

Missing Homes: Poe, Brontë, Dickens and Displacement

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Abstract

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“Missing Homes” examines three nineteenth-century authors whose experiences of displacement from home, professions and / or class influenced their literary innovations. Displacement is not a new theme to scholars of nineteenth-century literature, who have established it as a defining experience of an era characterized by financial crises, industrial development, migration and empire. However, scholarship on displacement has often focused on how novels train readers to manage the experience of displacement and has depicted the emotions like nostalgia that arise from it as potentially compensatory or reconciliatory to the dynamics of capitalism. “Missing Homes” departs from these narratives to explore authors who found displacement anything but manageable or liberating and whose works illustrate a more unstable spectrum of emotional responses to displacement and its dire long-term consequences. Attention to these authors, I argue, offers a parallel theory of nostalgia in which the unsettled longing for a place to call home registers political discontent with the relationship between the individual and the collective rather than reconciles the individual to displacement.

Departing from critics who have focused primarily on the work performed by metaphors and figures of the domestic, “Missing Homes” engages in biographical readings of the lives, economic circumstances and fiction of Edgar Allan Poe, Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens to show how they pursued fantasies of securing homes that could remove them from undesirable personal, economic and political conditions. The failures of these fantasies reveal how conventional narratives describing how individuals might attain security often fail in the face of

collective economic conditions in which attaining objects like a home is both economically challenging and often emotionally unfulfilling. Although the variables of their lives were different, I suggest that these authors' stories of displacement fail to perform therapeutic or intervening work, because the problem of displacement is rooted in material conditions that narrative innovation alone cannot resolve. Instead, readers should derive from these texts and their failures the need for more collective forms of security.

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Dedication

This one's for me.

Preface

In 2008, I left Columbia with an M.Phil. degree and decided to become a lawyer, because (1) it was clear that the odds of me and my spouse finding academic positions in the same geographic area were highly improbable; and (2) this economic reality had made me feel unsure whether literary criticism could progressively intervene in structural problems in the ways I had entered graduate school hoping it might. A decade later, I was in the position of having found a path to material stability but still carrying the emotional burden of desiring a version of the academic career that in many ways no longer existed due to the enormous economic changes that had reshaped the academy since the Great Recession. As it turned out, conversations with friends who had taken a variety of paths made it clear that I was not alone in struggling with feelings of profound displacement as well as the more material frustrations of procuring necessary items like housing that had become very costly in urban centers. Quite a few people of my generation were lacking homes in more senses than one. As these conversations unfolded, I was persuaded that I could build a life that included literary criticism and found my interest in nineteenth-century literature renewed as the current moment of precarity revealed these texts to me in new lights. I needed to write about displacement, and Columbia generously welcomed me back.

I wrote “Missing Homes” with the disadvantages of young children at home, a parent’s unexpected death, remote working conditions, lack of institutional funding and a pandemic that closed libraries and childcare centers. I also wrote with the advantages of secure housing, a tenured spouse and freedom from the anxieties of the academic job market that allowed me to survive these problems and find joy in writing. When I began writing, I wanted to reflect on the unresolved displacement caused by the Great Recession and the trauma it inflicted on my generation of graduate students. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic midway

through my writing process dramatically magnified the experience of displacement and re-centered security on access to a house. In an unexpected way, the moment normalized and validated my own experience of a career interrupted by caregiving and global events, while also underscoring how access to a secure family home remains a crucial, private and thus inadequate form of safety net in today's economy.

Surprisingly, I found a sense of closure to this stage of my journey through academia in the process of writing this dissertation that the authors I study usually did not. However, it was the increased sympathy for and recognition of my experience rather than the ritual of writing that did the most to resolve my feelings of displacement and interrupted potential, even while tragically underscoring the deep structural problems of housing, caregiving, healthcare, gender, race and education in America. I was no longer a failure at balancing family and career, but rather a member of a generation collectively grappling with enormous systemic problems and the challenge of writing new stories because the expectations we were raised with were no longer viable—a challenge very familiar to the authors I study here.

Introduction

Over the past decade, economic changes have caused many would-be academics to seek new professional and geographic homes. Displacement, however, is not new. It haunts the lives and works of many nineteenth-century writers, including Edgar Allan Poe, Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens.¹ Although their place in the canon is secure, their homes and lives were not. While the variables of their stories were different, each experienced displacements from homes, professions or class positions that were caused by the interplay of the crises of capitalism and the insufficiency of their particular family situations to provide emotional and economic safety nets to ease these disruptions. Displacement played out differently in their lives, but collectively they experienced the forced flexibility it occasioned as damaging in material and emotional ways that they imported into their writing.

Displacement, of course, is also not a new theme to scholars of nineteenth-century literature. Many scholars have established dislocation as a defining trauma of a period that included recurring financial crises, the movement of people and capital within nations as well as abroad and forced relocations of enslaved and native peoples, religious minorities, criminals and the poor. In many accounts, however, there has been a strong critical focus on literature's role in managing or resolving the experience of displacement, often through training in structures of emotion that are compensatory if not always satisfying.² Scholarship specifically about the

¹ I am indebted to Sara Murphy for helping me articulate this relationship between the present economic context and the nineteenth-century writers I study.

² For example, Nancy Armstrong and Mary Poovey view nineteenth-century literature and related disciplines as playing pivotal roles in shaping a domestic ideal that helped control the potential unrest arising from the period's political, economic and imperial upheavals. Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 8–9; Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 9. Jeff Nunokawa similarly calls attention to dislocations in *The Afterlife of Property* (1994), which discusses how financial crisis penetrates the fictional home that “never ceases to fail in its mission to shelter its inhabitants. . . .” Jeff Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994),

emotional effects of displacement from home has focused on the evolution of nostalgia, or homesickness, from a physiological disease to a more benign emotion that helps people adjust to capitalism's routine displacements.³ Nicholas Dames, for example, shows how the term nostalgia first emerged in medical literature in the late seventeenth century as a diagnosis for the distressing symptoms of traveling far from home.⁴ As Dames explains, “nostalgia”—“combining the Greek *nostos*, or homecoming, and *algos*, or pain”—emerged in 1688 as a pathological disease in a medical treatise by Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer.⁵ Nostalgia, which often arose in the context of sailors or soldiers separated from home, was described as a longing for home so severe that conditions like melancholy, fever, prostration, loss of appetite or nausea occurred.⁶ Nostalgia was a longing for a literal *place*, and the cure was to physically return home.⁷ This medical understanding of nostalgia persisted through the first few decades of the nineteenth century as nostalgia was gradually recast as a common sentiment or aesthetic more likely to

4. Nunokawa acknowledges the period's dislocations but finds in the novel a source of countervailing stability: specifically, the novel's creation of romantic love for a woman who cannot be alienated, sold or lost in the market. *Ibid.*, 13. Tellingly, his subsequent book even elevates the management of emotions into its title: *Tame Passions of Oscar Wilde: The Styles of Manageable Desire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Other critics have shown how the novel helped Englishmen navigate their own migrations within the British empire. For example, in *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (2008), John Plotz shows how the novel and other forms of portable property had both commercial and sentimental value that helped Englishmen retain a sense of connection to Britain even while abroad. John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1–2. Similarly, Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund demonstrate how the serial form, with its length and interruptions, “harmonized in several respects with capitalist ideology” as it fostered virtues like investment of time and money, perseverance and delayed gratification. Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 4.

³ See generally Linda M. Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition, 1780–1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 1; Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting and British Fiction, 1810–1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 24–25; and Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

⁴ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 28–33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 29; Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition*, 8.

signal successful leave-taking than troubled attachment to home. The transformation of nostalgia, so the story goes, gave people a tool for adjusting to the displacements necessitated by a capitalist economy while also instilling an individualist approach to wealth and security as people learned to leave family, home and past associations behind. As Susan J. Matt puts it in the American context, the story of homesickness shows “how Americans learned to manage their feelings, but beyond that, it reveals how Americans learned habits of individualism that supported capitalist activity. Central to modern individualism is the ability to separate oneself from home and family, to wander in pursuit of happiness, to leave communities (if only to rejoin others)”⁸

More generally, Foucauldian-inspired criticism has emphasized the role of the novel in habituating subjects to modern forms of displacement. For example, in *The Novel and the Police* (1988), D.A. Miller influentially formulates the task of the novel as forming “a subject habituated to psychic displacements, evacuations, reinvestments, in a social order whose totalizing power circulates all the more easily for being pulverized.”⁹ For Miller, the nineteenth century is characterized by displacements. The novel registers these displacements while also habituating readers to a state where dislocation is routine. For Miller and other Foucauldian-inspired critics, however, such habituations to displacement are no signs of political progress. Rather, they are empty satisfactions within systems that are negatively depicted as enclosing, inescapable and alienating. Partly in response to Foucauldian-inspired criticism, other critics have shown an opposing eagerness to dismantle the tools of control by embracing dislocation and contingency as moments that might disrupt, trouble or enable escape from structural forces

⁸ Matt, *Homesickness*, 7.

⁹ D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xiii.

and power dynamics that seem too entrenched or universalizing. As Anna Kornbluh recently puts it, “[T]here remains uniform in so many literary critical practices a code of particularizing and concretizing, of destabilizing norms, disassembling systems, undoing universals—of taking things apart.”¹⁰

However, the economic damage and political turmoil wrought by the Great Recession of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has made the costs of dislocation and contingency painfully clear within the academic community and exposed the flawed assumption Foucauldian critics made about the stability of structures that have since proved too fragile. This precarious moment in history has generated interest in reevaluating the profession’s embrace of the contingent and dislocated over security as well as sparked new critical appreciation of, and arguably even a kind of sentimental nostalgia for, the benefits of flawed but stable institutions. For example, Susan Fraiman’s *Extreme Domesticity: A View from the Margins* (2017) seeks to defend the “desire for domestic continuity and security, all the more so when it arises . . . within histories of danger and dislocation.”¹¹ Anne Kornbluh similarly argues in *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (2019) for “embrac[ing] projects of building” rather than “unsettling” as she points out how we depend for our survival on institutions that have sometimes been targets of literary criticism.¹²

Building on the momentum of scholars like Fraiman and Kornbluh, “Missing Homes” explores a parallel tradition of nineteenth-century, middle-class writing about displacement that does not recuperate nostalgia, romanticize contingency or offer habituation to the dynamics of

¹⁰ Anna Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 1.

¹¹ Susan Fraiman, *Extreme Domesticity: A View from the Margins* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 3, 11.

¹² Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms*, 4.

capitalist individualism. Rather, this tradition unmask the economic privilege and institutional stability on which beliefs that people habituate to displacement have often rested and ambivalently insists on the continued importance of having a literal place to call home to survival. The authors of these texts and the displaced characters they depict rarely achieve sufficient material stability to experience nostalgia as a reconciliatory emotion. As this dissertation will explore and as contemporary books from other fields like Mathew Desmond's *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2016) have illustrated, the negative consequences of displacement are often permanent and dire, as much as we sometimes prefer to believe they are temporary road bumps.¹³ The authors I examine did not habituate to displacement, and their writing illustrates a far more unstable spectrum of responses to it in which potentially conservative envy of the supports family homes can provide co-exists, for example, alongside deep feelings of resentment towards the political and economic systems that make possessing a home so important. Attention to these authors offers a corrective reading of displacement that (1) points to the continued importance of having a stable, material place to call home in order to survive modern displacements and systemic collapses; and (2) examines nostalgia—the emotion that arises in home's absence—as an unsettled, critical expression of the problematic relationship between the individual and the collective that arises when conventional narratives of achieving individual security, such as acquiring a family home, fail in the face of general economic and political conditions.

Although, as Susan Fraiman has observed, the domestic is often simplistically associated with political conservatism,¹⁴ in the texts studied here, nostalgia, or the desire for a place to call

¹³ Mathew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016) (following families in Milwaukee struggling with rent).

¹⁴ Fraiman, *Extreme Domesticity*,

home, is an unsettled emotion that registers deep unease and frustration about the existing political and economic relationships between the individual and the collective. The authors seek and fantasize stable homes in order to find individual liberation from sometimes truly horrific conditions. However, their efforts to procure such homes fail in ways that reveal to readers how such solutions are impossible without intervention in collective conditions. In this way, their pursuit of homes is reminiscent of what affect theorist Lauren Berlant has termed “cruel optimism:” a relationship that “exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.”¹⁵ When the authors here seek houses, they turn to a form of what Berlant calls “good-life fantasies” even though “evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear costs abounds.”¹⁶ The unsettled nostalgia their texts depict registers the gap these authors perceive between the individual fantasies their period offers as consolation—such as the idea that one can leave home in pursuit of mobility and build a new one—and the collective economic-political reality in which these fantasies are often difficult to achieve or emotionally inadequate compensations.

This study centers on three authors—Poe, Brontë and Dickens—whose lives collectively spanned 1809–1870, a period when the medical understanding of homesickness as pathological was receding and the sentimental model of nostalgia was emerging. By the early nineteenth century, housing insecurity and migration (both internally and abroad) were widespread phenomena that had been exacerbated by legal and economic changes. In England, for example, enclosure acts that privatized formerly common land; upper- and middle-class legal devices that

¹⁵ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

increasingly concentrated property in or passed business to an eldest son; and shifts from agricultural to industrial, wage labor resulted in economic disruptions and migration.¹⁷ In 1801, England's population was largely rural, but by 1851 more than half of its population was urban.¹⁸ A counterintuitive consequence of these changes was a baby boom: people married younger because they were earning wages and no longer waiting to inherit land, and mortality rates also declined.¹⁹ A more obvious consequence was raised rents.²⁰ Between 1801 and 1851, England's population nearly doubled, which, explains John Burnett, created an "unprecedented need for accommodation on a building industry which was ill-equipped by experience, organization and technology to meet it."²¹ Not everyone caught in this mass migration found a satisfactory home within England or elsewhere, as evidenced by the period's focus on emigration, empire and the conditions of the working poor. Poe's mother, for example, emigrated from England to America, and Poe's foster father was a Scottish emigrant who returned to England for a period with Poe. Brontë and Dickens also extensively explored emigration as a potential solution to the displacement of people within England.

The authors here were each familiar with forms of displacement or its constant threat. However, they refused to adopt reconciliatory relationships to the homes they were missing despite having the sentimental model of nostalgia culturally available. Instead, they often reintroduced the pathological tradition of homesickness in ways that stubbornly insisted on the

¹⁷ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10, 46–55, 205–217; John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815–1970* (North Pomfret, VT: David & Charles, Inc., 1978), 8.

¹⁸ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, 7.

¹⁹ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 324.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

²¹ Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, 4.

fraught importance of having a literal place to call home in a mobile society without a safety net. Their texts contain unreconciliatory and sometimes violent expressions of nostalgia that expose the gaps between the compensatory desires the characters are socialized to expect, such as the formation of new households to replace homes they have lost, and realities in which achieving such objects is often materially difficult and emotionally unsatisfactory. Poe and Brontë, for example, depict separation from home as giving rise to illness and violent emotions that register the importance of having a family home to achieving their writing goals given, respectively, the dire economic conditions Poe faced in the American literary market and the constraints on earning income imposed by Brontë's gender. Dickens' *David Copperfield* and *Pip* retain rather than forget traumatic memories, writing autobiographies in which the refusal to forget past associations becomes a potentially moral sentiment that criticizes the impulse to leave home in pursuit of mobility.

While the belief that people can routinely overcome displacement is a convenient one from the perspective of those who benefit from mobile labor, the authors in this study insist, sometimes grudgingly, that people cannot be so easily separated from their homes. They and their characters compulsively pursue homes, not to conform to or perpetuate ideological or national agendas but because they desperately need them in order to live beyond subsistence. In their stories, the home sought is usually a combination of a physical house, family and the emotional and economic resources they collectively provide. In fact, stories like Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) indistinguishably entangle houses, patrimony and the families that possess them, reflecting the ways in which family—and especially male heads of household—often controlled the property or positions needed to acquire shelter and employment. Yet as the authors create characters whose struggles to find homes often mirror their own, the characters'

failures to find what they seek cast light on the insufficiency of individual efforts to procure security in the face of generally bad conditions and lead to narrative forms that often derive their interest from the ambivalent oscillation they display between clinging to and rejecting individual narratives of success.

“Missing Homes” performs biographically inflected readings that emphasize the authors’ material circumstances to show how they import their own experiences of displacement into texts in which questions of housing security and property often drive their plots, inform their emotional dynamics and influence their often repetitive, episodic and aborted forms. In treating the home as primarily a material space of potential economic and emotional support rather than a metaphor that performs ideological work, I participate in correcting what I feel is a disciplinary tendency to overstate the political work performed by form and figures surrounding the domestic and understate the importance of economics. In so doing, I build on scholars like Elaine Freedgood and Diana Fuss who have drawn attention to the importance of the home and its contents as material rather than merely symbolic objects.²²

I place Poe, Brontë and Dickens in dialogue because they are particularly strong illustrations of the economic and emotional burdens of displacement and the influence those burdens have had on the creation and deployment of literary forms. Moreover, they were engaged in a common, transnational literary conversation in which they either knew each other or would have known of each other’s work. Dickens, for example, met Poe on a visit to America, and both were critical of the lack of international copyright that encouraged American publishers to pirate British authors rather than pay American ones, hurting Poe’s chances of being published

²² See, e.g., Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006) (exploring how objects in Victorian novels contain histories beyond their merely symbolic relationships to characters); Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them* (New York: Routledge, 2004) (exploring how physical space impacts the act of writing).

in America and Dickens' chances of earning money from international publication of his work.²³ Brontë read Dickens, and some scholars believe that Dickens was inspired by *Jane Eyre* (1847) in creating the heroine of *Bleak House* (1852–1853), Esther Summerson, despite Dickens' protestations that he had not read the novel.²⁴

My initial intention in selecting Poe, Brontë and Dickens rather than even more similarly situated authors was to explore how differences in gender, nationality, politics, financial success and choice of writing form might impact relationships to home and displacement. There were stark differences in their opportunities and trajectories: most obviously, Dickens and Poe often associated securing housing with the rewards or problems of masculine professionalization, while Brontë's gender caused her to approach housing as a basic necessity that might liberate women from the needs to earn a living in undesirable female professions and to dwell in other people's households. Despite the different facts of their lives and the major difference of gender, however, I have been more struck by the similarities in the stories they tell, the judgments they reach and their emotional responses to displacement. Although each author experienced devastating personal hardships, each wrote from a position of enough cultural privilege to understand and resent their inability to achieve outcomes they had been near enough to desire. Poe was downwardly mobile and wanted to write poetry without the need to cater to market conditions. Dickens was upwardly mobile and embraced rather than resented writing for the

²³ See, e.g., Charles Dickens to Jonathan Chapman, New York, 22 February 1842) in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, edited by Jenny Hartley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 96 (discussing his shock and disgust at the American treatment of international copyright); Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1941), 305–306, 390 (discussing Poe and the lack of international copyright); Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 199 (discussing Poe's meeting with Dickens in America).

²⁴ For articles discussing the relationship between *Bleak House*, *Jane Eyre* and/or *Villette*, see Jean Frantz Blackall, "A Suggestive Book for Charlotte Brontë?," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 76, no. 3 (1977): 363–383; Lisa Jadwin, "'Caricatured, not faithfully rendered': *Bleak House* as a Revision of *Jane Eyre*," *Modern Language Studies* 26, no. 2/3 (1996): 111–133.

market, but he felt scarred by childhood experiences of displacement that had precluded him from receiving the education he had hoped. Brontë was well-traveled and well-read for a woman of her period, but she relied on her father to provide her with a home and was excluded by gender from aspects of the market altogether. Surprisingly, however, their different situations, gender and politics often took them to functionally similar feelings of dispossession, insecurity and dissatisfaction with capitalism's distribution of resources. Each author's position, in other words, offered a pathway into interrelated sets of problems. While the chapters untangle how specific differences inflected their experiences, focusing too much on the particularities of their positions risks obscuring the importance to their writing of general conditions that impacted each of them in various ways but led to shared frustrations that could not be resolved simply by tweaking their locations within them.

Each of the authors had ineffectual fathers who could not or would not provide them with sufficient financial support in ways that compromised their prospects: Poe's birth father deserted his family, and, in Poe's debatable opinion, his foster father refused to sufficiently finance his education and career. Dickens' father was arrested for debt, which broke up his childhood home and forced him into factory labor. For Poe and Dickens, the lack of parental support compromised their abilities to pursue the educations and careers they had expected. Brontë's father was a poor clergyman whose position provided his family with housing but who had insufficient income to fully support his daughters, who had few ways of earning enough money to establish homes of their own due to their gender. Brontë felt keenly the limited employment options she and her sisters had to support themselves, which in turn magnified, and arguably distorted, the importance of continuing her relationship to her father and the shelter he provided.

For each writer, the lack of paternal emotional and financial support was constricting and scarring in ways that emphasized the general importance of having such support, whatever other talents and resources one might possess, and especially if one were female. Given this paternal deficiency, it is unsurprising that each author compulsively fantasized about securing an ancestral home or being adopted into a family that could provide the support they were missing. For Poe and Dickens, such fantasies were often entangled with ways of advancing their careers. For Brontë, her gender made securing a stable home through inheritance or marriage a baseline necessity needed to survive and, ideally, have a degree of self-determination and freedom from undesirable forms of female employment. While neither such archetypal fantasies nor their failures are unique to the nineteenth century, for these authors, return to these available fantasies often reflected desires to escape systemic economic conditions whose undesirability had been compounded by their specific personal circumstances. Poe, whose foster father left him placeless by refusing to formally adopt him, sought an alternative home with his paternal aunt and cousin, while tales like “The Fall of the House of Usher” can be read as adoption fantasies in which a narrator seeks a home that might provide the social position and capital needed to enable artistic freedom. Brontë often remained at home to care for the father on whom her shelter depended, and novels like *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853) illustrate how heroines must have a stable family home before they can form a conjugal one or find happy employment: Jane Eyre must recover her relatives at Moor House and receive an inheritance before marrying Rochester. *Villette*’s Polly Home can marry because of the financial security and home her father provides, while homeless Lucy Snowe is ultimately attracted to a suitor who provides her with shelter. Dickens was proud of his work in the literary market and became a financial success, yet he remained so fixated on his childhood dream house, Gad’s Hill Place, that he eventually bought it.

Moreover, novels like *David Copperfield* (1849–1850) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1861) explore the possibility of gaining a missing home through adoption even while ultimately requiring their heroes to work in professions.

The recurring fantasy of securing an ancestral home reflects how these authors understood that individual exertions were often insufficient to achieve—and keep—security when capitalism’s “revulsions”—a nineteenth-century term for a financial downturn that evocatively expressed the intersection of material and emotional horror such crises occasioned²⁵—or personal catastrophes could quickly upend even comfortable situations. Each of these authors repetitively returned to themes of displacement and dispossession, suggesting how unable they felt to resolve the experience in any lasting way. While family homes presented the most obvious source of unearned income and private safety nets, each author was attuned to how family homes could be easily lost or were complicit in maintaining systemic conditions they found frustrating.

Tellingly, each occasionally turned to the theme of house-as-prison—entrapping, yet at other times registering a desperate political desire for someone to provide people with shelter and a kind of safety net, however undesirable it might be. Their fiction reboots various scenarios in which displaced characters seek homes while also registering the ultimate failure of individual and familial resources to provide basic security or liberation from difficult general conditions. Their stories often begin with characters seeking security through individual efforts or family homes only for those characters to begin grasping for shared forms of security—typically still confined to acts of charity or inheritance—as the stories go on. As they fail to find homes, they refuse—or are insufficiently privileged in their landing places to feel—a reconciliatory nostalgia

²⁵ Gavin Jones, “Poor Poe: On the Literature of Revulsion,” *American Literary History* 23, no. 1 (2011), 3.

towards the homes and aspirations they have lost. Instead, they occupy a state of unsettled, permanent non-adjustment to displacement that registers the failure of private supports to provide lasting security and leaves them compulsively searching for alternatives. This unsettled nostalgia does not habituate them to capitalist individualism, but rather becomes the potential basis of complaints about its deficiencies.

Such nostalgia also had formal implications for their writing. While the genres these authors developed are now familiar, at the time their writings were innovative in ways that suggest preexisting genres and expectations of how a life should unfold were often insufficient to navigate the realities they faced. The forms they created struggle to resolve their feelings of unsettlement or provide satisfying replacement expectations, a struggle reflected in texts that are often compulsively repetitive, episodic or marked by narrative impasses where their authors' political visions seem to fail. Writing against critical tendencies to identify the reconciliatory, therapeutic or intervening work that literature can perform, I argue that these texts demonstrate that symbolic, figurative or metaphoric approaches are insufficient to resolve problems rooted in material economic and political conditions. Instead, readers are usually left to search outside the texts' pages for solutions to the frustrations they so well identify.

Chapter One, "Edgar Allan Poe's Magazine-Prison Houses," teases out the critical relationship between homesickness and economic conditions by examining the life and works of an author famous for his violent emotions, fictional houses and poverty. In this chapter, I depart from the overwhelming critical tendency to treat Poe's literary homes metaphorically to explore how his violent horror tales ambivalently replay the fantasy of escaping systemic economic problems by securing an ancestral home that can provide financial independence and creative freedom. Poe's take on this fantasy arose from his debatable but strongly-felt perception of

having been disowned by his wealthy foster father who could have provided—but did not—the social and financial resources that would have enabled him to live comfortably and have creative independence in the face of a brutally depressed literary market. As a consequence of lacking capital, Poe was forced to shift from his preferred genre of poetry to writing tales and nonfiction essays for the market in order to squeak out a precarious livelihood. In this chapter, I show how his repetitive, violent, dead-end tales about homes provide a form for housing the contradictory emotions and political views he experienced while feeling trapped in the situation of being a magazine writer working in an unwanted genre in which he could not seem to make progress: they oscillate between desire for inclusion within the class that controls the terms of literary production and a more radical desire to overthrow it, both of which desires prove to be political and personal dead ends. Collectively, Poe’s violent tales about family houses link unsettled emotions surrounding home to the intersection of personal and general economic conditions and help us understand his brand of horror as a response to the compulsion to pursue a place within a system one also perceives as entrapping. Poe must imagine a more just literary market in which the public fairly compensates literary talent before he can fictionalize a potentially viable personal and political future in a new genre—detective fiction.

Chapter Two, “Charlotte Brontë and the ‘Horrors of Homeless Destitution,’” explores how the housing Brontë had at Haworth Parsonage that was contingent on her father’s position enabled her writing career but also led her to meditate on the problem of housing insecurity for middle-class women who had no means of earning enough to live independently. Using her relationship to her own home as a lens, as well as the violent homesickness she and her sister Emily experienced when leaving it, this chapter reads *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853) as novels that deploy a pathological view of nostalgia similar to that found in eighteenth-century

medical accounts to more fully develop her belief that possession of a house is necessary to female self-determination, even if insufficient to resolve the systemic problems facing women. Violent nostalgia is mobilized in her novels to support political claims that people should not be separated from their homes. Departing from scholars who believe Brontë's heroines merely reproduce the exclusionary norms of middle- or upper-class domesticity or who suggest Brontë explores only individual solutions to public problems, I argue that attention to how housing insecurity drives her life and novels reveals a far more radical imperative to provide women with secure housing. Although Brontë's novels embrace and long for aspects of conventional domesticity, her plotting consistently denies her impoverished heroines that outcome, insisting that such ideals cannot be achieved without material support.

Chapter Three, "Charles Dickens' Disappointing Dream House," turns to an author who less obviously belongs within a counter-tradition of writers who do not adjust to displacement. Unlike Poe and Brontë, Dickens rose from a childhood that entailed factory labor to spectacular financial success through astounding individual exertions. This chapter, however, treats Dickens as an exception who proves the rule. Even after he earned enough money to buy his childhood dream home, he could not fully overcome the emotional scars of displacement, nor the anxiety that individual wealth can be lost. Although influential accounts of the serial novel emphasize how the serial form trains readers in capitalist values and creates a kind of home, this chapter reads *David Copperfield* (1849–1850) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1861) to show how Dickens used the serial form with its expansive structure and frequent pauses to both embrace the capitalist virtues that he needed to succeed professionally and maintain his own household while also criticizing the human costs of mobility, weak attachments to home and a capitalist

system that destroys the strong affective associations between people that might lead to greater collective security.

Canonical authors, of course, are usually not from the most extreme margins. Nor are most literary scholars. While I hope that future iterations of this project include a more diverse range of authors, all of the authors studied here had sufficient privilege and resources to be heard in venues that excluded persons of color and the truly destitute. They were capable of believing they could occupy houses and form families that would provide security, a position that left them substantially better off than enslaved and other more violently displaced peoples. However, their failure to achieve or find consolation in the fantasies of home available to them helps build the case that non-adjustment to displacement is often the norm rather than the exception even for the classes its economic advantages supposedly benefit.

While there is an intuitive appeal in describing the canon as a kind of home for middle-class fantasies, the attention I give to the instability of such fantasies in these texts complicates this equation and helps explain why readers continue to turn to these texts during moments of political instability in which social promises and expectations seem to fail. Both Poe and Brontë have been widely discussed during the 2020 pandemic, for example, by readers drawing parallels between Poe's horror stories and elite responses to coronavirus or humorously positing Jane Eyre-like governesses as solutions to collapsing public school systems.²⁶ The enduring power of these fictions derives less from the stability of the worlds they encode than from the malleable

²⁶ See, e.g., Maya Phillips, "The Rich Can't Hide From a Plague. Just Ask Edgar Allan Poe," *Slate*, March 26, 2020, <https://slate.com/culture/2020/03/edgar-allan-poes-masque-of-the-red-death-is-an-allegory-for-the-age-of-coronavirus.html>; Sarah Montgomery, "Dear Cousin: I Heard You Have Need for a Governess," *McSweeney's*, August 18, 2020, https://www.mcsweeney.net/articles/dear-cousin-i-heard-you-have-need-for-a-governess?fbclid=IwAR2AMH-1WULIZiLkYSRK0Dbqk6vd1oL_mnezkj6N-wJhd720drs8jou7mz.

and portable dynamics they embody of confronting the disconnect between expected stories and harsher realities.

While I cite Fraiman and Kornbluh as examples of scholars with academic affiliations who have critiqued approaches that minimize the importance of stability, it is important to recognize that these themes have long been familiar but sometimes uncredited chimes in the lives of students facing unstable employment, persons of color and persons whose health, personal or economic situations preclude them from even trying to enter a profession that, in the best of times, often requires surviving a series of moves before potentially landing a permanent position. In order to properly credit the wide range of people who directly influenced my thinking and to promote inclusion, I therefore expansively cite persons within and outside of the academy and occasionally draw parallels to the present. While every dissertation strives to intervene in an academic debate, my deeper hope is that this dissertation joins other voices in calling for intervention in the material circumstances that are dramatically limiting participation in and access to scholarship. There is need, I believe, for more literary criticism that (1) calls attention to the intersections between literary forms, their economic contexts and people's lived experiences; and (2) acknowledges and intervenes not merely in symbolic or historical debates but also in the material conditions of scholarship.

Chapter 1: Edgar Allan Poe's Magazine-Prison Houses

"All these and security were within."

— "The Masque of the Red Death"

"Ellison thought to find, and found, exemption from the ordinary cases of humanity . . ."

— "The Landscape-Garden"

When social media users took aim at residents who tried to escape the COVID-19 pandemic by fleeing cities and sequestering themselves in self-sufficient compounds, many turned to a literary source: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842).¹ For these readers, the parallels between the politics of coronavirus and "Masque" were clear: "Masque" is a horror story of a nation in quarantine, which, Jonathan A. Cook argues, was partially inspired by the Asiatic cholera pandemic that hit America in 1832, killing 853 people in Baltimore, where Poe was residing, and causing wealthy residents to flee New York.² Unlike Poe's other horror stories, which typically dive deep into the volatile minds of their first-person, secluded narrators, "Masque" is written in the third person, takes a nation's inequality as its subject and does not hide its economic and political moral.

