In the Mind's Eye:

Associationism and Style in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel

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ABSTRACT

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In the Mind's Eye: Associationism and Style in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel argues that the British novel, in its syntactic, grammatical, and rhetorical strategies, incorporated associationist premises about reading comprehension. Associationism, as a term, encapsulates a series of theories during the period that attempted to explain the ways in which external stimuli were "represented" in the mind and linked with other ideas. Inquiries into the association of ideas spanned numerous fields but shared a core belief: everything an individual touched, saw, smelled, or read, was translated into a secondary representation in the mind. Since all objects—whether a phrase, a misty moor, or a character's face—were thought to be experienced through mental "miniatures," the association of ideas was the mechanism of the reading experience and of phenomenal experience. Associationist theories delineated how words evoked images, and the ways in which these images became linked to form holistic ideas in the course of a sentence, a paragraph, and throughout a work of fiction.

In this project, I show how four canonical nineteenth-century authors—Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot—created prose styles intended to evoke, enhance, or even resist the spontaneous associative mechanisms considered essential to the

comprehension of language. In order to trace the contours of an associative stylistics during the period, I pair each author with associationist theories contemporary with their fiction. In Chapter One, I demonstrate how Jane Austen's techniques in *Persuasion, Northanger Abbey,* and *Sense and Sensibility* incorporated the tenets of the dominant model of associationism in Austen's day: those of David Hartley. Austen's mode of representation is highly metonymic, capitalizing on of principles of language comprehension proposed in Hartley's work. The great degree of stylistic control so often attributed to Austen's prose is inextricably rooted with the Hartleyan paradigm: a strategy of representation to depict a social world and its objects according to an associationist epistemology. In Chapter Two, I read Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* with the theories of his teacher Dugald Stewart. Walter Scott studied with Dugald Stewart at the University of Edinburgh and in Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind,* Stewart develops literary-aesthetic guidelines based on the mental models posited in his work. Stewart recommends that a writer delineate in the form of an "outline," a "minimum" required for the reader to comprehend a represented object. Stewart's theories about language cognition and literary technique, I argue, provide guidelines for Scott's development of his own style of literary outline. In Chapter Three, I unfold how Charles Dickens's style in *David Copperfield* draws on the associative principles in Lindley Murray's *English Grammar*. In *Murray's Grammar*, the sentence is a unit of cognition: a precise capsule in which our thoughts are both formed and transmitted. Grammar is an external representation of links between thoughts: the association of ideas in its most tangible form. In Chapter Four, I show that George Eliot integrates a number of discourses about the human mind into her style, with the goal of developing a technique to manage the spontaneous actions of mental associations. The work of James Mill, John Stuart Mill, and Alexander Bain influenced Eliot's view of associationist psychology, and Eliot, in turn,

develops her own associative theories of language in her essays and journals. Eliot's associative model of reading incorporates principles of chemistry. Elaboration, a term important to both literary and scientific discourse, provided Eliot with a syntactic style closely aligned with the structure of associative links. More importantly, elaboration afforded Eliot a strategy of cognitive delay; a stylistics intended to subvert the spontaneous action of the mind. By providing "raw materials" for the reader in the form of concrete nouns, and elaborating with a series of extended prepositional phrases, Eliot demands that the reader slow down the automatic action of association and redraw the mental picture.

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DEDICATION

To my parents

INTRODUCTION

In 1859, George Henry Lewes published a review of Jane Austen's work that challenged his predecessors' readings of the author based on his knowledge of Victorian psychology. Rather than acknowledging the "truth of description" produced by "a precision that delights the reader," as Sir Walter Scott famously noted, Lewes claimed that when speaking of Austen's work, "the very word 'describing' is altogether misplaced and misleading. She seldom describes anything."[1] "Although every reader must necessarily conjure up to himself a vivid image of people whose characters are so vividly presented," Lewes contends, "each reader has to do this for himself."[2] Lewes's criticism derives from his understanding of the reading process. Austen's language, which relied on abstract terms such as "wonderfully handsome,"[3] allowed the reader's mind to "conjure" a mental picture primarily of his or her own design. This strategy, Lewes believed, was "a defect and a mistake." In Lewes's view, the great imaginative leeway afforded by terms like "handsome" or "elegant" led to vagueness and imprecision.[4]

Yet, Lewes admits that the conceptual freedom that Austen's technique offered also resulted in the highest achievement in art: "the *truest* representation effected by the *least*

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[1] Sir Walter Scott, from an unsigned review of *Emma. Quarterly Review,* October 1815, No. 14, (issued March 1816) and George Henry Lewes, "The Novels of Jane Austen" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* July 1859 lxxxvi, both in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, Ed. B.C. Southam (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1995) 67 and 158, respectively.

[2] Lewes "The Novels." 158

[3] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice, The Complete Novels of Jane Austen* (New York: Modern Library, 1940) 234. These words comprise the first description of Mr. Bingley.

[4] Lewes 158

expenditure of means."[5] Austen's "economy of art," as he called it, produced vivid details in the reader's mind with very little detail on the page.[6] Lewes, in fact, defines Austen's merits and her flaws by the same measure: the amount of imaginative agency given to the reader to produce the grounds at Pemberley, the seaside at Lyme, and Elizabeth Bennet's famously fine eyes.

Lewes's review points toward one of the essential questions in British fiction of the period: what is the relationship between detail on the page and realistic representation in the mind? The principles of associationism, which dominated theories of cognition in nineteenth-century Britain, stated that textual detail and mental detail did not exist in a one-to-one ratio. An individual word could spark denotative and connotative content based on previous ideas with which it had been associated. Like many writers of nineteenth-century Britain, Lewes considered the associative models of mental life to be a measure for aesthetic judgments. In this project, I show how four canonical nineteenth-century authors, Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot created prose styles that capitalized upon—and sometimes subverted—the associative mechanisms thought to be essential in the comprehension of language.

The effects that literary style were thought to have on the reading experience were rooted in materialist paradigms of cognition and memory at the core of nineteenth-century British psychology. Inquiries into the nature of associationism spanned numerous fields but shared a

[5] Lewes argues: "if the art of the novelist be the representation of human life by means of a story; and if the *truest* representation, effected by the *least expenditure* of means, constitutes the highest claim of art, then we say that Miss Austen has carried the art to a point of excellence surpassing that reached by any of her rivals." "The Novels" 166.

[6] Lewes repeats "vivid" twice in the above sentence: "a *vivid* image of people whose characters are so *vividly* presented." Both the character and the attributes attached to the character are thought of as vivid images. Lewes's use of the word vivid exemplifies the difficulty in speaking of mental actions, especially when authors try to describe the experience of reading. For instance, when we imagine Pemberley or Wickham, do we actually "see" pictures in the mind's eye? The very use of the phrase "mind's eye"—a somewhat synesthetic phrase in English from Chaucer to the present—underscores the limitations of language to capture cognitive experience. See "One's mind's eye" under "Mind, n.1." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2014).

core belief: everything an individual touched, saw, smelled, or read, was translated into a secondary representation in the mind. Since all objects—whether a phrase, a misty moor, or a character's face—were thought to be experienced through mental "miniatures,"[7] literary critics suggested that authors turn to scientific models in order to create vivid prose. The association of ideas, a theory with roots in Aristotelian thought, systemized by John Locke in the seventeenth century, and further refined by David Hume in the eighteenth century, defined the ways in which miniature "representations" structured human thought. These representations were sometimes called "ideas," "mental pictures," or "images," despite the open question of whether or not these mental figures were truly visual. Regardless of the specific term by which they were named in various associationist theories, these representations were considered physiological phenomena: the material manifestations of a stock of ideas at the ready for recall and combination.[8] In the nineteenth century, British theorists like David Hartley, Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, John Stuart Mill, and Alexander Bain refined the psychology of association to more precisely delineate the application of associative logic in various literary genres. Associationist works of the nineteenth century theorized how the mind processed different types of sentences and syntax, parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and the operations of these linguistic structures within poetry and prose.

In *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction,* Garrett Stewart argues that these linguistic structures enact their own energy, an energy which runs independently of and

[7] David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations, etc.* (London: J. Johnson, 1791) 234-235.

[8] For the various metaphors used to describe these mental representations in associative psychology, see Michael Kearns, *Metaphors of Mind in Fiction and Psychology* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987). Kearns notes that most writers attempting to articulate a psychology of the mind acknowledge the inadequacy of language to talk about mental life. 24.

potentially counter to the forces of a novel's plot.[9] Stewart claims that through these elements "narrative texts are always, in literary form, writing more than they straightforwardly announce."[10] I argue that in the nineteenth century, associationism offered a model for writing and reading inseparable from stylistic and grammatical structures and a formal logic for the novel more akin to network theory than any linear arc of plot. With this attention, I read the shapes of paragraphs, syntax, grammar, and punctuation in order to show how novelists' representational strategies were part of the epistemological logic of associationism.

Associationist theories demonstrably influenced education during the period, implicitly and explicitly informing rules about grammar and structure. Lindley Murray's *Grammar*, a popular text of English schools in the first half of the nineteenth century, suggested that grammatical tenets be "deduced from the nature of the human mind."[11] Associationism defined how words became images, and images became broader ideas in sentences, paragraphs, and over the whole of the novel. James Mill, who was a mentor to G.H. Lewes and founder of the journal for which Eliot would become assistant editor, proposed precise distinctions between the way nouns (substantives) and adjectives conjured mental images. Mill theorized that written language, as "permanent marks" of ideas, attempted to duplicate the exact "train" of ideas (as the sequence and connections of thought were often called) that had originally occurred in the writer's mind. Writers like Scottish Enlightenment figure Dugald Stewart, who worked with Sir Walter Scott at the University of Edinburgh, devoted part of his associationist masterwork to the way writers might harness "local" associations (those temporally and historically specific) and

[9] Garrett Stewart, *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 6; 33-34.

[10] Stewart 33.

[11] Lindley Murray, *English Grammar, Adopted to the Different Classes of Learners…with appendix* (York: Longman, Hurst, and Co., 1837) 283.

"universal" associations (those not culturally contingent).[12] David Hartley, whose theories about mental functioning were foundational in the early nineteenth century, specifically defined associative mechanisms in the reading process.[13] A phrase like "spreading oak," according to Hartleyan principles, would evoke numerous details: the shape of the leaves, the texture of the bark, and the height of the tree.

Language's metonymic function was not only theorized in literary criticism, but also systematized. Eneas Sweetland Dallas, in his two-volume *The Gay Science,* attempted to reshape British criticism based on what he deemed a crucial but often overlooked aspect of aesthetic judgment: the science of the mind. Physiologist, critic, gastronome, and pioneer in nineteenth-century psychology, Dallas claimed that critics ought to not only "compare art to other art" or "art with history," but also compare "art with [the] mind."[14] A fiction writer, Dallas recommends, should craft his or her descriptions on epistemological principles. To represent a character, Dallas argues, an author ought to capitalize on a cognitive process "not different in kind from that by which the comparative anatomist sees the perfect form of an unknown animal in one of its bones."[15] Here, a novelistic specimen provides enough of a cue for the mind to surmise a whole. Not unlike Hartley's "spreading oak" example, Dallas delineates the effects of metonymy on the readerly imagination.[16] Dallas bases his analogy on a larger claim about the

[12] Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* in *Works of Dugald Stewart, in Seven Volumes*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Hillard and Brown, 1829) 276.

[13] David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations, etc.,* (London: J. Johnson, 1791).

[14] Eneas Sweetland Dallas, *The Gay Science,* Vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866) 42.

[15] Dallas 303.

[16] Dallas 179-182. Dallas acknowledges that "imagination" is a problematic term, at times referring to the memory, the reason, and the passion; the term seems to indicate many aspects of the mind yet no discrete part. Here, I use it (as the author does) to describe the somewhat unconscious actions that happen while "imagining" characters as one reads.

actions of the mind. "The mind is never content with a part," Dallas explains: "it rushes to make wholes. Where it cannot find them, it makes them."[17] In this example, principles of biology and paleontology provide analogues for an author's use of language and the reader's subsequent act of imaginative completion. The mind is busy with an act of finishing based on the writer's cues, but the completion is a subconscious act. "In the act of reading," Dallas claims, "we find the mind…at work for us, with a mechanical ease that is independent of our care."[18] While the mind is busy with work, the "mechanical ease" by which the picture is completed makes reading pleasurable. Work and pleasure are here cognitively intertwined in the reading process.

The associative paradigm broadly informed nineteenth-century aesthetics and criticism. In *Modern Painters*, *Volume I*, John Ruskin applies associative principles to suggest that the viewer of a painting should supply the particulars that finish a work. Ruskin imagines a person viewing a painting by Turner, and praises Turner's ability to encourage the spectator to form the whole by the delineation of a mere part. "As clearly and fully as the idea is formed," Ruskin writes, "just so much of it is given." Turner places on the canvas only "just so much that would enable a spectator of experience and knowledge to understand almost every minute fragment of separate detail."[19] For Ruskin, the completion of the image has an empirical basis; the painting becomes populated with precise detail based on subjective experience. Yet a tension exists between the subjective information that the viewer brings to the painting based on individual "experience" and the "understanding" that is somehow conveyed. Whose vision, we might ask, is the viewer to "understand"? Ruskin's observation reveals a collaborative act often articulated

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[17] Dallas 291.

[18] Dallas 224.

[19] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Volume I* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1848) 195.

in nineteenth-century visions of the reading process: the balance between the few strokes supplied by an author and "the minute fragment[s] of separate detail" that the reader somehow incorporates into the idea of the whole. Similarly, while particular elements may vary by individual "experience and knowledge," the act of mental completion transforms a partial representation into the feeling of authentic experience.

Each chapter to follow makes visible the intersection between associationist psychology and the style of one nineteenth-century novelist. In the first chapter, I read Austen's novels through the lens of Hartleyan associationism; in the second, I read Walter Scott's *Waverley* in conjunction with Dugald Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*.[20] Then turning to the second half of the nineteenth century, I read Charles Dickens with Lindley Murray's *English Grammar*, a widely popular grammar text of the period that was part of a new rhetoric interested in the workings of the mind. George Eliot, in contrast, published essays positing her own vision of associationism, even drawing upon her experience with chemical experiments to help her articulate the relationship of language to thought. While this project considers the reciprocal interactions of associationism and fiction, Peter Allan Dale's seminal *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture* notably argues that thinking about how one discourse in the nineteenth century (here, British associative psychology) influenced another (the novel) misunderstands the nature of intellectual inquiry in the period. Dale contends that disciplinary boundaries did not exist in the way a later era of specialization might wish to suggest.[21] Thus, even as I use the term "associationism" in the pages to come, it indicates a mode of discourse

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[20] Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, in *Works of Dugald Stewart, in Seven Volumes* (Cambridge: Hillard and Brown, 1829).

[21] Peter Allan Dale, *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) 8-9. Rick Rylance, in a similar spirit, refers to psychology as an "unfolding network of debate" among what the twentieth and twenty-first century consider different disciplines: "psychological texts, reviews, essays in the great periodicals, novels, poems, philosophical tracts, and political polemics." *Victorian Psychology and British Culture*, *1850-1880*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 3.

rather than a genre, and assumes fluidity between fiction, poetry, natural philosophy, physiology, grammar, rhetorical theory, political pamphlets, and literary reviews.

Chapter One establishes the surprising relationship between the "vivid, true to life" pictures that Jane Austen's early readers noted and the relative dearth of concrete details in the text. In this chapter, I demonstrate how representation in *Persuasion, Northanger Abbey,* and *Sense and Sensibility* integrates the model of associationism most prominent in Austen's day: that of David Hartley. Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749, expanded in 1791 and reprinted through the mid-nineteenth century) dominated Romantic and Regency-era discourses about the mind. While literary critics have pointed out the frequent references to associationism in her characters' dialogue and in her vision of their mental operations, I show that Hartley's theories about language shape Austen's descriptive technique. For example, according to Hartley's *Observations*, abstract terms were not vague, imprecise signifiers, but sparked a host of images when a reader encountered them. Abstract, general terms were highly condensed semantic packages, thought to "excite such ideas as…descriptions in all their particular circumstances do." In my reading of *Sense and Sensibility* I show that Austen deems picturesque discourse, in its hyper-attention to concrete attributes, to be epistemologically problematic. Austen used abstract terms and classical rhetoric according to Hartley's principles, aiming to create images that sprung, as one review lauded, "before our mind's eye, with a distinctness that rivals the pictures we see in memory of scenes we ourselves have beheld."[22]

In Chapter Two, I demonstrate the ways in which Sir Walter Scott's style is influenced by Dugald Stewart's associationist theories. Walter Scott studied with Dugald Stewart at the University of Edinburgh, and draws on theories like those articulated in Stewart's associationist

[22] Unsigned Review from "The Life of Peter Wilkins," *Retrospective Review* vii (1823), repr. in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. B.C. Southam. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968) 115.

work, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind.* In the *Elements,* Stewart describes how literature shapes "impressions" in our minds. To offer the reader's imagination enough cues to prompt the imagination but yet correspond to the author's ideas, Stewart advocates a representational practice he calls an "outline." The outline method delineates certain information but encourages readers to conjure for themselves the remaining details based on the "local" and "universal" associations evoked by a word or phrase. In *Waverley,* Scott's technique follows several principles of Stewart's "outline": first, by describing from a limited perspective; second, by using indirect discourse; and third, by creating a narrator who *announces* his withholding of details. In contrast to the "tyranny" of description by authors who misuse their "power to extend [their] materials," Scott "leaves [readers] to suppose these things, which would be abusing [their] patience to narrate at length."[23]

During Charles Dickens's childhood and the writing of *David Copperfield*, one of the most popular guides to grammar in both Britain and America was Lindley Murray's *English Grammar*. Murray's *Grammar* justified its guidelines for grammar not merely on aesthetic grounds, but also by the effects of grammatical choices on associative function. In Chapter Three, I show how in *David Copperfield* Dickens uses several techniques delineated in Murray's *English Grammar* to shape the reader's associations. *David Copperfield* begins with the narrative voice of a young child: a narrator whose associations are few, and just being forged. Dickens uses the structures of grammar to enhance the reader's sense of David's early perceptions, using clauses, phonology, and syntax in ways that mirror David's initial mental connections as they form. Dickens seems to follow the *Grammar's* guidelines concerning the scope and range of a sentence, which, Murray suggests, ought to correspond to the physiological

[23] Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley; Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 115; 331.

limits of visual perception. Next, I argue that Dickens begins his sentences with "there are/there is," or what Murray calls "expletive" construction, to offer the reader's mind the impression of a blank space in order to subsequently fill it. Third, Dickens uses root words and their linguistic offspring—what Murray calls "derivatives"—to mirror and highlight the absence of the father that catalyzes the central plot of *David Copperfield*. Thus the structures of grammar, syntax, and punctuation convey the experience of David far beyond what the young narrator can describe through words. Grammar allows Dickens to articulate the residues of trauma while being faithful to the young narrator's perceptions. In Dickens's novels, grammar evokes ideas already imagined, sounds already heard, linguistic shapes already seen, and patterns gesturing toward plots yet to be unfolded.

In Chapter Four, I show how George Eliot developed a prose style in response to her fundamental concerns about the operations of mental associations within the reading process. George Eliot's understanding of language was an amalgam of physiology, psychology, and even chemistry and the work of associationist thinkers like Alexander Bain, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill. Associationism provided a threat to the realist mode, as the quick, automatic recall of previous experience had the potential to thwart an author's ability to draw original characters. If readers imagined characters based on preconceived ideas, Eliot wondered, how could individual sympathies be cultivated? Rather than rely on the shorthand that mental associations could provide, Eliot developed a technique that attempted to subvert the spontaneous action of predetermined associations. By using unconventional syntax and rejecting the words most commonly used to signify an item, Eliot's technique is elaboration: a style that encourages the reader to painstakingly slow down the drawing of mental pictures and to erase and revise. Elaboration, in its most basic definition, is a technique of verbal extension: a stretching of

syntax, the modifying of original nouns with clauses and qualifiers to refine the original idea. But elaboration also refers specifically to the discipline of chemistry: the combining of raw elements until they form a new substance greater than the original parts. Eliot elaborates in the structure of her sentences, repeatedly refining the image in the reader's mind. Through elaboration, Eliot attempts to duplicate the form of thought itself, in which discrete elements are combined and synthesized. Eliot elaborates in order to replicate the affect of phenomenal experience, and to create the conditions for true sympathy.

Michael Kearns, in *Metaphors of Mind in Fiction and Psychology*, shows the importance of associative psychology to the portrayal of characters in novels by Austen and Dickens and the narration of these characters' minds.[24] Nicholas Dames has shown the importance of associationist paradigms on the psychology of forgetting in the plots of nineteenth-century novels, and, in his *Physiology of the Novel*, Dames establishes the incalculable influence of the largely-forgotten field of literary physiology on Victorian critical protocols.[25] Building on these works, I forge an associative stylistics. Etymologically, style originally referred to an inscribing tool on a wax tablet and eventually referred to the resulting inscription itself. In this sense, I trace the contours of nineteenth-century style: the aesthetic instrument crafting impressions in the mind.

Sally Shuttleworth's seminal research established connections between the form of the novel and nineteenth-century science.[26] Gillian Beer, in *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative*

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[24] For Michael Kearns's reading of the work of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, see especially 80-87 and 158-177.

[25] Nicholas Dames, *Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[26] Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction, explains that in the mid-nineteenth century, "the methods of scientists become the methods of emplotment and scientific theories suggest new organizations for fiction."[27] The connections established in these works have a contemporary analogue. Scholarship in the fields of evolutionary literary theory and neuroaesthetics show a vibrant interest in linking literary study with the physiological mechanisms of affect. These works have taken the form of aesthetic explorations like Elaine Scarry's *Dreaming by the Book* or neurological studies like Lisa Zunshine's *Why We Read Fiction*.[28] But these works tend to concentrate on how and why we read nineteenth-century texts *now*. My contribution, in contrast, illuminates the models of cognition contemporary to these authors' writing, and reveals how the style of nineteenth-century fiction sought to engage the mind's eye.

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[27] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 150.

[28] Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming By the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006).

CHAPTER ONE

The Style of the Sensorium: Association and Representation in the Novels of Jane Austen

In 1816, Sir Walter Scott praised Jane Austen in terms of qualities that would be largely associated with late-nineteenth century realism: an "inelegance" of subject, a "precision" of representation (as if "finished up to nature") and an affinity with "Flemish painting" and the visual arts.[1] This conception of Austen resonated throughout the early nineteenth century as critics saw her representational practices —whether viewed as literary strength or flaw—to be essential to her distinct style. Those writing about Austen in the first half of the century declared her novels to be "correct representations of life" that unfolded with a "minute fidelity of detail" that for some, even rendered too much.[2] Yet, looking back on Austen from the later nineteenth-century novel, attention to her technique reveals a relative sparseness, and even absence, of material detail. Characters and the domestic spaces they inhabit are represented without the descriptive opulence characteristic of Victorian fiction. Poised between the representational practices of the eighteenth century and the emerging realism of the nineteenth century, how might Austen evoke a sense of things in the social spaces of her novels?

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[1] Sir Walter Scott, Unsigned review of *Emma*, *Quarterly Review* 14 (October 1815, issued March 1816), reprinted in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage, 1811-1870*, ed. B.C. Southam (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1995) 67.

[2] See G.H. Lewes (1843); Whatley (1821); Longfellow (1839), respectively. Lewes praised Austen for "delineations [that were] unsurpassed," and for crafting the "*truest* representations" of any British novelist. Whatley's 1821 essay lauded the "perfect appearance of reality" in her novels and her "vivid distinctness of description." An 1839 article by Macaulay extolled the delicate touches of Austen's representations. Longfellow called Austen's work a "capital profile of real life," but thought she delineated "all the little wheels and machinery" to excess. All cited from *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*. Lewes 124; Whatley 96; Longfellow 117, Macaulay 122-123.

Austen's representational strategies, I argue, respond to the single most influential paradigm of perception in nineteenth-century Britain: the association of ideas. Associationism, especially the model proposed by philosopher-physiologist David Hartley, theorized the way spoken and written language could evoke vivid mental pictures. Austen's descriptive techniques, such as a strong reliance on metonymy, an oscillation between offering and withholding details, and a distinct favoring of abstract, rather than concrete adjectives, capitalize on the linguistic principles outlined in associationist discourse. While critical conversations about the novel have suggested that the completion of material details was the job of the eighteenth-century reader,[3] I claim that Austen's prose encourages a particular manner of finishing mental images derived from early nineteenth-century associationist epistemology.

First, I examine two very different representational strategies at work in *Persuasion*: the highly condensed, metonymic prose in the novel's early introduction of Kellynch Hall, and the expansive, decadent rhetoric of the landscape at Lyme. When Austen switches from her predominant metonymic mode of signification and employs a heavily adjectival or paratactic structure, she does so to indicate a physical and/or epistemological threat. In *Persuasion*, for example, an abundance of physical sensations at the seaside of Lyme results in one character's head trauma; the environment that inspires corporeal excess is represented in sensory-rich devices of classical rhetoric. In *Northanger Abbey*, on the other hand, the opulent adjectival description of the gothic genre is didactically linked to misperception: a "misreading" of the objects of the world. In the last section, I read a well-known conversation about the picturesque in *Sense and Sensibility* as a meta-discourse on the choices one can make in linguistic description. Austen demonstrates that because of its emphasis on particulars, the language of the

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[3] Q.D. Leavis' *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) and Cynthia Wall's *The Prose of Things* (2006) are seminal works that propose this model of eighteenth-century reading experience.

picturesque is limited in its descriptive and therefore epistemological power. Rather, general—even abstract—terms were believed to capture the overall feel of phenomenal existence while simultaneously connoting local attributes. I select these works in particular in order to deny accounts that portray Austen's style as simply maturing in a linear trajectory: moving neatly away from her Johnsonian roots to an inchoate form of high realism in her "late style." Rather, I argue that Austen has a number of techniques at her disposal and can, and does, use them in accordance with prevalent models of perception.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, associationism offered a comprehensive discourse concerning the way the mind sensed and interpreted external objects. Associationism is a term that encapsulates a series of theories that attempted to explain the ways in which external stimuli were "represented" in the mind and linked with other ideas.[4] Mental representations were thought to be both formed and retrieved by a variety of sensory sparks: called up in the mind by cues such as sights, sounds, and smells.

The ways in which mental pictures were created was a subject of inquiry central to the field then known as mental philosophy, and was debated in the periodicals, lectures, and poetry of the era. Building on the theories of John Locke, which largely informed eighteenth-century science, David Hume refined a process of ideation. In his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, unique, and most importantly, subjective combinations of external stimuli formed impressions in the mind. According to Hume, these impressions became "associated" by

[4] "Idea" is a rather slippery term during the period. To some theorists, ideas in the mind were distinctly imagistic: even a seemingly non-visual concept such as "dignity" took the shape of an image in the mind. Others conceived an idea as a more amorphous concept: a representation somehow shaped by a combination of several mental pictures. By and large, however, the word idea tends to signify a mental image. See, for example "Of Retention and Ideas" under "Metaphysics," *Encyclopaedia; or, A dictionary of arts, sciences, and miscellaneous literature...* Vol. 11. (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1798; repr. in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale Group, 19 Mar. 2007 <http:/galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>) 496.

their manner of appearance to the perceiving individual. Mental impressions became associated according to three factors: their resemblance to each other, contiguity in time or place, or a relationship of cause and effect.

Building on the associative factors delineated by Hume, David Hartley's 1749 *Observations on Man, his Frame, His Duty, and his Expectations* took a single psychological principle and refashioned it in purely bio-mechanical terms. All ideas, according to Hartley, were built on contiguous associations, either successive (occurring in temporal sequence) or simultaneous. In addition to delimiting the mechanics of thought to contiguous impressions, Hartley defined an entirely physiological system of perception and ideation. The stimuli of the world, in Hartley's theory, are apprehended by the senses and create material vibrations. In turn, these vibrations pass through an aetherial fluid in the brain through structures called "vibratiuncles." In this paradigm, no longer was associationism a "gentle" psychological force "that commonly prevails" as Hume proposed, but instead a precise physiological process.[5]

Associationism offered a physiological and psychological account of how the mind represented "real" objects of the world. Input from the physical world was represented in the brain through a process of mental finishing that drew on a vast database of previous sensory experience. Hartley explains: "Thus the sight of a large building suggests the idea of the rest instantaneously; and the sound of the words which begin a familiar sentence, brings the remaining part to our memories in order…"[6] This process of completion not only applies to visual information, but also to verbal language. The rhetoric of Hartleyan associationism links

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[5] As noted in Tim Milnes' *Knowledge and Indifference in English Romantic Prose* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 40, 127. Milnes most thoughtfully recounts the groundwork of early brain science of the Romantic period.

[6] David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations, etc.* (London: J. Johnson, 1791) 66. For all citations, I use the 1791 edition of Hartley's *Observations* for its contemporaneity to Austen's writing.

the *formal* qualities of language with models of visual perception. In this framework, the perceptive experience of the external world consists of the reproducing of aural and visual pictures—with the potential to coagulate in a nearly limitless array.

Shortly before Austen wrote *Northanger Abbey*, Erasmus Darwin published *Zoönomia*, which built on Hartley's work but posited that ideas were less strictly determined by vibrations or other mechanical processes. Many found Hartleyan associationism problematic in its potential to leave the mind subject to a random bombardment of associated thoughts. Mary Wollstonecraft recognized the "astonishing rapidity" by which associations caused information to "dart into the mind with "illustrative force," and viewed their automatic operations as a potential danger over which "we have little power."[7] Samuel Taylor Coleridge (whose initial enthusiasm for the *Observations* inspired him to name his son Hartley) refuted the physiological aspects of Hartleyan associationism for its lack of allowance for an "infinite spirit" and "intelligent will."[8] While perception was consistently posed as a mental act of combining associated parts (as in Hartley's "large building" example above), both Coleridge and Darwin insisted on a higher logic in the mind that helps regulate the numerous impressions—a hierarchy of sorts for the mind's eye.

But criticisms such as those from Darwin and Coleridge did not render Hartley's model obsolete as the century began.[9] Nor had associationism become unfashionable when Laurence

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[7] Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Vindications* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 1997) 244-245. Mary Wollstonecraft dedicated a section of the *Vindications of the Rights of Woman* (1792) to the influence of associationism, arguing that education was the only remedy for the "habitual slavery to first impressions" to which women were especially prone. *First Impressions* is, of course, Austen's original title for *Pride and Prejudice.*

[8] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, by S. T. Coleridge; ed. with his Aesthetical Essays, by J. Shawcross*. Vol. I. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, repr. 1907) 83.

[9]Alan Richardson, in *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind,* demonstrates that Coleridge's response to Hartley greatly influenced the emerging concepts of mind in the early nineteenth century by relocating the site of sensation out of the body alone and into the mind*. British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (New

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* rendered it the subject of parody. Rather, skepticism about the material aspects of associationism inspired a number of nineteenth-century thinkers to delineate the system in even greater detail. As the century unfolded, theorists developed increasingly complex models of the associating mind. James Mill, in his *Analysis of Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829) built on Hartley's ideas and refined his initial hypotheses. In his *System of Logic* and "Two Kinds of Poetry," John Stuart Mill further nuanced the associative model, outlining the ways in which associations shaped language and poetics. In the mid century, Alexander Bain completely rejected the remnants of an earlier faculty psychology, basing his two-volume psychological masterwork *The Senses and the Intellect* and *The Emotions and the Will* "entirely on the Laws of Association."[10] Even in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Hartley's system was still central to the psychology of perception. William James declared that his massive *Principles of Psychology* was a continuation of Hartley's initial effort, and was intended "simply to revise [Hartley's] conclusions by the aid of distinctions he did not make."[11]

In its strictest sense, Hartleyan associationism was a doctrine of human understanding by way of a mechanical process: the physical motion of vibrations and vibratiuncles passing through the aether of the brain. However, popular conceptions dropped the more mechanical and biological aspects in favor of its general explication of the transmission and formulation of ideas. Much like the assimilation of Freudianism into the popular culture of the twentieth century,

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York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 11-13. Michael S. Kearns, in *Metaphors of Mind in Fiction and Psychology*, explicates this shift in detail, arguing that the move from a theory of perception that consisted of senses-nerves-brain into a discreet "mind-as-entity" was the most significant change in models of perception during this period. *Metaphors of Mind in Fiction and Psychology* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1987).

[10] James Mill, *Analysis of Phenomena of the Human Mind,* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1829, repr., intro. John Stuart Mill, London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869); John Stuart Mill, "Two Kinds of Poetry" *Monthly Repository* 7 (October 1833): 714-724, and *System of Logic* (London: J.W. Parker, 1843, repr. London: Longmans, 1961); and Alexander Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect,* (London: John Parker and Son, 1855) Preface, and *The Emotions and the Will* (London: John Parker and Son, 1859).

[11] William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1923) 553.

Hartleyan associationism became firmly rooted in mainstream beliefs about perception.[12] While perhaps not in its strictest form of cognitive biology, the more accessible aspects of Hartley's *Observations* became a pervasive articulation of the mind's relation to its external world.

In Hartley's model, the brain reconstitutes sensory information from physiologically determined associations. In less mechanized versions like those of Darwin and Coleridge, experience is formulated by the mind and body at the time of sensation, by means of "an active mind that 'by perceiving, creates' the phenomenal world around it."[13] But perhaps these accounts are not as incompatible as they might seem. Materialist and humanist accounts uniformly give agency to the mind to create impressions actively, rather than locating this agency with the objects themselves. These accounts are also similar in understanding perception as a highly subjective experience—that of an individual who actively constitutes phenomena, rather than a passive receiver of input from external objects. In other words, all associationist theories claim that seeing the world is more a matter of "filling in the blanks" than direct apprehension.

The associationist paradigm, I argue, informs Austen's technique. While there is evidence that Austen read the work of David Hume, and she certainly may have had access to various associationist works in the extensive library at Steventon, more important is the sheer ubiquity of associationism during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, "quietly informing the period's most basic assumptions."[14] At their core, Austen's novels render the material world in

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[12] For this link between Freudianism and associationism in the popular imagination, see Nicholas Dames, *Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[13] Richardson 12.

