

Narrative Units: The Language of Form in British Fiction, 1749-1819

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2017

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## ABSTRACT

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"Narrative Units" traces the development of a unique perspective on narrative form in the theory and practice of the early British novel. From Aristotle's *Poetics* through twentieth-century formalism, structuralism, and narratology, major theories of narrative have approached narrative form as a unified whole, whether that whole is defined as plot, structure, or discourse. By contrast, early British novelists tended to conceive of narrative as a looser accretion of individual parts, identified with terms such as "adventure," "episode," "incident," "accident," "situation," "moment," "scene," "period," and "crisis," as well as temporal spans such as hours, days, weeks, and years. This dissertation examines the social, philosophical, and technical implications of viewing narrative through this lens of narrative parts, or what I call "narrative units." The project begins by comparing the emphasis on narrative units in the early British novel with dominant traditions in narrative theory, which tend to prioritize narrative totalities. It then proceeds to analyze the functioning of narrative units in the novels of three key innovators of the tradition: Henry Fielding, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen. In each of these case studies I identify the key units deployed by the author, considering the dialogic relationship between them and the unique narrative dynamics that they bring about. Ultimately, I show that the unusual emphasis on narrative units in the long eighteenth century emerges in response to a series of major social and intellectual crises of the eighteenth century: in Fielding, the epistemological opacity of cities and institutions; in Radcliffe, the

fragmentation of self in the sentimental subject; in Austen, the breakdown of community in a rapidly accelerating society. I conclude that by prioritizing and emphasizing narrative parts over narrative wholes, these authors deformed and disrupted prevailing models of narrative, from Aristotelian plot and Enlightenment progress to the sentimental flow of feelings, and along the way developed a new poetics of uncertainty, stasis, and fragmentation. In identifying and analyzing the historical vocabulary deployed by authors themselves to articulate the fundamental structure of their narratives, "Narrative Units" develops a new methodology for the study of narrative, offers a new approach to the history of the novel, and contributes to current critical efforts to synthesize formalist and historicist methods of literary study.

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## CHARTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a privilege to recall how many exceptional people have helped shepherd this project through to the end. First and foremost, I must thank my dissertation advisors, Jenny Davidson, Nicholas Dames, and Julie Peters: without their guidance, encouragement, and good humor over the years, this project would not have been possible. The example they set of intellectual energy, integrity, and omnivorosity has been a constant inspiration. I'm also grateful to Dustin Stewart for his generous and insightful feedback on the project in its later stages. While I did not work with them on the dissertation, Molly Murray, Julie Crawford, and Aaron Ritzenberg offered wisdom and care at critical moments.

It has been a joy to think, argue, and wonder with the extraordinary friends I've made at Columbia: I owe much of my perspective on literature – and life – to countless, adventurous conversations with them. I'm infinitely grateful for the curiosity and camaraderie of Zach Roberts, Alix Rule, Michael Lipkin, Joshua Swidzinski, Janet Min Lee, Brian Bartell, Maria Bo, Sophie Pinkham, Arden Hegele, Nick Mayer, Christine Smallwood, Robyn Jensen, Kate Brassel, and Ana Keilson. Many thanks are also due to my colleagues in the University Writing and Literature Humanities programs for opening my eyes to so many different ways of teaching. I'm equally indebted to the brilliant and dedicated students who I've worked with over the years at Columbia – I'm certain I've learned as much or more from them as they did from me.

Finally, I'm grateful to my family, who have been behind me from the beginning.

## INTRODUCTION: THE CRITIC AND THE BUTCHER

"A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like every other organism..."  
– Henry James, *The Art of Fiction*

"The Noble Inferences that are drawn from this one Part are worth all the rest of the story. . ."  
– Daniel Defoe, Preface to *Roxana*

According to Percy Lubbock, the formalist critic of fiction is caught in an impossible bind:

The form of a novel — and how often a critic uses that expression too — is something that none of us, perhaps, has ever really contemplated. It is revealed little by little, page by page, and it is withdrawn as fast as it is revealed; as a whole, complete and perfect, it could only exist in a more tenacious memory than most of us have to rely on. Our critical faculty may be admirable; we may be thoroughly capable of judging a book justly, if only we could watch it at ease. But fine taste and keen perception are of no use to us if we cannot retain the image of the book; and the image escapes and evades us like a cloud."<sup>1</sup>

According to Lubbock, the "form" of a novel can never be directly apprehended by the reader, because the "form" is nothing less than the novel's "whole, complete and perfect." Although we can perceive fragments of the whole in the course of reading a novel, the totality can never be assembled; and if we could momentarily intuit the shape of the whole, we would be unable to hold it in our minds long enough to analyze or even appreciate it. Instead of the whole, what we have access to is a series of "fragments," which Lubbock variably terms scenes, figures, episodes, moments, glimpses, and impressions. For Lubbock, these discrete units of narrative do not constitute "forms" in

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<sup>1</sup> Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, Compass books ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 3.



their own right, but rather the raw materials from which we must try to reconstitute the author's unitary vision.<sup>2</sup>

Lubbock's tendency to valorize the novel's "whole" at the expense of its parts is typical of most forms of narrative theory from Aristotle to the 20th century. Yet we can find a diametrically opposed perspective in the work of Henry Fielding, a pioneer not only of novel theory but also of the modern novel itself. In Book II, Chapter 1 of *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding offers a playful and typically arch excursus on the "Art of dividing" – that is, the authorial business of breaking literary works into "Books and Chapters."<sup>3</sup> Fielding begins by assuring his readers that that the purpose of this "Art" is not merely "to swell our Works to a much larger Bulk than they would otherwise be extended to."<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, such division is undertaken solely for the benefit of the reader: the space between chapters offers the reader a refreshing "Resting-Place" on his journey through the book, thus allowing for more attentive reading; the titles of chapters faithfully advertise to the reader "what Entertainment he is to expect" in the following pages; because the chapter break constitutes a natural stopping point for the reader, "it prevents spoiling the Beauty of a Book by turning down its Leaves." Meanwhile, the partitioning of literary works is sanctioned by literary tradition: no lesser figures than Homer, Virgil, Milton saw fit to divide their great epics into Books. Fielding concludes his treatise on the "Art of dividing" with a rather homely simile: "[I]t becomes an Author generally to

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<sup>2</sup> Lubbock derives his focus on the narrative whole chiefly from Henry James. See the epigraph and my discussion of James below, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews ; And, Shamela* (London: Penguin, 1999), 119.

<sup>4</sup> *Joseph Andrews*, 119.

divide a Book, as it doth a Butcher to joint his Meat, for such Assistance is of great Help to both the Reader and the Carver."<sup>5</sup>

In working through the argument on behalf of "dividing" narrative, Fielding intersperses and intermixes satire and sincerity – a gesture typical of his work more broadly. He assures the reader that his chapter divisions are not carried out for the mercenary purpose of turning out a product of "larger Bulk"; yet by acknowledging that such commercial pressures exist, he suggests that form in the novel is not merely an aesthetic decision but also a product of social and economic forces. He touts the white space created by chapter breaks as a sort of cognitive oasis that refreshes the reader's powers of attention; while this may read like parody of the salesmanship connected to the market pressures he alludes to above, it actually signals a deep concern with the reader's ability to perceive, analyze, and evaluate the events of the novel. The allusion to dog-eared pages, while similarly ironic in tone, suggests an awareness of the relationship between form and the pragmatic dimension of reading – which of course takes place across a series of intervals. The invocation of the great epics as precedent for division suggests a deference to authority that Fielding rarely holds to; yet epic structure plays an important role in his concept of narrative design. Finally, in the closing comparison between the author and the butcher, Fielding seems to ask not to be taken seriously: particularly after the allusion to classical literature, the sudden shift into the register of joints of meat registers as a textbook instance of Augustan bathos. Yet here Fielding is in fact making his boldest claim of all: "dividing" narrative into manageable, apprehensible parts is in fact the primary function of the author, just as jointing meat is the primary function of the butcher.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 119-121.

The butcher analogy is ultimately no more specious than Fielding's previous claims on behalf of the "Art of division": it is borne out in his extraordinary attention to narrative units in each of his novels. Throughout his oeuvre, Fielding segments his narratives into discrete, explicitly labeled parcels of action and time: from "incidents" and "accidents" to "scenes" and "adventures," from "cases" and "situations" to days and weeks. Not only does he constantly recur to these terms in order to give shape to his action, he frequently discusses them in his numerous theoretical asides. While Fielding is demonstrably concerned with the formal "whole" of his narrative – typically termed its "Design" – it is equally clear that he conceives of the building block units of narrative as formally significant, semi-autonomous, and valuable in their own right.

Taken together, Lubbock and Fielding represent two ends of a spectrum: on the one hand, a theory of the novel that identifies form with the transcendent totality of the narrative – what we might call the "total form" approach; on the other hand, a theory of the novel that conceives of the novelistic "whole" only in relation to an accretion of parts – what we might call the "partial form" approach.<sup>6</sup> While the "partial form" approach seems no less valid or intuitive than the "total form" approach, it has enjoyed far less success in the history of narrative theory; in fact, in the course of the 20th century it was nearly written out of that history altogether. Yet, as I will demonstrate, during the eighteenth century the "partial form" perspective came to dominate both the theory and practice of the novel.

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<sup>6</sup> While I was hesitant to coin a new term for this perspective on narrative form, I found that no existing term would do. (The absence of any such term is symptomatic of the erasure of this perspective from most twentieth-century theories of narrative.) The closest runner-up would be "episodic," but I chose to avoid this term for two reasons. First, it ipso facto defines the fundamental unit of narrative as the "episode"; my purpose in this dissertation is precisely to engage with a wide range of types of narrative unit, as conceived and named by early British novelists. Second, the "episode" suggests a sequence of actions and events; my analysis concludes that the key narrative units for the early British novel are in fact units of time.

This dissertation proceeds from the conviction that studying novels through their basic narrative building blocks – their partial forms – is not only valid but a necessary complement to theories of "total form." I draw this conviction from the theory and practice of the novel in the eighteenth century, the period in which this perspective flourished before being ignored, elided, and suppressed in the development of twentieth-century narrative theory. If the "partial form" perspective was legitimate and even dominant during the very period when the modern novel took shape, it seems to me eminently worthy of attention, analysis, and adaptation to the purposes of contemporary literary scholarship.

This project offers four interrelated contributions to the study of the eighteenth-century novel, as well as the novel more broadly. First, I recover the historical discourse of partial form in the eighteenth century, thereby expanding the repertoire of narrative theory in our own time. Because much of the theory of the novel during this period is embedded within novels, this work of recovery entails close analysis not only of 18th-century theory and criticism but also the novels that worked to implicitly and explicitly theorize the genre. Second, I demonstrate that the rise of partial form in the eighteenth-century novel correlates with the increasing prominence of temporality as a formal basis for the novel: in other words, I show that the key partial forms of the eighteenth century are temporal forms rather than units of action. Third, I demonstrate that the segmentation of narrative into discrete units is not only a formal concern of authors during the period but also a thematic problem within the representational space of novels themselves. More specifically, I consider how characters within novels divide their own subjective experience into coherent units, and draw out the ethical, epistemological, and

sociopolitical implications of various modes of division. In other words, I attempt to answer the question, what does it mean to give shape to one's experience through one form rather than another – for example, days or moments, episodes or situations, periods or episodes? Fourth and finally, through my own analysis of 18th-century novels, and building on the theoretical orientation of 18th-century discourse around the novel, I develop a new method for analyzing the novel based on the dialogic relationship between various partial forms.

\* \* \*

In order to draw out the significance of the partial form perspective on narrative, it is crucial situate it within the context of the longer history of narrative theory. Aristotle casts a long shadow over this history. His descriptive and normative claims about tragedy and epic in the *Poetics* were the decisive influence on theorists in 16th century Italy, 17th century France, and 18th century England; they also maintained significant influence among 20th-century theorists in Europe and America. Although his statements about narrative are focused on specific genres – namely, tragedy and epic – he is generally viewed as the first theorist to offer a systematic account of the forms and functions of narrative in general. As such, it is fair to say that his influence has extended beyond those theorists who explicitly defined their work as "Aristotelian."

One of the central claims of the *Poetics* is that the most important element of tragedy is plot: "[P]lot. . . is the first principle and, as it were, soul, of tragedy. . . ." <sup>7</sup> In Aristotle's view, the plot must constitute a unified whole, in which all of the constituent

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 53.

events must participate: "[T]he plot, since it is mimesis of an action, should be of a unitary and indeed whole action; and the component events should be structured so that if any is displaced or removed, the sense of the whole is disturbed and dislocated: since that whose presence or absence has no clear significance is not an integral part of the whole."<sup>8</sup> With this statement, Aristotle clearly designates the "component events" as subordinate to the "whole action" of the plot: if they are to have any "significance" at all, it derives from their integration into the "whole." Aristotle makes a similar claim about the relationship between parts and wholes in the epic: "As regards narrative mimesis in verse [i.e., epic], it is clear that plots, as in tragedy, should be constructed dramatically, that is, around a single, whole, with beginning, middle, and, so that the epic, like a single and whole animal, may produce the pleasure proper to it."<sup>9</sup> The simile of the animal, which recurs with some frequency in the neo-Aristotelian epic theory of early modern Europe, perhaps best illustrates Aristotle's attitude: the parts of an animal only make sense in relation to the unified nature of the animal, just as the parts of an epic only make sense in relation to the unified plot. (Unlike Fielding, Aristotle does not consider the case of the joint of meat.)

For Aristotle, the parts of a narrative are not only fundamentally subordinate to the plot – they are in fact epiphenomena of the plot. For in Aristotle's view the essential action of a plot transcends its actual representation in a specific tragedy or epic: "[T]he plot should be so structured that, even without seeing it performed, the person who hears the events that occur experiences horror and pity at what comes about. . ."<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the individual units of concrete action through which the plot is presented to the audience

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<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, 57-59.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 115-117.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 73-75.

– what Aristotle terms "episodes" – exist only to flesh out the plot: "With both ready-made stories and his own inventions, the poet should lay out the general structure, and only then develop the sequence of episodes. . . . The next stage is to supply the names and devise the episodes; but care must be taken to keep the episodes integral. . . ." <sup>11</sup> Here, Aristotle makes clear that while the plot is fixed and indispensable, the episodes are to some extent variable or even fungible.

Because the episodes exist only to body forth the plot, care must be taken that episodes do not take on a life of their own, separate from the unified purpose of the plot: "Of simple plots and actions, the episodic are the worst. By 'episodic' I mean a plot in which the episodes follow one another without probability or necessity. Such plays are composed by bad poets through their own faults, and by good poets for the sake of the actors: for in composing show pieces, and stretching the plot beyond its capacity, they are often forced to distort the continuity." <sup>12</sup> In the episodic plot, episodes serve purposes extrinsic to the logic of the story – for example showcasing the abilities of actors or the creativity of the author; this deviation from the central purpose of the plot ends up disfiguring the story, which is distended and distorted. To continue Aristotle's biological simile, it is as if one of the horse's hooves has been inflated to five times its natural size, grotesquely disturbing the *telos* of the horse – that is, to run.

While it is clear that Aristotle wishes to discourage the expansion and multiplication of episodes in tragedy, his attitude towards the episode is more equivocal in the case of epic. The greater scale of epic, according to Aristotle, entails different narrative possibilities than those that can be realized in tragedy: "[E]pic has a special

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 63.

scope for substantial extension of size, because tragedy does not allow multiple sections of action to be represented as they occur, but only the one on stage involving the actors; whereas in epic, given the narrative mode, it is possible for the poem to include many simultaneous sections, which, if integral, enhance the poem's dignity. So this gives epic an asset for the development of grandeur, variety for the hearer, and diversity of episodes.

. .”<sup>13</sup> Here, Aristotle argues that the excellence of the epic consists in its power to synthesize the unified plot of the drama with a multiplicity of simultaneous actions; thus in the context of the epic, the multiplication of episodes is not only acceptable but even advisable. However, in the closing chapter of the *Poetics*, where he compares the relative value of tragedy and epic, Aristotle judges tragedy to be superior in part because it "excels by achieving the goal of its mimesis in a shorter scope"; by contrast, "the mimesis of epic poets is less unified."<sup>14</sup> In sum, while he allows for an expanded role for the episode in epic, Aristotle makes it abundantly clear that the unified plot – in which the parts are subjected to and in service of the whole – remains the most excellent form of narrative.

Aristotle's concern with narrative unity was reanimated in 16th century Italy among both theorists and practitioners of narrative poetry. The *Poetics*, recovered by scholars and subjected to analysis beginning in the 1540s, played an important role in the emerging genre theory of the Italian Renaissance.<sup>15</sup> Yet, as Daniel Javitch demonstrates, the goal of Italian genre theory was not merely to provide a theoretical model for the imitation of classical literature; it was in fact deeply concerned with the problem of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Javitch, "The Emergence of Poetic Genre Theory in the Sixteenth Century," *Modern Language Quarterly*; Seattle 59, no. 2 (June 1998), 140.



adapting classical genres to modern purposes.<sup>16</sup> As such, theorists did not merely reproduce Aristotle's key principles, but instead deployed them in heated debates over new generic possibilities. Torquato Tasso, both a key practitioner and theorist of modern Italian epic, noted that the question of narrative unity stood at the center of these debates, occasioning “various protracted disputes among those 'fiercely involved in literary war.’”<sup>17</sup> Tasso, relatively conservative in his adherence to classical principles, vigorously insisted on the Aristotelian unity of plot; meanwhile, he publicly criticized his main poetic competitor, Ludovico Ariosto, for violating this principle in his multi-plotted romances: “Ariosto, leaving the tracks of ancient writers and the rules of Aristotle, has encompassed within his poem many diverse actions; and he is read again and again by all ages and both sexes, is known in all languages, liked by everyone, praised by all, his fame alive and renewed. . . I none the less assert that he is not to be followed in multiplicity of actions. . .”<sup>18</sup> In Tasso’s view the multiple plot was an unacceptable deviation from classical norms, and a venal concession to popular taste. By contrast, the partisans of Ariosto insisted that his masterpiece *Orlando Furioso* was not an epic but rather a romance, and therefore subject to looser standards of narrative unity. The romance, they argued, is supposed to be structured around multiple plots, each of which is whole in itself; moreover, the romance, unlike the epic, allows for highly digressive episodes.<sup>19</sup> The theorist Giovanni Battista Pigna affirmed this more flexible model in his

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<sup>16</sup> Javitch, 140-142.

<sup>17</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 65.

<sup>18</sup> Tasso, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 450-451.

judgment on narrative unity in Ariosto: "In the end, everything is properly conducted with beautiful unity, to the extent that this kind of poetry admits of unity."<sup>20</sup>

The rise of the romance model as a viable alternative to epic opens the way to a vision of narrative that is less committed to strict unity, and more approving of quasi-autonomous or even fully autonomous elements within the story. (This vision would be developed further in the maximally episodic Baroque romance.) Yet even the Italian theorists who insisted on Aristotelian unity accepted the episode as a critical component of the epic – at least as much as, and perhaps more than, Aristotle himself. This is in part because Italian theory conceives of the episode not only as a means of expanding the magnitude of narrative, but also as a desirable "ornament" to narrative.<sup>21</sup>

The idea that episodes provide a welcome "ornament" to narrative would come to be seen as anathema in the work of French and English neoclassical theorists of the 17th and 18th century, who retrenched towards Aristotle's more stringent vision of narrative unity. René Le Bossu, perhaps the most influential neoclassical epic theorist, dismisses the principle of ornament out of hand:

But can an Author put nothing into his Poem, but what is purely the Matter of it? Or has he not the Liberty of inserting what he pleases, and of tacking to it, as Horace expresses himself, some pieces of rich and gay Stuff, that have nothing to do with the Ground-work? This is another Vicious Extreme, into which we shall never fall, if we follow the Dictates of Right Reason, The Practice of good Poets, and the Rules of the best Masters.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Giovanni Battista Pigna, *I Romanzi* (1544), quoted in Weinberg, 451.

<sup>21</sup> Tasso, 55.

<sup>22</sup> René Le Bossu, *Monsieur Bossu's treatise of the epick poem containing many curious reflexions, very useful and necessary for the right understanding and judging of the excellencies of Homer and Virgil / done into English from the French, with a new original preface upon the same subject, by W.J. ; to which are added, An essay upon satyr, by Monsieur D'Acier ; and A treatise upon pastorals, by Monsieur Fontanelle* (London, 1695), 55. *Early English Books Online*.  
[http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:12091931](http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:12091931)

For Le Bossu, the epic poet must never stray from the "Matter" of his poem: that is, its unified action. His authority for this claim is Aristotle himself, who according to Le Bossu argues that "the most defective *Tragedies* are such, whose *Episodes* have no manner of Connexion. He calls them *Episodical*, that is to say, overcharg'd with *Episodes*: Because these lesser *Episodes* cannot make one single one, but of necessity remain in a Vicious Multiplicity."<sup>23</sup> Why do the neoclassicists embrace this more extreme standard? Le Bossu's repeated use of the term "vicious" points us in the right direction: in a major divergence from Aristotle, the neoclassical epic theorists consider the primary function of the genre to be moral education.<sup>24</sup> If, as these theorists insist, the epic must be grounded in a governing "Moral," any digression from the unified plot constitutes not only a violation of aesthetic norms, but also an irresponsible deviation from the moral argument. John Dennis, the most prominent English adapter of French neoclassical principles, formalizes the analogy between plot structure and moral argument:

[H]ere it will not be amiss to observe what has been all along hinted. That the Action is only fram'd for the Instruction; and that it is design'd for a proof of the Moral; that every part of that Action ought to be a gradual Progress in the proof; and that consequently all the Parts of it ought to be as dependant one of another, as the Propositions are of a Syllogism; and that to insert any thing between the Parts, which is foreign from the Action, that is, from the Argument, is to destroy, or at least to weaken that Argument.<sup>25</sup>

If, as many scholars have noted, Aristotle implicitly links plot with logic, Dennis insists that they are one and the same. This didactic, logicized vision of the epic can clearly admit no valorization of parts over wholes.

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<sup>23</sup> Le Bossu, 58.

<sup>24</sup> "THE Design of every Man who Writes an Epick Poem, is to give Moral Instructions to Mankind, and particularly to his own Country-men." John Dennis, *Remarks on a book entituled Prince Arthur, an heroick poem with some general critical observations and several new remarks upon Virgil / by Mr. Dennis* (London, 1696), 4. *Early English Books Online*.

[http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:15509725](http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:15509725)

<sup>25</sup> Dennis, 8.

The neo-Aristotelian insistence on narrative unity persisted in British theory and criticism all the way through the end of the eighteenth century, in the work of learned authors such as Hugh Blair and James Beattie<sup>26</sup> as well as less august commentators such as Henry Pye and Richard Cumberland.<sup>27</sup> However, beginning early in the century, an alternative vision of narrative form developed in the multifarious discourse around the emerging genre of the novel. In prefaces, treatises, and reviews, authors began to discuss narrative action less as a strictly unified whole and more as an accretion of parts. In the preface to *Incognita* (1691), one of the earliest theoretical statements on the novel as a genre, William Congreve explains that he has imitated the drama "in the Design, Contexture, and Result of the Plot. I have not observed it before in a Novel."<sup>28</sup> Here, in making a claim for the narrative unity of his own production, Congreve suggests that such unity is by no means the norm in early novels.

This suggestion is borne out by the prefaces of many important 18th-century novelists, as well as the responses of their critics. Daniel Defoe consistently treats the discrete parts of his novels not as subservient to a unified design, but rather as quasi-autonomous elements. We can see this tendency most clearly in the preface to *Moll Flanders*. In explaining the construction of the novel as a function of its didactic purposes, Defoe suggests that the individual parts of the novel are by no means interdependent or necessary in the Aristotelian fashion, but instead can be expanded or contracted, amplified or removed altogether:

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<sup>26</sup> See Ioan M. Williams, *Novel and Romance, 1700-1800* (New York, Barnes & Noble [1970], n.d.), 247-251; 309-327.

<sup>27</sup> See p. 17 below.

<sup>28</sup> William Congreve, Preface to *Incognita* (1791). Quoted in Williams, 28.

All possible Care however has been taken to give no lew'd Ideas, no immodest turns in the new dressing up this Story, No, not to the worst part of her Expressions; to this Purpose some of the vicious part of her Life, which could not be modestly told, is quite left out, and several other Parts are very much shortened; what is left 'tis hoped will not offend the chastest Reader, or the modestest Hearer; and as the best use is to be made even of the worst Story, the Moral 'tis hoped will keep the Reader serious, even where the Story might incline him to be otherwise: To give the History of a wicked Life repented of, necessarily requires that the wicked part could be made as wicked is the real History of it will bear; to illustrate and give a Beauty to the Penitent Part which is certainly the best and brightest, if related with equal Spirit and Life.<sup>29</sup>

Whether or not we believe Defoe that his novel has been written chiefly for didactic purposes, it is clear from this passage that he conceives of his story as an accumulation of "Parts," rather than a unified dramatic "Design." Defoe reinforces this idea in his discussion of the novel's action:

There is in this Story abundance of delightful Incidents, and all of them usefully apply'd. . . . The Repentance of her Lover at the *Bath*, and how brought by the just alarm of his Fit of Sickness to abandon her; the just Caution given there against even the lawful Intimacies of the dearest Friends, and how unable they are to preserve the most solemn Resolutions of Virtue without divine Assistance; these are Parts, which to a just Discernment will appear to have more real Beauty in them, then all the amorous Chain of Story, which introduces it."<sup>30</sup>

Defoe advertises the "delightful Incidents" that populate his novel without any suggestion that they fit into a unified whole. (This formula would become typical in prefaces and reviews throughout the 18th century, which frequently offer observations on and judgments of a given novel's "Incidents" without reference to the overall design.<sup>31</sup>) But even more radically, he seems to suggest that particular "Parts" – specifically those that inculcate a moral lesson – are actually more important than the plot itself – what Defoe calls the "Chain of Story." Finally, Defoe advises that the novel should not even be

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> Defoe, 4.

<sup>31</sup> See pp. 15-18 below for examples of this tendency.

considered a complete story, for "There are two of the most beautiful Parts still behind, which this Story gives some Idea of, and lets us into the Parts of them, but they are either of them too long to be brought into the same Volume..."<sup>32</sup> (78) It is clear that with the disparate "Parts" of *Moll Flanders* we are a long way from the unitary vision of narrative elaborated by Aristotle, Tasso, and Le Bossu.

The introductory materials to the novels of Samuel Richardson similarly disclaim Aristotelian efforts at narrative unity. After retailing the many moral benefits of *Pamela* in the preface to the 1740 edition, Richardson promises that these benefits are "*embellished with a great Variety of entertaining Incidents*"; here, as with Defoe, "Incidents" are treated not as the causal links in a unified plot, but rather as ornamental and possibly fungible episodes.<sup>33</sup> In the preface to the first volume of *Clarissa* (1747), Richardson invents the anecdote of a "Gentleman" who has advised him to excise the novel's "collateral Incidents." According to this "Gentleman," although these "Parts" are "both instructive and entertaining," they must be sacrificed because they retard the novel's "Progress." In response to this constructive criticism, Richardson conjures up a cadre of "other Gentlemen," who have collectively insisted that "the Story could not be reduced to a Dramatic Unity, nor thrown into the Narrative Way, without divesting it of its Warmth; and of a great Part of its Efficacy."<sup>34</sup> In this rather one-sided debate, Richardson and his "Gentlemen" explicitly reject the Aristotelian imperative of unity in favor of a far looser vision of narrative, in which the individual "Parts" need not be subordinated to any tightly organized plan. For Richardson, the purpose of these "Parts"

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<sup>32</sup> Defoe, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (1740). Quoted in Williams, 94.

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (1747). Quoted in Williams, 117.

is to evoke emotional reactions and inculcate moral lessons; as long as they succeed in these purposes, they need not be placed in any strict logical relationship with one another.

As we have seen above, Fielding, Richardson's great competitor, was keenly attuned not only to partial form, but also to the many potential varieties of partial form. Although he famously aligned his work with the Aristotelian vision of epic, Fielding constantly plays with the tension between narrative unity and disjunction in his novels. For example, in his address to the critics at the outset of Book X of *Tom Jones*, he offers a rather equivocal claim on behalf of the unity of his work:

[W]e warn thee not too hastily to condemn any of the incidents in this our history as impertinent and foreign to our main design, because thou dost not immediately conceive in what manner such incident may conduce to that design. This work may, indeed, be considered as a great creation of our own; and for a little reptile of a critic to presume to find fault with any of its parts, without knowing the manner in which the whole is connected, and before he comes to the final catastrophe, is a most presumptuous absurdity.<sup>35</sup>

In this typically wry admonition, Fielding appears to declare total allegiance to the fundamental principle of Aristotelian narrative theory: all the "Incidents" in his novel, he claims, are perfectly subordinated to the logic of a unified "Design" – what Aristotle termed *muthos* and what we would call plot. Yet by merely evoking the possibility that readers might misconstrue the strict relationship between "Incident" and "Design," Fielding recasts plot as a pragmatic construction – a collaboration between author and reader – rather than a transcendent principle.<sup>36</sup> In a situation where the plot is not a given but rather a construction, the individual parts of the narrative take on substantially more value and significance: because their interconnection is not immediately apparent to the

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<sup>35</sup> Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 459.

<sup>36</sup> Fielding thus reverses the logic of Aristotle, who, as we saw above, insisted that plot exists independent of its development into a specific performance or its reception by an audience.

reader in the course of reading, they must of necessity be quasi-autonomous, or else they would risk losing their intelligibility. Finally, and most ambiguously, Fielding reminds his critics here and elsewhere in the novel that *Tom Jones* is “a great creation of our own” – not only a highly original work but an attempt at establishing a new genre. With this claim of generic originality, Fielding opens the way to a set of “rules” for narrative that frequently contradict Aristotle. The most famous example of such a contradiction is the extended narrative recounted by Man of the Hill, which clearly constitutes an autonomous episode that is by no means necessary for the plot of *Tom Jones*. This episode drew the ire of Aristotelian-minded critics, such as the novelist Henry Cumberland: “[T]he adventures of *the Man of the Hill*, in *The Foundling* is an excrescence that offends against the grace and symmetry of the plot: whatever makes a man pause in the main business, and keeps the chief characters too long out of sight, must be a defect.”<sup>37</sup> Henry Pye, himself a commentator on Aristotle, suggests that this extended narrative does not even rise to the level of episode, but must be considered a separate tale altogether.<sup>38</sup>

If major innovators such as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding were instrumental in establishing partial form as a viable alternative to the Aristotelian consensus, this shift was echoed in the language of their critics, who from the 1750s began to approve and censure novels on the basis of individual segments, rather than the work as a whole. For example, multiple reviewers praised the “incidents” and “adventures” of Fielding’s final novel, *Amelia* (1751).<sup>39</sup> An approving notice of Frances Sheridan’s *Memoirs of Miss*

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Cumberland, *Henry* (1795). Quoted in Williams, 415.

<sup>38</sup> Henry Pye, *A Commentary Illustrating the Poetics of Aristotle* (1786). Quoted in Williams, 337.

<sup>39</sup> Review of *Amelia* (1751), *The London Magazine*, XX, April 1751. Quoted in Williams, 163; 171.



*Sidney Bidulph* (1761) celebrated the author's dramatic "situations."<sup>40</sup> One critic applauded the discrete "episodes" of Roussau's *Julie* (1761), which, he averred, "delight singly."<sup>41</sup> Another observer valued the "endless variety of incidents" and the "long continued train of scenes" in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794).<sup>42</sup> In his famous review of *Emma* (1816), Walter Scott commended Austen for her realistic portrayal of "common incidents" and her "sketches. . . of spirit and originality."<sup>43</sup> Taken together, these examples point towards an unprecedented mode of thinking about narrative based on the analysis of discrete, sometimes autonomous parts rather than coherent, integrated wholes.