For those unfamiliar with the tale, "Masque" begins when Prince Prospero summons his courtiers to quarantine in his castle during a plague that has "half depopulated" his country (269).³ Once they arrive, he wields shut the gates so that "the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion" while the "external world could take care of itself" (269). Although the courtiers have

¹ For a piece capturing this media trend, see Maya Phillips, "The Rich Can't Hide From a Plague. Just Ask Edgar Allan Poe," *Slate*, March 26, 2020, <https://slate.com/culture/2020/03/edgar-allan-poes-masque-of-the-red-death-is-an-allegory-for-the-age-of-coronavirus.html>.

² Jonathan A. Cook, "Poe and the Apocalyptic Sublime: 'The Masque of the Red Death,'" *Religion and the Arts* 23 (2019): 492.

³ All parenthetical references to Poe's tales are from Edgar Allan Poe, *Complete Tales & Poems* (Vintage: New York, 1975).

ample reason to question the Prince's leadership—fifty percent of the population is dead—they dismiss suspicions of his sanity through the personal assurances their proximity to him and his power provide: “There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be *sure* that he was not” (271, emphasis original). Flaunting their privileges of touch and access—and denying the risk to themselves and others their mingling might inflict—they conclude the Prince is sane on behalf of everyone dying outside the gates. The narrator describes the impetus behind their wishful thinking with the binary: “All these and security were within. Without was the ‘Red Death’” (269). Insiders, so the Prince's followers promise themselves, will be secure even if outsiders perish. A place in this court will save them from the destruction befalling everyone else.

The narrator presents the fates of the Prince and his courtiers with moral and political clarity that is unusual in Poe's repertoire of unexplained horrors. Defying the reality outside, the Prince hosts a “masked ball of the most unusual magnificence” (269). The ball is held in a fantastical suite of seven chambers that replicate the Prince's insular mindset. Unlike more typical palatial suites that create long, corridor views, his suites are laid out irregularly so that an observer can see only one room at a time, emphasizing how the Prince loses perspective as he journeys further into his enclosure. Predictably, the Red Death shows up at the ball and stalks the Prince and his followers to their deaths. Whether “Masque” is read as the revenge of the contagious masses on the rich or a radical, systemic critique of hoarding property, the functional outcome is similar and the moral obvious: even a palace provides insufficient protection, because no one is secure unless we all are. The horror lies within a system that unevenly distributes resources and access, and escaping the horror requires a change to that system.

“The Masque of the Red Death” can seem like an outlier in Poe’s works, because it is more explicitly political, moralizing and critical of property relations than the psychologically nuanced horror tales for which he is more famous today. However, the fatal fantasy it portrays of finding exemption from horrific general conditions by securing a place within an aristocratic home that confers wealth and position is a pervasive trope within Poe’s more psychological horror tales that has been obscured by critical tendencies to insufficiently examine the economic context in which Poe wrote and to treat his fictional homes primarily as metaphors of the troubled mind or body.⁴ As Terence Whalen argues, the accumulation of Poe criticism celebrating Poe as a romantic and troubled oddity has overlooked the dire economic context that influenced his work.⁵ Scholars like Whalen, Jill Lepore, Gavin Jones and W. H. Burden have recently begun correcting this deficiency, arguing that Poe’s writing should be understood within his economic context, particularly the Panic of 1837 that depressed the literary market and forced Poe from his preferred genre of poetry to magazine tales and nonfiction in order to survive.⁶ This chapter builds on this criticism to identify how many of Poe’s horror tales are structured by

⁴ See, e.g., Maurice Beebe, “The Universe of Roderick Usher,” in *Poe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Regan, 121–133 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), 124–125 (observing how features of the House of Usher and its surroundings correspond to mental states, such as the crack in the house corresponding to Usher’s insanity); Benjamin Fisher, *The Cambridge Introduction to Edgar Allan Poe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77 (arguing that in “Usher” “Poe centers on the house-as-mind symbolism” and that the narrator’s “entry into the Usher mansion is analogous to entering his own interior self”); Dawn Keetley, “Pregnant Women and Envious Men in ‘Morella,’ ‘Berenice,’ ‘Ligeia,’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher,’” *Poe Studies* 38, nos. 1–2 (2005): 9 (considering the house in “Usher” a potential figure of Usher’s “psyche” and the “maternal body”); Richard Wilbur, “The House of Poe,” in *Poe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 117 (generally treating Poe’s tales as characterized by “architectural symbolism”).

⁵ Terence Whalen, “Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy,” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1992), 382–383.

⁶ W.H. Burden, “‘What Was It?’: The Immaterial Self and Nineteenth-Century American Panic,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 61, no. 3 (2015); Jill Lepore, “The Humbug: Edgar Allan Poe and the economy of horror,” *The New Yorker*, April 20, 2009, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/04/27/the-humbug>; Gavin Jones, “Poor Poe: On the Literature of Revulsion,” *American Literary History* 23, no. 1 (2011); Whalen, “Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy.”

fraught searching for a material home that can exempt one from the problems of a depressed literary market controlled by those with capital. As in “Masque,” many of his more psychological tales—including the “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) and “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846)—shakily oscillate between unviable (1) conservative desires to escape economic conditions by finding a material home that confers a place within the aristocratic owner class that controls the terms of literary production; and (2) radical desires to overthrow such capitalist property relations. In these tales, a family home is an economic resource the narrators desperately need even while they deeply resent the systems that condition creative freedom on such capital. Attention to the ambivalence with which Poe’s tales compulsively search for homes helps us understand his particular brand of horror as the unhappy recognition that the object one feels compelled to pursue only further entrenches one in a constraining system. In Poe, horror is the unsettled emotion that arises from the simultaneous inadequacy of and inability to let go of narratives of private escape from general conditions.

From Poe’s perspective, he was unable to complete his education due to his wealthy foster father’s refusal to finance it and thus needed to earn his own way as a writer in a devalued literary marketplace that, in his view, concentrated control of production in the hands of the wealthy but less talented. While Poe dreamed from an early age of distinguishing himself as a romantic poet and eminent public figure, this aristocratic model of success typically required capital and familial support to achieve. As a result of the mismatch between what Poe had been socialized to desire and his lack of financial resources—as well as his stubbornness in pursuing a career as a writer in a literary market that offered little compensation—Poe dealt with constant economic and emotional precarity while ambivalently longing for a home that could provide liberating financial support and emotional stability. While most Poe criticism treats his fictional

houses in metaphorical terms, attention to the intersection of Poe's personal circumstances with the literary market reveals how homes were far more than a metaphor for Poe. The people and property which comprise home were material sources of inherited emotional and financial security that he had expected and resentfully recognized that he needed to live comfortably and have creative freedom within a depressed market. While his education surely would have been sufficient for him to find other means of employment if rising from poverty was his only goal, he desired artistic achievement more than stability and did not hold on to jobs that curtailed his literary independence.

Departing from approaches that treat Poe's texts as either primarily psychoanalytic case studies or as merely reflective of their historical or structural contexts in ways that, as Paul Lewis suggests, risk minimizing their uniqueness,⁷ I follow Poe's own lead in arguing for a social-systemic theory of his literature that understands his horror tales as the nuanced responses of a particularly situated individual to the systemic economic conditions of his time. Writing against the critical tendency to view a work as independent from its author, Poe opined in an essay, "The supposition that the book of an author is a thing apart from the author's self, is, I think, ill-founded. . . . Of such a person we get, from his books, not merely a just, but the most just representation."⁸ At the same time as Poe insisted that books are the products of particular authors, however, he was also keenly aware of how the market could compel authors into unwanted forms of literary labor. In a review of Dickens, he regretfully claimed that "the horrid laws of political economy cannot be evaded even by the inspired."⁹ By focusing on both the

⁷ Paul Lewis, "A 'Wild' and 'Homely Narrative': Resisting Argument in 'The Black Cat,'" *Poe Studies* 35, no. 1–2 (2002), 1.

⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City. No. IV.," *Godey's Lady's Book* 33, August 1846, 74.

⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of New Books," *Graham's Magazine*, May 1841, 249.

personal and systemic aspects of Poe's work, we can see how his horror tales, and fantasies of home in particular, are deeply ambivalent responses to the *interrelated* problems of familial and professional dispossession.

Writing horror tales did not help Poe resolve his familial and professional displacements, as his compulsive need to keep writing them for financial and emotional reasons suggests. Rather, his horror tales refuse to do the work of resolution and reproduce rather than negotiate feelings of being trapped in a combination of personal, aesthetic and systemic dead ends. For Poe, at least part of the horror of his situation was realizing that he could not write his way out of it. His horror tales do not perform the therapeutic, interventionist or financial work he likely hoped they might. Instead, they reflect the failure of literature to do progressive work. His life and texts suggest that resolving feelings of dispossession requires *material* change in the structural dynamics of the economy rather than merely symbolic interventions. Without such change, his horror tales can merely reflect, albeit with great emotional nuance, his present entrapment. This chapter examines the relationship between Poe's familial dispossession and precarious place in the literary market in order to show how tales like "The Fall of the House" and "The Cask of Amontillado" respectively express this dynamic and comment on the inability of literature to resolve or intervene in it. Ending with the Dupin tales, I show how Poe must imagine a more equitable literary market in order to fictionalize a potentially viable way out of his familial and professional dispossession.

Poe did not hesitate to fictionalize the facts of his experience to advantageously shape his image, requiring readers to be skeptical of his self-presentation. When asked to write a biography for his entry in *The Poets and Poetry of America* (1842), for example, he spun a fictitious story

of how he fought for the Greeks and ended up in Russia.¹⁰ He also frequently saw himself as wronged while turning a blind eye towards his own tendencies towards financial mismanagement, misrepresentations, alcoholism, quitting employment and self-pitying manipulation of others. Moreover, many of his existing letters were strategically written with an agenda of raising money, gaining employment or corresponding with persons within the literary market on whom his reputation and livelihood depended, making them incomplete reflections of his worldview. Attempting to piece together how Poe understood his family dynamics and their impact on his place within the literary market, however, is crucial to grasping the personal and systemic contexts that motivated his writing.

Born in 1809 to David and Eliza Poe, Poe was orphaned at age three by his mother's death and his father's desertion.¹¹ He was raised by well-off foster parents, John and Frances Allan of Richmond, Virginia. Frances Allan, whose idea it was to foster Poe, died prematurely at age forty-four. John Allan, who was less emotionally invested in Poe, was an industrious Scottish immigrant who abhorred financial dependence on others. He was a partner in the House of Ellis and Allan, a prosperous firm that facilitated the exchange of tobacco for consumer goods nationally and abroad. The Allans never formally adopted Poe, however, leaving him uncertain of his contingent status in their family. The consequence of this omission on Poe's trajectory is hard to overstate. While they gave Poe the name "Allan" and treated him like a son, their decision not to formally adopt him meant that he was socialized into genteel society and its aspirations while having no legal claim to John Allan's property or ongoing support.

¹⁰ [Edgar Allan Poe], "Edgar A. Poe," in *The Poets and Poetry of America: With an Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed., ed. Rufus W. Griswold (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1842), 387.

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, I draw facts about Poe's life from Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991).

In his early years with the Allans, Poe had a privileged upbringing, including attending schools in and around London when the Allans moved abroad for business. However, Poe's childhood soon became a lesson in the insufficiency of financial self-reliance and the corresponding importance of having family wealth to survive catastrophes when capitalism's revulsions could disrupt even seemingly stable situations. In 1819, the tobacco market collapsed, and the House of Allan and Ellis fell with it. Poe returned with the Allans to Richmond, where he attended school and John Allan struggled to pay his firm's debts. The Allans moved houses several times until they were finally rescued by that most literary form of bailout: the rich uncle. Although Allan disliked financial dependency on others, his uncle William Galt bought his firm's assets, kept him as a partner and provided him with a house in which to live. Then, on March 26, 1825, William Galt died, leaving Allan a massive inheritance that made him one of the wealthiest men in Virginia. Freed from his financial problems, Allan promptly bought a mansion called Moldavia.

In future years, Allan would refuse to extend the same kind of financial generosity to Poe that he had received from Galt. He bequeathed Poe nothing in his will, despite leaving behind an estate that included extensive plantations and eight houses in Richmond. Poe's writings and life suggest that he never forgot that Allan had been rescued by family connections and wealth, no matter how much he believed in financial self-reliance. Throughout his career, Poe would resentfully perceive the hypocrisy in men like Allan who touted financial self-reliance—and insisted on it for Poe—while their own position was largely due to unacknowledged dependence on wealth, family and slavery. Poe, who excelled academically and athletically, was a believer in merit and individual effort. However, he would come to resent the structural conditions in which

he was forced to bend to people whose minds he deemed inferior simply because their capital controlled the literary market.

While John Allan overcame a financial crisis through assistance and inheritance, Poe soon found himself in a life of perpetual destitution, addiction and magazine writing that was a far cry from the gentlemanly existence he had expected as Allan's "son." In 1826, Allan sent Poe, aged seventeen, to Thomas Jefferson's recently-built University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Poe badly wanted to attend college, which he deemed necessary to attain "eminence in public life."¹² Although he excelled academically during his first year, he also racked up debts. In a retrospective letter, Poe blamed Allan, saying "it was wholly and entirely your own mistaken parsimony that caused all the difficulties in which I was involved while at Charlottesville [*sic*]."¹³ He claimed that Allan had sent him to the university with too little money to cover his expenses: he had given Poe \$110 when the lowest estimated cost of attendance was \$350 per year.¹⁴ As a result, Poe wrote that he was "regarded in the light of a beggar" and forced to pay for things like books and laundry on credit.¹⁵ He claimed that he turned to gambling to find friends and pay his debts.

Poe's account is probably unfairly lopsided. Silverman observes that gambling was widespread among the university's students and that Poe did not only buy strict necessities,

¹² Edgar Allan Poe to John Allan, Richmond, [19 March 1827], in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, edited by John Ward Ostrom and revised by Burton R. Pollin and Jeffrey A. Savoye. 3rd ed. (New York: The Gordian Press, 2008), 10.

¹³ Edgar Allan Poe to John Allan, West Point, 3 January 1831, in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, 59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 59–60.

which suggests his own financial stewardship was also partly to blame.¹⁶ Yet even if Poe acquired debt to engage in the genteel pursuits of his peers, he was perhaps not wholly unreasonable in doing so when his foster father was one the most important figures in Virginia and his earlier days with the Allans had so clearly illustrated the importance to his career of having wealthy connections. Poe seemed to grasp that, then as now, much of the value in attending a university was associating with peers who could further his prospects. Connections and money mattered, however much Allan was committed to austerity and self-reliance (at least for persons other than himself). Or, perhaps, Poe was simply young, inexperienced with living on his own and had badly miscalculated in assuming that Allan intended to support him like a son of Virginia's aristocracy. In any event, John Allan refused to pay Poe's debts and send him back to the university. In Richmond, Poe was hounded by creditors and threatened with jail. The result was that Poe quarreled with Allan and moved out of Moldavia. He later accused Allan of supplying an insufficient education; withholding reasonable assistance at finding employment; and lacking affection for him.¹⁷ This incident set a pattern in which, fairly or not, Poe would view his dispossession from home and the emotional and financial support it could have provided as contributing to professional and class dispossession as well.

After a stint in Boston and periodic reconciliations with Allan, from whom he continued to need money, Poe joined the army and later attended West Point. During this period, his letters show a growing realization and frustration that the genteel pursuits and station to which he aspired typically required outside financial support no matter how much effort he applied. In a

¹⁶ Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 33–34.

¹⁷ Edgar Allan Poe to John Allan, West Point, 3 January 1831, in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, 59–61.

retrospective letter to John Allan, he emphasizes that he had “*earned*, myself, by the most humiliating privations—a Cadets’ warrant which you could have obtained at any time for asking,”¹⁸ implying that he could excel and be financially independent yet resenting the fact that he felt forced to be. His resentment was likely heightened by the fact that other cadets usually received supplemental family support.¹⁹ His claim to independence was not wholly truthful: Poe had risen in the army, but Allan had provided a testimonial for his application to West Point and some money while his application was pending. However, Poe’s statement reflects how he felt unusual among his peers in being forced to be substantially independent—and, in his mind, humiliatingly declassed—while also needing to prove his merit to a mistrusting Allan, whose connections and financial support he needed. Letters written to Allan around this time emphasize Poe’s financial and emotional precarity as he alternates between begging money for clothes and rent with attempts to impress Allan through his excellent academic standing.

Allan, however, had little interest in having his foster son back in his life. He had remarried following Frances Allan’s death and sent Poe a letter requesting no further communication. In response, Poe announced that he would quit West Point.²⁰ Specifically, he said that Allan had not provided sufficient money for him to attend and, comparing the situation to Charlottesville, claimed that the resulting poverty and ill-health was making his life there impossible.²¹ In other words, a successful military career assumed outside financial support in

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61 (emphasis original).

¹⁹ Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* [1941] (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 173.

²⁰ Edgar Allan Poe to John Allan, West Point, 3 January 1831, in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, 61–62.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

addition to his own exertions. His future, he explained, “[M]ust be passed in indigence and sickness. I have no energy left, nor health.”²² Quitting required Allan’s permission. It did not come, so Poe neglected his classes and thereby succeeded in being discharged by court martial in 1831.

Separation from Allan enabled Poe to seriously pursue the literary career to which he aspired. Poe had, in fact, continued writing poetry during his time at West Point and had even persuaded enough cadets to help cover the costs of printing a volume of his work. Ominously, and in a manner that would foreshadow Poe’s forced move from poetry to prose, the cadets who funded his work were disappointed by it: they had expected something different from the high-brow poetry it turned out to contain, such as the satires that had made Poe popular with them. However, the general conditions of the literary marketplace made it nearly impossible for Poe to make a comfortable living or achieve a position of creative freedom without capital, which fed his resentment of his personal circumstances when he considered the financial support Allan could have easily provided. The Panic of 1837 touched off a recession that depressed America’s literary marketplace and reshaped its offerings. Terence Whalen notes that the price of books dropped dramatically, the market was oversaturated and that Poe himself was forced to announce that a magazine he edited could no longer pay contributors.²³ Poe also felt that the lack of international copyright protection discouraged American writers from attempting novels, because it was cheaper for publishers to pirate international works.²⁴ Although Poe’s own inclination was to poetry, he concluded that poetry was unmarketable in America and rapidly shifted his post-

²² Ibid., 61.

²³ Whalen, “Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy,” 393, 395–396.

²⁴ [Edgar Allan Poe], “Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House,” *Broadway Journal*, 1, no. 7 (1845):103.

Panic output from poetry to magazine work.²⁵ In an 1842 letter, he laments: “The truth is that the higher order of poetry is, and always will be, in this country, unsaleable; but even were it otherwise, the present state of the Copy-Right Laws will not warrant any publisher, in *purchasing* an American book. The only condition, I am afraid, upon which the poem can be printed, is that you print at your own expense.”²⁶ His decision to write the magazine tales for which he is often celebrated today was thus ironically a calculated response to the shifting literary market as well as a resented dispossession from his preferred genre.

Despite Poe’s attempt to meet market demands, his works achieved more popularity than profit. In the depressed literary market, publications such as *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1839) and “The Raven” (1845) did not earn money. His poverty—and resentment of it—is hard to overstate. One house he lived in at Philadelphia was only half-built. Another was described as a lean-to against an adjacent building. His friends took out newspaper ads calling on the public to save him and his family from starvation and disease. To prospective editors, he admitted lacking the funds to read the journals in which he sought to be published: “Please reply by letter as I have few opportunities of seeing your Magazine. / P. S. I am poor.”²⁷ Pointing to the cascading consequences of destitution, he excused himself to his friend, James Lowell, writing, “A host of small troubles growing from the *one* trouble of poverty . . . have hitherto prevented me from thanking you. . . .”²⁸ Poe became stuck in a cycle of poverty that had dire consequences

²⁵ Whalen, “Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy,” 385–386.

²⁶ Edgar Allan Poe to Thomas H. Chivers, Philadelphia, 27 September 1842, in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, 363 (emphasis original).

²⁷ Edgar Allan Poe to Joseph T. And Edwin Buckingham, Baltimore, 4 May 1833, in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, 77.

²⁸ Edgar Allan Poe to James R. Lowell, New York, 28 October 1844, in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, 462 (emphasis original).

to his health and family but also limited his possibilities for literary production and professional advancement.

Poe bluntly recognized that his poverty and forced shift from poetry were products of *both* the systemic problems that plagued the literary marketplace *and* the personal circumstance of lacking the capital and social position that could have helped him avoid the brutality of the market. Poe served several brief stints as an employee-editor, yet seemed content to resign or be fired from these positions because they neither helped him amass the capital needed to own a journal himself nor permitted him creative control. Writing about his time at the *Southern Messenger*, he describes his realization that being an employee was a creative and financial dead end: “I had no proprietary interest in it, and my movements were therefore much impeded[.] The situation was disagree[a]ble to me in every respect. The drudgery was excessive; the salary was contemptible. In fact I soon found that whatever reputation I might personally gain, this reputation would be all. I stood no chance of bettering my pecuniary condition”²⁹ If his stories are filled with hunts for treasure, like in “The Gold-Bug” (1843), or quests for ancestral homes, it is likely in part because he realized how difficult it was to earn a living or advance to an ownership position without preexisting wealth or position. In one letter, for example, he explained that what he needed most to found his own journal was “*caste*.”³⁰ “I need the countenance of those who stand well not less in the social than in the literary world,” he explained.³¹ He also experienced working for journal owners who controlled capital but lacked

²⁹ Edgar Allan Poe to William Poe, Philadelphia, 14 August 1840, in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, 236.

³⁰ Edgar Allan Poe to Robert T. Conrad, Philadelphia, 22 January 1841, in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, 260 (emphasis original).

³¹ *Ibid*.

his talents as a painful curtailing of his art. “So far I have not only labored solely for the benefit of others (receiving for myself a miserable pittance) but have been forced to model my thoughts at the will of men whose imbecility was evident to all but themselves,” Poe wrote in a letter explaining that he was attempting to establish a literary journal so as to be independent “in respect to my literary opinions and conduct.”³²

Poe increasingly understood his precarious professional situation within magazines and the literary market as a kind of industrial prison in which he worked with no realistic means of advancement and was forced to write for the market. In his biting-titled essay “Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House” (1845), he describes the generic fate of a “young author, struggling with Despair itself in the shape of a ghastly poverty” who starves himself and his family in order to write an article for which he is promised to “be handsomely paid,” only to have the magazine defer payment so long that he in fact dies of starvation.³³ Yet even in this essay, which implicitly accuses magazines of killing their writers, he checked his criticism with the recognition that magazines were not wholly to blame for the public’s lack of financial support for the arts.³⁴ Poe would attempt to find ways out of his predicament by alternatively attempting to belong to the ownership class and, in other moments, imagining its destruction. For example, he attempted to enhance both his earnings and his freedom by establishing his own journals, but he never had sufficient money to succeed. As he began to realize the financial impossibility of becoming a magazine owner himself, Terence Whalen shows how Poe looked towards more revolutionary

³² Ibid.

³³ Edgar Allan Poe, “Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House,” *Broadway Journal* 1, no. 7 (February 1845), 104.

³⁴ Ibid., 103–104.

means of breaking out of his entrapment.³⁵ For example, in the 1845 essay “Anastatic Printing,” Poe speculated how new printing technology would allow the circulation of literary works that were valuable but currently unsaleable and that “[t]he wealthy gentleman of elegant leisure will lose the vantage-ground now afforded him, and will be forced to tilt on terms of equality with the poor devil author.”³⁶ Poe likened the liberating effects of technology on the literary market to a political revolution that would usher in an age of meritocracy: “At present the literary world is a species of anomalous Congress, in which the majority of members are constrained to listen in silence while all the eloquence proceeds from a privileged few. In the new regime, the humblest will speak as often and freely as the most exalted, and will be sure of receiving just that amount of attention which the intrinsic merit of their speeches may deserve.”³⁷ Although Poe is often associated with aristocratic politics and yearnings, this essay and his tales suggest that he held a less stable set of beliefs: he was at times promiscuously willing to embrace any politics that would facilitate his literary endeavors.

Recognizing the collective problems behind the financial state of the literary market and the impossibility of his situation did not prevent him, however, from imagining how things could have been different for him personally if he had familial financial support. He continually fantasized the possibility of being saved from the system by recovering the kind of ancestral home Allan could have provided, yet he also resented and devalued writers whose capital conferred on them influence and ease. For example, he began a review of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who represented what he might have become with Allan’s help, with the question of

³⁵ Whalen, “Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy,” 397.

³⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, “Anastatic Printing,” *Broadway Journal* 1, no. 15 (1845): 230.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

whether Longfellow could have attained his success “without the adventitious influence of his social position as Professor of Modern Languages and Belles Lettres at HARVARD, and an access of this influence by marriage with an heiress. . . .”³⁸ While Poe never could find a stable perch or extraction from the problems of the literary market, that didn’t prevent him from searching for one in his fiction, much of which repeatedly replays with emotional nuance the frustration of characters seeking a means of escaping their personal-systemic problems, often through the pursuit of homes that confer capital and position but also reinforce a failing system.

The magazine tales Poe was forced to write, and particularly his horror stories, became formal vehicles in which he could explore the collision of his familial situation, market conditions and aspirations and turn unresolved feelings of resentment, dispossession and desire into popular horror. Poe, as he explained in “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), believed that literature must be consumable in a single sitting in order to sustain intense emotion.³⁹ Given this viewpoint, the short tale that abruptly foreclosed further narrative development through an unexplained, horrifying ending was both supremely suited to exploring displacement as generating an intense, unresolved emotions and dire outcomes, while it also formally replicated the entrapment and political impasse he felt within a personal and professional situation that seemed to offer no viable path forward. Layering his short tales with puns and unexplained mysteries, he invited tunnel-like reading in which the exhilaration of uncovering deeper and deeper meanings is entwined with the claustrophobia of ultimately being trapped within the tale. While his horror tales chart the emotions of dispossession with nuance, they fail to resolve them

³⁸ [Edgar Allan Poe], “Longfellow’s Poems,” *Aristidean*, April 1845, 130.

³⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, “The Philosophy of Composition,” *Graham’s Magazine* 28, no. 4 (1846), 163–164.

because they emerge from a collision of personal and systemic conditions that require a material rather than merely symbolic change in dynamic in order to escape them.

“The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) is usually analyzed for its characters’ sexual desires, madness or medical history. However, scholarship has curiously overlooked how the narrator is less interested in Roderick or Madeline Usher than in possessing and describing their titular house. Read through the interrelation of Poe’s familial and professional insecurity, we can see how the House of Usher is not merely a metaphor for the diseased mind or body, as it is usually treated,⁴⁰ but rather a material object the narrator ambivalently covets and the pursuit of which drives the plot. “The Fall of the House Usher” (1839), which Poe published while editor of *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine*, a periodical that offered literature in addition to an emphasis on genteel sporting life, is a prime example of how writing in a genre that he found constraining, and for an audience he both envied and resented, allowed Poe to articulate and ambivalently reflect on his recurring fantasies of liberating himself from precarity and the constraints of the literary market through acquisition of a family home that provides capital and position or, alternatively, overthrowing aristocratic control of literature. “Usher” is the story of a tale-writing narrator who seeks to usurp or be adopted into a house that materially confers status and allows one to become, like Roderick Usher, a poet and patron of the arts rather than a beggar for support. At the same time, Poe uses syntax and puns to register the narrator’s awareness of the personal and political deadness of his desire to seek a place within a house that represents an exclusionary and hereditary legacy. To occupy the House of Usher is to purchase a place at the cost of the disease and lack of futurity entailed with it.

⁴⁰ See note 4.

At the level of plot, “Usher” tells the story of a narrator who visits the House of Usher in order to visit his friend, Roderick Usher. While there, Usher informs him that his sister, Madeline, has died from illness, and they temporarily inter her within a vault. Madeline, however, is not dead. She emerges from her coffin and takes her brother and his house crashing down with her in a lethal embrace as the narrator escapes from the family and the mansion. Yet however eager the narrator is to escape the house at the end, from the tale’s opening sentence, we find the much more mundane story of a narrator in search of a house: “During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been *passing alone*, on horseback, through a *singularly* dreary tract of country, and at length *found myself*, as the *shades* of the evening drew on, within view of the *melancholy* House of Usher” (231, emphasis mine). Like many Poe narrators, this one is alone, a state echoed in the singularity of the dreary landscape he describes. He wanders through a terrain whose deadness and melancholy sense of loss is reinforced by his punning use of the terms “passing” and “shades.” Although in a threatening world, he survives and “finds himself” as he moves steadily towards the melancholy house, an ambivalent equation of homecoming with survival and potential self-realization.

Purportedly, the narrator is traveling at the urgent request of his “intimate” boyhood friend, Roderick Usher (232). Everything he says, however, suggests that the journey is in fact his own idea—an idea intended to meet his needs more than comfort Usher. Looking at the house, he remarks, “[I]n this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks” (232). *Proposed to myself*. His wording implies that he has invited himself for an open-ended stay, while his emphasis is on dwelling in the mansion rather than staying with his friend. The narrator claims that Usher sent him a letter of “wildly importunate nature” that “admitted of

no other than a personal reply” and allowed “no room for hesitation” due to the “apparent *heart*” that had gone into it (232, emphasis original). We learn, however, that the narrator has not seen Usher in years, “really knew little of my friend” and had in the past found him excessively reserved (232). Nothing about their prior relationship suggests an obligation to respond to the letter with a strenuous journey and prolonged stay, nor does it imply any deep attachment to Usher.

Underneath the narrator’s superficial explanation for his journey, his house-evoking expressions of “admit” and “room” point to a deeper motive that is suggested by what he does remember about Usher: that he comes from an ancient, wealthy, artistic and dying family. After explaining how little he knows Usher, he continues, “I was aware, however, that his very *ancient* family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through *long ages*, in many works of exalted art, and manifested, of late, in *repeated* deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charity” (232, emphasis mine). The Usher family is everything Poe wished characterized his own household. They are secure, ancient landholders and patrons of the arts rather than artists forced to plead for money. Poe even smuggles his own poetry into their household by having Usher recite mid-tale his poem, “The Haunted Palace” (first published by Poe separately in 1839), a move that enviably aligns the Usher family with the possession of poetry and resentfully reinforces Poe’s sense of artistic superiority to the patron class. Most importantly, the Ushers are heirless. The narrator continues—and here reaches the point:

I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain. It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people . . . it was this deficiency,

perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the “House of Usher”—and appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the mansion. (232)

It was this deficiency, I considered What the narrator finds so attractive about the Ushers is that they need someone to inherit their estate. Better yet, it is an estate in which the family is inseparable from its home: the people reflect the character of the house, and the patrimony is passed with the family name. While the merged term “House of Usher” is used by the peasantry, it is a term the narrator uses too, uncomfortably implying and denying that he shares their displaced social status. From the perspective of someone familiar with the dire consequences of not having a place to call home—and of receiving a family name without family property—the appeal of being inseparable from one’s house is obvious. A house that imprisons is one that cannot kick you out. The House of Usher is an entrapping web, but that is part of its ambivalent appeal: “Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves,” he writes (233). Covered in fungi, or mold, an allusion also lingers underneath to John Allan’s *Moldavia*—the house Poe was never adopted into.

