Cognitive Boundaries: Perception and Ethics in Nineteenth-Century Britain

Cognitive Boundaries: Perception and Ethics in Nineteenth-Century Britain

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Abstract

Cognitive Boundaries considers the relationship between form and ethics in nineteenth-century literature through investigating representations of cognitive restraint. Using theories of cognitive limitation from neurobiology, psychology, philosophy, and economics, I argue that the Victorian interest in self-control goes beyond a simple ingestion of larger forms of authority, but instead represents a complex process of self-actualization that arises when the chaos of consciousness meets the ethical demands of the world at large. This interest in cognitive restraint coincides with a nineteenth-century distrust in unmitigated stream of consciousness; by managing one's perceptions, rather than capitulating to the momentary nature of individual sensation, it was possible to develop an idea of selfhood that was meaningfully and volitionally connected to long-term goals. Looking at the works of Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, I identify specific strategies that characters and authors use to manage their perceptions, charting the effects such limitations have on plot and action. Ultimately, controlling one's access to perceptual experience is revealed as theoretically connected with solving problems of deliberation, action, and ethics.

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Introduction

Stemming the Tide: Cognitive Control on the Rejection of Stream of Consciousness

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions — trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall…they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday…Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.—Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, Chapter 13

In her oft-quoted description of stream-of-consciousness style in *The Common Reader*, Virginia Woolf makes an impassioned plea for an author's faithful transcription of "the atoms [of perception] as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall." In Woolf's assessment, the only way in which to represent life as it really "is" and to avoid becoming a "slave" to literary convention would be to forgo the popular dictates of plot and character in order to register variations of consciousness exactly as they occur "to an ordinary mind on an ordinary day." Woolf's pleas for the comparative authenticity of stream of consciousness over popular forms of nineteenth-century narration have taken traction in literary studies. Her narrative style has been described as shifting focus "from the mind of the narrator to the minds of the characters," and it is credited with a literary economy that the vast, undisciplined novels of the nineteenth century lack (Dick 51, 59). Even Dorrit Cohn, whose *Transparent Minds* acknowledges and studies the many ways minds can be revealed without the aid of stream of consciousness, expresses some judgment about pre-Modernist narrators who "evad[e]…an inside view" of their characters' thought processes (23). An underlying assumption of such analyses seems to be that stream of consciousness is a more "accurate" way of presenting cognitive experience than can be provided through a filtering narrator, and while other modes of portraying characters' thoughts can be useful, the value that stream of consciousness offers in its direct access to realistic perception cannot be denied.

Perhaps, though, it is time to reassess this traditional acceptance of stream of consciousness as a more liberating and authentic form of representation than its nineteenth-century counterparts. If scientific theories of certain forms of stream of consciousness existed in the nineteenth century, as they had for almost a century before Dickens began writing, then the Victorian rejection of this mode of representation may not simply be the result of naiveté or authors' investment in controlling their characters at the expense of realism. This dissertation will argue, on the contrary, that failure to use stream-of-consciousness narration in nineteenth-century literature reflects an active belief that the mind's capacity for fluid thought needed to be controlled so that the individual could make decisions, achieve moral ideals, and ultimately survive in a modern world. As a result, authors like Dickens and Eliot advocate for managing and restricting stream-of-consciousness thinking, and they create novel strategies for controlling consciousness that directly result in characters' ability to act rationally and morally. Furthermore, while these authors' rejection of stream of consciousness can be treated as historical squeamishness about encountering unpleasant psychological realities, the sophisticated ways in which they articulate the dangers of fluid thought actually mirror arguments for cognitive restriction made in a variety of disciplines outside of the Humanities. Acknowledging the complex reasons why Victorian authors chose to focus on characters restricting their own streams of consciousness may allow us to rescue cognitive restriction from its typical association with repression and to develop a more nuanced vision of why stemming the tide of mental phenomena might be psychologically beneficial.

My argument, therefore, stands both within and against literary scholarship on the interaction between nineteenth-century literature and science, or, more accurately, literature and psychology. Critics' interest in the relationship between Victorian theories of the mind and the

era's literary production has grown over the last two decades.[1] From critical works that seek to distill the essential details of psychological debate and analyze their presence in novels and poetry—like Rick Rylance's *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1888*—to more targeted studies of the way particular authors responded to psychological theory—like Sally Shuttleworth's *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*—the wealth of critical attention given to the presence of minds in Victorian texts has illuminated the overlaps between scientific theory and imaginative representation during the era. These studies don't simply exhibit authors' awareness of contemporary theories of the mind, but also draw attention to the ways in which a failure to acknowledge such theories may lead to inaccurate readings of the period's literature. Many of these studies take efforts to show the awareness authors may have had of the scientific studies of their day; others make the argument that scientific debates seeped into literature regardless of concrete evidence of authors' interest in them. Either way, the importance of recognizing traces of scientific study within the actions of characters and narrators is seen as an important step in understanding Victorian literature, illuminating characters' motivations and authors' intentions that previously had been overlooked.

By seeking to illuminate an important stylistic absence in Victorian literature—stream of consciousness—this project takes a different approach than most of the cognitively-based criticism on the era. Instead of looking for the ways in which authors consciously or unconsciously reflected the psychological theories of the day, it instead asks why they chose not

[1] Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1888*; Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*; Dames, Nicholas. "The Network of Nerves." *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*; Ryan, *Thinking Without Thinking in the Victorian Novel*; Tate, *The Poet's Mind: The Psychology of Victorian Poetry, 1830-1870*; Vrettos, "Displaced Memories in Victorian Thinking and Psychology"; Stolte, "'Putrefaction Generally': *Bleak House*, Victorian Psychology and the Question of Bodily Matter"; and Gettelman, "The Psychology of Reading and the Victorian Novel," to name a few.

to represent an idea that had been present in medical literature (and some literary works) since the eighteenth century. The answer, curiously, pushes back against a recent trend in nineteenth-century criticism, and in literary studies more broadly, by questioning the realism and practicality of stream-of-consciousness narration as a mode of psychological representation.[2] Perhaps by taking Virginia Woolf's claims seriously, and accepting stream of consciousness as a largely faithful representation of mental processes, we have closed our eyes to an alternate interpretation of mental life—represented in Victorian novels and poetry—that is equally valid.

I. On Selection, Restraint, and Stream of Consciousness

Why isn't stream of consciousness present in Victorian literature?[3] The obvious answer seems to be anachronism, since coinage of the term "stream of consciousness" is often incorrectly attributed to William James's *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890. As historians of Victorian psychology have long observed, however, George Henry Lewes referred to the term over thirty years earlier in 1859 in *The Physiology of Common Life.* But even this early attribution fails to take into account all of the other physiologists and natural philosophers who, while not referring directly to a "stream of consciousness," still described the onslaught of

[2] Reading Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*, which tries to pair a courtship novel with elements of stream of consciousness, reveals problems with viewing the style as "typical" of perceptual experience. The effect on pacing and characterization that Woolf's style creates distorts the novel, revealing that stream of consciousness may be best reserved for exceptional, rather than "common," days.

[3] This dissertation engages with a very precise definition of stream of consciousness. Dorrit Cohn's *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) has shown that the fluidity of mental states can be expressed through a variety of different narrative techniques. However, this dissertation specifically interrogates why the moment-to-moment sensory experiences of consciousness remain unrepresented in many nineteenth-century texts, given the fact that it was precisely one's immediate access to sensory information that perplexed and challenged the scientific community at the time.

perceptions and impulses that attends consciousness as akin to a "stream." When Thomas Reid objected to Locke's descriptions of consciousness in *Essays on the Intellectual Power of Man* (1783), for instance, he did so by emphasizing the fluid and constantly moving nature of thoughts, which he treats as sensory objects and which he likens to external perception:

> [T]he objects of consciousness are never at rest: the stream of thought flows like a river, without stopping a moment; the whole train of thought passes in succession under the eye of consciousness, which is always employed about the present (516)

Later in 1820, Thomas Brown also described the continual onslaught of internal and external perceptions that the individual experiences as similar to a "stream" that fancy passes over. As he observes in *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*,

> Even while our soul is united to this bodily frame, and continually capable of being affected by the objects that are continually present with it, by far the greater number of our feelings are those which arise from our *internal* successions of thought. Innumerable as our perceptions are, they are but a small part of the varied consciousness of a day…[A]ll our perceptions of external things, and plans of serious thought…[are like] a stream…which picture on it their momentary forms, as they pass in rapid variety, without affecting the course of the busy current, which glides along in its majestic track, as if they had never been (461)

Brown here emphasizes the large quantity of impressions the individual has that never rise to the level of consciousness, all of which pass by like an unstoppable current. Dugald Stewart grappled with this description of a stream of consciousness in *Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1827), where he asserts that only through enacting human will over one's consciousness can thought be distinguished from "a mere stream of inconsistent fancies" (203). These descriptions of the mind's stream-like capacities predate Lewes's so significantly that the idea that stream of consciousness was a late nineteenth-century invention becomes increasingly unlikely. Instead, James or Lewes can be credited only with making portable an idea that had been common in psychological discussions since the eighteenth century.

Of course, it would be disingenuous to imply that these descriptions of stream of consciousness square neatly with the definition James would supply almost a century later. As Nicholas Dames rightly notes in his essay "Network of Nerves," these thinkers largely viewed the stream of thought "as merely epiphenomenal, rooted in a series of interweaving impulses," meaning that the "stream" of consciousness itself is rarely, if ever, directly experienced by the individual (221). In fact, this is largely what William James faulted these early thinkers for missing in their analyses of the workings of the mind. Since they were nearly all associationists (Reid remained suspicious of their claims), the first descriptors of stream of consciousness focused their studies on "the supposedly elementary sensory states…ignoring…the transitive, relational, and fluid elements of mind" (Reed 202). James, in essence, admonished them for observing the chaotic nature of mental states while still maintaining associationist assumptions about how basic sensory experiences led to the activation of higher reasoning. And yet, what James seems to miss is the effort or will that almost all these thinkers contend must be enacted in order to ensure that one's stream of impressions remains subconscious, allowing only desired impulses to make their way through the clamor of biological functions. It is true that much of the stream of consciousness is unconscious, but this does not evacuate one's mental processes of will and choice, which are often deployed when determining what impulses remain unacknowledged and which drift into active attention.

In fact, one of the central concerns of many nineteenth-century cognitive theorists was determining how attention was deployed and its effects on the mind's processing capacities. Alexander Bain notes in *Emotions and the Will*, for instance, that attention "coerces the flow of ideas" toward particular ends; since the individual cannot possibly process all the stimuli at his disposal, attention must pick limited information out of the perceptual field for conscious

treatment (378). Furthermore, attention achieves this goal by "direct[ing] our [minds] to a single [sensation] so as to perceive it not only more distinctly than the rest, but definedly and in its whole intensity," allowing the individual to prioritize stimulants in his environment in potentially beneficial ways.[4] Attention clarifies and prioritizes mental space, and in doing so displays the limitations of conscious experience even at moments of seemingly fluid perception. As Athena Vrettos notes in "Defining Habits: Dickens and the Psychology of Repetition," in the nineteenth century there was a "widespread view of the mind as an economy, subject to spatial limitations, energy exchange, and complex patterns of displacement and interdependency" (400). Habit was seen as one way the mind conserved its limited space, but accurately deployed attention was another. Today, experimental psychologists refer to the "rule of four" when discussing limitations to cognitive space, referencing the fact that working memory can usually, at most, accommodate four pieces of information at a time. By sculpting attention and habit, the individual could gain control over his otherwise unwieldy set of perceptual experiences and thus control his stream of consciousness.[5]

While nineteenth-century psychologists and physiologists did tend to adhere to an atomist view of cognitive functions, their observations about *experienced* psychology often square with

[4] Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, pg. 52.

[5] Significantly, though, William James faulted earlier associationist psychologists for failing to acknowledge the relational aspect of thinking—the fact that consciousness primarily flows rather than working in the jerky fashion associationism would suggest. Associationists, James argued, didn't have a strong enough account for how belief connects imagined and real experiences. How, in other words, does the individual tell between ideas enacted by cognitive processes and literal events in the world if they are all the mere accumulation of sensory experiences? James argued that belief was what allowed the individual to bridge this gap. Interestingly, though, much of Victorian literature, from *The Woman in White* to "Porphyria's Lover," expresses the real difficulty individuals have in telling the difference between real and imagined mental states, which can overlap. The transition between living in the world and living in the mind is often painful and abrupt, and it only occurs when sensory realities become so startlingly real that false beliefs can no longer stand.

James's later emphasis on the mind's fluid capacities. This implies that while there may have been disagreements within the medical community about how the mind was specifically constructed, James and the earlier associationists were still trying to elucidate the same conscious experience: that of being subject to far more impulses and sensations than the individual could possibly process, but which are experienced as a unified consciousness. This biological and experiential fact was brought into sharp relief during the nineteenth century by the sense that the modern era had increased the number of perceptual experiences an individual could be exposed to. Georg Simmel in "The Metropolis and Mental Life" and Gustave Le Bon in "The Mind of Crowds" articulate the increasingly complex strategies one must enact to deal with the overexposure to perceptual stimuli that attends urban life. Simmel locates the challenge in "the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli," which requires the individual, for the purpose of "self-preservation," to assume a "blasé outlook"—to, either by incapacity or by an act of the will, fail to observe all of his surroundings (62, 64). Only by finding a way to limit one's reactions to his environment can a functioning life be achieved in the city, where the individual's constrained attention must be carefully deployed. With the rise in travel, advertising, and media production that occurred in the nineteenth century, it is unsurprising that the sheer quantity of sensory options available to the individual was perceived as potentially inundating, and consequently in need of control. Thus, not only were nineteenth-century theorists aware of stream of consciousness as a concept, but they were also dealing with the fact that the amount of phenomenal experiences consciousness needed to accommodate was constantly increasing.

The limited capacities of conscious attention shed light on the central role that choice played in managing an individual's stream of consciousness. Consequently, the complex

interplay between cognitive overabundance and cognitive control significantly informs this dissertation's exploration of Victorian representations of consciousness. In the face of innumerable perceptual choices, characters in Victorian literature must filter the physical environment in which they live in order to construct a mental life with logical and philosophical coherence. I refer to this process as cognitive restraint. Acts of conscious cognitive restraint are attempts to make consciousness adhere to a conceptual framework that the individual wills. Achieving this end begins on the level of individual perception by suppressing the always present, but often unconscious, workings of stream of consciousness. At first, the individual avoids or ignores perceptual material that threatens his or her intellectual and emotional goals, and over time he or she hopefully trains the mind to dismiss such impressions altogether. This conception of mental life is based on the fundamental assumption that the best version of an individual is a mere selection of his many impulses, thoughts, and perceptions, and that by filtering how these are even perceived, one may increase his or her mental agency and ethical stature. Ideally, any perception that detracts from a desired course of action eventually ceases to be recognized or desired by the mind, and the will is converted into a cognitive filter for perceptual experience.

At this point, it can be helpful to see an example of cognitive restraint in action, so that the relationship between long-term goals, perceptual control, and decision-making can be analyzed. A textbook example of such restraint comes in *Jane Eyre*, when Jane's wedding has been interrupted by the revelation of Rochester's first wife's existence. There is a precedent for giving over to stream of consciousness thinking and narration at such a moment of crisis and conflict, which Brontë provides in Jane's childhood experience in the red room. There, the novel comes close to representing Jane's momentary impressions in ways that threaten to overwhelm

her access to reason. As soon as she enters the room, she finds herself consumed by knowledge that her situation is "unjust," and in her frenzied and terrified state her perceptions become increasingly chaotic and controlled by ephemeral feelings (12). Though Jane had "endeavoured to be firm" and stifle her sobs, she becomes completely unmoored by a quick and seemingly insignificant perception of "a light [that] gleamed on the wall" (13). What follows comes as close to stream of consciousness as Brontë allows her narrative:

> I thought the swift-darting beam was the herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled by ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings: something seemed near me; I was oppressed, I suffocated: endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort (14)

Seeing the light immediately undoes Jane's resolution to withstand her punishment despite the fact that, to an outside observer, it appears an innocuous perception. Her susceptibility here to the fear that her momentary perceptions cause leads her to capitulate on her stated goal of firmness, and the consequence is an extended punishment in the red room. This, it would seem, is the danger of losing conscious hold on how one's mind perceives and ranks its many impressions.

With this scene in the back of the reader's mind, Jane's reaction to her wedding's interruption might seem like a similar retreat into sensory vulnerability. She begins by reflecting on the "desolate" prospects that lie before her, quickly whipping her emotions into a frenzy as she considers the potential insincerity of Rochester's affections (252). Almost immediately, however, these individual, sensory impressions are replaced by Jane's ability to access a detached, larger view of her suffering. With her thoughts and emotions likened to a "flood" that rushes through Jane's consciousness, she imagines herself curiously as both vulnerable to and separate from their power:

> My eyes were covered and closed; eddying darkness seemed to swim round me, and reflection came in as [a] black and confused…flow. Self-abandoned, relaxed, and effortless, I seemed to have laid me down in the dried-up bed of a great river; I heard a flood loosened in remote mountains, and felt the torrent come: to rise I had no will, to flee I had no strength. I lay faint; longing to be dead (253)

Jane's desperation here might initially resemble her frenzied fear in the red room, but there is a significant difference: instead of reacting individually to the thoughts and impressions that assault her at this moment, she instead imagines herself outside of them, considering the "flow" of sensations, at least initially, from an exterior position. This position allows her access to "a remembrance of God," which Jane claims supplies her with the necessary clarity and strength to leave Rochester even in the confusion of her momentary emotions and thoughts. As the "consciousness of [her] life lorn…swayed full and mighty above [her] in one sullen mass," Jane locates her conviction to "Leave Thornfield at once" despite the fact that her emotional state threatens to undo this resolution at every minute. Jane's mind shifts here from emphasizing thinking to emphasizing action, a fact that Rochester bitterly acknowledges when he accuses her of "thinking how *to act—talking*, you consider, is of no use" (256, emphasis in the original). Jane's decision to leave is, quite explicitly, connected to her desire to stay removed from the moment-to-moment temptation that her perceptions create; she tells Rochester, "to avoid fluctuations of feeling, and continual combats with recollections and associations, there is only one way—Adèle must have a new governess." Even Rochester's attempts to couch his arguments in "reason" are rejected by Jane as "sophistical," though she acknowledges that "while he spoke my very conscience and reason turned traitors against me, and charged me with crime in resisting him" (258-9, 270). Jane maintains her "indomitable" decision, supported by her understanding that "Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour" (270).

By rejecting the temptation that Rochester presents in logic and emotion, Jane finds the ability to act; the "I do" that should have been the answer to her wedding vows instead becomes her decided response to Rochester's questions about whether she plans to leave.[6]

Jane, in this scene, exhibits cognitive control that is typical of many nineteenth-century protagonists. While the scene could be read as Jane's capitulation to social expectations, by portraying Jane's extended struggle to control her own perceptions and emotions, Brontë reveals the incredible act of volition that is expressed at such moments of mental control. Jane's stream of consciousness is not portrayed as her authentic self, but rather as a set of perceptual experiences that must be sorted and filtered based on the dictates of her will. Paying attention to the role that sensory experience plays in such scenes helps uncover the more complicated motives for suppressing stream of consciousness that emerge in Victorian texts. Rather than just serving as a capitulation to larger systems of authority, such perceptual suppression is essential to the ability of a character like Jane to identify her long-term values, to act in a way consistent with such values, and ultimately to survive in the face of psychologically debilitating trauma. The reward for Jane's cognitive restraint is comparative peace; she observes that though she "never thought" she would sleep that night, "slumber fell on me as soon as I lay down in bed" (272). Cognitive control is the key to self-realized, purposeful action, even if that action lies in direct conflict with the desires and wishes of the moment.

One reason why cognitive control proves essential to both conscious and unconscious thinking is because of the complicated role of temptation in Victorian fiction, which is

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[6] "'Jane, do you mean to go one way in the world, and to let me go another?'
'I do.'
'Jane (bending towards and embracing me), 'do you mean it now?'
'I do.'
'And now?' softly kissing my forehead and cheek.
'I do'—extricating myself from restraint rapidly and completely" (269).

exemplified in Jane's desire both to leave Thornfield and to remain with Rochester. In his study on the relationship between limited rationality and choice, *Ulysses and the Sirens*, Jon Elster draws attention to the problem of temptation and its relationship with perceiving unwanted mental stimuli, especially when one is making decisions. Elster uses the figure of the siren to illuminate this complicated dynamic, specifically because it represents a unique kind of perceptual threat. After all, the siren is a creature who presents danger in two sensory realms. By combining physical beauty with irresistible auditory power, it makes the challenge to controlling one's perception of unwanted stimuli particularly palpable. In the case of Ulysses, if he allows the siren's call to tempt him, he will behave contrary to his stated goals and desires (i.e. to continue on his journey). Ulysses, therefore, has two choices in order to be successful in controlling his conscious actions: he can either prevent himself from physically perceiving the siren's call by stopping his ears, as he instructs his crew members to do, or he can allow himself access to a full range of perceptions, but physically immobilize himself from action by tying himself to the ship's mast. Importantly, Ulysses cannot have it both ways. He cannot both hear the siren's call and prevent himself from acting in ways he does not desire through willpower; a choice must be made between action and perception. This choice, I argue, informs the ways in which perception and decision-making are presented in Victorian novels and poetry. By denying oneself certain perceptual experiences, and thereby stemming the stream of consciousness in predetermined ways, an individual can remain committed to long-term goals that are endangered by momentary desires and impulses, as Jane demonstrates. Elster's focus on temptation as a predictable onslaught of stimuli that can be prepared for and prevented puts emphasis on the forward-focused nature of cognitive restriction. In other words, acknowledging that I will likely lack the willpower to make proper decisions in the future when unwanted stimuli are present, I

bind myself now to a particular set of goals and ways of perceiving that increase the odds that I will follow through on appropriate or beneficial actions. This is how Jane prepares for her conversation with Rochester.

Sirens figure this concern with temptation in many Victorian novels. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray explicitly describes Becky Sharp as "a syren, singing and smiling, coaxing and cajoling," with a "hideous tail" Thackeray must avoid showing (637). Rosamond in *Middlemarch* and Lucy in *Lady Audley's Secret* are also explicitly described as sirens, while Lizzie Hexam is accused of producing an "influence of some tremendous attraction" over Headstone "which [he has] resisted in vain, and which overmasters [him]" in *Our Mutual Friend* (389). While these figures run the gamut from pernicious (Becky) to unwittingly destructive (Lizzie), they draw attention to the need for cognitive control as the individual pursues one of the largest determinations of his future action: marriage. The men who court these women fail to anticipate how they will be affected by their perceptions of physical attraction, and in each case they end up making choices under the women's influence, whether purposeful or unconscious, that result in their capitulation of larger social and ethical goals later. While portraying women as sirens shows the need for perceptive filtering and a strong commitment to long-term goals in an extreme way, it sets the groundwork for how managing one's access to even minor perceptual experiences affects one's ability to withstand temptation and achieve seemingly unrelated goals. The failure of Lydgate's medical aspirations, for instance, are explicitly due to his belief that small relaxations in his mental control around Rosamond can only have manageable repercussions. Elster's solution to the problem of temptation, like Ulysses', is pre-commitment; by affirming and reasonably determining one's ultimate goals before temptation presents itself, one is less likely to be taken off course. What Elster does not acknowledge is the essential role

that cognitive control plays in allowing pre-committed goals to stand. If stimuli cannot be absolutely avoided, they must be subordinated when filtered through mental space, a feat achieved by directed cognitive control.

The effects of failing to commit oneself to defined long-term goals, and to order one's mental space in order to support those goals, can be seen clearly in early stream-of-consciousness writing. While stream of consciousness was not present in Britain in the nineteenth century, it is remarkable to note how many literary precursors for the style arose elsewhere during this era. From Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1873 [1886 in English]), to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864 [1918 in English]), to Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* (1888), many nineteenth-century narratives experimented with representing the momentary thoughts and perceptions of an individual consciousness; even Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* can be read as a poetic attempt to embody this mode of perception. Furthermore, as Woolf herself notes in *The Common Reader,* precursors in Britain like *Tristram Shandy* and *Pendennis*—which might be added to even earlier works like Sidney's *Arcadia* or Spencer's *The Faerie Queene*—reveal that the idea of composing narrative based on fluid, momentary thought was hardly "discovered" by modernist authors. Even Victorian authors, at times, attempt to represent the nature of consciousness when a character gives in to perceiving its abundant stream of sensations. While they rarely, if ever, deploy stream of consciousness as a style, they do use a focus on momentary impressions as a way of showing divergences from "normal" conscious life. Esther Summerson's mind, for instance, wanders based on disconnected, momentary impulses when she suffers from smallpox in *Bleak House*; David Copperfield's consciousness experiences shifting perceptions when drunk; and Lucy Snow's narrative breaks into perceptual incoherence in *Villette* after she is drugged. These lapses in cognitive control are treated as the exception to

healthy mental life rather than expressive of it. Psychological coherence is treated as the hallmark of rational, self-possessed consciousness.

In fact, once one begins to look more closely at even nineteenth-century continental representations of stream of consciousness, it suddenly becomes clear that this valuation of coherent thought extends into even experimental depictions of consciousness. Rather than associating stream of consciousness with the realism and truth that Virginia Woolf asserts, many early depictions of stream of consciousness treat it as a "dirtied" or "polluted" form of mental processing. While they do not dispute the realism of stream of consciousness as an essential part of one's cognitive makeup, these texts suggest that an individual's inability to control its flow is indicative of lapses in mental control or health. In *Notes from Underground*, the narrator's disjointed thoughts on life and philosophy, interjected with indications of its stream-like nature ("wait, let me catch my breath…"; "I don't want to restrict myself in any way by editing my notes. I will not attempt any order or method. I will write down whatever comes to mind"), have caused him to "s[ink] into my slime"; they show humanity as being within a "stinking underground hole" (3,5,39,10). The speaker describes himself as suffering from "excessive consciousness," an affliction that he asserts is "a disease" and results in his increased sensitivity to the polluted nature of his environment (5). In this way, Dostoevsky connects the individual's capitulation to stream-of-consciousness perceptions with an inability to discern the greater capacities of mankind. Only when an individual gives into and credits his every thought and impression does he become aware of the constant presence of stream of consciousness. By not controlling such perceptions through focus and attention, the narrator becomes overwhelmed by immediate sensations of discomfort and anger.

Similarly, Tolstoy introduces stream of consciousness in *Anna Karenina* most explicitly at the point where Anna's ability to look at the world objectively and with an eye to long-term consequences has been compromised. As with Dostoevsky's narrator, her perceptions are almost entirely of a dirty or polluted environment around her. Passersby want "dirty ice cream"; "the smell of food" is "disgust[ing]"; others' thoughts are "nasty, to be sure"; a little girl is "ugly and affected"; a nearby couple clearly "hated each other"; and she is annoyed to see "a dirty, ugly muzhik" passing her window (760-6). Her "sudden" decision to commit suicide occurs when she instinctively accepts this dirtied worldview as an objective representation of reality (768). Here, too, recognizing stream of consciousness involves a failure to apprehend how one's momentary perceptions impact long-term trends and goals. Significantly, Levin, who briefly shares Anna's hopelessness toward the end of the novel, never lapses into stream of consciousness of this kind. Instead, he realizes that "the unquestionable meaning of the good" that exists in life does not reside there through simple perception, but it is within one's "power to put into it" (817). Levin does not reject the presence and power of momentary perceptions—as he says, he will still "get angry in the same way, argue in the same way"—but he acknowledges that overcoming them requires an act of will that structures and adds perspective to such sensations. While nearly always physically dirty, with "his face…grimy with…soot," Levin keeps his own thinking clear of such pollution (585). He even makes his final realization about the insignificance of his life's struggle with his child's bath in the background. In all of these examples, the individual's ability to filter his stream of perceptions through the lens of larger beliefs and long-term goals determines his ability to see the world with hope, and, ultimately, to survive within it.

Even though attending to stream of consciousness is portrayed as preventing the individual from accurately apprehending long-term cause-and-effect, this does not prevent either

Anna or the narrator from *Notes from Underground* from asserting the lasting "truth" of the realizations they develop from their momentary insights. Anna's stream of consciousness often displays her belief in her own rationality, as she continually articulates her impressions as profound understandings of the underlying reality of existence: "This was not a supposition. She saw it clearly in that light which now revealed to her the meaning of life and people's relations" (763). Similarly, Dostoevsky's narrator states that his purpose in writing is to "test whether it's possible to be entirely frank at least with oneself and dare to face the whole truth" (39). These moments of perceived insight by Anna and the narrator mirror the modernist epiphanic moment, but they are always negatively inflected; the realization made is false—an expression of a momentary sensation passing through an unmoored consciousness—and the larger understanding it points to is quickly emptied of its insight.[7] Part of the problem of giving over to stream-of-consciousness thinking is that it bypasses reason, even though the thinking that results may seem rational to the person experiencing it. While Victorians—and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky—were often skeptical of the supremacy of reason over other forms of knowing, giving over to stream of consciousness is doubly dangerous because it gives the false impression that 1.) an individual is gaining access to logic, and 2.) that she has a "truer" relationship with material reality than when she is more self-possessed. Instead, in these novels, the individual has merely given up one kind of false perception in service of another.

[7] Modernists like Joyce and Woolf, in effect, display the inverse of this: for them, it is in moments of insight based on unfiltered perceptions that one sees deeper truths, truths often hidden by socially-based and ultimately artificially internalized mental structures.

II. Literary Criticism and Cognitive Restraint

The alternative to the negative ramifications of stream of consciousness portrayed in *Anna Karenina* and *Notes from Underground* is cognitive control. And yet, this is not the assumption about healthy cognitive life often made in literary criticism, where stream of consciousness is regularly assumed to represent consciousness in its most authentic form. Outside the Humanities, though, the mind's ability to produce capacious and fluid thought is rarely treated positively. While stream of consciousness may be a realistic and aesthetically evocative way to represent the mind at certain times, decision-making and action depend upon one's ability, at least theoretically, to choose among potential stimuli, favoring some alternatives over others. In economics, for instance, the infinite number of potential choices and influencing factors impinging upon individual actors is often viewed as a problematically confounding variable when predicting human behavior. Only through finding mathematical ways to neutralize these infinite possibilities—and settle upon likely actions and influences in the face of innumerable potential decisions—does understanding the range of reasonable and predictable behavior become possible. While stream of consciousness is assumed by economic theories, the field is founded upon the belief that rational actors don't usually dwell within the infinite variables to which they have access, allowing themselves to be swayed by momentary impressions.[8] The same holds true for many political theories, strains of psychology, medicine, and a variety of other fields. Significantly, these fields present the dangers of unbound consciousness as formal, practical, or rational concerns rather than as moral ones. Instead of

[8] Of course, such theories of rational choice depend on their own sets of assumptions and idealizations about the virtues and prevalence of restrained cognition. My goal here is not to represent such theories as superior to those that value indecision, delay, and extended deliberation; instead, it is to assert that Victorians may not have always seen considering the full range of perceptual experiences as necessary or beneficial to decision making, and in doing so they often mirror models of rational thought processes used by other fields.

viewing cognitive restraint as a repressive adherence to socially dictated moral norms, acknowledging the ethically neutral treatment of perceptual control in other fields displays that moral evaluations of cognitive restriction aren't necessary in all situations. *All* humans enact cognitive restraint, except at isolated moments, and so the form such constraint takes is more important than the act of restraint in itself. Consequently, general acts of restraint may not have been a particularly valued by Victorian thinkers; rather, only appropriately directed control can lead to moral behavior.

Once this alternate view of stream-of-consciousness thinking is taken seriously in literary studies, it can help shed light on gaps in how Victorians understood the mind. Historically, one of the most pervasive criticisms of nineteenth-century narrative has been its consistent depiction of and support for acts of emotional and psychological repression. Following the lead of Foucault, many critics have noted the extent to which Victorian society sought to control its citizens, creating a world in which structures of authority became internalized and enacted without the need for direct intervention.[9] In *Repression in Victorian Fiction,* John Kucich turned this typical, Freudian-based analysis of repression on its head by analyzing how "repression heightens and vitalizes emotional autonomy, rather than threatening or repressing it," seeing acts of self-restraint as "a nineteenth-century strategy for exalting interiority" (3,2).[10] In both critical

[9] John Kucich provides an extensive catalogue of these works in *Repression in Victorian Fiction,* including Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*; Ronald Pearsall's *Public Purity, Private Shame: Victorian Sexual Hypocrisy Exposed;* Russell M. Goldfarb's *Sexual Repression and Victorian Literature*; and Duncan Crow's *The Victorian Woman*, among others.

[10] More recently, critics have turned on themselves on the repressors of fiction, with Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best advocating for surface readings that "de[fer]" to texts, rather than "mastering them or using them as objects" (10). This study both makes use of and complicates surface reading. While it uses an absence in Victorian literature (stream of consciousness style) to consider novelist's goals and their priorities, it ultimately affirms and attempts to resuscitate the non-suspicious treatment of mental control that exists on the surface of nineteenth-century

models, however, whether Freudian or characterological, repression is treated in an abstract, theoretical way; it arises in the suppression of memories, desires, and thoughts that are seen as, in themselves, constituting a fundamental part of selfhood. Cognitive control, on the other hand, since it is based on the scientific fact of limited cognitive space, treats restraint as a value-neutral activity: it is simply a normal part of mental life. While certain strategies of cognitive control lead to the development of more ethical personhood—and thus tend to be emphasized by authors—perceptual control is essential to any person's ability to act in and navigate through the world.[11] Thus, while this study does not claim that repression is absent from Victorian novels (it is, very clearly, present), it does suggest that becoming aware of acts of cognitive restraint, and their association with survival and decision-making, may force a reconsideration of what counts as repressive. Cognitive selection is, curiously, both an act of restraint and an expression of individual will. By viewing cognitive restraint in this fashion, conscious acts of mental restriction can in many cases become an expression of individual choice and agency. Rather than a capitulation of the self to subconscious acts of evasion, they lead to decisive action.

One of the reasons why acts of unconscious mental repression often get confused with cognitive control is because of the complicated relationship that restraint has to freedom. In Isaiah Berlin's landmark lecture "Two Concepts of Liberty," he distinguishes between two conceptions of freedom that have dominated political debates on individual rights and their restrictions. Individual actors have potential access to two very different kinds of freedom in Berlin's analysis, described as "negative" and "positive." Negative freedom is defined as those

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texts. Thus, it sees depth and surface as working together, rather than representing competing sites of inquiry.

[11] Freud recognizes the presence of healthy repression in all mental life, but he treats the process as unconscious and geared toward the suppression of negative experiences. Cognitive control makes no such claim, keeping its focus on the relationship between individual perceptual acts and the activation of higher reasoning.

liberties an individual enjoys in the absence of direct interference from an external source; negative freedom, in essence, sees freedom as "the area of control" one possesses before encountering obstacles—a space for movement and agency carved out of a world where eventual restrictions are inevitable (41). Positive freedom, on the other hand, turns the concept of liberty inward, defining one's freedom not as an absence of barriers, but rather as the potential one has to "be his own master" (43). Though somewhat vague in its original articulation, Quentin Skinner clarifies this purpose of positive liberty, stating that the logical conclusion of Berlin's argument is that "human nature has an essence, and that we are free if and only if we succeed in realizing that essence in our lives" (246). Positive liberty is, therefore, the ability to realize one's desired goals and be fulfilled by them, even if there are potential obstacles to that fulfillment that he never recognizes or encounters.

Understanding these two conceptions of liberty allows us to reconsider the role that repression often assumes in much Victorian literature, especially as it relates to cognitive control. As internalized versions of external social or political pressures, repression feeds into negative conceptions of freedom; it is only by removing the "obstacles" created by social forces that the individual can attain freedom (if such freedom is even accessible). By focusing on only such "negative" forms of freedom, however, and seeing characters as only capable of agential decisions in the constrained space of free action provided by society at large, it is possible to miss the importance of "positive" representations of freedom in many of the novels and poetry of the period. In fact, though one might initially assume that cognitive restraint also feeds into negative conceptions of liberty (cognitive control does, after all, involve individuals placing obstacles to their own freedom and actions), a quick appraisal of the motivations for and results of such restraint reveals a much more positive version of freedom at work. Cognitive restraint is

enacted by the individual; it is committed within one of the few realms in which he possesses primary control (the mind)[12]; and it results from an attempt to order one's mental space in order to ensure the achievement of one's desired ends. A fear of social or political obstacles may, at times, motivate cognitive restraint, but more often than not cognitive control emerges when characters have set defined goals and seek to achieve them without the distraction of unwanted stimuli. Unlike social agency, mental agency is accessible to any individual who is psychologically controlled enough to seek it. Thus, far from expressing repressive tendencies, cognitive control can be aligned with the individual's capacity to attain positive freedom.

