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FORMAL RECREATIONS: PLAY AND THE PRODUCTION
OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

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BRIAN OLSZEWSKI

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FORMAL RECREATIONS: PLAY AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

By

Brian Olszewski

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ABSTRACT

FORMAL RECREATIONS: PLAY AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

By

Brian Olszewski

Formal Recreations: Play and the Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel examines the ways in which novels extend or counter dominant discourses of play fueling emergent forms of recreation and leisure during the long nineteenth century. An increasingly popular recreational form as a result of increased leisure time and rising literacy rates, the novel is positioned squarely within more extensive nineteenth-century discourses and practices of recreation and leisure. The dissertation takes the novel-as-recreational form as a point of departure to investigate under-appreciated dimensions of its dual status as a work of art and a cultural object that performs social work. The demands of this inquiry necessitate acute attention to and a revision of an aesthetics of the novel form in order to trace this particular line of reciprocal production in the aesthetic and social fields. Canonical novels such as *Emma*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Wuthering Heights* tend to reinforce rubrics of play such as rational recreation by depicting it as a positive and desired leisure practice. But *Formal Recreations* locates another facet of the novel-social relationship arising as an expression of aesthetic form. Aesthetic terrains such as plot, illusions, and narration not only remain invested in social discourses of play by helping to reify dominant narratives of recreation and leisure as the means to their aestheticization; they double as aesthetic expressions of the productive play scaffolding the form-content relationship in a novel. The eighteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Schiller theorizes that a play instinct, what he terms the play-drive (*Spieltrieb*),

negotiates the simultaneous drives for form and content in aesthetic objects. While Schiller conceptualizes a just political state on the basis of his aesthetic theory, the dissertation contends that the play-drive, as the conditioning ground for the form-content relation in a novel, brings the social into the aesthetic. This transaction occurs because the play driving a particular novel formalizes as a unique set of aesthetic expressions simultaneously belonging to more extensive, disparate and contentious discourses of extra-literary play. In addition to opening new avenues to rethink the aesthetic-social relationship during the long nineteenth-century, the play driving the novel form emerges as a historical discourse, one that offers new concepts, terms, and relationships to reconsider the rise of the British novel.

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Formalizing Play in the Nineteenth-Century Novel

“Surely all other leisure is hurry compared with a sunny walk through the fields from “afternoon church”—as such walks used to be in those old leisurely times, when the boat, gliding sleepily along the canal, was the newest locomotive wonder; when Sunday books had most of them old brown—leather covers, and opened with remarkable precision always in one place. Leisure is gone—gone where the spinning—wheels are gone, and the pack—horses, and the slow waggons, and the pedlars, who brought bargains to the door on sunny afternoons.”

George Eliot’s lamenting of Old Leisure’s passing in *Adam Bede* (1859) signifies the emergence if not cementation of new modes and habits of recreating during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. In so doing, Eliot joins a chorus of Victorian voices from disparate cultural arenas chiming in on the status or worth of play. With all apologies to Johann Huizinga, who claims that a monolithic nineteenth century witnessed the decline of “play-elements” so apparent in former ages, one that left “little room for play” (195), it seems rather that play, as an omnipresent concern during this period, may have been hidden in plain sight.

Broadly conceived, play (I will parse this term shortly) remained a recurrent concern during the Victorian period. Its infiltration into aesthetic discourses (Ruskin and Dallas), utilitarian philosophy (Mill), cultural criticism (Arnold) and those of science and psychology (Groos and Spencer), and emergence as thematic in a litany of fictions – realist, urban, rural, nonsense – suggests that thinkers of all sorts put play to work or work out what play is in various settings and in numerous narratives. While social historians continue to map a history of leisure (the time of play) and recreation (what is played), and while literary scholars continue to find new regions to mine further our understanding of the codification of the Victorian novel, these two concerns historically

remain separate pursuits informed by disciplinary boundaries. The ensuing chapters take as a starting point that the reorganization and re-evaluation of play discourses and values and the development of the novel form during the nineteenth century coincide in fundamental ways that have yet to be fully appreciated.

The expressions and implications of what I term the novel's play-drive and the way in which novelists harness it comes to light through a critical amalgam drawing on a number of traditions and fields of study: philosophies of play, novel theories, narrative theories, aesthetic theories, discourse theories, as well as ideological discourses driving the reformation of recreational and leisure practices when the novels under examination are written and published, roughly 1780 – 1870. Perhaps it is this entangled pedigree that lends the dissertation its own motility, finding alliances with various critical schools and perspectives without ever pledging allegiance to just one. One might say I play some discourses off others in order to qualify the particular expression of the play driving a particular novel.

If there is, at times, a Marxian thrust in certain chapters – the Macherey and attention to ideology in this brief introduction suggests as much – for instance, I do not claim that a Marxist theory underpins the dissertation. I find the commitment to reproducing the spatialized metaphors of hierarchy (depths, levels, surfaces) endemic to this discourse limiting and binding at the same time that I find the work of Macherey, Jameson, and Eagleton essential to illuminating particular dimensions of my observations. (In the first chapter, I rather propose to consider fictional narratives in terms of contiguous terrains of production.) In like fashion, while at times I utilize

poststructuralist thought's performative encounter with play, it is ill-equipped to wrangle with the dissertation's historical and ideological concerns.

The critical paradigm encapsulating the larger project is less a model and more of a guiding logistic. Bakhtin's architectonic approach to the creative act specifically and aesthetics generally in his early work negotiates the encounter between the aesthetic and the social in mine. Or more accurately, an architectonic lens helps me locate the social inherent to the aesthetic. In brief, Bakhtin contrasts architectonics with a compositional logic, the latter of which he accuses Russian Formalists of using to theorize literature. Compositional logic is more concerned with the technical realization of the literary object, which isolates a novel or poem into a self-sufficient structure of motivations, style, and devices. Such a rubric establishes aesthetic relations that remain bound to the work itself, never moving beyond its borders into the extra-literary that hums with voices, discourses, utterances, and the word, which so occupies Bakhtin throughout his career.

An architectonic approach, in contrast, wrangles with the extra-literary, bringing it to bear on the literary object. For Bakhtin, the literary object establishes relations that transcend its own borders because it is an activity, not a static object, a zone of dialogic contact that mediates the encounter between creator/author and contemplator/reader. In this scenario, two individuated consciousness act upon a novel – an author writes and a reader reads what is written – at different moments to finalize or complete it. The particularities of this activity of completion are determined by an individual's ideology, history, and sociality, which make the art of novel-making far from neutral. An author and reader, then, occupy two sides of the productive process that must be accounted for

when considering the ontological status of the novel form, an issue that I return to in different chapters of the dissertation.

In my unfolding argument the play-drive refers to aesthetic processes and relationships arising as productions of the form-content dyad in a particular novel. In short, it is aesthetic work, or more exactly, what an author must work through in the writing of a novel. It is a hub of activity through which an author distributes, organizes, and structures novelistic relations that emerge from its simultaneous negotiation of form and content. As I will suggest, the importance of marking the productive terrain of this drive for play lies not in its role of furthering our understanding of abstract narrative structures. Rather the aesthetic work it performs in its varied expressions in particular novels loosens them from the illusion that they derive from such structures: the play-drive becomes essential in establishing the laws and conventions of a novel's particular aesthetic, the necessary genetic structuration that gives a work of art its apparent autonomy. But additionally, as Pierre Macherey emphasized decades ago, such aesthetic autonomy is not equivalent with independence from the social and ideological milieu in which a novel emerges.

A novel is comprised of aestheticized language an author organizes according to the structuring laws demanded of a novel, not *the* Novel. This aesthetic language yet does not dissociate itself from the ideological use and structures of language exterior to it, those discourses from which a novelist draws for novelistic material. For Macherey and others such as Terry Eagleton, this relationship has the capacity to reveal the ideology that otherwise flows unassumingly in the use of everyday language at large: while literary language refers to its own specificity and specialized existence, "it also imitates the

everyday language which is the language of ideology” (Macherey 68). By making ideology less elusive and obscure, literary works and the literary language comprising them allow readers to confront the ideology which otherwise potentially escapes them in life. A novel does so, in part, by virtue of its apparent totality and completedness.

The necessary separation and distance of the aesthetic object from the becoming, ongoing, and never-endedness that is a reality of life is a condition of novel production. So is an author’s selective use of aesthetic language. Both conditions, however, establish productive relations with reality and with extra-literary language, as Macherey suggests, because “the work exists above all by its determinate absences, by what it does not say, in its relation to what it is not” (172). The contours of a novel, then, the edges and boundaries that speak to its completion concurrently announce the work’s working relationship with the extra-literary and its attendant realities. In essence, an author re-works the latter. These relations, I will argue, cannot be sufficiently elucidated without acknowledging the role of play in forming them.

Such a claim is not an announcement of my own brand of criticism, one modeled upon a Derridean or Lacanian ludic practice of reading. I am simply suggesting that play is a productive aesthetic of the novel form that performs necessary work in the coterminous production of form and content rather than describing the performance of my playful reading of novels. This play-drive, the expressions of which accrue to form a historical discourse inherent to the novel, emerges as a primary conduit by which a novel’s aesthetic discourse and extra-literary discourse make contact. In fact, making the terms of this contact explicit, highlighting those extra-novelistic discourses that

determine the expressions, extent, and intensity of the play-drive, is often the only way the play-drive can come to our attention.

Not so much an obvious or even absent center, the de-centered play-drive has the capacity to move to-and-fro either register, and to occupy both simultaneously, depending upon the motives of an author. Such motility, which is determined by the kind of work in question (romance, realist, historical, parodic), does not mean that the play-drive disappears in certain novelistic genres. It only means the necessity of looking elsewhere for it, in that which is exterior to the novel, in order to re-accentuate the play-drive that has been muted, silenced, or tamed to accommodate various aesthetic ends.

My dissertation's tracing of the novelistic work of play extends terrain that needs to be accounted for in rubrics of literary production and theories of literary form. At the same time that various extraliterary discourses of play operate as the means by which I transcode the relation between the novel form and cultural arenas exterior to it, play remains the primary subject under investigation: as a drive that conditions the novel form. The dissertation, then, must live up to a dual demand: in addition to theorizing the novel through the multi-faceted productions of play, I must marshal a lexicon to demonstrate that the maturation and refining of a novel aesthetic of play remains intricately related to dominant play-values circulating in various cultural arenas during the long nineteenth century.

Terms such as edification, discipline, rational, safe, excess, and domestic may not all equally apply to an aesthetic of play that is central to my theory of the novel. But such terms and the values attached to them help to instantiate notions of propriety and impropriety that normalize ludic rubrics in prevailing recreational and leisure practices. I

will argue such models and their attendant discourses and values, at the same time, stabilize novelistic practices while opening up new aesthetic avenues, such as literary realism. The proper and improper operate as linchpin conceptions for an era that was driven by the attempt of the middle classes to shape society to their liking. The novel form, as a distinctive set of aesthetic utterances, it will be shown, contributes to this project at the hands of various authors, and, in turn, is concurrently shaped by the very discourses of propriety and impropriety that it disseminates. The epigraph from *Adam Bede* broaches a dimension of this relationship by accounting for the emergence of new forms of leisure that supplant its older forms.

