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Blank Subjects:

Orphanhood and the Rise of the British Novel

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

in Comparative Literature

by

Sina Rahmani

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Blank Subjects:

Orphanhood and the Rise of the British Novel

by

Sina Rahmani

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Saree Makdisi, Co-Chair

Professor Aamir R. Mufti, Co-Chair

From *Oliver Twist* to *Jane Eyre*, *Becky Sharp* to *Jude Fawley*, the nineteenth-century British literary horizon is replete with orphans. Both their ubiquity and prominence in so many canonical texts raises a question. Namely, how do figures often associated with social and material abjection — “Please sir, I want some more” — take center stage in a narrative form profoundly connected to the individuality and agency of the modern subject? My dissertation answers this question by making a case for what I call orphanhood as a central thematic in the history of the novel. Rather than fabricate some key to all orphans, I argue that the figuration of orphanhood crystallizing in the nineteenth-century British novel provided a discursive space to imagine modern individuated life—something made up of an infinite web of affiliations. Taken together, the different narratives and histories I analyze over four chapters highlight how orphans

showcase some of the ideal qualities of bourgeois individuality: deracinated, mobile, and above all, blank. In this sense, orphanhood can help us understand the link between literary production and the Empire, an imaginative venture that inscribed Britishness on a blank and colonizable world. Accordingly, I have built my dissertation around three authors who exemplify the formal, geographic, and temporal globality of the nineteenth-century “British” novel: Maria Edgeworth, Charles Dickens, and Rudyard Kipling. In my concluding chapter on W.G. Sebald, I show how long after the bond between national languages and literatures has been broken, orphanhood remains a perch to view the rise of the global individuality of the refugee as well as the transformations taking place in what is coming to be called the Global English novel.

The dissertation of Sina Rahmani is approved.

Jonathan H. Grossman

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University of California, Los Angeles

2014

for my mother

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Introduction

The world is full of orphans: firstly, those
 Who are so in the strict sense of the phrase;
 (But many a lonely tree the loftier grows
 Than others crowded in the Forest's maze--)
 The next are such as are not doomed to lose
 Their tender parents, in their budding days,
 But, merely, their parental tenderness,
 Which leaves them orphans of the heart no less.

The next are "only Children," as they are styled,
 Who grow up Children only, since the old saw
 Pronounces that an "only" 's a spoilt child-
 But not to go too far, I hold it law,
 That where their education, harsh or mild,
 Transgresses the great bounds of love or awe,
 The sufferers—be 't in heart or intellect—
 Whate'er the cause, are orphans in effect.

Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto the Seventeenth, (st. I & II)

Even the most cursory glance at virtually any corner of world literary history confirms Lord Byron's claim at the beginning of the final Canto of *Don Juan* (1819-1824). Be it in the Epic, folklore, myths, oral stories, or theology, "the world" of cultural production and its myriad textualities is undeniably "full of orphans." Whether they are authoring global Empires, unveiling mass religions, or undergoing fantastical transformations, an impressive number of the most universally recognizable cultural figures can be ascribed the label in one way or another. From Enkidu to Romulus and Remus, Zal and Oedipus to Augustus Caesar and Cyrus the Great; Moses, St. Nicholas and the Prophet Mohammad, Arjuna and Beowolf to Aladdin, Snow White, and Cinderella—orphans, fictional or not, have been a prominent fixture of storytelling since the

very beginning.

Their powerful spell over our reading habits has not waned in the intervening centuries. As much was evident at the beginning of the new millennium, by which time J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, having debuted barely three years earlier, conquered the globe with the publication of the fourth installment. Although the three preceding novels had been popular on both sides of the Atlantic, the release of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) made the story of the eponymous orphan's quest to defeat the man who murdered his parents a global cultural phenomenon. In addition to ascending to the hallowed ranks of most translated texts in history, the novels gave birth to massively popular blockbuster movies, an array of video games, and a vast catalogue of toys and other ephemera—not to mention an entire theme park. Although the canonical staying power of the series is impossible to judge from the current vantage point, the sales figures (an estimated 450 million copies of the novels have been sold to date) and the hundreds of thousands across the world who lined up to buy the latest installment underscore just how much orphan stories continue to profoundly move us.

Indeed, less than a week after the *Goblet of Fire* publishing spectacle, many of these same people lined up once again for another text about orphans. The release of the first film adaptation of the American comic book series *The X-Men* (1963) highlights not just the lucrative power of these narratives but also their generic translatability. The comic book as a form has long been ruled by orphan protagonists. The first to find a mass audience, Superman (1933), was soon joined by Batman (1939), Captain Marvel (1939), Aquaman (1941), Wonder Woman (1941), Spiderman (1962), Iron Man (1963), to name just a few. The three most popular—Superman, Batman, Spiderman—immediately migrated to other textual forms and eventually became global icons of American popular culture. *The Adventures of Superman* (1941-1951)

played to a national radio audience and was succeeded by a pathbreaking live-action television series of the same name (1952-1958). During the 1960s, the other two made their own debuts on the silver screen, the first of many that would follow in the decades to come. Even as the comic book form had begun receding from the popular imagination in the closing decades of the century, these figures still loomed large over the cultural horizon. Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978) earned over three hundred million dollars, while Tim Burton's neo-noir *Batman* (1989) ranked at the time as one of the highest grossing films ever. The box-office juggernaut of orphan superhero films continues to smash records. Bryan Singer's aforementioned *X-Men* (2000) has been followed by six others connected to that diegetical world, collectively grossing over three billion dollars. The popularity of the *X-Men* films also opened the door to the return of Batman, Superman, and Spiderman to the big screen in the first decade of the new millennium. In addition to the blockbuster films, when one factors in the countless television series, toys, and clothing lines, it is clear that these four orphan "franchises," to use the apt industry term, have injected trillions of dollars into the American culture industry.

Orphan narratives with global appeal are hardly an Anglo-American phenomenon. The first work of Chinese literature translated for European audiences was *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of Zhao*, a thirteenth-century drama attributed to Ji Junxiang. The first French edition appeared in the 1730s and was followed by English, German, Italian, and Russian translations. Voltaire, who in the 1750s rendered his own version of the story, praised it as "a valuable monument of antiquity."¹ Two centuries later, exiled French children's writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry returned the favour by giving the world *Le Petit Prince* (1943). The allegorical novel

¹ Voltaire, "The Orphan of China," in *The Works of Voltaire: The Dramatic Works of Voltaire. Volume XV*. eds. Tobias Smollett, John Morley, William F. Fleming, Oliver Herbrand, and Gordon Leigh. (Paris, London, New York, Chicago: E.R. Dumont, 1901), 177.

was an instant publishing success on both sides of the Atlantic, and stands as one of the most translated and bestselling Francophone texts of all time. Much the same could be said about Canadian novelist Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), which has also enjoyed a rich global afterlife. The red-headed orphan heroine is particularly popular in Japan. Every year, Japanese pilgrims by the thousands arrive in the tiny rural enclave of Cavendish, Prince Edward Island to visit the historical sites associated with the novel.

Yet another exemplar of this globality can be found in the Mexican sitcom *El Chavo del Ocho* [The Kid in Number Eight] (1971-1980). Soon after his debut, the titular eight-year-old orphan—played by the show's forty-year-old creator—became the most famous character not just on Mexican television but across the Americas as well. The series still enjoys a vast audience to this day, with daily reruns drawing upwards of one hundred million viewers. A recent *Forbes* article quotes one fan's apt explanation of the show's continued power: "El Chavo is not about a single character or a village, or just one story. It is about everyday people and a situation that we all know very well."²

Our obsession with orphans supersedes not just cultural and linguistic barriers but the limits of the human as well. Rin Tin Tin, the name given to a male German Sheppard rescued by an American soldier during final days of the First World War, became a major Hollywood star during the silent film era. During the 1920s, he appeared in over twenty films and made regular appearances at fundraisers for orphans.³ Around the same time across the Pacific, the Japanese press was having its own love affair with an orphan canine. An *Akita* named Hachikō, who had

² Anderson Antunes, "Meet El Chavo, The World's Most Famous (And Richest) Orphan," *Forbes.com*, February 2, 2012, accessed August 3, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/andersonantunes/2012/02/01/meet-el-chavo-the-worlds-most-famous-and-richest-orphan/>

³ One recent book argues that he was the top vote getter for the first Academy Award for Best Actor in 1929, but Hollywood's elite were worried about appearances and removed the dog from the ballot. Susan Orlean, *Rin Tin Tin: The Life and the Legend* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

met his master every day at a Tokyo train station upon the latter's return from work, continued to turn up at precisely the same time after his master's sudden death. For nine years, according to the legend, Hachikō awaited to no avail. Eventually, news of the dog's astounding loyalty spread across the country, making the dog a household name and even helped bolster the population of his rare breed. Upon Hachikō's death, a statue was erected in his honour, and his stuffed corpse was placed in the National Science Museum of Japan. His fame has not subsided over the years. A Japanese feature-length film based on his story was released in 1987, remade twenty years later by Hollywood under the title *Hachi: A Dog's Tale* (2009).

Eight decades later, a similar national fervor was provoked by Knut, the first polar bear to be successfully bred at the Berlin Zoo in over three decades—only to be promptly rejected by his mother. He spent the first two months of his life in an incubator, bottle-fed by his own personal staffer Thomas Dörflein, who also became a national celebrity for his round-the-clock care of the cub. Knut attracted thousands of daily spectators, smashing attendance records and soliciting intense national and international media coverage. *Vanity Fair* dispatched renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz to immortalize him, and a national broadcaster dedicated a daily television segment to the furry superstar. Azerbaijan even issued a postage stamp commemorating the first anniversary of his birth. Unfortunately, like the city of his birth, Knut's life was marked by tragedy as well. Dörflein died suddenly in September 2008, triggering a massive outpouring of grief in Berlin and across Germany. *Die Zeit* ran an editorial titled “Knut ist Waise” [Knut is an Orphan].⁴ Three years later, the far less cute and cuddly Knut collapsed and drowned in his enclosure in front of several hundred spectators. His death triggered yet

⁴ Matthias Stolz, “Knut ist Waise: Zum Tode des Berliner Tierpflegers Thomas Dörflein,” *Die Zeit*, April, 28, 2008, accessed August 1, 2014. <http://www.zeit.de/2008/40/W-Knut-40>

another massive outpouring of grief, and speculation over the cause of his death dominated headlines for weeks. Berlin's mayor was quoted as saying: "We held that polar bear so dearly in our hearts. He was the star of the Berlin Zoo."⁵

*

Still, to read "the world is full of orphans" simply as a statement on the omnipresence of orphans in cultural history ignores the far more powerful and radical idea embedded in the opening moments of Canto XVII. Byron's agenda is stated explicitly in the third stanza (reproduced in full at the beginning of the second chapter) when he points out that "Our common notion / Of orphan paints at once a parish school/ A half-starved babe, a wreck upon Life's ocean."⁶ Despite the tendency to use them as a "theme for Pity or some worse emotion," he makes the point that "if examined, it might be admitted/ The wealthiest orphans are to be more pitied." By expanding the semantic range of the word itself, Byron seeks to challenge what "we all know very well" about orphans.

Critics have for the most part avoided grappling too much with Canto XVII and its puzzling, if not provocative, opening line. Understandably so, given the fact Byron died having written only fourteen stanzas and left only a blank space under the number 15. To make matters worse, the majority of what made it to paper does not relate to the larger narrative of *Don Juan*. Of the handful who have ventured into this murky terrain, only one appears to have even caught a glimpse of the profound and far reaching implications of Byron's philological radicalism. Guinn Batten's *The Orphaned Imagination: Melancholy and Commodity Culture in English*

⁵ Qtd in "Eisbär Knut ist tot," FAZ.net, March 19, 2011, accessed August 1, 2014.
<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/jugend-schreibt/berlin-eisbaer-knut-ist-tot-1610485.html>

⁶ Lord Byron, *Don Juan*. eds. T.G. Steffan, E. Steffan and W.W. Pratt (London and New York: Penguin, 2004), 555.

Romanticism (1998) brings together four British Romantic poets through what she calls an “orphaned” condition in the world and the melancholia to which this condition gives rise. Ironically, even though she incorporates the first line of the Canto XVII into the title of her chapter on Byron, Batten does precisely what the poet warns against.⁷ That is, she conflates what she takes to be these poets’ “orphaned” position in the world with a broad but undefined notion of abjection. Hence alongside a literal deployment of the word to describe Byron’s chaotic familial life, Batten thus renders his departure from England: “Byron at last had to orphan himself from his native land” (34). Later in this introduction, I elaborate on her argument and show how it symptomizes a widespread critical impasse, but suffice it to say that Batten’s reliance on a presupposed notion of “the orphan,” timeless and intimately bound to some form of abjection, loses the forest through the trees.

The choice of idiom is not accidental, for it is the parenthetical aside—“But many a lonely tree the loftier grows/ Than others crowded in the Forest's maze”—that Batten and many other commentators on the pervasive presence of orphans overlook. So in the hopes of rescuing a long abandoned critical thread, I deploy Byron’s seemingly offhand remark as the basic argumentative framework of this dissertation project. Against the prevailing critical trend that collapses orphans with an abjected “condition,”⁸ I posit their ubiquity as a central site of what has come to be called the emergence of the modern individual. And while I am not the first to make this claim, what distinguishes my approach is its conceptual armature. Instead of expanding the term “orphan,” I exchange it for another, far more flexible conceptual pivot: orphanhood. Freed from the ontological baggage of archetypes and the crippling task of

⁷ Guinn Batten, *The Orphaned Imagination: Melancholy and Commodity Culture in English Romanticism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998). Hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁸ Baruch Hochman and Ilja Wachs, *Dickens: The Orphan Condition* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1999).

identifying certain characters as orphans or “half-orphans”, I use orphanhood to explore one extremely important corner of world literary history particularly “full of orphans:” the nineteenth-century British novel. Here too they dominate the list of characters held “so dearly in our hearts”: Belinda, Fanny Price, Jane Eyre, Becky Sharp, Heathcliff, Oliver Twist, Daniel Deronda, Jude Fawley, Dorian Gray, Mowgli, just to name a few. Their prevalence, it should be added, extends far beyond the canonical. A simple keyword search of the word “orphan” through the titles of the tens of thousands of long forgotten novels published during this era demonstrates this clearly.

It is therefore surprising that the decades-long debate over the connection between the novel’s “rise” as the dominant form of narrative fiction and the emergence of the individuated self has had almost nothing to say about the sheer mass of orphans manifesting throughout the history of the novel generally and in the Nineteenth Century specifically. Their plenitude is not even mentioned in many of the landmark inquiries into the origins of the form: Georg Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel* (1916), Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), Catherine Gallagher’s *Nobody’s Story* (1994), Franco Moretti’s *The Way of the World* (1987). On the rare occasion that someone in this discussion does take notice, it almost always is limited to a passing remark made during discussions of a specific novel featuring an orphan. Thus Peter Brooks: “As in so many nineteenth-century novels, the hero [of the text in question] is an orphan, thus undetermined by any visible inheritance.”⁹ Michael McKeon comes to a similar conclusion in a discussion of a different novel: “[The antihero]...begins his life in the unstable and supremely mobile condition of an orphan, ripe for

⁹ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 115.

the discovery of aristocratic parentage but also for self-creation.”¹⁰

It is precisely this “undetermined” quality to orphanhood and the ideal narratological conditions it offers for novelistic “self-creation” that this project considers. Through readings of texts by four authors, I show how a broadly-conceived notion of orphanhood yields powerful insights into how we imagine ourselves as individuals. The first three chapters focus on authors who together exemplify the formal, geographic, and temporal globality of the nineteenth-century British novel: Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), Charles Dickens (1812-1870), and Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936). In addition to reigning as the most popular and respected writers of their time, each of these figures emerged from key nodes of nineteenth-century British literary production. Not coincidentally, they have supplied some of the canon’s most famous individual orphans. The concluding chapter on W.G. Sebald (1944-2001) shows how long after the sun has set on both the Nineteenth Century and the era of hermetically-sealed national languages and literatures, a narrative of British orphanhood sheds light on a new kind of global individuality embodied in the refugee.

It goes without saying that the implications of this argument reach far beyond the literary realm. Accordingly, three of the four chapters are bifurcated between a close reading of a single text and an engagement with specific historical material relating to the question of orphanhood. In the first and third chapter, I extract different lessons from the divergent histories of three British orphan institutions. The first chapter compares the London Foundling Hospital with its far less well-known Dublin equivalent, while the third chapter excavates the self-styled “experiment in education” that took place at the Madras Military Male Orphan Asylum. The final chapter engages the emergence of a pipeline of orphans from the Global South to the Global

¹⁰ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 238.

North through the history of the *Kindertransporte*—the collective term for the series of private initiatives that brought over 10,000 “non-Aryan” children to the United Kingdom from various parts of the continent. In lieu of a historical discussion, the chapter on Dickens, whose power over the imagination of orphanhood is unparalleled, consists of a comparative reading of two of his novels that together highlight the troubling hermeneutical bind that plagues the critical conversation in this realm.

Though the geographic and temporal terrain these chapters cover is vast, they are bound together by a single conceptual tie: blankness. The canonical blank subjects and the narratives of orphanhood built around them showcase the single most defining feature of the individuated self. These “lonely tree[s],” to use Byron’s language, exemplify the inscribability operating at the very heart of the modern conceptualization of individuality. In the first three chapters, blankness provides a discursive space for the inscription of different fictions of fundamental importance to the modern subject: national identity, consumerism and mass commodification of everyday life, and institutional education. Orphanhood also sheds light on the link between literary production and the Empire—an imaginative venture that inscribed different and often contradictory images of Britishness on what Conrad’s Marlow famously calls the “blank spaces on the earth.”¹¹ The final chapter considers the afterlife of blankness in a globalized world, where national boundaries no longer demarcate geopolitics as starkly as they did in previous centuries. The juridical fiction of the stateless refugee—the only truly universal subject of the era of globalization—testifies to the continued discursive power of orphanhood and blankness in the modern world

¹¹“I have been in some of them, and . . . well, we won’t talk about that. But there was one yet—the biggest, the most blank, so to speak—that I had a hankering after.” Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*. ed. Cedric Watts (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2008), 108. For a deeper exploration of this phrase, see Alfred Hiatt, “Blank Spaces on the Earth,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 15.2 (2002): 223-250.

*

As I mentioned earlier, I am certainly not the first to suggest a link between the preponderance of literary orphans in the novelistic. Nina Auerbach's 1975 essay "Incarnations of the Orphan," which, despite its age, still exemplifies how critics approach this issue. If the title does not make it clear, the first line certainly shows the archetypal logic of her thinking: "The figure of the wandering orphan, searching through an alien world for his home, has fascinated generations of English novelists"¹² (395). At a certain distance, the line reads like a rearticulation of the claim that "the world is full of orphans." However, upon closer inspection, Auerbach's opening salvo is loaded with a number of presuppositions with far reaching consequences for her argument, and, as will become clear, much of the critical speculation that has followed in its wake. Indeed, it would not be unfair to describe the grammatical subject of Auerbach's first sentence—"the figure of the wandering orphan"—as the key to understanding the prevailing wisdom on the question of literary orphanhood.

This concoction is the result of a series of mostly unexplained semantic moves collapsing "the orphan" of the title with "the wandering orphan" of the first line. Moreover, this is not just any kind of wandering orphan, but one "searching through an alien world for his home." Auerbach proceeds to use this "archetype" that "always remains himself" to make a number of broad and increasingly ambitious claims:

The loneliness and the license of his point of view shake the solid foundations of English fiction. His isolation is a counterpoint to the view of the English novel given us by such critics as Wayne Booth, Ian Watt, and more recently David Goldknopf, who see it as a form in which consciousness is born into self-knowledge only in and through a fully realized social medium. The orphan is born to himself and establishes his own social penumbra. An examination of the forms he has taken in novels of different periods may

¹² Nina Auerbach, "Incarnations of the Orphan," *ELH* 42 3 (1975), 395.

give us another perspective on the English novel, both as a genre in itself and as a reflection of the culture it simultaneously embodies and repudiates.

Of course, artists have always been pulled toward visions of the self utterly dispossessed and exposed,, trying to construct out of solitude a house that will shelter it and attract visitors. But only in the novel do we find the orphan emerging as the primary metaphor for the dispossessed, detached self. In a sense, the orphan can be thought of as a metaphor for the novel itself: a faintly disreputable and possibly bastardized offspring of uncertain parentage, always threatening to lose focus and definition, but, with the resilience of the natural victim, always managing to survive; a particular product of the modern world (395).

Auerbach lives up to her promise and deftly navigates through two centuries of British literary orphanhood. Along the way there are a number of blanket statements about “the orphan” that align snugly with the traditional periodization of the British novel: “Throughout the eighteenth century, the orphan is a shadowy, manipulative, cloaked figure who finally achieves possession of an identity though the social category he attains” (400); “The orphan becomes a tarnished but exemplary figure for a class on the way up” (404); “It was easy for Victorian readers to see in the orphan a symbol of incendiary revolution energy; like the French Revolution which haunted Victorian England, the orphan is a dangerously unknown quantity because he is a being without precedent or visible sanction” (410).

Decades later, this archetypal thinking still prevails in the discussion of orphanhood in British literary history. Even though archetypes have all but disappeared from the critical lexicon, “the orphan” continues to take center stage, as evidenced in the titles of two recent books: Cheryl Nixon’s *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature: Estate, Blood, and Body* (2011) and Eva König’s *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: The Vicissitudes of the Eighteenth-Century Subject* (2014). And alongside the persistence of the archetype, theorizations of orphanhood continue to hem closely to the traditional periodization of the canon.

Take, for instance, Laura Peters's argument in her *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture, and Empire* (2000):

Victorian culture perceived the orphan as a scapegoat—a promise and a threat, a poison and a cure. As such, the orphan, as one who embodied the loss of the family, came to represent a dangerous threat; the family reaffirmed itself through the expulsion of this threatening difference. The vulnerable and miserable condition of the orphan, as one without rights, enabled it to be conceived of and treated as such by the very structure responsible for its care.¹³

Batten makes a similar move when she deploys the archetype over the Romantic period:

In the procreative poetics of the Romantics, we may witness a resistance to forms of thinking, whether idealist or empiricist, shaped increasingly, like production and consumption, by standardization and specialization. For as an orphan especially understands, the living body is itself a medium, one that links the past and the future, and one whose sexuality and linguist fertility are interdependent. Yet the orphan also may intuit, more keenly than others, how ideology may co-opt that fertility, shaping a cultural in which the two-parent heterosexual becomes the standard form of sexual, and reproductive expression (2).

In the second chapter, I analyze the role played by the figure who has enjoyed a long reign as “the orphan.” More specifically, I show how the stranglehold that the title character of Dickens’s *Oliver Twist, or, The Parish Boy’s Progress* (1837-1839) holds over the discussion of orphanhood lurks not too far from this archetypal logic.

This is not to suggest in any way that everything these authors have to say about orphanhood is wrong. On the contrary, Auerbach’s claim that the “mutability” of the figure is “an important facet of his survival” undergirds each chapter (395). And Nixon’s insistence on “the valued orphan” draws attention to the same problem outlined earlier of critics prefiguring orphans as always already abjected. The fundamental difference between my readings and these other approaches lies in the conceptual framework. In order to sidestep the ontological pitfalls inherent to all archetypes, I abandon “the orphan” as an object of inquiry and instead pursue the

¹³ Laura Peters, *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture, and Empire*. (Manchester: Manchester UP: 2000), 2.

blank possibilities of orphanhood. Furthermore, although nineteenth-century texts dominate the proceedings, I do not privilege this time period over any others. On the contrary, much of the first chapter pertains to the Georgian era and the rise of a public discourse on orphanhood during, while the concluding chapter focuses on the latter half of the Twentieth Century. Ultimately, I make the case that the intertwined concepts of blankness and orphanhood as key players in the rise of individualism supersede the conventional boundaries that dominate the world of professional literary criticism.

*

Given the fundamental importance of the term, a brief genealogy of blankness and the long, somewhat enigmatic hermeneutical life it has enjoyed is necessary. Once again, at the outset it should be clear that I am not the first to use this term in a discussion of orphanhood. In an 1853 article in *Household Words* titled “Received, a Blank Child,” Dickens and his colleague William Henry Wills begin an account of the London Foundling Hospital, which by this time had been in existence for more than a century. Although the flyover of its establishment and its early history is not particularly insightful, the article nevertheless manages to coin a term that captures precisely how the Foundling Hospital manufactured subjects: “This home of the blank children is by no means a blank place.”¹⁴ This line alludes to the admission card employed by institution used to keep track of every child that entered the institution. (Fig 1) Since all the children who were admitted to the London Foundling Hospital were renamed upon admission, the blank space was left for the inscription of the child’s gender. In the first chapter I explore the origins of this

¹⁴ [Charles Dickens and William Henry Wills]. “Received, a Blank Child.” *Household Words* 7. 1853.

card more in detail and the complicated and events that led up to its implementation.

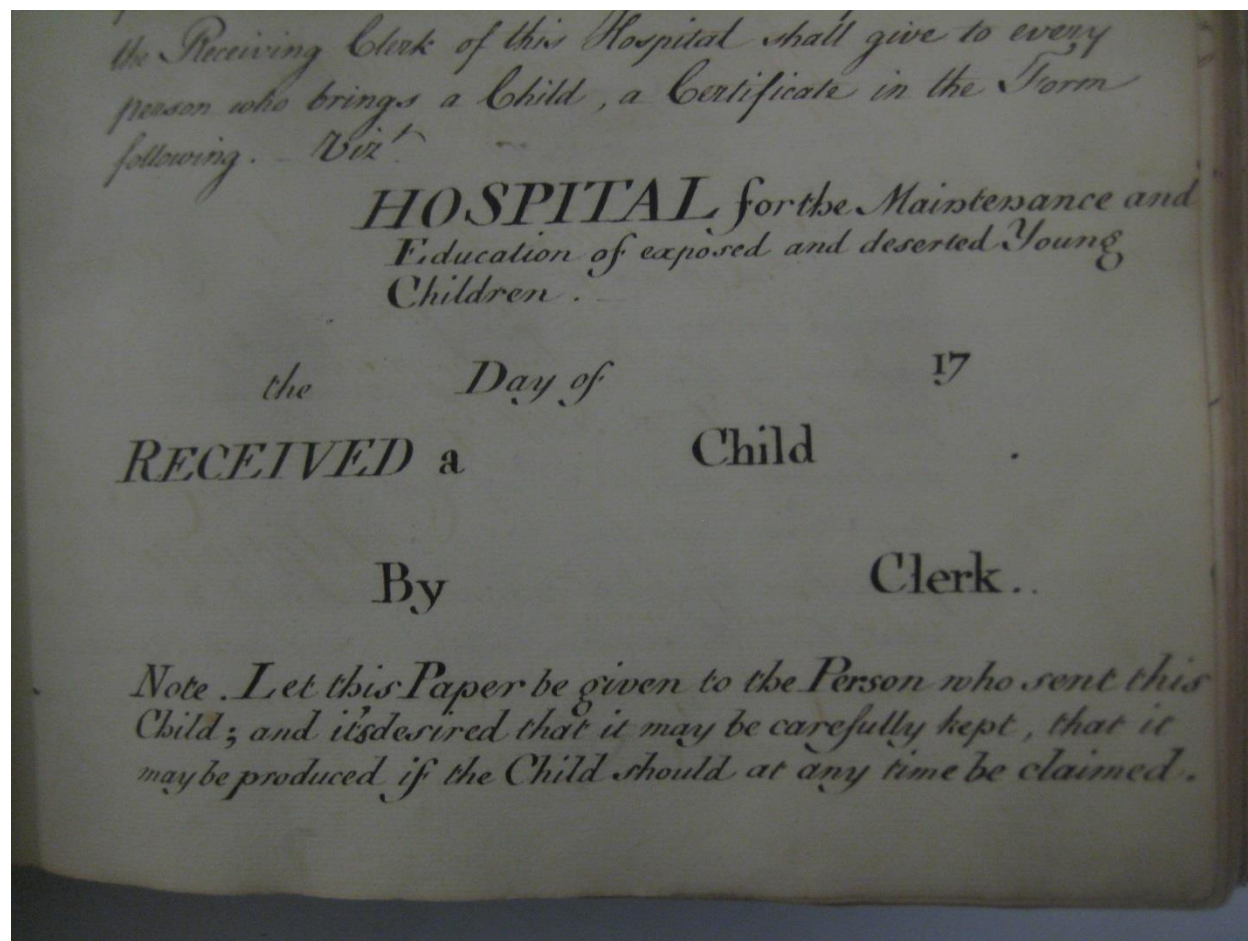


Figure 1: First design of the reception card from the minutes of a 1756 Board Committee meeting. Author Photograph.

In her in-depth exploration of the London Foundling Hospital archives, Jenny Bourne Taylor argues that the *Household Words* article “positions the child paradoxically as the image of both absolute emptiness (echoing Locke's famous description of the newborn child as a “tabula rasa”) and a blankness that is nonetheless already socially inscribed.” One problem with this analysis, and Bourne Taylor is not the only person to commit this error, is the fact that John Locke never uses the term “tabula rasa” anywhere in his writings. In the *Essay Concerning*

Human Understanding, Locke posits that “[a]ll ideas come from sensation or reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas.”¹⁵

Indeed, the notion of a blank slate long predated the father of Classical Liberalism. Before Locke, many preeminent Islamic thinkers considered the first line of *Surat-al-Qalam* [the Pen] and the other parts of the Qur’an and Ahadith that connect the pen to the act of creation.¹⁶ In addition to the theological sources, these philosophers grappling with this issue found inspiration in Aristotle’s treatise *On the Soul*. Here Aristotle claims that “[w]hat [the mind] thinks must be in it just as characters may be said to be on a writing tablet on which as yet nothing actually stands written.”¹⁷ Far and away the most important inquiry in recent years into the philosophical potency of blankness is Giorgio Agamben’s 1993 essay on what he calls “potentiality.” For Agamben, the different manifestations of blankness since Aristotle all point to the very possibility of creative action: “In its deepest intention, philosophy is a firm assertion of potentiality, the construction of an experience of the possible as such. Not thought but the potential to think, not writing but the white sheet is what philosophy refuses at all costs to forget.”¹⁸

Agamben’s trace raises an obvious question: if blankness appeared long before Locke and the foundational thinking of modern individualism, why does it play such an important role in these novels? The theory of the innately inscribable nature of the human mind (or in

¹⁵ John Locke, “Of Human Understanding,” in *The Works of John Locke, Esq. Vol. 1.* (London: S. Birt et al, 1751), 32. This rendering of Locke’s “white paper” into “tabula rasa” stretches back to Austrian-American psychiatrist and Freud translator, A.A. Brill. For more see, Robert Duschinsky, “Tabula Rasa and Human Nature,” *Philosophy* Vol. 87.4 (October 2012), 510.

¹⁶ Aida Shalar Gasimova, “Eyebrows” in *Islamic Images and Ideas: Essays on Sacred Symbolism*. Ed. John Andrew Morrow. (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2014), 176.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. J.A. Smith, (Oxford: Clarendon UP, 1931), 430a.

¹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, “Bartleby, or On Contingency,” in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Ed. and Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1999), 249.

Agamben's language, the potentiality of inscription) only supplies part of the explanation of orphanhood's essential importance to the novel. What, to return to Byron, does novelistic blankness say about the relationship between the individuated "lonely tree[s]" and the "forest's maze" of modern capitalism?

Edward Said's essay "Secular Criticism" and the dialectic of filiation and affiliation he proposes in it provides an answer.¹⁹ Said recasts Ferdinand Tönnies's foundational sociological theorization of modernity through the shift away from *Gemeinschaft* [community] to *Gesellschaft* [society]. While the former, according to Said, is a form of social organization dominated by blood ties, the emergence of the latter manifests in "transpersonal forms—such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class, and the hegemony of a dominant society" (20). Said applies these twin terms in a survey of canonical modernist texts and the "three-part pattern" manifesting in them:

Childless couples, orphaned children, aborted childbirths, and unregenerately celibate men and women populate the world of high modernism with remarkable insistence, all of them suggesting the difficulties of filiation. But no less important in my opinion is the second part of the pattern, which is immediately consequent upon the first, *the pressure to produce new and different ways of conceiving human relationships* (17, emphasis added).

For Said, the "difficulties of filiation" dramatized in so many canonical modernist texts "stand for a general condition afflicting society and culture together" (16). Citing Lukács, Said connects the primary alienation between workers and the products of their labour to the breakdown of the filiative order of things: "[A]ll products of human labour, children included, which are so completely separated from each other, atomized, and hence frozen in the category

¹⁹ Edward Said, "Secular Criticism," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 1-30 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1983). Hereafter cited parenthetically.

of ontological as to make even natural relationships virtually impossible” (17).

In his discussion of T.S. Eliot’s turn away from the national and religious ties he inherited by birth, Said speaks more directly to the affiliations that replace blood bonds. In his conversion poetry,

we have Eliot saying something like the following: the aridity, wastefulness, and sterility of modern life make filiation an unreasonable alternative at least, and unattainable at most. One cannot think about continuity in biological terms....The only other alternative seemed to be provided by institutions, associations, and communities whose social existence was not in fact guaranteed by biology, but by affiliation (17).

The third part of this pattern takes shape around the forms of authority these affiliations can create. These new relationships formed beyond the realm “guaranteed by biology” have a tendency to reinstate the same “paternal authority” that dominates the world of filiative ties (18). That is, “affiliation *can* easily become a system of thought no less orthodox and dominant than culture itself” (20, emphasis added).

