct jab at Johnson’s *Plan*. According to Johnson, Saxon is a “mutilated and doubtful” language, less a distinct language, in fact, than a “dialect,” and therefore inferior. See Johnson, *The Plan of a Dictionary*, 15.

²⁸² Weiler, *Mauthner’s Critique of Language*, 135.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 138.

language, so there are no correct definitions. There are only multitudes of ways of language-using by individuals.”²⁸⁴

This emphasis on the contingency of language asserts that definitions of words change from person to person and so defy universalizing lexicography. Words also change their meaning with each new use, for Mauthner conceives of language as a body of words which communicate and obtain new shades of meaning in their relationship to neighboring utterances. Any attempt to fix this fluid body is destined to fail, for the meaning of the first word in a sentence is inflected by the fifth, the sixth, and so on. According to Mauthner, this ceaseless semantic exchange indicates that words correspond less to reality than to themselves and each other. Mauthner argues that language, a closed system, refers less to phenomena than to language itself because “our vocabulary is generated...by other words,” and therefore “a large part of our vocabulary should be suspected of not having any clear meaning.”²⁸⁵ The unique job of the lexicographer is to define language via itself, and Mauthner might say that this is the predicament of all language: words relate to words, not necessarily to things in the world.

Both Beckett and Leacock stage these theories in similar parodies of closed systems of expression. *Watt* mocks the closed system of language where words refer only to themselves when, for example, a man is “disembowelled...in the bowels,”²⁸⁶ or when Watt “labour[s]” at his “labour,”²⁸⁷ or when, in the draft of the novel, the narrator elaborates on “an eloquence eloquent with the eloquence of great eloquence.”²⁸⁸ Leacock parodies language’s self-referentiality, too: the governess’ eyes are “eye-like” and her “face [is] so face-like in its

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 122.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 139.

²⁸⁶ Beckett, *Watt*, 73.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 110.

²⁸⁸ Beckett, *Watt*, typescript draft with author additions.

appearance as to be positively facial.”²⁸⁹ The self-reflexive simile makes the point clear. As if he were defining the word “eye” as “eye-like,” Leacock performs a tautology mocking lexicography’s reliance on words to define themselves. Unable to speak anything outside of itself, expression collapses in phonetic play when the governess’ suitor returns her gaze with “a gaze so gaze-like” that it was like a “gazelle, or a gas-pipe.”²⁹⁰ No attempt is made to link the “gaze,” “gazelle,” and “gas-pipe” at the level of empirical representation. The only thing associating these three very different phenomena is an alliterative first syllable, the association taking place fully at the level of the phoneme, far from representational language.²⁹¹

Central to Mauthner’s linguistic theory is the idea that this inability to *express* reality is connected to an inability to *know* reality.²⁹² Just as the young Beckett would have encountered Mauthnerian critiques of language in Leacock, so too would he have found Mauthnerian critiques of epistemology in the work of the parodist. This might in part explain why, as Linda Ben-Zvi observes, Beckett departs from Mauthner’s seriousness.²⁹³ One of Beckett’s early encounters with linguistic and epistemological skepticism came from Leacock, and Leacock certainly demonstrates how to treat the subject with levity.²⁹⁴ In Leacock’s detective parodies,

²⁸⁹ Leacock, “Gertrude the Governess,” 22-23.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁹¹ See Weiler, *Mauthner’s Critique of Language*, 135. Because language is incapable of representing reality, Mauthner argues that “language is most powerful as a tool of poetry,” suggesting sounds and moods rather than precise information. Watt takes this notion to its extreme, scrambling his speech so as to render it incoherent, yet using his “aesthetic judgment” to privilege a pattern of sounds “acceptable to the ear.” See Beckett, *Watt*, 135.

²⁹² Weiler, *Mauthner’s Critique of Language*, 136. Mauthner argues that language not only shapes thought, but that thought and language are one. We can only think that which we can express, and “what we cannot express we cannot think. Language sets the limits of thought.” Moreover, since language is contingent, prone to unreliability and distortion, so, too, is thought.

²⁹³ See Linda Ben-Zvi, “Fritz Mauthner for Company,” *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 9 (1984).

²⁹⁴ See Beckett, *Letters*, 509. In a letter to Linda Ben-Zvi, Beckett sums up Mauthner’s epistemological critique with an abbreviated syllogism:

For me it came down to:
Thought words

language is at the root of our inability to know, understand, and communicate experience. Keeping in mind Johnsonian programs of language standardization, we see that Leacock smirks at the failure of language to signify in any standardized way when his detective, discovering a check coat with one check missing and announcing he has found a clue, provokes the following response from his Watson (called “Nut”):

“A clew!” I [Nut] exclaimed.
“Yes, one of the checks on his coat had been cached.”
“Cashed,” I cried.
“You misunderstand me; not ‘cashed,’ CACHED.”²⁹⁵

The failure of the detective and his assistant to communicate has its basis in the multivalence of words and results in a failure to generate new knowledge. Similar miscommunications hinder the good work of an academic committee in *Watt*, which for more than two pages cannot determine whether its research presenter said “seventy” or “seventeen” and repeatedly misrecords the number.²⁹⁶

Both Leacock and Beckett specialize in the irony that seekers of truth (detectives, academic committees) cannot connect at the level of speech and are thus unable to agree on even a basic conception of the conditions they find themselves in. *Watt* insists that perception of experience, questionable to begin with, cannot be communicated. According to the narrator Sam, *Watt* communicates poorly. Sam “receive[s],” or comprehends, those communications poorly. And our narrator in turn communicates, or “give[s],” poorly:

Add to this the obscurity of *Watt*’s communications, the rapidity of his utterance and the eccentricities of his syntax, as elsewhere recorded. Add to this the material conditions in which these communications were made. Add to this the

Words inane
Thought inane
Such was my levity.

²⁹⁵ Stephen Leacock, “The Great Detective,” *Short Circuits* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1928).

²⁹⁶ Beckett, *Watt*, 151-153.

scant aptitude to receive of him to whom they were proposed. Add to this the scant aptitude to give of him to whom they were committed. And some idea will perhaps be obtained of the difficulties experienced in formulating, not only such matters as those here in question, but the entire body of Watt's experience, from the moment of his entering Mr. Knott's establishment to the moment of his leaving it.²⁹⁷

Watt's "levity," its mischief, is precisely here: in its insistence that its every expression is no more than a testament to the inability to express and understand experience.

Leacock demonstrates a similar irony in his detective parodies, which feature detectives trying to talk through a problem in search of its solution and, far from reaching that solution, failing, like Watt and Sam, at the basic level of communication necessary to identify the problem in the first place. In the murder mystery "Who Do You Think Did It?" the inspector and a journalist-detective come up with one solution, decide it is flawed, arrive at a second solution, determine it, too, flawed, reprise the first solution, again find it flawed, and end (the case unsolved) with the journalist Kent addressing the inspector Throgton and saying:

"Throgton...It has occurred to me that there were points about that solution that we didn't get exactly straight somehow."
"So do I," said Throgton.²⁹⁸

The detectives' failure to ascertain the truth is grounded in the grammatical disjunction: "it has occurred to me...so do I." This relationship between a mode of communication which resists rules of grammar and a solution which resists articulation and remains elusive evokes a similar occurrence in *Watt*, where Watt and Sam, attempting to penetrate the mystery of Mr. Knott, are confounded by Watt's repeated reconfigurations of language. His inversions of letters, words, and sentences, such as "*day of most, night of part, Knott with now*," disconcert Sam, who is

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 60.

²⁹⁸ Stephen Leacock, "Who Do You Think Did It?" *Winsome Winnie and Other New Nonsense Novels* (New York: John Lane Company, 1920), 141.

“desirous above all of information.”²⁹⁹ As in Leacock’s story, the breakdown of grammar signals a breakdown of the ability to reason and generate new knowledge. According to Johnson, the proper arrangement of words is “too inconstant to be reduced to rules.”³⁰⁰ This inconstancy is precisely the weak spot that the two authors seize on and link to Mauthnerian theory to suggest that language is an inefficient medium both for thought and communication. But breaking the rules of grammar is not the only way that language and speech-driven thought hinder the production and dissemination of knowledge in the work of Beckett and Leacock. Both authors also focus on figures of speech and exploit the ambivalence of nonliteral language and its openness to misinterpretation.

Leacock parodies the confusion caused by figurative language when he mocks his detective’s inability to understand the simplest facts of a case. In “Maddened by Mystery; or, The Defective Detective,” Leacock’s blundering investigator penetrates “the whole mystery” on the story’s penultimate page, or so he claims.³⁰¹ Actually, he has merely succeeded in finally understanding the nature of the mystery. A Countess’ dog has been robbed, but because the Dachshund is called “The Prince of Wurttemberg,” the detective has persisted in his assumption that “the prince” is a young nobleman. Although the descriptions of the missing prince clearly suggest a canine, the detective continuously misinterprets the problem by imposing figurative readings on his information:

His quick brain analysed and summed up the evidence before him—“a young man,” he muttered, “evidently young since described as a ‘pup,’ with a long, wet snout (ha! addicted obviously to drinking), a streak of white hair across his back (a first sign of the results of his abandoned life)—yes, yes,” he continued, “with this clue I shall find him easily.”³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Beckett, *Watt*, 134-135.

³⁰⁰ Johnson, *The Plan of a Dictionary*, 19.

³⁰¹ Stephen Leacock, “Maddened by Mystery; Or, the Defective Detective,” *Nonsense Novels* (San Bernadino, CA: Free River Community Project, 2016), 7.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 6.

Needless to say, these are hardly clues. They are unequivocal descriptions of a missing dog. But the detective errs, in the words of *Watt*, by seeing symbols “where none intended.”³⁰³ He reads metaphor where the meaning was meant to be taken literally. This points to the problem that language is, as Mauthner observes, a representational construct, a medium of metaphor, even in its most literal applications. For Mauthner, the difference between metaphorical and ‘literal’ language is merely that ‘literal’ language is “no longer felt to be metaphorical.”³⁰⁴ Leacock’s parody plays on the fine problem of distinguishing between types of figurative language. When the detective claims to have cleared up the mystery, he means not that he solved the crime, but that he at last understands the basic information that has been submitted to him. The suggestion is that linguistic coherence itself is the greatest mystery of all. Simply to understand a basic communication in the most basic way is a great achievement!

“I have it,” he [the detective] gasped to his secretary. “The mystery is solved. I have pieced it together. By sheer analysis I have reasoned it out. Listen—hind legs, hair on back, wet snout, pup—eh, what? does that suggest nothing to you?”
“Nothing,” said the secretary; “it seems perfectly hopeless.”
The Great Detective, now recovered from his excitement, smiled faintly.
“It means simply this, my dear fellow. The Prince of Wurtemberg is a dog, a prize Dachshund.”³⁰⁵

In the meantime, while the detective was spending all of his energy combing “every corner of London” and breaking into the homes of his clients in search of a clue *as to what they were asking him to do in the first place*, the prize dog has been mangled beyond recognition and the crime goes unsolved.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ Beckett, *Watt*, 214.

³⁰⁴ Weiler, *Mauthner’s Critique of Language*, 161.

³⁰⁵ Leacock, “Maddened by Mystery; or, The Defective Detective,” 6.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

Leacock's parodies are marked by this lack of closure and their refusal to serve up solutions to the questions they pose. As a bare set of principles, Leacock's approach to representing human knowledge in fiction is akin to Beckett's. Leacock says that the solution of a mystery is never as satisfying as the mystery itself. He suggests that detective stories should present mysteries – and not solve them. In Leacock's view, there is no way to make a mystery “really interesting except at the start; it's a pity they have to go on, that they can't just stay baffled...and call it a day.”³⁰⁷ He bemoans the facile solutions with which some detective stories make sense of the perplexities with which they began. Such conclusions, offering closure to the story's problems, are far less fascinating than the problems themselves: “the fact is that the writer *can't* end the story, not if it is sufficiently complicated in the beginning. No possible ending satisfies the case.”³⁰⁸

With *Watt* Beckett enacts just such a story—a story which presents the reader not with complexities that are solved in a neat denouement, but a story which presents complexities on top of complexities and does not even end with a recognizable conclusion (let alone a solution), but a series of dissociated addenda.³⁰⁹ As Watt's period of service in Mr. Knott's house comes to an end, we are treated to a brief catechistic inventory of Watt's ignorance: “What had he learnt? Nothing. What did he know of Mr. Knott? Nothing.”³¹⁰ For both authors, such

³⁰⁷ Stephen Leacock, “Frenzied Fiction,” *Laugh Parade* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940), 21.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁰⁹ See Frederik Smith, “Watt, Watson, and Sherlock Holmes: ‘Watt’ as Detective Fiction,” *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 16 (2016), 315. Smith argues that *Watt* parodies detective fiction. Yet no scholars have read *Watt's* relationship to parodies of that genre. Smith's argument that the second World War undermined the “confident rationality implicit in the detective stories...[Beckett] had loved as a boy” overlooks other stories Beckett loved as a boy: parodies, like Leacock's, of detective and mystery fiction, parodies which, long before the second World War, viewed “confident rationality” as the stuff of farce in an irrational world.

³¹⁰ Beckett, *Watt*, 121.

profound irresolution is related to the uncertainties of language. Human experience is unknowable because unnamable by a language too unstable to fix.

This lack of confidence in human speech and knowledge casts a shadow on Johnson's program of language standardization. It also contains an inherent critique of that program's own inherent nationalism. Johnson views language as a standard of national identity. In his *Dictionary* he defines the word "nation" as a community unified by a common tongue, "a people distinguished from another people; generally by their language, original, or government."³¹¹ And he defines the word "language" in national terms: "the tongue of one nation as distinct from others."³¹² As Jeff Strabone points out, Johnson is especially keen to excise from English the dialects he deems barbarous and liable to pollute "English in its imagined purity."³¹³ His *Plan* proposes to "brand" some foreign words and to root out others from what he hopes will become the national standard of English, guided by England's own literary models dating from an imagined golden age of fundamentally English culture. Johnson couches his aims for the standardization of the language in nationalist as well as imperialist terms:

When I survey the Plan which I have laid before you, I cannot, my Lord, but confess, that I am frighted at its extent, and, like the soldiers of Caesar, look on Britain as a new world, which it is almost madness to invade. But I hope, that though I should not complete the conquest, I shall at least discover the coast, civilize part of the inhabitants, and make it easy for some other adventurer to proceed farther, to reduce them wholly to subjection, and settle them under laws.³¹⁴

³¹¹ Samuel Johnson, "Nation," *Dictionary of the English Language, vol II* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1832), 184.

³¹² Samuel Johnson, "Language," *Dictionary of the English Language, vol II* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1832), 19.

³¹³ Jeff Strabone, "Samuel Johnson: Standardizer of English, Preserver of Gaelic," *ELH* 77, no. 1 (Spring 2010), 244.

³¹⁴ Johnson, *The Plan of a Dictionary*, 33.