The emphasis on freedom and volition present in acts of cognitive control brings into focus a debate among twenty-first century scholars about nineteenth-century studies of the mind. Nicholas Dames, Vanessa Ryan, and Athena Vrettos have all examined how theories of automatic thinking complicate the focus on deliberation and ethical choice that has long been considered a hallmark of the era's literature. As Dames puts it, theories of automatic action from the nineteenth century challenge the idea of effective introspection, since attention to the self often distorts the individual's ability to perceive influences that never rise to the level of consciousness; as a result, Dames argues, accident is more important than conscious action in the novel, because it relates the central, authentic desires of characters more fully than deliberation. Consequently, studies of automatic thinking tend to view cognition and its relationship to selfhood in ways similar to Modernists: unconscious actions, because they are not filtered by conscious thought processes, are more genuine and fundamental than "chosen" actions and

[12] Of course, control of one's mental space is never absolute, and Victorian authors are exceptionally interested in the challenges to mental control that plague all individuals, including the insane or mentally troubled. This interest in lapses in cognitive control, however, does not negate mental space as a potential site for individual agency; instead, it shows the challenges individuals face when controlling even their most immediate sites of agency, and dramatizes the value of mental control when it is achieved.

beliefs. They may, therefore, be more important than the acts that result from conscious cognitive control. This treatment of automatic action flies in the face of the idea that cognitive restraint leads to agency and freedom, because no matter how self-controlled an individual may be, he is still always subject to unconscious behaviors.

Treating unconscious action as more important than conscious action, however, distorts our vision of the Victorian novel and the aims of its portrayal of cognitive activity. By treating automatic thinking as the primary concern of the era's novelists, these critics often fail to account for the important temporal relationship between unconscious and conscious thought. While nineteenth-century novels do frequently represent unconscious thinking and action at critical moments in their narratives, the emphasis of their analysis tends to be less focused on the source of such automatic thinking, and more focused on how characters sort through impulsive decisions morally and rationally. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* provides a primary example of the dynamic between unconscious and conscious thinking in Maggie Tulliver's boat ride with Stephen Guest. At the beginning, the ride is entirely associated with automatic action. Maggie feels as if "she was being led…without any act of her will," with Eliot observing that "thought did not belong to that enchanted haze in which they were enveloped; it belonged to the past and future that lay outside the haze" (486-7).[13] Stephen is even portrayed rowing "half automatically," and Maggie possesses a "grave untiring gaze" that takes in both Stephen and the abundance of her natural surroundings without real attention (487). Having given in to an automatic, unconscious mode of thinking, Maggie is suddenly startled when Stephen stops rowing. However, rather than affirm the actions she has taken when loosening her hold on

[13] Given the attention to stream of consciousness present in George Henry Lewes's writing, and George Eliot's knowledge of it, it is unsurprising that Maggie's most significant encounter with unconscious thinking occurs when she is on a river, giving in to each sensory experience as it transpires.

conscious experience, Maggie instead reacts with strong revulsion. She first acknowledges, though, the attractiveness of living automatically, as she "yearn[s] after that belief that the tide was doing it all, that she might glide along with the swift, silent streams and not struggle anymore" (488). Despite yearning for this kind of thinking, Maggie clearly sees that her capitulation of conscious control "was a transient one and that the morrow must bring back the old life of struggle—that there were thoughts which would presently avenge themselves for this oblivion" (493). Following this logic, she rejects the possibility of running away with Stephen because of the pain it would inflict on her cousin. While Eliot uses the end of the novel to question the reaction of society at large to Maggie's actions, she does not undercut Maggie's assertion that "If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment" (499). Automatic action does not remove moral responsibility from psychological life in Eliot, as Dames suggests (233). Nor does it represent Maggie's "authentic" self, which resides between her momentary desires and her larger ethical and interpersonal goals. Automatic action and moral consideration are shown to exist side-by-side here, in an essential and constant relationship with one another; lapses in the control of consciousness are tempered by mental restraint. In the end, the portrayal of contemplative, rational thought does not eclipse the pervasiveness of automatic action, but it displays how ethically minded individuals deal with such lapses in conscious control.[14]

[14] Of course, an alternative reading to this issue that is frequently made by critics interested in automatic action has to do with habit or reflexive reaction. Instead of activating reason, which can be manipulated at will, working to program automatic thinking processes could lead to more moral behavior. Vanessa Ryan treats this issue extensively in *Thinking Without Thinking in the Victorian Novel*, suggesting that reading shaped automatic impulses and could thereby directly change readers' mental processes. While such an argument is compelling—offering a convincing way to assess how authors attempted to use automatic thinking to further their creative ends—it ignores the emphasis on willed action in the medical literature and fiction of the era. Molding one's reflexive actions is important, but without mental control one will find

How does one ensure that his contemplative, rational thought processes get deployed at such moments? And how can such thought processes be trusted as authentic? In *The Burden of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Andrew H. Miller speaks to this issue when he takes on the problem of casuistry in the novel, focusing particularly on Eliot. Miller notes that casuistry often held a morally positive valuation for readers; it was by "reading others' thoughts" that one could define and refine his own identity and actions (94). And yet, it is also true that such depictions were often "negative, casuistry downward, as it were, ingenuity in the service of self-deception" (95). In other words, when the explicit thought processes of a specific character are elucidated for the reader, as they could never be apparent in 'real' life because of the barriers of consciousness and perception, authors often portray characters using systems of logic to condone morally ambiguous behavior. Miller goes on to discuss how casuistry becomes positively valued in the novel, but "positive" casuistry is nearly always put in opposition to "maxims," which filter experience for the individual without activating his capacity for self-reflection and change (98).

Cognitive restraint can represent a static way of engaging with the material world such that the results of perceptive experience are always predetermined. After all, if a person is developing his response to mental and physical stimuli with the aid of cognitive filters based on long-term goals, then it seems logical that he would quickly devolve into a world of maxims, making honest responses to changes in environmental factors unlikely. To say that Victorian authors did not struggle with this problem would be patently false; one of the major dramas that besets nineteenth-century representations of thought and action involves how moral estimations

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oneself "reacting" to stimuli that may compromise rational long-term goals. Thus, automatic thinking is only one among many aspects of mental life that are portrayed as needing conscious curtailment in the Victorian novel.

can be made that are sensitive to change and yet not overwhelmed by it. Jane Eyre, again, embodies this problem. In her attempts to ascertain what a correct response would be to Rochester's disastrous first marriage, she struggles between her previously held religious and moral convictions and her sense that these same convictions might unfairly condemn Rochester. Is the appropriate action, in Jane's case, to remove herself from the site of tempting perceptions by leaving Thornfield, or should she reassess her moral framework to accommodate the new information she has received?

When Victorian authors confront problems like Jane's they are often explicit about the risks and rewards implicit to both restraint and revision. To restrain oneself from challenging perceptions may result in moral myopia (like Fledgeby's from *Our Mutual Friend*), while revising one's cognitive filters could result in precisely the kinds of self-serving casuistry that is often performed by morally weak characters (like *Middlemarch*'s Bulstrode). To understand the responses these authors develop, it can help to consider a few different factors. First, as mentioned earlier, cognitive restraint in and of itself is not categorized as a moral action; instead, it is portrayed as a necessary mental habit conducive to action and fruitful deliberation. *All* individuals engage in cognitive restraint, because acknowledging every perception or idea that challenges one's consciousness is impossible. While some characters are less rigorous in determining criteria for ordering their perceptual experiences (Grandcourt, from *Daniel Deronda*, for instance, is described as letting his thoughts wander like "circlets one sees in a dark pool continually dying out" [269]), most are portrayed as consciously restricting their thoughts and perceptions, for good or ill, in the service of decisive action. Second, predetermination and cognitive filtering do not make one oblivious to all forms of unexpected or thought-provoking perceptions. They prime individuals to encounter anticipated temptations and ordinary

distractions in agential and self-realized ways. They do not, however, completely tune out one's awareness of novel stimuli (this turns out to be particularly important for Brontë, as we shall see in a later chapter). Thus, although cognitive control may not always result in agential, moral responses to automatic action, if deployed correctly it might prevent such unwanted behaviors altogether, or, at the very least, help the individual prevent their occurrence in the future.

Ultimately, emphasizing the connection between cognitive control and freedom helps to counterbalance the naturalistic connection between cognitive selection and human action that arose with a wider acceptance of Darwin toward the end of the nineteenth century. Selection, in this context, does not involve the activation of the individual's will in any meaningful sense, but rather the completion of cognitive preferences that are innate and whose expressions are evidence of natural variations conducive to adaptation and survival. Before Darwin's apotheosis, however, the connection between selection, choice, and the will was actively debated in psychological literature, with Spencer and Bain representing the two extremes of automatism and self-determination seen as possible within individual psychology. It makes sense, then, that Victorian authors would also analyze and explore the relationship between cognitive control and the will, with similarly varied ends (for instance, the determinism of naturalists like Hardy and Gissing might be compared to the psychological optimism of Dickens or Trollope). Cognitive selection—choosing which impressions to acknowledge and to even allow within the range of one's vision—emerged as one of the last expressions of one's limited, but essential, access to free will as the human organism was increasingly treated as automatic. As such, it offers a unique window into mental behavior that speaks to debates on the existence of human will even today.

Clearly, performing good decision-making and actions is not as simple as merely adopting positive values and allowing them to passively order experience in nineteenth-century literature. Instead, the project of Victorian perception and consciousness becomes about constantly reassessing and balancing what is *perceived* with what is *acknowledged*. Cognitive restriction is intimately tied to an individual's attempts to order and understand a world that otherwise appears random and morally neutral. If everyone must constrain their psychic space in order to maintain a coherent mental life, the task becomes developing specific systems and tools for such ordering that combat temptation and aid in achieving desired ends. The chapters of this project identify such structures, elucidating how they work to improve characters' emotional and mental lives.

III. Cognitive Restraint in Practice

Reading Victorian novels with an eye to cognitive restraint involves analyzing texts for traces of mental restriction on several levels. First, and most obviously, the ways in which characters (or speakers, in the case of poems) actively constrain their own perceptions and thoughts give clues as to how the text at hand values restraint. This restraint on the level of characters' perceptions can be portrayed in a variety of ways. At times, characters are depicted developing careful systems of external and internal checks to maintain their constriction of conscious experience; at others, they simply dismiss unpleasant stimuli as they become registered within consciousness. Restriction can occur at a basic level, in the rejection of sensory stimuli, or at a more complex level, in the rejection of thoughts or reason. In all cases, small forms of restriction end up relating strongly to the larger goals of constraint. Take, for instance, Dorothea's rejection of her mother's jewels in the opening pages of *Middlemarch*. Her moral

dilemma is not awakened by any dramatic or intellectual action; instead, it is the small perceptual experience of "colours [that] seem to penetrate one, like scents" that momentarily tempts her toward abandoning her ascetic convictions, and which lead to her subsequent argument with Celia about wearing them in public (13). This small scene reveals that disruptions to one's sense of purpose and long-term goals don't often begin on the level of logic or reason, but frequently they find their source in the perception of basic sensory stimuli on an unconscious level. As a result, whenever a character is portrayed creating barriers to the perception of such stimuli, no matter how minor, cognitive restriction is likely at play.

While cognitive restriction is often portrayed on the level of character, it is also present in the larger forms that novels and some poetry assume. Initially, analyzing the form of Victorian texts from the standpoint of restraint and selection may seem an odd choice; the length and multiple plot arcs of most Victorian novels, which led Henry James to famously dub them "loose, baggy monsters," seem antithetical to the goals of cognitive restraint. This apparent formal capaciousness seems, furthermore, to extend beyond the realm of novels, with poems like *The Princess*, *In Memoriam*, and *Aurora Leigh* seeming as unwieldy as their novelistic counterparts. In fact, the very project of realism can seem in conflict with the goals of cognitive restraint. If the point of cognitive restraint is to limit oneself to only perceptual information that is necessary and salutary, then the tendency of Victorian novels to represent reality fully, and seemingly without a narrative filter, appears to nullify the value of perceptual control.

It is precisely this conflict between the dictates of realism and cognitive control, however, that shapes and sometimes warps narrative form. In other words, the formal openness of Victorian novels and poems does not have a direct correlation with psychological anarchy or logical laxity. If cognitive control involves making appropriate choices between perceptual

experiences, then presenting such choice to readers is important in remaining true to experience. And yet, while the authors analyzed in this study all produce texts that could be deemed loose and unwieldy, closer inspection of them often shows that such capaciousness is leavened by self-conscious acts of narrative restraint. Alex Woloch's *The One versus The Many* points out the ways in which authors like Eliot and Dickens show an awareness of restricted "character space," thus recognizing the role of choice and perceptual "sifting" in the construction of narrative. As Woloch notes, "Narrative meaning takes shape in the dynamic flux of attention and neglect toward the various characters who are locked within the same story but have radically different positions within the narrative" (2). In other words, when authors create stories they are required to deploy their narrative attention selectively; readers, and indeed all perceivers, are similarly challenged in their daily lives when deciding what stimuli to privilege and which to ignore. Authorial acts of restraint correlate to the cognitive restriction enacted by characters, even when a novel feels initially indiscriminate in its presentation of narrative material.

Each chapter of this project pairs a specific author with a method of cognitive restraint. First, the chapter shows how the author displays his or her preferred method of cognitive control through characters' actions and ethical priorities; it then considers the stylistic qualities present in the author's work that express his or her attitudes on perceptual limitation. The first half of the dissertation—the chapters on Dickens and Brontë—explore novels where cognitive boundaries are seen as ideally absolute, final, and unchangeable; in other words, once a moral system of perception is established, the goal is to refrain from revising its structure. The second half—the chapters on Eliot and Hopkins—formulate a concept of flexible control, where characters still cognitively constrain themselves but occasionally alter their perceptual filters based on changes in the external world. In the end, the authors analyzed here are seen as

representative of larger trends in Victorian fiction, though attention is paid to their unique narrative brand of cognitive and literary restraint. The project is, therefore, designed to accommodate comparison to other works and authors not represented in its pages; each of the "methods" for binding that I identify can be seen across authors and works of literature.

The first chapter begins this process by considering how characters manage the danger of perceptual overload in the novels of Charles Dickens. Focusing primarily on perceptual threats that originate outside the individual, I argue that characters in Dickens often make decisions using a consciously curtailed amount of information that mirrors those outlined in theories of limited rationality from political science, economics, and philosophy. Since taking into account all of the sensory and emotional information at their disposal is impossible, Dickens's characters seek objects, people, and ideals that will aid them in limiting their deliberative processes to only ethically relevant details. Filtering the cognitive data at their disposal in this way allows characters like Esther Summerson or John Jarndyce to act in situations where they would otherwise be paralyzed between equally viable alternatives. While this form of restraint might seem myopic, characters combat this problem by forming networks of perceivers who advise and pre-filter the world for one another. Such restraint also enables moral action, since Dickens's ideal form of cognitive control involves making oneself accountable to other human beings. The strategy of cognitive restraint that we see in plot and character recurs in style. Dickens deploys imperatives as a way of guiding his reader toward ethically salient details in the midst of lush descriptions. His literary form therefore reproduces the tension between perceptual overload and hidden relevance.

I then turn to *Villette*, which locates perceptual confusion internally rather than externally. Lucy's need to control her destructive thoughts and feelings so that they don't inhibit

her long-term goals raises problems for the novel. Since Lucy is a moral intuitionist, her beliefs about ethical action also have an internal source. How, then, can she effectively limit her internal perceptions without compromising her ability to make sound moral judgments? Brontë overcomes this challenge, I argue, through Lucy's careful use of her attention. Theories of attention in philosophy and psychology show that attention has the capacity naturally and purposefully to limit the scope of one's vision, ensuring that only a small number of perceptual details from one's stream of consciousness enter active cognitive processes. For Lucy, directing her attention ensures that harmful internal stimuli have little to no "free" cognitive space to arise within. Although focused attention creates the potential for harmful blind spots—a danger Brontë explores—it also has the ability to generate force and energy for "relevant" stimuli, allowing them to penetrate through cognitive boundaries. Lucy's honed psychological vision not only allows her to limit her perceptions, but also to be more sensitive to sites of ethical or emotional significance that might go unnoticed by others. Brontë's use of the first person serves as both a restraining technique and as a way of morally mediating an excessively complex world.

Characters are portrayed as unflatteringly "irritated," "annoyed," "nettled," or "perturbed" over 125 times in the course of *Middlemarch*. Why is this the case in a book invested in exploring the significance of self-sacrifice? George Eliot's work, I argue, formulates a new attitude toward cognitive control. While Eliot still eschews descriptions of unbound consciousness, she also challenges the efficacy of producing fixed filters for cognitive experience. In essence, Eliot puts value on restraint as an ethical form of mental management, but she also promotes developing boundaries that, though absolute in their workings, are capable of revision in their logic. This emphasis on revision significantly differs from Dickens's strategy of limited rationality, which often involves remaining committed to a chosen course of action

despite future changes in conditions. The challenge for Eliot and her characters is this: how to perceive when revisions to one's cognitive filters are necessary and not simply self-serving. Surprisingly, Eliot articulates the solution in the phenomenon of irritation. In *Middlemarch*, annoyance serves as a physical and emotional "signal" that one's cognitive boundaries are experiencing resistance and need to be revised. This revision becomes a moral act that allows characters to engage in sympathy without becoming overcome by the "roar on the other side of silence." Eliot makes the dynamic between annoyance and mental flexibility palpable to her reader through her use of metaphor and parable, where the uneasy relationship between truth and representation that she constructs acquires the structural force of irritation. Like Brontë and Dickens, then, Eliot absorbs her ideas about cognitive control not only into plot and character, but also into style.

My last chapter turns from novels to poetry to consider how lyrical and metaphoric shape structure perceptual experience in Gerard Manley Hopkins's work. Historically, geometry and metaphysical truth where treated as closely connected in both philosophy and literature. Around mid-century, though, the field of geometry underwent dramatic changes, as mathematicians began to question the usefulness of purely theoretical Euclidean geometry and called for a stronger tie between abstract geometrical principles and the properties of the physical world. This bridge between theoretical ideas of form and physical manifestations in the world can be mapped in many ways onto the verse and poetic theories developed by Hopkins, who I argue transitions from Euclidean to projective representations of shape in his poetry. His use of shape becomes a way of grounding abstract theories of value in concrete, material analogues. Shape helps to contain and filter the perceptual world by drawing one's attention toward physical forms that express and affirm Hopkins's metaphysical value system. Ultimately, this chapter

investigates how the poet's capacious and perceptive eye can be limited and saved from destructive egoism by lyric shape. Looking at the stylistic and thematic use of shape in "The Alchemist and the City," "Pied Beauty," and "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo," among others, I consider how Hopkins uses geometric structures to manage the energy of instress and inscape so that individuality can express greater moral meaning—a feat he achieves without devolving into free verse (the poetic equivalent of stream of consciousness).

Before turning to this analysis, I would like to supply a brief word about this project's methodology. In recent criticism, the role of the mind in nineteenth-century texts has been imagined as largely in-line with scientific writing from the era; writers are treated as either reflecting, creating, or working against the scientific theories that surrounded them. While this project will make use of nineteenth-century theories of cognition—particularly by Lewes, Bain, and Spencer—it also will utilize several modern-day theories of cognitive restraint from a variety of disciplines, including political philosophy, psychology, linguistics, economics, and philosophy. While using such ideas might appear anachronistic, it is my contention that Victorian writers' wariness about the effects of giving in to stream of consciousness is shared by many disciplines in past and present eras. Since literary criticism has been greatly shaped by Freud's theory of repression, it is possible that other fields possess a value-neutral vocabulary we lack for describing the ways that individuals control their conscious states. Seeing acts of cognitive control as salutary and necessary, rather than intrusive and capitulary, these other fields may clarify and enrich our understanding of the concerns expressed in many nineteenth-century texts. I will, therefore, use them to supplement traditional literary analysis, hoping that combining several fields of study may provide the best chance of fully perceiving the complex psychological vision these works present.

Chapter 1

The Devil in the Details: Dickens and Limited Rationality

Description is entirely different…'analogical,' its structure is purely summatory and does not contain that trajectory of choices and alternatives which gives narration the appearance of a huge traffic control center, furnished with a referential (and not merely discursive) temporality.—Roland Barthes, *Rustle of Language*, 142-3

Roland Barthes's description of the role seemingly "insignificant" details play in "The Reality Effect" draws a sharp distinction between two classes of linguistic information. On the one hand, the reader of a realist novel frequently encounters apparently superfluous or "luxur[ious]" details that seem to "increase the cost of narrative information" as they copiously signify the "real"; on the other hand, intermixed with these referents to the "real" are the "*predictive*" details of a text—those that point the reader toward the choices and alternatives imbedded in characters' actions (141). In bifurcating the import of narrative data in this way, Barthes implies that the realist novel has two parallel structures: the forward-moving thrust of narrative and the summatory stasis of descriptive details. Narrative has a direction; referents to the "real," in opposition, do not. But what if the mere act of perceiving objects—of consciously observing the "real"—were viewed as a choice, and one that, furthermore, possessed a range of moral consequences for both characters and readers? Such an interpretation would collapse the distinction between narrative details Barthes illustrates, as well as destabilize reading practices long associated with realism, in particular the belief that the central role of "descriptive" details is to bring a rich and "realistic" world into being. By granting the possibility that descriptive details possess narrative energy and moral stakes when read or perceived, it is possible to identify ethical undercurrents in realist descriptions that have been previously unexplored.

Dickens's *Bleak House* opens in a world of fog; details of the "real" world are portrayed as obscured, partial, and inconclusive. The solid basis that normally serves as the referent for realist details appears inconclusive and incomprehensible. This absence of stable referents in the

"real," perceptual world extends beyond the material details of the novel to infect its ethical standards and assessments. As in many of his novels, Dickens explores how individuals navigate a world of moral ambiguity and relativity, where ethical action is complicated by the fact that institutional systems created to promote 'morality,' like work houses and missions, often seem to be the death of it. How, in essence, can characters rationally make moral decisions if socially codified forms of morality are as hazy as the material world they exist in? As J. Hillis Miller notes when analyzing *Martin Chuzzlewit*, observation—both perceptual and moral—is an activity that has significant stakes in Dickens's world; characters cannot afford to engage in "passive observation," allowing perceptions and moral edicts to freely float into their consciousness unquestioned, but must instead take an active stance on their environment by "build[ing] an impregnable defense against the outside world" or, conversely, by "cleverly manipulat[ing]" it (118). Able to take neither the material world nor the ethical universe as straightforwardly perceptible, characters must carefully negotiate between their inner beliefs and outward realities.

In this chapter, I will argue that Dickens's characters manage the moral and perceptual uncertainty presented in his novels primarily by committing themselves to a very particular form of decision-making: cognitive and perceptual binding. Most clearly described by theories of limited rationality used in political science, economics, philosophy, and psychology, binding involves committing oneself to a particular course of action and then actively limiting the amount of information or data that is perceived subsequently. This cognitive limitation emerges as the strategy Dickens's characters most often use to prevent temptation from interfering with their achievement of chosen goals. First, I will first explore exactly how this method of decision-making emerges in Dickens's writing, particularly in *Bleak House*, followed by an exploration of

its moral stakes and potential pitfalls. I then conclude by considering how Dickens's depicted method of decision-making alters the ethical stance of descriptive details in the novel, creating an "ethics" of reading that involves precisely the kinds of perceptual "sorting" his characters enact.

I. Dickens and Limited Rationality

Limited rationality, as a model for human decision-making, emerged in the 1950s in response to the creation of broader theories concerning the "rational actor" during the Cold War. Since communism was seen as threatening the stature of the singular, rational individual—which was argued to be the centerpiece of political and economic liberalism—developing theories that displayed the expediency and necessity of individual freedom and choice appeared necessary. As such, rational choice theory began as a highly politicized way of modeling human behavior, but it has subsequently maintained an important position in political and economic theories despite (and in some cases, because of) its polemical beginnings. In its simplest form, rational theory claims that, rather than being motivated by collectivist impulses, human beings most often and most successfully make decisions based on individualized, self-interested, and rational processes.[1] A rational actor, thus, is an individual who:

[1] It is important to note here that in rational choice theory and philosophy "self-interest" is seen as encompassing "both selfish and altruistic preferences" (Amadae 5). While it is often noted that "most often theorists accept that agents are self-interested in a narrowly construed, self-oriented manner," it is also one of the fundamental assumptions of rational models of decision-making that such theories are possessed of a "strict morality. That is, they presume that a person should do what he believes right and believe what he does is right" ("Bounded" 603). It is beyond the scope of this study to disentangle the logical problems inherent in this articulation of self-interest, but it does open up the possibility that models of rationality could be used to read Dickens's characters, who will clearly *not* be rewarded for making decisions that only promote their own selfish interests. I take it for granted, therefore, that Dickens's concept of self-interest

(1) always makes a decision when confronted with a range of alternatives
(2) ranks all the alternatives facing him in order of his preference such that there is a clear preference
(3) has a transitive preference ranking
(4) always chooses from among the possible alternatives
(5) always makes the same decision each time he is confronted with the same alternatives.[2]

To be considered a rational actor, therefore, the individual must display complete consistency in his or her desires, tastes, and ultimately, decisions. It didn't take long for rival theories of "limited rationality" to emerge—theories that took for granted the idea that actors *prefer* to behave rationally when possible, but that various factors might impede them from achieving this given the complexity of the psychological and environmental factors that inform their decisions. As James G. March observes, "ideas of *limited rationality* emphasize the extent to which individuals and groups simplify a decision problem because of the difficulties of anticipating or considering all alternatives and all information" ("Bounded" 591). In essence, the assumption that lies at the heart of more general theories of rationality—that individuals can have completely accurate and completely intelligible views on the environment in which they are making decisions—is often belied by actual observations of human behavior. It turns out that "the most complex statistical relation that individuals can process in working memory is a three-way interaction," and thus the idea that any actor could logically make decisions while fully comprehending his situation and environment appears dubious, if not entirely fallacious (Gavetti 117). Clearly, some information must either be ignored or never perceived in order for individuals to act; the infinite amount of psychological, emotional, and concrete data that could

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would involve an emphasis on altruistic ends—that the desire to be a moral person enters into his idea of what it means to act in service of the self.

[2] Amadae 229.

potentially impinge on any individual could not all be incorporated into his or her decision-making process without forestalling it completely.

Given the world of perceptual and emotional contingency that Dickens portrays in his novels, it seems safe to imagine that he would object to both the feasibility and advisability of "fully" rational action. And yet, Dickens is similarly not invested in the idea of moral chaos; surely, there is moral action, and one is unlikely to uncover what it is without taking into account his environment and preferences when making decisions. Theories of limited rationality, in general, explore the idea that context determines how an actor conceives of "rational" behavior. What appears rational in one situation—whether emotionally, situationally, or otherwise—may not remain rational if the context for decision-making, or the predominate factors used to determine rationality, change. Along these lines, and for the purposes of analyzing Dickens's works in relation to moral decision-making, I'd like to focus on one particular strand of analysis within the larger discourse on context-based limited rationality, a strand that focuses on the problem of weakness of the will in determining actors' behaviors. The theorists in this strand of analysis deal specifically with how temptation can change an individual's perceived preferences, and they attempt to answer the following question: what do we do if we know a particular course of action is correct, but fear that in the future we will be too weak—emotionally, physically, or otherwise—to follow through on it?

In *Ulysses and the Sirens: Studies in Rationality and Irrationality*, Jon Elster cites weakness of the will as one of the major contributors to an actor's inability to behave rationally. Noting that many actors are "weak and k[now] it," Elster explores how individuals set up structures, either environmentally or internally by "rearrang[ing]… [their] inner space," that are aimed at promoting correct behavior when temptation arises (36, 37). The process for creating

these structures, as Elster describes them, involves the individual binding himself to a particular course of action that he deems right at a moment he believes himself to be acting rationally; in doing so, he simultaneously decides to deny himself future opportunities for deliberation or gathering more information, since this data could potentially alter his behavior. Just as Ulysses ties himself to a mast and has his sailors plug their ears in anticipation of being tempted by sirens, so too does the rational actor make decisions when he determines himself to be the most logical and then attempts to avoid revising those decisions when the will is less strong. As Elster argues, there is often a "cost-benefit calculus" involved whenever an individual alters his decisions, and binding oneself—physically or figuratively—to a particular course is a way of overcoming the possibility that "the very act of deliberating might require an effort that lies above the threshold of…will-power" (46). To deliberate is to allow the possibility that you will change your decision when in a less rational state of mind or with information that is less valuable in leading you toward your overall preferences, and thus "the meta-rational actor…put[s] blinkers on so as to make himself physically unable to gather the information" that would lead to revision (65). While the terms of Elster's argument may appear abstract, the decision-making process he describes is one engrained in everyday life. From the construction of constitutions, which bind nations and their citizens to a particular set of values that might be tested at times of conflict and stress, to creating a shopping list before going to the grocery store, actors often seek ways to bind themselves legally, psychologically, or emotionally to a course of action based on values they believe they have rationally determined.

As it turns out, the way in which Elster describes the weak-willed, limitedly rational actor almost precisely mirrors the processes that Dickens's characters use when making decisions. In fact, for good or ill, the frequency with which characters bind themselves to a particular course

of action, and purposefully avoid information or deliberation that might alter that course, is staggering. *Bleak House* alone is replete with such moments of conscious pre-commitment, from Esther's decision to marry Mr. Jarndyce, to Lady Dedlock's determination to protect Sir Leicester's reputation, to even Hortense's commitment to ruining her former employer. Characters consistently make decisions at moments they believe themselves to be seeing the world "clearly" and then doggedly stick to their chosen course of action, even as Dickens indicates that they have numerous alternative paths at their disposal. In the next section, I'll explore several examples of precisely this kind of decision-making, articulating how characters develop the binding structures that physically and psychologically commit them to one course of action over alternative possibilities and why they choose to remain committed to their decisions in the face of possible revision.

II. Ethical Decision-Making

The impetus toward binding in decision-making—or, toward committing oneself wholeheartedly to a chosen course with the intention of ignoring distractions from that course—often accompanies situations where the possibility of cognitive overload is high. In order to behave rationally, the individual must have a manageable amount of information guiding his decisions; otherwise he will be unable to use it optimally when assessing his options. As it turns out, when it comes to the practical application of rational models, studies have largely found that rational processes work quite well in tackling "simple problems," but they "have…not been repeated reliably in more complex situations" ("Rationality" 209, 207). In essence, the larger the amount of information that must be accounted for when determining a course of action, the

greater the possibility that rationality itself will break down in the face of overwhelming complication.

Dickens's construction of London in *Bleak House* calls attention to the possibility that—at any moment—a character might be completely overcome by the sheer quantity of sensory information that bombards him. While Dickens opens his novel with fog that obfuscates and impedes sensory perception, his characters are simultaneously threatened by the possibility of cognitive overload—of being inundated with perceptions of all the objects and people that London possesses. Mrs. Jellyby's home, for example, is described as "littered down with waste paper and Borrioboolan documents," and her attempts to keep all of these documents straight in her mind leave her possessed of only a "faint sense" of the outside world (440). In fact, the Jellyby home is so "very untidy" that Esther finds herself unable to comprehend it and its mistress, stating to Ada that "I want to understand it, and I can't understand it at all" (47, 52). Like Krooks's shop, Tom-all-Alone's, or Chancery itself, the Jellyby home represents a space possessed of a profusion of physical objects and cognitive data, and characters' only choice seems to be either to ignore the quantity of information in existence or be completely overwhelmed by its complexity (a state rather unfortunately dramatized through the listless Mr. Jellyby). The city itself, in fact, is as disorienting as its many interiors, possessed of innumerable nooks and corners that seem to reveal themselves exponentially. Snagsby eventually finds himself "doubtful of his being awake and out—doubtful of the reality of the streets through which he goes—doubtful of the reality of the moon that shines above him" (337). Having encountered so many inconceivable events, people, and places on the London streets, Snagsby is entirely overwhelmed by their quantity, and he ends up only feeling "reassured" of their existence "by the unchallengeable reality of Mrs. Snagsby" (337). If the physical and conceptual

worlds are so "crowded" in nineteenth-century London that the individual cannot possibly comprehend them in their entirety, then decision-making practices must be modified to either accommodate or overcome the excesses that the individual encounters.

While there are problems inherent in the decision to "ignore" information in order to act rationally (which will be discussed later), the tendency of characters like Miss Flite, Gridley, or Krook to become overwhelmed and immobilized by the profusion of sensory and conceptual data around them suggests that the benefits to cognitive limitation may outweigh its potential drawbacks. In fact, many studies in decision-making explore the ways in which stemming "epistemic uncertainty" proves necessary in order to "facilitate action"; without limiting cognitive deliberation, moving forward appears impossible (Holton 30). Andrew Miller notes in "Reading Thoughts" that casuistry, or the transcription of thought processes given in many nineteenth-century novels, is often seen as "tend[ing] toward action," but it is also striking how many of the internal deliberations presented by Dickens, and in fact by other Victorian authors also, actually involve the exclusion of certain information or forms of deliberation in order to guide the self toward decisive action (81). Dickens provides a striking representation of precisely the ways in which thought, cognitive restriction, and action are all related to one another in *Our Mutual Friend*. At the critical scene in which John Harmon finally reveals his past (and his aliases, John Rokesmith and Julius Hanford), Dickens describes him attempting to reconstruct the attack that changed his life by retracing his steps, but always "straying back to the same spot" and finding himself "again and again describ[ing] a circle" (359). Attempting to understand his situation by filling in gaps in his memory and understanding, John begins by seeking an increase in his cognitive "data"; however, he ends up deciding that the only way to deal with his situation—and determine what his future actions should be—is to "stop" and "think

it out" (367, 360). John hopes deliberating his situation *as is* will lead him toward acting in a way that investigating and understanding the crime committed against him will not.

To that end, throughout his extended deliberation, while John does methodically recount the precise events that surrounded his kidnapping, he stops short of allowing any new information or revelations to enter into his thought process. Instead, he questions himself as to whether he relays the "facts" of his story so that they are "accurately right," and he stops himself whenever he strays from "thinking the facts out," since this might lead to "confusing them with my speculations" (361). John is clearly attempting to construct a stable external referent for his decision-making process through rendering his hazy, confused memories as "facts." In fact, even though he admits that during his abduction he visited "places…I know nothing about" and had no "idea of time," he still attempts to imagine his memories as concrete and actively rejects any new or speculative information from entering into his ratiocination (362). This rejection of new information, furthermore, is not limited to John's engagement with the past. With John described as "deeply engaged" in his thought process, Dickens notes that "in thus communing with himself" John "had regarded neither the wind nor the way," but rather, he walks forward without observing surroundings (367). John has chosen what he deems a "straight" path for his thoughts, and he prevents new abstract and sensory information from infecting his deliberations, even though he notes being "tempted" from his path several times (365).

It is possible to read John's restrictive cogitations as repressive; he is not "binding" himself so much as refusing to acknowledge his hopes, desires, and speculations. However, while John's more permissive explorations at the beginning of the passage led him to walk in circles, even in his relative sensory blindness, restricted cogitation has allowed him to "leave the river behind" and "go home" (365). Though John determines that he will not allow any new

information to enter into his decision-making process, and even though he ultimately elects to adhere to the course of action he chose months before, he has still managed to move forward in a way that he couldn't have when he wandered the street attempting to gain *new* information about his abduction. As John sees it, any revision of his choice to give up his wealth and live under a false identity at this point might be unwisely motivated by his desire for Bella, which he states has arisen "against reason" (366). Though his current course of action was determined quickly and in the wake of his attempted "murder," he still views his state of mind at that moment as rationally superior to his current one. Revision, it turns out, is simply too costly for John, and thus his ability to act depends upon him consciously simplifying his past and present information sets.

This extended example from *Our Mutual Friend* displays a trend in Dickens's text, in which he asserts that adding new information to one's rational thought processes is not always logical or advisable. This does not, however, mean that Elster's form of decision-making is necessarily free from pitfalls. In fact, most of Dickens's characters don't just bind their thoughts temporarily, but they consciously try to adhere their entire mental framework to the needs of a particular "object" that is in line with their long-term goals. While this "object" might be a person or an ideal, it guides their decision-making, and what or whom a person chooses to bind herself to is as important as the decision to bind at all. One's ability to withstand temptation and bind "effectively," in essence, is partially determined by one's specific method of binding. More importantly, though, the object or binding structure one uses also has a significant impact on his ability to perform moral decision-making and, by extension, ethical acts.

In *Bleak House*, characters tend to bind themselves in one of two ways: either they commit themselves to acting based on the dictates of an ideal, like Mrs. Jellyby's Borrioboolan

campaign or Richard's allegiance to the Chancery case, or they commit themselves to acting based on the dictates of another person, like Esther's constant deferral to Mr. Jarndyce's opinion or Mr. Bagnet's submission to the advice of Mrs. Bagnet. It is probably already apparent from the examples provided above that the results of binding differ dramatically depending on whether one chooses to commit to an ideal or to a literal person. In each case, the individual is electing to "deposit [the] will" onto "some external structure" that will guide future action; however, qualities inherent in abstract principles in comparison to the physical reality of an individual bring about different cognitive ends (Elster 43). Perhaps the two best representations of these respective modes of binding are Richard Carstone and Esther Summerson, each of whom commit themselves entirely to a particular "object" (and objective) and persist doggedly in acting in accordance with its dictates.