[14] Milnes 51.

response to associationist principles of sensory perception. To support this premise, let us take a closer look at the ways these techniques operate in *Persuasion*.

Persuasion opens with two moments of absence: the absence of an heir from the Baronetcy, and the impending absence of the Elliots from their family seat. Not only is the retrenchment of the Elliot estate the narrative crux of the first chapters, it is the impetus for the resolution of the marriage plot via the future tenants of Kellynch Hall. It is within this context that the Elliot family and Mr. Shepherd, their legal counsel, discuss a naval officer as potential lessee. "'He would be a very lucky man, Shepherd,' replied Sir Walter, 'that's all I have to remark. A prize indeed would Kellynch Hall be to him; rather the greatest prize of all, let him have ever taken so many before—hey, Shepherd?'"

Sir Walter specifically envisions the officer's interaction within the physical space: "There are few among the gentlemen of the navy, I imagine, who would not be surprised to find themselves in a house of this description." This seemingly innocuous bit of dialogue contraindicates the fact that at this point in the narrative *the house has yet to be described*. Despite its relative importance to the plot, the only features of the house and grounds that the reader is privy to are its "respectability," a "character of hospitality," and an "ancient dignity," abstractions that have little to do with its physical structure. Instead, this statement works upon certain assumptions. Rhetorically, the sentence aligns the speaker in close familiarity with its listener, and implies a knowingness that we partake in. "A house of this description" not only creates a familiarity, but conveys an illusion of structural and physical characteristics by virtue of our implied ability to describe it. Austen's frequent use of litotic negative constructions (i.e., "few who would not be surprised," as opposed to "many would be surprised") is a device that

further encourages intimacy between her narrator and reader: a narratorial wink of sorts. Most importantly, the rhetorical construction and tone discourage the reader from ever noticing that she has no idea what the house looks like. Rather, Austen's representations depend on this fact.

The passage fosters a point of view both different from and similar to that of the imagined tenant. The reader, in a way, has been an occupant of the Eliot household for four chapters and is thus both within and without this inner circle. Yet Mrs. Clay—a widow hoping to gain Sir Walter's affections—voices the implicit desire to look around the material space, and replies in a way that focuses on the apprehension of things.

> "They would look around them, no doubt, and bless their good fortune," said Mrs. Clay, for Mrs. Clay was present; her father had driven her over, nothing being of so much use to Mrs. Clay's health as a drive to Kellynch: "but I quite agree with my father in thinking a sailor might be a most agreeable tenant…they are so neat and careful in all their ways! These valuable pictures of yours, Sir Walter, if you chose to leave them, would be perfectly safe. Every thing in and about the house would be perfectly taken care of! the gardens and the shrubberies would be kept in almost as high order as they are now. You need not be afraid, Miss Elliot, of your own sweet flower-garden's being neglected."[15]

The reader, like the tenant, "sees" the house for the first time; now permitted to look around at the objects and furnishings of its interior and its exterior landscapes. While particular narrative attention is drawn to the space and its objects, this act of looking is simultaneously elided. The textual space that should contain the act of looking is instead replaced by an ellipsis: "'They would look around …and bless their good fortune,' said Mrs. Clay, *for Mrs. Clay was present; her father had driven her over, nothing being of so much use to Mrs. Clay's health as a drive to Kellynch...*" This parenthesis temporally displaces the scene, leaving the narrative moment of the tenant looking around; even stepping out of the present moment of dialogue. Why this awkward aside to explain Mrs. Clay's presence? Surely, Austen's narrator possesses the technical acumen to escort Mrs. Clay to the room more elegantly. Instead, this ellipsis suspends the narrative

[15] Jane Austen, *Persuasion: Authoritative Text, Background, Contexts, Criticism,* ed. Patricia Ann Meyer Spacks (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995) 13.

action or, perhaps more accurately, covers it up. The direct action of looking around is camouflaged by this aside; the reader does not witness the tenant seeing, nor is able to apprehend the space directly. In addition, Mrs. Clay is herself an outsider in the space—as her potential invasion into the family unit is made explicit as the novel progresses. Her gaze, implicitly tied with her questionable decorum, is concealed.

However, despite its textual elision, the act of looking around does occur insofar as it yields material results: the objects of Kellynch Hall. According to Mrs. Clay, the property contains "valuable pictures," "gardens and shrubberies," and "sweet flower gardens." These objects are presented succinctly, mainly by the nouns that identify them. Yet, the threat of "neglect" encourages an imagistic consideration of their current "high order," one necessary to envision the potential alteration of their future state.

Traditionally, we might think of description as an element that occurs intra-diegetically (as a character encounters a space) or extra-diegetically (a stop in the action of the plot for the narrator to depict an environment). However, the technical sophistication of this passage delivers its objects neither completely inside nor outside the plot. Rather, it evokes material images by signifying the objects as if we *always knew* they were there. Paradoxically, this stylistic choice heightens intimacy, as objects already present are made familiar. Histories of prose description have noted versions of this assumed familiarity. In these accounts, part of the work of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century reader involved an effort, as Cynthia Wall describes it, to "fill in the empty spaces between visual tags," or "rehydrate" signs with familiar meaning.[16] However, the particular "tags" in this instance are notably non-visual; as the adjectives "valuable" and "sweet" are largely un-imagistic, yet strikingly capacious.

[16] Cynthia Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 9, 40.

This method of making material features present is one less of describing than of naming. Like Barthes' formulation of the proper Name, this act of naming, rather than describing, becomes essential to the creation of novelistic "truth" by allowing the narrator to be at once both "precise and insignificant."[17] In *Narrative and Its Discontents,* D.A. Miller specifically addresses the significance of the name in Austen's novels. Miller proffers the name as an essential element of narrative closure, the epistemological apex that Austen's novels ultimately work toward. [18] As Austen's heroines reach their narrative goals, characters complete their development through the conclusive act of naming. Excess signifiers and extraneous details must be "purged," as they are not only unnecessary but actually dangerous in their ability to distract and mislead. If a surplus of signifiers creates a chaos of "things," Miller proposes that "implicitly, Jane Austen insists…that a moral knowledge…must reconstitute the empirical phenomena brought before it according to its own principles."[19] While Miller suggests that the rejection of excess detail in her narratives is a move toward moral knowledge, I argue that the semantic svelteness that he notes is not only of a moral cast, but also of an epistemological one. In other words, I interpret Austen's omission of extraneous detail as a move *away* from an incalculable multitude of data and a move *toward* the phenomenal experience of daily life. In this sense, the reconstituting of the subjective experience of phenomena is precisely what her technique seeks to enact.

Revisiting the period's most popular model of perception, associationism posits the objects of the world to be understood through this very idea of naming. The mind, in common parlance, was said to "represent" and create mental pictures based on the previous associations a

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[17] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. David Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974) 68-69.

[18] D.A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[19] Miller *Narrative* 80.

single word or phrase could evoke. In fact, mental comprehension is described specifically in linguistic terms:

> This language of the eye, like the language of the tongue, suggests by one sensation what may be resolved into a variety of perceptions. A tree is composed of a trunk, branches, leaves; it has color, figure, size; and all these things are at once suggested to the mind by the two words *spreading oak*. Just so it is with respect to vision: the sensation received by the eye suggests at once the *trunk, branches, leaves, color, figure,* and *size* of the oak, and suggests them all as the qualities of one object.[20]

It is crucial that this paradigm of perception be understood not as an anomaly, but as a popular psychological premise of Austen's day. This particular excerpt was a metaphor for associationism appearing in such mainstream publications as editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* As a scientific theorem, this account explains the workings of visual and verbal perception. But it also provides a system of linguistic representation: "all these things are at once suggested to the mind by the two words *spreading oak*." In the Hartleyan example, the mind resolves a single sensation—a word—into a variety of physical attributes; therefore a multitude of physical characteristics can be—and perhaps should be—rendered with minimal description. One sensation, or one detail, metonymically represents many—the very principle at work in Austen's representational technique. It is within this context that Austen's narratives may become a form of realism: her economy of descriptive detail mimics the mechanisms of perception.

To achieve this economy of description, Austen chooses adjectives that are especially capacious. For instance, in the previously cited passage from *Persuasion,* the adjective "sweet" which modifies "flower gardens" encourages some associations but discourages others. In other

[20] "Of Retention and Ideas" 496.

words, “sweet” gardens may indicate any number of attributes: perhaps green, lush, cozy, or flowering; but the term would not likely suggest grand, natural, or sprawling. Furthermore, while words such as “gardens” might denote qualities of previously formed associations, an even greater sense of things is conveyed by Mrs. Clay’s assurance, “Every thing in and about the house would be perfectly taken care of.” This gesture at once contains all the objects inside the buildings and on the grounds—and reinforces the previous implication of intimate knowledge. Indeed, everything *about* the house, we might say, is taken care of in this assertion: the description allows an impression of great objects and grounds, and emphasizes the presence of items.

Like D.A. Miller, I contend that the method at work in Austen’s novels is one that reconstitutes the noise of empirical phenomena, but I propose it does so in order to reproduce the overall experience of the real. The power of this type of representation lies in its potential to evoke phenomena, rather than being limited by the unattainable ideal of replicating each particular sensation (lush, green, leafy, fragrant, well-groomed, etc.). The dynamic associative power of the individual word is but one feature of Austen’s technique that fosters a sense of realism in her novels. But we will now depart from the description of dwellings, and leave Somersetshire and Kellynch behind. It is time to move on to one of the most powerful and memorable scenes of *Persuasion*: the incident at Lyme.

The Lyme chapters of *Persuasion* prominently feature an interest in the sensory mechanisms of the mind and body. Opening with a focus on the natural features of Lyme, the narrative quickly moves toward its climax: Louisa Musgrove’s injury on the pavement of the Cobb. Disregarding warnings to the contrary, Louisa jumps from a high ledge, only to fall on the

hard pavement and sustain a serious head injury that renders her unconscious. Indulging the body's sensorium at the risk of its utter destruction, Louisa leaps in order to feel "the sensation [that] was delightful to her." The reactions of *Persuasion*'s characters show the influence of associative psychology in the depiction of trauma: a staccato and monosyllabic dialogue ("True, true, a surgeon, this instant"; "Yes, yes, to the inn") emulates the "bombardment of impressions upon the mind."[21] This psychological model is also evident in the rendition of Wentworth's "automatonlike" reaction, in which he "respond[s] as mechanically as any Hartleyan association network."[22] If the workings of the brain and its sensations are imbedded in the plot of the Lyme visit, its thoroughly embodied narrative invites the question of how Austen might render a site of intense physicality. In a place where the external objects of the world literally collide with the mind and body, how does Austen's mode of representation change?

The landscape of Lyme is first presented in the novel in poetic and highly descriptive language. This stylistic register, I argue, is not merely evidence of the author's engagement with the tropes of Romanticism (or an expansion of her technical repertoire), but is a mode crucially rooted in Austen's understanding of perception: an intersection of physiological and aesthetic systems.[23] A close look at the introduction to the Lyme episode helps unfold this idea:

> They were come too late in the year to come for any amusement or variety which Lyme, as a public place, might offer; the rooms were shut up, the lodgers almost all gone, scarcely any family but of the residents left—and, as there is nothing to admire in the buildings themselves, the remarkable situation of the town, the principal street almost

[21] A. Walton Litz, "Persuasion: Forms of Estrangement," *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 228-229.

[22] Richardson 104. Alan Richardson further finds the novel as a whole to exhibit an "embodied approach to human subjectivity."

[23] Litz first noted the novel's unusual interest in the natural environment, interpreting the details of its landscape as evidence of a Romantic aesthetic. Proposing this shift as a stylistic evolution of sorts, he claims Austen "learned that the natural setting can convey, more surely than any abstract vocabulary, the movements of an individual imagination." 153.

> hurrying into the water, the walk to the Cobb, skirting around the pleasant little bay, which in the season is animated with bathing machines and company, the Cobb itself, its old wonders and new improvements, with the very beautiful line of cliffs stretching out to the east of the town, are what the stranger's eye will seek, and a very strange stranger it must be, who does not see charms in the immediate environs of Lyme, to make him wish to know it better.[24]

Resplendent with a mazy, paratactic syntax, this single sentence seems to meander through the town. The prolixity of this periodic sentence connotes a careful, measured apprehension, instead of a passing glimpse at a familiar object. Yet, instead of establishing the setting of the current action, this description reveals an impetus toward something absent, something deferred. Beckoning toward the departed summer boarders while anticipating visitors of a future season, this sentence moves away from the present in both distance and time. A street "hurries" into the water; a walk skirts around the bay, and cliffs stretch out from the town, always referring elsewhere. The antithesis "old wonders and new improvements" temporally gestures backwards and forwards. Perpetually deferring the gaze, this opening sentence builds more on what we *seek*, rather than what we actually *see.*

In addition to deferring the gaze spatially and temporally, the sentence evokes the physical landscape less through adjectival description than through devices of classical rhetoric. The patterning of language produces an undulating motion that impels the gaze along the town, bayside, and cliffs. Syllabically, tonally, and metrically, clauses mirror each other, redoubling sounds, and anticipate further redoubling. The clause "the walk to the Cobb, skirting around the little bay" is parallel in structure to "the Cobb itself, its old wonders and new improvements," two elements linked together in the device of isocolon. As patterns of rhyme and meter continue and multiply, they suggest a sense of perpetuity. Finally, the sentence concludes with a barrage of rhetorical schemes: "are what the stranger's eye will seek, and a very strange stranger it must

[24] Austen, *Persuasion* 64.

be, who does not see charms in the immediate environs of Lyme, to make him wish to know it better." Two rhyming clauses of iambic tetrameter provide a childlike, precociously taunting conclusion. "Strange stranger" is the device of polyptoton, by which Lyme is made distant, even uncomfortable, by making the reader "strange." With this device, the narrator coaxes the reader into a place where he *must* want to know Lyme better—lest he be a "very strange stranger."

Rhetorical devices, however, contribute much more to the passage than a sense of motion; they enhance the materiality of the images they inspire. Consider the next sentence:

> The scenes in its neighborhood, Charmouth, with its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country, and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs, where fragments of low rock among the sands make it the happiest for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation; —the woody varieties of the cheerful village of Up Lyme, and, above all, 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.[25]

An equally prolix sentence as its forerunner raises the rhetorical stakes, boldly revealing its own apparatus. Linguistic devices are unabashedly wielded and lustily romantic, in their "dark cliffs," "green chasms," fragments of rock, and love for "unwearied contemplation." However, the language calls attention to the author's framing of the scene by repeating the word "scene" three times. The sentence begins: "The scenes in its neighborhood": an odd choice perhaps, compared to the more-expected "sights" in its neighborhood. Then, a "scene so wonderful and so lovely" is not only represented but "exhibited," and done so only in relation to "resembling scenes." (Austen's well-noted stylistic control makes the repetition of a word three times in one sentence not likely to be accidental). Several rhetorical devices are once again at work in an extended parataxis. The combination of anaphora and isocolon further builds the rugged landscape: "with

[25] Austen, *Persuasion* 64.

its high grounds / with its green chasms; where fragments of low rock / where scattered forest trees / where a scene so wonderful and lovely.” The description is permeated with internal rhyme such as sweet/sweeps; low/flow; green/between; forest/orchard, while alliteration (first/falling/far-famed/romantic/rocks) punctuates the phrases. A final clause leaves the reader with an imperative: “these places must be visited, and visited again.” The repetition of the word “visited” echoes its meaning—literally, it is “visited again.” But how exactly do these rhetorical techniques contribute to a sense of physical objects or, for that matter, relate to my claim about discourses of perception?

In eighteenth-century rhetorical theory, words were often considered material objects, frequently “studied as things, or material artifacts.”[26] When part of a rhetorical scheme, words became increasingly physical, even corporeal things. In earlier classical traditions, rhetorical devices were called “figures” which had physical “shapes” and were considered “ornaments” to verbal and written speech. Quintilian framed these devices in metaphors of the human body, calling the use of rhetorical schemes “a deviation…from the ordinary and simple method of speaking, a change analogous to the different positions our bodies assume when we sit down, lie down, or look back.”[27]

In descriptive prose, rhetorical schemes might have heightened the impression of materiality simply by their perceived nature as physical objects. If these devices were considered tangible, textual things, a description that employed these “shapes” might far exceed the sensorial effects of adjectival description alone. In this way, rhetorical schemes might be

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[26] H. Lewis Ulman, *Things, Thoughts, Words and Actions: the Problem of Language in the Eighteenth Century British Rhetorical Theory* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994) 23.

[27] Corbett, Edward P.J. “Classical Rhetoric,” *Literary Theory: An Anthology,* Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2004) 143. Similarly, Darwin’s *Zoönomia* defined physical motion as a “variation of a figure.”

thought of as language in "high relief." However, these devices are also distinct from other written forms in ways crucial to the brain science of Austen's day.

In a chapter concerning the comprehension of language, the *Observations* defines the act of reading as a multi-sensory process. "It may be," Hartley writes, "that in passing over words with our eye…particularly in writing…faint miniatures of the sounds of words pass over the ear."[28] We might recall Hartley's analogy for the workings of verbal language: "the sound of words which begin a familiar sentence, brings the remaining part to our memories in order." If reading brings miniature sounds to the ear, similar to the sounds of the spoken word, then this description offers reading itself as an associative act. Words act in ways similar to other physical objects in the brain, evoking associations as they are sensually perceived. Hartley's description of the process conflates the multiple loci of sensation, as the eye and ear are stimulated with visual and aural "miniatures." And the *Observations* further describes: if "visible objects, impress other vivid sensations besides those of sight…with sufficient frequency, it follows that…these sensations must leave traces, or ideas, which will be associated with the names of the objects, so as to depend on them."[29] In reading, stimulation occurs in many sites of sensation, combining to create an especially visceral impression. Rhetorical devices, because they primarily rely on visual and oral forms of repetition like alliteration and rhyme, achieve a "sufficient frequency" that far exceeds normal linguistic structure. According to Hartley's blueprint, the poetic language which rhetoric incorporates has the power to forge strong associations.[30]

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[28] Hartley 234-235.

[29] Hartley 272.

[30] In the Hartleyan model, associations form as the mechanical outcome of vibrations through the *aether*. In the humanist theories of Locke, associations come from behavioral habit. However, regardless of position on a

In addition, rhetorical devices work upon the completion of patterns. Similar to mathematical patterns, patterns like anaphora and alliteration rely on the mind to fill in the remainder of a series based on established expectations or, one might say, based on associations. The motion of association, imbedded in the rhetoric of the Lyme environment, is one of analepsis and prolepsis: an act of recall to retrieve a sensational clue, in order to project it forward on the present moment.

Yet, the motion of associationism resonates throughout the novel in a broader sense. This associative motion—the reaching back to earlier impressions and projecting them on to the present—is formally similar to the marriage plot of *Persuasion*. The re-union of Anne and Frederick revivifies the impressions of the pair's former courtship. When Anne assures herself (an assumption not contradicted by the text) that she and Wentworth share the "same immediate association," even as the pair appears mutually estranged, it establishes a confidence in a predictable, psychological reaction to external stimuli. Indeed, Anne "felt the utter impossibility, from her knowledge of his mind, that he could be unvisited by remembrance any more than herself. There must be the same immediate association of thought..."[31] Moreover, Anne's statement underscores the ability to create shared experience in the mechanisms of the body and mind. This paradigm might be extended to the reading experience of *Persuasion*. If this psychological phenomenon is physiologically derived, then perhaps associations were implicitly understood as a formal component of the experience of reading.

If the act of reading forms its own set of associations, certain elements of description seem to encourage their later replay. Despite its "happiest" spots and "cheerful" villages,

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humanist-mechanical spectrum, all accounts consider frequency of repetition a determining factor on the intensity of formed impressions.

[31] Austen, *Persuasion* 42.

something resonates in the Lyme description that presages the accident upon the Cobb. Reaching into the past, the description none-so-euphemistically evokes the "generations" that "have passed away." Syntactically, the "passing away" occurs because of a "falling" upon the ground, a site where a most violent "scene" is "exhibited." And the phrase "falling *of* the cliff" most easily morphs to "falling *off* the cliff," suggesting the motion of Louisa's body. Additionally, the danger implied in "fragments of rock" peeking through the sand reverberates in Wentworth's concern at the roughness and hardness upon Louisa's feet. Evoking the patterns of repetition and recall at work in associative psychology, the passage concludes: "these places must be visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood." More than simply an act of memory, the linguistic elements of this passage deftly anticipate the Cobb accident in a way that later readers might describe as subconsciously. To use the vernacular of Austen's day, it works by association.

While the language itself eerily prefigures the crisis upon the Cobb, there is another indication of something profoundly wrong at Lyme. The trip to the sea not only physically moves its characters out of the previous spaces of the narrative, but the move to Lyme represents a move away from social architecture to physical architecture. The narrator rather anxiously laments "the lodgers [are] almost all gone," "the rooms are shut up," and there is "scarcely any family" left, and Lyme is no longer "a public place." Even the buildings themselves, as sites of social activity, now leave "nothing to admire." In Lyme, social action becomes focalized through the town's natural architecture. More importantly, in a place strangely released from the social nexus, the reader is permitted to look, and to do so with full, audacious apprehension. The constraint so often attributed to Austen's prose is absent, and description is dispensed

immoderately. We see the green chasms, romantic rocks, and see them repeatedly, literally "visited, and visited again." And this passage concludes most compellingly:

> The party from Uppercross passing down by the now deserted and melancholy looking rooms, and still descending, soon found themselves on the sea shore; and lingering only, as all must linger and gaze on a first return to the sea, who ever deserve to look on it at all, proceeded towards the Cobb, equally their object in itself…[32]

The introduction of Lyme concludes with a "deserted," "melancholy" descent down to the Cobb, polarizing the place as "object." More unsettling though, is its punitive qualification: those who *deserve* to look. Looking is qualified by the spectator's fitness—a fitness to "*ever* deserve to look on it *at all."* The extravagant sensory apprehension of the Lyme environs is an extraordinary act that must be mediated. Such looking greedily consumes sensory stimuli—the same sensory excess that impels Louisa to near self-destruction. Furthermore, as the representation of the Lyme landscape is overdetermined, the description of the actual fall is oddly under-determined, as the gaze is abruptly withdrawn at the very moment one might wish to see most. At the moment of physical crisis, all visual description is absent. In both extremes, apprehension occurs incorrectly at Lyme. The narrative steps out of the social zone to an unhealthy relationship with the environmental world—an extraordinarily material world where sensation is everything (instead of a phenomenal clue), and the outcome threatens to destroy the body and mind.

Published in the same posthumous edition of 1817, *Northanger Abbey* was written nearly two decades before *Persuasion*. Austen criticism commonly divides the novel into two narrative

[32] Austen, *Persuasion* 64.

threads: the first, a coming-of-age marriage plot, and the second, a parody of the gothic novel. The two sections of the novel, however, are closely united in their depiction of objects, which I contend are crucial to its effect. The things of *Northanger Abbey*—whether the famous locked cabinet or the sprigged muslins of Bath—are all vehicles for hermeneutic lessons in reading the world. If the things of *Northanger Abbey* appear in order to serve hermeneutic ends, then how might their manner of representation suit this purpose?

Northanger Abbey presents its objects in order to be read in accordance with particular models of perception – of which the ultimate end is distinguishing the real from the unreal. Both the novel's plot and descriptive style encourage certain types of apprehension while discouraging others: showing the right and wrong ways to read external objects of the world. In the plot, the quick gleanings of normative perception prove to be accurate, where the details derived from focused attention tend to mislead. Similarly, the very descriptive practices that depict these objects help indoctrinate the reader in an epistemological practice that differentiates reliable from unreliable modes of perception.

For this reason, *Northanger Abbey,* perhaps more than Austen's other works, is a novel of things.[33] When items appear, they often arise in a way similar to the one I described in relation to the objects of Kellynch, in a manner indebted to the influence of eighteenth-century representational practices: rooms frequently "aris[e] on narrative demand," as Cynthia Wall has claimed, and lie in wait until a character picks them up.[34] Spaces and objects tend to emerge as they are entered or encountered, and thus, are connected to their discovery. Despite its numerous objects, the novel differentiates objects that arise through this method from those that become

[33] Tony Tanner and James Thompson, among others, have written extensively on objects in *Northanger Abbey*, most commonly attributing their appearance to their value as moral artifacts.

[34] Wall 123-124.

apparent through an act of looking around. When described objects suddenly proliferate rather than seamlessly emerge from a social space, they point toward perceptual dysfunction.

Catherine Morland, the heroine of the novel, meets Henry Tilney for the first time in the Lower Rooms of Bath. Their initial conversation is inspired by the objects in the room, and establishes an important relationship between attention to particulars and a more generalized attention:

> After chatting some time on such matters that naturally arose from the objects around them, he suddenly addressed her with: "I have hitherto been very remiss madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here, I have not asked you how long you have been in Bath, whether you were ever here before, whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theater and the concert, and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent; but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars?["][35]

I select this passage purposely because it is not a description at all. As I have already shown, Austen is particularly skilled at making a number of rhetorical gestures emulate the work of description. When they converse on subjects that "naturally arose from the objects around them," Catherine and Tilney speak inside a room filled with material things: perhaps a pianoforte, numerous tea tables, games of whist; but this fact is not evoked through the direct description of any object.[36] Yet, their interaction is highly dependent on the presence of these objects; the objects in the Lower Rooms provide the social lubrication that allows the conversation to take place. The moments in which Catherine and Tilney see these objects, however, are elided from

[35] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen* (New York: Modern Library, 1940) 1070. All subsequent citations (*NA*) are from this edition.

[36] Austen uses this technique repeatedly: for instance, in *Sense and Sensibility*: "The Dashwoods were now settled at Barton with tolerable comfort to themselves. The house and garden with all the objects surrounding them, were now become familiar…" Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002) 51.

the reader. Instead, when the subject of dialogue becomes "matters" that "naturally" arise from a general notice of objects in the room, the spaces of Bath fill with things.

As the conversation between Catherine and Henry continues, Austen emphasizes the contrast between a direct description of objects and the method of suggesting objects as part of a general space. Henry states that he has not inquired regarding any of the conventional "particulars": "Have you yet honored the Upper Rooms?" "Have you been to the theatre?" "To the concert?" Catherine assures Henry he need not take the "trouble" of reviewing particulars, but Henry, as throughout the novel, uses humor to make a sincere point, archly affecting a stereotyped man of fashion. As Henry quizzes Catherine, Austen describes his physical appearance with an unusual degree of focus: "Then forming his features into a set smile, and affectedly softening his voice, he added, with a simpering air, 'Have you been in Bath long, madam?'" First, Tilney's face receives noteworthy narratorial attention: a description of the "forming of features," "set smile," "simpering air" and soft voice. While Tilney lampoons the conventions of polite conversation, Austen caricatures Tilney through a high degree of detail. The change in tone to a comic mode is engendered by a change in description, and somatic detail becomes the stuff of parody. In addition, only when Tilney switches to a parodic mode is the dialogue rendered in full speech instead of free indirect discourse. Both direct dialogue and the description of Tilney's appearance imbeds the "particulars" of this conversation into its representation. By connecting described particulars with satire, Austen sets up a relationship between close attention to detail and parody—both structures outside the normative modes of narration.

Tilney continues, humorously presupposing that Catherine will record the evening in her journal, a gesture to a standard trope of the eighteenth-century epistolary novel and the novel of

sensibility. Here, the imagined journal affords a place for such ephemera as the "sprigged muslin robe with blue trimmings," "plain black shoes," and the "curl of [Catherine's] hair" "to be described in all their diversities." While the journal (an object of satire in itself) records this paraphernalia in detail, the narrator does not. We see a different method at work when the conversation turns with the approach of Catherine's fashion-obsessed chaperone.

> They were interrupted by Mrs. Allen: "My dear Catherine," said she, "do take this pin out of my sleeve. I am afraid it has torn a hole already. I shall be quite sorry if it has, for this is a favorite gown, though it cost but nine shillings a yard." [37]

An impressive scope of things become instantly present: the garment's sleeve, the offending pin (and subsequent hole), the gown, the fabric and its monetary value, and the body of Mrs. Allen, who arrives in the scene through this sentence. The representation of all these items, similar to those of Kellynch Hall, is based on a principle of implied familiarity: objects made always-already there. The reader fills in the mental picture with details in rapid succession, and I would argue, quite vividly at that. In contrast, we might imagine this same scene in a descriptive style redolent of any number of novels of the later century:

> Spying Catherine and Henry in conversation, Mrs. Allen walked toward the pair, her face pink with an anxious blush. A jeweled rose-shaped pin, due to the weight of the garnet stones encrusted within, caused a rent in the delicate white muslin of her sleeve.
>
> "Catherine," Mrs. Allen cried, raising the unfortunate arm...[etc., etc.]

Austen's description (in contrast to my own) relies on a verbal economy and a quick, colloquial cadence that is so adroitly deployed that it is easy to forget how her fictional worlds are rendered. Since the technical qualities of her descriptions are meant to be invisible, when the mechanisms are revealed, they warrant notice. When contrasting the representation of the grounds of

[37] Austen, *NA* 1072.

Kellynch or the Lower Rooms of Bath with the blatant sense of "scene" at Lyme, extensive adjectival description quickly becomes a signal of something awry.

The gothic description of *Northanger Abbey* shares more than it might seem with the curricles and muslins of Bath in the first half of the novel: both contain an assortment of material objects that indicate danger. Austen criticism has frequently noted that excessive attention to objects by the characters of *Northanger Abbey* often accompanies moral ineptitude: from Mrs. Allen's obsession with dress, to General Tilney, whose love of material objects signals his "parental tyranny."[38] The sexual threat of John Thorpe also materializes through physical objects, as his primary means of seduction are the pleasures of horses, carriages and other possessions. However, I suggest that "excessive solicitude" to objects in the descriptive techniques provides an even more emphatic education.

As the courtship plot progresses, Catherine visits the Tilney home (for which the novel is named) expecting to find a replica of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto.* Henry Tilney capitalizes on Catherine's expectations with a lengthy caricature of the abbey's "gloomy passages" and, more importantly, the objects characteristic of the Gothic novel. Henry asks, "How dreadfully will you examine the furniture of your apartment? And what will you discern?" In Henry's rendition, her own chamber will contain a treasury of gothic props, such items as a bed of "purple velvet" with a "funereal appearance;" "walls hung with tapestry exhibiting figures large as life," a "broken lute," a "portrait of a handsome warrior" and a "ponderous chest." This catalogue is so faithful

[38] James Thompson states that such things appear in the novel "to arouse our suspicions, for those characters who think so much of small matters are inclined to think improperly of great matters." Tony Tanner, speaking of Mrs. Allen, claims "torn garments mean more to her than torn lives" noting that this "displacement of concern…does involve some perversion of affective energy." Claudia Johnson adroitly states: "I lay it down as axiomatic that whenever objects are made to stand out with any sort of specificity in Austen's novels, something is wrong." See James Thompson, *Between Self and World: the Novels of Jane Austen*. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988) 21; Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen,* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986) 60-61; and Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) 163.

to the genre that after several pages Catherine interrupts: “Oh! Mr. Tilney, how frightful! This is just like a book! But it cannot really happen to me.” [39]

The manner of representation—“this is just like a book”—signals Catherine’s recognition of its falsehood. The statement “this is just like a book” is important insofar as it delineates why the events “cannot really happen” as Henry describes them. Catherine reaches this conclusion *because* his description is rendered in the manner of a book, as a plethora of object detail is the stuff of fiction. In this, the apprehension and subsequent recording of a mass of empirical data are set in opposition to more natural modes of perception and representation. Austen accentuates the aberrant nature of explicit seeing: “How *dreadfully* will you examine the furniture of your apartment? And what will you discern?”

Later that evening, Catherine will imagine her chamber as the one that Henry described, mistaking a linen chest for a mysterious locked cabinet. But prior to this mistake, Austen presents Catherine seeing correctly. The chapter opens with Catherine’s first entrance into the room:

> A moment’s glance was enough to satisfy Catherine that her apartment was very unlike the one which Henry had endeavored to alarm her by the description of…Her heart instantaneously at ease on this point, she resolved to lose no time in particular examination of anything…[40]

The information gleaned from the moment’s glance provides an accurate assessment, as she “reads” the room correctly by foregoing the examination of minute particulars. Time is lost and

[39] Austen, *NA* 1150-1151.

[40] Austen, *NA* 1153-1154.

nothing is gained in "particular examination of anything." As the plot will show, at this point Catherine's senses do not misguide her. But how does her view change?

> Her habit was therefore instantaneously thrown off with all possible haste, and she was preparing to unpin the linen package, which the chaise–seat had conveyed for her immediate accommodation…when her eye suddenly fell on a large high chest…the sight of it made her start; and forgetting everything else, she stood gazing at it in motionless wonder, while these thoughts crossed her…[41]

She disregards her normal "habit" and turns her attention to a *described* object in the room (the linen package). Then her eye "fell" suddenly, a type of gaze that is physically startling, causing her to forget everything (including herself) when she threw off her "habit." Furthermore, "gazing in motionless wonder" is clearly not a normal mode of apprehension anywhere in Austen's novels, and thus Catherine is "crossed" by her thoughts, which will prove to mislead her.

Catherine slips out of a more reliable form of perception due to her fear of General Tilney. Like her initial assessment of the room, her first, quick glance is dependable, as the General does prove to be a character less than benevolent. Rather than trusting her senses—which are physiologically designed to quickly read brief sensational clues—Catherine insists on the close inspection of all sensory tags.[42] Austen records Catherine's desire to look in language that indicates her error: "I will look into it; cost me what it may, I will look into it, and directly too." The word "directly" is repeated when General Tilney bellows "with violence": "Dinner to be on

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[41] Austen, *NA* 1154.