It may be objected here that the critical and theoretical statements discussed above do not rise to the level of systematic narrative theory. My response is that this is precisely the point: the eighteenth-century novel and its surrounding theoretical discourse together developed an unsystematic and highly heterogeneous conception of narrative form. Yet I would argue that the privileging of parts over wholes in eighteenth-century discourse constitutes a coherent trend and even an epistemic shift. Although this new way of looking at narrative was a profound and unprecedented development, it did not survive into the twentieth century. It was in fact written out of the history of narrative theory, likely because twentieth-century narrative theory by and large followed Aristotle in assuming the priority of the narrative whole over its constituent parts.

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<sup>40</sup> Review of *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), *The Critical Review*, XI, March 1761. Quoted in Williams, 235.

<sup>41</sup> Review of *Eloisa: or, a Series of original Letters collected and published by J. J. Rousseau* (1761), *The Critical Review*, XII, September 1761. Quoted in Williams, 244.

<sup>42</sup> Review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho, a Romance; interspersed with some Pieces of Poetry* (1794), *The Critical Review*, Series 2, XI, August 1794. Quoted in Williams, 392.

<sup>43</sup> *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. B.C. Southam (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), 67.

Some twentieth-century theorists, especially those in the Anglo-American world, embraced explicitly Aristotelian precepts and concepts. For example, Henry James adopts the typical biological metaphor for narrative deployed by Aristotle and his followers, insisting that "[a] novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like every other organism..."<sup>44</sup>; meanwhile, the Chicago school of critics concerned themselves with analyzing "the construction of poetic wholes," explicitly declaring their allegiance to Aristotle.<sup>45</sup> By contrast, the most dominant strains of European narrative theory – formalism, structuralism, and narratology – do not follow Aristotle per se; however, their shared commitment to developing a scientific and systematic approach to narrative leads them to prioritize the narrative whole, much like the Aristotelians. These theorists generally begin from the conviction that narrative is structured like a language, and therefore functions as a system.<sup>46</sup> From this perspective, the individual parts of a narrative are only meaningful in that they express the logic of the system; on this view, there is no imagining that the narrative whole could be constructed from, or even modified by, its parts. Meanwhile, in basing their theories on the putatively universal structures of language, these traditions ignore the variability and historicity of narrative units: from the systematic/scientific perspective, it is necessary to deduce a single, universal unit that serves as the basis for narrative form<sup>47</sup> – whether one calls it the

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<sup>44</sup> Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," *Longman's Magazine* 4, 1884.

<sup>45</sup> Ronald S. Crane, *Critics and Criticism, Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 17.

<sup>46</sup> Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, c1977), 82-85.

<sup>47</sup> Barthes, 88-91.

narrateme, the mythème, the lexia, the ideologeme, or the event.<sup>48</sup> It thus becomes superfluous to examine the historical discourse around narrative form, or to consider that the actual names given to narrative units by authors might hold some significance for the construction of narrative.

I mean to demonstrate that there is potentially a profound difference between a narrative constructed from incidents, from episodes, from situations, from cases, from periods, from epics, from moments, from scenes. Moreover, as against the ahistorical and universalist posture of systematic narrative theory, I would suggest not only that the systems underlying narrative order change over time, but also that there is an overlap and interplay of different systems at any given moment a literary history. One way of identifying and analyzing these heterogeneous elements is precisely to consider the range of narrative units deployed by a given author at a given time, along with the dialogic relationships between them. To my knowledge, no modern scholar has developed either a theory of narrative or a historical treatment of narrative genres based on the identification and analysis of historically specific narrative units; this study attempts to do both.

While my method is original, it is indebted to and influenced by a variety of theorists and scholars of narrative who depart from the systematic, ahistorical tendencies discussed above. The most important such influence, as may be inferred from my references to historicity, heterogeneity, and dialogism, is Mikhail Bakhtin. Specifically, I

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<sup>48</sup>These are the basic narrative units as defined by, respectively, Vladimir Propp, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Frederic Jameson, and Mieke Bal. See Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (1927), trans., Laurence Scott. 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968); Lévi-Strauss; "The Structural Study of Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 68 (270): 428–444; Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious / Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981); Mieke Bal, *Narratology : Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, c1985).

build on the vision of "historical poetics" that Bakhtin elaborates in his essays on the chronotope and the *Bildungsroman*.<sup>49</sup> In these two works, Bakhtin is concerned to describe the shapes in which events unfold in various narrative genres from the Greek romance to the 18th-century novel; the central technique for this work of description is to establish the key temporal mode or modes that characterize each genre. For example, the Greek romance is characterized by "adventure time," which stands outside of "historical, quotidian, biographical. . . biological and maturational" time;<sup>50</sup> by contrast, the "realistic novel" unfolds in "real historical time" – more specifically, the transition between historical epochs.<sup>51</sup> In Bakhtin's analysis, each temporal regime corresponds to a different mode of segmenting narrative action and development: the "adventure time" of romance corresponds, naturally, to a series of adventures; the "everyday time" of the ancient novel is ordered into discrete "episodes";<sup>52</sup> the "biographical time" of the biographical novel is divided into "extended periods, organic parts of the whole of life."<sup>53</sup>

Bakhtin's discussion of temporality and narrative segmentation across genres is one of a very few instances of narrative theory that engage with narrative parts as crucial indices of the nature and function of a given genre.<sup>54</sup> I build on Bakhtin's "historical poetics" in two ways. First, I pay close attention to the mixture of and tensions between different narrative units and modes of temporality within the novel; surprisingly, given

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<sup>49</sup> M. M. (Mikhail Mikhailovich) Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, University of Texas Press Slavic Series ;; No. 1; Variation: University of Texas Press Slavic Series ;; No. 1. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84-258; *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, University of Texas Press Slavic Series ;; No. 8; Variation: University of Texas Press Slavic Series. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 10-54.

<sup>50</sup> *Dialogic Imagination*, 91.

<sup>51</sup> *Speech Genres*, 24.

<sup>52</sup> *Dialogic Imagination*, 128.

<sup>53</sup> *Speech Genres*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Two examples of recent scholarship in this vein would be Matthew Garrett's work on "episodic poetics" and Nicholas Dames' analysis of days in the novel. See Garrett, *Episodic Poetics: Politics and Literary Form after the Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); "Middlemarch's Days." Paper presented at Forms of Fiction: The Novel in English, Chicago, November 7-9, 2013.

his interest in heterogeneity and dialogism with respect to discourse in the novel, Bakhtin does not say very much about this kind of mixture with respect to form. Second, in order to identify the fundamental units that structure a given novel, I rely on the vocabulary of the author rather than impose ahistorical terminology; for example, I examine the terms "moment" and "scene" in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* because Radcliffe herself uses these terms to divide her narrative into discrete units. It is my hope that examining both the heterogeneity and historically specific terminology of narrative units will open up a new way of looking at narrative.

Beyond Bakhtin, my project draws inspiration from a number of excellent studies of temporality in narrative, beginning with Stuart Sherman's groundbreaking work, *Telling Time*.<sup>55</sup> Sherman's incisive analysis of diurnal time in English diary-writing helped to spur my interest in analyzing historically specific temporal units in the early British novel; Sherman demonstrates that historicist and narratological approaches can be profitably synthesized in the study of temporality. I have also drawn inspiration from recent studies by Sue Zemka and Jesse Molesworth focused on specific temporal units in the novel – respectively, the moment and the hour.<sup>56</sup> By focusing on these units, Zemka and Molesworth interrogate narrative time from the bottom up: instead of reading the temporality of novels as a mere reflection of larger socio-historical tendencies, they consider how the novel uses specific temporal units to articulate the tensions and complexities of time at any given historical moment. Finally, recent work by Nicholas

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<sup>55</sup> Sherman Stuart, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>56</sup> Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jesse Molesworth, "Gothic Time, Sacred Time," *Modern Language Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (March 1, 2014): 29–55.

Dames has made me more attentive to the complex interplay of multiple temporalities in the novel.<sup>57</sup>

This dissertation comprises three chapters. The first chapter examines Henry Fielding's critical engagement with the Aristotelian vision of unitary narrative. I show that Fielding's mature novels attempt to adapt Aristotelian form to the epistemological conditions of modernity. In *Tom Jones*, Fielding succeeds in this project by training his reader to discern Aristotelian causality, imagined as a series of epic "Incidents," within a narrative shot through with contingency. However, in his final novel, *Amelia*, Fielding stages a confrontation between the Aristotelian form of the "Incident" and the epistemological opacity of modern London. Ultimately, I argue, this confrontation leads to the final breakdown of Aristotelian unity and the rise of a partial form better suited to representing modern urban experience – the situation.

My second chapter traces the more extreme development of partial form in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Scholarship on the Gothic frequently takes a psychoanalytic approach to the genre, arguing that it is fundamentally concerned to represent the intrusion of fragments of the past into the present – in other words, the "return of the repressed." Although the psychoanalytic perspective highlights the fragmentary character of the Gothic, the model of the "return of the repressed" implies at least the possibility of reintegrating the past into the present. By contrast, I demonstrate that in Radcliffe the present is itself deeply fragmented: her novel is segmented into autonomous temporal units that undermine any sense of narrative continuity. I focus on two such units: the moment and the scene. Whereas the moment had functioned as a crucial formal principle in both sentimental fiction and empiricist philosophy, for

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<sup>57</sup> Dames, op. cit.

Radcliffe it becomes a threatening emblem of fragmentation and disintegration, both on the level of personal identity and of narrative cohesion. Yet if the moment threatens both mental and narrative disorder in *Udolpho*, it is counterbalanced by the unifying form of the visual "scene," embodied in the protagonist's numerous encounters with sublime and picturesque landscapes. As against the moment, which reduces the present to an isolated instant of mental experience, the scene opens onto the infinitely ongoing present of aesthetic spectatorship. Yet both forms, by detaching the present from the past and the future, ultimately undermine any sense of linear, cohesive story. From this perspective, the Gothic present emerges as a radical refusal of both time and narrative.

My third chapter considers how Jane Austen's novels both advance and contain the eighteenth-century logic of partial form. Much Austen criticism is focused on the integration of narrative parts into the totalizing whole of the marriage plot; by contrast, I shift the focus from narrative parts to temporal units, thereby exposing a very different side of Austen's project. I demonstrate that Austen is deeply concerned with relationship between temporal and social fragmentation in modernity. More specifically, I show that Austen's novels struggle with the desynchronization of everyday time, biographical time, and historical time, and the pernicious effects of this desynchronization on social cohesion. Examining three key temporal forms – "present," "period," and "crisis" – I track Austen's ambivalent solutions to the problem of desynchronization. In *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*, Austen reluctantly solves this problem by subordinating the "present" of everyday time to the "periods" of biographical time through matrimony. By contrast, in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, Austen confronts the possibility of a total loss of temporal order; in doing so, she develops two innovative

partial forms: the timeless reverie of nostalgia and the urgent time of crisis. At the close of her career as a novelist, Austen seems to insist that in the future, both individual and historical narrative would be characterized not by Aristotelian *telos* but rather by the tentative configurations of partial form.



## CHAPTER 1: INCIDENT, ACCIDENT, SITUATION: THE END OF ARISTOTELIAN FORM IN THE NOVELS OF HENRY FIELDING

According to some eighteenth-century British observers, the advent of the novel constituted a decisive break with literary history. Unlike classical genres such as tragedy and epic, the novel had no long-standing theoretical and practical conventions, no consensus poetics: as one novelist put it: “[N]o modern Aristotle has stepped forth, and laid down Rules for the Conduct of History [i.e., the novel], like the Unities of Action, Time, and Place, prescribed by the Ancients to all dramatic Writers.”<sup>58</sup> Yet even if no “modern Aristotle” had arrived to codify the theory and practice of the novel, many eighteenth-century novelists and critics found that the original version would do just as well.

Aristotle's central ideas about narrative, often mediated through the theoretical treatises of his French and English neoclassicist adherents, held a central place in the theory and practice of prose fiction in the early eighteenth century. But no eighteenth-century novelist engaged more directly and productively with Aristotle's *Poetics* than Henry Fielding.

Throughout his career, Fielding both explicitly and implicitly identified his practice as a novelist with the rules of epic established by Aristotle and developed by the neoclassicists. Unsurprisingly, the most explicit references to this tradition can be found in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, which Fielding famously classified as a “comic Epic-Poem in Prose.”<sup>59</sup> Here, the author claims to incorporate five out of six of the elements of

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<sup>58</sup> Herbert Lawrence, *The Contemplative Man* (1771). Quoted in Michael Mckeon, “Prose Fiction: Great Britain,” in George Alexander Kennedy, ed., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), vol. 5, 238.

<sup>59</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews ; And, Shamela* (London: Penguin, 1999), 49.

epic as defined by Aristotle and the neoclassicists – namely, "Fable, Action, Characters, Sentiments, and Diction"; he forgoes only the requirement of writing in verse.

In practice, Fielding, like Aristotle himself, is above all concerned with the “Action” of his novels – what critics modern would call the plot. Fielding explicitly alludes to and approves of Aristotle's concept of "Action" in Parson Adams' extended encomium of Homer's *Iliad*:

[I]s it possible for the mind of man to conceive an idea of such perfect unity, and at the same time so replete with greatness? And here I must observe, what I do not remember to have seen noted by any, the Harriott, that agreement of his action to his subject: for, as the subject is anger, how agreeable is his action, which is war; from which every incident arises and to which every episode immediately relates.<sup>60</sup>

Here, Parson Adams affirms Aristotle's central precept about narrative action: without exception, the "Incidents" and "Episodes" that together constitute a narrative must be integrated into the unitary whole of the plot.<sup>61</sup> Fielding's allusions to the Aristotelian vision of plot are not merely an appeal to literary tradition and authority: throughout his novels, Fielding shows himself to be deeply concerned with the problem of narrative unity, frequently offering theoretical reflections about the relationship between the overall "Action" of his narrative and the individual "Incidents" that comprise that action.

Yet despite his reliance on Aristotelian unity as a structuring principle in his novels, Fielding was by no means a purist in his adherence to epic form – far from it. For as much as he identifies each of his novels with the epic, and to some extent develops a formal logic consistent with epic, he simultaneously deploys a variety of competing

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<sup>60</sup> *Joseph Andrews*, 210.

<sup>61</sup> “[T]he plot, since it is mimesis of an action, should be of a unitary and indeed whole action; and the component events should be so structured that if any is displaced or removed, the sense of the whole is disturbed and dislocated: since that whose presence or absence has no clear significance is not an integral part of the whole.” Aristotle, *Poetics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 59.

formal structures for dividing up his action: it is composed not only of epic "Incidents," but also "Accidents," "Adventures," "Cases," and "Situations."<sup>62</sup> Some of these terms plainly evoke models of narrative that prioritize individual parts over an integrated whole, in a decidedly non-Aristotelian fashion: for example, "adventure" suggests the chivalric romance and the picaresque, both highly episodic genres, while "accident" is a term that Aristotle associates with history, rather than fictional narrative.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, in the course of Fielding's career as a novelist, units of time such as weeks, days, and hours took on an increasingly important structural role: we can see this tendency in the elaborate time scheme of *Tom Jones*, as well as the obsessive accounting for calendrical and clock time in *Amelia*. This emphasis on chronology as an organizing principle in narrative is another clear violation of the precepts of Aristotle, who insisted that the poet must never use time as a structural principle in narrative; because a given span of time includes a multiplicity of events, many of which will have no logical relationship to one another, structuring narrative around such a span threatens to undermine the logical unity of the plot.<sup>64</sup>

What can we make of the coexistence in Fielding's novels of the Aristotelian model of narrative, structured around "Incidents" integrated into a unified plot, and alternative models, structured around other formal building blocks that may in fact

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<sup>62</sup> A number of scholars use these terms in discussing narrative form in Fielding: J. Paul Hunter considers "incidents" and "situations"; Leo Braudy discusses "accidents" and "incidents"; Ross Hamilton analyzes "accidents"; Douglas Patey refers to "episodes." However, no scholar offers a systematic analysis of the full range of narrative units deployed by Fielding, and the dialogic relationship between them. Moreover, with the exception of Hamilton, none of these scholars offer sustained analysis of any one of these forms. See Hunter, *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance* / (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, c1975.), 194-195; Braudy, *Narrative Form in History and Fiction: Hume, Fielding & Gibbon*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), 167, 196; Hamilton, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 144-151; Patey, *Probability and Literary Form: Philosophic Theory and Literary Practice in the Augustan Age* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 198-199.

<sup>63</sup> See p. 6 below.

<sup>64</sup> See pp. 6-7 below.

undermine narrative unity? To what extent does Fielding really accept Aristotle's injunction to subordinate narrative parts to a unified plot? How does Fielding's attitude towards the part/whole dynamic shift in the course of his career? And what role does the increasing emphasis on time play in Fielding's vision of narrative? In this chapter, I demonstrate that in the course of his career as a novelist, Fielding embraces, transforms, and ultimately explodes the totalizing logic of Aristotelian narrative form. I argue that this shift comes about as a result of Fielding's commitment to representing the contingency of human events: the more contingency he introduces into his novels, the more skeptical he becomes about the possibility of distilling modern experience into a unified Aristotelian plot.<sup>65</sup> Ultimately, the extreme contingency of the urban environment represented in *Amelia* leads Fielding to abandon the Aristotelian model and develop a new vision of narrative that prioritizes parts over wholes, and time over action.

In *Tom Jones*, Fielding purports to follow Aristotle's precept of unitary design; however, he buries that unitary design in a welter of seemingly accidental and extraneous events. The purpose of this maneuver is to train his reader to discern the causal logic of human events beneath the appearance of chaos and contingency. By emphasizing the role of the reader in assembling the narrative "whole" from its individual "parts," Fielding begins to challenge the donées of Aristotelian theory: here, plot ceases to be an objective, transcendent principle and instead becomes an object of empirical inquiry that must be grasped subjectively by an attentive reader. Meanwhile, by making the recognition of plot a gradual process, Fielding introduces temporality as a necessary horizon of meaning in narrative; as we will see, this is a further departure from Aristotle. In *Amelia*, Fielding

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<sup>65</sup> My discussion of contingency in Fielding is indebted to the indispensable work of Leo Braudy. See Braudy, *op. cit.*

begins by vigorously restating his allegiance to Aristotelian narrative unity; yet ultimately, the novel dramatizes the impossibility of such unity in the confounding context of urban modernity. *Amelia* marks a major shift from *Tom Jones*: in his final novel, Fielding shifts the burden of discerning narrative form from the reader to the characters within the novel itself. I argue that the central problem of *Amelia* is whether subjects can perceive, in real time, the form of the narratives in which they themselves are involved. The novel's setting, mid-century London, constitutes an epistemological maze that ultimately makes such perception impossible, thereby occasioning the final breakdown of Aristotelian form, and the rise of a new form to take its place – one that embodies the uncertainties of everyday urban life rather than the transcendent knowledge of the philosopher.

## 1. INCIDENT

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle unequivocally asserts that the most important element of poetic (that is to say, fictional) narrative is plot – the organization of events into a coherent structure.<sup>66</sup> According to Aristotle, the plot must be whole (possessing a beginning, middle, and end), and of sufficient magnitude (“the size which permits a transformation to occur. . .from adversity to prosperity or prosperity to adversity”<sup>67</sup>); but the most important structure is that it be unified:

the plot. . . should be of a unitary and indeed whole action; and the component events should be so structured that if any is displaced or removed, the sense of the whole is disturbed and dislocated: since that whose presence or absence has no clear significance is not an integral part of the whole.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 53.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Here, Aristotle insists that the introduction of events that have “no clear significance” for the plot will mar the excellence of a narrative. But how do we determine the “significance” – or, by contrast, the insignificance – of an event for the plot? Again, Aristotle is quite straightforward: the test of an event’s significance is whether it fits into a “probable or necessary sequence”<sup>69</sup> – that is, whether it can be linked to previous and subsequent events by necessity or probability. The organization of events into a “probable or necessary sequence” is, for Aristotle, very essence of poetry. He clarifies this essence through a comparison between poetry and history:

[I]t is not the poet’s function to relate actual events, but the *kinds* of things that might occur and are possible in terms of probability or necessity. The difference between the historian and the poet is not that between using verse or prose; Herodotus’ work could be versified and would be just as much a kind of history in verse as prose. No, the difference is this: that the one relates actual events, the other the kinds of things that might occur. Consequently, poetry is more philosophical and more elevated than history, since poetry relates more of the universal, while history relates particulars.<sup>70</sup>

Whereas history relates “actual events” as they *have happened*, the poet relates events as they generally *tend to happen* – that is, things that are *likely* to happen (probable events) and/or things that *must* happen (necessary events). For Aristotle, poetry is more “universal” than history because it represents the general patterns of events rather than specific turns of events, which may well be unnecessary or improbable. To put it another way, poetry excludes contingency, constructing an idealized account of the way things would happen if they played out according to the fundamental nature of things.

In order to develop a unified plot and thereby exclude contingency from narrative, it is necessary not only to structure the plot around necessary and probable actions, but also to avoid structuring the plot around temporal spans. For, as Aristotle observes,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 59-61.

representing a span of time, rather than a sequence of action, will almost certainly introduce the element of contingency; this is the case with history, "which require[s] an exposition not of a single action but of a single period, with all the events (in their contingent relationships) that happened to one person or more during it." Whereas a continuous sequence of action can be unified to advance the *telos* of a coherent plot, "in a continuous stretch of time event sometimes follows event without any single goal."<sup>71</sup> Based on these statements, Paul Ricoeur concludes that "Aristotle shows no interest in the construction of a time capable of being implicated in the constructing of the plot. . . . [T]he internal connection of the plot is logical rather than chronological. . . ."<sup>72</sup>

The neoclassical epic theorists of the late 17th and early eighteenth century closely follow Aristotle's insistence on plot as the soul of narrative, and action as the fundamental constituent of plot. But these theorists add another layer to the theory: for the neoclassicists, plot itself exists only to embody a moral lesson, which stands as the ultimate purpose of the epic. Placing the moral at the summit of the formal hierarchy of the epic shifts the purpose of epic away from imitation of human action and towards the instruction of the reader.<sup>73</sup> As the epic is reconfigured for didactic purposes, the problem of narrative unity takes on an unprecedented urgency: if the plot does not follow a clear chain of causality, how can it legitimately model the consequences of human action?

John Dennis explains:

[W]e are not so much instructed by what Men doe, as by the Causes and Springs of their Actions; which an Historian seldom transmits to us, because he seldom knows them: And when he ventures to give those Causes, they are, for the most part, Conjectures, and very seldom Certainties. *Homer* and *Virgil*, without doubt, knew this very well; and therefore, tho' they saw that Action was more proper for

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 115-117.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 39-41.

<sup>73</sup> Patey, 111.

Instruction, than bare Precept; yet they found that it must be General Action; something in which all might be equally concern'd; and something of which the Writers might be perfectly Masters, so as to render a Reason exactly of every part of it, and to discover the Causes, and to make known the Effects of every little incident.<sup>74</sup>

Here, Dennis takes up the same comparison as Aristotle – poetry versus history – but for new purposes. For Dennis, the problem with history is not only its inclusion of contingent events alongside general tendencies of human action: it is also the inability of the historian to assign a cause to every event with certainty. The advantage of poetic fiction, by contrast, is that the author, having total knowledge of events, can demonstrate for the reader a clear chain of causes and effects from the beginning to the end of the narrative. Whereas Aristotle was precisely concerned that poets should represent "what Men doe," Dennis asserts that demonstrating the "Causes and Springs of their Actions" is even more important, because tracing cause and effect is the best way to educate the reader about correct and incorrect human action.

In emphasizing the causal chain that links individual events in the plot, the neoclassicists move even closer than Aristotle to comparing or even equating narrative with logic. René Le Bossu, considered the founder of this school of thought, maintains that the individual "Incidents" that comprise the Action must be "deduc'd" from the Action, and by extension the Moral of the narrative.<sup>75</sup> Dennis declares for the alignment of narrative and logic even more explicitly:

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<sup>74</sup> John Dennis, *Remarks on a book entituled Prince Arthur, an heroick poem with some general critical observations and several new remarks upon Virgil / by Mr. Dennis* (London, 1696), 5. *Early English Books Online*. [http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:15509725](http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:15509725)

<sup>75</sup> René Le Bossu, *Monsieur Bossu's treatise of the epick poem containing many curious reflexions, very useful and necessary for the right understanding and judging of the excellencies of Homer and Virgil / done into English from the French, with a new original preface upon the same subject, by W.J. ; to which are added, An essay upon satyr, by Monsieur D'Acier ; and A treatise upon pastorals, by Monsieur Fontanelle* (London, 1695), 68. *Early English Books Online*.



[H]ere it will not be amiss to observe what has been all along hinted. That the Action is only fram'd for the Instruction; and that it is design'd for a proof of the Moral; that every part of that Action ought to be a gradual Progress in the proof; and that consequently all the Parts of it ought to be as dependant one of another, as the Propositions are of a Syllogism; and that to insert any thing between the Parts, which is foreign from the Action, that is, from the Argument, is to destroy, or at least to weaken that Argument; and is as absurdly impertinent, as a Parenthesis would be between the Propositions of a Categorical Syllogism. That an Epick Poet is to drive on his Action, which is but urging his Argument; and that he is still to have an eye to the end of his Action, and to make hast to that which is the conclusion of his Argument.<sup>76</sup>

In this passage, Dennis establishes an equivalency between narrative and logic. For Dennis, any "Part" of the narrative does not directly contribute to the linear "Proof" of the "Moral" must be excluded with extreme vigilance, to prevent the didactic purpose of the epic from being undermined. By equating narrative with logic, Dennis demands an even more stringent form of narrative unity than Aristotle. Although, as commentators have noted, Aristotle's vision of narrative in the *Poetics* is itself closely linked to logic,<sup>77</sup> Aristotle never explicitly compares or equates the two. Meanwhile, as we saw in the Introduction, Aristotle was willing to grant certain leeway to epic poets in using semi-autonomous episodes to develop the magnitude, grandeur, and variety of the poem. Dennis allows for no such leeway: if "all the Parts" of a narrative "ought to be as dependant one of another, as the Propositions are of a Syllogism", every event must have an extremely strict causal relationship with the chain of preceding and following events.

Fielding was clearly fluent in the theories of both Aristotle and the neoclassicists; as we have seen, his explicit claim to be writing "comic epics" is founded on Aristotle's

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[http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:12091931](http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:12091931)

<sup>76</sup> Dennis, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Ricoeur, op. cit.; Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, c1977), 98-99.

account of the elements of the genre, and he explicitly affirms Aristotle's imperative of narrative unity. Meanwhile, he cites Le Bossu directly as one of the great authorities in literary theory, ranking him with no lesser figures than Horace, Longinus, and Aristotle himself.<sup>78</sup> But if Fielding declares his allegiance to Aristotelian principles in theory, to what extent does he follow them in practice? To what degree does he construct his narratives as a series of mutually dependent epic "Incidents"? And how stringent is he in maintaining narrative unity? Fielding's narrative practice, while closely linked to – and even dependent on – the Aristotelian tradition, diverges from it in several important ways. We can begin to appreciate this divergence by examining his address to the critics in Book X, Chapter 1 of *Tom Jones*, where he simultaneously identifies his work with Aristotelian form and suggests that he is in the process of transcending it:

First, then, we warn thee not too hastily to condemn any of the Incidents in this our History as impertinent and foreign to our main Design, because thou dost not immediately conceive in what Manner such incident may conduce to that Design. This work may, indeed, be considered as a great Creation of our own; and for a little Reptile of a Critic to presume to find fault with any of its Parts, without knowing the Manner in which the Whole is connected, and before he comes to the final Catastrophe, is a most presumptuous Absurdity. (TJ, 459)

Here, Fielding preemptively warns his critics that his novel is perfectly compatible with the Aristotelian imperative of unified plot – even if it seems to violate that imperative by introducing seemingly extraneous events. The narrator unequivocally states that all of the "Incidents" in *Tom Jones* ultimately "conduce to" the "main design" of the novel: despite any appearance to the contrary, all of its "parts" are integrated into a coherent "whole." However, the manner in which the "Incidents" are linked to the narrative "Design" signals a major rupture with neoclassical theory. We will remember that Le Bossu and his followers insisted that all "Incidents" must be unmistakably linked both to one another (in

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<sup>78</sup> Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 501. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *TJ*.

a causal chain) and to the unified Action and Moral of the narrative (because individual incidents embody the unified Action, and the Action in turn embodies the Moral). By contrast, Fielding acknowledges that some of his "Incidents" may at first appear to be "impertinent and foreign to [the] main Design"; it is only after one has reached the novel's "final Catastrophe" that the fundamental unity of narrative part with narrative whole can be discerned with certainty. This shift constitutes a major innovation in the theory and practice of narrative, as Fielding himself immodestly suggests: "This work may, indeed, be considered as a great creation of our own" – that is, it is not a strict derivation from Aristotelian rules.

There are three key dimensions to Fielding's innovation. First, by presenting narrative unity as a hidden form to be discovered by the reader, Fielding transforms plot from an *a priori* transcendent principle to an object of empirical analysis. We will remember that Aristotle enjoined the poet to establish his plot before developing it into a series of specific incidents; Le Bossu explicitly characterizes this movement from generalized plot to specific incident as a process of *deduction*. Fielding turns this logic on its head, insisting that the plot must be assembled by the reader *from* the incidents through a process of *induction*. Second, by instituting a delay between the reader's encounter with the events of the novel and his eventual understanding of their orderly arrangement in a unified plot, Fielding introduces temporality as an integral feature of the reader's experience of the narrative, contravening the Aristotelian emphasis on action over time.<sup>79</sup> Third, and perhaps most radically, by leaving the assembly of the plot up to

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<sup>79</sup> "Accidents [in *Tom Jones*] do not occur as life-transforming points in time, but only reveal their full implication over a longer narrative time frame. That is, they carry signification that requires attentive interpretation, the assembling of additional information, and periods of reflection that elaborate the simple memory function that Locke required to establish personal identity." Hamilton, 146.

the reader, Fielding opens up the possibility that the reader may fail in this inductive process, and that the plot may never be discerned at all.

We can gain a fuller understanding of Fielding's unusual transmutation of Aristotelian narrative theory by observing how he applies his theory directly to the plot of *Tom Jones*. A telling instance would be the famous "Incident" of Sophia's muff in Book V, Chapter IV. Fielding prepares his reader to think about the nature and function of novelistic incident with a typically coy chapter title: "*A little Chapter, in which is contained a little Incident*" (*TJ*, 198). The "*little Incident*" in question is as follows: Squire Western throws Sophia's muff into the fire because it has slid down her arm and interfered with her playing one of her father's "favourite Tunes" on the harpsichord; Sophia hastily jumps up to rescue it from the flames (*TJ*, 200). This "little Incident" turns out to be not so little after all: it signals to the lovelorn Tom that Sophia actually reciprocates his feelings for her, and helps to precipitate the romantic relationship between the two that will ultimately end in marriage. At the close of the chapter, the narrator expands on the profound significance of the lowly "Incident" of the muff – not only for the plot of *Tom Jones* but also for Fielding's theory and practice of the novel:

Though this Incident will probably appear of little Consequence to many of our Readers; yet, trifling as it was, it had so violent an Effect on poor *Jones*, that we thought it our Duty, to relate it. In reality, there are many little Circumstances too often omitted by injudicious Historians, from which Events of the utmost Importance arise. The World may indeed be considered as a vast Machine, in which the great Wheels are originally set in Motion by those which are very minute, and almost imperceptible to any but the strongest Eyes. (*TJ*, 200)

Here, as in the above discussion of "Incidents" in relation to the "main Design", Fielding both affirms his adherence to the neoclassical tradition and radically transforms it. Again, we see him insisting on the ultimate logical unity of his narrative: each "Event" has

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clearly been caused by the preceding event, as one wheel in a "vast Machine" is "set in Motion" by a series of adjoining wheels. Yet Fielding radically diverges from the Aristotelian model by explicitly warning his reader that the causal relationship between events, as well as the larger arc of the narrative, may be anything but clear: in fact, decisive "Incidents" may at first appear utterly "trifling" – accidental, contingent, irrelevant to the overall "Design." Second, Fielding himself abdicates the responsibility for demonstrating the intricate patterns of causality in his narrative, and assembling the narrative whole from its individual parts: instead, the responsibility for this work falls on the reader, who may well fail unless he is possessed of "the strongest Eyes" – in other words, the most acute faculties of empirical observation.