The different kinds of affiliations that fill the void left by the breakdown of the filiative ordering of human life stands at the very center of this inquiry some canonical texts about orphanhood. These affiliations point to a larger story about the crucial function of blankness in the rise of individualism. Moreover, Said’s discussion of filiation and affiliation also highlights the fact that blankness is not limited to the characterological. Just as important as the blank subjects to the production of “new and different ways of conceiving human relationships” are the blank narratologies around them. Not coincidentally, like all the different orphans who play a starring role in the following chapters, this dissertation has had during its lifetime another name: “Blank Plots.”

*

The first blank plot I explore frames two interrelated discussions of orphanhood and the Irish Question, which together illustrate what Michel Foucault describes as the difference between “making live” and “letting die” wedged at the heart of modern biopolitical governance. In the first section, I offer a reconsideration of the national allegory of “union” in Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812). Although critics are divided on the political implications of Edgeworth's vision of Anglo-Irish peace, they generally agree that the marriage of the protagonist Lord Colambre to his orphaned cousin Grace Nugent enacts an allegorical union between masculine England and feminine Ireland. My account challenges this consensus by focusing less on the romantic pairing and more on the affiliation between Grace Nugent and Lord Colambre's mother, an adoption that allegorizes orphaned Ireland's incorporation into English modernity. In the second half of the chapter, I provide a comparative overview of the London Foundling Hospital and the Dublin Foundling Hospital, two very different orphan institutions erected in the first half of the eighteenth century. While the former stands out as one of the most storied social welfare institutions in British history, the latter has been totally effaced from the historical record. Looking beyond the shocking disparities as public health institutions—disparities I illustrate through both primary and secondary sources—it becomes clear that what differentiates the London Foundling Hospital from its Dublin equivalent is the active desire to “make live.”

The second chapter addresses one of the globe's most recognizable orphans and the role his author has played in both the critical and popular imagination of orphanhood. However, I show how despite the fact that the title character of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839) embodies many of our fundamental assumptions about orphans, *Great Expectations* (1860-1861)

provides a far more useful narrative terrain to explore the socially-symbolic power of orphanhood. Using Georg Lukács's definition of the novel as "the epic of the world abandoned by God" as a critical baseline, I map the narratological and formal contrasts between the fairy-tale salvation that resolves *Oliver Twist* and the fabrication of a web of orphan affiliations constituting *Great Expectations*. While Oliver's safe return home hinges on a moment of *anagnorisis* restoring his biological ties to a more virtuous but ultimately less realistic world, the two separate recognition scenes in *Great Expectations* hold no such restorative power in the plot. Rather, commodities and material wealth play the role of kingmaker as two socially-illegitimate orphans transform into "portable property" and thus morph into cosmopolitan, worldly subjects.

At the outset of the third chapter I show how Kipling's *Kim* (1900-1901) opens with a restaging of *Great Expectations*. Like Pip, the title character of Kipling's novel forges an affiliative tie with an outsider who provides him with access to material wealth. However, the cultivation Kim undergoes with the help of the lama takes place in a modern institutional education. Against the critical consensus on the novel's picaresque and plotless nature, I show how lurking inside *Kim* is a realist *Erziehungsroman* built around two affiliations—the first with the lama, the second with St. Xavier's—that together valorize the disciplinary force of an institutionalized education. Tracking "Kim's progress" (164) from vagabond to citizen along these two different pedagogical tracks provides a different perspective on the issue I take up in the first chapter: the link between orphanhood and bricks-and-mortar educational institutions. Thus I read the novel against the history of Andrew Bell's Madras Orphan Asylum, an institution built in the eighteenth century in which older orphans taught and mentored younger ones. Bell's radical pedagogy eventually migrated back to the metropole and provided an early model of the mass education programs of the Nineteenth Century.

In the final chapter, the focus shifts to W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001), a contemporary text exemplifying the formal, linguistic, and historical transformations of the British novel in the era of Globalization. Sebald's final work, which he once described as a "prosebook of an undetermined kind," recounts the life of a Czech orphan brought over to the United Kingdom on the *Kindertransporte*, an early example of the large scale transnational adoption schemes that have become so commonplace today. Officially called the "Refugee Children's Movement", both its history and the body of literature that has emerged from it mark the *Kindertransporte* as a key moment in the history of the Twentieth Century. I show how in addition to its role as one of the most omnipresent signifiers of the Shoah, the boxcar resides at the heart of our containerized economic production. In other words, in the background of the title character's orphan migration from Czechoslovakia to Wales looms not only the prehistory of what I call "the traffic in Kinder," but also the global implementation of container shipping. Ultimately, I triangulate *Austerlitz*, the emergence of global adoption industry, and containerization as a way of coming to terms with a new kind of juridical blankness located in the legal fiction of the refugee.

*

The expansive geographic and temporal span that my argumentative *telos* covers can very justly be accused of ignoring a great deal of British literary history generally and the history of the novel specifically. What is to be made of the many orphans, tramps, and heirs of the Eighteenth Century? Why no mention of the wandering spirits of Romanticism, the Victorian "New Women," or the shattered beings of high modernism? Moreover, where are the many orphanhoods scattered across the global Anglophone literary canon?

Aside from the obvious answer—no study of cultural production can be global²⁰—the goal of this dissertation is not meant to supply a concrete answer to an abstract problem of why orphanhood plays such a prominent role in the history of the novel. Rather, the sum total of these chapters is to put forward another abstraction. Orphanhood, in all its various forms, provides an opportunity to reanimate a moribund thread of critical debate, and, more importantly, yields some profound insights into what Foucault famously called “the history of the present.”

²⁰ “[A]ccording to estimate, between 1837 and 1901 40,000 novels alone were published.” Philip Davis, *The Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 11.

Chapter One

A Tale of Two Foundling Hospitals in Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812)

“During the time of my service in Ireland, which began in the first year of His Majesty's King James I reign, I have visited all the provinces of that kingdom in sundry journeys and circuits. Wherein I have observed the good temperature of the air and the fruitfulness of the soil; the pleasant and commodious feats for habitations; the safe and large ports and havens lying open for traffic into all the west parts of the world; the long inlets of many navigable rivers; and so many great lakes and fresh ponds within the land as the like are not to be seen in any part of Europe; the rich fishings and wild fowl of all kinds; and lastly the bodies and minds of the people endued with extraordinary abilities by nature.”

-Sir John Davies, *A discovery of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued*. (1747)

“[*The Absentee* provides] true insight into the proper ways of managing Irish people.”

- John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (1876)

Like many who emerge from “hyphenated cultures,”²¹ Maria Edgeworth's Anglo-Irish life and work seem to be profoundly tied up in the compound that she at once produces and is produced from. Her life (1768-1849) coincides with a historical era in which Irish peasants relentlessly pushed back against English colonial power.²² Not surprisingly, the antinomies of Anglo-Irish history have taken center stage in Edgeworth criticism, particularly since the bicentennial anniversaries of the 1798 Irish Rebellion and the 1801 Acts of Union that followed in its bloody wake. As a member of a very old and prominent Anglo-Irish family, Edgeworth's

²¹Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995). In this paper, I will be using the Penguin classics edition of *The Absentee*, eds. Heidi Thomson (London and New York: Penguin, 2000). Page numbers will be cited parenthetically hereafter.

²²“Every decade between 1760 and 1840 was punctuated by at least one major outbreak of rural discontent [in Ireland]...During that long time span, Irish peasants compiled a record of collective protest probably unparalleled anywhere else in Europe.” Clarke, Samuel and James S. Donnelly, “Introduction” in *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 26.

fraught relationship to the waves of Irish insurrectionist nationalism in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries has become the keystone question among critics.

Responding to the renewed interest in Edgeworth and the larger genre of the Irish national novel,²³ Marilyn Butler, the author of the only full-length literary biography of Edgeworth, criticizes “what is effectively a ‘school’ of Anglo-Irish postcolonial criticism” which she describes as “dogmatic” and “not closely concerned with the text.”²⁴ Butler argues that despite attempts to fit “the colonizer-stereotype” to her work, Edgeworth “has other objectives, including but not limited to nationalism, that prove her much more expressly committed than has hitherto appeared to the history, language, culture, and future of Irish people.”²⁵ The line that Butler delineates between two very different figures of Edgeworth—one “committed” to Irish nationalism and another complicit in English colonial hegemony—replicates itself in the recent criticism. Susan Egenolf claims that the cartoonishly Irish Thady Quirk, *Castle Rackrent*’s (1800) fictional editor, “performs linguistic blackface for her English and Anglo-Irish readers.”²⁶ Using similar language, Clara Tuite argues that *The Absentee* (1812) uses “interior decoration as the ground upon which a narrative of colonial mimicry and exile is staged.”²⁷ Esther Wohlgenut

²³ Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998). Inna Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge and New York: CUP, 2002). Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing 1790-1870: Politics, History, and the Family from Edgeworth to Arnold* (Cambridge and New York: CUP, 2004).

²⁴ Marilyn Butler, “Edgeworth’s Ireland: History, Popular Culture, and Secret Codes,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 34.2 (Spring 2001): 267. Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: a Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972). Some of the names that Butler associates with the postcolonial readings of Edgeworth were connected to the Field Day Theater Company in 1980s and 1990s.

²⁵ Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 266.

²⁶ Susan B. Egenolf, “Maria Edgeworth in Blackface: Castle Rackrent and the Irish Rebellion of 1798,” *ELH* 72.4 (Winter 2005): 846. Franco Moretti describes Quirk as a figure “who allows Edgeworth to create a bridge between past and present, and between the ‘here’ of her largely English audience and the ‘there’ of her Irish story.” “Serious Century From Vermeer to Austen,” in *The Novel: Volume 1 History, Geography, and Culture*. Ed. Franco Moretti. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2006), 387.

²⁷ Clara Tuite, “Maria Edgeworth’s Déjà-Voodoo: Interior Decoration, Retroactivity, and Colonial Allegory in *The*

sees more room to maneuver in the text, arguing that by “claiming national difference as anchored in education (‘culture’ rather ‘nature’), Edgeworth gives to national identity a sociocultural foundation, and thereby opens a space in which change can take place.”²⁸ Mary Jean Corbett reads the novel through Edmund Burke’s valorization of the private, conjugal family as the basis of national politics: “*The Absentee* represents the struggle for imperial hegemony within the discursive terms of heterosexual and familial romance...so central to the politics of the domestic novel.”²⁹

In what follows, I too will base a reading of Edgeworth’s *The Absentee* around her location at the center of that highly fraught compound: “Anglo-Irish.” Charting the return of Lord Colambre, the heir apparent of an Anglo-Irish absentee family, from the “fashionable” but vapid social life of London back to his family’s historic seat in the Irish countryside, the novel is Edgeworth’s clarion call for an end to absenteeism—the name given to the phenomenon of Irish Protestant landowners living far from their “native country.”³⁰ Resisting his mother’s

Absentee,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 20.3 (Spring 2008): 386.

²⁸ Esther Wohlgenut, “Maria Edgeworth and the Question of National Identity,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 39.4 (Autumn 1999): 647.

²⁹ Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union*, 71. Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (Oxford and New York, Oxford UP, 1987) describes this in the Foucauldian terms of Jacques Donzelot’s *La Police des Familles* (1977), “from a government of families to a government through the family,” 18.

³⁰“ABSENTEEISM, an expression which has arisen out of the discussions on the miserable condition of the Irish people, and which, as its derivation shows, denotes the habitual absence of the landed proprietors of a country from their estates. From such absenteeism has naturally sprung a system of farming out these estates to intermediaries, which has proved in its consequences of ever increasing injury to the tenant. These absentee Irish proprietors grant long leases of their estates to rich English capitalists, who sublet at a profit to other speculators, commonly known as middlemen, and these latter, dealing directly with the tenants, sublet for short terms, and contrive, by the minutest possible subdivisions, so to increase the number of bidders as to obtain for each holding the highest rental possible. Besides the effect of this feudal system of rack-rents in impoverishing the tenant to the last degree, the bulk of the rentals so accruing is annually exported without any return in exchange. No portion of such rentals is ever applied to the introduction of improved methods of agriculture, nor even to the development of either the manufacturing industries or the commercial enterprises of Ireland, as would naturally be the case were these proprietors themselves residents. It is unquestionable, then, that absenteeism is one of the causes of the wretched condition of Ireland.” Ambroise Clément, “Absenteeism” in *Cyclopædia of Political Science, Political Economy, and the Political History of the United States*. ed. John J. Lalor (New York: Maynard, Merrill, and Co, 1899), I.3.1.

machinations to have him marry an heiress, Lord Colambre travels to Ireland after discovering the debt his family has accrued pursuing a “fashionable life.” Back in Ireland for the first time since his childhood, Colambre encounters a diverse set of characters representing different parts of Ireland. With the help of a patriotic Irish Lord and a kindhearted member of the Irish peasantry, Colambre navigates Ireland both literally and figuratively. Most importantly, his return affords him an opportunity to bear witness to the daily humiliations that Irish peasants must endure at the hands of the exploitative middle managers reigning over the absentee estates. Exemplifying the Romantic “man of feeling,” he is spurred to action by the injustice he sees. In short order, he saves a peasant household from expropriation, wrestles control of his family’s finances and property, and persuades his obstinate mother to renounce their family’s absenteeism and return to Ireland.

Upon first glance, *The Absentee* reads like that much older story of a displaced and supplanted monarch returning triumphantly to his throne. However, disrupting this narrative is a plotline running seemingly parallel to Colambre’s restoration: the story of his romantic love of Grace Nugent, his orphaned and ostensibly illegitimate cousin. While Edgeworth makes it impossible to ignore their mutual desire, the stain of illegitimacy renders their “union” out of reach for most of the novel. However, all of this changes when a crucial piece of information is revealed to him, and Colambre sets out to collect the rest of the narrative pieces: the secret marriage of Grace’s parents, the heroic death of her soldier father, and her adoption into the Nugent family. Cleansed of her illegitimacy, Edgeworth lays the groundwork for their marriage and eventual settlement in Ireland, and the novel closes with an epistle describing the celebration that greets the happy couple upon their return home.

How does this two-fold narratology relate to the political anxieties surrounding the Irish insurrectionist *esprit* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? In answering this question, one of my goals in this chapter is to challenge the narrow understanding of “union” that pervades much of the critical discussion of the text. Although critics are split on the political implications of Edgeworth’s vision for the “future of the Irish people,” they generally agree that the marriage between Lord Colambre and Grace Nugent enacts an allegorical union.³¹ But instead of drawing a thick line of correspondence between the unions taking place in the text and a set of political desires ascribed onto Edgeworth, I put forward another framework for thinking through the vexed questions of nationhood, belonging, and political radicalism at the heart of *The Absentee*. Specifically, I argue that the novel forms itself around the making and unmaking of Ireland’s national orphanhood, a figuration of the nation abandoned by the Protestant Ascendancy. Specifically, I make the case against Butler’s claim that the “sub-plot” of Grace Nugent “is not relevant to the theme of absenteeism.”³² On the contrary, Edgeworth uses a rendering of national abandonment to clear a discursive space calling not simply for Ireland’s “union” with England but its adoption into a new kind of political power.³³ Rather than tether

³¹ Brian Hollingsworth's reading of “union” is unique as it centers on Irish national and class union: “The novel is not so much concerned with Union between England and Ireland, as with the need for unity within Ireland itself.” *Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing: Language, History, Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 153.

³² Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: a Literary Biography*, 375. This view has once again appeared in the recent publication of *The Absentee* in Pickering and Chatto's edition of Edgeworth's work: “Edgeworth's attachment of the issue of Legitimacy to [Grace Nugent] instead of to the absent King leaves behind the sphere of high politics in favour of the family, the estate and the woman.” “Introductory Note”, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, Eds. Heide Van de Veire, Kim Walker with Marilyn Butler. Vol.5 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), xxiii-xxix.

³³ Catherine Gallagher's reading of Edgeworth's work alludes briefly to the trope of adoption: “Most of her Anglo-Irish heroes are heir to a confused identity. Because the Ascendancy seemed insufficiently justified by history, those born of it are indeterminate at the outset of the tales. Many of them are unsure of their nationality...Anglo-Irishmen seem to suffer from an internal doubleness: like women who must 'change' their identities through marriage, the Anglo-Irish have 'changed' theirs by 'adopting' another nation.” *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1995), 289. Although Gallagher highlights the word specifically, she does not explore the implications of its deployment.

ourselves to the ideological valorization of the conjugal, privatized family as the model of national politics—which critics tend to view as an instantiation of Burke’s “little platoon”—I show how the union between England and Ireland modeled in *The Absentee* can also be understood as a national affiliation: a space for the creation of ties between nations, leaving us with a reading that unites Colambre’s “happy return” to Ireland and the “written acknowledgment” of Grace Nugent’s legitimate birth (169, 244).

In Edgeworth’s narrative of Ireland’s affiliation with England, I locate a shift in the way power is deployed onto subjects—something that can also be seen in the contrasting histories of two very different British orphan institutions. Taken together, the institution that came to be called the Dublin Foundling Hospital, and its far more celebrated counterpart in London, narrate what Michel Foucault in his later writings describes as the difference between an older model of sovereignty staked to the sovereign’s ability to terminate life and the biopolitical investment in life, the manufacture of life itself. Whereas the London Foundling Hospital is widely-cited as one of the most innovative examples of institutional social welfare in British history, the Dublin Foundling stands in the words of one critic as a “folly,” exemplifying the “mischievous effects of such institutions notwithstanding the benevolent idea which obtains at first sight on the subject.”³⁴ Chronically underfunded and understaffed—the death rate in the infant infirmary at one point reached 99.94% —it was subject to numerous parliamentary inquiries before finally being shuttered in the 1830s.³⁵ Rather than simply recount two institutional histories—

³⁴ Ed. William Dudley Wodsworth, *A Brief History of the Ancient Foundling Hospital of Dublin, from the Year 1702, with some account of similar institutions abroad* (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1876): 51, iv

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

unnecessary in the case of the London Foundling Hospital³⁶—and name the gap between them as racism against Irish Catholics, I situate these two institutions against the questions being posed in *The Absentee* about the “management” and the “future of the Irish people.” Dublin stands as an institution that held sovereignty *over* a set of particularly vulnerable and fragile Irish bodies. In London, however, politics is invested *into* the bodies themselves, manufacturing them as subjects and “a political problem.”³⁷

The contrast between these two institutions provides a new armature to mount a reading of *The Absentee* as a novel concerned profoundly with Ireland’s condition as an orphaned nation. In other words, inside Edgeworth’s novel of Anglo-Irish union lurks a tale of two foundling hospitals. Rather than the residue of a Burkean conservatism, Edgeworth, on the contrary, imagines something truly forward-looking for Ireland, both as a nation, and as a nation-state. By way of an insistence on “propinquity” as a solution to Ireland’s national orphanhood, a term imported from Jeremy Bentham’s felicific calculus, Edgeworth seeks to close the political gap between Catholic and Protestant subjects by closing the literal gap between the class that lives and works on the land and the class that owns it. Although, as Nancy Armstrong points out, Edgeworth’s political claims hinge on the self-declared moral superiority of the Protestant elite,

³⁶ Ruth K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981); Alyssa Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800: "Left to the Mercy of the World,"* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007). Tanya Evans, ‘*Unfortunate Objects: Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London*’ (London: Palgrave, 2004): 67-125. R.B. Outhwaite “‘Objects of Charity’: Petitions to the London Foundling Hospital, 1768-72” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32.4 (Summer 1999): 497-510. Jessica A. Scheetz-Nguyen, “Calculus of Respectability: Defining the World of Foundling Hospital Women and Children in Victorian London,” *Annales de Démographie Historique* 114 (2007): 13-36. Bernd Weisbrod, “How to Become a Good Foundling in Early Victorian London,” *Social History* 10.2 (May 1985): 193-209.

³⁷ “Beneath the great absolute power, beneath the dramatic and somber absolute power that was the power of sovereignty, and which consisted in the power to take life, we now have the emergence, with this technology of biopower, of this technology of power over ‘the’ population as such, over men insofar as they are living beings...Sovereignty took life and let live. And now we have the emergence of a power that I would call the power of regulation, and it consists in making live and letting die.” Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2005), 247.

the novel does more than cement the uneven political relations between the colony and its metropolitan masters. What Edgeworth realizes and affirms in the novel is that the future of Anglo-Irish relations turns on the *adoption* of Ireland into the modern regime of biopolitics, a process facilitated by Colambre, in whom the “sobriety of English good sense mixed most advantageously with Irish vivacity” (6). Succinctly: my reading seeks to show how *The Absentee* is a text that gives us, as John Ruskin once said, “true insight into the proper way of managing Irish people.”³⁸

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Edgeworth builds her plot around Colambre’s three arrivals (Dublin, London, and Dublin again) and three departures (London, Dublin, and London again). Although the goal is to reach his father’s estate, after his first arrival in Ireland he engages a series of characters, each of whom provides Colambre with knowledge about Ireland. Almost right away Colambre is confronted by the abandonment of Ireland as his tour takes him through Killpatrickstown, named for the local noble family “who had lived always for the fashionable world” (104). The vista of absenteeism’s effects is bleak: “[E]verything let to go to ruin for the want of a moment’s care, or pulled to pieces for the sake of the most trifling surreptitious profit; the people most assisted always appearing proportionally wretched and discontented” (104). Colambre learns of a nobleman who, when faced with the “deplorable condition of his castle,” decided to burn it down in lieu of making the necessary repairs (99,100). As they pass through Nugent’s Town and another community in ruins, Larry Brady, the coach driver and representative of the Irish peasantry who thinks he is speaking to a Welsh nobleman and not the landowner himself, pines for a time when it was a “snug place, when my Lady Clonbrony was at home.” Brady’s literal

³⁸John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (London: George Allen, 1896), 314.

and figurative position in the driver's seat of the scene allows him to provide a running commentary for Colambre on the social vista of the "[w]retched, wretched people" living under absentee landlords: people "with countenances and figures bereft of hope and energy" (140). Here we can see Edgeworth's rendering of the miserable conditions of the town anticipates the social realism of Dickens and Gissing later in the century:

This *town* consisted of one row of miserable huts, sunk beneath the side of the road, the mud walls crooked in every direction; some of them opening in wide cracks, or zigzag fissures, from top to bottom, as if there had just been an earthquake—all the roofs sunk in various places—thatch off, or overgrown with grass—no chimneys, the smoke making its way through a hole in the roof, or rising in clouds from the top of the open door—dunghills before the doors, and green standing puddles—squalid children, with scarcely rags to cover them, gazing at the carriage. (Emphasis in original, 140)

Edgeworth is not the only prominent writer in Ireland who figures the country as a "squalid child". The language of abandonment can be also found in a text on absenteeism published a decade after *The Absentee* by an Edgeworth contemporary. Although Sydney Owenson's *Absenteeism* (1825) discusses a different historical period, she too figures Ireland as a kind of abandoned being:

The talent, beauty, and virtue, which, if concentrated at home, might have redeemed and adorned the country from whence they were drawn, now served to increase the sum of elegant profligacy in that region, whose very atmosphere was as fatal to manly independence, as it was to female purity. Ireland, thus abandoned by the heads of her noble families, deserted by her rank, her talent, her beauty, and her education...Unhappy Ireland, during the whole of the reign of Charles II, exhibited the most deplorable picture of a country left to prey to strangers, to undertakers, to patentees, to delegated powers, and official despotism; and divested of all those ties and combinations which bind man to man, was totally destitute of every element that confers the strength of political cohesion, and disseminates the advantages of moral civilization.³⁹

³⁹ Lady Morgan, *Absenteeism* (London: Henry Colburn, 1825), 76-77.

Returning to the novel itself, the culmination of Colambre's first tour of Ireland makes this connection between absenteeism and Ireland's national orphanhood more explicit when finally he sets eyes upon his family's estate:

“And is this my father's town of Clonbrony?” thought Lord Colambre. “Is this Ireland?—No, it is not Ireland. Let me not, like most of those who forsake their native country, traduce it. Let me not, even to my own mind, commit the injustice of taking a speck for the whole. What I have just seen is the picture only of that to which an Irish estate and Irish tenantry may be degraded in the absence of those whose duty and interest it is to reside in Ireland to uphold justice by example and authority; but who, neglecting this duty, commit power to bad hands and bad hearts—abandon their tenantry to oppression, and their property to ruin” (156).

In psychological terms, this scene is arguably the novel's lowest point. Nevertheless, it becomes the backdrop for Colambre's epiphany to reclaim his land and his throne. His resistance to rendering the scene into a synecdoche for Ireland (“taking a speck for the whole”) signals a larger concern with the “representation” of Ireland that Edgeworth will return to again and again in the novel. Both the under-agents and unethical absentee landowners like Lady Dashforth are described throughout the text in terms of their “misrepresentations” of both the management of the estates and Ireland as a whole. The bleakness of these scenes contrasts powerfully with “the neat cottages, and well-attended schools” in the neighborhood of the Oranmores (57). An Irish family that has not succumbed to absenteeism, the Oranmores provide Colambre with an example of “not only what could be done, but what had been done, by the influence of great proprietors residing on their own estates, and encouraging the people by judicious kindness” (124).

The exemplar of good governance provided by the Oranmores confirms Colambre's desire not to collapse Ireland as a nation with the absentee estates. As such, the solution put forward for the problem of absenteeism is never really ambiguous; indeed, in the word “absentee” itself we see the problem's undoing. Larry Brady's voice becomes the medium to

express it when he announces that Lord Clonbrony's "neglect" is "the bottom of the nuisance." When Colambre asks why the blame should be heaped upon "this poor Lord Clonbrony," Larry's response is frank and honest: "Because he is absent...It would not be so was he *prisint*" (emphasis in original, 139). Katie Trumpener articulates Edgeworth's position thus: "The only solution to these social and economic disorders...is a renewed, nationalist identification with Ireland."⁴⁰ However, the project of "reforming Ireland" or its "secure possession" is only partially complete with the return of the patriarch to his lands.⁴¹ In other words, there is another component to Edgeworth's vision of Ireland's future, something located in the problem of an "illegitimate" female orphan.

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In addition to its usage as a description of the consequences of absenteeism, the word "neglect" is deployed in a romantic context early in the novel. Having been implored by his mother to pay particular attention to an eligible and very wealthy heiress, Lord Colambre reacts in his customarily honest manner: "My dear mother, I never can neglect any deserving young Lady, and particularly one of your guests; but I shall be careful not to do more than not to neglect, for I never will pretend what I do not feel" (25). More important than the deployment of a specific verb is the way in which it orients us to the real object of Colambre's desire. This early scene makes it clear that Colambre must secure himself a romantic partner for the return home, the form of whom can only be taken by Grace Nugent: "'Perhaps, madam,' said Lord

⁴⁰ Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, 21.

⁴¹ Corbett articulates the underlying logic of the restoration plot running through *The Absentee*: "In Edgeworth's view, reforming Ireland will require the presence of its restored patriarch and his earnest son, who would jointly recognize that their 'duty and interest' coincide with the proper supervision and regulation of their tenants. Everyone's well-being and security rest on the father's being reinstated in his proper position" (Corbett, 79). Catherine Gallagher makes a similar point in a discussion of *Ennui* (1809), arguing that the text suggests "that the secure possession of Ireland by the Anglo-Irish depends on the wholesale re-creation of the landowners" (301).

Colambre, fixing his eyes on Grace Nugent, ‘you think that I can see no farther than a handsome face?’” (25). We can attribute much of the certainty of her position as Lord Colambre’s only love object to the nature of *The Absentee*’s narration. Although omniscient, the vast majority of the narrator’s penetrations into the different characters’ thinking processes are focused on the turbulent emotions of the sensitive young protagonist. As such, when we learn that she is “[b]eautiful and graceful”, and how she is “so unconscious...of her charms, that the eye of admiration could rest upon her without her perceiving it,” we realize that the narrator’s thoughts articulate Colambre’s own desires (14). This is not accidental, for these two intertwined problems that the novel confronts can only be resolved by “our hero:” Colambre must reject and overcome his mother’s desires to keep the family in England, and resolve his own romantic desires for his seemingly illegitimate Grace Nugent.

It is in the seventh chapter, roughly halfway through the novel, that the narratological organization of Grace Nugent’s plot is made clear, when Lord Colambre’s romantic fantasies are seemingly dashed after a piece of information is shared with him. The source of this information is Lady Dashforth, an unapologetic absentee landlord, who tells him of “a family secret that has been kept, for some good reason from [Colambre], and from the poor girl herself” (106-107). Because Lady Dashforth has been the source of so much misrepresentation thus far in the novel, we are tempted to question the veracity of the report until confirmation of the story arrives from Lady Clonbrony:

Her mother’s maiden name was St. Omar; and there was a faux pas, certainly. She was, I am told (for it was before my time), educated at a convent abroad; and there was an affair with a Captain Reynolds, a young officer, which her friends were obliged to hush up. She brought an infant to England with her, and took the name of Reynolds—but none of that family would acknowledge her; and she lived in great obscurity, till your uncle Nugent saw, fell in love with her, and (knowing her whole history) married her. He adopted the child, gave her his name, and, after some years, the whole story was forgotten (118-119).

Although Edgeworth periodically reminds us of the romance plot through descriptions of Colambre's depressed state after hearing the news, only at the closing moments of the novel does the specific import of Grace Nugent's illegitimacy come into focus—after the rest of the narrative loose ends have already been tied up. This is after Colambre has successfully outwitted his father's under-agents and settled his family's debts, after he has convinced his mother to return permanently to Ireland, and even after we have learned the fates of the many minor characters in the novel. Colambre's heartbreak is propelling him towards the army, hoping to “lose all the painful recollections, and drive from his heart all the resentments” of his unrequited love (197). However, shortly before setting off, he learns by chance of “a young English officer who had been...in the Austrian service, a gentleman of the name of Reynolds” (218). The rest of the novel is concerned with uncovering the secret marriage between Captain Reynolds and Grace's mother. Grace Nugent thus becomes Grace Nugent-Reynolds, heiress to an estate and finally able to be subsumed into a union with Lord Colambre, becoming Grace Colambre.

How do you solve a narratological problem like Grace Nugent? Critics have spilled much ink trying to pin down her role in the novel through the hyphenated-identity that she, like her author, must bear. By the end of the novel, Edgeworth's heroine seems to be mired in an unresolvable contradiction. On the one hand, the Irishness of the name suggests that she is a feminized embodiment of Ireland, a *Marianne* carrying the Hibernian nation on her back, the central object of celebration for the Irish peasants when the happy couple returns home.⁴² On the other hand, the late revelation that she is in fact the daughter of an English officer seems to suggest that Edgeworth requires her allegorical Irish heroine to have some sort of connection to an English

⁴² It is not necessary to rehearse the now well-documented connections between the character in the novel, the contemporary of Edgeworth's named Gracie Nugent, and the figure about whom the Irish bard Turlough O'Carolan composed a song. For a complete explanation of both the historical significance of Grace Nugent's character, see Van de Veire et al, “Introductory Note”, xviii-xx.

bloodline, conjuring up the racist imperial ghost of the *Droit du Seigneur*. Not surprisingly, the critics are divided. One recent reading takes Edgeworth to task for “[emptying] out not only any radicalism from the figure of Grace Nugent, but Irishness itself.” Another makes the point that despite the revelation of her parentage, Edgeworth “implicitly continues to assert” Grace Nugent’s Irish Catholic identity. A third reading steers a middle path between these two poles, locating in both Colambre and Nugent an embodiment of “an Irish identity which is characterized by being elusive and adaptive.”⁴³

What all of these strategies share is that they are all premised on reading Grace Nugent’s narrative in a linear fashion: from beginning to end. As a result, they all emphasize her ontological transformation from an illegitimate Irish orphan to an heiress. What if, however, we attempted to read the story in the opposite direction, displacing her transformation from the center of analysis in lieu of a lens focused on the social connections that take shape through her orphanhood? To borrow language from the novel itself, what if we reject Lady Clonbrony’s claim that “the best part of the story” is that “she’s an heiress”? (247).

Reading the text from back to front, as it were, the solution to the question of how to situate the undoing of Grace Nugent’s illegitimacy against the larger question of Kantian “perpetual peace” between enlightened nation-states becomes apparent.⁴⁴ To do this we must return to the early moments of the novel, when, in the wake of her disastrous dinner party—an event that has consumed the entire novel thus far—Lady Clonbrony suffers a nervous crisis. As

⁴³ The three readings being cited here are respectively: Thomas Tracy, “The Mild Irish Girl: Domesticating the National Tale,” *Éire-Ireland* 39.1&2 (2004): 99; Robert Tracy, “Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan: Legality Versus Legitimacy,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40. 1 (June 1985): 1-22; Cliona Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment and Nation*. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005), 199.

⁴⁴ Spencer Jackson has shown not only the impossibility but also the “hidden nationalism” of the Kantian cosmopolitan future at work in the novel. “Never Getting Home: The Unfulfilled Promise of Maria Edgeworth’s *The Absentee*,” *Studies in Romanticism* 50 (Fall 2011): 505-529.

Grace takes up position as her nurse, the narration sets out to redeem Lady Clonbrony by focusing a spotlight on the origins of their relationship:

A few foibles out of the question, such as her love of fine people, her affectation of being English, and other affectations too tedious to mention, Lady Clonbrony was really a good woman, had good principles, moral and religious, and, selfishness not immediately interfering, she was good-natured; and though her soul and attention were so completely absorbed in the duties of acquaintanceship that she did not know it, she really had affections—they were concentrated upon a few near relations. She was extremely fond and extremely proud of her son. Next to her son, she was fonder of her niece than of any other creature. She had received Grace Nugent into her family when she was left an orphan, and deserted by some of her other relations. She had bred her up, and had treated her with constant kindness. This kindness and these obligations had raised the warmest gratitude in Miss Nugent's heart; and it was the strong principle of gratitude which rendered her capable of endurance and exertions seemingly far above her strength (39).