[42] Interestingly, the *Biographia Literaria* is also concerned with the potential dangers of apprehending *too* much. Coleridge insists that if "every partial representation awakes the total representation of which it had been a part," the result would be a chaos of associated stimuli. Coleridge states that "will, reason, and judgment" must mitigate potential over-apprehension by "regulating the impressions on the mind." 77-83.

table *directly*!"[43] The overt act of looking around is further associated with unsound apprehension when General Tilney repeatedly demands that Catherine look and comment on the rooms of the abbey, despite the fact that her "unpracticed eye" "saw little more than its spaciousness and the number of its attendants."[44]

When Catherine spends a stormy night attempting to unlock the imposing cabinet, her imagination crafting a scene of horror and suspense, her efforts are described in extensive adjectival details that underscore the parodic nature of the scene. In the morning, Catherine finds that the mysterious cabinet contained only a most mundane and domestic object: a stack of laundry bills. With misapprehensions dispelled, normative observing is restored—and with it, a more balanced method of representation. Henry mentions the previous night's storm at the breakfast table, eliciting the following from Catherine:

> "But we have a charming morning after it," she added, desiring to get rid of the subject; "and storms and sleeplessness are nothing when they are over. What beautiful hyacinths! I have just learnt to love a hyacinth."[45]

As perception resumes its regular (and regulating) function, the hyacinth seamlessly emerges from the social dialogue. In contrast to the inappropriate, over-stimulated looking of the previous night, no one in this scene is *caught looking;* objects come into view purely from a healthy, instantaneous absorption of the contents of the room. Austen's descriptive techniques oppose items delineated in great detail, such as the mistaken chest, with the brief yet incisive glance of normal apprehension. In *Northanger Abbey*, the plot and representational style are

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[43] Original emphasis, Austen, *NA* 1155.

[44] Austen, *NA* 1155.

[45] Austen, *NA* 1160.

didactically paired in a single epistemological premise: successful perceiving is a process of metonymy.

Sense and Sensibility explores two models of the psychology of perception: one based on input from the senses, and one grounded in the synthesis of the reasoning mind. As dual protagonists in this didactic novel, the sisters Marianne and Elinor Dashwood embody these subject positions. Perception and behavior are closely linked, as Elinor filters her perceptions and interactions with the world through steady emotions and a "coolness of judgment," while Marianne sees the world and bases her actions on the immediate input of her senses. As the two sisters navigate their romantic relationships and work toward the fruition of a double marriage plot, their choices are guided by these respective approaches. Although the novel's conclusion is usually read either as the triumph of sense as exemplified by Elinor, or an endorsement of an Augustan "middle way" between their two modes of understanding, I argue that *Sense and Sensibility* offers these differing modes of perception not only to critique how one ought to act in the world, but also to offer a model for representing it.

How sense and sensibility manifest on a representational level is perhaps nowhere more explicitly demonstrated than in a conversation between Marianne, Elinor, and the latter's would-be suitor, Edward Ferrars. In a dialogue that parodies the fashionable aesthetic of the picturesque, a conversation about the landscape becomes a debate about description itself. Shortly before this conversation, however, we find the Dashwood sisters and a pensive, somewhat melancholy Edward Ferrars gathered in the drawing room of Barton Cottage. Moments after his arrival at the Dashwood home, Edward awkwardly departs: "'I am going into the village to see my horses,' said he, 'as you are not ready for breakfast; I shall be back again

presently.'"[46] Dispensing with polite social exchanges, Edward declares his mission: he is on an expedition to see things.

But the narrative neither follows Edward to the village nor stays at Barton with the Dashwood sisters. Instead, the reader is presented with an unexpected formal feature: two lines of empty space on the page. This textual break suggests both the physical space of Edward's walk to the village and the temporal space required for the rest of the party at Barton to dress for the morning meal. The novel, in essence, pauses; at the moment of Edward's walk, there is literally nothing. This break is extremely unusual among Austen's works—unusual in both the use of a formal feature on the page to suggest the passing of time, and in the absence of the omniscient narrator that normally presents the action to us.

To be sure, there are plenty of moments in Austen's novels—as in most novels—in which action occurs but is not narrated. Typically, however, even when a narrator does not "show" the action, the reader is at least told that the actions transpired. Earlier I observed that in *Persuasion,* scenes of unmediated, bold acts of looking are elided. Here, the actions of both Edward Ferrars and the Dashwood sisters are not only put out of sight but entirely omitted. This unusual formal break, I suggest, opens up a space for a conversation about how the scene *could* be described.

When the narrative resumes, Edward is brought back to the drawing room in the following manner:

> Edward returned to them with fresh admiration of the surrounding country; in his walk to the village, he had seen many parts of the valley to advantage; and the village itself, in a

[46] Jane Austen *Sense and Sensibility: Complete Text with Introduction, Historical Contexts, Critical Essays*, ed. Beth Lau (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002) 88-89. All subsequent citations (*SS*) are from this edition.

much higher situation than the cottage, afforded a general view of the whole, which exceedingly pleased him. [47]

The report of Edward's walk simultaneously presents the scene to Elinor, Marianne, and the reader, and focuses on Edward's affective response. As any sensible Austenian character should, Edward finds the walk reviving, and his mood is now playful instead of melancholy. He returns to Barton Cottage with "fresh admiration" of its environs, with both his opinion and his body refreshed. Part of this change is no doubt due to the benefits of exercise that Austen's novels consistently recommend—at least for their heroines. But Edward's change in mood also results from the pleasure he felt seeing the features of the valley "to advantage." "To advantage" is a phrase Austen frequently uses to indicate the favorable forms of human bodies as well as bodies of the natural landscape.[48] And the advantage, in this instance, occurs because the higher elevation of the village allowed him to see "a general view of the whole." Enjoyment of the whole, we will see, characterizes Edward's personal aesthetic.

Throughout the novel, Marianne categorizes Edward as unemotional, "spiritless," and having "little sensibility." But clearly, Edward is neither immune to the beauties of a natural landscape, nor is he without feeling, as Marianne might charge. Edward is "exceedingly pleased" by what he sees on his walk, and derives pleasure from gazing at the valley. Upon hearing Edward describe his feelings, Marianne believes she may finally have found a topic on which they are like-minded. Edward's appreciation of the landscape, we learn,

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[47] Austen, *SS* 88.

[48] In *Pride and Prejudice,* Elizabeth Bennet famously cites the picturesque as her justification to flee an uncomfortable walk at Netherfield: "You are charmingly group'd, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth. Good bye." *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen* (New York: Modern Library, 1940) 262.

> was a subject which ensured Marianne's attention, and she was beginning to describe her own admiration of these scenes, and to question him more minutely on the objects that particularly struck him, when Edward interrupted her by saying, "You must not inquire too far, Marianne—remember I have no knowledge in the picturesque, and I shall offend you by my ignorance and want of taste if we come to particulars."[49]

As Marianne excitedly shares her own sentiments, she begins to ask Edward for specific details. But Edward interrupts Marianne, suggesting she goes "too far" in her inquiry. Edward attributes his caution to his ignorance of an aesthetic discourse: the picturesque. The picturesque was a late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century movement that favored the grooming of natural landscapes and the arrangement of objects within them in a manner that made them appear like a picture. William Gilpin wrote popular works on the picturesque beginning in the 1790s, and in the decade that followed, Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight expanded Gilpin's initial ideas.[50] Knight in particular tried to define the picturesque in relation to both physical sensations and mental associations, placing the aesthetic in discourse with materialist conversations about perception like those of David Hartley. Jane Austen's own interest in the picturesque is well documented, and Henry Austen most notably remarked that among the family's wide interest in the picturesque, his sister Jane was especially "enamoured" with Gilpin's work.[51] In gardening,

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[49] Austen, *SS* 88.

[50] William Gilpin, *Observations; Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty made in the Year 1776…* (London: R. Blamire, 1789); and *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty, On Picturesque Travel, and On Sketching Landscape* (London: R. Blamire, 1794). Gilpin published similar works discussing the picturesque features of specific locales through 1809. Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry Into the Principles of Taste* (London: T. Payne and J. White, 1805); Uvedale Price, *Essay on the Picturesque in Comparison to the Sublime and the Beautiful…* (London: J. Robson, 1794). Price subsequently expanded this essay in editions published from 1795-1801.

[51] See A. Walton Litz, "The Picturesque in Pride and Prejudice," *Persuasions* I (1979) 13-24; William Galperin, "The Picturesque, the Real, and the Consumption of Jane Austen," *Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) 44-81; and Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). William Galperin suggests that the picturesque may have been "the leading aesthetic in the years Austen was developing as a novelist." 45. Meanwhile, Peter Knox-Shaw explains

the picturesque meant a turn away from the intricate geometric patterns popular in Britain in the seventeenth century. Instead, the picturesque was intended to offer a view of nature that was more rough, spontaneous and free by the presence of such items as twisted trees, ruins of structures, and asymmetrical groupings of animals and people.[52] The picturesque might be thought of as a tempered version of the sublime, in which the landscape gestured toward the unpredictability of nature but was at the same time contained in a precise visual frame.[53]

Despite Edward's professed ignorance of the picturesque, the dialogue breaks down not because of his supposed deficiency in taste, but because his aesthetic experience takes a markedly different form from that of Marianne. Austen's language points us toward this difference; in the brief passage above, the word "particular" appears twice. Edward claims his ignorance will suddenly become apparent if he attempts to describe "particulars." In addition, Marianne eagerly starts to "question him more minutely on the objects that *particularly* struck him." But Marianne misunderstands Edward's experience in two important ways. First, when Marianne assumes that in his walk Edward encountered objects that "particularly struck him," Marianne imbues the object with an inappropriate degree of agency. By suggesting that the presence of an item in the landscape could strike him—as if against his will—Marianne denies Edward's participation in constructing a mental picture of the sensed object. By Austen's time, perceiving an object was conceived as an increasingly subjective act. This distinction hints that

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that most of the Austen family (including Jane and her brother James) was fascinated with the picturesque if critical of some of its permutations. Knox-Shaw writes that Jane Austen's family "retained some skepticism" toward the discourse while "remaining lifelong members of its broad church." 75.

[52] To make gardens more pleasing to the eye, Price famously advised, "In a word, instead of making the whole *smooth*, make it *rough*, and you make it also picturesque." Italics original. *Encyclopædia Britannica; or, a Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, &c.* (Edinburgh: Balfour & Co., 1778-83) 731.

[53] Although Gilpin, Price, and Knight differed on the precise relationship of the sublime to the picturesque, there is considerable slippage between the terms in the discourse of the period. Knight criticized Uvedale Price for being too much a disciple of Burke, whose notion of aesthetics was a strict binary between sublime and beautiful.

Marianne's fashionable aesthetic may actually be a bit outdated, as if based on a Newtonian model of perception, in which objects beam their qualities to the eye of the perceiving individual. Second, if Edward's perceptive experience is uniquely his own, then he cannot explain what he saw in particular terms because he did not experience the valley or the items within it *as* particulars. In fact, it was precisely the "general view of the whole" that made Edward "exceedingly pleased." Edward perceives the valley holistically, while Marianne seeks specifics.

The contrast between experiencing the world "in particular" or in a more holistic manner raises a question central to nineteenth-century aesthetics.[54] Whether one prefers to number each streak of the tulip or to depict by broader strokes, the issue of representation was inseparable from questions about the viewer's experience of a piece of art. Thus, the question of *seeing* in general or particulars was simultaneously a matter of representing in general or particulars. Similarly, *Sense and Sensibility* ties Edward's experience of the landscape to the manner in which he reports his experience. As the dialogue continues at Barton Park, the conversation turns from how Edward sees the valley to how he might describe it:

> I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, that ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere.[55]

Edward focuses on the words he chooses to "call" something, portraying himself bungling the terms of the picturesque. He contrasts one possible term for the features of the landscape with another: the "bold" vs. "steep" slope of a hill; a surface called "strange" in contrast with one

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[54] See, among others: M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1953); Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Methuen, 1987).

[55] Austen, *SS* 88.

deemed “irregular.” His self-deprecating speech parodies the jargon of the picturesque, highlighting the seemingly arbitrary nature of linguistic fashion. The slope of a hill may of course be both steep and bold, and at first glance, there seems little difference between strange and irregular. The comedy of Edward’s speech, however, depends on the fact that he does not err in his actual assessment of the objects that surround him, but instead merely differs in the terms through which he describes them.[56] For instance, in the doctrine of the picturesque one might call a surface “irregular and rugged,” while Edward calls this same surface “strange and uncouth.” While the difference between strange and irregular may seem subtle, there is an important distinction. Irregular and rugged identify particular physical details of the items, discernable by senses such as touch and sight. Edward’s adjectives, on the other hand, describe these items in terms of social feeling (uncouth) and knowledge (strange).[57] The words that Edward chooses focus on the relationship the viewer has to cultural codes that surround the object, rather than on a physical property of the object itself. Similarly, Edward deems a distant object “out of sight,” focusing on the position of his own bodily mechanisms to the item, rather than describing the “soft medium” of haze that renders the object itself “indistinct.”[58] As he

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[56] Rosemarie Bodenheimer claims that Edward’s parody does not criticize the enjoyment of the picturesque, but demonstrates that the picturesque is a “kind of language” that, like any language, may be “understood or abused.” “Looking at the Landscape in Jane Austen,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 21.4 (1981): 607-608.

[57] Uncouth, while often connoting a social impropriety, also functions like the word strange: meaning unfamiliar, or unknown. Used here to describe a surface, “uncouth”—means a surface unknown or not previously encountered. The word “couth,” however, derives from the Old English cúþ—which signified knowledge of things or people. Known and socially comfortable, therefore, are closely linked.

[58] Here, Edward (and Austen) refers to a popular notion of early nineteenth-century British aesthetics that considered a distant object more beautiful than one viewed clearly and distinctly. William Hazlitt’s 1822 essay “Why Distant Objects Please” lauds the aesthetic benefits distance confers. *Table Talk* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1878) 356-368. In relation to the picturesque, William Gilpin declared “A country retiring into remote distance is amongst the most beautiful parts of a landscape…A true disciple of nature…will see what vivid touches of light she often marks each prominent part—nearly as vivid as those upon the foregrounds.” *Observations…* 14.

explains his impressions to Marianne, he clarifies that there are only certain types of description he is willing to offer:

> You must be satisfied with such admiration as I can honestly give. I call it a very fine country—the hills are steep, the woods seem full of fine timber, and the valley looks comfortable and snug—with rich meadows and several neat farm houses scattered here and there.[59]

In the last passage, we noticed descriptions of objects that relate to the self. In this passage, we may surmise another pattern: Edward favors a simple noun-adjective combination, often pairing a single adjective with the noun that names the object. Hills are "steep," the "valley looks comfortable"; it contains "rich meadows" and the "woods seem full of fine timber." As in the last passage, Edward uses language that underscores the subjective nature of his perceptions: the valley *looks* comfortable; the woods *seem* full of fine timber. But the adjectives in this passage convey remarkably few visual or sensory-specific qualities: we have a "comfortable" and "snug" valley, "neat" farmhouses, "rich" meadows, "fine" timber and a "fine" country (indeed, Edward uses the word "fine" five times in this single dialogue alone). In fact, what all these words have in common is that *none* of them point to any physical property of the object. Even as he describes how the valley looks to him, Edward's adjectives are more abstract than visual. But why does Edward choose these terms?

In his *Observations on Man* David Hartley claimed that words have the power to excite "ideas," which he defined as "miniatures excited in the nervous system." A word can produce sensory "reproductions" of a given item, or evoke individual or multiple qualities of that item.[60]

[59] Austen, *SS* 88-89.

[60] Hartley 284.

Hartley divided words into four distinct categories, or "classes" of language. The first category consists of words that convey the "simple sensible qualities" of an object; they "excite ideas" but cannot be defined.[61] This class of words speaks directly to the experience of the senses, but is difficult, if not impossible to explain by other words. A word in the first class, such as the names of colors or tastes, would bring one sensory quality to mind (e.g., sour, grey, sweet). The second class of words signifies "natural bodies" whose names inspire multiple ideas: for example, the "hills" and "meadows" of Edward's country view. These terms are "aggregates" of several sensible qualities; for instance, "snow" might be a combination of white, cold, and wet. "Timber," in turn, may be a combination of "wooden" and "tall" and "birch." The third class of words identified by Hartley consists of "abstract, general terms," and can refer to items of a "moral, metaphysical, or vulgar" cast. Unlike the first class of words, these words *can* be defined and in fact, are "founded on definitions and descriptions."[62] In addition to producing "miniatures" of the items they signify, these words evoke "mental emotions." Finally, the last class contains auxiliary words like articles and conjunctions, which do not produce ideas or have definitions.

Reading Edward's description of the landscape in conjunction with Hartley's classifications, when Edward states that he saw a "rich meadow" or "fine timber," he uses two of Hartley's categories. The nouns in phrases such as "rich meadow" and "fine timber" identify natural bodies of the second class. "Meadow," for example, could inspire many associated images: properties of the first class (green, soft) and even additional objects of the second class (grass, hay, flower). Each of these words (like grass) might also have a series of sensory

[61] Hartley 278.

[62] Hartley 279.

properties associated with them, or could be potentially propelled by another term (like blade). This cascade of associations was well recognized: a personalized semantic network of sorts, catalyzed by the term *meadow.* In addition to the sets of images fostered by the names of these natural objects, Edward enriches the mental idea by adding an adjective from the third class. "Rich" and "fine" are abstract, general terms that might, as Hartley claims, signify an aesthetic, moral, or even metaphysical value. Interestingly, Hartley points out that these general terms "stand for a description of these qualities" and "if dwelt upon, excite such ideas as…*descriptions in all their particular circumstances* do."[63] Thus, the abstract terms of the third class—the type of adjectives Edward uses—are a highly condensed form of description, which disperse other descriptions upon a reader's encounter. If at first glance these terms seem non-visual, Hartley proposes quite the contrary: the associative links unique to each reader make these words rife with images. The third class of words, then, has the power to be a compact and efficient form of signification.

Terms of picturesque description, on the other hand, work differently in Hartley's model. In the same conversation, Edward states his distaste for such picturesque items as "rocks and promontories," "grey moss," "brush wood," "nettles, thistles, and "heath blossoms."[64] These items are described with nouns of the second class (rocks, nettles, thistles) and adjectives of the first class. The first class of words, as we recall, consists of words that are "indefinable" by other words and only acquire meaning through sensory experience. Thus, their direct congress with the senses makes this type of language especially apt to convey an aesthetic of sensibility.

[63] Hartley 275 (my italics). Hartley states that words that describe intellectual or moral concepts simply need to be "dwelt upon" to produce images associated with them. He specifies that a delay is necessary to slow the terms down enough so they may create images. Reading itself, as opposed to verbal speech, could perhaps offer such a delay.

[64] Austen, *SS* 89.

But although the first class of words might have a direct correspondence to the senses, these terms hone in on one particular quality, attached to one particular sense. Richard Payne Knight, in his 1805 *An Analytical Inquiry Into the Principles of Taste,* tied the picturesque to this delimiting function. Knight explains that according to Price's foundational definition, the picturesque "imitates the visible qualities of bodies, separat[ing] those qualities from all others; which the habitual concurrence and co-operation of the other senses have mixt and blended with them, in our ordinary perceptions, from which our ideas are formed."[65] While abstract terms operate on multiple semantic registers, the picturesque is a mode of particularity. In *Sense and Sensibility,* this particularity is demonstrated in the very terms by which picturesque objects are named.

When Edward sees the valley, he does not see individual aspects of a picture, but perceives multiple images and "mental emotions." To capture this synthetic experience, he favors abstract language that evokes the many valences of an idea. Even "names of intellectual and moral qualities," Hartley explains, can "suggest certain associated visible ideas, and nascent internal feelings."[66] While Edward's language is abstract, it conjures images, feelings, and even previous definitions. In this sense, Edward's descriptions engage both the synthetic functions of reason and the inputs of the sensorium; they unite sense and sensibility.

Moreover, if Hartley's first class of words cannot be explained or defined, picturesque terms prefigure a particularly Romantic problem: language is inadequate to express feeling. Rather than closing the gap between the signifying possibility of language and personal experience, the language of the picturesque seems to widen it. Repeatedly in the novel Marianne

[65] Knight 70.

[66] Hartley 276.

is unable or unwilling to speak because she "could find no language to describe [her feelings] but that was worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning." Conversely, Marianne's heightened sensibility makes it "impossible for her to say what she did not feel."[67] While the "hackneyed" nature of language was a prominent trope of Romanticism, many critics see Marianne's inability to speak as the result of her being repressed or silenced by Elinor—a manifestation of the dominant ideology.[68] However, I suggest that this Romantic trope is deployed not to show the novel's unequivocal endorsement of Elinor's ideology or behavior, but to show the limitations of the picturesque and to favor Edward's descriptions.

In the previous passage, Edward implores Marianne to "be satisfied with the admiration I can honestly give" and repeats the language from his previous statement—"I *call it* a very fine country," emphasizing that the discussion is really about the terms he uses to describe an item. His ability to convey honest admiration is closely tied to what he chooses to call something. In this sense, description has an ethical component for Edward: he cannot overstate nor choose a term incommensurate with his own experience. The words that he chooses determine whether his aesthetic experience is reported honestly or dishonestly.

Part of this descriptive honesty has to do with the limits of human vision. In contrast to the "fine country" and "rich meadows" that delight Edward, "grey moss," "nettles" and "brush wood" also differ in degree of focus. The elements of the picturesque, like heath blossoms and grey moss, outline minute visual characteristics; close attention is required to see them. Edward states that these items are "lost on [him]," as they are beyond his range of perception visually and

[67] Austen, *SS* 89, 105.

[68] Angela Leighton, "Sense and Silences: Reading Jane Austen Again," *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*., ed. Janet Todd. Vol. 3 (New York: Holmes, 1983) 208-223; Barbara K. Seeber, "I See Everything As You Desire Me to Do: the Scolding and Schooling of Marianne Dashwood," *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 11.2 (1999): 223-233; Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975).

mentally.[69] Unlike the panoramic view that offers a "general view of the whole," picturesque description portrays an intent view. Edward cannot actually *see* the small details of rocks and brush wood, so he dare not describe them—although he is willing to *believe* that they may be present in the scene due to Marianne's affective response.[70] Edward's holistic view can thus be understood as the very opposite of Mr. Collins's gaze in *Pride and Prejudice*. As Peter Knox-Shaw has noted, Mr. Collins sees the landscape as a series of particulars. Peering through a window toward the gardens at Rosings, "every view was pointed out with a minuteness which left beauty entirely behind. [Mr. Collins] could number the fields in every direction, and could tell how many trees there were in the most distant clump." "Minuteness" ignores, if not undermines beauty, and Mr. Collins appreciation of objects is neither aesthetic nor authentic. [71] Collins's hypocrisy, I suggest, could hardly be in greater contrast to the integrity of Edward's "honest admiration."

Although Edward repeatedly professes to be unpracticed in the jargon of the picturesque, he proves himself to be quite familiar with its discourse. [72] In order to explain the ways in which his aesthetic differs from the picturesque, he defines the tenets of the aesthetic in detail. He rejects the picturesque, however, because its particularity makes him deem it a less authentic way to describe his experience. Therefore, we should not take Edward's statement "I have no knowledge *in* the picturesque" to simply indicate that he has no knowledge *of* the picturesque.

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[69] Austen, *SS* 89.

[70] Austen, *SS* 89.

[71] Knox-Shaw reads this attention to particulars in this passage as an act of accounting, emphasizing the financial capital displayed in Lady Catherine's Rosings Park. But I suggest Collins's attention to particulars underscores his misapprehension of the social situations he greatly wishes to master, from which his comedy derives. 92-93.

[72] Rosemarie Bodenheimer also notes that Edward's ignorance is belied by his description of the principles of the picturesque. Bodenheimer claims that "Edward's speech shows that he knows exactly what the picturesque is: a descriptive vocabulary which predetermines what is to be seen and valued." 608.

Rather, I argue that Edward's statement is much more telling, implying that he finds no knowledge *in* the picturesque. In other words, seeing through picturesque modes of attention or describing the landscape through picturesque language does not lead to knowledge about the world. Epistemologically, the picturesque fails.

Edward's personal perception of a scene, of course, determines the words he uses to describe it. But when Edward tells his story, he also creates a secondary experience for Marianne and Elinor; the words that Edward chooses determine how his listeners mentally envision the scene. Verbal language enacts a reciprocal process: one selects the term that best matches one's personal mental "miniatures," and this choice then inspires images in the mind of someone else. In the discourse of associationism, experiencing first hand *and* imagining from a description both involve a mental (and perhaps even physiological) act of constructing miniature representations. Thus, seeing and describing are merely two different inputs leading to the same representational result.

This paradigm perhaps explains the formal break in the text that preceded this dialogue. D.A. Miller, in *Jane Austen and the Secret of Style*, claims that Austen's narration—perhaps more than that of any other novelist—is nearly invisible, as if her reader has unmediated access to the actions of the plot. Miller argues that Austen's style is an act of "abstracting" and "a willed denial of particularities."[73] While Miller interprets these denied "particularities" as the marks of the author's corporeal identity, I suggest that the narrator's elision of particularities is intended to produce the feeling of phenomenal experience.

If Austen's narration provides a reader with an illusion of direct access to the novel's actions, we might say that within the blank space lies the "real" version of Edward's experience. Since the reader has access to the walk through the village only when Edward tells his story, the

[73] D.A. Miller, *Jane Austen and the Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 28.

issues raised in Edward's relation of the scene applies more broadly to narration itself. Without the predetermined authority of Austen's initial narration—a control description, if you will—the reader may more earnestly weigh what is at stake in different choices for verbal description. Therefore, the implications of Edward's debate with Marianne go far beyond a discussion of the merits of the picturesque. The formal break that precedes the debate reminds us that description has the potential not only to capture experience, but also to shape it.

Thus, it becomes clear why the picturesque must fail. Earlier in this chapter, I showed that in *Northanger Abbey*, a description said to be "like a book" signaled something outside the modes of physical apprehension. Similarly, in *Sense and Sensibility* "like a picture" lies in sharp contrast to "like life." Descriptions that attempt to replicate a picture are opposed to verbal tags that evoke the blended, synthetic experience of the sensorium. While a picture contains elements that address the visual sense, they fall short of the polyvalent ideas and emotions of actual experience. The montage produced when Edward gazes at the valley is not equivalent to a picture. The mental diorama is colored by sensations, impressions, and even judgments that cannot be expressed by the delineation of physical particulars.

Yet, perhaps Edward's view *does* resemble a picture after all: the paintings of nascent realism. Edward prefers "tall, straight, and flourishing" trees to "crooked, twisted, or blasted" ones. And much like the quotidian subjects of the Flemish paintings to which Austen's own work was often compared, Edward finds more "pleasure in a snug farm house than a watch-tower—and a troop of tidy, happy villagers…than the finest banditti in the world."[74] In a way, we might call his preference for the everyday—if somewhat anachronistically—a preference for

[74] Austen, *SS* 89.

realism. Indeed, if we were to articulate Edward's and Marianne's respective points-of-view as genres, they would closely correspond to realism and romance.[75]

In this way, Edward's preferences for both the matter and the manner of description might be seen as a metonym for Austen's own method of representation. Edward prefers a simple view of a country village (perhaps "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village," to be precise),[76] and prefers to articulate these views via terms that inspire a variety of impressions rather than single sensations. So, too, does Austen recognize the descriptive work that these types of phrases can do. Thus Emma's "comfortable home," the "handsome house" of Mansfield Park, and most certainly Elizabeth Bennet's "fine eyes," are capacious yet highly economical descriptions capable of producing multivalent ideas.[77] Abstract terms capture a variety of images and emotions, yielding an experience more closely aligned with the experience of everyday life. The picturesque, we have seen, presents its objects in terms of qualities that make them seem part of a representation. Instead of aiming to represent a *representation*, however, the method favored in *Sense and Sensibility* seeks to replicate the experience of the real.

Austen's descriptive strategy taps into the period's beliefs about the mind and body: a scientific schema for a reality effect. The great degree of stylistic control so often attributed to Austen's prose may in fact be a symptom of its epistemology: the depiction of a social world and its objects according to an associationist model. In this way, a "proper" method for description

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[75] The generic differences are echoed in Sir Walter Scott's definition of Austen's craft: a "truth of description," "sentiment" and "exquisite touch" that "renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting" in contrast to his own "big bow-wow strain" of historical romance. See Scott's journal entry on the subject, 14 March 1826, repr. in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage, 1811-1870*, ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1995) 113.

[76] Jane Austen, "Letter to Anna Austen, September 9-18, 1814," ed. Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 287.

[77] *Emma, Mansfield Park,* and *Pride and Prejudice*, respectively, in *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen* (New York: Modern Library, 1940) 763, 469, and 246.

emerges: proper, not exclusively in a moral sense, but of a psychological and physiological propriety.

Finally, Sir Walter Scott proposes an analogy that locates the author's strength in the very terms of her descriptive style. "Upon the whole," Scott writes,

> the turn of this author's novels bears the same relation to that of the sentimental and romantic cast, that cornfields and cottages and meadows bear to the highly adorned grounds of a show mansion, or the rugged sublimities of a mountain landscape. It is neither so captivating as the one, or so grand as the other, but it affords to those who frequent it a pleasure nearly allied with the experience of their own social habits.[78]

Descriptions highly adorned and ruggedly sublime, I have shown, signal something outside of the normative mode of seeing when regarded with contemporary conceptions of the sensorial mind and body. Rather, a representational practice that renders cottages, curricles and characters in a structure allied to perceptive experience begets a most elegant realism.

[78] Scott 68.

CHAPTER TWO

The Outlines of History: Sir Walter Scott and Dugald Stewart

The first words of Sir Walter Scott's novel *Waverley; Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814) reveal a concern about the ways in which an author's language inspires pictures in a reader's mind. In the opening lines, Scott describes his long process of deciding on a title for his first novel: a matter, Scott cheekily explains, embarked "not…without the grave and solid deliberation which matters of importance demand from the prudent."[1] Scott proposes that if he titled his work "Waverley, a Romance from the German," his title would evoke a series of "preconceived associations" in the reader's mind. As the reader encounters certain words and phrases, Scott believes, her mind creates nearly indelible pictures. Only the most "obtuse head," Scott explains, would not "image forth a profligate abbot, an oppressive duke…black cowls, caverns, daggers, electrical machines, trap-doors, and dark lanterns."[2] Upon reading the phrase a "Romance from the German," the mind would produce a set of "ideas," a term which encompasses both mental images with concrete visual qualities (dagger, cavern, lantern) and abstract concepts (oppressive, profligate). Similarly, Scott proposes that if he instead chose for his title "'Waverley, A Tale of Other Days'…Would not the owl have shrieked and the cricket cried in my very title-page?"[3] While "A Tale of Other Days" would presumably evoke the twilight sounds of the screeching owl and the lowly cricket, Scott's presentation of the "owl shriek and the crickets cried" recalls Lady Macbeth's famous eerie pronouncement at the

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[1] Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley; Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 3. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent citations of Scott in this chapter are of this edition.

[2] Scott 3.

[3] Scott 3.

moment of Duncan's murder, "I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry." These particular words bring to mind, whether consciously or subconsciously, the plot of *Macbeth*. Therefore, it is not merely the phrase "A Tale of Other Days" that would "image forth" a picture in the reader's mind: the phrase that Scott uses as an example of associative psychology is itself intended to enact these principles. Scott's examples suggest that simple phrases have such connotative power that a single word or phrase can prime the reader to supply volumes of preconceived plot before the author has described any narrative action.

As evocative as a single phrase may be, Scott proposes that it might be possible to find words that allow readers to create new connections in the mind. Rather than engaging in the daunting task of erasing and redrawing the mental pictures that instantly appear, Scott attempts to discover a word or a name free from preconceived associations. Scott seeks for his protagonist an "uncontaminated name, bearing with its sound little of good or evil, excepting what the reader shall be hereafter pleased to affix to it."[4] If an author aware of the principles of cognition could find this linguistic *tabula rasa*, he could free the reader to decide, at his pleasure, what associations to "affix" to words and phrases while reading a novel.

Scott's rhetoric reveals a tension between two characteristics of the reading process. On the one hand, Scott describes a passive reader who cannot help but "image forth" a series of proscribed ideas when encountering certain words and phrases. But even as his introduction frames language as a potentially contaminating force bringing undesired associations, Scott simultaneously imagines a reader with agency, one who chooses the images attached to a given word or phrase.

Scott is concerned with managing the "impressions" of this active reader, whose mental images are prompted, but not dictated, by a novel's descriptive cues. The way in which Scott

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[4] Scott 3.

imagines these impressions to be formed during the reading process is drawn from the theories of Scottish moral philosopher Dugald Stewart. A prominent figure in Scottish Enlightenment thought of the early nineteenth century, Stewart was a moral philosopher and mathematician who was deeply interested in the working of the human mind. Scott studied with Stewart at the University of Edinburgh, and the two maintained a friendship for years.[5] Stewart's main work, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792), responded to the ongoing discourse about how ideas became associated in the mind. The goal of the *Elements* was to improve education, in order to serve the larger goal of perfecting man's "intellectual and moral nature." The main way to improve education, Stewart claimed, was by better "manag[ing] early impressions and associations."[6] In other words, the main concern of Stewart's work—managing associations in the mind—is the same concern with which Scott opens his novel. The first pages of a novel, in essence, initiate the reader's education: Scott's opening paragraphs bring attention to how an author's choices affect the impressions in the reader's mind.

Jana Davis, in "Sir Walter Scott and Enlightenment Theories of the Imagination: Waverley and Quentin Durward," acknowledges the influence of Dugald Stewart on the *Waverley* novels.[7] Davis argues that Stewart's concept of the imagination can be seen in Scott's *Waverley*, and claims that Scott borrowed concepts and phrasing directly from Stewart. For example, Davis shows that the character of Waverley, a young man who spends his youth

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[5] In the *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott,* John Gibson Lockhart writes that Scott's essay, "On the Manners and Customs of the Northern Nations," impressed Stewart, and Scott became a favored pupil before the end of the term. Lockhart writes that "Scott was a frequent visitor in Stewart's family, and an affectionate intercourse was maintained between them through their after-lives." *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 1837-1839, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1900), 19.

[6] Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* in *Works of Dugald Stewart, in Seven Volumes*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Hillard and Brown, 1829) 15. All citations of Stewart are taken from this 1829 edition.