When the narrator arrives at the House of Usher, however, he is disappointed to find that he is seeking a place within a home that offers no nurturing vision of futurity. While it may offer a place and patrimony, it is lacking in the emotional aspects of home and is physically in decline. Standing in view of the mansion, he is horribly disappointed by its emptiness and decay. The narrator writes, “I looked upon the scene before me—upon the *mere house*, and the *simple* landscape features of the domain—upon the *bleak* walls—upon the *vacant eye-like* widows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white *trunks* of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-

dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous *dropping off of the veil*” (231, emphasis mine). The mansion he fantasized does not live up to the house he finds. There is no heart—as he thought he saw in Usher’s letter—in this home. In fact, it is not a home but a “mere house” with “bleak walls” and “simple landscape.” Rather than being occupied by a family who might provide mirroring kindness, the windows remind him of vacant, oedipally-gouged eyes, while the trees are castrated, decayed trunks rather than stems ready to generate an heir. The narrator bitterly compares his discovery to the loss of a cherished fantasy. Comparing his shock to the “dropping off of a veil,” he tellingly treats himself like a bridegroom who has discovered that he does not like the house to which he wants to belong.

Unhappy with his discovery, he engages in the “childish experiment” (232) of remodeling the house by inverting its image in a nearby tarn, implying how much he still views himself as a child searching for a home: “It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to *modify*, or perhaps to *annihilate* its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a *black and lurid* tarn that lay in *unruffled lustre* by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the *remodelled* and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant *and eye-like* windows” (231, emphasis mine). The tarn he looks into is black, lurid and unruffled, suggesting a criminality and transgressive sexuality that lurks within him as he tries to possess and remodel a house that is not his own. What he sees in the tarn of his desires is ghastly but also thrilling. He reshapes the trunks into more fertile “stems” and subtly modifies the windows so that they are now “vacant *and eye-like*,” providing both an empty place in the house for him to occupy and inhabitants to ambiguously watch over him. Yet although he remodels the house, he cannot

escape the awareness that the house and his desires are manifestly flawed. Indeed, he notices a fissure in the house's wall, suggesting that the foundation on which the house and his desires are built is faulty (233). He is stuck merely rearranging the specifics of a situation that is irredeemably flawed. If he cannot remodel the house to please himself, then he will "annihilate" its capacity to bring him sorrow—as he does at the end of the story by outliving its collapse.

As the narrator-usurper enters the house, he makes himself at home. The tapestries, floors and armorial trophies "were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy—while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this . . . ," he writes, establishing a kind of sonship and ownership as he compares the house to the scenes of his childhood (233). When he first encounters Roderick Usher, he is initially stunned at his alteration since their boyhood, exclaiming, "Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood" (234). While his response describes a man who is sick, the narrator is also eager to deny the passage of time and his own age, expressing shock at how Usher has changed in "so brief a period" when in fact we know it has been "many years" since he last saw Usher (232). He conveniently allows Usher to seem old (and in need of an heir), while he himself remains young.

Although the narrator calls Usher a "hypochondriac" (237), Susan Scheckel observes that Usher's underlying disease arises from a strong sense of loss and nostalgia.⁴¹ Usher self-diagnoses his illness as "a constitutional and a family evil," suggesting that his affliction is partially linked to an insufficient home (235). Usher's nostalgia arises in part from the physical deficiency of his decaying home and in part from more emotional sources of loss, positioning

⁴¹ Susan Scheckel, "Home-Sickness, Nostalgia, and Therapeutic Narrative in Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher,'" *Poe Studies* 50 (2017): 16.

him intriguingly between the eighteenth-century understanding of nostalgia as a disease arising from separation from a literal place and the more expansive, modern understanding of nostalgia as reflective of psychological and temporal losses. Specifically, Usher believes in the sentience of vegetable things, with an “*abandon* of his persuasion” that the narrator cannot express, and claims that the physical house exerts a negative influence over his family’s destinies (239, emphasis original). His diseased house literally translates into a diseased family, underscoring how a family’s health is entwined with the state of its housing. On a psychological level, however, Usher’s merger of his mind and body with his physical house is a fatal defense against the abandonment he fears from his sister’s death. “‘Her decease,’ he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, ‘would leave him (him, the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of Ushers’” (236). Usher’s loss and fragility in part reflects the emotional problem of being the last member of his family and thus also of a way of life for the surrounding community.

The narrator and Roderick Usher’s collaboration in entombing alive Usher’s sister, Madeline, can be read as springing from their differing fears of impending dispossession. The narrator’s participation is a means of ridding himself of a rival heir to the house, while Usher’s premature actions suggest a preemptive eagerness to abandon (and securely preserve) his sister before she leaves him. Madeline Usher has been read as everything from a romantic rival to the narrator’s homoerotic interest in Usher to a pregnant woman. However, it is unnecessary to assign an exact interpretation of her sexual status to recognize that, for the narrator, she and any potential offspring would be threatening rivals to his designs on the house. The narrator’s hostility towards her is fully displayed in the single glimpse he sees of her upon his arrival. As Usher speaks to him, “the lady Madeline (for so she *was* called) *passed* through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared” (236, emphasis mine).

Madeline is aloof and unreachable in her “remote” apartment and fails to acknowledge his presence—decidedly unmaternal actions likely to disappoint a narrator who craves security, attention and welcome into the home. As Cynthia S. Jordan observes, the narrator’s use of language “exclude[s] her from the text.”⁴² He kills her with words before actually assisting to bury her: he speaks of her name in the past tense and punningly discusses her passing and disappearance. Perhaps not coincidentally, he learns that she succumbs to her malady on the evening of his arrival and permanently retreats to bed (236). Whether or not the narrator actually helps hasten her death, there is ample wish fulfillment as he learns that his only living glimpse of her will “probably be the last” (236) and she disappears into the walls of the house.

His rival dispatched, the narrator is free to develop a closer tie to Roderick Usher and to instill himself as a necessary part of the house. “I shall ever *bear* about me a memory of the many solemn hours I thus spent *alone* with the *master of the House of Usher*,” he writes (236, emphasis mine). As critics like Paul Christian Jones and Benjamin Fisher have noted, there is an erotic element to the relationship he seeks to establish with Usher as he emphasizes their intimate time spent alone and evokes pregnancy in his punning use of “bear.”⁴³ His desire for exclusive intimacy is re-echoed when the narrator describes how he “personally aided” Usher in bringing his sister to the vault for temporary burial, writing, “The body having been encoffined, *we two alone bore it* to its rest” (240, emphasis mine). However, the narrator’s attraction is less to Roderick personally than it is to the title by which he calls him—*master of the House of Usher*—and to the state of living apart from general conditions. Indeed, the narrator spills a great deal of

⁴² Cynthia S. Jordan, *Second Stories: The Politics of Language, Form, and Gender in Early American Fictions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 141.

⁴³ Fisher, *The Cambridge Introduction to Edgar Allan Poe*, 81 (speculating that the narrator and Usher may “retreat” from heterosexuality); Paul Christian Jones, “Resisting Reproduction in Edgar Allan Poe’s Family Fictions,” *Studies in American Fiction* 45, no. 2 (2018): 165–189, 181 (concurring with critics who find a homoerotic impulse).

ink describing the details of the house, discussing, for instance, the history of the smothering vault in which they enclose Madeline and the details of its floors and iron door (240). He even notes that his bedroom is directly above the vault in which they place Madeline, a detail that reveals both his interest in the house's architecture and his desire to displace her (240).

As the narrator's intimacy with Usher grows, however, so does his dissatisfaction with Usher, his house and the sense of restoration he might find there. "And thus," he writes, "as a closer and still closer intimacy *admitted* me more unreservedly into the *recesses* of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe in one unceasing radiation of gloom" (236, emphasis mine). The narrator describes his growing closeness in the architectural terms of admissions and recesses, again emphasizing how intimacy with Usher represents for him a means to a house. As he ventures into the remote corners of Usher's soul, however, he is "bitter" at finding that the master of the house is irredeemably unhappy. Usher's feelings undercut the hope that the narrator might find security and happiness merely through possession of the house, which is anything but stable. The narrator is particularly struck by the verses Usher recites to the "Haunted Palace," which, as many have noted, draw an explicit metaphor between an unsound mind and body and a crumbling palace.⁴⁴ Taken at face value, the metaphor reinforces the idea that people's health is connected to the state of their housing. The poem hints at how an (unspecified) loss can permanently destroy both the mind and the house, detailing how "evil things, in robes of sorrow, / Assailed the monarch's high estate" until "round about his home, the glory / That blushed and bloomed / Is but a dim-remembered story / Of the old time entombed" (238). In response to loss, home becomes entombed in the past

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Richard Wilbur, "The House of Poe," 104.

and remembered only through stories. The house embodies rather than cures nostalgia. However much the narrator seeks a home that provides place and position, Usher is a warning that possession of his house provides only the most fatal kind of security. As the verses to the “Haunted Palace” suggest, even the aspiration towards poetic glories associated with Usher’s house is potentially outdated: the poetic glory of the Haunted Palace is now entombed in story, just as Poe’s own poem is buried within a tale.

While possessing the House of Usher seems unlikely to bring the narrator satisfaction, equally troubling is that the emotional aspects of nostalgia embodied by Usher are incurable. In her discussion of “Usher” and homesickness, Susan Sheckel notes how doctors like Philippe Pinel popularized moral cures for illnesses that emphasized the value of therapeutic conversation.⁴⁵ Sheckel argues that the narrator attempts to cure Usher through conversation but that his efforts fail.⁴⁶ While I disagree with Sheckel that the narrator’s primary motive is to cure Usher, the narrator does bitterly perceive the futility of cheering Usher’s mind through his companionship and their shared artistic pursuits. The ability of language to intervene in the world is limited. Usher experiences physical and emotional losses of home, which can be cured neither by attachment to his decaying home nor therapeutic language.

At the story’s conclusion, the narrator becomes the last surviving occupant of the House of Usher *and* angrily watches as the house and family from which he is excluded is destroyed. He fulfills his fantasies of both usurpation and vengeance, however, only to find himself still in search of a home. On his final night in the house, he reads to Usher the “Mad Trist” of Sir Launcelot Canning while they listen to the sounds of Madeline ripping through her coffin. The

⁴⁵ Sheckel, “Homesickness, Nostalgia, and Therapeutic Narrative in Poe’s ‘The Fall of the House of Usher,’” 17–18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

narrator summarizes how “Ethelred, the hero of the Trist, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force” (243). The story parallels the narrator’s threat towards the Usher family: let me into your house, or I will destroy it. As in “Masque,” the tale’s compelling ambivalence is drawn partly from the inseparability of the narrator’s desires for admission and his radical desires for a revolution—an ambivalence of emotion that dispossessed and buried Madeline Usher shares. At the moment Usher realizes Madeline is struggling to leave her tomb, he implicitly—and not wrongly—accuses the narrator of his complicity in what happened to his sister. “*We have put her living in the tomb!*,” he murmurs to the narrator (245, emphasis original). “*Madman!*,” Usher continues, “*I tell you that she now stands without the door!*” (245, emphasis original). While Usher could be directing the cry of “Madman!” towards himself, the fact that he is speaking to the narrator suggests, as Jordan notices, that he is “unmask[ing]” the narrator as the madman.⁴⁷ The accusation hits home: The narrator is angry. He was complicit in burying Madeline. He is a threat to the Usher household.

When Madeline emerges with “blood upon her white robes” from the devouring “jaws” of the chamber’s door, the narrator famously writes, “For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold—then, with a low *moaning cry*, fell heavily *inward* upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, *bore him* to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated” (245, emphasis mine). The conclusion is a doubling-down on family as the siblings disastrously lean in rather than out and render indistinguishable the desires for possession and destruction, suggesting, ominously, that not even possession of a house and wealth can free its occupants from the emotions that trouble the

⁴⁷ Jordan, *Second Stories*, 144.

narrator. As many readers have observed, Usher and Madeline's final embrace is sexualized and incestuous, with the spotted blood upon her white robes, her moaning cry and, again, the pregnant pun on "bore him." Dawn Keetley reads the scene to suggest a pregnant Madeline bears Usher a still-born child.⁴⁸ Jonathan A. Cook reads it as an apocalyptic marriage between brother and sister.⁴⁹ Dennis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederholm say the story is an enactment of the narrator's return to the womb.⁵⁰ However we read the scene between Roderick and Madeline Usher, their inward embrace physically excludes the narrator from their family circle *and* leaves him the conquering, surviving heir to a house and fate that is horrifying.

"From that chamber, and from that mansion, I fled aghast," writes the narrator, as he emphasizes leaving the place rather than the people, illustrating again how much he desired the house more than its inhabitants. "The storm was still abroad in all its wrath as I found myself crossing the old causeway" (245). Rather than finding a home, the narrator's journey is circular as he echoes the opening lines of the text. He passively "finds himself" again and returns to the "old causeway," and perhaps to his old *causes* for grievance. Looking back towards the home that still obsesses him, he actively watches as the house collapses around the fissure he had noticed earlier: "While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened—there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind—the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight—my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the

⁴⁸ Dawn Keetley, "Pregnant Women and Envious Men in 'Morella,' 'Berenice,' 'Ligeia,' and 'The Fall of the House of Usher,'" 9.

⁴⁹ Jonathan A. Cook, "Poe and the Apocalyptic Sublime: 'The Fall of the House of Usher,'" *Papers on Language and Literature* 48, no. 1 (2012): 3–44, 33.

⁵⁰ Dennis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederholm, *Poe, "The House of Usher," and the American Gothic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 75.

fragments of the ‘*House of Usher*’” (245, emphasis original). The sentence wobbles between the narrator’s unawareness at the source of the destructive forces like the fierce breath, and his active, angry participation in the home’s destruction as the house collapses at *his* feet while *he* gazes, sees and reels his brain as if willing it on. He possesses and destroys the house that excludes him, silently entombing and preserving it in the tarn, just as Usher entombed and preserved his sister. While the House of Usher and the control it wielded over art is silenced, the narrator is liberated—though he cannot perceive it—to write a tale that has proved more compelling than the poetry it houses. “Usher” abruptly ends without any attempt at explanation. Trapped within the tale and the personal-systemic conditions from which it sprung, the narrator can merely chart his emotions without the ability to escape them or find critical distance for reflection.

“Usher” is Poe’s strongest articulation of the failed fantasy of escaping economic conditions by finding a home that confers capital and creative freedom. “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846), however, restages that fantasy while more specifically reflecting on the inability of language—and by extension the act of writing—to intervene in or resolve the entrapping material conditions of literary production. Published in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, a popular women’s magazine noted for its fashion plates, the story’s narrator, Montresor, strives to escape familial and economic conditions in which his superior artistry is unrewarded by usurping the place of Fortunato, whose luck, family and capital have made him an undeserving arbiter of taste. Montresor flatters Fortunato, who is appropriately dressed as a fool for Carnival, into visiting his family’s catacombs on the pretense of needing him to identify if a new pipe of wine is truly Amontillado. There, he buries Fortunato alive in retaliation for an unspecified insult,

killing but also incorporating Fortunato and symbolically his fortune into the Montresor family line.

Yonjae Jung has recently situated “Cask” within the context of Poe’s frustration with magazine work, arguing that “Cask” is Poe’s revenge fantasy against the oppressions of the literary establishment for whom he toiled without sufficient financial compensation.⁵¹ Building upon Jung’s association of “Cask” with Poe’s relationship to the literary market, I want to suggest that “Cask” is a meditation on the frustrating impossibility of literary merit being recognized or legitimate grievances against the market being expressed in a context where those with capital but less talent are the arbiters of taste—a dilemma highlighted by Poe’s own situation of publishing his tale in a women’s magazine where it would have had less chance of being recognized as high art. “Cask” is an illustration of the insufficiency of language to do desired work in altering the power relations that structure the art market.

“Cask” makes explicit the ultimate fatality of Montresor’s usurping desire in ways that are more buried in “Usher.” We know from the confessional tale’s beginning that we are in a revenge story. The narrative interest turns instead on the difficulty of parsing motive, the confusion of personal and systemic conditions, and whether Montresor’s revenge is satisfying. Montresor never articulates precisely how Fortunato has wronged him, stating only that the “thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could,” until he finally vows “to punish with impunity” after Fortunato “ventured upon insult” (274)—phrases, Jung points out, that intriguingly recall Poe’s own letter quarrelling with his publisher, William Burton of *Gentleman’s Magazine*.⁵² “If by accident you have taken into your head. . . that I am to be insulted with

⁵¹ Yonjae Jung, “Poe’s Magazinish Career and ‘The Cask of Amontillado,’” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 46, no. 22 (2014), 61.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 71.

impunity I can only assume that you are an ass,” Poe wrote angrily.⁵³ Unlike Poe, however, the more circumspect Montresor is as unable to voice his discontent as he is unable to say precisely how he has been wronged. “You, who know so well the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat,” he writes, implicitly suggesting that part of his unresolvable and vague frustration is that he occupies a dependent position from which he cannot verbalize—and society will not recognize—his complaints against a more powerful man (274).

Although Montresor longs to make his revenge felt, he cannot clearly articulate his own motive and hides it through his reticence even in a confessional tale. This inability to express desire is partially a function of his confusion about the extent to which he himself has contributed to his alleged wrongs. William Veeder observes that “I had borne” can mean both that he has passively suffered injuries placed on him and that *he* has given birth to injuries that he has inflicted on Fortunato.⁵⁴ As in Veeder’s example, “Cask” is replete with sentences that have potential but unprovable double meanings, endlessly confusing intentions, motives and the role of personal agency in a manner reminiscent of living within chaotic systems in which cause, effect and agency are often hard to trace. Montresor’s confusion—and resentment—derives from the collision of his own psychology, familial situation and general economic conditions, while his envy of Fortunato becomes expressed as a function of the way in which his capital confers on him aesthetic influence.

⁵³ Edgar Allan Poe to William E. Burton, Philadelphia, 1 June 1840, in *The Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe: Volume I: 1824–1846*, 217–218.

⁵⁴ William Veeder, “The nurture of the Gothic; of, how can a text be both popular and subversive?,” in *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography*, ed. Glennis Byron and David Punter (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 62.

Fortunato, whose name ambiguously means “fortunate one” or “fated one,”⁵⁵ is materially fortunate in his wealth and popularity in ways Montresor both envies and finds unearned. In order to trick Fortunato into visiting his catacombs, Montresor flatteringly plays on Fortunato’s belief in his superior taste through an appeal for him to exercise it: “My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking to-day! But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts” (274). He indulges his attraction to—and desire to be like—Fortunato in dwelling on his “luck” in meeting him and on his pleasant appearance before shifting back to his murderous intentions. His ploy—casting doubt on the genuineness of his Amontillado—takes advantage of Fortunato’s belief that he is a connoisseur and patron on whose wisdom the subservient Montresor must depend. “I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter,” Montresor sheepishly apologizes (274). Strategically framing himself as dependent on Fortunato’s judgment, Montresor is critical of Fortunato’s unearned confidence in his taste, which is continually reinforced through his powerful position. Indeed, Montresor structures his crime as a referendum on Fortunato’s readerly abilities. He openly reveals his intentions through puns like handing Fortunato a bottle of “De Grâve” (276), but Fortunato is too imperceptive to recognize the anger and double-entendres in Montresor’s virtuoso verbal play and take advantage of his repeated offers to turn back. Fortunato dies because Montresor proves through these tests, in which Fortunato fails to recognize Montresor’s superior verbal talents, that his position as an arbiter of taste is indeed undeserved. A better critic than Fortunato would have turned back.

As the men descend into the catacombs, we find more evidence that Montresor’s admiration and anger is rooted in resentment of Fortunato’s unearned social position and his own

⁵⁵ Fisher, *Cambridge Introduction*, 68.

dispossession. Elena V. Baraban notes that Montresor's name means "my treasure," because his "noble ancestry is indeed his treasure."⁵⁶ The lineage he values, however, is dwindling towards extinction. Fortunato, Baraban notices, forgets that Montresor comes from a numerous family, while Roberto Cagliero observes that Fortunato cannot even remember the Montresor family arms.⁵⁷ "You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as I once was. You are a man to be missed," says Montresor as he urges Fortunato to turn back, implying that he and his family have spiraled downward while Fortunato's has continued materially blessed and influential (276). His observation that people will miss Fortunato suggests through contrast the fear of nearly every Poe narrator: that he is alone and will not be missed by anyone. In particular, his talents are invisible to his community and its influencers in a way that complicates the problem of seeking revenge. Montresor states at the outset, "A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to *make himself felt* as such to him who has done the wrong" (274, emphasis mine). For Montresor, revenge is only satisfactory if he becomes *visible* to Fortunato as a superior talent, yet Fortunato falls into his trap precisely because he cannot truly see Montresor's meaning and intentions.

Montresor is thus not merely imprisoned by the self-destruction that comes with seeking revenge, but more specifically by the problem that his murderous revenge cannot be properly admired. Montresor can succeed in murdering Fortunato only if the talents he wants acknowledged *remain unrecognized*, both by Fortunato and the public—a plight highlighted by the anonymity of Carnival. Symbolically usurping Fortunato's position by burying him does not

⁵⁶ Elena V. Baraban, "The Motive for Murder in 'The Cask of Amontillado' by Edgar Allan Poe," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 58, no. 2 (2004): 51.

⁵⁷ Baraban, "Motive for Murder," 51–52; Roberto Cagliero, "Poe's Interiors: The Theme of Usurpation in 'The Cask of Amontillado,'" *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 2, no. 1 (2001): 32–33.

lead to recognition of his talent. Montresor is compelled to confuse his own agency and outside forces in ways that hide his complicity but also deflatingly discredit his skills. For example, Montresor emphasizes the role chance plays in his plan—and in our fates more generally—when he encounters Fortunato at the carnival and exclaims that he is “luckily” met. Luck, of course, is partly what he resents in *Fortunato*, whose position he feels is due to unearned chance. When Montresor thus aligns his own success with chance, he undermines the skill he displays in executing his plan even if it helps him conceal his guilt. Montresor cannot openly celebrate his achievement at beating the system nor insist that people recognize the artistic merit that he believes makes him more deserving than Fortunato of his place. Apart from writing his confessional tale fifty years after the event, Montresor, the verbal artist, is sentenced to silence through his success in entombing Fortunato.

In fact, I want to suggest that Montresor experiences his revenge as a failure in the denouement because the outcome he wanted was *not* to bury Fortunato and symbolically usurp his position, which symbolic work does nothing to alter his problems of wanting admiration and capital. Rather, Montresor wanted Fortunato to recognize his talents and turn back with him, as he repeatedly suggested they do. However much Montresor is angered by Fortunato’s slights to his family and reminders of his lower social status, he cannot stop wanting the person who represents what he doesn’t have to affirm him. The burial scene is filled with erotic longing and anger. As he builds the wall that will entomb Fortunato and permanently secure him within the Montresor family, he observes, “A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated—I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope around the recess I replied to the yells of him who clamored. I re-echoed—I aided—I surpassed them in volume and in

strength” (278). As the narrator moves himself from a feminized position into a masculine one in this sexualized scene, he seems to reverse the power dynamic between him and Fortunato (278). However, his sense of empowerment does not last. He answers the screams with louder ones, but in the process merely re-echoes and aids Fortunato, suggesting how little he has succeeded in having his existence and talents acknowledged. Montresor’s louder voice produces not the intelligible words of which he is vastly capable, but illegible screams of horror. Tellingly, he describes Fortunato as a “chained form,” a phrase that intriguingly suggests how his need and desire for Fortunato’s recognition imprison his own artistic form.

The scene ends with him still disappointedly waiting for Fortunato to acknowledge, at a minimum, what he is doing. Fortunato, speaking from within the tomb, dismisses the matter as a jest and says, “Let us be gone,” which produces the following exchange:

“Yes,” I said, “let us be gone.”

“For the love of God, Montresor!”

“Yes,” I said, “for the love of God!”

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud:

“Fortunato!”

No answer. I called again:

“Fortunato!”

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick—on account of the dampness of the catacombs. (279, emphasis original).

Montresor is thrust back into the position of copying Fortunato’s language rather than displaying his own verbal artistry. He experiences the final exchange with intense disappointment as Fortunato never provides the reply he seeks and instead offers only the jingle of the bells on his fool’s cap—emphasizing how he has not understood Montresor. “My heart grew sick—on account of the dampness of the catacombs,” Montresor writes, acknowledging and dismissing his disappointment (279). When silence finally descends, Montresor finishes the entombing wall and

“re-erected the old rampart of bones” over the “new masonry” (279). Having possessed Fortunato he has symbolically rebuilt a stronger, wealthier version of his ancient family only to be left longing for the acknowledging words and social position that will not come. As in “Usher,” “Cask” cannot provide closure or even distance from its power dynamics. Instead, those dynamics drown out Montresor’s artistic voice in screams of horror. His voice cannot perform the intervention in his circumstances he wishes it to accomplish or find a new form.

Many of Poe’s other horror tales replay with variations the core fantasy of escaping one’s entrapping condition by securing place and position, as well as the radical resentment directed towards such homes as they perpetuate rather than liberate one from entrapping systemic conditions. “The Black Cat,” for example, portrays a narrator who compulsively tries to reconstruct aspects of his insufficient childhood home, while also feeling such ambivalent resentment towards his home and family that he hangs his cat, kills his wife and probably burns his own house down—an action that reduces him to poverty and does nothing to liberate him from the repetitive cycle in which he is imprisoned. As in “Cask,” the narrator is confused about the distinction between his personal agency and systemic conditions, constantly refusing to draw casual links between events. Similarly, “Ligeia” depicts the narrator’s first marriage to the supremely learned, poetic and beautiful Ligeia as one made without any knowledge of her paternal name and thus of what position and wealth he might secure through her, though she happily proves to be very wealthy (654). His idealistic marriage to Ligeia is thus partly a fantasy of the highest forms of art flourishing without regard to material or familial conditions. He loses this fantasy, however, when Ligeia dies and he remarries a woman whose family reintroduces market forces by being eager for his wealth, and he then horrifically recounts it when Ligeia is

reborn by usurping the body of his second wife—proving that even she cannot escape the scarcity of material resources.

While Poe's horror stories replay and reflect the fantasies and dynamics reflective of his entrapping situation within his family and the literary market, his tales in which poet figures flourish tellingly involve an imaginative rearrangement of or intervention in *material* conditions. In "The Landscape-Garden" (1842) (later reprinted as "The Domain of Arnheim"), for example, the hero Mr. Ellison is unusual in Poe's repertoire because he "thought to find, *and found*, exemption for the ordinary cases of humanity" (611, emphasis original) and his happiness "refuted the dogma, that in man's very nature lies some hidden principle, the antagonist of bliss" (604). Mr. Ellison is in "the widest and noblest sense . . . a poet" (606) who inherits the astonishing sum of four hundred fifty million dollars (605). With this inheritance he becomes a landscape-gardener, an occupation that he believes offers the fullest way of expressing his poetic impulses (607). As Whalen observes, "Poe's most outrageously happy poet is also his most outrageously wealthy character."⁵⁸ Yet he not only experiences a material elevation of his own position but believes the highest form of poetry is one that rearranges the physical world. As Whalen puts it, "Ellison can realize the poetic sentiment only because he has the time and money to reshape the material world into a breathtaking sublimity."⁵⁹ Producing the noblest form of poetry requires an alteration in the poet's material condition, which in turn allows him to transform the poetic into a force capable of intervention in and alteration of the material world—a kind of intervention in material circumstances that Poe's tales and verbal play could not accomplish.

⁵⁸ Terence Whalen, "Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy," 409.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

While “The Domain of Arnheim” is an improbable inheritance fantasy, Poe invented a new genre—detective fiction—that more realistically reimagined the material market in a way that allowed him to chart a potentially viable personal and political way out of the dead ends that mark his horror tales and his perception of his own situation. Poe’s detective fiction— “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1842) and “The Purloined Letter” (1844)—contains many of the elements of the genre more familiar to modern readers through Sherlock Holmes: the stories are told by a narrator who lives with the hero, Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin, who has an unusual ability to use his powers of reasoning and reading to solve crimes. What allows Dupin to achieve the satisfying financial success and public recognition denied to the narrators of Poe’s horror tales, however, is that Poe imagines Dupin operating in a fundamentally more just market in which talent is recognized and compensated rather than in the entrapping dynamics of the real literary market Poe’s horror stories more closely reflect. Poe sets Dupin in the urban world of shopkeepers, apartments and the police, and Dupin is no stranger to the world of newspapers. In fact, as Stephen Rachman observes, Dupin is a “master paper-reader.”⁶⁰ In his first two tales, he primarily solves crimes by close-reading various newspaper accounts. In this way, he overcomes rather than is drowned out by the competing voices in the print market.

The Dupin tales begin with the familiar situation of a gentleman whose family fortunes have declined. In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), the narrator describes Dupin as a gentleman of “an excellent, indeed of an illustrious family” that “by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to bestir himself in the world, or to care for the retrieval of his fortunes” (143).

⁶⁰ Stephen Rachman, “Poe and the Origins of Detective Fiction.” In *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, edited by Catherine Ross Nickerson, 17–28. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20.

Unlike many other Poe characters, however, Dupin rises from his impoverished situation and recovers his family's station by turning towards the market rather than seeking inheritance or treasure outside it. When he falls into the company of the wealthier narrator through a chance meeting at a library, William Crisman observes that Dupin trades his companionship for housing in the narrator's rented Gothic mansion.⁶¹ In reversal of the logic that a poet needs a house before he can produce poetry, Dupin's literary talents have a value someone is willing to pay for and that lead to housing. There, they live in perfect seclusion and seem fatally poised to embrace the withdrawal that characterizes other Poe characters (144), but instead Dupin begins to solve crimes primarily for money. He overcomes financial precarity through exchanges that rely on his literary skills. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," for example, Crisman observes that Dupin agrees to solve the case to assist a banker who once did him a favor (153).⁶² In "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," Dupin accepts only once the Prefect of the police makes him a "liberal proposition" (173).⁶³ In "The Purloined Letter" (1844), Dupin reaps fifty thousand francs for retrieving a missing letter and reenters royal circles in the process (214).⁶⁴ As Dupin grows more skilled in turning his analytic abilities to profit, Crisman notes that the Gothic house he inhabits transforms from a "tottering" house into a place of relatively luxury.⁶⁵ Dupin outwits the police, and the dependent imprisonment and false security they might offer, while emerging as a reader who can command a hefty payday.

⁶¹ William Crisman, "Poe's Dupin as Professional, The Dupin Stories as Serial Text," *Studies in American Fiction* 23, no. 2 (1995): 217.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 218.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 216, 220.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

Dupin's financial success in the marketplace stands in stark contrast to the actual failure and starvation Poe experienced as a writer and editor as he was trapped in the low-wage labor of the "magazine prison-house." This contrast enables readers to view the Dupin stories as a fantasy in which persons of poetic talent are rewarded with the financial stability Poe was not. Robert Schulman, for example, shows how the Dupin stories affirm and financially reward devalued poets at the "expense of practical men of affairs."⁶⁶ Terence Whalen argues that Poe's detective tales allow Dupin to use information scarcity to his advantage in order to "overcome the loathsome dominance of capital over literary labor . . ."⁶⁷ The fantasy makes explicit Poe's longing for a more equitable approach to security—beginning with a paid market for literary skills—that is implied through the failures of his other home-seeking characters. Security is not found within the existing "prisons" of magazines, the police or family homes, but within a reimagined market that fairly compensates its laborers. Without material change, readers are left with the horror of pining for the unsatisfactory fantasies of private escape from bad conditions.