A sense of nostalgia for the old, feeling its irrevocable loss, as well as expressing concern and doubt for the efficacy of the forms of recreation and leisure replacing the older formations fuels the tenor of this passage. The disappearance of Old Leisure, for Eliot, coincides with the rise of an urban culture that threatens the rhythms and structures of a way of life she poses as rural and traditional. “Free of the periodicity” of “post-time,” Old Leisure enjoys the “pleasant seats and homesteads” that life in the country affords. In contrast to newer leisure practices, associated with cities, industrialism, and an increased pace of life, Eliot suggests that Old Leisure remained content when lingering in life’s idle moments. This “rather stout gentleman,” we are told, had the capacity to experience such quiet times as ends without needing or desiring to overload them with diversions. Claiming that “idleness is eager now—eager for amusement; prone to excursion—trains, art museums, periodical literature, and exciting novels,” Eliot casts the recreating mid-Victorian as losing Old Leisure’s “contemplative” demeanor, as well as his ability to generate “quiet perceptions” as a function of emergent leisure practices.

If here Eliot comments on a shift in leisure practices and values, she makes a similar observation about the novel form and the demands it exerts on the novelist over a decade later in *Middlemarch*. She claims that “historians” can no longer write in the manner of Henry Fielding, whose capacious fictive landscape more comfortably finds a home during a time “when the days were longer . . . when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings” (141). On the one hand, with such an observation Eliot offers a trajectory of the novel form from the middle of the eighteenth century to the closing decades of the nineteenth century in chronotopic terms. Industrialism, urban culture, and codified daily and weekly schedules that clearly defined work and play times for laborers are just a few of the developments that distinguish Eliot’s material and historical milieu from that of Fielding’s, in which the ebb-and-flow rhythms of agrarian culture contributed to a less urgent sense of time and a grander sense of space. Eliot suggests that a writer from one period will necessarily incorporate the temporal and spatial sensibilities into a work of fiction, which leads her to consider the complexities and interweaving of “certain human lots” at a much more localized level than Fielding’s more enlarged stage.

On the other hand, Eliot invites readers to consider how she maintains her focus in *Middlemarch*, how she structures her plot without veering outside the limited frame she constructs for herself, a frame that by no means limits her ability to complicate the figures and narratives within it. In the chapter (15) that opens with a gloss of Fielding’s artistry, Eliot also highlights the importance of structures in the lives of her characters. Her narrator explains Lydgate’s interest in “the fundamental knowledge of structure” as a way to color his relationship to science and medicine, which recalls Casaubon’s own life-

long pursuit in unlocking the narrative structures and patterns holding the key to all mythological traditions. Eliot announces her own awareness of the narrative structure informing her novel aesthetic by way of her remark about Fielding: she (or anyone else) may not be able to write in the manner of Fielding during the 1860s, but concomitantly she suggests that he was not able to write in the manner of an Eliot during the 1740s. This issue or question of what constitutes Fieldingness or Eliotness in relation to the maturation of the British novel boils down to a question of form: what differentiates one from the other?

But it is not so much this question but one lingering in its background that needs to be put into focus, the more fundamental question that asks what a novel form actually is. The first chapter broaches this concern in greater detail by suggesting the need for a revised language of literary forms, one that acknowledges the different but interdependent productive nodes comprising a form such as the novel: form, formatting, and formalization. Each designates a region of activity without which a novel form could not come into being, accounting for an author's (formatting) and a reader's asynchronous contribution (formalization) to the aesthetic activity that is form. I take as a central supposition Mikhail Bakhtin's observation that a literary object such as novel is an activity rather than a static object, one that impels author and reader, as creator and re- or co-creator to ultimately mold a novel into a particular form.

My reappraisal of the novel form theorizes the aesthetic work of play as a binding agent that simultaneously unites separate terrains of a novel – form and content – without robbing either of their seemingly semi-autonomous standing. Paradoxically, the work of play is what allows us to discuss form or content as if they were actually not conjoined

in their mutually determining and productive relationship. The logistics of this interaction, which I re-write as form-play-content, conditions a novel's aesthetic as the unassuming but absolutely necessary situation from which more localized novelistic terrains emerge. It is the unacknowledged ground that concurrently activates specific novelized content (words, utterances, discourses, images, characters) and form (plot, narration, style, structure). The play actively driving this interaction gives to content a form required for expression and concurrently gives to form the content it requires for its expression. The form-content relation, rather than a direct confrontation, arises through the work of play that is the means by which an author puts one in contact with the other. The recent turn to literary forms and formalism becomes essential in working through the particularities and overlappings informing the production of both terrains: the aesthetic – aesthetic relation (form and content) and the aesthetic – extra-aesthetic relation (novel form and forms of recreation/leisure).

The first chapter, “Reformations and Formal Renewals: Productions of Play,” mobilizes the theoretical and historical discourses necessary for this double reading, a burden dictated by the relative dearth of specialized criticism already in place for the specific contours and demands exacted by such a project. Operating in this lack, however, becomes a boon by forcing me to mine disciplines from various historical periods to illuminate the productivity of the play-drive. For instance, I borrow the concept of the play-drive from Friedrich Schiller, who fashions an aesthetic theory around it, but one that remains limited by his idealism and commitment to the “beautiful.” The work of social-anthropologist Roger Callois, who studied games and play in various cultures also requires a brief mention at the outset. He builds a discourse of play types that become

essential in translating Schiller's concept into the specific realm of the novel, which also allows for the tracking of expressions of the play-drive in various novel traditions. While his study and others like it explicitly wrestle with play in various cultural and historical arenas, other works less invested in the ludic yet emerge as central to my project. Peter Brooks's work on plot, for instance, explicitly re-writes narrative plotting through a psychoanalytic paradigm. Yet as my reading of his reading of plot suggests, his model depends upon a discourse of play for its elucidation, which implicitly positions play as a productive nexus of narrative.

The next chapter, "Play, Recreations and Re-creations in *Oliver Twist*" charts Dickens's use of representations of forms of play in his novel, which assume a central role in Oliver's development: competing forms of recreation, those of the city and the country, mark Oliver's transformation into a middle-class subject. The novel associates forms of "improper" play with Fagin's London in particular and by extension urban culture in general, while associating forms of "proper" play with Brownlow, the Maylies, and the country. To trace the dialectic between city and county and the forms of recreations that become attached to each is to acknowledge the role representations of city, country, and play in the novel's plot. The contest for Oliver's identity and thus the creation of his life-story as inaugurated by Fagin and then countered by Brownlow, the eventual victor in this game, unfolds, in part, through the games, play, amusements, and entertainments each exposes to the child when in their respective custody. While it is clear that in this novel Dickens aligns himself with the middle-class values of Brownlow, the novel is less forthright about the economy of play that it depicts. Despite claiming in his introduction to *Oliver Twist* that he depicts life as it really is, a closer look at the

forms of recreation in which Oliver engages while recovering in the country with the Maylies – cricket, reading, gardening – illuminates the way in which Dickens’s representational economy remains hedged in by a middle-class ideology of play. Contrasting Oliver’s recreative experience in the country to young Tom Brown’s experience of a local “veast” or feast in *Tom Brown’s School Days* reveals the rural, ludic expressions that Dickens omits in his novel.

In *Oliver Twist* Dickens treats formations of play as historically completed by naturalizing the middle-class experience, as if it equally applied to everyone. But in *Tom Brown’s School Days* Thomas Hughes presents a countryside in transition, in which traditional ludic expressions practiced at the “veast” are being abandoned by the younger generation in favor of urban habits and practices. This dialectic emerges as a literary expression of the ideological underpinnings informing extraliterary formations of play that country-city relations experience during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The third chapter, “Plotting the Play of Plot” works through the economies of “easy play” driving George Henry Lewes’s theory of fiction in his essay “A Word About *Tom Jones*” (1860). Under Lewes’s vision, a novelist should parse a fiction into distinct narrative terrains: what should be seen and not seen. Lewes outlines the principles of economy and selection that direct attention away from the narrative machinery that produces an illusion in a realist novel. For Lewes such principles in a fiction instantiate an organicism and naturalism grounded in an “easy” play among scenes and passages that give the appearance that fictional illusions unfold without the aid of the novelist.

Additionally, in light of Lewes’s theory of fiction, the ludism inherent to Peter Brooks’s theory of plot assumes greater meaning: more than the “play of repetition” or

plot forming a “playground” of textual energetics of desire and life and death drives attached respectively to beginnings and endings, Lewes suggests that any fictional narrative lives by playing in a certain way, easily. When it ceases to do so and a fiction reveals its machinery, for Lewes, “the illusion vanishes.” My reading of Lewes’s essay also becomes the occasion to historicize and contextualize Brooks’s influential essay, which does not account for principles of pleasure beyond Freud’s in his readings of nineteenth-century texts. Foremost among these is *The Gay Science* by E.S. Dallas, who attempts to found a theory of art based on pleasure.

The chapter “Sympathetic Inter-Lude: *Vanity Fair*’s Sym-aesthetic” examines the material and aesthetic conditions of production informing *Vanity Fair*, which work together to instantiate the circulation of sympathy. As I suggest, Thackeray harnesses the play-drive to produce his self-referential fiction, a tactic that simultaneously opens his novel to the circulation of sympathy, which already inhabits the serial mode of publication that was the novel’s initial form of distribution. The particularities of serialization allowed for author and reader to share in the creation of the unfolding narrative. Thackeray’s loquacious narrator/master of ceremony also thematizes the author-reader relationship as novelistic device and thus content, which extends the community of fellowship into the narrative’s pages. I conclude my reading by turning to expressions of German Romanticism to further heighten the stakes in Thackeray’s play of sympathy or sympathy as play. The work of Friedrich Schlegel and others on the aesthetic-philosophic importance of play, the fragment-fragmentation, and symphilosophy situate *Vanity Fair* as a meditation upon the social inherent to an aesthetic of the novel.

“Ludic Transgressions in *Wuthering Heights*,” the final chapter, examines how expressions of play produce disorder both in the novel (schemes of representation) and as the novel (scheme of narration). Early in the novel, when Heathcliff and Hareton stand idly by, “guffawing” at the spectacle of a pack of dogs pinning a helpless Lockwood to the ground, readers are initiated to an ethos of violent amusements and diversions that foster communal antipathies. This moment secures the bleeding Lockwood as a “blood sport” for the duo, a traditional entertainment that increasingly loses favor as the nineteenth-century progresses. Catherine Earnshaw’s game of playing ill to exact revenge against Edgar and Heathcliff, which spurs her deadly malady, models a transcendent ethos that circulates at the Heights and serves as the aesthetic disposition of the novel. If this game moves beyond Catherine’s control, and if positioning Lockwood as a blood sport violates codes of hospitality, *Wuthering Heights* breaches conventions of the novel form. This novelistic temperament emerges most prominently in the novel’s narratorial interplay between Lockwood and Nelly.

More disordering than violent, their pattern of narration confuses iterations of the story of the Heights that a more familiar narrative technique would take pains to separate. However, Catherine Linton’s reading to Hareton at the end of the novel signals a newfound social stability anchored by the shift to leisurely pursuits aligned more with the edifying pleasures of rational recreation than the displeasure spawned by a transgressive ludism. Despite the turmoil caused by a legacy of violent and unruly play, Brontë’s novel emerges as an emblem for the unfolding narrative of recreation and leisure in the long nineteenth century marked by its turn to reading as a legitimate leisure occupation.