If we are reading *The Absentee* in terms of its allegorical rendering of an Anglo-Irish future, this passage is one of the most important moments in the novel because it highlights that Grace Nugent's orphanhood generates a narrative space for the creation of an Anglo-Irish bond figured as an adoption. Not simply an adoption in the strict, legal sense of the word, but rather a kind of triangulation of social bonds made across orphaned Ireland, an affiliation between different families of different nations: English (Reynolds), Irish (Nugent), and Anglo-Irish (Colambre).⁴⁵ This affiliation, taking place across Grace Nugent's orphaned figure, transcends the politics of filiative bonds underlying the anti-Irish racism coming from both English and Anglo-Irish characters in the text. Reading the novel thus highlights that, in addition to the classic formulation of private and conjugal marriage, the novel invests profound allegorical and political potential in the relationship these two women form between themselves. The two plots of *The Absentee* become two sides of a single narrative of maternal redemption: the undoing of Grace

⁴⁵ "Two deeper patterns or urges may be detected" in the novel, W.J McCormack and Kim Walker argue: "One is the acknowledgment of reconciliation or union between differences of background, opinion, and value; the other, more tacit perhaps but also more intellectually rigorous, is the acknowledgment of difference in itself, difference as an inescapable condition of writing and reading, or—simply—being." "Introduction" in Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, Eds. W.J McKormac and Kim Walker (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1988), x.

Nugent's illegitimacy is in fact the cleansing of her mother's name—a cleansing mirrored in the redemptive force of Lady Clonbrony's decision to finally give up her English affectations. Although she is an object of ridicule for most of the novel, she ends the novel as Ireland's repentant mother returning to her abandoned child. As such, it is no accident that both Lady Clonbrony and Grace Nugent are transformed simultaneously into proper objects of male desire at the conclusion of the novel. Lord Colambre's repressed desires for Grace Nugent can now be reified into a private marriage, and his father's sexual vigor returns in force, embracing his wife for the first time since their departure from Ireland: "You never kissed me so since we left Ireland before" (196). While at the beginning of the novel the two women embody two "invincible obstacles" blocking Colambre's restoration, by the end we realize that the solution to the problem of absenteeism is located in the bond these two form between themselves.

Despite the elation marking the "happy return" that concludes the novel, it is impossible to read *The Absentee* or any of the other Irish tales—*Castle Rackrent* (1800), *Ennui* (1809), *Ormond* (1817)—without taking into account the profoundly traumatic nature of the 1798 Irish Rebellion. Taken together, these narratives remain to this day a kind of scar tissue.⁴⁶ This was a conflict characterized by an intimate brutality: servants against their employers, tenants against their landlords, and, in turn, local bands of counter-revolutionaries terrorizing a population deemed too sympathetic to the rebels and their French allies. It should not be surprising that Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Edgeworth's father and a wealthy Protestant landowner loyal to British rule, did not fully escape this violence. He was, according to one historian, "a queer fish

⁴⁶ Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty: The History of the Great Irish Rebellion of 1798* (London: Panther Books, 1972). James Kelly, "We were all to have been massacred: Irish Protestants and the Experience of Rebellion" in *1798: A Bicentennial Perspective*. eds. Thomas Bartlett et al. (Dublin: Four Courts, 2003), 312-31.

to find in the bogs of Longford.”⁴⁷ At one point during the revolt, he comes under attack by a group of Orangemen reactionaries who, not knowing that Edgeworth was a leading Protestant, accuse him of secretly signaling the French. Writing years later in the memoir she wrote jointly with her father, Edgeworth expounds on the “absurdity” of the entire affair: “My father had literally but two farthing candles, by the light of which he had been reading the newspaper late the preceding night. These however were said to be signals for the enemy!”⁴⁸ At another point during the insurrection, Richard Edgeworth is actually physically attacked by a crowd:

The mob had not contented themselves with the horrid yells that we had heard, but had been pelting them with hard turf, stones, and brickbats. From one of these my father received a blow on the side of his head, coming with such force as to stagger, and almost to stun him; but he kept himself up, knowing that if once he fell he should be trampled under foot.⁴⁹

The events of 1798 deeply affected Edgeworth, who had just celebrated her thirtieth birthday and was, by all accounts, profoundly close to her father. These reflections, decades later, can be read against the long history of distrust between the Anglo-Irish landowners and the underclasses of the Irish countryside they ruled over. One historian claims that the “readiness of Irish Protestants in 1798 to interpret the rising as a sectarian massacre derived in the first instance from the conviction of successive generations from the mid-seventeenth century that the Catholic population aspired to that end.”⁵⁰

With this in mind we must re-read a claim we find in the penultimate lines of Edgeworth’s personal recollections of the events of 1798 with a certain degree of incredulity.

⁴⁷ Pakenham. *The Year of Liberty*, 320.

⁴⁸Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria, *Memoirs of Richard Lovel Edgeworth, begun by himself and concluded by his daughter, Maria Edgeworth* (London: R.Hunter, 1820), 2.226.

⁴⁹Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria, *Memoirs*, 2.230.

⁵⁰Kelly, 313.

Thanks in large part to her father's moral temerity, "the Longford mob completely vanished from our imagination."⁵¹ Rather than simply dismiss the claim as untrue or a symptomatic act of repression, we can read it alongside Ruskin's claim about *The Absentee* I quoted earlier. In other words, Ruskin provokes us to not only think about the ways orphanhood can become a forum to imagine "the proper ways of managing Irish people," but also the improper ones. In what follows, I show how two institutions that formulated a response to the problems posed by orphanhood imagined two very different ways of "managing people."

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At the turn of the Eighteenth Century there were no foundling hospitals anywhere on the British Isles.⁵² However, by the end of the 1730s, four very different institutions had been constructed in different parts of the empire (Dublin, London, colonial Georgia, and Edinburgh). What happened in this relatively short period of time? Three different texts written by Anglican clergymen during the 1720s suggest one important development: for the first time, "orphans" and "foundlings" find themselves segregated conceptually from the larger class of "the Poor." All this newfound interest resulted in the coinage of a word, orphanotrophy, which circulated in print into the nineteenth century.

In 1729, London-based Thomas Bray published a pamphlet calling for the erection of a foundling hospital in the city—a text that Coram and his backers regularly cited in their appeal in

⁵¹ Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria, *Memoirs*, 236.

⁵² For accounts of other foundling institutions in Europe, see eds. Catherine Painter-Brick and Malcolm T. Smith, *Abandoned Children* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000). Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982) ; Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: the Ospedale degli Innocente 1410-1536* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); Joan Sherwood, *Poverty in Eighteenth Century Spain: The Women and Children of the Inclusa* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1988). Joel F. Harrington provides a historiographical overview of child abandonment in *The Unwanted Child: The Fate of Foundlings, Orphans, and Juvenile Criminals in Early Modern Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 2-5.

the next decade.⁵³ Bray provides case studies of other institutions in Europe and aims his argument at the city's wealthy men. The "necessity," he argues, of a foundling hospital in London, is "rendered evident from the public accounts we often have of infants murdered by their wicked mothers," and some orphans who are "made blind, or who have their limbs distorted by our strolling beggars, thereby to excite the compassion, and draw out from the charitable passenger a greater alms."⁵⁴ Bray's text echoes an earlier text written by a less well-known clergyman. In *The Case of the Foundlings of the City of Dublin* (1722), William King's focuses on the Dublin House of Industry, which, by that time, had been in operation for almost two decades. Not in any way a foundling hospital in the traditional sense, it was nevertheless the first orphan institution in modern British history.⁵⁵ That being said, however, it is important to remember that it shared a profound resemblance with the much older institution that had long been a place where orphans were sent: the workhouse. As such, children under the age six were refused admission. King's pamphlet militates against this policy, arguing that the original spirit of the 1703 Act establishing the institution calls for the reception of all orphans irrespective of their age. Like Bray, King was eager to highlight to his Anglo-Irish readership the economic and political incentives of such a venture:

It may be considered that these children will be bred up in the Protestant religion, which also, in a political view, will be a strength to the Protestant interest. As they grow up,

⁵³ Thomas Bray, *Memorial concerning the erecting in the city of London or the suburbs thereof an orphanotrophy or hospital for the reception of poor cast-off children or foundlings....* (London, 1729). For more on the importance of Bray's pamphlet to the Coram's campaign, see McClure, *Coram's Children*, 21-22.

⁵⁴ Bray, 13.

⁵⁵ William King, *The Case of the Foundlings of the City of Dublin; Humbly Recommended to the Consideration of the Parliament* (Dublin, 1730). The only modern account of the institution can be found in Joseph Robins, *The Lost Children: a Study of Charity Children in Ireland, 1700-1900* (Dublin: Institution of Public Administration, 1980). Henry Maunsell, a respected physician and professor of Midwifery, compiled the most extensive statistical report on the institution's last three decades. "On the Statistics of the Dublin Foundling Hospital, and on Child Desertion in the city of Dublin," *Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (London: John Murray, 1836.):113-118.

being children of the public, they may be put to what use the public pleases; they may be employed in husbandry, or in what sort of manufactures the public thinks fit. For the public will have full power of these.⁵⁶

The topic of both these inquires—orphanhood’s potential—is also at the center of a third text written around the same time, arguably the most well-known text on orphanhood, namely Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal* (1729). Dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Swift was ideally situated to see the very real consequences of child abandonment in Ireland. Although both Dublin as a city and Ireland as a nation loom only obliquely in the text, we see the same basic question being asked about what to do with the surplus corporeality of orphan children.⁵⁷ The increased attention to the question of orphanhood was not limited to men of letters. In 1729, an investigation was launched by Anglo-Irish authorities into the “pernicious practice” of orphans under the age of six being forcibly relocated to other parishes in an attempt to minimize costs.⁵⁸

Far more than a social policy debate, what all these texts are participating in will have major implications across both in Great Britain as well as in the Empire. In effect, they are manufacturing a new site of political investment, “children of the public.” Dublin and London would prove to be the two longest-lasting orphan institutions in their respective nation’s history. In the case of the London Foundling, its existence spans the entire history of modern institutionalization—its beginnings, its heights, and its eventual demise in the second half of the twentieth century. Superficially, in day-to-day operations, the two institutions overlapped in

⁵⁶ King, 6.

⁵⁷ Fred Powell foregrounds Swift's essay in his account of “the fuliginous history of the Dublin Foundling Hospital”. “Dean Swift and the Dublin Foundling Hospital,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 70. 278&279 (Summer/Autumn, 1981):169. Needless to say, to provide an overview of critical opinion on Swift's essay would require an essay unto itself. The most recent prominent inquiry into Swift's text can be found in Sean Moore's historicist “Devouring Posterity: *A Modest Proposal*, Empire, and Ireland’s ‘Debt of the Nation,’” *PMLA* 122.3 (Fall 2007): 670-695.

⁵⁸ *A Report from the Lords’ committee appointed to enquire into a Pernicious Practise carried on in this City, by removing of Foundling Children from One Parish to another, whereby many of the said Children have been Destroyed.* (Dublin: Andrew Grooke, 1729-1730).

how they designed the lives of their inmates. Infants and children received by authorities would be shipped out to wet nurses in the country, who would care for the child until a certain age.

“Grown” children would then return to the institution, where some sort of education was arranged with the hopes of eventually placing them out in the labor force. Both institutions thus shared a publicly articulated goal—the orphan’s transformation into a subject that is mobile, laboring, and “useful to the Public.” Recounting parts of both their institutional histories highlights the ways in which the response to orphanhood becomes a laboratory of subjectivity.

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The orphan institution that would eventually be called the Dublin Foundling Hospital was built as a section of the Dublin House of Industry in 1703. The children that were accepted were treated much in the same way as the other inmates of the workhouse. Unlike orphanages in other Catholic countries, which were largely focused on baptizing infants before they died, the Dublin House of Industry was part of the state-sanctioned discrimination against Irish Catholics. This had repercussions both inside and outside the institution; the employees, administrators, and governors were Protestants, as was the education administered to the inmates, and only Protestants were allowed to apply to the institutions for apprentices. This kind of ethnic cleansing is replicated in the “residential schools” of Anglophone world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that set out to “kill the Indian” and “save the man.”

In 1730, several radical policy changes were made to admission policies. Renamed the Foundling Hospital and Workhouse of the City of Dublin, the new institution was mandated to take in all foundling children, including infants. Another important change was the repealing of the policy of retaining children until they reached twenty-one years of age, thereby allowing the governors to apprentice out any child at their discretion, sometimes as young as six years old.

Although the ghost of the workhouse still loomed inside its institutional structure, these changes were the first in a series of policy decisions that would transform the Dublin foundling over the course of the next half-century. Along with opening up admissions to infants, it adopted a policy of “anonymous reception” as well—allowing for children to be given anonymously by way of some sort of vessel placed outside of the building. Often referred to as the “baby hatch,” the vessel was usually connected to a bell allowing attendants to be alerted to a child’s arrival. Like other foundling institutions with policies of open or general reception, the Dublin Foundling Hospital was haunted by an astonishingly high death rate throughout most of its history. Such rates were not only seen in the infant infirmary; based on the different statistical accounts, the majority of children given to the institution died either right away or soon after admission. This too was common at other institutions, since policies of general reception often attracted dying or otherwise unhealthy infants. As such, almost three decades after first opening its doors, the Dublin Foundling began the daunting task of setting up a modern orphan institution, and had to do so under the watchful eye of Anglo-Irish authorities. In the 1740s, the institution was subjected to the first of what would prove to be numerous state inquiries. These reports “named names” and were often swiftly followed by layoffs and policy changes. Nevertheless, the same problems soon manifested themselves, in turn provoking more inquiry. Reports were circulated in the press and they were often paired with sensationalized eyewitness accounts of life inside the institution. In the nineteenth century, one writer goes so far to describe the institution as “extensive misery in its most hideous forms,” lamenting the “melancholy waste of life.”⁵⁹ The institution unceremoniously closed its doors in the 1830s, just before the passing of the 1838 Irish Poor Law Act.

⁵⁹ Edward Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political*. 2 Volumes (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1812), 2.423.

Although it was eventually shuttered, the scrutiny of the institution over the decades resulted in a number of considerable changes. In the 1750s, fewer adults were admitted to the workhouse in an effort to free up more resources for younger inmates. In the 1760s, as a result of Lady Arabella Denny's campaign for the institution, a more standardized system of infant feeding and clothing was put in place. In the 1770s, the Dublin Foundling Hospital was eventually severed completely from the House of Industry and only children under the age of one year were eligible to be admitted. By the 1780s, therefore, the Dublin Foundling resembled its London counterpart in a number of important ways albeit with two crucial differences: firstly, it was still chronically underfunded, and secondly, the Dublin Foundling was mandated to take in all children under a certain age. Not surprisingly, the horror stories continued to emerge even after decades of efforts to improve care. The following extract from one of the more prominent parliamentary inquiries paints a bleak but telling portrait:

Mrs. Hunt, being sworn and examined, said that that she is matron to the hospital; that she has been in that employment since May 1790. The young children when brought into the Hospital are put into her care. That the children brought from the country are the most unhealthy; that she attributes their being so to the bad usage they receive on the road; that the children brought from the country are frequently dosed with spirits; that they are sometimes brought in convulsions; that she imagines this may proceed from the great quantities of spirits given them on the road. That children brought from the country frequently die almost as soon as brought into the house; that sometimes three are brought in the skirt of one woman's gown, living and dead together; that at other times seven or eight are brought together on a car, some of them dead, and so bruised and flattened that it is imagined the person who has been entrusted with them has sat on them. That the head nurse takes the children to the nursery, and dresses them in linen and flannel; that they are then fed with the allowance of food, but witness does not think is sufficient for many of them. That they are kept in the nursery till the surgeon or physician examines them, except in cases of particular distress, and then the apothecary attends them and removes them to the infant infirmary. That the physician and surgeon attend the Hospital twice a week. That the children remain in the nursery until disposed of to nurses who come recommended by gentlemen of the country; and that she thinks the weakly children require more nourishing food than is allowed by the institution. That the porter receives the children on their being brought to the Hospital, and he brings them to the head nurse. That the children brought this year from the country were in general in a very bad state of health, and rather worse than in the last year. That of fifteen children brought into the

Hospital on the 5th of March instant there are only two in sufficient health to be delivered out to nurses, and she believes that most of the others have died. That when children are brought to the Hospital dead they are entered on the books...That witness has a great deal of difficulty obtaining wet nurses for the children. That she thinks children might sometimes be saved if they had wet nurses. That she thinks the wages allowed by the Hospital is too small [sic]. That she believes one great cause of the difficulty in procuring wet nurses is the fear they have of catching the venereal disease from the children, and that there were on the day of her examination in the infirmary thirteen infants and in the Hospital forty-eight, not more than eight of whom were fit to be sent to nurse.⁶⁰

It would be easy to read both this testimony and the larger story of the institution solely in terms of the practices of state-sanctioned, structural English racism against Irish Catholics. If we were to take this thinking to its logical conclusion, the dysfunction of the Dublin Foundling Hospital becomes a part of the longer history of Anglo ethnic cleansing.⁶¹ Such a reading, however, would mire us in the murky terrain of historical intentionality, foreclosing the larger question of sovereignty. These questions come into focus when the institutional history provided above, albeit telegraphed, is viewed against the backdrop of Foucault's straightforward definition of the state. The latter, he argues, "is not a cold monster; it is the correlative of a particular way of governing."⁶² Both the testimonial extract and the larger story of the Dublin Foundling Hospital history not only bear witness to social history before and after the Union, but also provide an illustration of the way in which power over life can be shaped and deployed through an orphan institution. Therefore, looking back broadly over the history of the Dublin Foundling, we can see that the efforts to "reform" the hospital were limited by the fact that it turned on a

⁶⁰ *Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into the STATE and MANAGEMENT of the FOUNDLING HOSPITAL* (Dublin: 1792), 4-5.

⁶¹ Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State, vol. 2: The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 50-58.

⁶² Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart (New York : Picador, 2008), 6.

kind of sovereignty over bodies that proved itself increasingly incapable of dealing with the problems being posed by English imperial hegemony in Ireland. To use Edgeworth's language, the problem that the Dublin Foundling Hospital failed to resolve was how to govern "Irish vivacity."

The other half of Foucault's bifurcation of sovereignty, the realm of biopolitics, provides another way of thinking about the problems being raised. The London Foundling Hospital exemplifies the ways in which a certain set of political desires can generate life itself. While its role as one of the oldest bricks and mortar social institutions in Great Britain has been re-staged numerous times, there has yet to be a consideration of the ways in which it models an understanding of social welfare still very much with us to this day.

In his influential account of English charities, David Owen proclaims the Foundling Hospital as "the most imposing single monument erected by eighteenth-century benevolence."⁶³ Texts taken from its vast archive constitute an entire volume of Alyssa Levene's sprawling five-part collection of primary materials, *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2006). In her introduction, Levene describes the Foundling Hospital as "one of the most eloquent testimonials to the eighteenth-century charitable drive to assist the deserving poor in Britain."⁶⁴ Beyond broad declarations of its monumentality, however, there is no consensus among historians as to just how unique the institution was, or how much influence should be ascribed to it. In her authoritative account of its first sixty years, Ruth McClure emphasizes the ways in which the Foundling's early years were funded. As it was not directly connected to any governmental or church hierarchy, the governors had to answer only to a group of volunteer

⁶³ David Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660-1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1965), 54.

⁶⁴ Alyssa Levene, *Narratives of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), 1.

board members drawn largely from the pool of donors. This structure granted them a remarkable degree of control in designing and implementing an institutional program. Therefore, McClure argues, the “greatest accomplishment of the Foundling Hospital...was to set the pattern for the incorporated associational charities” for the rest of the century.⁶⁵ More recently, however, one historian warns us that that the “distinction between subscription and earlier forms of charity should not be overstated.” In this view, the rise of both the Foundling and the other similar charitable institutions “changed the environment in which questions of welfare strategy were debated and [boosted] confidence in the nation’s disposition to give.”⁶⁶ Linda Colley’s *en passant* account of the Foundling emphasizes the men of trade and industry who helped build it. For Colley, the Foundling is a product of British mercantilist global expansion, something that needed a limitless supply of deracinated labor working under the supervision of morally pure men.⁶⁷ Donna T. Andrew’s study of eighteenth century London philanthropy connects the Foundling’s emergence to mid-century angst around population decline. But more than simply responding to a perceived need, the Foundling is the first of a wave of subscription-based charities constituting a national project aimed at forging a healthy, “policed” national social body.⁶⁸

Literary scholars, too, continue to return to the Foundling to ask questions about the seemingly never-ending parade of orphans and foundlings in literary texts in the eighteenth and

⁶⁵ McClure, *Coram's Children*, 248.

⁶⁶ Joanna Innes, “The ‘mixed economy of welfare’ in early modern England: Assessments of the options from Hale to Malthus (1683-1803)” in *Charity, Self-Interest, and Welfare in the English Past*, ed. M.J. Daunton (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 153,154.

⁶⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 56-60.

⁶⁸ Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989).

nineteenth centuries. Harvesting parts of the very rich archive of texts attached to the institution, these engagements use the Foundling as a trope or kind of intertext to approach a broad set of conceptual debates—the production and management of children, illegitimacy, the Enlightenment, empire, motherhood and gender ideals. Lisa Zunshine asks why, despite its powerful presence over “the eighteenth-century cultural imagination”, the Foundling Hospital “was both absent from and present, a just beyond reach spectral entity,” in what she coins as “the foundling fictions of the Enlightenment”. In an expansive article, Jenny Bourne Taylor takes a cue from Dickens and centers her narrative overview and reading of the Foundling Hospital’s legacy through the trope of the “blank child” produced by its famed admission card. The blankness of the institutionalized child becomes a space to inscribe ever-fluctuating narratives of the British nationhood. Similarly, Laura Schattschneider sees in the reception of foundlings not only a preservation of life but the generation of “a particular story about sexual transgression, maternal authority, and redemption that pervaded eighteenth and early nineteenth-century English culture.”⁶⁹

Discussions of the Foundling are not limited to recent scholarly interventions. On the contrary, the London Foundling Hospital became a subject of intense cultural and creative interest shortly after opening its doors. Briefly one of the most fashionable social gathering spots—Handel conducted *Messiah* there, and Hogarth, Gainsborough, and Reynolds all displayed their art⁷⁰—it was already being codified in the ever-increasing set of printed texts

⁶⁹ Lisa Zunshine, “The Spectral Hospital: Eighteenth-Century Philanthropy and the Novel,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29.1 (2005): 2. Jenny Bourne Taylor, “Received, a Blank Child”: John Brownlow, Charles Dickens, and the London Foundling Hospital: Archives and Fictions,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56. 3 (December 2001): 293-363. Laura Schattschneider, “The Infants’ Petitions: An English Poetics of Foundling Reception, 1741-1837,” *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 33 (2004): 72.

⁷⁰Ilias Chrissochoidis, “Handel, Hogarth, Goupy: Artistic Intersections in early Georgian England” *Early Music* 37.4 (2009): 577-596; Katharine Eustace, “The Key is Locke: Hogarth, Rysbrack and the Foundling Hospital,” *British*

dedicated to British history and travel, even inspiring a satirical journal.⁷¹ The institution very quickly became a place to circulate all kinds of texts, in effect functioning as a salon, a theater, a gallery, and a university. In addition to the famous artists that found a *cause célèbre* in the Foundling, William Cadogan published a text drawing on his experiences as the early in-house physician.⁷² The chapel became a forum for both well-known and not so well-known clergymen to give public sermons, some of which would later be published.⁷³ This fascination with the London Foundling Hospital would continue into the nineteenth century, making appearances in the works of such prominent writers as Charles Dickens, among others.⁷⁴

Looking broadly at its wide variety of engagements, it goes without saying that, like any institution with a vast archive, the London Foundling Hospital functions as a discursive site to pursue a whole series of very broad questions. For my purposes, I am more interested in what separates its monumentality from the oblivion in which the Dublin Foundling resides, and what that difference might mean to a “political” reading of literature.⁷⁵ While in Dublin the difference

Art Journal 7.2 (Autumn 2006): 34-49; Catherine Roach, “The Foundling Restored: Emma Brownlow King, William Hogarth, and the Public Image of the Foundling Hospital in the 19th century,” *British Art Journal* 9.2 (Autumn 2008): 40-49.

⁷¹ The Foundling Hospital [has] risen to an extraordinary public Benefit” announces Benjamin Martin in his *The Natural History of England: or, A description of each particular county, in regard to the curious productions of nature and art* Volume 1 (London: W. Owen, 1759), I.282. This continued into the next century. See Peter Cunningham. *Handbook of London: Past and Present* Vol. 1 (London: J. Murray):190-191; George Clinch, *Marylebone and St. Pancras: their history, celebrities, buildings, and institutions*. (London: Truslove, 1890). *The Foundling Hospital for Wit: For the Reception and Preservation of such Brats of Wit and Humour, whose Parents chuse to Drop them*. (London: G. Lion, 1743).

⁷² William Cadogan, *An Essay upon Nursing, and the Management of Children, from their birth to three years of age* (London: J. Roberts, 1748).

⁷³ Charles Lawson, *Sermons Preached Chiefly in the Chapel of the Foundling Hospital, London* (London: John W. Parker, 1838).

⁷⁴ Charles Dickens, “Received, a Blank Child,” in *Household Words* 7 (1853): 49-53. It also shows up prominently in *Little Dorrit* (1855-1857) and in his only play (co-authored with Wilkie Collins and later published as a novel), *No Thoroughfare* (1867).

⁷⁵ In two recent studies on Irish social history there are no mentions of the institution. Anna Clark, “Wild Workhouse

between a living orphan body and a dead one is negligible (“sometimes three are brought in the skirt of one woman’s gown, living and dead together”), the London Foundling Hospital viewed orphans as material objects needing to be retrieved from the brink of destruction and placed back into social circulation. In a market economy, the limitless circulation of commodities not only defines modern economic production and the lives of those working inside of it but also provides a conceptual armature to model the very fabrication of life itself. “Blankness,” therefore, is a by-word for the transformation of the unauthorized, surplus orphan body into the ideal subjective site to deploy a set of ideas about modern life.

This circulation began at the moment the child was accepted into the institution’s care. Infants, some of whom arrived from far-flung corners of England and beyond, were immediately shipped to a wet nurse outside of the city. Bureaucratically, the hospital organized and maintained this network from London by mail—no simple feat given the limitations on long distance communication in the mid eighteenth century.⁷⁶ Inspectors kept tabs on the wet nurses scattered across rural areas outside of London and regularly sent back reports to administrators in London. Employees inside the institution were also subject to intense surveillance, and the high degree of turnover in the early years highlights how seriously the administrators took any allegations of malfeasance. Like today, the entrance of an individual into its machinery generated a whole series of texts—reception forms, health information, educational progress, and apprenticing certification. Once old enough to return to institutional care, these “grown children” began a regime of education and physical training aimed at making them employable. Girls were

Girls and the Liberal Imperial State in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ireland,” *Journal of Social History* 39.2 (Winter 2005): 389-409. Victoria Crossman, “Cribbed, Contained, and Confined? The Care of Children under the Irish Poor Law, 1850–1920,” *Éire-Ireland* 44.1&2 (Spring/Summer 2009): 37-61.

⁷⁶Alyssa Levene, *Childcare, Health, and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800: "left to the mercy of the world"* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007): 90-118.

taught skills ideal for domestic employment, while boys were given more physical work aimed at making them viable candidates for a diverse set of apprenticeships.⁷⁷ In addition to this labor training, they were taught to read and given rudimentary lessons in basic arithmetic, and the results were no less than remarkable: by the end of the eighteenth century, “the level of education achieved by the foundling boys exceeded substantially that of their contemporaries.”⁷⁸ Not only did the institution surpass the educational standards typical of the poor, but many also emerged from the Foundling overeducated for the kind of employment they were apprenticed to do.

The “blank children” of the Foundling Hospital were ideal sites to deploy an entire series of relatively new ideas about how life should be managed. To this day, the variegated patchwork of private and public social welfare programs is premised on a view of its “clients” as first and foremost “blank.” The rhetoric these programs employ often insists upon the importance of reinserting “at-risk youth” into the labor market, back into a kind of social circulation. Although the language has changed, the fundamental figure of a blank subject, an object capable of being inscribed and thus interpolated, is still at the center of a certain understanding of what we broadly refer to today as social welfare. To place children back into social circulation requires them to be objects of a kind of social inscription, and any stain of “illegitimacy” as orphans needed to be wiped clean. Like modern day schools, prisons, and other “total” or “complete and austere” institutions, what mattered first and foremost at the Foundling was the figuration of life produced by incarceration. In other words, as an institution it differed profoundly with the

⁷⁷While most of the females left the Foundling to enter into domestic service, for “the most the part, those who took boys from the hospital were from the lower ranks: peruke makers, cheesemongers, butchers, combmakers, blacksmiths, farriers, bakers, weavers, feltmakers, filesmiths, papermakers, tailors, ropers, tallow chandlers, cork cutters, shoemakers” (McClure, *Coram’s Children*, 127).

⁷⁸ McClure, *Coram’s Children*, 224.

extractive logic of the workhouse or the kind of parish orphanages that figure so prominently in the early moments of *Oliver Twist*, something that I will take up in the next chapter.⁷⁹ Obviously, this is not to suggest that the workhouse has simply disappeared in the era of biopolitics. On the contrary, we see its ghost inhabiting the neoliberal “workfare” programs that first emerged in the late 1960s, in which recipients of social welfare are forced into menial labor under the flimsiest pretexts of “job training.” What I mean to suggest is that London Foundling Hospital was in tune with the logic of modern biopolitical life, which views every life as a space of unlimited investigation. Paradoxically, the best way to see what was at stake in the London Foundling’s fabrication of a blank subjectivity is to look at four truly exceptional years when the institution pursued something radically imaginative.

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By 1756, fifteen years after first opening its doors, it had become clear to the administration that the Foundling was dreadfully unable to meet the demands placed on it. Although they had built a fully functional institutional charity from scratch—one that had become an object of national intrigue—the governors quickly realized the limits of their work. In the first five years of the decade, for instance, more than two thirds of the orphans offered to it were refused admission.⁸⁰ Since the charity was funded through subscriptions, the only way to increase funds was to either increase the number of subscribers or the amount that the subscribers were giving—neither of which could be mandatorily imposed. Clearly, something had to change. Harnessing all of the social capital that the institution had been accruing since its

⁷⁹ John Ramsland provides a straightforward Foucauldian reading of the institutional practices of the Foundling in his “‘Cultivating a Respectful and Modest Demeanour:’ Children of the Foundling, 1800–1926,” *The London Journal* 18.2 (1993): 95–112.

⁸⁰ McClure, *Coram's Children*, 478.

opening, the governors used their well-placed contacts in Parliament and successfully petitioned for governmental support. The charity, which until this point had been privately funded, suddenly became a state-sponsored charity in order “to render said Hospital of lasting and general Utility, the Assistance of Parliament is necessary.”⁸¹ Thus was the Foundling between 1756 and 1760 governed by a policy known as “General Reception” in which all infants under a certain age (a number that fluctuated over the four years) were accepted for admission, no questions asked. While the policy itself was not unique—indeed, for many foundling hospitals, including Dublin, this was standard—its implementation in London produced something that no orphan institution in the world has ever experienced.

The short account of the first day of the General Reception does not suggest that anything of any particular historical significance:

the Foundling Hospital was opened for the reception of all children under 2 months old, that shall be brought before the 31st of December next, agreeable to a late act of parliament, by which 10000£ was granted to defray the expense, for the reception of all children under 2 months old, that shall be brought before the 31st of December next, when 117 were taken in⁸²

The banality of this report contrasts starkly with the debate that General Reception generated in the public sphere.⁸³ One particular charge caused such an uproar among the governors that they considered taking legal action against the publication in which it appeared. In an unsigned book review, Samuel Johnson levels a serious accusation at the institution. Visiting the institution, he “found not a child that seemed to have heard of his creed, or the commandments. To breed up

⁸¹ Qtd in John Brownlow, *The History and Design of the Foundling Hospital: with a Memoir of the Founder* (London: W & H.S. Warr, 1858), 10.

⁸² *The Magazine of Magazine* 12 (Limerick, Andrew Welsh.1756), 558.

⁸³ Verax, *An Humble and Free Address to the Most Noble President, The Right Honourable and Worthy Vice-Presidents, Governors, Trustees, and Guardians of the Foundling Hospital* (London: J. Noon, 1749).

children in this Manner, is to rescue them from an early grave, that they may find employment for the gibbet; from dying in innocence, that they may perish by their crimes.”⁸⁴ Although the dispute itself is of marginal historical importance, both the offending text and the response it generated highlight the radical potential of the notion of unauthored, blank children. Behind the new rhetoric around orphans in the eighteenth century was a fear that an unclaimed child can also be inscribed with criminal qualities. This underlying fear that Johnson expresses in the review articulates widespread fears that the Foundling Hospital in fact *encouraged* illegitimacy and pre-marital sex, and therefore more child abandonment.

Despite the seriousness of the criticism from the outside, the real problems that the institution faced were inside its walls. Shortly after the grand success of winning Parliamentary support, all the parties involved realized what the mandate of the General Reception actually entailed. Until this point, the governors had had final say on who came into the hospital. Figuring out how best to screen the applicants was something that the early administrators struggled with constantly. Above all, however, it was a privately run institution that had to answer only to its governors. With the mandate of accepting all children under a certain age, it had transformed into a kind of institution that had never existed before in England or the world.

The admission numbers themselves makes clear why the initiative did not have a long shelf life:

⁸⁴ qtd in Ruth McClure, “Jonson's Critique of the Foundling Hospital,” 106.