It might appear at first as if Richard is one of the weakest-willed characters of Dickens's corpus, and thus he seems incapable of the kind of self-conscious binding that John Harmon engages in. Described repeatedly by Esther as possessing "an objection to all kinds of application" and a "confirmed…habit of putting off," Richard's early, fitful sampling of numerous occupations seems merely to illustrate Esther's reading of him as "meaning to be in earnest, and—somehow—not exactly being so" (249, 180, 249). Richard's constant revision of his early career path is superficially at odds with the committed, binding sort of decision-making that will characterize most of the action in the novel. And yet, throughout the process of selecting his profession, Richard has always claimed to have difficulty determining his own preferences, directly informing Mr. Jarndyce that "he really *had* tried very often" to analyze his inclinations, but ultimately "couldn't make it out" (180). Furthermore, Richard considers his role in the Chancery suit as paramount, calling whatever job he pursues "a kind of probation"

until it is decided (248). His early professional inconsistency, therefore, is not necessarily indicative of a lack of will power or commitment. Rather, it is a failure to make *any* decision as he struggles to determine his desires and preferences as a young professional—a vacillation that might, in technical terms, be seen instead as uncertain preference ordering. This reading of Richard's actions seems confirmed by his unwavering commitment to the Chancery suit as soon as he does determine his life "mission"—a commitment that certainly mimics the tendency toward limiting information and denying oneself deliberation found in theories of limited rationality. After all, Richard Holton notes that though we tend to associate akrasia—or behaving in ways that are antithetical to one's perceived best interests—as the sign of a weak-willed person, this is not necessarily the case; as we see with Richard, an individual can work tirelessly and forcefully against himself. Weakness of the will, by contrast, describes someone who "revise[s] their intentions too readily" (71). Richard may appear foolish to the reader, but he is anything if not committed to his ideals. And he is, based on the dictates of limited rationality, a rational actor: he has clear preferences (once he is able to express them); he chooses the same preferences every time he is asked; and he works tirelessly (though ineffectually) to secure them.

Esther, on the other hand, may have self-interested reasons for portraying Richard as inconsistent, particularly given the fact that she struggles with weakness of will on an almost continual basis. Unlike Richard, Esther must create myriad devices for maintaining her resolutions of "happiness" and "industriousness" in the time leading up to her marriage to Jarndyce—a goal that is presented as at odds with her deeper desires. At moments of weakness or temptation, Esther resorts to external checks on her behavior that include self-talk (resolutions, admonitions), physical reminders (keys, flowers), and gestures (pointing, shaking). With her engagement to Jarndyce undertaken in spite of her continued preference for Woodcourt,

Esther has put herself in a position where her natural inclinations—and the temptations they represent—are always in danger of altering her chosen course of action. In his book *Sour Grapes*, Elster distinguishes between rational and irrational determinations of an actor's preferences, arguing that when an individual changes his preferences based on causal, rather than intentional, factors, the change is irrational, whereas changes that are "deliberate adaptation" constitute rational choices (25). When Esther chooses to marry Jarndyce, she frames this decision as a conscious shift in her preferences; in order to maintain her "happiness" and "industriousness," she must bind herself to Jarndyce and consider Woodcourt "irrevocably past and gone" (528). And yet, while Esther's shift in preferences appears to be the result of deliberate consideration, an imbalance remains between Esther's stated preferences (marriage to Jarndyce) and her actual, implied preferences (marriage to Woodcourt).[3] Throughout the novel, Esther's emotional and psychological desires come into conflict with her logical aims, and as a result, her preferences become muddled in a way that Richard's never do. This preferential ambiguity is partially explained by Elster's reading of Pascal, where he notes that "reason is capable of *arriving* at…belief by ratiocination, but that it needs the assistance of the passions in order to *maintain* belief" (51). If Esther's passions must be deployed in order to shore up her logical marriage preference, then the success of that preference will always be uncertain.[4]

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[3] Not all scholars agree that it is irrational to change one's preferences without deliberate character planning. Bruckner argues "In Defense of Adapative Preferences" that even unconscious changes in preferences due to a change in the actor's feasible options can count as rational if "the agent holding the preference endorses [it] upon reflection" (316). While one could argue that Esther does choose Jarndyce by rationally changing her preferences based on the reduced feasibility of marriage to Woodcourt after her illness, Esther's continual need to "remind" herself of this change in her goals suggests that she has never, on a fundamental level, changed her preferences at all.

[4] Theorists of limited rationality debate the extent to which a person's tastes should be considered when anticipating his preferences. While the standard model of limited rationality assumes that individuals pursue ends that are in line with their tastes, one of the early proponents

Since Esther's stated preferences don't always align with her implied preferences, she must go to greater lengths to maintain her resolutions than other characters do. Esther's tendency toward self-talk—or maintaining her resolutions to behave rightly through verbal self-coaching—is a consistent strategy she utilizes at moments of temptation. Addressing herself in the third person, Esther often admonishes herself with reminders of her obligations to others ("Duty, my dear!" or "Once more, duty, duty, Esther" [95, 562]), followed by self-threats meant to serve as correctives to current behavior ("This *will* not do!" [36]; "you must…abandon this subject altogether" [212]; "if you do, I'll never speak to you again!" [729]).[5] Sometimes it appears, however, that the edifying effects of speech she expects are either beyond her grasp or fail in their aims, and in such cases Esther employs the aid of exterior objects to remind her of her goals. The most consistent object she utilizes are her housekeeping keys, which she gives "a little shake" whenever she is overwhelmed; in doing so, she creates the sound "of little bells" that remind her of, and affirm her in, her actions and choices (95).[6] She also utilizes gestures,

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of the theory, James G. March, notes in "Bounded Rationality, Ambiguity, and the Engineering of Choice" that "Choices are often made without respect to tastes. Human decision makers routinely ignore their own, fully conscious, preferences in making decisions" (596). Thus, Esther's preferences technically need not align with her desires in order to exist. However, March is concerned in general with the problem of goal ambiguity—whether preferences need to be clear in order to be rationally pursued. What he doesn't consider is the kind of case that Esther seems to be involved in: where certain preferences are stated and rationally pursued that ultimately don't turn out to be preferences at all.

[5] Esther's tendency to "talk" herself into following through on her reflective preferences oddly bifurcates the self; as Elster notes, in choosing to bind oneself to any system or individual, the actor creates "an alliance between the early and the late self against the intermediate and more docile self" (*Sirens* 41). Given the murkiness of both Esther's birth and her ultimate goals, she might be described—in contrast to other actors—as binding herself to resolutions as a way of creating a clear identity for (rather than against) her intermediate self. Resolutions and the way in which they bind Esther, therefore, become a way of creating an identity out of seemingly thin air.

[6] Esther maintains this device throughout the novel ("I gave the housekeeping keys that least shake in the world as a reminder to myself, and folding my hands in a still more determined manner on my basket, looked at him quietly" [110]; "jingled my housekeeping keys" [256]; "It

holding up her finger toward her reflected image in a mirror when she is "afraid the face in the glass was going to cry again," noting that at this self-admonition the crying "stopped" (639). Esther's use of auditory and visual aids in cementing her resolutions underscore how necessary it is for her to check back to the material world when shaping her thought processes. After all, the romantic "choice" that she makes in agreeing to marry Jarndyce is based on her belief that she is reading the external world properly—that Woodcourt is no longer a viable option and that her best practical chance for happiness is her guardian—and it stands to reason that checking back to the reality of material objects aids her in maintaining resolutions that her imagination or desires might naturally strive against. Esther even transforms the flowers Woodcourt gave her from a sign of affection to "a remembrance of what was irrevocably past and gone," changing the meaning of material objects so that they enforce rather than detract from her resolutions (528). Even potential sources of temptation become integrated into Esther's elaborate system of self-monitoring and correction.

Esther's need for self-talk and external checks to her behavior appear necessary not only because she is conflicted about her preferences, but also because she formulates so many—at times competing—resolutions over the course of the novel. Though Esther's initial resolution to be "industrious, contented, and true-hearted" garners the most attention from readers, the sheer number of intentions she devises over the course of *Bleak House* are enough to overwhelm the capabilities of even the strongest will (34). Because Esther tends to articulate all intended actions in the form of resolutions, she puts herself in a position where even mundane tasks have

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presented my life in such a new blank form, that I rang my housekeeping keys" [640]). She even passes their effect on to her protégé, Caddy, whom Esther describes as liable to "get up and attend me" whenever "I jingled my housekeeping keys" (440). Esther has transferred the values she associated with her resolution of industriousness onto a physical object, which is then capable of transferring those values to another individual.

the stakes of purposeful, forced activities ("I resolved to go on with it [stitching] until I couldn't keep my eyes open" [252]). If exerting the will requires energy, then Esther is bound to find difficulty maintaining her resolves the more of them she makes. Appropriately, following one of the greatest tests of Esther's willpower in the novel—when she discovers that Lady Dedlock is her mother shortly after a disfiguring illness—Esther suddenly begins to fail in her resolutions as she never has before. Reeling from two events that have undermined her physical and genealogical sense of self, Esther experiences a depletion of her willpower that immediately makes evident why she so often makes use of external devices to confirm her resolutions. Following her mother's revelation, Esther initially presents herself as "find[ing] comforting reconcilements to the change" that has befallen her, and she confirms that she has "renewed [her] resolutions, and prayed to be strengthened in them" (543). And yet, just a page later, when it comes time to reveal her changed appearance to Ada, Esther suddenly begins to falter. Stating that she at first "resolved to go along the road" to meet her friend, Esther immediately afterward reverses this position and is "resolved to turn back and go home again" (544). With no device to check her and no willpower left at her disposal, Esther cannot force herself to maintain the resolutions she creates.

Esther's quick alteration of her "resolutions" in this scene undercuts their status. While it's possible that Esther truly resolves on each of these actions, it's much more likely that she is framing her options as resolutions in the hopes that they will provide her with a settled course of action. As Michael Bratman notes, even intentions, which are often seen as less codified forms of resolutions, are frequently created as a means of preventing infinite deliberation (52). They allow one to act because, ideally, they mark the end of internal debate on a topic. While one can certainly revise an intention, excessive revision calls into question the presence of an intention at

all—or, as Bratman puts it, "we do not want, as limited agents, constantly to be reflecting in a serious way on whether to reconsider our prior intentions." By Bratman's definition, one cannot form an intention if she imagines she might abandon it in favor of another course;[7] in such a case, deliberation has never really ended, and so no intention, much less a resolution, exists. Since Esther ultimately follows through with neither resolution (she ends up acting on an impulse: "I did not mean to do it, but I ran up-stairs into my room, and hid"), it seems most likely that Esther never had a resolution at all. Esther's failure even to formulate a resolution in this instance, in conjunction with the numerous measures she takes to shore up those she does develop, reveal how tenuous her preferences and willpower really are. While Esther's resolutions have the effect of binding her to a particular reading of the material world, where she "constrain[s]" herself to "think of every sacred obligation that there was upon me," she must summon an enormous amount of energy in order to achieve this, since what she truly wants is often muddled or suppressed (538). Resolutions are, in effect, her way of shaping the world so that it comports with predetermined values.

If Esther doesn't reside easily with her resolutions—with the shear number of times she must repeat them indicating how often they falter—then why does she appear so much stronger and better directed in her bounded rationality than Richard? Significantly, though Esther makes her central resolution as a child, she transfers the weight of that act of binding from a series of ideas to literal embodiment in a single individual: Mr. Jarndyce. While J. Hillis Miller argues that Providence and Esther's access "through prayer, to divine grace" are ultimately what save

[7] The stability of an intention—or its ability to withstand revision—proves to have fruitful overlaps with issues of cognitive binding and limited rationality, about which more will be said later. For now, it's useful to keep in mind Holton's articulation of stability as "a shift in the threshold of relevance of information; some information that would have been relevant in forming an intention will not be sufficient to provoke rational reconsideration once an intention has been formed" (2-3).

her from "the smothering fog of the Court of Chancery," one could also argue that it is Esther's ability to relocate Providence in the material presence of her guardian that allows her to keep her resolutions and ultimately achieve the life she desires (*World* 331). After all, there is instability in Jarndyce's advice to Richard that he "Trust in nothing but Providence and your own efforts," considering the fact that it is Jarndyce himself who is capable of providing Richard with the best perspective of the Chancery suit and its possibility of judgment (196). Esther seems to realize this early in the novel, acknowledging that her "whole reliance and confidence" reside in Jarndyce (112). In practice, while Esther often "renew[s]…resolutions" by "praying to be strengthened in them," she just as frequently utilizes her guardian's counsel and advice to affirm her in her convictions (543). In fact, while Esther uses prayer to "find comforting reconcilements" to the discovery that Lady Dedlock is her mother, she still finds herself chapters later feeling that she can "no longer guide myself without [Jardyce's] opinion" (632). Rather than praying, she turns to Jarndyce to "put so plainly before me all I had myself imperfectly thought and hoped for in a better state of mind"; she finds that she reacts to his support by wondering "how I could ever be busy enough, how I could ever be good enough…to show him how I blessed and honored him" (634). In effect, Esther's support in seeking her goals of industriousness and contentedness has shifted from the divine to a material individual. Her goals no longer exist as mere ideals, but they have a practical application and embodiment in her guardian.

Esther's shift from seeing her resolutions as mere ideals to being embodied in a single individual sets her apart from Richard and his dogged devotion to the Chancery case. By placing her faith entirely in Jarndyce and conflating him with her aims of industry and contentedness, Esther makes him the "external structure" on which she "deposits [her] will" when dealing with

the world in a limitedly rational way. One way in which she displays this dependency is through rejecting any more information about her birth than her guardian deems prudent. Even when Jarndyce explicitly asks Esther if she has any questions about her origins, she responds immediately by saying "nothing! I am quite sure that if there were anything I ought to know, or had any need to know, I should not have to ask you to tell it me" (112). Esther rejects accessing or perceiving data that her guardian deems potentially harmful to her, and she determines that whenever she uncovers a subject that she cannot "pursue" without "changing the wind," she should forbear "ask[ing] any further questions" (135). If limited rationality involves curtailing one's access to infinite information in order to promote action, then Esther uses Jarndyce as a filter to her cognitive processes that limits the data she works with; by embodying her ideal resolutions, this filter guides her toward the achievement of her preferences.

Jarndyce's ability to serve as an effective object for Esther's cognitive binding arises from the ways in which binding to a person, as opposed to an ideal, helps to overcome some of the potential pitfalls of limited rationality. Unlike an ideal, an individual like Jarndyce possesses another consciousness with its own will and reading of the world based on its own partial apprehension of reality. When Esther uses Jarndyce as the object of her binding, therefore, she changes the relationship between her thoughts and the material world: her consciousness must defer to, or at least consider, alternate ways of experiencing and perceiving that Jarndyce represents. And Esther is not the only character who binds herself in this way. When Mr. George is asked to give Tulkinghorn his letters from Captain Hawdon, he becomes so overwhelmed by the pressure of deciding (which he describes as akin to the "sensation" of "being smothered") that he asks for the permission to consult "a friend of mine, who has a better head for business than I have" (403). Unable to perceive a correct course of action himself using

only his own perceptions and beliefs, he speaks to Mr. Bagnet and pledges to be "guided…entirely" by whatever "opinion" he espouses (409). Interestingly, the act of binding oneself to another person's superior apprehension of the world does not stop here; in fact, while Mr. George binds himself entirely to Mr. Bagnet's decision, Mr. Bagnet has bound *himself* to advise Mr. George according to his wife's reading of the situation ("It's my old girl that advises. She has the head" [407]). A second order of binding has occurred: Mrs. Bagnet supplies a clear assessment of the situation to Mr. Bagnet that leads Mr. George toward a definitive action without further deliberation. This string of bound individuals is mirrored in Esther's life too, where Caddy binds herself to Esther in much the way that Esther binds herself to her guardian. After declaring Esther to be "the best adviser that ever was known," Caddy proceeds to use her as a guide to her future actions and even comes to deify her to the point where "she believed I did her good whenever I was near" (437, 711). Beyond these examples, we see Ada bind herself to Richard; Lady Dedlock "resolves" to sacrifice her happiness to protect her husband; and Woodcourt's kindness to Jo is in part motivated by his desire to act in a way of which Esther would approve (537). These acts of binding one's thoughts and actions based on the needs and dictates of another person, especially when those connections develop into second-order levels of binding, begin to create a human network of tied individuals who act morally and considerately toward one another by allowing their thoughts and perceptions to be externally shaped.

Richard's form of limited rationality, on the other hand, contributes to his own self-delusions because of its abstract base in idealism, and, consequently, it lacks the morally edifying effects of Esther's. Delusions, it turns out, are one of the major pitfalls of any system of a rational assessment, since, while the *structure* of rationality doesn't require accurate beliefs about and assessments of the world, certainly the success of any action is increased—if not

entirely determined—by how closely a person's cognitive representations of the world mirror its "actual" characteristics. An individual's cognitive apprehensions of his environment will always be partial, incomplete, and tinged with subjectivity—a "simplified caricature" of the actual world that is "of lower dimensionality than the actual landscape"—but decreasing the effects of these inaccuracies contributes significantly to successful action (Gavetti 121). This is where the importance of considering the ideas and beliefs of other individuals comes into play in Dickens's novels. If each character in Dickens's text is overwhelmed, at least to some extent, by the complexity of the world around him, and in cognitively dealing with such overabundance of information he chooses to limit how much of that complexity he allows to enter into his thought processes, then the only way of overcoming the "simplified cognitive space" that results is by considering—and at times privileging—the apprehensions of others (Gavetti 117). After all, other individuals are taking in and analyzing aspects of the world that may be denied by one's own cognitive filters. This concept of the perceptually "limited" individual is supported by other analyses of how nineteenth-century individuals related to one another. As Tina Choi observes in "Writing in the Victorian City: Discourses of Risk, Connection, and Inevitability," the rise of probability statistics in Victorian England could at times obscure the importance of the "particular individual" and created an environment in which "the unsettling figure of chance…demands that sequentiality be expanded beyond the individual and his or her single, linear axis of possible consequences" (579). Probability, disease, and contact between the classes all led to a belief that the individual simply wasn't enough, and by triangulating themselves through binding, characters in Dickens's texts attempt to overcome their limited views to achieve a larger, more dynamic picture. Doing so can change one's beliefs about the

world in ways that adhering to ideals—which by definition exceed the actual and exist largely internally—cannot.[8]

In fact, one of the main reasons that binding oneself to another person, rather than simply to ideals or wishes, is so important in Dickens is because other people have the ability to undercut self-delusions in a way that idealism cannot.[9] Because revising one's decisions and deciding on their moral efficacy can be so tricky—as Elster notes, revisions can lead to a refracted sense of identity, where one can't determine whether "the self making the retraction is a more authentic self than the one that issued the meta-instructions"—having another perspective on one's choices can provide the affirmation or denial one needs to avoid a total collapse of the rational process (*Sirens* 41-2). Furthermore, when individuals or even groups choose to change a decided course of action based on changes around them, they tend to do so in "myopic" ways—responding to immediate pressures that may cause them to unintentionally choose "benefits that

[8] Richard, tragically, often believes himself to be bound in precisely the ways he would need to be in order to be "successful" in Dickens's world. Esther notes that he considers himself "calculating and prudent," despite his profligate expenditures, and his engagement to Ada would appear to bind him to a person in the way that Esther does (260). And yet, Dickens includes numerous indications that Richard's form of "binding" to the Chancery suit is ultimately stronger than any connection he has with an individual. Richard even admits that "I know what the thought of Ada ought to do for me, but it doesn't," and he adds that "I am not accountable to Mr Jarndyce, or Mr Anybody" (342, 547). Esther also affirms the secondary place that she believes Ada holds in his heart, saying she is "not so sure that Richard loved her dearly" (550). Richard may have ties to others and believe in his own prudence, but all of these pale in comparison to his commitment to the Chancery suit.

[9] Obviously, there are dangers to relying too heavily on another person's interpretation of the world. Andrew Miller observes in that in Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right*, as in many other nineteenth-century novels, that characters who adopt others' perspectives can believe they are "adopting the view of the universe," rather than a singular opinion, and in doing so they can be led into disastrous miscalculations (*Burdens* 100-1). While Miller's observations do confirm the need to choose carefully the person to which one binds, as Dickens also shows through Mr. Wickfield's disastrous trust in Uriah Heep, this does not undercut the fact that binding to another person is preferable to binding to mere idealism or to nothing at all; rather, it confirms the need to place one's trust carefully and solely in individuals invested in one's emotional and moral well-being.

are local in time or space" without fully apprehending long-term costs; attaching oneself to the advice of someone who sees beyond such short-sightedness consequently becomes critical to effective action ("Rationality" 205-6). In *Bleak House*, characters are continually able to see the weaknesses in others that they cannot perceive in themselves. Esther's first-person narration brings to the forefront her capacity for self-delusion, particularly in her continued musings about her own physical attractiveness. Unable to determine whether she is in fact "prettier than [she] ever [was]," Esther struggles with her difficulty in objectively evaluating herself; if beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then another consciousness is necessary to determine her attractiveness (914). The inability to see oneself, coupled with the partial apprehension each person has of his material conditions, emphasizes the vast realm of moral and psychological questions that cannot be answered simply through ratiocination. Even Mr. Jarndyce, who appears to be one of the most independently moral and clear-sighted characters in the novel, relies on Esther to perceive his blind spots—a fact Esther responds to with shock that "he who was so good and wise, [asked] *me* whether he was right!" (197). Dickens makes clear, however, that Jarndyce requires guidance from Esther, making his capacity for self-delusion evident in his irrational soft spot for Skimpole (197). Apparently, the only way to overcome one's own myopic tendencies is through perceptual binding to another.

In contrast to those who bind to people, characters who adhere to ideals become insensible to the outside world and consequently become victims to their own myopic misconceptions. Esther quickly notes that though Mrs. Jellyby "sometimes" engages with the world by "asking" questions to the room, she also "never seemed to expect a reply; but rambled on as if she were in the habit of doing so, when no one but herself was present" (67). Mr. Jarndyce, similarly, notices Richard's general insensibility to practical suggestion, and he

attempts to lead him away from his own insulated and insubstantial ambitions through taking "great pains to talk with him, seriously, and to put it to his good sense not to deceive himself" (181). Unfortunately, simply telling Richard to avoid self-deception is not enough; Richard is completely unable to gain perspective on his own situation, and by encouraging him to examine his own inclinations, Jarndyce inadvertently provides a basis for his later fallacious belief that "I am the best judge about myself" (358). All in all, characters who utilize the advice and guidance of others—and the benefits of their potential objectivity[10]—tend to make decisions and develop worldviews that are both more moral and more grounded in material realities than those who privilege only their own perspective.

Considering the role that self-delusion can play in determining an individual's cognitive apprehension of the external world, plus the negative effects that tend to result from viewing the world through the lens of an ideal (or any abstract notion without a concrete, material analogue), Dickens seems to be drawing a distinct line between obsession—which often has idealism at its base—and "genuine" binding, which grows out of an attempt to incorporate external (though limited) realities into internal thought processes. As it happens, one of the easiest ways to determine whether a person is rationally bound or obsessed arises from the ways in which he processes information. When studying how groups—and specifically corporations—make decisions, economists often refer to two kinds of reasoning: adaptive, or "on-line," reasoning, which involves taking new information from one's environment into thought processes, and

[10] In this case, objectivity should not be read as synonymous with disinterestedness. In fact, Dickens seems invested in displaying through Esther's relationship with Jarndyce that affection and marked interest need not interfere with an individual's ability to read with objectivity the emotional and moral needs of another. In fact, Richard's assertion that he will not take Jarndyce's advice because he is an "interested party" displays his false assumption that interest skews one's moral compass, and this leaves him open to "watching his own interests" under the destructive eye of Vholes (551, 560).

cogitative, or "off-line" reasoning, which involves only using information that has already been gathered to inform one's decisions (Gavetti 114-115). On-line processes necessitate an exchange between data in the external world and consciousness; off-line processes allow consciousness to work only with what it already possesses. Economically, engaging in on-line reasoning is seen as potentially costly and dangerous—any time new information is added to a preexisting structure it can destabilize or mislead it—whereas off-line processes are comparatively conservative. These theories about reasoning and taking in information, interestingly, have parallels in neuroscientific theories of consciousness. Jeffrey Gray, for instance, argues that consciousness has two orders of information processing that can be deemed either "online" or "offline"—individuals are capable of both automatic reactions and higher reasoning that indicate how consciously engaged they are with their environment (Corr 32).[11] For Dickens, these observations appear telling. Individuals have the ability to increase or decrease how much information from the world enters into their decision-making processes; they can either adapt to changes in the environment or ignore such data in favor of automatic responses.

Online processes, logically, require more effort than offline reasoning, and consequently one of the marks of individuals adhering to ideals—and who thus qualify as obsessed rather than genuinely bound—is the grotesque excess of energy they tend to display. After all, truly binding oneself is ultimately an act of the will that requires energy in order to be maintained. As Richard Holton observes, "subjects making choices become *ego depleted*: that is, they becomes less able to exercise subsequent self-control, a sign that their executive resources have been used up" (54).

[11] For clarity's sake, it is worth noting that—although there are differences in their application—the definitions of "online" and "offline" behavior are essentially inverted depending on whether one is reading an economic or neuroscientific text. For the sake of this argument, I will continue to use the economic version of these terms, referring to "online" processes as those that take in new information, and "offline" processes as those that only make use of previously possessed data.

Making decisions, especially if they require a suppression of certain desires and tastes, depletes an individual's psychological and emotional reserves, and the more decisions an individual is called upon to make, the more tired he should become. Dickens even dramatizes the way in which energy is required for mental control in his descriptions of Esther in the height of her illness, where she experiences a collapse of the "separation between the various stages of my life which had been really divided by years" (513). When the emotional and physical resources of a person become depleted, distinguishing between sensory data and categorizing memories becomes increasingly difficult; cognitive binding, in essence, begins to disintegrate as the energies required to maintain it are deployed elsewhere. Indeed, the spectacular collapse of Lady Dedlock at the end of the novel can be attributed in part to the "astounding," and almost excessive, "power and force" she has displayed in controlling herself throughout most of the novel—a control only relinquished in her emotional confession to Esther (605). Depleted emotionally by the role she has been playing, Lady Dedlock has finally exhausted herself to the point of death.

This depletion of energetic resources, curiously, does not occur for most of Dickens's characters who are actively pursuing the success of a particular abstract ideal. Mrs. Jellyby, who is described as a woman "of strong will and immense power…who throws herself into objects," admits that her African mission "involves the devotion of all my energies," which seem never to tire (83, 48). Similarly, Mrs. Pardiggle characterizes herself as "never fatigued," and she goes about her social missions with a "mechanical way of taking possession of people" that immediately displays how out of touch she is with their true material needs (122). Mr. Quale is always in "ecstacies" about missions he has nothing to do with; Richard is " one of the most restless creatures in the world" with "energy…of…an impatient and fitful kind"; and Miss Flite

spends the majority of her day "in contemplation" that goes nowhere (220, 126, 251, 60). Hortense, also, has a "surpassing energy" that she is capable of turning to horrifying ends when her "rich…hate" is summoned (171, 615). Even Bucket exhibits an almost perverse vivacity (Esther notes when they are pursing her mother that "the energy of my companion never slackened") that may serve as an indication, supported by other actions he takes, that his commitment to the law is based on its ideal application rather than concern for the individuals involved in its execution (833). While mental slackness can be a barrier to action—as we see in characters like Eugene Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend* or Steerforth in *David Copperfield*—limiting one's cognitive perceptions based on whether or not they adhere to an ideal can create such an excessive misdirection of energy as to be similarly disastrous. Both mental laxity and misguided binding involve a rejection of the immediate demands that the material world makes on the individual to act morally and decisively. Cognitive binding to a person, by contrast, allows individuals to engage in on-line, experiential reasoning without completely overtaxing their resources. By sharing the load of cognitive work involved in reasoning (Esther relies on Jarndyce, Caddy relies on Esther, Prince relies on Caddy, etc.), each is able to take on new information from the world without being completely overwhelmed by it. While the amount of information will still be limited, the characters create networks of perceivers and reasoners that take greater stock of material realities than any one, potentially self-deluded, person could.

III. Cognitive Restraint and Ethical Reading

If Dickens is creating a moral system in his novels that is possible because of the interdependence of individual consciousnesses—with each person voluntarily ceding some level of control over his perceptions and decisions to others—then this ethical framework would

appear to be at odds with the style Dickens employs in his writing. Characterized by its lush descriptions, attention to detail, and all-encompassing social vision, Dickens's narration seems to exhibit none of the "restraint" in perceptual apprehension that his characters enact. Despite the undeniable richness of Dickens's prose, however, it is possible to uncover an ethics of restraint in his novels by attending to their linguistic structure rather than to their direct content. After all, just as morality emerges through the relationships among people, so too does the moral content of Dickens's style arise in how the different linguistic registers he uses relate to one another.

Dickens, it turns out, is in a curious position as a writer: he must both bring into existence a rich world that is liable to be ignored by his readers, and with it the imperative moral claims that world produces, while at the same time encouraging the reader to "limit" his vision through some version of cognitive binding. If the complexity of the world can interfere with an individual's ability to make moral decisions, then how does giving voice to that complexity not interfere with the limitedly rational way in which it must be interpreted? The tension between making readers "see" and preventing them from "seeing" in particular ways is the challenge Dickens must overcome. Jennifer Nedelsky interprets this problem as one that is magnified by the tendency to conflate property and freedom in determining an individual's civil boundaries. The "protecting" of individual property, she argues, creates an impression that the individual's radius only extends as far as his possessions; the greater a person's property, the greater his or her radius. But since property and rights both need to be protected, in essence by "erecting a wall of individual rights around the individual," they increase the likelihood that an individual will feel removed from the claims of the other, failing to see whatever does not fall within his

limited radius (167). [12] Dickens, in G.K. Chesterton's estimation, embodied this paradox himself. Noting that Dickens often seemed to have "cotton wool in his ears" about certain realities, he still managed to "really destroy some of the wrongs he hated and bring about some of the reforms he desired" (270-1). Clearly, he imbedded in his narratives methods for helping readers overcome their own solipsism while still shaping the mass of information he gave them in a morally responsible way. We, as readers, must sort too.

Dickens's novels, even at their most descriptive moments, rarely threaten to devolve into total unboundedness in their style; when his narratives approach stream-of-consciousness methods, like the drunken scene in *David Copperfield* or Pip's illness in *Great Expectations*,[13] they almost always associate this style with moments of moral slippage that are in tension with the overall ethics of the novel. And yet, Dickens's novels' social and perceptual capaciousness can make them appear, on a broad level, little more than the unrestrained attempt to transmit as much information as possible to the reader. On a closer level, though, Dickens draws distinctions between specific kinds of observations and language, exhibiting that certain modes of perceiving are more ethical than others. In *Bleak House*, he dramatizes this distinction through the tense in which his characters speak. Richard, the other litigants in the Chancery suit, and characters like Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Chadband tend to frame their observations in the conditional, revealing a future-leaning tendency in their analyses of perceptual information. What is striking about the conditional, however, is that it not only looks toward future events, but

[12] Here, the origins of rational choice theory seem to become relevant again. If, as Jennifer Nedelsky claims, the conflation of personal property with freedom has created a wall around modern individuals, then the limited rationality these walls encourage might seem to work against collectivist, communal ways of knowing. For Dickens's moral aims to overcome this issue, therefore, limited rationality must be shown to accommodate and encourage communal impulses.

[13] David's encounters with alcohol ultimately bring him closer to Steerforth and his destructive desires, while Pip's moral clarity only occurs after he emerges from illness.

it also requires changes in present conditions in order to come about. Esther displays her awareness of this bent in Richard's thinking when she criticizes the resounding "*if*" that often accompanies his observations ("I don't know how many thousands of pounds, must be finally established, if there were any sense or justice in the Court of Chancery") (340). Richard constantly claims that he cannot "settle down" because he is living "in an unfinished house," seeing the world primarily as in process rather than as solidified and materially present (342). Even when Mr. Jarndyce suggests that Richard take heed of his immediate conditions as the only certainty in his life, Richard responds that "what I have of certainty…is not all I have" (359). Richard takes imaginative possession of his future fortune as if it has the material reality he denies to his present conditions. In order to maintain this fallacy, Richard must "postpon[e]" most of his actions and his engagement with the world to an "imaginary time" (554). Living in a conditional state, Richard fails to confront the immediate world and its present realities. And, given the end Richard meets, the reader slowly begins to discover that this linguistic mode will not, ultimately, be associated with moral action.

The alternative to this way of speaking and framing the world, therefore, arises in Dickens's use of the imperative. William James provides the connection between imperatives and morality in "The Moral Philosopher and Moral Life," where he claims that the origin of moral behavior lies in satisfying the immediate demands of others rather than in idealism. James acknowledges, however, the difficulty that arises at times in even perceiving these demands. Though he observes ideal judgment has no practical use unless it is "made flesh by being lodged concretely in some one's actual perception," he is also acutely aware of how fickle perception can be (193). As with Dickens's characters who often can only perceive or process limited amounts of the sensory and cognitive data at their disposal, "men" in general tend to be

"ludicrously and peculiarly insensible, to many goods" (204). Trying to balance between a moral vision that incorporates aspects of idealism (James and Dickens, after all, are invested in changing the material world for the better) with the world as it actually is, the individual can end up with a profusion of "demands" on him that require conflicting actions. In order to balance these demands, one needs to develop a filter for them, which James claims is provided by the fact that some demands "are urgent and tyrannical, while others [are] gentle and easily put aside. We call the tyrannical demands *imperatives*" (211). In essence, some of the claims made by others will be deemed so essential that any moral individual is incapable of resisting the call to meet them. As James observes, "Obligation can thus exist within a single thinker's consciousness; and perfect peace can abide with him only so far as he lives according to some sort of casuistic scale which keeps his more imperative goods on top" (211). To behave morally is to recognize the imperatives embodied in the world around one, and striving to meet them becomes the only form of idealism that is worth one's time and energy.

Unsurprisingly, Dickens's characters who bind themselves to moral forms of behavior and perception often make use of the imperative when articulating the motivations and need for their actions. And this makes sense: since they've bound themselves to view and interpret the world based on the dictates of another person, their perceptions are predicated upon the "claim" of other individuals that James describes as the source of ethical action. Esther immediately perceives the imperative demand on her moral character to aid Jo in his illness, observing that she "said to Charley that we must not leave the boy to die" (453). Similarly, when Lady Dedlock chooses to try to protect her husband after the revelation of her scandal, she sees caring for his emotional well-being as an unquestionable requirement. Stating that "I must travel my dark road alone, and it will lead me where it will," Lady Dedlock treats the sacrifice of her own happiness

as the only, imperative action available to her (535). The role of imperatives, however, become complicated when more than one demand is made upon the individual. Mr. Jarndyce observes this conflict in dealing with Richard and Ada, attempting to balance between Richard's demand for freedom and the imperative need he feels to protect Ada. With clear reluctance, Mr. Jarndyce confronts Richard, saying "I *must* go further…I ask you to wholly relinquish, for the present, any tie but your relationship," urging Richard that "we must be careful…that we make no more such mistakes" in choosing a profession (my italics, 359, 250). Mr. Jarndyce must rank the claims made upon him, and he recognizes the need to protect Ada as superseding Richard's desires. Richard, on the other hand, refuses to recognize the force of the imperative. He complains to Esther that Jarndyce has said "that Ada and I must break off, and that if I don't amend that very objectionable course, I am not fit for her. Now, Esther, I don't mean to amend that very objectionable course…Whether it pleases him or displeases him, I *must* maintain my rights" (my italics, 553). Richard's imperative need centers on the protection of his rights, rather than in caring for Ada; in essence, his only use of the imperative is in the service of a conditional end.