Taking these two passages together, we can offer a fuller description of Fielding's ambivalent attitude towards Aristotelian narrative theory in *Tom Jones*. To the extent that there is an irreproachably logical order subtending the seeming contingency of events in the novel, Fielding reaffirms the central imperative of Aristotle and his neoclassical adherents – namely, narrative unity. In doing so, he suggests that it is ultimately possible to arrive at an objective account of how events play out. At the same time, he suggests that such an objective account must be arrived at from the subjective position of the observer/reader, through the process of induction. Although Fielding maintains that this task is eminently possible – in fact, one might argue that the purpose of the novel as a whole is to train readers to succeed in it – he clearly signals that discerning the objective order of a complex narrative is a challenging proposition for the reading subject. The intellectual burden that Fielding places on the reader entails a substantial risk: the reader may simply not have the acuteness of perception and judgment that would allow him to

perceive the underlying order of the narrative. Of course, for the reader, as opposed to the actor in the world, the failure to perceive the shape of events has no dire consequences: Fielding's famously intrusive narrator is there throughout the novel to help the reader along. Meanwhile, as an observer of the narrative, rather than a participant, the reader has the advantage of taking all the time he needs to contemplate the unity of the narrative. Ultimately, *Tom Jones* establishes a fine balance between the writer's control of objective narrative order and the reader's capacity for subjective misperception; this exquisite equilibrium is in large part what lends the novel its unique intellectual and aesthetic dynamism. However, Fielding's careful balancing act would ultimately come crashing down in his dark final novel, *Amelia*.

## 2. ACCIDENT

In the opening "Exordium" of *Amelia*, Fielding concisely sums up the substance of his novel: "The various Accidents which befell a worthy Couple, after their uniting in the State of Matrimony, will be the subject of the following History."<sup>80</sup> Here, the author explicitly identifies "Accidents" – unexpected, contingent events – as the explicit subject of the novel. This embrace of "Accident" looks like a final break with Aristotle and the neoclassical tradition, which, as we have seen, seeks to exclude accident from fictional

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<sup>80</sup> Henry Fielding, *Amelia*; ed. Linda Bree (Peterborough, Ont. ; Buffalo, NY : Broadview Press, c2010), 57. Cited hereafter parenthetically as *A*. Bree's edition is based on the first edition of *Amelia* (1751); I have chosen to work with the first edition of the novel for two reasons: 1) The second edition (1762) excises Fielding's anachronistic references to the "Universal Register Office," which are crucial to my argument; 2) As Hugh Amory, Peter Sabor, and Bree argue, it is likely that the revisions represented in the second edition were not all instigated by Fielding himself. See Hugh Amory, "What Murphy Knew: His Interpolations in Fielding's 'Works' (1762), and Fielding's Revision of 'Amelia,'" *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*; *New York* 77 (January 1, 1983): 133–166; Peter Sabor, "Amelia," in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

narrative. However, Fielding immediately corrects any such impression, retrenching towards the unmistakable vocabulary of Aristotelian narrative theory:

Life may be as properly called an Art as any other; and the great Incidents in it are no more to be considered as mere Accidents, than the several Members of a fine Statue, or a noble Poem. The Critics in all these are not content with seeing any Thing to be great, without knowing why and how it came to be so. By examining carefully the several gradations which conduce to bring every Model to Perfection, we learn truly to know that Science in which the Model is formed: As Histories of this kind, therefore, may properly be called Models of Human Life; so by observing minutely the several Incidents which tend to the Catastrophe or Completion of the whole, and the minute Causes whence those Incidents are produced, we shall best be instructed in this most useful of all Arts, which I call the Art of Life. (*A*, 57-58)

In the opening sentence of this passage, Fielding deploys the typical Aristotelian analogy between narrative structure and the body: just as each part of a body must fit together for a unified purpose, so must each event in a narrative combine into a coherent plot. Further emphasizing his allegiance to neo-Aristotelian form, Fielding reasserts the primacy of epic "Incidents" over random "Accidents," suggesting that seeming "Accidents" are actually meaningful "Incidents" that have not yet been identified as such. However, alongside the vocabulary of Aristotelian form, Fielding introduces the vocabulary of empiricism and induction, just as he did in *Tom Jones*: he asserts that the totality of the narrative can only be perceived by "observing minutely" the "minute Causes" that together add up to a coherent story.

The central claim of the above passages – narrative constitutes a unified order, but that order can only be discerned by a highly perceptive observer – appears to recapitulate Fielding's theoretical statements about narrative in *Tom Jones*. Following this logic, we might assume that *Amelia* serves the same fundamental purpose as *Tom Jones* – that is, to

train the perception of the reader. Yet elsewhere in the “Exordium” we discover that Fielding is now concerned with modeling ethical behavior in his characters:

To retrieve the ill Consequences of a foolish Conduct, and by struggling manfully with Distress to subdue it, is one of the noblest Efforts of Wisdom and Virtue. Whoever, therefore, calls such a Man fortunate, is guilty of no less Impropriety in Speech, than we would be, who should call the Statuary or the Poet fortunate, who carved a *Venus* or who writ an *Iliad*. (*A*, 57)

This passage marks a major shift in Fielding's theory and practice of narrative form. Here, responsibility for establishing narrative unity is shifted away from the author and the reader and onto the characters; the result of this shift is that narrative theory is now deployed in the service of ethics. Ultimately, Fielding suggests, the well-lived life will resemble an epic poem, with its incidents fitting together seamlessly to form a coherent and compelling whole. Yet this vision of a life disciplined into Neoclassical form is aspirational, rather than representative of the way things actually are: Fielding avers that it is only by “struggling manfully” that one wrestles the “Distresses” of life into such coherent form (*A*, 57). Fielding is in fact deeply aware of the difficulty of arranging the events of one’s life into form; this concern is reflected in the tension that the Exordium establishes between “Incident” and “Accident.” The danger, in living one’s life, is to allow it to devolve into a series of mere accidents. From this perspective, we can read *Amelia* as a narrative constructed around the tension between Incident and Accident: its protagonists are constantly placed in situations where accident threatens to overwhelm them, and they struggle to transform the unstable welter of contingent events into the coherent and unified formal logic of incident. Yet whereas an author can unilaterally impose logical order on his narrative, it may be difficult, or even impossible, for an actual person to perceive – let alone shape – the narrative of his life as it unfolds in real time; it



is this difficulty, I would argue, that gives rise to the formal innovations and vexations of *Amelia*.

The problem of discerning the narrative form of one's own life is explicitly thematized throughout the novel in the extended stories told by characters about their earlier lives. From the vantage point of retrospection, as opposed to real-time situations, it should be substantially easier to discern logical order in the succession of events. By interpolating extensive first-person narratives into the novel, Fielding gives three of his main characters—Mrs. Mathews, Booth, and Mrs. Bennet—the benefit of such a retrospective view of their own lives, and the opportunity to arrange their respective stories into coherent form—to disambiguate the necessary, decisive “Incidents” from the contingent “Accidents.” Yet even with the benefit of hindsight, these characters frequently misconstrue or misrepresent the structure of their own life narratives, for various purposes – to produce a certain effect in the listener, to enact a delusive fantasy about themselves, or to obscure certain aspects of their past.

The novel’s characters themselves periodically show themselves to be aware of the responsibility to arrange their lives into form, and determine which are the decisive events in their narratives: they occasionally interrupt their own tales with questions or doubts about what constitutes a structurally significant “Incident.” For example, before sharing with Amelia the narrative of her life, Mrs. Bennet (later Mrs. Atkinson) expresses uncertainty as to what passages of her life and individual events to include in the narrative:

“I would, if possible, tire you with no more of my unfortunate Life than just with that Part which leads to a Catastrophe, in which I think you yourself may be interested; but I protest I am at a Loss where to begin. . . .[I]n Stories of Distress, especially where Love is concerned, many little Incidents may appear trivial to

those who have never felt the Passion, which to delicate Minds are the most interesting Part of the Whole. ” (*A*, 282-283)

Here, Mrs. Bennet actually appears to concern herself explicitly with the problem taken up by epic theorists from Aristotle to Le Bossu: what is the proper relationship between the parts of a narrative—i.e., the individual episodes or incidents—and the whole? By envisioning her narrative as tending toward a “Catastrophe,” and asking herself what events are most germane to the production of this “Catastrophe,” Mrs. Bennet shows herself to be concerned with achieving proper Neoclassical form in her own life narrative.<sup>81</sup> Yet in weighing the question of what incidents to include, Mrs. Bennet betrays her self-involvement: she seems eager to find a justification for including the “many little Incidents” that pertain to her own “Passion” and demonstrate that she is distinguished by a “delicate Mind.” This rationale sounds like a perversion of Fielding’s concern in *Tom Jones* with making visible the minute causes of great events: here, Bennet is concerned more with the minute causes of her own feelings. In order to make sure that this point is driven home to the reader, Fielding’s narrator, far more laconic than his predecessors in *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*, makes an uncharacteristic appearance here to render judgment on Bennet’s mode of storytelling:

[P]ossibly the reader will blame Mrs. *Bennet* for taking her Story so far back, and relating so much of her Life in which *Amelia* had no Concern; but in Truth, she was desirous of inculcating a good Opinion of herself, from recounting those Transactions where her Conduct was unexceptionable, before she came to the more dangerous and Suspicious Part of her Character. (*A*, 283)

Interestingly, the narrator judges Mrs. Bennet here not for the actions contained in the narrative in her life—i.e., the “content”—but rather for the self-serving rationale that

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<sup>81</sup> The term “Catastrophe” is standard neoclassical terminology. For example, “[S]o from their Catastrophes an admirable Moral may likewise be drawn.” Dennis, 76.

determines the scope and structure of her narrative of that life—i.e., the “form.”

Crucially, the logic that determines the narrator’s judgment on the form of Mrs. Bennet’s narrative is not theoretical, but pragmatic: he is not concerned, like the Neoclassical epic theorists, with the narrative’s conformity with the rules of epic; instead, he is focused on the discourse situation surrounding the narration of the epic—in particular, its use value for the listener, Amelia. It is only the *context* of Mrs. Bennet’s storytelling that allows us to judge its form. At this point in the novel, Amelia is being plotted against by the evil Noble Lord who has previously raped Mrs. Bennet, and Mrs. Bennet wants to warn Amelia of what the Lord has planned for her. This context makes Mrs. Bennet’s concern here with the inner workings of her own feelings appear trivial: although she professes to want to restrict herself to the incidents that are germane to Amelia’s situation, she offers a rationale for including events that pertain more to the history of her own conduct and emotions.

Unlike Mrs. Bennet, who seeks to manipulate the narrative of her life in order to present a particular image of herself, Booth, the novel's rather uninspiring protagonist, appears in his interpolated tale to demonstrate his own lack of understanding about the way events actually unfold. Booth’s narrative covers his courtship of Amelia, the resistance he meets from her mother, and his ultimate triumph before moving on to the Booths’ earlier married life. Booth’s unrealistic attitude towards the relationship between subjective experience, will, and the contingency of events is epitomized in his narration of one of the most famous—or notorious—events in *Amelia*—the carriage accident which breaks the heroine’s nose. It is this accident, and Amelia’s response to it, which first engenders Booth’s admiration for Amelia. In his account of the accident and its

aftermath, Booth emphasizes Amelia's preternatural stoicism in the face of great physical and emotional pain:

“What a Magnanimity of Mind did her Behaviour demonstrate! If the World have extolled the Firmness of Soul in a Man who can support the Loss of Fortune; of a General, who can be composed after the Loss of a Victory; or of a King, who can be contented with the Loss of a Crown; with what Astonishment ought we to behold, with what Praises to honour a young Lady, who can with Patience and Resignation submit to the Loss of exquisite Beauty, in other words, to the Loss of Fortune, Power, Glory; every Thing which human Nature is apt to court and rejoice in! What must be the Mind, which can bear to be deprived of all of these in a Moment, and by an unfortunate trifling Accident; which could support all this, together with the most exquisite Torments of Body, and with the Dignity, with Resignation, without complaining, almost without a Tear, undergo the most painful and dreadful Operations of Surgery in such a situation.” Here he stopt, and a Torrent of Tears gushed from his eyes. . .” (*A*, 98-99)

This rather overwrought passage embodies an idealized vision of the transformation of accident into incident: the accident, which is undignified in its randomness and pettiness (it is “unfortunate” and “trifling”), is transformed into an epic incident worthy of the annals of kings and generals, and expressive of the greatest possible dignity. It is crucial to note that in Booth's telling, this transformation appears to be effected almost instantaneously: the compression made possible by past-tense narrative allows for the impression that the accident was met and mastered in essentially the same moment. Meanwhile, the transformation is absolute: the “trifling” accident becomes not just any kind of “Incident” but a transcendently heroic one, and Amelia herself is transformed from a vulnerable, suffering object to a dignified, conquering subject capable of mastering any and all events. The extreme and instantaneous transformation from accident to incident in this passage gives rise to an ambiguity: does it represent a wish fulfillment on Fielding's part—i.e., that accidents could be mastered so readily and totally—or rather a biting satire of such wishful thinking? As Claude Rawson notes,

Booth's tone in this passage uncomfortably integrates the disparate literary registers of contemporary sentimental fiction (in the extreme emotion and the breaking off of narration to make room for an access of tears) and the mock-heroic (in the high-flown "speechifying" about heroic "greatness");<sup>82</sup> this unstable mixture makes it very difficult to discern Fielding's own attitude towards the carriage "Incident." But whether the passage embodies wish fulfillment, satire, or even an ambivalent amalgam of the two, its account of the subject instantly and thoroughly mastering random accident and transforming it into heroic incident strains credulity. And indeed, most of the novel's "accidents" are not so easily mastered.

One such insurmountable "accident" in *Amelia* is the acquaintance between the Booths and Mrs. Ellison, their landlady; this accident is critical to the plot of the novel, as it leads Mrs. Ellison to offer up Amelia as a target for seduction or rape to the predatory Noble Lord, Mrs. Ellison's cousin. The acquaintance results from a memorable "Incident" which occurs early on in the novel, as the Booths and their children are taking a walk in St. James's Park. Young Billy wanders onto the grass and is roughly handled by a soldier, and Booth jumps to attack and subdue the soldier; Atkinson, who has been promoted to Sergeant, appears and chastises the soldier. As a result of this episode, the acquaintance between the Booths and Atkinson is reestablished. Meanwhile, the emotional strain of this "Incident" causes Amelia to feel faint; Atkinson helps to get her back to the Booths' lodgings, where Mrs. Ellison sees her condition and immediately tends to her (*A*, 202-203). The relationship between Ellison and the Booths, established in this moment, precipitates one of the central lines of the novel's plot—the Noble Lord's

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<sup>82</sup> Claude J. Rawson, "Nature, Cruel Circumstance, and the Rage for Order: *Amelia*, with Reflections on Defoe, Smollett, and Orwell", in *Henry Fielding and the Augustan ideal under stress: "Nature's dance of death" and other studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 94.

dastardly attempts to seduce Amelia, by force if necessary. At the conclusion of this episode, the narrator emphasizes this causal link, echoing his analogy between the world and a “vast machine” in *Tom Jones*:

Thus ended this trifling Adventure, which some Readers will perhaps be pleased with seeing related at full length. None, I think, can fail drawing one Observation from it; namely, how capable the most insignificant Accident is of disturbing human Happiness, and of producing the most unexpected and dreadful Events. A Reflection which may serve to many moral and religious Uses. (*A*, 202)

The idea that trifling “Accidents” can produce great “Events” is one of Fielding’s central preoccupations, and is foundational for his ethics, aesthetics, and epistemology; however, this idea takes on a new meaning in *Amelia*. As we saw in the “Exordium,” Fielding is concerned in this novel to elaborate an ethics founded in part on a vision of narrative theory derived from the epic: he contends that the ethically upright individual, by “struggling manfully” and hewing to the dictates of prudence, will transmute the accidents that befall him into a series of epic “Incidents” that together will comprise the unified form of his life. Yet in the case of the “Incident” in the park, the Booths have no such opportunity to demonstrate either their stoic fortitude or their good judgment: by no fault of their own, and purely by chance, they have become embroiled in the diabolical plot of the Noble Lord. Unlike the narrator (and potentially the reader), they are not in a position from which they can discern the causal relationship between the “insignificant Accident” in the Park and the “unexpected and dreadful Events” that it will ultimately precipitate: they can only think, judge, and act in real time. The “Adventure” in the Park points up the limits of Fielding’s narratological ethics: in many “real-time” situations, chance dictates the drift of events, regardless of one’s wishes, commitments or intentions, and the subject is forced into playing the role of object. If Fielding is deeply

concerned with the problem of how a life might be given a unified form, he also appears to be acutely aware of the vulnerability and provisionality of any such form: the shape of the life is always in danger of being *de*-formed by the workings of accident. This awareness may account for the narrator's vague and platitudinous final recommendation of his own remarks on causality: "A Reflection which may serve to many moral and religious uses." The problem, in the world of *Amelia*, is that it is never quite clear *which* uses this "Reflection" on causality has: where it helps, and where it is ultimately powerless.

### 3. CASE/MODEL

The "trifling Adventure" in the Park clearly demonstrates the limits of Fielding's attempt to transmute the forms of epic theory into a viable ethics: the opaque and unpredictable urban environment depicted in *Amelia* leaves too many causes out of the field of vision of its protagonists, making it impossible to transform all "Accidents" into heroic "Incidents" in the epic of one's life. The Park "Incident" simultaneously points up the limits of the subject's agency in the face of the complex causal relations of contemporary life. It is telling that Booth, in his florid account of Amelia's carriage accident and her heroic response to it, deploys language that evokes the mock-epic: Fielding seems to be aware that the concept of heroic agency overcoming all obstacles is incompatible with the complex reality of contemporary urban life, much as epic glory and violence were incompatible with the mannered sociability of the Augustan period. Yet as we saw in the "Exordium," Fielding does not commit himself entirely to one mode of

ethics, or one concept of narrative form. As I observe above, the “Exordium” offers a way of looking at narrative form that seems more in tune with scientific method than with epic action and incident:

As Histories of this kind, therefore, may properly be called Models of Human Life; so by observing minutely the several Incidents which tend to the Catastrophe or Completion of the whole, and the minute Causes whence those Incidents are produced, we shall best be instructed in this most useful of all Arts, which I call the Art of Life. (*A*, 58)

While Fielding preserves here a number of terms from Neoclassical epic theory, such as “Incidents” and “Catastrophe”, the tone of the passage is curiously inflected with quasi-scientific language: there is a concern with “observing minutely”—associated with empiricism—and the discernment of “minute Causes” and their subsequent effects—associated with the metaphysics of mechanism pioneered by Thomas Hobbes.

Meanwhile, there is a suggestion that the genre of the novel itself serves a quasi-scientific function: instead of providing an didactic, exemplary “Model” of how to behave, or even an Aristotelian poetic “Model” of the way things generally are, it can offer an experimental space in which *to model* human behavior.<sup>83</sup> Finally, the ambiguous pronoun “we” makes it clear that the agent characterized here as “observing minutely” is not a character in the novel, but rather some unspecified collectivity of interpreters, which calls to mind the Enlightenment ideal of the scientific community engaged in the collective melioration of knowledge.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> John Bender associates this modeling of behavior with the emergent carceral order that would come to fruition in Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. While the resonance Bender draws is suggestive, I would caution that Fielding’s ideas about modeling and managing behavior are rather more inchoate and experimental. See *Imagining the Penitentiary* (Chicago, Ill. : University of Chicago Press, 1987., n.d.), 183-184.

<sup>84</sup> Steven Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump : Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life : Including a Translation of Thomas Hobbes, Dialogus Physicus de Natura Aeris by Simon Schaffer* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1985), 69-72.



This passage implies that where the narrative forms, ethical purchase, and epistemological *données* of Neoclassical epic theory reach their limits of usefulness, the rigorous procedures of scientific inquiry can effectively take over. We can see such a shift into the scientific register relatively late in *Amelia*, where we encounter one of the novel's most memorable figures of urban depravity, Captain Trent. Trent is an army officer, former comrade-in-arms of Booth, and "Pimp in ordinary" to the evil Noble Lord (*A*, 442); he remakes Booth's acquaintance in Book IX of the novel and, working with accomplices, quickly entraps him into a ruinous gambling debt. At first Trent magnanimously insists that the debt need not be paid promptly—and need not be paid at all if Booth is unable—but then suddenly reverses course, sending Booth a curt letter demanding immediate payment. This letter occasions an epistemological quandary for Booth: how can a helpful friend suddenly transform into a highhanded creditor? This sudden shift in attitude appears, at first, to belong to the sphere of contingency and sudden accident. But at this point, the narrator intervenes, wary of allowing the reader to see Trent's transformation as either random or overly mysterious:

This Letter a little surprized *Booth*, after the genteel, and indeed, as it appeared, generous Behaviour of *Trent*. But lest it should have the same Effect on the Reader, we will now proceed to account for this, as well as for some other Phænomena that have appeared in this History, and which perhaps we shall be forgiven, for not having opened more largely before. (*A*, 456)

Here, the narrator signals a shift into the quasi-scientific register with the term

"Phænomena," which recasts the events of the novel as the sort of data that may be

"observ[ed] minutely" and rigorously placed into the complex web of causality.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> It is telling here to compare Fielding's deployment of the term in *Tom Jones*, where it is used ironically to mock the scholarly discourse of Thwackum and Square, which does nothing to correct the behavior of young Tom: "A difference arising at play between the two lads, Master Blifil called Tom a beggarly

Meanwhile, in shifting from Booth's perspective to that of the abstract "we"—perhaps comprised of the narrator and reader together—the narrator effects a shift from subjectivity to objectivity, from the engaged and interested character to the distant, disinterested observer-position of the community of scientific inquiry.

The narrator's account of Trent's earlier life is more a relation of facts than a dramatic account or a discursive analysis; as such, it does not suffer terribly in summary. Trent is the son of an unknown—and therefore presumably immoral—father, and a mother who "carried on the Trade of Milliner in *Covent-Garden*"—a trade and location closely linked with prostitution.<sup>86</sup> He receives a fruitless education in a charity school whose master is himself uneducated, and holds the position as a party patronage appointment. As a youth, Trent runs off from an apprenticeship as a clerk to a lawyer, goes to sea with money robbed from his mother, and is pressed into the navy, where he is repeatedly disciplined for bad conduct and yet manages to distinguish himself for valor. Finally, he returns to his hometown to find that his former master, the lawyer, has married his mother; the lawyer buys Trent a commission in the army as an ensign, and he again distinguishes himself for valor in Gibraltar, where he meets Booth. Upon returning again to England, he finds that the lawyer has been ruined through a forgery charge, and has no fortune to pass on to his daughter. Having few prospects for advancement, and noticing the attraction of "Men of the First Rank" to his wife, Trent seizes on the idea of prostituting her to the rich and powerful in order to blackmail them (*A*, 457-561). (The narrator's account of the development of this scheme is a livelier, more dramatic set-piece, distinct from the life narrative proper.)

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bastard. Upon which the latter, who was somewhat passionate in his disposition, immediately caused that phenomenon in the face of the former [i.e., a bloody nose], which we have above remembered." *TJ*, 118.

<sup>86</sup> Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, ed. Martin Battestin (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1984), 466 n. 1.

If the purpose of this narrative is to fill in crucial plot details—specifically, the nature of Trent’s pimping business, and his relation to the Noble Lord—then the narrator, in relating Trent’s entire life story, provides too much information. Yet I would argue that this life story constitutes a sort of case history of Trent—a quasi-scientific etiology of his criminality—and that the putative surfeit of information in fact represents the thorough observation necessary to the case study. The introduction to the narrative promises to provide an explanation of the empirical phenomenon of Trent’s contradictory behavior toward Booth, and the narrative itself delivers, noting a number of possible social causes of Trent’s criminal character, including the absent father, the whoring mother, and the inadequate education resulting from corrupt party patronage. Meanwhile, in highlighting Trent’s martial valor, and by extension, his ability to serve a useful role in society, the narrator seems to suggest that given a different set of life circumstances, Trent might not have become a depraved criminal. The narrator’s “case study” of Trent delivers on the suggestion, in the “Exordium,” that the novel can serve to “Model” the complex causal chains that determine human behavior; given Fielding’s ongoing interest in the reform of institutions—reflected in his satires, his novels, and his work as a magistrate—it seems reasonable to suggest that the author believed that the “minute observation” of behavior in the “case study” mold might pave the way for improved institutional responses to social problems, which would in turn result in more orderly, predictable, and socially productive behavior.

It is also essential here to understand how the *form* of the narrator’s “case study” of Trent reflects its quasi-scientific purpose. In relating this brief narrative, the narrator adopts a seemingly omniscient perspective, which is rarely the case in the course of the

novel; usually the narrator adopts the limited point of view of his protagonists, only periodically filling in facts and details that the characters themselves could not know. It is important to note that this omniscient perspective on Trent's life does not include any account of Trent's own experience: he is treated more as object than subject, and the narrative is concerned only with *observable* facts about his life.<sup>87</sup> Also crucial to the "scientific" perspective of the "case" is its temporality: it is narrated *ex post facto*, when all of the facts of Trent's life up to this point have been settled; we can contrast this assured retrospective view with Booth and Amelia's "real-time" struggles to understand the facts of their own situation—for example, the meaning of the break-in at their apartment, which they later learn was carried out by Dr. Harrison. Meanwhile, although time is not completely absent from the history of Trent, it is reduced to a measurement: there is no indication of the subjective experience of time, which is so crucial to the novel as a whole.<sup>88</sup> Finally, we must note the rather extreme compression of Trent's life up to the present into a few pages (compare here the interpolated narratives of Mrs. Mathews, Booth, and Mrs. Bennet, each of which comprises multiple chapters); this compression allows for a reduction of the narrative to the salient facts and the workings of cause and effect. The compression of Trent's history helps to solve one of the crucial epistemological problems of the novel: how can one disambiguate facts that are relevant to the causal progress of one's life from those that are irrelevant? Whereas the novel's characters struggle to solve this problem with the conceptual apparatus of epic storytelling—as we saw above in the prefatory discussion to Mrs. Bennet's narrative of

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<sup>87</sup>This objective and exterior perspective on behavior undermines Bender's claim that Fielding is reaching towards the technique of free indirect discourse, and by extension, the surveillance and control of his characters from the inside. See Bender, 177-178.

<sup>88</sup> I discuss the subjective experience of time below, in my treatment of the form of "Situations."

her own life—the narrator is able to reduce narrative to a kind of epistemological degree zero: “Just the facts, Ma’am.”

The epistemological power of the “case” is further instantiated at the very end of the novel, where the narrator offers an account of the dealings of the scoundrel lawyer Murphy. The immediate purpose of this narrative is, as with the “case” of Trent’s life, to explain an apparent contradiction: “[B]efore we close this chapter, we shall endeavour to satisfy an Enquiry which may arise in our most favourite Readers (for so are the most curious) how it came to pass that such a Person as Dr. *Harrison* should employ such a fellow as this *Murphy*” (*A*, 498). The epistemological quandary here is: why would Harrison, the novel’s exemplary figure of right conduct and impeccable judgment, employ a lawyer whom we have seen to be a low criminal? The brief narrative that follows—this time, explicitly designated as a “Case” by the narrator<sup>89</sup>—traces Murphy’s turn to criminality, and the reasons why Harrison was not apprized of it. The narrative is as follows: After serving as a clerk to an attorney in the town where Harrison lives, Murphy sets up in his own practice with a good recommendation. After Murphy is caught in “Perjury and Subornation of Perjury” by a fellow lawyer, the latter blackmails Murphy, demanding that he hand over his law practice, along with his clients, and leave town. Murphy obliges. We then learn that Harrison could not have known of these developments: “This happen’d while the Doctor was abroad, and with all this, except the Departure of *Murphy*, not only the Doctor, but the whole Town. . . were to this Day unacquainted” (*A*, 499). Harrison comes to employ Murphy in London on the basis of his former reputation and the recommendation of the very lawyer who has blackmailed

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<sup>89</sup> “The Case was thus. . .” *A*, 498.

Murphy. The narrator concludes the “Case” of Murphy with an apologia for Harrison’s ignorance about Murphy’s criminality:

It will appear therefore, I apprehend, no longer strange, that the Doctor who had seen this Man but three Times since his Removal to Town, and then conversed with him only on Business, should remain as ignorant of his Life and Character, as a Man generally is of the Character of the Hackney Coachman who drives him. Nor doth it reflect more on the Honour or Understanding of the Doctor under these circumstances to employ *Murphy*, than it would if he had been driven about the Town by a Thief or a Murderer. (*A*, 499)

Here, the narrator is concerned to exculpate Harrison for a potentially dangerous misstep; as Harrison is the novel’s most prominent paragon figure, it is important to preserve the irreproachability of his character. Yet it is precisely Harrison’s failure of knowledge here that points up the power of the “Case”: the explanation of Harrison’s nescience demonstrates that the subjective perspective of the individual will always impose limits on knowledge, no matter how perceptive, prudent, and morally upright the individual may be.

As we have seen, the “Case”, the facts of which are assembled into a causal narrative *ex post facto*, can present knowledge from an omniscient, objective perspective that transcends the limits of individual perception. The epistemological failure of Harrison suggests an epochal shift in concepts of knowledge, ethics, and power: although the narrator is at pains to preserve Harrison’s status as a paragon, the “Case” of Murphy shows that Fielding’s older belief in the ability of the intelligent, upright individual to reform society has been shaken, if not displaced, by the realization that new forms of knowledge and power, no longer situated in the individual subject, must be developed to deal with the increasing complexity of urbanized social relations. The narrator’s rather grim analogy of the anonymous, murderous hackney coachman is telling in this

connection: the hackney coach is of course an exclusively urban phenomenon, and it is precisely the urban environment that embodies the kind of epistemological opacity that Fielding is concerned with in *Amelia*. In the context of the city, where one constantly meets individuals one has never seen or heard tell of before, there is no saying with certainty whether those individuals may be murderers. Harrison, paragon that he may be, is no match for such epistemological conditions; Fielding's deployment of the form of the "Case" towards the end of his novel suggests that a new form of knowledge—institutional rather than individual—must be developed to manage the epistemological uncertainty of the urban environment. And judging from the narrative conventions of the "Case", it seems that this new form of knowledge may necessitate a form of narration that is at odds with the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel and its increasing emphasis on subjective experience.<sup>90</sup>

If the "Cases" of Trent and Murphy appear as sudden formal anomalies, interrupting the modes of representation that characterize the novel as a whole, an even more glaring anomaly was detected and decried by contemporary readers: namely, Fielding's repeated anachronistic references, in the first edition of *Amelia*, to the Universal Register Office.<sup>91</sup> The Universal Register Office was an innovative enterprise of Fielding and his half-brother John founded in 1750; it served as a middleman

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<sup>90</sup> Here I part ways with John Bender's influential reading of the place of *Amelia* in the history of the novel. In Bender's view, *Amelia* prefigures the rise of the "omniscient narrator" in the nineteenth century: in his final novel, Fielding "took steps. . . toward the placement of individual subjectivity within the impersonal, all-embracing medium of transparent narration ordinarily associated with later realist fiction" (166). Bender reads Harrison as an uncanny hybrid of character-participant and omniscient narrator, and suggests that Fielding did not have the formal or epistemic resources that would allow him to employ the full-fledged omniscient narrator—otherwise he would have done so. Bender's argument, while impressive, is overly teleological: it places Fielding at the origin-point of a by now familiar Foucauldian reading of realism. (Meanwhile, Bender does not address the salient fact that Fielding abandoned the genre of the novel after completing *Amelia*.) My contention is that Fielding's experimentation in *Amelia* with the forms of the "Case" and the "Situation" (see below) actually points *away* from the novel and towards the possibility of other, perhaps unrealized, literary forms.