Poe never found a stable home or financial security during his life. In 1847, his wife, Virginia, died of consumption, and her death sent Poe deeper into a downward spiral of sickness, alcoholism and financial hardship. During his remaining years, he sought to find stability and a perch for his writing through remarriage. At the time of his death, there is evidence that he had an understanding with his former fiancée, Sarah Elmira (Royster) Shelton, who had since become a well-to-do widow. However, it was not to be. On September 27, 1849, Poe traveled to Baltimore. There, he was found delirious outside a polling place. He died a few days later at age

⁶⁶ Robert Schulman, "Poe and the Powers of the Mind," *ELH* 37, no. 2 (1970): 255.

⁶⁷ Whalen, "Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy," 410.

forty. The exact cause of his death is unknown. Some people suspected he was drugged and dragged to vote, the victim of a political system that valued power more than people.⁶⁸

In his afterlife, however, Poe found a home of sorts on the grounds of the University of Virginia. In 1904, the university established The Raven Society, “the oldest and most prestigious honorary society at the University of Virginia,”⁶⁹ which was intended to foster scholarship and serve as an alternative to the exclusive literary societies on campus.⁷⁰ Among other things, the university tasked the Raven Society with maintaining Poe’s former dorm room.⁷¹ Today, anyone who visits Charlottesville can walk through the red-brick, neo-Palladian grounds until she stumbles upon West Range, a single-story row of rooms covered with a brick portico. Tradition holds that Poe resided in room thirteen. Peering through its door, you can see a simple wooden bed, a desk, two chairs, a trunk, a rug and a statue of a raven. Looking at that statue, you might ponder how much—and how little—has changed since Poe racked up debts to attend a university from which he could not afford to graduate nearly two hundred years ago

⁶⁸ Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*, 629, 636–641.

⁶⁹ The Raven Society, “Welcome,” <https://aig.alumni.virginia.edu/raven/> (accessed May 15, 2020).

⁷⁰ The Raven Society, “History,” <https://aig.alumni.virginia.edu/raven/history/> (accessed May 15, 2020).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Chapter 2: Charlotte Brontë and the “Horrors of Homeless Destitution”

“I dread another essay of the horrors of homeless destitution.” — Jane Eyre, *Jane Eyre*

“To be home-sick, one must have a home; which I have not.” — Lucy Snowe, *Villette*

For many early theorists, homesickness was a problematic, provincial emotion that prevented people from embracing the mobility required to achieve a more cosmopolitan, imperial and capitalist society.¹ Charlotte Brontë understood, however, that women desperately needed a *place* to call home in order to survive these new economies. For her, a far bigger problem than longings to return home was that not every woman even had an adequate home to feel homesick about. Drawing on her experiences with the fatal and impoverishing potentials of housing insecurity, Brontë examines in her novels the dire consequences for single, middle-class women of not having a secure place to call home. Her heroines are frequently sick and impoverished for want of homes, but they rarely find stable perches from which they can experience nostalgia as a gentle longing for a past home. Rather, Brontë revives in her portraits of displaced women the portrayal of nostalgia as a physical disease curable only through a return home in order to underscore women’s needs for housing that provides permanent shelter. The ability to feel sentimental or effusive homesickness for a lost home becomes a luxury available only to those who already have housing security.

“Nostalgia” comes from the Greek *nostos* (“return home”) and *algos* (“pain”).² When the term was first coined by Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688, it was a medical condition that consisted of a diseased longing for a *place* that could be cured only through a literal return

¹ For a discussion of these views, see Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28.

² *Ibid.*, 26.

home.³ Typically, the disease was associated with sailors, soldiers, students and other men who journeyed far from home.⁴ Brontë's decision to draw on a discourse of male displacement in depicting the physical and emotional consequences that beset women without secure homes thus forcefully insisted that women suffered similar displacements even as their culture metaphorically associated their bodies with home in ways that seemed to minimize their abilities to feel distress at loss of place. Brontë's depictions of women who become unwell when displaced from their homes refuse to minimize (as the sentimental tradition of nostalgia often does) the importance to women of having a secure *place* to call home. While some people condemned homesickness as a backwards sentiment thwarting global movement and progress, Brontë more radically aligned herself with other displaced peoples within the British Empire by claiming attachment to home as necessary to women's well-being.⁵ For Brontë, women's homesickness was not a feeling that could be overcome by moral strength but rather a response to the loss of a necessary resource that must be cured by giving displaced women secure homes.

Brontë's home at Haworth Parsonage gave her ample opportunity to contemplate the necessity of housing security to women's self-determination as it evolved from a source of temporary security that permitted her to cease working as a teacher and governess into a site of

³ For discussions of Hofer and nostalgia's medical origins see, e.g., Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810–1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28–33; Matt, *Homesickness*, 26.

⁴ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 23–24, 30.

⁵ For discussion of how homesickness was viewed by privileged men, see Matt, *Homesickness*, 4–6, 27–28. Susan J. Matt shows that while many white thinkers strategically prized mobility and condemned homesickness as thwarting progress, enslaved peoples, Native Americans, drafted soldiers and poor migrants felt quite differently about their enforced and often fatal mobility than those who financially benefited from it. Matt documents, for example, how many slaves yearned for death that would return them to their homelands, with some even embracing suicide in hopes of a quicker reunion. *Ibid.*, 24. Revealing the selectivity with which persons in power applied their beliefs about homesickness, Matt also shows how slave-holders construed slaves as lacking the capacity for nostalgia in order to justify their bondage, only to insist after the American Civil War that former slaves would become overly homesick if they dared leave the southern states that depended on their labor. *Ibid.*, 110.

caregiving and reminder of loss. Haworth Parsonage was owned by the church, and Brontë's occupancy of it was contingent on her father's employment.⁶ As her home grew ever more precarious through the deaths of her siblings and her father's declining health, she increasingly explored the importance of housing security and family to women's well-being. Her real and fictional houses were neither primarily sites of confinement, nor of class consolidation, nor merely metaphors of interior life. Though they could be all those things, a focus on houses as metaphors or sites of ideological work obscures how they were first and foremost baseline necessities Brontë and her heroines required to live beyond subsistence. However, they were often denied this necessity due to the concentration of property, education or business within male relatives or institutions like the church.

This chapter examines how Haworth Parsonage enabled and informed Brontë's writing before turning to *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853) as novels that develop her belief that possession of a house is necessary to female self-determination, especially when employment outside of homes was unavailable to most women. Although Brontë is famous for her preoccupation with domestic interiors,⁷ and her heroines' homelessness is well-noted,⁸ less

⁶ See Juliet Barker, *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1998), 4.

⁷ See, e.g., Karen Chase, "Jane Eyre's Interior Design," in *New Casebooks: Jane Eyre*, ed. Heather Glen (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 59 (noting how *Jane Eyre*'s "houses preoccupy their inhabitants"); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 347 (claiming that Thornfield metaphorically structures Jane's experience); Elaine Showalter, "Charlotte Brontë: Feminine Heroine" in *New Casebooks: Jane Eyre*, 68 (arguing that in *Jane Eyre* "the sexual experiences of the female body are expressed spatially through elaborate and rhythmically recurring images of rooms and houses").

⁸ See, e.g., Penny Boumelha, "Jane Eyre" in *New Casebooks: Jane Eyre*, 136 (calling attention to Jane's destitution, homelessness and location outside the structures of patriarchal society after fleeing Thornfield); Peter Allan Dale, "Charlotte Brontë's 'Tale Half-Told': The Disruption of Narrative Structure in *Jane Eyre*" in *New Casebooks: Jane Eyre*, 208 (observing how Jane is excluded from "home, family, and filial love" throughout the novel); Monica L. Feinberg, "Homesick: The Domestic Interiors of *Villette*," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 26, no. 2 (1993), 180 (calling Lucy Snowe "a homeless woman"); Parama Roy, "Unaccommodated Woman and the Poetics of Property in *Jane Eyre*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 29, no. 4 (1989), 718 (referring to Jane's "feelings of homelessness"); Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 402 (referring to *Villette* as an exploration, among other things, of "homelessness"); Ahmet Süner, "Spectral Narration and the Houses of Desire in Charlotte Brontë's

attention is paid to how deeply her life, most celebrated novels and treatment of nostalgia are driven by access, or lack thereof, to secure housing. While Brontë's works have been faulted for upholding the social conventions that oppress their heroines or offering merely individual solutions to public problems,⁹ what emerges from a focus on housing security in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* is a more radical and collective desire: to end female homelessness by giving unmarried women housing. While many of her contemporaries turned to emigration to solve the problem of single women's displacement, Brontë's novels and depictions of homesickness clarify the need to provide shelter for women within England that is not conditional upon their marital status.

There would be no *Jane Eyre* or *Villette* without Haworth Parsonage for the simple reason that its existence enabled Brontë to write rather than perpetually work as a teacher or governess. In 1820, when Brontë was nearly four, her Irish father, Patrick Brontë, moved his family from Thornton to Haworth, where he assumed the position of a perpetual curate.¹⁰ His position provided him with only a modest income, but it also allowed him and his family of six children to occupy Haworth Parsonage, a home now synonymous with his celebrated family. The identification of Haworth Parsonage with the Brontë family owes much to Brontë's friend and first biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell, who sought to frame women's writing as an activity

Villette," *College Literature* 44, no. 3 (2017), 319 (discussing how "it is possible to understand [Lucy's] phobia of placelessness . . . in terms of her quest for a house").

⁹ See, e.g., Jina Politi, "Jane Eyre Class-ified," *Literature and History* 8 (1982), 66 (finding that "*Jane Eyre* comes to celebrate the very ethos upon which bourgeois capitalism and its patriarchal ideology rest"); Parama Roy, "Unaccommodated Woman and the Poetics of Property in *Jane Eyre*," 715 (arguing that "Jane ends up rather too well-adjusted and well-endowed for Brontë to carry through her radical convictions to the end").

¹⁰ Throughout this chapter, I draw on Margaret Smith's chronology in Margaret Smith, ed., *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1:77–82, as the source for events and dates in Brontë and her siblings' lives.

consistent with domestic duties.¹¹ As Lucasta Miller discusses, Gaskell was eager to excuse the discomfort many readers found with Brontë's passionate heroines as products of Brontë's isolated upbringing and tragic life while also providing a respectable counter-narrative depicting Brontë as a self-sacrificing clergyman's daughter devoted to home and family—a narrative that Brontë herself sometimes perpetuated.¹² Brontë's life *was* often tragic: By the time she died at age thirty-eight, she had lost her mother, Maria Branwell (1783–1821) (age 38), and all of her siblings: Maria (1814–1825) (age 11); Elizabeth (1815–1825) (age 10); Patrick Branwell (“Branwell”) (1817–1848) (age 31); Emily Jane (1818–1848) (age 30); and Anne (1820–1849) (age 29). Haworth was not as isolated, however, as Gaskell made it out to be—an inconsistency that disappointed tourists as early as the 1850s.¹³ Miller clarifies that while Brontë may have *felt* isolated, Haworth was less a dot on the windswept moors than a busy town in which Brontë would have encountered a growing middle class of shopkeepers and professionals.¹⁴ However, Gaskell's depictions of the Brontë family, which strongly identified them with Haworth and the isolation of domestic life at the parsonage, did more than obscure their sophistication. It also minimized the contingency of their relationship to their home: However much we associate the Brontës with Haworth Parsonage, it was not their house. It belonged to the church, and their occupancy of it was contingent on Patrick Brontë's employment. The Brontë family was typical for the time in not owning a house. However, this fact is crucial to understanding the anxiety Brontë felt about earning a living, the importance she placed on housing security and the caregiving she provided her demanding father, often at the expense of her own career

¹¹ Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2003), 34, 58.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

development. When her father died, she and her sisters would have nowhere to go and few means of earning enough to establish their own household.

Brontë and her sisters faced an emerging wage economy in which women's trades were both restricted and poorly paid.¹⁵ Writing about a slightly earlier period but with insight that applies equally well to Brontë's time, Ruth Perry explains that "women's sheer lack of possibilities for earning, not to mention the level of wages set for women in this new cash economy, reduced their economic value to their families and probably their psychological value as well."¹⁶ Jane Austen, for example, provides a blunt assessment of the emotional and economic harm done to poor daughters of the clergy in her unfinished novella *The Watsons* (~1803) when she describes the circumstances her heroine, Emma Watson, finds herself in when her aunt's remarriage seems to preclude the inheritance she had expected and she must return to the home of her poor, invalid father: "[S]he was become of importance to no one—a burden on those whose affections she could not expect, an addition to a house already overstocked, surrounded by inferior minds, with little chance of domestic comfort, and as little hope of future support."¹⁷ When her father soon thereafter dies, the family is broken up as some of her sisters seek positions and she lives with relatives. Speculating as to why Austen never finished the story, relative J.E. Austen Leigh suggested that she regretted "having placed her heroine too low, in such a position of poverty and obscurity" that would be "unfavourable to the refinement of a

¹⁵ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 55–64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁷ Jane Austen, *The Watsons* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1923), 102.

lady,” a comment that emphasizes how eager society was to conceal rather than acknowledge the widespread emotional and economic problems facing fortuneless women.¹⁸

Brontë was keenly aware that she and her sisters were an economic burden on her household. The Brontë family’s assets would be needed to further Branwell’s career, while Charlotte Brontë and her sisters would need to earn money to offset their expenses. They had, however, few realistic ways to be independent. As Perry notes, women needed family support because their wages were too low to support themselves,¹⁹ a factor that undoubtedly contributed to Brontë and similarly situated women accepting employment within schools or households that provided room and board. Yet despite the attention Brontë gives to the necessity of leaving Haworth in her letters and, more generally, to female displacement and employment in her novels, her father outlived his family and Brontë’s periods of leaving Haworth proved episodic and brief.

Brontë’s first departure stands out as an example of leaving home going terribly wrong. In August of 1824, Patrick Brontë sent her (and later Emily) to join Maria and Elizabeth at the Clergy Daughters’ School at Cowan Bridge, a subscription school for daughters of poor clergymen that would serve as the inspiration for Lowood in *Jane Eyre*.²⁰ The school’s existence responded to the real problem that many clergymen like Patrick Brontë had insufficient income to educate their daughters. Shortly after Brontë’s arrival, Maria and Elizabeth developed pulmonary tuberculosis, while Charlotte and Emily were sent with other girls to the coast due to a typhus outbreak at the school. Mr. Brontë brought his children home to Haworth, but Maria and

¹⁸ J.E. Austen Leigh, “Preface,” in Jane Austen, *The Watsons* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1923).

¹⁹ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 62.

²⁰ Unless otherwise noted, my discussion of Brontë’s life is drawn from Claire Harman, *Charlotte Brontë: A Life* (London: Viking, 2015).

Elizabeth died in rapid succession in May and June of 1825. While his decision to send his daughters to such a school—and to send Charlotte and Emily back to finish the term after their sisters' deaths—seems cruel and neglectful, it also underscores the financial problem he and other clergymen faced in providing for daughters. Following their deaths, Brontë lived at home under the care of her aunt, Elizabeth Branwell. She remained at Haworth until 1831, when she again left home to attend Roe Head School. She was a student there for only a year, but she met women who would become her lifelong friends and correspondents: the school's mistress, Margaret Wooller, and fellow pupils Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor. In 1835, she returned to Roe Head as a teacher. Her teaching at Roe Head and its subsequent location, Dewsbury Moor, did not even last three years, but it would be her longest stretch of employment.

Brontë's experiences as a pupil, teacher and governess were brief, although they preoccupy *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. Her first stint as governess was as a temporary replacement for the Sidgwick family's governess in the summer of 1839. Although the Sidgwick family lived only twelve miles from Haworth, Brontë found the situation uncongenial. She lamented that the children left her no time to herself and that Mrs. Sidgwick, perhaps less cruel than unwilling to invest time in so temporary a member of her household, loaded her with work while not appreciating her as a human being.²¹ “[A] private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil,” complained Brontë to her sister Emily.²² She would later memorialize the condescension she felt in Blanche Ingram's dismissive treatment of governesses in *Jane Eyre*. This formative experience, however, lasted only about two months. Her second and final position as a governess

²¹ Charlotte Brontë to Emily J. Brontë, Stonegappe, 8 June 1839, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 1:190–191.

²² *Ibid.*, 191.

was with the more hospitable White family in 1841. While she acknowledged that it was a favorable position, it also lasted less than a year.²³ She spent the next two years as a pupil and teacher in Brussels before returning permanently to Haworth, where she remained apart from occasional journeys.

Brontë's desultory record of employment underscores the difficulty she had adjusting to life away from Haworth—and her lack of enthusiasm for the living and working options available to women in her position. In a letter to Nussey written while she was a governess with the Whites, she confesses to worrying that she has “no natural knack for my vocation.”²⁴ While she did not struggle with teaching, she did not like boarding in another's house, a condition which characterized many forms of employment she would have had available as a middle-class woman. She writes that “it is living in other people's houses—the estrangement from one's real character [—] the adoption of a cold, frigid—apathetic exterior that is painful.”²⁵ Forced to reside in another's household, she could not enjoy the separation of work and home so celebrated for middle-class men. She undoubtedly also associated leaving home with physical risk: At Cowan Bridge, she and her sisters suffered from dampness, poor food, typhus and forced excursions in the winter to attend church, conditions that she probably suspected contributed to her sisters' deaths. In light of her traumatic experience at Cowan Bridge, it is unsurprising that she struggled when she later left home again to become a pupil at Roe Head. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), friend Ellen Nussey retrospectively recalls that

²³ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Upperwood-House, 7 August 1841, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 1:266.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Brontë was so “sick for home she stood in tears” when she arrived at the school.²⁶ When financial necessity required Brontë to return to Roe Head as a teacher, she told Nussey of her pain, writing, “I am sad, very sad at the thoughts of leaving home but Duty—Necessity—these are stern Mistresses who will not be disobeyed.”²⁷ She did not hide the envy she felt for her friend, whose greater resources permitted her more freedom. She adds, “Did I not once say Ellen you ought to be thankful for your independence?”²⁸

Consistent with the danger she perceived in leaving home, she understood the feeling that arose in its absence—homesickness—as a physical disease curable only through a literal return home. In a retrospective description of Emily’s time as a pupil at Roe Head, she writes of Emily’s debilitating homesickness while hinting at the depth of her own, “Every morning, when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me. I knew only too well. In this struggle her health was quickly broken: her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength, threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die, if she did not go home, and with this conviction obtained her recall.”²⁹ Linda M. Austin notes that Brontë initially attributed Emily’s ailment to “overwork and exhaustion,” but by 1850 chose to depict it as homesickness,³⁰ implicitly linking the lack of one’s own home to the necessity for exhausting labor. Emily’s visions of home are so

²⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), edited by Elisabeth Jay (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 78.

²⁷ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Haworth, 2 July 1835, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, 1:140.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ [Charlotte Brontë], “Selections from the Literary Remains of Ellis and Acton Bell” in *Wuthering Heights and Agnes Gray*, by Ellis and Action Bell (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1850), 473.

³⁰ Linda M. Austin, “Emily Brontë’s Homesickness,” *Victorian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2002), 573. Austin’s article provides a contextual study of this episode and of Emily’s homesickness more generally.

overwhelming, and her health so broken, that Brontë sincerely believes she will *die* if separated longer from Haworth—a violence that leads Austin to call this scene, combined with Emily’s poems, “perhaps the fullest English account of pathological nostalgia before 1850.”³¹

While Brontë’s diagnosis of Emily seems extreme to modern ears, her view had a supporting history in eighteenth-century medical discourses with which doctors were still familiar. Nicholas Dames explains how *nostalgia*, or “homesickness,” first emerged in late-seventeenth-century medical literature as a diagnosis for the distressing symptoms of sailors and soldiers traveling far from home.³² Before nostalgia evolved the sentimental, even saccharine, meanings with which we are more familiar today, its symptoms were psychological and physiological—including melancholy, desire for solitude, fever, loss of appetite and nausea.³³ This pathological understanding of nostalgia began to fade in the nineteenth century as people gradually began to see nostalgia as common sentiment.³⁴ However, Susan J. Matt notes that nostalgia’s prevalence as a pathological diagnosis continued as late as the American Civil War, in which the Union and Confederate Armies both wrote extensive literature about soldiers suffering from—and in some instances dying of—nostalgia.³⁵ Austin suggests that it is clear from *Villette* that Brontë understood nostalgia as “an affliction”: “the ailment is at one point suggested as the etiology of Lucy Snowe’s chronic nervous disorder”³⁶

³¹ Linda M. Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition, 1780–1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 49.

³² Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 24; see also Austin, “Emily Brontë’s Homesickness,” 574.

³³ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 29.

³⁴ See, e.g., Linda M. Austin, *Nostalgia in Transition*, 1–2; Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 24.

³⁵ Matt, *Homesickness*, 94.

³⁶ Austin, *Nostalgia*

Brontë certainly had alternative models of nostalgia available to her, such as the forms of “comfortable retrospect” or sentimental longing Dames shows emerging in the works of Jane Austen.³⁷ In choosing to frame homesickness as a disease inflicting displaced women, however, she radically refused to minimize the importance of the missing home even for the women Victorian literature often metaphorically identified *as* home. Medical discourse construed homesickness as a longing for a literal *place*, not merely for a lost time.³⁸ By insisting on the importance of place, Brontë implicitly invited the inconvenient implication that people cannot move as readily as economic or political convenience may wish. In Brontë’s view, Haworth provided Emily with a habitat that could not be easily replaced or ignored. While Brontë was less prone to severe homesickness than her sister, she also found Haworth essential to her health. When she later became dispirited while teaching at Dewsbury Moor, she readily complied with medical directives to return home. “My health and spirits had utterly failed me,” she writes to Ellen Nussey, “and the medical man whom I consulted enjoined me *if I valued my life* to go home[.] So home I went, the change has at once roused and soothed me. . . .” (emphasis mine).³⁹

As her personal accounts of homesickness show, home was not merely a spiritual idea for Brontë: It was a specific place on which she and her sisters depended. Brontë and her sisters struggled away from home, but their resume gaps also reveal the extent to which their home’s existence permitted them to stop working. Haworth Parsonage functioned repeatedly as the safety net that enabled her and her sisters to escape unwanted employment and devote their efforts towards writing. To be sure, their grip on the parsonage was insecure: it would return to

³⁷ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁹ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Haworth, 9 June 1838, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 1:178.

the church upon their father's death. But it was a refuge from deadly alternatives, like Cowan Bridge, or merely unhappy ones, such as Brontë's first situation as a governess. As such, it permitted them to exercise a modest amount of self-determination and recover from the taxing demands of work in others' households.

In order to secure more permanent independence for herself and her sisters who would need a place to work and live, Brontë dreamed of opening a school and persuaded her aunt to lend them money towards this endeavor. Brontë and Emily went to Brussels in 1842 in order to acquire accomplishments they would need to attract students. In determining to go abroad, Brontë appealed to the example of her father, who had found upward mobility in leaving Ireland to attend Cambridge. As a female, however, her results were vastly different. Homesick and lonely, she fell in love with her married teacher, Constantin Georges Romain Héger, and suffered a breakdown fictionalized in *Villette*. Upon returning to England, she decided the school should be located at Haworth, probably, Gaskell suggests, for the pragmatic reason that they would not have to pay house-rent.⁴⁰ However, the school did not materialize. Parents were not interested in sending their children to a location like Haworth, and, biographer Claire Harman speculates, perhaps Brontë and her sisters wanted to write more than run a school. Brontë, Harman points out, turned down an excellent opportunity to run a boarding school.⁴¹

Brontë had more opportunity to reflect on the meager security Haworth provided, as well as on her professional disappointment, in the months leading up to *Jane Eyre*. Her father, for one, was going blind and needed care, an unwelcome reminder that his mortality put her housing at Haworth in jeopardy. Her domestic burdens were transforming Haworth from a house that had

⁴⁰ Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 203.

⁴¹ Harman, *Charlotte Brontë*, 183–184.

enabled a degree of freedom into a site of confinement and uncertainty. Writing to Ellen Nussey, Brontë speaks for many unpaid caregivers when she reveals her sorrow for her vanishing potential, fears for her future housing and employment, and the strength of her domestic convictions,

[I]f I could leave home Ellen—I should not be at Haworth now—I know life is passing away and I am doing nothing—earning nothing . . . but I see no way out of the mist . . . probably when I am free to leave home I shall neither be able to find place nor employment—perhaps too I shall be quite past the prime of my life—my faculties will be rusted—my few acquirements in a great measure forgotten—These ideas sting me keenly sometimes—but whenever I consult my Conscience it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home—and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release. . . .⁴²

We, at least, are fortunate that she prioritized her father even while the future she had imagined was vanishing into uncertainty. She began *Jane Eyre* on a trip to accompany him to cataract surgery in Manchester.

Her choice to embrace home contrasted sharply with her brother Branwell's actions. The Brontës had looked to his artistic talents with hopeful expectations, and Brontë had taken the position of a teacher at Roe Head in large part to pay for his training.⁴³ Branwell repaid his sister's sacrifice for his career with dissipation. After brief stints as a tutor and railway clerk, he became a tutor for the Robinson family of Thorp Green. There, he became enamored of its mistress, which led to his abrupt dismissal in July 1845.⁴⁴ Indulging his disappointment rather

⁴² Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Haworth, 14 October 1846, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 1:503 (emphasis original).

⁴³ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Haworth, 2 July 1835, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, 1:140.

⁴⁴ See Smith, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, 1:87–89.

than earning a living that could support his sisters, he angered Brontë by burdening his family with alcoholism, drugs and debt until his death in September 1848.⁴⁵

I suspect Brontë reflected on the difference between the sacrifices she had made and her brother's indulgence of disappointment when she began *Jane Eyre* in 1846. While she understood the material importance of Haworth and her father to her survival and hopes of independence, Branwell took his home and sisters' sacrifices for granted, destroying domesticity at both Haworth and Thorp Green. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë contrasts her home-seeking heroine, whose final homes at Moor House and Ferndean resemble Haworth, with men like Branwell who recklessly regret or entitledly pursue misguided futures at the expense of women and the domestic: Edward Fairfax Rochester, most obviously, whose desires are thwarted by his unwanted marriage to Bertha Mason, but also John Reed, whose status as heir empowers him to bully Jane and who squanders his mother's and sisters' money, and St. John Rivers, who sacrifices his home and his life for his spiritual mission. Through Jane, Brontë rebukes the impulse to set aside domestic attachments in pursuit of other aims by revealing the consequences to women of not having a Haworth to provide stability and extraction from impossible circumstances. Readings of *Jane Eyre* that primarily emphasize Jane's spiritual or meritocratic social ascent overlook how her housing insecurity first enables her repeated abuse and then causes her to nearly die when she flees abuse. However unintentionally, the novel builds an argument not merely for the moral importance of the domestic but for the necessity of giving women housing as a precondition of their well-being and progress. In this chapter, I follow the convention of calling female characters by their first names and male characters by their family

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1:15, 1:87–89.

names to emphasize a point Brontë's novels forcefully make: that male characters are structurally associated with secure attachment to parental family and place in ways female characters are not.

At the level of plot, *Jane Eyre* is driven by problems of housing insecurity. Jane journeys towards a permanent home, moving from Gateshead to Lowood to Thornfield to homelessness to Moor House and, finally, to Ferndean. However, Rochester's unhappy marriage to Bertha—an immigrant imprisoned in her own house—is also framed as a product of conventions surrounding property. Ruth Perry discusses how the shift towards viewing property as investment capital corresponded to the rise of primogeniture and other legal changes designed to concentrate property within the eldest son. Even within middle-class families, resources were taken from both younger sons and daughters in order to support the eldest son in an economy that required capital to advance.⁴⁶ The way Rochester tells it, his father encouraged him to trade his English birth for colonial wealth because his father would not divide his estate to support him, the economically burdensome younger son. Rochester thus also views himself as displaced, feminized and deceived into marriage, although to a lesser extent than Jane. The novel must undo the desire to hoard real property before its characters have secure houses that feel like homes.

Rochester's complaint, of course, is an enviable one—that his marriage deprives him of the home he wants despite his possession of multiple houses. His pain comes from the comparatively privileged state of mourning an unwanted attachment to his wife. Pained by his association with Bertha, but secure in the wealth she and his elder brother's death bring, he idealizes the institutional detachment whose reality is so dire for Jane. "Little girl," he calls her in a characteristic moment of construing her social disconnection as ethical innocence, "a

⁴⁶ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 213.

memory without blot or contamination must be an exquisite treasure, —an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment: is it not?” (*JE* 154).⁴⁷ Jane, however, is a little girl only in stature, whose stunted growth is a visible reminder of what she too-well learns and remembers: that a clean conscience is no substitute for friends, society and the refreshment of actual food. For women, these necessities come only with sufficient *attachment* to the institutions of families and households. Rochester can idealize detachment, and worry about his conscience, because he is independent and rich. Even his ability to focus on memory and his past is a product of his greater security, a theme Brontë develops more fully in *Villette*. While he pours into Jane’s ears lurid stories of his past, he rarely inquires about Jane’s own history, and she rarely volunteers it.

Jane, who desperately needs the benefits of social inclusion, does not have the luxury of contemplating her entanglement with unwanted or unethical institutions. She articulates her belief in the *necessity* of attachments to Helen Burns, rejecting as empty and impractical ethics the idea that she can live on a clean conscience without also having the support and nurture of other people, “[] I know I should think well of myself, but that is not enough: if others don’t love me, I would rather die than live—I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen” (*JE* 81). These are strong words, but they are not hyperbole. She requires love to survive, because she depends on others’ charity. As a Gateshead servant reminds her, she is “less than a servant, for [she does] nothing for [her] keep” (*JE* 19). She neither possesses a legal claim to the house in which she dwells nor the skills to support herself through earned income. Her destitution teaches her that she must rely on others’ households, even when they do not feel like homes. The problems of leaving even an unwelcome home are foregrounded in the novel’s opening lines: “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. . . . I was glad of it: . . . dreadful to me was the coming

⁴⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Ed. Michael Mason (New York: Penguin Books, 1996). Citations to *Jane Eyre* are noted in parentheses with the abbreviation “*JE*.”

home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes. . . .” (*JE* 13). Leaving home is dangerous. We are allowed to feel her longing to escape Gateshead before she remembers the reality of nature’s harshness. As Margaret Homans remarks, “With this opening assertion, Charlotte Brontë founds her novel on her heroine’s skepticism about the experiences in nature that her sister’s just-completed novel so ambiguously celebrates.”⁴⁸ To Jane, even a bad home is preferable to no home, because escaping the problem of confinement, as Karen Chase observes, leads to the problem of exposure.⁴⁹ Jane is not at all eager to trade Gateshead for living in poverty with her other relations (*JE* 32). Gateshead may be unhomely, but it is *shelter*. Under its roof, Jane is fortunate enough to imagine a hunger strike as she contemplates “never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die” (*JE* 22). Even after her isolation in the Red Room, which impresses upon her the deadly consequences of being abandoned, she has surplus food (*JE* 39). However, as her eventual flight from Thornfield will clarify, a woman without a house is prone to abuse, exposure and starvation.

The famous series of abuses Jane suffers can be analyzed through many lenses, but her lack of a home and family protection enable them by preventing intervention and escape. She is physically beaten by John Reed and ordered to solitary confinement at Gateshead. She is starved and punished at Lowood. At Thornfield, Rochester carries more than her annual salary in his pocket but neglects to pay her earned wages (*JE* 252). He asks her to become his mistress. He does provide her a temporary home that she finds comparatively pleasant after her experiences at Gateshead and Lowood, but its violence to Bertha and Jane’s own contingency is only lightly veiled. Rochester may break up his servants and send them out of England at whim: Jane

⁴⁸ Margaret Homans, “Dreaming of Children: Literalisation in *Jane Eyre*” in *New Casebooks: Jane Eyre*, ed. Heather Glen (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 147.