In influencing the decisions of others, formulating the correct moral choice as an imperative can help guide another's decision-making when conditions are ambiguous. When Mr. George begins to waver in taking the advice and counsel of the Bagnets concerning his trial, Mrs. Rouncewell is brought in to make their claims upon George imperative rather than negotiable. They present George as having no alternatives, but they say he "must be governed by the best advice obtainable by money and influence; that he must yield up his case…; that he must act…as he shall be advised to act; and must not be self-willed, however right, but must promise to think only of his poor old mother's anxiety and suffering until he is released, or he will break her heart" (783). Once the correct action has been explicitly connected with an

individual (Mrs. Rouncewell) making an imperative demand, Mr. George is morally compelled to observe it. And yet, while imperatives can be used to encourage moral behavior, they can also be used as a kind of emotional blackmail—a way of trying to manipulate others through making one's demands appear unchallengeable. This is one of the primary methods Tulkinghorn uses in obtaining power over others, making his actions appear as if they have imperative origins. When he pushes Mr. George's debt toward an early repayment, he tells George that "you must pay your debts"; he similarly entraps Lady Dedlock by claiming that if she avoids him, then he "must speak out, before every guest and servant, every man and woman" (509, 606). In both cases, Tulkinghorn uses his victims' moral tethers to others (Mr. Bagnet, Sir Leicester) as a means of forcing them to take his own claims of imperative action seriously. And Tulkinghorn is not alone in this behavior. Part of the insidiousness of Chancery is its attempt to make its superfluous actions appear necessary, with Jarndyce observing that "all through the deplorable cause, everybody must have copies, over and over again…or must pay for them without having them…and must go down the middle and up again" (108). As a machine that cares more for its self-perpetuation than for the lives of those involved in its suits, Chancery uses the power of the imperative to create a fiction of its importance. Even dubious moral work can take on the form of the imperative, which Dickens reveals when Mrs. Jellyby tells Caddy "You must accommodate the visit to the demands upon my time," despite the fact that her mission, like Richard's case, is based on a conditional rather than immediate claim on her moral resources (354). Ignoring the "neglected girl" in front of her, Mrs. Jellyby uses imperative demands as a way of recasting her stubborn myopia as moral action (201). Uncovering false imperatives, therefore, becomes as important to ethical behavior as the perception of imperatives at all.

Dickens's use of imperatives and conditionals begin to display how a reader can sort or filter his vast novels using a kind of moral, interpretive binding. Novels, like environments, contain more information than any individual can entirely command, and limiting and prioritizing what the reader remembers or deliberately perceives becomes the only way manageable analysis is possible. Imperatives become one way of lifting "important" information out of the sea of possible foci. However, while noting Dickens's use of the imperative helps to display which characters are "filtering" the world morally, it doesn't independently overcome the problem of Dickens's lush and detail-oriented prose.

Binding, it turns out, need not always be contingent on not seeing things. As Jon Elster notes, determining one's focus when binding is far more important than a categorical rejection of any set of perceptual experiences. It is not about "avoiding exposure to information in a strict sense…only a question of avoiding exposure to *conditions* that might trigger off the efficacy of information already in your possession" (my italics, 104). A smoker, Elster argues, might actually take special care to note where tobacco shops are in order to avoid them. In essence, learning how to focus one's gaze so that the new information obtained is relevant to one's moral reasoning processes becomes more important than the wholesale rejection of certain perceptions. Significantly, the problem of focus is one that is often read as attending the urban condition in general. Georg Simmel argues in "The Metropolis and Mental Life" that the overexposure to perceptual stimuli that attends urban life requires the individual, for the purpose of "self-preservation," to assume a "blasé outlook"—to fail, either by incapacity or by an act of the will, to observe his surroundings (64). In order to overcome the blasé attitudes of others, those who wish to obtain the focus and attention of fellow city-dwellers must develop "eccentricities"—strategies for standing out from the general population, "of making oneself noticeable" in the

face of multitudes (65). Dickens's novels are obviously full of eccentric characters, but their eccentricity doesn't seem particularly connected to a moral system; Krook, for instance, may be memorable, but his eccentricity doesn't seem to forward or contribute to a theory of ethical engagement. Rather, picking out structures that resemble the arresting nature of eccentricity, but are replicable across people, is likely to bring one closer to Dickens's own method for allowing moral action to rise above the dangers of perceptual overstimulation.

Just as some of Dickens's characters have physical characteristics that set them uniquely apart from others, so too do others have linguistic "tags," or phrases, which are repeated and which characterize in shorthand their role in the novel. E.M. Forster notes this technique in Dickens's writing in *Aspects of the Novel*, where he criticizes Dickens for writing characters so flat that they can be encapsulated by a phrase as simple as "I'll never desert Mr. Micawber" (73). Forster observes that such linguistic tags, and flat characters in general, can have comic efficacy, but he questions their ability to succeed dramatically—when they gesture at profundity, he suggests, they are "apt to be a bore." At first glance, most of the linguistic tags that Dickens uses in *Bleak House* appear to be comic. Mrs. Jellyby's constant musings on "Boorioboola-Gha," Mr. Bagnet's insistent claim that "order must be maintained" in his household, Mr. Turveydrop's constant references to "deportment," and Smallweed's affection for the adjective "brimstone," all seem to take on linguistically the eccentric, comic dimensions that have come to define Dickensian characters. While these humorous representations might cause one to dismiss such simplification as a sign of a character's limitations or inherent "flatness," there is a sense in which the ability to encapsulate characters in a single statement—to filter all of the aspects of their existence into one or two salient phrases or characteristics—might prove to have moral ends when deployed correctly.

These moral ends seem to be dramatized in one of the more curious linguistic tags Dickens creates in the novel: the association of the phrase "he wos wery good to me"—stated by Jo—with the character of Nemo. Nemo, unlike most of the characters in the book, barely makes an appearance in it before he dies; defying even one-dimensionality, he slips out of the text before the reader has the ability to apprehend him on his own terms, and he literally becomes the "no one" that his name signifies. Thus, when Jo describes him at the inquest as the man who "wos wery good to me" and then repeats this phrase in front of Nemo's grave just pages later, it becomes the most concrete image the reader has of the dead man's character (163, 165). In the absence of his material reality, a single phrase slowly begins to determine the reader's interpretation of Nemo's character; whatever else one learns of him, the reader knows that he was generous to a small boy even in his own time of need. While complexity might be a lauded trait from an aesthetic standpoint, from a moral vantage it means very little. Jo does not need to understand the complexity of Nemo's life or his former identity as Hawdon to comprehend the kindness he has performed. After all, if the perceptual overstimulation of the urban environment means that city-dwellers only have the time and energy to comprehend small amounts of information, then it becomes all the more important that the "refrain" one develops for his or her character is one of moral stature. In fact, by the end of the novel, Jo doesn't even refer to Nemo by a "name" at all, simply saying he wants to be buried "where they laid him as wos wery good to me, wery good to me indeed, he wos" (677). The phrase that once described Nemo has effectively become his name, serving as the only material reality that survives his body's death.

The importance of Nemo's charitable actions and the linguistic tag, or "refrain," that they end up creating for him take on further significance as they begin to spread throughout the novel. This occurs first at the inquest, where, after hearing about Nemo's generosity to Jo, Mr. Snagsby

decides to replicate his charity by "laying in wait" for Jo as he leaves and "putt[ing] a half-crown in his hand" (163). Charity, much like the disease that spreads through the novel, is capable of becoming catching. This "catching," furthermore, is registered linguistically, a fact that Dickens displays through having the phrase "he wos wery good to me" evolve over the course of the novel. First used in reference to Nemo, Jo then repurposes the phrase when recalling Esther's kindness to him in his illness, claiming that "he never went fur to hurt her…and that she wos wery good to him, she wos" (662). After hearing about Esther's role in helping the child, Allan softens toward him in kind, causing Jo to shift the phrase again and, by the end of the interaction, to claim that "*you* [Allan] wos wery good to me too" (663). The fluidity with which Dickens allows this phrase to evolve throughout the novel brings attention to the way in which language and focus interact when it comes to moral action. In Jo's eyes, Nemo, Esther, and Allan are essentially interchangeable because the effect that they have on his diminished existence is the same: a small amount of kindness that makes all the difference in his ability to survive from day to day. The repetition of one linguistic tag binds them in their moral action in a way individual eccentricity never could.

Dickens's treatment of the phrase "he wos wery good to me" shows how the imperative—the demands of one person on another—can begin to rise above a sea of perceptual information to become the focus of one's interpretations even when the forms of the imperative aren't present. Ideally, after the reader has come to understand the basic moral capacities of the novel's characters, this knowledge begins to shape, filter, and essentially bind his reading of the novel as a whole. Thus, the practice of reading *Bleak House* becomes one in filtering for the reader—of sorting information so that some perceptions are privileged and others ignored, allowing a moral framework to rise above its many details. In this way, no detail in Dickens's

text can serve as insignificant, nor can a reader's apprehension of it avoid being laden with the stakes of choice and decision. To perceive is to "act"—to make choices about the kinds and quantity of information that will inform behavior. And how an individual negotiates that process becomes one of the greatest indicators in Dickens's novels of his moral relationship with the world.

Chapter 2

Green Ribbon and Violets: Attention and Knowledge in *Villette*

When Lucy Snowe prepares for her arrival in Villette, she performs an act that is surprisingly familiar to modern frequent travelers. Worried that she won't be able to locate her trunk from a heap of undifferentiated luggage, she ties a "piece of green ribbon" around the direction card so that she can know it "at a glance" (61). Lucy's ribbon serves as a visual marker intended to bring order and efficiency to the chaos of baggage claim. When she arrives in Villette, however, Lucy's trunk never materializes. Though her attention has been honed to seek out a flash of green, and with it the security of knowing her possessions have arrived safely, she is instead whisked away through the disorienting streets of Villette by Dr. John, the man who will prove her primary source of distraction for the rest of the novel. Dr. John's guidance, furthermore, is far from encompassing; rather than being taken under Dr. John's wing, Lucy finds herself navigating "the double gloom of trees and fog," powerless "to see my guide" and only able to "follow his tread" (63). Lucy's attempts to use her careful attention to control her environment appear to unravel in the face of the unexpected.

This tiny scene serves as a microcosm for the novel's obsession with attention. From Lucy's self-destructive monomania, to Dr. John's emotional insensibility, to Paulina's unconscious allure, the novel dramatizes the many ways in which the objects of an individual's attention shape and determine the world he or she inhabits. In each of these cases, attention limits one's vision to only salient information in an overly complex environment, and therefore it appears essential to healthy cognition. And yet, Lucy's tendency to be overlooked implies inherent problems with attention even as the novel explores its uses: if attention is limited, are its destructive capacities as pronounced as its benefits? Lucy's narration of *Villette*, and particularly her careful use of the first-person perspective, reveal attention's inherent mechanisms for

overcoming its own shortcomings, and how important correctly deploying its restrictive capacities is to constructing an ethical subject.

The world of *Villette*, and the one depicted in most of Brontë's novels, differs significantly from Dickens's. How and where attentive energies will be deployed, therefore, diverge as well. While counsel is extremely important to Dickens's characters and their navigation of moral ambiguity, Brontë often portrays her characters as ethically isolated individuals with few avenues for constructive advice. From Jane's loss of Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*, to Lucy's realization that no one "knew how to advise me" after a family disaster leaves her penniless, Brontë's novels early on rule out depending on others for practical or ethical counsel. The presence of Catholicism in *Villette*—and what Brontë presents as an intrusive system capable of inculcating ethically lax habits—further limits Lucy's ability to depend on external forms of guidance. Quickly realizing that she "must look only to myself," Lucy's self-reliance is born out of repeatedly finding outside sources of stability impractical (83). Unlike in Dickens's novels, where characters rely on communities of advisors to guide right behavior, in Brontë's, determining ethical action or engaging in decision-making that facilitates long-term goals will largely depend on individual judgments of value.

Lucy's dependence on internal cues for ethical judgment, however, creates as many problems as it solves. While inner convictions guide her toward right action in a deceptive and immoral world, it is also Lucy's interior sensations that most often threaten to derail her sense of purpose and equanimity. Attending to her interior life, therefore, won't necessarily lead to ethical cognition in any straightforward way. This double bind raises a significant question for the novel: How can Lucy identify a coherent moral worldview based on rationalistic, internally developed priorities if she also possesses a chaotic emotional life? Put another way, is it possible

for her to filter her conscious experiences effectively if her most salient and most destructive sensations all come from the same source? This chapter will consider how theories of attention from the nineteenth century and current psychology help elucidate Brontë's answer to these questions. Specifically, it claims that the cognitive barriers that attention constructs actually lend force to meaningful stimuli, allowing them to break through to influence thought processes even under restrictive conditions. By looking at attention in *Villette*, therefore, I offer at least one explanation for what appears to be a large puzzle in the novel: whether Lucy's excessive self-control merely constitutes unproductive restraint, or if it results in the psychological and ethical survival her narrative seeks.

I. Attention: Structuring Stream of Consciousness

Villette is in many ways a novel about misapplied attention. Almost every character is focused on someone who is relatively oblivious to their notice: Dr. John focuses on Ginevra; Lucy focuses on Dr. John; M. Paul focuses on Lucy; and Madame Beck enacts her surveillance on nearly everyone. Some characters are noted for their impressive ability to attend, while others for their incapacity to see what is right before them. Lucy is constantly occupied by her work and by an "inexpressible sense of wonder" about Graham; M. Paul "glean[s] every stray look" and is possessed of a "basilisk attention"; and Madame Beck displays a monstrous capacity for attention by "watching and spying everywhere," apparently at all times (149, 330, 336, 73). Conversely, Ginevra does not properly "notice" Graham despite his obvious affections, and Graham, while "vigilant" and often "absorbed," is equally liable to being "preoccupied" and as "*unimpressable*" as water (87, 102, 31, 259). There is, therefore, no single way in which Brontë depicts attention; rather, its ability to function in many different ways, both productive and

destructive, makes it a strong site through which to investigate individual character. In general, attention has been theorized to work in two ways: it can be "voluntarily" deployed, and thus "moved to a…location in a goal-directed manner," or it can be "captured" outside the individual's will by "by an object or event occurring in a different, [previously] unattended location" (Chun 79). In limiting one's perceptions of the world to only sensory stimuli in its radius, attention both expresses and undoes individual will. As Alexander Bain notes, attention "coerces the flow of ideas" toward particular ends, and the agent's ability consciously to direct this flow speaks to the level of cognitive control he possesses (*Emotions* 378). Attention is how the mind directs its relationship with its environment: attentional boundaries are cognitive boundaries.

When twenty-first-century neurobiologists and psychologists study attention, they tend to divide its operation into top-down processes and bottom-up processes, depending on whether attention arises from cognitive goals or a stimulus in the environment. A recent synthesis of attentional studies in *The Annual Review of Psychology*, however, suggests a new way of thinking about how we deploy attention. Instead of focusing on the mechanisms of attention, as the previous categories do, the authors instead claim that by considering attention as either "internal" or "external," it is possible to analyze it while "encompassing all its mechanisms and properties" (77). The differences between internal and external attention are relatively straightforward. Internal attention is also referred to as "cognitive control," and it focuses on "information that is already represented in the mind, recalled from long-term memory or being maintained in working memory" (77, 76). External attention, on the other hand, is synonymous with "perceptual attention" and "refers to the selection and modulation of sensory information" (77). These categories are helpful because they not only offer a spatial model for mapping

attention's source, but they also align nicely with the concept of cognitive restriction as a conscious effort to limit how (external) stimuli come into contact with (internal) reasoning.

Brontë explores the difference between internal and external perceptions, and the attention directed at them, frequently in *Villette.* When it comes to outwardly directed attention, Brontë suggests that there is little in the physical world that it would be "dangerous" for Lucy to observe. Giving herself over to the sensory pleasure of nature, Lucy frequently goes on "walk[s]" outdoors, and she feels little threat from the nearby "wide streets brightly lit, teeming at this moment with life" (84, 108). Furthermore, it is not just impressions from the natural world that are considered unthreatening; Brontë even implies that many of the scandalous influences that Victorians often thought corrupted women ultimately have little affective power. When Lucy views the "affluence of flesh" presented in a painting of Cleopatra, for instance, she looks on her with equanimity before proclaiming her as on par with women who are "insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities!" (200, 202). In addition, despite the fact that the actress Vashti's singing "affected [Lucy] like the tricks of a conjuror," she is still able to view her with her rational faculties at work, acknowledging rather than succumbing to her influence (216). These moments suggest that threats to ethical or psychological integrity are unlikely to arise outside the individual; Lucy consequently can attend to such impressions without anxiety.[1]

Lucy's internal perceptions, on the other hand, are more chaotic and destructive than any threat from the outside. From unwelcome memories to her desires for Graham, Lucy constantly experiences internal sensations that must be ignored so she can be "fit for [a] day's work" (231).[2]

[1] Of course, this relationship with external perception is particular to Brontë's heroines and cannot be generalized as a truth about all characters.
[2] Here I make a distinction between "emotional reactions that are similar to sensory perceptions," or emotional states that have strong physical analogues, and the kinds of thoughts that Lucy is combating (Brady 116). While Lucy does filter emotional sensory experiences, she often

She refers to many of her emotions as "shadowy chances [that] imagination pictures," and while they may provide momentary pleasure, she "cannot live" on them (239). Most of these destructive emotional perceptions, of course, can be traced to Graham and her monstrous affections for him that, if "released from that hold and constriction," are capable of overtaking her (457). As Michael Brady notes in "Virtue, Attention, and Emotion," such emotions can be powerful adversaries because they "do not just direct or capture our attention; they also *consume* our attention…emotional objects and events often hold sway over us…so much so that it is sometimes difficult to disengage our attention and shift focus elsewhere" (120). If Lucy is to function and make rational decisions, cognitive power must be exerted to avoid attending to her voracious internal sensations.

Lucy appears acutely aware of the need to filter such internal perceptions. From childhood, she notes a disdain for "vehement, unrestrained expansion," and she describes her own emotions as akin to torture: to being "indescribably…torn, racked and oppressed in mind" (14, 160). While she rarely represents painful memories or impressions directly, presumably in an effort to constrain her narrative as she does her behavior, she gives a sense of their shape through the violent language she uses to describe her methods of cognitively controlling them. Making "imperious rules" for herself, Lucy "prohibit[s]," "command[s]," "checks," "bridle[s]," "discipline[s]," "suppress[es]," and "swallow[s]" fugitive thoughts that seep into her consciousness (231, 244, 410). When she experiences fleeting conscious pangs for Graham, she describes them as "flung away" or "knock[ed] on the head," and she ultimately uses this cognitive refereeing to create a barrier "round my heart…[which] at least restrained its [painful]

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connects them to memories or other abstract cognitive ideas and thereby brings them to her "reflective consciousness" (123). This prevents them from functioning as mere sensation and thus "external" sources of attention. Even when they also possess physical manifestations, therefore, they still remain under the umbrella of internal attention.

throbbings" (105, 110). While Lucy occasionally expresses dismay at the psychological policing "Reason" enacts, she also acknowledges that it does "right" to "leap in, vigorous and revengeful" when she indulges her feelings too excessively (254).[3] Ultimately, Lucy seems to realize that "wherever an accumulation of small defences is found…there, to be sure, it is needed" (310).[4] In the struggle to attend to only appropriate impulses, Lucy calls on her strongest defenses internally.

Lucy's stringent attitude toward cognitive restriction is understandable given that nineteenth-century discourse often suggested that even small lapses in mental control could have long-term consequences. Natalie Mera Ford has noted that early Victorian psychological "discourse [was] dominated by a wary critique of unconstrained inwardness," but the amount of vigilance that such sources suggest against cognitive breeches can at times border on the

[3] Lucy does occasionally engage in some coaxing self-talk, begging herself not "to think of [the Brettons] too often, too much, too fondly," or she quietly pleads with herself to hope of "no delight of heart—no indulgence of intellect: grant no expansion of feeling—give holiday to no single faculty" (178, 229). Where these moments of gentle self-admonishment are so central to Esther's binding in *Bleak House*, however, they are the exception in *Villette*, where Lucy must resort to much more extreme, and potentially violent, means of self-control in order to maintain equilibrium.

[4] Lucy's attempts at self-control often can seem akin to repression, but it is important here to make a distinction. While her cognitive binding is certainly extreme, and while it involves the denial of sexual and psychic desires, her actions differ from the Freudian conception of repression as a "force that prevent[s one] from becoming conscious" of emotional realities (21). Lucy certainly tries to prevent her unwanted desires from entering into her cognitive processes, but she is never *unconscious* of their existence. In fact, she describes her feelings for Graham as troubling not because they are unspeakably emotional or sexual, but because their misalignment with reality makes them psychologically destructive. They represent a "craving" that Lucy "could not satisfy," requiring her to be "armed" against expectation rather than reality, and it is this inability to *benefit* from the enactment of desire that marks it, at least partially, as a sensation to be filtered (109, 412). Brontë, furthermore, clearly did not believe in the "talking cure," describing Lucy's desperate trip to a confessional to unload her "long accumulating, long pent-up pain" as motived by "no impetus of healthy feeling" (*Villette* 162, *Letters* 80). From then on, Lucy pours her emotions only into unsent letters that she locks up as effectively as she does her own mind. Lucy may be extreme in her methods of binding, and the reader is right to question whether she takes them too far, but she is not afraid to acknowledge the existence of the feelings she suppresses.

ludicrous (81). Alexander Bain, for instance, claims that the only way to ensure enduring cognitive control is to bring "the influence of habit to assist the force of volition," which is achieved "by means of an *unbroken* series of decisions on one side" (*Senses* 441, my italics). Only if a person can consistently "overbear sensual solicitations in an unbroken series of trials" can she develop "a confirming stream of the nervous power" to aid her during future moments of challenge. Bain even cautions against "gradual" attempts at bringing about virtuous habits; instead, the individual should begin with either "a very strong putting forth of volition…or an imperative urgency from without" (442). In fact, in *Emotions and the Will*, he ups the ante, claiming that "it is necessary, above all things…never, if possible to lose a battle. Every gain on the wrong side undoes the effect of the many conquests on the right" (440). This level of cognitive restraint is akin to telling a dieter to eliminate all sugar from his diet without even minor exception; only through choosing every day not to indulge in sweets can he "give new force to the victorious side, enabling it to cope with stronger adversaries" (442). Welcome stimuli should be "spr[ung] upon…like a wild beast on its prey," while unwanted impressions must be removed with equal force (377). Bain's language seems purposefully bellicose here; where mental management is concerned, the mind is a battleground where one has "to fight…to resist the currents of association or intellect proper, and the fury of excited feeling" (379). George Henry Lewes concurs about the amount of effort it takes for an individual to manage his attention, calling it "analogous to muscular fatigue" and noting that "when the effort of suppressing irrelevant ideas is great, there is a muscular effect traceable in the temporary arrest of respiration" (*Problems* 188). Apparently, the energies of the whole body must sometimes be engaged to overcome the force of internal distracting stimuli.[5]

[5] While it is important to note the motivations for Lucy's tight mental control, the psychological

Lucy's need to combat her internal rather than external impressions clearly affects how she deploys attention in the novel, particularly in how she manages her natural tendency toward stream of consciousness. Both nineteenth-century theorists of the mind and contemporary scholars have connected the natural capacities of attention with an ability to "direct" one's stream of consciousness toward particular ends. William James famously called attention

> the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects of trains of thought. Focalization, concentration, of consciousness are its essence. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others, and is a condition which has its real opposite in the confused, dazed, scatter-brained state which in French is called *distraction* (403-4)

Where distraction causes "the world [to] melt into confused unity," attention directs cognition and allows "the wheels of life [to] go round again" (404). Similarly, George Henry Lewes took great pains in *Problems of Life and Mind* to point out that attention is not a cognitive faculty, but rather a "volitional" reflex in which the individual "fix[es]…[on] one series of feelings, and disregard[s] all those not congruent with the series" (188). This distinction between attention as a faculty and a reflex is important for Lewes because it allows consciousness and attention to exist as two separate entities; "to *have a sensation*," he argues, "and to be *conscious* of it, are one and the same thing; but to *have a sensation,* and to *attend* to it, are two different things"

"laws" she creates for herself shouldn't be confused with her actual practices. In Lucy's subconscious discussion with Reason, she asks "If I feel, may I *never* express?," to which Reason answers "*Never!*" (229). The finality of this injunction implies a rigidity of mental binding that borders on pathology. And yet, Lucy's self-talk is much more extreme than she behaves in reality. Lucy *does* have avenues for expression, even claiming she "served two masters [Reason and feeling]," and there are times at which ruptures in her cognitive barriers are read as rational (253). Just as "Imagination" must "break bounds at intervals" to combat reason, so too do Lucy's cognitive boundaries falter at moments of importance. These ruptures, however, are not simply refuge expressions of emotion that happen in *spite* of previous cognitive strictures, but rather they are carefully crafted moments that Brontë represents as possible only because Lucy has previously been so stringent with herself, a concept that will be discussed at greater length later.

(Physiology 52). Attention does not create consciousness, but it sharpens our perceptions of sensations by "direct[ing] our attention to a single one so as to perceive it not only more distinctly than the rest, but definedly and in its whole intensity." As Alexander Bain puts it in *Senses and the Intellect*, attention's ability to "make certain objects paramount to certain others" is a way of managing the potential chaos of cognitive space (441).

The capacity attention has to structure thought continues to be discussed by philosophers and psychologists today. Attention—both internal and external—is necessary because "at any given moment the environment presents far more perceptual information than can be effectively processed [and] one's memory contains more competing traces than can be recalled" (Chun 164). Without picking a site of importance or focus within this stream, the individual cannot meaningfully provide context for his thoughts or decide on volitional actions. As Sebastian Watzl argues, "consciously attending to something consists of the conscious mental process of structuring one's stream of consciousness so that some parts of it are more central than others" (145). This means that "to focus one's attention on [a long-term goal] is to structure one's life around it" and that one will "experience everything in terms of its relation to that project." Stimuli that appear directly related to one's goals become paramount in vision, while unassociated perceptions may never rise to the level of consciousness. In a similar vein, Wayne Wu considers how attention directs a person's thought processes when it comes to action. Attention, he claims, allows one to pick a single action out of the many available to one at a given time by "deploying representational resources that help identify specific target[s] of relevance" (59). Attention leads to cognitive specificity, which in turn invites volitional action.

One of the reasons attention can be so useful in structuring perceptual experiences is because it is inherently limited. Governed by the "rule of four"—the number of items most

cognitive scientists agree that humans can apprehend at a time—attention is naturally limited even when the subject doesn't feel it to be (Chun 88). Referred to as "working memory," the mind's ability to hold and manage only a small amount of information at any time mediates its use of internal and external attention (Knudsen 58).[6] By attending to a sensation, one moves it from the competitive realm of random perceptions into the more ordered and confined space of working memory, where it is "temporarily store[d]…for detailed analysis" (59, 58). Items that are imported to working memory can be actively used in reasoning, or stored in long-term memory for later retrieval.

Lucy often tries to use the constraints imposed by working memory to her advantage, managing her perceptions through distraction.[7] This is not the *ennui*-tinged distraction James describes, however, but rather filling one's limited capacity for conscious attention with innocuous, externally situated stimuli.[8] After Madame Beck is romantically rejected by Dr. John, Lucy observes that she redirects her attentions to her "important avocation, a real business

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[6] Neurobiologists refer to this capacity as "executive functioning." While there is some debate as to whether working memory and executive functioning refer to the same mental process, recent studies have suggested that there are significant overlaps in how they operate (McCabe 222). Since *Villette* is so self-consciously concerned with the issue of memory, however, I will continue to use "working memory" from psychology, rather than "executive functioning" from neurobiology.

[7] Lucy, of course, is not aware of her mental space as specifically controlled by working memory and its maximum capacity of four pieces of information. She does, however, seem acutely aware that her conscious mental space is limited by her attentional focus, and she uses this limitation to support what she considers the best version of her mental life.

[8] This "distraction" is not only distinct from James's definition of it, but also the kind of unbounded, directionless thinking that attends stream of consciousness that Stephen Arata identifies with distraction in "On Not Paying Attention." While Brontë does show that limiting the scope of one's vision actually reveals the value of "irrelevant" details that break through cognitive boundaries, she has little interest in the "abstraction of mind" that Arata locates in late-century fiction (193). "Diffused" attention is relatively absent from Brontë's pages, and distraction for her is engaged with the same energy as rapt attention (195). For Brontë's dynamic to work, therefore, the individual must be *actively* and self-consciously not paying attention, and the amount of work that this entails would be as unpalatable to the writers that Arata identifies as *ennui* is to Brontë.

to fill her time, divert her thoughts, divide her interest" (105). This is an attitude Lucy quickly replicates, choosing to "[fill] with occupation every minute of [the] day" when she feels in danger of indulging internal desires (440). Distraction, however, won't prove a strong enough antidote to the threat of these insistent emotional perceptions; as soon as "the prop of employment [is] withdrawn," Lucy experiences the greatest breakdown of her psychological barriers that the novel represents (157). Occupying one's working memory with innocuous perceptions and ideas is important to Brontë's depiction of psychological survival, but its ability to withstand adversarial pressures remains limited.

An inability to be indefinitely distracted is not the only challenge to actively controlling attention. While work memory's capacity to contain and prioritize stimuli can be salutary, it also creates a corresponding premium on cognitive space that creates problems of its own. One's ability to attend is already naturally limited, and there are benefits to constricting one's focus even further by focusing on one or two items to "effective[ly] concentrate[e]… processing resources" (Eriksen 227). People, in essence, think and act more efficiently the narrower the scope of their attentive focus; as Nilli Lavie states, "goal-directed behavior requires focusing attention on goal-relevant stimuli while ignoring irrelevant distractors" (339). In *Villette*, this dynamic results in a market economy where characters vie for recognition in the limited cognitive space of others. Attention becomes a site of competition, where the short-term and long-term goals of the individual help dictate which perceptions become victors (Wu 59, Knudsen 58, Lavie 342). This idea of attention as a competitive environment akin to a market also existed in the nineteenth century. William James called attention "the taking possession of the mind," as if it were something to be owned, and George Henry Lewes saw concentration as a matter of "*interest*," where only "the brightest point" is deemed valuable enough to be entered

into cognitive processes (403, *Problems* 186). With a limited number of resources at hand, the mind uses attention to maximize its efficiency by weeding out "distractors."

While Lucy finds the limited "economy" of her mental space useful in warding off unwanted perceptions, at least temporarily, the constraints of attentive consciousness do not work to her advantage when it comes to capturing the notice of others. Dr. John is the prime example of this problem. While a remarkably perceptive man in many way, who Lucy notes "at once felt by instinct, what no more coarsely constituted mind would have detected," his attentive powers always seem to be turned toward other women in Lucy's orbit (125). Lucy acknowledges that Dr. John "has had…much to do and think of," implying that his limited capacity for working memory is likely saturated at most times; and yet, while Lucy seems to accept Dr. John's overfull mental life, she smarts from his inability to apprehend her identity in not one but two different contexts (176). If it is true that "emotional arousal enhances attention" and "charged stimuli capture attention," then Lucy is at risk of never entering into the attentional radius of those around her (Chun 89). Lucy sees that others can, "in a moment's calculation, estimat[e] me at about the same fractional value," and this failure to excite "interest" causes her to lose their attention (59). By contrast, Graham responds like a "magnet" to the "interest" Ginevra generates, while Paulina is a character so replete in value that "what she borrowed [of affection], she, with interest, gave back" (150, 436). Lucy's ability to attract is not strong enough to surmount the interest that others are capable of producing. In the economy of mental space, she is therefore likely to lose.

II. Demanding Attention

Attention has restrictive capacities that act as a bulwark against stream of consciousness and help define one's mental space by prioritizing some perceptions over others. The limited nature of attentional focus, however, raises problems for moral behavior and individual happiness. In the same way that limited rationality, and its tendency to eschew certain kinds of information, led to the danger of missing relevant details in Dickens's novels, so too does attention create a potential for injurious insensibility. Physiologically, when the brain is searching for particular kinds of stimuli, neurons that are tuned for relevant functions experience increased "sensitivity," while "neurons tuned for different stimulus parameters often exhibit a decrease in sensitivity" (Knudsen 63). Consequently, the "influence of…distracting items is naturally attenuated," meaning that distractor stimuli run the risk of being invisible to the perceiver (Serences 686). Philosophers and psychologists even refer to this perceptual limitation as "attentional blindness" (Watzl 149). This appears to be what Lucy suffers from as she is consistently ignored by those around her, and it raises questions about whether the limitations of attention can be ethically as well as practically productive. As it happens, cognitive restriction in Brontë's novels actually helps individuals locate relevant sites of attention that lie outside of their immediate focus, a feat possible because of some of the unintended consequences that cognitive binding has over long periods of time.

While attention tends to determine the boundaries of one's perceptual field, there are factors that overcome the "blindness" produced by visual or psychological concentration. Though being an efficient perceiver involves using internal guidelines that "prioritize which perceptual information to encode and maintain in working memory, while suppressing distraction," there are times in which distractors force themselves on the individual's notice

(Chun 85). Attention can be "captured," and sometimes "signal strength," or the intensity of a potential distractor, can overpower intended objects of perception and thereby "enter [the] circuitry for working memory" (Knudsen 58). Alexander Bain observes that even when we are searching our environment for particular kinds of stimuli, "anything that strikes us with surprise…will receive the benefit of the excitement produced in the form of effective concentration" (*Senses* 352). Abrupt changes, he notes, have the ability to break through perceptual insensitivity. While stimuli that are persistent and uniform tend not to excite attention, the "unfamiliar" quickly brings about a cognitive "interest" that abiding perceptions lack (*Problems* 186). Though one's vision can be constrained by high-level cognitive priorities, stimuli that surprise are capable of disrupting this process, thereby hijacking attention. While such theories were likely alien to Brontë, they precisely match the way she describes characters reacting to surprising stimuli and provide a helpful framework for understanding how she saw attention working.

In *Villette*, perceptual hijacking partially accounts for why characters like M. Paul and Lucy experience such violent, but also meaningful, eruptions in their behavior. The relationship between a limited attentional radius and meaningful eruptions is metaphorically rendered early in the novel in the scene of Miss Marchmount's death. Before Miss Marchmount narrates her life history, which is remarkably similar to Lucy's eventual fate and therefore meaningful in framing her actions and decisions, Lucy notes how the storm outside emits "strange accents" that are marked by "a new tone—an accent keen, piercing, almost articulate to the ear" (38). Closed off in a small room, with a chaotic storm raging outside, Lucy picks up on a single auditory tone that penetrates through the tempest and the physical barriers that protect her from it. The tone significantly presages the eruption of "relevant" information from Miss Marchmount that ought

to warrant Lucy's attention. Over the course of the novel, this metaphorical dynamic becomes gradually literalized; Lucy often will be "interrupted" or "surprised" in enclosed spaces by individuals or stimuli that turn out to be essential points of future attention. The physical world begins to force perceptions into Lucy's attentional focus that need to break through her cognitive barriers and enter her rational thought processes.

The ability surprising stimuli have to break through cognitive barriers is shown most forcefully in M. Paul, who literally and metaphorically invades Lucy's otherwise sealed mental space. Lucy, after all, gives M. Paul a relatively small role in the beginning of the novel, since her attention is focused on Dr. John. Though this oversight marks M. Paul as a "distractor" likely to escape notice, he still manages to pierce Lucy's attentional radius like the "tone" that preceded Miss Marchmount's narrative. This ability is dramatically rendered on the day of Madame Beck's fete, where M. Paul's approach is described as a literal process of breaking down barriers. Though Lucy had been sitting in a confined room, placidly enjoying a book and the reverie it provided, she suddenly hears "the sharpest ring of the street-door bell to which that much-tried instrument had ever thrilled, snatch[ing] me back to consciousness" (132). Lucy acknowledges that there is no particular reason why the bell should be so affecting; "one hundred externs" are planned to arrive, and yet still "this particular peal had an accent of its own, which…startled me from my knee" (133). This initial auditory piercing is followed by M. Paul barreling his way toward Lucy's location. Moving "firm, fast, straight," M. Paul is described as striding "right through the vestibule, along the corridor, across carre, through first division, second division, grande sale," barging through each door between him and Lucy until "the closed door of the first classe—my sanctuary—offered no obstacle; it burst open." Lucy has been

"preoccupied" with Graham up to this point, but M. Paul emerges as perceptually forceful enough to demand access to her visual and psychological attentional field.

Though it might seem as if M. Paul's physical forcefulness is enough to disrupt Lucy's worldview and capture her notice, Brontë also emphasizes that his ability to act in less obtrusive, unexpected ways is equally powerful. When she is in the art gallery looking at Cleopatra, she describes "suddenly" feeling "a light tap [on] my shoulder," which turns out to be the unexpected touch of M. Paul (200). Later, when her attention is focused on Graham following an affecting conversation, she suddenly experiences "a sharp hiss pierc[ing] my ear on the other side," which reveals the unnoticed proximity of M. Paul; and yet, when she later expects this hiss to be repeated, she is surprised to find "nothing" (318, 320). Lucy eventually claims that "watch as I would, I could not detect the hour of his coming," implying that his unpredictability forces Lucy to devote attentional resources toward anticipating his movements (334). The persistence of M. Paul's surprising materializations ultimately affects the way that Lucy utilizes attention at all times. She feels so consistently forced to notice him at unforeseen times that she begins to perceive that he is everywhere and that "not a tear can be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand" (231). Later in the novel, when she starts to anticipate M. Paul's insistent company more reliably, Lucy notes that he has begun to inspire "a little thrill—a little sensation" in her that is "too quick and transient to be analyzed" (480). This bodily reaction to M. Paul, which precedes a cognitive explanation or analysis, is telling; it implies that M. Paul has broken down her barriers effectively enough to produce momentary sensations that are automatically admitted into her attentional zone. M. Paul consequently both gains a space in her mind and begins to bypass her perceptive filters.