Johnson's choice of metaphor suits his assertion that the campaign to control language is the province of "princes and statesmen."³¹⁵ Linking language standardization to a tradition of nation building and colonial assimilation, Johnson's project is not only lexical, but political. His *Plan* promotes linguistic conformity as a form of nationalism, a shared language being, in Johnson's view, a prerequisite for a coherent national identity.

It stands to reason that Leacock, so conscious of linguistic and epistemological uncertainties in his fiction, would recognize and refute Johnson's program of linguistic nationalism. In response to the claim that language can be constrained to suit nationalism we might expect the parodist to counter that language will as readily resist political as other modes of management. If, as Leacock's fiction suggests, language is too volatile to control, then linguistic nationalism will flounder in its attempts to regulate expression.

Yet Leacock's notions of nationalism were ambivalent. James Steele points out that Leacock endorsed nationalism during wartime, and perhaps this explains how the parodist of language would come to applaud British linguistic imperialism during the Second World War.³¹⁶ In *Our British Empire: Its Structure, Its History, Its Strength* (1940), Leacock argues that "there is no doubt of the power of language to unite, or rather of the power of diverse language, to separate."³¹⁷ Because Leacock believes linguistic diversity impedes cooperation among people, he promotes the unification of British colonies under a common tongue, and although he regrets that "a single world language is as yet only a dream," he is pleased to announce that that dream

³¹⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

³¹⁶ James Steele, "Imperial Cosmopolitanism, or the Partly Solved Riddle of Leacock's Multinational Persona," *Stephen Leacock: A Reappraisal*, ed. David Staines (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1986).

³¹⁷ Stephen Leacock, *Our British Empire: Its Structure, Its History, Its Strength* (London: The Right Book Club, 1940), 259.

has the best chance of being realized by his own native English.³¹⁸ For Leacock, linguistic diversity implies political disunion. This is why he criticizes backlash against the transnational Anglophone community he envisions, calling “the resuscitation of Gaelic...just a piece of Irish nonsense.”³¹⁹ Such revivals harm his hope that “speech, thought, and language [in the imperial context] now amalgamate, not diverge.”³²⁰

Watt functions as a contrary response to this manner of thinking. Written during the war and just after Leacock’s publications on linguistic imperialism, Beckett’s novel throws into relief the Canadian writer’s disregard for the political implications of his earlier parodies of language standardization. In other words, Leacock himself seems not to see the implicit critique (in his fiction) of his own linguistic imperialism (in his later political works). Beckett, on the other hand, takes Leacock’s linguistic skepticism to its conclusion for politics and brings it to bear on nationalist and imperialist controls on language. In this sense, Beckett uses the tools of the early Leacock (a Mauthnerian treatment of language) to dismantle imperialist propositions, like the later Leacock’s, that language unification is possible and conducive to stable national and transnational communities. For Beckett language’s dynamism defies the discourse of nationalism, and *Watt* shows how nationalist and imperialist modes of lexicography and communication in particular break down.

Frederik Smith’s identification of *Watt*’s narrator Sam as a Johnson-like figure points the way toward the novel’s critiques of imperialist lexicography.³²¹ Like a lexicographer, Sam seeks to codify Watt’s inverted language. When Watt seems to speak senselessly, Sam catalogues the apparent rules of Watt’s speech:

³¹⁸ Ibid., 258.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 206.

³²⁰ Stephen Leacock, *Canada: The Foundations of Its Future* (Montreal: House of Seagram, 1941), 216.

³²¹ Frederik Smith, *Beckett’s Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 116.

From this [Watt's speech] it will perhaps be suspected:
That the inversion affected, not the order of the sentences, but that of the words
only;
That the inversion was imperfect;
That ellipse was frequent;
That euphony was a preoccupation;
That spontaneity was perhaps not absent;
That there was perhaps more than a reversal of discourse;
That the thought was perhaps inverted.³²²

As soon as Sam is confident he can comprehend Watt's language, the language changes: "So all went well until Watt began to invert, no longer the order of the words in the sentence, but that of the letters in the word."³²³ As soon as Sam can make sense of that change, Watt changes again: "So all went well until Watt began to invert, no longer the order of the letters in the word, but that of the sentences in the period."³²⁴ These changes occur eight times.³²⁵ Each time, Sam provides an example of Watt's new mode of speech, explains how it functions, then the language changes again.

So far, the passage might be merely another Mauthnerian demonstration of language's resistance to standardization: language is so changeable that as soon as Sam lists its laws they are outdated. The passage builds to an overt criticism of linguistic imperialism in the eighth and last iteration of Watt's changes in speech, which alone has no example, and which Sam says is "so much Irish" to him.³²⁶ It is significant that the speech which represents "so much Irish" is the one for which he can "recall no example" in his lexicographical catalogue of Watt's syntax. Following this failure Sam insists that his "mental faculties," the "faculties properly so called of...????...were if possible more vigorous than ever."³²⁷ The omission in the manuscript is ironic

³²² Beckett, *Watt*, 134.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 135.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 134-138.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

in that it is an amateur lexicographer that is at a loss for words. This loss for words carries an implicit argument against a lexicography intent on the exclusion of some elements of language. Sam fails to record Watt's last mode of speech and dismisses it as sub-standard in a manner reminiscent of Johnson's plan to omit, brand, and eradicate dialects. The passage suggests that such an act of linguistic erasure might result in a series of question marks, a limited vocabulary indicative of a limitation of thought. That this loss for words should occur at the precise moment that Sam is trying to describe his "mental faculties" signals the presence of Mauthner's idea that thought and language are indistinguishable from one another. Losing language, Sam's mental capacities are also compromised.

Just as lexicography fails when it begins to think about language in terms of exclusionary imperialism, so does communication falter in *Watt's* postcolonial context. The words of those representing foreign powers are particularly hard for Watt to parse. Reading *Watt* in the tradition of the Irish Big House novel, Harrington argues that the piano-tuners the Galls assume the role of an intrusive colonial force, and I would add that we might read the owner of this particular Big House, Mr. Knott himself, as a representative of the Anglo-Irish.³²⁸ Significantly, it is the language of these, the satellites of colonial power, that most confounds Watt. The servant Watt cannot make sense of the master Mr. Knott's language—cannot even tell if it is, in fact, a language to begin with:

The words of [Mr. Knott's] songs were either without meaning, or derived from an idiom with which Watt, a very fair linguist, had no acquaintance...Mr. Knott talked often to himself too, with great variety and vehemence of intonation and gesticulation, but this so softly that it came, a wild dim chatter, meaningless to Watt's ailing ears.³²⁹

³²⁸ See Harrington, *The Irish Beckett*, 126. As Harrington explains, Irish Big Houses owners were predominantly Anglo-Irish.

³²⁹ Beckett, *Watt*, 171.

Watt never hears Mr. Knott form coherent words, although “once he heard him make a strange noise, PLOPF PLOPF Plopf Plopf plopf plopf plopf plopf pl.”³³⁰ Chris Ackerley notes that in the early drafts of the novel “the sounds have no final ‘F’ and the phrasing is more explicit: ‘once he had heard him break wind.’”³³¹ *Watt’s* omission of the euphemism introduces ambiguity. Mr. Knott’s “strange noise” might be of intestinal origin; but it might just as well be an oral communication unintelligible to Watt. Presented as a parallel to speech, Mr. Knott’s “noise” parodies the incoherence that prevails among members of a colonial state. If Watt’s language is “so much Irish” in the context of imperial lexicography, then the language of colonial power might be so much flatulence to the ear of the colonial subject.

This reading of Mr. Knott as a farcical figure of foreign power corresponds to Mark Quigley’s argument that Beckett’s critiques of language constitute critiques of nationalism. Quigley observes that to critique language is to critique nationalism because nationalism depends on the representation of a “discernible, enduring, and indeed, overarching national character.”³³² The same might be said of colonialism’s claims that diverse cultural and political groups belong to an identifiable and seamless transnational community. While *Watt’s* elements of the Irish Big House novel cue us to read Mr. Knott as an embodiment of colonial power, Mr. Knott’s resemblance to some of the quirkier sketches of Samuel Johnson direct the reader to the novel’s subversion of the linguistic nationalism of Johnson’s *Plan* and its attempt to efface marginal means of expression.

³³⁰ Ibid., 120.

³³¹ Chris Ackerley, *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 143.

³³² Mark Quigley, “Unnaming the Subject: Samuel Beckett and Colonial Alterity,” *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui* 15 (2005), 91.

The irony that the great standardizer of English exhibited eccentricities in his speech was not lost on Beckett, and Mr. Knott's peculiar vocalizations resemble Johnson's in their oddness and incomprehensibility. In Boswell's *Life*, the biographer records that Johnson was "averse to society" and prone to "sighing, groaning, talking to himself, and restlessly walking from room to room"; "talking to himself was, indeed, one of his singularities ever since I knew him."³³³ Johnson's seclusion, self-communion, and unintelligibility evoke the strange behavior and speech of Mr. Knott. Like Watt, Boswell cannot understand yet records his subject's bizarre utterings: the "various sounds he made with his mouth...chewing the cud...giving a half whistle...clucking like a hen...pronouncing quickly under his breath, *too, too, too*...blow[ing] out his breath like a whale."³³⁴ In his *Human Wishes* notebook Beckett copied out this passage from Boswell and might have had it in mind when composing his very next project, *Watt*.³³⁵ In a Johnson-like manner Mr. Knott "talked...to himself...with great variety and vehemence...a wild dim chatter, meaningless to Watt's ailing ears."³³⁶ And Johnson's tweet of "*too, too, too*" brings to mind Mr. Knott's equally inane "Plopf plopf plopf."

Like *Watt's* allusions to Big House fiction, the presence of a figure of power who is speech-deficient in much the same way as Johnson points to the novel's interest in the collapse of language against the backdrop of the goals of nationalism, especially the goal of state standards for language. Beckett would have been aware of the similarity between Johnson's and Mr. Knott's muddled utterances. His research on Johnson tended to focus not only on Johnson's

³³³ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson: Including a Journal of His Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887), 483.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 485-486.

³³⁵ See Beckett, *Letters*, 521. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck note that Beckett transcribed this passage in his *Human Wishes* notebook.

³³⁶ Beckett, *Watt*, 171.

relationship with his housemates and obsession with matters of illness, but also on idiosyncrasies in Johnson's speech. Scholarship has emphasized Beckett's interest in the private rather than the public Johnson and has tended to overlook Beckett's thematic attention to the disparity between the two, a public figure of language standardization and a private man whose unusual vocalizations defied organized language.³³⁷

Although Frederik Smith is not wrong to claim that *Watt* "does not contain a character who clearly [and consistently] recalls Johnson," *Watt* does allude to Johnson and his circle.³³⁸ Much of the Johnson research set aside for *Human Wishes* seems to have made its way, albeit with some distortion, into *Watt*. Mr. Knott and Johnson share a garbled 'language.' The Johnson household harbors a dog not unlike Mr. Knott's.³³⁹ And in their early conceptions both texts intended to focus on Johnson and Mr. Knott only to shift that focus to the inhabitants of their homes, the former's boarders and the latter's servants.

³³⁷ Ruby Cohn, James Knowlson, and Stephen John Dilks have addressed Beckett's fascination with Johnson's private life, depression, morbidity, drug use, and indolence. What these readings of Beckett and Johnson have in common is an emphasis on Beckett's attraction to Johnson's inner struggles and deviations from standards of distinguished behavior. This scholarly emphasis on Beckett's study of Johnson's personal life tends to elbow out Beckett's awareness of Johnson's personal quirks within the scope of his public persona and the linguistic nationalism it in part stood for. Dilks, for example, suggests that "Beckett was not interested in the Johnson celebrated for his...*Dictionary*." However, what likely drew Beckett to Johnson's peculiarities is precisely their opposition to Johnson as the eminent champion of linguistic nationalism. It is instructive to keep in mind that in researching Johnson's idiosyncrasies Beckett would not have discounted their contrast to the ideology represented by the public figure of the lexicographer.

See Cohn's *Beckett's Theatre* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 144; Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 250; and Dilks' "Samuel Beckett's Samuel Johnson," *The Modern Language Review* 98, no. 2 (April, 2003), 297.

³³⁸ Smith, *Beckett's Eighteenth Century*, 116.

³³⁹ See Ackerley, *The Annotated Watt*, 112. Mr. Knott employs the Lynch family to oversee the daily feeding of a dog. Hester Lynch Thrale kept a dog in Johnson's house. Beckett noted her name, Lynch, probably for its Irish origin, in a letter to Thomas McGreevy of August 4, 1937 and again in his *Human Wishes* Notebook. Just as Mr. Knott's Lynch family oversees the complex operations (20 pages worth) concerning the dog's meals, the dog of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (later Piozzi), like the Lynch's dog, sustains eating habits that in Johnson's words "condemn" one to "perpetual vigilance." This latter quote comes from Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Johnsoniana: Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* (London: G. Bell, 1884), 96.

This residue of Beckett's research on Johnson tends to coincide with the novel's breakdowns of communication in a household of linguistic disequilibrium. Mr. Knott's colonial authority coupled with his Johnson-like babble touches on the problem of speech between the powerful and the subaltern, as does the novel's focalization on the house's common tenants and their alienation from expression. Beckett's early plan for *Human Wishes* was to focus on Johnson but in the end the fragment concentrated on the several men and women who made up Johnson's household and depended on him for lodging. Likewise, the *Watt* manuscript begins by focusing on the owner of the house Mr. Knott (named Quin in notebooks 1-3) but in the published version centers on the house's inmates.³⁴⁰ In the texts' interrogations of discourses of power the absence or unintelligibility of the master of the house is complimented by the inaccessibility of authentic representation for his dependents.

Watt's loss of language is related to his condition as a servant of low standing in the Knott house, where even human waste is segregated according to status.³⁴¹ Unable to find the names for things concerning "his situation...Mr. Knott...his duties," Watt's disassociation from language is couched in the terms of his servitude.³⁴² The pot in which, shedding "tears of mental fatigue" and sweat from "exertion,"³⁴³ Watt prepares Mr. Knott's meals becomes the focal point of those properties of the master's house "which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance."³⁴⁴ Watt finds that the word "pot" no longer applies to the pot in Mr. Knott's

³⁴⁰ John Pilling reads the *Watt* manuscript and traces the removal of Mr. Knott/Quin from the center to the margin of the novel. This material is all cut from the final version, which focuses on Watt as an object of fascination within pages of the novel's opening. See Pilling's *Beckett Before Godot* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³⁴¹ Beckett, *Watt*, 54. One of Watt's duties is to dispose of his own and Mr. Knott's "slops," and it is understood "that their commixture...if not formally forbidden, was not encouraged."