Admissions Rate for the London Foundling Hospital⁸⁵

| | |
|-----------|--------|
| 1741-1756 | 1384 |
| 1756-1760 | 14,934 |
| 1760-1800 | 2301 |
| 1800-1950 | 6236 |

Although more than half of them died during infancy, the costs of maintaining both the dying and living bodies were astronomical. Parliament's initial grant of ten thousand pounds had quadrupled by 1760 to cover the influx of new admissions, intensifying the public scrutiny of the Foundling. In addition to a string of articles in periodicals, the General Reception solicited entire pamphlets harshly critical of the program. A typical criticism is found in a pamphlet attributing to David Stansfield:

But the [Foundling Hospital], through the legal licentious latitude contended for, a legal licentious asylum for *every* Bastard (of *every* whore, and of *every* whoremonger) under the name "foundling", even where, not one of them all is a foundling, favours of quite another spirit...this other evidently tending to conceal and protect from public infamy those who ought to be exposed to it.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ These numbers are taken from the most recent analysis of the archive by David Allin, *The Early Years of the London Foundling Hospital* (2010). Foundling Museum. "Research Resources." Accessed November 23, 2012. http://www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk/uploads/David_Allin/David_Allin_The_Early_years_ofthe_Foundling_Hospital_Complete_1.pdf

⁸⁶ For other examples of the intense criticism the Foundling now faced: Anon. *The Tendencies of the Foundling Hospital in its Present Extent, considered in several views...* (London, 1760), 13; Joseph Massie, *Further Observations concerning the Foundling Hospital, pointing out the ill Effects, which such a Hospital is likely to have upon the Religion, Liberty, and domestic Happiness of the People of Great Britain* (London: Payne, 1759); Anon. *The Rise and Progress of the Foundling Hospital considered: and the Reasons for putting a Stop to the General Reception of all Children* (London: W. Sandby, 1761); Anon. "Some Strictures at a certain Charitable Institution" *The London Chronicle for 1761, from January 1 to June 30* (London: J. Wilkie, 1761):341-342. Anon. *Some Objections to the Foundling Hospital considered by a Person in the Country to whom they were sent*. (London: Pasham, 1761). Based on her research in the archives of the Foundling Hospital, McClure takes the position that the author of the latter texts is Dr. Robert Bolton, Dean of Carlisle. McClure also provides a round-up of the different positions taken up in the debate around the General Reception. McClure, *Coram's Children*, 106-114.

After Parliament unceremoniously withdrew its support, it continued to give the hospital an annual grant to support those children (called “Parliamentary children”) who had been accepted during the General Reception. As quickly it began, the utopian venture at the London Foundling Hospital ended.

What makes these four years at the London Foundling Hospital exceptional? This was certainly not the first time an orphan institution adopted a policy of general reception. Furthermore, in terms of the day-to-day operations, the new policy did not fundamentally alter the ways in which children were fashioned by the institution. Rather, what sets this example apart from other institutions with open reception policies is the fact that the London Foundling was a modern institution born of the biopolitical age. The addition of state support raised the stakes considerably for the Foundling. Accidentally, it seems, the governors of the Foundling set in place a scheme that attempted to realize the utopian fantasy that Karl Polanyi describes in the belief in the self-regulating market.⁸⁷ The brief period in which Parliament wrote the institution what was essentially a blank check mandating equal access to states resources for all, and this utopian dream of a market economy was in effect being abetted by some of capital’s managers in Parliament. It is clear from the amount of the first grant (a nicely-rounded £10,000) that Parliament was fairly clueless in regards to what was about to unfold. The establishment of six “branch hospitals” to deal with the influx of bodies during the General Reception is absolutely crucial here, because it helps us imagine what would have happened had support for the project not ended: a utopian, bureaucratic state that housed, fed, and educated, employed all of its subjects, absolutely irrespective of their origins.

⁸⁷Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon, 2001).

Afterward, the institution would return to the more “sustainable” kind of social welfare that is still practiced today, where access to the vast amount of surplus material wealth capitalism produces is carefully maintained by an elaborate network of public and private ventures. It is true that the post-war Liberal welfare state “cares” for (at least some of) its subjects in often highly elaborate ways, particularly those in that nebulously defined group known as “children” or “youths.” Social workers scour neighborhoods daily, keeping tabs on an “at-risk” youth, while doctors in specially-designed children’s hospitals work furiously to separate a set of conjoined twins, holding press conferences later broadcast on the evening news. This care, however, is always hinged on a process of knowing the information collected from the very moment we encounter the biopolitical state. In between the “certification” of the birth and deaths of a single life, it is never truly absent from our lives. .

This presence, or closeness, of politics to the corporeal beings is at the heart of Edgeworth’s political anxieties in *The Absentee*. Returning to one scene in the novel where this is rendered most visibly will not only bring all of the different threads of this chapter together but will also show why Edgeworth’s vision for Ireland looks forward to Ireland’s adoption into modern biopolitical statecraft.

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David Lloyd has recently claimed that “modern Irish literature has always been highly attuned to the workings of the biopolitical state.”⁸⁸ Although neither a strictly Irish nor modern text, Lloyd’s claim can be extended onto *The Absentee*—something best demonstrated in one relatively short but important scene. Early into his first tour of Ireland, Colambre finds himself

⁸⁸ David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800-2000: The Transformation of Oral Space*. (Cambridge, England and New York: Cambridge UP, 2011), 14.

part of a group paying a visit to Count O'Halloran, an Irish nobleman, eccentric antiquarian, and militant nationalist patriot.⁸⁹ Described alternatively as a “great oddity” and “singular,” he lives in “a fine old building, part of it in ruins, and part repaired with great judgment and taste” (109). On the surface, O'Halloran bridges ancient Irish life and the modern habits of a responsible and ethical landlord. More than just a counter-example to the absentees and their abandoned estates, O'Halloran's home is teeming with all different kinds of biological life. The guests find themselves “in the midst of an odd assembly: an eagle, a goat, a dog, an otter, several gold and silver fish in a glass globe, and a white mouse in a cage” (110). The “odd assembly” is not limited to live animals—O'Halloran's has collected skeletal remains in addition to urns filled with human ashes. The discussion between O'Halloran and his guests turns very quickly to absenteeism as the Count, not surprisingly, bemoans the behavior of a local absentee landlord and declares the entire class to be “enemies of Ireland” (117).

In O'Halloran's home we are thus introduced to the two notions of life carried in the Greek words *zoos* and *bios*. More specifically, the management of Irish *bios* (“vivacity”) is imagined through the stewardship of *zoos*. Under his enlightened, nationalist stewardship, “wild” creatures are brought together under a single roof. The control that O'Halloran holds over these beings models precisely what is at stake in the novel, and in the gap between the two different orphan institutions. The limitless configurations of human life through reproduction poses a mortal threat to the modern biopolitical state, which must carefully attenuate a population to the specific and contradictory needs of modern production. In *The Absentee*, Edgeworth's makes it abundantly clear that this attenuation hinges on a project of “knowing,” something that can only

⁸⁹ Scholars have zeroed in on Sylvester O'Halloran and Robert Barnwell as two sources for this character. For more, see W.J McCormack, “Sylvester O'Halloran and Maria Edgeworth's *Absentee*,” *Long Room* 9 (1974). See also Heidi Van de Vreie et al, “Introduction”, xxiii.

happen when the physical gap between landowners and their tenants is closed. James Buzard includes Edgeworth in a group of authors in whose hands the “novel first takes up the task of safeguarding, salvaging, or recovering cultural identities and territories.”⁹⁰ Thus she uses Bentham’s insistence on “propinquity” as a basis of social happiness, because a lack of propinquity between the classes makes knowing Ireland impossible. However, as the different histories of the Dublin and London Foundling Hospital should make clear, the implications of *The Absentee* go far beyond the geographical borders of the Emerald Isle. Imagining “the proper ways of managing Irish people,” in fact, becomes a way of managing all people.

⁹⁰ James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 40.

Chapter Two

The “[E]pic of the world abandoned by God:”

Dickens, Orphanhood, and the Secularism of the Novel

But to return unto the stricter rule—
 As far as words make rules—our common notion
 Of orphan paints at once a parish school,
 A half-starved babe, a wreck upon Life’s ocean,
 A human (what the Italians nickname) "Mule!"
 A theme for Pity or some worse emotion;
 Yet, if examined, it might be admitted
 The wealthiest orphans are to be more pitied.

-Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto the Seventeenth (st.3)

Anyone with a basic knowledge of the novels of Charles Dickens cannot help but take notice of the multitude of orphans in his fictional worlds.⁹¹ The names of some of these orphans are well-known (Oliver Twist, Pip, Lucy Manette, Esther Summerson, Nell Trent, Ada Clare, Sissy Jupe) and not so well-known (Smike, Jo, Biddy, Harriet Beadle/Tattycoram, Miss Wade, Harrison). A large number of these orphans have no name at all. And even though critics and laymen commonly make reference to something called “the Dickensian orphan,” the range of characters orphaned in one way or another in Dickens’s novels resists easy generalization. Considered as a whole, they exemplify what critics have alternatively referred to as “the

⁹¹ I cite parenthetically from the following editions: *Oliver Twist, or The Parish Boy's Progress*, ed. Philip Horne (New York and London: Penguin, 2003); *Great Expectations*, ed. Margaret Caldwell (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2008).

multiplicity of representation” and “an inexhaustible fecundity of invention.”⁹²

In addition to the omnipresence of orphans at the level of the characterological, orphanhood manifests narratologically in many novels. Sometimes the archaeology of an orphan’s life story functions as a main narrative thread of a multiplot novel. The orphanhood of Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* (1852-1853), for instance, comes undone with the revelatory disclosure of Lady Dedlock’s maternity. This *telos* is inverted in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), which opens with the discovery that the novel’s orphaned protagonist is in fact not an orphan after all. Orphanhood can also function as what Edward Said calls a “pure” or “intransitive beginning.”⁹³ The picaresque wanderings of Nell Trent form the narrative ground of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41), while *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870-71) follows the global trajectories of two pairs of orphans. And sometimes orphans at the margins of society end up playing central roles in the events of the plot.⁹⁴ *Bleak House*’s vagabond Jo and *Little Dorrit*’s (1855-1857) troubled maidservant Harriet Beadle/Tattycoram both make short but critical interventions precisely because their alterity as orphans allows them to perform a kind of surveillance over other characters.

This wide range of figures and narratives notwithstanding, most discussions of orphans and orphanhood in Dickens are dominated by a single name. This is not altogether that surprising, given the fact that the title character of *Oliver Twist, or, The Parish Boy’s Progress*

⁹² Respectively, Hilary Schor, “Dickens and Plot” in *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*. eds. John Bowen and Robert L. Patten (London: Palgrave, 2005), 93. J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1958), 11.

⁹³ Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intentions and Methods* (New York: Columbia UP, 1975), 5.

⁹⁴ My model of plot comes wholesale from Peter Brooks: “that which makes a plot ‘move forward,’ and makes us read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning” Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1992), xiii.

(1837-1839) ranks as one of the most well-known orphans in Anglophone cultural history. His ascendance to these lofty heights can be largely attributed to the billion dollar afterlife he enjoyed in the twentieth century. A novel that continues to rank among the bestselling of all time, *Oliver Twist* also claims the title of the Dickens text that has inspired the most films, television serials, and stage productions. Oliver's life on the silver screen has spanned the history of cinema itself. Since J. Stuart Blackton released his silent film adaptation of the novel in 1909, there have been at least 25 major motion pictures based on his story. On their own, David Lean's *Oliver Twist* (1948), Carol Reed's *Oliver!* (1968), and Disney's *Oliver and Company* (1988) introduced the basic outline of Oliver's story to three successive and increasingly global generations of moviegoers. (And just to provide a sense of the dollar figures at stake: the latter has earned Disney over \$100 million dollars since its release). And thanks to Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* (1961), which buffed out many of the novel's more unpleasant moments, parents across the Anglophone world routinely gather and watch their children reenact Oliver's story in amateur productions.⁹⁵

Oliver's representational force, in fact, reaches beyond the limits of his fictionality. This is borne out in recent studies in British social history mapping the high-profile evangelical social welfare campaigns that proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century, when London's East End became a site of social intervention. Although the use of pauper children in British philanthropic fundraising long predated the novel,⁹⁶ *Oliver Twist* provided social reformers later in the century with an ideal and well-recognizable embodiment of urban poverty: "With the

⁹⁵ Amy Benjamin. "Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* is not for the faint of heart." *An English Teacher's Guide to Performance Tasks & Rubrics: Middle School*. (Larchmont: Eye on Education, 2000), 171.

⁹⁶ Seth Koven argues that reformers "from the late-18th century onward had recognized the power of images of poor children to stir the sympathies of the public and stimulate generous donations to humanitarian causes." *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 130.

publication of *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens created a portrait of the workhouse child that remained the standard image for the Victorian age...The archetypical workhouse child was first and foremost an orphan: alone, without a past, and completely disconnected from his parents.”⁹⁷

His colossal stature on the cultural horizon goes a long way in explaining why critics have anointed Oliver’s orphanhood as exemplary. Indeed, critics have played a crucial role in Oliver’s transformation from an orphan into “the orphan.” He is the first and only of Dickens’s major orphan characters to make an appearance in Laura Peters’s monograph on Victorian orphanhood, even though its first sentence reminds readers that “[o]ne can hardly open a novel by Dickens, the Brontes, or George Eliot without stumbling over at least one orphan.”⁹⁸

Dickensians seem to be caught in Oliver’s mesmeric hold as well, particularly those who make him a template for what is vaguely defined as “the orphan.” Catherine Waters claims that Dickens’s “abiding concern with this figure [of the orphan] is inseparable from his representation of the family, and amongst his earliest novels *Oliver Twist* shows the significance of the orphan for the ideological work of the family quite clearly.”⁹⁹ Alex Woloch overlays Oliver’s subjective position onto the orphan first-person narrators of the later novels: “[T]he very predicament of orphanhood canonically exemplified in the third-person *Oliver Twist* becomes a *discursive* condition for Dickens’ later first-person narratives.”¹⁰⁰

Cheryl Nixon’s *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature: Estate, Blood, and*

⁹⁷ Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London*. New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers UP, 2006), 1.

⁹⁸ Laura Peters, *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire*. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001).

⁹⁹ Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 31.

¹⁰⁰ Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 190. Emphasis in original.

Body (2011) provides the best illustration of Oliver's stranglehold. Nixon distinguishes what she names as the "valued orphan" of the eighteenth century and the

far more commonly known figure of the neglected orphan that is given much of its imaginative force by nineteenth-century authors such as Dickens and the Brontës. The word 'orphan' conjures up *Oliver Twist* begging 'Please Sir, can I have some more' [sic], *Jane Eyre* suffering abuse at the typhoid-ridden orphanage Lowood, *Wuthering Heights*' Heathcliffe being rescued from gypsy abandonment only to lead a life defined by that second-class status.¹⁰¹

That Nixon could so easily reduce an entire century of literary history into three very different characters seems to confirm something that Oliver himself is told in the novel: "Well! Of all the artful and designing orphans that ever I see, Oliver, you are one of the most bare-facedest" (25).

In what follows, I attempt to circumvent the Parish Boy's hegemony by situating his "Progress" against another of Dickens's most famous orphan narratives. Despite their differences on aesthetic, formal, and discursive registers, *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) are two texts plotted around the adoption of orphans. Moreover, these narratives of affiliation turn on a crucial moment of *anagnorisis*—"the change from ignorance to knowledge"—in which orphans are connected to their ostensibly lost biological origins.¹⁰² In this structural coincidence there is also a radical divergence, a divergence that grants new perspective into one of the oldest and most persistent questions in genre criticism. Namely, why is the realist novel the ideal narrative space for seemingly disconnected and fictional "individuals" to congeal into something called "society"? Reading these two texts through this question highlights the fact that

¹⁰¹ Cheryl Nixon, *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature: Estate, Blood, and Body* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 6.

¹⁰² Terrance Cave's *Recognitions: a Study in Poetics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1988) reads Aristotle's concept through centuries of canonical Western literature, including an engagement with *Hard Times* (1854).

despite widespread belief to the contrary, the ostensibly political overtones of Dickens's canonical orphan story do not say very much about orphanhood. Whereas *Oliver Twist* recounts a tale of an individual orphan redeemed by the discovery of his filiative ties, *Great Expectations* plots itself through four orphaned individuals forging affiliations in a reified and increasingly globalized world.¹⁰³

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From the very moment he comes into the world of the novel, it is clear that Oliver Twist is going to be “brought up by hand” (6).¹⁰⁴ Although modern audiences probably do not recognize it without some kind of editorial glossing, Dickens's Victorian readers would have known that the idiomatic term for bottle-feeding stands in this context as another name for orphanhood. Dickens equates Oliver's alienation from the female breast with “a systematic course of treachery and deception” (6). These early moments effectively bind Oliver's unflinching passivity to his orphanhood:

What an excellent example of the power of dress, young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him his station in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none.

Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of church-wardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder (5).

The word orphan is never too far away from the proceedings as Oliver's body moves

¹⁰³ Steven Marcus argues that the “*socially radical* impulse behind the moral idea in *Oliver Twist* is revealed in the fact that it is written from a point of view which...regards society from without. (qtd in Horne, “Introduction”, xiv)

¹⁰⁴ C.J.P. Beatty, “Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860-1) and the Probable Source of the Expression ‘Brought Up By Hand’” *Notes and Queries* 38 (1991): 315. Susan Schoenbauer Thurin, “To Be Brought ‘Up By Hand,’” *Victorian Newsletter* 64 (1983): 27-9.

through various stages of incarceration: “He was brought up by hand. The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish authorities” (4). Dickens uses other characters as well to repeatedly link Oliver’s name to his orphaned condition in the world:

“Boy,” said the gentleman in the high chair, “listen to me. You know you’re an orphan, I suppose?”
 “What’s that sir?” inquired poor Oliver.
 “The boy *is* a fool—I thought he was,” said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.
 “Hush!” said the gentleman who had spoken first. “You know you’ve got no father or mother, and that you were brought up by the parish, don’t you?”
 “Yes, sir,” replied Oliver, weeping bitterly. (12)

Dickens harnesses the discursive force of the state to forge the link between Oliver’s name and his embodiment of a specific kind of orphanhood. From the “baby farm” to the workhouse to the courtroom, these early scenes manufacture Oliver as a “miserable little being” (7) living on society’s margins through what Louis Althusser names as the act of hailing or interpellation.¹⁰⁵

As many critics have pointed out, an anxiety about the ethical limits of representation pervades both the novel and Dickens’s prefatory comments. Central to this concern is Oliver’s allegorical stake in the narrative, something that the narrator signals during his admission into the workhouse: “Oliver bowed low by the direction of the beadle, and was then hurried away to a large ward; where, on a rough, hard bed, he sobbed himself to sleep. What a novel illustration of the tender laws of England! They let the paupers go to sleep” (5). The novel’s subtitle recalls two other paradigmatic British moral allegories, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) and William Hogarth’s twin works *The Rake’s Progress* (1732-1733) and *The Harlot’s Progress*

¹⁰⁵ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174.

(1732).¹⁰⁶ Although he would later alter the subtitle to read “The Adventures of Oliver Twist”—providing, for some, yet another example of Oliver’s immutability¹⁰⁷—Dickens’s “novel illustration” navigates between the two moral poles provided by these works. While Dickens uses the subtitle to look backwards in literary history, the novel is nevertheless embedded synchronically in the political debate of the 1830s over urban poverty, debates in which some of the heaviest hitters in British letters took part. According to Keith Hollingworth, “*Oliver Twist* reflects also the parliamentary attention given to the revision of criminal law, an attention nearly constant between 1833 and 1837.”¹⁰⁸

But what precisely Dickens does with his allegorical orphan is less obvious. John Bowen offers one answer in his description of the novel as “troubled by the diet of paupers, the injustice of the law, by hunger, starvation, and the need to find an appropriate, urgent language to speak and represent them.”¹⁰⁹ Oliver seemingly pulls this off during his most defining moment in the novel. Although crucial details are often lost on the many who reference it—not only the actual

¹⁰⁶ Steven Marcus discusses the novel’s connection to Bunyan in *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey*. (New York: Clarion, 1965), 67-77. Hilary Schor’s alternate schema of the novel places Nancy at the center: “But Nancy does not just become another Oliver; rather, her story displaces the progressive, heroic model, and reveals a series of regressive and open-ended narratives that begin to suggest an alternative plot. This plot is one of female masochism and sexual obsession, and its patterns are closer to those of the harlot’s than of the parish boy’s progress.” Hilary Schor. *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

¹⁰⁷ Oliver is “too perfect” according to Anny Sadrin’s *Parentage and Inheritance in the Novels of Charles Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994). For more on Oliver’s immutability, see Barry Westburg, *The Confessional Fictions of Charles Dickens* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University, 1977), 6. David Paroissien complicates this account by insisting on the Hobbesian thinking underwriting *Oliver Twist*. “Introduction,” *The Companion to Oliver Twist*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1922), 1.

¹⁰⁸ Keith Hollingworth, “The Newgate Novel and the Moral Argument” in *Oliver Twist*, ed. Fred Kaplan (New York and London: Norton, 1993): 470-471. See also Juliet John, *Dickens’s Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 122-40; and Peter Stokes, “Bentham, Dickens, and the Uses of the Workhouse,” *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 41.4 (2001): 711-727.

¹⁰⁹ John Bowen, *Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 89. In *Sketches by Boz* (1839), Dickens leads around a group of orphans at a fundraising dinner for the “Indigent Orphans’ Friends’ Benevolent Institution.” The titular orphans “walk round the room, curtsying, and bowing, and treading on each other’s heels, and looking very much as if they would like a glass of wine apiece” *Sketches by Boz* Ed. Dennis Walder (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 163.

words but also the fact that he makes this request against his will and on behalf of another boy—Oliver’s plea for more “thin gruel” successfully locates an “urgent language to speak and represent” the other orphans. He therefore momentarily inhabits what Gayatri Spivak describes as the dual function of representation: he literally speaks for the other orphans as their representative while simultaneously functioning as a “novel illustration” of a real world social problem.¹¹⁰

But when Oliver utters the words “Please sir, I want some more” he exposes the unresolved paradox wedged at the very heart of the novel. That is, the moment he becomes the voice of the voiceless, Oliver divulges the fact that he is undeniably exceptional. Although it will take a few hundred pages to prove definitively, his act of supplication is the first clue readers get that he is not a typical parish boy. Following his chance encounter with Brownlow, the kind gentlemanly figure who will uncover buried filiative ties, Oliver regains access to the life his birth should have guaranteed him:¹¹¹

Mr. Brownlow adopted Oliver as his son. Removing with him and the old housekeeper to within a mile of the parsonage-house, where his dear friends resided, he gratified the only remaining wish of Oliver’s warm and earnest heart, and thus linked together a little society, whose condition approached as nearly to one of perfect happiness as can ever be known in this changing world (451).

Oliver’s exceptionality has spawned a healthy dose of skepticism. One critic argues that the subtitle

indicates that Dickens intended Oliver’s story to be representative of a general pattern. The novel begins in the kind of realistic milieu appropriate to such a concern, but by the

¹¹⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Eds. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 275.

¹¹¹ The ending of *Oliver Twist* recalls a distinction Hilary Schor makes between the early novels and *Bleak House*: “Unlike the early novels (and this includes *Oliver Twist* and *Barnaby Rudge* as well as *The Old Curiosity Shop*), *Bleak House* could never be resolved by a single character coming on and talking to us for a chapter or two” “Dickens and Plot,” 95.

time of the closing chapters, when the mystery of Oliver's birth has been unraveled and his fortune restored, he has certainly ceased to be a typical parish boy, and the novel's realism has been displaced by the strangest sort of melodrama.¹¹²

Many others share this concern about the implications of the narrative trajectory, which some have described as “conservative” or a “fairy tale.”¹¹³ Understandably, many who complain about the novel's ending reiterate the now commonplace refrain about Dickens's saccharine veneration of the “bourgeois hearth.”¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, this charge—also leveled at his other novels—does not offer very much about the formal incongruence between the dark realism of the opening and the rosy “happily ever after” mood of the ending. Clearly, something else beyond the “the ideological force of the family” propels *Oliver Twist*.¹¹⁵

A number of critics in recent years have put aside the title character entirely in lieu of the other characters around him.¹¹⁶ Naturally, much of the attention has fallen on the powerful but murky figure of Brownlow, who seems to dominate every scene in which he appears. His presence is felt acutely at the story's conclusion—after he has completed all the necessary sleuth work confirming his initial suspicions that Oliver was the “living copy” of his mother (93). His

¹¹² William T. Lankford, “‘The Parish Boy's Progress’: The Evolving Form of *Oliver Twist*.” *PMLA* 93.1 (Jan 1978), 22. Bowen has made this same observation more recently, commenting on Dickens's refusal to provide a place or time for Oliver's birth: “It is clearly a process of typification and Oliver is a representative character. Yet if he is typical, he is also anomalous and transgressive—transgressive, not because he is illegitimate, but also because he is curiously privileged” (Bowen, 83).

¹¹³ Respectively, Michal Peled Ginsburg, “Dickens and the Scene of Recognition.” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 3.2 (June 2005), 80; Sadrin, 35.

¹¹⁴ Cates Baldrige, “The Instabilities of Inheritance in *Oliver Twist*,” *Studies in the Novel* 25.2 (Summer 1993): 184. In a similar vein, Marianne Novy argues that “Dickens's stress on [the theme of physical similarities between parents and children] both influenced and epitomized Victorian sentimentality of the family.” *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 97.

¹¹⁵ Waters, 34.

¹¹⁶ “Much of Nancy's power as spectacle comes from a curious absence at the center of *Oliver Twist*: the book offers, in its subtitle, to give us a ‘parish boy's progress,’ but it is fairly careless of its boy; in fact, it has a tendency to lose its hero while he is on the road. And while Oliver faints, weeps, and disappears, only rarely does he think, and even more rarely does he act. Not only is he not heroic, he is only marginally, in conventional gender terms, even a ‘boy.’” Schor, *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*, 22.

intervention alone provides the answer to the question posed by the novel's title: will Oliver twist? The only decisive "twist" is the *peripeteia* following the *anagnorisis* that he orchestrates. Before this, though, he has to confirm his theory and therefore must seek out Monks, the only living witness to Oliver's displacement. During their climatic confrontation, Brownlow ominously tells him that "every word that has passed between you and [Fagin] is known to me. Shadows on the wall have caught your whispers, and brought them to my ear" (414).

This is not the first time Brownlow takes on deific qualities. His physical being seems superhuman: his heart is "large enough for any six ordinary old gentlemen of humane disposition" (92). Brownlow can make things appear out of thin air: "[Oliver] was no sooner strong enough to put his clothes on, properly, than Mr. Brownlow caused a complete new suit, and a new cap, and a new pair of shoes, to be provided for him" (106). When he communicates, his words are telegraphed from above: "[T]here came a message down from Mr. Brownlow" (106), and he determines who is "worthy" (109) and "unworthy" (414). Ultimately, for Oliver, being in the presence of Brownlow "seem[s] like Heaven itself" (106).

Brownlow's godliness can help explain why so many are dubious about the ending of *Oliver Twist*. More than simply adopting Oliver, Brownlow ends the Parish Boy's nightmarish journey through the London's pauper underworld by returning him to the sacred space of the private household. Because he solves the problems of the novel through Brownlow's omniscience, Dickens runs afoul of a fundamental law of the realist novel. Unlike older forms of literature, the "modern novel," Jack Goody argues, "was essentially a secular tale, a feature that is comprised within the meaning of 'realistic.' The hand of God may appear, but it does so through "natural" sequences, not through miracles or mirabilia."¹¹⁷ Goody's is only the most

¹¹⁷ Jack Goody, "From Oral to Written: An Anthropological Breakthrough in Storytelling," *The Novel*. Vol 1. Ed.

recent of a long line of similar declarations about the secularism of the novel stretching back decades. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, argues that the “change from traditional literature to a modern genre like the novel can be defined as a moving of once objective worlds of myth and romance into the subject consciousness of man.”¹¹⁸ And in his influential account, Ian Watt claims that the “novel could only concentrate on personal relations once most writers and readers believed that individual human beings, and not collectivities such as the Church, or transcendent actors, such as the Persons of the Trinity, were allotted the supreme role on the earthly stage.”¹¹⁹

The most well-known rendition of this thesis made its print debut decades earlier and in a much different critical setting. Although it took more than a half a century for Georg Lukács’s *Die Theorie des Romans* (1920)¹²⁰ to become available to English-language audiences—during which time the author himself famously disavowed it—the declaration near the end of the first section that the “novel is the epic of a world abandoned by God” [“Der Roman ist die Epopöe der gottverlassenen Welt”] has enjoyed a long and rich afterlife in Anglo-American literary criticism. In addition to the fact that it is one of the most oft-quoted extracts of Lukács’s writings, it also reigns as one of the most widely-circulated statements about the novel as a genre.

Surprisingly, most critics do not take notice of the image of orphanhood Lukács employs

Franco Moretti, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006), 21.

¹¹⁸ J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-century Writers* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000 [1963]), 12.

¹¹⁹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 84.

¹²⁰ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1971), cited parenthetically.

to describe the relationship between God and his modern subjects. For Lukács, the “first great novel of world literature”—Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*—“stands at the beginning of the time when the Christian God began to forsake [*zu verlassen beginnt*] the world” (103). This retooling of Nietzsche’s announcement that “God is dead” is marked by a playful irony, in so far as it recalls one of most definitive moments in the history of Christianity (“My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?”). More importantly, the trope of godly abandonment is part of a cluster of key terms Lukács uses to describe the ontology of modern life. Unlike the Classical Greeks, the denizens of the modern world cannot claim any access to a solidified reality, an existence “rounded from within” (60): “The circle within which the Greeks led their metaphysical life was smaller than ours: that is why we cannot, as part of our life, place ourselves inside it. Or rather, the circle whose closed nature was the transcendental essence of their life has, for us, been broken; we cannot breathe in a closed world” (33). Instead, we moderns, in Lukács’s Hegelian idiom, must cope with the “transcendental homelessness” of the post-Epic world (41).

When situated against the Lukácsian criterion, *Oliver Twist* lacks one of the crucial elements of the novel as a genre of narrative fiction. Although at the outset Dickens promises readers something about the plight of a particular group of subjects “raised by hand,” the hand of God ultimately intervenes and rescues the title character from his own orphanhood. The “little society” formed around him bears the hallmarks of a world “rounded from within,” a world in which totality can still be grasped.

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The narrative totality enveloping the conclusion of *Oliver Twist* comes into sharper focus when situated against *George Silverman’s Explanation* (1868), a short but intense faux-novel

published in three parts in *The Atlantic Monthly*.¹²¹ One critic describes it as a “late last comment on the self-deceptive possibilities in the autobiographical impulse”¹²² Over nine “chapters” (the first two are made up of only a few sentences), Dickens offers up a more purified and intensified version of Oliver’s orphaned abjection—albeit without any of the concluding salvation. Marked by a dark, confessional tone, this first-person memoir mimics *Oliver Twist* by opening with a return to the scene of his title character’s orphanhood. However, before allowing the story to unfold, Silverman brings the narrative to a screeching halt with two narratorial false starts. The “First Chapter” in its entirety:

IT happened in this wise -

But, sitting with my pen in my hand looking at those words again, without descrying any hint in them of the words that should follow, it comes into my mind that they have an abrupt appearance. They may serve, however, if I let them remain, to suggest how very difficult I find it to begin to explain my explanation. An uncouth phrase: and yet I do not see my way to a better (708).

The autobiography of George Silverman shares some important elements with *Oliver Twist*. It makes an impassioned plea on behalf of an abjected figure. Moreover, the title character’s name signals the potential for violence that he confronts, in so far as Silverman anxiously anticipates the accusation of having a silver tongue. But the notion of verisimilitude that underwrites this “Explanation”, however, differs radically from what operates in *Oliver Twist*. Ironically, Silverman’s insistence on verisimilitude opens a discursive fissure between the author, the text, and the narrated world. Who, in other words, is pondering the pen, Dickens

¹²¹ Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007), 87-89. See also, Harry Stone, “Dickens’s Tragic Universe: ‘George Silverman’s Explanation,’” *Studies in Philology* 55.1 (Jan 1958): 86-97. Barry D. Bart, “George Silverman’s Explanation,” *Dickensian* 60 (January 1964): 48-51; Deborah Allen Thomas, “The Equivocal Explanation of Dickens’s George Silverman,” *Dickens Studies Annual* 3 (1974): 134-4. Michael C. Ullman, “Where George Stopped Growing: Dickens’s George Silverman’s Explanation,” *Ariel* 10.1 (January 1979):11-23.

¹²² Bodenheimer, 89.

or Silverman? Comparing Silverman's "limited voice" to the moral outrage of *Oliver Twist*, it is evident that the certitude of the latter has given way to a narratorial opacity. The insecurity of the authorial voice is only increased in the second "chapter," as Silverman tries and fails again, interrupting himself to explain his lack of an explanation:

IT happened in THIS wise -

But, looking at those words, and comparing them with former opening, I find they are the self-same words repeated. This is the more surprising to me, because I employ them in quite a new connection. For indeed I declare that the intention was to discard the commencement I first had in my thoughts, and to give the preference to another of an entirely different nature, dating my explanation from an anterior period of my life, I will make a third trial, without erasing this second failure, protesting that it is not my design to conceal any of my infirmities, whether they be of head or heart. (709)

By threatening to "discard the commencement" only to back away and retain the second attempt, Silverman highlights the difference between the manufactured nature of prose fiction and the seemingly organic life history of the autobiography. Although the capitalized "IT" draws the attention, far more interesting is the interplay between literary form and narrative voice taking place between the initial opening and the authorial reflections. The opening seems to recall a specific event, although determining what exactly "IT" is gets continually deferred by Silverman's discursive interventions. In the next chapter, readers see that the only way to break out of this cycle is for Silverman to put aside "IT" all together at the outset: "NOT as yet directly aiming at how it came to pass, I will come upon it by degrees. The natural manner, after all, for God knows that is how it came upon me" (709). Silverman grabs control of his narrative by acquiescing to the rules of realist narration privileging the epistemology of human experience, which, it seems, cannot reflect on anything directly. That is, in order to transform his "explanation" into a something that resembles a narrative, his only choice is to "come upon it by degrees."