⁴⁹ Chase, “*Jane Eyre*’s Interior Design,” 62.

promises, at his request, not to advertise for a position upon his marriage to Blanche Ingram and to instead leave her next placement to him—a promise she can barely refuse, if inclined, because she needs his recommendation and has nowhere else to go (*JE* 254). The situation he proposes: Ireland (*JE* 282). As Janet C. Myers observes, “From very early on in the course of *Jane Eyre*’s journey, emigration is imagined as a potential solution to the problem of the heroine’s dependency.”⁵⁰ She is the recipient of three proposals to emigrate: to Madeira, Ireland and India.⁵¹

As Rochester’s suggestion of Ireland makes clear, Jane is part of a modernity’s global commerce in displaced people—a commerce that included drafted soldiers, indentured servants, governesses, native populations and enslaved peoples. Having “no home within the British nation,” explains Myers, Jane is “herself a locus of anxieties about female emigration and empire.”⁵² Indeed, Jane famously compares her class and gender oppression to slavery, a move we criticize today for shifting attention from the plight of enslaved peoples to that of more privileged white women.⁵³ Jane *is* far more privileged than the men and women who were literally sold to produce the colonial wealth she inherits and whose race precluded her happy ending. Yet, her comparison is more constructive—though not absolved from racism—when we read the novel as the story of a woman whose placelessness exposes her to abuse and

⁵⁰ Janet C. Myers, “‘Verily the Antipodes of Home’: The Domestic Novel in the Australian Bush,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 35, no. 1 (2001), 46.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 46–47.

⁵³ Jane’s comparison of her class and gender oppression to slavery is thoroughly discussed in Susan Meyer, *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women’s Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 60–95. Meyer also observes how her metaphor can overshadow the histories of racial violence. *Ibid.*, 64.

commodification rather than of an autonomous woman who triumphs through her own merits.⁵⁴

Writing about the origins of African slavery, Saidiya Hartman explains, “The most universal definition of the slave is a stranger. Torn from kin and community, exiled from one’s country, dishonored and violated, the slave defines the position of the outsider. . . . [] Africans did not sell their brothers and sisters into slavery. They sold strangers”⁵⁵ *Stranger* is the very word Jane uses to introduce herself at Moor House after her flight from Thornfield (*JE* 375). There, she attributes her distress to her placelessness, explaining, “Not a tie links me to any living thing: not a claim do I possess to admittance under any roof in England” (*JE* 387). Homeless and estranged, she powerfully perceives how she is an exile within her native country, inhabiting the conditions of non-belonging in which Hartman suggests slavery is born. Her absence of *protective* bonds—of ties to people, homes and England—leaves her vulnerable to unwelcome forms of bondage, including domestic abuse.

A friend who represents victims of domestic violence introduced me to the relationship between intimate partner violence (IPV) and housing insecurity. IPV is now a leading cause of homelessness among US women,⁵⁶ with one study, for example, finding that female victims of IPV are four times more likely to report housing instability.⁵⁷ Sometimes, abusers create housing

⁵⁴ As an example of a critic who views Jane as an autonomous woman who triumphs through her merits see, e.g., Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, Anniversary ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 26 (arguing that Brontë’s “fiction portrays the unprotected self in its lonely conquest of harsh conditions, and so intimates a meritocratic vision. . . .”).

⁵⁵ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 5.

⁵⁶ Andrea Hetling, Amy Dunford, Sarah Lin and Emily Michaelis, “Long-Term Housing and Intimate Partner Violence: Journeys to Healing,” *Journal of Women and Social Work* 33, no. 4 (2018), 528.

⁵⁷ Joanne Pavao, Jennifer Alvarez, Nikki Baumrind, Marta Induni and Rachel Kimerling, “Intimate Partner Violence and Housing Instability,” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 32, no. 2 (2007), 145.

instability through tactics like theft or impeding victims' abilities to work,⁵⁸ and survivors frequently struggle to find new housing when they flee. High rents, long waitlists for affordable housing and credit problems (often caused by the abuser) can make securing long-term housing challenging.⁵⁹ Survivors, who may be financially distressed, often find themselves perpetually moving through shelters, homelessness or even going back to the abusive situation.⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly, the friend who introduced me to this topic later revealed that Jane Eyre was one of several fictional heroines who inspired her career path.⁶¹

Brontë did not have the term “sexual harassment” available to her, but Rochester’s unlawful pursuit of an isolated dependent with employer-based housing fits a pattern the #metoo movement made familiar. As Mary Poovey observes, “Jane is vulnerable to Rochester’s advances because, as his employee, she lacks both social peers and the means to defend herself against her attractive, aggressive employer.”⁶² More fundamentally, she cannot easily leave because she has no alternative shelter or family to intervene, and she undoubtedly is attracted to Rochester and the shelter he provides as a wealthy and older male. She reminds Rochester that she has “no kindred to interfere” with their marriage, and he too eagerly agrees, “No—that is the best part of it” (*JE* 287). What should disqualify Jane from marrying Rochester—her lack of home and family—is what enables Rochester’s attempt to deceive her into an unlawful marriage. She

⁵⁸ Cris M. Sullivan, Gabriela López-Zerón, Heather Bomsta and Anne Menard, “‘There’s Just All These Moving Pats’: Helping Domestic Violence Survivors Obtain Housing.” *Clinical Social Work Journal* 47 (2019), 199.

⁵⁹ Nicole C. Jeffry and Paula C. Barata, “When social assistance reproduces social inequality: intimate partner violence survivors adverse experiences with subsidized housing,” *Housing Studies* 32, no. 7 (2017), 914.

⁶⁰ Hetling et al, “Long-Term Housing and Intimate Partner Violence: Journeys to Healing,” 526.

⁶¹ This story is included with permission.

⁶² Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 136.

senses something amiss in their conversation, but can only gesture vaguely towards the savageness of Rochester's behavior: "[I]f I had loved him less I should have thought his accent and look of exultation savage: but, sitting by him, roused from the nightmare of parting—called to the paradise of union—I thought only of the bliss given me to drink in so abundant a flow" (*JE* 287). She overlooks the warning she feels, because she is so desperate to belong somewhere.

Jane has no Haworth through which to survive her emergency when she flees Rochester's inappropriate conduct. She sleeps in the heath because she has no other shelter, but Nature, as Penny Boumelha shows, does not supply Jane's physical necessities.⁶³ When "Want" returns in the morning, she is reduced to wishing she were a "bee or lizard" in order that she might have "permanent shelter" (*JE* 364). The town of Morton is equally inhospitable. In a study of the characters who engage in direct speech in *Jane Eyre*, Tara Menon shows how Jane frequently engages in short verbal exchanges with strangers during moments of transition from one household to another that collectively depict "the transactional public sphere."⁶⁴ One function of these exchanges, Menon argues, is to reinforce Jane's isolation by revealing "the paucity and fragility of her real connections. In these scenes, we see Jane is a member of society without a community."⁶⁵ Jane's journey through Morton is a prime example of her isolation, her inability to find support through appeals to the transactionally driven public sphere and the necessity, therefore, of belonging to a household. Her experience there underscores, as Menon

⁶³ Boumelha, "Jane Eyre," 136–137.

⁶⁴ Tara Menon, "Keeping Count: Direct Speech in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel," *Narrative* 27, no. 2 (2019): 165.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

argues, “Jane’s failure to find material help in the language of claims and rights” when she lacks money to participate in a public space that functions primarily through transactions.⁶⁶

Jane’s appeals to female networks and gender solidarity are insufficient to provide her with help, which underscores how little financial power women have when assets and jobs are primarily controlled by men: each woman she approaches turns her away, until one permits her to eat pigswill.⁶⁷ Jane repeatedly draws near houses in search of food, but is “always repelled by the consciousness of having no claim to ask—no right to expect interest in my isolated lot” (*JE* 367). As a stranger, the houses that might comfort her instead cast her out. As an isolated woman, she has no claim to a house, nor even to a job, in a town where testaments of character and local networks serve as qualifications. In words that sound familiar to over-qualified and under-employed jobseekers, she reflects, “To be sure what I begged was employment: but whose business was it to provide me with employment? Not, certainly, that of persons who saw me then for the first time, and who knew nothing about my character” (*JE* 369). Unable to secure shelter or employment, she wanders to Moor House, where the servant, Hannah, refuses to house a “vagrant” (*JE* 375). She resolves to die of starvation and exposure on its doorstep before the man of the house improbably returns and intervenes on her behalf (*JE* 376). The owners of Moor House—the Rivers siblings—are ultimately revealed to be Jane’s cousins, reinforcing rather than altering the pernicious logic in which strangers are only welcome in homes to which they in fact already belong. Although St. John Rivers also represents the church, the family relationship eclipses the church as the source of more sustaining support—an issue with implications we will revisit in *Villette*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

No other episode in the novel is as traumatic to Jane as her experience in Morton. “I dread another essay of the horrors of homeless destitution,” she states bluntly when begging the Rivers to let her stay with them (*JE* 390). In a novel frequently characterized as repressive, the memory Jane most explicitly avoids is that of being homelessness. She can vividly narrate her comparatively benign experiences in the Red Room and Lowood, but she finds it impossible to reflect calmly on her flight with sentimental nostalgia. In a rare moment of breaking her narrative to reflect on her present emotions, she writes, “Reader, it is not pleasant to dwell on these details. Some say there is enjoyment in looking back to painful experience past; but at this day I can scarcely bear to review the times to which I allude: the moral degradation, blent with the physical suffering, form too distressing a recollection ever to be willingly dwelt on” (368–369). Her memory is painful because she *still* feels the physical and emotional trauma of having nowhere to dwell. As her editorializing demonstrates, the trauma is not truly past. She hurries over the topic, writing, “Let me condense now. I am sick of the subject” (*JE* 369). *Sick*. Homesick. Sick for want of a home. The memory of being homeless retains a pathological quality. Jane cannot unfeel or forget her proximity to homelessness. In this way, Jane’s experience recalls Svetlana Boym’s claim that nostalgia can become a “taboo” for immigrants who leave under painful circumstances, observing how they often share “the predicament of Lot’s wife, a fear that looking back might paralyze you forever, turning you into a pillar of salt, a pitiful monument to your own grief and the futility of departure.”⁶⁸

Once sheltered at Moor House, Jane is startled by being labeled as a beggar by others (*JE* 369, 381). Although she is dependent throughout the novel, Penny Boumelha observes that she clings to the belief that she is a lady despite her poverty, reassuring herself, for example, that she

⁶⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), Kindle edition, location 117.

is not like Grace Poole by writing, “Bessie Leaven had said I was quite a lady; and she spoke truth; I was a lady” (*JE* 179).⁶⁹ Her episode in Morton severely challenges this self-construction by rendering visible her hidden poverty and homelessness in ways that threaten her class status. Jane, though poor, conforms to middle-class notions of female propriety while living in other people’s homes or in home-substitutes like Lowood. Once homeless, however, Jane reads as lower-class. An exchange with Hannah, the Rivers’ servant, reinforces the extent to which lacking a house is associated with beggary, even while Jane tries to reconfigure class as a moral quality decoupled from property:

‘You are mistaken in supposing me a beggar. I am no beggar; any more than yourself or your young ladies.’

After a pause, she said, ‘I dunnut understand that: you’ve like no house, nor no brass, I guess?’

‘The want of a house or brass (by which I suppose you mean money) does not make a beggar in your sense of the world.’ (381)

One of the first actions Jane takes to establish herself at Moor House is to chastise Hannah for having considered her a beggar in order to promote her own position, appealing to class and education as qualities that distinguish her from ordinary beggars despite their shared lack of money (*JE* 381–383). Perhaps a more secure Jane could have acknowledged that she had even fewer financial resources than Hannah and united with her in a shared appeal for greater economic security. But she instead precariously reasserts the social logic that rewards her with class inclusion (and excludes Hannah) at the expense of her economic well-being. The absurdity of her pretense is made evident when she accepts a position at a charitable school in Morton. St. John Rivers worries the job is beneath her (*JE* 397), and she herself shamefully confesses to finding it “degrad[ing],” because she perceives it as downwardly mobile (*JE* 402). The salary she

⁶⁹ Boumelha, “Jane Eyre,” 138.

receives at the charity school, however, is exactly the *same* as she receives at Thornfield: thirty pounds a year and a roof over her head (*JE* 103, 397).

Jane's allegiance to a class system that does not adequately pay her and her insensitivity to Hannah is politically uncomfortable. In the face of economic precarity, Jane learns to prioritize her immediate survival and precarious hold on middle-classness while suppressing the radical yearnings and sense of injustice she undoubtedly feels. Gazing out her window at Lowood after Miss Temple's marriage, she reflects: "I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed *scattered on the wind* then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into *vague space*; 'Then,' I cried, half desperate, 'grant me at least a new servitude!'" (*JE* 99, emphasis mine). *Liberty! Liberty! Liberty! Scattered on the wind. Vague space.* Jane's dreams of liberty and stimulus evaporate when not housed in concrete forms. Resigned to circumstances, and emphasizing her absolute need for housing, she resolves to want only a "new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances," because "it is of no use wanting anything better" (*JE* 100). Even *wanting* to better her condition is an impossible desire, because it takes independence to enable more than a lateral move. While some of Brontë's predecessors and near contemporaries celebrated cosmopolitanism and condemned nostalgia that keeps "people rooted and provincial,"⁷⁰ Jane understands that security is what enables people to perceive mobility as liberating rather than forced. She will not fully voice deep economic radicalism until her inheritance and the home she secures with it liberate her to look beyond necessity.

⁷⁰ Matt, *Homesickness*, 28.

Jane Eyre punishes its characters for daring to feel that their spiritual equality can overcome the materially unequal facts of their situations in order to show the necessity of greater economic equality. On returning from Mrs. Reed's deathbed, Jane permits herself to believe that home is where the heart is, daring to tell Rochester, "I am *strangely* glad to get back again to you; and wherever you are is my home—my only home" (*JE* 276, emphasis mine). But Rochester's heart is an unstable home for Jane, who cannot quite conceal from herself that she is a stranger who has neither home of her own nor secure claim to him. Soon after Rochester says she must leave for Ireland, she voices her love and complaint at forced departure: "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?—You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty, and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh:—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal—as we are!" (*JE* 284). It's a thrilling speech—a prayer for equality that feels right; a eulogy for their love; a mournful farewell; a hope for a better life in heaven. However, Jane is fully resigned to the probable fate of a woman in her circumstances until Rochester misuses her brave and vulnerable assertion of self-worth as an excuse to propose a marriage he knows lies outside of law and convention. Guilty of deception, he eases his mind by blaming an unsuspecting Jane for her own abuse, arguing that she actually proposed to *him* in claiming her equality: "You glowed in the cool moonlight last night, when you mutinied against fate, and claimed your rank as my equal. Janet, by-the-by, it was you who made me the offer" (*JE* 294).

Brontë chastises Rochester for setting aside the fact of his marriage through the loss of his sight, hand and house, but Jane, though innocent, also reaps the consequences of their engagement during her episode of “homeless destitution.” Even before her flight, she senses that a spiritually equal marriage cannot be sustained amidst economic inequality, comparing herself to Rochester’s doll or slave as he showers her with presents and leaves her feeling more like a plaything than a person (*JE* 301–303). Her repulsion prompts her to write her recently-discovered uncle, John Reed, in hopes of gaining independence from the only source available to her as a woman—inheritance. From this act flows the discovery of Bertha; Jane’s flight to Morton; her elevation to heiress; and, finally, her marriage. In this way, *Jane Eyre*’s plot functions similarly to eighteenth-century novels analyzed by Ruth Perry in which dispossessed daughters do not successfully marry until after they are acknowledged by their fathers or parental family.⁷¹

In the absence of alternative means for women to earn the money to establish a house within England, Jane must be *given* a house and family before she has sufficient independence to marry Rochester. Her inheritance is improbable, but, as Mary Poovey argues, its improbability “can be seen to underscore—not dismiss—the problem of women’s dependence. That only the coincidence of a rich uncle’s death can confer on a single woman autonomy and power, after all, suggests just how intractable her dependence really was in the 1840s.”⁷² While improbably becoming an heir is a common trope in Victorian novels, Jane’s use of her inheritance is anything but conventional.

⁷¹ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 38–41.

⁷² Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 142.

In contrast to Rochester's father, who sets in motion the plot and Rochester's imperial entanglements by refusing to divide his estate, Susan Meyer observes how Jane partially undoes this wrong by dividing her wealth with her cousins in order to satisfy her sense of justice and to secure for herself a family and home.⁷³ "I am resolved I will have a home and connexions," Jane insists (*JE* 431). Her wealth enables her to claim Moor House as a *permanent* home: "I like Moor House, and I will live at Moor House; I like Diana and Mary, and I will attach myself for life to Diana and Mary" (431). *I like. I will.* She can finally exercise control of her destiny, because she is *attached*. At Moor House, Christine Alexander observes, "She at last has a home of her own, not unlike that of her author."⁷⁴ Moor House becomes for Jane what Haworth was for Brontë: a source of material stability and an emotional refuge complete, as Alexander notes, with two sympathetic sisters who resemble Emily and Anne to whom she will *attach* herself for life.⁷⁵ Its security is achieved through collectively sharing family wealth rather than concentrating it on one person.

Jane's change in circumstance enables her to make the appeal to economic justice that she does not while destitute. Meyer notices how her decision to share her inheritance with her cousins is a "redistribution of wealth" that enables her to speak, finally, in the language of revolution:⁷⁶ "Brother? Yes; at a distance of a thousand leagues! Sisters? Yes; slaving amongst strangers! I, wealthy—gorged with gold I never earned and do not merit! You, penniless! Famous equality and fraternization! Close union! Intimate attachment!" (*JE* 432). In a rare

⁷³ Meyer, *Imperialism at Home*, 86–87.

⁷⁴ Christine Alexander, "Myth and Memory: Reading the Brontë Parsonage," in *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory*, ed. Harald Hendrix, 93–110 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 106.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Meyer, *Imperialism at Home*, 86.

moment of overt political speech, Jane argues what her plot has shown all along—that, in Meyer’s words, “truly acknowledged fraternity . . . requires distributing wealth equally”⁷⁷

Jane stops short, as Meyer notes, of providing for Hannah, the working-class and the enslaved people whose labor in fact created the wealth that constitutes her inheritance.⁷⁸ She keeps her wealth in her extended family. Yet in her limited capacity as a private person, she displays an embryonic impulse towards the claim that someone—or some state—must give England’s dependent women homes as she uses her wealth to become a benefactor for her cousins. In the context of Horatio Alger’s writings, Bruce Robbins discusses the role benefactors in Victorian literature play in “undermining popular, patriarchal individualism and preparing the ethical metamorphosis presupposed by the welfare state’s increasing replacement of private with public responsibility. . . .”⁷⁹ His insight applies equally well to Jane Eyre, who uses her position to redirect funds towards others and thereby strengthen the institution of family. Brontë will return even more expressly to the figure of the benefactor who provides a prototype of public welfare in *Villette*, where M. Paul Emmanuel uses his private resources to support charities and shelter persons who are not legally his family.

Jane Eyre is thus in many ways the predecessor of Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). In an essay that probes the systemic and historical reasons women have not been fully represented as writers and that expressly discusses Brontë, Woolf alights on the solution that a “woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”⁸⁰ While this is

⁷⁷Ibid., 86–87.

⁷⁸Ibid., 87.

⁷⁹ Bruce Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 73.

⁸⁰ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (New Delhi: General Press, 2019), Kindle edition, 1.

of course not strictly true, as less advantaged women have proven, her solution is an attempt to seek extraction from systemic conditions by acquiring the private resources of money and a house that has a predecessor in Brontë. Woolf explains how she reaches this solution, recounting how the narrator of her essay received an inheritance from her aunt that freed her from precarious reliance on gigs like freelance reporting and teaching kindergarten.⁸¹ Her inheritance, she explains, provided her with financial stability as well as liberation from the emotional “poison of fear and bitterness” that her need to earn a living and flatter those she relied on had engendered. “Food, house and clothing are mine forever,” she writes. “Therefore not merely do effort and labour cease, but also hatred and bitterness. I need not have any man; he cannot hurt me.”⁸² Woolf’s account helps illustrate the genuine difficulty women face in financially surviving and having the ability to speak their minds to the population they rely on for their survival, while her elitism and failure to address precisely who should labor if women writers do not underscores how this solution relies on rather than extracts her from the systemic economic, class and gender systems that she elsewhere in the essay acknowledges. As in *Jane Eyre*, Woolf’s solution is an impulse towards the realization that women often need to be given shelter and support in order to have meaningful forms of self-determination, yet neither Brontë nor Woolf has the toolkit to articulate a more inclusive approach to this ideal that addresses the systemic problems from which it springs.

Bertha Mason, of course, burns down Thornfield and the concentration of wealth it literally and symbolically represents, while Jane’s own future home with Rochester, Ferndean, is famously flawed. It is “buried in a wood” and formerly “uninhabited and unfurnished” due to its

⁸¹ Ibid., 29.

⁸² Ibid.

“ineligible and insalubrious site” (*JE* 478). Rochester does not believe it is suitable even for Bertha Mason, and the novel reduces him to an injured, blind cripple destined to a homely life as a “fixture” in England and furniture in his own house (*JE* 476). Yet, I do not think that Ferndean was without promise to Charlotte Brontë, who prioritized caregiving for her blind father, knew the importance of her own ill-situated Haworth and perhaps saw the appeal of a spouse attached to home. Brontë, who wrote *Jane Eyre* while worried that her role as caregiver would permanently narrow her future, proved by writing a novel rather than running a school that even flawed homes can enable our most radical futures. It’s the point St. John Rivers, the brother-figure whose story ends the novel, does not grasp. He sets aside home for his conviction—unable to see that he is chasing a colonial future in India that will merely end in his death.⁸³

Charlotte Brontë was not the only writer of her time interested in how to provide Englishwomen—and men—with housing. Only a few years after Brontë’s publication of *Jane Eyre*, Charles Dickens concluded *Bleak House* (1852–1853) by having his parentless heroine, Esther Summerson, gifted a replica of her guardian’s house prior to her marriage.⁸⁴ Yet while a great deal of attention was paid to housing for the poor, including cottages and workhouses,⁸⁵ urban lodgings,⁸⁶ and even cooperative family housing,⁸⁷ housing for single, middle-class

⁸³ My thoughts on *Jane Eyre*’s ending were developed in an unpublished essay workshopped with Candace Cunard, Ruth Lexton, Sara Murphy, and Tim Youker and professionally edited by Ashley-Mae Holland.

⁸⁴ See Lisa Jadwin, “Caricatured, Not Faithfully Rendered”: *Bleak House* as a Revision of *Jane Eyre*,” *Modern Language Studies* 26, no. 2/3 (1996): 111–133 for a discussion of *Jane Eyre*’s influence on *Bleak House*.

⁸⁵ John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815–1970* (North Pomfret, VT: David & Charles Inc, 1978), 30–93 (discussing housing for the rural and urban poor).

⁸⁶ Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 83–132 (discussing urban lodgings).

⁸⁷ Lynn F. Pearson, “Ideal homes: Women and cooperative housing in Victorian times,” *Ekistics* 310 (1985): 62–64.

women was usually imagined as living with family or finding an employment situation like a school or hospital that resembled one by providing room and board, a fact that underscores how essential having a family home was to middle-class identity.⁸⁸ Martha Vicinus, for example, explores the rise of institutions in the second half of the nineteenth century like “schools, colleges, sisterhoods, [and] settlement houses” for women who wanted independence, but she notes that giving space and independence to single, middle-class women was still widely viewed as a sign of their failure in the marriage market.⁸⁹ For many of Brontë’s contemporaries, the solution to unhoused, single women of both the working- and middle-classes was emigration to the colonies where they would have a better chance of marrying. Dickens, for example, helped assist fallen women, including prostitutes and former prisoners, by establishing and managing Urania Cottage, a home that rehabilitated and trained them with an ultimate view towards their emigration.⁹⁰ Further up on the social scale, Marie Ruiz documents how private female emigration societies formed to send “surplus” unmarried, middle-class women to the colonies.⁹¹ However, emigration was not limited to women. George Henry Lewes, who corresponded with Brontë, encouraged two of his sons to emigrate to Africa, although they met with disastrous results, contracting symptoms of tuberculosis of which both would die.⁹²

⁸⁸ See Martha Vicinus, discussing how employers like charities, schools and hospitals would often provide women room and board. Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 37.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 14, 31.

⁹⁰ See generally Jenny Hartley, *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women* (London: Methuen, 2008), Kindle edition.

⁹¹ Maire Ruiz, *British Female Emigration Societies and the New World, 1860–1914* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 2.

⁹² See Rebecca Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch* (New York: Broadway Books, 2014), 95, 98–100, 105.

Brontë was less optimistic than these contemporaries about the fates that awaited Englishmen and women forced abroad. In Brontë's social novel *Shirley* (1849), for example, emigration to Canada is the fate Robert Moore is eager to avoid. Nor did she believe that women who lacked housing security would find the life of self-effacing homemaking and charitable activity that epitomizes *Bleak House*'s Esther Summerson—a character that Brontë called a “caricature[], not faithfully rendered.”⁹³ Brontë was personally experienced with the sickening loneliness of living abroad from her time in Brussels, and her experience colored how she perceived even instances of emigration that had elements of success. Most notably, her childhood friend and close correspondent, Mary Taylor, emigrated to New Zealand, because she was dissatisfied with women's employment opportunities in England. Taylor is enthusiastic about her life as a shopkeeper and the importance accorded women in the colonies in her letters,⁹⁴ but she also occasionally pined for news of England and expressed feelings of depression⁹⁵ that caused Brontë to wish Taylor could return to England.⁹⁶ Realistically, however, Brontë believed her friend would have little hope of finding prosperity if she returned. “I should break out in energetic wishes that she would return to England—if Reason would permit me to believe that prosperity and happiness would there await her—but I see no such prospect,” Brontë wrote to their mutual friend Ellen Nussey.⁹⁷ James Taylor, a manager with Brontë's publishers, Smith,

⁹³ Jean Frantz Blackall, “A Suggestive Book for Charlotte Brontë?,” *The Journal of English and German Philology* 76, no. 3 (1977): 363–383, 364 (discussing how *Bleak House* may have influenced *Villette*).

⁹⁴ See, e.g., Mary Taylor to Charlotte Brontë, Wellington, New Zealand, 5 April 1850 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 2:378–380; Mary Taylor to Charlotte Brontë, Wellington, New Zealand, [c.29 April 1850] in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 2:391–393.

⁹⁵ See, e.g., Mary Taylor to Charlotte Brontë, Wellington, New Zealand, Spring 1852 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:36–37.

⁹⁶ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Haworth, 26 April 1852 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:44.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Elder and Company, perhaps inspired part of *Villette*. In 1851, he moved to India under circumstances reminiscent of the pressure M. Paul Emmanuel faces to journey to the colonies. Although he was reluctant to make a trip projected to last five years, his voyage was deemed essential to the firm's success.⁹⁸ The Bombay branch of Smith, Elder and Company did not succeed, but James Taylor returned permanently to India in 1863.⁹⁹ With these experiences of emigration before her—and colored by her own difficulties living away from home—Brontë called emigration “a problem not easily solved.”¹⁰⁰ Focusing on the problems of emigrants rather than the peoples they displaced, she believed they could potentially find advantage in countries “less thickly peopled” but cautioned that “great physical powers of exertion and endurance ought to accompany such a step.”¹⁰¹

Brontë's final novel, *Villette*, written during a period of intense grief and loneliness, goes where *Jane Eyre* narrowly avoids—abroad—to detail the stunted lives of Englishwomen stashed in Europe's schools, convents and, for the more fortunate, marriages. In *Villette*, Englishwomen who lack homes and families do not find satisfactory ones abroad. As Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky observe, *Villette*'s “most compelling phobia is that of not belonging, of having *no* place, of the state of being ‘placeless’”¹⁰² Brontë revives in her heroine Lucy Snowe the pathological effects of separation from home that characterize her depictions of Emily's

⁹⁸ Brontë discusses the circumstances of his departure in Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Haworth, 4 and 5 April 1851 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 2:597–598.

⁹⁹ Smith, “Biographical Notes” in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, 2:liv–lv.

¹⁰⁰ Charlotte Brontë to W.S. Williams, Haworth, 26 September 1851 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 2:702.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky, “Fantasies of National Identification in *Villette*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 49, no. 4 (2009), 932 (emphasis original).

homesickness. Unlike Emily, however, Lucy has no home to which she can be restored and thus tries to suppress her memories of it. From the viewpoint of a woman truly unable to go home, the ability to feel homesickness—and the continuity with the past that it signals—becomes a distant luxury.

By the time Brontë wrote *Villette* (1853), Haworth Parsonage was less her refuge than a painful symbol of how easily home is lost. Between 1848 and 1849, her three remaining siblings died in rapid succession: Branwell of bronchitis and marasmus on September 24, 1848; Emily of tuberculosis on December 19, 1848; and Anne of tuberculosis on May 28, 1849. Brontë returned to a house painfully without the siblings who had made it home. She writes of reentering the parsonage after Anne's death: "I shut the door—I tried to be glad that I was come home—I have always been glad before—except once—even then I was cheered. but [sic] this time joy was not to be the sensation. I felt that the house was all silent—the rooms were all empty—I remembered where the three were laid—in what narrow dark dwellings—never more were they to reappear on earth. So the sense of desolation and bitterness took possession of me. . . ." ¹⁰³ Grief was transforming her relationship with Haworth from a refuge into a tangible reminder of her sorrow. She found it difficult to read and write in a house whose associations now spoke desolation. Memory was painful rather than consoling. To her publisher, she hinted that her delay in completing *Villette* was because she "sometimes desponded and almost despaired because there was no one to whom to read a line—or of whom to ask a counsel." ¹⁰⁴ "'Jane Eyre' was not

¹⁰³ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Haworth, 23 June 1849, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 2:222.

¹⁰⁴ Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, Haworth, 30 October 1852 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:74.

written under such circumstances, nor were two-thirds of ‘Shirley,’” she lamented.¹⁰⁵ Brontë dismissed travel as a cure, because it intensified the painful inevitability of returning home. She writes to Nussey, “You will recommend me I daresay to go from home—but that does no good . . . I cannot describe what a time of it I had after my return from London—Scotland &c. there [sic] was a reaction that sunk me to the earth—the deadly silence, solitude, desolation were awful—the craving for companionship—the hopelessness of relief—were what I should dread to feel again.”¹⁰⁶ The time when homesickness could be cured by returning home must have felt painfully distant—that prescription had assumed a stable home to which one could go back.

“To be home-sick, one must have a home; which I have not,” states Lucy Snowe, the grieving and withdrawn heroine of *Villette* (*V* 363).¹⁰⁷ Lucy draws on the medical model of homesickness with its focus on place to assert the impossibility of her own restoration. Capable only of envying those whose illness can be cured by a return home, as Charlotte and Emily once returned to Haworth, Lucy’s own unhappiness defies a simple cure. In Lucy Snowe, Brontë creates a character whose separation from home is so complete that she cannot even afford to indulge its memory. Too pained to narrate her own childhood, Lucy gives us a hole in place of a personal history. She allows readers to infer only through metaphors and scattered hints the sobering facts that her family lost its wealth and left her its sole survivor. In a characteristic moment, she uses the metaphor of a shipwreck, writing obscurely, “I *too well remember* a time—a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Haworth, 23 October 1850 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 2:487.