³⁴² Beckett, *Watt*, 64.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

house, which, differing from Watt's conception of a "true pot," leaves Watt to deal with a thing "of which the known name, the proven name, was not the name, any more, for him...of which the true name had ceased, suddenly, or gradually, to be the true name for Watt. For the pot remained a pot, Watt felt sure of that, for everyone but Watt. For Watt alone it was not a pot, anymore."³⁴⁵

As Dirk Van Hulle notes, this passage illustrates Beckett's Mauthnerian skepticism of language, its inadequacy as a medium of representation, communication, and thought.³⁴⁶ The passage also comments on the relationship between socio-economic subjugation and linguistic alienation when Watt realizes that both he and the pot are, in a "sense," the possessions of his employer. Watt's recognition that the pot belongs to Mr. Knott suggests that it is this state of ownership which renders him incapable of speaking about the item: yet "when he turned for reassurance to himself, who was not Mr. Knott's, in the sense that the pot was...he made the distressing discovery that of himself too he could no longer affirm anything."³⁴⁷ Patrick Bixby's argument that the situation is akin to the post-colonial subject's severance from speech and identity is supported by the passage's focus on ownership. The conflation of Watt with an object, each in a sense owned by another, calls attention to the way in which it is the possessors of people and things who determine their names, the fixtures of linguistic hegemony that deny one the chance to speak of, identify, and know oneself.³⁴⁸

The passage also alludes to Johnsonian lexicography and reaches for critiques of colonialism through its engagements with literature on Johnson, including Beckett's own *Human*

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 65.

³⁴⁶ Dirk Van Hulle, "Beckett—Mauthner—Zimmer—Joyce," *Joyce Studies Annual*, no 10 (1999), 150.

³⁴⁷ Beckett, *Watt*, 65.

³⁴⁸ Patrick Bixby, "Watt Kind of Man Are You?: Beckettian Anthropology, Cultural Authenticity, and Irish Identity," *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 15 (2005), 71-85.

Wishes. In the fragment of the play, “words fail” the inhabitants of Johnson’s home.³⁴⁹ And, after a short time in Mr. Knott’s home, Watt experiences a similar impairment: “words... fail him.”³⁵⁰ The affinity of phrasing links linguistic failure in the house of nationalist lexicography to linguistic failure in the house of colonial power, grounding Beckett’s disruptions of language in political spheres. The formulation of Watt’s problem even calls to mind lexicography when Watt cannot say “Pot, pot” as if the two words, with the first capitalized like a dictionary entry, define one another.³⁵¹ The appearance of this expression of Johnson’s discipline in the middle of one of the novel’s clearest critiques of linguistic hegemony reinforces the novel’s association of lexicography with linguistic oppression.

Moreover, the disjunction in meaning between “Pot” and “pot” illuminates for political purposes Mauthner’s claim that there are no such things as synonyms or repeatable words³⁵²—an insistence on language’s ambivalence which might encourage us to consider that this pot might accommodate more than one meaning and contain an indirect reference to the illegal sale of Johnson’s fabled coffee pot out from under his black servant, the ex-slave from Jamaica Francis Barber, to whom the pot was bequeathed. Such a reference falls in line with my reading of the “pot” passage as a critique of constructs of power which deprive subjects of representation, for the history of Johnson’s coffee pot is a history, like Watt’s, of the deprivation of an individual subject to yet excluded from the dominion of law and influence.

The story is related, in part, in John Wilson Croker’s edition of *The Life*. Among the edition’s “Johnsoniana” is the information (taken from an engraving on the coffee pot itself) that

³⁴⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Human Wishes*, in *Disjecta* (London: John Calder, 1983), 160.

³⁵⁰ Beckett, *Watt*, 68.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁵² Weiler, *Mauthner’s Critique of Language*, 163. For Mauthner, there are no such things as synonyms: you can never say the same word twice because you can never replicate perfectly the context of its first utterance.

when the lexicographer died his coffee pot was “weighed out for sale, under the inspection of [Johnson’s executor] Sir John Hawkins, at the very minute when...[the medical team] was in the next room closing the incision through which Mr. Cruickshank had explored the ruined machinery of its dead master’s thorax.”³⁵³ It is likely that Beckett would have come across this colorful anecdote. He read Croker’s *Life* while researching Johnson in the 1930s.³⁵⁴ And his enduring interest in Johnson’s medical conditions would have brought his attention to this very vivid description of his autopsy.³⁵⁵ Indeed, Beckett’s notes for *Human Wishes* quote Hawkins’ descriptions of the autopsy, and also take special care to record Johnson’s final changes to his last will and testament, many of them made in Barber’s favor.³⁵⁶

Beckett thus would have been aware that the coffee pot rightfully belonged to the freed slave Francis Barber to whom Johnson left “all the rest, residue, and remainder of my estates and effects.”³⁵⁷ Johnson even specified that the coffee pot go to Barber in a separate deed, written one week before his death.³⁵⁸ In his research, Beckett may well have encountered a reproduction of this deed in Aley Lyell Reade’s miscellany of *Johnsonian Gleanings*, published in 1937.³⁵⁹ That same year, the year that Beckett was researching Johnson at the National Library in Dublin,

³⁵³ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson: Including a Journal of His Tour to the Hebrides*, vol. 10, ed. John Wilson Croker and John Wright (London: H. G. Bohn, 1846), 150.

³⁵⁴ Beckett’s *Human Wishes* notebooks contain quotes from Croker’s 1846 edition of *The Life*.

³⁵⁵ For a fuller discussion of Beckett’s interest in Johnson’s physical and mental health, see Ulrika Maude, “Chronic Conditions: Beckett, Bergson, and Johnson,” *The Journal of Medical Humanities* 37 (2016): 193-204.

³⁵⁶ Beckett, *Human Wishes* Notebook 2.

³⁵⁷ Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, Hill edition, 403-404. This quote is from George Birkbeck Hill’s fourth volume of *The Life*, Beckett’s preferred edition. All quotes from *The Life* are taken from Hill’s edition unless found only in the Croker edition, in which case they are noted as such.

³⁵⁸ Like the coffee pot itself, the manuscript of this deed is held at Harvard University’s Houghton Library. The deed reads: “I give to my man Francis Barber in consideration of his care and trouble, a large silver coffee pot.”

³⁵⁹ We know that Beckett was reading new publications on Johnson during 1936-37. See Smith, *Beckett’s Eighteenth Century*, 112, where Smith notes that Beckett was reading, for example, C. E. Vulliamy’s 1936 *Mrs. Thrale of Streatham*.

the library acquired Reade's volume.³⁶⁰ As Ruby Cohn points out, Beckett "retained academic research habits and plodded through background materials" on Johnson and, among others, his servant Francis Barber.³⁶¹ It seems quite probable that by the time he was writing *Watt* Beckett was aware of the deed and the fact that Barber was cheated out of the possession of this valuable relic.

If so, Beckett would also have known that Hawkins' misuse of his power as Johnson's executor was in part based on his supercilious attitude toward Barber as a black man and postcolonial subject. Boswell informs us that Hawkins, angered by Johnson's bequest, considered it too high a sum to settle on "negroes."³⁶² Croker's edition quotes Hawkins' disparagement of Barber's interracial marriage and his condemnation of Barber as a "loose fellow."³⁶³ While *Watt's* pot is not a replica of Johnson's, both pots are emblematic of the disenfranchisement of the nationless subject, both gesture to a broader association between Barber and *Watt*, and both underscore the way in which the specter of Johnson is yoked to the novel's critiques of cultural othering. If Mr. Knott is in some ways a Johnson-like figure, *Watt* might in turn be a Barber-like figure and the novel an expansion on one of Beckett's ideas for *Human Wishes* in which, in "perhaps only one long act," the play would feature only Johnson and his "mysterious servant."³⁶⁴

As Johnson's servant of more than thirty years, Barber drew interest from Johnsonians. Yet the basic facts of his life eluded them, just as the basic facts of *Watt's* life elude the bewildered trio at the beginning of the novel. Like *Watt*, Barber's exact age and time of service

³⁶⁰ My thanks to the National Library's Research Assistant Justin Furlong for confirming the library's holdings in 1937.

³⁶¹ Cohn, *Beckett's Theatre*, 148.

³⁶² Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, Hill edition, 404.

³⁶³ Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, Croker edition, 163-164.

³⁶⁴ Beckett, *Letters*, 396-397.

to Johnson are contested, and after his time of service Barber was nearly deported from the parish of St. Michaels, Lichfield, under laws designed to protect the parish from the potential influx of indigents, a parallel to the deportation Watt endures at the end of the novel when ejected from the train station.³⁶⁵

One cause of Watt's deportation, his physical appearance, is described in terms reminiscent of descriptions of Barber in Johnsonian literature. An interview in *Gentleman's Magazine* describes Barber in the following terms: "about 48, low of stature, marked with the small-pox, has lost his teeth; appears aged and infirm; clean and neat, but his cloathes the worse for wear;" in sum, a man of "imprudence and low connexions...oppressed with a troublesome disorder" which remains unnamed; and although Barber cuts a dubious figure here, the author grants that he was "modest and humble."³⁶⁶ Compare this description of Barber to descriptions of Watt: indigent, itinerant, and infirm,³⁶⁷ a "bony shabby seedy haggard knockkneed" man "with rotten teeth"³⁶⁸ and a smile resembling a "fart,"³⁶⁹ and nevertheless the mildest, most "inoffensive creature."³⁷⁰

These portraits speak to how national identities create nationless subjects of people maladaptive to the national mold. Like Barber, Watt's disorders signify foreignness, his "nationality...[and] birthplace" indeterminable.³⁷¹ In both descriptions, an ambiguous national identity is imbedded in physical degeneracy and impoverishment. While Barber's foreignness is

³⁶⁵ Aleyn Lyell Reade, *Johnsonian Gleanings, Part VIII: A Miscellany* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. LTD, 1937), 78-79.

³⁶⁶ "A Meteorologist's Tour from Walton to London," *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical*, 63, 2 (July, 1793), 620. Beckett references this piece in his Notes towards Human Wishes and in his Human Wishes Notebook 3.

³⁶⁷ Beckett, *Watt*, 16.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

distinguished by disorders, Watt's disorders mark him as foreign. In other words, there is an implicit suggestion that because Barber transgresses stable national identities, he is physically, fiscally, and morally substandard, while because Watt appears to suffer from similar deficits, his nationality is questionable.

Debarred from national belonging, both Watt and Barber are confirmed superfluous. In George Birkbeck Hill's *Johnsonian Miscellanies* Barber's purpose in the Johnson house is explained in as vague a manner as Watt's purpose in Mr. Knott's home, for "the uses for which [Barber] was intended to serve this his last master were not very apparent," as Johnson had no need of a servant.³⁷² Leslie Stephen's *Samuel Johnson* records that "no one ever solved the great problem as to what services were rendered by Barber to his master... whose clothes were never touched by the brush."³⁷³ And in *Gentlemen's Magazine* Francis Barber's services are again belittled, "for, as master" Johnson "required very small attention: Francis brought and took away his plate at table," and did, it seems, little else, as it was "out of his power to render himself very useful as a servant."³⁷⁴

This repeated anecdote of Barber's position as an expendable servant in the Johnson house corresponds to Watt's redundancy in Mr. Knott's house. Just as Johnson needed little from his servant, Mr. Knott "needed nothing, as far as Watt could see."³⁷⁵ And just as Johnson "required very small attention" at mealtime, "Mr. Knott's meals gave very little trouble."³⁷⁶ But Beckett disrupts the smug conceit, so jarring in writings on Barber, that the servant's opportunity

³⁷² George Birkbeck Hill, *Johnsonian Miscellanies, vol. 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 391. Beckett records this quote in his Notes towards Human Wishes.

³⁷³ Leslie Stephen, *Samuel Johnson* (New York: Harper & bros., 1878) 170. Beckett records this quote in his Human Wishes Notebook 3.

³⁷⁴ "A Meteorologist's Tour," 620.

³⁷⁵ Beckett, *Watt*, 166.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 69. In his Human Wishes Notebook 1, Beckett records that, like Watt and his master, Barber was the "only man who took food up to" Johnson.

to serve is an act of charity on the part of the master. Far from “very little trouble,” Mr. Knott’s meals actually cause Watt a great deal of anguish and consternation, taxing “Watt’s powers, both of mind and body, to the utmost.”³⁷⁷ And, if we read the “pot” again as a cooking pot, it is the task of meal preparation (into which the “pot” passage leads) with its sweat, “tears,” and “mental fatigue,” that marks the occasion for Watt’s loss of language. In its manipulation of colonial discourses like those demarcating Barber, *Watt* reveals how nationalist discourses likewise dehumanize, evaluate according to use-value, and dismiss as useless individuals deemed unrepresentative of national qualities.

This dismissal obtains a racial component when, in the novel’s last scene, Watt is covered in slop by the train station attendants. Wishing to rouse and eject the sleeping vagrant from the premises, the station managers douse him in “slime,” prompting the local woman Lady McCann to ask: “is it a white man?”³⁷⁸ When he attempts to speak, Watt’s words go unheeded, and his ethnic ambiguity is augmented by Lady McCann’s next observation that his “accent” is “extraordinary.”³⁷⁹ Here, ethnic difference is reified through linguistic othering, reinvigorating the novel’s examinations of language standardization as a tool of political alienation. It is not how Watt looks but how he speaks that fixes his identity by means of cultural contradistinction and warrants his removal from the community. Dramatizing the political ramifications wrapped up in speech codification, the scene questions the Johnsonian dream of abolishing mispronunciation. For Johnson, regional accents and dialects are corruptions of authentic speech and ought to be eradicated. Yet, as *Watt* exhibits, systems of language standardization threaten

³⁷⁷ Beckett, *Watt*, 70.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 201. The scene is comparable to Barber’s near eviction from Johnson’s native Lichfield after Johnson’s death. Considering Barber an alien and a deadweight on the district, the parish authorities attempted to remove him from his former master’s community. In a similar way, and for similar reasons, Watt is expelled from Mr. Knott’s town with a one-way third class train ticket to the last stop on the line.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

to banish the speaker along with the manner of speaking, consigning to abjection whomever dishevels the mandates of ‘proper’ speech.

It is precisely these types of political ramifications that are missing from Leacock’s critiques of language. While both authors exercise linguistic skepticism in their fiction, only Beckett’s turns that skepticism to considerations of power in the political sphere, breaking from the socially disengaged parodies he enjoyed in his youth. *Watt’s* engagement with and complications of Johnson’s linguistic nationalism accentuate his departure from apolitical parodies like Leacock’s. In his famous letter to Axel Kaun, Beckett writes that “language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it.”³⁸⁰ What *Watt’s* attention to language’s social entanglements shows is that even in his early fiction Beckett was at work disassembling language for political as well as formal or philosophical purposes. His agenda, to rip the veil off of language, might be read as a response to Johnson, for whom a “vicious” writing style, “darkened with old words and peculiarities of phrase, and...remote from common use” belies an author who has “written no language.”³⁸¹ Beckett’s attempts to write “no language,” to manipulate, strip away, and erase narrative style, are in large part attempts to deconstruct the social implications of regulatory language’s productions of power.