<sup>91</sup> Amory, 152.

facilitating commercial exchanges, for example between employees and workers, buyers and sellers, landlords and renters.<sup>92</sup> In the first edition of *Amelia*, Fielding has Amelia and Booth rely on the Office to solve two typical urban problems: securing new lodgings, and finding an honest pawnbroker. Yet the office does not represent only a convenient service: it is also characterized as possessing an almost uncanny degree of information about the goods, services, and individuals of London. At one point Amelia recalls Booth's claim that "there was no kind of Information whatsoever, which was not to be had at the Universal Register-Office" (*A*, 464). Even more uncanny is the narrator's avowal, at one point, that he himself has relied on the Office to fill in details of his own narrative—particularly about Mrs. Mathews: "Many other materials of a private nature were communicated by one of the Clerks of the Universal Register Office, who, by having a general Acquaintance with Servants, is Master of all the Secrets of every Family in the Kingdom" (*A*, 245). Here, the Office is characterized as a sort of private intelligence agency, compiling exhaustive data on the activities of the residents of London.

John Bender has brilliantly explicated Fielding's interest in surveillance and his pivotal role in the development of new paradigms for criminal justice and social control; in particular, he has characterized *Amelia* as an index of Fielding's desire to adopt an omniscient perspective on his narrative from which to administer and coordinate the lives of his characters. In Bender's view, the "comparatively elusive presence of the narrator," along with the "characterization of omniscient authority in the benevolent Dr. Harrison,"

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<sup>92</sup> Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (New York: Guilford Press, c1998), 211-212.



prefigures “the transparency of the later realist novel”:<sup>93</sup> in other words, for Bender, Fielding is reaching towards the form of omniscient narration—the narrative form that complements the carceral society—but does not have the epistemic resources to make a definitive break with earlier narrative forms and traditions. Whereas Bender locates *Amelia* as a precursor to the main tradition of nineteenth-century realism, I would like to suggest that the presence in the novel of the Universal Register Office, along with the form of the case, suggests a different trajectory: Fielding’s impulse to reduce narrative to a field of data suggests that he is reaching not towards realism but towards a sort of quasi-statistical modeling of social life that is actually meant to *displace* fictional narrative as a medium for the representation and regulation of behavior.<sup>94</sup> The anomalous incursion of the Register Office into the space of fictional representation suggests a utopian vision wherein the machinery of social life has been so well oiled by the aggregation of “Intelligence” that conflict—the *sine qua non* of plot—would be reduced to manageable levels, if not eliminated altogether. If Fielding's novels can be read as an attempt to adapt the Aristotelian vision of narrative to modern circumstances, his development of the quasi-scientific forms of "case" and "model" suggest that Aristotle, and perhaps fictional narrative itself, must ultimately fall by the wayside.

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<sup>93</sup> Bender, 180-181.

<sup>94</sup> Fielding would of course abandon the novel after *Amelia*; in this final work, the *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, he throws in his allegiance with history, rather than fiction: “I must confess I should have honored and loved Homer more had he written a true history of his own times in humble prose, than those noble poems that have so justly collected the praise of all ages; for, though I read these with more admiration and astonishment, I still read Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon with more amusement and more satisfaction.” Henry Fielding, *The journal of a voyage to Lisbon, by the late Henry Fielding, Esq.* (London, [1755], viii.. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. Columbia University Libraries. 8 May 2017 <<http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=columbiau&tabID=T001&docId=CW115560808&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

#### 4. SITUATION

The related forms of the “Case” and the “Model” represent a move towards the kind of knowledge that can only be produced by relying on the perspective of objectivity: as we have seen, the “Cases” of Trent and Murphy eschew any mention of the actual experience or perspective of these two characters: the sole concern is with their observable circumstances and actions, and the causal relationship between them. Meanwhile, the intimations of quasi-statistical modeling of human behavior in both the “Cases” and the role played by the Universal Register Office suggest that knowledge about human behavior can only be achieved by treating people as *objects* whose movements can be observed, whose habits can be charted, whose tendencies can be mapped, predicted, and perhaps ultimately controlled. Yet if Fielding is attempting in *Amelia* to adumbrate forms of absolutely objective knowledge sufficient to the complexity of urban life, the novel also evinces a deep interest on the author’s part in the subjective experience of the city. The form that embodies such subjective experience in *Amelia* is the “Situation.”

We have already seen two very different formal logics at work in the novel: first, the Neoclassical logic of epic “Incident”; second, the quasi-scientific logic of the “Case” and the “Model.” We might think of these formal principles as representing for Fielding, respectively, the past and future of narrative form: as we have seen, the novel as a whole tends to discredit the Neoclassical insistence on a clear correlation between individual incidents and a larger unified fable and moral, suggesting that this type of correlation cannot hold under the conditions of modernity; meanwhile, the limited use of the “Case” and/or “Model”—which are adumbrated rather than fully elaborated—suggests that these

forms have yet to come into their own. What, then, constitutes the *present* of form, in Fielding's view? I would suggest that "Situation" plays this role in the novel: it best represents the form of experience in the contemporary moment.

One might argue that *Amelia* as a whole is constructed less around a chain of discrete incidents, or a collection of cases, than around a series of intractable *situations*: imprisonment (Booth's sojourn in Newgate, his confinement to the Verge of the Court to avoid arrest for debt, his stays in the Bailiff's sponging house), penury (caused by Booth's release from his regiment on half-pay), debt (to Harrison, to Trent), illness (Booth in the Gibraltar campaign, Amelia subsequently), alienation (Booth's estrangement from Colonel James). The term "Situation" itself features prominently within the narrative: it is used with far greater frequency than "Incident," for example.<sup>95</sup> As the term "Situation" is quite elastic, it is significant that the "Situations" that pervade the novel are remarkably similar in form, and share the following characteristics:

*Extended duration.* None of these situations is momentary or ephemeral: while they vary in duration, they all continue for at least a full day, and often for several weeks or even months.

*Open-endedness.* None of these situations points towards a necessary or obvious outcome; instead, it is radically unclear how the situation will be resolved. Will the serious illness result in recovery or death? Will the debt be claimed before it can be repaid? Will the friendship be repaired? Will the corrupt mechanisms of justice allow Booth to exit Newgate? Will Booth get a new commission and therefore a sufficient income?

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<sup>95</sup> See Appendix. It is significant that Fielding's usage of "Situation" in his three major novels (relative to total number of words) almost precisely doubles between *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* and then again between *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*.

*Limited agency.* All of these situations drastically limit the agency of the protagonists: they are not empowered to resolve the situation through either good judgment or sheer force of will. They may be presented with certain dubious possibilities for action, such as bribing an official or asking a powerful individual to intervene.

*Tension.* All of these situations place the protagonists into a state of tension, primarily by placing them in uncomfortable or even intolerable positions, and secondarily by subjecting them to expectation and uncertainty.

*Intersubjectivity.* These situations may be shared by two or more people (e.g., the Booth family as a whole, Booth and his fellow prisoners in Newgate, Booth and his fellow half-pay junior officers). While they prioritize the perspective of the individual(s) undergoing them, they are legible to others.

While it is worth analyzing the central mode of “situation” in *Amelia* in its own right, this form gains further significance in comparison with the form of the case, discussed above, for the situation appears almost as the antithesis of the case. As we have seen, the case de-emphasizes duration; the situation prioritizes it. The case is a closed form—its narrative is complete—whereas the situation is open-ended. The case implies the agency of the observer, who is not caught in the action observed; the situation limits the agency of the subject enmeshed in it. The case is without tension: it is clinical and dispassionate, and the narrative depicted has already been resolved in one way or another; the situation is wracked with tension. Finally, the case implies an objective observer position that may be shared by anyone, while the situation implies a condition shared amongst those subject to the situation.

If, as I have argued, the case represents for Fielding the future of narrative form, and perhaps even governance, what purpose does the situation serve in the novel? What is Fielding up to in emphasizing what seems to be a rather particular concept of the situation? In order to answer these questions, it is helpful to place Fielding's specific construction of the situation within the context of other contemporary uses of the term. In his *Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson offers three definitions of "Situation":

1. Local respect; position.

Prince Cesatini has a palace in a pleasant *situation* and set off with many beautiful walks. *Addison*.

2. Condition; state.

Though this is a *situation* of the greatest ease and tranquility in human life, yet this is by no means fit to be the subject of all men's petitions to God. *Rogers*.

3. Temporary state; circumstances. Used of persons in a dramattick scene.<sup>96</sup>

The meaning of "situation" in our own historical moment is usually limited to Johnson's third definition—i.e., a temporary state or set of circumstances; meanings one and two have almost entirely vanished from the English language. Yet in order to understand the role played by situation in *Amelia*, it is important to recover the capaciousness of the term in the eighteenth century: it could denote permanence, as in the "situation" of a building; extended duration and relative stability, as in one's social, economic, or professional "situation"; or indeed ephemerality, as in the momentary "situation" in which one finds oneself in any given social interaction or encounter.

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<sup>96</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers. ... By Samuel Johnson, ...* Vol. 2, 6th edition (London: 1785), 649. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. Columbia University Libraries. 8 May 2017  
<<http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=columbiau&tabID=T001&docId=CW111657460&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

As *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* will attest, Fielding was deeply preoccupied with the continuum of meanings comprised by the term “situation”: in fact, one might argue that Fielding’s interest in engineering dynamic interactions between the three principle definitions—physical location, semi-permanent condition, and momentary circumstance—is the generative force which gives both novels their form. For example, in the famous “Good Samaritan” episode in *Joseph Andrews*, wherein Joseph is encountered naked, a victim of robbery, by the passengers in a stagecoach, the satire on the passengers’ self-interest is animated by the concatenation of a particular location (the road, the stagecoach), the social positions of the coachman, the postilion, and the passengers (A “Lady,” an “old Gentleman,” and a “Lawyer”) and the unexpected momentary circumstance of finding a helpless naked man in a ditch.<sup>97</sup> Both *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* appear to be structured around the interplay between all three definitions of “situation”: both novels concern the departure of a socially misplaced hero (definition 2) who undergoes a series of adventures and encounters (definition 3), and ultimately returns to his original location (definition 1), but now in his proper social place. The various comic situations in which he finds himself (definition 3) serve to illuminate his true worth (definition 2), which in turn legitimizes his re-installation in his original home (definition 1).

If Fielding is concerned in his earlier novels with the dynamic interplay between the three meanings of “Situation,” I would propose that in *Amelia*, the peculiar form of the situation, described above, is a result of a collapse of the distinctions between the different definitions. As this claim is rather abstract, let us take as a concrete example the novel’s most famous situation: Booth’s incarceration in Newgate prison. Booth’s

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<sup>97</sup> *Joseph Andrews*, 88-92.

imprisonment is associated with the semi-permanent condition and social place of “prisoner” or “criminal”; yet as Booth expects to be released at some point, it also constitutes a temporary circumstance. Meanwhile, Booth’s actual conditions within Newgate are temporary and subject to change—for example, Mathews’ money and influence allows Booth to stay in her relatively well-appointed “apartments” in the prison. The novel’s other key situations fit the same profile: confinement, poverty, illness, indebtedness, estrangement from a friend: all occupy a place somewhere between the permanent and the temporary. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that they are simultaneously permanent *and* temporary: there is no way to be certain that they will continue indefinitely, but nor can one assume that they will be resolved.

To the extent that we can read *Amelia* as being structured by situations, Fielding's final novel constitutes a decisive break with Aristotelian narrative. First, the situation displaces the Aristotelian emphasis on action: a situation is not an action, but rather a condition; in *Amelia* it is in fact typified by *inaction*. Second, as it demotes action, the situation prioritizes temporality as the most important horizon of experience – a revolutionary reversal of Aristotle’s hierarchy, in which time is merely an epiphenomenon of action. Third, the rise of situation undermines Aristotle's insistence on causal sequences: a given situation in *Amelia* typically has a whole range of causes, including not only action but also the structure of institutions; meanwhile, because one situation can overlap with another, the situation model threatens even the basic idea of sequential narrative. Fourth, because situations are quasi-autonomous from the narrative, they challenge the fundamental unity of the narrative. Fifth, the situations of *Amelia* militate against any sense of a narrative *telos*; instead, they give form to a sense of deep

uncertainty, a feeling that the tensions of the current moment are pushing towards an as yet unknowable resolution.

Situations cause the protagonists to feel that they are implicated in a struggle, yet unable to discern its contours or act instrumentally to direct it in one way or another. This characteristic may serve to explain one of the most salient features of the novel—its tendency to produce a feeling of restlessness or even boredom. The novel’s characters are constantly waiting— for an illness to run its course, for the demands of a creditor, for the payment of a promised pension, for the aid of a powerful figure or a trusted friend. This waiting is made tangible by the novel’s unusually specific notation of time: as Martin Battestin observes, “the reader [of *Amelia*] encounters innumerable references to time—to the number of days or weeks, months or years, that have elapsed between events, as well as the precise days of the week and times of day when episodes occur.”<sup>98</sup> For example, we get many formulations such as the following:

“On the first of *April*, in the Year —— . . .” (58)

“Two Months, and more, I had continued in a State of Uncertainty. . .” (143)

“A Whole Week did our Lady and Gentleman live in this criminal Conversation. . .  
 . (176)

“The two next days *Booth* continued at home. . .” (210)

“In about six Weeks after *Booth*’s first coming into the Country, he went to *London*, and paid all his debts of Honour. . .” (515)

It is useful to compare these notations of time with those in *Tom Jones*, which is of course famous for its elaborate time-scheme. In the earlier novel, the subtitles of the individual books mark out the durations that they comprise: *Containing the Time of a*

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<sup>98</sup> See “Appendix I” in Battestin, 535.



*Year; Containing about three Days; Containing twelve Hours; Containing the Space of Five Days*. While quite specific, these notations have little bearing on the *meaning* of the action represented in their respective books: the books may be “contained” within time, but they are not *about* the experience of time in any meaningful way. In the time-scheme of *Tom Jones*, Fielding is most concerned with the temporality of *coincidence*: he must manage durations accurately so as to account for the positions of characters in multiple plot lines, and their convergence at key plot points such as the missed encounter at Upton. In *Amelia*, the durations experienced by the protagonists are not correlated to some simultaneous action, nor are they calibrated to fit with the mechanisms of plot: instead, these durations take on a form and significance of their own. The highly specific notations of time here become oppressive: they tangibly indicate time spent waiting for deliverance from any number of difficult or even unbearable situations.

The demarcation of time in *Amelia* simultaneously points in two seemingly opposing directions. Walter Benjamin famously identified a shift in the experience of time as one of the crucial dimensions of modernity; according to Benjamin, the “Messianic time” of Christianity, in which the events in a sequence are most crucially linked not to each other, but to the schema of Providence, is displaced by the “homogenous, empty time” of modernity; according to Benedict Anderson, this modern time is “marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, [sic] but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.”<sup>99</sup> As we have seen, temporality *Tom Jones* is precisely “marked. . .by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.” It is also true that in *Amelia*, time is carefully measured, and that there is a sense that time is precisely

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<sup>99</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt ; translated by Harry Zohn (New York : Schocken Books, c1968.), 265. Quoted and discussed in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London ; New York : Verso, 1991), 24.

“homogenous” and “empty”—witness the enumeration of days, weeks, and months without contour or event. It is this representation of “homogenous, empty time” that generates the novel’s sense of boredom. However, time in *Amelia* is also characterized by deep feelings of expectation and anticipation of a necessary change in situation; the gratuitous piling up of “homogenous, empty time” ultimately indicates—if only via negation—the conviction that time must in fact have a shape—must be linked to a larger narrative—and that that the protagonists and their world are moving towards something new. This sense that time must have a shape may not correspond to the older “Messianic” dynamic, but perhaps it points the way forward to a new, secular, Romantic-historicist Messianism. And in this context, it may be helpful to recall Johnson’s indication that the term “Situation” can be used “of persons in a dramattick scene.” If “Situation,” in the literary context, can mean a particularly dramatic moment in a play, in the context of Fielding’s interest in reform, it may indicate a particularly dramatic moment in history. And it is the longer view—of history, rather than the dramatic scene—that may ultimately lend *Amelia* its curious sense of boredom, stuckness, and anticipation: it is as if the characters in a drama had been forced to hold their places in an uncomfortable tableau, which is highly dramatic and yet, as it continues to be held, increasingly banal. There is a sense that it is the banality itself, as much as the dramatic tension, which intimates the shape of better things to come.

It seems likely that the striking form of the situation in *Amelia* owes a debt to the sentimental novels of Samuel Richardson. As several critics have noted, Fielding came to respect and admire Richardson’s work; it is in fact likely that *Clarissa* was a key inspiration for Fielding’s embrace of the sentimental female heroine in the figure of

Amelia.<sup>100</sup> The dire “Situations” of Richardson’s two famous heroines, Pamela and Clarissa, may well have provided the formal model for the “Distresses” experienced by the Booths and other characters in *Amelia*: Richardson’s heroines inhabit confining, open-ended, tense situations that continually limit their agency. Perhaps the most striking innovation of *Amelia* is Fielding’s transposition of a key form of sentimental experience—the situation—from the private to the public realm, from the individual life to the social whole. *Amelia* may in fact constitute a crucial, underexamined link between the forms of sentimental experience and the Romantic sense of historical situation.

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*Amelia* has frequently been characterized by critics as Fielding’s most ambitious work, and at the same time uneven, fundamentally flawed, a failure as a novel.<sup>101</sup> These diagnoses are certainly true from the teleological perspective of the later development of the novel: *Amelia* is not *Middlemarch*. But I would suggest that this teleological reading occludes the most important innovation of Fielding's novel: the destruction of Aristotelian total form and its replacement with partial form – in particular, the situation. *Amelia* may not be a forerunner to the grand tradition of the nineteenth-century novel; however, it helped pave the way for the dominance of partial forms in the novel of the

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<sup>100</sup> For the relationship between *Amelia* and Richardson, see Ronald Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 285-287.

<sup>101</sup> Critics have read *Amelia* as an incomplete transition from Fielding's unique comic/epic novel to various other prose genres, including the sentimental novel pioneered by Richardson (Sabor), the "plain history" of Fielding's *Voyage to Lisbon* (Rawson), and the "public history" of Edward Gibbon (Braudy). All of these arguments, though they highlight innovative aspects of *Amelia*, ultimately stress the weakness of the novel. See Sabor, 95; Rawson, 68; Braudy, 191.

second half of the eighteenth century – forms such as moments, days, scenes, periods, and crises. In the following chapters, I consider this flowering of partial form.

## CHAPTER TWO: MOMENT, DAY, SCENE: THE PERPETUAL PRESENT IN ANN RADCLIFFE'S *THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO*

Most major scholarly discussions of the Gothic novel assume a shared premise about the genre: it is structured around, and fundamentally "about," the relationship between past and present. Historicist critics have considered how the Gothic mediates between the past and present of English social, economic, and political life,<sup>102</sup> whereas those of a more psychoanalytic perspective have examined how the Gothic dramatizes the relationship between the past and present of the individual subject.<sup>103</sup> Meanwhile, some of the most influential studies of the Gothic have synthesized these two methods, approaching the Gothic from the perspective of the history of consciousness. Despite the wide range of methods and interests that characterize this body of scholarship, much Gothic criticism is unified by a very specific understanding of the relationship between past and present in the genre – one grounded in Freud's theories of repression and trauma. We can see a typical articulation of this Freudian orientation in the influential work of David Punter, who characterizes the Gothic as

a genre in which the attractions of the past and of the supernatural become similarly connected, and, further, in which the supernatural itself becomes a symbol of our past rising against us, whether it be the psychological past – the realm of those primitive desires repressed by the demands of closely organised society – or the historical past, the realm of a social order characterised by absolute power and servitude.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See for example Mary Poovey, "Ideology and 'The Mysteries of Udolpho,'" *Criticism* 21, no. 4 (1979): 307–30; Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall, "Gothic Criticism," in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000): 209-228.

<sup>103</sup> See for example William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Valdine Clemens, *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from The Castle of Otranto to Alien* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

<sup>104</sup> David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1996), 47. Terry Castle also offers a compelling historico-psychoanalytic account of

Here, Punter deploys language typical of Gothic studies more broadly: the past is characterized as a repressed trauma or primal emotion forcibly and uncannily "rising", ghost-like, to haunt the present.<sup>105</sup> On this view, the special achievement of the Gothic is the representation and symbolization of a cultural and psychological "return of the repressed."

This perspective would seem to accord with my argument that the eighteenth-century novel develops an unprecedented emphasis on partial form as against narrative unity, for in the Gothic the repressed past intrudes on the present precisely in the form of parts and fragments: we need only think here of the giant helmet and the disembodied hand in the prototypical Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). To recur to Freudian terminology, the precise problem with repressed trauma, along with its attendant emotions, is that it cannot be "integrated" into the subject's psyche: it is a part that resides in but has broken off from the whole of the self. However, the Freudian view suggests that the Gothic novel – like psychoanalysis itself – explores the potential for reintegrating the past into the present, the part into the whole, by naming and acknowledging the secret from long ago. (This is precisely what happens at the end of many Gothic novels.) Thus in handling the Gothic novel as a neurotic or hysterical analysand, the psychoanalytic trauma theory actually risks *understating* the fragmentary character of the genre.

In reading the Gothic through the narrative framework of psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the disconnection and reintegration of past and present, the trauma approach

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the Gothic. See *The Female Thermometer : Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1995.

<sup>105</sup> Baldick and Mighall offer a trenchant historicist critique of the tendency to project psychoanalytic categories and concepts onto the Gothic.

fails to examine precisely how time is articulated on the manifest, empirically observable level of the narrative itself, through chronological and calendrical forms such as hours, days, and weeks as well as less quantifiable temporal units such as “moments” and “scenes.”<sup>106</sup> (In the trauma approach, it is this “manifest” dimension of narrative that is, ironically, repressed.) Yet such analysis of empirically observable temporal units in the Gothic novel allows us to gain a fuller picture of the genre's contribution to the formal development of the novel. My own investigation in this vein suggests that the Gothic is preoccupied not only with the relationship between past and present (whether the nation’s or the subject’s or both), but also with the nature, form, and meaning of the present itself. Ultimately, I argue, this emphasis on the present results in an unprecedented fragmentation of narrative. If the psychoanalytic model of narrative holds out hope for the reintegration of psychic fragment into psychic whole, and narrative past into narrative present, the Gothic present, I will demonstrate, undermines the very premise of narrative unity and continuity.

This chapter offers an analysis of the Gothic present through a case study of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). I have selected Radcliffe’s most famous work as the basis for this analysis for three reasons: 1) *Udolpho* explicitly and relentlessly thematizes time; 2) Radcliffe offers a number of innovations in narrative

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<sup>106</sup> This omission may be the result of a larger tendency to ignore what Jesse Molesworth calls “Gothic craft”—the formal and technical practice of Gothic authors—except to point out its failures, inconsistencies, and bizarreries. Molesworth takes up the challenge of analyzing chronological time in the Gothic in a recent article examining the function of the hour in the genre. See Molesworth, “Gothic Time, Sacred Time”, *Modern Language Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2014): 29-55. While his work is not concerned with the Gothic, Stuart Sherman's study of “diurnal form” stands as a foundational example for empirical approaches to temporality in eighteenth century literature and culture. See Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). The recent work of Nicholas Dames on temporal units in the novel has been another important influence on my empirical approach, and especially my analysis of the day as a narrative form. See Dames, “*Middlemarch's* Days.” Paper presented at *Forms of Fiction: The Novel in English*, Chicago, November 7-9, 2013.

form that challenge standard models of narrative time; 3) Radcliffe is frequently read as a partisan of the (“middle class”, Enlightenment) present against the (feudal, superstitious) past—yet a careful analysis of narrative structure in her work reveals a deep ambivalence about the very concept of the present, and the progression of time as such. Focusing on three key narrative units prominently featured in *Udolpho* – the moment, the day, and the scene – I argue that Radcliffe’s novel performs and works through anxieties about the form of the present, and its continuity—or discontinuity—with the past and future.<sup>107</sup> I begin by considering the ubiquity of moments in *Udolpho*, suggesting that the moment, a crucial and highly valorized form in the sentimental novel, has become for Radcliffe a threatening marker of temporal, narrative, and psychological discontinuity. I then turn to Radcliffe's handling of chronological time in the form of the day, positing that the unusual continuity of days in *Udolpho* serves to counterbalance the discontinuity of moments, and establish a regime of continuous time—one which is, however, ultimately specious and self-defeating. Finally, I interrogate the nature and functioning of the “scene” as a narrative and temporal form in *Udolpho*, concluding that Radcliffe's peculiar formal conception of the scene constitutes a radical solution to the problem of temporal continuity: by spatializing the experience of time, the form of the scene works to eliminate time altogether as a structuring principle of narrative.

## 1. THE POST-SENTIMENTAL MOMENT AND THE DISCONTINUOUS PRESENT

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<sup>107</sup> My analysis complements that of Richard S. Albright, who is concerned with similar questions of temporal continuity in *Udolpho* but chiefly within the context of history (rather than narrative as such). See Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future: Time and Narrative in Gothic and Sensation Fiction* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press), 31-67.



“O! what an infinite difference between this moment and the next!”  
—Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

"Our moods do not believe in each other."  
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Circles”

*The Mysteries of Udolpho* is inundated with moments: the term "moment" occurs 415 times in the novel, roughly once for every page and a half, on average. This striking usage rate is not unique to Radcliffe, or indeed to the Gothic: beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, the term was deployed with increasing frequency by British novelists working in disparate subgenres.<sup>108</sup> However, even within the context of the general rise of moment, Radcliffe's emphasis on the term appears extreme: beyond the sheer quantitative ubiquity of "moment" in *Udolpho*, it is also given particular emphasis by frequent repetition in tight clusters, especially in dialogue. What is the significance of this maximalist deployment of "moment"? What can it tell us about the way time was constructed and experienced in the 1790s?

It is tempting to explain the ubiquity of “moments” around the turn of the century as a function of technological development—in particular, the increasingly precise segmentation of clock time, and the wider distribution of clocks and watches.<sup>109</sup> However, the moment also holds an important place in eighteenth-century British intellectual history, as a crucial temporal form in both empiricist and associationist philosophy and sentimental literature. As Sue Zemka observes, these two traditions

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<sup>108</sup> To take some familiar reference points from the 1790s, William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) has 142 uses of “moment,” Frances Burney's *Camilla* (1796) has 353, and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) has 225.

<sup>109</sup> The major leap forward in precision timekeeping was Christian Huygens' invention of the pendulum clock in the mid-seventeenth century; this advance was followed by further innovations through the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century also saw the spread of mass produced, relatively inexpensive clocks and watches. See Carlo M. Cipolla, *Clocks and Culture, 1300-1700* (New York: Norton, 1977), 58-60; 71.

tended to associate the moment with subjective mental activity, as opposed to objective measures of time.<sup>110</sup> In this section, I will argue that the explosion of "moment" in *Udolpho* develops out of these twin traditions, and correlates with Radcliffe's unprecedentedly exhaustive representation of the succession of individual mental events in her characters – above all the heroine, Emily St. Aubert. Like her forebears in the sentimental literary tradition, Radcliffe isolates and emphasizes moments of heightened feeling; however, Radcliffe expands this motif to the point where her novel appears to be composed exclusively of such moments. When, as we will see, every sensation and emotion can be isolated as a moment, the form loses its ability to organize narrative and instead becomes a figure of mere succession – one feeling after another. In this process, the form of the moment is divorced from the tripartite structure of time – past/present/future – and comes to embody a series of discrete, disconnected presents.

In the early chapters of *Udolpho*, the moment exhibits a typically sentimental form: this tendency is epitomized early on in the narrator's description of St. Aubert's idyllic moments with his family "in the fine evenings of summer" at his Gascony chateau: "He has often said, while tears of pleasure trembled in his eyes, that these were moments infinitely more delightful than any passed amid the brilliant and tumultuous scenes that are courted by the world. His heart was occupied; it had, what can be so rarely said, no wish for a happiness beyond what it experienced."<sup>111</sup> In this passage, we see a number of typical aspects of the sentimental moment at work. It appears to be simultaneously immanent ("experienced") and transcendent ("infinitely more delightful"). It is a

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<sup>110</sup> For an informative synopsis of the cultural and intellectual history of the moment in eighteenth and 19th century Britain, see Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19-35.

<sup>111</sup> Ann Ward Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4. Subsequent citations will appear parenthetically.

fundamentally embodied experience ("tears of pleasure"; "His heart was occupied"). It is circumscribed in time and yet of unspecified duration. It emerges as a crystalline, indelible structure from the gauzy welter of sensory experience ("brilliant and tumultuous scenes"). It is situated in a particular place and time, yet mediated and given extended life by memory and reflection ("He has often said. . ."). It is not a plot point that gives order to a sequential narrative but rather an epiphany that organizes a Humean self composed of a succession of feelings.

If the sentimental moment, typified in this early passage of the novel, offers a form for structuring narratives centered on feelings rather than events, this form is quickly imperiled by Radcliffe's unrelenting morbidity.<sup>112</sup> After Radcliffe's description of St. Aubert's transcendent moments with his family, we find the voice of St. Aubert himself throwing into question the transcendent and life-affirming character of the moment: "Perhaps I shall some time look back to these moments, as to the summit of my happiness, with hopeless regret. But let me not misuse them by useless anticipation; let me hope I shall not live to mourn the loss of those who are dearer to me than life." (8) Here, the moment loses its capacity to bring order to temporal and emotional flux: it ceases to become a singular, organizing experience and is thrown back into the sequence of temporality, epitomized by the inevitability of death. In this reflection on his most cherished moments, St. Aubert strips them of their transcendent character: their power

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<sup>112</sup> Terry Castle, drawing on the work of Philippe Ariès, argues that *Udolpho* participates in a key transition in the history of Western attitudes towards death—away from acceptance of the mortality of the corporeal subject and towards an increasingly hallucinatory belief in the ghostly persistence of the dead. See Castle, "The Spectralization of the Other in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*," in *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 129-133.

becomes conditional on the sequence of events and experiences that will follow them. They no longer transcend but are forced to inhabit time.