An observation by Bill Brown marks the point of departure of my project with his own meditation on the relation between the literary and play and other similar studies. He writes that *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economies of Play* “imagines literature as a recreational form that, in its conscious and unconscious relation to other recreational forms, discloses their liberating and restricting contradictions” (13). I also begin with the assumption that literature is a recreational form. But the importance of the relationships I trace in subsequent chapters reveal the necessity of disclosing the role recreational forms play in arming readers with a language with which to gauge expressions of the novel’s play-drive. This drive for play lends the novel form its own liberating and restricting potential. In individual novels it serves as ground zero for aesthetic production by organizing, and formulating relations among various narrative terrains, such as plot, illusions, and narration according to generic, stylistic, and thematic demands. When a number of particular expressions of the play-drive are assembled into a representative set used by authors of a literary tradition or school, we can begin to think about the way in which the development and maturation of the novel form in the long nineteenth-century, in part, remains driven by exploiting, re-routing, and taming the extent and reach of the play’s productions. I hope to suggest that far from only representing images of rational recreation, novels, through the work of play, have the capacity of embodying an aesthetic sympathetic to such dominant leisure formation.

The rise of literary realism in the long nineteenth century, I argue, coalesces as a consequence of novelists’ heightened concern for depicting true-to-life content. Such an emphasis means a concomitant de-emphasis on the performance of form that is so vital to

an earlier novel tradition, a subject I discuss in the next chapter. It is not an accident that the latter accompanies the former; it becomes an aesthetic necessity, a tactic used by novelists invested in literary realism to manage the form-play-content relation, whether consciously or otherwise. In short, giving more play to content of a certain type necessitated giving less play to a form that becomes more a less a container for the “real” world that is fictionally rendered so this world retains the aura of a sense of authenticity. My reading of *Emma* that closes the next chapter suggests that its representations of domestic leisure forms arise as emblems for the novel’s aesthetic, which relies on a restrained play-drive when viewed in light of a more excessive novel ludic practiced by her predecessors.

Reformations and Formal Renewals: Productions of Play

“It is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work’s relationships with the author, not to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather, to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships.” Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”

“To know the work, we must move outside it.” Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*

Recent expressions of the New Formalisms¹ suggest the way in which the consideration of literary forms benefits from remembering that literary discourse(s) (prosaic, poetic, dramatic) is always double: as a plastic set of linguistic and aesthetic conventions, it concomitantly arises as a distinctive branch of a culture’s larger set of discourses or utterances, what Marc Angenot refers to as Social Discourse or SD.² Probing the conventions of the novel form most intensely influenced by the play-drive finds the dissertation negotiating familiar theories of narrative and the novel to do so. But theories of discourse, particularly those of Bakhtin, Volshinov, and Edmond Cross, also will be central in establishing the transdiscursive set of utterances comprised of aesthetic and extra-aesthetic expressions of play, without which the play-drive would risk further obscurity.

This set of aesthetic and extra-aesthetic utterances of play localizes sympathetic and ideological affinities in transit to and from the novel and other recreational forms without eliding the integrity of the fields from which the utterances emerge. Integration, then, does not mean historical or material disintegration into an abstract or ideal structure. Though there is a structural or formulaic calculus to my readings of the play-drive, this is a critical necessity rather than end. Not play itself or the form-play-content triadic, then,

but what this model produces and how it in turn is produced and determined from without is my primary interest. Absolutely dependent upon a transdiscursive assemblage of utterances about play that is not given or already in place, to reach this end means finding this discourse.

With such a discourse we can identify particular lines and zones of contact that open one field to another, allowing for the tracking, for instance, of a shared commitment to normalizing notions of the proper. Discourses of the proper and forms of rational recreation, to be sure, remain explicitly and inextricably bound in the nineteenth-century. To play rationally according to its dominant expressions, is to play the right way. The varied expressions of the novel form during this time, at first glance, however, escape such blatant ideological blanketing, for various reasons. (But early reviews and criticism of fiction and the novel often weighed the merits and legitimacy of the novel, as well as the propriety of representing particular content, as I discuss below.)

Reconsidering the form-content relation through the play that conditions it, however, makes manifest that the novel, as a recreational form itself, unavoidably remains beholden to normalizing processes specific to it. The development of genres is otherwise impossible. Unfolding over time in various works, this process of normalization arises as a result of authors meeting the aesthetic demands inherent to the creation and maintenance of genres, subgenres, and literary schools. Acute attention to the language used by nineteenth-century authors, reviewers, and critics that legitimizes (or decries) a novel or genre implicitly reproduces a rubric of propriety. These rules, conventions, and codes, if not explicitly stated, remain implied by the examples proffered in/as the works themselves.

This body of material encodes the traces of the harnessing, binding, and limiting of the play-drive that condition particular aesthetic/generic ends that quite often, is not so obvious. The processes informing it do not remain free of ideology, as we shall see. Neither do they remain determined wholesale, as does rational recreation, to ideals of discipline, the proper, and the like. Not necessarily. But as a whole, they do remain susceptible to traditional aesthetic ideals: beauty, totality, harmony, and unity.

Early novel reviewers and critics, lacking a specialized discourse, inherit literary and aesthetic discourses and models from poetry and drama, initially using it to read narratives of fiction. This inheritance, which is an imposition – the imposition of a model, models, and the very idea of *the* model as a law – serves the same role here as the proper does in relation to rational recreation. With regard to the latter, expressions of play are determined by a model or ideal – edification or discipline – that consequently reproduce this model, giving it particular expression, context and meaning in its various iterations.

This transaction is not difficult to trace because rational recreation is a discursive formation of play. The novel, on the other hand, complicates its relation to play because it is more than play. Its status as a form of recreation does not totally account for the novel, which impinges upon questions of the aesthetic, the political, the imagination, writing, reading, and the production and dissemination of knowledge. Since a novel is more than play, we need to explicitly formulate its relationship to ludic discourses in other fields, because one still works by playing. An intervention, then, is required to make this playing more pronounced, since the novelistic work of play continues to be inconsistently or incidentally highlighted and generally de-emphasized in favor of a host of other theorizations to which the novel opens itself. In turning to extra-literary recreational

forms to elucidate the various expressions of the play driving the novel form, I use one ludic discourse to expose another.

The fact that we can directly confront recreational forms as expressions of play establishes a certain relationship between these terms and the fields each denotes. Play, as a conceptual category, exceeds the more limited terrain designated by forms of recreation by encompassing them. Because of this transparent relationship, we know that recreational forms are one way to come to an understanding of play. (There are others, of course: play vs. work, play vs. waste, play as relaxation, or contrasted ways of playing, such as excessive vs. restrained, etc.) And vice versa, play is one way to come to terms with recreational forms. (But we could also consider them from other angles: from the standpoint of health; as part of an examination of wealth, class, community or region; or whether one form has the greatest impact on the mind, soul, or body and why, which would not necessarily be framed by play).

Here, play and rational recreation can be the means to the end of discussing the other, or both can be discussed without absolute dependence on the other. Acknowledging the novel as a recreational form works in much of the same way. But grounding a theory of the novel form on the premise that it works by playing, that a play-drive conditions the form-content relationship, presumes another kind of relationship. This is a question, ultimately, of aesthetic or literary production, one that claims that the novel form depends upon the work of play as a condition of possibility. Play, in this formulation, becomes the means to a novel's aesthetic ends. Unlike in the play-rational recreation or the novel-recreation relation, the play-novel relation necessarily destabilizes at least one term of the dyad, "novel," by demanding the reconsideration of form and

content subtending its production. This is why a reappraisal of form, content, and their relation needs to precede play's introduction into it, which, as we shall see, is really only a reintroduction and reapplication of Friedrich Schiller's theory of aesthetics and the play-drive.

Pre-Lude

A 2003 issue of *Victorian Studies* dedicates substantial attention to publishing Caroline Levine's program of "strategic formalism" and responses to it. As an expression of New Formalism, it seeks to further our understanding of literary forms by forging what she describes as a contradictory aesthetic. Levine concludes the introduction to her "post-post-structuralist formalism" with a reading of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's "Cry of the Children." She demonstrates the efficacy of strategic formalism to unpack the poetic enactment of an "inconsistent" politics based on the interaction of the poem's form with the social forms conditioning it.

Much of the force of Levine's reading derives from her consideration of Barrett-Browning's imagery and the manner in which, for instance, "domesticity" launches a network of "contradictory political aims" (640). While instructive, equally so is the response to her reading by Herbert F. Tucker, who finds in the "insistence" of the poem's meter a confrontational politics that supplements Levine's findings. Tucker discovers in the "mechanically driven, metronomically merciless prosody" "the industrial experience of the child worker on whose behalf Barrett Browning presumes to speak" (88). Taking Levine's cue, then, Tucker discovers that the versification of the poem carries its own political charge, revealing the way in which a poem's formal metrics complement the

contradictory images or the content of the poem. Mapping the political charges underpinning the formal impulsions of a novel in a similar fashion further extends and complicates Levine's program.

Narratologists in particular and scholars of narrative in general have produced a poetics of narrative drawing on the formalist ethos used by Tucker that will be indispensable in my dissertation's re-mapping of the form-content relationship through three primary arenas: plot, fictional illusions/representation, and narration. My use of this literary discourse arises from the need to trace the work of play as a structuring force of the form-content pairing that, in turn, is expressed in the above narrative terrains/operations. Doing so allows for the coming to terms with a diachronic and synchronic understanding of the novel form. Following Russian Formalist Yuri Tynianov's functional theory of the evolution of literary forms, I find it necessary to account for the relational/structural elements of a novel as a necessary condition for establishing a novel's relation to social life.

On the one hand, attention to the interplay of structural elements is necessary for understanding the work under consideration. On the other, these structural elements allow for situating a particular novel in relation to a tradition or "literary order" of the day. Attention to the unique verbal acts and conventions in which a novel invests (realism, romance, comic, gothic) reveals what Tynianov refers to its "orientation" to life. He insists upon this tripartite consideration of literary forms to ensure that literature, properly understood as a verbal act, cannot be divorced from the social factors that produce it, since as a verbal act, it remains part of the set of utterances of a given culture's discourse. His triadic model – the individual work, the literary order, and the social order– these are

the realms through which I will move to and fro to account and locate the play driving form and content and the relations such play maintains with the dominant, middle-class social order, primarily through the set of discourses about play informing aesthetics, literature, and recreation.

In referring to the set of discourses at a given time, I am using terminology wielded by French sociocritic Edmond Cros. His particular brand of sociocriticism³ insists that any reading of a text depends upon navigating what he terms “ideological traces” or “ideological junctures” and the social antagonisms of social classes. For Cros, unlike Bakhtin, ideology remains an expression of a politic. Whereas Bakhtin often uses the term simply to designate an idea or concept inherent to a given group or community, Cros channels sociological and linguistic paradigms indebted to Marxist thought to formulate his program of microsemiotics, which tracks the distribution and interaction between what he terms a text’s semic and ideosemic elements.