³⁸⁰ Beckett, *Letters*, 518.

³⁸¹ Samuel Johnson, “Rambler 121,” *The Rambler, by Doctor Johnson, and Persian Letters, by Lord Lyttleton* (London, 1800), 276. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Samuel Johnson is here quoting, and agreeing with, Ben Jonson’s criticism of Spenser.

Chapter 5

Graham Greene's Aesthetics of Design, Sport, and Violence

Abstract

This chapter argues for the relationship of modernist architectural theory, health and leisure culture, and martial violence in Graham Greene's early criticism and fiction. The first section reads Greene's response to the rhetorical strategies and values of the new architects and argues that Greene draws on that rhetoric in order to associate it with the language and value systems of regimented military violence. The chapter then examines Greene's representation of distinctly modernist recreational spaces like holiday camps and seaside resorts. For Greene, these modernist architectural spaces are also (like the movement's rhetoric) easily assimilated into systems of discipline and force, as are the athletic games associated with the holiday camp and resort. Moving from recreational to popular culture, the chapter reads those same martial qualities in Greene's treatment of cultural items like story magazines and films. In this manner, Greene's fiction paints a picture of a culture of conformity to military values which have infiltrated every sector of civilian life – from architectural discourse to sport, leisure, and popular culture. The chapter ends with a short reading of Greene's descriptions of the Blitz. Paradoxically, it is here alone – in the instant of bombing – that Greene finds a reprieve from the pervasive regimentation of what he views as a culture of increasing discipline, surveillance, and organized brutality.

This chapter looks at the interrelation of modernist architectural rhetoric, sport, recreation, and militancy in the pre-1945 novels of Graham Greene. In particular, I examine Greene's response to the design doctrines of modernist theorists Herbert Read, Walter Gropius, and Corbusier. For these and other advocates of modernist design, the new architecture's subordination of form to function would facilitate physical as well as mental health, hygiene, and recreation. By contrast, Greene represents the new architecture's emphasis on pragmatism, efficiency, and fitness as a set of martial values easily appropriated by the state in order to militarize civilians in preparation for war. Greene's identification of military and nationalist interests in the rhetoric of housing and health culture informs his novels' disparagement of modernist approaches to design and sport.

For Greene, the values imbedded in new approaches to architectural theory, sport, and leisure result in a society for which recreation is regimented, athleticism a form of training for combat, and popular culture a vehicle for habituating citizens to military life and its programmatic violence. For Greene, systems of social organization – be it in architecture, leisure, athletics, or art – are dangerously adaptable to systems of social surveillance and militarization. This Foucauldian framework – in which cultural discourse is assimilated to state interests – enables us to understand Greene's classical liberalist leanings and his resistance to cultural institutions in which he perceives the language and values of coercive regimes.

I. Architecture in Greenland

Greene's friendships and editorial work put him into close contact with theories of architecture during the 1930s and the Second World War. He was editor for *Night and Day*, which featured a regular section on plans and disputes in the discipline. He was friends with fellow *Night and Day* contributor, Herbert Read, whose criticism on architecture and design

echoes modernist architect Walter Gropius'. And he developed connections to the Architectural Association in Bedford Square, part of Greene's warden area during the Blitz.

Greene's contact with architects and with architectural criticism certainly influenced him, and he would eventually write a novel whose main character is a Corbusier-quoting architect.³⁸² In fact, much of Greene's earlier fiction and indeed worldview are colored by his thoughts about architecture. For example, Greene acknowledges that architecture plays a key role in his fiction when he finds himself struggling to depict Liberia because there is "no architecture to describe."³⁸³ And he says of his childhood Berkhamsted that "one's future might have been prophesied from the shape of the houses as from the lines of hand."³⁸⁴ Architectural spaces are personally and creatively important for Greene. But it is not spaces alone that intrigue him. He is also drawn to architectural theory and develops its imaginative possibilities in his novels, which comment on, mimic, and re-contextualize the rhetoric of design.

Attentive to the self-promotions of the new architecture, Greene engages with the principles of modernism as vocalized by architectural theory. As Elizabeth Darling points out, the interwar period saw a campaign to establish modernist architectural values in the general public.³⁸⁵ The movement's theorists sought not only to create new buildings but to create a demand for those buildings, buildings whose merits the builders would teach the public to appreciate. The writings of the new architecture were thus a style of advertising which sought to edify – an attempt to teach the consumer a new set of values by which to judge innovative design.

³⁸² See Graham Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case* (London: Heinemann, 1961), 149, where the architect Query references Corbusier's conception of houses as "machines for living in."

³⁸³ Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape* (London: The Bodley Head, 1980), 48.

³⁸⁴ Graham Greene, *A Sort of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 15.

³⁸⁵ See Elizabeth Darling, *Re-Forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity before Reconstruction* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor, & Francis Group, 2007).

That Greene was doubtful about these discursive efforts is evident in his treatment of modernist schemes for housing projects. Greene was aware that the working class neighborhoods of the late 1930s suffered from poor housing conditions,³⁸⁶ and his criticisms of modernist architecture begin with the movement's failure to deliver affordable, quality housing to the masses. Modernist architecture called for equable standards of design for the home, asserting that the architect had a moral duty to provide the working class with an "enhanced standard of living."³⁸⁷ However, as Juliet Gardiner observes, this much vaunted program was not realized in practice because modernist architects, no matter how genuine their advocacy of public housing projects, tended to take private commissions.³⁸⁸

While the modernist architect's promises to build better living spaces for the working class was in keeping with what Tyrus Miller has called the period's "unprecedented rationalization of social life...[and] the subordination of previously distinct spheres to impersonal or collective aims," Greene, aware that these promises were largely unrealized in practice, presents model housing projects as sites of abjection.³⁸⁹ Slipshod housing projects appear throughout Greene's early fiction and function as denunciations of modernism's unfulfilled pledges to the poor. Distrustful of claims that the new program would enhance standards of living for the working class, Greene's novels feature neglected communities like

³⁸⁶ For example, *The Confidential Agent's* mining community signals squalor through its drab houses, uniformly grey, where the workers wait like dormant machines for the mine to reopen, and *This Gun for Hire's* "Cozyholme" housing development resembles a wasteland of "scarred fields" and featureless houses designed for stark utility. See Graham Greene, *The Confidential Agent* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), 161; and Graham Greene, *This Gun For Hire*, In *Triple Pursuit: A Graham Greene Omnibus* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 38.

³⁸⁷ Walter Gropius, *New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (London: Faber and Faber, Limited, 1935), 45.

³⁸⁸ Gardiner notes that "of the nearly four million houses built in England between 1919 and 1939, nearly three million were built by private builders, and just over one million by local authorities—despite the initial post-war intention to make building homes fit for working-class 'heroes' the priority." Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: HarperPress, 2010), 296.

³⁸⁹ Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 33.

Brighton Rock's Paradise Piece, a "wasted ground" where "houses had been pulled down for model flats which had never gone up."³⁹⁰

The demolition and displacement of this community, razed for purposes of reconstruction and then abandoned, serves as a clear example of Greene's cynicism when it comes to the public housing schemes of modernism. Yet the remainder of the passage suggests something more than a mere betrayal of the working class. In a pre-Blitz, peacetime description of a domestic bombing, the passage informs us that those houses which remain in the derelict community, with their "flapping gutters and glassless windows," "look as if they had passed through a bombardment."³⁹¹ This figurative flourish introduces one of Greene's subtler concerns: the relationship of architectural theory, warfare, and violence.

II. Rational Space, Thought, and Action: The Language of Modernist Design as a Lexicon for Mechanical Violence

Greene's novels explore the potential for violence in modernist ideology's elevation of reason, function and efficiency as standards of excellence for architectural designs, societies, and individuals. Greene disagreed with the opinions of his friend, the art critic and advocate of modernist design theory Herbert Read.³⁹² Channeling Gropius, Read proclaims the inauguration of a new industrial aesthetic: the appeal of "objects designed primarily for use."³⁹³ According to Gropius, functional patterns in architecture not only appeal to reason over emotion; they also cultivate rationality. Architecture which is practical and functional in design thus exercises "a

³⁹⁰ Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 127.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 127. For more on pre-war representations of bombsites, see Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites, and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³⁹² See Greene's "Herbert Read," *Collected Essays* (New York: The Viking Press, Inc, 1961), 354, where Greene particularly disparages Read's work on architectural criticism, *Art and Industry*.

³⁹³ Herbert Read, *Art and Industry* (London: Faber and Faber, Limited, 1934), 49.

settling and civilizing influence on men's minds."³⁹⁴ As Marjorie and Charles Quennell put it, "rational" arrangements substitute "order for chaos."³⁹⁵

By contrast, in Greene's fiction this new ethos overvalues efficiency and produces stifling conditions. In *The Confidential Agent* London's modernist buildings signify "spiritless routine,"³⁹⁶ and in *It's a Battlefield* the transparent "glass cells" of an office building render it lifelessly "blank."³⁹⁷ Like reinforced steel, glass was a preferred medium of modernist architecture, whose aesthetic origins Corbusier locates in the automobile's embodiment of streamlined efficiency.³⁹⁸ As though following the logic of the Swiss architect from automobile to building, Greene calls both "cages."³⁹⁹ For Greene, neither the machine nor the mechanized building represent freedom, speed, or efficiency: the building's lift is dysfunctional, and in the cramped cab of the vehicle one twists "a wheel a fraction this way, a fraction that," suggesting not speed, but immobility.⁴⁰⁰

Characterized by confinement, modernist spaces in Greene's fiction are also sites of discipline and behavioral modification. In *It's a Battlefield*, the schemes of the prison and the modern factory are described in wryly identical terms.⁴⁰¹ Each possesses three buildings, Blocks A, B, and C; and each upper Block in the sequence grants privileges which the lower Blocks

³⁹⁴ Gropius, *New Architecture*, 37.

³⁹⁵ Marjorie Quennell and C. H. B. Quennell, *A History of Everyday Things in England, IV: The Age of Production, 1851-1934* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1934), 136. The architect Charles and Marjorie Quennell were the parents of Greene's school friend, the poet Peter Quennell.

³⁹⁶ Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 56.

³⁹⁷ Graham Greene, *It's a Battlefield* (New York: The Viking Press, 1934), 1-3.

³⁹⁸ See Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1986), 19.

³⁹⁹ Greene, *It's a Battlefield*, 17, 21.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 24. The prison: "That's Block A. The new prisoners all go there. If they behave themselves, they get shifted to that one there, that's Block B. Block C...that's the highest grade. Of course if there's any complaint against them, they get shifted down" (13-14). The factory: "That's Block A. The new employees go there for the simplest processes. Then if they work well they go to Block B, and so to Block C. Everyone in Block C is a skilled employee. Any serious mistake and they are moved back to Block B."

forbid, incentivizing the prisoner/employee to pursue promotions through compliance. This ironic approximation of reformatory and industrial space indicates how for Greene modernist design superintends human action. Significantly, Greene suggests that a building's design elements can be used to inculcate behavioral norms. Formally incorporated into a system of punishment and reward, the prison and workplace are structurally engineered to adapt individuals to approved modes of conduct.

As with behavior, so with thought: Greene's fiction acknowledges that the features of design can be used to teach, influence, and shape the psyche of an individual. In *Brighton Rock*, where "man is made by the places in which he lives," the heroine Ida's "mind worked with the simplicity and the regularity of" an electric sign.⁴⁰² And the mental makeup of the young gangster Pinkie is shaped by the urban space of his childhood, "his gray cells...formed of the cement school playground."⁴⁰³ The idea that design elements not only impact but are formative of one's mental life coincides with Corbusier's contention that architecture determines psychology.⁴⁰⁴ For Corbusier and other modernists, the new architectural aesthetic would create conditions in which "man can employ fully his gifts of memory, of analysis, of reasoning and of creation."⁴⁰⁵ Corbusier suggests that human behavior and psychology will come to reflect the expressions of logic and functionality communicated by clear and coherent design. But while Corbusier champions the rationalization of mental life, Greene sees a danger in the elevation of reason and pragmatism.

Appropriating the rhetoric of theorists like Corbusier, Greene explores the potential for violence in the overvaluation of efficiency. In Greene's fiction modernist buildings tend to

⁴⁰² Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 47-48.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 331.

⁴⁰⁴ See Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 14-15.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

house characters who execute acts of violence with speed and economy and without any fuss, as if the modernist emphasis on function complimented the cold rationalism of dispassionate brutality. *The Confidential Agent's* cruel murderess possesses a room that “seemed made and furnished for nothing but use,”⁴⁰⁶ – a design approach which, taken alone, recalls that of the modernist camp.⁴⁰⁷ Likewise, in *The Ministry of Fear* the “modern building” is a “sinister,” “disquieting” site of violence where professional spies try to assassinate the guileless hero Rowe.⁴⁰⁸ The attempted murder (using a bomb) is precise, impersonal, and planned with “efficiency,” as is the modernist space the assassins inhabit: yet another “huge white modern” building as “mechanized” as their protocol to eliminate human liabilities.⁴⁰⁹

Throughout his work Greene announces that the mechanization of modern life has led to routine modus operandi, programmatic thought and behavior, and intellectual detachment that underpins procedural violence. Written during the Blitz, *The Ministry of Fear* presents a London in which violence is as regular, streamlined, and automated as a tool of industry. The nightly bomb raids conform to a tight industrial schedule by which “one can set one’s clock,” the “routine” labor of the bombardier commencing early in the evening and continuing “till three or four in the morning: a bombing pilot’s eight hour day.”⁴¹⁰ Reducing civilian warfare to an ordinary trade, the German bombers’ daily barrage is described in rationalist terms: methodized, effective, reliable. A similar automation directs the destructive actions of the assassins on the

⁴⁰⁶ Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 70-71.

⁴⁰⁷ Gropius espouses the new architecture’s “emphasis...on function,” “liberation from mass ornamentation,” and “quest for concise and economical solutions” to formal problems. Walter Gropius, “Appraisal of the Development of Modern Architecture,” *Scope of Total Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1943), 62.

⁴⁰⁸ Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear: An Entertainment* (Kingswood, Surrey: Windmill Press, 1943), 112.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 122, 40.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68, 22.

ground. One assailant bears “steadily down on Rowe like something mechanised,” and another, facing imminent capture, takes up a pair of shears and slits his own throat “without hurry, serious, professional,” his movements as systematic and unemotional as his work as a tailor: “everything he did...was carefully pondered...[with] no room in that precision for the eccentricity, the wayward act.”⁴¹¹

Dependable and direct, the deadly logic in Greene’s novels suggest that late modernist “demands for rationality” establish a system of methods and values which can be assimilated to systems of violence.⁴¹² For modernist architecture, a rational design is simple, practical, and economical. In this manner, modernism draws on the lessons of industrialism and applies them to the home. Like industrial design, the new architecture should be clean, sleek, and efficient, its standards determined by functionality and ease of use. Architectural theorists acknowledge their indebtedness to the principles and aesthetics of manufacturing.⁴¹³ And Greene, too, traces design’s call for functionality to its industrial origins.