Having finally laid this discursive groundwork, Dickens begins George Silverman's autobiography only in the third chapter, using the genesis of his orphanhood as a point of narratorial departure. The only role his parents ever play in the narrative is to articulate the story's framing motif:

My parents were in a miserable condition of life, and my infant home was a cellar in Preston...A worldly little devil was mother's usual name for me. Whether I cried for that I was in the dark, or for that it was cold, or for that I was hungry, or whether I squeezed myself into a warm corner when there was a fire, or ate voraciously when there was food, she would still say, 'O, you worldly little devil!' And the sting of it was, that I quite well knew myself to be a worldly little devil. Worldly as to wanting to be housed and warmed, worldly as to wanting to be fed, worldly as to the greed with which I inwardly compared how much I got of those good things with how much father and mother got, when, rarely, those good things were going.

Sometimes they both went away seeking work; and then I would be locked up in the cellar for a day or two at a time. I was at my worldliest then. Left alone, I yielded myself up to a worldly yearning for enough of anything (except misery) (710).

Like Oliver, Silverman's orphaned abjection seems to manifest itself on his body. After his parents die, the narrator's affiliative life begins as he is literally raised by hand from the depths of the cellar. His first words in the memoir recast Oliver's plea to something less pathetic and more descriptive and direct: "I am hungry and thirsty." Silverman makes a plea to a world that first and foremost interpellates him as an orphan: "Do you know your father and mother are both dead of fever?" (711) Also like Oliver, his filiative heritage allows him access to material wealth. However, unlike the story of the Parish Boy, Silverman's "explanation" does not provide the title character any protection from the brutality of the world. He is eventually cheated out of his grandfather's "courtful of houses," and, to make matters worse, he is rejected by his love interest and shunned by those closest to him. At every turn, his good deeds and his inability to pursue any strategy that would cause harm to anyone but himself are turned against him. He is publicly humiliated and literally beaten at points. Not only does the story lack a deified problem solver like Brownlow, Dickens uses two hypocritical religious figures to

rearticulate his long standing criticisms of Calvinism. Fundamentally, *George Silverman's Explanation* borrows a version of Oliver's abject orphanhood only to forego the deific salvation returning to the "little society" from which he was unjustly displaced. In the words of Bodenheimer, the text "worries the same old material as *Oliver Twist*, but Dickens has come a long way to get at its unromantic depths" (89).

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More than two decades after the publication of *Oliver Twist*, Dickens sat down to compose another text that reused many of its basic elements. *The Times's* E.S. Dallas provides a succinct rundown of the similarities between the two texts in his 1861 review:

Great Expectations is republished as a three-volume novel. Mr. Dickens, we believe, only once before published a three-volume tale—*Oliver Twist*. We mention the fact because the resemblance between the two tales is not merely the superficial one that they are both in the same number of volumes, but is also one of subject very much and of treatment. The hero of the present tale, Pip, is a sort of Oliver. He is low-born, fatherless and motherless, and he rises out of the cheerless degradation of his childhood into quite another sphere. . . . Pip's life is not less mixed up with the ways of convicts. He befriends a convict in his need, and henceforth his destiny is involved in that of the prisoner. The convict in the new story takes the place of Mr. Brownlow in the old, and supplies Master Pip with every luxury. In either tale, through some unaccountable caprice of fortune, the puny son of poverty suddenly finds himself the child of affluence. If we are asked which of the tales we like best, the reply must be that the earlier one is the more fresh in style, and rich in detail, but that the later one is the more free in handling, and the more powerful in effect.¹²³

While there is nothing technically incorrect about this comparative flyover, Dallas's deployment of Oliver as a yardstick of literary orphanhood comes at a price. Namely, since only one figure in *Great Expectations* is "a sort of Oliver," the other forms of orphanhood radiating around Pip go unnoticed. Like his modern day counterparts, Dallas does not notice the fact that

¹²³ [E. S. Dallas] *The Times*, 17 October 1861.

almost all of the novel's key players are orphans. Magwitch's autobiography, for instance, is fundamentally a narrative of orphanhood: "I've no more notion where I was born, than you have - if so much. I first become aware of myself, down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living. Summun had run away from me - a man - a tinker - and he'd took the fire with him, and left me very cold" (316).¹²⁴ At the opposite end of the class spectrum stands Miss Havisham and her own very tragic orphanhood that takes shape around the inheritance of her dead father's estate. After her abandonment at the altar, she leads a reclusive life in Satis House surrounded by stopped clocks. In addition, some of the novel's more important minor characters are orphans as well: Biddy, whom Pip refers to as "an orphan like myself" and Trabb's Boy, "a vagabond" (40, 136). Even Herbert, with his pathetically dysfunctional familial life, seems to be mired in a kind of orphanhood.

Estella's orphanhood also goes by the wayside in most accounts of the novel, even though the recovery of her origins induces a considerable degree of anxiety late in the proceedings. In fact, a closer look at the basic outline her narrative recalls many of the key elements of Oliver's story: Pip's frantic reconstruction of Estella origins is triggered by a chance encounter that betrays a filiative bond between parent and child. This bond, moreover, is a bond that only a third party can recognize. (While Brownlow locates Oliver's mother in her son's face, Pip connects Estella to Molly through the resemblance of their hands and eyes).¹²⁵ And most importantly, Estella's plot also builds towards its own moment of *anagnorisis* that comes about through an interrogation of a living witness (Jaggers). Thus when Herbert divulges that she is not

¹²⁴ Australian novelist Peter Carey on the title character of *Jack Maggs* (1997), his rewriting of *Great Expectations*: "I'm writing a book now about an orphan. But it's also the story of Australia, which is a country of orphans." Peter Carey, "The Art of Fiction. No. 188". *The Paris Review* 177. (Summer 2006). <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5641/the-art-of-fiction-no-188-peter-carey>

¹²⁵ Peter J. Capuano, "Handling the Perceptual Politics of Identity in *Great Expectations*," *Dickens Quarterly* 27.3 (September 2010):185-208.

related to Miss Havisham but “only adopted” (162), the riddle of Estella’s origins generates its own orphan narrative taking place away from Pip’s gentlemanly transformation.

If they have anything at all to say about it, most interpreters fold Estella’s origin story into Pip’s gentlemanly transformation. Peter Brook’s influential Freudian model, for instance, divides the novel into four separate “lines” that hinge on Magwitch’s return at the end of the second volume:

The scene of Magwitch’s return is an important one for any study of plot since it demonstrates so well how such a novelist as Dickens can make plotting the central vehicle and armature of meaning in the narrative text. All the issues raised in the novel—social, ethical, interpretive—are here simultaneously brought to climax through the peripety of the plot.¹²⁶

This view of the novel’s structure is confirmed subtly in the scholarly introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of the novel. In between authoritative-looking brackets, readers are told that the “plot of *Great Expectations* turns upon a surprise revelation; readers new to the novel who would rather not have this information revealed in advanced may wish to treat this introduction as an afterword” (vii).

There is certainly no consensus on this point. On the contrary, the permutations here are countless—not least because of the two very different “endings” Dickens composed. Although there has been more than enough evidence to show the inferiority of the revised, “happy” ending, the very existence of two conclusions seems to raise awkward questions about what is at stake in any attempt to fashion a coherent framework of the narrative. To claim, for instance, that *Great Expectations* “is a typical Dickensian comedy of manners in which the worthy central character loses illusions in order to find his true *métier*” eradicates Estella entirely. Alternatively, grafting the concept of the romance plot onto the novel—“the story of a hero positioned between a

¹²⁶ Brooks, 129.

wealthy, materialistic, status-conscious woman who would enhance his social prestige and a poorer, more altruistic, and psychologically independent woman”—not only drastically inflates Bidley’s presence in the novel but also writes off both Magwitch and Miss Havisham.¹²⁷

A glance at the few readings attenuated to Estella’s orphanhood only adds to the confusion about the emplotment of *Great Expectations*. Unlike the vast majority of other critics who engage the question of *anagnorisis* in the novel, Michal Peled Ginsburg’s aforementioned essay does not even acknowledge Magwitch’s return as such. Alternatively, Sharon Marcus supplants Pip’s transformation from the center of the narrative in lieu of the plot of female bonding between Estella and her adoptive mother. For Marcus, the novel’s obsession with fashion “suggests a social order so identified with women that one can only find a place in it by becoming a mother’s daughter.”¹²⁸

Is it possible to read *Great Expectations* in such a way that takes account of both Pip and Estella’s orphanhood? Miss Havisham answers this question in the affirmative at the end of the first volume during her interrogation of Pip after he comes into his mysterious inheritance:

"I have come into such good fortune since I saw you last, Miss Havisham," I murmured. "And I am so grateful for it, Miss Havisham!"

"Ay, ay!" said she, looking at the discomfited and envious Sarah, with delight. "I have seen Mr. Jaggers. I have heard about it, Pip. So you go to-morrow?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

"And you are adopted by a rich person?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

"Not named?"

"No, Miss Havisham."

"And Mr. Jaggers is made your guardian?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham" (143).

¹²⁷ Respectively, Andrew Saunders. “*Great Expectations*” in *A Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. David Paroissien, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 431 and Elsie Michie, “Rich Woman, Poor Woman: Toward an Anthropology of the Nineteenth-Century Marriage Plot,” *PMLA* 124.2 (March 2009): 421.

¹²⁸ Sharon Marcus. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), 186.

Miss Havisham's question to him—"are you adopted by a rich person?" (143)—offers a key to understanding the emplotment of *Great Expectations*. Simply put, Dickens plots the novel around two juxtaposed orphan affiliations, both of which yield a moment of *anagnorisis*. Two wealthy orphans adopt two other orphans as a strategy to cope with the traumas of their own orphanhood. For Magwitch, giving birth to gentlemanly Pip becomes the ultimate triumph over the violence and brutality of his life. And for Miss Havisham, her heartbreak will be redeemed through the transformation of a bastard child of two criminals into a cosmopolitan sex object who is supposed to "wreak revenge on all the male sex" (161).

Unlike *Oliver Twist*, though, the affiliations that plot *Great Expectations* have nothing to do with recreating an idealized "little society." Nor are they a straightforward symptom of the "ideological force of the family." Rather, they fall in line with what John Wemmick, Jagger's clerk, calls his "guiding-star." Namely, these affiliations follows his injunction to "[g]et hold of portable property" (184). Recall that this command comes from a man whom critics routinely cite as a prototypical modern character because of how he shuttles between the public and the domestic sphere.¹²⁹ But Wemmick's modernity is just as evident in his "guiding-star" (his *stella*) as it is in his bifurcated life. Therefore even if the adoptions schemes they concoct fail to live up to their expectations, Miss Havisham and Magwitch, two abjected orphans, prove themselves to be the exemplars of Victorian England. The Victorians, after all, were "the first people to be so closely identified with the belongings."¹³⁰ Two orphans, both marked by a kind of degeneracy, harness their material wealth to transform two other orphans into worldly global citizens. In this

¹²⁹ Wemmick "comically represent[s] the schizophrenic divide between the office persona of the bureaucratic modern and his home life." William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996), 47

¹³⁰ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006), xi.

way, they give birth to Pip and Estella, the two most important pieces of “portable property.”

The characters in the novel seem to be aware of the reified nature of the bonds that tie them together. As soon as Pip is told of his inheritance—his liberation from the premodern economy of the forge—his natural inclination is to thank his newfound “guardian.” Jagers is quick to let Pip know what kind of world he is entering: “You will please consider me your guardian... I tell you at once, I am paid for my services, or I shouldn’t render them” (126).

Similarly, when Estella confronts Miss Havisham near the end of the second volume, she cites what brings the two women together: “Mother by adoption... mother by adoption, I have said that I owe everything to you. All I possess is freely yours. All that you have given me is at your command to have again. Beyond that, I have nothing” (278). Magwitch too describes his adoption of Pip in a similar way, albeit from the opposite perspective: “Look’ee here, Pip. I’m your second father. You’re my son - more to me nor any son. I’ve put away money, only for you to spend” (292).

As the figure organizing these affiliations, Jagers, more than any other character, embodies the novel’s two most crucial recurring tropes. On the one hand, he is the narrative’s unacknowledged blacksmith because he forges bonds between orphans. Simultaneously, he is also a spider who weaves a web of relationships. Most importantly, neither he nor his actions in the purity and the godly omnipresence of his counterpart in *Oliver Twist*. Jagers, on the contrary, gets his hands very dirty (hence his seemingly neurotic hand washing) as he both literally and figuratively transfers “portable property” between two generations of orphans. Ultimately, the affiliations that Jagers helps fabricate confirm one of the novel’s most definitive statements about “life”, namely Joe’s declaration that “life is made of ever so many partings welded together” (205). In contrast to the “little society” that resolves *Oliver Twist*, the orphan

partings that constitute *Great Expectations* replicate the “transcendental homelessness” of life after God’s abandonment.

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Dickens’s Doughty Street home—where he wrote *Oliver Twist*—was literally around the corner from where the London Foundling Hospital stood for nearly two centuries. During this time, the young author and his family were active participants in the institution’s rich cultural life. “The Foundling” clearly left an impression on Dickens. Aside from borrowing the name of one of its most famous employees¹³¹—it makes prominent appearances in *Little Dorrit* (“You have heard of the London foundling Hospital?”) and *No Thoroughfare* (1867), a play-cum-novel he co-wrote with Wilkie Collins.

But it is the account of a sojourn he and his fellow journalist William Henry Wills made through the institution mentioned in the introduction that proves to be his most important statement about the Foundling Hospital. Published in *Household Words* in 1853, “Received, a Blank Child” blends journalistic observations of life inside the building with an historical overview of the charity, which by this time had been in existence for more than a century. Although the flyover of its establishment and its early history is not particularly insightful, the article nevertheless manages to coin a term that captures precisely how the Foundling Hospital manufactured subjects. “This home of the blank children,” readers are told early on, “is by no means a blank place.” This coinage of a “blank child” is a reference to the entrance card each admission generated. This document, first instituted in 1756, left blank spaces upon which the

¹³¹John Brownlow, the inmate-turned-employee, was one of the institution’s most active and most important chroniclers. For more on his relationship to the institution and *Oliver Twist*, see Jenny Bourne Taylor, “‘Received, a Blank Child’: John Brownlow, Charles Dickens, and the London Foundling Hospital: Archives and Fictions,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56. 3 (December 2001): 293-363. Holly Furneaux’s reparative reading paints Oliver’s adoptive father as a “bachelor dad” and therefore evidence of “the flexibility of Dickens’s vision of what constitutes family.” *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 24.

gender of the admitted child along with the date of his or her admission was inscribed (Fig 1, Introduction). As Jenny Bourne Taylor argues, "blankness becomes the means by which the child expresses and is assimilated into the social body of the Hospital" (306).

In addition to providing a key into the history of a specific orphan institution, blankness neatly explains the difference between the title character of *Oliver Twist* and his counterparts in *Great Expectations*. While Oliver is undoubtedly orphaned, and although it is suggested that his last name is "White" (83, 93), there is not much evidence to suggest that he bears the markers of blankness. Oliver resides in a very different world than the blank children Dickens and Wills encountered that day inside the London Foundling Hospital. His life is pre-written, pre-authored.

The far more instructive site to go looking for this blankness is to be found in *Great Expectations*. Because it which lacks any claim to "totality" or a god who solves the problems of the novel does it reign as one of great works of modern realist literature, for it is a tale of the unknown and unknowable connections constituting us as subjects ("the partings welded together"), relationships and identities mediated by a social system organized around the buying and selling of commodities. In other words, the narrative of orphan transformations constituting *Great Expectations* is infinitely more secular. The purity of the world that both the novel and the people around the title character of *Oliver Twist* yearn for is effaced in the affiliative sociality of four orphans trying to relate both to themselves and to each other "upon the blinding dust of earth" (145).

Chapter Three

The Vagabond and the Citizen:

Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) and the Madras Orphan Asylum

“Of the thousand millions of human beings that are said to constitute the population of the entire globe, there are socially, morally, and perhaps even physically considered but two distinct and broadly marked races, viz., the wanderers and the settlers—the vagabond and the citizen—the nomadic and the civilized tribes. Between these two extremes, however, ethnologists recognize a mediate variety, partaking of the attributes of both.”

Peter Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those that Will Work, Those that Cannot Work, and Those that Will Not Work, Part 1*

A word noticeably absent from the proceedings thus far appears prominently in the short biography of the title character of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1900-1901), the text at the center of this chapter:

[Kim's] mother had been nursemaid in a Colonel's family and had married Kimball O'Hara, a young colour-sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment... The wife died of cholera in Ferozepore, and O'Hara fell to drink and loafing up and down the line with the keened-eyed three-year-old baby. Societies and chaplains, anxious for the child, tried to catch him, but O'Hara drifted away.¹³²

Kipling's novel offers a canonical exemplar of orphanhood taking shape in the figuration of a “child.” Or to put it more correctly, Kipling's self-described “Little Friend of all the World” is the first (and only) blank subject in this study whose childhood plays a significant role to the blank narrative around him. Grace Nugent arrives to the world of *The Absentee* like Athena,

¹³² Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, Ed. Alan Sandison (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2008), 1. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

fully-formed and sexually-available. And neither Pip's nor Estella's childhood greatly concerns the unfolding of *Great Expectations*; one day the two orphan protagonists are children and the next they are not. And even though many have anointed the text as a landmark in the history of childhood, one critic's claim about *Oliver Twist* nevertheless rings true: "It is hard to imagine *Oliver Twist* ever grown up."¹³³

Therefore to claim that childhood plays a significant role in the blank narrative undergirding *Kim*, I only want to suggest that what sets it apart from the other novels is the fact that the title character's orphanhood is fused to the transformation he undergoes from child to "grown up." Phrased differently: Kim's blankness crystallizes in his migration from one moniker to another, from "Little Friend of all the World" to just "Friend of all the World."

The word choice here is not accidental, for the questions raised by the multiplicity of fusions in *Kim* has become a dominant talking point for critics. The title character's "hybrid" figure, as scores have pointed out, is constituted from some of the different national cultures residing in the subcontinent at the time.¹³⁴ Although such a statement overly simplifies his identity, Kim is at once Irish and British, Indian and Anglo-Indian. And while Kim's origins story renders his filiative heritage unambiguously Irish—a disclosure that takes place in the first chapter, another feature that distinguishes Kipling's novel from the other texts—his skin colour ("burned black"), linguistic nativity in the vernacular, and many sartorial flourishes undermine the narrator's assertion that he is "white."

¹³³ Robert Newsom. "Fictions of Childhood." *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*. Ed. John O. Jordan (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 96.

¹³⁴ Zohreh T. Sullivan calls Kim an "orphaned Indianized hybrid." *Narratives of Empire: the Fictions of Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 150. For more examples of the frequency of this word in discussions of *Kim*, see Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998), 150 and Barbara Black, *A Room of His Own: a Literary-Cultural Study of Victorian Clubland* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2012), 162.

One of the most important amalgamations in the novel, however, has received almost no attention. Namely, Kimball O'Hara is not just any "child," he is "a little country-bred vagabond" (176). Unlike Oliver, the only roof over Kim's head stretches "from sky's edge to sky's edge" (259). Vagabondage is precisely what the "societies and chaplins" are "anxious" to "catch him" from falling into after his father's death. And it is his "vagabonding" (215) that comes to an end after the scene of *anagnorisis* that discloses his ties to the Masons and the Mavericks, returning to Kim the Sahib subjectivity his birth origins should have guaranteed him.

Paying closer attention to this conjuncture of vagabond and child does more than just add another entry to the long list of hyphenated identities Kim has acquired over the years.¹³⁵ More importantly, it points the way to some new insights into the "monstrous hybridism" underlying the novel's narrative architecture (239). In addition to Kim's personal hybridity, critics have pursued the many facets of the narrative's mixed nature. The plot, for instance, is "shaped by the double quest of Kim and the Lama," and these "two questions run along parallel lines." And at the generic level *Kim* is a textual *mélange* of many literary forms: "a spy story, a quest novel, a Bildungsroman, but above all, it is a love letter to India, a celebration of the sounds and smells and colours of the subcontinent."¹³⁶

In what follows, I challenge one of the few points upon which the majority of the novel's readers have agreed. That is, despite all its apparent narratological and formal meandering, *Kim* is in fact best understood as an *Erziehungsroman*—"a tale of ripening" tightly-structured around

¹³⁵ Some critics have linked Kim's many bifurcated selves to the life of his author. Harry Rickett sees in Kipling an assortment of binary pairings: "devoted son/damaged 'orphan'; precocious aesthete/apprentice sahib; scholar-gypsy/rule-bound conformist; would-be American / Empire Tory; innovative craftsman/ fervent jingoist; doting father/bellicose tub-thumper." *The Unforgiving Minute: A Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1999), xi.

¹³⁶ Respectively: Phillip Mallett, *Rudyard Kipling: a Literary Life* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 120 and Fred Lerner, "The Tragedy of Rudyard Kipling," *Kipling Journal* 82 (September 2008): 12.

two affiliations, each representing a very different model of the relationship between student and teacher.¹³⁷ Taken together, Kim's two affiliations, the first with the lama and the second with St. Xavier's in Lucknow, are the "guide for this journey" (121) he makes between the two poles of subjectivity Victorian journalist Henry Mayhew divides the globe into at the outset of his epoch-marking sociological account of London's poor and working-class neighbourhoods.¹³⁸

Tracking "Kim's progress" (164) from vagabond to citizen along these two different pedagogical tracks provides a different perspective on the question at the center of the first chapter: the link between orphanhood and bricks-and-mortar educational institutions. I show how the "parallel lines" of Kim's transformation come together in the history of a radical experiment in Benthamite educational theory that began more than a century before the novel's publication. Two thousand kilometers due south of Lucknow in the city of Madras (Chennai), Scottish Episcopalian Andrew Bell (1753-1832) used the now long-forgotten Military Male Orphan Asylum, built for children of fallen British soldiers like Kim, as a staging ground for what he called an "experiment in education." However, since Bell did not have the lavish state support nor the army of wealthy backers that the London Foundling Hospital did, he devised a system in which a handful of paid teachers selected and trained the most talented older pupils to do the lion's share of teaching. Bell eventually returned to England and brought his system of "mutual tuition" with him, where it spread across the British Isles and to different parts of the

¹³⁷ George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 404. Another theorization of this form highlights the importance of keeping the term separate from its more well-known relative, *Bildungsroman*, because the "*Erziehungsroman*...describes works that deal specifically with problems of schooling or education" and "often has been a vehicle for pedagogical doctrine or institutional criticism" (17, 26). *The Bildungsroman in Nineteenth-Century Literature. Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Ed. Russel Whitaker. Vol. 152. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005).

¹³⁸ Other than using Mayhew's phrase as a rhetorical frame for understanding Kim's transformation, this chapter does not make any use of Mayhew's landmark text. For a study that does, see Priti Joshi, "The Other Great Exhibition: Mayhew's Catalog of the Industrious," *Literature Compass* 9.1 (2012 Jan): 95-105.

Empire as well. Although it declined quickly after his death, at its apex an estimated 346,000 students fell under the “Madras System.”

Reading *Kim* through the history of this orphan institution brings to light the two radically-different models of education inscribed into the text’s structuring affiliations. Thus the mutuality and anti-hierarchical nature of Kim’s connection with the lama fuses with the bricks-and-mortar institutionality of his years at “St.Xavier’s in Lucknow.” The orphan institution in Madras stands, as it were, at the vanishing point where the plot’s “parallel lines” come together, offering an alternative prehistory of the modern classroom. Before I can engage that history, however, it is necessary to get a better sense of these “lines” and the role they play in *Kim*’s narrative architecture.

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Although today it ranks as one of Kipling’s most well-known and critically-lauded works, at the time of its publication *Kim* provoked both befuddlement and a considerable amount of ire. Even before it began its initial serial run in England, some speculated that *Kim* would definitively prove “whether or not [Kipling] can write a successful long story.”¹³⁹ Two months into its first publication run in the United States, at least one critic had already made up his mind, pondering if readers had

ever read such a dreary, witless, formless trail of drooling as *Kim* without interest to the story, brightness to the lines, or palpable substance to the whole thing? Can anyone who has read the composition so far say that he honestly likes it, or even knows what it is all about? Is there a point at which it rises above inane commonplace and claptrap obscurity? ...It reads like a pointless burlesque. The man who makes the monthly synopsis must

¹³⁹ William L. Alden. “London Literary Letter.” *New York Times* (1857-1922); Dec 29, 1900, pg. BR11

find it difficult to wring any connected sense out of the connection...It [is] like an attempt to make an essence from the froth of a dubious egg.¹⁴⁰

An even harsher critique of Kipling's "mediocre and meaningless" novel makes much the same complaint: "[Readers of the novel] have put their heads together and asked each other confidentially what it is all about, finally coming to the conclusion that they did not know."¹⁴¹

This view was not limited to Kipling's many contemporary detractors. Less hostile voices seem to agree on the same underlying point: "The plot meanders like a man on an uncharted walking tour."¹⁴²

Even though opinions on the novel have softened in the intervening decades, most modern engagements agree with the claim about the lack of "connected sense." The editor of a prominent recent edition tells readers in his introduction that "[t]here is no dominant central action whose necessities dictate the shape of the characters and the organization of all subordinate action."¹⁴³ Others argue that *Kim* "is concerned with movement rather than with the goal" and "lacks a teleological structure."¹⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt connects the novel's plotlessness with the title character when she describes "[p]urposeless" as "the very charm of Kim's existence."¹⁴⁵ More recently, Jed Etsy offers the most sophisticated theorization of the novel's

¹⁴⁰ "Kipling's Latest Romance." *The New York Times*. Feb 23, 1901. Pg BR10.

¹⁴¹ Arthur Bartlett Maurice, "Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*," *The Bookman: a Review of Books and Life*. 14.2 (October 1901): 146.

¹⁴² "Mr. Kipling's Way." *The Academy*. 61 (October 5 1901): 289.

¹⁴³ Alan Sandison. "Introduction" *Kim* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2008), xiv.

¹⁴⁴ Mallet, 118.; Patrick Brantlinger. "*Kim*" *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 129.

¹⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1973), 217.

narrative structure: “Kim operates as a set of generic modules, pieces of the ‘narrative of development’ now isolated and objectified so that they are no longer connected or animated by the driving historical pulse of the classic bildungsroman.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the widespread agreement on the absence of a narrative focal point accords with Kipling’s own description of the novel as “nakedly picaresque and plotless.”¹⁴⁷

But does *Kim* actually lack a *telos*? There is at least one “goal” that the novel openly declares. “[W]hat will they do with thee?” asks the lama when Kim introduces him to the mysterious band of white men who have taken an interest in his *chela*. “Make me a Sahib,” Kim responds. Although he at the time dismisses the idea and promises to return to the lama soon, Kim’s statement taps into the very heart of the novel. Coming on the heels of the pivotal moment of *anagnorisis*, this simple phrase is the first clue that the novel’s narrative locomotion has less structurally in common with Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605/1615) and more with *Great Expectations*. Kim, as it were, travels the same path that Pip does after Jaggers makes him aware of his expectations. Obviously, this is not to suggest that Kim’s inheritance grants him access to unlamented aristocratic delights. Much to the contrary, whereas Pip trades in his blacksmith’s apron for “a fashionable suit of clothes,” the arrival of Kim’s expectations inserts the vagabond into the world of wage-labour and “suitable employment.” Rather, all I want to point out here is that both novels are narratologically structured around orphans making affiliations with strangers who enter their lives through nothing more than happenstance. In turn, these affiliations remove these young orphans from their insulated lives and place them into a much broader circulation as modern subjects.

¹⁴⁶ Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 10.

¹⁴⁷ Rudyard Kipling. *Something of Myself* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 170.

These structural similarities notwithstanding, *Kim* hones in on something of little concern to *Great Expectations*: education. While Pip and Estella undergo a process of cultivation aligned with certain ideals of Victorian gentility and marriageability, Kim's education is underwritten by far more complex historical forces. His "progress" from vagabond to citizen hinges less on his racial and linguistic hybridity but on the mutability of childhood itself, a kind of blankness that has functioned as the cornerstone of modern institutional education.

Thus given their foundational importance to the story, it is no accident that an educational institution is the setting for the novel's first scene. Like many things in *Kim*, this institution bears more than one name: "the Wonder House, as the natives call the Lahore Museum" (1). Similarly, the function of "that big house" in the unfolding of the plot is two-fold. Firstly, it is the backdrop for the unplanned encounter between Kim and the lama, an event that marks the beginning of an affiliation that literally alters the course of both of their lives. More precisely, their affiliation commences later that evening, after Kim has learned of the lama's search and the demise of his *chela*. In yet another echo of *Great Expectations*, Kim first finds some food for his newfound friend and leaves him to rest. After the lama wakes up, Kim, because he is both fascinated by and sympathetic to this strange foreigner, decides that he "too must go a travelling" in search of his own "prophecy." (16)

Thus under the guise of pursuing two separate, unrelated quests—"thou, thy River: I, my bull" (16-17)—the two characters forge an affiliation that functions as one axis of Kim's transformation. This bond, moreover, is modelled around a specific theological relationship common to both Hinduism and Buddhism: *guru* and *chela*, "a lama — or, say, a guru in your tongue." (30). While the sincerity of lama's belief in this relationship is never in doubt, Kim initially gives off the impression that he has acquired simply another disguise in his newfound

role as a *chela*: “I am now that holy man’s disciple; and we go a pilgrimage together — to Benares, he says. He is quite mad, and I am tired of Lahore city. I wish new air and water” (19). Boredom, it seems, is the biggest contributing factor to Kim’s impulsive decision to become the lama’s travelling mate. An added bonus: the lama’s novelty is a boon to Kim’s income: “I am very poor. My father is dead — my mother is dead. O charitable ones, if I am left here, who shall tend that old man?” (30) Kim’s instrumentalizing is seemingly confirmed when the two spend a night in a village outside of Umballah. Kim uses the knowledge he accidentally acquired about upcoming troop movements to confirm the lama’s declaration to the villagers that he is “from the other world” (48). Everyone is convinced by his elaborate theatrics, except for the local priest, who wryly tells Kim that he is a “master-beggar” and how “[n]ot the cunning of forty years could have done better. Surely thou hast made the old man rich?” (49).

This odd and seemingly contradictory compound, “master-beggar”, points to one of the most important facets of the novel. Namely, despite the solidity of the *guru-chela* relationship, Kim and the lama fluidly shift between both roles. Kim himself at the end of the novel captures the mutuality of their bond: “Thou leanest on me in the body, Holy One, but I lean on thee for some other things” (272). Kim’s worldliness brings the lama and his “immense simplicity” down to earth (26). One critic describes this as a “little man-child piloting the old child-man though the shoals of life in the outside world.”¹⁴⁸ The lama marvels at his *chela*’s omniscience: “What dost thou not know of this world?” (83) His idyllic life in Tibet, where pilgrims like him are received with generous hospitality, has not prepared him for a world in which his considerable personal wealth is under constant threat. “It is otherwise in Hind,” Kim informs him shortly after ensuring that his naïve friend does not get robbed by an opium dealer (50). Indeed,

¹⁴⁸ Mark Kinkead-Weekes. “Vision in Kipling’s Novels” in Andrew Rutherford. *Kipling’s Mind and Art* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 219.

the fact that the lama survives after the two separate implicitly confirms the value of his *chela*'s tutelage. Therefore despite the fact that many of the title character's self-aggrandizing boasts to the lama ring hollow, one seems credible: "All earth would have picked thy bones within ten mile of Lahore city if I had not guarded thee" (61).

But for all his knowledge of the world, a life of "defiance" has made Kim intolerable and prone to outbursts of aggression (1). The lama's arrival therefore marks the beginning of what could be called the young vagabond's ethical education. After they leave Umballah the lama's patience tempers Kim's anger against the incensed farmer whose land the two accidentally trespass. Kim denounces the man for his threats against them and responds by making his own about the farmer's crops. But the lama harnesses the incident to teach his *chela* a lesson about acceptance: "'Take notice.' The lama turned to Kim. '[The farmer] was led to speak harshly by the Red Mist of anger. That clearing from his eyes, he becomes courteous and of an affable heart. May his fields be blessed! Beware not to judge men too hastily, O farmer'" (42-43). Although the lama directs his comment to the farmer explicitly, his imperative is clearly intended just as much to his young counterpart. A few paragraphs later when the two encounter a cobra, the lama dispenses with another ethical lesson about the value of a single life. Since "[n]o native training can quench the white man's horror of the Serpent," Kim's initial response is to kill the snake. But the lama refuses to let Kim harm the snake: "Let him live out his life" (43).

The second function of the novel's opening scene in front of the Lahore Museum is to foreshadow the fabrication of the text's other important affiliation several chapters later. Upon being informed that he was standing in front of the museum, the lama asks, "[c]an any enter?" (5) Kim responds by reading him what is "written above the door — all can enter." But the lama, in the first indication that he is not as clueless as he appears, understands that "all can enter" does

not necessarily answer his original question, so he asks for more information: “Without payment?” Kim’s answer to this question is markedly less clear: “I go in and out. *I am no banker*” (5, emphasis in original). A seemingly minor detail upon first sight, when read against the rest of the novel, it becomes apparent that this dialogue is restaged a few chapters later in the wake of Kim’s encounter with Bennett, who decodes the texts stored in his amulet. The discovery of Kim’s filiative ties automatically brings this “country-bred vagabond” into the purview of two different yet related affiliative organizations: the fictional Mavericks and the non-fictional Masons. More importantly, each affiliation comes with free admission to an orphan institution: “The Regiment would pay for you all the time you are at the Military Orphanage; or you might go on the Punjab Masonic Orphanage’s list” (94).