[7] Jana Davis, "Sir Walter Scott and Enlightenment Theories of the Imagination: Waverley and Quentin Durward." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 43, 4 (March 1989): 437-464.

reading romances and histories, is a clear example of the dangers of what Stewart called an "ill-regulated imagination." Davis suggests that although Waverley's idle reading at first distorts his perceptions of the world, the trajectory of the novel traces Waverley's harnessing of the imagination as a tool for human sympathy.

However, I argue that the concerns of Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* can be seen not only in Scott's characterization of Waverley, but also in the author's descriptive techniques. Stewart suggests that by being aware of the principles of mental cognition, an author can make choices that encourage the reader to "fill up different parts of the picture,"[8] and he advocates a manner of representation in which a writer adjusts what and how he describes to capitalize upon the readers' associations. Because art and literature are significant parts in an individual's education, Stewart spends considerable time exploring how literature shapes "impressions" in our minds. He focuses on literary form, understanding that mental impressions are formed not only by the things we read, but the *shape* in which they appear. Stewart's suggestions for narrative practice concentrate on a balance of creative agency between writer and reader, and advocate that an author limit what he describes to allow for the action of the reader's imagination. Stewart recommends a technique that delineates an "outline," a representation of the "minimum" required for the reader to conjure a mental image. Stewart's theories about language cognition and literary description, I argue, provide a framework for Scott's development of his own version of the literary "outline."

In the first section of the chapter, I summarize the points of Stewart's *Elements* most pertinent to Scott's methods of representation. In the second section, I offer examples of the ways in which Scott integrates Stewart's principles. In *Waverley*, Scott develops several strategies of outline: first, describing from a limited perspective to restrict by the laws of physical

[8] Stewart 366.

space what could be represented in a scene; second, representing dialogue through indirect discourse in order to leave the sound of speech up to the reader; and third, by repeatedly announcing the presence of textual "mysteries." In the final section, I show how Scott uses the techniques of outline in order to represent a culture "Sixty Years Since" and at the same time, to craft a "description of men" that transcends any historical moment.[9] To meet both of these aims, Scott directs his efforts toward evoking what Stewart calls "local" and "universal" associations.[10] Local associations allow a reader to apply individual particulars based on their own time, place, and experience, while universal associations call up similar ideas in most readers' minds and allow an author to convey commonalities about the human condition. By combining historical language with cues for the reader to produce contemporary associations, Scott represents a specific historical period while granting the reader creative agency. In the context of Scottish Enlightenment thinking about language, Scott draws on Stewart's work to help him create a representational partnership between reader and writer.

Set at the time of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, *Waverley* is the tale of the clash between Jacobite forces and the English Hanoverian government. Both of these forces appeal to Waverley's sympathies: Waverley's uncle maintains his Jacobite allegiance to Prince Charles Stuart, while his father acquiesces to the Hanoverian government. As a character, Waverley is emblematic of the clash between the two forces and the difficulties in their coexistence. An idealistic young man whose childhood was filled with romantic tales (including stories of those

[9] Scott 4. Scott writes that he avoids the manners of a particular time in favor of representing "those passions common to men in all stages of society…which have alike agitated the human heart, whether it throbbed under the steel corslet of the fifteenth century, the brocaded coat of the eighteenth, or the blue frock and white dimity waistcoat of the present day." 5.

[10] Stewart 276.

fallen in the 1715 rebellion), Waverley is given by his father an appointment in the Hanoverian Army, only to join the Highlanders later in the Jacobite uprising.

In her introduction to *Waverley*, Claire Lamont argues that Scott himself was deeply affected as a youth by the tales of the 1715 and 1745 rebellions.[11] Like those of the novel's hero, Scott's own "impressions" were shaped by the stories of Jacobite uprisings. In an 1806 letter, Scott describes the impact of these stories through a vocabulary of mental functioning. Ever "since reason and reading came to my assistance," Scott writes, "I have never quite got rid of the impression which the gallantry of Prince Charles made on my imagination."[12] The indelibility of these early impressions on the author's imagination seems to manifest in his thinking about both Waverley's and the reader's impressions. Scott wishes to create sympathy for a Highland culture all but defunct, as the narrator describes it, "a race…almost entirely vanished from the land."[13] He wishes to portray the Scots to "the sister kingdom, in a more favorable light than they had been placed hitherto," as Maria Edgeworth had done for the Irish in her fiction.[14] To portray the political and cultural complexity of Scotland during the '45, Scott knows he must encourage his readers to surrender previous conceptions (and misconceptions) and ask them to re-imagine the history of Scotland. Stewart's theories help Scott's attempt to efface the reader's existing impressions and to create a vivid and nuanced picture of the Scottish people.

Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* was published less than two years after Scott was his student. The work was dedicated to Stewart's mentor Thomas Reid,

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[11] Claire Lamont, "Introduction," *Waverley; Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) xvi.

[12] Lamont xvi.

[13] Scott 340.

[14] In the 1814 first edition of the novel, Scott states that he wishes to emulate Edgeworth's work, but in the 1829 "Preface," he is more explicit about his rationale, quoted here.

who significantly influenced Stewart's specific version of associationist psychology. Stewart wished to parse the mechanisms of association of ideas even further than his predecessors had, understanding that "ideas" was itself an ambiguous term.[15] Associationists before Stewart, such as Reid, had generally used the term idea to refer to a mental representation or "image" in the mind, often of the external world, whether or not the object of reference is actually present.[16] Typically, they identified three essential principles through which ideas come to be associated: resemblance (similarity between things), contiguity (sequence in time or place) of one item to another, and cause and effect.[17] Stewart argued that while one can observe the results of these connections, the search for the physiological (or even metaphysical) *causes* of the association of ideas—whether "supposed vibrations" or physiological "traces in the sensorium"—is fruitless, as this line of inquiry would inevitably lead the philosopher down a road of speculation. However, he claimed, one could observe human actions and responses to the phenomenal world and surmise certain laws of association. A careful observer can deduce the way ideas get connected and how ideas become connected to units of language.

Language was thought to be especially dependent on associative logic: a sign has no real signifying power until it becomes linked with an item.[18] In a most basic example of association,

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[15] Michael Kearns, in *Metaphors of Mind in Fiction and Psychology*, shows that Stewart's concern about the term is typical of writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987) 15.

Stewart acknowledges that the term "image" is a misnomer, as ideas such as "profligate" or "tea" are not necessarily visual although they may have visual components. Stewart 50-52. Since the psychology of the period lacked a more accurate term, Stewart alternates between terms such as images, mental pictures, and ideas for sake of consistency with previous theorists.

[16] Stewart quotes Thomas Reid to remind his readers that "philosophers, from Plato to Mr. Hume agree in this, that we do not perceive external objects immediately; and that the immediate object of perception must be some image present in the mind." Stewart 51.

[17] Stewart 211.

[18] Stewart 68.

a child associates, through repetition, the sound of the word "apple" with his favorite snack. This is an association of contiguity: the sound of the word is heard every time he eats his snack. In addition, the child may learn "apple" by an association of cause and effect (if I say this word, the snack appears). Eventually, the letters of the word "apple" become associated with the sound of the word and the snack. Just as children learn to associate a word with an object, they learn to associate words with more abstract concepts (such as happy, cold, yes and no). The word apple, according to Stewart's logic, would provoke an idea "in the mind's eye."[19] Similarly, the act of reading requires a constant retrieval of images previously associated with words, phrases, and sounds. As we read, Stewart explains, we "naturally feel a disposition to form, in our own minds, a distinct picture of what is described."[20] For example, when reading any type of literature, whether fiction, history or poetry, "we annex imaginary appearances to the names of favorite characters." In our progress through a text, we pick up additional data to form more nuanced ideas.

Like his predecessor Thomas Reid, Stewart theorized that the forming of associations alternated between deliberate and subconscious mental activity.[21] While association could happen so quickly as to seem automatic, Stewart claims that by repetition and habitual action a person could deliberately "strengthen" a "particular associating principle" (such as resemblance, contiguity, or cause and effect). This type of deliberate practice, Stewart suggested, could "give us a command of all the different ideas in our mind."[22] For instance, an orator could strengthen

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[19] Stewart 99.

[20] Stewart 363.

[21] Kearns summarizes Reid's position on associations: "The mind has both active and passive modes, and in the active mode it can either direct the flow of thoughts, the train of ideas, or let them "flow spontaneously." 7.

[22] Stewart 218.

the principle of "resemblance" by repeating phrases with similar patterns in order to trigger the recall of certain images. Practicing linking phrases with similar patterns, for instance, builds a tendency for certain trains of association—or what we might in contemporary terms might call habits of mind that form cognitive "muscle memory." Such trains of associations might be thought of as the nineteenth century's articulation of neural pathways, which have indeed been shown in contemporary neurological research to be plastic and capable of strengthening by repeated practice (like meditation).

For the novelist, however, the ability of the human mind to control the association of ideas by practice was both a challenge and a boon. The reader, encountering the word "apple," could envision certain properties in common with nearly every other reader—let's say, a general sweet taste—which Stewart calls "universal" associations. These universal associations allow a writer to do his most basic job: to communicate semantic value by means of written characters. However, while the *process* of imagining a visual image for a character is similar for all readers, Stewart claims that the imagined portraits that each individual may produce can vary considerably.[23] Even simple, concrete nouns such as "river, mountain, or grove," Stewart explains, "will produce very different effects on different minds."[24] The image a person creates of a character, or previously associated with a name or word, will inevitably differ somewhat in the composition of particulars (sensory features like color, size, hardness or smoothness) based on his or her own previous experience. Stewart calls these particulars "local" associations: qualities specific to the time, place, and circumstances of individual experience. A reader's "local" associations might give the mental representation of an apple a particular shape or flavor:

[23] Stewart 364.

[24] Stewart 366.

the exquisite tartness of the local apple, the compactness of crabapples, a soft, unappetizing blemish. In addition to diverging in shape or in the construction of individual features, the images could also differ in vividness. If habit (like a phrase encountered frequently and repeatedly) creates especially strong connections between things, a novelist might have a significant challenge breaking or diverging from an individual's long-forged trains of ideas.

At the same time, the experience of reading a lengthy work of fiction could itself train (or retrain) the mind to link particular elements. The congruence, resemblance, or the causal relationship between plot events could forge new associative links. The degree of habitual encounter with a word or a term could, in essence, start a new linguistic "habit." Furthermore, the reading "experience" is similar in the mind to phenomenal experience, as both reading material and other input from the external world become translated and experienced as mental representations. Therefore, the associations potentially formed while reading could be as powerful as those formed in interactions with the phenomenological world, especially if reinforced by frequency.[25]

We can see these theories about the reading process within the very first page of Scott's novel. Scott playfully gestures toward the influence of associations on the reader as he narrates his selection of a name for his protagonist:

> according to the example of my predecessors, I had only to seize upon the most sounding and euphonic surname that English history or topography affords, and elect it at once as the name of my hero. But alas! what could my reader have expected from the chivalrous epithets of Howard, Mordaunt, Mortimer, or Stanley, or from the softer and more sentimental sounds of Belmour, Belville, Belfield and Belgrave, but pages of inanity, similar to those which have been so christened for a century past? I must modestly admit I am too diffident of my own merit to place it in unnecessary opposition to preconceived associations: I have therefore, like a maiden knight with his white shield, assumed for my

[25] Unlike other theorists, who generally propose that the vividness of the image can help one determine reality from fiction, Stewart proposes that the reading experience may produce stronger, more vivid affective responses than real life. Stewart 376-7, and see also the final pages of this chapter for more on this phenomenon.

> hero, WAVERLEY, an uncontaminated name, bearing with its sound little of good or evil, excepting what the reader shall be hereafter pleased to affix to it.[26]

Here, Scott frames previous associations as a "contamination" which carries a variety of characteristics, such as affect ("sentiment"), time ("history"), space ("topography"), and moral judgment ("good or evil"). Scott, therefore, must avoid possible resemblances to names of historical figures or geographical places, whether in history or in fiction. Just as "A Tale of Other Days" will bring to mind a series of images characteristic of other plots, the names "Belville," "Belfield," and "Belgrave" are simply minute variations on previous ideas drawn from other works of fiction. Scott repeats the "Bel" syllable in an anaphoristic pattern to underscore the resemblance that was thought to produce similar ideas. What we notice in this series is a lack of distinctiveness—precisely what Scott is trying to avoid.

In this passage, the potential contagion of previous associative content is carried in one particular quality of the words: in their sound. Sound is crucial to Scott's deliberation of a name for the novel's protagonist. The importance of sound is emphasized by the number of times sound-related words recur in this paragraph: "sound," "sound," "sounding," "euphonic." The contaminated name specifically "bears with its sound" a set of "preconceived associations," and the writer who chooses to use this signifying power could simply choose a "euphonic or sounding" name that is resonant of the qualities he wishes to convey.

Stewart considered sound to be an important but overlooked principle of associationism. In addition to the long-established criteria of cause and effect, contiguity, and resemblance, Stewart adds his own criterion to the list: "accidental coincidences in the sounds of words."[27] In fact, Stewart argued that the sound of words was distinct from the other ways in which

[26] Scott 3.

[27] Stewart 213.

associations were formed. Unlike the other principles, the sound of words links ideas through a secondary, or more distant relationship between the items that the words signify. Put another way, the sound of words creates a connection between things based on the relationship between the *signs that stand for items*, not between the things themselves. For example, an association based on contiguity might look as follows. If a waltz (to propose a hypothetical, if somewhat anachronistic example) was heard the night our hero Waverley met the lovely Flora Mac Ivor, the melody of that waltz might make him thereafter think of Flora. This is a contiguous association: Waverley encountered the waltz and Flora in the same ballroom (spatial contiguity) on the same evening (temporal contiguity). But if after reading the word "wall" in a novel, Waverley suddenly thought of a "waltz," the wall is now associated with the dance, and therefore Flora, merely because of similarity in sound. In this hypothetical situation, "wall" and "waltz" became linked in Waverley's mind by the "accidental coincidences" among the phonetics that denote them. We can see the potential ripple effect here: if the word "wall" inspired Waverley to think of the word "waltz," and the waltz made Waverley think of Flora, the sound of words can set in motion a vast network of potentially (and perhaps surprisingly) connected ideas.

Stewart claims that associations from the sound of words occur especially when the mind is in a "playful" mood.[28] While these connections tend to form when the mind is at leisure, Stewart implies that one ought nonetheless to be mindful of these accidental phonetic coincidences. Stewart claims the human mind is most susceptible to these type of associations "when we are careless and disengaged,"[29] as if only the most vigilant readers could gird

[28] Stewart 212. "Accident" and poetry, for Stewart, are closely related. In fact, Stewart claims that part of our enjoyment of poetry derives from observing (or believing we observe) an author's "accidental" associations. Poetry is the recording of often arbitrary and unexpected associative connections; the documentation of witnessing the process of accidental connections in others gives us surprise and pleasure.

[29] Stewart 213.

themselves against haplessly linking semantically unrelated content. If being "careless" and "disengaged" allows these associations to form, then deliberate "care" and "engagement" might prevent these cognitive accidents.

Since mental links can be forged between ideas of things by the "accidental" properties of sound, Scott must avoid inadvertently recycling a previously used name, but he goes further in his intention to avoid any name that merely *sounds* like one that has come before. Scott suggests that his predecessors, in contrast, capitalized on the associations that sound can produce, and he takes issue with this process for two reasons. First, his reader has little agency in the process of attaching associations: if Scott wishes to avoid any associations except those "that the reader pleases to affix" to the name, then he ought to avoid resemblances to existing words. Second, Scott suggests an implicit laziness in the writer who exploits sonic similarities. Names like Mordant, Mortimer, and Stanley have historical resonance to legendary knights, and the name Howard recalls the powerful family of Anne Boleyn; therefore, instead of crafting of new descriptions, authors who use these names simply forecast ready-made plots and characters (as in the allusion to *Macbeth* in the opening to the novel). If, according to Stewart, the reader should have some creative agency, names with geographical or historical resonance supplant the work of description for both the author and the reader.

Maria Edgeworth, the Anglo-Irish writer of *Castle Rackrent* (1800), whose work Scott names in his postscript as a model for *Waverley*, considers the potential associations provoked by the sound of words to be a crucial element in fiction. In a letter to Scott, Edgeworth praises his first novel, but sharply criticizes his choice of a name based on its sound. Discussing his portrait of Flora Mac Ivor, one of the prominent characters of Waverley's adventure, Edgeworth notes,

> Flora we could wish was never called *Miss Mac Ivor*, because in this country [Ireland] there are tribes of vulgar Miss *Macs,* and this association is unfavorable to the sublime and beautiful of your Flora—she is a true heroine.[30]

Because Edgeworth has previously and repeatedly encountered "tribes" of "vulgar Miss Macs," reading "Miss Mac Ivor" in Scott's novel evokes associations too strong to be dissolved. Note that it is not the name "Flora" or even the full articulation "Flora Mac Ivor" that has the deleterious effect, but the combination of "Miss Mac" specifically evokes the "vulgar" individuals of Edgeworth's personal experience. This is an example of the "unnecessary opposition" to "preconceived associations" in which Scott had tried to avoid placing his hero. Battling an already-fixed image would require such significant effort as to be nearly insurmountable. In fact, even the repetition over the course of the novel is not enough to allow Edgeworth to forget the old associations and replace them with new ones (hence the need to cite this criticism amidst a letter otherwise full of praise). We might surmise, however, that "Miss Mac—" would be an astoundingly common prefix. But this is precisely Edgeworth's point: the frequency with which Miss Mac is likely encountered renders Flora common. The appellation "Miss Mac" hinders Edgeworth (and her family, for whom she speaks in her letter) from experiencing the heroine as a unique individual.

In the context of Edgeworth's criticism, Scott's introduction is not merely a comic gesture. While he self-deprecatingly pokes fun at the conventions of historical romance, his interest in the sounds of words is earnest, as potential associations are foundational to both Scott and Edgeworth's thinking about the mechanics of language. We might read Edgeworth's letter as a response to Scott's stated intention of avoiding "preconceived associations," and read the

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[30] Maria Edgeworth, "To the author of *Waverley* (October 3, 1814)," *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John Hayden (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970) 77.

words of his introduction, in turn, to be in some degree a pledge to the reader. Edgeworth implies that part of a skilled author's craft was to guard against (or at least be conscious of) these associations, as the images evoked by the sound of a name (or here, even the sound of part of a name) were thought to fundamentally affect the author's efficacy at drawing his characters.

If we turn back to Scott's introduction and his criticism of "contaminated" names, he writes that sounds like "Belfield" or "Mortimer" would produce nothing but "pages of inanity." Scott offers a bit of his own sound-play in his very description of "softer and more sentimental sounds," underscoring through alliteration the frivolity that the sensory qualities of language can inspire in the mind. But while "inane" can mean silly or senseless, inane also means "empty." Interestingly, Scott used the word "inane" in another context connected with the *Waverley* novels. In 1826, Scott published a political pamphlet under the name of one of the characters of the *Waverley* novels, Malachi Malagrowther, the ostensible "descendant of Sir Mungo Malagrowther" from *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822). The pamphlet, issued as a letter to the *Edinburgh Review*, argued against the dissolution of banknotes of less than five pounds, which were long used in Scotland, but rarely in England. The change in currency was proposed in response to a banking crash, and was an English effort to control currency more tightly.[31] In his argument against the proposal, Scott used as his motto the following line: "Ergo, Caledonia, nomen inane, vale" (Therefore, Scotland, empty name, farewell).[32] The line is a fragment of a heroic ode by Archibald Pitcairne commemorating the fall of Jacobite hero John Graham, Viscount of Dundee. Here, "Nomen inane" does not refer to the silly name, but to the empty

[31] Matthew Rowlinson, *Real Money and Romanticism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 92.

[32] Rowlinson 93. For the original poem, see Archibald Pitcairne, *The Latin Poems*, eds. John MacQueen, Winifred MacQueen (Assen, Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2009) 72-73. See also Sir Walter Scott's own 1828-1831 non-fiction work *Tales of a Grandfather: Being the History of Scotland from the Earliest Times* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1868) 271, which quotes Pitcairne's poem in his section on the history of Dundee.

name of Scotland. In the political context of the pamphlet, Caledonia is an "empty name" because the Scots lack the agency to determine their own currency.

Here, we can see a parallel between the "inanity" associated with the names of Scott's introduction and the "nomen inane" he cites in his pamphlet. In both cases, the names are empty because of the values *others* assign to them. In the pamphlet, Scott calls Caledonia an empty name because this proposal denies the Scots the right to assign value to their currency, a microcosm of political tensions.[33] In Scott's novel, Mortimer and Howard are "empty" names because the reader does not actively assign value to these signs; instead, the signs derive value only from long-distant, imprecise historical associations. Perhaps if any sign—whether currency or language—is not assigned value by those who should have the power to do so, it is an empty sign. Thus, a name—whether the name of the hero, of Scotland, or any word that names an idea or object—might be empty or "inane" if the reader applies no current, contemporary meaning to it. When it comes to semantic value, words populated only by associations of the distant past hold little currency.

Yet, even as Scott professes to seek an "uncontaminated" name in his introduction, the humor with which he delivers the metaphor of the "maiden knight" acknowledges this goal as an unattainable quest. Scott alights on the name Waverley, identifying him as a maiden knight; his name is a virgin word uncontaminated by associative residue and a champion of linguistic purity. But language, by its very definition, is always already signifying; a term wholly unfamiliar and unattached would result in a nonsense word, to which our impulse would be to find acoustic

[33] Rowlinson shows that Scott compares the abolition of the banknotes to the "obliteration of the Scots character itself" and punctuates it with the following metaphor: "For God's sake…let us remain as nature made us, Englishmen, Irishmen, and Scotchmen, with something like the impress of our several countries on each!" See Rowlinson 94.

resemblances. A word truly uncontaminated would cease to be language. In this sense, language is the opposite of inane, since it is already "filled" with meaning.

Scott's analogy of the maiden knight, however, does not only refer to Waverley the protagonist, but also to the title of the novel itself. As the name of the whole, *Waverley* is the vehicle for linguistic possibility, the manifestation of language to which the reader may supply fresh, unsullied associations. The analogy reinforces that if the reader is not active in supplying meaning, language is but an empty shell, worthless in exchange between author and reader. Language that is associatively bound, with no room for flexibility, is also cognitively and affectively fixed, leaving the reader no room for "filling up parts of the picture."

According to Stewart's principles of the association of ideas, a writer must strike a delicate balance if he wants to create a successful work of literature. He ought to allow readers to "choose" what images they "affix" to his words, but in the interest of novelistic coherence, must select words that produce *some* images in common (universal associations) and simultaneously allow for difference (local associations). A narrative technique that manages these multiple types of associations—incorporating rather than prohibiting their action—renders the language of *Waverley* both virgin and knight, and the experience of reading the novel both one of active and passive mental creation.

If the reading experience of *Waverley* ought to be both generative and evocative, what descriptive technique would provide enough cues to activate the stock of images already present in the minds of his readers, while still allowing them to fill in the picture for themselves? Stewart explains that the writer ought to be aware of two distinct but related mental faculties when creating descriptions: the "imagination" and the "conception." Conception, Stewart

explains, is a faculty that retrieves associations previously stored in the mind, and offers before the mind's eye "a transcript of what we have felt or perceived."[34] Imagination, on the other hand, is a generative faculty that puts previously formed images together into original combinations.[35] The imagination is typically thought not to create from scratch, but instead to combine already existing components. The definition of imagination as a combining faculty is not unique to Stewart, and was common in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philosophy. But Stewart's definition of "conception" is unique, as is his application of the term to literary techniques. Both imagination and conception are involved in the reading experience, and Stewart claims that an author can address each of these faculties separately. In fact, Stewart argues that it is difficult for an author to write for both the conception and the imagination simultaneously. Just as the mind cannot truly multi-task, as recent studies suggest, Stewart argues that different faculties of the mind must likewise operate singly.

Thus, the *Elements* proposes that at some moments in a text the author will want to engage the conception, which allows stored images from the reader's past to arise spontaneously. But at other times—and perhaps more importantly—the author can encourage the imagination to place together in new combinations the concrete parts it has at its disposal from the conception. Because the imagination has some creative choice in how it combines individual conceptions (which are somewhat fixed, as in Edgeworth's example), the reader feels more enjoyment when he has the opportunity to engage this more complex faculty. Furthermore, while the vividness of a single conception is dependent on the quality of its previous representation in the mind, the imagination has more liberty to comprise the new image with its best components.

[34] Stewart 100.

[35] Stewart 100.

Interestingly, the best way to encourage the reader to engage his imagination may be by restraining the hand that draws the descriptive portrait. In a comparison between visual and literary art, Stewart explains that if the "imitation be carried so far as to preclude all exercise of the spectator's imagination, it will disappoint, in great measure, the purpose of the artist."[36] Therefore, description ought to leave some things unspoken. "It is not only," Stewart explains,

> in interpreting the particular words of a description, that the powers of Imagination and Conception are employed. They are farther necessary for filling up the different parts of the picture, of which the most minute describer can only trace the outline. In the best description, there is much left for the reader to supply…[37]

Here, "the best description" merely "trace[s] the outline" and leaves out details for the reader to provide. The reader not only chooses what he may "affix" to a word, but also introduces elements somewhat outside the connotative boundaries of the words on the page. In other words, the reader is supplying information for words that *aren't* present. Part of this paradigm is by necessity: a text would be unwieldy if it attempted to describe every corner of the novel's world. The "most minute describer" can at best merely represent a fraction of the details, or "trace the outline" of the object it attempts to render. "Best description" may read be in this sense as synonymous with "most complete." On the other hand, the "best description" may be read as a qualitative, not quantitative comment. To produce the most effective and vivid descriptions, details may be deliberately withheld.

We can get a better idea of what describing by "outline" might mean by examining the structure of Scott's descriptions. In the following passage, Waverley follows the Highlanders on a night mission. Moving through the heath, the Highlanders track the movements of English

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[36] Stewart 363.

[37] Stewart 366.

soldiers by following the calls of their watchmen. Once the English soldiers are a substantial distance away, the Highlanders mobilize:

> When these sounds had died upon the silence of the night, the Highlanders began their march swiftly, yet with the most cautious silence. Waverley had little time, or indeed disposition for observation, and could only discern that they passed at some distance from a large building, in the windows of which a light or two yet seemed to twinkle. A little farther on, the leading Highlander snuffed the wind like a setting spaniel, and then made a signal to his party again to halt. He stooped down upon all fours, wrapped up in his plaid, so as to be scarce distinguishable from the heathy ground on which he moved, and advanced in this posture to reconnoitre. In a short time he returned, and dismissed his attendants excepting one; and, intimating to Waverley that he must imitate his cautious mode of proceeding, all three crept forward on hands and knees.[38]

In this paragraph there is indeed "much left for the reader to supply." The narrator replicates the perspective of Waverley, who is very limited in what he can see and has "little time" or "disposition for observation." Through Waverley's restricted perspective, we receive only an "outline" of the scene. The Highlander leading the party is described as "scarce distinguishable" from the heath, and in the darkness Waverley can "only discern" a twinkling light in the distance. The passage concentrates on rendering the edges of what can be seen, leaving the reader, like Waverley, to surmise the details.

The narrator moves quickly through the scene, which is appropriate to the swift pace of the Highlanders' movement. And while Waverley has "little time" to look around, his lack of "disposition" for observation might refer to more than his own physical position, since it could refer also to an attitude against stopping-and-looking-around. This lack of "disposition" allows the narrator to eschew the type of description we might expect (and that Scott creates elsewhere in the novel) of a third-person narrator.

In addition, the narrator describes the items that are presented in this scene in terms perhaps more uncertain than the limitations of Waverley's perspective might require. The

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[38] Scott 183.

narrator is unsure if there is a “light or two” in the distance, which only “seemed” to twinkle at “some distance.” Since the *Waverley* narrator often reveals details far beyond the possible perception or knowledge of the protagonist, these are concrete details that could potentially be reported. The imprecision in phrases like “a light or two” and “at some distance” not only replicates Waverley’s inability to see in the night, but also leaves choices open for the reader (how far shall they place the Highlanders’ bodies from the apparent glow in a window? Is there one candle or two?).

Furthermore, no description of the lead Highlander preceded or followed this paragraph: we are to imagine his physical features at this moment just as we wish. The “large building” in the distance is signaled just enough for us to outline the vague edges of the structure in the darkness. The salient points of the troop’s physical posture are delineated by “hands and knees,” and in turn, we supply the characteristics of their physical bodies and set them in motion.

Walter Scott’s novels were praised for their mastery of this outline form of description. One American review explains that the mere outline actually produced a greater effect on the reader than the author’s more meticulous descriptions. In fact, Edward Tyrell Channing’s 1818 review of the *Waverley* novels reads as a case study in Dugald Stewart’s principles of associative representation. Scott’s inclusion of “some little picturesque circumstance,” Channing explains, will “suggest and illuminate everything else, to provoke our imaginations to independent action and perception, and thus give a vivid reality to things.”[39] The reader acts “independent[ly],” and this “independent action” of the imagination, the reviewer explains, makes the novel feel real. When the imagination encounters a small bit of description, it springs into action, combining the

[39] Edward Tyrell Channing, Review of *Waverley, North American Review* vii (July 1818): 149-84, repr. in *Scott, the Critical Heritage*, ed. John Hayden (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1970) 151.

impressions of previous conceptions into a vivid picture. In fact, the success of the description depends on not describing *too* much:

> [Scott] does not always depend for the effect of his painting, upon the enumeration of particulars or a broad, complete presentment of things…He knows that the mind once kindled, will throw light on all around it…a hint, a word is enough to open the whole upon you—you are made happy by finishing the picture yourself, and in the process, you are visited by old recollections and associations, till the prospect grows as familiar as home." [40]

A word—a "hint"—provokes the mind to craft a whole, and finishing the picture is an act of pleasure much to the satisfaction of Channing's hypothetical reader. The independence the reader feels in completing the picture makes him happy, and the result is a portrait in which the reader is familiar and emotionally invested. Former associations—the previous products of the conception—combine in the imagination to form a new mental picture. Because the mind constructs its own pictures, the image is familiar, as if one could walk about and inside the mental image as if it were one's "home."

Scott's rough and sporadic descriptions produced more powerful mental impressions for Channing than those that were more methodically delineated. In fact, the review cites the night scene in the heath as exemplary of Scott's roughly hewn descriptions that produced lasting effects:

> [Scott's] most scattered and irregular description, coming here and there in the midst of a wild and hurried narrative—such as Waverley's night adventure on the heath, after his

[40] Channing 150.

rescue—has kept its hold on the memory, while others [descriptions], more compact and finished…have faded.[41]

Channing proposes that if a reader looked back on the sections of the novel remembered most vividly, like this one, he would be surprised at how little detail is actually present in those passages. Rather, he would observe how "distinct views are offered from light and rapid touches, and conclude that "much [of these views] was owing to the excited state of the mind, to the watchful notice it took and the wide use [the mind] made of the smallest hints." Indeed, on the reviewer's return to the particular moments in question, he wondered that "the effect should have been so powerful and the scene so full and distinct."[42]

The "smallest hints" to which Channing refers corresponds remarkably to the language Stewart uses when describing the outline technique. In an analogy to the visual arts, Stewart explains further how an author might describe by outline. An outline delineates the "minimum visible,"[43] which is the fewest number of details required for the mind to visualize a figure. Stewart explains: "When a figure is very simple, the process of the mind is so rapid, that the perception seems to be instantaneous: but when the sides are multiplied beyond a certain number, the interval of time necessary for these different acts of attention becomes palpable."[44] The more details of a figure that are delineated, the slower the process of mental perception, even when the perceived object is a fictional object. Slowing down the process of creating a mental

[41] Channing 150.

[42] Channing 150-151.

[43] Stewart's remarks on perception are strikingly contemporary, and sound remarkably akin to twenty-first century neurological studies on aesthetic response. For example, Vittorio Gallese's work on neuroaesthetics and sympathy experiments offer a viewer a "figure" consisting only of scattered points of light. Mirror neurons in the subject's motor cortex fire as if he or she were indeed performing the action. Gallese's work asks how rough a representation may be in order to have the subject respond sympathetically. See David Freedberg, Vittorio Gallese, et al., "Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11, 5 (May 2007): 197-203, at 98-97.

[44] Stewart 97.

representation calls attention to the means of production, which detracts from the spectator's immersion in the work of art itself. Stewart compares the mind's composition of the figure to an audience watching a performance of a play. To maintain disbelief, actions on stage ought to be executed quickly, else we see the machine behind the ghost. Similarly, effective descriptions ought to be somewhat rapid; if an author (and therefore the reader) lingers too long on the details, the illusion is spoiled. Thus, there is a connection between rapidity of apprehension and an effect of verisimilitude.

Scott's description of the Highlanders' movement on the heath incorporates Stewart's rules for an outline: it passes through the scene with rapidity and illuminates only the "minimum visible." The description of the scene on the heath, featuring only a sparse twinkling of light to illuminate the darkness, might in fact be an ideal example of the "minimum visible" necessary for imaginative completion. Perhaps not coincidentally, Channing's review repeatedly characterizes Scott's technique through metaphors that involve light. Channing describes Scott's method as a "kindling" of the mind, sparked by tiny touches that allow the imagination to "throw light upon" and "illuminate" the rest. Describing a night scene that can only be seen by the vaguest twinkling seems to be a formula that particularly invites the reader to finish the scene.

Scott's treatment of dialogue is another strategy that helps achieve Stewart's outline form. *Waverley* frequently features indirect discourse, a technique in which the author leaves out the exact words of the speakers and instead reports a summary of what they had said. For instance, when Waverley sprains his ankle during a hunting party, Scott writes: "Fergus and his friends expressed the greatest sympathy." This statement indicates the affect of the characters' dialogue without presenting any of their exact words. In the same imagined conversation, Scott

reports that "it became a question how to dispose of the disabled sportsman,"[45] which also implies a series of speech acts, none of which are directly reported in the text.