For Greene, however, the interwar period’s industrial and architectural ideologies herald the manifestation of the martial in quotidian life. Combining industrial, architectural, and militarized space in one barren landscape, Greene characterizes the inner bounds of industry, a manufacturing goods yard, not as a wellspring of progress, but as a ruin of war, a “dark, desolate

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 20, 203-205.

⁴¹² Compare Greene’s situating of violence within reason to Tyrus Miller’s suggestion that many of Greene’s contemporaries saw reason and violence as binary opposites, their critique of reason being that the binary was unequal and rationalization weakened, all too soon, under the escalating pressures of violence and fascism. Greene, by contrast, locates violence not contrary to but *within* the value system of rationalist ideology. For Miller’s point, see Miller, *Late Modernism*, 40-41.

⁴¹³ See Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 19; Gropius, *New Architecture*, 77; and Read, *Art and Industry*, 34. Corbusier contends that modern spaces like “factories” taught the new architectural movement to prize clean, sleek efficiency. Gropius sent his apprentices “to work for short periods in factories” and absorb industrial techniques. Recognizing the industrial aesthetic principles that modern architecture would inherit, Read observes that the modern industrial aesthetic is so-called because, among other things, it develops from industrialism’s emphasis on function and practicality, the elimination of waste, and ease of use.

waste of cinders and points, a tangle of lines and sheds and piles of coke and coal... a no man's land full of torn iron across which one soldier picked his way with a wounded companion."⁴¹⁴

This conflation of manufacturing and martial space gestures to the industrialization of war. But the scene also gestures to what in Greene's view is the popularization of the new industrial ethos and its normalization of non-civilian life. The two "soldier[s]," actually the civilian Anne and fugitive Raven, only half-jokingly have to agree that their refuge for the night, a storage shed surrounded by the "dark, desolate waste" of the goods yard, is "like home," even "homey."⁴¹⁵

Two years before this scene was composed, Gropius observed that Britain's best contributions to the modernist movement were innovations in basic housing design.⁴¹⁶ Here, Greene suggests that the modernist re-conception of home transforms domestic space into a stark environment suited to soldiers, each home a barracks, each civilian on reserve for mobilization in war.⁴¹⁷

III. Camps, Resorts, and Training for War: Regimented Recreation and the Space of the Foucauldian Holiday

This critique of the new aesthetic extends to its rhetoric around health and fitness. The general health of the working class was a major preoccupation of interwar reform and modernist architecture. Corbusier calls for designs that fulfill one's "right to health."⁴¹⁸ Equally, Gropius invokes physical well-being and calls for communal gymnasiums.⁴¹⁹ Such demands from the continent were consistent with new legislation promoting physical fitness in Britain. The 1937

⁴¹⁴ Greene, *This Gun for Hire*, 89.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87, 101.

⁴¹⁶ See Gropius, "Appraisal," 67.

⁴¹⁷ For more on this passage, see Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976), 233-234. In Hynes' analysis the derelict industrial city of *A Gun for Sale* is represented in "battlefield images," suggesting that the war to come (in 1936) has its origin in industrialist exploitation of the poor and working class. For Hynes, the novel is about two wars: the war of big finance against the working class, and the larger, more destructive war that grows out of big finance's unscrupulous greed, with Sir Marcus seeking to spark an international conflict in order to create a demand for the munitions he produces.

⁴¹⁸ Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 19.

⁴¹⁹ Gropius, *New Architecture*, 29.

Physical Training and Recreation Act designated funds for “gymnasiums...holiday camps...and other buildings...for physical training and recreation.”⁴²⁰ The 1939 Camps Act pledged to expand “the construction, maintenance and management of camps.”⁴²¹ And the camps themselves pledged to enhance physical health and community spirit by ministering to “rational” and “healthful recreation.”⁴²²

Greene portrays one such holiday camp in *The Confidential Agent*. The novel’s “Lido” is a “cheap,” seaside, sprawling “village” of accommodations, group activities, and recreation.⁴²³ In this, Greene acknowledges, it “resemble[s]” a “Butlin’s holiday camp.”⁴²⁴ By the mid-1930s holiday camps like Billy Butlin’s were boasting affordable seaside getaways and informal social mixing via a regular program of games, contests, dining, and dancing. Targeting a lower and middle class clientele, Butlin’s first camp at Skegness was a rapid success and resulted in a string of Butlin-brand camps, each a self-contained space equipped with modern chalets, restaurants, dancehalls, swimming pools, and sports facilities. Espousing physical activity and exercise, the camps met demands for a healthier working class. In addition, historians have pointed out that the relaxed atmosphere of the seaside community lifted prohibitions and granted holiday-makers a degree of latitude unattainable in the working world. John K. Walton, for example, identifies an element of carnivalesque misrule in the seaside holiday communities, where “the pleasure

⁴²⁰ “Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937,” 3. The National Archives. Online. Legislation.gov.uk

⁴²¹ “Camps Act 1939,” 40. The National Archives. Online. Legislation.gov.uk.

⁴²² See the *Holiday Camp Review*, quoted in Colin Ward and Dennis Hardy, *Goodnight Campers! The History of the British Holiday Camp* (London and New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1986), 52-53. *The Holiday Camp Review* reported regularly on the health benefits and comradery of camp culture.

⁴²³ Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 194-195.

⁴²⁴ Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 91.

principle is given freer rein, the certainties of authority are diluted, and the usual constraints on behavior are suspended.”⁴²⁵

Yet for some the holiday camps embodied anything but the misrule of carnival.⁴²⁶ Far from liberating, the camps assimilated the individual into the group, inculcated consumerism and restricted freedom of movement through architectural schemes.⁴²⁷ Recognizing that “you can organize a holiday, but you can’t organize people,” Butlin set about an “experiment” which was “socially significant,” outfitted his staff in red blazers and delegated them to arrange events for the guests.⁴²⁸ Accepting that “holiday-makers...are more relaxed if relieved of some thinking and organizing,” Butlin proposed that the Redcoats, as they came to be called, should “lead, advise, explain, comfort, help,” and generally organize the guests’ leisure time for them.⁴²⁹

For guests like Greene, all of this leading, advising, explaining, and comforting was an unwelcome imposition, and the author of the Lido could tolerate no more than “two extraordinary days” at a Butlin camp before he “packed secretly and fled.”⁴³⁰ An “awful hotel” of “organized fun,” the Lido reimagines the holiday camp as a bizarre incarnation of modernist ideology in which the emphasis on function and efficiency has led to a form of leisure that relies on and reinforces regimentation.⁴³¹ Architecturally, the Lido draws on the new architecture’s “maritime motifs,” “porthole windows,” and “paneling from superannuated ocean liners” for

⁴²⁵ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3.

⁴²⁶ See Walton, *The British Seaside*, 129-130, where Walton cites complaints that the holiday camps are too regimented.

⁴²⁷ For example, guests en route to the sea were forced to take a detour through the amusement park. And Butlin’s carnival was dominated by advertising stunts. See Rex North, *The Butlin Story* (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1962), 56, 66-68.

⁴²⁸ North, *The Butlin Story*, 53-54.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁴³⁰ Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 91.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

seaside resorts.⁴³² The building is designed like “an airport” or a cruise ship, is advertised as a “cruise on land,” and its standard guestroom is “like a [ship’s] cabin,” with a “port-hole instead of a window” and a “washing basin folded back against the wall to make more room.”⁴³³

Recalling Corbusier’s demand for design derived from ships and airplanes, the Lido also recalls iconic modernist plans like the L. M. S. Railway’s holiday camp at Prestatyn.⁴³⁴ Constructed the same year as *The Confidential Agent* (1939), the holiday camp at Prestatyn and the Lido share a “central tower” and “geometrical arrangement” of guest accommodations which some guests complained resembled “barracks for the mass holidaymakers of a regimented future.”⁴³⁵

Greene’s Lido examines the panoptic power of such a design. The Lido, a seaside resort of “circle after circle of chromium bungalows round a central illuminated tower,” enforces discipline through exposure.⁴³⁶ Every room opens “immediately...on to the unsheltered deck” facing the central tower, and when the hero D., a foreign agent of an unnamed government, seeks privacy in his room his fellow guests peek through D.’s window “to have a look” at the “foreign bloke.”⁴³⁷ The panopticism of the Lido is pervasive, the tower’s position of centralized surveillance recreated in the gaze of each guest. Habituated to being on display, the Lido’s guests pay no mind to the lack of privacy, romp around the open deck and banter back and forth so that all can hear. A newcomer like D. is compelled to listen to “everything that went on in the neighboring rooms,” and the conversation is uniformly puerile.⁴³⁸ With names like Pig, Spot,

⁴³² Walton, *The British Seaside*, 129.

⁴³³ Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 195-196.

⁴³⁴ Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 19.

⁴³⁵ Walton, *The British Seaside*, 129-130.

⁴³⁶ Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 195.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 196-197.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

and Chubby, the Lido's patrons have been hailed in the Lido's language and inducted into its culture of group think and forced frivolity.

The Lido speaks to Greene's classical liberalist leanings and reveals a problem in Foucault's conception of panoptic control. For Foucault, the panoptic model architecturally "reduce[s] the number of those who exercise [surveillance]...while increasing the number of those on whom it is exercised."⁴³⁹ Yet in the Lido the situation is reversed – everyone (except D.) is observing everyone else. The situation evokes Foucault's theory that the panoptic model encourages the public – indeed, anyone – to subject the institution to a surprise inspection and thus appropriate the role of panoptic authority, for "any member of society will have the right to come and see with his own eyes how the schools, hospitals, factories, prisons function. There is no risk, therefore, that the increase of power created by the panoptic machine may degenerate into tyranny" – anyone can "come and observe any of the observers."⁴⁴⁰ Greene's Lido suggests that while such a model may indeed suppress tyranny in the monarchical sense of the word, it nevertheless encourages a different kind of tyranny, the compulsion to conform or, in the language of Mill, "the tyranny of the majority."⁴⁴¹ In Greene's Lido, everyone observes everyone else, and is in turn observed. The tyranny of the place is therefore twofold – for the individual is simultaneously the agent and the object of surveillance, both coercing conformity and coerced to conform to the culture of the resort.

⁴³⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 206.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴⁴¹ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1867), 3. For Mill (and Greene) "Social tyranny [is] more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself" (3).

The passage draws a further correlation between disciplinary and recreational space when D. remarks that his room number at the Lido “sounds like a convict’s.”⁴⁴² In Greene’s analysis, institutionalized leisure is indistinguishable from institutions of discipline. During a prison tour in *It’s a Battlefield*, the minister’s secretary mistakes an “execution shed” for a “gymnasium” or “billiards room.”⁴⁴³ Significantly, he also mistakes a school for a prison, linking education to recreation through the penal apparatus of the state. The error suggests that sites of regulation, sport, and instruction are akin. In fact, Greene intimates that disciplinary regimes embrace the doctrines of the new recreation and its expectation of healthful living spaces. In a draft of the novel the prison teaches its prisoners the importance of health and fitness. Transferring the prisoner Drover to a new cell, the warder promises warm quarters with good air, “beautifully ventilated [as] the cells are,” an ironic interlude echoing modernist demands for wholesome designs.⁴⁴⁴ The prison also endorses a sporting zest for competition, the warder expressing his keenness for card games and his admiration for a condemned man who is a “real sportsman” and “plays poker” with the guards.⁴⁴⁵

The same sporting spirit is alive in the Lido, where the games arranged by the management might as well be compulsory. Conceived for people who are “great...on physical fitness,” the Lido’s games are “organized” by a “sports secretary” who helps plan the day.⁴⁴⁶ This of course mocks the “organized fun” Greene abhorred, that form of leisure which capitulates to authority for scheduling and other modes of direction. In Greene’s view this

⁴⁴²Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 195.

⁴⁴³ Greene, *It’s a Battlefield*, 15.

⁴⁴⁴ Graham Greene, *It’s a Battlefield*, Holograph with author inserts and revisions, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Compare the warder’s appreciation of ventilated, hygienic space to Corbusier’s demand for good “ventilating...abundant lighting, all hygienic needs met” in Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 241.

⁴⁴⁵ Greene, *It’s a Battlefield*. Holograph at Harry Ransom Center, Austin, TX.

⁴⁴⁶ Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 195-196.

regimentation resembles military training, a resemblance which comes into clearer focus when the Lido's young athletes spontaneously form a citizens' police corps. Led by the Lido's prospective manager who "had obviously been entering into the life of the place," the young men take it upon themselves to arrest D., by now a fugitive.⁴⁴⁷ Notably, this confederacy comes into being inside the "recreation centre" at the base of the tower, a spatial affirmation of recreation's supportive services to central authority.⁴⁴⁸

Although the holiday camps were not overtly political, it is instructive to note that Greene was conscious of nationalist undercurrents in institutions of sport and leisure.⁴⁴⁹ By the eve of the Second World War, Butlin had "divided the camp into four Houses, largely because he had learned that even when they were relaxing the English, as a nation, love to be in competition for something. So each House [named after a branch of the royal family] was duly given the opportunity to fight for honours for anything from athletics, football, swimming, cricket and dancing."⁴⁵⁰ That this fierce fighting spirit of the English "as a nation" is coded in nationalist terms was obvious to Greene, who ironically noted that the Butlin dining halls were "loyally called Gloucester and Kent after the two royal dukes."⁴⁵¹

The fundamental nationalism of the holiday camp informs the behavior of the Lido's militia-like band. The self-appointed police of the recreation room base their authority on a belief in English preeminence and a distrust of D. as a foreigner. Citing English superiority, they

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 197-198.

⁴⁴⁹ See Bruce Peter, *Form Follows Fun: Modernism and Modernity in British Pleasure Architecture, 1925-1940* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 118. Peter observes that the message of the Butlin camps was not so much political as commercial, pursuing Butlin's goal to develop "a solid brand identity...[unlike] any before, involving not only the architecture, but also the furnishings, the staff uniforms, the catchphrases, music, entertainment and rituals."

⁴⁵⁰ North, *The Butlin Story*, 64.

⁴⁵¹ Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 91.

presume that D. is guilty because the English police suspect him and are infallible.⁴⁵² Inflated with xenophobia, they recall a fellow sportsman's report of rampant lawlessness abroad and inform D., who is wanted for murder: "it's a mistake you foreigners make. In your own country you kill each other and nobody asks questions, but...[you can't] do that sort of thing in England," home to "the best police force in the world."⁴⁵³

That this chauvinism should dominate a holiday camp underscores the relationship between sport and recreation and the interests of the state. Greene presents the holiday camp as a product of national investment: in the same language as the 1937 Physical Training and Recreation Act's call for "gymnasiums, playing fields, [and] swimming baths," the Lido boasts "a gymnasium...playing fields, [and] swimming pools," a realization of the legislative contract and its goal of national security⁴⁵⁴—for behind such subsidies was the understanding that a fit populace would make for a stronger armed force in the event of another military engagement. According to Lord Dawson, funding the holiday camps would help to build up "a fit race; fit not only in body, but as citizens."⁴⁵⁵ Such claims alluded to and were bolstered by fears that the average working class man was unfit to serve as a soldier.⁴⁵⁶ In response one solution looked to athletic training as a form of peacetime preparation for combat.⁴⁵⁷ Such military preparations

⁴⁵² Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 201. When D. protests that "in England people are supposed to be guilty until proven innocent," the leader of the gang, Captian Curry, counters: "Oh yes...that's right. But of course the police don't arrest a man unless they've got the right dope."