Readers learn quickly that Kim’s future lies in neither of these institutions but rather a third: “St.Xavier’s in Partibus at Lucknow” (94). What sets this institution apart from the other two is not limited to the fact that it offers “the best schooling a boy can get in India.” Whereas admittance to the other two institutions hinges solely upon some kind of filiative tie, like the Lahore Museum “all can enter” St.Xavier’s. The lama reiterates the same question he posed outside the museum during the conversation about Kim’s future: “Do they give or sell learning among the Sahibs?” (94) The lama accedes with remarkable ease to a pedagogical model diametrically opposed to the *lama-chela* relationship: “The more money is paid the better learning is given?” (94) He even draws up a contract between him and the white men, underscoring just how much he understands that education in the world of Sahibs is first and foremost a commodity. Kim himself articulates this when he declares in a different context that “[i]t is not good to sell knowledge for nothing” (118).

Therefore despite all the importance laid upon the trinity of texts stored inside his amulet,

Kim's filiative ties prove to be of little significance to his "progress." Recall here the demise of his father:

His estate at death consisted of three papers — one he called his 'ne varietur' because those words were written below his signature thereon, and another his "clearance-certificate." The third was Kim's birth-certificate. Those things, he was used to say, in his glorious opium-hours, would yet make little Kimball a man (1-2).

However, immediately after the title character's "pedigree...is fully established," the claim that these texts "would yet make little Kimball a man" turns out to be entirely false. On the contrary and against the critical tendency that downplays the lama's role in Kim's education, it is their affiliation that proves to be the decisive factor in making "little Kimball a man."¹⁴⁹ And as if to cement this triumph over the filiative, one of the direct consequences of Kim's participation in the Great Game is to provide the necessary proof for British authorities to "change the succession in Hilar and Bunar, and nominate new heirs to the throne" (279).

Thus another instructive coincidence between *Kim* and *Great Expectations* comes to the fore. The affiliation between Kim and the lama creates a new conduit for the flow of surplus wealth, but these expectations are not mired in some vague and ultimately destructive romantic idealization of the "Sahib" as an emblem of gentility. (After all, Magwitch's urge to see his manufactured gentlemen leads directly to his death). On the contrary, the parties involved in the transaction over Kim's future understand it as an investment, although each side envisions very

¹⁴⁹ Philip Mallet argues, for instance, that the "transformation of his father's regimental badge into 'a sort of fetish' is, Creighton remarks 'very interesting': the kind of topic on which one might write a paper. But it also earns Kim his admission into St Xavier's school, and the world of the Sahibs" (121). Mallet does not even mention the lama's monetary contribution. Esty also seems to be guilty of erasing the lama when he claims that "education is compressed into a few scenes of schooling" (10). Ian Baucom's influential reading takes the textuality of these documents and connects it to the what he calls "a dramatization of the labors of imperial subject formation" (89). Baucom argues that the amulet's "paper, inks, and official imprints will make a man of him and, by providing Kim with a fixed, archival genealogy, will apparently allow Kipling to redeem Englishness from the confusions of empire" (90). *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999).

different kinds of dividends. In the lama's Buddhist reasoning, he "acquires merit in that I help thee, my chela, to wisdom" (121). And for British men, the product of Kim's education is a unique addition to the machinery of colonial governance: "So far as Kim could gather, he was to be diligent and enter the Survey of India as a chain-man. If he were very good, and passed the proper examinations, he would be earning thirty rupees a month at seventeen years old, and Colonel Creighton would see that he found suitable employment" (118).

Kim's transformation into a "chain-man," though, does more than simply restore him to the class of Sahibs. His acquisition of "a man's job" (173) is the decisive feature of his transformation from vagabond to citizen because it removes Kim from the pre-modern gift economy of begging and introduces him into the modern world of commodities and wage-labour. To put it in the language of the novel, Kim trades in the "disguise[s]" of his "vagabonding" for "suitable employment." Although critics have overwhelmingly interpreted his career as a "chain-man" as evidence of the knowledge-power dyad, that the difference between surveying and surveillance is never clearly articulated suggests something else.¹⁵⁰ Namely, irrespective of the nature of the work Kim performs for the empire—whether he maps India's geographic contours or its sociological ones—Kim essentially does the same work: he "sell[s] knowledge."

It could be argued that Kim's career is an elaboration of his "dealings" prior to the events of the novel with Mahbub Ali, the horse trader who "knew the boy's value as a gossip" (18). In exchange for the information Kim gathers using his invisibility, Mahbub "gave him beautiful meals all hot from the cookshop at the head of the serai, and once as much as eight annas in money" (18). But these transactions are fundamentally different from his employment as a

¹⁵⁰ According to Thomas Richards, *Kim* "represents the India Survey as gathering knowledge for the state in regions of Tibet and India, and turning that knowledge into military intelligence useful in consolidating British hegemony in the region" *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 5.

chain-man for the simple reason that Kim does not “sell” anything to Mahbub Ali. It is only after his affiliation with St.Xavier’s that Kim enters into the world of commodities. In contrast to the interchangeability of the hot meals and *annas*—not to mention the lama’s primitive accumulation in the “good store of money somewhere about” him (11)—his newfound life as a “chain-man” is inextricably bound up to the singularity of the money form as the universal mediator. Not coincidentally, Kim’s job description is a textbook example of Marxian valorization: “merely marching over a country with a compass and a level and a straight eye, carry away a picture of that country which might be sold for large sums in coined silver” (163). The phrase “all India,” used repeatedly through the text, suddenly loses its purely abstract character and transforms instead into a concrete statement about the work that awaits the young protagonist. Even time, Kim learns from his affiliation with St.Xavier’s, is subject to commodification: “A boy’s holiday was his own property” (125).

Thus Kim’s transformation from vagabond to citizen accords powerfully with Marx’s oft-quoted comparison between the Roman slave and the modern worker. The former, Marx argues, “was held by chains,” while “the modern wage-labourer is bound to his owner by invisible threads.”¹⁵¹ A more recent explanation of the commodity form describes how what “is distinctive about capitalism is that it is characterized by a system of *generalized* commodity production in which *labor power* also figures as something that is bought and sold; in a sense, the production of commodities by commodities.”¹⁵²

Reading the novel in this way undercuts claims about its supposed plotlessness. Rather than lacking one altogether, *Kim* is more correctly described as bearing an extremely simple plot

¹⁵¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 719.

¹⁵² Jack Ralph Kloppenburg Jr., *First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology*. Second Edition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 22-23.

unfolding through two affiliations, the first laying the groundwork for the next.¹⁵³ His bond with the lama enables his enrollment in St. Xavier's and his subsequent conscription into the Great Game under the direction of Colonel Creighton. Although Kim periodically returns to the lama after this point, these sojourns away from the plot of the Great Game barely consume any narrative energy.

That the handover of the title character from the lama to the white men after the moment of *anagnorisis* goes so smoothly—nobody, including Kim, makes any serious remonstrations against this exchange—illustrates perfectly a claim Edward Said makes about the “absence of conflict” in the novel. For Said, this absence is a symptom of Kipling's belief in the Empire's totalizing control over India:

There is no resolution to the conflict between Kim's colonial service and loyalty to his Indian companions not because Kipling could not face it, but because for Kipling *there was no conflict* and, one should add immediately, one of the purposes of the novel was, in fact, to show the absence of conflict once Kim is cured of his doubts and the lama of his longing for the River, and India of a couple of upstarts and foreign agents. (emphasis in original).¹⁵⁴

Another reading comes to a similar conclusion: “Yet when Kim is forced to choose between his loving relations with the lama and his contract with Creighton, he puts the contract and all it implies first... This choice is further confirmed at the book's end, when Kim decides to continue his work as a spy.”¹⁵⁵ Aamir Mufti elaborates on this point and argues that the novel testifies to

¹⁵³ “[T]hat which makes a plot ‘move forward,’ and makes us read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning.” Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1992), xiii.

¹⁵⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1994), 146. (emphasis in original).

¹⁵⁵ John A. McClure, *Kipling and Conrad: The Colonial Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass and London, England, 1981), 77.

Kipling's view of "the settled nature of British colonial rule in India in the late nineteenth century."¹⁵⁶

British hegemony over the subcontinent is not the only thing that is "settled" in *Kim*. Fairly early on into the novel the same could be said of the title character's destiny. There is little doubt as to what will happen to him after he gains admission to St. Xavier's: "One must never forget," the narrator remarks during the few sparse paragraphs dedicated to the institution, "that one is a Sahib, and that some day, when examinations are passed, one will command natives" (125). Kim's physical entrance into the school is eye-catching: "'The Gates of Learning' shut with a clang" (123). Against the overly simplistic critical tendency to hear in this onomatopoeia only a comment about the resemblance between the school and the prison, the better analogy here is to the factory.¹⁵⁷ Far more than a correctional facility, St. Xavier's is a place where Sahibs are made. Kim may struggle in his newly-acquired chains, but as he himself admits, "[n]o man can escape his Kismet" (117)

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John McClure sees Kipling's own traumatic childhood experiences at a second-rate boarding school in Portsmouth looming over what he calls the "theme of education" not just in *Kim* but in *The Jungle Books* (1894/1895), *Stalky and Company* (1899), *Captain Courageous* (1897) as well. Like many Anglo-Indians, Kipling's parents sent their son to England for his

¹⁵⁶ Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: the Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 113.

¹⁵⁷ According to Patrick Brantlinger, the "brief descriptions of the school make it sound like a prison" (133). Zohreh T. Sullivan raises the stakes and argues that the "imprisonment implied by the gates shutting on Kim gradually penetrates the fabric of the narrative and is assumed not only by the narrative voice but by Kim, who, ironically, struggles against it even as he is hypnotized by its power and charm" (Sullivan, 162).

formal education beginning at the age of six. The early pages of *Something of Myself* paint a bleak portrait of life at Lorne Lodge:

It was an establishment run with the full vigour of the Evangelical as revealed to the Woman. I had never heard of Hell, so I was introduced to it in all its terrors—I and whatever luckless little slavey might be in the house, whom severe rationing had led to steal food. Once I saw the Woman beat such a girl who picked up the kitchen poker and threatened retaliation. Myself I was regularly beaten.¹⁵⁸

Even though *Kim*'s narrator relates only a few details on what goes on inside the walls of St.Xavier's, it is safe to say the title character's life inside the "Gates of Learning" does not resemble Kipling's years in Portsmouth. Quite the contrary, the "atmosphere" in Lucknow "suited [Kim], and he thrived by inches." In comparison to St.Xavier's, the "barrack-school" he is encouraged to attend during his summer break (and where he may have ended up if not for his affiliation with the lama) "would be torment" (125). Therefore for McClure, St. Xavier's is Kipling's "picture of the ideal education for the imperial officer and of the ideal officer's new relationship with the subjects" (57).

The figurative power of St.Xavier's as a model site for manufacturing Sahibs was most certainly enhanced in Kipling's mind by the historic significance of its real-world inspiration. Luckily for the founders of the school, La Martinière College, which first opened its doors to boys in 1845 and to girls a quarter century later, did not require the construction of a massive building. The school was installed in the palatial summer residence constructed decades earlier by the institution's namesake and founding benefactor. And as is so often the case for men with monumental designs for their immense fortune, the Lyon-born Claude Martin (1735-1800) never

¹⁵⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself and Other Autobiographical Writings*. ed. Thomas Pinney. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 6

lived to see its completion. Even more problematically, Martin, who had served the French East India Company only to join its English equivalent after the fall of his nation's last colony in Pondicherry in 1761, did not marry and left no heirs. In his will, he left the bulk of his estate for the establishment of schools in Calcutta, Lucknow, and Lyon, but a protracted legal battle delayed the actualization of his dreams by four decades.

Alongside the excellent “schooling” it provided, what made La Martinière in Lucknow famous was the role it played during the signal moment in Anglo-Indian history. Namely, it became a key player in one of the few undeniably triumphant scenes for the British during the 1857 Insurrection. Having been evacuated from the school to the Lucknow Residency, many pupils joined the defense of the city, thus enshrining La Martinière into the story of what became known as “the Siege of Lucknow.”¹⁵⁹ The eventual defeat of the insurrectionists in Lucknow became one of the few proud moments for the Anglophone press in India and beyond, and in the next year the school and many of its staff and pupils were awarded the “Indian Mutiny Medal.” That the glorious history of La Martinière College would appeal to Kipling is self-evident. Putting aside his complicated and often contradictory views about the Empire, the kinds of Sahibs that came out of this factory—unlike, it can be assumed, those at the “barrack-school” or the Masonic orphanage—were for Kipling the best candidates to manage India. “Kipling,” according to McClure, “wants us to approve of these boys [at St.Xavier’s], and to recognize their superiority to English-born-and-bred imperialists” (73).

But however powerfully the figure of La Martinière’s looms over St.Xavier’s, it would be

¹⁵⁹ One report describes the school’s “formidable appearance” and the role played by the students in the defense of the city. L.E. Ruutz-Rees. *A personal narrative of the siege of Lucknow, from its commencement to its relief by Sir Colin Campbell*. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longman’s, and Roberts, 1858), 58. The school is also mentioned prominently in Charles Ball’s *The History of the Indian Mutiny* (1858). One of the students who participated in the defense of Lucknow later wrote a memoir about his experiences: Edward H. Hilton. *The Martinière Boys in the Residency. By one of them* (Lucknow, 1890).

impossible to trace these two institutions too solidly around each other. Kipling simply provides far too few details about what exactly constitutes “the best schooling a boy can get in India” to make any substantial claims about St. Xavier’s correspondence with its historical inspiration. In other words, notwithstanding its monumental position in Anglo-Indian history, La Martinière yields no real insights into *Kim*.

The story of his “progress” does however lead to another set of “Gates,” a small Anglo-Indian orphan institution in Madras that first opened its doors at the end of the Eighteenth Century. Here at the Madras Male Orphan Asylum the two “parallel lines” of the plot, Kim’s two affiliations that each represent radically-different pedagogies, come together in an “experiment” in Benthamite education. Its long-forgotten history exemplifies the kind of “monstrous hybridism” both Kipling and the novel endorses as the ideal setting for the making of a Sahib.

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The story of the Madras Military Male Orphan Asylum is inseparable from the life and work of its founding figure. Born into an educated family, from an early age Andrew Bell was immersed in the flourishing intellectual life of eighteenth-century Scotland.¹⁶⁰ His father, a clock-maker and regulator of the St. Andrew’s University library clock, was a prominent man of letters well-known among the city’s intellectual elite. Bell showed an early aptitude and at the age of sixteen enrolled in St. Andrew’s on a scholarship. After his graduation in 1774, Bell accepted work as a private tutor to a wealthy tobacco planter in Virginia. He returned to England several years later and was ordained deacon in the Church of England in 1784. Since

¹⁶⁰ The majority of this biographical snapshot is taken from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Jane Blackie, “Bell, Andrew (1753–1832), Church of England clergyman and educationist.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

his plans to return to the United States were upended by the political upheaval that followed the American Revolution, he instead set sail for Calcutta in February 1787. On the way the ship made a call at Madras, another strategic hub of English power, where Bell disembarked and spent the next decade of his life. He secured work as a chaplain, but in his spare time he taught classes, conducted research, and lectured on different topics. Bell's intellectual prowess promptly made an impression on his peers, and he was invited to join the Royal Asiatic Society in 1789.

However monumental his election to this esteemed group of scholars must have seemed at the time, there was a far more important event in his life that same year. This was the year the East India Company constructed an orphanage on the outskirts of Madras for the children of fallen British soldiers and asked Bell to be its first superintendent. He agreed and set to work designing what would turn out to be a revolutionary approach to childhood education. Ill health forced him to return to England in 1797, and he never returned to the subcontinent. But the programme he developed at a small orphan institution in Tamil Nadu came back with him, where it would be incorporated as the basis of England's first mass national education project aimed at the poor and then later spread across the globe.¹⁶¹ At its apex in the first few decades of the Nineteenth Century, an estimated 346,000 students across the Anglophone world studied under the "Madras System." Not surprisingly, its meteoric rise sparked a debate in which some of England's most prominent public intellectuals took part. Bell was hailed by some as a visionary—Robert Southey authored a two-volume biography about him¹⁶²—and lambasted by

¹⁶¹ John Griscom, *Monitorial Instruction: An Address, pronounced at the opening of the New-York High-School, with notes and Illustrations* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1825).

¹⁶² More correctly, Southey began a biography of Bell but died before its completion. His son and daughter finished the two-volume book that included a considerable amount of Bell's correspondence. Robert Southey, Charles Cuthbert Southey, and Caroline Bowles Southey, *The life of the Rev. Andrew Bell ... prebendary of Westminster, and master of Sherburn hospital, Durham. Comprising the history of the rise and progress of the system of mutual tuition*. (London: J. Murray, 1844). For a more recent account of Southey's interest in the monitorial system, see

others as a naïve charlatan. When he died in 1832, Bell was buried in Westminster Abbey, a testament to his influence over his contemporaries. Nevertheless, the pedagogical program he helped construct declined rapidly after his death.

Oddly enough, one sentence from Kipling's reflections on his own abysmal education provides the most succinct introduction to the fundamental tenets of the Bell's system: "I was made to read without explanation, under the usual fear of punishment." (6). The Madras system embodied the very antithesis of Lorne Lodge and the pedagogy of isolated reading underwritten by the threat of physical violence. Firstly, surveillance, in the eighteenth-century sense of the word, was a central organizing principal of the Madras system.¹⁶³ It relied upon an interlocking chain of monitors who carefully tracked and reported everything under their purview. In the classrooms, students were watched by assistants who were in turn supervised by teachers. The latter were under the supervision of the sub-ushers, "the agents and ministers" of the schoolmaster, who answered to the ultimate authority of the superintendent, "whose scrutinizing eye must pervade the whole machine, whose active mind must give it energy, and whose unbiased judgment must inspire confidence and maintain the general order and harmony."¹⁶⁴

But the most important form of surveillance, what Bell described as "distinguishing characteristic" of his system, was carried out by the students themselves. Not just another set of

David M Craig, *Robert Southey and romantic apostasy: political argument in Britain, 1780-1840* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2007), 96-99.

¹⁶³ It is not difficult to see the Benthamite origins of this bureaucratic design: "Bentham's ideal state was therefore envisaged as a hierarchy of individual officials, related to one another in a military form of subordination, with a perfectly clear chain of command and distribution of responsibility." Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: OUP, 1959), 74.

¹⁶⁴ Andrew Bell, *The Madras School: Or, Elements of Tuition: Comprising the Analysis of an Experiment in Education, Made at the Male Asylum, Madras; with Its Facts, Proofs, and Illustrations; to which are Added, Extracts of Sermons Preached at Lambeth; a Sketch of a National Institution for Training Up the Children of the Poor; and a Specimen of the Mode of Religious Instruction at the Royal Military Asylum, Chelsea* (London: T. Bensley, 1808), 28. All citations from this text will be parenthetical.

eyes, this monitoring was the cornerstone of the institution's pedagogical strategy of "mutual tuition." In lieu of a single teacher charged with leading a group of children through a specific curriculum, the lion's share of the teaching fell to the students. "Mutual tuition" hinged upon a simple idea: "Qui docet indoctos, docet se" [He who teaches, teaches himself]. Each class was divided between "tutors" and "pupils." The tutors were selected by the teachers solely on their knowledge of the material, and they sat beside their assigned pupils and answer questions directly. The tutor's position was not guaranteed in anyway; if any lessons given by the teachers or assistants proved too difficult for the tutor, he returned to pupilhood and was assigned his own tutor, sometimes his erstwhile student. The assistants (older boys from the institution) and the teachers introduced new material in the form of "easy and short lessons" (19).

The result was a dynamic learning environment where the line between teacher and student was in constant flux. Bell saw a number of advantages to this system:

First, the sociable disposition, both in the tutor and pupil, is indulged by the reciprocal offices assigned to them. Next, the very moment you have nominated a boy to tutor, you have exalted him in own eyes, and given him a character to support...Next, the tutors enable their pupils to keep pace with their classes, which otherwise some of them would fall behind, and be degraded to a lower class, or else continuing attached to their class, forfeit almost every change of improvement, by never learning any one lesson as it ought to be learned. (21)

This system used interlocking gears of supervisory observation to keep every single student attached to it. Nothing, at least in theory, could escape its reach. Interestingly, Bell uses language itself as a metaphor to capture the pedagogical mechanics of his approach: the "tutors learn their own lessons, while they teach their pupils, letter by letter, syllable by syllable, word by word, line by line, verse by verse, or sentence by sentence" (43).

In addition to the panoptical scrutiny of the inmates, the other defining feature of the

Madras system was Bell's militant opposition to corporal punishment. In his view, the best way to "obtain an immediate and willing conformity" from students was not through "newly-invented racks or screws, or whips, or cords," but rather "example, method, general laws, and equal justice" (3-4). Bell defends this position passionately. First, he outlines the affective dimension of this leniency: "It is not to be forgotten that temperate and judicious correction is more effectual than that which is intemperate and severe; that praise, encouragement, and favour are to be tried before dispraise, shame, and disgrace" (47). Bell adds an economic component to his stance. Whereas physical punishment cannot account for any lost classroom time, "confinement at extra hours is made an instrument of regaining what was lost in past time, as well as of preventing future loss" (13). Students could be given "a task in charity schools, between school hours, or on holidays" a form of punishment instead of physical violence. Like the teaching, the students themselves were tasked with enforcing discipline. They were required to record any perceived rule infractions in a "black book" that was ceremonially examined once a week by the entire school. The accused were then tried publicly by a "jury of good boys" and given punishments according to guidelines the students and the administration hammered out together (47).

Ultimately, at the heart of the Madras system was an unbreakable belief in the two overlapping precepts. On the one hand, it presupposed that children have an inherent desire to make affiliations among each other. "At Madras," as Bell puts it, "the most hardened offender could not stand out for three days against an order to his schoolfellows not to speak to him or play with him" (13). On the other hand, the child who entered the institution acquired a kind of blankness: "As there is no soil which will not shew itself grateful to culture, so there is no disposition, no character in mankind, which may not, by dexterous management, be turned to the

public advantage” (8). It is not too difficult to hear in “public advantage” an echo of “useful to the Public,” the phrase employed by the early boosters of the London Foundling Hospital. Indeed, Bell’s slogan for what his institution aimed to produce—“good scholars, good men, good subjects, and good Christians” (141)—could have been just as easily been used in London. Therefore rather than a fictionalized imprint of a well-known school in India, St. Xavier’s, in so far as it represents a Sahib factory, turns out to be deeply embedded into a much larger history of British orphan institutions.

It is important to take note of the fact that what came to be called the Madras system was not an identical copy of the institution in Madras. During his tenure, Bell was confronted with extremely limited financial resources. Basic writing materials like paper, pens, and pencils were essentially luxury items. After visiting a Malabar school and watching children teach the rudiments of alphabet and writing using fingers or sticks outdoors in sand or earth, Bell suddenly found an extremely cheap and elegant solution to one of his problems. In effect, he brought the outdoor indigenous education he witnessed one afternoon inside under the roof of modern institutionalism. He provided his students with their own boxes of sand thirty-six inches wide and ten inches tall, with which, at least according to Bell, they became literate in less than a year (160). Because this kind of writing resulted in larger individual letters, most of Bell’s students used these sandboxes to learn individual letters and then moved onto simple and eventually more complicated individual words. When it was time to start composing entire sentences, they were given more traditional writing implements. In addition to its cost effectiveness, using fingers “engages and amuses the mind,” “prevents learning by rote,” and provides “a distinct and accurate idea of the form of each letter” (159).

Taking a step back from these specific details, it is important to make clear that any

discussion of this history is limited by the fact that very little of the documentary history of the Madras Military Male Orphan Asylum has survived. Virtually everything to do with this time period that is known comes from Bell's own writings about the institution—texts carefully crafted to convince readers of the merits of his system. Consequently, there is little information about what happened to the Madras Orphan Asylum after Bell's departure in 1797.¹⁶⁵ But whether or not Bell's system was altered, overhauled, or thrown out altogether is impossible to judge. In September 1871, the institution was closed permanently, combined with another orphanage, and the grounds were sold to private buyers.¹⁶⁶

Given this dearth of primary materials, it makes sense that the eight-decade-long history of the Madras institution has been overshadowed by the story of its meteoric rise in England in the first decade of the Nineteenth Century and the heated debates that followed. Bell partnered with the National Society for Promoting Religious Education, one of the first national organizations dedicated solely to the mass institutional education of the poor.¹⁶⁷ The National Society used Bell's method as a template to design low cost schools for lower class children across England and Wales, albeit with a far heavier religious emphasis. The organization openly declared in their mandate that the "National Religion should be made the foundation of National

¹⁶⁵ There are a few interesting tidbits: like the fact the school printed its own newspaper during the 1830s and many of the smartest inmates were trained as surveyors at the Madras Observatory. The *Madras Male Asylum Herald* ran from January 1833 to May 1836. According to a recent study, during its short run it nevertheless "became an important source of information about social and political issues." Stuart H. Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 78. In the aftermath of 1857, the institution itself played an important role in the making of the grand narrative of the British victory. In 1858, barely weeks after the final defeat of the insurrectionists, the institution published its own account of the events as a fundraiser. Titled *Narrative of the Indian Mutinies of 1857*, the text provides a detailed account of the rebellion based on a variety of sources: official documents, troop movements, newspaper reports, and, most importantly for the institution, oral histories of the students and staff who lived through it. Madras Military Male Orphan Asylum, *Narrative of the Indian Mutinies of 1857* (Madras: Madras Military Male Orphan Asylum Press, 1858).

¹⁶⁶ W. Francis, *The Nilgris* (Madras: Government Press, 1908), 262.

¹⁶⁷ H.J. Burgess and P. A. Welsby, *A Short History of the National Society 1811-1961* (London, National Society: 1961).

Education, and should be the first and chief thing taught to the poor, according to the excellent Liturgy and Catechism provided by our Church.”¹⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, Bell’s ambitious plans to bring his program onto the national stage was met by angry resistance. Controversy broke out between his supporters and those of Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker educationalist who popularized his own “Monitorial System” similar to the Madras System but with critical differences. (Lancaster, for instance, enthusiastically beat the boys under his charge and gave students monetary rewards for certain scholastic feats).¹⁶⁹

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Even though the historical portrait of the Madras Male Military Orphan Asylum precludes any serious claims about its significance beyond its role as a staging ground for Bell’s “experiment in education”, the institution does offer a new backdrop to make sense of *Kim*’s supposed plotlessness. That is, it exemplified the kind of hybrid education Kipling imagines as the ideal site for the making of a Sahib. The “relationship of reciprocal nurturing,” as one critic has called it, between Kim and the lama forges with the bricks-and-mortar institutionality that began its rise earlier in the century.¹⁷⁰ The result of this fusion was a unique learning

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Pamela Silver and Harold Silver, *The Education of the Poor; the History of a National School 1824-1974* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1974), 10.

¹⁶⁹ Lancaster came under heavy fire for the supposedly secular underpinnings of his project. The author of a contemporary defense of his system counters by describing how he personally visited several of Lancaster’s schools and attests to the fact that “the lessons read by the children are entirely directed to religious instruction, being wholly composed of the SCRIPTURES.” Anon. “Education of the Poor.” *Morning Post* (London). 4 October 1811:2. For more on Lancaster’s system, Carl F. Kaestle, *Joseph Lancaster and the Monitorial School Movement: A Documentary History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1973). For an overview of the Bell vs. Lancaster debate, see Bruce Curtis “Monitorial Schooling, ‘Common Christianity,’ and Politics” in *Transatlantic Subjects: Ideas, Institutions, and Social Experience in Post-Revolutionary British North America*. Ed. Nancy Christie. (Montreal and Kingston, On: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2008), 251-282 and Silver and Silver, 9-17. Like Bell, Lancaster took his system across the globe. For more on this, see Ronald Rayman, “Joseph Lancaster’s Monitorial System of Instruction and American Indian Education, 1815-1838.” *History of Education Quarterly* 21.4 (Winter 1981), 395-409.

¹⁷⁰ John Kucich, *Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy, and Social Class* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 166.

environment. The inmates did not simply run the asylum, they did it well—at least according to the testimonials from former students that Bell included in the many texts he composed proselytizing his system. The story of Kim’s transformation from vagabond to citizen, therefore, is a testament to the power of blankness not just for novelistic writing but also the modern institutionalized education.

More than a century after the publication of Kipling’s novel, another very similar text about a vagabond in India was met by both popular and critical success. Based on Vikas Swarup’s *Q & A* (2005), Anglo-Irish film director Danny Boyle’s *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) proved just how much the story of a vagabond’s transformation into a citizen still enthralls audiences across the world. Like “the master-beggar” Kim, the film’s title character copes with a seemingly oxymoronic title, and the story of how a “slumdog” named Jamal came into his millions on a nationally-televised quiz show is what the narrative unravels. Also like Kipling’s novel, the film begins with a brief account of the tragic circumstances that lead to the title character’s orphanhood, followed by a description of the many affiliations that mark his childhood on the streets. Surviving on the streets with his brother, they join forces with an array of the other street children. Eventually, they are conscripted into the ranks of a group of child beggars housed and fed by a sinister gangster, a kind of updated version of Fagin’s gang.

More importantly, the autobiography of *Slumdog Millionaire*’s title character shares in common something more profound with Kipling’s novel. At the heart of both is a single question, posed by a police inspector who must ascertain how a “Chai wallah” progressed so far in the quiz show: “Professors, doctors, lawyers...never get beyond 60,000. He’s won 10,000,000. What the hell can a slumdog possibly know?” As was the case in *Kim*, the narrative

of *Slumdog Millionaire* tracks the vagabond's transformation through his ability to turn knowledge into currency.

Chapter Four

The Traffic in Kinder:

Austerlitz (2001), Multinational Adoption, and the Global British Novel in the Era of Containerization

“Oranges do not grow at Reykjavik.”

-G. van der Burg, *Containerisation: The Modern Transport System* (1969)

Until this point I have focused on texts and contexts situated in the abstract block of time widely-referred to as the Long Nineteenth Century. In this final chapter, the focus shifts to an orphan narrative published at the outset of the new millennium. Despite the sprawling temporal gap between it and the other texts I have discussed thus far, W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* (2001) seems, at least from a certain distance, to be comprised of many of the same constituent parts. At the center of the text is the adoption of an orphan, a plot that pivots on a crucial moment of *anagnorisis*. Yet again, key moments of the story unfold inside the corridors of a semi-fictive bricks and mortar educational institution. The orphan protagonist, moreover, also copes with the peculiar burden of bearing two different names and must grapple with the many contradictions of a hyphenated identity.

Although *Austerlitz* as a narrative of British orphanhood clearly inherits the legacy left behind by these other novels, it would be impossible to situate it along the critical trajectory I have set up and simply ignore the radical changes of the Twentieth Century. One of the most

important developments of course is the fact that, despite widespread belief to the contrary, the sun very much did set on the Empire. While each figure certainly experienced it in different ways, Edgeworth, Dickens, and Kipling all lived and wrote in a world dyed in the golden hues of the *Pax Britannica* (although the latter did indeed see its fiery demise). By the time a young W.G. Sebald settled in East Anglia in 1970, the Union Jack had lost virtually all of its imperial luster. Two calamitous global conflicts coupled with the rise of anti-imperialist liberation movements hastened the United Kingdom's retreat from the global geopolitical stage. And even though the Pound still stubbornly clings to life, the Island's incorporation into the European Community in the 1970s was yet another sign that the monolithic force of British dominance was dead.

This was certainly not unique to the Brits; all the major European imperial states shared the same fate. Although the last vestiges of this imperial power fell away by the end of the 1960s, the horizon was visible enough for Karl Polanyi to make a simple yet powerful declaration at the outset of *The Great Transformation* (1944): "Nineteenth-century civilization has collapsed."¹⁷¹ In its stead, a new, planetary economic order has risen—and in the process of doing so has accrued a long list of appellations: globalization, late capitalism, postcolonial, postmodern, Empire, among others. For my purposes, the name on the banner is less important than one of its most ubiquitous (and underappreciated) manifestations: the shipping container.

Although "global trade" has become a key term in the discussion of globalization, the centuries-long history of capitalism is replete with economic activity spanning vast geographies. Be it in the form of tulips, tobacco, sugar, or slaves—capitalist trade has long been global in its reach. What sets the era of globalization apart is the dramatic increase in the global circulation

¹⁷¹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 1.

of durable and non-durable commodities. And more than just a matter of scale, the distances that an increasing number of these commodities travel between where they are produced (mostly in the Global South) and where they are consumed (mostly in the Global North) have never been as great. It would have been unthinkable, for example, for the vast majority of the world's inhabitants as recently as a half-century ago to buy footwear made in China. Today, 85% of the world's footwear is made in China.

This kind of overseas economic production, though, required a timely and cost effective form of transoceanic shipping. Although the railroad and then later the automobile transformed continental shipping by the early years of the twentieth century, five decades later the riddle of cost-effective and reliable transoceanic transport had yet to be solved. Two centuries after the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, most of the world's seaports operated in much the same way they had done since antiquity:

When ships moored, hordes of longshoremen unloaded “break bulk” cargo crammed into the hold. They then squeezed outbound cargo in as efficiently as possible in a game of maritime Tetris. The process was expensive and slow; most ships spent much more time tied up than plying the seas.¹⁷²

Containerization, the name given to the rise of the steel shipping container as the dominant form of commodity transportation, “changed everything.” In the 1950s, American trucking entrepreneur Malcolm Mclean took an idea that had been in circulation by that time for decades—moving railway cars and transport trucks onto ships—and distilled it to its common element: the box.¹⁷³ By separating the steel container from its undercarriage, Mclean

¹⁷² *The Economist* “The humble hero” *The Economist*. May 18th 2013.