As a representational practice, indirect discourse gives an impression that the author maintains tight control of our version of the dialogue, as the narrator glosses over moments of speech. At the same time, indirect discourse is one way of assigning the particulars of dialogue to the determination of the reader. Indirect discourse leaves flexibility for the reader to imagine the texture of expression that seems the most realistic and natural to the vision of the characters they have thus far created. Pragmatically, indirect discourse also allows an author to avoid presenting colloquial terms that will rapidly render the novel outdated. In the beginning of the novel, Scott described his intention for the work to be "a description of men" of "all stages of society" rather than a novel of manners.[46] Allowing readers to imagine the nuances of dialogue in a way that sounds natural to their current moment encourages this sense of timelessness. Incredibly, the reader hears Waverley's voice—that is, given the direct speech of Waverley—only once in the first 50 pages of the novel.[47] To Scott's credit, this omission of direct speech largely goes unnoticed, perhaps because of the author's attention to a cues-to-creation ratio: a measure of indirect discourse and character's words that creates an effect of dialogue without having dialogue actually present in the text.

But perhaps leaving out details is, as a technique, a bit of a parlor trick. From a logistical standpoint, the very idea of describing-by-not-describing is a flawed proposition. There is no set

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[45] Scott 119.

[46] Scott 4.

[47] Scott renders direct dialogue when other characters speak to Waverley, but the first direct speech from the protagonist is the following question: "Can this poor fellow deliver a letter?" Scott 39. Previously, the only other statement that could qualify as Waverley's voice is when the narrator relays his thoughts on his learning, but I consider this more internal monologue than external dialogue: "I can read and understand a Latin author," Waverley said with the self-confidence and rash reasoning of fifteen, "and Scalinger or Bentley could not do more." Scott 12.

standard for when a scene is fully elaborated; therefore, how would one know what makes up an outline without knowing precisely what constitutes a full picture? Far from a precise qualitative or quantitative measure, excessive detail is something that readers (at least according to many nineteenth-century reviews) seem to know when they see it, but cannot define.

Scott addresses this problem of description by omission by repeatedly *announcing* that details have been left out. Perhaps it is more important to the outline effect that an author *suggests* that details are withheld, than that he actually withholds details at all. For example, Scott describes the family history of Fergus Mac Ivor, whose ancestor "had set up a claim to be recognized as chief of a powerful and numerous clan …the name of which it is unnecessary to mention."[48] This is a rather odd narratorial maneuver. If the clan's name is in fact not necessary to mention, the author *needs simply not to mention it at all.* Similarly, when Waverley meets the obsequious Baron Bradwardine, the hero's future father-in-law, the narrator summarizes a series of Highland tales with which the Baron entertained Waverley. After recounting a few of the Baron's tales of family history, Scott concludes the chapter by informing the reader that they were privy only to a portion of Bradwardine's words: "The Baron justified himself at greater length than I chuse to report."[49] Repeatedly, and especially at the end of paragraphs, the narrator proclaims that there is something that he didn't describe. These narratorial gestures announce, "here is a detail that is present to me, but I will not describe it." On the one hand, this technique seems to draw attention to the narrator's power, seemingly at odds with the intention of giving agency to the reader. But on the other hand, statements such as these let the reader know that

[48] Scott 91. Scott here evokes the rhetorical trope of occupatio, which draws attention to the very thing it will not name.

[49] Scott 63.

more details *do exist* in the world of the novel (e.g., Bradwardine's words, or the name of the clan), thereby giving us a space in which we are free to imagine them.

Scott's pronouncements of descriptive omission are often conjoined with mysteries within the plot. For example, Waverley's limited perspective highlights missing information, even if something as simple as the ambiguous source of the twinkling light. At other times, the mysteries are more essential to the plot. After Waverley's injury, Fergus and the rest of the party leave on an "expedition," which the reader senses (if Waverley does not) is a matter of political intrigue. Waverley wakes to find his companions gone, with only an attendant left beside him. Waverley asks where they went and receives only the following in reply:

> The old man looked fixedly at him, with something mysterious and sad in the smile, which was his only reply. Waverley repeated his question, to which his host answered in a proverb,—
>
> "What sent the messengers to hell,
> Was asking that they knew full well."[50]

The man has a "mysterious smile," and an undefined look of sadness. At first he refuses to respond to Waverley's question. When he does eventually speak, he offers a proverb that highlights the very idea of information left out. In the proverb, asking for explicit information is a damning act. The old man implies that Waverley ought to know the answer to his own question, but when Waverley fails to interpret the meaning of the proverb correctly, the riddle is left to the reader.

In another instance, Waverley receives an important parcel of papers that he is not given the chance to open. The package lingers through the text, and the narrator periodically reminds

[50] Scott 120.

us of its existence. The unopened package, in a way, is emblematic of Scott's descriptive technique: an item that is made apparent but not unpacked by the author, the contents of which are left for us to imagine.

"Little intimations," Channing's 1818 review noted, "make the mind busy in its own way," causing it to be diligent, active, and alert. In contrast, Scott's "more labored pictures…almost fail of a whole."[51] In more "labored" descriptions, readers are "obliged to follow him step by step," which inhibits their ability to synthesize the pieces. Attempting to replicate the author's mind instead of being able to forge new associative paths results in mental images that are weak and disposable, and perhaps more importantly, that deprive the reader of the pleasure of constructing them. Thus, when Scott elaborates a scene in more detail, the "work" is on the page, not in the mind.

At the beginning of Volume II, we can see an example of a "more labored description" in contrast to Scott's delineations of the "minimum visible." In this chapter, Scott is about to describe a hunting party with the Highland Chieftains. To set the scene, the narrator quotes at length from an early sixteenth-century manuscript, which described a banquet set by the Earl of Athole for the hunting party of King James IV. He first addresses the reader to show his many alternatives for rendering the scene:

> I can find copious materials for description elsewhere. There is old Lindsay of Pitscottie ready at my elbow, with his Athole hunting, and his "lofted and joisted palace of green timber; with all kind of drink to be had in burgh and land…"

Like the phrases borrowed from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in his titular example of "A Tale of Other Days," historical names come with ready associations that provide details of plot. Scott quotes from the original text as if to show the precise associations that *should* come with the

[51] Scott 151.

names: with “Lindsay of Pitscottie” comes “Athole hunting” and a “lofted and joisted palace of green timber; with all kind of drink to be had.” But to further underscore the difference between relying on historical associations and allowing the reader to form his own composite images, Scott presents the reader with a massive list in which every possibility seems to be spelled out:

> “…lofted and joisted palace of green timber; with all kind of drink to be had in burgh and land, as ale, beer, wine, muscadel, malvaise, hippocras, and aquavitae; with wheat-bread, main-bread, ginge-bread, beef, mutton, lamb, veal, venison, goose, grice, capon, coney, crane, swan, partridge, plover, duck, drake, brisselcock, pawnies, black-cock, muir-fowl, and capercailzies;” not forgetting the “costly bedding, vaiselle, and napry,” and least of all the “excelling stewards, cunning baxters, excellent cooks, and pottingars, with confections and drugs for the desserts.”[52]

The contents of the banquet unfold exhaustively, and this list is clearly comedic in effect. The phrase “all kind of drink to be had in burgh and land” suggests an opulent table, but one that could be filled with diverse items of the reader’s own conjuring. But following the phrase “all kind of drink,” an extensive list of precise names delineates exactly of what kind of drinks “all” should consist.

A series of rhetorical gestures in this catalogue of items expands, but simultaneously limits, the variety of items the reader might imagine. The quotation marks around items in the list enhances a sense of their fixity: it is these things precisely and no other. For instance, we are meant not only to understand that there is a variety of bread at the table, but also specifically to envision wheat-bread, main-bread, and ginge-bread. The repetition of “bread” conveys a sense of bounty but also redundancy, as the identical endings form an epiphoric pattern. The redundancy—or we might even say, excess—is underscored by alliterative patterns in the words

[52] Scott 115. Quotation marks original.

and the large number of alliterative pairs and trios of items: muscadel/mulvasie, veal/venison, goose/grice, capon/coney/crane; partridge/plover; duck/drake. Most of these alliterative sets also display patterns of isocolon—phrases consisting of the same length and syllabic structure. Furthermore, the paratactic structure of this list—where all items are separated by commas without hierarchy—perhaps makes the food and drink on the banquet table difficult to envision. The list of items is indeed long, but implicitly made longer by the perpetuity that these rhetorical devices suggest.

In addition to failing to allow the reader imaginative agency, these excerpts have a temporal effect as well: this type of description slows down time. As Stewart noted, hurrying over a scene leaves the reader with details to supply, and keeps hidden the mechanisms that paint the fictional world. But the time required to list and process these items differs significantly from the nimble and "light touches" of the previous passage.

Scott offers one more excerpt pulled from another source to introduce this hunting scene. Six lines of iambic pentameter composed by Elizabethan ferryman-poet John Taylor (the self-named "Taylor the Water Poet") are offset from the rest of the text and signaled by quotation marks. (I recommend reading this aloud for full effect:)

"Through heather, mosse, mong frogs, and bogs, and fogs,

Mongst craggy cliffs and thunder-battered hills,

Hares, hinds, bucks, roes, are chased by men and dogs,

Where two hours hunting fourscore fat deer kills.

Lowland, your sports are low as is your seat;

The Highland games and minds are high and great."[53]

[53] Scott 115. Quotation marks original.

The lines plod along clumsily, alternating between using “and” to separate items in the list (syndeton) and omitting connecting conjunctions (asyndeton). Sounds are repeated in alliterative pairs such as mosse/mong, hares/hinds, craggy/cliffs, and fourscore/fat, and are supplemented by internal rhyme in thunder/battered. But rather than patterning an elegant rhythm of iambic pentameter, these lines toddle unsurely on their feet. The rather unmusical “and frogs, and bogs, and fogs” pushes syndeton to the limit, as if each phrase sacrifices the normal cadence of speech and/or the musicality of lyric to preserve the meter. At the end of these lines the reader cries “enough” (or, at least this reader did), craving Scott’s usual prose.

What these passages achieve in comedic effect, they lack in descriptive effect; instead of making the objects of the scene visible, they display the texts themselves as their object. These excerpts point to texts, rather than the objects of the novel’s world. The attention to the excerpts themselves highlights the mechanisms of description rather than the things described, violating Stewart’s guidelines. After this final example of the “copious materials for description” that he may draw upon, Scott finally promises to release the reader from this representational “tyranny.” These descriptions are a “tyranny” because representations in this manner are a “display [of the author’s] own reading,” and demonstrate the “arbitrary power” of the author at the expense of the reader.[54]. Unlike the descriptions that make the reader happy and keep his “mind busy” by allowing him to “finish […] the picture himself,” this description precludes much of the creative combination of particulars so pleasurable to the human imagination.

If an author ought to allow the reader a good degree of imaginative agency, how does he depict the particulars of a historical moment? One way is by inviting the reader to apply his own associations to historical ones: to connect his own local associations with past conceptions. For

[54] Scott 115.

example, after the former instance of descriptive "tyranny," Scott pledges to describe the grand hunting party in his own style. He chooses to "content himself with borrowing a single incident" from the historical documents. Yet, while he borrows the *event* from history, the description is purely his own. He pledges to represent the event in his own style, "with all the brevity that my natural style of composition will permit me."[55] Throughout the text, Scott uses self-deprecating humor to draw attention to the contrast between an effort at compactness and long, loose forms of description. Here, Scott comically states that he willfully constrains his tendency toward what the "vulgar call the circumbendibus" or what scholars deem "periphrastic."[56] These remarks are another means of drawing the reader's attention to the fact that the narrator could describe more than he does: there are elements he leaves out. The "single incident" is a form of condensing or compressing history, a form of metonymy that signals that there are more details that could be told, but are cleverly condensed into a palatable form.

We can see the combination of local and historical associations in this single incident from the hunting party. When Waverley is caught in a stampede of fleeing deer, he is injured and must be carried by the party for the rest of the excursion. The following passage is typical of Scott's technique and concentrates on integrating, not segregating, historical language into his prose:

> Early the next morning, the purpose of their meeting being over, and their sports blanked by the untoward accident, in which Fergus and his friends expressed the greatest sympathy, it became a question how to dispose of the disabled sportsman. This was settled by Mac-Ivor, who had a litter prepared, of "birch and hazel grey," which was borne by his people with such caution and dexterity as renders it not improbable that they may have been the ancestors of some of those sturdy Gael who have now the happiness to transport the belles of Edinburgh in their sedan chairs, to ten routes in one evening.

[55] Scott 116.

[56] Scott 116.

> When Edward was elevated upon their shoulders, he could not help but being gratified with the romantic effect produced by the breaking up of this sylvan camp.[57]

Within this description, Scott excerpts another historical text. "Birch and hazel grey" is a line from the "Ballad of Chevy Chase," whose origin is not precisely known, but dates at least from the early fifteenth century. The ballad commemorates a conflict that arose between the Scots and English concerning the border of hunting lands. The allusion to the "Ballad of Chevy Chase" is significant: like Waverley's own adventure, the incident of the hunting party occurs in the context of the struggle for cultural identity and national independence. In this sense, Scott capitalizes on the political and historical associations the reader may have with Chevy Chase.

Although Scott once again incorporates in his narrative a snippet from a historical text, this example differs greatly from the excerpts of John the Water Poet and Lindsay's 1528 account of the banquet. First, there is simply the difference in the sheer amount of text: as Stewart noted, the mass of the former slows down comprehension in comparison to the terseness of "birch and hazel grey." Second, Scott places the historical phrase in the text in a way that is not dissonant with the rest of his prose (and here, I mean dissonant in its full implication of sound). The phrases that come before and follow "of birch and hazel grey" are of similar structure, and demarcated by the placement of commas to help the reader hear their sound: "This was settled by Mac Ivor, who had a litter prepared, of 'birch and hazel grey,' which was borne by his people." These phrases are similar in length, and, consisting of 7-8 syllables each, approximate tetrameter. In other paragraphs in this chapter, Scott often includes a single Gaelic term or regional term within his regular sentence structure. He presents the sound of the Gaelic word with his own prose, often glossing the term (e.g.: "forming a circle, technically called a

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[57] Scott 119.

tinchel," or "breeches pocket, or *spleuchan* as he called it").[58] Historical language is visually marked by italics, but the sound of the words—which we know to be extremely important to readerly associations—remains intact. In both of these techniques, the form of the phrases helps the reader integrate the words of the past relatively seamlessly into the same sentence.

Scott's description further invites the reader to link the people of the past and those of the present by contextualizing the characters of the scene as part of a lineage that moves forward in time. At least three different temporal moments combine in this description: the medieval Scotland of "birch and hazel grey," the time of the narrative (60 years since), and the speculative moment of the future reader whom he asks to connect to their own time. (We might even consider the time of Scott's writing as a fourth period.) Scott compares those who carried the injured Waverley to the modern men of the reader's day "who have now the happiness to transport the belles of Edinburgh in their sedan chairs." By asking the reader to create associations of resemblance between the characters of the text and their own time, the author enables him to help create the historical narrative. To describe the Highlanders of the historical past, Scott compares them to the "sturdy Gael" of later generations. He connects the people of Waverley's adventure to those of the reader's day by suggesting the people of the past are, by blood, the same people of the present.

In the narrative, the inability to link the past and the present has dire consequences. Waverley's injury is, in large part, due to his inability to take in the words of the past. When the sportsmen close in on the deer, the panicked animals stampede. The experienced hunters at the lead cry out to warn the others:

[58] Scott 119, 146.

> The word was given in Gaelic to fling themselves upon their faces; but Waverley, upon whose English ears the signal was lost, had almost fallen sacrifice to his ignorance of the ancient language in which it was communicated.[59]

Waverley is presented with a Gaelic phrase, but his “English ears” are deaf to its significance. Like the reader, Waverley must become acclimated to the sound of words foreign to him. While the reader has Walter Scott’s narrator as a guide, who kindly glosses many of the phrases for him, Waverley must learn the hard way.

The ignorance of these historical artifacts threatens the life of the protagonist. Fergus Mac Ivor throws his body atop Waverley, shielding him from the trampling force of the animals’ hooves. In the novel, Fergus embodies Scotland’s Gaelic past and is described by the narrator as the last of a type that, by Scott’s time, “are no more.” Fergus’s quick action limits Waverley’s injury to only a bad sprain. If Waverley was unable to take in the words of the past on his own, Fergus’s act of pushing Waverley to the ground and covering him with his body physically connects Waverley with his Gaelic heritage. This encounter with the past saves him.

It is, perhaps, not merely an ignorance of history per se that cripples Waverley, but his inability to interact with the past once it is presented to him. This is what Scott’s novel asks of us: not empty historical reference, but an encounter with the past that brings history into our own story. Scott acts as a guide for phrases the reader has not previously encountered. In a way, the Gaelic words featured in *Waverley* might be examples of an “uncontaminated” phrase. As for Waverley’s name, a reader affixes meaning to phrases never heard before, and a willingness to do so primes the reader for an openness outside the boundaries of one’s “English ears.” The text, then, calls for an aural sympathy: a willingness to “hear” the sound of a population perhaps unlike the reader’s own. In a way, this is similar to the associationist model of the reading

[59] Scott 117.

process: the present must be grafted upon the past to derive meaning. Language functions only if it has both past significance and present meaning: an amalgam of previous knowledge and new information.

Both the writer and the reader must take part in building a historical novel. Scott repeatedly refers to the responsibility that they share, building a series of metaphors that uniformly emphasize a tacit agreement to work together. The novelist repeatedly alludes to a contract between the writer and reader, as if they have entered a legal partnership to complete the novel together. Scott poses these metaphors in various ways. In one version of the agreement between writer and reader, Scott envisions himself in an early chapter as a the driver of a coach, in which he promises to "engage as soon as possible into a more picturesque and romantic country, if my passengers incline to have some patience with me during my first stages."[60] The terms of the satisfactory ride depend on the terms of description. Part of the contract Scott holds with the reader depends on his pledge to move more quickly as they get farther along the narrative journey. Moving through the detail of the early sections of the novel is equated to a journey by stagecoach—the first portion of which is less "picturesque" than the later journey. The stagecoach metaphor suggests two aspects of the narrative: time and place. Dwelling too long compromises the picture, as Stewart explained in the *Elements*: the speedier the coach, the more realistic the mental representation. The stagecoach travels from less visually pleasing territory, which ironically, contains more detail, to a more "picturesque" locale. The end of the novel is, of course, more "picturesque" because the pictures are of our own making.

If Scott's representations are drawn by outline, this outline becomes sparser as the novel progresses. In an analogy similar to the hurrying stagecoach, the narrator compares his

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[60] Scott 24.

alternating depth of presentation to a large boulder being pushed downhill. At first the stone moves slowly and laboriously, but it gains speed and momentum as it progresses. “Such is the course of a narrative,” Scott explains:

> the earlier events are studiously dwelt upon, that you, kind reader, may be introduced to the character rather by narrative than the duller medium of direct description; but when the story draws near its close, we hurry over the circumstances, however important, which your imagination must have forestalled, and leave you to suppose these things, which it would be abusing your patience to narrate at length.[61]

Toward the end of the novel, one ought to “hurry over the circumstances, however important.” Even if the events are important to the plot, they must be presented only briefly, as the reader’s “imagination would have forestalled” these events. In later chapters, instead of aiding the imagination, such “studious” description inhibits the reader’s ability to picture the events. “Dwelling” on something “at length,” especially in later chapters, interferes with allowing the reader to “suppose these things” on his own. As Stewart noted, the purpose of the artist will be thwarted if the “imitation be carried so far.”[62] Like the “tyranny” of Scott’s banquet description, in which the reader was presented a massive list of specific items, the mature reader suffers a form of “abuse” if the writer forecloses the productive work of the imagination.

Like a child as he grows, the reader is given increasing responsibility until he is ultimately given the greater share in crafting the visions he imagines. In the last few pages, Scott closes the contract and ends the novel as it began: with a recognition of the reciprocity they share in the representational process. “Our journey is now finished, gentle reader, and if your patience

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[61] Scott 331.

[62] Scott 363.

has accompanied me between these sheets, the contract is, on your part, strictly fulfilled."[63] While in one sense the reader is released from any contractual work in the representational process, in another sense, at the close of the novel Scott transfers the story entirely to the reader's imagination, where it remains to be replayed in the reader's memory and extended in perpetuity. Or, should the novel be opened again, the images of Waverley, Flora Mac Ivor, and the Highland chase will look different than in the reader's first encounter. The words and phrases are no longer maiden, but evoke a network of images that were affixed over many volumes, now ready to "image forth."

"Vivid reality," as the 1816 reviewer called his experience of the *Waverley* novels, is produced by the "independent action" of the mind .[64] The degree of imaginative investment in this representation gives what we read cognitive and emotional life. The vividness that results from this independent action, however, led Stewart to notice a paradoxical relation between fiction and reality. Fiction, ironically, can produce an intensity of feeling perhaps greater than that of real life. "In a Novel," Stewart writes,

> the picture is completely finished in all its parts; and we are acquainted not only with every circumstance on which the distress turns, but with the sentiments and feelings of every character with respect to his situation. In real life we see, in general, only detached scenes of the Tragedy, and the impression is slight, unless imagination finishes the characters and supplies the incidents that are wanting.[65]

[63] Scott 339.

[64] Channing 151.

[65] Stewart 377.

In this passage, Stewart seems to both reinforce and contradict his previous words. He refers to fiction as a "finished" picture, in which the reader is privy to "every circumstance on which the distress turns, but with the sentiments and feelings of every character." Could it be that fiction is "completely finished"?

In a novel, readers have a tacit agreement with an author—and in Scott's case, an explicit contract—to finish parts of the mental picture. As we have seen, the imagination must not only supply associations to round out the meaning of words and phrases, but also more substantively "finish the characters and supply the incidents that are wanting." In this sense, the novel *is* completely finished.

Stewart's seemingly contradictory formulation hints at an ethical distinction between real and imagined communities. Because of the permission we hold as readers of a novel, Stewart suggests that fiction provokes a level of detail that real life rarely provides, as we ourselves offer the associative "circumstances" that surround events as well as "sentiments and feelings" of every character. But in real life, we do not have access to the "sentiments and feelings" of every "character" in our communities, nor do we have permission to fill in the details of characters and circumstances. From an ethical standpoint, it is problematic to judge our peers based on these imaginative assumptions. Stewart therefore claims that what may seem to others like "selfishness" may be rather a lack of "comprehension." Our lack of sympathy for others is due not to a lack of feeling, but to our inability—or perhaps our lack of permission—to imagine them.

And thus, the framing of Scott's relationship to the reader underscores his representational goal for his first novel. Scott hoped to do for the Scottish people what Maria Edgeworth's fiction had done for the Irish: to bridge cultures and create sympathy. *Waverley* is a

tale of the clash of cultures. “There is no European nation,” Scott writes, “that within the course of half a century, has undergone such complete change as this Kingdom of Scotland…the insurrection of 1745,—the destruction of the patriarchal power of the Highland chiefs—the abolition of the heritable jurisdictions of the Lowland nobility and barons,—the total eradication of the Jacobite party, [who were] averse to intermingle with the English or adopt their customs.”[66] The “arbitrary power” the narrator wields—a potential “tyranny” of description—puts the reader in the position in which he may be sympathetic for those without autonomy. The relationship between Scott’s narration and the reader’s contribution may be read, perhaps, as metonym for the English and Scots, who, bringing individual histories, must work together in creating their world. A reader denied imaginative agency has “no vote.”

[66] Scott 340.

CHAPTER THREE

Copperfield's Cognitive Grammar: Charles Dickens and Lindley Murray

In *David Copperfield,* David's beloved nurse Peggotty asks David if he might like to spend a holiday at her brother's house at the Yarmouth seashore.

> 'Is your brother an agreeable man, Peggotty?' I inquired, provisionally.
>
> 'Oh, what an agreeable man he is!' cried Peggotty, holding up her hands. 'Then there's the sea; and the boats and ships; and the fishermen; and the beach; and Am to play with—'
>
> Peggotty meant her nephew Ham, mentioned in my first chapter; but she spoke of him as a morsel of English Grammar.[1]

What David doesn't know, but the reader suspects, is that the invitation is occasioned by his mother's remarriage and honeymoon. During the fortnight he will spend at Yarmouth, his mother will be married to the cruel Mr. Murdstone.

The first part of Peggotty's catalog of delights is in some ways typical of Dickens's descriptions. Concrete nouns fill in the imagined physical environment through a series of items in parataxis: sea, boats and ships, fishermen, beach. The list has a hint of redundancy, a technique that puts a faint imaginative pressure on our comprehension of the items, over-filling the sentence ever so slightly. An expletive structure ("there's"/there is) unfolds the attributes of Yarmouth one at a time, letting each item round out an imagined vista that was formerly blank.

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[1] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Criticism,* ed. Jerome Buckley (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1990) 30. Subsequent citations, labeled *DC*, will be from this edition. Dickens's capitalization here suggests that David may be referring not to just the subject of grammar, but specifically to Lindley Murray's *English Grammar,* a popular guide to grammar in the nineteenth century. Murray's work was important to Dickens's conception of language, and is a text I will discuss at length.

The end of her description, however, contains a wry grammatical pun. Peggotty's Yarmouth dialect turns her nephew Ham, into "Am." What registers first in David's mind though, is not her dialect, but the present tense form of the infinitive "to be." Dickens's capitalization of "English Grammar" suggests that David may be thinking specifically of Lindley Murray's *English Grammar*, an enormously popular guide in nineteenth-century Britain. "Am," as the truncated version of Ham, is distinct from the rest of the items in this list, for he is—as his grammatically inflected name alludes—a being. We may also read "Am" as an echo of David himself. David's own "am" was foregrounded in the preceding chapter, entitled "I Am Born." As a character, David did not exist in the narrative until his birth at the conclusion of the chapter, and thus, his own being is only recently established. Furthermore, in misunderstanding Ham's abbreviated name as the verb "Am," David may also hear the assertion of a self. David's adventure at Yarmouth, as his first journey from home and first separation from his mother, will establish relationships that profoundly shape his own plot. Yarmouth, in a sense, is the site of David's first debut of "I am" to the world: his first attempt to "play" at being, his initiation in the immense possibilities of "I am." Lastly, in Peggotty's shortening of his name, we may also read "Am" as a "morsel," as it were, of Ham (porcine puns notwithstanding).

This excerpt, I suggest, is in many ways representative of the multiple registers in which grammar operates in *David Copperfield.* Garrett Stewart, writing on Dickens's language, argues that linguistic moments such as this can focalize the whole of a work, "inflecting our sense of an entire novel."[2] These small linguistic details comprise "nerve centers" that "frequently collapse into a single disclosure the largest themes" of Dickens's novels: what he calls "monads," or figures of "symbolic synecdoche." Nicholas Dames, on the other hand, sees in *David*

[2] Garrett Stewart, "Dickens and Language," *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 141. See also *Dickens and the Trials of Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) xvi-xvii.

Copperfield "metonymies" that "coalesce" novelistic content both analeptically and proleptically: recalling details already presented, and foreshadowing events yet to come. Dames argues that in Dickens's fiction these metonymies operate in a way wholly consistent with nineteenth-century associative psychology.[3] These moments of confluence, he contends—whether we call them monads, synecdoches, or metonymies—demonstrate the logic of association of ideas as it was envisioned in the mid-nineteenth-century popular imagination.

I argue that in *David Copperfield*, these constellations are specifically located in grammar. Grammar, in the conventions of the early nineteenth century, was distinctly associative: that is, it formed its rules in relation to contemporary models of mental activity. Grammar was thought both to affect cognitive activity and at the same time to model the structures of mental connections. In this reciprocal relationship to cognition, grammar both shapes, and is shaped by, mental associations.

I define grammar as the bounded and available set of morphological possibilities in which a language can manifest: inflections of words (accidence), combinations of words (syntax), and the sound of words, whether just a portion like "Am," or several words in sequence (phonology). These manifestations supply a network of connotative meaning: some supplement the denotative, semantic meaning of words, while some resist this meaning. Grammar, I suggest, often exploits the associative register to revive details already presented (as in this passage, where the connection is explicit: "Ham, mentioned in my first chapter"), or even to future content.

[3] In his study of *David Copperfield* in *Amnesiac Selves*, Nicholas Dames claims that associationism is the logic by which the novel "manages the tremendous amount of mnemonic data that David has to contend with."[3] Associationism functions in the text writ large, presenting "visual condensations of metonymies that tie together the significant strands of memory and elide troubling or more 'dispersed' recollections." *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 141.

In the readings of *David Copperfield* that follow, I will demonstrate how Charles Dickens uses several techniques delineated in Murray's *English Grammar* to shape the reader's associations. First, I show that Dickens uses the structures of grammar to enhance the reader's sense of young David's early perceptions, using clauses, phonology, and syntax in ways that mirror David's initial mental connections as they form. Next, I argue that Dickens crafts his sentences in a form that Murray calls "expletive" construction, beginning a sentence with phrases such as "there are," "here are," or "there is" in order to convey an impression of a blank space in order to subsequently fill it. Third, I argue that Dickens contrasts expletive constructions—which are, in essence, syntactic assertions of existence—with a grammatical technique that highlights what is *not.* Garrett Stewart, in *Novel Violence,* argues that formal features of Dickens's novels tell "half-stories" that run parallel and often counter to the trajectory of the narrative's semantic surface. I show that through a structure that Murray calls "derivatives," or, the use of root words and their linguistic offspring, Dickens highlights the absence of the father that catalyzes the central plot of *David Copperfield*.[4] Prior to these readings, I describe how the nineteenth-century Britain's most popular guide to grammar, *Lindley Murray's English Grammar,* theorized linguistic structures in the context of mental life.

[4] In *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009), Garrett Stewart argues that in *Little Dorrit*, "unprocessed mourning" lingers and finds expression in formal features like syntax and grammar, a register of signification that creates friction against the direction of plot. Stewart writes that "Against such linear momentum are inscribed phantom half-stories—if not whole throttled chronicles—along the underside of grammar, diction, and the forward drive of their meshed linguistic expectations." 34. See also Sarah Winter, "Epitaphic Readings and Cultural Memory," in *The Pleasures of Memory: Learning to Read with Charles Dickens* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011)

In the mid-nineteenth century, one of the most popular guides to grammar in both Britain and America was Lindley Murray's *English Grammar*.[5] Published in 46 editions between 1795 and 1837 and expanded in an additional *Octavo Grammar*, Murray's *Grammar* was the essential text on the subject in both schools and private libraries. Nineteenth-century novelists such as George Eliot, Herman Melville, and Harriet Beecher Stowe referred to Murray's text in their fiction.[6] Dickens mentions Murray by name in *Nicholas Nickelby*, refers to the *English Grammar* in *Little Dorrit*, and quotes Lindley Murray nearly verbatim in *Dombey and Son*.[7]

The *Grammar* featured rules for composition organized under the headings Orthography, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody, but also contained an appendix that spoke to the aesthetic qualities of language. Murray's work offered instruction both to the new learner and the advanced writer, addressing stylistic virtues such as strength, perspicuity, precision, clarity, and unity. In addition, *Murray's Grammar* also offered an appendix of examples that demonstrated the multiple ways in which a sentence might be arranged to show how different grammatical choices had different cognitive and aesthetic effects. Minor points of grammar, Murray explained, had a significant impact on cognitive experience. "A sentiment which is expressed in accurate language," he writes, "and in a period, clearly, neatly, and well arranged, always makes a stronger impression on the mind than one that is expressed in a feeble or embarrassed

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[5] Lindley Murray, *English Grammar, Adopted to the Different Classes of Learners…with appendix,* (York: Longman, Hurst, and Co., 1837). Subsequent references are from this edition, unless otherwise noted.

[6] Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, *The Bishop's Grammar: Robert Lowth and the Rise of Prescriptivism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 7-8. See also Henry Hitchings, *The Language Wars: A History of Proper English* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011). Hitchings notes that the Grammar was well known enough to be the target of several parodies. 126.

[7] Tieken-Boon van Ostade 7-8. Dickens also echoes Murray's wording in Chapter 3 of *David Copperfield*, "I Have a Change." Peggotty's brother threatens "to be 'Gormed' if he didn't cut and run for good" if anyone dare thank him for his generosity. David remarks: "nobody had the least idea of the *etymology of this terrible verb passive* to be gormed; but they all regarded it as constituting a most solemn imprecation." 37 (my emphasis). Murray's *Grammar*, on page one of verbs under the heading Etymology: "A Verb Passive expresses a passion." 70.

manner."[8] The vividness of an "impression"—the mental pictures that came before the mind's eye while reading—were determined not only by word choice, but also by the arrangement of grammar.[9] Murray further elaborates (italics original):

> The fundamental rule for writing with accuracy, and into which all others might be resolved, undoubtedly is, *to communicate in correct language, and in the clearest and most natural order, the ideas which we mean to transfuse into the minds of others.*[10]

The goal of the grammar was to "transfuse" —with the full implication of physiological transference—"ideas" from one mind to another. Implicit in Murray's choice of "transfuse" is a sense that it is possible to physiologically extract or replicate mental representations from one mind to another. The method for this transference depended not only on choosing "correct" terms, but on understanding the array of potential grammatical structures and choosing the most "clear and natural" sequence available. The success and relative "ease" of this transference, Murray claimed, was directly "in proportion to our knowledge of the nature and properties of words, of their relation to each other, and of their established connexion with the ideas to which they are applied."[11] To produce mental pictures in another individual, one must understand the properties of each word, the potential combinations in which they might be linked, and the ideas to which words were commonly associated. Grammar is the system that attempts both to capture

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[8] Murray 333.

[9] The Introduction to Murray's *Grammar* also expresses a similar statement: "in proportion to our knowledge of the nature and properties of words, of their relation to each other, and of their established connexion with the ideas to which they are applied, will be the certainty and ease, with which we transfuse our sentiments into the minds of one another; and that without a competent knowledge of this kind, we shall frequently be in hazard of misunderstanding others, and of being misunderstood ourselves." Interestingly, the word "sentiment" appears in this preface, which first appeared in the 1795 first edition, but by 1837 the *Grammar* uses the term "ideas" more frequently in the body of the text. This change in terminology is congruent with changes in the mental models of the nineteenth century: a movement from an undefined concept of ideas and emotions in mental life to an increasingly specific physiological model of brain activity.