M. Paul's ability to penetrate into Lucy's thinking is mirrored by her own unexpected social eruptions. The first time M. Paul successfully demands Lucy's attention at an unforeseen moment, she experiences one of her first demonstrations of "surprising," attention-grabbing behavior. Acting in the fete's play, she inhabits the role so "recklessly" that M. Paul states he "knew not what possessed [her]" (141). Lucy, however, surprises in a variety of contexts, presumably because her typical "sang-froid" allows her outbursts to command attention (95). When she first takes control of her classroom, she feels "baffled by mere undisciplined disaffection and wanton indocility," and she ends up throwing a young woman into a closet with such unexpected force that her class is "stilled for a moment" before recognizing her authority (83, 81). She seems proud at one point to have elicited a "look of some surprise" from Graham, to be credited with "eccentricity" by Mr. Home, and to be called "peculiar and so mysterious" by Ginevra (152, 285, 309). And, it is Lucy's unique ability to breach M. Paul's "will and law" that, at least partially, makes her stand out in his eyes (324).

Lucy's ability to surprise in this way allows her to counteract the disadvantage she finds in the "market" of mental space. Implying that "pedigree, social position, and recondite intellectual acquisition" serve as primary points of "interest" in the thoughts of others, Lucy creates a new kind of capital where attention arises more forcibly out of uniqueness, and thus scarcity, than in an abundance of "desirable" characteristics. "Beauty," she states, "flourish[es] round weakness"; unable to "bear a blast," the delicate refinements that make other women desirable can't withstand the force of an attraction like M. Paul's and can therefore only serve as short-term assets in a market that relies on memorability and persistence (314). Lucy seems to have learned this truth from childhood. Graham states that his young attraction to Paulina arose because she resembled a "perfect cabinet of oddities," making her a greater site of interest and

"amuse[ment]" than his mother or Lucy (27).[9] To be the focus of another's attention, one must create adequate interest to capture and retain it, and Brontë's invocation of the term "oddities" indicates that the source of such interest won't simply be physical charms. Recent studies of attention have argued that stimuli that are "unusual or extreme" or "unexpected" have the greatest salience in one's visual searches (Chun 81).[10] Lucy's use of her ability to surprise, therefore, creates capital for her in capturing the notice of others that she could not gain through physical allure.

Lucy and M. Paul's ability to "surprise" so effectively doesn't simply arise in spite of the cognitive limitation both enact, but rather directly from it. The effect of "abrupt onsets, emotionally salient stimuli, [and] the appearance of new objects" on attention are certainly significant, but it turns out that their ability to break through attentional blindness partly depends on how psychologically "focused" the individual is (Chun 80). While many studies have shown that "distracting" stimuli are less likely to be processed by individuals who are engaging with highly saturated perceptual fields, this isn't true when working memory is engaged to capacity (Lavie 345).[11] The more "relevant" perceptions the individual is holding in his mind for higher level reasoning at any time, the less energy he has to fend off distracting stimuli. In Lucy's case

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[9] It is interesting to note that Lucy's decision to delay revealing Dr. John's true identity seems to stem partly from her desire to deny him the power to surprise. Stating she ascertained his connection to her childhood "scarcely with surprise," Lucy seems to deflect attention from the drama of this discovery onto herself, making her the object of "interest" instead (174).

[10] In their summary of research in this field, Marvin M. Chun, Julie D. Golomb, and Nicholas B. Turk-Browne cite the following sources: Wolfe JM, Horowitz TS. 2004. What attributes guide the deployment of visual attention and how do they do it? *Nat. Rev. Neurosci.* 5495-501 and Itti L, Koch C. 2000. A saliency-based search mechanism for overt and covert shifts of visual attention. *Vis. Res.* 40:1489-506.

[11] Lavie notes that this dynamic seems to defy logic. Since individuals tasked with seeking out a particular stimulus in a saturated field tend to do better if there are *more*, rather than fewer, pieces of stimuli to perceive, one would think that a full working memory might be similarly "helpful." The studies run by his team, however, found the opposite; trying to maintain a packed working memory actually made study participants more likely to pick up on distracting stimuli.

particularly, by so carefully guarding what information and perceptions are allowed into her attentional focus, she creates an environment where the "abrupt onset" of M. Paul can have extreme affective force (Theeuwes 83). Considering Lucy's psychological antithesis, Ginevra, helps to highlight how an engaged mind becomes more susceptible to unexpectedly salient perceptions. Lax in her mental rigors—and consequently "*blasee"* about nearly everything—Ginevra experiences an emotional shallowness that interferes with her ability to be keenly perceptive (54). Lucy describes her "faculties" as "mere cobweb and gossamer," holding to nothing with particular strength, and she connects such laxity with seeing "nothing [as] sacred" (85, 217).[12] Ginevra's inability to apprehend the sacred—or sites of importance that stand in relief against the rest of the perceptual world—implies an overly democratic attitude toward sensory stimuli that attention and mental management combat. Only by imposing narrowness on one's vision can she perceive the affective relevance of people and objects that demand to be noticed. Furthermore, this benefit to cognitive restraint also sets the conditions for one to develop elements of "surprise" in one's own behavior.

Lucy's binding allows her to be "surprising" in ways that Ginevra fails to be, at least partially because of the effect it produces on stimuli that break *out* of her cognitive boundaries. As Lucy finds when she is under the influence of Madame Beck's administered drugs, it is only when her barriers are "pierced deeper than [she can] endure" on seeing M. Paul with Justine Marie that she is finally "made…to feel what defied suppression" (481). This is not a casual relaxation of cognitive control; it is a deep expression of the importance of what Lucy is experiencing that her feeling is capable of rupturing her controlled demeanor. Lucy has also just

[12] While Brontë never describes Ginevra as giving in to stream of consciousness, her tendency to give over to every whim of her fancy aligns her with the dangers associated with unbound cognition.

seen Graham, and though she experienced a moment of expansive realization about the nature of their relationship, no similar rupture of psychic restraint occurred despite the presence of naturally relaxing drugs. Rarely indulging her emotions confers on them an eruptive force at moments of importance, and consequently words can "come unbidden" when they are most necessary (483). Lucy temporarily loses "consciousness" at these moments of unforeseen expression, but she finds herself "fluent" nonetheless (486, 490).[13] This is particularly apparent at the end of the novel, when Lucy notes that the normally rigorous M. Paul does not "check" her, even though her verbal expansiveness "deserved strong reproof" (491). The force of Lucy's emotions, refined by the careful mental control she has exerted throughout, reveals the "reward" that Brontë sees attending rigorous mental management. Cognitive boundaries can and should be breached at moments, but only through restraint at all other times can such outbreaks be directed and effective. Love for Lucy ultimately possesses many of the same characteristics as a bound mind: to her, it should be "furnace-tried by pain, stamped by constancy, consolidated by affection…[and] submitted by intellect" (468). Only by restricting herself is she capable of perceiving and expressing such affection.

III. Moral Attention

So far I have considered how Lucy allows relevant information to enter into her thought processes even when her attention is focused elsewhere, thereby partially overcoming the myopia of concentrated vision. It remains unclear, however, how the novel's deployment of attention contributes to Lucy's ethical development. Most obviously, Brontë displays self-willed

[13] After all, if Lucy's mental control exists primarily to manage her internal perceptions, then breaks in it are likely to result in the release of emotional information she tries not to recognize. However, because Lucy is so guarded in her affective releases, she can place some faith in the essential or psychologically meaningful nature of these outbursts.

cognitive control and its employment of attention as the locus of moral behavior by contrasting it with external forms of authority. The Catholic Church is a primary site of investigation for this theory since Lucy immediately rejects the surveillance it enacts, most often embodied in Madame Beck. Kept in "distrustful restraint," the girls at Madame Beck's school become increasingly docile morally and intellectually (73). By shifting the burden of self-control from the students themselves onto teachers and the Church, Madame Beck has not ensured their ethical development, but instead created an environment where "heavy demand on the memory, the reason, the attention, [are] rejected point-blank" (83). When "surveillance" is seen as the "whole cure" for inward waywardness, failure is inevitable (94). While Lucy often struggles with the unpleasant demands of self-inflicted mental restraint, wondering whether her efforts are "futile and fruitless," she ultimately determines that surveying and judging one's actions "do[es] good" (321). Given that the Church and Madame Beck are involved in the conspiracy to impede Lucy's happiness at the end of the novel, and all at great benefit to themselves, ethical authority is unlikely to reside in external systems.

Self-regulating one's emotional and behavioral life not only keeps artificial forms of authority from replacing a genuine moral sense, but it also confers on moral truths the same revelatory, eruptive force other "essential" perceptions have. Like stimuli that force themselves on one's notice, revelation is the apprehension of truths—in this case moral ones—that emerge in spite of one's will and break through the otherwise bound space of cognition. Lucy is frequently represented as possessing such revelatory inspiration. Her decision to venture to Villette at all arises from an unbidden voice telling her to "Leave this wilderness…and go out hence" and later specifically to "Go to Villette" (44, 60). Imperatives like this have an ability to

surmount cognitive restrictions and direct the individual toward meaningful action, often with ethical underpinnings.[14]

Lucy's apprehension of the "correct" or ethical way to behave, however, doesn't always take the dramatic form of self-vocalization. As a moral realist, Lucy intuitively uncovers her obligations to others despite deceiving appearances, often using rational processes to aid her. When Graham begins to unfairly judge Ginevra, for instance, Lucy responds that she can "see where you are blind" and that his condemnations are too excessive to be "just" (219, 225). Later, combining reason with intuitive beliefs about moral good, Lucy's "sense of harmony" acknowledges that Graham and Paulina's marriage has its "charm" even when she "seal[s] my eyes and my ears" from it (468). Lucy's sense of ethics is able to break through her cognitive barriers in the same way that M. Paul barrels through them; the source of such "intrusion" is simply internal rather than external. Lucy's ethical revisions of her perceptions are in line with Michael S. Brady's argument in "Virtue, Emotion, and Attention," which states that strong emotional experiences can make the individual aware of the operations of his cognition in relation to evaluative reality (120). Since Lucy so rarely allows her emotions to overpower her cognitive processes, moments when they do activate her rational faculties are significant, causing her to arrive at more generous, ethical responses to others than her initial reactions would suggest.

This relationship between ethical reasoning and cognitive binding helps to account for the novel's eschewal of stream of consciousness, not just in Lucy's actions, but insofar as Brontë

[14] This is a technique Brontë employs most forcibly in *Jane Eyre*, where Jane's decision to apply as a governess arises after hours of "vain [mental] labour," producing a voice that "came quietly and naturally to my mind," telling her to advertise (73). Similarly, when Jane returns to Rochester, it is because of an unbidden voice exclaiming "Jane, Jane" from a place "impossible to know" (357).

herself refuses to indulge in the style. This narrative refusal to represent perceptual chaos is particularly evident on the nights when Lucy goes to the confessional and is drugged, both of which render her too weak to enforce her cognitive restraints. Rather than directly represent her chaotic thoughts, however, Brontë carefully conceals them under the ordered structure of Lucy's remembered narration. Lucy's narrative style, in fact, contributes to her cognitive restraint throughout, and it speaks to how literary form can promote an ethics of cognition. This ethics of style, however, has a difficult task at hand. It must, first and foremost, promote the values of the coherent and limited mindset that Brontë endorses; at the same time, though, it must try to overcome the limitations of attentional blindness by allowing the reader to observe relevant information that may lie beyond the scope of Lucy's bound narration. First-person narration, as it happens, allows Brontë to achieve both of these ideals.

Brontë hints at the challenges of representing Lucy's mind as coherent and limited—the first step in creating a narrative anchored in an ethical ideal of personhood—by beginning the text in a displaced childhood home. In Victorian fiction, and much nineteenth-century psychology, the child's relationship with her home was seen as contributing importantly to her cognitive development. Specifically, it was through the child's familiarity with the household and its objects that Victorians believed she first began to develop a sense of a distinct, yet grounded, self: of self-consciousness as opposed to simply consciousness. Walter Pater, who famously coined the phrase "wall of personality" in *The Renaissance*, narrates the process of becoming self-conscious in his short story "The Child in the House." Childhood, Pater notes, is a period where "inward and outward…[are] woven though each other into one inextricable fabric," where children possess a uniquely close relationship to the external world that makes "material objects…so large…[they] become a part" of the self (5, 3). It is in this environment

that children begin the process of "brain-building," which makes "each one of us, what we are," slowly shedding their identification with the home around them until they fully realize their separateness from it (5). William James reinforces this description of a fluid relationship between interiority and exteriority in childhood in *The Principles of Psychology*, when he states that "first spaces, times, things, qualities" experienced by children "appear…in [an] absolute way, as simple beings, neither in nor out of thought" (272). And this attitude was commonly depicted in nineteenth-century fiction as well. George Eliot, in *The Mill on the Floss*, identifies the objects of one's childhood home as "an extension of our own personality; we accepted and loved [them] as we accepted our own sense of existence and our own limbs"; Dickens similarly describes David Copperfield's movement toward self-consciousness as a process of locating the "first objects that…stand out by themselves from a confusion of things" (263, 13). Each of these authors, then, draws a parallel between self-consciousness and adulthood that is put in opposition to the fluid relationship with the external world that accompanies childhood.

This dynamic, of course, creates a problem for reading Lucy. Presumably, Lucy has an original childhood home, but it remains undescribed, and she appears displaced from it throughout *Villette*'s pages. What is clear early is that she identifies strongly with the Bretton household, an identification that seems in line with Eva Badowska's claim that *Villette* "suggests the bourgeois subject…comes into being through its relations with things" (1510). Lucy states that the "well-arranged furniture" and "quiet…atmosphere" of the Bretton house "pleased me well," and she even refers to it as a "fixed residence" (5). This sense of fittingness, however, fails to provide ground for the development of selfhood that occurs in legitimate childhood homes. Lucy ultimately relates to the space indirectly and uneasily, calling herself a "visitor" and quickly feeling unseated by the arrival of Paulina (7). If most children end up defining their

mental space, at least in part, in opposition to the grounding of a primary residence, then Lucy will always have to exert more effort to produce a "separate," cohesive mental life than others. Thus, potentially supplementing Lucy's already chaotic emotional life is a natural lack of structure for her mental space.[15] This disruption of Lucy's self-consciousness also creates potential problems for her development as a moral subject: if strong cognitive barriers allow the individual to perceive moral truths more clearly, as Brontë's use of revelation suggests, than Lucy is at an ethical disadvantage early in the text.

This potential incoherence in Lucy's natural cognitive structure contributes to her need for reflective narration. While she combats the problem of chaotic cognition on a daily basis using distraction and self-discipline, she ups the ante in her autobiographical narrative by using the first person to assert retrospectively an egoically distinct subject who rises above perceptual struggles. Remembering is another form of exercising attention, where "selecting a memory from competing memories [occurs at the cost] that unattended information may be missed" (Chun 75). After all, memories, like all perceptual information, "compete for recall" (85). Lucy's narrative, therefore, is another structure that contains and prioritizes mental information at her disposal. It is also a more direct expression of willed attention than many of the events she narrates, given that, as George Henry Lewes notes, remembering is a "volitional" process aided by reflection (*Problems* 187). Memory serves as another antidote to stream of

[15] Lucy's reaction to being reintroduced unexpectedly to objects from the Bretton home following her illness expresses how uneasily her identity resides with them. Lucy describes her consciousness as reviving with "fear," with the objects around her feeling "spectral" (165). Wondering why the Bretton household has come to "haunt" her, Lucy feels herself reawakening into a particular version of her identity that she must inhabit, but which seems to constrain her artificially, rather than naturally (169). The fact that Lucy's time in the Bretton household was during her "fourteenth year" is significant; while Lucy will not have developed a basic sense of self-consciousness in the home, her identity as a social being was solidified during her time there, away from the comforting, cohering presence of a more familiar household environment.

consciousness, allowing the speaker to recast moments of mental incoherence through the lens of later understanding. Since language itself can bind thought as effectively as mental action, by essentially "mapping" onto "semantic relations" the sensory realities a narrator experiences, Lucy's style reflects her cognitive priorities and needs (Posner 1917).

Lucy asserts that she can only truly be "Lucy Snowe" when "complicated, disquieting thoughts" are completely under her power (119). To maintain such control narratively, while still giving voice to the realism of her situation, Lucy references breaks in her cognitive restraint indirectly before strongly reasserting her objective triumph over them. Typically, when Lucy encounters situations that disturb her mental equilibrium, she expresses this disruption through short, declarative sentences that Margot Peters has identified as one of the defining marks of Brontë's style (41). When Lucy is emotionally wrought at the prospect of leaving the Bretton household, for instance, instead of voicing these emotions, she declares "I must go this morning: I must go directly; my trunk is packed and corded" (227). Lucy fears that indulging in descriptions of her complex state will confuse her resolve, and thus she limits herself to declarative statements about actions she will take. She also employs this style when describing the chaos of being drugged, where "Villette is one blaze; one broad illumination; the whole world seems abroad; moonlight and heaven are banished" (452). These staccato sentences force her thoughts to interlock in truncated bits, interrupting their flow by asserting straightforward, willed action.

To speak from the vantage of first-person experience both asserts a controlled site of narration and a subject coherent enough to be responsible and obligated in an ethical world. In this way, the perspective of Lucy's text goes a long way toward expressing the first requirement of ethical narration. However, if memory is selective like all forms of attention, then the very

mechanisms that lend Lucy's text structural and philosophic integrity can also undermine its moral capacities. Any form of selection implies hierarchy, making retrospection liable to expressing "judgments and convictions that [support] perversion or bias" (*Emotions* 381). Focusing one's memory to create a firm perspective requires deploying attention that interferes with "equal representation." Brontë, however, finds ways around this problem by imbedding details in her text that appear as random red herrings or outside the reader's attentional focus at first glance, but ultimately have deep narrative relevance. The inclusion of such details implies that curtailed sensory representations have the ability to promote the disempowered and overlooked, even when attention is not captured immediately by them.

Lucy's more democratic nods toward psychological confusion come in the form of strategically placed barrages of questions. These questions imply without asserting the abiding ambiguities that informed Lucy's decisions and may still occur to the reader. The second half of the novel, in fact, is littered with hundreds of questions to the implied reader, all of which gesture toward remaining doubts Lucy has about whether her narrative has ignored anything that should have entered her attentional focus. Some of these questions come directly from the implied reader ("'Why were you so glad to be friends with M. Paul?,' asks the reader, 'Had he not long been a friend to you? Had he not given proof on proof of a certain plurality in his feelings?" [409]), while others are posed reflectively ("Shall I yet see him before he goes? Will he bear me in mind? Does he purpose to come? Will this day—will the next hour bring him?" [479]). Even on the night Lucy is drugged, and she is tempted by every "sight, and…sound, call[ing] me down this alley and that," she still largely employs questions to express her mental wandering rather than blow-by-blow representations ("To what was I coming?...But where is the park?...where were they, and where was I?" [452]) (454). While Lucy often uses retrospection to situate

herself as an active agent in chaotic situations, she still democratically includes questions that bring her reader's attention to competing thoughts and impressions that she may be filtering out of her narrative. This allows her reader to expand her constricted textual focus without giving free range to all perceptual experience. Lucy's text, therefore, mirrors her own rational process: working with a constricted access to perceptual information based on rational and ethical needs, the individual can expand the information at her disposal by considering it from multiple angles. Excessive perceptual representation is only likely to mimic the dangers of unbound thinking; allowing free range of thought within a confined context can promote the more generous interpretations of characters like Graham and Pere Silas that Lucy herself develops.

IV. Attending to Violets

Lucy's journey in the novel can be partly described as a movement from distraction to vocation: from seeing her activities as drawing her attention away from a site of real importance to enacting a strong expression of psychological meaning. Lucy's narrative shows how mental management needn't prevent one from engaging fully and ethically with the world. Imperatives have a force that breaks through cognitive boundaries, and memory allows the individual to relive her filtered perceptions over and over, thereby developing new insights about them. This ability to expand from within the confines of a restrictive space is something that Lucy allows her reader as well. A novel, after all, is a filtered experience of reality; even if it weren't constructed solely from memory, it still can only give a limited range of information to the reader, and it is necessarily constrained by a beginning and ending. Lucy, however, imbeds subtle rewards for the reader who remembers, reconsiders, and re-experiences her narrative, suggesting that even carefully honed attentional radii are capable of startling new discoveries.

No narrative detail is more appropriate to this task than Lucy's inclusion of violets within the text. Many readers will not have noticed their presence at all, or if they do, they are likely simply to recall M. Paul's enigmatic claim toward the end of the novel of having given Lucy a bouquet of them "when we were still strangers" (365). And yet, whether through repeated reading or a strong deployment of attention, it is possible to uncover a narrative beneath Lucy's superficial one that tells the story of her courtship with M. Paul through their relationship with violets. As it happens, the reader had already been told about the incident M. Paul refers to earlier in the text. Lucy notes as she is going through the treasured items in her desk that one of them is "a certain little bunch of white violets that had once been silently presented to me by a stranger (a stranger to me, for we had never exchanged words), and which I had dried and kept for its sweet perfume in the folds of my dress" (119). The readers have no reason at this point to imagine the stranger in question is M. Paul, but if they looks back at other moments where violets are mentioned, the flowers almost always relate to him, even if obliquely. The first time violets arise is when Lucy, while walking behind the school, is almost struck by a missile that turns out to be a box filled with violets (110). Before realizing that the flowers are for Ginevra, Lucy reads that the box is addressed "Pour la robe grise" and contemplates how she had never "dreamt" of finding a lover (111). This is followed only a few pages later by her looking through her drawers to find the "violets" M. Paul had given her.

Other than when M. Paul explicitly asks Lucy about the violets, the two never directly talk about them. But they both do seem to be actively thinking about the meaning of the flowers at various other times. On M. Paul's birthday, Lucy notes that she is probably expected to give him a "small knot of violets," but she refuses to do so, claiming cut flowers are "things rootless and perishable" (337). Lucy's failure to present the violets, however, "vex[es]" M. Paul so

greatly that he assumes a "tragic" attitude (340). He deals with this dismay, however, by going to Lucy's room and "stirring up the contents" of her desk, which Lucy notes he is "on intimate terms with" (344, 343). While the reader's attention is not drawn to what M. Paul specifically is looking for, one can assume that he is aware she keeps the flowers in her desk, given how often he invades it—and that their quick reconciliation is, in part, due to the fact that they remain among her treasured items. The role violets play in symbolically binding their relationship is finally dramatized in the school that M. Paul sets up for Lucy before leaving the country. As she notes the many objects that meet her eyes upon entering the room, she finishes on "a glass filled with violets in water," noting that "the sweet violets lent fragrance" to the air (485). M. Paul has brought this tiny symbol of their growing affection full circle, offering the flowers as a reminder of his first sign of affection.

The drama of the violets in *Villette* is striking primarily because of how veiled it is. Lucy so frequently draws explicit attention to the ways in which she manipulates her reader, particularly in her decision to delay the revelation of Dr. John's identity, that the subtlety of the violet references seems almost ludicrously obscured. And yet, their presence highlights how attention is meant to be working in the text as a whole. Clearly, even in a limited worldview, information is constantly being filtered out of one's cognitive processes; when a detail defies logic or fails to fit into assumed patterns of behavior, the reader is likely to "forget" it. Only through re-reading, or reading excessively closely, is it possible to uncover the detail of the violets, and this draws our attention to how much meaning there is even within the curtailed quantity of information at one's disposal. The violets—like the green ribbon Lucy ties to her luggage—can stand out in relief from the background of perceptual bombardment only when we have been effectively primed to seek them out. Ethically reading is akin to ethically seeing: it is

not about the quantity of perceptual details one possesses, but rather how these details are integrated into thought processes. Though readers may be thrown by the late inclusion of M. Paul as a significant figure in Lucy's romantic life, it is still possible to shift their attentional radius to incorporate him. Binding, reading, and remembering, therefore, must all come together to inform the way that one deploys one's attention; if engaged in properly, they can lead to a more ethical form of interaction with an otherwise chaotic, contingent world.

Chapter 3

A "Soul-Wasting Struggle with Worldly Annoyance":

George Eliot, Irritation, and the Mechanics of Morality

I. A Girl Walks into a Train Station…

> The bell rang, some young men went by, ugly, insolent and hurried, and at the same time conscious of the impression they produced…The noisy men quieted down when she passed them on the platform, and one whispered something about her to another—something nasty to be sure. She mounted the high step and sat by herself in a compartment, on a soiled, once white, spring seat…an insolent conductor slammed the door and latched it. An ugly lady with a bustle (Anna mentally undressed the woman and was horrified by her hideousness) and a little girl, laughing unnaturally, ran by under the window.—Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 765

When Anna Karenina makes her fateful journey to Nizhni Novgorod train station, Leo Tolstoy constructs one of the most striking early uses of stream of consciousness in the nineteenth century. With Anna speaking in absolutes and claiming that "it's impossible" to alter her broken relationship with Vronksy because "all efforts have [already] been made," Tolstoy proceeds to chronicle the chaotic thoughts and impressions that strike her racing mind as she moves toward suicide (764). Anna's stream of consciousness is made up of both revelations about her emotional life and random perceptions from the external world. The latter, significantly, are almost all evocative of dinginess: passersby want "dirty ice cream"; "the smell of food" is "disgust[ing]"; others' thoughts are "nasty, to be sure"; a little girl is "ugly and affected"; a nearby couple clearly "hated each other"; and she is annoyed to see "a dirty, ugly muzhik" passing her window (760-6). As Anna's hopes about the future crumble, her ability to see the world objectively becomes correspondingly compromised; she finds herself "irritated" and "disgusted" in turns (762). Her "sudden" decision to commit suicide, therefore, occurs when she instinctively accepts this dirtied worldview as an objective representation of reality (768).

Surprisingly, this scene from *Anna Karenina* is mirrored almost exactly in Volume II of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. While it might seem arbitrary at first to consider these novels side-by-side, there are reasons for doing so. Both novels feature beautiful, tragic heroines; have

profound philosophical and cultural interests; and were published within a year of one another (1876 for *Daniel Deronda*; 1877 for *Anna Karenina*). Early in *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen Harleth, like Anna, finds herself at a train station, distraught over the collapse of her family's fortune and contemplating whether she can go on living. She arrives at the Railway Inn conscious that "men were hateful. Yes, men were hateful"; she is immediately disgusted by "the dirty plant in the waiting room, the dusty decanter of flat water" and later "a dirty old barouche" (194-5). With a vision tainted by "the dreary prospect…[of] her family troubles," Gwendolen reads everything around her as a dirtied reflection of her pessimistic thoughts, even identifying the "innocent" railway official as "intolerable" simply because of "the cast of his eye." This ugliness overwhelms Gwendolen to the point where she questions "What was the good of living in the midst of hardships, ugliness, and humiliation?" (195). Gwendolen, it seems, is in much the same hopeless, desperate position as Anna Karenina when she arrives at the train station; Gwendolen, however, does not end her life there.

What gives Gwendolen the ability to cope with the tragic destruction of her worldview in ways that Anna cannot? Why does Gwendolen ultimately determine not "to submit, and let misfortune do what it would with her" when Anna seems incapable of such a perspective? While there are certainly many significant differences between Tolstoy's and Eliot's narratives that contribute to their heroines' separate endings, a clue to the distinction appears to reside in the divergent styles that the authors use to portray their protagonists' declining mental state. Eliot, unlike Tolstoy, never launches into stream of consciousness to describe the confusion of Gwendolen's thoughts. Refusing to allow Gwendolen's troubled mindset to overtake her narrative, Eliot instead steps back and offers a small analysis of her situation in the middle of Gwendolen's musings:

> Contemptible details these, to make part of a history; yet the turn of most lives is hardly to be accounted for without them. They are continually entering with cumulative force into a mood until it gets the mass and momentum of a theory or a motive. Even philosophy is not quite free from such determining influences; and to be dropt solitary at an ugly irrelevant-looking spot with a sense of no income on the mind, might well prompt a man to discouraging speculation on the origin of things and the reason of a world where a subtle thinker found himself so badly off. (196)

Gwendolen's petty thoughts are transfigured when Eliot places them in the light of philosophical inquiry. Stepping back from the overwhelming "mood" Gwendolen finds herself in, Eliot narratively contains her heroine's tainted perceptions by offering perspective on them even as they occur. This containment of negative affect, furthermore, turns out to be exactly what Gwendolen herself enacts to overcome her despair. She first constructs a "ruling vision" that entails going abroad with her family, giving her an active plan for combating her grief, and then she mitigates her remaining pain by focusing her sorrow, albeit temporarily, upon her "mother's feeling" (195-6). Neither Eliot nor Gwendolen herself will allow the unstructured chaos of mental despair to overtake her active role in containing it.

Eliot's treatment of Gwendolen's situation is evocative of a greater trend in her novels and short stories. Where Tolstoy uses stream of consciousness to portray Anna's disordered state of mind with as much fidelity to detail as possible, Eliot instead actively combats representations of unstructured thinking in her narratives.[1] This commitment to opposing

[1] In addition to her treatment of Gwendolen, Eliot's aversion to directly representing unprincipled thinking can be seen in Maggie Tulliver's sensorily rich boat trip with Stephen Guest in *The Mill on the Floss*, in which their "enchanted haze" creates a space where "thought did not belong" and ethical action is duly compromised (487). Giving over to cognitive laxness is also invalidated in *Daniel Deronda* through Grandcourt's tendency toward lax thinking, and "The Lifted Veil" is in many ways a cautionary tale about the dangers of seeing another's "stream" of unfiltered thoughts. While it might seem that a more fluid relationship with the external world and sensory experience would open up new avenues for sympathetic engagement (through seeing and experiencing more, the individual could conceivably come closer to understanding the minds of others), Eliot's decision to align depictions of stream of

unbound cognition, however, invites scrutiny. If any nineteenth-century author was suited to depicting stream of consciousness in her narration, it was George Eliot. She knew the psychological theories behind it; the development of the phrase itself has even been credited to her partner, George Henry Lewes.[2] Eliot's commitment to psychological realism is apparent, and yet, at moments when fluid consciousness should be represented, she acknowledges its presence while refusing to depict it. Instead, she steps back and offers a philosophical perspective the character could not possess at the time.

The motive for this narrative elision appears both practical and ethical. In giving free rein to her thoughts, whether intentionally or because of mental illness, Anna loses the ability to make sound decisions and to consider how her actions impinge on others. Like Dickens and Brontë, Eliot refuses to represent unbound, fluid cognition because its presence is most palpable at moments of ethical compromise. And yet, Eliot is a helpful author to look to when interrogating representations of psychological restriction because she does not engage uncritically with processes of mental control. The need to restrain perceptive activity—filtering one's immediate perceptions through the lens of long-term goals—in order to make rational, ethical decisions appears at odds with the capacious, outward-reaching requirements of sympathetic engagement that are central to her literary project.[3] If Eliot is acknowledging that

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consciousness with ethically compromised characters and situations signals her concern about the morality of such cognition.

[2] Eliot was living with Lewes and was in the process of writing *The Mill on the Floss* when he developed his first articulation of stream of consciousness; he would later use the phrase explicitly in *Problems of Life and Mind* (Rylance 12-3).

[3] Eliot even uses water imagery to describe the movement of sympathy in *Middlemarch*, particularly in the final scene of mutual understanding between Dorothea and Rosamond, thus making it appear more metaphorically compatible with stream of consciousness than structured thought. In this scene, as in others, however, her characters appear able to pull themselves from the "shipwreck" of emotions they feel only because of Dorothea's predetermined, rational

consciously structuring one's thoughts and perceptions has ethical value, therefore, then she must also provide a mechanism for sympathetically revising the terms of such structures to accommodate the unexpected needs of others. As it happens, this appears to be the unusual role annoyance plays in *Middlemarch*. Often an overlooked affect in the text, annoyance plays a crucial role in Eliot's ethical vision, serving as a somatic warning sign that one's thinking has become *too* principled, and therefore requires sympathetic revision. Through analyzing Eliot's depiction of annoyance, therefore, it becomes possible to see how cognitive control and sympathy interact and mutually contribute to the individual's ethical development.

II. The Aesthetics of Annoyance

The plot of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* does not begin as we might expect. Despite the lofty tone of the novel's "Preface" and its evocation of the ideals of sympathy and heroic kindness, the first scene of action is a pedestrian "little explosion" between Dorothea and Celia over wearing jewels (14). Why, in a book invested in exploring the significance of self-sacrifice, are we first met with a squabble between two sisters? As it happens, characters in *Middlemarch* are portrayed as unflatteringly "irritated," "annoyed," "nettled," or "perturbed" over 125 times, and often at key moments of decision and crisis. Surprisingly, one of the primary subjects of this annoyance in the first half of the novel is Dorothea. After her first scene of irritation with Celia, Dorothea's "annoyance" quickly emerges in her interactions with Mr. Brooke, Sir James, and, soon after her marriage, with Casaubon. Dorothea finds herself caught in "annoyance" or "irritation" with Mr. Brooke when he taunts "her ignorance of political economy" or suggests Sir James as a desirable suitor (17, 37); with Sir James when he "solicit[s] her attention" and when

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attempt to "master herself with the thought that this might be the turning point in three lives" and to "resolve" herself to subordinating her own desires to Rosamond's needs (*MM* 749, 742, 747).

he provides an "interruption" to her afternoon walk to give her a dog (17, 27); and with Casaubon when he suggests Dorothea bring Celia as a companion on their honeymoon ("The words 'I should feel more at liberty' grated on Dorothea…she coloured from annoyance") and in their many "small explosions" in Rome (80, 189). If Dorothea is meant to be the moral center of Eliot's novel, then why is she so consistently portrayed as falling victim to an emotion as petty as annoyance?

Conflict is clearly an important impediment to sympathetic engagement, but what is striking about these moments of tension is that they convey Dorothea's seemingly unremarkable annoyance, rather than forceful anger, with those around her; and if annoyance is to count as destructive conflict, it isn't immediately clear how it acquires damaging power. Irritation, it turns out, is a unique category of experience because it simultaneously references an unpleasant physical *and* mental experience, and it therefore can be characterized as both a sensation and an emotion. Physiologically, annoyance often occurs when slight impediments arise in one's perceptual field, and though it does not possess an identifiable neurobiological difference from anger, annoyance's psychological effects can be significant even when its outward manifestations are imperceptible.[4] Often seeming outside the control of the individual, feelings of annoyance express the immediate, unconscious reaction of the mind when interior expectations and exterior circumstances jar. Ray Jackendoff, in his recent analysis of rational thinking and linguistic structures in *A User's Guide to Thought and Meaning*, has suggested that

[4] There is evidence that part of the brain that is activated when one is annoyed—the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex—functions as a meeting place between automatic processes and more conscious ones (Denson, Thomas F., "The Angry Brain: Neural Correlates of Anger, Angry Rumination, and Aggressive Personality," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 21.4 (2009): 734). In other words, annoyance forces the individual to become conscious of whatever the source of unpleasantness is, whether it originates externally (perception of stimuli) or internally (an unconscious concern). Moments of annoyance, therefore, may occur when individuals are most actively interrogating the limits of their own conscious experience.

such moments of disjunction between interior and exterior might be one of the few ways an individual can identify potentially damaging mental insularity. Through searching for "cues" that "our physical and social environment…conflict[s] with our convictions," we can begin to uncover aspects of our mental life that are at odds with perceived realities (Jackendoff 226). Thus, while feelings of annoyance are often reflexive, they can nonetheless activate rational processes by serving as a physical "cue" that one's consciousness is encountering meaningful resistance. This association between irritation and the need for mental reconstruction, furthermore, offers a practical solution to one of the major, unanswered issues raised by work on the importance of automatic thinking in Victorian literature: how, and when, can an individual apprehend that his thought processes must be altered if so many of them occur on an unconscious level?[5] Dorothea's association with annoyance, in this reading, marks her as a character who is painfully "cued" to the fact that her mental life is jarringly out of synch with her environment.