¹⁰⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*. 1853. Ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Citations to *Villette* are noted in parentheses with the abbreviation “*V*.”

the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs” (*V* 35, italics mine). *Too well remember a time*. To an even greater extent than Jane Eyre reflecting on the “horrors of homeless destitution” she experiences at Morton, Lucy is incapable of experiencing memory as pleasurable or distant. She does not remember a place in her past, but merely a time, suggesting how dislocated from home she is. Her trauma is too strong and prone to repetition to safely voice. Waves attack the throat and lungs that give her speech. To use Lucie Armitt’s words, Lucy’s relationship with her past is “in some sense sickened, pathological, perhaps even ‘haunted.’”¹⁰⁸

Lucy experiences home loss through an aesthetics in which she is both present and not fully present in her own story, haunted by a past that is only partially continuous with her present. Her narration, which usually focuses on persons other than herself, is replete with instances of non-recognition and withheld information in which the external world, other characters or readers fail to reciprocate her gaze or gain access to her internal thoughts—most famously, when she fails to disclose her initial recognition of Dr. John. These ellipses emphasize the disjunction between herself and her place, and yet that place is not wholly unfamiliar. Writing about the experience of living in exile, Svetlana Boym observes how “a surprise, a pang of intimate recognition” may spring upon the emigrant as she is learning to live with “the habitual estrangement of everyday life abroad.”¹⁰⁹ *Villette* is full of such surprises, highlighting both the novel’s yearning for return and the problems of achieving it. As Robert Newsome observes,

¹⁰⁸ Lucie Armitt, “Haunted Childhood in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 32 (2002): 218.

¹⁰⁹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 254.

instances of déjà vu structure *Villette*, most notably through the reestablishment of the Bretton household.¹¹⁰

Rather than recall memories, Lucy avoids experiences that could enable her to make new ones or risk further trauma, sacrificing potential for greater happiness to her need for greater stability. She seeks refuge in spaces of caregiving and nurture, first taking a position as a companion to the elderly Miss Marchmont and then, after Miss Marchmont's death, a position as a nanny to Mme. Beck's children. Both of these positions provide her with the room and board she desperately needs while enabling her to regress to a temporary state of childhood security in which she has few contacts with other adults. She relishes these domestic retreats from the harshness of instability, writing, for example, that "I would have *crawled* on with [Miss Marchmont] for twenty years" if fate permitted (*V* 38, italics mine). She's equally reluctant to leave the safety of the nursery when Mme. Beck asks her to become an English teacher, confessing that she "was capable of sitting twenty years teaching infants," not because the work fulfilled her—a luxury she does not have—but because "it seemed to me a great thing to be without heavy anxiety, and relieved from intimate trial; the negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know" (*V* 76–77). Recognizing that her family's misfortune precludes a future as prosperous as her past, she cultivates emotional numbness to contain her grief. "About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future—such a future as mine—to be dead" (*V* 109). Although Lucy's coldness bothered readers accustomed to more pleasing heroines, Brontë wanted her heroine to reflect how a woman without home or family would actually feel. Lucy's debility was precisely the point. As Brontë wryly wrote William Smith Williams, "You say that she may be thought morbid and weak unless the history of her life

¹¹⁰ Robert Newsome, "*Villette* and *Bleak House*: Authorizing Women," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46, no. 1 (June 1991), 55–56.

be more fully given. I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times . . . anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid. It was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional for instance—it was the semi-delirium of solitary grief and sickness. If, however, the book does not express all this—there must be great fault somewhere.”¹¹¹

While women like Ginevra Fanshaw move abroad in search of marriage and money, Lucy’s lack of home, family and wealth preclude her from participation in even that desperate but comparatively enviable international marriage market. As in *Jane Eyre*, it takes having a home—or at least a rich uncle—in order to have the resources to establish a new one through marriage. Without resources to permit a social existence, her life in Villette is one of solitary confinement within the enclosed spaces of schools, nunneries and private houses that are her only available shelters. She *is* treated well, though she is attuned to how her gender and lack of alternatives lead to her economic exploitation. She notices when she is promoted to English teacher, for example, that “Madame raised my salary; but she got thrice the work out of me she had extracted from Mr. Wilson, at half the expense” (V 81). Her situation, however, is neither Lowood nor Morton. She is free to socialize with teachers, receive student confidences and visit friends, but that permitted freedom only underscores that she lacks the economic means and social support to enjoy it. She is forced to stay at the school over vacation, because, unlike most other students and teachers, she cannot travel. She has no home to visit. She cannot afford a hotel. She has no one to accompany her. In a scene based on Brontë’s own experience, Lucy’s enforced solitude is so overwhelming that she confesses to a Catholic priest in order to feel a sense of human connection, despite being a devout Protestant. Sharing her burden provides

¹¹¹ Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, Haworth, 6 November 1852 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:80 (emphasis original).

temporary relief, but both confessor and penitent are puzzled for a long-term solution for a Protestant who cannot remove herself to a nunnery (*V* 162).

Despite the distrust Lucy shows for Catholicism throughout the novel, she also recognizes the powerful attraction that Catholicism and a nunnery hold for her—an attraction centered in Catholicism’s provision of housing. While Lucy portrays Protestant characters with more emotional sympathy, and at times dreads the confining life symbolized by the ghostly nun, Catholic characters like the priest and, later, M. Paul Emmanuel provide tempting shelter. During the confession scene, the kind priest invites her to visit him at his *house*, because he recognizes that she is ill and that the church is inhospitably cold (*V* 162). Lucy admits that had she accepted the invitation she might now “be counting my beads in the cell of a certain Carmelite convent” rather than writing her narrative (*V* 163). Similarly, M. Paul comes closest to diagnosing the disconnection that ails Lucy, asking, “You looked pale in your slumbers; are you home-sick?” (*V* 363). Although Lucy denies that one can be homesick without a home, M. Paul intervenes to provide pillows, blankets and, later, a house (*V* 363). While Brontë was a clergyman’s daughter and devoted Anglican, the contrast between the contingent nature of her own church-owned housing at Haworth and Catholicism’s provision of shelter, purpose and a safety net for women helps explain the ambivalence and desire she shows towards Catholicism in *Villette*.

Following this confession, she collapses from the weight of isolation. Unwilling to have her heroine convert to Catholicism, Brontë resorts to improbability in the form of having Lucy rediscover a temporary home from her past, which underscores how there is no other likely means for Lucy to move forward. Lucy’s collapse reunites her with her godmother, Mrs. Bretton, and her son, Graham, when she wakes up in a house surrounded by familiar mementos. Miraculously, she learns that the Brettons of Bretton have relocated from England to Villette,

where Graham now practices medicine as Dr. John. Brontë's decision to reintroduce Graham as a medical doctor is partly pragmatic: medical doctors, priests and teachers are the few classes of professional men women are permitted to interact with at the school. Graham's status as a medical doctor, however, also allows Brontë to present Lucy's isolation as a physical illness deserving of remedy, even while emphasizing the limitations of the medical establishment's ability to treat a condition that springs from social causes.

Dr. John strives to provide Lucy with care, but his prescriptions merely privatize the problem of Lucy's isolation, which is the product of systemic forces ranging from a woman's limited employment options to inability to afford a home in which to entertain. "Cheerful society would be of use to you; you should be as little alone as possible; you should take plenty of exercise," he orders (*V* 183). Cheerful society! Don't be alone! Exercise! These cures take resources. "Acquiescence and a pause followed these remarks," deadpans Lucy, who would doubtlessly have done these things if she could afford them (*V* 183). "They sounded all right, I thought, and bore the safe sanction of custom, and the well-worn stamp of use" (*V* 183). The only medical advice Dr. John knows how to offer are conventions whose financial impossibility reinforces her sense of exclusion. To top it off, he recommends "travel for about six months" (*V* 185)—this to the women whose collapse was triggered by her inability to leave the school even for vacation. Dr. John is not wrong in his understanding of the social connection and relaxation Lucy needs, but his pronouncements highlight the extent to which Lucy's real disease is poverty.

Lucy's loneliness is a product of her gender, but also of the prohibitive cost of transportation and social conventions that force her to remain inside the school. Her reunion with the Brettons provides her with greater access to the city of Villette, but this access is contingent on their unsteady charity and carriage since their house is not her own home: Lucy has no space

in which to reciprocally host. She has no carriage to visit their house. She must wait—for letters, for invitations, for transportation, for chaperones. When they don't come, she must conceal her emotions so as not to weary those on whom she depends. "Those who live in retirement, whose lives have fallen amid the seclusion of schools or of other walled-in and guarded dwellings, are liable to be suddenly and for a long while dropped out of the memory of their friends, the denizens of a freer world," she vents after passing anxious weeks without a letter from the Brettons (*V* 266). She excuses her friends' neglect as the "result of circumstances, the fiat of fate, a part of my life's lot. . . ." (*V* 267)—an explanation that modern readers would call "structural" or "systemic."

Without a house and transportation, Lucy Snowe has little chance of success in Villette's marriage market, if only because she has few places to meet someone. As Dr. John's romantic interest turns towards Polly Home, she accurately reflects that he would not love Polly if she lacked wealth and cultivation (*V* 369–370). The novel expressly links Lucy's romantic loss of Dr. John to her lack of command over any space. In contrast to the Bretton household, whose mementos are transported from Bretton to Villette and lovingly displayed in stable continuity, Lucy resolves to "gather and lock away" her treasured letters from Dr. John so as not to be "stabbed to the heart each moment by sharp revival of regret" (*V* 294). Her mementos are painful, because they represent hopes so irrecoverably lost. She is reminded, however, that she does not even have control over her drawer: M. Paul, she discovers, has read her letters (*V* 294). She possesses no place in which to secure even her most intimate thoughts. She has no privacy in a house controlled by her employer.

Like Jane Eyre reflecting on Morton, Lucy must turn away from reminders of the past so as not to succumb to grief. No pleasant recollection of the past is possible, so it must be buried.

Lacking alternatives, she resolves to bury her letters and grief in the hollow of the nun's pear tree (*V* 295–296). Mourning her romantic potential beside the letters' "newly-sodded grave" (*V* 296), however, she finds more reason for fear rather than a new way forward. While pondering what futures remain open, her path is blocked by the appearance of the "snowy-veiled" nun (*V* 297). Without the support of Dr. John, with whom she shared her initial vision of the nun, and thus with no prospect of marriage, the nun now seems to prophesy her probable future—solitary, sexless, exposed and silent (*V* 297)—and demonstrate how few alternatives Lucy truly has if she lacks independence and the ability to marry.

"[B]itter sorrow, while recent, does not flow out in verse," Brontë wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell.¹¹² Lucy's complete loss of home is too momentous to find wordy or nostalgic expression. Instead, Brontë recasts nostalgia as a feeling expressible only by those who know stable-enough homes. She invents a more fortunate foil, Polly *Home*, who parades effusive—almost affected—displays of homesickness that have in part caused Eva Badowska to remark that "diffuse homesickness amounts to an art form" in *Villette*.¹¹³ The novel opens with a younger Lucy observing Polly as a child while she is at the Brettons' house in England as her father travels abroad, writing, "[N]o furrowed face of adult exile, longing for Europe at Europe's antipodes, ever bore more legibly the signs of home sickness than did her infant visage" (*V* 12). As Nicholas Dames notes, the child Polly is "a tableau of homesickness, of eighteenth-century nostalgia."¹¹⁴ Notably, however, she mopes for a person—her father—rather than a physical

¹¹² Charlotte Brontë to Elizabeth Gaskell, Haworth, 27 August 1850 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 2:457.

¹¹³ Eva Badowska, "Choseville: Brontë's *Villette* and the Art of Bourgeois Interiority," *PMLA* 120, no. 5 (2005), 1519.

¹¹⁴ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 117.

place. This shift might reflect Brontë's own life in which she was mourning the loss of siblings so central to her sense of home, but it also reflects how Polly's housing and security is contingent on her attachment to her father, whose wealth and resources ensure her shelter so long as their relationship is intact. As such, her homesickness borders on the comic, even if it displays damaging emotional and economic reliance on her father, because her temporary loss will be cured by the return of her beloved parent. In Polly, homesickness is no longer a disease like Emily Brontë experienced but a luxurious manifestation of emotion that reflects the stable continuity of her life and substantial resources. By contrast, Lucy can only regret the time when she had a family and home to which she could return—an emotion Brontë likely shared in the wake of her siblings' deaths.

While Polly's homesickness is affected, Brontë by no means intended that to diminish her virtue. Brontë wrote that she intended Polly to be the novel's "most beautiful" character, a claim we should take seriously.¹¹⁵ As Gilbert and Gubar observe, Polly Home is "Lucy Snowe born under a lucky star . . .," a "part of herself who 'haunts' her (chap. 2) like 'a small ghost (chap. 3)."¹¹⁶ Brontë frequently doubles Lucy and Polly from the novel's opening in which they share a room at the Brettons' house.¹¹⁷ From this beginning, their fortunes diverge and intersect: Polly, Lucy and the Brettons reunite when Lucy and Graham unknowingly assist Polly with medical treatment. Polly, they discover, is now an heiress living with her titled father in Villette as Paulina Mary Home de Bassompierre. Rediscovering Polly, Lucy finds a woman whose beauty she genuinely admires and whose inner life mirrors her own, including, as Gilbert and Gubar

¹¹⁵ Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, Birstall, 6 December 1852 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:88.

¹¹⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 427, 404.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 404.

observe, her love for Graham and his letters.¹¹⁸ Lucy voices the affinity she feels for Polly, writing, “[] I wondered to find my thoughts hers: there are certain things in which we so rarely meet with *our double* that it seems a miracle when that chance befalls” (V 278, emphasis mine). She approvingly makes the parallel again, stating, “If any one [sic] knew me it was little Paulina Mary” (V 301).

As an adult, Polly retains a connection with her childhood, telling Lucy, “The child of seven years lives yet in the girl of seventeen” (V 277). Polly’s claim, however, is not merely a mark of psychological regression, but a manifestation of her emotional and financial dependence on her father that also makes her circumstances comparatively easy. While Polly does not have a mother, Brontë’s decision to nevertheless name her Polly *Home* and have her exemplify the domestic underscores how she perceives a woman’s ability to build a home and overcome trauma as dependent more on male financial resources than maternal caregiving and sentiment. After all, characters like Lucy are themselves hired to serve as maternal surrogates to the children of busy mothers. Brontë construes what Nicholas Dames calls Polly’s “backward turning reverence” as a sign of her relative security.¹¹⁹ Polly has the capacity to express memory and seek out past associations because she has largely eluded significant trauma. An envious Lucy observes, “Her eyes were the eyes of one who can remember; one whose childhood *does not fade* like a dream, nor whose youth *vanish* like a sunbeam” (V 276, emphasis mine). In Lucy’s mind, Polly’s capacity to fondly remember is associated with the stability of her childhood, whereas Lucy’s own childhood has faded and vanished. Unlike Lucy who speaks in redirection and omissions, “[Polly] would not take life, loosely and incoherently, in parts, and let one season slip as she

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 427.

¹¹⁹ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 116–117.

entered on another: she would retain and add; often review from the commencement, and so grow in harmony and consistency as she grew in years” (*V* 276). *Harmony. Consistency*. There is no doubt that Lucy views Polly’s retentive and progressive mind as admirable and worthy of Dr. John’s love. She also finds these qualities conditioned on not having experienced too jarring a sense of dispossession.

Like the *Homes*, the Brettons of Bretton’s family name implies that they carry home with them. John Plotz has analyzed how portable property’s potential for housing both economic and sentimental value enabled English emigrants to feel more at home within the Empire.¹²⁰ Abroad in *Villette*, the Brettons’ retention of portable property both signifies their economic security and ensures continued associations with Bretton. Although Lucy recognizes Dr. John before entering his house, it is the Brettons’ portable property—and thus their comparative wealth—that definitively proves their identity. As Eva Badowska notes, when Lucy wakes at the Brettons’ after her collapse, the familiar object of the pincushion “functions not only as a prosthesis of memory but also as an axis around which Lucy’s subjectivity gets reconstituted.”¹²¹ These objects, as if providing an aura of security, enable Lucy to indulge pleasant recollections of a past that she avoids when alone and without such costly mementos. As memory becomes inscribed in property, and possession of property makes memory safe to contemplate, memory itself becomes a matter of class privilege and a sign of economic security worth courting, as Dr. John surely recognizes in wooing Polly Home. As Dames notes, “Memory precisely *is* the attraction between Polly and Graham,” a couple who played house as children before becoming lovers.¹²² Polly

¹²⁰ See John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹²¹ Badowska, “Choseville: Brontë’s *Villette* and the Art of Bourgeois Interiority,” 1516.

¹²² Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 119 (emphasis original).

does not transfer her affection from her father to Graham so much as retain her love for both, an impulse she cements through the ritual of braiding their hair to place in her locket (*V* 435). The conjugal home adds to rather than displaces the paternal one in a gesture that again underscores the emotional and financial importance of fathers to their daughters.

Brontë worried that Polly, the novel's most beautiful character, was also its weakest.¹²³ “[I]f this be the case,” she wrote, “the fault lies in its wanting the germ of the real, in its being purely imaginary.”¹²⁴ Brontë could dream Polly Home, a character so secure in her home that she could flaunt homesickness, but she could not relate to a life so blessed. Her mother and siblings were dead, and Haworth had become a reminder that they would not come back. She would lose Haworth, too, if her father predeceased her. Like Lucy Snowe, she no longer had an earthly home that could cure her homesickness. *What then?* Brontë gives Lucy her own lost dream of establishing a school, even though Lucy considers it a limiting path:

Courage, Lucy Snowe! With self-denial and economy now, and steady exertion by-and-by, an object in life need not fail you. Venture not to complain that such an object is too selfish, too limited, and lacks interest; be content to labour for independence until you have proved, by winning that prize, your right to look higher. But afterwards, is there nothing more for me in life—no true home—nothing to be dearer to me than myself, and by its paramount preciousness, to draw from me better things than I care to culture for myself only? Nothing, at whose feet I can willingly lay down the whole burden of human egotism, and gloriously take up the nobler charge of labouring and living for others? (*V* 361)

Lucy articulates the logic Brontë merely implied in *Jane Eyre*: women must have independence (usually in the form of a secure paternal house) before they can have true homes that expand their worlds beyond survival and forced focus on self. Yet even Lucy's narrow dream of

¹²³ Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, Birstall, 6 December 1852 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:88 (emphasis original).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

establishing a school is so unlikely that, as in *Jane Eyre*, Lucy's position is ameliorated only through improbable intervention in the form of M. Paul Emmanuel.

Hardly an ideal partner, M. Paul, like Rochester, is to modern eyes abusive: he locks Lucy in an attic without food, harasses another teacher until she is forced to leave the school and spies on young women. Like Rochester, he also has a hidden past in the form of Justine Marie, a woman he was not allowed to marry because his family lost its fortune. His deficiencies highlight Lucy's desperation for his main virtue: he shelters non-relations. M. Paul literally houses Justine Marie's remaining family, the priest to whom Lucy confesses and his family's aged servant, and he devotes an estimated three quarters of his income to their maintenance and to other charities (*V* 392–393). M. Paul emerges as a benefactor who uses his private income to provide for those who lack necessities. Before offering Lucy his romantic love, he invites her to consider him a brother and uses his resources to establish her in a building that functions as both house and school. Although *Villette*'s ending has the unrealized trappings of a marriage plot, the function M. Paul plays is less that of a prospective husband who will ensure Lucy's private comfort than a foreshadowing of a social safety net that provides shelter. Any hope for Lucy's well-being depends on a non-relation supplying her a house, because her private tragedy prevents restoration to her own home.

As in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë underscores the direness of Lucy's situation through the necessity of gift housing. With *Villette*, however, she retreats from the possibility of Lucy ever turning M. Paul's gift house into a true marital home. Unlike in *Jane Eyre*, the colonies will not rebuild family fortunes or provide spouses. M. Paul's journey to the colonies kills rather than enriches him. Lucy strongly implies that he drowns in a shipwreck, recalling the metaphor she uses to describe her own family's fate and casting doubt on the possibility that Lucy has

progressed beyond her tragedy. There is no happier ending for Lucy than becoming a school mistress—hardly a thrilling role for a woman who told Polly Home that she teaches to keep a roof over her head and not burden others (*V* 285). She is left aging and alone as she struggles to pay the rent. Contrasting Lucy’s fate to the happy one of Ginevra Fanshaw, who does not hesitate to take financial assistance from her uncle and suitors, we might wonder whose interest Lucy’s vaunted self-sufficiency actually serves. Mr. Home preaches self-sufficiency, claiming he would prefer Polly “to work for herself, that she might burden neither kith nor kin” should she become poor (*V* 286), but he does not leave his niece Ginevra to this fate. We are left suspecting that Lucy’s reliance on her labor only serves to relieve “society” of a burden no one but M. Paul is willing to meet.

Brontë insisted that *Villette* “touches on no matter of public interest.”¹²⁵ Disclaiming pretensions to activism, she explained in a letter to her publisher, “I cannot write books handling the topics of the day—it is of no use trying. Nor can I write a book for its moral. . . .”¹²⁶ Despite her disclaimer, Lucy’s impossible plight demonstrates both that women need housing and that foreign countries are not appropriate homes for Englishwomen. England must provide them with housing itself through the transfer of private wealth to public housing purposes.

On June 29, 1854, Charlotte Brontë married Reverend Arthur Bell Nicholls. It was a pragmatic marriage, reminiscent of Polly Home’s desire to bind together her lover and her father. For Brontë, Nicholls’ main attractions were his constancy to her and his devotion to her father,

¹²⁵ Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, Haworth, 30 October 1852 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:75.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

attractions that reflect a yearning for stability. Nicholls, a poor Irishman, had become Mr. Brontë's curate in 1845, and he concealed an attachment to Brontë before finally proposing in 1852. "What I taste of happiness is of the soberest order," writes Brontë to Ellen Nussey in a letter that implies she does not *yet* love her fiancé.¹²⁷ But, as she tells Margaret Wooler, "Mr. Nicholls seems deeply to feel the wish to comfort and sustain [Mr. Brontë's] declining years. I think—from Mr. N.'s character—I may depend on this not being a mere transitory impulsive feeling, but rather that it will be accepted steadily as a duty—and discharged tenderly as an office of affection."¹²⁸ Whatever Nicholls lacked in intellect and wealth, she told her publisher that her "feelings [were] much impressed and changed by the nature and strength of the qualities brought out in the course of his long attachment."¹²⁹ For Brontë, the state of being attached was of vital importance.

While aware that her marriage would not be "regarded as brilliant," she was able to "see in it some germs of real happiness."¹³⁰ Tragically, those germs never fully blossomed. She died nine months after her marriage of what we now call hyperemesis gravidarum, a pregnancy complication causing severe nausea and vomiting more recently experienced by Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge.¹³¹ Nicholls, true to his word, remained at Haworth until Mr. Brontë's death in 1861. Passed over by church trustees for the Haworth living, he returned to Ireland,

¹²⁷ Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, Haworth, 11 April 1854 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:240.

¹²⁸ Charlotte Brontë to Margaret Wooler, Haworth, 12 April 1854 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:242.

¹²⁹ Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, Haworth, 25 April 1854 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:250.

¹³⁰ Charlotte Brontë to Margaret Wooler, Haworth, 12 April 1854 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3:242.

¹³¹ Harman, *Charlotte Brontë: A Life*, 346.

became a farmer and remarried.¹³² In 1928, Sir James Roberts bought the parsonage for £3000 and donated it to the Brontë Society, enabling me to visit the house in 2009.¹³³

Like others before me, I was disappointed to discover that Haworth was not beautifully isolated. I looked at Charlotte Brontë's clothes, wondering with anxiety how I had come to imagine that the writings of a woman so malnourished and small could feed me if I went to graduate school. A decade later, I believe I needed to feel disappointed in Haworth in order to leave my academic career behind. I knew graduate school would likely not lead to a job once I decided to marry my spouse. Many days, I felt disappointed in myself, watching, like Brontë, as my education and youth vanished in unemployment, caregiving, retraining and job changes while my husband's career marched steadily on.

I could recite here the too-familiar list of what marriage, children and supporting my spouse's career cost me professionally, but that story alone would be partial and misleading. As I return to Brontë at thirty-eight—the same age at which Brontë died—I realize now how Brontë grasped what for me and many women still holds true: that a stable parental family, marriage and housing security can enable opportunity. Writing at my desk in my house, I see an irony I couldn't before: the same decision to follow my spouse that foreclosed my academic career is the one that financially enables me to write now. I don't have the career I once planned, but I have a husband and house. Perhaps, like Brontë, I can afford to write a little more radically.

¹³² Ibid., 353.

¹³³ The Brontë Society. "Our History." The Brontë Society: Brontë Parsonage Museum. <https://www.bronte.org.uk/about-us/our-history> (accessed January 3, 2020).

Chapter 3: Charles Dickens' Disappointing Dream House

"It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home." – Pip, *Great Expectations*

"To me, parting is a painful thing." – Pip, *Great Expectations*

In an 1860 sketch, Charles Dickens writes of a "queer small boy" who suggests to a traveler that they stop to look at a house at the top of a hill near Chatham, Kent.¹ "[E]ver since I can recollect," explains the boy, "my father, seeing me so fond of it, has often said to me, 'If you were to be very persevering and were to work hard, you might some day come to live in it.' Though that's impossible!" "I was rather amazed to be told this by the very queer small boy," records the traveler, who does not stop, "for that house happens to be *my* house, and I have reason to believe that what he said was true."² Dickens, of course, is writing about himself. He is *both* the vulnerable boy who is longing for a home he must earn *and* the traveler who grew up to own the "old-fashioned, plain, and comfortable" country estate called Gad's Hill Place.³

The passage's temporal disjunction highlights the coexistence of a Dickens who, on the one hand, embraced perseverance and was rewarded with both his childhood dream house and the means to wander from it, and, on the other, continued to identify as a boy who must earn a home. Like the traveler who does not stop, Dickens bought his childhood dream house only to find that possessing it did not make him feel settled. While he spent much time at Gad's Hill Place and enjoyed its associations with the happy days of his early childhood, he also restlessly embarked on reading tours, travelled abroad, remodeled the house, lived with his mistress and dwelled on his childhood experiences of neglect and abandonment. Gad's Hill Place operated as

¹ [Charles Dickens], "The Uncommercial Traveller No. 6, Travelling Abroad," *All the Year Round*, April 7, 1860, 557.

² *Ibid.* (emphasis original).

³ Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett Coutts, Household Words Office, 9 February 1856, in Charles Dickens, *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Jenny Hartley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 302.

a fantasy of recreating childhood abundance while also exposing the home's inability to truly provide security or satisfaction. At Gad's Hill Place, Dickens uneasily dwelled in multiple temporalities, cherishing and idealizing his early childhood associations and aspirations while also maturely recognizing their insufficiencies.

Serial fiction, of which Dickens was one of the most famous practitioners, has been influentially framed as instilling in readers capitalist-industrial values; reflecting and managing the experience of a society moving through space and time in multiple temporal rhythms; and creating a portable sense of home and community that could survive disruption through shared, recurring literary experiences.⁴ For example, Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund argue that the serial form “harmonized in several respects with capitalist ideology:” its expansiveness “suggested a world of plenitude,” its recurring parts encouraged “confidence that an investment (whether of time or money) in the present would reap greater rewards in the future” and its form demanded “perseverance and delay of gratification.”⁵ Focusing on the physiological experience of reading, Nicholas Dames argues that Victorian novels, of which serials were an important part, were “a training ground for industrialized consciousness” as they taught readers to read “with a rhythmic alternation of heightened attention and distracted inattention locking onto ever

⁴ Rob Allen, “Pause You Who Read This: Disruption and the Victorian Serial Novel,” in *Serialization in Popular Culture*, eds. Rob Allen and Thijs van den Berg (New York: Routledge, 2014) (studying how the “various disruptions affecting Victorian serials” derived from “industrial-capitalist processes”), 33; Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition, 1850–1910: Studies in Media and Book History* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 11 (observing how the regularity of issue days created “numerous and large communities of readers, all of whom were reading the same publications at roughly the same time all over the country. . . .”); Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 4, 43, 58; Mark W. Turner, “Periodical Time in the Nineteenth Century,” *Media History* 8, no. 2 (2002), 183 (noting that periodicals “are continually on the move, across time” and in a cacophony of different temporal rhythms).

⁵ Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Serial*, 4.

smaller units of comprehension.”⁶ Rob Allen and Laurel Brake note that the regularity of issues and pauses between parts enabled community as readers discussed the novel and collectively looked forward to the next scheduled installment.⁷ From these perspectives, serial fiction seems to participate in the process of acclimating readers to the routine displacements and interruptions occasioned by personal tragedies and global capitalism while also rewarding the kinds of hard work and perseverance Dickens embraced. As Hughes and Lund observe, plots may “require travel over great distance” and exercise of “patience and compassion sustained over time and space” before reaching a rewarding resolution.⁸ Although a home is often achieved in the resolution, home itself can feel synonymous with the emotional endurance and travel needed to obtain one.⁹

However, as Hughes and Lund hint elsewhere, the serial novel’s long journey towards an ending also suggests how difficult domestic stability can be to achieve.¹⁰ Building upon this hint, this chapter argues that Dickens used serial novels to explore a much more divided, and pessimistic, view of the ability of persons to overcome and endure displacements—a view encapsulated by the temporal disjunction of his essay on Gad’s Hill Place in which the home attained through his perseverance and individual exertions feels neither settled, final nor securely possessed. On the one hand, producing and reading serial novels required embrace of capitalist values, habits, routines and temporal rhythms through which Dickens proudly rose from

⁶ Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

⁷ Rob Allen, “Pause You Who Read This: Disruption and the Victorian Serial Novel,” 35; Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition*, 11.

⁸ Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Serial*, 31, 43.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39, 43.

insecurity to financial success, becoming a poster child for the idea that people can leave home and build a potentially better one through personal efforts and flexibility. On the other hand, the serial form's interruptions, pauses and resistance to closure provided a vehicle unusually suited for exploring how feelings of trauma, displacement and insecurity can persist even after one seems to obtain a home. The serial novel's multiple temporalities, particularly the tension between movement forward and frequent pauses, retrospect or digressions, reflected the multiple, and sometimes competing, timelines and values in which Dickens and his novels dwelled. The serial form allowed him to both embrace capitalist and individualist values in its mode of production and financial results while also critically voicing how displacement from home and past associations is an arresting and lasting trauma accompanied by real harms to individuals and their communities. Dickens' characters rarely display feelings of habituated, sentimental nostalgia. Rather, their impulses to stop time and narrative progress, dwell on past associations and places, and indulge memory become countervailing moral sentiments that exist uneasily alongside capitalist and individualist values and criticize the human costs of displacement—particularly, how mobility and weak ties to places and people prevent the formation of human attachments that could potentially translate into alternative forms of collective security.

Like Charlotte Brontë, Dickens understood the importance of a universal, collective approach to shelter. He was himself displaced from home as a child and sent to labor in a factory when his father was arrested for debt. In *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), David prays after his harrowing episode of living on the road “that I never might be houseless any more, and never might forget the houseless” (DC 210).¹¹ In *Bleak House* (1852–1853), Dickens goes further to

¹¹ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*. Rev. Ed. 1849–1850. Ed. Jeremy Tambling (London: Penguin Books, 2004). Citations to the novel are noted in parentheses with the abbreviation “DC.”

imply that individual acts of charity are nonsensical—even dangerous—without universal shelter. Esther Summerson contracts a scarring disease after admitting a homeless boy into Bleak House, while the self-absorbed Mr. Skimpole is not wrong to urge kicking the boy out to prevent the spread of infection (*BH* 492–493, 499).¹² However, Dickens was compelled by his lack of family resources and the pressures of capitalist society to take the individualist approach of procuring a household of his own through exertions in the market. Unlike Edgar Allan Poe, he embraced writing for the mass market and achieved success through habits, hard work and monumental acts of exertion: Massive novels. Journals controlled by himself. Reading tours. Charitable projects. His gender, race, unusual drive and good fortune allowed him to access professions and networks in which he earned the money needed to establish a household.