[10] Murray 333. Italics original.

[11] Murray 6. Originally in the introduction to the 1795 edition, and reprinted in subsequent editions.

the original thinker's ideas and to replicate the sequence and substance of these ideas for someone else.

In the most basic understanding of English grammar in the mid-nineteenth century, the attributes of language helped shape mental pictures, and at the same time, attempted to emulate the connections of thought. In associative theories, a single word could spark numerous images with which the word had previously been associated. Because of the multiplicity of mental pictures a word could produce, Murray advises that in order to convey a clear and "distinct" idea, a sentence should be composed with an eye toward precision. To be precise, Murray explains, words and phrases should be "pruned" from a sentence to "exhibit neither more nor less than an exact copy of the person's idea who uses it."[12] The confidence with which Murray states that language could reproduce "an exact copy" of one person's idea for the mind of another indicates the importance of grammar on cognition (and even, perhaps, on sympathy). Verbal clarity, or the lack thereof, is actually a measure of the ability of language to produce a clear mental picture. Grammatical principles were justified not merely on aesthetic grounds, but also by their influence on cognitive function.

Although the goal of the *Grammar* was certainly to provide technical guidance for representing ideas in language, Murray's work devoted very little space to definitions of words. Rather, Murray's prescriptivism attempted to correct the confusions that arise from the "tenacious misapplication of language" by focusing on the composition of sentences. While grammatical features like inflection and tenses first delimit possible mental representations, syntax determines the way in which individual representations are linked. Murray states that it is important to "select" and "arrange" phrases well because certain components will "make an

[12] Murray 283.

agreeable and strong impression." For example, Murray warns that short sentences "are apt to break the sense, and weaken the connexion of thought."[13] While grammar places the multifarious images that language can produce in a logical sequence, the skill with which a sentence is composed determines the quality of the connections between them.

While Murray understood that grammar could affect the quality of mental representations, he also turned to psychological models of the imagination to help determine the tenets of his grammar. For example, Murray asserts that his principles can be "deduced from the nature of the human mind."[14] And in response to any inquiry into achieving "harmony or beauty" in language, Murray suggests we look to what feels natural, pleasant, and "in unison with the human mind."[15] In this regard, Murray might be considered part of a second generation of "new rhetoricians," who were a group of eighteenth-century writers interested in thinking about literature through the relationship of language to the mind.[16] If Latin models provided the initial structure to English grammar, Murray and his predecessors looked to psychological models for its subsequent growth.[17] Writers like Joseph Priestley, George Campbell, James Beattie, Hugh Blair and Robert Lowth brought into their grammars the influence of associationism. James Engell, in his essay on the New Rhetoric, notes that George Campbell thought that the study of language was "perhaps the surest and the shortest, as well the pleasantest way of arriving of the

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[13] Murray 286.

[14] Murray 283.

[15] Murray 279.

[16] Sarah Winter shows the link between associationist thought, prominent models of grammar and rhetoric, and Dickens's understanding of reading. Winter claims that "Dickens's novelistic versions of associationism…draw on the rhetorical arts of memory and invention that eighteenth century professors of rhetoric such as Adam Smith, Blair, [and] George Campbell had combined with an associationist faculty psychology, and that still formed the basis of training in rhetoric and elocution in Victorian grammar schools and universities." *The Pleasures of Memory: Learning to Read with Charles Dickens* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011) 35.

[17] For the specific influence of Latin grammars on Murray's text, see Allen Walker Read, "The Motivation of Lindley Murray's Grammatical Work," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 38, 4 (Oct. 1939): 529.

science of the human mind."[18] Murray specifically cites the work of George Campbell and Hugh Blair as the basis for his rules on perspicuity and accuracy.[19]

The relationship between the mind and grammar becomes especially apparent in Murray's writing on the topic of precision. Murray writes that precision is important because "It [the mind] can never view, clearly and distinctly, more than one object at a time."[20] Here, the rules for precision are built with the goal of creating a linguistic structure that will allow the mind's eye to focus on a single item. A sentence that includes several visual frames "forms a jumble of objects…which the reader cannot, without much difficulty, comprehend under one view."[21] A sentence should aspire to a classical unity of sorts, and stay rooted in one scene. In one sense, Murray's guideline takes the norms of visual perception as a model; the scope of a sentence should correspond to what a reader could potentially apprehend in the gaze of the human eye.

Yet, while the "view" to which Murray refers seems to take its norms from visual perception, he is not quite referring to an optical "view," but a picture that appears in the mind's eye. Despite the fact that he borrows terms from the sense of sight, the measure is comprehension, not apprehension. Visual perception, of course, involves both the physical organs of sight and the mental representations produced from the information transmitted by the senses. However, as it is impossible in daily human experience to separate mental pictures from

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[18] James Engell, "The New Rhetoricians: Psychology, Semiotics, and Critical Theory" in *Psychology and Literature in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Christopher Fox (New York: AMS Press, 1987) 277-302, at 283.

[19] Murray 5.

[20] Murray 283.

[21] Murray 294.

the “real” pictures of the outside world, Lindley Murray rightly conflates the mental pictures created in reading to the mental representations created in visual perception.

In addition, Murray sees direct correlations between relationships among ideas and the manifestations of these relationships in language. “Till men began to think in a train, and to carry their reasonings to a considerable length,” Murray writes, “it is not probable that they would make much use of conjunctions and other connectives.”[22] “Trains” of words are likened to the trains of associations; grammar both shapes and emulates the connective tissues of thought.[23] For Murray, the sentence serves as the vehicle for units of cognition: the precise unit by which our thoughts may be both transmitted and formed. In this sense, Murray’s work gestures toward the possibility of a universal grammar. Grammar is an external representation of links between ideas: the association of ideas in its most tangible form.

Dickens’s novels frequently highlight the unpredictability of ideas in the minds of their characters. Non-sequiturs are a regular occurrence, and characters often remark on the curious connections made by the associating mind. For example, David Copperfield’s nurse Peggotty is often “seized with a fit of wondering on some most unexpected topic,” a “fit” which she accounts for by the capricious activity of mental associations over which she has little control. “My head never can pick and choose its people,” Peggotty explains. “They come and they go,

[22] Murray quotes poet and moral philosopher James Beattie at length. Here, he duplicates Beattie’s contention that “ignorant people,” “ children,” and “barbarous nations” rarely speak in sentences that require connectives. From Beattie’s *The Theory of Language*: “The Greeks were the greatest reasoners that ever appeared in the world; and their language, accordingly, abounds more than any other in connectives.” Beattie, qtd. in Murray 128.

[23] Sarah Winter notes that the term “train,” a popular metaphor in the nineteenth century for the connections of associations, appears in Hobbes’s 1651 Leviathan. *The Pleasures of Memory: Learning to Read with Charles Dickens* 44.

and they don't come and they don't go, just as they like."[24] To many of Dickens's characters, cognitive processes are largely mysterious and seem to have a life of their own.

But at the same time, Dickens makes clear that ideas do not present themselves to the mind's eye only through seemingly random acts. Quite often, something in the formal qualities of language prompt the associating mind to call up an idea. For example, patterns created by the visual shape or sound of letters, syllables, and sentences can evoke an idea of a person or thing that would at first seem to have little to do with the thing that inspired it. For example, after David's housekeeper Mrs. Crupp recommends "skittles" as a healthy diversion from his infatuation with Dora, David gets the idea to visit his friend "Traddles," an event that significantly changes the course of the plot. Like Peggotty, David wonders how this unexpected "idea came into [his] head." But unlike Peggotty, who attributes her lack of cognitive control to being "stupid," he attempts to discover the cause that inspired this idea. David finally concludes that he thought of Traddles "perhaps, for no better reason than because there was a certain similarity in the sound of the words."[25]

Phonology—one of the aspects of grammar—will change David's thoughts, his actions, and, in the whole of the novel, the course of the plot. "Traddles" and "skittles" share accentual similarities (both are trochees with stressed/unstressed syllables), begin with a double consonant, and have second syllables that are almost identical (d and t sounds in the middle of a word are almost indistinguishable). Furthermore, the timing of Mrs. Crupp's suggestion is important: she

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[24] *DC* 102. In this conversation with Mrs. Copperfield, Peggotty may be subtler than she admits to Mrs. Copperfield. However, the activity of the unconscious mind is often used by characters in Dickens's fiction to cover up conscious knowledge of a disagreeable subject. For more examples, see also "Mrs. Flintwich Has a Dream," and "Mrs. Flintwitch has Another Dream" (chapters four and fifteen, respectively), in *Little Dorrit.*

[25] *DC* 340-341. See Nicholas Dames, "Associated Fictions" in *Amnesiac Selves*. Dames claims that unlike eighteenth-century notions of the association of ideas, Dickens and other novelists of the mid-late Victorian period understood that associations, even if outside of our awareness, were not at all random but based on logical connections that simply needed to be uncovered. This shift in understanding also may account for the difference in attitude between Peggotty and David toward the activity of their associating minds.

mentions skittles at the end of an evening, and the chapter closes with David going to bed. At the top of the next chapter, David wakes with the idea to visit Traddles. The activity between the chapters—sleep—implies that the unconscious mind made the link based on phonology. In this instance, we might say that the regular, conscious meaning needs to fade (as the two words do not mean the same thing) for the alternative logic of associations to take over. The chapter break, representing the night between Mrs. Crupp's advice and David's resolution, shows that the formal qualities of grammar could operate independently from the semantic content, forging their own connections within the mental database of ideas. When David Copperfield is suddenly inspired to think of Traddles after hearing the word skittles, this is not presented as a psychological anomaly. Rather, Dickens understood associations to be part of language comprehension, making his reader as potentially subject to mental representations based on linguistic form as David Copperfield and Peggotty.

The novel's opening chapters particularly demonstrate associative psychology within the unit of the sentence. *David Copperfield* opens just moments before David is born and six months after his father's death. The benevolent but eccentric Aunt Betsey (the sister of the late David Copperfield) visits the young widow as she is about to go into labor. David's mother remarries shortly after the novel opens, and the home is permanently changed by the strict discipline of her new husband, Edward Murdstone. David, as the first person narrator, describes his world from a viewpoint quite early in his childhood, while he is merely a toddler just learning to walk. In the homodiegetic narration of the novel, what David sees and what he describes are closely intertwined. Point of view, according to Murray's principles, ought to affect the way his sentences are formed. In order for an idea to be vividly "transfused" from David (as the narrator) to the reader of his history, the sentence structure should be built to mirror the potential view of

the mind's eye. If, as Murray's *Grammar* states, the goal of a clear grammar is to "exhibit…an exact copy of the person's idea," Dickens faces the task of describing the mental/visual experience of a narrator who is himself just learning to perceive. At this point in the novel, there is an incongruity between the scope of mental representation the child is capable of and the reader's visual frame. Dickens must describe David's world in a manner that both replicates the ideas of young David and invokes representations that correspond to the scope of the reader's own mental "view." Dickens meets these two different goals, I suggest, by using grammar as a descriptive register.

The first chapter, titled "I Am Born," is an analeptic look back on the day of David's birth, based on what the narrator was "informed." The second chapter is titled "I Observe," and describes David's world based on his own memory and experience of the self at the time.[26] The second chapter opens thus:

> The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as I look far back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty with no shape at all, and eyes so dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighborhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples."[27]

In this opening paragraph, Dickens depicts the developmental moment in which the child distinguishes himself from the objects around him. The narrator reaches into the "blank of… infancy"—a state of mind before any concrete associations exist, a state of pre-memory—to glimpse the very first items he apprehends. Accordingly, Dickens structures his syntax to place these emerging objects in the first position of the sentence. These objects are not grammatical

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[26] *DC* 19.

[27] *DC* 18.

objects, but are in fact subjects, and agents in the sentence in a way that the infant David is not. As the adult David looks back into the "blank of infancy," he refers to both the difficult act of penetrating early memory and the blank slate of the infant mind. In other words, infancy is a blank to the adult David not just because he cannot remember it, but also because it represents a state before the synthetic powers of the mind are fully formed. Items coalesce and "assume a distinct presence" before David, as if the power of being observed lies with the objects themselves, rather than in the power of the observer. The two objects of this description in fact do have the power to make their presence known: his mother, and his nurse Peggotty. David's own perceptions at the time are "in little pieces," fragmentary, and without the associations that give them context and meaning.[28] Thus, this grammatical construction is appropriate: because David's synthetic mental powers are just forming and he is too young to be self-aware of his role in perception, his description places agency with the objects to form themselves.

Although David's description of the bodies of Peggotty and his mother mimic his inchoate perception, his lack of precision also alludes to a sexual distinction between the two figures. David describes his mother as having "pretty hair" and a "youthful shape," while Peggotty is described as "having no shape at all." In this instance, the claim of "no shape at all" is not merely the by-product of his tentative apprehension, but innocently contrasts Peggotty's figure to that of his mother's sexual attractiveness. David's mother is described with abstract adjectives, "pretty" and "youthful," which lack the sharp, even exaggerated concreteness by which Dickens's descriptions are often characterized.

However, the form of these phrases might also exhibit the contrast between the two women's figures. For example, Mrs. Copperfield's "***Pre***tty hair" and "***you***thful shape" consists

[28] Later in this chapter, the elder narrating David remarks on what he could and could not at the time sense about Mr. Murdstone's courtship of his mother: "I could observe in little pieces, as it were, but as to making a net of a number of these pieces and catching anybody in it, that was, as yet, beyond me." *DC* 22.

of two phrases of dactylic feet (/ - - /- -), a repeating pattern of stressed/unstressed/unstressed syllables. This vacillation between hard and soft syllables creates an undulating, rhythm akin to the curves of the body. Peggotty, on the other hand, is described as having "no shape at all," a phrase of four single-syllable words. Even when these monosyllabic words are placed in a sequence, none stands out with any degree of prominence, presumably like the features of her figure. Unlike the description of David's mother, Peggotty's phrase defies any clear scansion, or has "no shape at all." According to Murray's *Grammar,* when a writer wishes to put two things in contrast within the same sentence, the "*opposition*" between the terms should be "*expressed…in the language and construction*."[29] The relative parts of the sentence should be presented in different grammatical shapes to reflect the items' disparate qualities. Thus, Dickens's contrasting shapes of poetic rhythm can convey sensory impressions of their distinct bodily shapes. Dickens presents a rhetorical pun: depicting Peggotty's and Mrs. Copperfield's figures by means of a figure.

However, the specific figure in which Dickens chooses to describe Mrs. Copperfield is significant. First, "***Pre***tty hair and ***you***thful shape" echoes dactylic hexameter, a meter traditionally used for elegiac poetry. In fact, the word "elegy" originally only signified dactylic hexameter, but eventually, the form became associated with poems of memorial. As the elder David consciously "look[s] back" to describe the scene, his narration is colored by a fact that he cannot un-know: his mother will die shortly after the birth of her second child. Thus, the "shape" in which David describes his mother is the shape of elegy.

[29] Murray 308. Italics original; the *Grammar* uses italics to highlight its most important rules.

Second, dactyl means “finger”; and while dactylic feet were encountered less often than other patterns in English prose,[30] the dactyl was known by an extremely recognizable mnemonic device: the image of the extended digit. The pattern of stress was taught by its association to the joints of the finger, consisting of one long segment followed by two short ones.[31] A finger suggests the sense of touch, highlighting the tactile and sensual elements of his mother’s body. And in the sentences that immediately follow this description, David describes his very first sense-memory of touch: the feel of an outstretched finger. “I believe I can remember these two at a little distance apart,” David recalls,

> and I going unsteadily from the one to the other. I have an impression on my mind which I cannot distinguish from actual remembrance, of the touch of Peggotty’s forefinger as she used to hold it out to me, and of its being roughened by needlework, like a pocket nutmeg-grater.[32]

The outstretched forefinger is perhaps a memory from actual experience, or, may be an association from a different source, like the mnemonic image of the dactyl. But the detail of the roughened hand may allude to why his mother has a shape but his nurse Peggotty does not. Roughened by labor, Peggotty’s finger (and by synecdoche, her body) is a figure of work, not art.

While Peggotty is described as having “no shape at all,” David does describe her in greater detail. Peggotty’s body, if not shapely, is described in more concrete terms than that of

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[30] Murray 247. In a section on versification, Murray’s *Grammar* gives several examples of metrical feet, but only offers one example of dactylic measure as it is “very uncommon.”

[31] Metrical feet, in their original reference to Greek prosody, corresponded to syllable length rather than emphasis. In English, long and short is not the terminology for the relationship of syllables, but the system of prosody (and the original mnemonic device) is used for English patterns of stress. See Herbert Tucker’s extensive, interactive, and wittingly titled digital resource on prosody: “For Better or Verse.” http://prosody.lib.virginia.edu/

[32] *DC* 18-19.

his mother: dark eyes and a dark complexion, ruddy cheeks, and hard, apple-red arms. In its structure, the sentence moves from clauses of less detail to more detail, and ends with several concrete nouns: eyes, cheeks, arms, birds, apples. (Indeed, the passage ends with the word "apples"—a fitting "first object" that we might imagine as the first word-image in a child's primer.) Correspondingly, David will have far more experience, and thus, more vivid and more numerous memories of Peggotty than his mother, due to his mother's death in David's childhood. Likewise, according to the logic of associationism, Mrs. Copperfield's death early in the novel makes impressions of her more ephemeral for both David and the reader.

Up until this point in the narration, Dickens has presented David with the point of view of a passive rather than an active observer. But these paragraphs are followed by a long aside in which the narrator steps out of the present to praise the very powers of observation in children in general terms. Two paragraphs describe the narrator's theories about the abilities of young children, arguing that their abilities to observe and remember details should not be underestimated. "I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy," he explains. Most children can observe closely, and adults do not actually learn to be keen observers but rather, forget to be so. "Most grown men who are remarkable in this respect," he contends, "may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it."[33] While the narrator admits his own "meandering" to make these statements, he reiterates that he makes these generalizations from observing both those around him and reflecting on his own powers as "a child of close observation" and strong memory.

The effect of this aside is twofold. First, the adult narrator explains why the observations of young David should be trusted. His descriptions are not, as in the first chapter, what was

[33] *DC* 19.

merely later reported to David to have occurred but instead are based on his own experience. David will now emerge as a force whose impressions are worth recording. Second, if each sentence, as Murray suggests, ought to maintain some temporal unity, the paragraphs where the narrator delivers these asides perhaps also allow for the passing of novelistic time. Just as a child rapidly develops over weeks and months of infancy, David seems to develop cognitively after this narrative segment. When the narrative returns to the young David, the descriptions change: his observations are recorded with a sharper focus. To emphasize this change in David's abilities, immediately after this aside, the narrator repeats the very first sentence of the chapter, this time in a new grammatical structure:

> Looking back, as I was saying, into the blank of my infancy, the first objects I can remember as standing out by themselves from a confusion of things, are my mother and Peggotty. What else do I remember? Let me see."[34]

Unlike the previous version of this sentence, which placed the word "objects" in the primary position, the sentence now begins with the narrator's own action. But more importantly, the original sequence has been altered to emphasize the most important act of the chapter: "looking." Grammatically, "As I was saying" would be the clearer choice for the first clause of the sentence—signaling the return to the moment where he left off narrating the recalled moment, and then moving to the same sequence of the first version: "As I was saying, looking back into the blank of my infancy, the first objects…"[35] In this second version, Dickens moves "looking back" out of the second phrase and places it in the initial clause of the sentence. According to

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[34] *DC* 19.

[35] Murray's *Grammar* contains hundreds of examples where the clauses of a sentence like this one are repositioned to show the different effects produced by grammatical structure. The effects are justified by reference to the physiology of the mind: the proper construction of a sentence "not only gives clearness, but makes the mind pass smoothly and agreeably along all the parts of it." 292.

Murray's *Grammar*, one of the main rules for the "strength" of a sentence is to identify the word most important to the overall meaning. This most important word should be put at the most "conspicuous and distinguished place" in the sentence, at its the head. The "capital word" at the beginning of the sentence, Murray suggests, inscribes an initial vision in our mind, and "makes the greatest impression."[36] To ensure that the most important idea forms the basis of our mental image, he admits, sometimes "the natural order of our language must be inverted."

This switch in grammatical construction helps unite the young (experiencing and perceiving) David and the elder (narrating) David. "Looking" describes both the adult narrator "looking back" and the young David looking around. The initial word "looking" helps close the gap between the two points of view. Thus, after justifying our trust in David's observational powers, the narrating elder David/Dickens now restarts his narration with the word of utmost importance: looking. "I observe," the structure seems to say, "therefore I am."

In this second version of the passage, the placement of the first word underscores David's new power. But the new arrangement of the remaining clauses also helps emulate for the reader David's progress from a haze of pre-memory to clear apprehension. Four clauses precede and delay the appearance of the objects that David and the reader are to visualize, each clause progressing toward a more distinct formulation. The first clause, as noted, contains merely the act of looking itself. The second clause describes the narrator's consciousness at telling the story to an audience. In the third clause, a first "thing"—if we can call it such—appears: the "blank of infancy." The next clause introduces the very concept of mental discernment, preparing us to isolate some objects distinctly from a crowd. Finally, at the end of the sentence appear the two nouns that were the objects of this inchoate act of perception: "mother" and "Peggotty." Like the narrating David, the reader must work through several stages, progressing from indistinct to

[36] Murray 303.

distinct objects. And even within this final clause, the language progresses from the less concrete "my mother" to the more specific proper noun "Peggotty." The capitalization of the name itself, the use of a proper name, is itself a noun more precise than the phrase "my mother."

Yet, in a grammar that is informed by nineteenth-century associative psychology, "my mother" and "Peggotty" bring more content than these phrases might seem at first to denote. The second clause "as I was saying" not only points toward the resuming of the narration at the moment it was left off, but also calls for the reader to retrieve and incorporate what was already said. It is a cue for the reader to begin the process of linking her *own* impressions, just as David will do. The repetition of the clauses elicits a memory, whether consciously or not, of the first line of the chapter. When encountered for a second time, this series of phrases bring with them sets of descriptive images from the former sentence: David's mother's "pretty hair and her youthful shape," and Peggotty's "eyes so dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighborhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples." The action of mental associations, as a nineteenth-century audience would have generally understood it, would round out this description with the details already established in the first.

This revised version of the sentence concludes with a new question and a statement: "What else do I remember? Let me see." On the one hand, "Let me see" is typical of the intimate tone in which the narrator voices his thinking throughout the novel. It is a bit of verbal filler covering a moment of introspection: a rhetorical pause that permits David to transition to the next memory. But on the other hand, "let me see" also marks a developmental achievement of David's mind. In this reiteration of the passage the objects can only emerge because of the actions of David. More than a request, "let me see" is an imperative.   The phrase is a

declaration, if not a celebration: marking the moment in which the mental gaze opens. The aperture of the mind's eye widens, penetrating the clouds of early cognition. Unsurprisingly, a new syntactical strategy presents this domestic panorama:

> There comes out of the cloud, our house—not new to me, but quite familiar, in its earliest remembrance. On the ground-floor is Peggotty's kitchen, opening into a back yard; with a pigeon-house on a pole, in the center, without any pigeons in it; a great dog-kennel in a corner, without any dog; and a quantity of fowls that look terribly tall to me, walking about, in a menacing and ferocious manner. There is one cock who gets upon a post to crow, and seems to take particular notice of me as I look at him through the kitchen window, he is so fierce…[37]

If the syntax of the previous sentence had mirrored the development of perception in the young child, this description reveals the contrast between the "blank" condition of the infant mind and David's burgeoning perceptive acuity. Now, David can observe beyond the obfuscating cloud and a variety of non-human objects take shape: the objects themselves no longer need to push through.

Both sentences contain an inverted subject/verb/structure: "on the ground floor is Peggotty's kitchen" (rather than "Peggotty's kitchen is on the ground floor"), and "there comes out of the cloud our house" (instead of "our house comes out of the cloud"). Now, instead of prioritizing the objects themselves, the passive construction emphasizes the *process* of perceiving. The inversion of the logic of subject/copula/object focuses on the act of seeing itself rather than the objects within the gaze. The "cloud" of early perception is placed at the head of the sentence and thus visualized first, allowing the house to slowly emerge from David's mental view.

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[37] *DC* 19.

The "cloud" that we visualize at the start of the paragraph refers to the perceptual, rather than mnemonic experience, because the house, even while described and thus realized for the very first time, is actually "not new…but quite familiar…in its earliest remembrance." The house was, to the senses at least, always there: existing in early snippets of apprehension, but yet to be combined and fully realized by the mind. The narrator plunges back in memory to the moment when David combines these pieces into a cohesive object, each to be associated with and signified by a name: "kitchen," "store-room." Scraps of perceptual memory now congeal into an item with meaning.

Out of the space of nothing unfold the features of David's home. In the second sentence, the clauses appear in a sequence that follows David's (mind's) eye as he moves about through the house. The object is situated (kitchen) only after David's perception of space is established (ground floor). This structure of clauses suggests movement from inside to outside in two respects: from the interior rooms to the exterior yard, and from the interior of the mind (the cloud) to the external world surrounding it.

There is a form of grammar that captures this movement from something to nothing: the expletive. Expletive construction features phrases such as "there is" or "there are" prior to the noun/s and verb being described.[38] In the next paragraph, Dickens relies heavily on expletive construction to form David's descriptions. I have emphasized the expletive syntax with italics:

> *Here is* a long passage—what an enormous perspective I make of it! —leading from Peggotty's kitchen to the front-door. A dark store-room opens out of it, and that is a place to be run past at night; for I don't know what may be among those tubs and jars and old tea-chests, when *there is* nobody in there with a dimly-burning light, letting a mouldy air come out at the door, in which *there is* the smell of soap, pickles, pepper, candles, and coffee, all at one whiff. Then *there are* the two parlours; the parlour of which we sit of an evening, my mother and I and Peggotty—for Peggotty is quite our companion, when her work is done and we are alone—and the best parlour where we sit on a Sunday;

[38] Murray 187.

> grandly, but not so comfortably. *There is* something of a doleful air about that room to me, for Peggotty has told me—I don't know when, but apparently ages ago—about my father's funeral, and the company having their black cloaks put on.[39]

As David continues to describe the house, his perceptions multiply, increasing in the specificity of objects that comprise his world, and their relationship to each other. Each line of description reveals an increasing amount of detail in comparison to the previous passages. The rooms of the house begin to form more clearly, becoming populated with people and objects (pickles, peppers, candles, and coffee). Fully a participant in the cooperative process of perception, David narrates the track of his internal eye, leading the reader down the passageways that both fascinate and haunt him. Even the elder David pauses with a parenthesis to remark: "what an enormous perspective I make of it!" This parenthesis both comments on the enormity of scale that small children tend to give the adult-proportioned world, but also conveys his wonder and excitement at David's own "making" of the scene. The heavy reliance on expletive construction contributes to this sense of making.

Of the five sentences that make up the above passage, four of them share a similar structure: all begin with statements of "there is," "here is," or "there are." The remaining sentence does not begin with there is/there are, but instead contains two internal clauses that feature the same construction ("there is nobody in there"; "there is the smell"). Expletive constructions begin with a statement of existence. Rather than placing the subject in the first position (i.e., "a long passage leads from the kitchen") or an inversion that puts the object in the first position ("from the kitchen leads a long passage"), these sentences emphasize the very state of being.

Expletive constructions start with no previous assumptions, as if placing the reader in a room after being blindfolded. The expletive adds a pause, a beat of mental time, a metaphorical

[39] *DC* 19.

rest, before it fills in the mental picture. Expletive constructions implore the reader to imagine—however briefly—a space before anything exists.

It is easiest to see this quality of expletive syntax by contrasting this passage from the first chapter of *David Copperfield* with other passages in which Dickens describes a scene for the first time. In the four-sentence-long passage above, Dickens uses the expletive forms five different times, and he begins the next two paragraphs with expletive constructions. In contrast, descriptions in *Little Dorrit* take a quite different form, as when the novel introduces a scene at Marseilles: "Boats without awnings were too hot to touch; ships blistered at their moorings; the stones of the quays had not cooled, night or day, for months."[40] Here, subjects are neatly lashed to their verbs in each clause (ships blistered; boats were hot; stones had not cooled). No previous sentence introduces the fact that there *were* boats, stones, or ships; in this sentence, these items become present at the same time that their actions or states of being (hot) are described.

Or, consider this sentence containing multiple subjects: "Blinds, shutters, curtains, awnings, were all closed and drawn to keep out the stare."[41] Four subjects share the verb "were" that modifies two states (closed and drawn). Here, single words suffice to present these ideas to the reader, and the image of each item is produced in rapid succession, then modified by the two states of being in which we are to picture them (closed and drawn). Or consider this:

> Besides the two men, a notched and disfigured bench, immovable from the wall, with a draught-board rudely hacked upon it with a knife, a set of draughts, made from old buttons and soup bones, a set of dominoes, two mats, and two or three wine bottles.[42]

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[40] Dickens, *Little Dorrit* 5.

[41] *Little Dorrit* 6.

[42] *Little Dorrit* 6.

In the last example, there is not even a verb present; nouns and adjectives alone present these images to the reader in an extensive parataxis. Images materialize almost instantaneously upon readerly encounter, as if these items already exist, and all the narrator need do is look about him. Interestingly, the *Grammar* recommends that to heighten the "tumult" and "vivacity" of descriptive images, the writer may omit connecting words.[43] Here, Dickens takes this advice to an extreme with a pared-down, verbless description in order to heighten the extreme physical conditions of the Marseilles prison. It should be noted that this comparison does not imply that Dickens fails to use expletive construction outside of *David Copperfield*. Rather, Dickens uses expletive construction in his novels in a rather deliberate and recognizable manner: to convey the impression of a space or a void, in order to subsequently fill it.[44]

Rather than the rapid, concise sequence we see in the examples from *Little Dorrit*, where objects are presented in close quarters on the page and in the mind, the expletive is expansive. Expletive syntax stretches out what could be said more economically. In fact, expletive construction is so named because it is considered to have this effect of filling up space. Because the expletive was commonly thought of as a grammatical tool for expansion, it was largely considered an inefficient, amateurish or low form of prose.[45] But rather than a symptom of an

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[43] Murray states that to convey passion, the author may want to omit linking words. Murray again quotes poet and moral philosopher James Beattie again, in the particularly relevant passage: "When narration is full of images or events, the omission of connectives may, by crowding the principal words upon one another, give a sort of picture of hurry and tumult, and so heighten the vivacity of descriptions." Beattie, qtd. in Murray 129.

[44] In *Little Dorrit*, a variation on the expletive is used to describe Amy Dorrit's first night outside of the walls of the Marshalsea prison, where she lives as the helpmate of her father. Little Dorrit is taken into the church for a few short hours of respite after wandering the majority of the night on the streets of London. The beadle recognizes her as a celebrity of sorts among the community: "The child of the Marshalea"—and shows her the church registry to document her existence. Her "celebrity" in the community—as "curiosity" proven real by the church register—belies both her diminutive size and social stature. "Here you are, you see….Here you'll find yourself, large as life. There you are, you see. Again as large as life." *Little Dorrit* 181-182.

[45] Murray states that expletive construction sometimes extends a sentence unnecessarily. He gives the following example to show that "There is a person at the door," might more concisely be stated as "A person is at the door." 187. Murray also gives an example of an expletive phrasing in a section on "Perspicuity," noting "some

unskilled or uneconomical form of syntax, I suggest that Dickens employs expletive construction precisely *because* it fills up space. Unlike other ways of building a sentence, the expletive lingers upon the moment in which the reader's imagination does its work. The expansive nature of the expletive fosters a temporary delay in image-making—a mental black box, if you will, of potentiality.[46]

Thus far, we have seen how Dickens uses the structures of grammar to enhance the reader's sense of what is happening in David's early perceptions. Dickens structures clauses, phonology, and syntax in ways that mirror David's initial mental connections as they form. But I now want to offer another layer of connotation to the grammar of David's early narration, one that troubles the readings I have offered. While grammar enriches the reader's sense of David's burgeoning perceptive acuity, grammar also highlights a psychic dissonance in the scene he observes. Therefore, let us take a moment to reread the previous passage:

> On the ground-floor is Peggotty's kitchen, opening into a back yard; with a pigeon-house on a pole, in the center, without any pigeons in it; a great dog-kennel in a corner, without any dog; and a quantity of fowls that look terribly tall to me, walking about, in a menacing and ferocious manner. There is one cock who gets upon a post to crow, and

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writers needlessly multiply demonstrative and relative particles." However, he notes that expletive construction is useful for "introducing a subject" or "laying down a proposition"—which, in a sense, we see in Dickens's usage here. 301.

[46] Andrew H. Miller has characterized potentiality as an important psychological feature of Dickens's fiction, an "optative mode" that often manifests in his grammar. See "'A Case of Metaphysics': Counterfactuals, Realism, Great Expectations," *ELH* 79, 3 (Fall 2012): 773-796.

seems to take particular notice of me as I look at him through the kitchen window, he is so fierce…[47]

In this scene, we follow David's eye moving through the kitchen, out a door to a backyard, to the center of the yard, and up a pole to a pigeon house—albeit with no pigeons. Then, the mental gaze moves to the corners of the yard, where a dog-kennel, like the pigeon-house, lies empty. The two domestic structures are empty, echoing an outburst in the previous chapter from David's well-meaning, if-eccentric, Aunt Betsey.

David's Aunt Betsey—who will eventually adopt him—visits Mrs. Copperfield (for the first and last time) on the day she is to go into labor. Upon meeting her brother's young widow, she chides Mrs. Copperfield for her and her late husband (for whom our protagonist is named) calling their house a "Rookery" when in fact, there are no birds. Betsey responds with an outburst (as she often does): "David Copperfield all over! David Copperfield from head to foot! Calls a house a Rookery when there's not a rook near it, and takes the birds on trust, because he sees the nests!"[48] To Aunt Betsey, any instance of unclear speech is a sign of a fault in logic. Whether willful obfuscation or accidental malapropism, anything but plain and direct speech sets Betsey on the attack to expose the fallacy.[49]

Aunt Betsey's observation proposes a relationship between language and the successful management of domestic life. For Aunt Betsey, this linguistic issue points toward a problem of

[47] *DC* 19.