The former refer to the set of unquestioned images, ideas, and symbols that give a culture its identity. According to Cros, they collectively integrate the material of a text, providing stability and coherence as a result of their self-evident importance and value. The ideosemic, in contrast, speaks to a symbolic economy belonging to a specific class within a culture, highlighting the ideological differences the semic seeks to elide. Identifying and accounting for the textual junctures and gaps resulting from those ideosemic expressions that contest the semic’s striving for unity emerges as Cros’s primary objective. He locates them in the selective use of words and word-phrases that speak to a destabilized language and symbolic order.⁴

Though the synchronic ensemble of discursive formations of 16th and 17th Spain that Cros reads falls outside the terrain of the dissertation, his acute attention to the ideological traces intrinsic to discourses models the sort of reading necessary to parse the political residues emerging within expressions of the novelistic play-drive, those that we can trace back to discourses of play driving social formations such as recreation and leisure during the nineteenth century. His project remains aligned with Levine's concern for locating a text's contradictions and differences, if in different textual form, locations, and for different ends (ideological semiotics). Together the studies of Cros and Levine constitute the limits of the aesthetic terrain that I consider in the dissertation. The polyphonic and always social word or phrase and the productive activity of the novel form (and their relations) constitute the primary means of outlining the play-drive. Locating it, at the same time, locates what opens an aesthetic of the novel to the extra-literary, or more specifically, what social values of play emerge as the driving force of the not-so-autonomous play-drive of the novel form.

As an aesthetic expression that occurs within and thus as a part of the sum total of the era's SD, in the play-drive, what we are considering is not language so much as that which structures the language of a novel. Not representations, then, not the utterances of or about play in a particular novel that relate more to aesthetic content, the play-drive is relational, structuring a novel's form, structuring its content, emerging in a novelist's style, an immaterial but fundamental structuring energetic, ironically driven by a social materiality only available to us indirectly by way of a novel's more "concrete" terrains and the relations arising among them.

As the often immaterial and unacknowledged workhorse of the form-content relationship, play materializes similarly to the way in which, as Lucien Goldmann describes it, the nonconscious operates as a facet of subjectivity. The nonconscious, we learn, is “formed by the intellectual, emotional, and imaginary structures and practices of individual consciousness. The nonconscious is a structural by-product of transindividual subjects” that intermingles with “libidinal structures.” Subjectivity, accordingly, remains a function of the interplay between the nonconscious and the libidinal (Goldmann, qtd. in Cros 10). But unlike the Freudian unconscious, which is repressed, the nonconscious carries the traces of the social, political, and ideological informing the particular utterances of the transindividual subject out in the open, as a condition because a conditioning ground for each word that we utter. Attenuating ourselves to the nonconscious heightens our awareness of our investments in particular collective values (family, state, region, religion) while demonstrating, in turn, how the collective shapes the transindividual subject and a given pattern of discourse.

Positioning play as an often nonconscious novelistic expression by relocating the latter as a structuring influence of an aesthetic object puts various pressures on Goldmann’s concept as well as our understanding of the novel form. In short, my project assumes that play is there, as a necessary novelistic drive and conditioning agent of the form-content relation that emerges in various expressions of this relationship. However, as a nonconscious element of this relationship, it is not surprising that the work of play in such fundamental narrative arenas as narration, plot, and illusions have yet to be explored fully. Only by turning to these basic dimensions of fiction in relation to the productive form-content dyad can we trace the quality of play that a particular novel employs: each

becomes the novelistic material that makes the often immaterial processes of play available to readers as traceable and thus relatable to the social values of play that a given ludic expression in a particular novel reinforces or undermines as an aesthetic process.⁵

As I emphasize throughout in the ensuing readings, the novel form is not simply a passive and static receptacle of ideology – it is the activity of form, the way in which a particular form draws in and on ideology as a result the creative processes that writing and reading necessitate.⁶ We know that reading and writing are mutually co-productive and interdependent. It is stating the obvious to observe that the task of reading is a process of re-authoring or co-authoring the work that is being read. This “ethical” transaction or the “interplay” between author and reader is the primary relationship Dorothy Hale monitors in her readings of the various pressures that twentieth-century critical models put on it. Under her rubric of “social formalism” fall a series of author-reader, co-productive relations underpinning variations of Jamesian, reader-response and poststructuralist theories of text. In one sense, her project actually re-plays a relationship broached by Friedrich Schlegel and other German Romantics under the loose rubric of symphilosophy, which accounts for the circulation of sympathy between author and reader.⁷

The author-reader interplay central to social formalism and symphilosophy, which accounts for the processes of formatting and formalizing that I parse below, must be differentiated from the play driving the form and content that is ultimately formalized. I will argue that these two ludic processes, one apparently interior to the aesthetic object (the play of form and content), the other that apparently acts upon the aesthetic object (the play arising from writing, reading and their relations), become a fundamental means

by which the novel form remains invested and implicated in the political and the social. Language, the very material of a novel, as Voloshinov and Bakhtin emphasized over eighty years ago in responses to what we refer to as Russian Formalism, remains inherently social and political because it is ideological.

Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* outlines a theory of language based on the sociological consideration of words, phrases, and utterances as they are used in actual moments of communication (*parole*). To make the case for the ideological valence of the word, Voloshinov leaves aside the abstract rules governing the production of sentences, which should be understood as the domain of linguistics and grammar (*langue*). To understand the workings and inflections of a sign, word, and utterance in a social environment, is for Voloshinov to first and foremost highlight the settings in which a word is used, where it arises, who uses it, and why. For Voloshinov, there is never a word that is spoken without ideological inflection. As we know, Bakhtinian theories of language (including Voloshinov's) similarly concentrate on the social dimensions and implications of the utterance, which ultimately leads him to formulate a theory of speech genres that encompasses aesthetic genres as well.

Using the utterance as the basis for a socially-grounded theory of language has repercussions for any theory of literary forms: on the one hand, Bakhtin underscores that a literary form such as a novel (as an utterance itself – what he terms a “complex” or “secondary” utterance) remains comprised of smaller utterances and words that cohere or clash as belonging to particular segments of society. These smaller utterances, he terms as “simple” or “primary” and lose contact with “actual reality” as part of a novel's content.⁸ As novelistic content, these primary utterances take a detour through the novel,

and relate to life as it is mediated only through their now-aestheticized existence: “They enter into actual reality only via the novel as a whole, that is, as a literary artistic event and not as everyday life” (Bakhtin 62). On the other hand, and this is most important for the trajectory of my argument, these models offer the possibility of considering the novel form from a different starting point, one at odds with the linguistic and structuralist accounts of narrative and genres that various poststructuralist, deconstructive, and Marxist theories re-process and recycle in the very act of troubling them.

A list by Voloshinov pinpoints the limitations of “abstract objectivism” driving linguistic theories of his day. His objections also prefigure critiques of structuralist-formalist literary programs, those that emerge from the linguistics of Saussure focused on *langue*: stable linguistic forms over their mutability, the abstract over the concrete, and the neglect of historical actualities in favor of abstract system. Foundational structuralist and narratological works by Levi-Strauss, Todorov, Greimas, and the early Barthes, not to mention the rewriting of psychoanalysis by Lacan redeploy abstract models of language steeped in concerns of *langue* to re-write theories of myth, poetics, narrative, semiotics, as well as the unconscious. But another implication of such abstract objectivism located by Voloshinov, ironically expands to implicate semiotic theories harnessing the signifier-signified relation used by Barthes, Iser, and Derrida to open a textualism that becomes more invested in economies of potential, the possible, or the irresolvable rather than reinforcing the notion of a knowable but abstract language or “grammar” of narrative.

Voloshinov suggests that abstract objectivism also privileges the “singularization of word meaning and accent to the neglect of its living multiplicity of meaning and

accent” (77). However, the poststructuralist lauding of the signifier leads to a situation in which the multiplicity of meaning, if not questioning the very idea of meaning, leads to its own brand of historical neglect. Such programs retreat from the socially-informed, generative life of language as it is used in the world to a bracketed world of textuality that lives primary for itself as a result of being in conversation with itself in ludic, phenomenological, or deconstructive isolation. If not isolation, what results is the proliferation of a textual experience that intensively reproduces its relays, connections, and hinges, the instantiation and expression of textuality’s ability to systematize its resistance to systematization from without. To exemplify or celebrate this aspect of language’s plasticity reinforces the inherent flexibility of language-as-system, returning to *langue* at its very foundations. Although not so much concerned with the rules and structures of grammar as models for textuality, poststructuralisms yet concentrate on the systematicity of language at a much more localized scene, the scene of structuration, that which structures structure. Turning to this structuring dynamic of language, however, merely shifts the production of literary practices to another scene yet detached and out of reach of the living word despite the investment in what, linguistically speaking, gives a word its life.

In effect, literary-critical models indebted to a linguistics of *langue* tend to divest a novel from its materiality, its place in the world, how as an utterance it responds to the world, how it elicits a response, and how a reader responds to it by finalizing it according to the values, consciously or otherwise, derived from one’s particular social environment. Theories of reader-response, Iserian textual fetishism (the fictive and the imaginary), Barthesian codes, implied readers (and authors), Foucauldian discourses, and Derridean

deconstructions intersect and overlap with the concerns an utterance-driven theory of the novel grounds by overlaying a novel with various accounts of communication, reading, and writing. But, ironically, such *langue*-driven models remain ill-equipped to consider the other side of the novel's sociality. The *langue*-driven textualization of a novel, reader or both, rather than accounting for the social textures of this aesthetic moment further extends the linguistic-structuralist endeavor by expanding its expression and terrain. The social, it would appear, remains severely limited because inhibited by rubrics fundamentally severed from life.

The novel as an utterance, a formula that Jameson uses to re-politicize the novel form, offers a way to account for the reader's active role in shaping the text that a novel comes to be without doing violence to the political urgency of his rubric of the political unconscious. We can do so by remembering two things: the individual psyche as a social scene constantly re-writes and re-invents itself as a function of its interaction with other utterances (the utterances of others), and, as such, the psyche remains an ideological form that remains beholden to the social languages comprising it.

For instance, the ensuing readings are determined by the academic discourse, community, and ideology from which they emerge; they remain individuated expressions of this sociality that only come to light because they are, in part, determined by the nineteenth century texts and contexts to which they respond. The dissertation as text-as-utterance and its response to other texts-as-utterances merge in an ideologically charged dialogue that is simultaneously and reciprocally productive and creative. At the same time, this exchange does not dispense with the concept of *langue*, which is needed to mobilize the particular interest that prompts the response, namely the very possibility of a

ludic drive inherent to the novel form. Conceptualizing the interaction between aesthetic values of play and social values of play requires the implicit or explicit investment in a structural schematic that helps us understand the textual terrains that are formalized and formatted in the process.

Reforming Form

My introduction of the term “format” into the formalist equation is an attempt to come to terms with the looseness associated with the term “form” that continues to plague formalisms and genre studies. Format suggests the individuating process the novel form undergoes in a particular fiction as conceived by a particular author. With the concept of formatting, we can determine a particular novel’s relation to the abstract category that is form – what a particular novel is in relation to the abstraction of *the novel*, as well as what it isn’t, what a work culls and what it does not, what is present in its aesthetic, and what is absent based on an understanding of the novel form at a given point in time.