Thus even as Radcliffe attempts to conform to the logic of the sentimental moment in the opening of *Udolpho*, we can see substantial doubt about the transcendent nature of the moment, and its ability either to organize time or to compensate for loss. Indeed, after the two most traumatic losses suffered by Emily – the death of her father, and her separation from Valancourt – the power of the sentimental moment is not only called into question but turned inside out: it ceases to serve as a transcendent, organizing, and compensatory mechanism and becomes a marker of the threatening contingency, discontinuity, and potential incoherence of experience. We can see this reversal at work in Valancourt's parting words to Emily at the end of Volume 1, before she is taken away to Venice:

O Emily! this countenance, on which I now gaze – will, in a moment, be gone from my eyes, and not all the efforts of fancy will be able to recall it with exactness. O! what an infinite difference between this moment and the next! *Now*, I am in your presence, can behold you! *then*, all will be a dreary blank – and I shall be a wanderer, exiled from my only home!" (160)

In this plangent valediction, Valancourt illustrates the degraded character of the moment in *Udolpho*. It no longer marks a transcendent emotional experience that gives meaning and structure to the succession of feelings that constitutes human consciousness; instead, it is transformed into a naked singularity – an insular present, fundamentally disconnected from both the past and the future. An "infinite difference" has imposed itself between "Now" and "Then", leaving only an archipelago of discontinuous presents. Meanwhile, the faculties of memory and reflection, so fundamental to the power of the

sentimental moment to integrate disparate mental and moral experiences,<sup>113</sup> appear to have been excised from the catalog of human capacities. Here, Valancourt envisions how a failure of the continuity between moments, normally brokered by memory, entails a failure of the continuity of the world and its objects (“this countenance, on which I now gaze – will, in a moment, be gone from my eyes, and not all the efforts of fancy will be able to recall it with exactness”) as well as the self (“*Now*, I am in your presence, can behold you! *then*, all will be a dreary blank – and I shall be a wanderer, exiled from my only home!”).

Valancourt’s rather bleak characterization of narrative time—as a series of discrete, disconnected, mutually alienated presents—is reflected in Radcliffe’s use of the term “moment” throughout the novel. While the term periodically designates sentimental experiences like St. Aubert’s, described above, it is much more frequently used to designate the rapid succession of discrete mental states and activities. A substantial number of Radcliffe’s moments demarcate individual perceptions:

“she observed the planet trembling between the fringed tops of the woods, and, in the next moment, sink behind them.” (84)

“Having reached these steps, she paused a moment to look around. . .” (151)

“She then heard the clink of arms, and, in the next moment, the watch-word. . .” (309)

“It was in one of these moments of obscurity, that she observed a small and lambent flame, moving at some distance on the terrace.” (372)

“She heard a rustling sound, and in a low voice. . . in the next moment, she perceived it to be the voice of Verezzi. . .” (432)

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<sup>113</sup> As James Chandler notes, sentimental literature was above all concerned with “feeling mediated by reflection”; it was therefore intimately linked with the flow of duration and the processes of memory. See Chandler, “The Languages of Sentiment,” *Textual Practice* 22:1 (2008): 21. Quoted in Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 28.

However, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the moment marks off the duration of a transient emotional state:

"Having passed through the green-house, her courage for a moment forsook her. . ." (95)

"she felt her poor heart warmed for a moment by a ray of sympathy." (98)

"her resolution yielded for a moment to excess of grief." (100)

"For some moments their emotion would not suffer either to speak." (152)

"She gazed at him for a moment in speechless affright. . ." (261)

"her spirits were relieved, for a moment, from an almost intolerable weight of apprehension." (354)

What is striking about Radcliffe's use of the term "moment", whether it is used to designate perceptions or emotions, is that it almost always corresponds to and contains a single mental event. This usage echoes John Locke's discussion of duration in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he defines the moment as the minimal unit of duration, which corresponds to "the time of one idea in our minds, in the train of their ordinary succession there."<sup>114</sup> In Locke's epistemology the "succession" of ideas in the mind is of course governed by the logic of association; but what logic controls the sequence of emotions experienced by Radcliffe's characters?

The didactic dimension of the narrative does offer a clear logic through which to view the sequence of mental events experienced by Emily — namely the struggle of Enlightenment values of reason and stoicism against the transports of excessive sensibility and superstition. At times, the narrator characterizes the sequence of Emily's emotions precisely as such a struggle:

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<sup>114</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 193.

For a moment she paused in terrified perplexity, till a sense of her father's condition again overcoming every consideration for herself, she proceeded. (65)

She sat for a moment motionless, and then, her dissipated reason returning, 'What should I fear?' said she. (95)

The single lamp, that burned in her spacious chamber, was expiring; for a moment, she shrunk from the darkness beyond; and then, ashamed of the weakness, which, however, she could not wholly conquer, went forward to the bed, where her mind did not soon know the soothings of sleep. (331)

In these passages, the oscillations of Emily's mental state are implicitly characterized as swings of the pendulum between stoical self-assurance and sensibility-induced paralysis; as such, it appears that the succession of mental states follows a certain logic. However, this is an entirely discursive logic, rather than a narrative or temporal logic: there does not appear to be any causal pattern to the succession and duration of mental states that constitute Emily's experience. Indeed, there are many instances in which the successive "moments" of Emily's subjective experience appear to arise and succeed one another without any logic at all, discursive or otherwise:

Having passed through the green-house, her courage for a moment forsook her, when she opened the door of the library. . . (95)

Emily lost, for a moment, her sorrows, in the immensity of nature. (225)

At length, she reached her chamber, and, having secured the door of the corridor, felt herself, for a moment, in safety. (318)

Emily was so overwhelmed with terror, that, for a moment, she was unable to determine what conduct to pursue. (345)

Emily, bending over the body, gazed, for a moment, with an eager, frenzied eye; but, in the next, the lamp dropped from her hand, and she fell senseless at the foot of the couch. (348)

A thousand opposite emotions agitated Emily, successively, as she listened to old Carlo; those of joy, grief, distrust and apprehension, appeared, and vanished from her mind, with the quickness of lightning. (398)

This last passage typifies the succession of moments in *Udolpho*: each individual mental state occupies its own discrete, discontinuous present; it "appears" and then "vanishes," without reference to past or future states. Each feeling corresponds to its own "moment", and is displaced by another feeling cordoned off in a fresh "moment." Mental states do not appear to occur in the course of a continuous flow of time, but instead occupy individual, disconnected particles of time.

If Radcliffe's use of the term "moment" in reference to emotions establishes a series of discrete, disconnected presents, this serial logic is also visible on the level of narrative action, in which the term "moment" is frequently used to introduce a sudden event or non sequitur that disrupts the flow of narrative:

[A]t this moment an hasty footstep approached from behind the plane-tree, and, turning her eyes, Emily saw Madame Cheron. (109)

In the next moment, a door opened, and a stranger appeared, who stopped on perceiving Emily, and then began to apologize for his intrusion. (100)

[I]n the next moment, the door was opened, and a person, whom she conceived to be Montoni, appeared, who instantly started back, and closed it. . . (309)

[I]n the next moment, she heard the heavy gates of the portal open, and then the clattering of horses' hoofs in the court, with the confusion of many voices. (327)

In the next moment, she found herself clasped in the arms of some person, and heard a deep voice murmur in her ear. (384)

At this moment a cluster of lights issued from the great gates, and she immediately heard the shrill voice of Annette above those of several other persons, who advanced. (349)

Although these passages concern external events, rather than mental events, they are structurally analogous in their segmentation of experience into discrete, discontinuous particles. There is no apparent causal logic driving the emergence of these events, other than what we might call an atmosphere of suddenness. (The sense of such an atmosphere



is intensified by the frequent use in the novel of the terms “sudden”, “instant”, and their variants.) Meanwhile, the phrase "in the next moment" epitomizes the structure of action in the novel more generally. It illustrates the weak coordination of events, which tend to be linked by mere succession or proximity rather than by causality or plot trajectory; moreover, it indicates that individual events occupy their own discrete tranches of time—events do not develop through time, as processes, but rather are cordoned off within disparate segments of time.

The form of the discontinuous present embodied in the moment is operative in *Udolpho* not only on the micro level of successive actions, events, and emotions, but also on the macro level of its larger narrative articulations. Towards the end of the novel, Emily conceives of the narrative she has lived through in precisely such terms of discontinuity:

While she walked mournfully on, gazing on the long volumes of the vapour, that poured upon the sky, and watching the swallows, tossed along the wind, now disappearing among tempestuous clouds, and then emerging, for a moment, in circles upon the calmer air, the afflictions and vicissitudes of her late life seemed portrayed in these fleeting images; – thus had she been tossed upon the stormy sea of misfortune for the last year, with but short intervals of peace, if peace that could be called, which was only the delay of evils. (619)

In the imagery of the tempest-driven swallows, the structure of the narrative is characterized precisely as a loose string of momentary presents that are contingent ("tossed along the wind"), ephemeral ("fleeting images"), and related to one another not by a clear mechanism of logic or causality but rather by their mere succession in a sequence (“now. . . then”). Meanwhile, Emily's narrative is not figured as having an arc, a shape, or a trajectory, in which its individual elements cohere into a unified pattern; although there is some suggestion of periodicity ("short intervals"), the narrative is at best

raggedly periodic, like an arrhythmic pulse. A narrative made up of moments is a narrative of the feeling body – not a structured account of events in their succession.

As Sue Zemka observes, from its earliest usage in English the term "moment" has communicated the sense of an important juncture in time, classically designated as *kairos*.<sup>115</sup> The near ubiquity of moments in *Udolpho*, coupled with their quality of seriality, suggests a dwindling or degeneration of the power of the moment: when every instant is momentous, none is. Paradoxically, by inflating the importance of the moment, Radcliffe ultimately evacuates it of its significance.

## 2. ALMOST NO MEMORY

“A certain woman had a very sharp consciousness but almost no memory.”  
—Lydia Davis, "Almost No Memory"

I have argued that the post-sentimental moment, as envisioned and deployed by Radcliffe, disturbs and even threatens to destroy the continuity of narrative, time, and personal identity. Yet in order to grasp fully the radical character of Radcliffe’s discontinuous moments, it is crucial to address the mental faculty that might have been brought to bear to unify them in a sentimental novel: namely, memory. As James Chandler notes, sentimental literature was above all concerned with “feeling mediated by reflection”;<sup>116</sup> it was therefore intimately linked with the flow of duration and the processes of memory. Yet in *Udolpho* we see a curious failure of memory that serves to underline the dispersal of sequential experience into discrete, disconnected particles.

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<sup>115</sup> Zemka, *Time and the Moment*, 17-18.

<sup>116</sup> James Chandler, “The Languages of Sentiment,” *Textual Practice* 22:1, 21. Quoted in Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2011, 28.

This failure is not a matter of excluding memory as an explicit concern: in fact, the concept of memory, the act of remembering, and terms explicitly linked with memory (e.g., recall, recollect, remember) pervade the novel. Yet the functioning of memory in the novel is consistently bizarre and, one might say, disordered. Ultimately, the various modes of memory enacted in *Udolpho* tend to deny or militate against the sine qua non of memory – the passage of time itself. I will discuss three such modes; (1) memory as the spatialization of time; (2) memory as an adjunct to perception and cognition of the present; and (3) memory as the work of reanimation. I identify each of these modes loosely with the novel's three main phases: Emily's early travels, her imprisonment at the castle, and her repatriation in southern France. (While each mode can be found throughout the novel, they seem to occur with the most frequency in their respective phases.) I conclude my discussion of memory by considering how the narrator models—or fails to model—the work of memory.

*Udolpho* begins with a description of and meditation on place. After describing the geographic situation of St. Aubert's chateau, the narrator passes on to his reflections on a favorite childhood place at the moment of his return to it:

To this spot had been attached from his infancy. He had often made excursions to it when a boy, and impressions of delight given to his mind by the homely kindness of the grey-headed peasant, to whom it was intrusted, and whose fruit and cream never failed, had not been obliterated by succeeding circumstances. The green pastures along which he had so often bounded in the exultation of health, and youthful freedom – the woods, under whose refreshing shade he had first indulged that pensive melancholy, which afterwards made a strong feature of his character – the wild walks of the mountains, the river, on whose waves he had floated, and the distant plains, which seemed boundless as his early hopes – were never after remembered by St. Aubert but with enthusiasm and regret. At length he disengaged himself from the world, and retired hither, to realize the wishes of many years. (2)

In this passage, we can see the continuity of place defeating the discontinuity of time. The original "impressions of delight" enjoyed during visits to the chateau and in its environs do not need to be remembered, as they have persisted through time – they "had not been obliterated by succeeding circumstances." Meanwhile, the natural features of the area – the woods, the mountains, the plains, the river – have persisted not only in their massive solidity, but also their intimate relationship with St. Aubert's character. Although St. Aubert has "remembered" them over the years, it is their continuing presence that is emphasized by the passive sentence structure deployed here: the objects of St. Aubert's memory are transformed into subjects—yet subjects whose action is merely to be and endure in the face of passing time. Finally, and most importantly, the passage points out that a place, unlike a period of time, can be not only revisited but regained: returning to the beloved place allows one "to realize the wishes of many years". (4)

The idyll of St. Aubert's recovery of the past in the form of place is very quickly interrupted by the rather sudden death of his wife— a rather unwelcome intrusion of time on idyllic space. Yet St. Aubert swiftly and ably manages this loss precisely by applying the logic of space, rather than time, to recover his wife: he "felt more reluctant than ever to quit the spot which his past happiness had consecrated. The presence of his wife had sanctified every surrounding scene, and, each day, as it gradually softened the acuteness of his suffering, assisted the tender enchantment that bound him to home." (22) Through St. Aubert's identification of her with place, Mme. Aubert is removed from the sequential passage of time and loss and diffused into something like a general presence or condition. She is dissolved into both into the literal geographic location of St. Aubert's domain and the more diffuse space of "home." The spatialization of time allows her "presence" to

remain perpetually present; as long as St. Aubert remains at the chateau, she need not be relegated to the realm of memory at all.

St. Aubert's strategy of transposing time into place, thereby making memory unnecessary, is ultimately cut short by his own death—the pathos of which is heightened by his distance from home at the time. When Emily returns to the chateau, she picks up where her father left off in transposing the spirits of her departed family from the realm of past time onto the presence of place:

This lovely scene!—how often shall I remember and regret it, when I am far away. Alas! what events may occur before I see it again! O, peaceful, happy shades!—scenes of my infant delights, of parental tenderness now lost for ever!—why must I leave ye!—In your retreats I should still find safety and repose. Sweet hours of my childhood—I am now to leave even your last memorials! No objects, that would revive your impressions, will remain for me! (114)

Although Emily acknowledges that her parents are gone, and their tenderness is "now lost forever," she asserts that the place itself can become a kind of surrogate parent, offering "safety and repose." In Emily's view, the "objects" of home have the capacity to "revive . . . impressions"—to reanimate the past. It is not her parents that she anticipates remembering, but rather the spatialized "scene" into which they have been enfolded; as with St. Aubert, there is a sense that a return to the "scene" of the past would be a good enough consolation for the passage of time and the loss it entails.

Radcliffe's refiguring of the past as a place that can be revisited and thereby regained evokes the cultural strategy of nostalgia, which is manifested in a curious transitional form in *Udolpho*. In the eighteenth century the term "nostalgia" denoted a medical disease characterized by the compulsion to literally return to one's home, and driven by increasing geographic mobility; yet in the course of the nineteenth century, as Nicholas Dames has shown, nostalgia was transformed into a cultural and aesthetic

procedure for forgetting—“a retrospect that remembers only what is pleasant, and only what the self can employ in the present.”<sup>117</sup> The spatialized model of memory deployed in *Udolpho* appears to sit at a curious, rather uncanny midpoint in this historical trajectory: there is a compulsive desire to return to the physical “scene” of the past, but there is also an erasure of the specificity and narrativity of the past, which is dispersed into a nebulous yet emotionally nourishing atmosphere.

As we have seen, in the first volume of *Udolpho*, Radcliffe’s characters tend to deal with the inevitable passage of time by translating time into space—thereby assimilating the past into the present and obviating the need for memory. By contrast, in the novel’s most famous section, recounting Emily’s imprisonment in the castle, Emily tends to elude the problem of time by shrinking the scope of memory to the point where the past begins to converge with the present. During this phase of the novel, Emily’s points of reference in the past tend to be extremely recent; very rarely does she reflect back either on her earlier experience (i.e., before the imprisonment) or on the overall narrative of her imprisonment.<sup>118</sup> Instead, she tends to remember only the most recent past. The general tendency here is for short-term memory to displace long-term memory.

Frequently, Emily’s short-term memory is on the scale of days. It is typical for Emily to remember mysterious or worrying events of the previous day – for example, her first encounter with the veiled picture, the frightening scene in which Montoni attempts to convince his wife to sign away her estates, the first appearance of the mysterious music,

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<sup>117</sup> Kevis Goodman, “‘Uncertain Disease’: Nostalgia, Pathologies of Motion, Practices of Reading,” *Studies in Romanticism* 49:2, 199-200; 206-207. Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>118</sup> The only exception to this tendency is the continuing habit of remembering the past as a fixed place or general condition rather than a sequence of actions or events—the procedure described above.

the frightening journey to the cottage in Tuscany with the assassins Ugo and Bertrand. Yet these instances tend not to be remembered a second time, from a further temporal distance, unless they actually recur (as in the case of the music).

If the day is already a rather small scale for the functioning of recollection, Emily's memory is often directed to much shorter intervals of time. There are a number of instances during Emily's imprisonment where she loses or nearly loses consciousness and struggles to recollect even the events immediately preceding her fainting spell:

"when she recovered her recollection, the remembrance of what she had seen had nearly deprived her of it a second time." (249)

"When she recovered, she was alone, and recollected only, that Madame Montoni had been there, together with some unconnected particulars of the preceding transaction. . . . When her recollection was more complete, she raised herself. . ." (317)

"When her recollection returned, she spoke again at the door, and again attempted to open it. . ." (324)

"On waking in the morning, she looked with surprise on Annette, who sat sleeping in a chair beside the bed, and then endeavoured to recollect herself; but the circumstances of the preceding night were swept from her memory, which seemed to retain no trace of what had passed. . ." (352)

In these instances, the work of memory is focused on recovering even the most basic sense of narrative and cognitive continuity. These lapses in consciousness, along with the powerful emotions that Emily endures throughout the novel, suggest that in the context of extreme sensibility, there is so much danger of discontinuity that memory must be trained on the immediate succession of events, rather than any longer narrative arc.

If memory becomes increasingly restricted in scope during Emily's imprisonment, it is also curiously transformed in its fundamental functioning. At a number of points in this phase of the novel, memory appears to become confused with other mental faculties:

"terror supplied the place of conviction, and a kind of instinctive remembrance of her remote situation from the family heightened it to a degree, that almost overcame her senses." (299)

"he promised to obey her immediately, and was departing, when she remembered to ask who were the persons just arrived." (328)

"A sudden hope, that something good was approaching, seized her mind, till she remembered the troops she had observed from the casement. . ." (395)

In these passages, the faculty of memory appears to converge with that of attention. It is as if the distinction between that which has passed in time and that which is passing through the mind has been effaced.

The predominance of short-term memory, as well as the convergence or confusion of memory with other mental faculties such as attention or consciousness itself, suggests a remarkable attenuation of the faculty of memory. During the period of Emily's imprisonment, the scope of memory is not only compressed into the realm of the most recent past—it is even pulled into the realm of the present. This striking transformation has the effect of denying time as a sequence comprising past, present, and future: instead we begin to see something like a perpetual present—a series of brief durations without a cumulative history.

Thus far we have seen the deformed functioning of memory in *Udolpho* from the perspective of the novel's characters, through the processes of spatialization and attenuation; yet we will also find a profound failure of memory on the part of the narrator. It is striking to note that, in a novel as long as *Udolpho*, there are there are few "narrative reminders" linking a given juncture in the story with the related actions, events, or situations that preceded or precipitated it. Such "narrative reminders" are typical of the



multi-plot Victorian novel, where they are necessary in order to coordinate and disentangle complex, overlapping plotlines; yet because *Udolpho* focuses almost exclusively on the ongoing experience of Emily, such reminders are not strictly necessary for the purposes of clarifying the narrative and situating the reader. However, it is not atypical for eighteenth-century novels to issue such narrative reminders – for example, Fielding's "intrusive narrator" does so frequently. I would argue that the absence of narrative reminders in *Udolpho* does not constitute a merely neutral technical decision, but instead reflects the tendency to represent time as a continuous present, rather than a process including past, present, and future.

This overall tendency perhaps becomes most apparent in the rare exceptions in which the narrator does in fact refer to an earlier period in the diegesis. At a number of points in the novel, the narrator shifts focalization away from Emily to recount events experienced by other characters during the novel's main narration of Emily's story. For example, Volume 2 Chapter 8 begins, "We now return to Valancourt, who, it may be remembered, remained at Tholouse, sometime after the departure of Emily, restless and miserable" (291). Read out of context, this opening seems to have the character of a typical narrative reminder – picking up a thread of the narrative that has been temporarily dropped. Yet the narrative of Valancourt's activities, recounted in the remainder of the chapter, does not continue an earlier plot line concerned specifically with Valancourt – nor does it constitute the beginning of such a plot line. Instead, it is an exposition of past events that are related to but not substantially integrated into the main narration of the novel. It constitutes what we might call an "interpolated past": a narrated sequence of earlier time that cannot be a reminder because it has never been a part of the narration.

This unusual technique is repeated on several occasions to dispose of characters who have become extraneous to the narrative (Count Morano, Montoni after Emily's escape from Udolpho). It is also deployed at the end of Volume 3 to introduce the characters and setting of much of Volume 4—namely, Count Villefort, his family, and their Languedoc estate. In the space of a chapter and a half, the narrator expeditiously builds up a backstory for the Villefort family, which has played no role so far in the novel. As the narrator is outlining the circumstances of the Villeforts, Emily's storyline quite literally crashes back into the narration: she and her traveling companions are coincidentally shipwrecked by a storm within direct view of the Villefort estate. This collision of narrative perspectives surely constitutes the most striking and unusual temporal effect in the novel: here, the interpolated past—thin, arbitrary, factitious—is dragged violently and quite suddenly into the present, which flies in amid lightning and thunder to reclaim its unquestioned primacy in the novel. Taken together, *Udolpho's* interpolated pasts do not establish a true sense of a past within the narrative, but instead give only enough of the past to maintain the continuity of the present.

There is one other salient exception to the *Udolpho* narrator's general failure to remind: there are periodic reminders throughout the novel of the narrative's two key enigmas: the mysterious woman portrayed in the miniature found with St. Aubert's effects, and the horrifying image that Emily finds behind the black veil at Udolpho. Both of these enigmas are certainly indices of the past: they ultimately refer back to the tragic narrative of Signora Laurentini. However, this past is extraneous to the span of lived time represented by the novel, and it does not contribute to a sense of the past in the novel. If anything, it corresponds to a model of what we might call "enigma time", which would

be typical of the detective novel: a mode of time in which the crucial events have already transpired, and must be unraveled through the atemporal work of ratiocination and detection.

### 3. DAY AFTER DAY: CONTINUOUS TIME

The order is not rationalistic and underlying but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another.  
– Donald Judd, “Specific Objects”

I have argued that the fragmentary quality of the post-sentimental moment and the attenuation and transformation of memory in *Udolpho* both serve to undermine the continuity of time in the novel, instead configuring time as a series of discrete, discontinuous presents. Yet these two elements of the novel stand in apparent tension with a third: Radcliffe's exhaustive, even obsessive accounting for the chronological passage of time. While there are a number of stretches of indeterminate time in the novel, passages assigned no specific duration, it is Radcliffe's typical practice to represent chronological time as the passage of specific temporal units—above all, days—seamlessly joined together. One indicator of Radcliffe's tendency to represent time as a continuous flow is the establishment of relatively specific durations both for summarized action and for ellipses – for example, "several days," "some weeks," "A fortnight," "the winter months," "Two following days." But such specification is rarely necessary, as Radcliffe uses ellipsis and summary quite sparingly. The vast majority of *Udolpho* is taken up with the narration of specific, real-time action (what Gerard Génette termed

scene);<sup>119</sup> and this action is generally situated within clearly designated days, which are more often than not strung together in multi-day sequences. These multi-day sequences constitute the bulk of the narrative, accounting for roughly 546 of the novel's 672 pages, or 81.25% of the narrative. Thus we might say that the vast majority of the novel is narrated in “continuous time.”

The establishment of a regime of "continuous time" would certainly appear to militate against the forms of temporal discontinuity described above; Richard S. Albright argues that Radcliffe deploys it precisely as a way of evoking the more loosely segmented time experienced by the pre-modern subject.<sup>120</sup> However, in order to evaluate the functioning of continuous time in *Udolpho*, and how it relates to the temporal order of the novel as a whole, it is necessary to analyze in some depth the form that makes possible an impression of continuous time—namely, the day.

As Paul Ricoeur reminds us, “time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.”<sup>121</sup> As such, in order to understand the significance of days in *Udolpho*, it is critical to consider precisely how they articulate with the narration of actions and events in the novel. A brief example will illustrate something of this relationship. After St. Aubert's death in the mountains, Emily returns to the family chateau, where she is beset with memories of her father evoked by the places and objects associated with him; it is only after some time that she remembers his deathbed injunction to destroy a number of his personal effects: “awakening from the lethargy, in which sorrow had held her, she was shocked to think she had not yet obeyed

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<sup>119</sup> Gerard Génette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 94.

<sup>120</sup> Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future*, 35.

<sup>121</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.

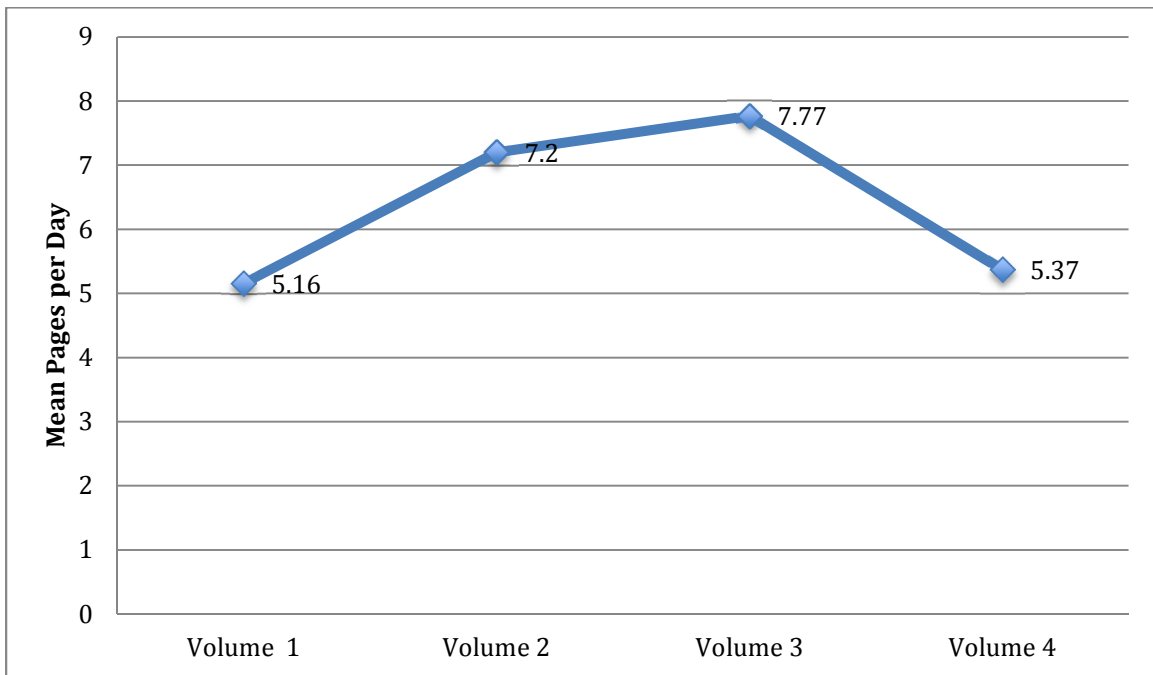
him, and determined, that another day should not reproach her with the neglect” (102). Here, the passage of days appears as a kind of slipstream separate from and yet parallel to the course of actions and events (i.e., narrative): while it appears possible to correlate one’s actions with time—particularly the form of the day—such a gesture appears as an act of will, rather than a natural tendency. Yet even after a particular day – the following day – becomes associated with a particular concern and a particular project, time and action quickly fall out of phase with one another. The following day does indeed begin with Emily destroying her father's effects, but this action neither structures nor is structured by the form of the day; instead, the day continues with an accumulation of unrelated events: the unexpected arrival of Valancourt, Madame Cheron’s “petty tyranny” over Emily, Emily’s moonlight walk in the garden and fear of encountering Valancourt again (113). This disjunction between coherent or unified action and the form of the day is typical of the novel as a whole, where the day tends to function as a highly plastic container for events rather than a social, epistemological, or psychological form through which events take shape or are assigned meaning. In other words, it is very unlike the “diurnal form” that Stuart Sherman identifies as a crucial structuring principle in eighteenth-century narrative and self-fashioning.<sup>122</sup>

The unusual plasticity of the day in *Udolpho* can be observed not only through qualitative analysis of individual passages, but also by way of quantitative analysis of the relationship between days and events in the novel. By finding the ratio between the number of days represented in a volume of the novel and the number of pages used to narrate those days, we can establish a rough measure of the “density” of days in *Udolpho* – the quantity of action, event, and experience that tends to be comprised within a single

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<sup>122</sup> Sherman, *Telling Time*, x-xi.

day (See Figure 1). Visualizing this ratio demonstrates a significant variability in the density of days across the four volumes of the novel: density increases substantially through the course of the first three volumes before subsiding back near its initial level in volume 4. In other words, days become increasingly dense with narrated action as the novel proceeds, before thinning out at the close of the novel. (This



*Figure 1. Mean Pages per Day, by Volume*

increased density corresponds roughly to the period of Emily's imprisonment at Udolpho.) The overall increase in density through the course of the novel suggests that the day can be stretched at will to accommodate more and more events; this increasing capacity suggests that the day itself does not serve as a meaningful temporal division. Meanwhile, the significant variation of density compared across volumes suggests that

the form of the day may follow a logic that is autonomous from the logic of the narrative itself.

Beyond its plasticity, another indication of the day's diminished ethical and narratological significance in *Udolpho*, as well as its quasi-autonomy from the course of events is, paradoxically, Radcliffe's tendency to narrate days in their entirety. This tendency is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that days typically end with Emily either retiring to her chamber or actually going to sleep, and typically begin on the following day with Emily awakening at dawn or in the morning. This pattern indicates that the day is generally not structured by the scope or duration of actions, events, and projects but instead comes close to being coextensive with Emily's consciousness—regardless of the events that are being filtered through that consciousness. This is a degree zero conception of the day: the day as the time when one is not asleep.

A related feature of the narrative is the tendency to “fill in” parts of days that do not contain any specific action, through the following typical formulas, which frequently rely on the verb “to pass”:

Thus, without any particular occurrence, passed the day in languor and dejection. (92)

This day passed without any material occurrence. . . (122)

[T]he day was passed in an intensity of anguish, such as she had, perhaps, never known before. (150)

This day passed with Emily in continued grief and anxiety for her aunt. . . (329)

During the remainder of the day, Emily's mind was agitated with doubts and fears and contrary determinations. . . (343)

Thus passed the time, till twelve o'clock. . . (355)

Thus passed the melancholy day, as she had before passed many in this same chamber. (437)

This day was devoted entirely to business. . . (583)

These formulations appear to insist that no part of the day can go unaccounted for, even if there is nothing in the way of action to narrate: the day is accorded a coherence and integrity that is autonomous from the course of events.

If the form of the day in *Udolpho* is out of phase with or even autonomous from the narration of events, neither is it substantially integrated into any larger temporal structure. Albright observes that the day is by far the most prominent indicator of chronological time in *Udolpho*, noting “the novel’s nearly total absence of references to days of the week, months, or seasons.”<sup>123</sup> Left to its own devices, as it were, without the comparative scale of longer temporal units, the day degenerates into something like an arbitrary division of time; meanwhile, the passage of days in sequence takes on the character of a senseless, potentially infinite series. This tendency did not go unremarked by early commentators on the novel, whose weariness with Radcliffe's insistence on the sequential continuity of days was palpable: the anonymous reviewer for *The British Critic*, seizing on the sheer volume of dawns and dusks represented in the novel, drily noted, “We have somewhat too much of the evening and morning”;<sup>124</sup> the more exasperated Jon Colin Dunlop lamented not only the tiresome quantity but also the belabored quality of these twilit interludes: “[T]he sun is never allowed to rise nor set in

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<sup>123</sup> Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future*, 35.