[48] *DC* 13.

[49] Betsey leaves Blunderstone Rookery—never to return—after the doctor, Mr. Chillip, informs her that the baby was a boy. Betsey is perhaps as frustrated with Mr. Chillip for delivering a boy child as his circuitous delivery of the message; she is vexed by Mr. Chillip's attempt to couch this important (and life-threatening) event in delicate language. Impatient at the "five minutes or so that Mr. Chillip devoted to the delivery of this oration," Betsey answers his circumlocution with physical action: "My aunt never said a word, but took her bonnet by the strings, in a manner of a sling, aimed a blow at Mr. Chillip's head…and never came back." *DC* 17-18.

domestic economy: calling their home a rookery when there are no rooks is not only misleading, but is also a misuse and misunderstanding of the terms by which domestic life is organized. First, to name a thing by the very thing that it lacks creates confusion and debases the function of language. Second, giving a domestic structure a nonsensical name indicates a sort of play-acting at housekeeping, and more-dangerously, an ignorance of the social and financial structures upon which domestic life depends. Aunt Betsey's own marital and financial history—a woman separated from her physically abusive husband, whom she pays off to stay away—emphasizes the importance of these socioeconomic systems (especially for women). Betsey's marital separation also heightens the impact of a financial subplot in which her investments, entrusted to Mr. Wickfield, are bankrupt by the actions of Uriah Heep. Her bankruptcy is revealed to be a willful misrepresentation, stressing the value of accuracy in both linguistic and socioeconomic systems only too well.[50]

I suggest that like Aunt Betsey, Dickens presents a grammatical or linguistic quirk as emblematic of a problem in the Copperfield household. All three terms, dog-kennel, pigeon-house, and rookery, are inflections of the original noun. Murray called these forms of grammar "derivatives," words that retain the root term from which they derive. Murray states that derivatives are the inevitable product of a language as it evolves, and derivatives indicate the additional functions necessary as thought expands. Interestingly, in all three phrases where these terms appear, Dickens chooses to place the derivative term along side its root word in the same phrase. This juxtaposition is a technique of classical rhetoric called polyptoton: e.g., "a dog-kennel without a dog," a "rookery when there's not a rook near it." By placing the (older) root

[50] Betsey's desire for a female child is based on her wish for an opportunity to correct, vicariously, her own marital errors. Betsey declares: "There must be no mistakes in life with *this* Betsey Trotwood… [she] must be well guarded from reposing any foolish confidences where they are not deserved." *DC* 14.

word near its (newer) derivative form, Dickens allows us to consider, with largely comedic effect, the contrast between the root words and their variations.

Yet, by juxtaposing these terms through the device of polyptoton, Dickens places in high relief the problematic aspect of the relationship of these linguistic parents to their verbal offspring. All three items—the rookery with no rooks, a pigeon-house with no pigeons, and a dog-kennel without a dog—are homes built for the very thing they lack. The very things that give these domestic structures their names, and therefore their identities, are missing. These domestic structures synecdochally represent the Copperfield household. Through the device of polyptoton, Dickens offers a metaphor for the central domestic problem of the novel: the absence of David's father.

Like the conspicuous space left by the animals that were intended to live in the three structures, the absence of David's father leaves an inestimable void. The loss of David's father has left Mrs. Copperfield and the household in a vulnerable economic and social position. While absent from the novel's *sjuzet*, the death of David's father is the catalyst for major plot events (to name just a few): Mrs. Copperfield's second marriage to the abusive Murdstone, David's rebellion against his stepfather's physical and mental abuse, his being sent to boarding school, David's subsequent friendship with charismatic but antisocial schoolmate Steerforth, David's mother's death, and the eventual ruin of Em'ly.[51]

In addition to pointing toward an economic and social problem, these three sets of polyptoton also demonstrate a semantic dysfunction: a problem of identity. The three structures that comprise this metaphor are not only physically missing their *raison d'être* (e.g. pigeons or dogs), but are also rhetorically empty. If the meaning of these words is based on entities that are

[51] If we recall the previous passage, his father would likely have been a third object that stood out from the "confusion of things" in the child's memory; if not for this loss, the list would likely read "my mother, my father, and Peggotty."

not there, their powers to signify are dubious (i.e., may we rightly call a thing pigeon house if it in fact houses no pigeons?). Through the use of these "empty" derivatives, Dickens poses in grammatical form a metaphor for the relationship of David to the absent root for whom he was named. This rhetorical emptiness calls the notion of identity into question for the novel's most central "derivative": the young David Copperfield.

In *David Copperfield*, the difficulty in fixing David's identity is reflected by the slippery and multiple names by which he is called. Throughout the work David is referred to by several, constantly changing names: Daisy, Doady, Trot, Trotwood, Mr. Copperfull and perhaps least often, David. And even at her brief visit during David's birth, Betsey anticipated a female baby and (rather insistently) named him "Betsey Trotwood Copperfield."[52] Of course, it should be acknowledged that a protagonist whose identity must be developed through the plot of a novel does not in itself indicate a problem. Rather, this trajectory of development simply describes a *Bildungsroman*, in which *David Copperfield* may fairly be classified. But development—whether among men, or among words—requires one element to differentiate from the parent. David Copperfield not only lacks the root from where his identity derives, but has the *identical* name as his father, which perhaps problematizes his identity to an even greater extent than the examples of truly derivative terms (like rookery/rook). If in language, derivative forms manifest "maturity," as Murray suggests, then David Copperfield may be metaphorically handicapped by a self named for a circular yet non-existent referent.

The instability of David's identity makes the animal within the concluding sentence all the more threatening: "There is one cock who gets upon a post to crow, and seems to take

[52] *DC* 18.

particular notice of me as I look at him through the kitchen window, he is so fierce…"[53] The rooster is a figure of the dominant male and (at least to David's mind), occupies the role of a fierce alpha male in the absence of Mr. Copperfield. Furthermore, the grammar of this sentence stabilizes the rooster's presence, with expletive construction confidently stating his existence.

Polyptoton is not the only grammatical aspect of Dickens's prose that suggests the loss of David's father. As David narrates the interior of the house, the death of the elder Copperfield leaves a mark upon David's description through shifting syntax and grammatical residues. Once again, here is the passage that was dominant in expletive construction:

> Here is a long passage—what an enormous perspective I make of it! —leading from Peggotty's kitchen to the front-door. A dark store-room opens out of it, and that is a place to be run past at night; for I don't know what may be among those tubs and jars and old tea-chests, when there is nobody in there with a dimly-burning light, letting a mouldy air come out at the door, in which there is the smell of soap, pickles, pepper, candles, and coffee, all at one whiff. Then there are the two parlours; the parlour of which we sit of an evening, my mother and I and Peggotty—for Peggotty is quite our companion, when her work is done and we are alone—and the best parlour where we sit on a Sunday; grandly, but not so comfortably. There is something of a doleful air about that room to me, for Peggotty has told me—I don't know when, but apparently ages ago—about my father's funeral, and the company having their black cloaks put on.[54]

The impact of David Copperfield's death is palpable in this passage. The parlor has a "doleful air" where the family sits "grandly, but not so comfortably." David explains the cause of the doleful air about the room: "for Peggotty has told me—I don't know when, but apparently ages ago—about my father's funeral." David's explanation, however, hides as much as it reveals. In between the dashes lies the thing that is unspeakable: the lifeless body of his father. The parlor is the room where his father's body lies, we may assume, in wake before the funeral, and the body haunts the space for young David. The parentheses themselves point toward another tale:

[53] *DC* 19.

[54] *DC* 19.

the one told to him by Peggotty. His father's death is a story too monstrous to be fully told in David's narration, but is set off in the punctuation as a separate rhetorical act. This tale was told to David not by his mother but by Peggotty: "I don't know when, but…apparently ages ago." Like a fairy tale, the story originated at some unlocatable temporal point, yet was somehow always there.[55] Expletive construction, the syntax dominant in this passage, is also the form of the fairy tale: "There was once…" In addition to filling up space, expletive is the shape of the introduction to a folk tale. Here, the expletive fills the space of the conspicuous void in the family history, and reveals what the parlor signifies. And like a folktale or fairy tale, the information it discloses is both didactic and haunting.

The presence of David's father permeates his description of the house, seeping through his syntax. It imbues David with nervous energy as he runs down the hall and past the dark storeroom. He fears the "mouldy air" that comes from the storeroom "when there is nobody in there with a dimly burning light." Although David states, "I don't know *what may be among* those tubs and jars and old tea chests," the juxtaposition of this sentence with the description of the parlor implies the presence that he anticipates in the dark pantry. Semantically, the description states that there is no person in the room: "nobody in there." But Dickens's syntax challenges this assertion. "When *there is* nobody in there *with a* dimly burning light" is quite awkward a formulation if one intends to convey: "when no one is in there," "when the room is empty" or, "when I am alone in the dark room." The sentence in fact presents an oxymoron: the syntax and semantics are at distinct odds. The clause is structured in expletive syntax, which as

[55] It is a well-worn novelistic trope that household servants are the ones who tell fairy tales, folk tales, and ghost stories. The tales, especially in gothic fiction, often reveal unseemly details of family history. Mrs. Copperfield's second marriage to the iron-fisted Murdstone could also be seen as a family betrayal that makes her unqualified to possess the tale. Peggotty argues with Mrs. Copperfield during her courtship with Murdstone: "not such a one as this, Mr. Copperfield wouldn't have liked… No! No price could make it do! No!" In this sense, Mrs. Copperfield may not be entrusted with the important task of preserving and telling the history of David's father. *DC* 24-25.

we have seen, is a syntax that asserts something exists. Therefore, while the word "nobody" states that no one is present, the syntax connotes that someone in fact *is*. Grammatically, "When *there is* nobody in there with a dimly burning light" implies that *there is* actually something, or someone. Furthermore, the sentence does not indicate the absence of light, but somebody in there *with* a dimly burning light. (On a more pragmatic level, it also seems unlikely that candle would be likely left to burn in an unoccupied storeroom.) Dickens's choice of syntax leaves the candle burning, as it were, suggesting the ethereal presence of someone: a no-body. The somebody that is a no-body is, of course, his father.

The paragraph ends with David gazing at the graveyard where his father was buried, looking for proof that the dead lie peacefully. His thoughts linger on a story told by his mother in the Sunday parlor:

> One Sunday night my mother reads to Peggotty and me in there, how Lazarus was raised from the dead. And I am so frightened that they are afterwards obliged to take me out of bed, and show me the quiet churchyard out of the bedroom window, with the dead all lying in their graves at rest, below the solemn moon.[56]

The Lazarus story seems perhaps particularly acute for young David, perhaps raising both his greatest fear and his most earnest wish. Here, Dickens mirrors the construction of a previous paragraph, encouraging the reader to map the details of the first paragraph onto its formal analog. The very first time we "see" David in the text (that is, see him as a character, and not only hear him as a narrator), he is presented in a paragraph at end of the "I Am Born" chapter that is formally similar to the Lazarus paragraph. David has just been born (and much to Aunt Betsey's chagrin, is a boy), leaving Betsey Trotwood Copperfield to live only in the imagination:

[56] *DC* 20-21.

> No. I lay in my basket, and my mother lay in her bed; but Betsey Trotwood Copperfield was for ever in the land of dreams and shadows, the tremendous region whence I had so lately travelled; and the light upon the window of our room shone out upon the earthly bourne of all such travellers, and the mound above the ashes and the dust that once was he, without whom I had never been.[57]

Several grammatical features link the above paragraph with the paragraph containing the Lazarus story. The structure of the two passages mirror one another: both contain one clause that draws our attention to the bedroom window, followed by a clause that directs the reader's attention out of the window to the gravesite below. What was the "mound above the ashes and dust that once was he" in the penultimate clause of the earlier passage, becomes a settled plot in the later passage: "the dead lying in their graves at rest." (The years that pass between the two passages allow for this change.) The earthly "bourne" of the second passage recalls the just "born" David of the first passage.[58] This homonym also echoes the title of the first chapter: "I Am Born." The form of the language in which David is first presented ties him to the churchyard where his father lies.

After his fears at the Lazarus story have been allayed, David continues to describe the churchyard. He explains that there is nothing he knows better than the yard in which his father rests: "There is nothing half so green that I know anywhere that I know anywhere, as the grass of that churchyard;"

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[57] *DC* 18.

[58] The "earthy bourne" echoes the words of Hamlet's soliloquy: "the undiscover'd country, from whose bourn /no traveller returns": the lament of another son dealing with the psychic repercussions of his father's death 3.1 79. Shakespeare also intertwines "bourn" and "borne" when Hamlet proclaims in the next lines "that it were better my mother had not borne me." 3.1 122-123. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson Learning, 2002), 291-332.

> nothing half so shady as its trees; nothing half so quiet as its tombstones. The sheep are feeding there, when I kneel up, early in the morning, in my little bed in a closet within my mother's room, to look out at it; and I see the red light shining on the sun-dial, and think within myself, 'Is the sun-dial glad, I wonder, that it can tell the time again?' [59]

Dickens repeats the word "nothing" in three anaphoric phrases. The capital term is, according to the *Grammar*, the spot of the most enduring mental impression; in each phrase the "nothing" of the graveyard is highlighted again and again. This expression of loss reverberates: a preoccupation that, like any trauma, the narrator is compelled to repeat. And the sundial, dead at night when the sun sets, revives in the morning—unlike the quiet shades that lie nearby.

In addition to patterns of repetition, Dickens's punctuation in the concluding passage of the "I Am Born" chapter underscores the contrast the living and the dead. Several clauses lyrically lead from the child toward his father, through the "land of dreams and shadows": the metaphysical states of life and death that forever separate the two, even if their corporeal selves are physically proximate. Before these clauses, however, we have three short phrases: "No. I lay in my basket, and my mother lay in her bed." The phrase that represents David ("I lay in my basket,") is punctuated by a comma: appropriate for a character whom we shall follow through all the novel's chapters, a character whose life continues past the end of the narrative (the *sjuzet*). The next phrase contains his mother and is punctuated by a semicolon, a mark that combines a comma and a full stop: fitting for a character whose life shall at first continue, but whose narrative will meet an early end at her death. Finally, we have the terse, one-word sentence: "No." Immediately prior to this sentence, a set of three negations (nothing so green," "nothing so shady," "nothing so quiet") alluded to the elder David Copperfield. Previously, the syntax that described a "no-body" in the storeroom also implied the presence of David's father. Thus,

[59] *DC* 21.

we may also read his father in the simple but irrefutable negation: "No." Punctuated by a full stop, the first phrase is cut short; a period that ends, both in the *fabula* and on the page, before the birth of David and his mother's lying-in.

Dickens's grammatical structures suggest the lasting resonance of his father's death in ways that the young boy's memory does not, or can not, depict. Realizing that the sound and visual shapes of phonemes generate their own mental impressions, Dickens articulates the trauma of Mr. Copperfield's death in grammar far beyond what the young narrator can directly describe.

David Copperfield, as a *Bildungsroman*, traces the protagonist's development of identity. David's ever shifting set of names—including possessing the same name as his father—is one linguistic manifestation that suggests instability in David's identity. But from the start of the novel, the question of identity is focalized in grammar. In the exchange between Peggotty and David about his trip to Yarmouth with which I opened this chapter, David connected Peggotty's reference to her nephew with the first person form of the verb to be. Like the confusion around David's own name, the slippage between " Am" and Ham connects a question of grammar with a question of identity:

> 'Then there's the sea; and the boats and ships; and the fishermen; and the beach; and Am to play with—'
>
> Peggotty meant her nephew Ham, mentioned in my first chapter; but she spoke of him as a morsel of English Grammar.[60]

The substitution of "am" for "Ham" is especially poignant, as Ham is in some senses David's double. While the two share an enduring, perhaps idealized love for Em'ly, Ham's self-sacrifice

[60] *DC* 30.

renders him a *self*-less version of David. But as Peggotty's elision of the first letter cuts short his name, Ham Peggotty's life will be cut short as a result of his relationship to David. David's charismatic schoolfellow Steerforth will not only end Ham's engagement (and therefore his marriage plot) but also cause his death. Ham Peggotty will sacrifice his self—or as it might be said, his "Am"—attempting to save Steerforth from drowning. "Am" Peggotty is therefore a "morsel"; a character whose identity is truncated both orthographically and within the narrative. Ham Peggotty is a morsel of Am: only a morsel of the potential to be.

The presence or absence of a single character—both in sense of the orthographic character "H" and in the narratological character, Steerforth—demonstrates the fragile slippage between life and death. Similarly, the window through which a moonbeam shines on both the snug bed of the infant David and the bed of earth in the churchyard is at best a tenuous threshold, all that separates David Copperfield's "I am" from the elder David Copperfield's I am not.

If grammar, as Lindley Murray suggested, serves to both replicate thought and to shape it, it is the material that brings thought into being in the material world. Language gives the noumenal world of the thinking mind a physical body in which it can be born(e) in the phenomenal world. Grammar helps organize the ways in which these bodies act with others in the world, delineating their relationships. Grammar structures the transition between thought and reality, smoothing the passage to and from a "land of dreams and shadows." Each morsel of Dickens's grammar contains its own associative content, retrieving impressions and yet beckoning forward, each a unit that helps articulate the self in a novel world.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Chemistry of Associationism: George Eliot Elaborates

George Eliot worries about language. In *Adam Bede,* Eliot laments the technical limitations of literary representation. "Examine your words well," George Eliot warns, "and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings."[1] Eliot's words are not, as at first glance, about the difficulty of honesty or emotional candor. This statement, part of her well-known realist manifesto in *Adam Bede*, is about the difficulty of representational accuracy. "The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin," Eliot explains, "but the marvelous facility which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real, unexaggerated lion."[2] In the process of representing the lion, something unintended occurs: the original idea is either diluted to something base; or, equally problematic for Eliot's realism, idealized. If expressing truth accurately is an ethical problem, it stems from a representational deficit. Eliot's realism, a dedication to representing the "truth" of the phenomenal world, succeeds or falters based on the method of representation. The obstacle to truth lies in the material process that occurs between the mind and the word, or more accurately, the mind, the word, and another mind. The metaphysical problem of knowing another mind manifests for Eliot as a problem of representation.

This chapter examines George Eliot's literary strategies to minimize the gap between the conception in the mind and the representation on the page. The first and briefest section of this

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[1] George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 195. All subsequent citations from this edition are referred to as *AB*.

[2] Eliot, *AB* 195.

chapter will show that in Eliot's earliest work, the author attempts to cope with the challenge of building a consistent image across the breach of mind/word/mind by focusing on a name. The name of an object, Eliot wrote, contains "all essential qualities of the thing."[3] But Eliot realizes that the mechanisms of reading, according to the principles of mid-century associative psychology, would render even the most "essential" qualities evoked by a given term to be widely disparate between individuals. In *Adam Bede,* Eliot develops a stylistic strategy in response to the principles of associative psychology: elaboration. Elaboration helps Eliot manage the heterogeneous and unpredictable impressions that a given word could produce among different readers. Elaboration, however, is a term with two distinct meanings for Eliot. First, as a literary term, elaboration is a technique of verbal extension: the stretching of syntax; the modifying of original nouns with clauses and qualifiers to expand upon the initial idea. Second, elaboration also is a term from chemistry: the combining of raw materials until they form a new substance greater than the original substances. Eliot uses the term in both senses in her literary criticism.[4]

Elaboration is the style of Eliot's syntax. Beginning her sentences with concrete nouns (substantives) and simple adjectives, Eliot then modifies, combines, and revises the original word, and therefore, the initial idea. According to the logic of associative psychology, reading a word results in a secondary representation, or as she refers to it, a "picture" in the mind.[5] If the first encounter with a word drafts a mental picture, elaboration is the process that demands

[3] George Eliot, "A Natural History of German Life," *Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 107.

[4] For example, see George Eliot, "Story-Telling," *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook* (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1884) 284-288, and "Notes on Form in Art," *Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 231-240.

[5] Eliot, "A Natural History of German Life" 107.

second, third, and fourth drafts. Eliot discovers that the best way to limit the potential semantic confusion inherent in the associationist paradigm is to work and rework the original object until the mental picture is fully developed. Eliot refines the image in the reader's mind until it is elaborated, resulting in a different composition than the original signifier.

If, for George Eliot, elaboration denoted both a literary style and a chemical process, both senses of the term gesture etymologically toward a crucial concept: work. In order to do the work they are intended to do, words must signify across the minds of different individuals without evoking limitless interpretations. But the semantic labor in elaboration raises both aesthetic and ethical concerns. Both characters and words that do not work are, in Eliot's novels, deeply problematic. The labor of elaboration (or lack thereof) raises ethical concerns about a nineteenth-century industrial class increasingly divided into those who work and those who do not. In the last section of the chapter, I show that in *Adam Bede* characters who do not work are described in abstract terms. In this section, I will unfold a technical variation on elaborative description that Eliot uses to represent the work of a servant class. Members of the servant class do not produce any goods (in either ethical or economic senses), but serve primarily to preserve the standards of an aristocratic class soon to be obsolete. Eliot modifies the technique of elaboration when she wishes to mirror this unproductive state, writing in a style that offers an illusion of semantic significance.

George Eliot, it has often been said, embodies the integrated thought of several strains of Victorian science, such as associative psychology, natural philosophy, evolutionary theory, and chemistry. Gillian Beer argues, for instance, that in George Eliot's work various "systems

proposed by current scientific thinking are consciously appropriated."[6] Eliot thought of her work as a place of scientific inquiry and testing, and in 1876 Eliot reflected that her work was "simply a set of experiments in life."[7] Similarly, in "Principles of Success in Literature," G.H. Lewes frames the novel as scientific experiment.[8] Sally Shuttleworth observes that *Middlemarch* begins with "a series of experiments" in which Eliot's narrator examines "'how the mysterious mixture behaves under the varying experiments of Time.'"[9] Eliot's "experiments" are, however, perhaps nowhere more important than in her attempt to use language in accordance with the structures of the mind.

Eliot's thinking about language and the mind was highly influenced by her work as editor for the *Westminster Review,* a journal founded by James Mill and later revived by Eliot and G.H. Lewes. Through the *Review*, Eliot and Lewes interacted with theorists of literature and psychology such as John Stuart Mill, Eneas Sweetland Dallas, Herbert Spencer, and Alexander Bain. For instance, E. S. Dallas—gastronome, literary critic, and pioneering thinker on the subject of the "unconscious" mind—published work that called for the new science of the mind

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[6] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Gillian Beer argues that in the mid-nineteenth century "the methods of scientists become the methods of emplotment and scientific theories suggest new organizations for fiction." 150.

[7] Diana Posthelwaite, "George Eliot and Science," *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 103.

[8] Posthelwaite 108. For more on the importance of Eliot's scientific thinking to the structure of her novels, See also, George Levine, "George Eliot's Hypothesis of Reality," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Jun. 1980) 1-28; Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning*. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[9] We might compare *Middlemarch* to Goethe's novella *Elective Affinities (Die Wahlverwandtschaften*), in which characters are combined and observed based on the principles of chemistry. Posthelwaite shows that Lewes in 1854 traveled to Weimar to work on his Life of Goethe, and George Eliot helped Lewes translate Goethe's work. Lewes described Goethe as a "poet in science" and "equally…a scientific poet…" the latter, Posthelwaite points out, much like George Eliot would be. Posthelwaite 107.

(i.e., psychology) to be the unequivocal basis for literary criticism.[10] John Stuart Mill, who edited his father James Mill's *Analysis of Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1869), was deeply interested in the workings of mental faculties and the imagination: concepts central to his essays on poetry and prose.[11] Alexander Bain, a leading theorist of the physiological aspects of associationism, also published work on rhetoric and grammar. In George Eliot's own work, discourses like these, which together formed a literary psychology, were integrated and revised.

For example, in "A Natural History of German Life," her review of W.H. Riehl's sociological study of the German peasantry, George Eliot describes the mental processes involved in language comprehension. "It is an interesting branch of psychological observation," Eliot wrote in 1856, "to note the images that are habitually associated with abstract or collective terms—what may be called the picture-writing of the mind."[12] Certain images are "habitually associated," a psychological process that links a word with a corresponding mental representation, or idea. When a reader encounters a word, language inscribes a new, secondary representation: a "picture-writing" in the mind. With the phrase "picture-writing," Eliot creates a portmanteau that combines two media, writing and image, in an effort to capture the substance of an idea.

Eliot suggests that it might be possible to research mental representations, collecting data on the types, amount, and quality of images produced by a given term. Eliot imagines the comparison of individuals' particular cognitive illustrations when encountering certain terms, with the goal of gaining a more comprehensive and therefore accurate understanding of the

[10] Eneas Sweetland Dallas, *The Gay Science* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866).

[11] James Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869). This edition is used for all citations of James Mill's text. For examples of J.S. Mill's intersection of literary criticism and associationist psychology, see "What is Poetry?" *Monthly Repository* 7 (January 1833): 60-70, and "Two Kinds of Poetry," *Monthly Repository* 7 (October 1833): 714-724.

[12] Eliot, "A Natural History of German Life" 107.

meaning of a word. "Perhaps the fixity or variety of these associated images," she explains, "would furnish a tolerably fair test of the amount of concrete knowledge and experience which a given word represents, in the minds of two persons who use it with equal familiarity."[13] If data was gathered on each of the images, one might determine the boundaries of signification for a certain word. The stability of a term might be determined by comparing mental images: a word might inspire similar fixed images among different persons, or evoke a wide variety of different pictures—perhaps even conflicting images—across individuals. To this end, Eliot proposes a thought experiment (the subject of which *is* thought):

> The word railways, for example, will probably call up, in the mind of a man who is not highly locomotive, the image either of a "Bradshaw," or of the station with which he is most familiar, or of an indefinite length of tram-road; he will alternate between these three images, which represent his stock of concrete acquaintance with railways. But suppose a man to have had successively the experience of a "navvy," an engineer, a traveller, a railway director and shareholder, and a landed proprietor in treaty with a railway company, and it is probable that the range of images which would by turns present themselves to his mind at the mention of the word "railways," would include all the essential facts in the existence and relations of the thing.[14]

In the "railways" example, meaning is derived from a "stock" of images that a person stored in the mind upon previous encounters with the term. But because meaning is comprised of one's personal host of images, the meaning of a word changes based on personal experience. For example, because the non-locomotive man has limited interactions with the things the word connotes, he imagines three images only: the railway timetable, the track stretching in the distance, and the physical train station.[15] But the second man, whose experience includes

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[13] Eliot, "A Natural History of German Life" 107.

[14] Eliot, "A Natural History of German Life" 107.

[15] Here, we can see a conflation of the terms image and idea in a manner typical of Victorian associationist psychology. The term "image" could signify a single imagined component of a thing or a composite item: a train station, for instance.

physical work on the railway, administrative matters, and riding as a passenger could include "all the essential facts in the existence and relations of the thing."

Eliot's essay seems to recall the work of her friend John Stuart Mill, who defined a name "as the sum total of all the *essential* propositions which can be framed with the name for their subject."[16] In John Stuart Mill's words we discern the foundation of Eliot's "railways" experiment, in which a term encountered by a man with railroad experience would inspire "a range of images…[which] would include all the essential facts in the existence and relations of the thing."[17] The greater one's experience, the greater the chance that one's associations with a particular term would include the "essential" or necessary facts of an object.

According to Eliot's understanding of psychology, the association of ideas comprised the connective "tissue" of thought and the ground on which knowledge was built. Association was therefore a key process and the potential foil to any representational project. Yet, unless the writer could manage the vast and varied images the reader could produce, the endlessly subjective nature of associations could undermine the goals of realism.

Early in her writing career, Eliot tried to solve this problem by being as precise as possible in her description of things. Precision, Eliot believed, could be better achieved through the connotative power of a name. "The mere fact of naming an object," Eliot wrote, "tends to give definiteness to our conception of it—we have then a sign that at once calls up in our minds the distinctive qualities which mark out for us that particular object from all others."[18] In Eliot's formulation, a name "marks out" certain qualities from a host of others potentially indicated by a

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[16] John Stuart Mill, *System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive* (London: J. W. Parker, 1843; repr. London: Longmans 1961) 87. Italics original.

[17] Eliot, "A Natural History of German Life" 107.

[18] George Eliot, "The Ilfracombe Journal" (8 May –June 1856), *Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 229.

general conceptual tag. Assigning a name defines the shape of a concept, turning amorphous or ambiguous mental images into distinct and vivid pictures.

Eliot's concern for the right name, and therefore, the precise mental picture, can be seen in her journals. During the time that Eliot embarked on her first attempt at fiction with *Scenes of Clerical Life,* she and Lewes travelled to the port town of Ilfracombe on the North Devon coast to make observations, collect samples, and record details of plant and animal life. George Eliot was fascinated with the diversity and beauty of the seaside ecology of Ilfracombe, but when she tried to capture the details of what she saw, she was dissatisfied with the language she possessed. Eliot's very ability to describe the objects surrounding her, she argued, was dependent on her ability to identify them by name. "I have talked of the Ilfracombe lanes without describing them," Eliot writes, "for to describe them one ought to know the names of all the lovely wild flowers that cluster on their banks."[19] Eliot's comment marks the difference between discussing an item and describing it; one might "talk" of an item, but a name, interestingly, is required for description. "I never longed so much to know the names of things as during this visit to Ilfracombe," Eliot notes. "The desire is part of the tendency that is now constantly growing in me to escape from all vagueness and inaccuracy into the daylight of distinct, vivid ideas."[20] Eliot here connects the name with accuracy and vividness in representation. When faced with something new, the lack of a precise name is a representational or aesthetic issue ("I have talked of them without describing them") with significant epistemological stakes.

The roots of Eliot's thinking about the epistemological power of precise naming are found in James Mill's writing on language. In his *Analysis of Phenomena of the Human Mind*,

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[19] Eliot, "The Ilfracombe Journal" 228.

[20] Eliot, "The Ilfracombe Journal" 228-229.

James Mill stated that a name had two distinct purposes. First, a name is a vehicle with which one individual can convey his or her ideas to another: to "make known to others what passes within us."[21] The name allows transfer of one's internal thoughts to the world outside our minds. Names are thus a technology that attempts to solve (at least linguistically) the problem of theory of mind, which Eliot expressed in the previous passage of *Adam Bede.*

James Mill's second and equally important function of the name is "to secure to ourselves the knowledge of what at any preceding time has passed within our minds."[22] Names not only put one's experience into a form that can be communicated to others, but also "secure" the inner life into a form in which we can retrieve it within ourselves. Names fix our experience of ourselves, transforming fleeting phenomena into "knowledge." A name, according to Mill, is necessary both to remember our experience and to understand it: "to secure to ourselves the knowledge…of what has passed." Similarly, Eliot believed that knowing the name of the fauna and flora of Ilfracombe would help her better understand the object itself, as a name "tends to give definiteness to our conception of it." But moreover, James Mill proposed that experiencing a mental representation amounted to experience itself. It was only through these mental representations, Mill wrote, that "the events which are passed are to us any thing." Ideas give us history, a story to tell. "If the objects which we have seen, heard, smelt, tasted, and touched, left no traces of themselves," Mill contends, "…yesterday would be as unknown to us as the months we passed in the womb."[23] These "traces" in the mind fix our experience for future retrieval when the present sensation has past. Whether having an experience or reading about an

[21] James Mill 128, 134.

[22] James Mill 128.

[23] James Mill 130.

experience, the name creates a mental inscription and leaves behind ideas for future retrieval when the present sensation has past.

At the time of the Ilfracombe journal and *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Eliot believed that the name had epistemological power; a name gave experience a permanent shape, which was necessary both for the self and for communicating one's experience to others. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, we see Eliot describing characters with a distinction between their given name and the name by which others understand them. In the sketch "The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton," Eliot names characters in a way that attempts to capture all their salient features at once. Eliot's effort to encapsulate all the character's defining attributes in a single name is so overt that her names seem closer to allegory than to realism. For example, Eliot describes the unsentimental "Mrs. Brick" as "one of those hard undying women, to whom age seems to have given a network of wrinkles, as a coat of magic armour, against the attacks of winters, warm or cold."[24] Mrs. Brick, like the substance for which she is named, is "hard" and "undying," "armour[ed]" against the elements. In the same scene, Eliot introduces "'Silly Jim,'" whom the author describes as "a young man affected with hydroencephalitis, who rolled his head from side to side."[25] Similarly, "Poll Fodge" is a one-eyed woman, with a "scarred and seemy face." "Poll" is a generic name (like moll), but can also mean "cut" (in both noun and verb senses), and "head" (especially that of an animal or fish). Eliot's characters are named by their most essential features: the mental incapacity of Silly Jim, the harsh, scarred face of Poll Fodge, and the hardness of Mrs. Brick.

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[24] Eliot, "The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton," *Scenes of Clerical Life* (New York and London: Penguin 1998) 27. Citations of this edition are henceforth referred to as *SCL.*

[25] Eliot, *SCL* 26.

Moreover, if the birth names of the characters do not capture the important features of their identity, Eliot imagines that the community would rename them, as in the case of the elder "Old Maxum":

> 'Old Maxum,' as he was familiarly called, his real patronymic remaining a mystery to most persons. A fine philological sense discerns in this cognomen an indication that the pauper patriarch had once been considered pithy and sententious in his speech; but now the weight of ninety-five years lay heavy on his tongue as well as in his ears, and he sat before the clergyman with protruded chin, and munching mouth, and eyes that seemed to look at emptiness.[26]

The real name of the patriarch is unknown and unnecessary: the salient features of his personality are offered in his name. Yet, in the case of Old Maxum, there is a dissonance between what the name represents and the features of the man at the moment of Eliot's story. While there seems a discrepancy between what the name signifies and the current qualities of the person to which the name is attached, the elder patriarch, in a sense, now has *no* qualities rather than different ones. The name points us, by way of contrast, toward understanding what the patriarch was, before the "emptiness" of senility set in.