Formatting highlights the productive processes of particularizing form and content that a novel form undergoes at the direction of an author during the act of creation. It is more akin to Bakhtin’s utterance (*parole*), while the idea of the novel form as a literary category/object maintains a closer bond with the abstract systematicity of language (*langue*). As such, each novel as utterance, as a complex of smaller utterances, brings to the novel form a sociality, a livedness, a history that the abstract notion of the form itself will always lack. Of course, we can only come to the abstract form, understand it and make sense of it through a reading of particular novels – Genette’s *Narrative Discourse* is the classic example, as he theorizes “Narrative” through Proust’s

novel. But it is only recently that scholars have begun to examine the way in which a novel is formed by and in turn forms the world outside of it, which complicates or extends foundational Marxist works (Jameson and Eagleton). Here is how I distinguish among, form, format, and formalization in relation to the novel as a genre.

Form: an enigmatic abstraction functioning as a placeholder for its particular expressions.

As an immateriality, the concept of aesthetic form is yet active, requiring its demonstration or theorization. Because forms are not material things or static, and despite their apparent plenitude (we can describe a form, list its processes, rules, conventions, etc.) and the invitation they seemingly give critics, forms cannot be reduced or defined with any sense of ultimate finalization.⁹ The attempt to materialize the novel form, to make it tangible in some way breaks down into a commentary about its previous commentary – this is what makes genre studies enigmatic and non-reductive – the very concept is a placeholder for a continual conversation that will not be exhausted. Genre studies, in other words, only materializes theoretical (historical) conversations as to what it might be and how one might work as opposed to what they are, since they only emerge in practice, as a particular work of art (novel, poem or drama) or in the critical endeavor (a genre itself). This means that genres essentially become the conversation that we have about them, suggesting a sort of inherent negative capability in that genres do not do anything or exist as anything except as what we say they do in theorizing them. The drive for form, unlike what Schiller writes, is not the drive for ideality or perfection; on the contrary, when I write of the drive for form in a novel, it is merely to express the fundamental drive/need of a work to maintain aesthetic integrity or coherence –

according to a particular system of values and genetic structuration that gives meaning to such terms – that allows for the expression of particular content.

Format: an author's activation and intensification of a novel's formal qualities in relation to form as well as to the formation of content available in a specific genre/subgenre/tradition, which requires unique content for its expression. With regard to a novel form, emphasis here is on the narrative grids, structures, and conventions driving a particular novel's expression of form. A novel is presented to a reader as already formatted by the author, but this format may yield a great number of formalized readings that condition the production of a text. Formatting is what allows for the comparison of literary schools or genres, for instance, say between romance and literary realism, in that a particular novel of either genre expresses its generic affinities as a function of its drive for form. Formatted content refers to the act of creating content that remains informed by extra-literary systems of value. Content in a novel is presented to readers for their completion, which is accomplished in the act of reading.

Formalization: the shaping of a particular novel format and unique content into a text. The emphasis here is the relational and accounts for the drive for form and content through the play that mutually conditions both impulsions. A reader/consumer formalizes a novel into a text by finalizing the formatted content that is read by negotiating other images, ideas, emotions, and values previously encountered in other texts, literary or otherwise with this uniquely formatted content. To speak of formalization, then, is to locate the act of reading simultaneously as intra-textual and intertextual. With regard to

the former, it refers to the activity undertaken by a reader to finalize a particular work of art when it is read/consumed. The latter refers to the negotiation of a complex web of values and associations that conditions the finalization of formatted content as well as the intra-textual relations a reader maintains with a particular text. This process may go relatively unnoticed by a great number of readers and is subject to changes and alterations by a great number of influences.

Such a schematic is not so much a reproduction of a totalizing and rigid hierarchical structure but a list that locates moments/events/processes for which a formalist reading must account and confront. This list artificially separates mutually reciprocating co-productive operations in order to individuate otherwise inseparable processes at work in the production of a novel. Neither should this list be taken as sequential, that we must start with form, move to format, and finally come to an understanding of a certain brand of formalization. Each can be a point of entry for a consideration of narrative forms, which complicates, to a degree, Gerald Prince's observations in a recent historical reconsideration of formalism and narratology.¹⁰

Referring to what I term as formatting, Prince suggests that pursuing inquiries that foster our understanding of the structural "grids" of narrative remains a vital aspect of the formalist project conceived in its broadest sense. I, too, engage in the probing of narrative grids and the relational nodes of production subtending them, as alluded to above in relation to Tucker's reading of Levine's reading of Browning's poem. But I approach the task with this difference: such grids only begin to make sense through the primary aesthetic material of a novel, the language it utters. And to understand the linguistic

matter of a novel requires negotiating the aesthetic discourses with the extra-aesthetic set of discourses comprising the SD of a given period in which a novel emerges. The inherent risk of grid-work that Prince continues to pursue and defend is that it de-emphasizes the work of the unique content that actually reshapes the grid as the grid shapes this content – without returning to particular content, the grid simply is an abstract grid that is produced and formalized by the mind considering it. Using the format metaphor highlights the inseparable bond between the grid and what it grids, for lack of a better term.

Consider the blank page of a word processing document. The one I am using to type a draft of this essay has headers atop of the screen of my computer. Beneath the title of the documents in a border a lighter shade of blue there are tabs with such titles as File, Edit, View, and Format. Under the Format heading, a number of sub-headings emerge: paragraph, columns, and style and formatting. Clicking on this last heading opens a column on the right of the screen, which allows me to select particular text from this document to be formatted. But more the point is that this column allows me to select the kind of formatting to apply to the selected text by demonstrating the available option. The Bold option is offered to me with the word bold bolded (**Bold**), while the bold and centered feature is exemplified with **Bold, Centered** and so on, which underscores the degree to which formatting is formatting something particular and further, that formatting cannot be demonstrated without recourse to something outside of itself, even if this means particularizing itself as it were outside of itself.

This performative aspect of the formatting feature of word processors positions the activity of formatting as its own content. Narratological accounts of narrative can

perform a similar operation by positing the novel format “narrative discourse” as its own content in a critical account (narrative) of narrative without referring to a specific novel. Moving from a grammar of narrative conventions and rules to the sociality of the grammar informing what a novel “utters” or the novel as utterance, grounds a formalist project in a network of what at initially appears to be extraliterary concerns and conversations but what turns out to be inherently literary.

Closer to the spirit of *langue* rather than *parole*, the form-format-formalization schematic erects a grid of constraints and possibilities that conditions the actual utterances that derive from it. But even so, it is less the individual grids of plot, illusion, and narration that come under pressure in my reading of the play driving each structure that interests me. Nor is it the larger structure of narrative that each grid helps to construct. Rather my reconsideration of such structural concerns of narrative allows for the unpacking of the social and political inherent to the unique textual utterances that arise from the interaction among a novel, the extraliterary, and a reader that is ultimately formalized by the reader. If a reading of a text depends upon a reader to bring it into being, likewise the response a text elicits from a reader shapes, codifies, and mobilizes the being of a reader in the process, even if only temporarily.

The ability of the one to put the other in play, or conversely, the play that puts these utterances into co-productive relation to each other in a particular expression or utterance, such is the terrain that Jameson’s politicized formula of the novel inadequately takes into account. More than a passive relay in a network of narrativized class struggle, the reader, I argue, becomes an active part of the ideological circuitry mapped by Jameson that brings this network into actual being: without including the act of reading

into the formal calculus of a novel, one only has a theory that remains closer to the realm of *langue* than it does to the lived life of the utterance, however intense one's commitment to the political a reading of a novel or a theory of the novel form may be. As Voloshinov reiterates an utterance "is determined by the actual conditions of the given utterance – above all, by its *immediate social situation*" (85).

An immediate social situation in which a novel engages is its interaction with a reader, which as the ground for formalization and formatting occurs as a pliable zone that situates both novel and reader in extraterritorial relation. This relation thrusts the novel outside itself as a text-to-be finalized while subjecting a reader to similar process of re-authoring as a function of reading. Both novel and reader, I argue, experience the potential for radical de- and/or reterritorialization as a function of their interaction. Voloshinov's understanding of the inner psyche illuminates the extra-territorial interaction between novel and reader

He positions a subject's inner life or psyche on the borderline between the exterior world and one's physical body. In this zone separating these two spheres of reality "an encounter between the organism and the outside world takes place, but the encounter is not a physical one: the organism and the outside world meet here in the sign" (26). Bakhtin makes a similar observation in "Discourse in the Novel" to highlight language use as a social rather than individuated endeavor: "language for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's" (293). Such a meeting, there in the sign, as a sign of language's social grounding, is also an event, a scene that becomes an emblem for the way in which a novel is reckoned by a reader according to the terms it gives a reader. A

novel offers fictional material to a reader, specific material that needs to be determined, and in turn this determination remains determined by the very material it reimagines. But a reader not only reckons a novel into a text; at the same time, a reader reckons either consciously or unconsciously his or herself as function of the same reading. The creation of this extra-textual relation is the production of a text and the (re)production of the individual that highlights the sociality to which both remain indebted for these productions.

In other words, the very act of reading, of re-writing the material of a fiction to experience it, brings one's own values into contact with those that a novel deploys at a given formal "horizon" as described by Jameson. This complicated encounter, what Bakhtin refers to as the axiological dimension of the utterance, situates one in relation to oneself at the same time it thrusts the self in relation to the world as mediated by the reading of a given novel. It is during moments of reading that one's values are imported, consciously or unconsciously, as an integral experience of the creative response to the material that one reads. Reading, as writing, responding, and creating, as comprising the aesthetic experience of a novel allows us to answer for and to formalize our own values. As such, reading explicitly formalizes or implicitly reinforces our own politics as a policy of reading and makes us aware of our own sociality, whether by challenging the values we have, reinforcing them, or simply by making us cognizant of them.

Such a transaction is not so much a matter of intention as it is a consequence of reading, an ethos of reading that a reader cannot escape, whether one wishes it away or wishes to explicitly acknowledge this aspect of reading. Because we express our values socially (even in an internalized self-dialogue), what I value accrues meaning and begins

to make sense to me only in relation to other values, the values of others. Reading, although an intensely personal and individuated experience, yet emerges as a social act of another order: it is a creative rejoinder to a particular text as utterance that elicits and requires a response. A text, until it is read and responded to, in a sense, remains unfinished. The conjoining of two inseparable processes – the formalization of what is read (the play of form and content) and the reading (the play of writing, creating, and answering) of what is read is what ultimately finalizes a text in the sense of a complete response on the part of a single individual, not the closing off of the text from additional responses in the future. Any response, Bakhtin reminds us, not only responds to another; it also anticipates a future response. Such openness and citationality serve as essential features to his theory of the utterance.

A short essay by Bakhtin supplementing his *Art and Answerability* titled “The Problem of Content, Material, and Form” (1924) suggests that approaches to literary forms and their content fail to consider the importance of language as the material of the artists working in these genres. The very title of the essay acts as an intervention, announcing Bakhtin’s complication of the traditional form-content dyad early in the twentieth century, a pairing that yet remains relatively untroubled in a critical climate that is actively re-examining the very idea of literary forms and literary formalism. This is a very different Bakhtin at work, not at all the familiar Bakhtin that glorifies the novel form and the novelistic or the Bakhtin that celebrates the carnivalesque in its anarchic excesses. This early Bakhtin wrangles with general aesthetic and philosophical concepts in the wake of Neo-Kantianism and the rise of psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and Saussurian linguistics. Having yet to develop his dialogic theory, in this essay Bakhtin

works out the terrain of his architectonic approach to aesthetics. A central nexus of this essay is his observation that formalist theories of aesthetics conflate the material and the content of a work of art.