¹⁷³ “Moving Can” is a term that Bill Sharpsteen uses in his ethnographic account of containerization, *The Docks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

manufactured what very quickly became the global standard of commodity transport and what became known in industry parlance as “intermodal transport.” Thus the container’s “intermodality” is another word for its global *translatability*—as one historian calls it, the “seamless shifting” between ship, train, and the trailer truck.¹⁷⁴

This relatively simple act of standardization drastically reduced both loading and unloading time, and since containers can be easily stacked, ships vastly expanded the amount of cargo they could carry. The figures speak for themselves: from 1965 to 1970, shortly after the “container revolution” began, the average number of tonnes moved per hour around the globe jumped from 1.7 to 30. In that same brief time period, the size of container ships more than doubled, establishing a pattern of exponential growth that continues unabated to this day.¹⁷⁵ And like every process of industrialization, containerization erased most of the labour force that had hitherto dominated commodity transportation. Modern container ships, as titanic as they are, require only a skeletal crew. Moreover, the stevedores who for centuries hauled cargo on and off-board cargo ships—like the men of Elia Kazan’s *On the Waterfront* (1954)—were replaced en masse by fleets of container cranes controlled by a single operator.¹⁷⁶

Ironically, the birth of the global village has meant the death of one of the oldest and most hallowed institutions of human cultural interaction and exchange: the port. The modern container port has become a military zone off limits to anyone not directly involved in the

¹⁷⁴Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 9.

¹⁷⁵ In 2013, the Danish shipping concern Maersk will unveil the South Korean-built Triple-E Class, billed as “The World’s Largest Ship.” According to the company, this is not only the world’s largest but also the most fuel-efficient.

¹⁷⁶ “The men who worked [on the docks in the 1950s] were soldiers, gladiators, the sweaty, muscled foundation of shipping” (Sharpsteen, 185).

industry.¹⁷⁷ Since most of the men working on container ships originate from the Global South, the vast majority of them are not allowed anywhere near the cities that rely on their labour. The boisterous reverie Jacques Brel celebrates in his homage to the port of Amsterdam, a place where sailors and their friends in the city meet to “sing”, “sleep”, “die”, “eat”, “dance”, and, above all, “drink,” has vanished. The far more accurate representation of how commodities travel today is provided by Allan Sekula and Noël Burch’s documentary film, *The Forgotten Space* (2012). As the camera makes grandiose sweeps over dreary, depopulated Northern European ports, it becomes clear that the world of Kazan’s Hoboken and Brel’s Amsterdam has disappeared as the port itself has succumbed (albeit belatedly) to the forces of mass mechanization.

In what follows, I use *Austerlitz* to probe at least some of the ways the rise of intermodal transport manifests in literary and cultural production. But rather than simply link textual symptom to underlying economic cause, I show how “intermodalism” itself provides the best conceptual key to unlock some of the pressing critical questions at stake in the text. Reading this “prosebook of an undetermined kind”, to use Sebald’s preferred generic label for *Austerlitz*, against the backdrop of containerization proves once again that a narrative of British orphanhood sheds light on a number of political, historical, and formal issues.¹⁷⁸

In so far as it provides an archaeology of one family’s shattering, *Austerlitz*, following in the footsteps of many canonical Holocaust texts, pivots on a series of long distance railway journeys. Having been made aware of his orphanhood as a teenager, Jacques Austerlitz spends much of his adult life shunning any kind of inquiry into his “true origins” (125). But after he

¹⁷⁷ American authorities take port security so seriously that in 2002 U.S. Customs and Border Patrol launched the “Container Security Initiative,” which effectively extended the sovereignty of U.S. border agents allowing them to scan American-bound ships in dozens of partner ports around the world.

¹⁷⁸ W.G. Sebald. “Ich fürchte das Melodramatische.” *Der Spiegel* 11, 12.3.2001: 232.

discovers crucial details of his arrival in England, he embarks on a search for the remnants of his past life. Austerlitz retraces his journey from Prague to London aboard the *Kindertransporte*—the collective term for the series of private initiatives that brought over 10,000 children to the United Kingdom from various parts of the continent. In Prague, he reunites with his *Kinderfraulein*, Vera, who helps Austerlitz fill in the blank spaces of his autobiography. Having tracked down the important details of his own life, Austerlitz embarks on a search for the remnants of his mother and father, a search that leads to many powerful discoveries.

Also in line with many other Holocaust texts, *Austerlitz* pointedly invokes its master trope: the boxcar loaded with human life. Commonly referred to as the “cattle car,” the boxcar is an omnipresent force in how we imagine the industrialized massacre wrought upon the world by National Socialism. It looms in the background of the famous still images known collectively as the “Auschwitz Album,” and most (if not all) of the canonical literary and cinematic depictions of the Holocaust feature prominent scenes of deportees either entering, waiting in, or exiting boxcars.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, a number of *Wagen* used by the Reichsbahn have themselves been shipped around the world and transformed into museum artifacts.¹⁸⁰

Its reign as an icon of this history is not particularly difficult to understand. Putting aside the fact that without the railways the Final Solution would have been impossible, the signifier

¹⁷⁹ A children’s memorial project in a small town in Tennessee is a good example of the allegorical potential of the boxcar. Having managed to collect over 24 million paperclips from around the world, many of which came with attached stories, the students eventually placed eleven million of these into an out of commission Reichsbahn boxcar imported directly to the school. Daniel H. Magilow, “Counting to Six Million: Collecting Projects and Holocaust Memorialization,” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 14. 1 (Fall 2007): 23-40.

¹⁸⁰ The most elaborate example is the “Holocaust Tower”, one of the centerpieces of Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin. Visitors are enclosed into a dark, disorienting space into which the sounds of the outside world stream. For more on the institutionalization of the boxcar as an artifact of the Shoah, see Oren Baruch Stier, “Different Trains: Holocaust Artifacts and the Ideologies of Remembrance,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19.1 (Spring 2005): 81-106. See also Alfred Gottwald, “Der deutsche Güterwagen: Eine Ikone für den Judenmord?” *Museums Journal* 13.1 (1999): 14-17.

“boxcar” captures in a word the industrialized nature of the Shoah. That is to say, National Socialism erased one of the hitherto organizing principals of railway transportation: the distinction between passenger rail and freight. As Raul Hilberg puts it in his epoch-marking essay, “the Jews were booked as people and shipped as cattle.”¹⁸¹

There is, however, more to this instantiation of the boxcar than a straightforward reference to the systematic dehumanization of Europe’s Jews. Rather, Sebald appropriates a sentence from arguably the most famous boxcar scene in World Literature—“Le monde était un wagon hermétiquement clos”—and sews it deep into the fabric of the text.¹⁸² This sentence, from the early moments of Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1958), echoes throughout the entirety of *Austerlitz* on different registers. Beginning with the narrator’s decision to “take refuge” in the Antwerp Zoo’s exhibit of nocturnal wildlife, followed by myriad encounters with caged animals, insects in display cases, and uprooted forest trees growing indoors, to the stories of mental patients and prisoners of war languishing endlessly in isolation cells, Sebald returns repeatedly to different configurations of what the narrator calls an “unreal world” [*falsche Welt*]. This concern with the different ways living things end up in artificial worlds “through no fault of their own” (4) culminates in the surreal confines of Theresienstadt, the Potemkin village Nazi officials erected with the help of an army of conscripted Jewish slave labour collected from across the Reich.

But in addition to its function as a keystone of *Austerlitz*’s narrative architecture, this figuration of boxed life points to a landmark moment in the history of the twentieth century. Namely, Jacques Austerlitz’s rescue on the *Kindertransporte*, known in official British parlance

¹⁸¹ Raul Hilberg, “German Railroads / Jewish Souls,” *Society* 14.1 (December 1976): 61.

¹⁸² Élie Wiesel. *La Nuit*. (Paris: Les Éditions De Minuit, 2007), 38.

as the “Refugee Children’s Movement”, prefigures the emergence of a massive private industry funneling refugee orphans mostly from the Global South into the Global North. This flow of blank subjects into the United Kingdom inverts the history of the “Home Children”, the name for the hundreds of thousands of orphans shipped to different corners of the Imperial map beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, the *Kindertransporte* yields important insights into the birth of a new kind of orphanhood, an intermodal blankness taking shape in the juridical fiction of the refugee. Woven together by a complicated series of international treaties and statutes, refugees and refugee children have become a focal point of an immense amount of Anglophone cultural production. And not coincidentally, looming in the background of much of this fascination with the refugee is the figure of the container. Thus the same limitless mobility at the heart of commodity production today haunts the many histories of mass displacement scattered across the horizon of the twentieth century. The non-Aryans “evacuated” by the *Reichsbahn*, the religious minorities fleeing in the wake of India’s partition, the Japanese internees forcibly displaced during the Second World War, all the way to the expelled Albanian Kosovars at the cusp of the new millennium—the many boxcar scenes of history allegorize not only a century of cataclysmic political violence but also global economic production as a whole.

But before I elaborate on this larger thesis, it is necessary to gain a foothold in the text itself by asking the requisite that most engagements with Sebald’s oeuvre must confront: what is *Austerlitz*?

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The difficulty of answering this question is two-fold. On the one hand, as “a typical

Sebald book,” *Austerlitz* bears many of his signature markers.¹⁸³ At the outset, readers recognize the nameless narrator who, like the other first person narrators, shares some important biographical traits with Sebald. The subject matter bears more than a passing resemblance to the narrative of *The Emigrants*’ Max Ferber, a Jewish man who performs an archaeological recollection of his life. Sebald also redeploys the same “periscopic” narration he borrows from Austrian Modernist Thomas Bernhard, totally foregoing direct speech and therefore any kind of dialogue between characters.¹⁸⁴ On the other hand, *Austerlitz* diverges considerably from anything Sebald ever wrote, differences that pose even more troubling questions about genre and form. One of the most important (and something that many have pointed out) is the focus on a single autobiographical recounting. Both the lack of chapter divisions, a first for Sebald, and the way the title itself is bolded in the original German edition, *AUSTERLITZ*—something to which few critics have paid any attention or even noticed altogether—seem to suggest a kind of unity that eludes his other texts.¹⁸⁵

Random House, which recently released the “Tenth Anniversary Edition” of Anthea Bell’s translation in the United States, has a straightforward response to the dilemma posed by all these formal peculiarities. In line with standard publishing conventions, the book designers chose to incorporate selections from the critical fanfare that enveloped the text in the

¹⁸³ Uwe Schütte. *W. G. Sebald: Einführung in Leben und Werk* (Goettingen and Oakville: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 178.

¹⁸⁴ W.G. Sebald, “Ein riesiges Netzwerk des Schmerzes”: Interview mit W.G. Sebald” in “*Auf ungeheuer dünnem Eis*”: *Gespräche 1971 bis 2001*. Ed. Torsten Hoffmann (Munich: Fisher, 2011), 226.

¹⁸⁵ To name only a few of the numerous books and articles published on *Austerlitz* in the last five years: J.J. Long, *W. G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008); Deane Blackler, *Reading W. G. Sebald: Adventure and Disobedience* (Rochester: Camden House, 2007); Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005); Judith Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*. (New York: Columbia UP, 2013); Mark McCulloh, *Understanding W.G. Sebald* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

Anglophone world. One extraction in particular, three words culled from James Woods' introduction, hangs like a banner above them all, the first three words confronting the reader on the (non-removable) inside flap: "[a] beautiful novel." Putting aside the questions raised by the very existence of this "Tenth Anniversary Edition"—this is, after all, a book which rails against the fictitiousness of linear time—there would not be much worth noting about this paratextual accoutrement if not for the fact it directly contradicts Sebald's own position in regards to the generic classification of *Austerlitz*.

Time and again in the dozens of interviews he gave between its German publication in February 2001 and his death in December that same year, Sebald, a professor of literature for more than three decades, declared his opposition to *Austerlitz*'s being labeled as a novel. One of the most prominent examples is found in an interview with *Der Spiegel*. In contrast to many of their Anglophone counterparts, the interviewers are aware of Sebald's position and ask him to elaborate on it:

Because in my view [*Austerlitz*] is not a novel. It is a prose book of an undetermined kind. A novel, for me, means a lot of dialogue and all the *staffage* you expect from proper novelists. I just can't manage that. I can't write dialogue either, something that could have to do with the fact that I have lived so long out of the country and so removed from everyday German.¹⁸⁶

Sebald's resistance to the label "novel" long predated *Austerlitz*. He said the same thing about his other works of "prose fiction," to use his own term for *Vertigo*, *The Emigrants*, and *The Rings of Saturn*. In fact, he suggests his outsider stance in one of the first interviews he ever gave, after

¹⁸⁶ W.G. Sebald. "Ich fürchte das Melodramatische." *Der Spiegel* 11, 12.3.2001: 232. Elsewhere he explains this opposition in greater depth. "A novel," as he puts it in one of the final interviews he gave, turns fundamentally on human relationships and is something in which a lot of dialogue takes place. I just can't come to terms with writing dialogue. Although this may be just my own disposition, I find it unbearable to read in books, "she said, as she stared pensively out the window" ("Elaborate" 6).

the release of the Dutch translation of *Vertigo*: “I am not a *littérateur* in the true sense of the word.”¹⁸⁷

Despite the veneration and praise he has been subject to in the Anglophone world—“Sebaldland” as one critic calls it—it is surprising that Sebald’s own thoughts about his “masterpiece” have not been afforded much weight by the very people who made him a global literary phenomenon.¹⁸⁸ The majority of his readers simply avoid this issue altogether and refer to *Austerlitz* as a novel either with no qualification whatsoever or with some gestural comments.¹⁸⁹ Others, like Schütte, one of his former graduate students and leading authority on

¹⁸⁷ W.G. Sebald, “Echoes from the Past: A Conversation with Piet de Moor,” in *Saturn’s Moons: W.G. Sebald – a Handbook*, edited by Jo Caitling and Richard Hibbitt, London: Legenda, 2011):350-355. A brief elaboration is required here. Published at a time when Sebald was a relative unknown, the interview mistakenly describes Sebald as Austrian. Interestingly, Sebald describes *Vertigo* as a novel, while at the same time describing the chapters on Stendhal and Kafka as “literary-biographical essays” (350).

¹⁸⁸ Juliane Röhmild’s “Back in Sebaldland”: Zur Rezeption von W. G. Sebald in der britischen Tagespresse’, *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* (Neue Folge) 15.2 (2005): 393-398. For more on his reception in the Anglophone world, see Mark McCulloh, “Introduction: Two Languages, Two Audiences” and Scott Denham “Die englischsprachige Sebald-Rezeption” in Michael Niehaus and Claudia Öhlschläger. *W.G. Sebald: Politische Archäologie und melancholische Bastelei* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006): 259-268.

¹⁸⁹ Judith Ryan’s incorporation of *Austerlitz* into her *The Novel After Theory* (2011) is a recent example of this. Given the formal issues at stake in such a project, the absence of any consideration of Sebald’s own views is surprising. Even more surprising, however, is Ryan’s references to *Austerlitz* as a novel while simultaneously reminding us of the fact that *The Rings of Saturn* “is not a novel but a strange mixture of travel narrative, personal and historical reflections, and accounts of books, newspaper articles, and related items” (200). That is, Ryan describes a “strange mixture” in the earlier text but a novel in the other, even though *Austerlitz* is comprised of virtually the same material. Eric Santner sidesteps genre as well in his much longer study of Sebald’s oeuvre. Despite referencing the “difficulty of categorizing the sort of literary practice Sebald engaged in,” he nevertheless proceeds to do just that (“[e]arlier in the novel” (55), “in the final pages of the novel” (57), and, in a footnote, a reference to “Sebald’s last novel”(65)). He concludes the discussion of genre by pointing back to Woods, who “got it right when, in a review of one of Sebald’s works, he cited Walter Benjamin’s well-known remark apropos of Proust, that all great works found a new genre or dissolve an old one” (11). Mark McCulloh’s *Understanding W.G. Sebald*, the first full-length English study dedicated to his oeuvre uses the term not only for *Austerlitz* but also for *Vertigo*, *The Emigrants*, and *The Rings of Saturn*. In the more recent introduction to the volume he co-edited, McCulloh retrenches himself into this position by referring once again to all four texts as “novels.” In the Francophone context too, “roman” also appears frequently in discussions of *Austerlitz*. Judith Kaspera, “Austerlitz de W.G. Sebald. Une vue poétologique sur l’histoire des camps,” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 19. 3 (2012): pp 367-376 and Jean-Marc Dreyfus, “L’absence et la trace: Kindertransport, Nuit de Cristal et Opération Meubles dans ‘Austerlitz,’” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 19. 3 (2012): 355-366.

Sebald, address this resistance and overrule him nevertheless.¹⁹⁰ And those who accede to Sebald's position have responded by minting an array of coinages: "faction", "process books", "novel memoirs", "narrative texts", "literary historiography" to name only a few.¹⁹¹ That critics have failed to come to any consensus on the terminology adds a certain degree of poignancy to Sebald's description of English travel writer Bruce Chatwin: "Just as Chatwin himself ultimately remains an enigma, one never knows how to classify his books. All that is obvious is that their structure and intentions place them in no known genre."¹⁹²

Of all the different options to choose from, Franz Loquai's description of *Austerlitz* as a "novel and essay, scholarly treatise and autobiography" is the most helpful.¹⁹³ Although I will return to the significance of this formal intermodality at the end of this chapter, at this point, Loquai's claim is useful insofar as it provides a blueprint of *Austerlitz*'s bifurcated narrative structure. However imprecise a term it may be, "essay" is probably the best word to describe the first section of *Austerlitz*, which is largely comprised of the title character's running commentary on a number of different buildings and structures. This commentary comes about as a result of a series of planned and unplanned encounters between Austerlitz and the anonymous narrator that

¹⁹⁰ Uwe Schütte, for instance, claims that Sebald's position "changes little" (177). Amir Eshel's verdict is much the same: "Rereading the plot from the narrator's perspective, it now seems obvious that the narrative is a postmodern crypto-*Bildungsroman* stretching over some thirty years" (73). In Eshel's view the problem rests on Sebald's "somewhat naïve... understanding of the relation between fictional and historiographic narratives of history." Amir Eshel, "Against the Power of Time: The Poetics of Suspension in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*," *New German Critique* 88 (2003): 76.

¹⁹¹ Respectively: Peter Craven, "W. G. Sebald: Anatomy of *Faction*," *Heat* 12 (1999): 212; Marianna Torgovnick, *The War Complex: World War II in Our Time*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005): 117; Gray Kochhar-Lindgren, "Charcoal: The Phantom Traces of W.G. Sebald's Novel-Memoirs," *Monatshefte* 94. 3 (Fall 2002): 368; Graham Jackman, "'Gebranntes Kind'? W.G. Sebald's 'Metaphysik der Geschichte,'" *German Life and Letters* 57.4 (October 2004): 466; Lynn L. Wolff, "H.G. Adler and W.G. Sebald: From History and Literature to Literature as Historiography," *Monatshefte* 103.2 (Summer 2011): 257.

¹⁹² W.G. Sebald, "The Mystery of the Red-Brown Skin: An Approach to Bruce Chatwin" in *Campo Santo*. Trans. Anthea Bell. (London and New York: Modern Library, 2005), 151.

¹⁹³ Franz Loquai, "Vom Beinhaus der Geschichte ins wiedergefundene Paradies: Zu Werk und Poetik W. G. Sebalds," in *Sebald.Lektüren*, Eds. Marcel Atze and Franz Laquai. (Eggington: Edition Isele, 2005): 244-256.

begin in 1967. The essayistic quality of these pages is confirmed by the narrator's astonishment at Austerlitz's ability to "put his ideas together as he talked, forming perfectly balanced sentences out of whatever occurred to him" (12-13).¹⁹⁴ The two eventually lose touch after the narrator's relocation from England to Germany, to which, as the narrator learns later, Austerlitz refuses to send any kind of communications. Almost two decades later, yet another geographic coincidence—this time in Central London—brings them together again, and Austerlitz launches into the novel of what he calls "his own story" (43).

This bifurcated structure between essay and novel is itself replicated in Austerlitz's biography. That is, his life story can be understood as divided between two separate texts he authors over the course of his adult life. The vast majority of this time he spends amassing "endless preliminary sketches" for what promises to be a monumental study of "the architecture style of the capitalist era" (33, 64). But like the office he occupies at an unnamed London art institute, his research is totally unsystematized and in disarray. His early retirement, he explains to the narrator, was supposed to afford him an opportunity "to set out on paper" his "accumulation of knowledge" (120,140). In the end, though, he is unable to synthesize his work into a cohesive whole, a failure that lays the groundwork for one of *Austerlitz's* most dramatic moments:

One evening, said Austerlitz, I gathered up all my papers, bundled or loose, my notepads and exercise books, my files and lecture notes, anything with my writing on it, and carried the entire collection out of the house to the far of the garden, where I threw it on the compost heap and buried it under layers of rotted leaves and spadefuls of earth (124-125, my emphasis).

¹⁹⁴ W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell. (New York: Random House, 2001). All citations from this text will be parenthetical. When necessary, I quote in square brackets from the German edition. W.G. Sebald, *Austertlitz* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2001).

This burial scene, what Austerlitz tellingly calls his “work of destruction,” is at once the definitive end of his professional career—the essay—and the first link of a narrative chain that leads directly to the moment of *anagnorisis* in a London bookshop, an event that forces him to begin compiling his autobiography. (126) Since his research can no longer keep his attention, Austerlitz begins what he calls his “endless nocturnal peregrinations” through the streets of London. (140) During one of these solitary journeys he ends up at Liverpool Street Station, where he has a vision of his four-year-old-self being met by his adoptive parents in Liverpool Street Station. Although he has been aware for most of his adult life that he was adopted, this vision is the first clue about his “pre-history” (335). This scene lays the groundwork for the “sudden realization” he has a few pages later in a London bookstore. And while he is unsure of the specificities of his own displacement, listening to two women recount their experiences on the *Kindertransporte* finally pushes him to come to terms with his “orphaned frame of mind” and go seek out his “true origins” (265,125). Thus the autobiography of Jacques Austerlitz/Daffyd Elias (the name his foster parents give him) links together two different lives through two textual forms. Austerlitz himself seems to be aware of the sharp caesuras of his life when he describes how as a child he “felt as if an invisible twin brother were walking around beside me, the reverse [*Gegenteil*] of a shadow, so to speak” (54-55) [80].

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Vera’s recollections do more than reconnect the broken lines of Austerlitz’s familial life; she highlights one of the key tropes circulating through the text. Near the end of her account, Vera recalls what Austerlitz’s mother, Agata, says as she watches the *Kindertransport* train carrying her only son pull out of the train station: “We left from here for Marienbad only last summer. And where will we be going now?” (205-6). The vision of her son’s departing train

portends Agata's own deportation two years later, an event which Vera witnesses. "[O]nly years later, from one who had survived the ordeal" (206) does Vera learn of what awaited Agata:

They stayed in this cold Trade Fair building for several days, until finally, early one morning when scarcely anyone was out and about, they were marched under guard to nearby Holešovice railway station, where it took almost another three hours to load them on the trucks. (179)

Mehrere Tage dauerte der Aufenthalt in den Baracken beim Messepalast, bis man schließlich, in einer frühen Morgenstunde, wenn kaum jemand um die Wege war, von Wachmannschaften begleitet zu dem nahegelegenen Bahnhof von Holešovice marschierte, wo dann das *Einwaggonieren*, wie man es nannte, [as it was called] noch einmal nahezu drei Stunden dauerte. [258, emphasis added]

The strange term that Vera flags, *Einwaggonieren*, comes up again later just as conspicuously. This second instance is located near the beginning of the colossal sentence that spans over eight pages in the German original describing life in Theresienstadt, the name given to the concentration camp outside of Prague where Agata is deported. In one sentence, Sebald provides a "bird's-eye view" (169) of this "extra-territorial place" based largely on the H.G. Adler's monumental and immensely-detailed study of the camp. As I will explain later in this chapter, Adler, who was also deported to Theresienstadt, played a pivotal role in collecting and archiving the surreal history of the camp after the end of the war.¹⁹⁵ The word *einwaggoniert* appears at the end of what could be called the first movement of the sentence, preceded by what seems to be an indeterminably long list of occupations and place names:

It seems unpardonable to me today that I had blocked off the investigation of my most distant past for so many years, not on principle, to be sure, but still of my accord, and that now it is too late for me to seek out Adler, who had lived in London until his death in the summer of 1988, and talk to him about that extra-territorial place where at the time, as I think I have mentioned, said Austerlitz, some sixty thousand people were crammed

¹⁹⁵ For more on the connection between Austerlitz and Adler's study, see Wolff, "H.G. Adler and W.G. Sebald."

together in an area little more than a square kilometer in size – industrialists and manufacturers, lawyers and doctors, rabbis and university professors, singers and composers, bank managers, businessmen, shorthand typists, housewives, farmers, labourers and millionaires, people from Prague and the rest of the Protectorate, from Slovakia, from Denmark and Holland, from Vienna and Munich, Cologne and Berlin, from the Palatinate, from Lower Franconia and Westphalia—each of whom had to make do with about two square metres of space in which to exist and all of them, in so far as they were in any condition to do so or until *they were loaded into trucks* and sent on east.....(236-237, emphasis added)

Deshalb scheint es mir unverzeihlich, dass ich die Erforschung meiner Vorvergangenheit so viele Jahre hindurch zwar nicht vorsätzlich, aber doch selber verhindert habe and dass es darüber nun zu spät geworden ist, Adler, der bis zu seinem Tod in Sommer 1988 in London gelebt had, aufzusuchen und mit ihm zu reden über diesen extraterritorialen Ort, an dem zeitweise, wie ich wohl schon einmal sagte, sagte Austerlitz, an die sezigtausend Personen auf einer Fläche von kaum mehr als einem Quadratkilometer zusammengezwungen waren, Industrielle und Frabrikanten, Rechtsanwaelte und Ärzte, Rabinner und Universitätsprofessoren, Sängerinnen und Komponisten, Bankdirktoren, Kaufleute, Stenotypistinnen, Hausfrauen, Landwirte, Arbeiter und Millionäre, Leute Aus Prag and aus dem übrigen Protektorat, aus der Slowakei, aus Dänemark und aus Holland, aus Wien und München, Köln und Berlin, aus der Pfalz, aus dem Mainfränkischen und aus dem Westfalen, von denen ein jeder mit zirka zwei Quadratmetern Wohnplatz auskommen musste un die alle, wofern sie irgendwie dazu imstande waren, beziehungsweise bis sie, *wie es hiess*, [as it was termed] *einwaggoniert* und Richtung Osten weitergeschickt wurden..... [335-337, emphasis added]

Both the compound and Sebald's emphasis on its oddity are lost in Bell's translation. (The French, Spanish, and Italian translations, in contrast, keep both intact.¹⁹⁶) Adler uses the term without any kind of special emphasis at different points of his study, and one passage in particular sheds light on the way Sebald used Adler's study as what he once called "raw

¹⁹⁶ "...ils furent conduit en colonnes, sous bonne escorte, à la gare de Vyšehrad toute proche, où l'enwagonnement, pour reprendre le terme employé, dura encore près de trois heures" (249) ; "...chacun devant se contenter pour vivre d'un espace d'environ deux mètres carrés et, dans la mesure où il était à peu près en état de le faire ou plutôt jusqu'à ce qu'il soit enwagonné, comme on disait, et expédié à L'Est" Patrick Charbonneau (trans). *Austerlitz*. (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 324.; "...finalmente, a primera hora de una mañana, cuando no había casi nadei por allí, fueron acompañados por guardias a la próxima estación de Holešovice, donde la "vagonificación", como la llamaban, duro todavía case tres horas" Miguel Sáenz (trans). (Editorial Anagrama: Barcelona, 2002), 181.

material.”¹⁹⁷ That is, “the survivor” from whom Vera draws her account appears to be the same survivor whose long testimonial is reproduced in the chapter on transportation to and from Theresienstadt.¹⁹⁸

One relatively straightforward interpretation of the prominence of *Einwaggonieren* would cite it as yet another example of how the German language was conscripted into National Socialism. Agata’s response to the bureaucratic vernacular employed by Nazi officials articulates this directly:

...and I remember, said Vera, how she once showed me a passage in one of those proclamations issued by the occupying power stating that in the case of any contravention of this regulation, both the Jew concerned in the transaction [*Der betreffende Jude*] and the person acquiring the property must expect the most severe of measures to be taken by the State Police. The Jew concerned in the transaction! Agata had cried, adding: Really, the way these people write! (176) [253]

This is not the only time when a connection is made between what Austerlitz describes as “the endless possibilities of language” and the “slave state” created by National Socialism (122-123,139). Describing his encounter with Adler’s study, Austerlitz tells the narrator that

reading this book, which line by line gave me an insight into matters I could never have imagined when I myself visited the fortified town...was painstaking business because of

¹⁹⁷ Sebald on the sources of his work: “You just can’t come up with something off the top of your head. It’s simply not possible. You need real exemplars [*Vorbilder*] in order to narrate these kinds of stories. Ultimately, the point is to somehow make it clear to the reader that life is horrendous...the way we have it organized. In order to find the right framework, you need stories that bear a certain authenticity. This signals that you are dealing with more than just the private problems of writers being aired out for all to see—something I find downright laughable. In other words, storytelling requires that the narrator focus not on himself but on the individuals in the narrative, or the people who resemble them, people who are actually alive or once lived. In a way, you have to do right by these people in this way. Of course, during the writing process you make changes to the material in one way or another—trimming around the edges, elaborating or intensifying something. You can’t take these things as raw material and dump them directly on the page. It comes down to a question of how you work, the abbreviations and syncopes, exactly like every other form of art” (“Elaborate” 6).

¹⁹⁸ In addition to using this word, the testimonial reprinted in Adler’s study describes how people had to wear “Nummerntäfelchen um den Hals” another detail that Sebald imports into Vera’s account. Hans Günther Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-1945: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1955), 284.

my poor knowledge of German [*mangelhafte Deutschkenntnisse*]...The long compounds, not listed in my dictionary, which were obviously being spawned the whole time by the pseudo-technical jargon governing everything in Theresienstadt had to be unraveled syllable by syllable. (233) [334]

Sebald goes so far as to photocopy an entire page from Adler's study consisting solely of a long list of increasingly complex neologisms that ruled over life at Theresienstadt and stitches it directly into *Austerlitz*. Consequently, it becomes clear that this passage slyly points out one of the absurd ironies of National Socialism. That is, in its pursuit of racial purity, the Third Reich inadvertently "spawned" a language just as foreign to the German narrator as it is to Austerlitz.¹⁹⁹

There is, however, one problem with this interpretation: *Einwaggonieren* is not, strictly speaking, a *Naziwort*. A simple internet search reveals that it began circulating in the second half of the nineteenth century with the construction of the first national railway systems. Although the word circulates today only in the context of discussion of National Socialism, *Einwaggonieren*—like its English equivalent, *entrain*—simply means to enter into a train. But following Austerlitz's lead and dismantling the word "syllable by syllable" makes it evident that Sebald's intention is to highlight how lying not far away from the banal literal meaning is another, more sinister reality of the preverb "ein" signifiers in this context. Namely, it means that this loading of passengers is not going to involve any kind of return journey.

More important than its linguistic novelty, *Einwaggonieren* highlights one of the text's central tropes. Long before any mention of National Socialism, the image of life languishing in hermetically-sealed boxes makes its appearance in the opening moments as the narrator tours the

¹⁹⁹ For more on this topic, see Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: A Philologist's Notebook*, trans. Martin Brady (London: Continuum), 2002.

Nocturama. Recalling the demented quail the narrator of *The Rings of Saturn* encounters at the Somerleyton and a number of similar figures from Sebald's oeuvre, a conspicuous raccoon sits "beside a little stream with a serious expression on its face, washing the same piece of apple over and over again, as if it hoped that all this washing... would help it to escape the unreal [*falsch*] world in which it had arrived so to speak, through no fault of its own"(2)[7].²⁰⁰ Later on, the adolescent Austerlitz marvels at all the "natural curiosities" collected under one roof at Andromeda Lodge, one of which is an "ancient parrot" that has to be let out of "his box" [*Kiste*] (83)[121]. Caged, tamed, and preserved: many different kinds of life manage to end up in storage boxes on display. Austerlitz describes how

there was some kind of cabinet of national curiosities in almost every room at Andromeda Lodge: cases with multiple drawers, *some of them glass-fronted*, where the roundish eggs of parrots were arranged in their hundreds; collections of shells, minerals, beetles, and butterflies; slowworms, adders, and lizards preserved in formaldehyde; snail shells and sea urchins, crabs and shrimps, and large herbaria containing leaves, flowers, and grasses (83, emphasis added).

Austerlitz's description of the *Haut-de-Jardin* public reading room at Paris's Bibliothèque Nationale towards the end of the text demonstrates the violence lurking behind the attempt to manufacture artificial environments. Austerlitz explains how he

sat for many hours and days on end, looking out abstractedly... at the inner courtyard and the curious nature reserve cut, so to speak, from the surface of the promenade deck and sunk two or three stories deep, which has been planted with about a hundred full-grown stone pines from the Forêt de Bord transported [*hineingesetzt*], how I do not know, to this place of banishment (280)[393].