<sup>124</sup> "The Mysteries of Udolpho, a Romance; Interspersed with some Pieces of Poetry," *The British Critic*, 1793-1826 4, no. 8 (1794): 120.  
<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/4804466?accountid=10226>.



peace."<sup>125</sup> These critics appear to suggest that Radcliffe's days, and the countless crepuscular transitions between them, are chiefly sources of gratuitous aesthetic effect rather than meaningful narrative forms. While Radcliffe's sunrises and sunsets are clearly meant to have an aesthetic effect, I would suggest her handling of the boundaries of days is in no sense gratuitous: it serves as a constant reminder of the passage of time. Yet it simultaneously betrays a fundamental failure to integrate time with narrative in the manner delineated by Ricoeur – a failure that renders time an inhuman abstraction. Radcliffe's days are ultimately akin to Flaubert's barometer, famously glossed by Roland Barthes as producing a "reality effect": they do not represent temporality, but instead signify the very fact of temporality: they produce a "temporality effect".<sup>126</sup>

All of the qualities of the day enumerated here – its plasticity, its autonomy from the logic of narrative, its simulacral instantiation of a sense of time passing – serve to undermine any sense of temporal continuity that might otherwise be established by the sequential passage from one day to the next. The sequence of days in *Udolpho*, like the sequence of moments, is fundamentally serial – a mere succession, one thing after another. Far from articulating a continuum between past, present, and future, *Udolpho*'s days leave both the reader and the novel's characters mired in a perpetual, horizonless present.

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<sup>125</sup> John Colin Dunlop, *The History of Fiction: being a Critical Account of the Most Celebrated Prose Works of Fiction, from the Earliest Greek Romances to the Novels of the Present Age* (London, 1814), 387. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn1c8l>.

<sup>126</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 141-148. Stuart Sherman similarly extends the concept of the "reality effect" to temporality; however Sherman uses the concept to make quite the opposite point – that references to calendrical time in the eighteenth-century novel do in fact refer to the reader to the reality of temporal experience. See Sherman, *Telling Time*, 245-247.

#### 4. "IDEAL SCENES": VISION AGAINST TIME

Thus far we have considered two narrative units in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—the moment and the day—and found that both tend to undermine the unity, coherence, and continuity of the narrative, and to call into question the tripartite structure of temporality—past/present/future—replacing it with a perpetual present. The remainder of this chapter will address a third prominent narrative unit in the novel: the scene. There is a strong basis for arguing that the scene constitutes a crucial form in *Udolpho*, beginning with the sheer frequency with which the term is used: there are 359 occurrences in the novel (comparable to the 415 occurrences of “moment”). But perhaps the most important testimony on behalf of the scene as a “significant form” in the novel comes from Radcliffe herself, who appears to designate the scene as something like the “official” form of the narrative in the novel’s closing lines, through the voice of the narrator: “And, if the weak hand, that has recorded this tale, has, by its scenes, beguiled the mourner of one hour of sorrow, or, by its moral, taught him to sustain it— the effort, however humble, has not been in vain, nor is the writer unrewarded” (672). This invocation of scene as an organizing or even controlling structure in *Udolpho* raises a series of fundamental questions for our inquiry: What precisely does Radcliffe mean by “scene”? What are the implications of imagining and constructing narrative as a compendium of or progression through scenes, rather than a unified plot or story? And how does Radcliffe’s use of the scene inflect or even determine the model of temporality elaborated in the novel?

Before attempting to answer these questions, it will be helpful to consider briefly the semantic range of the term “scene”, in order to place Radcliffe’s quite specific usage

in context. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the English term "scene," as well as its French and Latin etymons, has always tended to comprise at least two dimensions of meaning, one predominantly spatial and visual (physical stage structure or backdrop [1, 3a], location for dramatic action [5], total view of stage and scenery presented to a theatrical audience [3b], "A view or picture presented to the eye or mind" [10a]) and one concerned with the demarcation and division of actions and events in time (subdivision of a play [2a], "sequence of continuous action" [2b] "An incident, an event; an episode; a situation" [9a]). Another cluster of meanings integrate both the spatial-visual and sequential-temporal emphases, marking out a nexus between action/event and its location in space: "The setting or context in which events unfold or current action is concentrated; the sphere or arena of activity; the focus of events" (8a); "The physical site or setting at which a particular event occurs" (8b).

What is most striking about Radcliffe's use of the term "scene" is her almost total avoidance of the second set of usages enumerated above – namely, those concerned with the division of actions and events into coherent sequential units, or what we might call "dramatic scenes". Only very rarely does she designate a sequence of action or a dramatic encounter between characters as a "scene"; instead, the most salient usage of "scene"—and certainly the most unique in the context of novel-writing—is that of visual field, view, or vista, associated above all with the description of sublime, beautiful, and picturesque landscapes. By emphasizing this usage, Radcliffe explicitly identifies her novel with two genres outside of the novel: so-called locodescriptive poetry, typified by the work of James Thomson (who is quoted repeatedly in *Udolpho*); and aesthetic theory, as pioneered by figures such as Edmund Burke and, directly contemporaneous with

Radcliffe, William Gilpin. These extra-novelistic sources certainly provide a set of theories and practices that help to structure Radcliffe's descriptions of natural scenery; however, they do not provide any indication of how precisely the mode of scenic description can be integrated into a narrative as anything other than an interpolation of discourse or an interruption of action. In the remainder of this chapter, I will turn to this fundamental problem: precisely what role does the scene, considered chiefly as a spatial and visual phenomenon rather than a temporal or narrative structure, play in the functioning of narrative and time in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*? It is easy enough to see that Radcliffe is invested in contemporary aesthetic discourse about scenes, but it is more difficult to ask what it means to construct a novel around visual scenes. In order to respond to this question, I will offer a brief taxonomy of the characteristics and functioning of the scene in *Udolpho*. Through this taxonomy, it will emerge that Radcliffe's scenes are not merely at odds with or extraneous to time and action, but actually work to displace or transcend these two constitutive elements of narrative.

*Scenes are autonomous and lateral to narrative.*

The term "scene," whether it designates a visual field, a geographic place, or a narrative sequence, demarcates the object in question as an autonomous form, detachable as a unified whole from the totality of the narrative. This autonomy is implied in the closing lines of the novel, quoted above, where Radcliffe refers to the accumulated "scenes" of *Udolpho* as potentially having an effect on the reader independent from the novel as such. Scenes are very frequently marked off by the narrator (e.g., "They traveled leisurely; stopping wherever a scene uncommonly grand appeared. . ." (42); the

characters too often participate in identifying and designating scenes (e.g., “This lovely scene!—how often shall I remember and regret it, when I am far away” [114]). In both cases, the frequent formal designation of scenes carves up the narrative into a series of “views” (whether literal or more abstract or figurative) that stand, in some sense, perpendicular to the temporal movement of the narrative into the future: each scene is like a lateral tranche or cross-section of experience, rather than a unit in a forward-moving temporal sequence. This tendency is perhaps best illustrated in the scenes that we might most expect to carry a durational element: i.e., cases where “scene” is used to refer to a dramatic sequence of action. In these cases, the specific action and/or dialogue of the scene is often hastily narrated, or even elided altogether, and the entire sequence—and its duration—is flattened into something more like an instantaneous image than a durational unfolding:

“the scene of her father’s death appeared in tints as fresh, as if it had passed on the preceding day.” (102)

"the solitude and obscurity of her chamber again affected her spirits, the more, because of its nearness to the scene of horror, that she had witnessed in the morning." (253)

“the scenes of terrible contention, to which Emily was frequently compelled to be witness, exhausted her spirits. . .” (296)

“O! could I strike from my memory all former scenes—the figures, that rise up, like furies, to torment me!—I see them, when I sleep, and, when I am awake, they are still before my eyes! I see them now—now!” (575)

Even dramatic sequences are ultimately “witnessed” or “seen”; they “appear” and reappear like images. What they do not do is unfold in the dimension of time. They also appear impervious to the passage of narrative time—as we can see in the passages quoted above, they persist as real, unchanging objects in the minds of characters. Finally, it is

telling that this usage of “scene”—i.e., meaning “dramatic sequence”—is actually quite rare in the novel; in the vast majority of cases, the term designates objects that are already explicitly visual, rather than durational—settings, atmospheres, vistas, tableaux.

*Scenes are serial.*

If we conceive of the structure of *Udolpho* as a series of autonomous, image-like scenes, what precisely is the relationship *between* these scenes? I would like to suggest that Radcliffe's scenes form a series or succession in which one scene merely follows another, without any clear causal logic linking them. Perhaps the most salient mechanism for the succession of scenes in the novel is the travel sequence, which allows characters to view one scene after another without regard for the logic of plot. While such travel sequences only take up a certain segment of the novel, the logic of pure seriality that they embody typifies the functioning of narrative as a whole. Especially during the period of Emily's imprisonment at Udolpho—the opposite of a travel sequence, as it were—the narrative is structured as a series of images, tableaux, and atmospheric descriptions, rather than a causally linked sequence of actions and events. This structure is formally akin to the magic lantern show, which is structured by series of slides, and is perhaps best typified by the form of St. Aubert's reflections on his own life after the death of his wife: “He stood lost amid the scenes of years which fancy called up, until the succession closed with the picture of his dying wife, and he started away, to forget it, if possible, at the social board.” (24) Here, we can see the purely serial character of Radcliffe's scene logic: narrative is structured as a loose “succession” of image-like skeins of experience that merely succeed one another. The seriality of Radcliffe's scenes challenges both the basic

directionality of narrative and the irreversibility of time, suggesting that the specific sequence of scenes is by no means necessary and could be subject to drastic rearrangement. (Meanwhile, Radcliffe's scenes frequently repeat and recombine formal and aesthetic elements, suggesting a modular or permutative vision of narrative.)

*Scenes are comparative and atemporal.*

Throughout *Udolpho*, characters tend to apprehend and cognize scenes not with reference to the sequence in which they are experienced (i.e., as the individual parts or units of a cohesive, ongoing narrative), but rather through atemporal comparisons between them. One of the most prominent axes of such comparison is the aesthetic functioning of scenes. Both the narrator and the characters frequently compare the differential aesthetic effects of scenes, highlighting the relative prominence such aesthetic dimensions as sublimity, beauty, wildness, and the picturesque. Such comparisons are frequently made quite explicit:

After traversing these regions for many leagues, they began to descend towards Rousillon, and features of beauty then mingled with the scene. Yet the travellers did not look back without some regret to the sublime objects they had quitted; though the eye, fatigued with the extension of its powers, was glad to repose on the verdure of woods and pastures, that now hung on the margin of the river below; to view again the humble cottage shaded by cedars, the playful group of mountaineer-children, and the flowery nooks that appeared among the hills. (43)

This passage typifies the schematic, atemporal quality of the aesthetic comparison of scenes in the novel: although the comparison is predicated on movement from one scene to another, as well as the forward movement of the narrative in time, it seems to transcend the duration of the narrative itself, entering into the realm of universal aesthetic values. We find a similar appeal to atemporal aesthetic judgment during the Venice

section of the novel, in Emily's comparison of the sublimity of nature with the appeal of human art:

It was near midnight before they withdrew to the opera, where Emily was not so charmed but that, when she remembered the scene she had just quitted, she felt how infinitely inferior all the splendour of art is to the sublimity of nature. Her heart was not now affected, tears of admiration did not start to her eyes, as when she viewed the vast expanse of ocean, the grandeur of the heavens, and listened to the rolling waters, and to the faint music that, at intervals, mingled with their roar. Remembering these, the scene before her faded into insignificance. (189)

Here, we can see the almost explicit process by which narrative and its sequences (movement from one place to another) is displaced by the atemporal realm of aesthetic judgment (human art vs. the natural sublime). This process temporarily suspends the very work of narrating present experience: "Remembering these, the scene before her faded into insignificance." The appeal to quantitative and qualitative comparisons of aesthetic effect in *Udolpho* evokes the classificatory "grid of thought" that Michel Foucault identified at the center of Enlightenment thought: a discursive, spatialized accounting for the world's being, rather than a narrative account of its becoming.<sup>127</sup>

If the repeated procedure of aesthetic comparison between scenes tends to displace narrative action and time onto an atemporal discursive grid, and to transcend the problem of time altogether, nowhere is this displacement more extreme than in the explicit comparison of past and present scenes. Emily frequently makes such comparisons during her imprisonment at Udolpho:

The scenes of terrible contention, to which Emily was frequently compelled to be witness, exhausted her spirits more than any circumstances, that had occurred since her departure from Tholouse. The gentleness and goodness of her parents, together with the scenes of her early happiness, often stole on her mind, like the visions of a higher world; while the characters and circumstances, now passing beneath her eye, excited both terror and surprise. (296)

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<sup>127</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 109.



In this passage, we can see that the only difference between the past scene (Emily's image of happy family life) and the present scene (the strife at Udolpho) is that the latter is literally available to Emily's perception ("passing beneath her eyes") at the present moment. Through the faculty of imagination, the past scene is equally present to Emily; but more importantly, and more shockingly from the perspective of narrative form and temporality, it is never treated as actually *past*—in other words, lost to the passage of time. Instead, the past scene appears as another potential present that can be returned to at any time; in fact, it is precisely such a return that closes the novel. Radcliffe's model of the scene ultimately removes the temporal dimension from narrative by displacing time onto space: narrative then becomes a series of stopping points through which one can move both forwards and backwards.

Nowhere is the spatialization of time more palpable than in Emily's musings on viewing the Italian coastline, which she compares with the imagined scenes of ancient Greece:

Emily sat alone near the stern of the vessel, and, as it floated slowly on, watched the gay and lofty city lessening from her view, till its palaces seemed to sink in the distant waves, while its loftier towers and domes, illumined by the declining sun, appeared on the horizon, like those far-seen clouds which, in more northern climes, often linger on the western verge, and catch the last light of a summer's evening. Soon after, even these grew dim, and faded in distance from her sight; but she still sat gazing on the vast scene of cloudless sky, and mighty waters, and listening in pleasing awe to the deep-sounding waves, while, as her eyes glanced over the Adriatic, towards the opposite shores, which were, however, far beyond the reach of sight, she thought of Greece, and, a thousand classical remembrances stealing to her mind, she experienced that pensive luxury which is felt on viewing the scenes of ancient story, and on comparing their present state of silence and solitude with that of their former grandeur and animation. The scenes of the Illiad illapsed in glowing colours to her fancy—scenes, once the haunt of heroes—now lonely, and in ruins; but which still shone, in the poet's strain, in all their youthful splendour. (206)

As in the passage quoted above, Emily's mind drifts here between the present scene available to her perception (the Italian coast and the Adriatic) and a past scene available to her imagination (the shores of ancient Greece); only in this case, the distance separating the two scenes is not one of years, but of centuries. Emily explicitly acknowledges this distance, and the baleful power of time to transform "grandeur and animation" into "stillness and solitude." Yet ultimately the power of Emily's imagination is able to elide the distinction between past and present, reanimating the past into yet another present scene.

This work of reanimation epitomizes the atemporal character of narrative in *Udolpho*: at any given time, scenes can be taken from their chronological sequence, shuffled around, and experienced as present. This logic, pursued to its extreme, allows for the possibility that past and present scenes can be merged. This is precisely what happens in the novel's penultimate "scene," depicting the double wedding of Emily and Blanche at the recently disused but now reanimated Chateau-le-Blanc:

As Annette looked down from the corridor upon the hall, whose arches and windows were illuminated with brilliant festoons of lamps, and gazed on the splendid dresses of the dancers, the costly liveries of the attendants, the canopies of purple velvet and gold, and listened to the gay strains that floated along the vaulted roof, she almost fancied herself in an enchanted palace, and declared, that she had not met with any place, which charmed her so much, since she read the fairy tales; nay, that the fairies themselves, at their nightly revels in this old hall, could display nothing finer; while old Dorothee, as she surveyed the scene, sighed, and said, the castle looked as it was wont to do in the time of her youth. (671)

In this passage, the scene of the past and the scene of the present need no longer be compared, as they have actually merged into the same image, like a double exposure. One of the advantages of a spatialized model of time for Radcliffe is that time ceases to be a linear process and can instead be reimagined as a series of superimposed planes. It is perhaps an adherence to such a model of time—what we might call heterotopic time—

that accounts for one of the most typical visual motifs in the novel: a vista in which some features of the landscape are swallowed up by darkness, while others remain brightly lit.

*The scene is animated.*

While, as we have observed, the form of the scene, as deployed by Radcliffe, tends to undermine the temporal dimension of narrative, the scenes themselves often internalize processes of time and change through the mechanism of animation, a term Radcliffe herself periodically uses in describing the character of her scenes (see the above quotation on the “grandeur and animation” of the “scenes of the Iliad”). Animation usually takes the form of subtle changes that take place in the perceptual field, caused by the gradual movement of objects, the changing play of light, and/or the progressive displacement of the spectators:

Emily delighted to observe the grandeur of these clouds as they changed in shape and tints, and to watch their various effect on the lower world, whose features, partly veiled, were continually assuming new forms of sublimity. (43)

As they advanced towards this city, the Alps, seen at some distance, began to appear in all their awful sublimity; chain rising over chain in long succession, their higher points darkened by the hovering clouds, sometimes hid, and at others seen shooting up far above them; while their lower steeps, broken into fantastic forms, were touched with blue and purplish tints, which, as they changed in light and shade, seemed to open new scenes to the eye. (171)

The market people, passing with their boats to Venice, now formed a moving picture on the Brenta. . . . The swift movement of the boats down the current, the quick glance of oars in the water, and now and then the passing chorus of peasants, who reclined under the sail of their little bark, or the tones of some rustic instrument, played by a girl, as she sat near her sylvan cargo, heightened the animation and festivity of the scene. (212)

In the description of each of these scenes, we get something like a micro-narrative of perceptual experience—one which does indeed imply the passage of time, as indexed by

change. Many of the novel's more elaborate visual scenes, much longer than those quoted here, offer highly detailed accounts of emerging peaks and valleys, transitions between mountain and plain, snaking rivers and precipitously dropping torrents, and above all the play of crepuscular light on landscape and buildings. This commitment to the "animation" of scenes appears to be the novel's one concession to fundamentally temporal character of human experience. However, Radcliffe ultimately concedes very little. The mode of time represented here is entirely divorced from the totality of narrative time (whether we are thinking of fictional narrative or the narrative of history): the autonomy of the scene, discussed above, allows it to figure discrete pockets of ongoing time that are never integrated into the passage of narrative time as such. This tendency is nicely epitomized in William Hazlitt's appreciative evocation of the sense of ongoingness evoked by Radcliffe's scenes:

“[T]he simple notes of Clara's [sic] lute, which so delighted her youthful heart, still echo among the rocks and mountains of the Valois; the mellow tones of the minstrel's songs still mingle with the noise of the dashing oar and the rippling of the silver waves of the Mediterranean; the voice of Agnes is still heard from the haunted tower, and Schedoni's form still stalks through the frowning ruins of Palinzi.”<sup>128</sup>

Here, Hazlitt aptly illustrates the working of temporality in Radcliffe's animated scenes: it functions not as a substrate for narrative but rather as the basis for autonomous aesthetic effects that transcend narrative. The animated scene models time as a purely phenomenological and/or aesthetic experience, unmoored from action and event, condition and situation, past and future. It is no coincidence that, despite the specificity of description in the passages quoted above, Radcliffe's scenes have a tendency to end in

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<sup>128</sup> William Hazlitt, "On the English Novelists," *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (London, 1818), 166-167. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015008543939>.

abstract evocations of perceptual and aesthetic experience as such (“new forms of sublimity”; “open new scenes to the eye”; “animation and festivity of the scene”). Radcliffe’s animated scenes, with their appeal to pure aesthetic and phenomenological experience, call to mind a much later episode in the history of aesthetic theory and practice: the development of minimalist sculpture, famously critiqued by Michael Fried as a “theatrical” instantiation of temporality as such, “a presentment of endless, or *indefinite*, duration.”<sup>129</sup>

Taken in sum, the form of the scene as elaborated by Radcliffe constitutes a radical “solution” to anxieties about the fragmentation or discontinuity of time, as manifested in her handling of the “moment”: it offers a model of narrative that evades and elides time altogether, by spatializing it out of existence. Yet the cost of this “solution” is to push beyond the limits of narrative as a genre and language as an artistic medium: Radcliffe’s novel aspires to the condition of the visual. What emerges from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is a narrative procedure more akin to the magic lantern slide show or the phantasmagoria than the novel or even the romance: it is constructed as a series of quasi-hallucinatory, frequently non-sequential views, images, atmospheres, backdrops, and settings stitched together through physical movement rather than integrated into a narrative sequence or the passage of time.

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<sup>129</sup> Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art; a Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968). 144.



Fig. 2: Woodcut illustration of *The Romance of the Forest*



Installation view of *Primary Structures*, The Jewish Museum, 1966

## 5. CONCLUSION

If, as I have argued, the dominant temporal figures in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* all work to sever the present from the past, and establish the present as the only functional dimension of time, what conclusions can we draw from this curious tendency? From the diachronic perspective, we might infer that the Gothic not only prefigures but even helps to inaugurate what Fredric Jameson calls "the end of temporality" – the reduction of time in postmodernity to a "perpetual present" limited to the experience of the body.<sup>130</sup> However, if we take up the synchronic perspective, as I have in this essay, we can see that each of *Udolpho*'s forms implies a substantially different model of the present – in the case of the moment, a psychological and physiological present; in the case of the day a merely formal or simulacral present; in the case of the scene, a present keyed to aesthetic contemplation. Ultimately, Radcliffe's multiplication of forms of the present suggests that by the end of the eighteenth century, partial form was reaching its saturation point. In the following chapter, I examine Jane Austen's response to this extreme: Austen begins the turn away from this degree of narrative fragmentation while subtly maintaining the logic of partial form.

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<sup>130</sup> Fredric Jameson, "The End of Temporality," *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 4 (2003): 706, 710, 712. doi:10.1086/377726.

### CHAPTER THREE: PRESENT, PERIOD, CRISIS: DESYNCHRONIZATION IN THE NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN

With the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, we have seen the logic of partial form pushed to its extreme: all of Radcliffe's key narrative units serve to undermine the fundamental unity of her story. This level of narrative fragmentation marks both the fullest realization of partial form and also its limit: how could this tendency be pushed further without abandoning narrative altogether? Indeed, before long the British novel would step away from the brink, moving back towards a more unified, teleological model of storytelling. One of the key figures in this retrenchment is certainly Jane Austen, who bound up the centrifugal energies of the eighteenth-century novel in measured prose, limited length, and tightly crafted plots. Austen, unlike her eighteenth-century forebears, does not explicitly or insistently call the reader's attention to distinct units of action or time: individual events are not designated as "Incidents"; narrative sequences are not labeled as "Episodes"; sets of circumstances are not stamped as "Situations"; time is not parceled out into a continuous series of "moments"; encounters are not formalized as "scenes." Moreover, Austen's turn towards narrative unity is at least in part an explicit reaction against the dilation and repetition of *Udolpho* and its ilk: *Northanger Abbey* famously satirized the prolonged mysteries and repetitive motifs of the Gothic.

Austen, then, would at first glance appear to be precisely the wrong author to carry forward the eighteenth-century logic of partial form; she might even be read as the instigator of its demise. This view would fit cleanly with much Austen criticism, which has frequently insisted that the unified, teleological marriage plot constitutes the



controlling logic of her novels, overriding any indications of formal or social fragmentation. Some critics identify Austen's novels with plot *tout court*: for example, Marilyn Butler insists that "What *happens* in *Persuasion*" is "Wentworth's choice of Anne for a wife, and the discovery of true values which is implicit in that choice."<sup>131</sup> By contrast, more balanced readings of Austen acknowledge the possibility, even the specter of fragmentation in her novels, but insist that this specter is exorcised in the end. Perhaps the most compelling account along these lines is that of Franco Moretti in his study of the *Bildungsroman*. Moretti argues that *Pride and Prejudice* – and in fact the modern novel in general – is structured around a loosely structured series of discrete episodes, some of which are ultimately integrated into a coherent story through the growth and enlightened retrospection of the protagonist(s): "The novelistic episode is almost never meaningful *in itself*. It becomes so because someone – in the *Bildungsroman* usually the protagonist – *gives it meaning*."<sup>132</sup> On this view, novelistic episodes can go one of two ways: they can be woven into the meaning of the character's life story or retrospectively shed from the narrative as mere contingencies. But whatever function they ultimately serve, episodes can never be self-contained: "if no episode in itself is immune to meaning, no episode, on the other hand, can contain the *entire* meaning of existence. No character will ever reveal his essence in a single gesture or encounter. . ."<sup>133</sup> Moretti's account of the novelistic episode reads almost like an epitaph for the model of partial form that I have sought to recover, in which the parts of a narrative may actually hold some autonomous value and

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<sup>131</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 27.

<sup>132</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), 45.

<sup>133</sup> Moretti, 46.

meaning. To the extent that Moretti's theory holds for Austen, she should not have a place in this project, except perhaps in a wistful coda.

However, I mean to challenge the powerful tendency to identify Austen's novels with their plot or outcome, and argue that as counterintuitive as it may seem, Austen is a crucial figure in the history of partial form – even if her work helped to pave the way for its demise. To the extent that critics emphasize on the plot and action of her novels, they are unlikely to engage with or even detect this dimension of the novels. Yet if we shift our attention from plot and action to time and temporal experience in the novels, we will discover very different Austen, who is concerned precisely with formal and temporal fragmentation.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Unfortunately, critics have on the whole devoted insufficient attention to the formal, ethical, and social significance of temporality in Austen's novels. While there have been essays treating temporality as a thematic concern in particular novels (Duffy), technical narratological analysis of temporal functions and devices (Ireland), and historical reconstruction of the novels' internal chronologies (Chapman), until recently critics have rarely discussed temporality as one of the central or even defining elements of Austen's project as a novelist. Yet in recent years a number of Romanticist critics have offered highly original accounts of Austen that not only analyze the complex functioning of temporality in her novels but also establish temporality as one of her central concerns. Pursuing allied but highly individual lines of thought, William Galperin, Mary Favret, and most recently Emily Rohrbach have shown that Austen's novels construct complex temporalities that challenge linear models of time, history, and progress. While these critics have opened up important new avenues of thought about the role of temporality in Austen's project, their analysis is constrained by two limiting factors. First, while each critic offers a compelling account of Austen's temporal strategies, they all focus solely on the diachronic dimension of time – in other words, the relationship between past, present, and future – as opposed to the synchronic dimension – that is, the relationship between multiple forms of temporality that coexist and frequently stand in tension in Austen's novels. If, as Stuart Sherman contends, "time in narrative *always* is 'dialogic,'" any thorough accounting for temporality in the novel will have to account for the multiple forms and registers of time that intersect in every novel (Sherman, x); as I will demonstrate, such accounting is particularly crucial in the case of Austen, who proves to have been acutely attentive to both the multiple timescales that serve as horizons of meaning for individual and social life and the potential for tension and conflict between these timescales. Second, the Romanticist critics approach temporality in Austen with a particular polemical agenda in mind, which we could broadly call deconstructionist historicism: while deeply concerned to engage with Austen's historicity, they aim to demonstrate how her construction of temporality critiques and undermines linear, determinist accounts of history, progress, and narrative itself, and thereby opens up a space for liberatory "possibility" as opposed to regulatory "probability" (Galperin, 4). While the readings of Galperin, Favret, and Rohrbach are attractive, they are ultimately problematic in their fidelity to the abstract deconstructionist values of difference and indeterminacy: they variously portray her as registering "the difference or 'density' accruable to a world 'over time'" (Galperin, 7); constructing "a romance of belatedness, recursiveness, and possibility: temporal complications of the 'now'" (Favret, 6); elaborating "a temporal logic that renders the goal of recovering a discrete past finally untenable" (Rohrbach, 131) Whatever merit these versions of Austen's project may have, they would be more convincing if they were

Austen's subtle construction and interrogation of fragmented temporality is not only an important formal or thematic dimension of her work: in fact, it stands at the very heart of her project. To the extent that we are interested in Austen's analysis of social life and her attitude towards modernity, we must also be interested in the functioning of time in her novels. For as many social theorists have shown, both social order in general and modern social formations in particular are tightly enmeshed with specific temporal structures and regimes.<sup>135</sup> This chapter develops a new account of the relationship between temporality, social life, and modernity in Austen. Drawing on the work of social theorists Anthony Giddens and Hartmut Rosa, I examine the construction of three specific registers of time in her novels – everyday time, biographical time, and historical time – as well as Austen's changing attitude towards the nature, form, and meaning of the present.<sup>136</sup> I argue that Austen is deeply concerned to dramatize the increasing desynchronization of time horizons in modernity, and to illustrate the severe social

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grounded more fully in the raw materials of novelistic temporality: the terms and forms that Austen herself uses to delineate specific units of time. See Joseph M. Duffy, "Structure and Idea in Jane Austen's 'Persuasion,'" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 8, no. 4 (1954): 272–89; K. R. Ireland, "Future Recollections of Immortality: Temporal Articulation in Jane Austen's 'Persuasion,'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 13, no. 2 (1980): 204–20; Jane Austen, *The Novels of Jane Austen: The Text Based on Collation of the Early Editions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); William H. Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, c2003); Favret, Mary A. "Jane Austen's Periods," *A Companion to Jane Austen.*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Blackwell Publishing, 2009) Blackwell Reference Online; Emily Rohrbach, *Modernity's Mist: British Romanticism and the Poetics of Anticipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Sherman Stuart, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>135</sup> It is impossible to give an exhaustive account of this tendency here, but major figures would include Emile Durkheim, Norbert Elias, Karl Mannheim, Michel Foucault, and Anthony Giddens. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1965); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, c1994.); Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge: Collected Works*, Volume 5 (New York: Routledge, 1968): 276–322; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

<sup>136</sup> Anthony Giddens, "Time and Social Organization," *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013); Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (Columbia University Press, 2013).

consequences of this disjointed temporality. This argument is based on close analysis of three key temporal units in Austen's novels — the "present," the "period," and the "crisis" — as well as the author's handling of chronological and calendrical time.

I begin my argument by demonstrating that in the bulk of her novels, Austen is deeply concerned with tensions between everyday time, figured in the present moment, and biographical time, which is keyed to longer stages of life development and above all marriage: *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma* all turn on the successful integration of the everyday and its present moments into the longer scale of the life narrative. I then turn to Austen's two most problematic novels, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, which considerably complicate the picture of temporality elaborated in the other novels. In these two works, Austen confronts the possibility of a radical and irreversible desynchronization of the three registers of modern temporality; however, each work develops a very different "solution" to this crisis. In the figure of Fanny Price, Austen explores methods of escaping from modern temporality and its social consequences. While the other characters in *Mansfield Park* suffer from the absence of traditional social and temporal order, Fanny temporarily evades this problem by withdrawing into nostalgia – a way of being-in-time that reconstitutes socio-temporal harmony as a vague simulacrum. *Persuasion* similarly confronts the catastrophic disjunction of everyday time, biographical time, and historical time; yet here the anarchic energies released by desynchronization offer tentative new possibilities for community. Ultimately, I show that *Persuasion* carries the logic of "partial form" into the nineteenth century, in the shape of the "crisis," a form that in modernity not only resists integration

into a coherent narrative – whether personal, social, or historical – but also challenges the very possibility of any such narrative.