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 201, 199.

⁴⁵⁴ "Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937," 3. Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 195.

⁴⁵⁵ Quoted in Ward and Hardy, *Goodnight Campers!*, 51. The quote is taken from Lord Dawson's speech on the Second Reading of the Camps Bill in the House of Lords, 1939.

⁴⁵⁶ See Darling, *Re-forming Britain*, 51-53. Many of those who were conscripted to serve in the Boer and Great Wars were found to be physically incapable; the national interest in health thus represented an interest in national security.

⁴⁵⁷ As a measure of the period's growing interest in sports training for national security purposes, we might compare Doyle's "Sports," written between the World Wars, to his earlier unpublished manuscript on the causes of World War I, composed during the First World War. While the later piece considers sports training a form of preparation for military service, the earlier piece disparages the "young athletic men" who have been too busy "playing football or cricket" to prepare for war. See Conan Doyle,

influenced the planning and surely also the culture of the holiday camps.⁴⁵⁸ In fact, Butlin's camps not only doubled as military barracks, but were built for the purpose.⁴⁵⁹

IV. Games, Play, and Exercise: The Militarization of Sport

The way in which recreation was pressed into the service of national defense helps us understand the aversion to sport pervading Greene's work and the personal agonies of his childhood. Greene's physical education sought to turn the children of his school at Berkhamsted into battle-ready servicemen. It was no coincidence that the school acquired new playing grounds as World War I came into view, and like most of his generation the young Greene practiced military drills and marches, learned to handle a rifle, and generally grew up in a world where physical fitness and sport were connected to training for the Front.⁴⁶⁰ Despite social pressures to the contrary, Greene resisted the injunction to join in the zeitgeist of nationalist athleticism. In his former schoolmate's opinion, Greene "didn't play games well. He wasn't in a school team or a house team. His physical participation was minimal."⁴⁶¹ In fact he so disliked the school's fitness programs that he tried to "hobble" himself with a pen-knife in order to be

Untitled Article on The Causes of World War I, Holograph with author's emendations, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin; and also Doyle's "Sports," Holograph inserts on sports for unidentified work, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

⁴⁵⁸ See Peter, *Form Follows Fun*, 119. Peter points out that the period's "strong vein of militarism...spilled over into leisure time in relation to health, recreation and fitness. This had consequences for the planning and layout of entertainment venues and this was particularly true of holiday camps."

⁴⁵⁹ See North, *The Butlin Story*, 76, 87. When war broke out, the War Minister contracted Butlin to build "a holiday camp as well as a military establishment"—that is, a military establishment that could be converted to a holiday camp, and vice-versa. The conversion from military to holiday camp would be "pathetically simple," Butlin thought, and carried out the conversion after the war, establishing a holiday camp at Filey "along lines that would make it suitable for Service use if another emergency occurred." The example illustrates the way in which holiday camps and barracks were designed to be interchangeable.

⁴⁶⁰ Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume One, 1904-1939* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), 53, 58.

⁴⁶¹ Quoted in Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 1, 70.

“excused gym.”⁴⁶² Understood in the period’s political terms, Greene’s rejection of school-organized athletics constituted a rejection of nationalist calls to arms or, at the very least, a rebuff to the regimentation now required of sport.

Reaching back to his youth, Greene’s antipathy to state-controlled sport takes a form of flippant satire familiar to the short-lived magazine he edited, *Night and Day*. For example, the sardonic “England in Deep Waters” remarks that the nation, presently “sloppy” in sports, is nevertheless witnessing “vast and moderately expensive schemes by which Britain is to become physically fit,” meaning that “school-children will be dragooned into dressing up in shorts and doing a quantity of hips-firm-knees-bend nonsense, with or without tossing around some dummy rifles.”⁴⁶³ Possibly written by Greene, this piece was certainly edited by him and is consonant with his critique of physical education as a series of lessons on the fundamentals of soldiering. For “England in Deep Waters,” Britain’s ambitions to militarize civilians forebodes fascism in that England’s physical education emulates German athletes’ ability to “march...straight” and assume the uniform movements of an armed unit.⁴⁶⁴

The implication that the so-called valor of the soldier is in reality no more than a reflex of training and indoctrination elucidates Greene’s contempt for overeager heroism. In *The Ministry of Fear* Arthur Rowe calls on a friend only to find that that friend’s wife recently died when a wall collapsed during the bomb raid of the previous night. A relief worker and a hockey player, her self-sacrifice is surreal and absurd in light of its relationship to sport. The mantelpiece of her home displays “four silver cups with the names of [hockey] teams engraved” on them, and

⁴⁶² Marie- Françoise Allain, *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Greene*, trans. Guido Waldman (London, Sydney, Toronto: The Bodley Head, 1983), 34.

⁴⁶³ “England in Deep Waters.” *Night and Day*, ed. Christopher Hawtree (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985), 67.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

Henry, her bereaved husband, bitterly remarks that his wife rushed to help during the bombardment because “she thought she’d win another of those blasted pots.”⁴⁶⁵ The man’s mother reminds him, in the language of sport, that “she was playing for England, Henry,” and adds that (as a Union Jack is unattainable) “we ought to lay a hockey-stick beside the uniform” adorning her coffin.⁴⁶⁶ Combining symbols of sport and state service, the passage with its dry humor derides that athletic fervor which is an instrument of power. By the time the post warden predicts that the deceased will be hailed as a “heroine” and awarded another of those blasted pots, “the George Medal—posthumously,”⁴⁶⁷ the very idea of courage and athletic prowess has been reduced to a kind of sad and mindless savagery, registered in the “furniture [which] had an air of flimsiness” from having been battered around by the woman, causing the narrator to speculate that “perhaps in her home the hockey-player had reacted from the toughness of the field.”⁴⁶⁸

However the game might have influenced her behavior at home, the deceased woman will not actually be receiving the George Medal. The George Medal, “intended primarily for civilians” who showed “great bravery” during the Blitz, was not to be granted posthumously.⁴⁶⁹ Greene was no believer in awards from the state,⁴⁷⁰ and the post warden’s error indicates that for Greene the royal warrant for this medal is especially dubious. Disqualified on account of death, the would-be heroine’s ineligibility for recognition suggests that the state acknowledges

⁴⁶⁵ Greene, *The Ministry of Fear*, 95.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 96

⁴⁶⁹ Instituted by George VI in 1941, the George Medal was not awarded posthumously until 1977, when the warrant was amended by Elizabeth II. See the original “Royal Warrant for the George Medal,” *The London Gazette* (Jan. 31, 1941); and Elizabeth II’s amended “Royal Warrant for the George Medal,” *The London Gazette* (Dec. 6, 1977).

⁴⁷⁰ Greene famously declined the knighthood.

individuals only insofar as they remain of use and in its service. The point is reinforced by the Major whom Rowe meets in a rural asylum. The Major, who “disapproved of civilians,” had “always kept himself fit and ready to be of use” militarily.⁴⁷¹ Debilitated by trauma, this man who views his health as a state asset is treated as one, removed to the rural asylum and forgotten by the state which can no longer use him. What the Major has failed to recognize is that “if you are going to be kept alive by institutions run by and paid for by the State, you must accept the State’s right to economise when necessary.”⁴⁷² For Greene, the state’s esteem of its citizens is limited to their utility for the state.

Evaluated in military terms and devalued in death, civilians learn to identify with one community and disassociate from others through, Greene asserts, the culture of sport. Reflecting on his experience at school, Greene remarks that “games and I should like to be kept rigidly apart, for games are used more than anything else to teach...narrow loyalties.”⁴⁷³ These loyalties are narrow in that they associate the athlete with an institution which is exclusive and encourages homogenous communities.⁴⁷⁴ At the same time the athlete learns to direct aggression outwards at rivals. Although this aggression is to be sublimated for the good of society Greene also observes that the athlete learns a crude form of rivalry and not “sportsmanship,” suggesting that the combativeness imbibed through athletics lacks integrity and might exceed its intended uses.⁴⁷⁵

Greene’s intimation that sport does not displace aggression so much as cultivate it for institutional purposes also asks whether that militancy which is learned as a game might not

⁴⁷¹ Greene, *The Ministry of Fear*, 145.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 220.

⁴⁷³ Graham Greene, *The Old School* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), 256.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 256. Greene observes that school sports teach “narrow loyalties” to the homogenous body, male and affluent, of the school.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

foster an enjoyment of martial action for its own sake. Greene's spies, agents, and militarized civilians often experience a sense of personal gratification in acts of violence committed less for duty than for amusement. Although conforming to the plans of the state, these aggressors revel in games of violence not for national or other concerns so much as for the sheer pleasure of participating in contests of guile and force. When Rowe confronts his enemy, *The Ministry of Fear's* sadistic Hilfe is "sleeping as though he had lain down after a game."⁴⁷⁶ Waking to find the revengeful Rowe hovering murderously near, he smiles "with amusement...as though they...had been playing a game."⁴⁷⁷ Of course, the object of Hilfe's "game" is to eliminate Rowe. Hilfe's pleasure in the sport of destruction exceeds nationalism even as it exceeds the basic rationale of self-preservation, his gamesmanship bespeaking a mind that has learned violence as a kind of pastime to pursue as a source of fun and diversion. When Hilfe is captured he regards the German bombers circling London and refers to his compatriots as fellow sportsmen, saying "with a curious wistfulness, 'What fun they are having up there,'" for:

He was like a mortally sick man saying farewell to the sports of his contemporaries: no fear, only regret. He had failed to bring off the record himself in destruction. Five people only were dead: it hadn't been much of an innings compared with what they were having up there; wherever men killed his spirit moved in obscure companionship.⁴⁷⁸

Moving beyond national allegiances, Hilfe identifies with the bombers not as fellow countrymen but as fellow contenders competing in wreaking carnage. In Greene's analysis the problem is transnational, the pleasure in violence pandemic, and the English, too, have developed a taste for the application of force.

⁴⁷⁶ Greene, *The Ministry of Fear*, 244.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 258.

Written before the Second World War, Greene's *This Gun for Hire* scrutinizes a youth culture whose sense of 'fun' and physical potency fulminates in expressions of sadism. In the prescient novel Britain is on the brink of war, and during a gas drill the young medical students are delegated to comb the streets and 'rescue' anyone they find not wearing a mask. The students' leader Buddy raises their role in the gas drill to a mission of national importance, planning to round up "conchies" (conscientious objectors), pelt them with soot and flour and detain them in the mortuary, explaining that the goal is to abase people who think "so little about their country that they wouldn't even take the trouble to put on a gas mask."⁴⁷⁹ A mere pretext, Buddy's nationalism camouflages his deeper desire to dominate and degrade others.

That the company should use a civil defense drill as an opportunity to indulge a flair for small-town terrorism speaks to Greene's lack of confidence in the motives of public-spirited bands of brothers. The group cites selfless nationalism but actually coalesces around a shared exultation in the exercise of power and strength which their authority as the town's representatives permits them. Far from serving the good of the community, they make "predatory" rounds in search of "victim[s]," feeling that the "whole gas practice would have been a dull, sober, official piece of routine" if they had not turned it into a game.⁴⁸⁰ After brutalizing and "wreck[ing] the room" of a fellow student, Buddy and company are "immediately happy and at ease, exerting themselves physically like young bulls."⁴⁸¹

Greene's suggestion that assertions of nationalism provide an occasion to satisfy impulses of violence learned through militarized athleticism is evident in Buddy's robust body. Looking "forward with pleasure and excitement to war," Buddy "keep[s]...fit" so as to be ready

⁴⁷⁹ Greene, *This Gun for Hire*, 122.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 122, 120.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

for combat.⁴⁸² His physical preparation not only requires an outlet for aggression but registers aggression in terms of the physical pleasure he associates with war. “Strong, coarse, vital, a town bull,” Buddy relishes “a feeling of physical well-being” as he plans “to do [harm]...physically” to his classmate.⁴⁸³ In another encounter, he finds a “conchie” on the street, inflates “his chest,” swells “his biceps,” and feels “the satisfaction of superior strength. He’d punch his nose for him if he didn’t come quietly.”⁴⁸⁴ Buddy’s satisfaction in violence is visceral and voluptuous, as if to say that the body developed as an instrument of assault takes its pleasure in the performance of its function. In Greene’s estimation such a person in their lack of will and autonomy, in their domesticated role to the state, is less human than animal, for “like a great beast which is in need of exercise, which has fed on too much hay, Buddy Ferguson was aware of his body. He felt his biceps; he strained for action.”⁴⁸⁵ Recalling that Greene’s critique of militarization is imbedded in his critique of modernist theories of art, here again Greene breaks from modernist luminaries like Herbert Read. For Read, the human body is the site of intuition—from its “harmony” and “proportion” one learns to “apprehend” the elegance of industrial forms.⁴⁸⁶ For Greene, the body is a product of ideology, conditioned by martial systems in civilian culture to sense pleasure in violence.

V. **Martial Violence in Popular Culture: Umbrella Stands, Boys’ Magazines, and War Films**

Greene adopts the language of commerce in order to express the civilian desire for experiences of war, implying that such desires are reinforced by the market. During the Blitz, Greene writes in an essay entitled “At Home” that “violence comes to us more easily because it

⁴⁸² Ibid., 127-128.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 122.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 127. The stranger is the fugitive Raven, and Buddy’s bubble is quickly burst.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁸⁶ Read, *Art and Industry*, 29.

was so long expected;”⁴⁸⁷ and its victims thus “accept violence so happily, with so little surprise, impatience, or resentment” because pre-war culture prepared them for it.⁴⁸⁸ This preparation is couched in commercial terms in Greene’s work. The holiday camps are of course businesses which meet and build demand for what Greene considers a military-like experience. Likewise, Greene speaks of a kind of tourism of violence by which people travel to “corners” of the world where political instability fulfills their “craving” to be in close proximity to the dissolution of peace.⁴⁸⁹

This commercialization of war reappears in the transformation of martial artefacts into ornaments for the home. In D.’s hotel room in London the foreign agent finds “an umbrella rack in the form of a shell-case” and is reminded of the civil war he left behind, reflecting with bitter amusement that “we could make an industry out of that, with all the shells we have at home. Empty shell-cases for export. Give a tasteful umbrella stand this Christmas from one of the devastated cities.”⁴⁹⁰ The hotel’s casual treatment of violence and its absorption into the world of interior design are symptomatic of a social pathology diagnosable in consumer goods. Repurposed as merchandise, the bombshells-cum-umbrella rack connote an apparent peacetime which is actually permeated by the materials and callousness of a culture inured to the prospect of war. Tellingly, D.’s last word on the rack (“give a tasteful umbrella stand this Christmas from one of the devastated cities”) evokes an advertisement which, according to the data collection group Mass-Observation, was a manner of teaching.⁴⁹¹ In its *Enquiry into People’s Homes* the

⁴⁸⁷ Graham Greene, “At Home,” *Collected Essays*, (New York: The Viking Press, Inc, 1961), 447.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 450.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 448.