II.a. Cognitive Binding and Irritation

Critically, irritation has been a subject of interest in several theories of emotion, where it is often read as an incipient form of anger. In *The Vehement Passions*, Philip Fisher connects anger with a will that has been "irritated," locating its source in "events that have not been willed" and are perceived as "contrary to what the will knows itself to want" (164). Anger is

[5] In *Thinking Without Thinking*, Vanessa Ryan offers an in-depth analysis of how habit and mental training were seen by nineteenth-century physiologists as a potential "corrective" to damaging unconscious thinking. While Ryan convincingly shows that such concerns are at work in *Daniel Deronda*, she does not consider *how* exactly individuals recognize the need for self-revision in a world of automatic mental responses unless the individual is, as occurs with Gwendolen, explicitly told by another person that such revision is necessary. This study, by contrast, will consider how perceptual experiences—like annoyance—can shock a person out of his or her mental habits, activating a reasoned reconsideration of his or her actions and environment.

thus an almost physical encounter between "*the radius of the will*" and external, abrasive resistance (160). Sianne Ngai nuances this argument in *Ugly Feelings* by focusing on irritation's anemic effect on the will when compared with anger. Connecting irritation with "flatness or ongoingness," Ngai views it as a marker for "suspended agency" that sees no immediate or feasible avenue for reprieve (7, 1). Annoyance emerges when an individual has "indeterminate or undifferentiated objects" that are producing physical or psychological discomfort, and this vagueness interferes with the individual's ability to act through inhibiting the "setting and realizing [of] clearly definable goals" (26, 11). Irritation, in this case, does not simply precede anger, but it indicates a disempowered structural and political relationship with one's environment.

Ngai goes on to claim that persistent irritation is a sign of mental laxness or lethargy; she asserts that irritation is overlooked artistically because "the cultural canon itself seems to prefer higher passions and emotions—as if minor or ugly feelings are not capable of producing 'major' works" (11). Eliot, however, gives the lie to any theory that would see "annoyance" as a less intense emotion than anger. By depicting irritation as a fundamental emotion expressed by nearly all her characters, she suggests that annoyance does not involve an absence of clearly defined goals, but rather an *over*-determination of them. After all, if irritation is the cognitive and somatic apprehension that a character's expectations are not finding external expression, then the more defined those expectations are, the greater the susceptibility to annoyance. Part of Eliot's sympathetic project, therefore, is to discover when the result of annoyance should be self-renegotiation and when a reinforcement of a character's goals is necessary. Consequently, a

character's changing susceptibility to irritation can be used as a marker for alternations in her "stance" on an external, resistant world.[6]

Fisher's connection between anger and the radius of the will, and Ngai's evocation of the suspended agency that accompanies irritation, set the groundwork for considering how annoyance relates to consciousness and its restriction. In the case of *Middlemarch*, irritation emerges most often in characters who align themselves with a particular set of emotional or intellectual aspirations and who filter their access to people and experiences accordingly. Such cognitive binding results in individuals who are only capable of seeing the world, and the people within it, insofar as they supplement or detract from their goals or ideals. This can be seen clearly enough in how Bulstrode's socio-economic convictions and Lydgate's medical aspirations affect their psyches, but it also emerges in Dorothea, whose otherwise ardent character is bound by "the intensity of her religious disposition" (26). While this chosen form of binding is supplemented by the external bonds of "narrow teaching" and a "hemmed in…social

[6] My decision to analyze annoyance, as opposed to anger, is also an attempt to view the relationship between psychological binding and ethical behavior outside the context of sexual desire. Several studies, including Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* and John Kucich's *Repression in Victorian Fiction*, have considered how self-abnegation in Victorian novels works as a vehicle for the development of the desiring subject. In these studies, when an individual encounters resistance from the external world, that individual is seen as internalizing that resistance to create new forms of desire through self-negation (whether that end result is spun negatively, as it is in Foucault, or positively, as Kucich attempts to do). By focusing on annoyance, however, I hope to show the ways in which desire cannot always be an adequate interpretation of the responses characters develop to external resistance. True annoyance, unlike anger, lacks the emotional power to be converted effectively into desire; it can't be flipped from repulsion to attraction by sheer force of energy. Tinged with disgust, the enervated, unpleasant emotions aroused by genuine irritation seem incapable of *producing* anything—desire or anger included—and this is precisely why annoyance appears such a useful source of investigation for Eliot. After all, it is not until Dorothea is able to feel an unexpected and "frightening" "shock of *repulsion* from her departed husband" that she is able to recognize "a sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw" (my italics, 461). Annoyance seems to lack the energy to bring about such a result, and thus it can be analyzed—for the purposes of this argument—as separate from the many emotions associated in Eliot with creating sexual desire.

life," Dorothea nevertheless finds her greatest moments of annoyance when the lofty ideals of her internal world are frustrated by the demands of another individual. This connection between cognitive restriction and irritation implies two central and yet abstract principles: that binding oneself to a particular worldview lends a material hardness to consciousness, and that consciousness itself is capable of somatically apprehending its encounters with external resistance.[7]

Physically, the connection between materiality and irritation is fundamental. By definition, irritation arises in the encounter between two solid objects in which one or both of those objects senses with pain the resistance of the other's solidity. John Locke, in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, imagines solidity as defined by the "utter exclusion of other bodies out of the space [the object] possesses," and he defines a hard object as one that "will put us to pain sooner than change figure by the pressure of any part of our bodies" (101). By extension, in order for a character to become psychologically irritated, she must have preconceptions and emotional responses so strongly formed that they resemble a solid entity, and then she must encounter painful resistance from a character or situation that is perceived as equally immovable. Eliot displays a drama of precisely this kind in the first scene of her novel, in which Dorothea's "Puritanic" superiority in rejecting her mother's jewels is felt by Celia as a "little hurt" exercised against her "blond flesh" (14). Both sisters emerge from this argument

[7] Will Ladislaw initially appears the counterargument to this trend. Since he is consistently annoyed in the novel *and* plagued by an absence of purpose, it can be difficult to see how his actions contribute to this model. Will, however, while lacking a consistent profession or clearly defined goal over the course of the novel, still commits himself almost monomaniacally to the causes he supports. His love for Dorothea, his sense of pride in his birth, and his aesthetic convictions all hold the force of a determined worldview, even if they don't cohere into a particular ideology. Unsurprisingly, nearly all of Will's moments of irritation are inspired by a challenge to one of these personal convictions.

pained, with neither ultimately yielding to the other's view.[8] Consciousness, therefore, is not only capable of exerting immoveable force onto others, but also of somatically feeling when that force is rebuked.

Dorothea's rejection of her mother's jewels, in fact, brings to the fore the implicit connection Eliot often makes between sensory irritation (perceiving unwanted stimuli) and conceptual irritation (perceiving unwanted ideas). For each of Eliot's significantly "irritated" characters, a source of perceptual annoyance—usually a sound or image that is meant to be filtered out of conscious perception—serves as a precursor to conceptual forms of irritation that develop later, implying that annoyance evolves from an initial somatic experience into an intellectual perception of discomfort. In Dorothea's case, the threat posed by jewels emerges in the beauty she unexpectedly perceives in their physical, synaesthetic properties: in the "strange…d[eep] colours that seem to penetrate one, like scents" (13). Her rejection of aesthetic pleasure finds momentary flexibility when she decides to keep the emeralds, but it leads to an even stronger manifestation of irritation when Celia suggests Dorothea "wear them in company." In essence, Dorothea's immediate, unwanted sensory pleasure is quickly replaced by a conceptual annoyance. For Dorothea, as well as Bulstrode and Lydgate, the severest instances of irritation emerge when stimuli that she expects to be "filtered out" of conscious experience are suddenly impinging on her thoughts. We see this same pattern in Lydgate's unwelcome inundation with the physical paper of bills, representing quotidian concerns he has deemed himself above, and Bulstrode's encounter with Raffles, whom Eliot describes as an irritating "black spot" in the field of Bulstrode's vision (499). Unlike a character's unperceived "blind

[8] In the end, the situation is remedied by an act of misdirection (Dorothea calls Kitty to look at her plans, which Kitty reads as "Dorothea [seeing] that she had been in the wrong") rather than direct amelioration (14).

spots," these perceptual annoyances are sensory experiences that refuse to escape attention, thereby troubling the long-held convictions of the characters who would seek to filter out such realities from their mental space.

By displaying how irritation can be a symptom of mental inflexibility with the capacity to create pain, Eliot reveals annoyance to be one of the most harmful emotions in *Middlemarch*. While lacking filters for cognitive experience leaves the individual susceptible to damaging momentary impulses, over-determining the content of perception presents its own dangers through creating a susceptibility to irritation. And yet, irritation's dangers also allow it to be a valuable sign. Somatically, feelings of annoyance are often interpreted as evolutionary signals of danger to an organism; eating chili peppers, for instance, causes discomfort because excessive amounts of it can lead to serious damage.[9] Thus, moments of irritation in *Middlemarch* can be seen as points of conflict in which the mind is in some way perceiving that it is about to hurt, or be hurt by, another consciousness. These moments can, if heeded properly, nudge the individual out of complacency and into concentrated psychological revision. In the next section, I will investigate annoyance and its effects on three different characters—Dorothea, Bulstrode, and Lydgate—and the challenges that irritation presents to their ability to engage in sympathy. Whether a character succumbs to these challenges or uses them to develop a more sensitive worldview depends on his or her ability to read annoyance as a "cue" for cognitive redefinition. The problems Eliot portrays attending irritation include: 1) its ability to physically harm, 2) its production of a calloused perspective, and 3) its dissipation of energy that could be put to better ends. The physical effects of each of these conditions are best described by theories from the

[9] Palca, Joe, and Flora Lichtman. *Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011): 237; and Trevsani, M., et al. "4-Hydroxynonenal, an Endogenous Aldehyde, Causes Pain and Neurogenic Inflammation through Activation of the Irritant Receptor TRPA1," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104 (2007): 13519.

natural sciences,[10] and they consistently illustrate the profound somatic effects that both insufficient and overly-rigid mental control can produce.

II.b. The Physics of Irritation

Dorothea's recurrent irritation at the beginning of *Middlemarch* appears to contradict Eliot's many descriptions of her as psychologically defined by "vistas"; the structured, potentially closed mindset associated with annoyance seems to have few overlaps with this image of a capacious consciousness, fluid in its intellectual and spiritual possibilities (183). Although images of Dorothea's mental space are almost always metaphorically "open," her "insistence on regulating life according to notions" of right behavior betrays that her mind has never been as receptive as its capacities allowed (9). Dorothea views her religious commitment as an ethical structure that guides her behavior and interprets her experiences, filtering her conscious exposure to particular ideas and stimuli. And her filter seems to be working, considering the blind spots that emerge in her vision. While she becomes irritated early in the novel by Celia's entreaties to wear jewels, Chettam's intrusions, and Mr. Brooke's opinions, she fails to perceive the ways in which Casaubon annoys. This lapse in sensory apprehension is made clear by Celia when she betrays her own annoyance at how Casaubon "scrapes his spoon" or "always blinks before he speaks," auditory and visual stimuli that have clearly grated on her nerves (45). Dorothea, however, seems unaware of these behavioral tics, responding to Celia dismissively with "pray don't make any more observations of that kind." Though Dorothea often feels annoyance, she only does so when the source of irritating stimuli conflicts with her

[10] Given the number of studies that have thoroughly explored Eliot's knowledge of and exchanges with the nineteenth-century scientific community (see Shuttleworth, Ryan, Rylance, and Davis), Eliot's ability to converse intelligently on relevant psychological and physiological theories contemporary with *Middlemarch* is treated here as a given.

broader conceptual goals. Since Casaubon is Dorothea's imagined embodiment of the intellectual "good," his actions fail to create annoyance as they sail through her cognitive filters.

Of course, Casaubon too eventually begins to annoy Dorothea as it becomes clear that he does not represent the ideal she had envisioned. As Dorothea becomes increasingly irritated, her ethical stance appears duly compromised. In general, Dorothea's displays of irritation implicate her in an unsettling kind of intellectual violence, in which her attempts to enforce her "religious disposition" impinge on those around her like "spilt needles, making one afraid of treading, or sitting down, or even eating" (26, 20). Annoyance, it turns out, can often work in two directions. Dorothea's irritation not only negatively affects her own psychology, but it also pains those at whom it is directed. This mutual violence is consistent with the very concept of irritation; if consciousness is a feeling organ, which becomes irritated when it encounters resistance in the external world, then it also is capable of jarring against, and thus injuring, other more tender psyches. Dorothea's later mistreatment by Casaubon often overshadows her early scenes of annoyance with Celia, Chettam, and Brooke, but they display a juvenile insensitivity to the feelings of others that is important in her later psychological development toward sympathy. Her marriage to Casaubon, therefore, marks a turning point in the novel, where the injury caused by irritation is not simply inflicted, but also acutely felt by her.

Casaubon turns out to be even more susceptible to annoyance than Dorothea, finding her words "cutting and irritating" and viewing her as a "cruel outward accuser…in the shape of a wife" (188). Herbert Spencer notes in *The Principle of Ethics* that the "most sensitive" are those whose "mental powers are the highest," drawing a direct connection between "men of genius" and "the general irritability characteristic of them" (177). Claiming that "men with overwrought brains are irritated in unusual degrees by annoyances, both physical and moral," he likens the

general discomfort of the intellectually gifted with "Limbs over-worn by prolonged exertion, [which] cannot without aching perform acts which would at other times cause no appreciable feeling. After reading continuously for many hours, even strong eyes begin to smart" (*Ethics* 177-8). It is hardly coincidental, therefore, that the "disease" Casaubon ultimately contracts is one that requires him to be "careful against mental agitations of all kinds," so that Dorothea concludes she must remove "whatever might have been the sources of his annoyance…he must, if possible, not be annoyed again" (271, 272). As a character whose "exaggerated sensitiveness" causes him to see Dorothea's comments as "cruel and unjust" judgments—and to express irritation at every encounter he has with Will—Casaubon expresses the very real physical injury that can result from the constant pressure of annoyance (188). Irritation can wear away at the individual physically and emotionally, and this erosion works in direct opposition to the sustaining power of sympathy that Dorothea values.

Because Dorothea's perception that she must try her best not to "annoy" Casaubon results in her committing herself to a role of "resolved submission" within their marriage, she is not portrayed as annoyed or irritated again in the novel (400). While the sustainability of this "resolved submission" can certainly be debated, Dorothea's decision to acquiesce whenever she encounters resistance—a challenge dramatized in Casaubon's final request that she bind herself to his unarticulated dying "wishes"—marks an ethical achievement in the novel and indicates a new flexibility in Dorothea's mental life (449). Eliot treats Dorothea's active decision not to press her own considerations onto her husband's fragile psyche as morally superior to her earlier religious convictions. This ethical shift involves not only the softening of Dorothea's previously inflexible sense of "the right," but also an attempt to understand the "equivalent centre of self" that Casaubon possesses (198). Significantly, Eliot describes Dorothea's apprehension of

Casaubon's psychological and emotional integrity as akin to a new kind of perception. Replacing "reflection" with "feeling," Dorothea finds that the alleviation of irritation involves moving toward "the directness of sense" and away from abstract worldviews and "idea[s]." Another psychology must be recognized as having the immediacy and persistence of a physical reality so primal that it mirrors "the solidity of objects." Discovering Casaubon's own unique consciousness is thus akin to uncovering a previously unperceived object: there all along, irritation and "small explosions" have led Dorothea to sense Casaubon's material psychological presence and to respect it as she would any body susceptible to pain. Responsive "to anything that gave her an opportunity for active sympathy," Dorothea emerges as an early victor over irritation, despite her husband's inability to overcome its effects (191).

Though Casaubon's death in Book V marks the end of Dorothea's "annoyance," that same book represents mere pages later the beginning of Bulstrode's trials with irritation when Raffles arrives in Middlemarch. Superficially, there appears to be no character whose consciousness is more restricted that Bulstrode's. Structuring his life based on the "regiment" of his religious convictions, Bulstrode's ethical inflexibility toward those around him finds its greatest test in Raffles, who arrives with the "chief intention…[of] annoy[ing] Bulstrode" (119, 495). In fact, while Bulstrode's later violence toward Raffles is motivated by anger, a steady stream of annoyances precedes it, facilitating his transition from equanimity to outrage. Annoyance's ability to facilitate anger is essential, since Eliot portrays Bulstrode's consciousness as nearly impossible to penetrate until irritation emerges. Functioning like a closed system, Bulstrode's mind justifies his every action in accordance with his religious life, creating a "padding [of]…moral sensibility" that bends solely to accommodate his own actions (579). While one might imagine that this "padding" would soften Bulstrode's behavior toward others,

Eliot makes clear that this is not the case when, during his pleas on behalf of Fred, Mr. Vincy faults Bulstrode's religious dogmatism because "Life wants padding" (119). The padding Vincy refers to is not simply material, but also moral; flexibility in judgment has only been applied to Bulstrode's own actions, and not those of others. Bulstrode's particular brand of cognitive restriction has led to a bizarre paradox: the rigidity of his dogmatic views has led to a moral "padding" that softens self-reflective ethical judgments, but which simultaneously deadens his ability to perceive appeals by others for similar clemency.

Bulstrode's ability to maintain such cognitive dissonance reveals a second problem of irritation that emerges directly from mental restraint: callousness. Spencer again proves a useful voice in connecting this psychological habit with a physical reality: in contrast to the extreme sensitivity of "men of genius," who often smart under the effects of irritation, he claims that in "well-toned tissues" a "friction" that would "blister…tender skin…does not even redden a coarse one" (*Ethics* 176). While Spencer goes on to make frightening claims of racial and class difference in levels of sensitivity, he does draw an essential connection between the physical fact of friction and the ways in which organic matter responds to it: "insensitive" organs are unlikely to even perceive irritating stimulants over time.

George Henry Lewes takes the claim one step further when he notes that while "friction will thin and wear away a dead man's body," it actually results in "the thickening of the living" (*Problems* 14). Rather than take this organic fact to indicate that life "resists mechanical friction," Lewes instead insists that "organic activity repairs the waste of tissue" that results from irritation. Lewes focuses on the manner in which the "waste" caused by irritated friction can be repaired by the thickening of one's defenses, much as Bulstrode compensates for the irritation of his ideological stance by creating a mass of insensitive moral "padding." Fortunately, Spencer

makes explicit the connection between physical friction and psychological callousness in his *Principles of Psychology*, when he states that "We know that a sensitive skin frayed by much friction, becomes thickened and callous if the friction is often repeated; and we know that use eventually makes easy the endurance of a misfortune that seemed at first too great to bear…Where circumstances are such as frequently excite a sympathetic pain, that pain will become less and less excitable sympathetically by those circumstances—there will result in that direction a moral callousness" (571-2). Spencer marks this gradual movement toward moral callousness as a generally positive one: it is highly functional, allowing surgeons to perform procedures that they would otherwise shrink from in sympathetic pain. However, given that Eliot praises her own surgeon Lydgate for the "abundant kindness of his heart" and a sensitive voice that can "bec[ome] very low and gentle at the right moments," it is clear that developing such callousness is not valued in *Middlemarch* (144, 116).

Bulstrode's studied callousness—his obdurate commitment to seeing others' troubles as the righteous expression of God's judgment—is radically shaken as soon as Raffles arrives in Middlemarch with the intention of "invent[ing] annoyances" for him (498). Emerging with "unmanageable solidity," Raffles is the only figure in Bulstrode's world who can create psychological resistance as strong as his own, and therefore he is the first surface "hard" enough to annoy Bulstrode's otherwise unshakeable exterior (492). Bulstrode, in fact, even expresses the uncomfortable resistance he feels in Raffles by using images of natural obstacles, referring to him as "a…stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" (493). While Bulstrode claims that he is "not in any way bound" to Raffles and that "the law has no hold on me," he still finds his path obstructed by the inescapable reality of Raffles's being, and by Raffles's very real ability to irritate Bulstrode with the threat of exposure (497). Beyond ethical insensibility, Bulstrode's

movement from annoyance to murderous anger reveals a further problem with callousness: it cannot be maintained indefinitely. Just as each individual has blind spots, so too will areas of weakness emerge in even the most rigid cognitive systems. Irritation, in essence, is inevitable, and the tendency to respond to such irritation with callousness only confuses one's moral compass when such weak spots are revealed. This helps to explain Bulstrode's extreme reaction when he becomes "irritated at the persistent life" of Raffles even in illness; used to emotional insensibility and terrified of his ongoing vulnerability, Bulstrode commits himself to murdering the source of his annoyance (665). Through Bulstrode, Eliot demonstrates the problem of excessive mental restriction that reveals itself through irritation: that "general doctrine" is capable of "eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men" (582). Bulstrode has failed to use his experience of annoyance as a "cue" that he must revise his worldview in order to avoid misguided rationalization. Unlike Dorothea, therefore, he succumbs to his own persistent insensitivity.

While Bulstrode's encounter with annoyance is perhaps *Middlemarch*'s most dramatic, Lydgate emerges as its most eloquent exploration of irritation. Lydgate begins the novel as a character who is rarely annoyed or anxious. Eliot draws attention to this when she states that Lydgate is "abrupt but not irritable" after one of his encounters with the perpetually annoyed Will (436). Lydgate's ability to maintain complete equanimity after his first introduction to Rosamond—saying he "felt no agitation" as he "dwelt on her image"—displays the extent to which he refuses to allow external influences to ruffle his calm purpose (153). Lydgate avoids irritation partially because of his structural relationship with the community around him; determined to maintain his scientific pursuits as the singular focus of his energies, he "stand[s] aloof," and in doing so, he avoids the psychological contact necessary to produce true irritation

(154). If irritation requires the meeting of two surfaces, Lydgate is determined to keep himself removed from those around him, inviting contact with only those who can potentially forward his intellectual aims (Bulstrode) or who appear harmless to their attainment (Farebrother). Lydgate, therefore, has a more self-conscious relationship with irritation than most, treating his mind and aspirations as a hermetically sealed environment that he can render impermeable by an act of will. In fact, where Dorothea and Bulstrode both ignore potential perceptual irritants around them at the start of the novel—refusing to perceive Casaubon's spoon scraping or to see Raffles's grating person—Lydgate goes so far as actively to seek out a counter-irritant: the piano that Rosamond plays. Producing an auditory harmony that masks potentially jarring realities, Lydgate will often entreat Rosamond to play when irritation becomes a possibility, as he does when he finds himself "unintentionally annoying" Will Ladislaw about his work with Mr. Brooke (439). Lydgate desires so greatly to avoid vexation that he introduces sensory soothers as an antidote to conceptual irritants.

Lydgate's reasons for avoiding irritation arise not only from his scientific disposition, but also from his purposeful avoidance of human relationships: an avoidance based on his awareness that "small temptations and sordid cares" would produce a "retarding friction of his course towards final companionship with the immortals" (137). This language of friction, along with Lydgate's ardent desire to avoid it at all costs, introduces a consistent physics of emotion to *Middlemarch*.[11] Notably, the nineteenth century is often hailed as the beginning of energy

[11] Eliot's use of images from physics in *Middlemarch* have been explored by Selma B. Brody in "Physics in *Middlemarch*: Gas Molecules and Ethereal Atoms" (*Modern Philology* 85.1 (1897): 42-53), in which Brody points out Eliot's exposure to and knowledge of fundamental concepts of physics, citing her deployment of such theories through metaphor throughout the novel. Rather than commenting on the physics of energy, however, Brody limits her focus to the atomistic representation of Middlemarch citizens as she develops a theory of "the gas model of society," where collisions between individuals—like atoms—occur without intention and at random.

studies in physics,[12] leading to the "discovery" of energy conservation mid-century that brought about a new approach to the idea of "work." Theoretically, nineteenth-century scientists believed that mechanical effort didn't have to result in the diffusion of energy, but could be efficient to the point where perpetual motion was achieved. While there was much debate about the feasibility of perpetual motion,[13] the idea of streamlining a machine's, or conceivably a person's, processes such that energy could be kept at equilibrium held imaginative sway throughout the century. Of course, the force that most often stood in the way of achieving maximum efficiency was friction: the tendency for energy to diffuse itself in unusable heat. While James Joule consistently tried to convert heat into mechanical effect, many scientists remained skeptical of his efforts, and the goal of most was to avoid friction whenever possible in the search for increasingly efficient machines (Smith 77). The emotion of annoyance connects to the mechanical effects of friction in the physical reactions they both create: Dorothea burns "under the heat of irritation," just as Sir James finds himself "getting warm" in annoyance (28, 455). Emotions, like machines, can waste valuable energy through heat, failing to put their resources to better use.

The parallels between the effects of friction on a physical object and that of irritation on a psyche—particularly one that has been hardened by an overly determined perspective—are

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[12] For an account of the scientific and intellectual experiments conducted on energy in the nineteenth century—as well as the attitudes evinced toward perpetual motion—see Crosbie Smith's *The Science of Energy: A Cultural History of Energy Physics in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[13] George Henry Lewes himself would state in *Problems of Life and Mind* that "To the inventor of a *perpetuum mobile* the mechanician says: 'Produce it, and you will prove our arguments erroneous; but till you have produced perpetual motion we shall continue to hold the attempt chimerical.'" Eliot, somewhat less overtly condemnatory in *Daniel Deronda*, compares the "contriver of perpetual motion" to "Copernicus and Galileo," who were similarly "immovably convinced in the face of hissing incredulity" (*DD* 436). Eliot, therefore, seems less interested in the feasibility of perpetual motion than in the psychological and intellectual attitudes that would lead one to search for it.

numerous. When irritation results in injury or callousness, as it does with Dorothea and Bulstrode, the effect arises from the weakness of one entity in relation to the other: one body feels pain, while the other inflicts it. Lydgate, however, often conflicts with entities that are as unrelenting as himself, with people or situations that refuse to give, thereby increasing the potential for friction and heat. He incorrectly assumes, however, that his intensity of purpose and decided convictions will protect him from the ramifications of this friction.

Most of Lydgate's actions early in the novel can be seen as efforts to streamline his intellectual production. He regards his scientific process as supremely efficient, possessing an "imagination which is not mere arbitrariness, but the exercise of disciplined power," one that is capable of making deductions from limited experimental information with such precision and psychological efficiency that it is "the last refinement of energy" (154). Lydgate is essentially a scientific machine; by avoiding the retarding influence of society, he can maximize his experimental output and manage to do "good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world" (139). Of course, in Eliot's universe, which is dictated by the inevitable web of social interactions within a community, it doesn't take long for such a dream of psychological isolation to destabilize. Lydgate needs "a medium for his work, a vehicle for his ideas," and in dealing with local debates about the spiritual leader for the hospital, he quickly finds himself "feeling the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity" for the first time (168, 169). The hospital vote, however, marks a significant moment in Lydgate's use of annoyance. Deciding whom to vote for had stymied Lydgate, but when Mr. Larcher accuses him of siding with Bulstrode for political reasons, Lydgate takes "the energy" of his irritation to "mak[e] resolve easy," voting on the impulse his annoyance creates. He has, in essence, allowed the "feeling rushing warmly" through him to counteract the energy that would

be wasted in "debate in cold blood" (169). Instead of spending precious mental energy trying to logically deduce the best man for the job, Lydgate makes his mind a perpetual motion machine, using the heat of annoyance to push him mechanically toward a decision. Lydgate thereby uses irritation to obliterate a moral conundrum without recognizing its ability to compromise his ethical integrity.[14]

Rosamond, of course, threatens Lydgate's machine-like efficiency shortly after their marriage. Lydgate soon finds that he can "b[ear]" his wife's "little claims and interruptions without impatience," but that "his endurance" ultimately is "mingled with self-discontent,…slackening resolution, [and] creeping paralysis" (551). In the face of the "petty degrading cares" that come with marriage, Lydgate's focus deviates from its single-minded purpose; he cannot, as he did in the hospital vote, allow his annoyance to carry him to a swift conclusion and then simply walk away from the results of his actions. Much of Lydgate's irritation, it turns out, arises from his inability to simply filter out or avoid unpleasant realities and sensations as he previously did. We see this in the "unpleasant letters" Eliot describes as "forc[ing] themselves on his attention," material realities that cannot be ignored despite their incongruity with Lydgate's ambitions (553). Unsurprisingly, Lydgate begins to change at this point in the novel into a consistently "annoyed" person: he now finds himself chaffing under Rosamond's "indifferent manner" and constant demands (555, 748). In short order, Lydgate is

[14] Lydgate's disastrous decision-making in this scene serves as a striking counterpoint to Dorothea's seemingly impulsive choice to marry Will Ladislaw at the conclusion of *Middlemarch*. While both moments employ the "automatic" information processing that Ryan and Dames emphasize in their work on unconscious cerebration, the results of their impulsivity differ greatly. It is through organizing one's mental space and assessing one's perceptions at moments of irritation or annoyance, at least in Eliot, that one prepares oneself to make moral, rational decisions at moments of crisis.

> a party to that worst irritation which arises not simply from annoyances, but from the second consciousness underlying those annoyances, of wasted energy and degrading preoccupation, which was the reverse of all his former purposes. '*This* is what I am thinking of; and *that* is what I might have been thinking of,' was the incessant murmur within him, making every difficulty a double goad to impatience. (609)

Annoyance, in Lydgate's case, takes on its most tragic form: as one who has "know[n] the supremacy of the intellectual life," he acutely feels "the grief of…fall[ing] from that serene activity into the absorbing, soul-wasting struggle with worldly annoyances" (695). Eliot's articulation of Lydgate's annoyances as "soul-wasting" is particularly striking; not only has the mental diffusion of his energy led to a dissipation of his intellectual purpose, but it also has enervated the very essence of his identity. The friction of annoyance, ultimately, has largely squandered Lydgate's soul in useless, purposeless heat.

Lydgate's disintegration under the friction of annoyance points to another consequence of irritation: it not only can destroy one's ability to work, but also to become angry. While it might seem that anger would be unequivocally condemned in Eliot (if irritation creates pain, then anger must be even more harmful), her belief in the absolute superiority of certain moral positions creates the possibility that forceful anger could, in fact, result in positive outcomes. Again, Lydgate is the novel's example of failed efforts in this arena. In one of his more exasperating conversations with Rosamond toward the end of the novel, Eliot conveys that Lydgate "started from his chair with an angry impulse" before realizing that "he should have to master this impulse" (713). Lydgate's attempt at self-mastery here might originally appear akin to Dorothea's attempts at "resolved submission," which Eliot has described previously as requiring "the energy that would animate a crime" (401). Choosing to rein themselves in rather than inflict pain, both actions might appear equally sensitive in their motivations; however, Eliot faults Lydgate for his restraint. Noting that the argument "might have had better issue" if Lydgate

"had been strong enough to persist in his determination," the narrator states that even "inflexible and peculiar" natures like Rosamond's can be "taken by storm and for the moment converted" by "a more massive being than their own" (714). Lydgate is representing a morally superior position to a robustly antagonistic Rosamond (in opposition to the enervated Casaubon), and his failure to enforce that position is credited to "his energy hav[ing] fallen short of its task." Tired from his constant annoyance with Rosamond, Lydgate collapses under the pressure of her stronger will, and in doing so, he forfeits his opportunity to convert her to a better perspective.

Dorothea's, Bulstrode's, and Lydgate's experiences show that the sensation of irritation should signal a meaningful disparity between internal expectations and external events. Easy to dismiss as a minor emotion, irritation nearly always occurs when deeply reconsidering one's relationship to another might prove ethically and logically prudent. While Eliot's anti-systematic moral philosophy prevents her from actively elucidating a guide to behavior, her depiction of irritation as a warning sign for moral reconsideration displays the extent to which somatic responses can have intellectual implications. For Dorothea, acknowledging her annoyance and the pain it causes others is an essential step on her path to developing sympathy. For Bulstrode, the moral value of irritation is lost because he chooses to destroy the person who causes annoyance rather than alter his worldview. Finally, Lydgate shows that attempts to avoid irritation only make one more vulnerable to its unconscious, destructive effects.

Ultimately, Eliot's treatment of irritation speaks to the style she employs in writing her own novel. While it might seem as if stream of consciousness would be a less "frictive" way of representing the mind, Eliot refuses to value unbound thinking even as she critiques certain methods of cognitive restraint. Between psychological capaciousness and insistent narrowness, she offers a third alternative: a mind that commits itself to ethical ends but remains flexible to

moments when the external world demands cognitive revision. Discovering how to keep that world bound, and when to alter its limits, becomes the goal of Eliot's narrative. Irritation—the emotion that signals a conflict between inner and outer worlds—becomes the warning that sympathetic change is needed.

III. Flexible Binding and Language: Irritated Readers

As we have seen, excessive cognitive control in *Middlemarch* consistently leads to irritation, which is portrayed as a negative force responsible for cruelty, callousness, and mental and emotional enervation. It is appropriate to question, therefore, whether Eliot advocates mental binding at all. After all, a more fluid relationship with the external world and sensory experience could be seen as logically opening up new avenues for sympathetic engagement: through seeing and experiencing more, the individual can come closer to understanding the minds and feelings of others. However, while Eliot is clearly critical of the effects of excessive cognitive restraint and the blind spots it creates, her representations of unbound consciousnesses are uniformly tragic. We can see this on some level during Maggie Tulliver's sensorily rich boat trip with Stephen Guest in *The Mill on the Floss*, where their "enchanted haze" creates a space where "thought did not belong" and ethical action is duly compromised (487). Giving over to cognitive laxness is also negatively portrayed through Grandcourt's unprincipled thinking in *Daniel Deronda*. Noting his generally inactive demeanor, Eliot describes his idle thoughts as manifesting themselves "like the circlets one sees in a dark pool continually dying out and continually started again by some impulse from below the surface" (269). With no direction or conviction guiding them, Grandcourt's thoughts translate into erratic and unpredictable action. With his toxic self-interest emerging as one of the great evils of *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's decision

to align Grandcourt with free-form, unprincipled thinking signals her concern about the morality and efficacy of such cogitation.

Though *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda* offer two compelling instances of the dangers of unbound thinking, Eliot most forcefully deflates the possibility of a redemptively unbound consciousness in *The Lifted Veil.* Through providing a fantasy of direct access to all perceptual experiences—including other minds and past and future sensory events—Eliot explores what an entirely fluid relationship with the world would look like, and she ends up writing a horror story of what is discovered there. In *Middlemarch*, the narrator's access to the inner thoughts of characters displays their hidden motivations and careful self-delusions in order to develop the foundations for sympathetic engagement; for the narrator of *The Lifted Veil*, whose perceptions are tainted by his own opinions on what he finds, a startlingly different picture emerges:

> the graceful attentions, the wittily-turned phrases, the kindly deeds, which used to make the web of their characters, were seen as if thrust asunder by a microscopic vision that showed all the intermediate frivolities, all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling chaos of puerilities, meanness, vague capricious memories, and indolent make-shift thoughts, from which human words and deeds emerge like leaflets covering a fermented heap. (295)

Direct and unmediated access to the internal lives of others has not led to a greater understanding of their natures, except perhaps to *decrease* their empathetic potential. In fact, the narrator goes on to describe one's "sweet illusions" about others as akin to "effects of colour that we know to be made up of tinsel, broken glass, and rags." Emphasizing his view that consciousness is a place of accumulated waste, the narrator is overwhelmed by the "fermented heap" of impulses and ideas that the mind is constantly trying to sort and prioritize, much like Mr. Boffin's dust heaps in *Our Mutual Friend* (320, 295). The narrator here affirms that the mind is a place of constant filtering, and one's social and mental lives benefit both from that sorting *and* its

inability to access every idea that flits through consciousness. Ultimately, the narrator of *The Lifted Veil*'s "superadded consciousness" deflates the idea that it is a "narrowness of knowledge" about others that "hems in our generosity," and that our egoism would "easily melt" if we truly saw every detail of those around us (302, 307-8). As a result, throughout his tale, he makes evident his own attempts to shape his narrative and provide it with well-defined boundaries, often claiming to "hurry through the rest of the story," to "not dwell so much" on "the details" of "my internal experience," and often allowing "a few sentences" to "f[ill] the space of years" (320, 294, 326). A lack of mental restraint, therefore, seems detrimental to both ethical action and sympathetic perception. Eliot's exploration of unbound consciousness in *The Lifted Veil*, therefore, simply reaffirms the endorsement of flexible mental control found in *Middlemarch*.

Eliot's stance on what constitutes a "healthy" mental life has an effect on her narration, and, consequently, any irritation or annoyance on a linguistic level that emerges in her texts should have implications for her readers. Eliot's views on how language aids the individual toward both sympathy and cognitive control are best apprehended on the sentence level, and, incidentally, through exploring the narrator's famous "pier glass metaphor." There is probably no metaphor in *Middlemarch* that has undergone greater scrutiny than this one, in which Eliot provides a protracted description of how a pier-glass that is "scratched in all directions…produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement" when encountering the light of a candle (248). Indicating that all individual perspective is the natural result of cognitive or "optical" selection, the narrator goes on to explicitly state that "These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent." What is striking about this parable is not its characteristically Eliotic nature—its use of a scientific observation to illuminate a central facet of human experience—but rather the manner in which its

central metaphor unfolds. For, while some individuals no doubt read the passage seamlessly, others experience an odd sense of disappointment, if not outright irritation, at the point where Eliot explicates her own metaphor. After all, Eliot has just created an elaborate parable that the reader has no doubt already begun to parse; why, then, does she choose to be so explicit? Most readers already sense the meaning of Eliot's metaphor, so her decision to articulate its "correct" interpretation seems to undercut the need for the metaphor at all, encroaching upon the reader's "right" to analyze a text for him- or herself.