## 1. THE BIOGRAPHICAL AUSTEN

"in general the felicity of being with him for the present bounded her views..."<sup>137</sup>

"Captain Tilney had at present no intention of removing..." (NA, 150)

"if I should resolve to quit Netherfield, I should probably be off in five minutes. At present, however, I consider myself as quite fixed here." (PP, 42)

"At present I am not in love with Mr. Wickham; no, I certainly am not." (PP, 144)

"At present we have nothing to guide us." (PP, 295)

"I have no thoughts of matrimony at present." (E, 132)

"he pleased her for the present; she liked to have him near her; it was enough." (MP, 65)

"thoughtless and selfish from prosperity and bad example, he would not look beyond the present moment." (MP, 115)

As this brief catalog indicates, the present is not a neutral temporal indicator in Austen; instead it is most frequently portrayed as a limit on the self-knowledge, judgment, and long-term perspective of her characters. The present moment is a trap into which they fall, variously indexing their willfulness, their capriciousness, their powerlessness, their thoughtlessness. What is damning is not merely a character's tendency to experience her

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<sup>137</sup> Jane Austen, *The Novels of Jane Austen : The Text Based on Collation of the Early Editions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), vol. 5, 138. All following references are to the Chapman edition of Austen; hereafter works will be cited parenthetically using the following abbreviations: *SS*, *Sense and Sensibility*; *PP*, *Pride and Prejudice*; *MP*, *Mansfield Park*; *E*, *Emma*; *NA*, *Northanger Abbey*; *P*, *Persuasion*.

life as a series of discrete present moments; it is failure to incorporate the feelings and impulses of the moment into a larger temporal and narrative scheme. Austen plays up distinction between the ephemeral present and larger time horizons in her typical linguistic formulations of the present: "at present," "for the present," "the present moment." To say "at present" is to valorize the present moment as against some other duration: what duration would that be? "At present" as opposed to what?

Austen lays out this dichotomy most clearly in in *Northanger Abbey*, in the passage where Catherine Morland learns that she will be able to remain in Bath for an additional fortnight and keep up her acquaintance with Henry Tilney; although she has "got so far as to indulge in a secret 'perhaps'" regarding a potential marriage with Henry, her perspective remains firmly rooted in the immediate present: "in general the felicity of being with him for the present bounded her views: the present was now comprised in another three weeks, and her happiness being certain for that period, the rest of her life was at such a distance as to excite but little interest" (NA, 150). This passage explicitly weighs the seeming "felicity" of Catherine's present against "the rest of her life," giving us a clue to Austen's general disdain for the present as a misleading horizon for judgment, action, and understanding: it frequently conflicts with the longer horizon of the life taken as a whole. I would like to suggest that this tension between temporal horizon of the immediate present and the temporal horizon of a life taken in sum stands at the center of Austen's project; in order to develop this argument it will be helpful to turn to sociological analysis of time horizons in modern Western society.

In his analysis of time and social organization, Anthony Giddens posits "three interlacing forms of temporality that enter into all moments of social life." These are "the

*durée* of day-to-day life," "the *durée* of the lifespan of the individual," and " the *durée* of institutions – the *longue durée* of which Braudel speaks."<sup>138</sup> Hartmut Rosa more straightforwardly terms these three temporal registers everyday time, biographical time, and historical time.<sup>139</sup> According to Rosa, the individual's experience of time depends on "the interplay of all three of these levels of time and their respective time horizons"; in order for the individual's experience to be unified and coherent, the three levels "must be brought into accord with each other in a continuously renewed fashion."<sup>140</sup> Rosa goes on to claim that narrative plays a crucial role in mediating the often vexed relationship between the three levels of time as experienced by individuals and groups:

The interconnection of the three levels of time in the perspective of actors always follows narrative patterns. Everyday time, biographical time, and historical time are related to each other, and mutually criticized and justified, in cultural and individual narratives. . . . Cultural and institutional forms of change and persistence are legitimated, and sometimes criticized, through the narrative interrelation of everyday time, life history, and world history. . .<sup>141</sup>

It is my contention that the "narrative interrelation" of these three registers of time constitutes a core element of Austen's project as a novelist, and moreover that this attention to the relationship between timescales was one of the central means by which she worked to "legitimate, and sometimes criticize" ongoing changes in British culture and institutions. It is precisely this tendency that is evident in the passage from *Northanger Abbey* quoted above: in Catherine's refusal to acknowledge the longer *durée* of her life as a whole (biographical time) while simultaneously reveling in the immediate present (everyday time) we can see Austen posing the problem of how precisely the two registers should be integrated.

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<sup>138</sup> Giddens, 144-145.

<sup>139</sup> Rosa, 10.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

This problem is at the heart of Austen's novels; we can begin to discern its contours in Austen's handling of everyday time. Both William Galperin and Mary Favret have written compelling accounts of Austen's interest in the everyday; both critics argue that in Austen the everyday opens up a space of possibility that has the capacity to interfere with hegemonic social and historical developments.<sup>142</sup> Yet ultimately these readings are over-reliant on a theoretical concept of the everyday drawn from Michel de Certeau, who configures it as a crucial site of critique and contestation; in their insistence on the critical potential of the everyday, discerned in Austen through deeply elaborate readings, they fail to recognize the more manifest judgments that Austen levies *against* everyday time in the novels. This critique is most obvious in the assortment of characters who live in a perpetual present, and can engage with time only on the everyday register, to the absolute exclusion of biographical and historical time. In *Northanger Abbey* we have characters such as Isabella Thorpe, whose standpoint is utterly restricted to the whims of the present, at the expense of ethical conduct ("so it always is with me; the first moment settles every thing" [NA, 118]), and her brother James, tied up in obsessive concern with horses and carriages, and the speeds and times they can make. In *Pride and Prejudice* we have Mr. Bennet, attached to the everyday routine of reading in his library, which serves as a cynical refuge from the pressures of biographical time – both his own as a father and that of his unmarried daughters ("With a book he was regardless of time..." [PP, 12]). And of course in *Emma* we have Mr. Woodhouse, who is essentially defined by his tenacious clinging to everyday routines and activities, which defend him against the menace of biographical time, with its larger-scale disruptions – marriage, death, change as such. What makes these characters and their activities grotesque is not

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<sup>142</sup> Galperin, 2-4, 29-33; Favret, 373.



their submersion in everyday time; it is instead their refusal to integrate their everyday experience into the longer time horizon of the individual lifespan – let alone the historical *longue durée*. Detached from the two larger time horizons, everyday time is reduced to the narcissistic perpetual present of the infant. This reduction is on balance comical, except when biographical time violently intrudes on the everyday idyll, as it does for Mr. Bennett during the desperate search for the eloped Lydia: "At present we have nothing to guide us" (PP, 295). Here the cozy rounds of the everyday open onto a chasm.

Austen's heroines, like their most grotesque family members and friends, closely identify with the everyday time of the present; yet in the course of the novels they gain the ability to integrate everyday time with the larger horizon of biographical time. In fact, one might say that the struggle between these two horizons defines the trajectory of Austen's heroines. This struggle is most obvious in the heroines' beginning attitude towards courtship and marriage, typified by Elizabeth Bennett's coyness: "At present I am not in love with Mr. Wickham; no, I certainly am not." (PP, 144) With the phrase "At present," Elizabeth Bennett jauntily aligns herself with the perspective of the everyday: her feelings correspond to *this* particular present, and they are subject to revision based on the flow of her impulses. They need not heed any unit of time beyond the moment. "At present" could also serve as shorthand for Emma Woodhouse's entire attitude towards marriage, and social life more generally:

"as there are no husbands and wives in the case *at present*, I will break my resolution now." (E, 46)

"at present I only want to keep Harriet to myself." (E, 66)

"I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all." (E, 84)

"at present she could not doubt his having a decidedly warm admiration, a conscious preference of herself..." (E, 262)

The comic energy of these resolutions, and Elizabeth Bennet's quoted above, is of course generated by the suggestion that the heroine will in fact be tempted into marriage at some point in the future, whether she knows it or not; in these moments, allegiance to the present appears as a method of hiding one's own desires and intentions from oneself. However, in explicitly adopting the immediate present as the standpoint from which to gauge questions of marriage, Emma and Elizabeth are not simply deluding themselves: they are also clinging to the everyday as a source of power and self-determination. For as long as they can inhabit the realm of everyday moments, rather than large-scale biographical phases, they can retain some degree of agency.

Giddens' analysis of social time can help to illuminate precisely what Austen's heroines are doing in their play with the relationship between the everyday present and the longer *durée* of the life as a whole. According to Giddens, everyday time constitutes a form of "reversible time" – reversible because it is characterized by the ongoing, structured repetition of social activities. By contrast, "The duration of the lifespan is experienced as irreversible time, time itself having a fixed quantum."<sup>143</sup> I would like to suggest that this tension between "reversible" and "irreversible" is a defining feature of both the comedy and the underlying pathos or even trauma of Austen's marriage plots: as they simultaneously evade and flirt with marriage, her heroines struggle to project the reversibility of everyday time onto the irreversible domain of biographical time – or, to put it another way, to drag the grave irreversibility, the "fixed quantum" of biography into the reversible and endlessly playful field of the day-to-day.

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<sup>143</sup> Giddens, 144-145.

Of course this struggle is a doomed one: through the course of the novels Austen's heroines are both educated and self-educated out of their allegiance to the everyday, with its inexhaustible supply of present moments, and subsumed into the longer biographical horizon of marriage. This educational process is often visible in explicit, didactic lessons served up by the heroes. For example, we have Henry Tilney archly declaiming on the sacrifice of present pleasure for the sake of biographical *durée*: "it is very well worthwhile to be tormented for two or three years of one's life, for the sake of being able to read all the rest of it" (NA, 110). We have Darcy sniffing at Elizabeth's seeming tendency to overvalue the immediate moment: "'The *present* always occupies you in such scenes — does it?' said he, with a look of doubt" (PP, 93). And most explicitly of all we have Mr. Knightley's insistence on a linear progression through distinct life stages that must be adhered to: "The post-office has a great charm at one period of our lives. When you have lived to my age, you will begin to think letters are never worth going through the rain for" (E, 293). As Mary Favret points out, the term "period" itself is frequently associated with the "periodization" of Austen's characters' lives: it is a force that presses violently against the temporality of the everyday and the agency it provides.<sup>144</sup>

Whatever potential for independence, agency, and play that Austen inscribes in the everyday present, Elizabeth and Emma are of course eventually brought around to accept the biographical "periodization" that marriage entails: the marriage plot ensures that the perspectives of day-to-day time and biographical time will be "brought into accord with each other," to use Rosa's phrase. D. A. Miller's reading of Emma's ultimate submission to matrimony perhaps says it best:

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<sup>144</sup> Favret, n.p.

what in the end overtakes Emma's style. . . is nothing less than a sense of its temporality – a temporality measured not against the large, event-filled scale of world-historical time, but in that minor unit of social pressure within which the Novel typically begins and ends: the time of a *generation*, from youth to eventual settlement. . . . It is through this sharp new pressure of generation that the conjugal imperative now speaks to Emma so loudly. . . .<sup>145</sup>

From this perspective, it would seem that the eventuality of marriage, the incorporation into one's "generation," means that biographical time has fundamentally vanquished or absorbed the everyday time of the present. Yet beyond this "official" triumph of the biographical, the present remains as an uneasy "supplement" in Austen's novels, best discerned in the moments that reveal the powerlessness of the heroines to control their own lives. The fact that Catherine Morland lives from moment to moment both intellectually and emotionally is presented as fundamentally comical, as with her nervous vicissitudes at Northanger: "the breakfast-room was gay with company; and she was named to them by the general as the friend of his daughter, in a complimentary style, which so well concealed his resentful ire, as to make her feel secure at least of life for the present" (NA, 192). But how funny is it that Catherine should "feel secure at least of her life *for the present*"? She has very good reason not to "feel secure"; given her powerlessness, "the present" is all that she *can* actually be sure of. We can see an analogous correlation of the present with powerlessness in *Pride and Prejudice*, where Darcy begs off being judged by Elizabeth based on her transitory impressions of him:

"I could wish, Miss Bennett, that you are not to sketch my character at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either."

"But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity."  
(PP, 94)

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<sup>145</sup> D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, Or, The Secret of Style* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c2003), 50.

As a landed aristocrat whose social place is stable and grounded, Darcy can easily disclaim the "present moment" as it reflects on his "character": his grandeur rises above the level of everyday incidents and exchanges. Yet Elizabeth, by contrast, is forced to inhabit the "now," is vulnerable to the "present moment" and unable to create her own "opportunity" whenever she pleases. But perhaps the darkest reminder of both the potential of the present and its relationship to powerlessness is the case of Jane Fairfax. Having fixed the biographical "period" when she will begin work as a governess, Jane's hold on the potential agency and reversibility inscribed in everyday time is far more tenuous than that of Emma: "I am very serious in not wishing any thing to be attempted at present for me. . . . For two or three months longer I shall remain where I am, and as I am." (E, 301). At stake for Jane in the fall from everyday time into biographical time is her very self.

The troubling tension between time horizons evident in these examples is typical not only of Austen's novels, but also of the rapidly changing society that Austen worked to anatomize. In his account of modern temporality, Rosa describes the tendency in capitalist societies for the three time horizons – everyday, biographical, and historical – to become increasingly incongruent and desynchronized, undermining the stability of both individual experience and social systems.<sup>146</sup> Rosa's analysis opens up a new way of reading Austen's project as deeply concerned with this tendency towards desynchronization. The novels discussed above all begin with everyday time and biographical time being "out of joint": for various reasons – above all, the failure or absence of parents – everyday time has taken disproportionate precedence in the lives of the heroines at the expense of biographical time. Then, through the course of the novels,

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<sup>146</sup> Rosa, 17-18.

everyday time is forcibly reintegrated with biographical time through the mechanism of marriage. (Although I have not thus far discussed historical time, Austen is also deeply concerned with the harmony and/or disharmony established between her characters' lives and major historical developments, as many critics have demonstrated.) Yet as the preceding examples indicate, the harmony achieved in Austen's plots between the everyday and the biographical is imperfect: for female characters in particular, the two horizons cannot be fully integrated without substantial loss of agency and even the threat of trauma. Thus even if these novels end with an "official" solution to the problem of desynchronization, they subtly suggest that such solutions are fragile, and may not ultimately hold. In the following sections of this essay, I will turn to Austen's two most problematic novels, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, both of which conjure up worlds where the desynchronization of time horizons – and the concomitant destabilization of social systems – is not merely a looming threat, but a present catastrophe.

## 2. NOSTALGIA AND NEGATION IN *MANSFIELD PARK*

*Mansfield Park* opens with a rapid tour through biographical landmarks in the lives of the three Ward sisters, who we will come to know as Maria Bertram, Mrs. Norris, and Frances Price. We hear in quick succession how, "About thirty years ago," Miss Maria Ward "had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park. . . and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady"; how her elder sister Miss Ward, "at the end of half a dozen years, found herself obliged to be attached to the Rev. Mr. Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law, with scarcely any private fortune"; and how her younger sister Francis "married, in the common phrase, to disappoint her family, and by

fixing on a lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connections, did it very thoroughly" (MP, 3). Following this third and most imprudent match, there is an eleven-year period of estrangement between Frances and her sisters at Mansfield, which only ends when Frances writes to reconcile and beg for help, as she is financially overwhelmed by her drunk and disabled husband, narrow income, and expanding family: at the time of writing "She was preparing for her ninth lying-in. . ." (MP, 5).

These major life events, compressed into a few pages, distilled down to a few key facts, and conveyed with the mordant tone characteristic of *Mansfield Park's* narrator, present a deeply disordered vision of biographical time. The series of marriages is not precipitated by the sisters reaching maturity – in fact, we are given no idea of how old they are; instead, the first marriage is driven by mere chance (Maria's "good luck"). The second marriage is made out of fear of reaching *too great* a level of maturity: Miss Ward settles for Mr. Norris only after six years of searching for a man of larger fortune. The third marriage places Frances with a military man who has not advanced far enough in life to support her properly; yet her husband is soon disabled from active service while still a relatively young man. Finally, in the most grotesque violation of biographical periodization, Frances continues to be exceptionally fertile – and by implication, sexually unregulated – beyond the stage where it is either fitting or prudent. (Mrs. Norris periodically informs her relations "in an angry voice, that Fanny had got another child." [MP, 4]) In the case of Frances, the linear development of human biography is displaced by the repetition of animal biology.

The crisis of biographical time sketched out in the novel's opening pages sets the stage rather darkly for the familiar problem of Austen's other novels: the tension between

irreversible biographical time, signaled chiefly by marriage, and reversible everyday time, associated by turns with impulsivity, playfulness, imprudence, and a measure of self-determination. Yet curiously, in *Mansfield Park*, this tension is not negotiated through the figure of the heroine, but rather through the novel's other main characters; Fanny Price, as I will argue below, stands curiously to the side of this social and temporal problem. Before taking up Fanny's role in the novel, and her peculiar relationship to temporality, I will briefly discuss the tension between everyday and biographical time as manifested in Fanny's female cousins.

Fanny's cousins, Maria and Julia, are left to negotiate this tension on their own when Sir Thomas, the patriarch of the family, departs for Antigua to manage business difficulties on his estate there. The narrator marks this abdication of responsibility precisely in the language of biographical time:

The necessity of the measure in a pecuniary light, and the hope of its utility to his son, reconciled Sir Thomas to the effort of quitting the rest of his family, and of leaving his daughters to the direction of others at their present most interesting time of life. He could not think Lady Bertram quite equal to supply his place with them, or rather to perform what should have been her own; but in Mrs. Norris's watchful attention, and in Edmund's judgment, he had sufficient confidence to make him go without fears for their conduct. (MP, 32)

Sir Thomas's daughters are in the "most interesting time of life" – that is, the biographical period of marriageability; yet rather than supervise their passage through this critical period himself, Sir Thomas implicitly delegates patriarchal authority to the "watchful attention" of Mrs. Norris and the "judgment" of his more responsible son, Edmund. The absence of Sir Thomas and his authority has immediate consequences: his older daughter Maria is rapidly engaged to Mr. Rushworth, of whom Sir Thomas conditionally approves by letter. However, because Sir Thomas insists that the marriage be delayed until his



return, Maria's progress towards her next biographical "period" is officially suspended, and everyday time becomes the only meaningful horizon of action and experience – not only for Maria but also for the novel's other "young people."

The newfound dominance of everyday time is immediately dramatized in the Sotherton outing, which is structured around the contrast between the long duration of marriage, embodied in the grandeur and fixity of the great estate, and the momentary duration of immediate urges, embodied in the young characters' profound impatience and impulsive behavior. Nowhere is this contrast more apparent than in the scene where Maria and Henry Crawford insist on shimmying around the edge of a locked gate on the grounds while Maria's plodding, slow-witted husband-to-be, Mr. Rushworth, goes to retrieve the key (MP, 98-100). As if the contrast were not clear enough, Henry's flirtatious remarks to Maria spell it out explicitly: "I do not think that *I* shall ever see Sotherton again with so much pleasure as I do now. Another summer will hardly improve it to me" (MP, 98). Here, the "now" of immediate desire is placed in the balance across from the interminable seasons and years of marriage, which will cut off all access to erotic spontaneity.

As the span of Sir Thomas' absence is repeatedly extended, the reversible logic of everyday time, according to which flirtation can carry on forever without consequence, comes to fully displace the irreversible logic of biography. This imbalance reaches its extreme point with the planned theatrical performance, which formalizes and institutionalizes the triumph of the momentary impulse over the prudential management of the lifespan: "This, though the thought of the moment, did not end with the moment" (MP, 123). Austen makes this point quite explicitly through the absurd figure of Yates,

the prime mover behind the theatrical project. Yates, we learn, has just been prevented from joining in another performance by a death in his host's family:

[T]he play, in which he had borne a part, was within two days of representation, when the sudden death of one of the nearest connections of the family had destroyed the scheme and dispersed the performers. To be so near happiness, so near fame, so near the long paragraph in the praise of the private theatricals. . . which would of course have immortalized the whole party for at least a twelvemonth! (MP, 121)

Here, Yates begrudges death – that most conclusive milestone of biography – for spoiling the momentary fun of performance. Austen plays up the grotesque contradiction between the timescale of days until the would-be performance and the rather more expansive timescale of the beyond; the finality and dignity of death is further impugned by Yates' offhand invocation of immortality, along with the suggestion that a “twelvemonth” is itself tantamount to eternity.

In the course of preparation and rehearsal, the Bertram family does not quite reach the grotesquerie of this *reductio ad absurdum*; but they do not lag not all too far behind Mr. Yates in their disregard for biographical duration. Henry and Maria enjoy the momentary pleasures of their flirtation right in the face of Maria's soon-to-be husband. Tom rationalizes the project as a balm for Lady Bertram, bereft of her husband, but totally ignores the reality that Sir Thomas will indeed return and demand a restoration of longer-term order. Even Edmund, whose commitment to taking orders as a clergyman makes him the most prominent adherent to the logic of biography, is drawn by Mary Crawford into the realm of ludic, erotic immediacy represented by performance.

Ultimately, the period of preparation and rehearsal for the performance installs everyday time as the only thinkable horizon of judgment, action, and experience.

Nowhere is this temporal regime more artfully and ironically signaled than in the scene of

Sir Thomas' return: just at the moment when the strictures of biography are likely to be dusted off and vigorously enforced, the "young people" appear and behave like characters in a play, surprised by a shocking event offstage. Before the reality of Sir Thomas' authority sets in, they cannot but interpolate him as another play-actor hitting his cue on the nose. But it is precisely at this moment that the reversible logic of performance – which is of course, always a repetition – is brought to a rather brutal close.

While Edmund is chastened by the restoration of patriarchal authority, it is too late for his sisters to turn back from the impulsivity of the moment. Even after Maria has been technically shifted into the next phase of her life through marriage, she cannot give up the tendency to act entirely within the present, and without regard for future consequences or longer time spans. Her scandalous flight with Henry, doubled by Julia's elopement with Yates, betokens an ongoing inability to see life as anything other than a game. The fate of Maria – never to develop, never to gain a longer perspective than the instant – stands as a deeply pessimistic pendant to the classical comic endings of the novels discussed above, in which everyday time and biographical time are ultimately harmonized.

If, as I have argued, the tension between everyday time and biographical time is not negotiated through the novel's heroine, Fanny Price, what precisely is Fanny's relationship to these time horizons, and to temporality more generally? To address this question, we must return to the opening of the novel. We will recall that Fanny is the issue of a mother who cannot regulate her sexuality and fertility; the surplus of children is a major factor in the family's financial distress. Frances Price cannot seem to move beyond the procreative phase of her life: contrary to the logic of biographical

development, she appears to treat the production of children as an endlessly repeatable activity – a recurring feature of everyday life, rather than a biographical milestone. But if Frances embodies a severely unregulated relationship to time, Fanny, from the first moment she is introduced, appears to be straining against having any relationship to time at all: "She was small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty; exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice; but her air, though awkward, was not vulgar, her voice was sweet, and when she spoke, her countenance was pretty" (MP, 12). In our first glimpse of her, it is as if Fanny is shrinking from biological development itself, the most fundamental index of human time. The point is made more forcefully as the narrator contrasts Fanny's stunted development with the physical precocity of her cousins:

They were a remarkably fine family, the sons very well-looking, the daughters decidedly handsome, and all of them well-grown and forward of their age, which produced as striking a difference between the cousins in person, as education had given to their address; and no one would have supposed the girls so nearly of an age as they really were. There was in fact but two years between the youngest and Fanny." (MP, 13)

Whereas the Bertram children already look promising as future participants in the marriage market (they are "well-looking" and "handsome"), Fanny has no such allure (she has "no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty"). Meanwhile, while the cousins are "all of them well-grown and forward of their age," Fanny appears to shrink back from her own age, such that she appears significantly younger.

Fanny's alienation from biological and biographical time is reinforced in the discussion between Mary and Edmund around whether Fanny is "out" or not. Confronted with the question, Edmund pleads ignorance: "I believe I know what you mean — but I will not undertake to answer the question. My cousin is grown up. She has the age and

sense of a woman, but the outs and not outs are beyond me" (MP, 49). While Edmund's demurral might be read as a function of his disinterest in social gossip, his fundamental seriousness, it also suggests a real ambiguity in Fanny's status: although possessed of "the age and sense of a woman," she is clearly not available to potential suitors. This ambiguity is only heightened by Mary's curt judgment that Fanny is "*not* out," which is based only on social signifiers (Fanny is not taken out for balls or visits) and takes no account of the heroine's peculiar liminal position with regard to biographical development. Later on, we see Fanny registering active resistance to such development, as Edmund reveals to her that Sir Thomas has been admiring her physical flowering: "Oh! don't talk so, don't talk so," cried Fanny, distressed by more feelings than he was aware of..." (MP, 198)

We have seen that Fanny consciously, unconsciously, and perhaps even biologically resists the forward, irreversible thrust of biographical time. Yet unlike other Austen characters who offer similar resistance – Isabella Thorpe, Mr. Bennet, Mr. Woodhouse – she does not take refuge in the predictable, repetitive rounds of everyday time. On the contrary, she seems to be alienated from this seemingly benign horizon of temporality as well. This alienation is pathetically registered at the beginning of her residence at Mansfield, when Edmund finds her crying because she misses her brother William; she has promised William to write to him first, but she has no paper. Edmund easily resolves the situation by offering paper and declaring, "let it be done now" (MP, 16). For Edmund, writing a letter is a simple everyday activity; for Fanny, it is a source of vexation and perplexity. Suddenly placed in a new social context with its own rules and rhythms, she cannot simply declare, "I will write to William 'now.'" Fanny's painful

alienation from the rhythms of everyday life is emphasized throughout the novel. For example, as her cousins enjoy the formalized rounds of social mixing in the spring season, Fanny, is unable to participate: "'Fanny had no share in the festivities of the season; but she enjoyed being avowedly useful as her aunt's companion, when they called away the rest of the family..." (MP, 35) Later on, during the Sotherton outing, Fanny cannot join in the moment-to-moment movements and flirtations of the others, but is instead immobilized: "A quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, passed away, and Fanny was still thinking of Edmund, Miss Crawford, and herself without interruption from any one. She began to be surprised at being left so long, and to listen with an anxious desire of hearing their steps and their voices again" (MP, 97). For Fanny, everyday time is not an opportunity for impulsive enjoyment; it is a painful index of her isolation and a duration to be endured.

Fanny's visit to Portsmouth suggests that her alienation from temporality began well before her removal to Mansfield, with the habits and customs of her family. In fact, this phase of the novel offers us something like a temporal primal scene. From the moment of her arrival, we encounter a family that cannot manage to maintain the most basic order or rhythm in everyday affairs. At the door, a nameless younger brother bursts out of the house exclaiming about the timing of William's arrival, and interrupting the maid-servant who has come out to greet the visitors: "you are just in time. We have been looking for you this half hour. The Thrush went out of harbour this morning. I saw her. It was a beautiful sight. And they think she will have her orders in a day or two. And Mr. Campbell was here at four o'clock, to ask for you; he has got one of the Thrush's boats, and is going off to her at six, and hoped you would be here in time to go with him" (MP,

377). The boy's leaps from one time to another – "this half-hour," "this morning," "in a day or two," "four o'clock," "six" – along with his paratactic style of speech and his keenness to interrupt others, suggests a breathless, unplanned, disordered relationship to time. The boy's disorganized way of being-in-time is immediately echoed in the figure of Fanny's mother, whose patterns of speech and thought are equally associative and non-sequential:

Oh! my dear William, how glad I am to see you. But have you heard about the Thrush? She is gone out of harbour already, three days before we had any thought of it; and I do not know what I am to do about Sam's things, they will never be ready in time; for she may have her orders to-morrow, perhaps. It takes me quite unawares. . . . I thought to have had such a comfortable evening with you, and here every thing comes upon me at once. (MP, 378)

Like her son, Mrs. Price leaps fitfully between past, present, and future, which do not follow one another in sequence, but instead crash into one another chaotically: "every thing comes upon me at once." Things are constantly happening too early or too late: In this family, even that most temporally regular of everyday practices – the taking of tea – cannot be counted on to occur at a precise time or within a precise timeframe (MP, 383). The temporal disorganization of Fanny's family, and the chaos it occasions, suggests a very reasonable basis for her withdrawal from social time, her wish to avoid being subjected to the rhythms of others.

If Fanny seems to resist incorporation into the easily disordered rhythms of everyday time, the developmental schema of biographical time, and even the steady pulse of biological time, what sort of time is proper to her? Is it reasonable to read her as a figure of absolute atemporality? Such a reading would go too far, for she does indeed have a typical mode of relating to time; yet this mode can only be discerned through her relation to space. The first moment in which Fanny appears to relate actively to time

instead of avoiding or negating it comes during the outing to Sotherton. Here, Fanny locates in the family chapel a mode of temporality better suited to her spirit than any other in the novel. Mrs. Rushworth explains that the chapel "was formerly in constant use both morning and evening. Prayers were always read in it by the domestic chaplain, within the memory of many. But the late Mr. Rushworth left it off" (MP, 86). Fanny responds with uncharacteristic force: "'It is a pity,' cried Fanny, 'that the custom should have been discontinued. It was a valuable part of former times. There is something in a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer is fine!'" (86). In the space of the family chapel, Fanny discerns the residue of a more functional and harmonious temporal order, and by extension a more functional and harmonious social order. The institution of the chapel, for Fanny, meaningfully integrates everyday time (the ritual of morning and evening prayer), biographical time (embodied in the family), and historical time (the hazily construed realm of "former times"). It is to such an integrated temporal order that Fanny wishes desperately to belong; integrated into such an order, she would have no reason to secede from social time. But the irrecoverable loss of any such an order is immediately pointed up by Mary's modern, liberal dismissal of the institution of the family chapel: "Every body likes to go their own way — to chuse their own time and manner of devotion" (MP, 87). What Fanny imagines as blessed harmony, Mary views as tyrannical constraint.

As the social and temporal harmony of "past times" cannot be revived in the present for Fanny's benefit, she finds another sort of harmony to dwell in, epitomized by another crucial space in the novel: the East room, which Fanny is allowed to occupy as



her own. Here, the harmony that is lost to time is reconstituted in space: the constellation of Fanny's beloved objects is endowed with the power to recall the all too intermittent moments of human connection from her past, and to throw a gauzy sheen of indistinctness over the rest of her history: "the whole was now so blended together, so harmonized by distance, that every former affliction had its charm" (152). Harmonized by distance: the phrase could serve as an apt motto for nostalgia, in which sanded-down tranches of the past are removed from the sequence of time and reconstituted as places one can freely revisit.<sup>147</sup> Given the insurmountable chasm between the disordered time of the present and the cohesive, integrated time of the historical past, Fanny learns to live in the precisely in the hazy "distance" between the two, where loss can be refigured as fullness, and absence as presence.

Given that Fanny's retreat into nostalgia entails a turning away from social, historical, and interpersonal reality, it hardly constitutes a viable "solution" to the crisis of social cohesion that haunts all of Austen's novels. As such, Austen ultimately turns to the inevitable "solution" of all her novels: marriage. Yet I would argue that in *Mansfield Park*, Austen registers a protest against her own marriage plot by showing us that Fanny can only be integrated into the standard biographical periodization by force. It may be objected to this claim that Fanny's desire for Edmund is revealed to her in the course of the preparations for the amateur theatricals, that her marriage to Edmund is a fulfillment of her most devout wishes. Yet even if Fanny comes to recognize such desire, it only comes about through a violation of her very way of being. The first such violation occurs in the literal invasion of her room by Edmund and Mary. Within the space of her own

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<sup>147</sup> For a more focused account of nostalgia in *Mansfield Park*, with an emphasis on Fanny's tendency to forget, see Dames, 94-111.

fragile order, Edmund and Mary conscript her into their own performance of eros, using her as a triangulating figure to spur further desire. Even if Fanny's own desire is awakened here, it is very much against her will.