⁴⁹⁰ Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 52.

⁴⁹¹ Founded by Tom Harrison and Charles Madge in 1937, Mass-Observation was an organization designed to catalogue and establish an understanding of English thought and behavior. For an overview of Mass-Observation, see Gardiner, *The Thirties*, 338.

organization proclaims that advertising is educational.⁴⁹² Understood in these terms, D.'s satirical blurb implicates the commercial sphere as an agent of instruction, teaching the consumer to be as familiar with the fallout of war as they might be with an object as common as an umbrella stand.

Of course, Buddy's notion of war is also determined by popular culture, his articulation of heroism paralleling that of the boys' adventure magazine. Assuming the adventure story's tone of daring and pluck, Buddy imagines himself a "leader of men. No Red Cross work for him when war broke: Buddy Ferguson, company commander; Buddy Ferguson, the daredevil of the trenches."⁴⁹³ During the First World War Greene saw soldiers aping similar language from boys' magazines, adopting a superficial dauntlessness and exaggerated bravado.⁴⁹⁴ Buddy's own imitation of the popular form calls attention to the easy transmission of ideology via the products of popular culture, an example of Greene's view that "all writing for schoolboys is propaganda for the established order."⁴⁹⁵ In the case of Buddy, Greene parodies popular writing in order to examine its ramifications in Buddy's benighted dreams of trench warfare and the way in which those dreams introduce a kind of sanctioned aggression into civilian life.

The scene crystallizes Greene's concerns that the established order reaffirms itself even during periods of apparent liberty. Buddy believes he is free from restraint, self-determining, and able to do as he pleases, a sense of license which he perceives as a carnivalesque reversal of

⁴⁹² *An Enquiry into People's Homes: A Report Prepared by Mass-Observation for the Advertising Service Guild* (London: John Murray, 1943), iii-iv. Commissioned by the Advertising Service Guild, the report contends that advertising informs people about housing "equipment" and home design.

⁴⁹³ Greene, *This Gun For Hire*, 121.

⁴⁹⁴ Compare Buddy's self-promotions to the aggrandized memory of a graduate of Greene's Berkhamsted in the school's magazine of November, 1914. Eulogized by a fellow soldier, the Berkhamstedian is commemorated as "the life and soul of our lot. When the shells were bursting over our heads, he would buck us up with his humour...but when we got to close quarters it was he who was in the thick of it and didn't he fight!" Quoted in Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 1, 56.

⁴⁹⁵ Graham Greene, *The Pleasure Dome: Collected Film Criticism 1935-1940*, ed. John Russell Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 150.

power. Confident that the transformation of the gas drill into a prank “conferred complete freedom from control,” Buddy reflects that “even a surgeon,” the most senior authority, “wasn’t safe today if *he* [Buddy] gave an order” to harass that superior.⁴⁹⁶ Yet true as this seems, Buddy is nevertheless subject to a way of thinking, speaking, and acting which has been prescribed for him by popular fiction. Perhaps this is why in “At Home” Greene likens the flames from an air raid to “a sticky coloured plate from the *Boy’s Own Paper*.”⁴⁹⁷ For Greene the atmosphere of the boy’s adventure story is one of recruitment for the defense of the status quo, and the violence of the Blitz is the logical outcome of a society whose architectural theory, athletics, and popular culture has been mobilized for military purposes.

These three domains overlap in Greene’s critique of *The Lion has Wings*, England’s first World War Two propaganda feature. The film, which began production before war was even declared, seeks to reassure its audience that Britain is invulnerable to attack and culturally superior in matters of architecture, sport, and leisure. Produced in a rush, the film presents a disjointed combination of documentary and fictional segments. The documentary-style introduction boldly announces that “this is Britain, where we believe in freedom” before elaborating on the national achievements of

A new Britain in which everyone of us might have a home of which he was proud, a gigantic task we undertook, to re-house the urban population in well-built, well-lighted, well-ventilated flats...a Britain of new factories as well as new homes, where people can work in healthy surroundings, a Britain of new schools where our sons and our daughters are equipped for life and taught to be good citizens of their country and of the world, in which the importance of physical health and clean living are taught.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶ Greene, *This Gun For Hire*, 121.

⁴⁹⁷ Greene, “At Home,” 450.

⁴⁹⁸ *The Lion has Wings*, directed by Adrian Brunel, Brian Desmond Hurst, and Michael Powell (1939; London: London Film Productions and Alexander Korda Film Productions, 2010), DVD.

Following this opening, unmistakably derived from modernist design in its emphasis on fitness and hygiene,⁴⁹⁹ the film contrasts British peace to German belligerence, mounts a slipshod recreation of the Kiel Battle, and slides into a purely fictional drama centering on Ralph Richardson's and Merle Oberon's portrayals of a Royal Air Force officer and volunteer nurse, husband and wife, doing their bit for the war effort.⁵⁰⁰

Writing as a reviewer for *The Spectator*, Greene dismisses the film on its opening night as poorly wrought "propaganda."⁵⁰¹ In particular Greene mocks the film's closing remark that England is fighting for "truth, and beauty, and fair play, and...kindliness," observing that this is an unconvincing "statement of war aims."⁵⁰² The review also ridicules the film's lack of realism in its recreation of the Kiel Battle, "fought in the Denham film studios," in which "all the deaths are German and all the heroics English."⁵⁰³ Moreover, Greene recognizes the film's economy of architecture and sport and takes apart the methods by which each is transmitted as propaganda: the freedom of British "swimmers in a bathing-pool" juxtaposed to the "goosestep" and "grey lines" of Hitler's army; the tactic of repetition in the litany of England's new architectural accomplishments (its tedium paraphrased by Greene: "and the new workers' flats and the new hospitals and the new schools") against Germany's single-minded militarism.⁵⁰⁴ For Greene, the

⁴⁹⁹ Indeed, this section of the narration might derive directly from Gropius, who was a friend of the producer Alexander Korda and designed his Denham Film Studios where scenes of *The Lion has Wings* were shot.

⁵⁰⁰ For a fuller account of the film and a sharp reading of its perpetuation of upper class privilege, see Neil Rattigan, *This is England: British Film and the People's War, 1939-1945* (London: Associated University Press, 2001), 253-263.

⁵⁰¹ Graham Greene, "The Lion has Wings," *The Graham Greene Film Reader: Reviews, Essays, Interviews & Film Stories*, ed. David Parkinson (New York: Theatre Book Publishers, 1994), 341. Though the film was a success financially, the producer Korda himself admitted that it was "a piece of crude propaganda." See Charles Drazin, *Korda: Britain's Only Movie Mogul* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2002), 225.

⁵⁰² Greene, "The Lion has Wings," 342.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 341.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 341.

juxtaposition of British architecture and recreation with German militarism would have been an especially tenuous binary. In his view, the “swimmers in the bathing pool” might be the rabid nationalists of the Lido, “the new workers’ flats” the razed wasteland of *Brighton Rock*, and “the new schools” indistinguishable from the prison of *It’s a Battlefield*.

Months later Greene was still thinking about the film, and finds space in an unrelated review to praise another critic’s assessment that *The Lion has Wings* is “puerile” “propaganda.”⁵⁰⁵ Few other critics were as honest or perceptive. A survey by Mass-Observation found that “83% of Press criticism was favourable to *The Lion has Wings*, and 58% praised the film greatly,” perhaps from a wartime feeling of civic duty.⁵⁰⁶ By contrast, Greene uses the film review as a vehicle for demystification, revealing the processes by which architectural theory, leisure, and athletics are woven into the fabric of nationalism.

In this regard Greene’s critical work carries on the project of his fiction, and his criticism comes to inform his reactions to the bombing of civilian space. Albeit obliquely, *The Lion has Wings* resurfaces in Greene’s account during the Blitz of a bombed house “in Woburn Square neatly sliced in half”:

With its sideways exposure it looked like a Swiss Chalet: there were a pair of skiing sticks hanging in the attic, and in another room a grand piano cocked one leg over the abyss. The combination of music and skiing made one think of the Sanger family and Constant Nymphs dying pathetically of private sorrow to popular applause.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵ See Graham Greene, “*The Real Glory*” and “*Twenty-One Days*,” *The Graham Greene Film Reader: Reviews, Essays, Interviews & Film Stories*, ed., David Parkinson (New York: Theatre Book Publishers, 1994), 363. Here Greene commends *The Documentary News Letter* for giving *The Lion has Wings* “the treatment it deserves.” That treatment is located under the paper’s review titled “*The Lion has Wings*,” January, 1940, 6.

⁵⁰⁶ “Public Reaction to *The Lion has Wings*; A Survey made by Mass-Observation,” *Documentary News Letter*, 2 (February, 1940), 5.

⁵⁰⁷ Greene, “At Home,” 447.

The reference to *The Constant Nymph* serves as a reference to that film's director, Adrian Brunel, and would remind Greene's readers of Brunel's latest (and, as it would turn out, last) film, *The Lion has Wings*, which, topical and popular, would linger in the public mind.⁵⁰⁸ Thus in the middle of a description of a bombed home Greene alludes to one of the authors of a film "preaching [the] invincibility" of England's impenetrable system of defense which the film promised would repel all invaders and prevent such an attack.⁵⁰⁹ The bombed home in Greene's essay belies the film's promises, exposes its affected optimism, and implicates the film in the ongoing acculturation of the British to the conditions of war. Greene's assertion that the British are acclimated and "at home" in "the bombed cities" suggests a cultural normalization and production of violence which the film, like the state's stakes in health culture and recreation, helped to establish.⁵¹⁰

VI. A Way of Escape

Elsewhere, Greene frames the voyeuristic compulsion to gaze on a bombed home as an invasion and an assault:

a person's home has a kind of innocence. When a house-front gave way before an explosion and showed the iron bed, the chairs, the hideous picture and the chamber-pot, you had a sense of rape: intrusion into a stranger's home was an act of lust.⁵¹¹

Here, to obtrude on another's privacy is to sexually violate, and the disquieting equivalence of the gaze with an act of rape reflects Greene's discomfort with all forms of surveillance.

Intensely private, Greene denounced the lack of solitude at Berkhamsted and detested the

⁵⁰⁸ The survey by Mass-Observation reports that "The film was widely seen; in at least two cinemas it broke all existing records despite concurrent showings." See "Public Reaction to *The Lion has Wings*; A Survey made by Mass-Observation," *Documentary News Letter*, 5.

⁵⁰⁹ Greene, "The Lion has Wings," 342.

⁵¹⁰ Greene, "At Home," 450.

⁵¹¹ Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 136.

boarding school's "communal society which afforded no individual privacy, where even solitary walks were forbidden."⁵¹² Formulated in terms of institutional management, Greene's understanding of breaches of privacy extends to the bombsite, and the ruin represents the life laid bare and thus degraded by the community. The emphasis on the act of looking compliments the "Lido," where peering in on the private lives of others is a means of control, domination, and violence.

With its emphasis on the gaze as an act of assault and a limitation on freedom, the description informs Greene's later surprising and complex nostalgia for the Blitz. That nostalgia can in part be explained by the lack of surveillance, the escape from stringent social organization, that occurs during the moment of bombing and its immediate aftermath:

During the Blitz one loved London in particular. Awful as the war was, one is nostalgic for the feeling of that period. London became a series of villages. During a blackout you could see the stars and the moon even on Oxford Street, and flares dropping like chandeliers. In the morning there was the sound of broken glass being swept up. It wasn't white, as you'd think, but blue-green.⁵¹³

In this description of the blackout the gaze is inoperable as an instrument of social order or assault: the gazer gazes on no human subjects, is thus free from functioning on behalf of discipline, power, or force, and is in turn free from scrutiny. The scene is not rationalized but aestheticized in a swell of unexpected sensations—the loss of the immediate visual field, the sudden celestial view, the sounds and surprising blue-green of the glass—which arrests the linear temporal flow of the text and prompts a sense of hush and wonder at the rich diversity of experience.

⁵¹² Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 1, 41, 69.

⁵¹³ Graham Greene, "Places," TS with author's revisions, Letters and Papers of Graham Greene, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

The “flares dropping like chandeliers” against “the stars and the moon” convey an equally unexpected, celebratory sense of freedom. Of particular interest is Greene’s evocation of a fixture of design – the chandeliers – coming unfixed during this moment of liberation. The figuration might be read as a celebration of Herbert Read’s admission that in design it is the deviations from formal rules which constitute “an affirmation of our freedom of will, an escape from determinism in art.”⁵¹⁴ For Greene, determinism in art leads to other forms of social control, and a break from determinism in art represents an opportunity to break beyond prescribed behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. This is why Greene glories in the fragmentation of the city into “a series of villages,” decentralized and thus antithetical to the goals of the new architecture. Seeking to incorporate fragmented social space into a single organizational system, modernist architecture apprehends the urban zone as an organic unit, the part pertaining to the whole, and the entire structure manageable so long as the new architect “extend his researches beyond the house to the street, from the street to the more complete organism which is the city itself.”⁵¹⁵ In Corbusier’s words, “a well-mapped out scheme” for a community “inevitably imposes discipline on the inhabitants.”⁵¹⁶ For Greene, any such organizational system—in architecture, athletics, or art—psychologically, physically, and culturally conscripts the individual into its mode of being.

⁵¹⁴ Read, *Art and Industry*, 29.

⁵¹⁵ Gropius, “Appraisal,” 69.

⁵¹⁶ Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 242-243.

Conclusion

The underlying point of this research has been to argue for a literary modernism that does not eschew but that engages with popular literary forms like detective fiction. In their interactions, each genre reveals the other's participations in intellectual and social debates. Classic as well as later popular detective fiction is critically attentive to intellectual problems and how they ramify in social life. And modernist fiction is politically grounded and not interested only in aesthetic experimentation. Modernist and popular detective fiction thus relate to each other not only in terms of formal and stylistic devices; they also throw into relief one another's attitudes toward arguments in the sciences and social sciences. Their engagements in these arguments contradict modernist critical discourse's claims that the popular genre reduces real intellectual problems to juvenile games and that modernist experimentalism is beyond mundane politics. Actually, both forms of writing develop complex questions concerning the relationship of scientific knowledge to social problems. Both examine the rhetoric circumscribing the sciences, and suggest that the "facts" are always culturally refracted. And both distrust claims to objective empiricism and link supposedly disinterested social theories to the perpetuation of nationalist, imperialist, and class-based systems of social privilege and disenfranchisement.