Bakhtin differentiates the two as following: material is the matter shaped by the artist, while content emerges as extra-matter (values, ideology) that gives matter its unique expression. If a sculptor's material is marble, a novelist's material is words and language. A sculptor works a slab of marble into an image of the perfect human specimen, while a novelist organizes language into a fictional narrative. For Bakhtin, it is of the utmost importance to understand that an artist of the word, in any genre, must overcome or surmount the inherent limitations of the matter being shaped, that is, language, because language becomes the *means* to expression only, not the ends of artistic expression:

Language as language is something he surmounts, for language must cease to be perceived as language in its linguistic determinateness (its morphological, syntactic, lexicological determinateness, etc.), and must be perceivable only insofar as it becomes a means of artistic expression . . . It is not in the world of language that the poet creates; language is something he merely uses. In relation to material, the artist's task (based in the fundamental artistic task) could be described as the surmounting of material. . . .What is surmounted in the material is its extra-aesthetic determination: marble must cease to persist as marble, i.e., as a particular physical phenomenon; it must give plastic expression to the forms of the body. (192-193)

As the means to artistic expression for a novelist, language as language must be overcome as a function of the activity of creation in order to bring value and meaning to a verbal image. The content of the sculpture of the perfect human being comes not from the marble-as-material; it derives outside the marble and comes to it as imagined by the artist, who ultimately fashions marble into a representation of the human body by adhering to a set of values that has currency in the world: proportionality, harmony, grace etc. Content, then, is extra-aesthetic and is the means by which an artist surmounts the limitations of a given material. This is no different for a writer of fiction, who overcomes the limits of language by pushing language beyond itself to realize the creation and instantiation of a fictional landscape that draws on values, images, and utterances from the “real” world.

Such a model shifts the gravitational center of content. Bakhtin dislodges content as simply another formal, mechanical, structural, or linguistic component interior to the work of art as envisioned by Russian Formalists. Instead, he offers an axiological theory of content in which language becomes the means by which an author contends with the world by using it as the source and origin of artistic content. Rather than isolating content from the world by relegating it to a constituent of an inward looking, “material” aesthetics, Bakhtin suggests the act of identifying and isolating content from the world-at-large exterior to the work of art and subsequently formalizing such content through language-as-material necessitates conceptualizing content as an aesthetic moment or aesthetic event. This means that content is simultaneously creative and re-creative, a re-creating of content found in the world and situating it in a new context that is the work of art. And this same interaction reinforces form’s relationship to content for Bakhtin: to

surmount language's own determinateness by way of extra-aesthetic content is to formalize this content in language, which is to say that content, to be content, must be formed by a novelist.

As is the case with Bakhtin, he is prone to treating readers with contradictory or unclear messages, and his early thoughts about form, material, and content exemplify this propensity. While he asserts that form is conditioned by content and the kind of material used by an artist, he yet claims that content becomes a constituent moment of form, because it "relativizes content completely" (283). In other words, it is possible to reduce the content of a novel to a purely formal moment in a reading, suggesting the domain form maintains over content. But for Bakhtin, the reduction of content to a moment of form in a novel fails to account for the complexity of the verbal act that such an aesthetic object becomes. Although Bakhtin suggests that form, content, and material instantiate an interplay of mutual determination, ultimately, it would appear, that Bakhtin, in opposition to Jameson, argues for the dominance of form over content. The former is the active shaping of the latter, an activity that for Bakhtin, remains as ethical as it does aesthetic. More than diverging from Jameson's privileging of content over form, Bakhtin's situating form over content places him as an aesthetic heir of sorts to Friedrich Schiller.¹¹

Like Bakhtin, Schiller wrestles with the implications of Kantian paradigms, even if he does so a hundred years prior to Bakhtin. And like Bakhtin, he theorizes an aesthetics that problematizes the form-content dyad by installing a third variable into the equation, namely play. Schiller's notion of the play-drive (*Spieltrieb*) as a conditioning agent and experience of the aesthetic emerges as the linchpin concept that I redeploy in my theory of the novel and cultural history of Victorian forms of recreation and leisure.

The Play of Form and Content

Written in the wake of the French Revolution, Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794) is at once a treatise on aesthetics and politics, or to be more accurate, an attempt to politicize aesthetics and aestheticize politics post-Kant's divorcing of aesthetics from any real moral or ethical possibility. For Schiller, an aesthetic education works as a corrective to the failures of the French Revolution as well as to the limitations of Kant's aesthetic theory. Such an education, ideally, would fortify our rational impulse to prevent tragedies like the French Revolution from devolving into the Reign of Terror. More than a study of art and politics, or as a necessary corollary to such an inquiry, Schiller's letters double as proto-psychological study of the alienation and fragmentation informing human subjectivity (crude nature vs. noble nature) that arises as a function of existing within an increasingly specialized (capitalist) political state. Schiller explicitly announces in the first letter how his project aims at providing a program by which to raise humanity from crude to noble nature via an aesthetic education, which gives his study a decidedly moral/ethical/political thrust. At the core of his educational rubric is the beautiful.

It is not so much the beautiful itself but how Schiller understands the workings of the beautiful that emerges as a productive model for further locating the ludic dynamics of the novel form, which are necessary to map in order to better understand how a particular novel marshals form and content into a productive assemblage. The beautiful as it manifests in works of art remains informed by two concurrent drives, the drive for form (*Formtrieb*) and the drive for sense (*Stofftrieb*). This partitioning of the beautiful,

more than existing within the exclusive sphere of the aesthetic or the experience of it, also informs the constitution of humans. Such a duality reflects, for Schiller, the condition of being human and being a particular person with a unique personality. His parsing of this relationship is worth pausing over.

He writes that “I and my determinations which we represent as one and the same in the necessary being, are eternally distinct in the finite being” (65). Prefiguring Heidegger, Schiller broaches the ontic-ontological relationship of Being/being, concluding that each individual embodies “the principle of existence within itself.” However, Schiller underscores the difficulty in reconciling this duality, in which “necessary being” as the manifestation of infinity within each of us risks failing to conjoin with the finitude of being someone in particular. The following passage clarifies the stakes of this apparently agonistic dyad and how the infinite and the finite, finally, become expressions of our formal and sensuous drives:

“Considered in itself, and independently of all sensuous matter, [one’s] personality is nothing but the pure virtuality of a possible infinite manifestation; and so long as there is neither intuition nor feeling, it is nothing more than a form, an empty power. Considered in itself, and independently of all spontaneous activity of the mind, sensuousness can only make a material man; without it, it is a pure form; but it cannot in any way establish union between matter and it. (67)

Although Schiller suggests that each of us has the potential for a human sort of divine infinity that the virtuality of our personality affords, it, like the hypothetical person experiencing only the random and varied life of the senses devoid of the activity of the

mind, remains simply a form, “an empty power.” Much of the middle letters of Schiller’s treatise focuses on this initial binary, how to overcome it and why doing so serves as a fundamental pivot in his aesthetic theory/program. In addition to reason, morality, and infinity the form-drive becomes associated with the ideal, timelessness, unity, harmony, and permanence. The sense-drive grounds individuals in the concreteness of the world, binding them to it, which limits the development and cultivation of the spirit or inner life: a person can never do without the world of the concrete no matter how often or intensive it attempts to separate from it by overindulging in the abstract musings underpinned by the form-drive.

This drive for sense, for matter/material, prevents one’s spirit from reaching heights it can only attain in abstraction where it is free to roam without earthly encumbrances in a pursuit that unfolds within the seemingly timelessness of the mind’s activity. But this drive for sense also steers individuals to the present moment: the material world around us interrupts the possibility of pursuing timeless abstractions by continuously offering up specific and concrete “contents, substance, knowledge, and an aim for our activity” (69) that emerge as the presence of the historical present impacting our being in the world, including our thinking of it while living in it. Schiller qualifies this relationship more directly when he writes that the sensuous impulsion desires change at the same time the formal drive desires permanence.

Admitting that these two impulsions are contradictory yet springing from the unity of the self, Schiller seeks a way to resolve the apparent antagonism driving each from the other. He returns to a subject broached earlier for this project: play. In his sixth letter Schiller contrasts two notions of beauty. While he admits that exercise forms

athletic bodies, he does not find beauty in such bodies themselves. Rather it is in “the free and equal play of the limbs” in which beauty is developed. Not the body, but the movement of the body itself, a process of free and equal play, the negotiation of concurrently active parts of the body becomes synonymous with the beautiful here. Such a logic informs the colliding of the form and sense drives; as a function of their meeting, a third drive emerges, what Schiller refers to as the play-drive (*Spieltrieb*). It is through this play drive that form’s drive for identity and permanence and sense’s drive for change productively work together. As Schiller understands it, it is the only way that they can.

Schiller clarifies the nature of the meeting of the form and sense drives and what results in the production of the play-drive: it is not that the play-drive mediates the meeting of form and sense. Rather this meeting activates the play-drive, or the play-drive activates it, an operation that operates as the means by which the divergent ends of the form-drive and sense-drive work in conjunction, not in opposition. Here is one of the more clumsy yet suggestive accounts of this process offered by Schiller: “The sensuous instinct wishes to be determined; it wishes to receive an object; the formal instinct wishes to determine itself, it wishes to produce an object. Therefore, the instinct of play will endeavor to receive as it would itself have produced, and to produce as it aspires to receive” (74-75). On the one hand, Schiller expresses the desires of one drive in terms of what only the other can provide. If the sensuous instinct wishes to be determined, following his oppositional logic, only the form drive can determine it. The same need arises in the form drive, which can only determine what it lacks, namely a specific object that serves as a conduit for its own determination. Thus it would appear that Schiller

creates a problem that is solved by the problem's very terms and conditions. But on the other hand, the inclusion of the play-drive into this equation complicates matters. What allows Schiller to erect this tripartite division of drives, and further, what allows one to more fully appreciate this suggestive model is how these dynamic drives are concurrently spatialized. In other words, to talk about these drives, what work each performs and how they interact requires Schiller implicitly to speak of them as if they occupy an instinctual space or region. Although he relies on building an implicit topographical map of drives, Schiller does not attempt to locate what he maps in the way Freud will a little over a hundred years later.

The story of these drives, then, requires thinking of them as performing distinctive actions as well as occupying distinctive instinctual territories, wherever form and content interact to produce the play that reorganizes the initial opposition into a productive pairing of drives. While Schiller's theory of drives continues to elicit critical commentary, there has been insufficient consideration of it in terms of how his model depends upon a process of what Deleuze and Guattari discuss as the reciprocating process of re- and deterritorialization informing the mutual piercing and recombining of distinct regions or spaces.¹² While not specifically cast in terms of play, the reconstituting borders and boundaries of insect and flower emerge as what Deleuze and Guattari term a "machinic assemblage" of both. This new pairing operates along very similar lines to that of the logistic of the play-drive that conditions the meeting of form and sense in Schiller's letters.