Yet while his success distinguished him from perpetually precarious writers like Poe, he was unable to dismiss the enduring emotional burdens of childhood trauma and displacement, in part because he was aware of how tenuous any success was in the face of personal catastrophes and capitalism’s revulsions. D.A. Miller observes in the context of *Bleak House* that one can never “feel at home” in the novel, “For what now is home—not securely possessed in perpetuity, but only leased from day to day on payment of continual exertions—but a House?”¹³ D.A. Miller’s observation rings true of Dickens’ life as well. Renting rather than ownership was the norm in Victorian England,¹⁴ but Dickens never ceased worrying over how to fund his household even after he took the unusual step of buying Gad’s Hill Place. In 1867, for example, he expressed his enthusiasm for embarking on another American reading tour despite his bad health,

¹² Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*. 1852–1853. Ed. Nicola Bradbury. Preface by Terry Eagleton (London: Penguin Books, 2003). Citations to the novel are noted in parentheses with the abbreviation “*BH*.”

¹³ D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 106.

¹⁴ John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815–1970* (North Pomfret, VT: David & Charles, Inc., 1978), 145.

because he was tempted by the prospect of earning £10,000 and stressed by the cost of maintaining his family and position.¹⁵ “To get that sum in a heap so soon is an immense consideration to me—my wife’s income to pay—a very expensive position to hold—and my boys with a curse of limpness on them. . . . I shall never rest much while my faculties last . . . ,” he explained.¹⁶ Dickens could not stop working to maintain his household even after he owned his dream house outright.

Dickens’ novels provide numerous social commentaries on the dire state of English housing, entering into workhouses, prisons, squalid apartments and many other undesirable alternatives to the middle-class home. In this chapter, however, I am interested in how even successful attempts to materially rise from insecurity—whether through professional success, improbable inheritance or patronage—do not dispel the emotional scars of displacement, nor the anxiety that wealth can be easily lost. In *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1861), for example, the leading characters rise from poverty only to find themselves unable to leave behind past associations and become dispossessed again as their financial security is snatched by circumstances beyond their control: In *David Copperfield*, orphaned David is rescued from factory labor by his aunt, only for his aunt’s investments and the firm at which he is apprenticed to fail. His professional success ultimately enables him to establish a succession of conjugal homes, yet he remains haunted by the memory of his displacement and longs to restore his lost childhood home. In *Little Dorrit*, the Dorrit family is saved from a life in debtors’ prison by inheritance. However, Little Dorrit is so emotionally stunted by her experience of living in the Marshalsea that she cannot adjust to life

¹⁵ Charles Dickens to William H. Wills, [6 June 1867], in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, 409.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

outside its walls. She pines for her old position as caregiver to her father and cannot leave behind past associations, which angers her sister and father who are eager to forget their past lives. In *Great Expectations*, Pip is recused from a working-class life by an unknown benefactor who intends to make him a gentleman, only to discover that his patron is a criminal whose money he feels morally unable to accept. Neither the most diligent habits, biggest inheritances nor cushiest institutional perches can guarantee the characters' well-being and secure a happy ending. Nor is it clear that these characters even experience movement away from their origins as desirable. Indeed, the novels align our moral sympathy with characters who remain attached to the past. However, while the texts often condemn the impulse to journey away from origins, they also highlight the deadening potential of the opposite desires for restoration, permanency and closure. The serial form places these contradictory impulses in a dialogue that does not resolve them but rather uneasily accommodates the volatile swings of emotion and political longings inherent to displacement and its long-term emotional and financial burdens.

Using Dickens' childhood displacement, work and domestic routines as lenses, this chapter examines Dickens' most introspective novels, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, as reboots of the scenario in which a child rises from a failed home and financial precarity only to find that he cannot achieve emotional resolution or find the sense of abundant security he desires in a home. These characters neither feel at home nor leave behind the past, because they are still haunted by the perpetual trauma of displacement within a capitalist system in which genuine security does not exist. Rather than merely pathologizing their trauma, however, Dickens frequently aligns our moral sympathy with the characters who do not forget the past rather than those who too easily habituate to spatial, class or other forms of mobility. The novels imply that past associations, no matter how embarrassing or socially undesirable,

should not simply be forgotten in the busy pursuit of individual success. The serial form becomes an uneasy space where characters emphasize the importance of pauses and retrospection, ultimately expressing dissatisfaction from which readers can infer the need for collective forms of security even while writing gives the characters a viable path forward in their existing conditions.

Born on February 7, 1812, Charles Dickens was an unlikely candidate to become his era's most celebrated author and the owner of Gad's Hill Place. He first saw the house as a boy living in Chatham, the naval town in which he first encountered literature and attended school.¹⁷ In his words, he considered the house "a wonderful Mansion (which God knows it is not)," emphasizing the sentimental value he placed on his childhood aspirations even while maturely recognizing their limitations.¹⁸ However, his happy childhood in Kent abruptly ended at age ten. In 1822, his father, John Dickens, a Navy Pay Office clerk only one generation removed from domestic service, was transferred to London. Ten-year-old Dickens was forced to follow at the end of the school term, traveling alone from Kent to London in a stagecoach. Although the transfer was a routine form of capitalist displacement, Dickens was devastated to find himself removed from his boyhood companions in Chatham and the occupant of a "mean small tenement."¹⁹ His parents did not put him school, as he desperately desired, but neglected him at home.²⁰ In 1824, his father was arrested for debt and sent to debtors' prison in the Marshalsea,

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, I draw facts about Dickens' life from Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (London: Viking, 2011).

¹⁸ Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett Coutts, Household Words Office, 9 February 1856, in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, 302.

¹⁹ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (Boston: James R. Osgood & Company, 1875), 1:36.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

where Dickens would later set *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857). Twelve-year-old Charles was thus thrust into one of literary history’s most infamous experiences of displacement. In a story that is well-known today but that Dickens took pains to conceal during his lifetime, he was sent to work in a shoe blacking factory, Warren’s Blacking, and his mother and younger siblings moved into the prison. This story is central to understanding how Dickens came to understand displacement as potentially catastrophic and long for restoration of his home and what we would call today a social safety net even as he embraced capitalist and individualistic values as a means of survival—competing impulses he would uneasily import into his fiction.

Dickens was so ashamed of his factory experience that he did not record it until 1847, when his friend and biographer John Forster accidentally learned that he had once been employed in a warehouse near the Strand, prompting Dickens to write an autobiographical fragment about his experience that Forster published posthumously.²¹ Dickens experienced his displacement as crushing his dreams of becoming a “learned and distinguished man” and thrusting him into a working-class existence.²² Class-conscious, ambitious and attached to family, his expectations for the future came crashing down. Looking back, he reflected with bitter intensity on how he “could have been so easily cast away at such an age” and how strange it was that a child of such “singular abilities” was not sent to school.²³ His abandonment seemed all the more shocking since his sister was sent to the Royal Academy of Music—a reversal of the more common situation in which families educated their sons before their daughters.²⁴

²¹ Ibid., 1:47–49.

²² Ibid., 1:53.

²³ Ibid., 1:51.

²⁴Ibid., 1:38–39.

Dickens found the “tumble-down old house” of Warren’s Blacking to be a sorry substitute for home.²⁵ When his mother and siblings were forced to move into the Marshalsea, he records that “I (small Cain that I was, except that I had never done harm to any one) was handed over as a lodger to a reduced old lady. . . .”²⁶ Covered in black polish from the warehouse, his reference to himself as an innocent Cain would have seemed alarmingly apt as he confronted the fact that his parents had traded him for their economic convenience. Anxieties about degradation, the unjust criminalization of placelessness and loss of social class hover over this account as he registers how he was involuntarily cast out. Unattended and neglected, Dickens came close to falling through the cracks. Lacking a safety net, and resenting his position, he reflects in his autobiographical fragment, “I know that I have lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.”²⁷ His comparison of himself to a vagabond underscores how close he felt he had come to being homeless. Moreover, his own sharp memory of the time contrasts with that of his family, who did not seem to remember him. For Dickens, abandonment was a trauma of being too easily forgotten or set aside.

Cut off from his family, he experienced “going home to such a miserable blank” as his lodgings so keenly that he begged his father to switch his housing so that he could breakfast with his family in prison.²⁸ He seemed to register that prison provided an alternative home, and even a kind of safety net, that was better than what he experienced working in the factory, even if also

²⁵ Ibid., 1:51.

²⁶ Ibid., 1:55.

²⁷ Ibid., 1:57.

²⁸ Ibid., 1:58–59.

prone to trapping people within dependent routines rather than transitioning them to thrive outside its walls. Years later, he would draw explicit parallels between home and prison in *Little Dorrit*, where the eponymous character is born and raised in the Marshalsea and her father both parades and is ashamed of his position of the “Father of the Marshalsea” as he parodically holds court over his fellow prisoners. In *David Copperfield*, similarly, the Micawber family is so habituated to debt that they are more comfortable in prison than facing the uncertainty that lies outside. Routines could provide necessary if stunting stability, even while falling far short of creating emotionally and materially satisfying homes.

While Dickens was ashamed of his manual labor and traumatized by what could happen to talented boys in a society that lacked safety nets, his time in the warehouse was also an experiment in how he could stay afloat by mastering routines. He quickly began to learn the work assigned to him while also being careful to conceal his inner complaints: “How much I suffered, it is, as I have said already, utterly beyond my power to tell. No man’s imagination can overstep the reality. But I kept my own counsel, and I did my work. I knew from the first that, if I could not do my work as well as any of the rest, I could not hold myself above slight and contempt.”²⁹ Dickens began to perceive that mastery of systems, detachment from peers and concealing unwanted knowledge were his best tools for emotional and financial survival. Rather than forging alliances with his fellow workers, his resentment at sharing their situation prompted him to double-down on his exceptionality and individual efforts at mastery. As he describes his mechanical routine at the factory in the autobiographical fragment, he envisions his work as purging the blacking product of its lowly origins. “My work was to cover the pots of paste-blackening; first with a piece of oil-paper, and then with a piece of blue paper; to tie them round

²⁹ Ibid., 1:58.

with a string; and then to clip the paper close and neat, all around, until it looked as smart as a pot of ointment from an apothecary's shop."³⁰ Dickens transforms the pots of blacking so that they resemble healing pots of ointment. This moment of cleansing is an early instance of how the boy covered in black polish would turn continuously to discipline, habits and repetitive routines to restructure a placeless life and cleanse it of its dirty origins by creating portable systems that allowed him a sense of anxious control. After leaving the warehouse, Dickens taught himself shorthand and became a clerk and then parliamentary reporter—a career, observes biographer Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, that again showed his ability to profit by mastering systems.³¹

Dickens continued to import the habits of survival he had learned at the factory into his writing and domestic life. Discipline, routines and habits helped him avoid financial mismanagement, but also provided the compensatory stability that comes with repetition even if one lacks a permanent home. His breakthrough as a fiction writer began when he secured a position as a full-time, salaried reporter for the *Morning Chronicle* at age twenty-two.³² This institutional affiliation brought him a degree of financial stability as well as an editor, John Black, who encouraged him to pursue his literary work when not reporting on Parliament.³³ Dickens was lucky: then as now, accounts of freelance writers starved or killed by the unstable conditions of their labor abounded.³⁴ As a reporter, he worked diligently, exhausting himself to meet deadlines. Yet he was not wholly satisfied. Dickens complained when he finally left the

³⁰ Ibid., 1:52.

³¹ Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 72.

³² Ibid., 135.

³³ Ibid., 136.

³⁴ Ibid., 144.

paper that he had sacrificed his “health, rest, and personal comfort” to his work,³⁵ and letters from that time are replete with instances of him canceling social engagements.³⁶ There was a disjunction between the habits he needed to achieve professional success and the emotional dissatisfaction that would reappear in his novels and domestic life. His chance to convert his skills into a career as a novelist came in 1835, when the publishing firm of Chapman and Hall approached him to write monthly sketches to accompany illustrations by Robert Seymour—a project that would become *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–1837).³⁷ Dickens accepted the proposal in large part for money. The extra £14-a-month it provided enabled him to marry Catherine Thomson Hogarth and establish a household of his own.³⁸ In a twist of fate, Seymour soon committed suicide, allowing Dickens to control the project and pioneer the potentials of serial fiction.³⁹

There are striking parallels between the manner in which Dickens approached his serial fiction and his own process of building a household. As scholars like Hughes and Lund have noted, serial fiction provided a kind of portable, literary form of home that mirrored the continuity and disruption that characterized actual homes: “[J]ust as Victorian spouses and parents were called upon to remain loyal to their families, preserving secure homes amidst temporary absences or temptations, so the serial publishing format encouraged a kind of loyalty

³⁵ Charles Dickens to John Easthope, 15 Furnivals Inn, [18 November 1836], in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, 32.

³⁶ See, e.g., Charles Dickens to Catherine Hogarth, Furnivals Inn, [?19 November 1835], in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, 22; Charles Dickens to Catherine Hogarth, Furnivals Inn, [25 November 1835], in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, 23.

³⁷ Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 190–191.

³⁸ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens*, 63.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

from its readers that could also transcend the absence of a story's characters in the intervals between parts."⁴⁰ When Dickens began the periodical *Household Words* in 1850, a journal that would serialize novels like Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854–1855), he counted on its contents entering readers' homes and becoming part of a domestic routine characterized by repetitive consumption and shared national time and vocabulary.⁴¹ While serialization relied on regimented time tables, it also often had no logical endpoint, giving the form a sense of permanence. As Laurel Brake observes, periodicity fostered a "market cleverly predicated on the assumption that it will *never* end: there is always the next number to consume, to collect."⁴² Readers apparently felt unwilling to part from Dickens' novels, too. Pirated and unauthorized spinoffs of Pickwick's adventures began to appear shortly before *Pickwick's* final number.⁴³ In 1837, Dickens was delighted to receive fan mail notifying him of the existence of the "Edinburgh Pickwick Club."⁴⁴ Dickens had created less a story with a beginning and end than a predecessor of today's Hollywood franchises in which the future extends indefinitely and characters' origin stories are open to endless rebooting—an advantage for authors wanting a perpetual income and who struggled to achieve a sense of resolution about their own life and emotions.

From Dickens' perspective, serialization offered the financial and emotional stability provided by repetition, routine, an extended paycheck, and, increasingly, personal control while

⁴⁰ Hughes and Lund, *The Victorian Serial*, 16.

⁴¹ For a general discussion of how *Household Words* helped structure a mobile society, see Caroline Reitz, "The Novel's Mobile Home," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 43, no. 1 (2010): 72–77.

⁴² Brake, *Print in Transition*, 31.

⁴³ Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 188.

⁴⁴ Charles Dickens to William Howison, 48 Doughty Street London, [21 December 1837], in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, 39–40.

also mirroring the emotional unrest we see in his life and novels. The financial benefits assisted him in maintaining a household, while his tendency to import routines and control into his housekeeping suggest how these rhythms provided him with a type of stability associated with home, both by ensuring financial prudence and by keeping the trauma of displacement at bay through the familiarity of routine. After his marriage, Dickens kept the household accounts himself and was extremely involved in the details of running his house, actions that suggest how fearful of losing home he remained.⁴⁵ His level of involvement was so high, in fact, that it became a source of gossip. American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne reports hearing about Dickens' unusual—and controlling—involvement in household management, writing that Dickens allegedly took “on himself all possible trouble as regards his domestic affairs.”⁴⁶ Dickens' children would later remark on the systemic, organized nature of his housekeeping. Henry Dickens discussed how “each boy was appropriated a particular peg for his hats and coats” and how a “parade was held once a week for overhauling the inevitable fresh stains on our garments.”⁴⁷ Mary “Mamie” Dickens recalled, “There never existed, I think, in all the world, a more thoroughly tidy or methodical creature than was my father.”⁴⁸ His children's comments emphasize his method and cleanliness—as if through the compulsive rituals of housekeeping he could create both financial and emotional stability by conserving resources, controlling his children and hiding the stains of his traumatic past.

⁴⁵ Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 258–259.

⁴⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Passages from the English Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Sophia Hawthorne (Boston: Osgood and Co, 1876), 103.

⁴⁷ Reported in Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 255.

⁴⁸ Reported in W. Teignmouth Shore, *Charles Dickens and His Friends* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1909), 2.

Shifting his focus from house to housework, Dickens organized the potentially unstable site of home into an ongoing, portable system that promised more permanency than he had experienced as a child. Monica F. Cohen observes that the Victorian novel often treats home as either a memory or an activity.⁴⁹ For Dickens, housekeeping was often both. Good housekeeping meant keeping things the same—an impulse *Bleak House* fictionalizes in a curiously literal way when Mr. Jarndyce rewards his model housekeeper Esther Summerson with a Bleak House of her own prior to her marriage that incorporates the housekeeping methods of the original (*BH* 962). Mirroring the portable nature of Bleak House, Dickens would rearrange hotel furniture during his travels and organize his writing materials in a consistent form in order to take home with him.⁵⁰ When traveling, he even instructed his wife, “Keep things in their places. I can’t bear to picture them otherwise.”⁵¹ Housekeeping was an anxious act of preservation in a world full of voluntary and involuntary displacements.

Although Dickens clearly connected housekeeping to industrial habits, like Poe and Brontë he indulged the fantasy that a good house could remove him from personal and systemic problems. Dickens used housekeeping rituals as a means to solve or hide his own family’s difficulties, including the traumatic and recurring problem of his father’s financial mismanagement. In 1839, he removed his parents from London to the Devon countryside, where he believed they would have fewer opportunities for incurring debt. He selected a “jewel of a place” for them that spoke of tininess, cleanliness, order and new starts. The house was “in the

⁴⁹ Monica F. Cohen, *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, work and home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 102.

⁵⁰ Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 256.

⁵¹ Charles Dickens to Catherine Dickens, Genova, [8 November 1844], in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, edited by Madeline House and Graham Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 4:216.

most beautiful, cheerful, delicious rural neighbourhood” and had a “beautiful little drawing-room” and “a kitchen and little room adjacent,” waxed Dickens to his wife. “The place is exquisitely clean and the paint and paper from top to bottom are as bright as a new pin.”⁵² Dickens called this carefully staged home “a perfect little doll’s house,”⁵³ which, observes biographer Douglas-Fairhurst, was for Dickens the “ultimate accolade.”⁵⁴

Dickens often described characters as dolls or showed them playing with them. But, Douglas-Fairhurst observes, Dickens was also keenly interested in dollhouses: he kept a toy-theater of *Oliver Twist* in his bedroom, rented homes abroad that he compared to dollhouses and wrote during the last years of his life in moveable, wooden chalet that a friend sent to Gad’s Hill Place.⁵⁵ He often put his characters in dollhouses or tiny homes, too. Esther Summerson, for example, describes her new Bleak House as “a rustic cottage of doll’s rooms” (BH 962).⁵⁶ The staged world of the dollhouse became a model by which Dickens sought—unsuccessfully—to orchestrate his parents’ lives in order to solve their financial problems and remove them from his circle. This focus on dollhouses is an example of a general tendency in Dickens to fantasize and associate the domestic—and the parade of Little Dorrits, Little Em’lys and tiny Doras who often embody it—with what is controllable, small and evocative of an idealized, abundant childhood separated from the demands of labor.

⁵² Charles Dickens to Catherine Dickens, New London Inn Exeter, [5 March 1839] in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 1:517.

⁵³ Charles Dickens to John Forster, Alphington, 31 July [1840] in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 2:109.

⁵⁴ Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 257.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 245, 254–255.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

Predictably, Dickens' effort to contain his parents by inserting them into a dollhouse failed. They returned to London, where his father continued to harass Dickens, his friends and even his publishers for money. Yet Dickens continued to believe in the power of removal to a carefully managed house to secure new futures and erase even the most shameful personal histories. In 1846, he framed a plan for the creation of Urania Cottage, a home for fallen woman that he managed with support from the wealthy philanthropist Angela Burdett Coutts.⁵⁷ The Cottage taught fallen women housework with the aim of enabling them to emigrate and begin new lives. The house would run by a "system of training" that would inculcate the same virtues Dickens valued in his own life: "[o]rder, punctuality, cleanliness, the whole routine of household duties. . . ."⁵⁸ For Dickens, a core function of the Cottage was disassociating fallen women from their past lives and laundering their shameful secrets. "[B]eing entirely removed from all who have any knowledge of their past career, [the women] will begin life afresh, and be able to win a good name and character," explained Dickens in a letter designed to recruit fallen women.⁵⁹ Urania achieved this objective through fenced walls and new habits, but also by insisting that the women not discuss their past lives with each other and emigrate upon completion of their training.⁶⁰ Only Dickens, and for a time Miss Coutts, was privy to the fallen women's stories. He maintained a case book (now lost) in which he would record each woman's story before admonishing them to silence.⁶¹ An uncomfortable current of sexual interest and personal profit

⁵⁷ For a book-length study of Urania Cottage, see Jenny Hartley, *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women* (London: Methuen, 2009), Kindle edition.

⁵⁸ Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett Coutts, Devonshire Terrace, 26 May 1846, in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, 164.

⁵⁹ Dickens' Letter to Fallen Women, 1847, in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, 188.

⁶⁰ Hartley, *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women*, location 2059–2061.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, location 2060–2134.

runs through Dickens' actions at Urania Cottage and his fantasy of saving fallen women. Yet he distanced himself from the troubling aspects of his charity even as he exploited them, sometimes converting the women's stories into fiction and profiting from them in the sale of his novels.

Yet however much Dickens sought emotional and financial stability or exemption from horrifying conditions through the routines of serial fiction and household management, he found the kind of home he was constructing deeply dissatisfying. His work and household were sources of ongoing labor and financial demands rather than shelters providing emotional nurture and feelings of security. In fact, his dedication to work and his desire to control the domestic resulted in the breakdown of his relationships in ways that he sometimes had trouble acknowledging outside of his novels. In 1856, he bought Gad's Hill Place, the house he had dreamed of owning as a child, suggesting how strongly he still wished both to restore the sense of childhood idealism and security he had lost when his family moved to London and to prove that he had indeed worked hard enough to call it home. Yet Gad's Hill Place became a house without a full household, a shrine to the memory of a small child and his former ambitions, haunts and professional success more than a functioning home that represented present fulfillment, stability and satisfaction. In 1858, he separated from his wife to conduct an affair with a much younger actress, Ellen "Nelly" Ternan, a separation that alienated him from many friends and family members.⁶² Sensing a continuity with his childhood experiences of abandonment even while he owned Gad's Hill Place, he admitted to John Forster that aspects of the character he had formed as a child have "reappeared in the last five years:" "The never-to-be-forgotten misery of that old time bred a certain shrinking sensitiveness in a certain ill-clad, ill-fed child, that I have found

⁶² See Tomalin, *Charles Dickens*, 289–304 for a general discussion of Dickens' separation and affair.

come back in the never-to-be-forgotten misery of this later time.”⁶³ He succeeded in achieving the trappings of a home and material comfort, only to find he couldn’t escape the emotional burdens of his childhood displacement and was miserable. Nor did he feel financially secure. Despite faltering health, he agreed to participate in reading tours and other travels because he was anxious to secure more money. As biographer Claire Tomalin suggests, he was probably also eager to leave his domestic troubles at home and conceal his affair.⁶⁴

Dickens did not—or would not—always recognize the complexity of his emotions and the ways in which his need for stability, manifest by personal exertions, routines and control, may have contributed to his unhappy marriage and restlessness when reflecting on his own life in correspondence. However, his fiction provided a form in which he could embrace the capitalist values and routines he needed to survive while critically reflecting on the dissatisfaction and continued feelings of displacement his embrace of this system had not dispelled or even perhaps partly engendered. As his characters pause, look back and abort narrative progress, the novels explore in a nuanced way the difficulty of emerging from instability through personal exertions and the insufficiency of individual fantasies of rising above conditions.

When *David Copperfield* ends his story as a successful writer who finds a home with Agnes Wickfield, he seems to embody the idea that a child can recover from a series of displacements through perseverance, talent and efforts that are ultimately rewarded. Such a progressive take, however, overlooks how David also undercuts his narrative’s progress through aborted plots, abandoned careers, failed homes and retrospective longings that resist narrative

⁶³ Charles Dickens to John Forster, [June 1862], in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, 368.

⁶⁴ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens*, 289–290.

development and mobility. David's discontent grows with his financial success, staging a tension between the discipline and habits he must adopt to economically survive and the memories, people and security with which he emotionally associates home. The exertions through which he finances his household in fact estrange him from the people who might make his home complete as well as the fantasy of abundance he desires in a home. *David Copperfield* is less a story of progressive individual development than an exhibit of how the unresolvable trauma of displacement undermines even the most admirable individual success, implicitly casting doubt on the benefits to individuals of mobility as well as helping readers see the need for a stronger social safety net.

David's childhood home at the Rookery is both deeply insufficient and, retrospectively, a fantasy of baseline security that David wants to reclaim. At the heart of his home is a paternal absence: David is a posthumous child (*DC* 14). David's mother Clara is beloved but unable to survive traumas on her own: in her words, she is ill-equipped for "being alone and dependent on myself in this rough world" (*DC* 19). Foreshadowing David's first wife, Dora, she knows little about housekeeping (*DC* 20). She is herself childlike, "afraid she was but a childish widow, and would be but a childish mother if she lived" (*DC* 17)—an *if she lived* that David could hardly find reassuring. Clara's inability to survive through her own exertions is a deficiency that possibly inspires David's later compensatory and necessitated self-reliance. However, childishness is also a widespread condition in *David Copperfield* reflected in the novel's cast of orphans like David, Emily, Ham, Clara and Dora; parent-child couples like the Steerforths, the Spenlows, the Wickfields and the Heeps; habitually dependent characters like the Micawbers; and minor characters like Mr. Dick who are arrested in family trauma. This resistance to maturation and independence is a countervailing force in the novel that undercuts temporal

progress towards a satisfying resolution. Significantly, childishness is a condition that David also frequently admires, and he laments the loss of it as childish characters like Clara and Dora die. As Mary Poovey has noted, David idealizes his mother's childishness even as he recognizes the ways in which her weakness and practical deficiencies result in her disastrous remarriage, death and David's abandonment.⁶⁵ Childishness is not merely a character flaw, but also an ideal destroyed by brutal social and economic forces.

For David, childishness is associated with a political ideal of universal abundance. Even as his journey compels him to embrace discipline, professionalism and financial responsibilities, he longs to linger in memories that nurture and physically sustain the child within—traits he associates with his childish mother and home at the Rookery. As Poovey observes, “[T]he imaginary plenitude [Clara Copperfield] seems to embody constitutes the ideal that David will strive to re-create throughout the novel, even though—or, rather, precisely because—it is the discrepancy between what Clara seems to offer and what she indirectly causes that provokes David to run away in search of the love and station he ‘deserves.’”⁶⁶ Looking back, he reconstructs the Rookery as a loving Eden that provides for his physical needs, complete with his innocuous attempt to pluck forbidden fruit: “Now I am in the garden at the back, beyond the yard where the empty pigeon-house and dog-kennel are—a very *preserve* of butterflies, as I remember it, with a high fence, and a gate and padlock; where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than fruit has even been since, in any other garden, and where my mother gathers some in a basket, while I stand by, bolting furtive gooseberries, and trying to look *unmoved*” (DC 28, emphasis mine). His use of the present tense cancels the passage of time, lending the beloved

⁶⁵ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 92.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

memory a permanence which is reflected in his punning use of the terms “preserve” and “unmoved.” Its static nature cancels and conceals the future that follows when David’s mother remarries and metaphorically casts him from Eden—an Eden that we might also call a safety net. David’s remembrance of home is contiguous with a social-political fantasy of abundance in which people have—and do not need to earn—enough.

Even as David becomes professionalized, he refuses to engage in sentimental nostalgia that might better reconcile him to his present and reduce the traumas occasioned by the loss of his childhood home by glossing over the harms of the past. Rather, he keeps past traumas vividly alive in the present, allowing them to guide his moral thinking and shape his narrative. For example, he resists Traddles’ retrospective fondness for their vicious schoolmaster, Mr. Creakle, by reminding him that Mr. Creakle was a “brute to you” and feeling “as if I had seen [Traddles] beaten but yesterday (*DC* 411). Past harms, he implies, should not be dismissed in order to better habituate to the present. As in the Edenic Rookery scene, he punctures his narrative with moments of intense, and often present-tense, memories that make the past again inhabitable and permanent. At other times, he wishes that time would stop before it is interrupted by an undesired, and often sexually and economically disruptive, future. When his mother holds him and his baby brother, he interrupts his story to exclaim, “I wish I had died. I wish I had died then, with that feeling in my heart! I should have been more fit for Heaven than I ever have been since” (*DC* 121). Once again, he evokes the present tense to stop himself in an ideal moment of childhood security and prevent the destruction of his home and his interpolation into professions that lie in the future. His subsequent wish to replace his brother in his mother’s grave is transformed into a vaguely ethical feeling made possible by the assumption that the future that follows entails estrangement from his most worthy feelings. The movement towards adulthood

and its precarity is experienced as a moral fall rather than refining moral instruction. He evokes this attitude towards the passage of time again when pondering if Emily would have been better dying while a child rather than becoming Steerworth's mistress (*DC* 48). Emily's fall is occasioned by her desire for social mobility, whereas David's innocent, childhood romance with Emily can flourish because "we had no future" and no practical worries (*DC* 49). Love and moral feeling in David's mind flourish best against a backdrop of protection that he associates with childhood and the exclusion of sexual and economic considerations, whereas the passage of time, economic demands and mobility estrange rather than perfect people's purest emotions.

David's moral inclination to stop time and arrest narrative development is an act of preserving what he has lost. It also criticizes the competitive, mobile and productive environments into which he is thrust by the loss of his childhood home as destructive to moral feeling and human attachments. David traumatically loses his childhood home through his mother's remarriage to Mr. Murdstone, who destroys it as David's emotional haven before physically selling or letting it to a "poor lunatic gentleman" after Clara's death (*DC* 328)—an ominous warning of what David himself might have easily become. As David drives away with Pegotty upon the occasion of his mother's remarriage, he turns to the trope of a fairy tale to process his departure, wondering "whether, if she were employed to lose me like the boy in the fairy tale, I should be able to track my way home again by the buttons she would shed" (*DC* 39). The trope registers his resentment at abandonment as well as his belief that he must thereafter rely on his own cleverness and exertions to regain a home.

However, David's economic efforts to procure a home estrange him further from the ideals of abundance and nurture that he associates with his mother and the Rookery. Mr. Murdstone sends the orphaned David to work at Murdstone and Grinby's, in which he

experiences the same neglect, horror and turn towards self-reliance and habits that Dickens did at Warren's Blacking factory. David's experiences at the factory are in fact often drawn verbatim from Dickens' autobiographical fragment, which he composed before *David Copperfield*. David rescues himself from this situation by running away to his aunt, Betsey Trotwood, who agrees to effectively adopt him. Playing the role of fairy godmother—and underscoring that even David cannot rise without family support—she uses her wealth to provide him with an education and apprentice him to Mr. Spenlow, a member of Doctor's Commons. Personal and economic catastrophe snatch away these homes, however, revealing them as only temporary forms of refuge. His aunt loses most of her wealth due to fraudulent activity, and Mr. Spenlow dies, forcing David to turn to writing and other forms of work to earn a living. Ironically, the narrative develops and new episodes follow only because homes and professions fail to provide David with security. Narrative progress and personal progress are sometimes opposed within the novel.