Furthermore, the interpretation that Eliot provides is in conflict with the very point of the metaphor itself. After all, if every consciousness imposes its own perspective on random, raw material, so too does the narrator impose *her* partial analysis on the parable. J. Hillis Miller argues in "The Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*" that Eliot's narrator is able to "escape this fate [of doomed solipsism]…by using perspective to transcend perspective, by moving the microscopic close-up to the panoramic distant view" (142). But this reading diffuses without answering the very real tension Eliot creates in this passage. Even if the narrator can effectively transcend a myopic vision, she's brought her reader to a place where he can challenge this assertion by emphasizing the inherent instability in her own shifting narrative style. The "irritation" that Eliot creates between her metaphor and its analysis—one often felt by readers—is in fact central to the way in which she sees language working within the text as a whole. It illustrates why Eliot, despite her clear apprehension of the relativity of human experience, never portrays the raw material of it: why she never utilizes stream of consciousness narration.

To explore the relationship between language and perceptual control in Eliot's text, it's helpful to examine the role of metaphor in her writing as a whole. In the 1868 essay "Notes on Form in Art," Eliot considers the role of metaphor in narrative, and she begins by observing that

"abstract words and phrases which have an excellent genealogy are apt to live a little too much on their reputation and even to sink into dangerous impostors that should be made to show how they get their living" (355). Though Eliot mainly considers the challenges that attend "Poetic form," her overall assessment clearly carries over to her novelistic endeavors: form is not simply a "framing…shell" that can be put on an emotion, but it is something that arises organically out of the "tendency to repetition" found in genuine experience (358-9). If this relationship between language and emotion is not observed, then "the form itself becomes the object and material of the emotion," and substance is obscured or potentially lost (359). Language, therefore, is held to be in a dynamic relationship with meaning, and if it fails to vibrate with the truth of human experience, then it must be replaced.

The selection of a metaphor, it turns out, in many ways mirrors cognitive restraint in the novel: it relies upon careful selection and the vibration—rather than irritation—between a framing object (the mind or language) and the external world. In *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, Max Black discusses the mechanics of what makes metaphors "work." Relying upon a community's "system of associated commonplaces," metaphors function by calling upon the interaction between "two thoughts" that become "active together" (40, 39). If someone says "She is a lamb," a person in her community can call upon a shared set of expectations about the characteristics that the word "lamb" implies (innocence, purity, etc.), and, in doing so, the person can activate a better understanding of "she." This linguistic "activation," however, is possible only because metaphor acts as a "filter" between all possible meanings and the one(s) intended by the author (39). While not necessarily an absolute filter (we could, after all, have slightly different understandings of the exact purity or innocence of a lamb), a metaphor's effectiveness depends upon its ability to evoke "a system of ideas, not

sharply delineated, and yet sufficiently definite to admit of detailed enumeration" (40-1). In this way, metaphors do not strictly determine our reading of a particular event or individual, but instead, they "suppr[ess] some details, emphas[ize] others – in short, *organ*[*ize*] our view[s]" (41). Like the system of cognitive selection that orders the mental lives of Eliot's characters, metaphors create boundaries to meaning that are definite, but also potentially flexible.

Given Black's description of metaphor's function, an ideal metaphor should create no friction or annoyance in the reader. Linguists have found that "ordinary" auditors or readers are capable of understanding metaphors with even "incomplete and partial representation of linguistically and culturally shared metaphorical concepts," indicating that a major rupture between language and expectations must occur in order for a metaphor to be truly jarring (Gibbs 3). And, though aesthetic inelegance can create its own form of dissonance, Eliot's lyric language can often mask, rather than reveal, the inaptness of a metaphor. In fact, the source of the exasperation or annoyance that a reader might find with Eliot's treatment of the pier-glass metaphor does not come from the language or the reader's apprehension of it. Instead, it arises—if it emerges at all—from the narrator's own gloss of her "parable," which seems to remove from it some of the interpretive power it might have possessed.

What I am suggesting, therefore, is that when Eliot glosses her own metaphor, she forces her language to assume the static, inflexible form that many of the minds in her text possess; she makes it express one worldview and one way of apprehending reality. Consequently, if her parable can only have one meaning, then the reading she provides is likely to rub against the one her reader has devised, even if that friction arises more from the specific language Eliot uses than from the substance of the meaning itself. Catherine Gallagher in "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian" points to the ways in which the conflict between "general" categories and "particular"

individuals in *Middlemarch* creates a "vigorous narrative friction between probability and surprise" (61, 66). On the level of character, the reader is constantly aware that any of the broad statements Eliot makes about "types" of people will constantly be brought into question by the vibrancy of her individual characters, who defy easy categories. This frictive dynamic appears to seep down to the level of language, where a metaphor asserts at least a linguistic connection between two individual emotions, characteristics, or events. When the nature of this connection, in metaphor, is allowed to remain fluid, the reader is empowered by the connection; when the exact nature of the connection is explicated and asserted, or when the connection fails to be convincing, however, the potential for friction emerges.

Rather than reading this friction as a failure in Eliot's narrative construction, however, the persistence of retarding features like this in her texts—including the relatively abrupt shifts in focus ("Why always Dorothea?") or attempts to disorient the reader from an instinctively occupied viewpoint (relating the life history of "a superfluity" like Joshua Rigg)—indicate that this is a deliberate part of her literary method (386). After all, if the irritation that a person experiences when he encounters the unexpected and potentially unwelcome aspects of another person is meant to bring about changes in Eliot's characters' psychologies, then so too is the reader's irritation, annoyance, or friction an opportunity to engage in cognitive reconsideration. If a reader feels irritation at a metaphor or statement Eliot makes, it signals either 1.) that Eliot has created a generalization that leaves out too many particularities or 2.) that the reader's own mental categories or preconceptions need to be made flexible to accommodate a truth that seems initially repellant to him.[15] Either way, irritation becomes an opportunity for cognitive

[15] Since there is no proof that Eliot purposefully created moments of friction in her narratives for this purpose, it is likely that she only imagined the latter situation happening—in which the

renegotiation—for assessing one's own access to "direct fellow-feeling" and reasoning—and thus it can lead to a more accurate *and* sympathetic reading of the world (582).

As mentioned earlier, this connection between irritation and a change in behavior makes sense even on a scientific level: when our bodies are bothered by a noise or smell, it is often because, while low levels of the object of offense may be harmless, larger quantities have the potential to be fatal (Palca 237). Irritation is an emotional and physical sensation that has evolved to signal danger to the brain. This connection between somatic and psychological pain was also observed by several of the early physiologists writing in the nineteenth century, and they explicitly connect the experience of irritation to the expression of sympathetic impulses, while differing in their assessment of its outcome. In *Mental Science*, Bain sees friction as potentially interfering with one's sympathy. He states that "the noise of friction…and the sight of roughness and rust, suggestive of friction, are calculated to pain our sensibilities," but he argues that "indications of comparative ease in the performance of work…are a grateful rebound of sympathetic power" (299). The brain's desire for perceptual ease, therefore, means that it is more likely to seek out stimuli and concepts that are smooth and quickly apprehensible. Bain notes, however, that perceptions of ease and beauty in "clean" work are often "illusory," and he ultimately believed, in opposition to Spencer, that developing psychological defenses against unpleasant sensations would lead to emotional callousness. In fact, he even accused Spencer of depicting "callousness to suffering as a kind of culture, like the discipline of endurance" in *The Emotions and the Will* (66). Spencer had stated in *The Principles of Sociology* that "pain of every kind, down to even the irritation produced by discomfort, entails physiological waste of a detrimental kind," leading to a condition where "the most callous must have the

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reader revises her own preconceptions upon feeling resistance to the text. Here, Eliot's message may have exceeded her own relationship with the text.

advantage…[and] callousness must be made, by survival of the fittest, constitutional" (55-6). Though he acknowledges that this callousness means that those who possesses it are less "readily spurred into activity," this state is treated as preferable to "the sufferings which come from over-excited nerves." Bain, in contrast, believed comparing emotional callousness with "the thickening of the skin under friction," as Spencer had done, was a fallacy, declaring that "For my own part, I doubt whether the hardening process was ever called for" (*Emotions* 66). While Bain and Spencer differed on whether the perceptual and emotional experience of pain and irritation led to desensitization, they concur that individuals *prefer* to avoid unpleasant sensations. In fact, Bain's articulation of the psychological desire for perceptual cleanliness and clearness has a parallel with smooth, concise language. It would seem to suggest, in fact, that difficult, frictive language causes pain to its reader, who naturally prefers a more fluid reading experience.

Incidentally, Lewes, Bain, and Spencer all wrote "guides" on grammar and writing,[16] a coincidence Nicholas Dames notes in *The Physiology of the Novel*. While each expresses the importance of clear, uncluttered writing, it is interesting that Lewes emerges as the most concerned with the consequences of "friction" in prose. While Lewes devotes chapters to considering the importance of vision and imagination in writing, when he turns to the mechanics of composition, the first "Law of Style" he elucidates is "Economy." In this section, he begins by noting that the most apt analogue for successful writing is to be found "in Mechanics," and he goes on to note that "the first object of a machine" is "effective work…Every means by which friction can be reduced, and the force thus economized be rendered available, necessarily solicits the constructor's care" (128). Since the writer must produce prose that can overcome "the

[16] Lewes, *The Principles of Success in Literature* (1865); Bain, *A Higher English Grammar* (1863), *An English Grammar* (1863), *Manual of Rhetoric* (1866), *A First English Grammar* (1872), and *Companion to Higher Grammar* (1874); and Spencer *The Philosophy of Style* (1852).

friction of ignorance and pre-occupation," she must consider that "every superfluous detail, every retarding influence, is at the cost of so much power, and is a mechanical defect though it perhaps may be an aesthetic beauty" (129, 128). The goal of writing, in the end, is to "arrange words that they shall suffer the least possible retardation from the inevitable friction of the reader's mind" (129). If sentences fail to "reflect meaning like a mirror," then the reader, like Lydgate, "wastes" energy that "might have [instead] been concentrated on meditation of the propositions" in parsing language (129). Until a reader of "abundant energy" can be found, writing must attempt to work as cleanly and efficiently as possible in the service of its ultimate goals.[17]

Given that Lewes saw "friction" in writing as detracting from its efficacy, Eliot's decision to include so much of it in her novels appears purposeful. And, in some sense, what initially appears to cause "waste" in the reader's energy performs work toward changing the reader's mind, moving him to question the source of friction rather than enjoy an easy reading experience. Ultimately, if irritation, annoyance, or friction are emerging in *Middlemarch* at moments when its prescriptive narrator is forcing the reader to see in explicit language ideas that may have existed unformed or partially realized in the mind, then the annoyance he feels is actually a testament to the "aliveness" of the feeling or subject matter Eliot treats. Every time a

[17] Bain echoes similar sentiments to these when, in *English Composition and Rhetoric: A Manual* (1867), he uses the first law of motion and friction to illustrate how "Examples, or Particular Instances" should be used in "expounding general principles." He then goes on to state that such examples should "not…contain distracting accompaniments" in order to increase "the force of the principle in explaining matters of difficulty" (196, 197). Spencer, similarly, gives voice to the fact that at times long or complicated language may be necessary in order to make a point, but he emphasizes "the economy of the recipient's mental energy," and he even explicitly states that if one "carr[ies] out the metaphor that language is the vehicle for thought, there seems reason to think that in all cases the friction and inertia of the vehicle deduct from its efficiency; and that in composition, the chief, if not the sole thing, to be done, is, to reduce this friction and inertia to the smallest possible amount" (15, 12).

reader, at least in *Middlemarch*, reacts in irritation or disagreement with Eliot's language, she disproves Eliot's concern in "Notes on Form in Art" that abstract words and phrases can serve as "imposters" that mask emotional or intellectual vacuity (355). To reject a description Eliot provides is to assert that her meaning exceeds the language provided: that the humanity of her characters and narrative have been so sympathetically apprehended by the reader that she balks at their reduction to categorical statements. Language, therefore, resides uneasily beside meaning; it expresses aspects, but never the entirety, of the entity it describes. Eliot ultimately uses frictive language to signal to readers that truth must always exceed verbal representation, just as Dorothea's irritating encounters with Casaubon were her first indication that an unknown world existed within him that she had never fully apprehended.

Frictive language points toward the need for a new kind of reading, an intuitive, vibration-like understanding that exceeds mere verbal representation. Metaphors, in their interpretive openness, aid this process. Dorrit Cohn offers some support for this claim when she notes that metaphor, rather than stream of consciousness, is most apt for expressing the deepest levels of consciousness, since "the least conscious strata of psychic life is devoid of language" and must therefore be expressed through "the most traditional of available modes" (*Minds* 56). The closer to psychological truth that Eliot gets, the more she must rely on metaphors and their power to convey the vague and inarticulable. In the pier-glass parable, Eliot calls attention to the ways in which literal articulation will always fail in light of the dynamic power of energized, ambiguous metaphors. Eliot's reader, as a result, is called upon not to waste energy resisting the surface incongruities of her analyses. Instead, readers are called upon to recognize the psychological truths that inform Eliot's analyses—and to use the potential sense of annoyance or anger that they create to fuel sympathetic engagement.

Chapter 4

Shaping Experience: Geometric Form and Constraint in Gerard Manley Hopkins

What do squares have to do with ethics? In Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, the depressive bone collector Mr. Venus reflects upon the nefarious blackmail he's committed by stating that "the best amends for having got out of the square is to get back into the square" (566). Right behavior, in Mr. Venus's estimation, is understood through a geometric figure that one is either "in" or "out" of. Similarly, in *War and Peace*, Pierre finds himself hashing out a new life plan while also contemplating the "square" of the Freemason society, of which he is a recent initiate. Struggling to grasp the "meaning" of the square, Pierre reflects that "one side…represented God, another the moral world, a third the physical world, a fourth the union of the two" (488). Pierre uses the square to imagine a new path for his behavior, and though he later reflects that the wisdom he gains through this contemplation "was slipping away under his feet the more firmly he tried to rest on it," the square still remains for him a powerful image of a life devoted to noble and ethical causes. This tendency to use geometric symbols to express ideal ethical behavior isn't limited to literature. In China, the traditional concept of "neifang waiyuan" describes a person who is seen as internally square and outwardly round: relaxed and flexible interpersonally, but highly principled and strict inwardly; this symbol, consequently, is frequently used as a model for business relationships and personal management. These shapes, be they squares or circles, are all being used to communicate an abstract ideal of ethical behavior that is, arguably, clarified by its articulation through a geometric aid. But if many struggle, as Pierre does, to understand how to fit one's actions in with the "shape" of moral behavior, what work are such images doing for the concepts they support?

The ability that shape has to convey philosophical or metaphysical meanings is one Gaston Bachelard explores in *The Poetics of Space*. His chapter "The Phenomenology of Roundness" is devoted to understanding how circles can represent "life," or, more specifically,

the unity of being that occurs when an individual is "concentrated upon itself" (239). Rejecting geometric form as merely an expression of "empty" spheres, poetic images of roundness are meant, by contrast, to "displace all psychological determinations" and "invit[e] us to the actuality of being" (235, 236). For Bachelard, then, the role of images of roundness in poetry is to illustrate a spiritual fullness that exceeds individual experience or literal description. Shape is not simply referring to a form in the world, but pointing back to a metaphysical largeness that is embodied by the subject of the poem at that moment. In light of Bachelard's analysis, the geometric images of "squareness" described above appear poor substitutes for the ecstatic possibility of poetic "roundness"; by referring back to literal actions in the world—and requiring their contemplator to actively reflect on his past and future behavior—they fail to go "*immediately* beyond all psychology" and embody the "autonomous," phenomenologically unified state Bachelard values (xxiii, xxxii). But is there a value to this crude "geometric" imagery that Bachelard misses? Straddling the line between metaphysically transcendent and practically useful, these geometric shapes carry the potential to be both individually meaningful and universally applicable. Perhaps it is possible to reconcile the fullness of Bachelard's circle with the practical usefulness of the square.

This chapter will deal centrally with this issue, exploring the role of shape in Gerard Manley Hopkins's poetry, and paying particular attention to the relationship between geometric forms and metaphysical truth in his lyric. As suggested above, shapes can draw our attention to the boundaries of ethical behavior by grounding otherwise abstract notions of the good in forms that replicate themselves in the physical world; they also express the potential fullness of being that Hopkins believed the world possessed at moments of divinely provided instress. In addition to providing a medium through which to convey metaphysical meaning, shape—both in poetic

imagery and form—helps to counter perceptual formlessness by drawing the eye toward images that, for Hopkins, legibly manifest the presence of God. In doing so, shape helps contain the otherwise indulgent perceptions of the poet, which can lose sight of meaning in an abundance of sensory experience. Shape is, therefore, neither purely practical nor purely aesthetic for Hopkins. Instead, it is a mix of both, pointing toward a new way of perceiving the material world that is both appreciative of its beauty and mindful of its ultimate metaphysical purpose.

I. Shaping Consciousness

"You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself" ("Song of Myself," 1855)

In 1882, Gerard Manley Hopkins found himself in the awkward position of defending his poem "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" to his good friend and editor, Robert Bridges. Bridges had written to Hopkins and informed him of what appeared to be striking similarities between his devotional poem and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which Hopkins responded to with characteristic passion.[1] Hopkins makes, on the one hand, a startling admission, claiming that "I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living" (155). This remarkable statement is followed by his belief that Whitman is "a very great scoundrel" who, with the exception of "a half dozen pieces at most," Hopkins has "determined" to avoid (154-5). And yet, despite this aversion, Hopkins goes into great detail as to why his poem couldn't possibly be a replication of Whitman's style. Focusing primarily on rhythm, Hopkins accuses Whitman of writing "irregular rhythmic prose," claiming that "The

[1] Christopher Clausen, in his article "Whitman, Hopkins, and the World's Splendor," points out that these similarities are largely thematic, since both authors express an exuberance about natural phenomena unique among nineteenth-century poets.

Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" is a "highly wrought piece" where "everything is weighed and timed" (156-7). Though sprung rhythm may feel "natural" to the reader, it is the result of careful crafting, shaping the details and themes of the poem despite its potentially unstructured feel (156). It has, therefore, nothing to do with Whitman's indulgently free verse.

Whether there is a poetic equivalent to stream of consciousness is up for debate, but it appears plausible that free verse might, in some instances, be an appropriate analogue. Whitman's "Song of Myself," for instance, famously shuttles between perceptive acts at alarming speed, moving in the space of just a few lines from "the sniff of green leaves," to "the sound of the belched words of my voice," to "the play of shine and shade on the trees" (16-19). While not as abstract or seemingly non-causal as the stream of consciousness of Tolstoy or Joyce, Whitman's verse still attempts to portray the capaciousness of human consciousness at speeds that approximate perceptual experience. Whitman's style, furthermore, reflects his political and spiritual convictions. Claiming in his preface to the 1855 version of *Leaves of Grass* that "all that a person does or thinks is of consequence," Whitman displays a democratic attitude toward perception by refusing to rank any action or thought above another (2124). The work of sorting and prioritizing such impulses is not for the poet, but rather for the reader, who "listen[s] to all sides and filter[s] them from yourself" ("Song of Myself," 1855). Rather than directing the reader's focus and mental experience, the free verse of Whitman instead mirrors the naturally chaotic and free-flowing state of stream-of-consciousness thinking.

Hopkins's poetry might initially seem to support this vision of democratic, realistically presented perception. After all, Hopkins's poems typically contain lush descriptions and an ecstatic appreciation for the beauty of nature; many also seem to follow the Romantic model of the lyric speaker overwhelmed by aesthetic pleasure, portraying his perceptions without an

obvious filter. Hopkins's verse, however, despite its superficial appearance to the contrary, is in constant tension with the idea of the poet as a free and democratically responsive perceiver. This conflict is clearly played out Hopkins's journals and letters, which chronicle both minute descriptions of his perceptual experiences of the natural world and his anxieties about his status as a priest and poet. How can Hopkins revel in the beauty of the world that God has provided, while also keeping the pleasure it provides from becoming indulgent? In "The Habit of Perfection," one of his early poems, the speaker seems to struggle with precisely this problem, as Hopkins considers the perceptual abundance that occurs even in the absence of purposeful perception. In it, "silence" is shown to have the ability to "sing to me/ And beat upon my whorlèd ear,/ Pipe me pastures still and be/ The music that I care to hear" (5). By showing that even the removal of perception is productive of sensory pleasure, Hopkins sets up one of the central tensions of his poems: if the idea of a "space" outside of perceptual experience is illusory, then how does the poet ensure that such perceptions are appropriately processed and ordered? In other words, how does Hopkins square his openness to all perceptions with his stated belief that "to recognize the form you are employing [in a poem] and to mean it is everything" (qtd. in Lichtmann, 159)?

The answer, it turns out, can be found in Hopkins's unique brand of poetic cognitive control, which differs from the patterns that emerge in many nineteenth-century novels, particularly those explored thus far in this project. This is unsurprising, since Hopkins's world is largely lyric, rather than social, and it is strongly influenced by his theological beliefs. Rather than advocating for shutting out abundant sensory stimuli, Hopkins instead portrays perception as usefully limited by the individual's search for predetermined meaning manifested in his environment. Perception may be unlimited, but it is not democratic, and organizing such

perception becomes an essential first step in poetic construction. This organization is achieved primarily through seeking out the shape and divine structure of the material world. However, unlike Whitman—who saw the reader as the individual who "filters" perceptual experience—Hopkins uses poetic images and form in order to guide the reader's perceptions toward details that support the order of God in nature. As Hopkins wrote in his journal, "Poetry is speech framed for contemplation of the mind…some matter and meaning is essential to it but only as an element necessary to support and employ the shape which is contemplated for its own sake" (289). In the end, the perceptual details of a poem only support and clarify the "shape" that the poem as a whole puts forward for the reader's understanding and contemplation. Free verse, therefore, means the loss of poetry's shaped potential; it is, in essence, the loss of the most important meaning poetry is capable of conveying. While the control of perception does not happen at the moment of experience for Hopkins, it is still an integral part of his poetic project that eventually aids in cognitive control.

In order to understand Hopkins's specific objections to free verse and his precise use of shape in order to avoid it, it is helpful to take a broader look at the role of poetic form in nineteenth-century poetry. The Victorians experimented with both form and meter. As Jason David Hall notes in his introduction to *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, "so staggering was the 'multitude of meters' in circulation [at the time] that nineteenth-century poets and readers sometimes struggled to make sense of—not to mention agree on—matters of versification" (2). Theories about prosody abounded as writers attempted to uncover a "system" of English versification that determined whether contemporary poetry was primarily quantitative, accentual, temporal, or even scientific (7-8). In *The Origins of Free Verse*, H.T. Kirby-Smith reflects on the strange bifurcation in Victorian poetry between free verse and an

even stricter observation of poetic form than the Romantics had displayed (123). It would seem, therefore, that there was not a Victorian consensus on how precisely verse should function, and Hopkins's use of his own unique poetic form—sprung rhythm—can be read as his own intervention in a debate about the proper goals of lyric structure that pervaded the era.

While Whitman's use of free verse in America represents an obvious extreme of structural looseness, there are other nineteenth-century precedents that suggest poetry was becoming less strict in its formal observations. Many poets sought ways of representing consciousness in ways that were consistent with its potentially stream-like qualities, even when observing metrical laws below the surface.[2] Unlike the Romantic poets who sought to represent the refined verse of experience recollected in tranquility, Victorian poets seemed to revel in the possibility of representing momentary, chaotic thought processes with formal flair. The dramatic monologue, in particular, displays an attempt to make poetry feel "conversational" and "in real time" by masking rhyme schemes and meter and portraying moments of interruption, distraction, and madness. While Browning's "My Last Duchess," "Fra Lippo Lippi," and "Porphyria's Lover" perhaps most famously portray the conversational yet clearly unmoored thoughts of the poems' speakers, Tennyson's "Maud" comes closest to portraying the stream of consciousness of its central voice. "Maud" is Tennyson's long-form exploration of a Wertherian lover who progressively descends into insanity as the poem advances; consequently, the presentation of his experiences is marked by unexpected interjections, ever-changing rhyme schemes, and disordered perceptions. While the meter and rhyme scheme of the poem's stanzas are

[2] In his book, *The Poet's Mind: The Psychology of Victorian Poetry 1830-1870*, Gregory Tate explores the ways in which poetry attempted to represent and grapple with contemporary theories of the mind, particularly in the way that Romantic introspection is destabilized by the century's new conception of the relationship between the physical and metaphysical. While Tate convincingly shows the overlap between medical and poetic advancement in the nineteenth century, he does not consider how theories of stream of consciousness impact lyric constructions.

emphasized by Tennyson's consistent use of end-stopped, rhyming lines, making the structural composition of the poem readily apparent, the formal polish of the speaker's presentation only emphasizes the erratic and seemingly momentary nature of his perceptual experiences. The speaker, for instance, often notes apparently irrelevant aspects of the environment, depicted as flashes of perception, which provide evidence of Maud's infidelity. In one stanza, he describes how "the sun looked out…betwixt the cloud and the moor" when he is out on a walk, a seemingly unnecessary detail that is followed up by an image of Maud appearing across the way as "Something [that] flashed in the sun…Like a sudden spark/ Struck vainly in the night" (317, 323-7). Maud appears as an unexpected perception of light out of the corner of the speaker's eye, and yet this flash of light triggers a host of irrational and unbidden thoughts. The speaker immediately asks "Sick, am I sick of jealous dread?," allowing his mind to reel with the implications of his momentary impression—that is, that the flash of light may point to her infidelity. The speaker's focus and mental coherence continue to deteriorate as the poem moves toward its conclusion, as his fevered thoughts are continually plagued by momentary visions of Maud rendered in erratic verse. Tennyson thus holds his speaker's troubled and unmoored consciousness in check only with the strength of his own formal stringency, which works against the speaker's constant move toward an almost stream-of-consciousness state.

Tennyson's and Browning's use of rhyme and meter to subtly rein in the chaotic perceptions of mentally unbalanced speakers moves away from the Wordsworthian idea of poetry as experience recalled in tranquility. They develop, instead, poetic forms that assist in portraying mental states as they occur. Doing so, however, draws attention to some of the theoretical problems that might attend importing cognitive control into the act of poetic creation. The speaker of "Maud," like the speakers of all poems, functions as a lyric voice precisely

because he turns a sensitive eye toward perceptual experience; rather than filtering out stimuli based on ethical or practical goals, poetic voices are meant to revel in perceptual experiences that might be missed by an average consciousness. Clearly, though, the decision to make these figures insane points to the dangers of perceptual openness. In his analysis of "St. Simeon Stylites," Herbert Tucker considers the larger tradition of dramatic monologues that were brought to a fever pitch by Browning and Tennyson, calling the form an expression of "its authors fencing with, or even better fencing in, a mode of romantic lyricism that the belated Victorian poet both covets and fears, and therefore masks or mocks in the hopes of outgrowing it" (122-3). Tucker argues that Browning in particular shows a deep understanding of the complexity of the lyric 'I' that emerges in Romantic poetry, often simplified as self-expressive by naïve readers. The dramatic monologue, by contrast, becomes a study in "the fate of the Romantic self" writ large (124).[3] Browning's narrators "represent in overblown caricature precisely the unconstrained lyrical 'I' whose private (and therefore sincere) utterances Browning's readership were sympathizing with in contemporary poetry" (124-5). Tucker's use of the word "unconstrained" brings attention to the very problem of lyrical selfhood and perception that troubled many Victorian poets. How can a poet be both receptive to the power of ecstatic perceptual experiences, but also keep his consciousness in check? In essence, how does a poet put boundaries on his own thinking without sacrificing his sensitivity to external and

[3] Hopkins's wariness about the Romantics and their relationship with perception and nature was recorded in his letters, and it is synthesized in Maria R. Lichtmann's *The Contemplative Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. In a letter to Bridges**,** Hopkins described Keats as living "in mythology and fairyland the life of a dreamer," resulting in "verse…at every turn abandoning itself to an unmanly and enervating luxury" (160). Similarly, the lake poets are criticized in a letter to Dixon as "faithful but not rich observers of nature." While Hopkins's condemnation of the Romantics was not complete (he would also praise Keats as genius [White 415]), his letters do express ambivalence over whether they perceive and portray reality responsibly and accurately in their verse.

internal phenomena? With dramatic monologues suggesting that sanity may be the price for a Romantic susceptibility to ego-driven perception, it becomes clear that producing appropriate boundaries for sensation will be necessary—a task that lyric shape addresses.

When turning to the impact of shape and condensation on poetry, it may be most elucidating to consider the thoughts of George Meredith. As both a novelist and poet, his treatment of shape across these two media allows for a more thorough assessment of how thought and its constraint find representation in the shape and images of poetry. Furthermore, his overt judgment of hasty, uninformed cognitive restraint helps to clarify his use of shape. This judgment is best gleaned in the more expansive psychological content of his novels. In *The Egoist*, for instance, Meredith explores the role of cognitive restriction in perception through the hopelessly myopic and self-interested Sir Willoughby, whose fiancé Clara must grapple with her waning affections for him once she discovers his underlying self-infatuation. This begins in the text's prelude, where Meredith presents a tongue-in-cheek assessment of the role of narrative concision, claiming that "Art is the specific," and "to be profitable to us the Book needs a powerful compression" (8,7). Comedy, in particular, is a form that "condenses whole sections of the book in a sentence, volumes in a character," and thus the stated purpose of his book, delivered in excessively long and labyrinthine sentences, is to facilitate "reading swiftly and comprehensively" (9). Meredith's satiric tone implies that his novel will not sacrifice faithful representation of life to pithy but glib observations. If condensation and constraint occur in this text, it will not be in order to create a plot-driven and vacuous reading experience.

The novel in general condemns of the idea that shutting out and "sifting" reality leads to a stable existence. Sir Willoughby is described as "Spiritually…a despotic prince," and his disastrous engagement to Clara is undermined by his blind wish for his lovers "to have come to

him out of an egg-shell…completely enclosed before he tapped the shell" (22). Willoughby constrains his perceptual experiences too expertly—refusing to admit any impressions that seem in conflict with his desires—and he wishes to extend that limited vision to others. To convey Willoughby's constricted egoism, Meredith often describes Willoughby's conscious use of shapes as metaphors for his mental actions. In one instance, he refers to Willoughby's mind as a "circle," with various rays extending out to pin and fix those around him within the orbit of his personality (104). Later, he imagines the "offence" of his fiance's waning interest as an "orb" he can observe with interest. As Meredith describes it, Willoughby is "projecting [the orb] more and more away from him, so that in the outer distance it involved his personal emotions less, while observation was enabled to compass its vastness, and, as it were, perceive the whole spherical mass of the wretched girl's guilt impudently turning on its axis" (153). Stepping back from this image, Meredith observes that "to detach an injury done to us, and plant it in space, for mathematical measurement of its weight and bulk, is an art," but also importantly "an instinct of self-preservation." While it is certainly problematic that Willoughy detaches himself from his perceptions in this way, to do so is treated as a natural response to personal injury; there is nothing unnatural or specific to Willoughby about it. Regardless, if the constraint of consciousness is to be advocated for in this novel, it will not be demonstrated through Willoughby's myopic, circular vision. Providing "shapes," and often geometrical ones, for his thoughts allows Willoughby to grapple with his otherwise abstract musings in concrete ways. By providing consciousness with spatial characteristics, Willoughby treats thoughts as if they are objects that can be moved and manipulated in order to be better understood; and, though Willoughby is an exceptional character, this act is treated as natural.

Healthy cognitive restraint seems to find its greatest voice in Meredith himself, however, who acknowledges the necessity of cognitive control while also trying to find a place for psychological exploration. Meredith plots the novel around the central problem of judgment in the face of information tinged by personal perception. This is the job presented to readers, who he states

> begin upon the precept that not all we see is worth hoarding, and that the things we see are to be weighted in the scale with what we know of the situation, before we commit ourselves to a measurement. [Readers] may be accurate observers without being good judges. They do not think so, and their bent is to glean hurriedly and form conclusions as hasty, when their business should be to sift each step, and question. (220)

Meredith makes a clear case for the reader's filtering of narrative experience. And yet, he too must develop strategies for filtering and conveying the abstract jut like his readers and characters. In practice, Meredith contains narrative abundance through making use of metaphors or shape, grounding abstraction in concrete images. Consequently, individual "design" becomes a "ship" that "shapes us" and provides order to "an undisciplined world"; pathos is a "tide" that "carries its awakener…off his feet"; and truth is "pin's head" that is "rarely hit by design" or "calculations" (231, 297, 336). This practice is one he carries into his poetic works as well. In "Modern Love," passion is a "cage" whose "prison bars" color perception (IV.9); "knowledge" is a beast that "crouches in its den" (VII.11); and "love" is a "nerveless body" the speaker drags with him (X.4). As the speaker grapples with his wife's assumed infidelity in the poem, he observes that "love is a thing of moods:/ Not like hard life, of laws" (X.6-7). By providing such moods with concrete, shaped images metaphorically, he lends them a material hardness and intelligibility he knows they lack. While all metaphor relates one idea or image to another, Meredith consistently grounds his abstract musings on the nature of perception and truth in

discrete and portable shapes, thereby increasing the sense that thoughts are objects that can be manipulated at will.

It might seem at first that Hopkins's use of shape adheres to Meredith's model. And yet, though Hopkins does use shape to provide concrete form for abstract ideas, his shapes are neither portable nor capable of being universalized. This is because shapes are not assumed by abstract concepts in search of material representation, as they are in Meredith,[4] but become apparent in the world *as they* reveal abstract truth. Shapes are not metaphors, but a way of identifying forms

[4] Meredith is not the only novelist who took a strong interest in how shapes relate to human cognition. For many authors, in fact, shape is often portrayed in abstract terms to convey how characters attempt to give form to otherwise chaotic and unintelligible perceptions and emotions, thereby providing them with meaning and direction. In *Adam Bede*, Eliot even seeks to relieve Hetty of some of her culpability in forming unrealistic expectations by observing that she "had never read a novel" and consequently questions "how then could she find a shape for her expectations?" (141). Shape here is imagined as a cultural context that grounds an individual's imagination in a socially accepted realism. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens plays with the ways in which the mind seeks shapes to provide form to its tentative thoughts, portraying Pip standing in front of his father's tombstone and imagining that his father as "a square, stout, dark man with curly black hair," based on "the shape of the letters on my father's grave" (5). Naturally abstract, Pip's impressions of his father are determined by the concrete shapes that make up his name. The mind, seeking grounded forms around which to organize its thoughts, quickly makes use of the shaping material at its disposal. In a similar vein, though using a different technique, Trollope brings attention to the way that one's perception of action and its meaning is determined by the way the mind "shapes" the information it receives in *The Warden*. Central to the novel is the potentially illegal salary paid to Mr. Harding as warden, a sum of "two thousand pounds" that he "has never felt any compunction as to receiving" (11). Trollope is sure to note, though, that "the subject has never presented itself to his mind in that shape." Trollope immediately absolves Mr. Harding of some guilt here by simply stating that certain facts have failed to "shape" themselves in his thinking as moral transgressions; without such shaping, their status as such is brought into question. This interest in mental shaping is further evidenced in one of Trollope's stylistic ticks, which is to show how mental expectation encounters material resistance the external world, and perceives it as a conflict with unexpected shapes. An "enemy" presents itself "in the shape of hunger"; "the lion's mouth" emerges in "the shape of an attorney's office"; and "opposi[tion]" takes "the shape" of a newspaper article (223, 194, 158). While all these examples are negatively inflected, they point to an essential fact: thought is often inchoate and wandering, seeking an object or shaping influence to provide material grounding and clarify the importance and meaning of certain perceptions.

that stand out in the perceptual world because they perfectly embody the metaphysical truth undergirding them. [5]

We can see this dynamic developing in Hopkins's journals, where the shapes that capture attention seem to illuminate in their very form the miracle of God's universal design. Waves are particularly striking because they appear both universal and particular; they are natural phenomena that seem identical (each wave has roughly the same predictable shape and occurrence), but they are simultaneously unique (each wave is individual and momentary). In looking out at the ocean, Hopkins first observes "the regularity" of the waves, which are caused by breakers "always…parallel to the coast" and "shaped" to produce swells with "regularity" (August 10, 1872). And yet, out of this persistent predictability, Hopkins delights in the comparative chaos of a wave that is retreating, where "the eyes have before them a region of milky surf" and "it is hard for them to unpack the huddling and gnarls of the water and law out the shape and the sequence of the running." The neat order of the successive waves is belied by the scatter of retreating water, creating a murky undertow that "if it were clear and smooth [would show] a network" of underlying pebbles. The shape the wave assumes is an object of

[5] It's important to note how this use of shape differs from symbolism or metaphor. While symbolism and metaphor use one image or concept to indirectly refer to another, Hopkins brings attention to shape as a means of showing how the physical properties that are constituent of an object can represent deep metaphysical truths. Think, for example, of Henry James's golden bowl from *The Golden Bowl*. As becomes clear over the course of the novel, the bowl metaphorically encapsulates the psychological relationships, and betrayals, that the characters have developed in their interactions. When Maggie breaks the bowl, she displays, however, the emptiness of this signification; the bowl, in and of itself, means nothing, and it is only when it is imbued with meaning for others that it begins to take on the metaphysical properties the characters recognize within it. The role of shape in the works of Hopkins, by contrast, differs in that the physical form represented does not signify an absent or contingent metaphysical truth, but rather is constituent of it. Meaning resides *in* the shape the object takes, which constantly displays its metaphysical or philosophical reality, rather than referring to an abstract truth that is arbitrarily applied to it.

contemplation not simply because it passively embodies a concept of God, but because it actively displays the dynamism of an individual's relationship to divine form and design.