Whereas previously Schiller lauds the motility of playing limbs, here the play-drive becomes less associated with the movement of an object/body part (the free and

equal play of limbs) in space that maintains its structural integrity than as that impulsion which allows for form and sense to relax their own spatiality so that they may recombine into a productive assemblage of both. Without this merging of drives the beautiful would not come into being as what Schiller refers to as a “living form” in reference to a work of art, how a work of art works: when the ideal and the timeless (form) plays with the material constituting a concrete work of art (sense), the beautiful results. Schiller devotes ample time “proving” his transcendental deduction of beauty, invoking notions of activity (form) and passivity (sense) and how each mutually and beneficially limits the other for the production of the beautiful, as well as how the beautiful leads individuals from feeling to thought and even mediates the relationship between individuals and the political state. But it is less these concerns than how Schiller’s model of drives becomes a compelling model not only for aesthetics but for the novel that is most relevant here.

It is this process of formalization, the way in which demands of genre formalize a particular narrative, that Schiller’s form-drive punctuates. His emphasis on the drive for form allows us to consider a particular novel as a cultural artifact/product without losing sight of the narrative processes at work that ultimately produce the story that we read. But as Schiller states in so many ways, the form-drive is emptied of meaning when left to its own devices. In so doing, he prefigures a similar critique of twentieth-century formalist and structuralist approaches to literature that deemphasize content or minimally consider content as the means to discuss formal concerns that are its ends. The form drive needing sense, matter, or material, as Schiller argues it does, can be understood as a drive for content, the contentualization of form, the grounding the form-drive requires for it to be expressed in a particular work of art, in this case a novel.

Applying the sense drive and its appetite for matter to the functioning of a novel does not require much work, it would appear. What is a story without story material? The sense drive is a way to conceive of story matter – setting, characters, plot, theme – as mattering more than as the manifestation of static, raw material an author creates, manipulates, and separates from other possible content comprising a particular novel. Schiller's aesthetic model offers a way to consider just how such story material actively participates in the shaping of a fictional narrative. For instance, consider the gothic novel, which has its own distinctive qualities. Following Schiller, if not the beauty, then the functioning of a gothic novel can initially be parsed into the formal and sensual drives as determined by the demands of the genre. The gothic, as a genre, requires some combination of a somber mood, the creation and maintenance of heightened suspense, the circulation of terror and/or horror, danger, intrigue, and mysterious origins. Such a list, which is not meant to be exhaustive, emerges as a set of plastic conventions that formalize the gothic, what constitutes literary gothicness. But without content, such a rubric remains simply a statement of the generic conventions formalizing this mode of literary production, a summary of the generic demands driving so many gothic narratives.

An author obviously needs to emplot the gothicness such conventions produce in a particular story through its represented content, which as a generic list is just as familiar as the formal demands gestured to above: a house/castle, rattling chains, mist/fog, threatening male, threatened female, ghosts, the supernatural, etc. Through any combination of these and other specific contents an author can channel various gothic conventions to produce a gothic narrative (or spoof one) as varied as *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Monk*, *The Italian*, and *Northanger Abbey*. All maintain gothic qualities,

rely on gothic conventions, and deploy what come to be known as stock characters operating within stock situations of the gothic but yet each retains idiosyncrasies that others lack. *The Italian* lacks the blood and horror of *The Monk*, for instance, as Radcliffe draws on the sublime and terror, not horror, as the basis for her gothic narrative. One way to penetrate the production of familial affinities circulating among these novels is to consider the way each routes and shapes the interchange between formal/generic demands and content specific to each narrative, which for Schiller emerges as play.

When mapped into a novel as a dynamic of narrative, Schiller's play-drive casts the interaction of the impulses driving a novel – its need for form and content – as a productive union that does not elide either drive. Overdetermined, or to use Iser's term, "doubled" as a process that encounters itself as a productive space, the play-drive, as a narrative dynamic, operation, and territory produced in the union of a novel's form and content, the expression of this union, works not without purpose. Rather play becomes the means by which an author purposefully channels the demands of genre to create a new expression of it through original content. Form may have a content of its own as Jameson suggests. But there is also contentform or formcontent, which results when these two drives meet so as to mutually determine the other in their concomitant novelistic expression.

Play establishes this co-dependent relationship and works as the drive that conditions the manner in which the impulsion for generic adherence in one novel is determined by its particular contents and the way in which this content needs the formalization of generic demands to ground its determination. While Schiller considers play and the beautiful as the means to broach the aesthetic, the "state of real and active

determination,” the “medium situation in which the soul is neither physically nor morally constrained and yet in both ways active,” and emerges as a “free situation,” (94-95) the play-drive achieves a similar state of relative freedom within the context of the genre of the novel. Or stated another way, it is the play-drive of narrative that allows each author the freedom to create a unique story within an already acknowledged genre of the novel or as the means to spoof a genre (*Northanger Abbey*) or the conventions of narrative (*Tristram Shandy*).

In light of Schiller’s theory of drives plot’s concomitant impulsion for life and death described by Brooks becomes more complicated. A narrative’s instinctual drive for life as it progresses toward its own death necessarily encompasses the triadic drives of form and content, and the play that negotiates their meeting. On the one hand, the play of repetition described by Brooks implicitly remains a function of a novel’s drive for form – a gothic novel must repeatedly formulate the drive for its particular form while accommodating its original (to varying degrees) content. It does so, in part, by building upon familiar generic-bound plots with original content; this is how a novel continually fuels and maintains its drive for life. But if the play of repetition binds plot, as Brooks suggests, a repetition of play drives the form-content union at the same. In this context, Schiller’s notion of a living form garners greater meeting. For Schiller, the coexistence of life and beauty in a work of art becomes a living form, which brings together “absolute formality” and “absolute reality.” But a novel can be considered a living form in its own right, one that dies what Brooks would call its proper death,¹³ which necessitates that it repeatedly adhere to drives for form and content by playing each off the other simultaneously before ending. Which is to say, that what, in part, gives life to a narrative

prior to its death is a drive for play. If for Schiller humanity is most itself when it plays, this dissertation is driven by the assumption that a novel, in order to be itself, must play.

The Discursive Playground

As social historians have suggested, a disparate program such as rational recreation assumes various forms during the nineteenth century; but it most often is practiced indoors within the confines of domestic spaces in order to more effectively produce the edifying entertainment that is its end. Separated from suspect crowds, less bodily and more concerned with the development of an individual's intellectual and spiritual capacity, any number of hearthside entertainments – reading poetry, math or linguistic games, music, drawing, painting, and the like – remain invested in producing a certain type of individual as a result of particular modes of recreating based on the kinds of recreations practiced. Social historians may disagree on the impetus for rational recreations and the class antagonisms informing it. But they agree that despite its disparateness, those favoring it as a model for play often used it to exact real-world work to (re)shape individuals and communities.

Quite often members of the working classes become targets of such programs. Cast as unproductive and/or unruly as a result of their practicing of traditional entertainments that become associated with excess, violence, and drunkenness by the later decades of the eighteenth-century, the laboring-classes and their brand of recreations comes under question and attempts at revision from various quarters. The RSPCA helps change attitudes and practices about animal cruelty in general and bull-, bear-, and badger-baiting specifically, although local business concerns often complicate the

matter.¹⁴ In *Bleak House*, Dickens lampoons Mrs. Pardiggle's inept, ineffective, because insincere attempt to steer the unemployed from drinking to reading verses from the Bible. But it is not only more "enlightened" or rational modes of recreating pointing to a play-drive at work in culture.

To take one specific example of the way in which play was put to work, we only have to look at the discipline that the game of rugby instilled in young male students at Marlborough. J. A. Mangan outlines the importance of G. E. L. Cotton's implementation of sports in the 1850s to mold the character of boys at boarding school. Cotton's reign at Marlborough is the basis for Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days*, which details the way in which the game of rugby emerges as an ordering and disciplining influence in the young students' lives. A former protégé of Thomas Arnold at Rugby, when hired at Marlborough as headmaster, Cotton assumed control over a failing program with a reputation for admitting students more interested in hunting small animals and trampling crops on neighboring properties than for excellence in the classroom. By re-routing the students' energy in a more codified fashion on the rugby field, Cotton spearheads a revival at Marlborough. This game, which Cotton saw Arnold use so effectively at Rugby, also cultivated a sense of masculinity within students, which comes to be associated with skill at sport, as well as a sense of fair play that translated to facets of life off the playing field. After witnessing Cotton's results, headmasters at competing schools adopted a similar game-rubric that informed the character and values of a generation of a class of young men.

But the reorganization of ludic habits and practices occurring in other arenas of culture, suggests not so much a master narrative of one type of play driving all modes of

recreating. Rather it points to the ability of any number of groups or individuals possessing power to harness forms of play and recreation as a means to an end, to drive policies, to police, to suppress, or even in the name of progress for the sake of religion (the revival of Evangelicalism), productivity (Protestant work-ethic), or anxiety of political unrest (distrust of crowds). At the same time the lower orders were not helpless victims of subjugation to particular modes of recreating; they had the capacity to resist such programs. While I am over-generalizing and giving short shrift to an obviously complicated process that social historians continue to probe, the reformation of leisure paradigms during the long nineteenth century emerges as an intensive marker of a wide-ranging shift in notions of respectability. The new regimes of leisure suggest that respectability comes to be defined in terms of what eventually is negatively linked with the crudity of popular behavior. This is not so much a new development but the intensifying of an existing opposition that becomes further vexed with the dominance of urban culture, the middle classes, industrialism, and the concomitant decline of traditional agrarianism.¹⁵ Play, games, recreation, and leisure, then, perform cultural work in this changing world, working to shift values away from strains of traditional/popular patterns of conduct while reinforcing alternate behavioral codes.

Indeed, a standard Victorianism positioned play as an extension of work, a means to recharge the body and mind for the next cycle of labor. The essay simply titled “Recreation” appearing in *The Nineteenth Century* (1879) clearly demarcates play’s relation to work: “leisure time and appropriate employment serve to repair the organic machinery which has been impaired by the excesses of work,” and “Recreation is, or ought to be, not a pastime entered upon the sake of the pleasure which it affords, but an

act of duty undertaken for sake of the subsequent power which it generates, and the subsequent profit which it insures” (Romanes 402). For the industrious middle-classes, play was work, an activity that could help sustain the economy by producing a more informed and discriminating working class at leisure, which in turn, produced a more efficient and productive employee during the workweek. Such a thesis positions improving-recreations as producing a new working-class at leisure, one whose body, morals and desires remains in check while at play. A healthy mind and healthy body, in part cultivated by a new rubric of playing, ideally, would translate into a more robust national economy.¹⁶

As an important economy of work, then, play was viewed as both poison and cure by the vanguards of middle-class cultures. Traditional ludic expressions threatened the social order and the values of the middle-classes they hoped to disseminate beyond their brood. New paradigms of playing remained keenly attentive to how one played, where one played, and what one played as a dimension of a burgeoning urban playscape. If the middle classes implicitly had the ability to self-monitor, many took it upon themselves to “improve” those below them in rank. Those in various seats of power could recruit modes of recreating as a means to reinforce the dominant cultural order it might otherwise undermine. Recreations and diversions, according to this line of thought, should not function as a retreat or repose from the obligations and duties expected of “good” or “proper” citizens in other spheres of life. Rather leisure should be used to practice such behavioral codes in altered form by recouping them at play, which became a training ground for many of the working classes, a classroom of sorts conceived by some as an effective means to promulgate middle-class ideology.