David responds by doubling down on the discipline he learned at the factory—thus reproducing even as he tries to escape it the trauma of displacement. When David reflects retrospectively on his spectacular rise from a neglected orphan to an established author, he credits his success with habits associated with industrial time management. “[] I never could have done what I have done, without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one object at a time, no matter how quickly its successor should come upon its heels, which I then formed” (*DC* 613). Punctuality. Order. Diligence. Concentration. Jennifer Ruth observes how Dickens, who longed to be anywhere but a factory, ironically depicts David's success as his ability to internalize “the time-discipline of the factory clock.”⁶⁷ As D. A. Miller puts it, the habits David needs to work at Murdstone and Grinby's and

⁶⁷ Jennifer Ruth, *Novel Professions: Interested Disinterest and the Making of the Professional in the Victorian Novel* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), 56, 58

become a writer are “quite the same.”⁶⁸ Without doubt, David is proud of the work he adopts of necessity. However, his pride coexists with an ambivalent sense of the emotional and human costs of capitalism, factory labor and the discipline it demands.

David struggles with a cruel compulsion to weaken ties to friends with whom he shares a forbidden knowledge of economic displacement, much as Dickens did to his fellow workers at Warren’s Blacking. He is haunted by the fear that his homeless past will be exposed in ways that disqualify him from social inclusion and employment. For example, when he returns to school after his experience at the factory, he reflects, “[T]roubled as I was, by my want of boyish skill, and of book-learning too, I was made infinitely more uncomfortable by the consideration, that, in what I did know, I was much farther removed from my companions than in what I did not. . . . How would it affect them, who were so innocent of London life, and London streets, to discover how knowing I was (and was ashamed to be) in some of the meanest phases of both?” (*DC* 238). Possessing the wrong kind of knowledge is more dangerous and potentially exposing than privileged ignorance. The novel validates David’s fears of exposure in its depiction of Mr. Mell, the compassionate teacher at Mr. Creakle’s school who loses his employment when Steerforth reveals that Mr. Mell’s mother lives in an alms-house—information Steerforth learned from David (*DC* 110–111). However, it also morally condemns David’s decision to cast aside the less fortunate for his own social mobility. David permits Mr. Mell’s exposure in order to advance his interests with Steerforth, who ultimately proves unworthy of his friendship and trust. Similarly, David struggles with his desire to distance himself from the Micawbers in order that they not expose his past (*DC* 238, 266). However, this desire proves misguided when Mr. Micawber

⁶⁸ Miller, D. A. “Secret Subjects, Open Secrets,” *Dickens Studies Annual* 14 (1985), 34.

exposes Uriah Heep's past in order to restore David, his aunt and the Wickfields to fortune and something like a home.

Similarly, David embraces discipline in order to marry Dora and recover idealized aspects of his childhood, only to find that such discipline makes it difficult for him to feel at home. "What I had to do," he concludes, "was, to turn the *painful* discipline of my younger days to account, by going to work with a resolute and steady heart. What I had to do, was, to take my woodman's axe in my hand, and clear my own way through the forest of difficulty, by cutting down the trees until I came to Dora" (*DC* 526, emphasis mine). David succeeds in a steady, even frenetic, way to do just that as he throws himself into new avenues of work and wins Dora. However, his words register the pain this discipline causes him and how much the experience resuscitates the trauma of abandonment even as he tries to restore his home. His reference to a woodman in the forest recalls the lost, fairytale boy who must now find his own way home.

David's attraction to Dora is based largely on her resemblance to his mother and his desire to restore what he lost at the Rookery. Mary Poovey observes that both Clara and Dora are diminutive and impractical housekeepers,⁶⁹ and their connection is strengthened by the fact that Dora is improbably chaperoned by Miss Murdstone, the sister of Clara's second husband (*DC* 397). David even associates Dora, like the Rookery, with the "garden of Eden" (*DC* 400). However, she is ominously framed as a reward for his work rather than a source of security that alleviates work's constant necessity. David must quickly confront the tension between the practical exertions required to finance his home and the plentiful security that he desires in the childhood home is attempting to rebuild.

⁶⁹ Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 92.

Unwittingly, and out of a well-intentioned desire to provide, David replicates the cruelest aspects of factory discipline and the Murdstones' fatal, controlling attempts to make Clara more practical in his own relationship with Dora. Financial need, as well as an emotional desire for routines that create stability, prompt David to import disciplined habits into his housekeeping that estrange him from Dora after they marry. In describing the discipline with which he pursues a financial avenue to marriage with Dora, he senses the uncomfortable parallel to his step-father, noting that "little Dora was quite unconscious of my desperate *firmness*" (DC 542, emphasis mine), the very quality that characterizes the Murdstones. His description of his firmness as "desperate" also underscores how much he is failing to find security and happiness through his habits. In the novel's most extensive look at housekeeping, David strives to introduce Dora to the rhythms of time and financial management by techniques such as presenting her with a Cookery Book that denotes the proper times for cooking meat (DC 548, 647) and encouraging her to learn the "little habit" of accounts (DC 548). Dora is incapable of learning such systems, and David's descriptions of their domestic life become a series of her failures to control time and resources: She cannot buy proper meat (DC 646–647). She cannot add numbers or keep accounts (DC 652). She cannot focus on tasks (DC 652). She is so negligent of time that Jennifer Ruth observes that their servant steals her watch (DC 698).⁷⁰ By contrast, Emily Rena-Dozier notes that the families David begins to admire blend their domestic and professional lives: Traddles and his wife live and work together within his legal chambers, while David works from home alongside Agnes in his second marriage.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ruth, *Novel Professions*, 57.

⁷¹ Rena-Dozier, "Re-gendering the Domestic Novel in *David Copperfield*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 50, no. 4 (2010), 821.

David is uncomfortably aware of his complicity in his marital frustration. When he asks his aunt to exert a practical influence on Dora, she declines to interfere, reminding David that he has “chosen freely” for himself and warning him of the parallel between his behavior and Mr. Murdstone’s. “Remember your own home, in that second marriage; and never do both me and her the injury you have hinted at!” she warns him (*DC* 645). Dora’s own reproach and request that David call her his “child-wife” cautions him that she is exactly the kind of wife and home of which he fantasized, even while hinting at their mutual recognition of the unsustainability and impracticality of his ideal: “When I am very disappointing, say, ‘I knew, a long time ago, that she would make but a child-wife!’” (*DC* 651). David attains the external trappings of his lost home and mother, only for both David and Dora to recognize that she cannot provide the nurture and stability that he craves. He desires a home that functions as an abundant safety net, yet the exertions he must undertake to maintain his home dispel that fantasy.

David experiences growing discontent that is both personal to his choice of wife and part of a general condition in which desired objectives rarely prove fully satisfying:

The old unhappy loss or want of something had, I am conscious, some place in my heart. . . . I did miss something of the realisation of my dreams; but I thought it was a softened glory of the Past, which nothing could have thrown upon the present time. I did feel, sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife had been my counsellor; had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me; but I felt as if this were an unearthly consummation of my happiness, that never had been meant to be, and never could have been. (*DC* 653)

David’s driving emotion remains a sense of loss rooted in his past, but he struggles to identify any condition that could fill this void. While he speculates that a different wife could provide more sustaining support, he also recognizes the impossibility of anyone healing his sense of dispossession. He restores his relationship with Dora by abandoning his attempts to cultivate her

practical knowledge, but the cost of preserving their childish fantasy is further emotional estrangement as he decides to keep his work and anxieties to himself (*DC* 653, 701).

Although the novel urges us to see David's remarriage to Agnes as a sign of more mature development—implying he can fill the void by picking a stronger wife—his remarriage is yet another attempt to restore childhood. His yearning for Agnes is inextricably tied with his desire for the security he experienced while living in her father's house: "When I thought of the airy dreams of youth that are incapable of realization, I thought of the better state preceding manhood that I had outgrown; and then the contented days with Agnes, in the dear old house, arose before me, like specters of the dead, that might have some renewal in another world, but never never more could be reanimated here" (*DC* 703). The Wickfields' home is not, of course, secure, because Uriah Heep threatens it with financial ruin. In David's fantasy, however, the home becomes another ideal, "contented" state before the disappointments of manhood. He longs for the security the house represents, even though he recognizes that both the past and the desire for security is deadening. There, David was content, not yet disillusioned by marriage and secure in the "dear old house" whose substantial, ancient atmosphere once helped dispel his fears of being unsuited to attend school after his experiences in the factory. "As I went up to my airy old room, the grave shadow of the staircase seemed to fall upon my doubts and fears, and to make the past more indistinct," recalls David of his boyhood, as insertion into a solid, old house seems to bury his history at the warehouse and promise to make him a "passable sort of boy yet" (*DC* 239). The security the solid home provides allows him to momentarily forget his shame by providing an alternative history to which he can cling.

David's marriage to Agnes reads less like a relationship with emotional depths than a symbolic blending of childhood associations with adult pragmatism, highlighting

David's desperation to find a settled solution while also generating disbelief in the ultimate satisfaction he will find there. Agnes blends David's longing for the past with the practical: she is like his sister; she is linked to Dora because she has her blessing; she serves as her father's housekeeper and caregiver; and she earns money through teaching. Housekeeping-as-preservation is a function that she performs perfectly with never-failing faithfulness. She maintains David's desired memories by keeping things in place. "I have found a pleasure," Agnes tells David, "while you have been absent, in keeping every thing as it used to be when we were children. For we were very happy then, I think" (*DC* 845). Agnes's housekeeping fuses David's childhood with his adulthood, an act of continuity as well as selective erasure of the horrific abandonment and exploitation David experienced before knowing Agnes. Unlike Clara or Dora, she is a survivor who does not abandon David. Walking near her house, David reflects on how she has outlasted her childhood surroundings, noting, "Nothing seemed to have survived that time but Agnes. . . ." (*DC* 846).

David's remarriage to Agnes presents a disjunction between the plot, which seems to reward David's seeming maturation with a true home, and David's continuing feelings of displacement. He describes the moment after their engagement, "We stood together in the same old-fashioned window at night, when the moon was shining; Agnes with her quiet eyes raised up to it; I following her glance. Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and, toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy, forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own" (*DC* 868). Here, then, is the scene in which Agnes' patience and David's perseverance should be rewarded with a home that distances them from the wanderings and traumas of the past,

but the temporal disjunction undercuts it as David simultaneously sees himself as a neglected boy who is *still* toiling and journey on the open road. The moment denies resolution and calls into question both David's growth and the permanence and security of the situation he has found with Agnes.

The most enduring compromise David finds between the economic necessity of unending labor and his competing desires for stasis, the past and a nurturing safety net may be less in his home with Agnes than in writing novels—the activity that takes place in his home. He masters the art of turning memory, lost possibilities and repetition-compulsion into productivity as he writes serial novels that house his emotional unrest, moving forward but also allowing for pause, return and repetition. It is the same strategy Dickens himself employs. As he writes in his Preface to *David Copperfield*,

It would concern the reader little, perhaps, to know, how sorrowfully the pen is laid down at the close of two-years' imaginative task; or how an Author feels as if he were dismissing some portion of himself into the shadowy world, when a crowd of the creatures of his brain are going from him for ever. . . Instead of looking back, therefore, I will look forward. I cannot close this Volume more agreeably to myself, than with a hopeful glance towards the time when I shall again put forth my two green leaves once a month, and with a faithful remembrance of the genial sun and showers that have fallen on these leaves of David Copperfield, and made me happy. (*DC*, Preface)

For Dickens, the experience of ending *David Copperfield* is an ambivalent form of mourning as he faces the necessity—and perhaps relief—of leaving his youthful memories and parts of himself behind. The process of writing the novel becomes a way of purging himself of potentially disruptive memories and desires so that he can move forward while also giving them a permanent home. However, moving forwarding is also a way of moving back. The future he envisions is one in which he repeats the act of writing with a “faithful remembrance” of what has

come before. Novel writing becomes an activity that balances the need to live in time and be financially productive with a refusal to completely set aside attachments to the past.

While David is the novel's most obvious example of someone who converts trauma into repetitive productivity, many of the novel's minor but memorable characters follow a similar trajectory. Jennifer Ruth, for example, notes that middle-class characters of less ability than David find employment in various forms of copying.⁷² Miss Trotwood, Mr. Dick and Traddles each respond to trauma by reproducing obsessions. Miss Trotwood is eager to produce a new version of herself in a niece who she will raise to not make her same marital mistakes (*DC* 19). Disappointed in a niece, she unsuccessfully focuses her attention on encouraging other young women not to marry (*DC* 205). Mr. Dick works obsessively on a memorial that is never finished, because he is always interrupted by the image of King Charles the First, who has become a symbol of Mr. Dick's own family trauma (*DC* 215). Traddles habitually draws skeletons after being beaten at school (*DC* 102). Their defenses are redeemed as they channel their impulses into socially productive if repetitive forms: Mr. Dick learns to make money as copyist of documents, with the result that he settles into "an orderly business-like manner" and controls his impulse to think of Charles the First (*DC* 534–535). Traddles settles down into an unimaginative legal career that provides him the means to marry, and Miss Trotwood learns to mother David. While the degree of creative and mental labor required by writing serial fiction and by rote reproductive work is vastly different, both allow their practitioners to find a tolerable kind of home not by rejecting their past trauma but by channeling it into productive routines that extend into the future.

⁷² Ruth, *Novel Professions*, 67.

The uneasy optimism that Dickens shows in *David Copperfield* about the potential of finding a satisfying home in serial writing, however, did not last. In 1860, the same year in which Dickens wrote the “Uncommercial Traveller” essay on Gad’s Hill Place, Dickens decided to revisit the themes of *David Copperfield* in *Great Expectations*—suggesting just how unable he had been to resolve them. Written from Gad’s Hill Place and reflecting the preoccupations of an older author who had secured fame and the house he desired only to find himself still anxious about finances, separated from his wife and eager to travel abroad, *Great Expectations* depicts the scenario of a boy who casts aside his unhappy origins in pursuit of social mobility. Even more so than in *David Copperfield*, however, the individual pursuit of security through adoption, professions, emigration or abstract legal and financial institutions not only fails but results in the destruction of the affective ties between the people who could create homes. Rather than providing a form that trains readers to adapt to mobility, the novel uneasily criticizes desires to forget past associations in order to pursue mobility. Pip finds moral redemption only once he learns to insist on the importance of memory and loyalty to his origins. However, this moral redemption only leads to continued feelings of displacement, and the past remains both foreclosed and undesirable.

Great Expectations’ protagonist, Pip, is another Dickensian orphan, and one who lacks even David’s fantasy of an ideal home lost in the past. He lives a working-class existence with his sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Gargery, that is emotionally and materially barren. While novels like *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* extoll housekeeping as necessary to a family’s financial security and more obliquely reveal its emotional distortions, Mrs. Gargery is a too-strict housekeeper whose lack of warmth and kindness obviously destroys the affection that could make a house a home. Armed with a bib of pins that prevents anyone from

establishing a nurturing connection with her, she is “a very clean housekeeper” who has the “exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable and unacceptable than dirt itself” (*GE* 22). Pip finds comradeship in Joe Gargery, whose compassion, uneducated simplicity and lack of self-interest he later idealizes as an alternative to people who use others to advance their self-interest. His idealization, however, is in many ways unearned. Joe’s true heart does not protect Pip from the beatings and emotional starvation Mrs. Gargery doles out—and which provide a very sound reason for Pip to wish to leave the forge. “I always treated him as a larger species of child, and as no more than my equal,” Pip reflects with much justification (*GE* 9). Childish and unworldly himself, Joe does not protect Pip from abuse within his own household even if his feelings are innocent.

Neither does Satis House, which most attracts Pip as an alternative to the forge, offer any sense of sustaining futurity. Within the neglected manor, Miss Havisham grotesquely enacts the fantasy of stopping time by burying herself alive with her adopted daughter, Estella, as a response to the trauma of being jilted on her wedding day. She cuts herself off from social interaction, stops her clocks and lives in her tattered wedding dress, abandoning housekeeping, barricading her home with fences and keys, and letting her once-productive brewery run to waste. She dwells timelessly and repetitively in a house that, as Monica Cohen observes, conceals its financial history as it leaves the brewery to become part of a ruin aesthetic.⁷³ Satis House is marked by welcome permanence but also by obvious deadness, reflecting its owner’s decision to cease living in time but also the narrative problem that what is secure invites no development. Satis House, whose name meant “when it was given, that whoever had this house, could want nothing else” (*GE* 55), conveys the fantasy of permanent refuge. It implies that the

⁷³ Cohen, *Professional Domesticity*, 77.

home can provide all necessities, but also forecloses futurity and the possibility of its inhabitant developing other desires.

Despite Satis House's deadness, Pip is deeply attracted to the exemption from the brutality of living in the market or with his family that adoption by Miss Havisham would seem to provide. From the opening scene of the novel, Pip is attuned to the fact that people forced to make a living typically die, dwelling with some envy on his five dead brothers "who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle" (*GE* 3). As Cohen has observed, "[B]eing adopted by Miss Havisham would mean Pip's release from being a working-class boy."⁷⁴ Yet Pip misses what the ruin of Satis House also obviously implies—that his fantasy of being lifted out of the working class through adoption or marriage into wealth is misguided. Miss Havisham has no intention of adopting him or marrying him to Estella, and she is actually connected to rather than exempt from the legal system, the market and criminals. The novel repeatedly insists on the impossibility of escaping unwanted origins or finding exemption from general conditions as it reveals how financial systems and adoption connect the most respectable with the most criminal characters. Miss Havisham, for example, wields her wealth to manipulate Pip and her relatives and has adopted a convict's daughter.

While it is common to draw the idea that everyone is morally tainted from the implication that everyone is connected, the novel more sophisticatedly condemns characters who conceal their connections while suggesting that acknowledgment of interconnections might provide impetus for developing a society that more justly distributes resources. Strategic obfuscation of origins, attachment and memory are aligned with self-serving ways to amass power. Characters like Mr. Jaggers, Magwitch and Miss Havisham are all highly skilled at leveraging abstractions

⁷⁴ Ibid., 76.

like the law or cash-nexus to obscure unwanted origins and access seemingly foreclosed social circles. Mr. Jaggers is the novel's clearest example of a professional who turns his ability to disown or launder unwanted knowledge and relationships into profit. Mr. Jaggers insists on his passivity as a professional tool in his law practice. Rejecting the parental functions of a guardian, he tells Pip that he is merely the "agent of another" (*GE* 134) and renders services only because he is paid (*GE* 137). Viewing himself as merely a tool of the legal system without personal loyalties or inclinations, he feels free to profit by a profession that connects him to secrets that span classes and countries, including Estella's origins, Miss Havisham's financial affairs and Magwitch's identity. He maintains his position of control by ruthlessly guarding himself from facts that could expose him to liability and by keeping secrets close. He berates clients for conveying information to him in words that might connect him to impropriety (*GE* 167–168) and ritually "wash[es] his clients off" with soap so as to preserve his innocence and disconnection (*GE* 208). When Pip discovers Estella's parentage, Mr. Jaggers implies—without, of course, admitting anything—that the knowledge would benefit no one and should be concealed (*GE* 408–409). While Pip's loyalty ultimately leads him to share the secret with Magwitch, Mr. Jaggers is not wrong that concealing and controlling knowledge better serves Estella's social interests and his professional ones. So thoroughly does Mr. Jaggers cleanse himself of relationships and knowledge that he manages to obscure even his own origins and desires. When Mr. Wemmick suggests that perhaps Mr. Jaggers has domestic dreams of his own, we read that "Mr. Jaggers nodded his head retrospectively two or three times, and actually drew a sigh" (*GE* 408). His reversion to the past raises the possibility that he has lost a home or lover, too, but the novel will not disclose whatever domestic drama might lie in his history. The knowledge no longer exists in the world of the novel, and his sigh makes us wonder if he is merely performing

nostalgia rather than still feeling a loss deeply. His nostalgia is not a sign of his healthy habituation to change, but rather of the paucity of his emotional life and excessive fixation on his professional advancement to the exclusion of other pursuits and values.

Magwitch and Miss Havisham use people and cash as proxies in order to compensate for domestic losses even while seeming to exist outside society. Magwitch (dissatisfied with the life abroad that Dickens once depicted as a solution to displacement) wants to become the “owner” of a gentleman (*GE* 317) and establish a new household in England, displaying an astonishing perception of how he can use the cash-nexus, legal formalities and the human proxies they buy to obscure his criminal origins and gain power in upper-class circles from which he is excluded. Using his resources to become a “second father” to Pip (*GE* 315), he believes in the power of capital to provide them both with a new, genteel home and family. His plan finds a modern parallel in Bong Joon Ho’s *Parasite* (2019), in which Kim Ki-Woo, a working-class young adult who gains a tutoring position by impersonating a college student, plans to free his father from the mansion in which he is hiding (without the owners’ knowledge) from the law by earning money to buy the mansion himself. Purchasing the house, he hopes, will dissolve the boundaries between house and prison, allowing his father to walk free. Magwitch’s belief in his ability to erase his origins and escape the law is ultimately inflated. He does not escape recognition and recapture, and his money is forfeited to the Crown. But even if he fails to perceive how the cash-nexus favors those who wield the levers of power, what’s remarkable is that his actions—like Kim Ki-Woo’s impersonations—almost succeed.

Miss Havisham has physically removed herself from the world (Mr. Jaggers’ visits excepted), and she has done anything but forget her past trauma. Like Magwitch, however, she uses money and a child proxy to access what she cannot directly reach as she grooms Estella to

wreak vengeance on men and deny others the domestic bliss she did not receive. As Gail Turley Houston puts it, Magwitch and Miss Havisham act like their children's "business managers."⁷⁵ While Magwitch genuinely desires to help Pip as well as himself, Miss Havisham is a very self-interested one. Miss Havisham amasses power by obscuring Estella's knowledge of her personal history and requiring her to set aside her affective attachments and well-being to promote her agenda. Miss Havisham also encourages Pip's misperception that she is his benefactor to serve her own interests. Pip learns that he has put his faith in a person who he believes is loyal to him, when in fact she cares little for him and is perfectly willing to provide him with severance and a pink slip in the form of money for his apprenticeship when her need for him ceases.

Pip errs in the novel by being too willing to follow the roles others self-interestedly prescribe for him in pursuit of his own social mobility. In adopting these roles, he mimics them in obscuring his own origins and ceasing to remember his own home and the people to whom he should be loyal. When he is first sent to play at Miss Havisham's house, for example, he reflects that even the stars throw no "light on the questions why on earth I was going to play at Miss Havisham's, and what on earth I was expected to play at" (*GE* 52). Nevertheless, he plays what she demands without fully understanding the consequences. Similarly, he leaves the forge without knowing the true identity of his benefactor or the scope of his expectations. Rather than questioning his own actions and the motivations of those around him, he tautologically desires what he is told he should strive for yet cannot reach. "[] I loved her simply because I found her irresistible," he confesses about his interest in Estella (*GE* 229), while he fantasizes that Miss Havisham intends him to be the "young Knight" who will marry "the Princess" and restore Satis House (*GE* 229). He enacts prescribed roles and familiar tropes.

⁷⁵ Gail Turley Houston, "'Pip' and 'Property': The (Re)production of the Self in *Great Expectations*," *Studies in the Novel*, 24, no. 1 (1992): 17.

Like David Copperfield and Dickens with his blacking polish, Pip is haunted by a fear that his degrading origins will be exposed as he plays various parts. While still at the forge, he reflects: “What I dreaded was, that in some unlucky hour I, being at my grimiest and commonest, should lift up my eyes and see Estella looking in at one of the wooden windows of the forge. I was haunted by the fear that she would, sooner or later, find me out, with a black face and hands, doing the coarsest part of my work” (*GE* 106). He becomes preoccupied with the what we might now call “impostor syndrome,” a condition that primarily reinforces existing power relations. He exists in a state of anxious paranoia, suspicious that he has unknowingly violated the mysterious rules and norms that comprise his life. Similarly, Pip obsessively fears that he will be “haled [sic.] before the Judges” after sparring with Herbert Pocket in Miss Havisham’s garden, yet “[w]ithout having any definite idea of the penalties I had incurred” (*GE* 91–92). The sense that Pip’s wants and paranoias are unnamable persists throughout the novel, recurring when Pip rides in a coach with two convicts and calls his fear “altogether undefined and vague” (*GE* 228). His fear of exposure serves the interests of those in power by keeping him focused on their aspirations for him and rules.

While Pip learns to dread exposure of his origins and set aside attachments to home as threatening to his upward mobility, the novel suggests that exposure of origins and loyal attachment to people and memory in fact provide more promising pathways to security and happiness. When Pip is left destitute by the revelation of Magwitch’s identity, *Great Expectations* clarifies that emotional and financial happiness is more likely to be found in the affective ties between family and friends than in the people that nudge us to set aside those ties. When he is arrested for debt, Pip is saved by Joe’s financial assistance as well as by his decision to finance Herbert Pocket’s career against standard business advice, which ultimately provides

him employment when his resources fail. The loyal but unworldly characters whom he believed would not financially succeed in fact prove to be his economic salvation, with an assist from Miss Havisham's and Magwitch's money. As Cohen and Bruce Robbins have noted, Pip moves toward a more ethical and financially viable future only once he ceases to wish for an adoption plot and instead asks Miss Havisham to invest in his friend and her relative.⁷⁶ An ethics of acknowledging rather than casting aside or concealing ties points to potentially superior and shared forms of financial security.

Great Expectations paints retentive memory and loyal human attachments as potentially countervailing powers to the market forces that split persons apart for the benefit those who wield capital and power. The novel associates the absence of affection and memory with the characters most intractably tied to pursuing the roles they are allotted, often to the exclusion of their own well-being and emotional life. Estella, for example, explains after she is unable to remember having made Pip cry, "You must know . . . that I have no heart—if that has anything to do with my memory" (*GE* 235). The implication of her speech is that memory is woven into our capacity for moral sympathy and action. At the end of the novel, Pip illustrates her moral transformation by having her speak of both memory and heart, saying, "There was a long hard time when I kept it far from me, the *remembrance* of what I had thrown away when I was quite ignorant of its worth. But, since my duty has not been incompatible with the admission of that remembrance, I have given it a place in my *heart*" (*GE* 478, emphasis mine). Acknowledging memory and past associations is the first step towards moral transformation. Pip also seeks redemption in his strong memory, telling Biddy, "I have forgotten nothing in my life that ever had a foremost place there, and little that ever had any place there" (*GE* 476). He never truly

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Professional Domesticity*, 97–98; Bruce Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 82–83.

succeeds in leaving his origins behind or forgetting them, which the novel paints to his credit. He never forgets his childhood encounter with Magwitch, prompting him both to renounce the money he perceives as tainted and, eventually, to loyally acknowledge his relationship. In putting loyalty above his financial interest with Magwitch, Pip parallels his flawed but compassionate first father—Joe Gargery—who refuses payment for the loss of Pip as an apprentice.

Great Expectations also encourages readers to dwell on memory as they set the story down between chapters or parts. Rob Allen, for example, calls attention to how one installment of the novel ends with the narrator's injunction to readers, "Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the first link on one memorable day" (*GE* 71). As Allen observes, the serial form reinforced this authorial mandate to reflect on one's life by forcing readers to pause and wait for the continuation of the story.⁷⁷ Pip as narrator invites readers to dwell on memory rather than unilaterally move forward. However, he undercuts belief in the radical potential of memory at the same moment: the content of the sentence posits the "memorable day" as the first link in a binding chain of events that one cannot escape. In *Great Expectations*, it is often moral to remember, and yet the incidents, people and places recalled by that memory are often undesirable: Pip, for example, remembers his encounter with the convict "long after the subject had died out" (*GE* 42) while Mr. Wemmick "is laden with remembrances of departed friends" as he wears portable property belonging clients sentenced to death (*GE* 169). While the novel bluntly critiques Pip's desire to set aside his attachments home in pursuit of mobility, its appeal to memory as a potentially countervailing force does not resolve the problem that the past is often traumatic and that the act of recollection can itself become grotesque and participatory in

⁷⁷ Rob Allen, "Pause You Who Read This: Disruption and the Victorian Serial Novel," 38–39.

harmful social forces, as illustrated by Mr. Wemmick's portable property or Miss Havisham's retreat into traumatic memory.

While Pip is morally redeemed by acknowledging his past associations, there is little personal or transformative benefit in such acknowledgement for Pip aside from finding a position in Herbert's firm. Magwitch dies. Pip loses his fortune. His ethical feelings have little practical effect for good. The novel cannot translate affective connection and moral feeling into action that fully provides collective security and a political vision that becomes more than individual assistance to friends and family. It also struggles to avoid having the potentially radical implications of claiming past associations turn into its opposite—the personal and political dead end represented by Miss Havisham's decision to excessively dwell on trauma.

Great Expectations' ending leaves Pip no alternative but to embrace professionalism and individual exertions, but the cost of his professionalization is perpetual displacement. Joe and Biddy's marriage reasserts the nuclear over the collective family, and forecloses any permanent return to the home he left at the forge. Indeed, Pip is displaced by their son, a new Pip, in the family circle. Unable to find a home within England, Pip lives with Herbert and his wife abroad, where he works in the business he helped finance. He does not feel at home and becomes a self-described "wanderer" (*GE* 478) until he returns to England and unexpectedly encounters Estella on the grounds of what was once Satis House. Satis House, however, is no longer a home, or even a house, but rather a lot that will soon be redeveloped (*GE* 478), implying that the fantasy of a home that provides security is permanently lost. The same social forces that take Pip from fantasies of finding a secure domestic home at Satis House to a profession are symbolically reflected in the final conversion of the familial house into an investment. Whether Satis House's

transformation represents a healthy loss of Pip's misguided adoption fantasy or the ambivalent triumph of the market over past associations and the security offered by homes is unclear.

The destruction of Satis House is paralleled by the novel's refusal to provide resolution or closure. Serial novels evade closure through their construction as a series of ever-extensible parts, and *Great Expectations* specifically ends with a reflection on the tenuousness of attempts to achieve finality. As Douglas-Fairhurst has noted, Dickens struggled with partings, both from people and from his novels: *Bleak House*, for example, ends with Esther Summerson breaking off mid-sentence (*BH* 989), while the ending of *Great Expectations* foregrounds the difficulty of leave-taking.⁷⁸ When Estella tells Pip that she is happy to "take leave of you in taking leave of this spot" (*GE* 478), Pip responds, "To me, parting is a painful thing. To me, the remembrance of our last parting has been forever mournful and painful" (*GE* 478). Without resolution, the exchange pits the virtues of habituation represented by Estella, who is more easily able to leave home and content to "continue friends apart," against those of Pip, who is permanently pained by partings from those he loves. Pip takes Estella's hand and sees "the shadow of no parting from her" as they exit the grounds (*GE* 479). Associating "shadow" with the state of not parting, Pip recognizes the narrative deadness in the finality he desires—and eludes it by choosing words that leave their relationship ambiguously open-ended. Although we do not know if they go on to build a home, the unsettled refuge we know Pip finds is the same one as David Copperfield and Dickens—converting his memory into words as he writes novels that allow him to productively and financially move forward while also remembering, resisting and criticizing the human costs of mobility and narrative development as he pauses and lingers on the past.

⁷⁸ Douglas-Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens*, 329–330.

At age fifty-eight, Dickens died prematurely at Gad's Hill Place of a brain hemorrhage. Ignoring his declining health, he worked to the end, embarking on tours that took him from home and leaving behind the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). According to his daughter, Catherine "Katey" Dickens, he spoke in his last days of his regrets about having not been a better person and father.⁷⁹ Dickens' eldest child, Charles Dickens Jr., who had refused to leave his mother when Catherine and Charles Dickens separated, bought Gad's Hill Place upon his father death, perhaps in a fantasy of restoring his own broken family.⁸⁰ He was unable to hold on to it financially, and he was forced to sell it in 1890.⁸¹ In the 1920s, the house was converted into an independent school, which it remains today.⁸²

⁷⁹ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens*, 393.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 406.

⁸² Gad's Hill Independent School in Kent, "About Us: School History," <https://www.gadshill.org/about-us/school-history/> (accessed June 17, 2020).

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