In making these claims my intention is not to collapse distinctions. Clearly, modernist and popular detective fiction are separate genres of writing. A whole century of criticism teases out their dissimilarities. And indeed, passages of the preceding chapters speak to their divergences as well as their convergences. I emphasize the latter because they have been underappreciated by criticism influenced by the modernist critical strategy of dissociating "serious" literature from popular fiction. As a corrective to this critical tradition and as a contribution to recent revisionist scholarship, my object has been to argue that the two literary

forms share more similarities than has generally been acknowledged, and that these similarities, too, reward investigation.

With the exception of the opening chapter's experiment in distant reading, I have supported this position with the close readings of texts – and time and space demanded omissions. For example, my study omits a discussion of detective fiction's early pioneers, most conspicuously, Edgar Allen Poe and Wilkie Collins. And it also neglects Golden Age detective writers like Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers. But we might reasonably ask whether such writers belong to the category of "popular" fiction as it is understood by modernist criticism and its post war successors. Albeit begrudgingly, Eliot acknowledges Poe's place in the pantheon of high literature.⁵¹⁷ Less ambivalently, he praises Collins whom he associates with high literary art.⁵¹⁸ And later criticism in the modernist vein argues that Golden Age detective fiction (unlike its classic forerunner) belongs to the category of serious literature.⁵¹⁹ My aim here has been to complicate the modernist idea of a "great divide" between high and low literature. And so in choosing popular texts to read beside the modernist canon I focused on those that modernist criticism itself deemed decidedly low and against which it claimed to have defined its standards.

Significantly, critics from the post war period to the present day have followed literary modernism in its goal to dissociate high from low literature. Reinforcing the idea that an unbridgeable chasm separates serious from popular fiction, later twentieth-century and contemporary criticism argues that post war experimentalism adopts the formulae and concerns

⁵¹⁷ T. S. Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry," *The Hudson Review*, 2 (Autumn, 1949), 327-342.

⁵¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, "Homage to Wilkie Collins: An omnibus review of nine mystery novels," *New Criterion*, (January 1927).

⁵¹⁹ Michael Holquist, for example, considers the Golden Era detective novel to be more like high literature and less formulaic than its classic forerunner. See Holquist's "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Postwar Fiction," in *The Poetics of Murder*, eds. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 164.

of classic detective fiction only to parody, subvert, and negate them. Writers as far-ranging in time, space, language, and style as Italo Calvino, Vladimir Nabokov, Flann O'Brien, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Jorge Luis Borges, and, more recently, Umberto Eco, J. G. Ballard, Thomas Pynchon, and Paul Auster are just some of the many contributors to this strain of experimental fiction who have, the argument goes, actively resisted and overturned the expectations of the classic detective story by, for example, leaving the text's mysteries unresolved and its social world in disorder.

Scholarship on such texts tends to define them against classic detective fiction. For Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, for example, classic detective stories like "Doyle's adventures... provided material for later writers to question and parody."⁵²⁰ In these later parodies of the classic form, the sleuth "finds himself confronting... insoluble mysteries" as well as "the sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence," implying that in the classic form the clues are reliable and the solutions straightforward.⁵²¹ Similarly, Stefano Tani sets up classic and mainstream detective fiction as the foil to post war experimentalism, arguing that the later experimental story subverts what, for Tani, are the classic form's ready solutions and faith in positivism.⁵²² And William V. Spanos likewise establishes the classic detective story as the antithesis to post war manipulations of the genre. For Spanos, the classic detective story is defined by a "rigid narrative sequence" which leads to a tidy conclusion and the comforting idea that the universe itself is ruled by rational laws.⁵²³ By contrast, the post war experimental novel

⁵²⁰ Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, "The Game's Afoot," in *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 4.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 2, 8.

⁵²² Stefano Tani, *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Illinois University Press, 1984).

⁵²³ William V. Spanos, "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination," *boundary*, 2 (Autumn, 1972) 150.

lacks closure and suggests that the world is neither immediately knowable nor ruled by human-like reason.

These and other theorists of this anti-genre have given it various names. For Merivale and Sweeney, the text which “parodies or subverts traditional detective conventions” is the “metaphysical detective story” – for it explores questions unanswerable by empirical science.⁵²⁴ For Elana Gomel, such stories explore deep questions of being and should thus be called “ontological detective stories.”⁵²⁵ And for Spanos and Tani, the texts of this explicitly “anti-” genre should simply be called “anti-detective” novels. This latter term seems to be the most popular among scholars, and for good reason. For to one degree or another, scholars of the anti-genre consider it just that: a reversal of “the conditions we have come to expect from the whodunit,” a form of parody which “violate[s] just about every” rule of the classic genre.⁵²⁶ Thus, for Bennett Kravitz, “the anti-detective genre is not a continuation of but rather a ‘transgression’ against detective fiction.”⁵²⁷ Kravitz is drawing on Tani’s similar stance, exhibiting a continuing trend to view the “anti-detective” novel as a form of writing which is directly opposed to the classic detective story.

Yet to suggest that the so-called anti-detective novel transgresses, violates, and opposes detective fiction is to assume that the earlier genre itself considered its ‘rules’ inviolable. In this manner, such arguments overlook the classic genre’s own tendency to travesty the very things it is supposed to hold dearest – its formulae, rules and conventions, and expressions of positivist

⁵²⁴ Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, “The Game’s Afoot,” 2.

⁵²⁵ Elana Gomel, “Mystery, Apocalypse and Utopia: The Case of the Ontological Detective Story,” *Science Fiction Studies*, 22 (November, 1995), 343-356.

⁵²⁶ Bennett Kravitz, “Thoughts on the Anti-Detective in Paul Auster’s ‘New York Trilogy,’ Adam Ross’ ‘Mister Peanut,’ and Martha Grimes’ ‘The Old Wine Shades,” *Studies in Popular Culture*, 36 (Autumn, 2013), 45-46.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

confidence in reason and science. One of the main claims for the anti-detective story is that it emphasizes “the inability of the detective to bring the case to a satisfactory conclusion, because he or she...cannot conclude with certainty whodunit, bring the criminal to justice, or even determine if a crime has been committed.”⁵²⁸ Yet the classic genre also abounds in unsolved crimes and mysteries, in error-ridden techniques of detection, wrongful arrests, bad reasoning and false solutions, and in detectives dumbfounded by the mysteries of their own methods of interpretation.

My argument therefore implies that a reappraisal of the post war anti-detective novel’s relationship to classic detective fiction is also in order. While it is obvious that the anti-detective novel draws on its modernist precursors – that, for example, Pynchon owes something to Joyce, and Ballard to Graham Greene⁵²⁹ - equally notable is the post war literary form’s connections to pre-modernist, popular detective fiction. For this traditional form is not straightforward, not purely formulaic, and not naïve in its treatments of rationalism. Its very venue – the popular magazine – evokes Bakhtinian dialogism insofar as the magazines’ stories comment on, mime, and mock each other. For as the classic genre is being established in the popular press, the same magazines that are publishing detective fiction are also publishing parodies of it, so that it is not uncommon to find a more straightforward detective story of the *Sherlock Holmes* variety appearing beside a roaring comedy of errors in a detective tale. But this dialogism also appears in individual stories, and to call a *Holmes* story straightforward is itself misleading – for even those apparently earnest approaches to the genre are often swimming in elements of self-parody.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 47-48.

⁵²⁹ Ballard praises Greene’s work in the short essay “Memories of Greenland,” in *A User’s Guide to the Millenium: Essays an Reviews* (New York: Picador, 1996), 137-139.

These elements of self-parody oppose the idea that the classic detective story is monologic. This idea, suggested by Todorov and taken up by the anti-detective school of criticism, argues that the detective story is ruled by polyphony, by different characters' interpretations of events, clues, and leads, until, that is, the great detective appears, explains everything, and effectively silences all other voices and interpretations.⁵³⁰ In this manner, the argument goes, classic detective fiction promotes a positivist perspective in which all mysteries can be rationally explained and all contrary voices forced to capitulate to the highest rational authority, to the soundest logic and evidence. However, the classic form is far from monologic, and it often traduces and ridicules authorities as they appear. Holmes, for example, calls Watson's representations of their cases "meretricious," depriving the good doctor of his claims to objective reporting.⁵³¹ And Holmes' own authority is also deflated, when, for instance, he fails to catch the criminals,⁵³² fails to decide with which party (suspect or client) the true guilt lies,⁵³³ suspects crime where there is none,⁵³⁴ finds that his "analytical skills" are "baffled," forcing him to work by means of "conjecture and surmise" rather than by reason,⁵³⁵ and bemoans the futility of reason in a world given to chance.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, "The Typology of Detective Fiction," in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Ithaca University Press, 1971), 45-46.

⁵³¹ Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Crooked Man," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume VI, July to December, 1893* (London: George Newnes Ltd), 23.

⁵³² See, for instance, Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume III, January to June, 1892* (London: George Newnes Ltd), 276-288.

⁵³³ Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume II, July to December, 1891* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 61-75.

⁵³⁴ Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Yellow Face," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly* (February, 1893), 162-172.

⁵³⁵ Conan Doyle, "The Five Orange Pips," in *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume II, July to December, 1891* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 481.

⁵³⁶ "Human reason," Holmes says, "is as far from an answer as ever" when it comes to the question of whether or not the universe is ruled by laws of reason. Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box," *The Strand Magazine, An Illustrated Monthly: Volume V, January to June, 1893* (London: George Newnes Ltd.), 73.

Critics who have formulated the theory of the anti-detective novel might be surprised to think that Holmes, too, “finds himself confronting...insoluble mysteries.”⁵³⁷ Yet, as such examples demonstrate, the classic detective story does in fact de-center voices of authority, does ridicule faith in empiricism, and does resist simple solutions and the kind of narrative closure in which all questions are answered in the simplest terms for the inactive reader. For these reasons, the classic genre is not a perfect negative of the anti-detective story. As with the modernist experimental novel, to suggest that post war anti-detective fiction is defined by its opposition to the earlier classic form is to miss an opportunity to examine the significance of the two literary forms’ points of comparison. Further, this line of analysis does a disservice to the complexity not only of these particular forms of popular fiction and literary experimentalism but also to the cultures that spawned them.

Criticism which devalues classic detective fiction lends itself to a similar devaluation or oversimplification of the society that popularized the classic genre. Michael Holquist, for example, argues that the classic detective story functioned as a source of comfort during a period of growing skepticism toward established truths. For Holquist, the detective story offered “relief and easy reassurance” that the “certainties of the nineteenth century” were not breaking down under attacks against rationalism.⁵³⁸ Though valuable, such arguments paint a picture of a popular readership harassed by anxieties and turning to the detective story to pacify fears of social dissolution. To me, this line of reasoning infantilizes a complex society and reduces both genres – classic detective fiction and its supposed literary counterparts – to the limited role of

⁵³⁷ Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, “The Game’s Afoot,” *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 2.

⁵³⁸ Michael Holquist, “Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Postwar Fiction,” in *The Poetics of Murder*, eds. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 163-164.

opposing forms. Further, such conclusions betray a wider academic unfamiliarity with the once-popular ephemera of the classic genre. And they also reveal an unwillingness to study the genre for its potential polyvalence.

This is not to underappreciate the work of critics who have sought to define and establish as a literary force the genre of post war anti-detective fiction. As Ralph Cohen reminds us, “generic differentiation serves” specific historical ends – genres are constructed by specific critical communities for the purposes of communicating new ways of understanding culture.⁵³⁹ The critical turn away from classic detective fiction during the 1970s-80s might very well have been more interested in arguing for the aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual value of postwar experimentalism than in devaluing the classic form. If this was the case, however, then classic detective fiction was sacrificed in order to establish the merits of the postwar anti-detective novel, which, like modernist literature before it, was defined by its departures from popular fiction. Unfortunately, this binary demarcation persists in today’s scholarship and thus remains an obstacle to the way we read the interpenetration of classic detective, modernist, and post war experimental fiction.

In other words, the dominant strain of anti-detective criticism would be enriched by the methods of the “New Modernist Studies,” in which “quite sharp boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered.”⁵⁴⁰ My own readings of literary modernism and its popular antecedents have reconsidered the relationship of high and low literature not only in order to salvage texts which modernist and anti-detective criticism seek to belittle or jettison, but also in order to show that literary modernism reveals new aspects of itself in its relationship

⁵³⁹ Ralph Cohen, “History and Genre,” *New Literary History*, 17 (Winter, 1986), 217.

⁵⁴⁰ Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, “The New Modernist Studies,” *PMLA*, 123 (May 2008) 737–738.

to those texts. If there is no binary demarcation between literary modernism and its popular predecessors, then the two forms' interactions are mutually revelatory, exposing qualities seldom considered by criticism emphasizing their differences.

For one, the interplay of modernist with popular fiction reveals that the linguistic skepticism of literary modernism contains critiques of classist, nationalist and imperialist approaches to language and discourse. The intellectual detachment associated with high modernism is thus belied by the political engagements of its games with language. High modernist entanglements with popular detective fiction reveal that the latter, too, has a political edge. Its role as popular entertainment does not diminish its ability to meddle with questions of social and intellectual significance. Compared with modernist satire and parody, the popular form can be seen to embrace a similar ambivalence towards the natural and social sciences.

This ambivalence contradicts another critical narrative which, working again from binaries, suggests that unlike the interwar period Victorianism was a period of confidence in notions of progress. According to this conceptual framework, Victorian confidence in the sciences neatly contrasts with the modernist cynicism that results from the devastation of World War I and the rapid changes of the twentieth century.⁵⁴¹ What the recovery of classic detective stories affirms is that we ought to reconsider this idea of a neat divide between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' receptions of the sciences. To assume that from the Victorians to the Edwardians faith in the sciences more or less prevailed and was only shattered against late

⁵⁴¹ That we still tend to slip into this way of diametrically opposing the two periods' reception of the sciences is evident in Mark S. Morrisson's recent suggestion that "the vocabulary of 'progress,' 'improvement,' 'advancement,' 'growth,' and 'prosperity' was a legacy of the Victorian period" and that modernism by contrast questioned "inherited narratives of progress." See Morrisson's *Modernism, Science, and Technology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 2.

modernist cynicism is once again to reduce the complexity of the earlier generations' relationships with the physical and social sciences.

The study of classic detective fiction uncovers another side to late Victorianism. The literary form slips into farce in its treatments of unexamined notions of progress in the sciences and in social reform. Its stories are well aware that problems of interpretation obtain in empirical analyses and that those analyses can be distorted to serve the interests of individual social groups. And its stories – premised on the examination of mysteries – are perfectly suited to ridicule methods of knowledge production, including its own. With this emphasis on questions of hermeneutics, with its parodies of theoretical discourse, and with its social satire, popular detective fiction functions not only as a critical venue for the physical and social sciences, but also as a house of mirrors – a funhouse – for literary modernism.

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