After the return of Sir Thomas and the cancellation of the performance, Austen's male characters continue to interpellate her into the discourse of desire: Sir Thomas remarks on her improved "countenance" and "figure" (MP, 198); Edmund cheerfully reports these observations to her, insisting that she must accommodate herself to "the idea of being worth looking at" (MP, 198); Henry Crawford comes to admire the "decided beauty" of her blushing skin and the expressiveness of her "eyes and mouth" (MP, 230). Yet Fanny herself repeatedly and resolutely rejects the possibility that she might be viewed as an object of romantic and sexual interest. We can discern an analogous protest in the narrator's mordant relation of the leadup to the inevitable marriage:

Scarcely had [Edmund] done regretting Mary Crawford, and observing to Fanny how impossible it was that he should ever meet with such another woman, before it began to strike him whether a very different kind of woman might not do just as well — or a great deal better, whether Fanny herself were not growing as dear, as important to him in all her smiles, and all her ways, as Mary Crawford had ever been; and whether it might not be a possible, an hopeful undertaking to persuade her that her warm and sisterly regard for him would be foundation enough for wedded love. (MP, 470)

The narrator's meditation on Edmund's timing in shifting his affections strikes me as anything but lighthearted. It is hardly attractive to see him considering whether Fanny "might not do just as well — or a great deal better" than Mary. But the narrator's deepest irony comes with her refusal to establish a timeframe for the courtship and marriage:

I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people. — I only intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss

Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire. (MP, 470)

Here, the narrator insinuates that the periodizing logic of biography, epitomized by the marriage imperative, is anything but "natural." Fanny is ultimately adjusted to this logic not by compromise, but by social and narratorial fiat; this brutal "solution" suggests that Austen is by no means satisfied with marriage as the mechanism of social resynchronization. Yet beyond the retreat into nostalgia, *Mansfield Park* offers no alternative mechanism. To locate such a possibility we must turn to Austen's final novel.

### 3. CRISIS AND COHESION IN *PERSUASION*

From the opening image of *Persuasion*, there is a sense of temporal vertigo, of time out of joint:

Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch-hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs, changed naturally into pity and contempt. As he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century — and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed — this was the page at which the favourite volume always opened:

#### ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH-HALL.

Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married, July 15, 1784, Elizabeth, daughter of James Stevenson, Esq. of South Park, in the county of Gloucester; by which lady (who died 1800) he has issue Elizabeth, born June 1, 1785; Anne, born August 9, 1787; a still-born son, Nov. 20, 1791. (P, A3)

This opening scene appears to establish a node of connection between everyday time (Walter's habitual, reassuring perusal of the Baronetage), biographical time (the chronicle of the lives of the Elliots), and historical time (the evolution of the aristocracy across

centuries). Yet ultimately these three horizons are not meaningfully integrated in Sir Walter's experience. History is recognized here not as a temporal process in which Sir Walter is involved but rather as a mark of personal distinction: he recognizes historical change only in the form of the regrettable dilution of the aristocracy ("the endless creations of the last century"), and the concomitant devaluation of his own status. But if Sir Walter is ill-equipped to recognize the *longue durée* of history, he appears to be equally insensitive to the horizon of biographical time, which is reduced to a mere schema of dates and data. We can see this insensitivity in his additions to his family's entry, where he diligently adopts the Baronetage's terse house style:

Precisely such had the paragraph originally stood from the printer's hands; but Sir Walter had improved it by adding, for the information of himself and his family, these words, after the date of Mary's birth — "married, Dec. 16, 1810, Charles, son and heir of Charles Musgrove, Esq. of Uppercross, in the county of Somerset," — and by inserting most accurately the day of the month on which he had lost his wife. (P, A3)

Although he is capable of "inserting most accurately the day of the month on which he had lost his wife," for the better "information" of his family, he is incapable of recognizing the significance of that loss, which actually precipitates the final decline of the Elliots and sets in motion the action of the novel: "While Lady Elliot lived, there had been method, moderation, and economy, which just kept [Sir Walter] within his income; but with her had died all such right-mindedness, and from that period he had been constantly exceeding it" (P, A9). The death of Lady Elliot leads to a loss of proportion, whereby the family cannot keep its finances synchronized with the historical horizon of the changing economy, nor keep its two older daughters on track in terms of biographical time — that is, by marrying them off.

Without the guiding prudence of his wife, Sir Walter falls out of phase with both historical time and biographical time: he cannot keep up with the cultural and economic dynamism of the age, nor can he act with any awareness of his own stage of life – as an older man or as a father. The novel's opening image of him engaged in a habitual, everyday activity typifies his outlook: he is ensconced in a perpetual present and willfully blind to the larger trajectories of biographical and historical time. And it is well that he should cling to the horizon of everyday time, given that through repetition it produces a sense of "reversibility", and balances out the irreversible finitude of the biographical lifespan. Yet Sir Walter cannot escape the most basic element of biographical time, which is the biological process of growth and decay: although he flatters himself on his well-preserved appearance of youthfulness and continuing eligibility as a bachelor, he is scandalized by the very fact of aging, shocked to see "Anne haggard, Mary coarse, every face in the neighborhood worsting; and the rapid increase of the crow's foot about Lady Russell's temples had long been a distress to him." (P, A6) There is a limit to what the everyday can do.

Although Sir Walter can escape from the disappointments of biology into the self-assurance of his social distinction any time he opens up his book, it is more difficult for his daughter Elizabeth to content herself with the consolations of the everyday, despite her position as mistress of the Elliot household:

Thirteen winters revolving frosts had seen her opening every ball of credit which a scanty neighbourhood afforded; and thirteen springs shewn their blossoms, as she travelled up to London with her father, for a few weeks annual enjoyment of the great world. She had the remembrance of all this; she had the consciousness of being nine-and-twenty, to give her some regrets and some apprehensions. (P, A7)

For Elizabeth, the biographical scale of years weighs heavily; the "scanty" and infrequent pleasures and distinctions that her life affords her cannot outweigh the menace of spinsterhood. By contrast, her sister Mary, having made a passable marriage, can narrow her experience of time to a perpetual present even more narcissistic and infantile than that of her father, as evidenced in an early scene in which Anne visits her at Uppercross:

"So, you are come at last! I began to think I should never see you. I am so ill I can hardly speak. I have not seen a creature the whole morning!"

"I am sorry to find you unwell," replied Anne. "You sent me such a good account of yourself on Thursday!"

"Yes, I made the best of it; I always do, but I was very far from well at the time; and I do not think I ever was so ill in my life as I have been all this morning – very unfit to be left alone, I am sure. . ." (P, A37)

Mary is incapable of seeing beyond the immediate present: she cannot anticipate or envision even the following day, let alone the flow of weeks, months, and years. Whereas Sir Walter hides from physical decay within the comforting rounds of everyday activity, Mary inhabits physical pathology as a satisfying everyday routine in its own right — one that has the power to create its own private time horizon through which others can be manipulated.

Although each of the Elliots has a distinctive – and distinctively pathological – attitude towards time, these attitudes are linked by a shared tendency to displace the more threatening aspects of biographical temporality onto the everyday temporality of fashionable social life, in which they are better equipped to navigate and – at least within the limited scope of their own social circle – dominate. The triumph of the everyday over any longer duration in the imagination of the Elliots is perhaps best exemplified by the family's reaction to the arrival of their noble cousins in Bath:

"The Bath paper one morning announced the arrival of the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple, and her daughter, the Honourable Miss Carteret; and all the comfort

of No. —, Camden-place, was swept away for many days; for the Dalrymples (in Anne's opinion, most unfortunately) were cousins of the Elliots; and the agony was, how to introduce themselves properly." (P, A148)

Here, the family's concern with social place makes an utter mockery of time as an evolving, long-term process: in the face of their shared "agony" over etiquette, the time of narrative action is suspended, and duration itself becomes dispensable, meaningless, a mere signifier or empty formula ("many days"). This obliviousness to time as a significant source of meaning contributes substantially to the grotesque quality of the Elliot family, and helps to explain the poor fit between the savage, satirical depiction of the Elliots and the narrative texture of the novel as a whole. Marilyn Butler diagnoses the incongruence of the Elliots with the world of *Persuasion* as a technical and generic failure on the part of Austen: in her view, they properly belong to "a two-dimensional tradition of social comedy."<sup>148</sup> Yet I would argue that the incompatibility of the representation of the Elliots with the style of the novel as a whole is not a failure of generic unity but rather a function of their absolute alienation from biographical and historical time. What is grotesque about the Elliots is not merely their immurement within the redoubt of a perpetual present: it is the contrast of this almost vegetative stasis with a turbulent, accelerating world.

By all rights it would seem that Anne Elliot should, like the rest of her family, be eager to escape from the pressures of biographical time. After all, the backstory of her failed engagement with Wentworth constitutes something like a derailed or deformed version of the earlier Austen marriage plots: in contrast with the previous heroines, her life has failed to develop into a recognizable and accepted biographical form. Yet despite – or perhaps because of – this failure for her experience to be integrated into the horizon

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<sup>148</sup> Butler, 279.

of the lifespan, Anne clings tenaciously to the logic of biographical time. This commitment is most evident in her association with the term "period," and its close cousin "interval".

As we have noted, in the earlier novels – above all *Emma* – the term "period" frequently corresponds to biographical time in the form of stages of life. In *Persuasion*, there are near constant references in the narrative to specific spans of time, which are frequently termed "periods" or "intervals" and corresponds to discrete phases of the characters' lives; a partial list of these spans would include the 17-year period of the marriage between Sir Walter and Lady Elliot, Anne's three years at school in Bath, Wentworth's stay at Monkford for "half a year", Anne's week at Kellynch with Lady Russell, her two months at Uppercross, the two-year interval between the death of Richard Musgrove and the moment of his mother mourning him, the two years Mrs. Smith has spent at Bath after her husband's death, the 12 years that have elapsed since the last meeting between Mrs. Smith and Anne, and perhaps most importantly the "Eight years and a half" between the canceled engagement between Anne and Wentworth and their final reconciliation (P, A225). There are also many references to fixed intervals which are not assigned exact durations: for example, the "interval of several years" between the Elliots' first acquaintance with Mr. Elliot and the opening of the novel, the "period of exquisite felicity" during which Anne and Wentworth are engaged, the "many years" of Mr. Elliot's marriage, and the "period" of Mr. Elliot's early indiscretions. The term "period" is used with some frequency (16 instances), as is the closely related term "interval" (14 instances).



Although many of the novel's periods are marked out by the narrator, the form of the period is associated above all with the perspective of Anne. Anne tends to read her own life, and the lives of others, as segmented into discrete periods; Mary Favret, borrowing from Russell Berman, terms this tendency her "periodization strategy."<sup>149</sup> For example, Anne marks off her time at Uppercross as a unified period of "two months" (P, A43, A93); she fixes a period of "a week" of expectation of her first encounter with Wentworth (P, A53); she insists on conceptualizing Mr. Elliot's early bad behavior as belonging to a coherent "period" of his life (A200); and most importantly, she views the "More than seven years" of separation from Wentworth as a discrete period (A28).

The prominence of periods in the novel, as marked by both Anne and the narrator, would seem to suggest some continuing faith in the logic of biographical development. Yet if we examine the content of these periods, we will see that they do not correspond to the fullness or completion of developmental processes or stages; on the contrary, they are fundamentally arbitrary in duration. The period of Anne's "three years" at school in Bath does not correspond to the completion of an education. The period of her week at Kellynch corresponds only to the arbitrary travel plans of her family and Lady Russell. The period of her "two months" at Uppercross does not correspond to the fulfillment of a meaningful function. With these arbitrary segments of time, we are far from Mr. Knightley's genial, self-assured schema of discrete, naturally occurring biographical stages. But what is more alarming and anomic than the arbitrary duration of *Persuasion's* periods is their propensity to replace or cancel out lived experience: they are generally presented as abstract, smooth, without content or contour. We learn nothing of Anne's "three years" at school, other than the fact that she was "unhappy" and grieving her

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<sup>149</sup> Favret, n.p.

mother (P, A152). We are given no concrete sense of what happens during Elizabeth's "thirteen years" as mistress of Kellynch Hall (P, A6). Only token detail is provided about Richard Musgrove's "six months" aboard Wentworth's frigate (P, A51).

Nowhere is the decoupling of the period from any biographical or developmental logic more extreme and more pathetic than in the narrator's descriptions of the novel's most crucial period – namely, the period of separation between Anne and Wentworth after their first courtship has failed. The first such description occurs soon after Anne realizes that Wentworth may return to Kellynch to visit his sister, Mrs. Croft:

More than seven years were gone since this little history of sorrowful interest had reached its close; and time had softened down much, perhaps nearly all of peculiar attachment to him,—but she had been too dependent on time alone; no aid had been given in change of place (except in one visit to Bath soon after the rupture,) or in any novelty or enlargement of society.—No one had come within the Kellynch circle, who could bear a comparison with Frederick Wentworth, as he stood in her memory. No second attachment, the only thoroughly natural, happy, and sufficient cure, at her time of life, had been possible to the nice tone of her mind, the fastidiousness of her taste, in the small limits of the society around them. (P, A28)

The key phrase here is "time alone." This passage begins with the narrator defining the separation between Anne and Wentworth as a period ("More than seven years"); this period is then associated with the passage of time, but not the development of events or the passage from one stage of life to another (it is comprised of "time alone").

Meanwhile, although time is at first posited as a causal agent in the process of Anne's life moving forward ("time had softened..."), it is ultimately represented as incapable of bringing about meaningful change. The period has been reduced to an arbitrary, contingent span of "time alone," and "time alone" is not enough.

This point is made even more forcefully in the narrator's second description of the period of separation, which occurs immediately after Anne's first encounter with

Wentworth at Uppercross:

Eight years, almost eight years had passed, since all had been given up. How absurd to be resuming the agitation which such an interval had banished into distance and indistinctness! What might not eight years do? Events of every description, changes, alienations, removals,—all, all must be comprised in it; and oblivion of the past—how natural, how certain too! It included nearly a third part of her own life.

Alas! with all her reasonings, she found, that to retentive feelings eight years may be little more than nothing. (P, A60)

In this passage, we can see that Anne's "periodization strategy" is no match for the contingency that has ruled her life. Although she struggles to characterize the "interval" of separation as a discrete, coherent biographical phase ("nearly a third part of her own life") – it is clear that the "eight years" have not constituted a coherent developmental stage in her life narrative. This passage indicates that in the world of *Persuasion*, lives do not develop according to any intrinsic logic: instead, they are formed and deformed by arbitrary externalities. From this perspective, we can see that Anne's recurrence to the terminology and logic of biographical periodization, like Fanny Price's reliance on nostalgia, communicates a desperate wish to return to a coherent temporal and social order. Yet the arbitrary and anomic quality of periods as represented in the novel speaks of a profound, even catastrophic desynchronization of temporal horizons, wherein brief intervals of everyday time can loom as large as historical eras, while spans of years can be reduced to the blink of an eye.

Rosa lays out the dire stakes of such profound desynchronization:

Where the three . . . levels of the individual's experience of time can no longer be brought into accord with one another and with the systematic patterns of time [in society], severe consequences unavoidably result for actors, both individual and

collective. A resynchronization is then only possible at the cost of a (temporal-) cultural or (temporal-) structural "revolution."<sup>150</sup>

If there is a figure in *Persuasion* who is undaunted by such destabilization, who even appears game for the kind of cultural or structural "revolution" that would restore social cohesion and temporal synchronicity, it is surely Captain Wentworth. As many critics have noted, Wentworth embodies the increasing power and confidence of the professional classes, and the Navy itself figures as a model for a new social order in the novel.<sup>151</sup> Yet what is "revolutionary" about Wentworth is not merely his activity, energy, or social outlook: his very mode of being-in-time corresponds to radical enlightenment attitudes toward historical change. In *Futures Past*, Reinhart Koselleck locates the increasing desire for accelerated progress in the eighteenth century in the figure of the "prophetic philosopher," sketched by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing as a thinker who "takes well-judged prospects of the future... for he cannot wait for the future. He wants this future to come more quickly, and he himself wants to accelerate it... for what has he to gain if that which he recognizes as the better is actually not to be realized as the better within his lifetime?"<sup>152</sup> While it would be an exaggeration to cast Wentworth as an explicit allegory of enlightenment attitudes, his stance towards temporality mirrors that of the "prophetic philosopher": he wishes to merge the present with the future, and rejects the premise that change must happen in some natural, eventual course of time.

Throughout the novel Wentworth is presented as supremely confident in his ability to act

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<sup>150</sup> Rosa, 22.

<sup>151</sup> Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986), 228.

<sup>152</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 22.

on and shape his world: this confidence translates into an impatience with the longer spans of time associated with biography and history. In fact, Wentworth treats the immediate present of his everyday sphere of action as if it were already hurtling into the future; it is precisely this attitude that dooms his original courtship with Anne: "he was confident that he should soon be rich;— full of life and ardour, he knew that he should soon have a ship, and soon be on a station that would lead to every thing he wanted" (P, A27). Here, we can see that Wentworth does not see his life as a form that will develop through ongoing processes or extended durations: instead, he envisions it proceeding by sudden, self-willed leaps forward. Wentworth's alignment with the headlong rush from present to future is curiously reinforced on the level of narrative technique: throughout the novel, he is presented as appearing and acting with a degree of suddenness or even instantaneity that appears out of phase with the novel's emphasis on longer durations, embodied in the predominance of "periods" and "intervals" described above. For example, in the early part of Wentworth's stay at Uppercross, he quite suddenly rescues Anne from a physical assault by little Walter, who is interrupting her ministrations to the injured young Charles:

In another moment, however, she found herself in the state of being released from him; some one was taking him from her, though he had bent her head down so much, that his sturdy little hands were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it. (P, A80)

Here, when Anne is caught in an uncomfortable situation with an open-ended duration, Wentworth acts with a degree of suddenness that appears to disrupt duration altogether: whereas Anne tends to endure duration, Wentworth cuts through it. A similar scenario plays out towards the end of the long autumn walk taken by the inhabitants of

Uppercross. When Anne appears to be on the verge of succumbing to fatigue, and the walking party encounters the Crofts in their gig, Wentworth springs over a hedge "in a moment" to encourage his sister to offer a ride to Anne (P, A82). As in the scene with little Walter, Wentworth, through headlong, instantaneous action, liberates Anne from the endurance of duration.

The characterization of Wentworth as a figure of suddenness and the denial of duration is reinforced by his own language. During the dinner party at Uppercross, Wentworth describes a close call during his command of the sloop Asp:

"I had the good luck, in my passage home the next autumn, to fall in with the very French frigate I wanted.— I brought her into Plymouth; and here was another instance of luck. We had not been six hours in the Sound, when a gale came on, which lasted four days and nights, and which would have done for poor old Asp, in half the time; our touch with the Great Nation not having much improved our condition. Four-and-twenty hours later, and I should only have been a gallant Captain Wentworth, in a small paragraph at one corner of the newspapers; and being lost in only a sloop, nobody would have thought about me." (P, A66)

Here, Wentworth uncharacteristically acknowledges duration ("four days and nights"; "half the time"; "four-and-twenty hours later"); yet in this brief narrative, duration turns out to be something that Wentworth has luckily *avoided* – in particular, the threatening duration of the storm. From Wentworth's perspective, duration seems to be associated with a loss of agency, and even with fatality. Yet Wentworth has been able to avoid being caught in duration through his typically instantaneous form of action: "I had the good luck . . . to fall in with the very French frigate I wanted .— I brought her into Plymouth . . ." Wentworth's narrative draws a sharp contrast between willful action, which immediately brings into being a desired future, and watchful waiting, which is not only ruinous but tantamount to death.

Wentworth's curiously radical attitude towards duration is perhaps most clearly embodied in his famous speech to Louisa Musgrove about the hazelnut:

"To exemplify,— a beautiful glossy nut, which, blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn. Not a puncture, not a weak spot any where.— This nut," he continued, with playful solemnity,— "while so many of its brethren have fallen and been trodden under foot, is still in possession of all the happiness that a hazel-nut can be supposed capable of." Then, returning to his former earnest tone: "My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm. If Louisa Musgrove would be beautiful and happy in her November of life, she will cherish all her present powers of mind." (P, A88)

The imagery that Wentworth deploys in this brief, "playful" monologue suggests something profound about his attitude towards time. A hazelnut is obviously not only a hazelnut, but also a potential tree: it can thus be read as a figure of development over time. Yet Wentworth emphasizes the qualities of the nut in the present, just as he emphasizes the qualities of Louisa in the present; in neither case does he imagine that the passage of time will effect a transformation. In his speech to Louisa, Wentworth betrays a fundamental blindness to the possibility that change might occur through ongoing processes: in his view, the future is no more and no less than the fulfillment of present projects and intentions.

Through his confident projection of the present into the future, as well as his association with the insurgent Navy and the professional classes it represents, Wentworth appears triumphantly to synchronize his everyday actions, his life plan, and his historical moment, and even to embody the hope that society itself can be analogously transformed following his example. Yet Austen is far from unequivocally approving this mode of forcible resynchronization. One of the central ironies of the novel is that Wentworth's revolutionary confidence is shaken precisely through an instance of literal desynchronization: his failure by "half a second" to catch Louisa as she jumps down from

the steps at Lyme (P, A109). It is no coincidence that Wentworth, the man of instantaneous action, is unmanned against the backdrop of the longest of *longue durées*, embodied in the cliffs of Pinny,

with its green chasms between romantic rocks, where the scattered forest trees and orchards of luxuriant growth, declare that many a generation must have passed away since the first partial falling of the cliff prepared the ground for such a state, where a scene so wonderful and so lovely is exhibited, as may more than equal any of the resembling scenes of the far-famed Isle of Wight: these places must be visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood. (P, A95-A96)

Here, Austen invokes the deep time of geology, geography, and natural history not only in her description of the landscape but also in her choice of setting for the excursion: as Noah Heringman notes in his study *Romantic Rocks*, Lyme became a focus of interest for natural historians and geologists in the early 19th century, and a site of major fossil discoveries.<sup>153</sup> Meanwhile, Austen aligns the deep time of the earth with human history considered at the largest scale ("many a generation must have passed away"), which is so monumental as to be impersonal and to transcend the lives and stories of individuals. By staging Wentworth's humiliating loss of power in front of this implacably grand backdrop, Austen insinuates a mordant irony: even the man of revolutionary confidence and instantaneous action must have drastically limited agency in the face of the deepest timescales. Taken as a whole, the Lyme excursion stands as a profoundly unsettling image of desynchronization. Whereas the "young people" of Uppercross, following the example of Wentworth, have chosen to take their outing suddenly, capriciously, and literally out of season, the cliffs and orchards around Lyme speak of the deeper, steadier temporal order of natural history and anthropology, which is being irreversibly outpaced

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<sup>153</sup> Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3.



in an accelerating social world. This looks like a point of no return for the project of resynchronization, through revolution or otherwise.

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Where then does *Persuasion* leave us? To what extent does it imagine any hope of temporal or social coherence in an accelerating world? I would like to suggest that Austen's final novel offers a limited vision of unity precisely where it seems most disjointed: in the social-temporal form of the "crisis." Reinhart Koselleck helpfully chronicles the history of this concept from its origins in Greek law, theology, and medicine to its eventual migration into social, political, and economic discourse around the turn of the 19th century; in all of these intellectual spheres, the concept of crisis delineates a period of tense waiting for an uncertain outcome or eventuality: the life or death of a patient, the judgment of a court, the coming of the Apocalypse, the outbreak of a revolution.<sup>154</sup> Austen deploys the term "crisis" only once in her novels, in the lighthearted context of decoding the charade in *Emma*, but she does so to delineate precisely this form of anxious expectation: "Things must come to a crisis soon now" (E, 72). But she also periodically alludes to the form of crisis in a graver mood via the term's adjectival form, "critical": for example, "critical moment" (NA, 74); "so critical an emergency" (SS, 121); "the most critical time in his life" (SS, 251); "critical situations" (E, 203); "critical period" (P, A74). Austen's use of the term is admittedly limited;

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<sup>154</sup> Reinhart Koselleck and Michaela W. Richter, "Crisis," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 2 (2006), 358.

however, because the modern meaning of “crisis” was still in formation during the period of Austen’s literary production,<sup>155</sup> it seems reasonable to suggest that she may have seized on the form without having a name for it, or even being conscious of it. In any case, Koselleck's definition fits admirably with the most crisis-like episode of the novel: Louisa's near-fatal accident at Lyme and its anxious aftermath. As I will demonstrate below, the figure of crisis also resonates with the sense of alarmed expectation of war in the novel's closing lines. These two crucial moments in *Persuasion* suggest that the outbreak of crisis can effect a temporary synchronization of temporal horizons, and by extension a fragile and ephemeral form of coherent community.

If the novel as a whole tends to represent the time horizons of its characters as diverging widely, even becoming incompatible or incommensurable, Louisa's injury at Lyme suddenly places them into the shared temporality of immediate action and urgent expectation. This new configuration constitutes something like an extended present: as Emily Rohrbach notes, "It is the only scene in which the narration of events takes much longer to read than the events themselves would take to unfold, as if the 'present' has expanded in the rare urgency of these few pages."<sup>156</sup> I would like to suggest that this urgent present corresponds to the temporality of crisis, and offers a way of being-in-time that is generally absent from the rest of novel, and from Austen's oeuvre more generally.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> During the period of Austen’s literary production, the modern concept of “crisis” was still “emergent”; according to Reinhart Koselleck, the term became newly significant for history and the philosophy of history and took on a specifically temporal dimension beginning around 1780. See Koselleck, *Crisis* 358; for “emergent,” see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 123-125.

<sup>156</sup> Emily Rohrbach, *Modernity's Mist: British Romanticism and the Poetics of Anticipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 116.

<sup>157</sup> My reading of the Lyme incident as an ongoing present corresponds to some extent with Rohrbach's characterization of *Persuasion* as concerned with articulating an "uncertain present"; however, I diverge from Rohrbach in my interpretation of that present. Whereas Rohrbach treats Austen's handling of

The urgent present of crisis disrupts and temporarily suspends concern with longer time horizons, suddenly synchronizing the perspectives of characters in a way that proves impossible in the rest of the novel. This synchronization allows for a rare experience of coordination and community,<sup>158</sup> reflected in the sudden advent of a third person plural, a corporate identity embodying the shared action, judgment, and experience of the group: "they had set off immediately"; "They were sick with horror"; "They were now able to speak to each other, and consult" (P, A112). While Louisa's life hangs in the balance, the shared present of crisis merges the alienated perspectives of the characters, and disrupts the novel's general strategy of presenting the narrative exclusively from Anne's individual perspective. But this special temporal and interpersonal dispensation, this extended present in which both time and social relations are suddenly stabilized, is quickly brought to an end as Anne, chosen to accompany Wentworth and Henrietta back to Uppercross, turns her mind away from the immediate present and towards the future: "How the long stage would pass; how it was to affect their manners; what was to be their sort of intercourse, she could not foresee" (P, A116). The episode closes with the image of Anne and Wentworth speeding away from Lyme in the carriage: "They got on fast. Anne was astonished to recognize the same hills and the same objects so soon. Their actual speed, heightened by some dread of the conclusion,

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temporality in general, and the present in particular, as tracing the outline of a distinctly romantic philosophy of history, I see Austen as more concerned with the relationship between temporality and social structures. See Rohrbach, 124-131.

<sup>158</sup> Mary Favret reads this sudden emergence of community around danger and suffering as obliquely figuring "the structures of feeling demanded by war – its peculiar blend of self-alienation, selfless caring for others, alarm, survival, even a felicity hard to distinguish from pain." Mary A. Favret, *War at a Distance : Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c2010), 171.

made the road appear but half as long as on the day before" (P, A117). Here, the shared present of crisis yields back to the destabilizing logic of acceleration.

The exceptional experience of crisis is promptly buried even further, as it is transmuted in polite conversation into a past "accident":

As to the sad catastrophe itself, it could be canvassed only in one style by a couple of steady, sensible women, whose judgments had to work on ascertained events; and it was perfectly decided that it had been the consequence of much thoughtlessness and much imprudence; that its effects were most alarming, and that it was frightful to think, how long Miss Musgrove's recovery might yet be doubtful and how liable she would still remain to suffer from the concussion hereafter! — The Admiral wound it all up summarily by exclaiming, "Ay, a very bad business indeed." (P, A126)

In this passage, we see the crisis being "wound. . . up summarily." The ongoing, open present is retrospectively configured as a series of "ascertained events"; meanwhile, the contingency of the crisis is minimized through the didactic judgment on Louisa's "thoughtlessness and . . . imprudence." A sudden transformation in temporal and interpersonal experience is reduced to "a very bad business indeed."

Yet if the communal experience of crisis is deftly "wound up" in the middle of the novel, cocooned in the confident eighteenth-century discourse of prudence, the anxiety and uncertainty registered in the closing lines of *Persuasion* stand as a reminder that there will assuredly be more opportunities to endure crisis. For despite their happy domestic union, Anne and Wentworth remain subject to "the dread of a future war," "the tax of quick alarm" (P, A252). And indeed, as the novel takes place during the "false peace" of the Napoleonic wars, it is precisely such a renewal of war that is around the corner.<sup>159</sup> Yet the cyclical recurrence of crisis, which Koselleck identifies as "a structural signature of

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<sup>159</sup> Rohrbach, 119-120. By ending the novel on a note of tension between the biographical time of marriage and the historical time of war, Austen seems to warn against readings that reduce *Persuasion* to a "fairytale" based on its deferred but ultimately fulfilled marriage plot.

modernity," paradoxically offers a modicum of hope.<sup>160</sup> For at the historical moment portrayed in the novel, in which social life has been catastrophically and perhaps irreversibly desynchronized, the shared temporal horizon of crisis may offer the only basis for coherent community. But as to whether such a community can ever be established or maintained, Austen remains silent.

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<sup>160</sup> Koselleck, "Crisis," 372.

## CODA

The later novels of Jane Austen insinuate that partial form, with its tentative configurations and rejection of teleology, constitutes the native narrative form of modernity. Yet as we have seen, Austen herself is a key figure in the binding up of partial form, and the return to a more unified vision of narrative. This contradiction raises a confounding question: if partial form is the mode of narrative best suited to modernity, why does it fade from the theory and practice of the novel in the nineteenth century? While I am not prepared to account for the disappearance of partial form from the discourse of the novel, I will conclude this project by considering just where it went.

It seems to me that partial form ultimately migrated into various modes of critical theory, reaching a second flowering in the twentieth century. We might think here of the later significance of "situation" for politically engaged philosophy and theory from existentialism to Situationism to the leftist ontology of Alain Badiou. We might trace the ongoing importance of "moment" for historians, cultural critics, and philosophers of modernity such as Søren Kierkegaard and Walter Benjamin. We might ponder the crucial role of "scene" in psychoanalytic theory. Meanwhile, "Incident" reemerges in the context of fraught international relations in the twentieth century. The day recurs as a crucial frame in twentieth-century theories of the everyday from Henri Lefebvre to Michel de Certeau. And "crisis" of course pervades all areas of modern thought, from economics and politics to ecology and sociology.

These discourses generally proceed from the assumption that experience in modernity is fundamentally fractured; as such, they reject the "grand narratives" of the nineteenth century and find crucial intellectual tools in the terminology of partial form.

But the rejection of narrative in twentieth-century theory helps us to define more precisely the unique achievement of the eighteenth-century novel. Figures like Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Radcliffe, and Austen found ways to embody the fragmentary experience of modernity precisely in the form of narrative; instead of theorizing modernity, they depicted the challenges and contradictions of dwelling in it through the course of time.

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## APPENDIX