²⁰⁰ "However, on emerging into the open air again, I was saddened to see, in one of the otherwise deserted aviaries, a solitary Chinese quail, evidently in a state of dementia, running to and fro along the edge of the cage and shaking its head every time it was about to turn, as if it could not comprehend how it had got into this hopeless fix." *The Rings of Saturn*, Trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1995), 36.

If there is a whimsical or quasi-fantastical tone to this passage—Austerlitz ponders at one point if some of the trees “perhaps are still thinking of their home in Normandy”—the consequences of this false world created solely for the benefit of solitary, isolated readers announce themselves literally: “And several times, said Austerlitz, birds which have lost their way in the library forest flew into the mirror images of the trees in the reading room windows, struck the glass with a dull thud and fell lifeless to the ground” (280, 281).

Far and away the most important “unreal world” in *Austerlitz* is the “extra-territorial place” that awaits Sebald’s mother after her entrainment. A place where “some sixty thousand people were crammed together in an area little more than a square kilometre in size,” forcing each inmate “to make do with about two square metres of space in which to exist.” Theresienstadt provides the stage upon which the thematic links between all the different images of boxed life converge. Austerlitz describes how “the transport of goods maintained within the walls of the fortress” took the form “of a medley of carts [*Karren*] of every conceivable kind and four dozen ancient hearses” (237) [342]. However morbid the appropriation of these hearses for daily economic activity seems, a few pages later Austerlitz describes how “much of the load carted round Theresienstadt every day was made up by the dead” (239).

It goes without saying that deplorable living conditions and a high death rate for internees did not distinguish Theresienstadt from the myriad other concentration camps and ghettos erected by National Socialism. Rather, after disentangling the name of the camp itself “syllable by syllable” the significance of this bizarre space to both *Austerlitz* and the larger history of the Shoah comes into view. Namely, Nazi officials manufactured an “unreal world” out of an eighteenth-century fortress erected by Austrian Emperor Joseph II in what is now the Czech Republic and named it as a “city.” On the one hand, it was a way station for deportees on their

way East to the death camps and as such resembled many other similar ghettos. But on the other hand, by end of 1944 it also became the stage for a surreal theatrical performance exemplifying the cruel absurdities of National Socialism. In order to understand the importance of Theresienstadt to *Austerlitz*, one must understand its evolution from prison camp to “the model of a world made by reason and regulated in all conceivable respects” (199).

The first foray of German soldiers into the small Bohemian fortress town of Terezin took place shortly after the invasion of Czechoslovakia on June 10, 1940. Because the citadel had been transformed into a prison camp in the nineteenth century and used as such in the intervening decades by different regimes, it would take only four days for the first of what would eventually become tens of thousands of political prisoners to begin arriving. But the Gestapo had far more elaborate designs for this sleepy town of about 7000. Over the course of the next two years, all of the original inhabitants of the town were expelled from their homes, and a phalanx of forced skilled labourers set to work transforming Theresienstadt in another node of the massive network of ghettos spread out across Eastern Europe.

However perverse such a claim may come across, it is nevertheless fair to say that Theresienstadt was no ordinary ghetto. The standard terminology of the complicated “slave state” erected by the Reich fails to capture what unfolded. (139) Like other ghettos, it functioned as a transit camp and assembly camp (“*Durchgangslager*” “*Sammellager*”) for Jews and other non-Aryan beings sent further east to the death camps of Eastern Europe. But at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, Theresienstadt became officially designated as an “*Altersghetto*” (Seniors’ Ghetto). Jews over the age of 65 and Jewish veterans of the First World War were sent there, as were many of the Jewish cultural elite collected from across the Reich. The sincerity of this seemingly humane gesture is made clear by some sobering statistical

figures: “Between 24 November 1941 and 20 April 1945 a total of 139, 667 people were deported to the ghetto of whom 33,818 died. Some 86,934 were subsequently sent on mainly to Auschwitz for extermination, only 3,568 survived this ordeal.”²⁰¹

But what truly set Theresienstadt apart from the rest of the National Socialist horror show was a decision made in the first half of 1944, a decision that produced yet another neologism:

Verschönerungaktion. This “general improvement campaign,” as described by Austerlitz,

was undertaken, with an eye to the imminent visit in the early summer of 1944 of a Red Cross commission, an event regarded by those authorities of the Reich responsible as a good opportunity to dissimulate the true nature of their deportation policy, and consequently it was decided to organize the ghetto inmates under the command of the SS for the purpose of a vast cleaning-up program: pathways and a grove with a columbarium were laid out, park benches and signposts were set up, the latter adorned in the German fashion with jolly carvings and floral decoration, over a thousand rosebushes were planted, a children’s nursery and crèche or *Kriechlingskrippe*, as it was termed, said Austerlitz, in one of those perverse formulations, were adorned with pretty fairy-tale friezes and equipped with sandboxes, paddling pools, and merry-go-rounds, whilst the former OREL cinema, which until now had served as a dumping ground for the oldest inmates of the ghetto and where a huge chandelier still hung from the ceiling in the dark space inside, was converted within a few weeks into a concert hall and theater, and elsewhere shops stocked with goods from the SS storehouses were opened for the sale of food and household utensils, ladies’ and gentlemen’s clothing, shoes, underwear, travel requisites, and suitcases; there were also a convalescent home, a chapel, a lending library, a gymnasium, a post office, a bank where the manager’s office was furnished with a sort of field marshal’s desk and a suite of easy chairs, not to mention a coffeehouse with sun umbrellas and folding chairs outside it to suggest the agreeable atmosphere of a resort inviting all passersby to linger for a while, and indeed there was no end to the improvements and embellishments, with much sawing, hammering, and painting until the time of the visit itself approached and Theresienstadt, after another seven and a half thousand of the less presentable inmates had been sent east amidst all this busy activity, to thin out the population, so to speak, became a Potemkin village or sham Eldorado which may have dazzled even some of the inhabitants themselves and where, when the appointed day came, the commission of two Danes and one Swiss official, having been

²⁰¹ Lutz Becker, “Film Documents of Theresienstadt” In *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television Since 1933*, eds. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (London: Wallflower, 2005), 95. See also, George E Berkley, *Hitler’s Gift. The Story of the Theresienstadt* (Boston: Branden Books, 1993).

guided, in conformity with a precise plan and a timetable drawn up by the Kommandant's office, through the streets and over the spotless pavements, scrubbed with soap early that morning, could see for themselves the friendly, happy folk who had been spared the horrors of war and were looking out of the windows, could see how smartly they were all dressed, how well the few sick people were cared for, how they were given proper meals served on plates, how the bread ration was handed out by people in white drill gloves, how posters advertising sporting events, cabarets, theatrical performances, and concerts were being put up on every corner and how, when the day's work was over, the residents of the town flocked out in their thousands on the ramparts and bastions to take the air, almost as if they were passengers enjoying an evening stroll on the deck of an oceangoing steamer, a most reassuring spectacle, all things considered, which the Germans, whether for propaganda purposes or in order to justify their actions and conduct to themselves, thought fit after the end of the Red Cross visit to record in a film, which Adler tells us, said Austerlitz, was given a sound track of Jewish folk music in March 1945, when a considerable number of the people who had appeared in it were no longer alive, and a copy of which, again according to Adler, had apparently turned up in the British-occupied zone after the war, although he, Adler himself, said Austerlitz, never saw it, and thought it was now lost without trace. (242-244)

Soon after the end of this colossal sentence (running eight pages in the original German), Austerlitz explains that the film footage is, in fact, not lost and recounts the remarkable discovery of his own mother in a few frames. Indeed, this vision of Agata, the final snapshots of her boxed life, aligns perfectly with that of the raccoon at the Nocturama at the very opening of the text, two lives "through no fault of their own" trapped inside an "unreal world."²⁰²

²⁰²Austerlitz himself makes the same analogy when he explains how the story of Robert Schumann's sad decline reminded him of a decrepit dovecote filled with ailing pigeons:

[Schumann] lived for a number of years after that, said Marie, in a private asylum for the mentally deranged near Bonn or Bad Godesberg, where he was visited by Clara and the young Brahms at intervals, and since it was impossible to converse with him anymore, withdrawn from the world as he was and humming tunelessly to himself, they generally contented themselves with looking into his room for a while through a small trap in the door. As I listened to Marie and tried to imagine poor Schumann in his Bad Godesberg cell I had another picture constantly before my eyes, that of the pigeon loft we had passed on an excursion to Königswart. Like the country estate to which it belonged, this dovecote, which may have dated from the Metternich period, was in an advanced state of decay. The floor inside the brick walls was covered with pigeon droppings compressed under their own weight, yet already over two feet high, a hard, desiccated mass on which lay the bodies of some of the birds who had fallen from their niches, mortally sick, while their companions, surviving in a kind of senile dementia, cooed at one another in tones of quiet complaint in the darkness under the roof, and a few downy feathers, spinning round in a little whirlwind, slowly sank through the air. The torment inherent in both these images that came into my mind in

The evocative power of this trope of boxed life was on display at a recent exhibition at the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Titled “*Die Ganze Wahrheit*” [The Whole Truth], the curators took this figuration of boxed life and transformed it into a pedagogical tool to educate Germans about Jewish life and culture.²⁰³ The premise was simple: a solitary volunteer sits in a see-through glass box and answers whatever questions visitors may have. It did not take very long before people began expressing concern that this exhibition was invoking painful memories of the past: “Our grandparents and friends spent enough time in boxcars on the way to concentration camps” wrote one user on the exhibit’s Facebook page.

*

Even if the word *Einwaggonieren* does not have any intrinsic connection to the Third Reich, the other pivotal moment of entrainment in *Austerlitz*—a different kind of boxed life—yields a neologism that does. Needless to say, *Kindertransporte* was not in any way like the many other compounds “spawned” by National Socialism, and the insights it offers extend far beyond the historical confines of the Shoah. As much is confirmed in a newspaper article written as the project was taking place by one of its principal organizers, Martha Wertheimer, a German-Jewish social activist and journalist. Entitled “*Kinder werden verschickt*” [“Children are being posted”], the article opens with the discussion of how

[n]owadays we learn many new words—and not only English, and Spanish, and Portuguese ones...Barely a couple of weeks old is another new word: *Kinderverschickung*. It is not a beautiful word, however it is a beautiful and good thing. It came principally as the most practical and efficient way of describing giving Jewish children the possibility of enjoying hospitality in Holland, Belgium, France, and

Marienbad, the mad Schumann and the pigeons immured in that place of horror, made it impossible for me to attain even the lowest step on the way to self-knowledge. (214-215)

²⁰³ Nicholas Kulish, “Berlin Exhibition on Judaism Hits a Nerve,” *The New York Times*. Apr 4, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/05/world/europe/berlin-exhibition-on-judaism-hits-a-nerve.html>

Switzerland. The word was all of a sudden just with us—in the orphanage, in the *Kinderheim*, in the office of the Jewish community center. Nobody knows today who coined it. It has no official origin or official character. It is a new word in our vocabulary and not able to be erased, either from our daily speech, our insight, or our thoughts.²⁰⁴

Although her word choice was off the mark, a simple glance at the numerous *Kindertransporte* memorials erected at various European train stations and the sprawling archive of memoirs, studies, and documentary films engaging it confirms Wertheimer's premonition that the history that she was watching (and indeed helping) unfold would not "be erased."²⁰⁵

All this fascination is not unwarranted. The *Kindertransporte* represents a landmark moment in British history and the history of orphanhood. More specifically, it announced the beginning of the era of deinstitutionalization and the rise of private foster care and adoption.²⁰⁶ Although orphanages would continue to exist for decades to come in the U.K. and in the West more generally, today orphans are no longer institutionalized as they were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And like the erection of the London Foundling Hospital, this was a venture organized by a handful of individuals working independently of the state. Some were representatives of Jewish and Quaker organizations, and others, like Sir Nicholas Winton and Geertruida Wijsmuller-Meijerm, were private citizens drawing upon personal wealth and

²⁰⁴ Martha Wertheimer, "Kinder werden verschickt: Momentbilder aus einem jüdischen Waisenhaus," in *Nach der Kristallnacht: jüdisches Leben und antijüdische Politik in Frankfurt am Main 1938-1945*, eds. Monica Kingreen (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 1999), 198.

²⁰⁵ Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000); Diane Samuels, *Kindertransport*. (New York: Plume, 1995); Ann Byers, *Saving Children from the Holocaust: The Kindertransport* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2011); Olga Levy Drucker, *Kindertransport*. (New York: H. Holt, 1992); Rebekka Göpfert, *Der Jüdische Kindertransport von Deutschland nach England 1938/39* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1999). Wolfgang Benz, Claudia Curio and Andrea Hummel, eds. *Die Kindertransport 1938/39. Rettung und Integration* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003).

²⁰⁶ Jenny Keating, *A Child for Keeps: The History of Adoption in England, 1918 – 45*. (London and New York: Palgrave, 2009).

connections. Nothing like it had ever been attempted in British history, and the fact that 10,000 children were evacuated so rapidly between December 1938 and the outbreak of war in September 1939 is a testament to the courage and tenacity of the organizers. (Wertheimer, for instance, chose to return to Germany on multiple occasions after chaperoning groups of children to England. She died later in Sobibor). Despite all the best efforts of the Third Reich and Her Majesty's Government to hinder their work, the organizers forged an international network of fundraisers, recruiters, chaperones, and host families with a single goal in mind: the rescue of as many "non-Aryan" children as possible.

Surprisingly absent from all the attention heaped upon the *Kindertransporte* is any serious appreciation of how its legacy resonates in the many other "rescue operations" that have followed in its wake in the decades after the Second World War. Like the *Kindertransporte*, these ventures are attached to specific signifiers and have inspired an impressive amount of textual production. Two prominent examples can be located in "Operation Babylift", which transported 3000 children from South Vietnamese orphanages to the United States during the evacuation of Saigon, or its earlier predecessor, "Operation Pedro Pan", in which 14,000 Cuban children were sent to Miami shortly after the Revolution.²⁰⁷ More recently, under the sign of the "Lost Boys of Sudan", for instance, an array of novels, documentaries, and other assorted non-fictions emerged soon after the first refugees of the Sudanese Civil War began arriving in the

²⁰⁷ The former was covered extensively by the American media, and a photo of President Gerald Ford greeting one of the transports has been enshrined in his Presidential Library. And upon the conclusion of the latter, a venture organized by the CIA as part of the counterrevolutionary campaign against the newly-installed Communist regime of Fidel Castro, the U.S. Government commissioned a documentary film chronicling how some of the refugees were acclimatizing to life in the U.S. For more, see Dana Sachs, *The Life We Were Given: Operation Babylift, International Adoption, and the Children of War in Vietnam* (Boston: Beacon Press), 2010; Yvonne M. Conde, *Operation Pedro Pan: The Untold Exodus of 14,000 Cuban Children* (New York: Psychology Press, 2000); Karen Dubinsky, *Babies Without Borders: Adoptions and Migration across the Americas* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2010).

United States and other parts of the Global North.²⁰⁸ And not all these orphans arriving en masse are seeking refuge from political strife. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti or the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, references to “Haiti’s Orphans” and “Tsunami orphans” started appearing in newspapers and televised pleas for donations.

What links these different global adoption ventures together is captured by the long forgotten term used in England to describe the *Kindertransporte* as it was taking place: “Refugee Children’s Movement.” That is, at the center of these projects manifests a new kind of intermodal orphanhood, a blankness taking shape in the juridical fiction of the refugee. If the relationship between the modern nation state and its subjects is analogous to the relationship between parent and child, then the orphanhood of the refugee is squarely located in its supranationality. “After all,” as one legal historian puts it, “refugees are by definition persons who are outside the bounds of their own state.”²⁰⁹ Or to phrase it in Saidian terms, the filiative bonds fashioned between nation and citizen give way to an affiliative connection between “host nation” and “asylum seekers,” to use the jargon employed by the vast network of NGOs, governmental agencies, and the United Nations who govern the global refugee population. This subjective boundlessness is precisely what Agamben recognizes (and indeed celebrates) in his widely cited essay, “We Refugees.” Expanding on Arendt’s essay of the same name, Agamben shows how refugees exemplify the vexed notions of citizenship and sovereignty: “By breaking the continuity of man and citizen, *nativity* and *nationality*, [refugees] put the originary fiction of

²⁰⁸ Dave Eggers’s *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2006) is one of the more prominent examples.

²⁰⁹ James C. Hathaway, *The Rights of Refugees under International Law* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2005), 78.

modern sovereignty in crisis.”²¹⁰

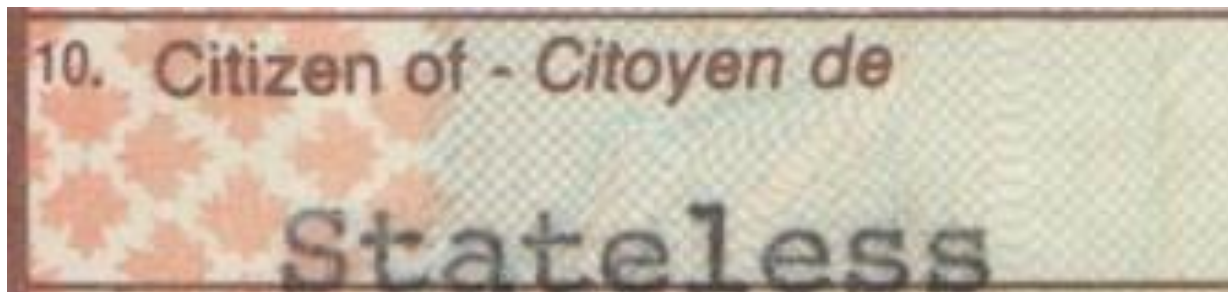


Figure 2: Extract from a document used by Canadian border authorities for the reception of refugee claimants. Author photograph.

It is no accident that the juridical birth of the refugee takes place more or less simultaneously with the rise of containerization.²¹¹ The legal boundlessness of the refugee is a mirror image of the infinite global circulation of the intermodal container. In other words, the same “seamless shifting” at the heart of economic production is also one of the defining features of the subjectivity most closely associated with the era of globalization. It is therefore also no accident that containers make prominent appearances in any number of refugee narratives. As Imre Szeman and Maria Whiteman argue, “the container hides its cargo, transforming its concrete contents into abstract units that, stacked up, even resemble money.”²¹² One illustrative example of this connection can be found in a promotional poster for Aki Kaurismäki’s *Le Havre*

²¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, “We Refugees.” trans. Michael Rocke *Symposium* 49.2 (Summer 1995), 116.

²¹¹ The standard narrative of the emergence of the refugee in international law drops the line of plumb at the creation of the United Nations High Commission of Refugees in 1950 and the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* that followed the next year. For more, see Guy Goodwin-Gill. *The Refugee in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). A short overview of this juridical history can be found in Irial Glynn, “The Genesis and Development of Article 1 of the 1951 Refugee Convention” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25.1 (2012): 134-148.

²¹² Imre Szeman and Maria Whiteman, “Oil Imag(e)inaries: Critical Realism and the Oil Sands,” *Imaginations* 3.2 (Fall 2012): 51.

(2011) and the container cranes looming over Idrissa (Blondin Miguel), the refugee protagonist who loses his entire family on their way to England in a shipping container.²¹³

²¹³ Michael Winterbottom's *In This World* (2002) and the second season of the American television series *The Wire* furnish more examples of this trend.

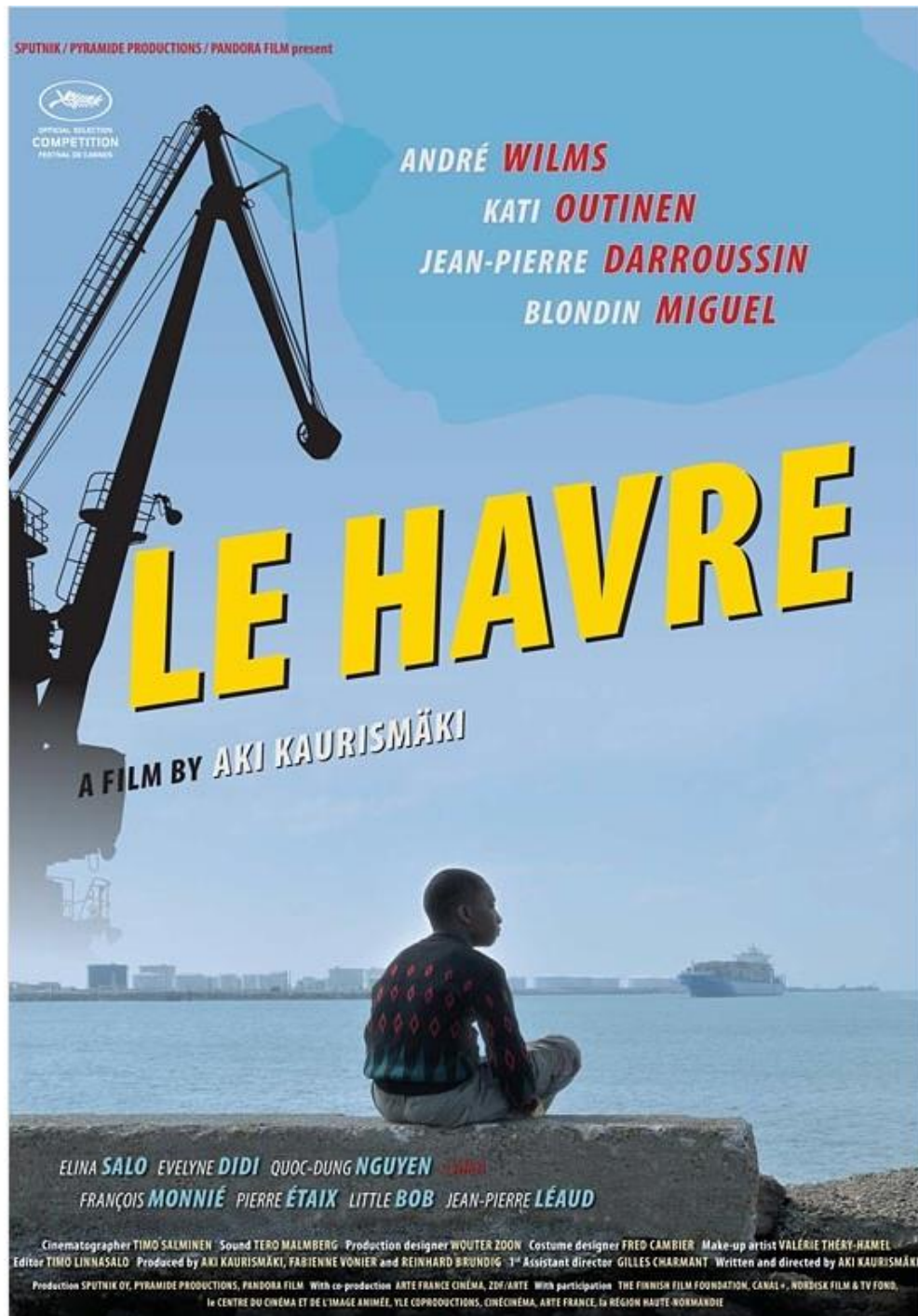


Figure 3: Film Art for Aki Kaurismäki's *Le Havre* (2011)

An even better example of the proximity of the shipping container to the figure of the refugee is currently on display in the Turkish city of Killis. Here the Turkish government, which has become host to one of the world's largest refugee populations in the world since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, has begun conducting a radical experiment in refugee camp design. A recent and widely-circulated *New York Times* profile of the camp, notably titled "How to Build a Perfect Refugee Camp." "Many of the world's displaced live in conditions striking for their wretchedness, but what is startling about Killis is how little it resembles the refugee camp of our imagination. It is orderly, incongruously so. Residents scan a card with their fingerprints for entry, before they pass through metal detectors and run whatever items they're carrying through an X-ray machine. Inside, it's stark: 2,053 identical containers spread out in neat rows."

Austerlitz himself underlines the link between intermodalism and the refugee during the "sudden realization" he has in the London bookstore:

I was listening to two women talking to each other about the summer of 1939, when they were children and had been sent to England on a special transport. They mentioned a number of cities—Vienna, Munich, Danzig, Bratislava, Berlin—but only when one of the couple said that her own transport, after two days traveling through the German Reich and the Netherlands, where she could see the great sails of the windmills from the train, had finally left the Hook of Holland on the ferry Prague to cross the North Sea to Harwich, only then did I know beyond any doubt that these fragments of memory were part of my own life as well. (141-142)

All of these examples demonstrate why the racist appellation first coined in Australia to describe the Vietnamese refugees fleeing after the fall of Saigon has become a synonym for refugees: "boat people."



Figure 4: Photo from "Operation Babylift." Credit: H99.1.60. Robert Stinnett, untitled (*Babies Strapped in Seats in 747 Jumbo Jet*), 1975. Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in. The Oakland Tribune Collection, The Oakland Museum of California, gift of ANG Newspapers.

But the “special” nature of this “transport” is not limited to its anticipation of the rise of intermodal transport. Indeed, the *Kindertransporte* yields a lesson about one key aspect of the emergence of refugee that has gone largely unnoticed in the vast body of scholarship. Agamben provides the best example of what the discussion of refugees has left out in his brief analysis of an Italian advertising campaign on behalf of Rwandan refugees in *Homo Sacer*: “The ‘imploring eyes’ of the Rwandan child... is the cipher of the bare life that humanitarian organizations, in perfect symmetry with state power, need.”²¹⁴ Here Agamben implicitly suggests that the “Rwandan child” is a more effective synecdochal stand-in than his adult counterpart for the

²¹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), 131. Emphasis in original.

larger national crisis he emerges from (in this instance, the 1994 Rwandan Genocide). However, he does not explain the slippage between “refugee” and the other keyword in that sentence, “child.”

The story of the *Kindertransporte* offers an explanation of the significance of this gap between refugee and refugee children. At the time of its inception, it constituted an exception to the United Kingdom’s closed-door policy on Jewish refugees escaping the Reich. Having made it clear at the July 1938 Évian Conference that the U.K. was not interested in granting asylum to a substantial number of refugees, just a few months later the government of Neville Chamberlain began issuing travel documents to the first *Kindertransporte* children. Why this seeming course reversal? The answer to this question lies in a statement made by the British Foreign Minister at the time, Sir Samuel Hoare, who publicly insisted that it was “essential to avoid creating an impression that the door is open to immigrants of all kinds.”²¹⁵ Hoare’s statement, which can still be heard today almost word for word in official press conferences around the Global North, suggest that this was in fact no reversal at all. Rather, the British state was making it clear to the world that it had learned from its experiences during the General Reception at the London Foundling Hospital two centuries earlier. That is to say, the *Kindertransporte* exemplifies how selective reception is the guiding philosophy behind how the British state (and all the other countries in the Global North) copes with the increasingly growing crisis of orphanhood embodied in the world’s refugees.

Thus another kind of orphanhood comes into view: inscribed inside the juridical orphanhood of the refugee stands another figure, the refugee child. This is a figure who stands at the center of a large industry funneling hundreds of thousands of children from the Global South

²¹⁵ A.J. Sherman. *Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich 1933-1939* (London: Routledge, 2013), 93.

to the Global North. If refugees are exceptional figures for residing outside of the nationalist order of things, then the refugee children that circulate everyday have carved out their exceptionality. At a time when the Global North refuses entry to all but a tiny portion of the global refugee population—most of the world’s ten million stateless people stand little chance of ever leaving the Global South—refugee orphans harvested from various sites around the world reenact Austerlitz’s arrival at Liverpool Street Station on a daily basis.²¹⁶

The commodified nature of this traffic in children is apparent in the stories of those *Kindertransporte* children who lacked relatives in the U.K. and prearranged adoptive parents waiting upon their arrival. These “unguaranteed children” as they were called were forced to sell themselves as potential adoptees. Unfortunately, some of the *Kindertransporte* orphans were more in demand than others: young girls were highly sought after, while older boys faced immense difficulties, as did children with physical disabilities. Trevor Chadwich, one of the organizers of the Prague transport, recalls how he “had to above all consider the wishes of the people. Most of them wanted young girls between the age of seven and ten, if possible blond. Boys twelve and older were very difficult to take care of.”²¹⁷ Recalling the scene in *Little Dorrit* in which the Meagles go orphan shopping at the London Foundling Hospital, some families in England put in highly specific requests for children: “We have a request for a girl between the ages of four and six, not orthodox, if possible an orphan...We request the necessary documents including a passport photo to be sent, such that the lady in question can choose a child.” One of the children describes the scene of their selection aptly: “People came looking for pretty

²¹⁶ Diana Marre and Laura Briggs, *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children*. (New York and London: New York University, 2009); Laura Briggs, “Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption” *Gender & History* 15.2 (August 2003): 179–200.

²¹⁷ Qtd in Claudia Curio, “‘Unsichtbaren’ Kinder: Auswahl- und Eingliederungsstrategien der Hilfsorganisationen” in *Die Kindertransporte 1938/39: Rettung und Integration*, 68.

children. It was a kind of beauty contest. Thus the most beautiful, dear, and younger girls would be taken immediately. People come looking for cute little girls.” It was, according to him, like a “cattle market.”²¹⁸

*

If the novel, as has been believed by literary critics at least since Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), was the birthplace of the modern individuated subject, does the rise of the intermodal blankness of the refugee complicate this script? Moreover, is there a connection between this stateless figure and the formal questions raised by the “prosebook of an undetermined kind” at the center of this chapter? One way to answer these interrelated questions in the positive is to return to Franz Loquai’s description of Sebald’s work as a “novel and essay, scholarly treatise and autobiography.” Loquai is certainly not the only one to make this claim; Martin Swales says something similar when he argues that “Sebald’s work is suspended between two sharply contrasting narrative possibilities. On the one hand, there is a high degree of literariness in evidence...On the other hand there is a register that unmistakably bespeaks and expresses documentary solidity and authenticity.”²¹⁹

Catherine Gallagher’s influential discussion of the “rise of fictionality” is illuminating here, using an everyday scenario to make the case that the novel invented fictionality: “[W]e cannot walk into a bookstore or read the Sunday papers without noticing that the primary categorical division in our textual universe is between “fiction” and “nonfiction.”²²⁰ The

²¹⁸ *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*. Dir. Mark Jonathan Harris. (Warner Bros, 2001)

²¹⁹ Martin Swales, “Theoretical Reflections on the Work of W. G. Sebald,” in *W.G. Sebald – A Critical Companion*, eds. Jonathan J. Long and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004): 23.

²²⁰ Catherine Gallagher, “The Rise of Fictionality,” in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), 336.

runaway success of Sebald's books forces us to rethink just the primacy of this "categorical divisional." This is particularly true given the fact that the experience of "[walking] into a bookstore" and "[reading] the Sunday *papers*" are increasingly rare today for most modern readers. Ultimately, the generic indeterminacy Sebald insists upon provides an illustration of a claim that Frederic Jameson makes about the rise of global capitalism and modern cultural production considered as a whole:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.²²¹

Of all the terms that have been applied to his oeuvre, "novel-seeming goods" captures precisely the kind of "innovation" Sebald practiced in his four prosebooks. And more than simply refusing "the novel" as a genre, these texts together bombard one of the central pillars of our textual universe. Understood in these terms, Sebald's public eschewal of "novel" recalls Defoe's impassioned attempts to forswear the perceived fictionality of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). However, in contradistinction to Defoe, Sebald's persistent disavowals do not seek out the supposedly high ground of the non-fictional. On the contrary, these works explode the very gap between fiction and non-fiction, announcing a new kind of literary production after print capitalism.²²²

Therefore, in the same way that the term "novel"—at least in the unqualified sense that

²²¹ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, Duke UP, 1991), 4.

²²² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 224

so many critics use it—fails to adequately capture the formal convergences taking place in *Austerlitz*, neither “English” nor “German” do justice to all the different national lineages from which Sebald drew. Not coincidentally, the latter seems to come up noticeably short when applied to the author himself (Sebald once claimed that “Husum,” the famed birthplace of Theodor Storm, “is as foreign to me as Denmark”²²³). *Austerlitz* thus highlights how both the formal and national categories that have dominated our understanding of cultural production for so long have been breached. Moreover, its critical success suggests that the gap between the fictional and the non-fictional, the novel and the essay, could function as a new formal space where authors situate their texts—thereby distinguishing themselves in a crowded literary marketplace.

Given Sebald’s penchant for reported speech, it seems fitting to give him the last word on the matter—albeit filtered through the voice of Christopher Macle hose, the first publisher of the English translation of *The Rings of Saturn* (1995). In a recent documentary film on Sebald, Macle hose recounts an instructive anecdote about the author’s first major foray into the Anglophone literary marketplace:

One of the questions we asked him was, “Which category would you like your book to be in?” And Max [Sebald] said, “Oh, I’d like all the categories. I want fiction, I want biography, I want autobiography, I want travel, I want history, I want...” Well, he didn’t say Holocaust Studies, but anyways, there wasn’t a category he didn’t require. Well it turns out, when you’re dealing with the people who do the classification, they will only allow you three... Max was very clear, what he was saying was... “Don’t put me in a box. I want to be in all the boxes. I’m not writing a familiar formula.”

²²³ Sebald on why his critical work focused mostly on Austrian literature: “This has to do primarily with my own background and where I grew up, Allgäu, which lies directly on the Austrian border. When you travelled from my town somewhere on a day trip or an excursion, you didn’t drive north to Augsburg and only rarely to Munich, rather you went south or west: to the Bodensee and Bregenz, towards Vorarlberg on the Passstraße over the Arleburg massif, towards Innsbruck or Tyrol or even South Tyrol. As a result, Postwar Austria was a far more real part of the world for me than Germany, such that by the time I moved away, Germany was a totally unfamiliar place. I knew absolutely nothing of Germany. In terms of literature, the representatives of Austrian literature—or, at the least, the older ones—were for me far more important than any of the German literati (“Elaborate” 3).

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