Hopkins clarifies this connection years later, when, in observing waves crashing against a seawall, he writes:

> The laps of running foam striking the sea-wall double on themselves and return in nearly the same order and shape in which they came. This is mechanical reflection and is the same as optical: indeed all nature is mechanical, but then it is not seen that mechanics contain that which is beyond mechanics. (1874)

In observing the strange capacity waves have to convey both the individuality and the uniformity of the ocean, Hopkins reveals how "shapes" function in his poetry as a way of zeroing in on and expressing the persistent presence of God that might be missed if the world is viewed only through its mechanical wholeness. Rather than providing a mere container for abstract thought, shape actively produces an understanding that exceeds material reality.

II. Geometric Hopkins

Hopkins's view of shape as a concept that unites the world of ideal, theological truth with grounded instantiation participates in with a longstanding intellectual debate about the relationship between ideal cognitive "shapes" and physical forms in the world. In the nineteenth century, this debate could be felt in advances in the field of geometry. Geometry, in fact, is the academic discipline that might best be aligned with Hopkins's poetic aspirations; in searching for a mathematical language to describe space and its properties, geometry weds the abstract and the particular in ways that mimic Hopkins's use of shape. In the philosophical and even mathematical communities, geometry had long been considered "an exemplar of transcendental truth" with "theorems…[that] could be discovered without recourse to experiment, and…were exactly true of the external world" (Richards 299). And yet—as Daniel J. Cohen observes in

Equations from God: Pure Mathematics and Victorian Faith—the nineteenth century was a period of flux for pure mathematics. Though pure mathematics counted some major successes during the era, including being used to calculate the existence of planets like Neptune, they were strongly associated with faith; through using the rational logic of mathematics, one could bypass the senses and "see" what was otherwise unobservable (7). Only in the 1860s and 1870s, when the academic community started actively to separate science and mathematics from issues of belief did the divine association between mathematical proof and higher truth become dislodged (12). This separation between ideal and empirical forms of knowing was played out in the rise of projective geometry, which tried to account for how objects appear rather than simply their ideal Euclidean formation. In "Projective Geometry and Mathematical Progress in Mid-Victorian Britain," Joan L. Richards emphasizes the extent to which the development of projective geometry was tied to a desire to consider "a new open-ended science of space," which aligned more fully with inductive reasoning than the deductive nature of Euclidean geometry (299). While Euclidean geometry had been praised for its ability to stand free from experience, representing "transcendental truths" untainted by the confines of human perspective, projective geometry reveled in the messiness of perception.

While it might seem at first that Hopkins's poetics would find their analogue in the universalizing, ideal formulations of Euclidean geometry, his use of shape draws attention to a simultaneous "projective" focus. Shape is never static in Hopkins's verse: waves crash, leaves rustle, and light dances. The energy and vitality of any living being comes into conflict with idealizations that would deprive it of its individuality. In many ways, therefore, Hopkins's verse stands out as straddling the logical line that split Euclidean and projective geometry; while Hopkins revels in the energy of nature and the way that individual perception affects objects in

the world, he still treats shape as pointing toward the seemingly objective reality of God's existence, which is supplemented by, but not dependent on, sensory experience. The ideal perfection of God is manifest in—rather than subverted by—the perceptually non-ideal forms present in physical reality. While Hopkins would never himself have identified with the aims of projective geometers, especially in their desire to move science away from systems of faith, the descriptions in his journals of encountering physical phenomena often square with the geometers' ideas about the perceptive experiences that geometry needed to expand to include. Hopkins even describes a particularly inspired moment of perception as possessed of "great brilliancy and projection," where "the eye seemed to fall perpendicular from level to level along our trees, the nearer and further Park; all things hitting the sense with double but direct instress" (120). Perspective here is integral to Hopkins's perception of instress, showing an interest in how individual perception affects geometric apprehension, a theory that underpinned the development of the field. Exploring how Hopkins's depictions of shape relate to theories of geometry, therefore, may aid in elucidating precisely how perceptions and meaning interact in his poems.

This relationship between thought and physical shape, particularly as it pertains to the field of geometry, has found consistent voice in philosophical investigation. Plato, of course, proves a foundational figure in this line of inquiry, as he provided a baseline distinction between the mind's transcendent forms and the infinitely varied, non-ideal material world. In the centuries leading up the Victorian era, philosophers continued to puzzle over whether Euclidean geometry, with its neat and ideal articulations of spatial properties, had any essential relationship to observed phenomena. Since perception lacks the reliability and universalizing abilities available in systems like geometry, thinkers like Locke and Hume challenged its direct

applicability to the material world. Straight lines don't exist, so geometry can only represent reality in a limited way. Descartes, of course, offers an opposing vision of mathematics. If the only real access to knowledge is available from within, then the apparent truth and universality of geometric principles, available to the individual through reason, prove that subjectively attained knowledge is capable of taking on objective qualities. Thus, for Descartes, geometry was a "spiritual exercise, meant to counter instability, to produce and secure oneself despite outside confusion through the production of real mathematics" (Jones 42). This conflict between rationalists and empiricists in the interpretation of geometric principles was taken up by Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason,* he utilizes Euclidean geometry to support his claims about human intuitions of space, arguing that an "*a priori* cognition of the principles of Euclidean geometry" shows the transcendental nature of spatial understanding (Shabel 195).[6] By putting pressure on the necessity of perception for mathematical knowledge, Kant separates himself from rationalists and "locates the primary seat of *a priori* mathematical understanding in sensibility rather than in the intellect" (Friedman 232). It is one's "pure form of outer sensible intuition—space" that creates his ability to attain "pure geometrical knowledge." The space between geometry and reality, for Kant, is bridged by "sensibility and imagination," allowing the individual to yield "universal and necessary knowledge" from particulars in the material world. While Kant seems to "solve" the problem of geometry's relationship to physical space in transcendent idealism, the debate raged into the nineteenth century.

This "problem" of geometry's relationship with material reality seeped into literature as well, particularly in the work of the Romantics. In Book 5 of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth portrays

[6] While Shabel ultimately argues that this is a slight misreading of a critical portion of the *Critique of Pure Reason*—and that Kant's argument here is not in fact transcendental—she provides a lengthy analysis of the critical history that has read it as supporting this claim.

a fantastical dream that he claims was inspired by musing on the relationship between "poetry and geometric truth" (109)**.** As Henry Weinfield explains, geometry and poetry formed a "crucial dialectic" in Wordsworth's verse, where the location of authentic truth was at stake (103). The dream depicted in *The Prelude* dramatizes this conflict using mythic images and symbolism. In the end, poetry wins out; reason cannot stand up to the power of knowledge derived through experience. Coleridge also took up poetry's relationship with geometry and truth in *Biographia Literaria*, though his conclusions seem to provide a greater bridge between mathematical and poetic aims in a Kantian fashion. Here, he suggests that the gulf between inner conceptions and outer manifestations—between "a line drawn before me on the slate" and "the ideal line"—is bridged by the "imagination" (Vol. 1, 172). He argues that perceivers connect ideal forms with material ones "by the act of the imagination," which then brings forth intuitive knowledge. Poetry, therefore, is a medium through which the delicate relationship between internal and external, between divinely transcendent and materially present realities, may be interrogated. The difference between poetry and geometry, however, arises in its focus. While geometry is "universal truth itself," poetry finds its access to truth in "individual form" (Vol. 2, 159). For Coleridge, poetry does inspire the individual to "sus[pend] our individual recollections…amid the music of nobler thoughts," but a reader or auditor only gains access to the "possible greatness" of the human mind through interacting with the particularity of a work of art and its speakers. Poetry thus seems to nullify the problem of internal/external distinctions that plagued Euclidean theories of geometry. While the relationship between the material world and transcendent logic may be troubled by the gulf between exterior and interior knowledge, imagination allows the individual to overcome this separation.

The physiological writings of the nineteenth century were predictably concerned with the problem of reconciling mental processes with material realities. As Edward S. Reed considers in *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James*, parsing out the relationship between "stimulus, sensation, and perception" often stumped nineteenth-century physiologists (26). How do we account for the complex conceptions we have about the world, including our idea of the self, when we are limited by our sense organs and the constraints of consciousness? It is in this scientific discourse, interestingly, that Hopkins intervenes in the debate, in an Oxford essay written for Walter Pater in which he speculates on "The Probable Future of Metaphysics." Hopkins first accuses contemporary physiologists of attempting to "show an organ for each faculty and a nerve vibrating with each idea," a hopeless venture since "this only shows in the last detail what broadly no one doubted, to wit that the activities of the spirit are conveyed in those of the body" (118). In his refutation of more recent scientific progress, Hopkins expresses his preference for a Platonic vision of form that, though in flux in the physical world, still maintains spiritual significance and truth. He takes a direct stab at theories of evolution, where "species hav[e] no absolute types and [are] only accidentally fixed"; this vision of forms, he observes, is in direct conflict with the forms of Platonic theory (120).[7] Hopkins then challenges the assumption that science accurately "sees" the development of species. Comparing evolution to music, Hopkins argues that the animal kingdom is like "a

[7] In her essay "Philosophy and Inscape: Hopkins and the Formalitas of Duns Scotus," Bernadette Waterman Ward argues in a footnote that many critics have been "misled by Hopkins's early Platonism," so that they consequently have failed to notice how "his Aristotelianism elbowed out his Platonism" (233). However, lining up Hopkins's precise beliefs about the relationship between forms and the material world is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Hopkins's interest in the individual nature of each form and its accessibility to the senses may feel Aristotelian in its focus, but his attempts to connect such individual forms to the uniformity of God, particularly in his use of shape, strongly echoes Platonism. Since Hopkins did not read Duns Scotus until after he had already developed much of his poetic theory, it is best to read Hopkins on his own terms, rather than attributing his intellectual and aesthetic aims to a single school of thought.

string[,] all of the differences in which are really chromatic." While to empiricists the "fixed" points on this scale are "arbitrary," metaphysics should show how all chords "are mathematically fixed and give a standard by which to fix all the notes of the appropriate scale." In other words, "forms have in some sense or other an absolute existence," and the job of the new metaphysician will be to articulate how these forms are represented even in a world of apparent flux.

Hopkins's analysis, though written at a young age, draws attention to the relationship he sees between metaphysical knowledge and the material world. If all of nature is a musical scale waiting to be mathematically revealed, then it expresses the reality of God's divinity even if the perception of it remains muddled or unclear. This is a common tenet of religious faith, but Hopkins's specific articulation of the importance of forms to his ability to reconcile material perception and transcendent truth brings attention to the role that shape plays in his poetry. If forms are the mind's way of apprehending universal truths in this midst of material flux, then grounding perception in shapes that can be overlaid with these forms becomes essential. Furthermore, by connecting these shapes with a tradition of ideal geometric knowledge, it is possible to connect transcendent knowledge to the material world visually. As Daniel Brown observes in *Hopkins' Idealism: Philosophy, Physics, Poetry*, "in the midst of the Darwinian assault upon essentialism [Hopkins] seeks a new affirmation of form that acknowledges and is able to incorporate the fluidity of nature" (24). Hopkins's use of both Euclidean and non-ideal shapes, I argue, is his method of connecting the universal presence of God to forms made intelligible in the natural world. [8] It is also a strategy he uses to enact cognitive control, making

[8] The idea that specifically geometric shape serves as a sign that natural phenomena are adhering to God's design and expressive of his order is deeply imbedded in the very idea of inscape. While there is much critical debate about the exact meaning of this term, Hopkins's use of it in his journals is often closely aligned with geometric descriptions of the objects he is observing.

geometric forms highlight salient features in the natural world worthy of recognition and contemplation.

To see how this theory finds expression in Hopkins's work, though, it is helpful to examine the ways in which his verse represents shape across time. Hopkins's early poetry is far more geometric in a strictly Euclidean sense than his later verse. This early interest in ideal shape's ability to clarify perceptions and experience is particularly apparent in "The Alchemist in the City." In representing a speaker invested in a false set of ideas about how the spiritual and material worlds align, Hopkins foregrounds the problem of the relationship between perception, shape, and philosophy. The poem itself is divided into two parts: the first represents the alchemist in an urban location, dissatisfied and yearning to leave his life of fruitless scientific inquiry; the second seems to represent a freed speaker, acknowledging the power God has to replace his earlier, impractical ideals. Throughout, attending to the role that geometric shape plays in the poem's progression enhances the reader's understanding of its underlying meaning.

The placement of the alchemist in a city for the first stanza offers perspective on the poem's beliefs about perception and shape. Given the interest in the overabundance of

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When looking at a collection of oak trees, for instance, Hopkins observes that "the organisation of this tree is difficult," but then he goes on to describe it in the following terms:

> "Speaking generally no doubt the determining planes are concentric, a system of brief contiguous and continuous tangents, whereas those of the cedar wd. roughly be called horizontals and those of the beech radiating but modified by droop and by a screw-set towards jutting points" (108)

By carefully observing the geometric properties of the tree, Hopkins both understands its own essential structure and becomes capable of differentiating it as a species from trees that would otherwise appear similar to a careless eye. Later, he observes a group of bluebells, noting how a single flower "touched out with the tips of the petals an oval/not like the rest in a plane perpendicular to the axis of the bell but a little atilt, and so with [the] square-in-rounding turns of the petals" (120). Here, again, the unique beauty of the individual is supported and revealed by a geometric understanding of the whole. Of course, viewing natural phenomena through the lens of geometric forms is no new idea, but Hopkins seems to use these shapes as a way of quantifying and understanding the relationship between particularity and its type.

perceptual information present in urban environments in the nineteenth century—particularly in the work of thinkers like Georg Simmel and Gustave Le Bon—the poem's setting establishes it as an ideal opportunity to consider the way that poetic shape can manage anarchic perceptual experience. The poem begins with the image of "my window," immediately throwing the reader or auditor into a square-shaped vantage on the world outside (Line 1). Outside his window, the alchemist perceives "the whole world pass[ing]," in addition to "travelling clouds, leaves spent, new seasons, altr'd sky, the making and melting of crowds" (Lines 1-4). At first, it might seem that the alchemist is using his window in a way consistent with the dictates of cognitive control; rather than allowing himself to be overcome by the perceptual overabundance of the world outside his window, he keeps such chaotic stimuli at bay through the comforting shape of his square aperture. However, an alchemist is an individual who has a false spiritual and physical theory undergirding his apprehension of the world, which compromises the efficacy of the window as a productive form of perceptual control. Since it is the crowd outside his window that "make[s] and melt[s]," and not his scientific endeavors, the alchemist is using the shape of the square to artificially order his perceptions in the absence of philosophical or spiritual truth (Line 3). Consequently, the window, rather than productively ordering the potential perceptive chaos of the outside world, is simply protecting the speaker from the logical and spiritual threats to his purpose that exist outside his room. The speaker hints at his dissatisfaction with his life's endeavors when he observes that others "do not waste their meted hours" as he does, and that a successful knowledge of the relationship between materiality and scientific theory ought to result in the ability to "plan and build," which he lacks (Lines 4-5). As becomes quickly apparent, Hopkins is using the alchemist's square window as a filtering mechanism that inadequately

protects the speaker from the material and spiritual truths that are manifest just beyond his vision.

Since the physical world, even in all its flux and change, does not support the views the alchemist possesses, he finds the instability of the physical world threatening; all it does is reinforce his feelings of inadequacy and impermanence. Alchemists, though engaged in a scientific endeavor that is focused on processes of change and transformation, are portrayed by Hopkins as feeling imperiled by the natural states of flux that proliferate in the material world. Thus, the alchemist's attempts to limit his exposure to the "real" world ultimately fail. Once the alchemist goes to his roof and observes "the horizon-round," he quickly begins to "hate the most that lore/ that holds no promise of success" (Lines 31, 33-4). Hopkins's use of "horizon-round" is striking; though he is ostensibly referring to the speaker's panoramic view, he also forces the reader to put two geometrically opposing images together: the circle and the line. The speaker has clearly reached a place of psychological instability, unable to reconcile his scientific doubt with the theories he holds about how material property works. Though he longs to put his fruitless endeavors behind him, evidenced in the shift in part one from the speaker looking through a window to imagining himself lying "on a long and squarèd height," he ends the stanza on the pessimistic word "die," rather than with an analysis of how he might shift his philosophical mindset.

"The Alchemist in the City" clearly presents a pessimistic vision of the way in which shape can fail to properly constrain perceptive experience when its motivations are intellectually and spiritually empty. This sentiment, and the negative associations geometric shapes take on in "The Alchemist and the City," are overturned in "Let me be to Thee as the circling bird." No longer constrained indoors and peering through a square window, or even lying on a "long and

squarèd height," the speaker of this poem describes himself as a "circling bird" moving freely and happily over the landscape (Lines 41, 45). He does not just observe shapes in his environment, however, as the alchemist did, but instead creates his own "shapes in the half-light," producing "departing rings" in the surrounding air (Line 47). The speaker of this second poem is clearly coming for a different spiritual perspective than the alchemist; he actively describes a circle, free within his environment, because he claims to have found "my music in a common word" issued forth in a "changeless note" (Lines 48-9). The Romantic self-examination that marks the alchemist's plight is replaced by joyful supplication, with the poem clearly addressing God, who is identified as the "authentic cadence" that persists once "other science [has] all gone out of date" (Lines 53-5). "Let me be to Thee as the circling bird," therefore, almost serves as an answer to "The Alchemist in the City," replacing failed science with timeless theological truth, and thus expressing a different attitude toward shape and its purpose. The speaker's perceptions in "Let me be to Thee as the circling bird" may now limited by the circle he traces, but this limitation is born of the his claim to have experimentally "Tr[ied] each pleasurable throat that sings/ And every praisèd sequence of sweet strings" and found "infallibly which I preferred" (Lines 50-2). Unlike the alchemist who limits his own experiences using the arbitrary boundaries of his window, the speaker of "Let me be to thee as a circling bird" chooses to seek out perceptions that reflect "the dominant of my range and state": God (Line 57). The speaker moves in a shape that expresses the totality of God's presence and truth, the circle, and in doing so he solves the perceptual and intellectual conundrum of the alchemist.

"The Alchemist in the City" and "Let me be to thee as a circling bird" draw attention to the different kind of cognitive control and constraint that exists in Hopkins's verse, and which serves as his potential answer to the problem of poetic solipsism and its relationship with egoism.

Clearly, Hopkins's perceptual ideals will not involve the kind of restriction present in the alchemist's relationship with his window; the goal will not be arbitrarily to cut off perception based on a predetermined set of parameters. And yet, while one might think that Hopkins would therefore advocate complete perceptual openness, the concern that egoism would replace such restrictions, resulting in a capitulation to Whitmanesque forms of capaciousness, remains present. The key to Hopkins's restraint, therefore, abides in his concerted attempts to, at all times, seek God out in the material world. Hopkins can, in this way, remain receptive as a poet while (potentially) avoiding the egoism of the Romantic lyric "I." While there are certainly problems with this theory of cognitive restraint, which we will consider later in relation to Hopkins's "terrible" sonnets, Hopkins does forward a notion of perception consistent with his beliefs about the relationship between the material and spiritual worlds. By seeking out stimuli in his environment that signals God's presence, mostly through evoking larger forms of his divine design, Hopkins limits his poetic vision and attempts to evacuate it of the overpowering presence of the lyric speaker.

Hopkins expands his exploration of the relationship between shape and geometrical truth in "Hurrahing in Harvest." While the shapes represented in "The Alchemist in the City" are initially static and clearly defined (a window that does not move, and a horizon fixed beyond the speaker), the poem moves toward a more active, dynamic depiction of shape in the moving circle created by the bird the speaker identifies with. Extending from this later, alive form of geometric description, "Hurrahing in Harvest" shows its speaker's ecstatic perceptions of a beautiful spring day—perceptions that are superficially random but quickly shaped into a geometric form. In the first line, for instance, the seemingly inactive "stooks" are shown to "rise/ around," imbuing piles of cut grain with the sense of movement embodied by the flying bird (Lines 1-2). This activity

and circularity is supported by the enjambed first line, which forces the reader to circle mentally to the next line before learning the direction of the stooks' movement ("around"). The imagined vitality of the stooks is supplemented by the dynamism of the clouds above, of which the speaker asks "has wilder, willful-wavier/ meal-drift moulded ever and melted across skies?" (Lines 3-4). The speaker soon asserts that these perceptions, though they may appear arbitrarily chosen, are determined by his attempts to "lift up heart, eyes" to "glean our Saviour" within his environment—he has discovered a "rounder repl[y]" to his request for divine perception than he ever imagined. Hopkins's decision to take his focus back to the image of roundness here is telling: even when the actual movements of the environment may appear erratic and non-geometric, "melt[ing]" and moving in unexpected ways, they still express the predictable form of God's truth. The speaker perceives them as the "round" reply to his spiritual questions, even though only the stooks are portrayed as actually expressing any material rotundity.

It soon becomes clear that the poem meditates on the role that perception holds in the existence of beauty, with the speaker observing that "these thing, these things were here and but the beholder/ wanting" (Lines 11-12). Significantly, these lines express the same enjambment present in the first two lines, forcing the reader to connect the two lines in order to perceive "the beholder" as "wanting." Not only does this compel the reader into the same action of looping and joining lines present earlier in the poem, but it also emphasizes the idea of the emptiness of individual perception without the guiding influence of God. The speaker does not, on his own, possess the power to order and understand nature; all he can do is identify the divine shapes within it, here represented in circles, and thereby serve as an intermediary between the chaotic beauty of nature and the eternal wisdom of God. And, just as the content of the poem enacts Hopkins's attempt to find the "shape" of God in his environment, so too does the form of the

poem constrain and confer meaning of the images it represents. Sprung rhythm hurtles the reader metrically through the speaker's thoughts, mirroring the dynamism and speed of his perceptive experiences, while its stanzaic structure and carefully placed enjambment are leavened by endstopped lines that put emphasis on the organizing power of "our Saviour" (Line 6). By the end of the poem, the agency of the speaker has been relinquished as "the heart…half hurls earth for him off under his feet" (Lines 13-4). The act of perception guided by searching for God's shaping design leads to the capitulation of poetic agency.

The emphasis on the encircling power of God found in "The Alchemist in the City" and "Hurrahing in Harvest" crops up in many of Hopkins's poems, including "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Aire We Breathe" and "The Caged Skylark." And yet, most of Hopkins's poems aren't as obviously geometrical in their relationship with shape as these examples would suggest, particularly as his writing progressed. While it might seem logical to continue using explicit references to forms like squares, circles, and lines—and thereby to confer onto his lyrical observations the philosophical power of Euclidean geometric truth—Hopkins seems to shy away from this use of shape in many of his poems. His earlier writing on the future of metaphysics and its relationship with Darwinistic principles shows an awareness that the ability to identify Platonic forms in one's environment may be more difficult than originally thought. While shape can still hold all the meaning for Hopkins that it does in its Euclidean geometric formulations, the world of species-level flux and change means that shape itself must morph to accommodate the rough edges of material experience; finding a perfect circle in nature may not be possible, so perception must be honed to locate shapes with similarly transcendent meaning, even if they have less idealized edges. Thus, as Hopkins's focus shifts more and more to individual

particularities, the applicability of Euclidean ideal shapes becomes less apparent, though his emphasis on the importance of the relationship between form and shape never slackens.

"Pied Beauty" exemplifies Hopkins's attempts to express the individuality of specific beings while also observing how the larger, species-level forms they take are expressive of God's greater design. The poem itself seems to zero in on more and more concrete forms as it progresses in order to channel and control the natural variety it considers. Starting with the abstract notion of "skies," the speaker bypasses "a brinded cow," "rose-mole[d]…trout," and "finches' wings" before settling on the geometrically comforting "landscape plotted and pieced" (Lines 1-4). In all the "things counter, original, spare, strange" that Hopkins focuses on here, the goal is ultimately to declare the guiding hand of God whose "beauty is past change" (Line 10). None of the individual creatures outlined by the speaker is geometrically simple; the very nature of "dappled things" is that they defy the simple impression of sameness that uniform appearances might suggest (1). And yet, while the speaker clearly references specific, individual animals in the poem, he never takes a particularly close look at them. From his bird's-eye view, each freckled fish is both himself and just one of a larger species. Consequently, he manages to represent the non-ideal shape of species in ways that highlights the perceptive wonder of individuality, while still impressing upon his reader that even these apparently singular beings are grouped into recognizable forms.

The speed with which Hopkins passes over these individual figures may come as a surprise to the reader of his journals, even more so when one recognizes that this relatively superficial treatment is characteristic of his verse. Where his journals often pause to luxuriate in every detail of a given wave or bluebell, his poems rarely place such concentrated attention on a single figure, as Keats would do in his odes. This conflict between actual acts of perception by

Hopkins and his representation of them in verse draws attention again to the importance of shaping both in content and structure that takes place in his poetry. While the inscape of an individual object, and the instress it creates, are important to the perceiver, the aim of the poem is not to replicate the individual poet's experience; it is to create *in lyric itself* an inscape that activates instress in the reader.[9] In other words, it is only by shaping the poem to resemble the mathematically perfect, though simultaneously individuated, appearance of objects in nature that the feeling of instress can be replicated. Consequently, in poems like "Pied Beauty" where Hopkins fails to depict images of ideally geometric figures, the structure of the verse takes on extra pressure to shape poetic experience, and thereby to imbue it with inscape. In "Pied Beauty," Hopkins uses the organizing power of meter to achieve this end, deliberately end-stopping his lines to a greater extent than in the majority of his poems. This end-stopping is further supported by internal punctuation that divides his lines more extensively, allowing each parcel of perceptual experience to feel contained and self-consciously presented. "Pied Beauty," therefore, uses sprung rhythm and individuated images to flow through perception, while simultaneously containing that flow using carefully placed punctuation. In this way, it mirrors the shaping power that God himself is shown to possess in the poem's content, turning random individuality into transcendent truth.

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[9] When Virginia Woolf considered the effect of a novel on the reader's consciousness, she formulated its impact in terms of shape, claiming that novels are "a structure leaving a shape on the mind's eye, built now in squares, now pagoda shaped, now throwing out wings and arcades" (107). What Woolf quickly observes, though—and what is taken up by authors like Hopkins who show a strong concern with shape—is that the "shape" of a narrative is not a static concept; it is not, in essence, a simple narrative structure to be pulled from the technical execution of the piece. Instead, Woolf argues that "this shape, I thought, thinking back over certain famous novels, starts in one the kind of emotion that is appropriate to it. But that emotion at once blends itself with others, for the 'shape' is not made by the relation of stone to stone, but by the relation of human being to human being" (107-108). The "shape" of a novel or poem is not the sum of its narrative or lyric parts, but instead it is an active manifestation of the energy produced by the piece in conversation with the reader who consumes it.

Hopkins's use of a poem's structure to shape experience into forms that mirror inscape is even more apparent in some of his more abstract poems. Indeed, it is almost as if the less formally Euclidean the imagery, the more self-consciously Hopkins shapes the poem itself. This is particularly true in "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo," the very poem that Hopkins defended against metrical looseness in his letter to Bridges. The poem opens with what feels like a desperate, uncontrolled plea, with its first question—about whether it is possible to maintain beauty over time—spanning just two lines, but encompassing 24 stressed syllables. In the same way that the ecstatic experiences depicted in his other poems can overwhelm the senses, so too can the "despair" that consumes the speaker. Consequently, following the first two lines, the poem seems to tumble downward, with lines progressively shortening in length, until they collapse on the trochaic repetition of the perception that threatens to block out all others: "Despair, despair, despair, despair." Structurally, the poem is almost a chiasmus, hinging on the life-affirming, single-syllabled request to "Spare!" that constitutes the beginning of the golden echo. But, though the golden echo does start to amplify its line length, such that the number of stressed syllables almost matches the poem's opening count in line 24, the second half of the poem seems to stand on its own. Rather than "echoing" the first line in its last, the golden echo repeats itself and constitutes a metrical circle, ending with a single word, just as it began: "Yonder." This creates an obvious imbalance between the opening and conclusion of the poem. However, again, the shaping of the verse here creates a powerful, felt experience of the difference between despair and salvation. The poem is not meant to express a single, shaped experience, but to animate the opposing "inscapes" of both sensations. To despair is portrayed as giving into a full, over-rich abundance of perceptions and emotions that boil down to a mundane and endlessly repeated reality: sensations of despair only beget more despair.

Salvation, on the other hand, begins with the simplicity of being "spare[d]," which then builds out to be represented in all creation. While the end of the poem moves toward a single conclusion, just as the leaden echo did, the evocation of what lies "yonder" points toward a linear future, but it also seems to circle back to the metrical simplicity of salvation (being "spare[d]"). The poem's structure, therefore, allows both the fullness of despair and the fullness of joy to be represented, while pointing toward the comparative spiritual superiority of the latter alternative.

In form and content, Hopkins portrays his commitment to shaping his own perceptually abundant experiences into a defined poetic structure for his reader. As we have seen, this structure sometimes takes on the responsibility of shaping visual and spiritual content when forms in the world diverge from their Euclidean ideals. Throughout, shape is shown to hold enormous weight as the primary means through which divine design is conveyed. Shape, therefore, answers and refutes accusations of material randomness and meaninglessness, creating instress that shows the spiritual significance of appropriately guided perception.

III. Social Geometry

While Hopkins's use of shape, both in image and form, to express metaphysical truth and limit perception has been analyzed, its connection to ethical behavior still remains to be elucidated. Hopkins's verse always has an eye toward expressing the presence of God in each detail of existence, but it can feel remarkably asocial; even when his lyrics gesture toward human figures, as in "The Wreck of the Deutschland" or "Spring and Fall," the social application of his verse appears superseded by natural or divine concerns. While it isn't necessary that Hopkins's poetry express a sense of social responsibility, its ability to function as a useful model for

cognitive control depends, in some capacity, on its applicability to daily acts of perception, which often involve others.

To determine Hopkins's potential social application, it is helpful to start by looking at his depictions of other individuals in his poetry. As it happens, when Hopkins portrays human bodies, they tend to fulfill one of two functions. On the one hand, many of his poems delight in the activity and possibility of the human form and its ability to merge with and complement the dynamism of nature. This is particularly apparent in "Harry Ploughman," where the ploughman, his horse, and the earth seem to coalesce into an almost singular being, powerful and magnificent in their ability to move in concert. But this celebration of the physical potential of the body in motion is countered by images of the body as a "cage" in "The Caged Skylark" or as "bound bones and veins" in "The Wreck of the Deutschland." Part of the reason for this distinction seems to be the role of the perceiver in his relationship to the body in question. When it is possessed by another, it is capable of greatness; when it is bound to the self, it is a shackle. Even when Hopkins describes the body as less encumbering in "The Wreck of the Deutschland," calling it "soft sift/ In an hourglass," the fluidity still becomes threatening, and only when the "pressure" and "principle" of "Christ's gift" are introduced does the self avoid collapsing. How does the reader reconcile these vastly different representations of selfhood and embodiment? And how does the answer lead to the ethical treatment of others?

While the implications of this dilemma for the poet will be considered in a moment, the guide to encountering the bodies of others, and the importance of seeking out the shape within them, is best articulated in "As kingfishers catch fire." Hopkins starts out early, as he does in many of his poems, tempering the individuality of kingfishers and dragonflies with images of "ring[s]," "string[s]," and "bell[s]," all of which draw attention to the divinely shaped nature of

even individuated beings. But where many of Hopkins's poems simply revel in the sensory beauty of the dynamic between the individual and the divine, "Kingfishers" displays the important implications of looking out for the divinely shaped nature of each creature:

> Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
> Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came*.

Seeking out the shape in others, in many cases exhibited in inscape and felt through instress, frees the recipient from the potential prison the individual feels in his own experience. By connecting the action of the individual to a larger pattern consistent with God's order, the other is capable of transcending his materiality. The perceiver can celebrate what the individual speaks but can never enjoy: his own singularity that expresses God's vision, but which is perceived by the self frequently as a limiting and crushing cage. When Hopkins describes Christ as living "in ten thousand places,/ Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his," he not only describes the presence of God in others, but also the way in which beauty is best seen in the other. The recognition of the design in others—and how that design is shaped in their individual actions and appearance—allows for the perception of God in the social world, creating the possibility of ethical perception.[10]

Dennis Sobolev, in *The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Essay in Semiotic Phenomenology*, claims that all of Hopkins's work portrays a "gap…that could never be

[10] The consequences of failing to perceive the world in this way are significant. In "Binsley Poplars," Hopkins draws attention to these consequences through mourning the destruction of a previously wooded glen. Composed of "aspens," individually shaped as "airy cages," the poplars had been a site of "beauty" that has now been thoughtlessly destroyed. The vulnerability of the poplars is equated to the delicacy of the eye—a "sleek and seeing ball/ But a prick will make no eye at all"—displaying the equivalency between human frailty and the sensitivity of nature. By failing to see the presence of God in nature—in essence, by failing to seek out such meaning within the potentially undifferentiated abundance of the perceptual world—man has "felled" a direct expression of God's order and presence.

bridged" between his theological beliefs and his experience of the world perceptually and emotionally (11-12). While there certainly is evidence of this gap permeating Hopkins's verse, the remedy to the problem Sobolev elucidates may be hiding inside Hopkins's imagery, even if this answer is not immediately intelligible to readers or to Hopkins himself. By focusing on shape and its appearance in each individual, Hopkins weds the universal with the particular, grounding the abstraction of God with the material presence of each person. This allows Hopkins to connect his spiritual and experiential lives, even if the connection bypasses intellectual understanding. By applying this theory of shape to the social world, Hopkins manages to reconcile the problem posed by Bachelard about the aura of geometric shapes. While Hopkins would likely bristle at the simplicity of considering a person "square" in his behavior, it is through seeing the way that God has shaped each individual that ethical perception can be activated. However, instead of the poet experiencing his own fullness at such moments, as Bachelard asserts, he becomes capable of seeing beyond his own imprisoned form. Thus, the importance of perceiving shape in one's environment eclipses the need to create moral maxims that can be easily described in geometric terms. Ultimately, it frees the perceiver briefly from his own subjectivity, which can never be "full" in the ways the Romantics imagined.

Hopkins's use of shape appears to be one of the primary ways in which he reconciles the poetic need for free and unbridled perception with the spiritual need for focus and careful design. But the success of this venture seems questioned in the "terrible" sonnets, which express the despair of perception that fails to find its divine shaping. If one opens up to the full range of sensory experiences, the ability to classify and contain them—to, as Hopkins calls it, "call off thoughts awhile/ Elsewhere"—can become compromised ("My own heart let me more have pity on" 10-11). More importantly, while the monomania that Herbert Tucker identified as the

endpoint of Romantic consciousness may not afflict Hopkins, putting oneself forward as an absolute perceiver does complicate the ability to compartmentalize the sensory experience of selfhood.[11] Though Hopkins has no difficulty consistently recognizing the inscape and divine possibility in others, the lingering of the persistent self despite the absence of ecstatic, revelatory experience leads to the sense that "Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours" ("I wake and feel the fell of dark" 12). Inscape is not portrayed as a structure that can be divined in the self, and perceiving it in others only affirms the self *as a self*, all the more isolated by its inability to participate in the glory it perceives. If beauty is a relationship, as Hopkins continually suggests, it cannot be apprehended in the self, since the distance necessary to create it is absent. Thus, the perceiver in Hopkins's verse lapses into the inverse of the monomaniacal speaker, a constantly self-effacing consciousness that can never empty itself completely of the ego it seeks to deny.

In the end, the "terrible" sonnets do not have the last word on Hopkins's perceptual experiments in his poetry. While not all affect can be shaped and packaged convincingly as an expression of divine design, even the composition of Hopkins's darkest sonnets are attempts to form and contain perception in order to survive and reaffirm his higher convictions. Though Hopkins's cognitive control comes later in the process of perception than for most Victorian novelists, he conveys the importance he saw in shaping experience, both emotionally and spiritually. Doing so opens up the individual to the ordered beauty of creation. It makes perceptual experience meaningful as stream of consciousness could never be.

[11] Hopkins's famous descent into "disillusionment and solipsism" late in his career, particularly over the difficulty of reconciling his joy in God's creation with what he perceived as a problematic increase of isolation—makes the danger of the lyric "I" explored in dramatic monologues all the more troubling (Muller 8).

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