While Eliot's technique of naming attempted to be epistemologically accurate, it was aesthetically problematic. Eliot's publisher John Blackwood had substantial praise for her first foray into fiction, but he specifically criticized her use of names. Responding to her anonymous submission of the "Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton*,"* Blackwood writes: "the descriptions are very humorous and good. The death of Milly is powerfully done and affected me much. I am not sure whether [s]he does not spoil it a little by specifying so minutely the different children and their

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[26] Eliot, *SCL* 26.

names."[27] The precision of the name, Blackwood thought, detracted from the emotional impact of the scene.

Furthermore, while a name like "Mrs. Brick" could encapsulate and condense all the salient parts of the thing, the composition of these parts was highly subjective. A name packs several qualities of a thing into one sign, an economical way of signifying many individual attributes at once.[28] But on the other hand, as Eliot's ideas in "Natural History of German Life" proposed, the name evoked the "essential" elements of a thing only in the mind of someone with a full range of experience. The name delimits, but its boundaries are entirely dependent on the qualities already assigned to the particular term. If naming changes a vague concept into a distinct idea, it does so based entirely on preconceived associations and thus, its epistemological power is compromised.

Acutely aware of the potential pitfalls of association, Eliot realized that the single name would evoke spontaneous and highly subjective mental images and connotative connections. Thus, she develops a strategy in *Adam Bede* to slow down or subvert the automatic action of association: a process that extends the time it would take to produce an image. If "railways" does not produce a mental picture featuring the characteristics of the thing she imagines, Eliot will slowly, methodically, describe the characteristics themselves in order to compose a picture. Instead of relying on the single name to specify the attributes of a thing, Eliot develops a technique that is in many senses quite the opposite: elaboration.

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[27] John Blackwood to G.H. Lewes (12 November 1856), *George Eliot, The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Carroll (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971) 50.

[28] James Mill 137.

Adam Bede (1859) begins with a scene of labor. The protagonist, for whom the novel is named, emerges slowly at the end of a series of long, periodic sentences. A great degree of attention is paid to the numerous physical aspects of the scene, and unlike the assertive nomenclature seen in *Scenes of Clerical Life,* the protagonist is unnamed even when his body emerges.

> The afternoon sun was warm on the five workmen there, busy upon doors and window-frames and wainscoting. A scent of pine-wood from a tent-like pile of planks outside the open door mingled itself with the scent of the elder-bushes which were spreading their summer snow close to the open window opposite; the slanting sunbeams shone through the transparent shavings that flew before the steady plane, and lit up the fine grain of the oak paneling which stood propped against the wall. On a heap of those shavings a rough grey shepherd-dog had made himself a pleasant bed, and was lying with his nose between his fore-paws, occasionally wrinkling his brows to cast a glance at the tallest of the five workmen, who was carrying a shield in the centre of a wooden mantelpiece.[29]

In contrast to *Scenes of Clerical Life,* where names are in fact the sign that connotes the most essential qualities of a person, here, identity is delayed. In fact, if a name was thought to be a compact sign that condenses many qualities into one identifier, the absence of a name allows the qualities to be distinguished one at a time. Like the objects of the physical environment, Adam is presented only in discrete rather than composite parts. After the above passage, the narrator concentrates on the sound of the man's voice, and offers verses of the men's work song. Even the voice is imagined as an atomized, physical part of the body:

> Such a voice could only come from a broad chest, and the broad chest belonged to a large-boned, muscular man nearly six feet high, with a back so flat and a head so well poised that when he drew himself up to take a more distant survey of his work, he had the air of a soldier standing at ease. The sleeve rolled up above the elbow showed an arm that

[29] Eliot, *AB* 9.

> was likely to win the prize for feats of strength; yet the long supple hand, with its broad finger-tips, looked ready for works of skill. In his tall stalwartness Adam Bede...[30]

Each part is atomized and connected anatomically by the structure of the sentence: the voice comes from a chest, the chest is connected to a man, a back, a head, a sleeve, an elbow, an arm, a hand, and eventually, his fingers. After mentally collecting the pieces of this deconstructed human, the reader finally is offered a name: Adam Bede. Body parts are articulated in relation to one another, and prepositional phrases (with, from, belonged to) act as joints: a body elaborated by syntax.

This elaborated construction does not only apply to the body of Adam Bede. Rather, all objects of the scene are described in a way that eschews the capability of single names to instantly bring multiple images to the mental stage. A bevy of prepositional phrases move the imaginative gaze from object to object. Each of these clauses builds upon one another: the scent is of pine-wood; the pinewood is from a tent-like pile of planks; the planks are outside the open door, near the elder-bushes. When a noun appears it is a simple one: Scent. Sun. Door. Each subsequent noun is linked to the previous by a prepositional phrase that adds to its specificity: a scent of pine-wood. As the series of nouns and prepositions continues, the original object becomes more specific: a scent of pine-wood from a tent-like pile. A tent-like pile of planks. The details emerge slowly, as the shape of each imagined object is repeatedly modified. A description with a grammatical structure heavy in prepositional phrases brings an object to a complete whole differently than the quick recall of associative logic. Unlike the compressed form of signification in the name, a syntax consisting of many prepositional phrases constantly modifies the image. Highlighting the prepositions of the sentence in italics demonstrates their substantial presence in the construction of the image:

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[30] Eliot, *AB* 10.

> the scent *of* pine-wood *from* a tent-like pile *of* planks *outside* the open door mingled itself *with* the scent *of* the elder-bushes which were spreading their summer snow *close to* the open window opposite; the slanting sunbeams shone *through* the transparent shavings that flew *before* the steady plane, and lit up the fine grain *of* the oak paneling which stood propped *against* the wall.

Instead of using adjectives to suggest what kind of scent, (fresh, flowery, pine, rose) prepositional phrases and nouns do the majority of descriptive work. For instance, the subject of the second sentence ("scent") is separated by from its verb ("mingled") by a long serious of prepositional phrases modifying the noun. What kind of scent? Instead of an adjective "pine," Eliot uses a series of prepositional phrases as adjectives: [*of* pine-wood *from* a tent-like pile *of* planks *outside* the open door]. Similarly, when we finally reach the verb (more than ten words later), "mingled" is followed by another series of phrases that acts as one adjective [itself *with* the scent *of* the elder-bushes which were spreading their summer snow *close to* the open window opposite].[31]

A syntax heavy in prepositional phrases requires extra steps in the "picture-writing of the mind" and delays the mental formation of the object. For example, when we read the phrase "fragrant apple pie," the items come into view relatively quickly, with the odor foregrounded and already attached to a whole object (apple pie). But when we read a sentence such as "the scent of the pie on the windowsill, which carried the fragrance of apples ripe from the harvest this week," there is a small check in the process of mental composition. The apple pie is not composed until nearly the end of my example sentence, and several pieces of knowledge (what kind of pie? what kind of smell?) are held in suspension. As each prepositional phrase situates

[31] Eliot's grammatical structure shares some qualities with Germanic languages, which Eliot was frequently translating at the time.

and resituates the object in ever-increasing levels of specificity, the picture writing of the mind must pause in a process of continually redrawing the image. Eliot's syntax demands that her reader erase and correct initial imaginative assumptions. These assumptions are of course instantaneous; the corrections brief mental moments. However, the small delay in the progress of image-making is long enough to for Eliot's intended specifications to come to fruition.

In fact, the initial words of the sentence suggest an image that will prove to be false. The first phrase, "the sun warm on workmen there," might lead the reader to imagine the men working outside in the sun, rather than indoors. While every word in a sentence, to be sure, asks a reader to adjust his or her initial assumptions, if Eliot had instead written "Inside the sunny workshop, five men worked on doors, wainscoting, and windowframes," the speed with which one could comprehend the worker's location would be quite different. I suggest that Eliot deliberately avoids sentence structures that offer quick and efficient composition of an image.

In the space between the first glimpse of the textual object and its subsequent elaboration, work is performed. The reader completes one form of work, as the constant correction of the mental image belabors the process of mental composition. Yet, Eliot's complex phrases also demand a good degree of labor within the original textual composition. The work required in both the writing and reading of the sentence emphasizes the labor of the scene. Labor is, of course, the very subject of the paragraph; the work that the sentences require from the reader and writer mirrors the activity of the workmen.

While elaboration is a literary style that, for Eliot, purposefully evoked labor, elaboration also designated a specific act of fashioning important to mid-Victorian natural science. In the discipline of chemistry, elaboration referred to the working and reworking of crude, raw materials into a more complex substance. Eliot, in fact, proposed a metaphor in which she

envisioned parts of a sentence as chemical agents. In an instructional essay titled "Story-Telling," Eliot states that getting to know a new character is like witnessing an experiment in the laboratory. "To see a chemical experiment," Eliot writes,

> gives an attractiveness to a definition of chemistry, and fills it with a significance which it would never have had without the pleasant shock of an unusual sequence, such as the transformation of a solid into gas, and *vice versa*.[32]

Being present at the chemical experiment gives the spectator—or to follow the metaphor, the reader—a "pleasant shock of surprise" when one element is placed in conditions that can transform it to something new. Her language here is resonant of *Middlemarch*, in which Eliot envisions the juxtaposition of characters with distinct psychologies as an experiment to see "how the mysterious mixture behaves under the varying experiments of Time."[33] But in this essay on the modes of storytelling, the components of the experiment are not characters or plot events, but grammatical parts of speech. She continues the chemical analogy as follows:

> …we would have never had without the pleasant shock of an unusual sequence, such as the transformation of a solid into gas, and *vice versa.* To see a word for the first time either as substantive or adjective in a connection where we care about knowing its complete meaning, is the way to vivify its meaning in our recollection. Curiosity becomes the more eager from the incompleteness of the first information.[34]

Eliot's metaphor is quite complex, and the tenor and vehicle operate on multiple registers. There are several aspects of the comparison: the "elements" of the experiment, the measure of time,

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[32] Italics original. George Eliot, "Story-Telling," *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook* (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1884) 285.

[33] Beer 151.

[34] Eliot, "Story-Telling" 285.

and the feeling of suspense. First, the elements of the experiment consist of substantives (nouns) and adjectives, which subsequently transform into other objects. Like items in the periodic table, parts of speech are building blocks of composite substances we see daily around us: flower, table, candle. Interestingly, if we look at the words in the description of the workshop, they are rather rudimentary. The passage largely contains one and two syllable words (sun, door, wood, tent, pine, plank) and equally simple verbs (were, shone, flew, lit, stood). But these nouns, when they appear in the mental representation for the first time, are "incomplete." It is not possible to comprehend the object fully until the materials are reworked. Each time a noun is put through the process of addition and subtraction by means of a prepositional phrase it is refined, combined, and transformed. A process much like a chemical reaction takes place as some potential attributes are distilled out while others are added. The initial raw material ("the substantive or adjective" seen for the first time") must be changed from its original form into something new. Simple words provide the raw materials; Eliot's syntax works the elaboration.

For elaboration in both the representational and the chemical process, time is crucial. Rather than the spontaneous recall of images associated with a term like railways, Eliot's elaborative syntax, as in the description of the workshop, deliberately builds temporal delay. The "afternoon sun," for instance, is an adjective and a substantive that were revealed to be not what they first seemed: as the sentence continued, ten, twelve, thirteen words later, we learned that the sun is not the globe in the sky, nor even the sunlight outside, but a beam through a window, illuminating an indoor workshop filled with sawdust and pollen. In both the laboratory and the sentence, time is necessary for the complete transformation of the elements. In order to acquire knowledge—whether scientific knowledge or the definition of a term—one must be willing to wait.

Temporal delay is not only vital for accuracy, but also enhances affect. By placing "substantives" and "adjectives" in "an unusual sequence," Eliot builds a "pleasant shock" which "vivifies" the experience of reading. The unexpected sequence first surprises the reader, and because he or she is presented with "incomplete …first information," the reader subsequently feels suspense. This structure propels the reader to continue and, as implicit in the chemistry analogy, the structure makes the reader more curious about the outcome, which leaves a greater impression. Partial and/or incomplete information leads to suspense, an affect that has been said to be a strategy of epistemological training both for characters in and readers of Victorian fiction.[35] The type of suspense Eliot recommends here, however, is not about withholding facts or building suspenseful plots; rather, the suspense she builds is syntactical. Eliot's thinking about the effect of incomplete information on readerly curiosity shares theoretical resonance with the work of her friend and contemporary Alexander Bain. Professor of psychology and author of *The Emotions and the Will* and *The Senses and the Intellect*, Bain was one of the leaders of a physiologically rooted associationist psychology in the Victorian era and a grammarian and rhetorician. In *The Emotions and the Will*, Bain claimed that a novelist's sentence structure could particularly stimulate the emotion of "pursuit," spurring the reader to continue.[36] The novel itself, Bain claimed was perhaps (my emphasis) "the greatest *elaboration* of the pleasures of ideal pursuit."[37]

Knowledge, especially knowledge gleaned from language, is an act of suspending automatic assumptions and instead inquiring into possibilities. G.H. Lewes, as Gillian Beer

[35] For instance, see Caroline Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

[36] Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: John W. Parker & Co., 1859) 194-197.

[37] Bain 197. The novel was indeed so good at stimulating the feeling of pursuit to excess, Bain notes, that real physical "exertion" was eventually needed to dissipate the mental state. 197.

points out, articulates the importance of suspense in *Problems of Life and Mind*: "The anticipatory rush of Thought prefigures qualities and foresees consequences; instead of pausing to ascertain whether our anticipations do or do not correspond with fact, we proceed to argue, to act on them as if this mental vision were final."[38] The "anticipatory rush of thought" equally applies to language comprehension in the context of associative psychology: the word "prefigures qualities" and produces "mental visions." As the very mechanisms of associative psychology causes one to "rush," "anticipate," and "foresee," Eliot's strategy is to revise the mental vision and to make the reader wait. This is, of course, the scientific method at its best.

Furthermore, Eliot compares the structure of sentences to the form of thought itself. In the same essay, Eliot forms an analogy between the way she places substantives and adjectives together to how the mind aggregates the input of the senses in order to form knowledge.[39] Real events are recalled in the mind, she states, in the same sequence in which they occurred. As we experience the world, we gather information about our surroundings sequentially, and build and rebuild our ideas as we gain further input. Our first impressions exist only to be revised, refined, and rarified. So too, Eliot suggests, ought to be our movement through sentences, if one wants to tell a story well. The structure of sentences should replicate the process in which our trains of thought were created. Furthermore, in memory, the sequence of each original connection is preserved. Eliot explains:

> Moreover, it is in this way that memory works in its incidental revival of events; some salient experience appears in inward vision, and in consequence the antecedent facts are

[38] Beer 151.

[39] Eliot, "Story-Telling" 86.

> retraced from what is regarded as the beginning of the episode in which that experience made a more or less strikingly memorable part.[40]

The mind "reviv[es]" a "salient" part of some experience in the "inward vision" and, like following a trail, the mind retraces the previous path, connecting landmarks along the way to reform the whole episode. Thus, Eliot's sentences seem to mimic both the structure of phenomenal experience and the memory of that experience. Eliot connects the structure of sentences to the structure of thought, and chemistry becomes the model for both of them.

Chemistry was, in fact, a metaphor for associationism itself. John Stuart Mill, in his preface to his father's *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, suggests that chemical elaboration is the very process of thought. Mill presents an analogy by Thomas Brown, a Scottish poet and theorist of association who stated that the relationship of individual chemical elements to the whole was akin to the relationship between individual impressions in the mind and their combined effect.[41] Just as "in chemistry…[where] the qualities of the separate ingredients are not recognizable by us in the different qualities of the compound itself," Brown explains, "in [the] spontaneous chemistry of the mind, the compound sentiment that results from the association of former feelings has… little resemblance to these constituents of it." [42] In this mental chemistry, the parts fuse, as it were, into a new sort of holistic product. The "simplest elements," Mill thus explains, "generate the manifold complexity of our mental states," and the

[40] Eliot, "Story-Telling" 86.

[41] Preface by John Stuart Mill to James Mill's *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* x-xi. Brown taught at the University of Edinburgh, and was the author of texts such as *Physiology of the Human Mind*, and *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind.*

[42] Brown, qtd. in James Mill, Vol. 1 (1869) ix.

facts of the human mind are the products of the association of ideas.[43] From associational processes new forms emerge, with properties far greater than the properties of their antecedents.

In other words, the syntax Eliot builds is deliberately, methodically intended to mimic the temporal and epistemological delay of our experience of the phenomenal world, in which individual associations combine to something greater than the sum of their parts. If elaboration is the fundamental mental mechanism that changes individual images and sensations to total experience, Eliot's style capitalizes on the presentation of separate elements in order to subsequently produce a new substance: the object she wishes to render. Eliot explains that literary style should be built upon the structures of thought. It is especially effective to "Tell[ing] a story founded on these processes of outward and inward life," because "our earliest, strongest impressions, our most intimate convictions, are simply images added to more or less of sensation."[44] Elaboration is, therefore, a method drawn not only from the discipline of chemistry, but also from the chemistry of the mind.

Reviewers understood the connection between Eliot's elaborative style and the mental affect her work produced. When introducing a character, one reviewer remarks, "Instead of referring to the village organist, [s]he refers to 'a collector of small rents, differentiated by the force of circumstances into an organist.'"[45] These descriptions were innovative, the reviewer noted, insofar that they were comprised of "detached points" synthesized into "a connected whole." "Indeed," the reviewer noted, "so far from carelessness being the fault of the style, we

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[43] In this preface, John Stuart Mill traces the trajectory of the "analytic study of the facts of the human mind" thought the history of associationist theorists: Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hartley, Thomas Brown, and finally, to the work of his father, James Mill.

[44] Eliot, "Story-Telling" 286.

[45] Unsigned Review from the *Saturday Review* (26 February 1859), *George Eliot, The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Carroll (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971) 73.

should rather urge the objection of a too-constant elaboration."[46] But "whatever faults [readers] may discover in [the novel]," the reviewer maintains, "they will also find that it contains things which stamp it as a book by itself, leaving new impressions and awakening new feelings."[47] "Impressions" referred, in contemporary terms, to the mental representations left after the initial perception of the text. Furthermore, the reviewer explained that Eliot's language "always expresses distinct ideas." Expressing "distinct ideas" was, of course, the very thing for which Eliot had longed as she wrote in her journal on the seaside of Ilfracombe; a style of elaboration allowed her to achieve this goal.

If, in the process of elaboration, words are raw materials, Eliot understands that all raw materials were not equal. Like layers of paint on the mental canvas, each noun-preposition-adjective phrase in Eliot's syntax alters the original image. But nouns and adjectives that describe concrete objects provide materials quite different than terms that are abstract. For example, in her essay "Notes on Form in Art," Eliot questions the meaning of words like "form," suggesting that in order to even discuss the principle of form in aesthetics, one must not only suspend but perhaps also reverse one's initial assumptions about the word. The word "form," like other abstract terms, is especially prone to dubious or unclear interpretations. She begins the essay by questioning how much one can trust an abstract term's signifying potential:

> Abstract words and phrases which have an excellent genealogy are apt to live a little too much on their reputation and even to sink to dangerous impostors that should be made to show how they get their living. For this reason, it is often good to consider an old subject

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[46] Unsigned review from the *Saturday Review* (29 May 1858), *George Eliot, The Critical Heritage*. ed. David Carroll (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971) 69.

[47] Unsigned Review (26 February 1859) 73.

> as if nothing had yet been said about it; to suspend one's attention, even to revered authorities, and simply ask what in the present state of our knowledge are the facts which can with any congruity be tied together and labeled by a given abstraction.[48]

Here, Eliot proposes an empirical test similar to the "railways" experiment: to gather all the facts that come about when various individuals encounter a term. An inquiry into the facts within the "present state of our knowledge" would yield a series of facts that could be "with any congruity be tied together…and labeled by a given abstraction." But for an abstract term, perhaps even more than for a word like "railways," it is important to "suspend" our assumptions. Readers must be patient, she satirically jabs, "except for those who are under the dire necessity of using the word and cannot afford to wait for a meaning."[49]

Eliot suggests that because abstract terms "rely on reputation," they may be "dangerous impostors." Their "reputations" have theoretically been established long ago, and, because they have a potentially more distant connection to the concrete items of the world, may be more likely to go astray from their true meaning. Abstract terms *seem* to signify, but are sometimes vague and imprecise. More importantly, however, abstract terms are "dangerous impostors" because they live "on their reputation" and do not work for their livelihood. Rather, these words must "be made to show how they get their living."

In the plot of *Adam Bede*, Eliot explicitly links abstract terms to people who have an "excellent genealogy" but do not earn their good reputation. Arthur Donnithorne, the youngest heir to family in an aristocratic line, seduces Hetty Sorrel, a young woman whose family are tenants on his land. Squire Donnithorne and Adam Bede are rivals for Hetty's love. Arthur

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[48] Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art" 231.

[49] Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art" 231.

Donnithorne and Adam Bede are set in opposition: the aristocrat and the manual laborer. Eliot draws attention to the different modes for describing the two men. When representing a gentleman, Eliot writes,

> It would be ridiculous to be prying and analytic […] as if one were inquiring into the character of a confidential clerk. We use round, general, gentlemanly epithets about a young man of birth and fortune […] and ladies, with that fine intuition which is the distinguishing attribute of their sex, see at once that he is 'nice.' [50]

Eliot distinguishes the particular type of language one uses to speak about a man like Arthur Donnithorne. Instead of concrete terms, one uses "round," "general" epithets like " 'nice'." In its most overt sense, the term "nice" refers to elegant, refined, and aristocratic; however, Eliot's quotation marks around the word signal her satire. Nice can mean proper and ostentatious; foolish and virtuous; refined and lascivious; ignorant and yet contriving.[51] These definitions, examples of the heritage of a word, show that nice may signify so many things as to perhaps signify nothing. If the word "form," as Eliot's essay noted, was a term that ought to be interrogated because of its vagueness, "nice" is even more questionable. Eliot builds a still finer irony with her use of the term: nice also means precise, particular, and discriminating. Yet, as Arthur Donnithorne's plot unfolds, it becomes apparent that abstract terms like "nice" are in fact anything *but* precise and analytic, and do the very opposite of "prying into character."

Because these abstract terms are unclear, they do not work as they should. Like Arthur Donnithorne himself, they merely rely on the laurels of their respectable history: the "good name" with an "ancient genealogy." Like Arthur Donnithorne himself, the "good name" belies

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[50] Eliot, *AB* 137.

[51] "Nice, adj." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, April 2015)

the nature of the current character. Eliot alludes to the disconnect between Squire Donnithorne's reputation and his actual behavior:

> Whether he would have self-mastery enough to be always as harmless and purely beneficent as his good nature led him to desire, was always a question that no one had yet decided against him: he was but twenty-one, you remember; and we don't inquire too closely into character in the case of a handsome generous young fellow.[52]

Donnithorne's actions will not only lead to the ruin of a young woman but also set off a chain of events that leads to murder. The discrepancy between his "good name" and real character makes him a "dangerous impostor." What Hetty Sorrel and the community of *Adam Bede* fail to discern in their understanding of nice, is the extent of Donnithorne's sexual desire and his poor judgment; two meanings of the word obscured by his "excellent genealogy." This distinction is missed by the "fine intuition" that perceives one meaning of 'nice' yet ignores other potentialities.[53]

Furthermore, the aristocracy is described in abstract generalizations because the terms, like people they signify, do no productive work. While the description of Arthur Donnithorne, in its emphasis on abstraction, runs counter to the expansive nature of elaboration, Eliot's introduction of the butler to the wealthy Donnithornes demonstrates yet a different mode of description. Where the description of Arthur consisted of "round," "gentlemanly epithets," the

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[52] Eliot, *AB* 136.

[53] Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has a similar moment in which Jane is skeptical of the general terms by which we describe a gentleman. Jane expresses a similar frustration when trying to discern the character of Mr. Rochester in anticipation of their meeting. Jane asks Mrs. Fairfax to describe her employer, but finds the terms in which she phrases her description unsatisfactory. "There are people who seem to have no notion of sketching a character, or observing and describing salient points, either in persons or things. Mr. Rochester was Mr. Rochester in her eyes; a gentleman, a landed proprietor, nothing more… [Mrs. Fairfax] evidently wondered at my wish to gain a more definite notion of his identity." Describing Mr. Rochester as "a gentleman" does not provide an idea that is definite or distinct, nor, as we readers get to know Rochester, renders any of his personality. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York and London: Norton & Co. 1987) 92.

description of Mr. Casson, his butler, consists of quite the opposite. Eliot introduces Mr. Casson to the reader by first highlighting the uncommon nature of the object described:

> Mr. Casson's person was by no means of that common type which can be allowed to pass without description. On a front view it appeared to consist principally of two spheres, bearing about the same relation to each other as the earth and the moon: that is to say, the lower sphere might be said, at a rough guess, to be thirteen times larger than the upper which naturally performed the function of a mere satellite and tributary. But here the resemblance ceased, for Mr. Casson's head was not at all a melancholy-looking satellite, nor was it a "spotty globe," as Milton has irreverently called the moon; on the contrary, no head and face could look more sleek and healthy, and its expression—which was chiefly confined to a pair of round and ruddy cheeks, the slight knot and interruptions forming the nose and eyes being scarcely worth mention—was one of jolly contentment, only tempered by that sense of personal dignity which usually made itself felt in his attitude and bearing. This sense of dignity could hardly be considered excessive in a man who had been butler to "the family" for fifteen years, and who, in his present high position, was necessarily very much in contact with his inferiors.[54]

This description of Mr. Casson, like physical properties of the man himself, is of a special type. Eliot begins with an astronomical simile, in which she compares the proportions of Casson's head and body to the measurements of the moon and earth. Eliot's description reads like a caption under a scientific rendering. (Mr. Casson, Figure 1: "On a front view *it* appeared to consist principally of two spheres…the lower sphere might be said, at a rough guess, to be thirteen times larger than the upper…") The geometric specificity renders Casson oddly dehumanized, as if only with further elaboration could one identify this mysterious entity.

Eliot then expands the conceit by layering several other moon metaphors on top of her initial astronomical comparison. Eliot tests the validity of the initial moon metaphor with other lunar figures: Shakespeare's "melancholy-looking satellite" and the "spotty globe" of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. These literary references offer new ways to envision the relationship between Casson's head and body, which, even as described through analogy, is far from clear. While

[54] Eliot, *AB* 19.

these metaphors elaborate on Casson's physical body, they still provide a somewhat vague picture.

Even as these metaphors elaborate on the original vehicle, they undo the initial representation. Casson's head is in fact "not at all a melancholy satellite, nor was it a 'spotty globe,' as Milton has irreverently called the moon." Even as Eliot expands the original description, she simultaneously unravels the original terms of the metaphors, supplying several limitations to the comparison. While elaboration, as we have seen, can delimit the item described by delineating some attributes and eliminating others, Eliot's moon metaphors are introduced merely to be overturned. The metaphors in this instance introduce ideas to show precisely what Mr. Casson's body is not (e.g., "on the contrary, no head and face could look more sleek and healthy").

Eliot's elaboration in this passage seems to suggest something unsettling. Several phrases call into question the reliability of this description even as it draws upon scientific language. The weirdly mathematical specificity of "thirteen times larger than the upper [sphere]" is juxtaposed with phrases that call into question the accuracy or reliability of this description: "*that is to say*, the lower sphere *might be said*, *at a rough guess*, to be thirteen times larger than the upper [sphere]." Considering the description consists of measurements of planetary bodies, the phrase "at a rough guess" strikes one as hardly plausible.

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, this description of Casson's body is simply weird. Casson is difficult to visualize; the description aesthetically seems to falter. For all the lines of text spent on the description of Casson's body and head—in fact, *fifty* words appear before the name of the item is finally given in its simple concreteness—diagrams are drawn, metaphors rise and fall, comparisons posed and rejected, before we simply get the simple

linguistic tag behind it all: head. Casson's head, as ruddy and rotund as it is, is tiny compared to his corpulent body.

Eliot's elaboration of Mr. Casson, I suggest, is deliberately problematic. Like her description of Arthur Donnithorne, Casson's description lacks concrete elements. Casson is, in a sense, a surrogate for Donnithorne himself: a satellite of the master. Toward the end of the above passage, Eliot describes Casson surveying the crowd with a demeanor of "dignity" that reflects his "high position." Casson, through his "dignity" and reluctance to interact with his inferiors, is closely aligned with the aristocratic nature of "the family." As butler to the Donnithornes, Casson is a member of the leisure class and yet outside of it; he performs work, but is not of the working class.

Just as a description without elaboration signaled an ethical problem in the description of Arthur Donnithorne, Eliot's elaboration in the description of Casson signals an ethical problem related to the concept of work. The lack of concrete nouns in the description of Arthur Donnithorne signaled his "rely[ing] a little too much on reputation." Similarly, while the description of Casson *seems* to elaborate, it in fact, like Casson himself, does little work. Several phrases of the description function only as filler, and Eliot repeats phrases like "that is to say" or "might be said." Other parts of her description serve to negate the value of information given earlier in the paragraph or the same sentence: e.g., "was not at all," "nor was it," "on the contrary" and "scarcely worth mention." These phrases seem to elaborate, but have little epistemological function.

Eliot signals the difference between actual work and only *seeming* to work through the terms of her astronomy metaphor: "that is to say, the lower sphere might be said, at a rough guess to be thirteen times larger than the upper, which naturally *performed the function of a mere*

satellite and tributary" (my emphasis).[55] The head on top of a body is, of course, not at all "a mere satellite," and the head (at least one hopes) leads the body. (Although, if a servant is an extension of his employer, perhaps the body leads the head.) Just as the elaboration attempts but does not accomplish epistemological work, instead of stating that the head "functioned as a satellite," Eliot writes that the head merely "*performed* the function." Characters who do no work are associated with words that do no work, and in *Adam Bede*, as in the rest of Eliot's fiction, neither ought not to be trusted.

At one pivotal moment in *Adam Bede,* a moment that perhaps reads more like Thomas Hardy than the subtle hand we will see in *Middlemarch* or *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot steps away—or gives the illusion of stepping away—from the elaborative chemistry at work in her syntax. When Adam's father neglects his work to drink at the pub for the final time, Adam works through the night to finish a coffin due for the next day's funeral. While alone in the workshop, Adam hears a willow branch knocking upon the workshop door. A mysterious rap at the door, Adam recalls, was according to folklore a sign that someone had died. Adam will later realize that it was at this moment that his father had drowned in a brook after falling incoherent from drunkenness. While describing Adam's feelings about the premonition, Eliot hints at a limitation in her regular method: "I tell it as he told it, not attempting to reduce it to its natural elements: in our eagerness to explain impressions, we often lose hold of the sympathy that comprehends them."[56] Eliot explains that Adam has competing thoughts about the rap of the willow branch. He always explained phenomena by their concrete elements and "natural" causes; however, Adam also

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[55] Eliot, *AB* 19.

[56] Eliot, *AB* 56.

"believed in dreams and prognostics."[57] Eliot does not devalue Adam's belief for the reader by "reduc[ing] [the noise] to its natural elements." "Reduction to natural elements" refers to a scientific rather than metaphysical explanation. Yet, reduction to natural elements also corresponds to the chemical process of elaboration.

To "tell it as he told it" signals a narration outside of Eliot's elaborative style. While chemical refinement—the reduction to "natural elements" in their basic state—offers the best explanation of phenomena, Eliot admits that a style less elaborative, and more reliant on instantaneous associations, might give a more immediate access to feeling. Yet, if the elaboration could delay affect, Eliot maintains that elaborative work is nonetheless the best way to produce sympathy. If chemical elaboration produces a substance from individual elements, then the slow presentation of each particular element sets up the conditions for the production of original sympathy. For example, while engaging in the seemingly psychologically debilitating task of creating his father's coffin, Adam Bede remarks,

> "There's nothing but what's bearable as long as a man can work," he said to himself, "the nature of things doesn't change, though it seems as if one's own life was nothing but change. The square o'four is sixteen, and you must lengthen your lever in proportion to your weight, is as true when a man's miserable as when he's happy; and the best o' working is, it gives you a grip hold o' things outside your own lot."[58]

If we apply Adam's statement to the concept of elaboration, the work of elaboration helps one know other minds. To extend the metaphor further: individually, each chemical element, or, the "nature of things," is stable; in combination, elements interact to create a life that is "nothing but

[57] Eliot, *AB* 56.

[58] Eliot, *AB* 126-127.

change." The wording of Adam Bede's statement is strikingly similar to Eliot's well-known statement about the purpose of art in "A Natural History of German Life." Art, Eliot explains, is "a mode of extending contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot."[59] Thus, labor and art are in Eliot's philosophy inextricably linked. Labor, whether in the sentence, the workshop, or the lab—elements which are here synthesized by Eliot's own theory on language—ultimately offers "a grip hold o' things outside your own lot."

At the time she was writing *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot expressed her desire to represent "human beings in such a way as to call forth judgment, pity, and sympathy."[60] But when the reader encounters a word like "peasant," "clergyman," or "widow," associations can act as tropes in the mind. Descriptions that draw on previous associations convey nothing more than that which is already known, and are thus affectively bound. "Appeals founded on generalizations," Eliot explains, "require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity."[61] When drawing from preconceptions, our feelings about others really stem from a history of the self. In contrast, Eliot's innovative use of language, the linguistic equivalent to Adam Bede's labor, paints a "picture of human life" that "surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves."[62]

Eliot claims that language, when at its formal best, is "the object and material of emotion…amplified and elaborated by discrimination of its elements till at last by the abuse of

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[59] Eliot, "Natural History of German Life" 110.

[60] George Eliot to John Blackwood (30 January 1857), *George Eliot, The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Carroll (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971) 54.

[61] Eliot, "A Natural History of German Life" 110.

[62] Eliot, "A Natural History of German Life" 110.

its refinement, preoccupies the room of emotional thinking."[63] In our experience of literature, words become feeling through a process of diligent elaboration. Eliot's style sets up the conditions in which such transmutation is possible. The elements are constantly refined until they finally change phase and fill the mental room as emotion. Language becomes the substance of affect. The reading process transmutes the original elements—a noun, a verb, a substantive, an adjective—into a new substance: the syntax of sympathy.

[63] Eliot, "Notes on Form in Art" 235.

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