As such, we should expect to encounter the subject of play in much of the fiction of the era, in the aesthetic/philosophical work of Ruskin, Carlyle, Bagehot, or as a frequent subject of the periodicals. But as a general rule, nineteenth-century discourses of play remain hedged in by the dominance of utility and an ethos of productive labor for them to be anything other than a prosthesis of work in its acceptable expressions. Fiction and criticism of the era emerge as intensive sites that reproduce and disseminate this play-as-work model as a vital discourse within an evolving and more complex Victorian literary marketplace.

Working Play: Narratives

As I mention in the introduction, play as a form of work, whether aesthetic, social, philosophical, or “as a newly privileged mode of encountering, encoding, or effecting cultural change” (3), as Bill Brown describes it, remains the working definition marshalling the various ludic discourses deployed in the dissertation. Such a tactic leaves enough play in play, remaining true to its spirit while not allowing it to elude the harnessing necessary for it to remain a manageable concept to illuminate its role as a conditioning ground of the form-content relation. Doing so also allows me to wield equally nineteenth-century and subsequent discourses in order to establish synchronic (Victorian) and diachronic (history of the novel/narrative/aesthetics) concerns that illuminate the play-drive as a fundamental operation conditioning the novel form, one that is not an ahistorical or timeless structural expression of novelty. This is because the play driving form and content relations in a novel is itself driven by a wider set of social discourses of play that it yet remains a part from within the aesthetic.

Bill Brown's *The Material Unconscious* (1996) and Jeffrey Franklin's *Serious Play* (1999) bridge the gap separating the study of play by historians and literary critics of the nineteenth century that I hope to continue forging. But while there is much to recommend in these studies both remain less inclined to position play as a productive aesthetic of the novel form in their readings of representations and discourses of play as a content and historical context of fictions. It would appear that an either/or binary continues to complicate approaches to the subject of play in criticism and theorization of the novel, fiction, or narrative. *PlayTexts* (1995) by Warren Motte and *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game, and Narrative Theory* by R. Rawdon Wilson (1990), on the other hand, approach play and narrative from a decidedly formalist and narratological slant, with minimal consideration of the material, historical, and social formations that are the primary concern of Brown's and Franklin's readings of fiction. Games and play in the work of Motte and Wilson become overpowering metaphors that qualify writer and reader relationships as agonistic or driven by competing paradigms that Peter Hutchinson echoes in his *Games Authors Play*. Such a view tends to locate a ludic impulsion outside of the formalization a particular novel takes by concentrating on the production of a text in terms of the way in which an author and reader vie for authorial supremacy.

Wolfgang Iser's literary anthropology is a variation of such textual interplay. His *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (1993) borrows heavily from Roger Caillois's anthropological/sociological study of games and their functions in pre-industrial and industrial societies, which I will say more about subsequently. Relying on Caillois's typology of games does not prevent Iser from installing free play into the kinds of textual

games that become its determining ground (note). Iser deploys his brand of ludism as an underpinning process of textuality and reading, one that depends upon a productive binary opposing free play with what he terms as instrumental play. While the former type of textual play eludes meaning and endings by “overshooting” both in favor of open-endedness, instrumental play guides a reader and text to a determinant endpoint, the closure of meaning. According to Iser, a text simultaneously pulls readers in both directions, toward a determinant meaning, as well as potentially vaulting readers and texts into a state of indeterminacy that attempts to transcend such finality.

Such a rubric, while certainly informative, risks veering into a phenomenological/experiential textual analysis that has the potential to lose contact with a text in question as well as its material conditions. Such a retreat becomes more about how a particular literary work operates as a conduit for considering psychic/subjective/textual processes underpinning the formatting of any text that is read. A product of the poststructuralist preoccupation of the inherent potential of play to work as a disruption to dominant modes of Western structures of thought and understanding (as well as a German aesthetic tradition that goes back to Schiller) – whether of philosophy, language, narrative – Iser’s distinction between free play and instrumental play, it seems, recasts Barthes’s conception of writerly and readerly texts. But whereas Barthes emphasizes the play of signifiers within a writerly text that evolves as “structuration without structure” or the “novelistic without the novel,” Iser’s point of emphasis is less about the workings of the text as a “galaxy of signifiers” (Barthes 4) as it is about the “doubling” nature of play, how play encounters itself in a text when free play and instrumental play meet, with an emphasis on the individual reader’s role, experience, and

production of the text that minimizes the influence of the immediate sociality that informs such textuality.

This transaction between free and instrumental play, however, Iser describes in terms of the dominant movement of the former, the “to-and-fro” or back-and-forth movement that the latter ceases by ending the text-as-game. I agree with Iser’s following Hans-Georg Gadamer’s lead in locating a fundamental logic of play in the simple yet suggestive to-and-fro dynamic,¹⁷ to which the following reading of Peter Brooks’s theory of plot will testify: such oscillation functions as a primary logistic of narrative plotting, a possibility that Brooks opens up but does not pursue outside of his psychoanalytic rubric. It would appear that Brooks cannot discuss narrative plotting without a discourse of play to elucidate its operations: plot is a “playground” of textual forces, the location of “instinctual” play, and what instantiates the “play of repetition,” a fundamental binding process of narrative.

Brooks’s brief but powerfully suggestive essay, the narrative of narrative plotting unfolding in/as “Freud’s Masterplot,” depends upon the repetition of play as a narrative strategy. But more than a discourse deployed by Brooks to unpack the workings of plot, play becomes a central dynamic of plot itself, the movement and motility expressing the various kinds of narrative economies marshaled by plot. While Brooks binds his ludic discourse to serve the demands of his psychoanalytic rubric, at the same time, his essay and the larger study of plot of which it is a part gestures toward moving beyond this Freudian framework. Ironically, the game of *fort-da* (gone-there) described by Freud in *Beyond* inaugurates the ludic discourse used by Brooks, operating as the de facto logistic underpinning the playground of plot. At root is that Brooks’s reliance on this ludic

discourse becomes more than a critical apparatus employed to express plot's complicated and conterminous operations: it also becomes a fundamental expression of narrative plotting itself. Brooks's study becomes instrumental in opening up the study of the novel form to the play formalizing its production, which extends and complicates New-Formalist theories.

Roger Caillois's sociological corrective to Huizinga's study of the importance of the play-element in culture becomes another vital rubric in my argument.¹⁸ In *Man, Play, and Games*, Caillois outlines a basic schematic of game types Huizinga fails to address.¹⁹ In addition to describing four foundational types of games (*agon*/competition, *alea*/chance, *mimicry*/acting-performing as another, and *ilinx*/vertigo), Caillois suggests that games are played by individuals according to a rubric that amounts to a sliding system marking the quality of game-play. On one end he positions *paidia* (child's play/spontaneous/disorganized), on the other he slots *ludus* (educational/disciplined play).

Rather than being mutually exclusive, Caillois understands games as encouraging an interplay of both extremes to players that is determined by what game is being played. For example, a game of chess (*agon*) with its rules and bounded space of play aligns itself with *ludus*, while a child spinning around in a circle until she drops (*ilinx*) is less formalized and organized, which is closer to spirit to *paidia*'s often non-purposive movements. Caillois presents a series of combinations of his game-types, focusing on what he considers the most important in culture's development, such as the agon-chance amalgam, which he describes as "parallel and complementary" (74). But it is the *paidia-ludus* relation that opens up the novel-recreation relation most productively:

diachronically speaking, the long nineteenth-century witnesses the novel form and forms of recreation move closer to the pole of *ludus* and further away from *paidia*, as a function of refining narrative technique and the development of particular schools of aesthetics in the former (literary realism), and the refining of propriety in the latter.

As I return to the *ludian-paidian* relationship to qualify the play-drive at various points in my reading, I will have recourse to supplement this model with additional discourses, to make it more amenable for its emplotment in the story of the novel form. Mihai Spărosu's encyclopedic, pan-disciplinary narrative describes the way in which pre-rational or rational forms of play alternate as dominant models over time, emerging as an equivalent if more encompassing binary to Caillois's *paidia-ludus* system that further colors the aesthetic and cultural shifts toward the spirit of *ludus* at work during the nineteenth century. Spărosu's tracking of dominant forms of play in the Western tradition, beginning with the Pre-Socratics and ending with poststructuralism, figures as a historical backdrop that illuminates the foundations of a post-Enlightenment, Victorian culture in which rational and edifying recreations proliferate. The conspicuous production of such practices and expressions of rational leisure models – which is to conspicuously invest in the ideology buttressing them – so ubiquitous in so many Victorian novels, at the same time, devalues forms of play that fall outside this rubric. While social historians have theorized the role that enclosure, industrial capitalism, the move of populations from the country to cities, and Methodism exacted on traditional recreational forms, an equivalent study that takes into account the novel has yet to materialize.

If I take as a founding supposition that the novel, in fact, works by an inherent and conditioning play-drive, then does this literary expression of play remain out of play, out

of reach of the impulses re-shaping social values of play that is so conspicuous in extraliterary realms? If, as I argue, that it does not, then in what ways do particular novels move from *paidia* to *ludus* or become more rational? Thorsten Veblen's consideration of the leisure class, most specifically his notion of its conspicuous consumption, becomes instructive here. But rather than consumption, with regard to a novel aesthetic, it is more apt to think about conspicuous or inconspicuous (nonconscious) productions of play driving a novel as part of the text that readers consume.

Domesticating Play

In recent years scholars of the British novel have revised Ian Watt's observation that the rise of the novel coincided with the rise of the middle-classes, perhaps none more extensive than Michael McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740*. Rather than the ascent of the middle-classes, McKeon suggests that the novel becomes a new expression of a declining aristocracy, not the expression of a dominant, rising middle class (4). Also tackling the rise-of-the-novel in *Licensing Entertainments*, William Warner positions the reformation of reading practices at the center of the novel's emergence (xiii). Watt's project, according to Warner "obscures the historical and cultural strife that produced 'the novel' as a coherent cultural object" (2), while arguing that the novel emerges at the center of an entertainment industry that was media-driven rather than the result of individual invention on the part of authors as the genre unfolds in the long eighteenth century. If I highlight these two responses to Watt, it is because the dialogue that crystallizes among them broaches terrain vital to my project: the impetus to associate the novel's rise with a particular social class and situating the novel squarely

within a larger field of recreation and leisure. But at the same time, I diverge from the studies of Watt, McKeon, and Warner on these same concerns.

Rather than aligning the novel form with a particular social class, I probe an ambivalent aesthetic at the core of the genre that precludes such easy alliances, even if so many nineteenth-century novels represent and present an identifiable rubric installing what Jameson might refer to as an ideological binary machine distributing and reinforcing values of middle-class play. It is by looking closely at the narrative processes of a novel, and how authors at different points in time put them to use, as well as the ideological implications of the deployment of narrative devices that makes it more difficult to align firmly the genre with any particular class. The close attention my dissertation gives to the formulations of the novel's form expands the topography usually staked out in generic studies of this type. Warner's project remains noteworthy for my study, as it positions the genre as an intensive site reflecting changing reading and thus leisure practices. Following Warner's lead, I remain invested in positioning the novel form within a diverse field of recreational and leisure formations, which experiences profound pressures to re-organize during the later decades of the eighteenth-century and continues to do so as the nineteenth-century progresses according to a distinctive middle-class model.

Histories of the novel appearing in the early decades of the nineteenth century create a tradition that the genre previously lacks at this point in time. Anna Laetitia Barbauld's 50-volume *The British Novelists* (1810) is notable for its breadth as well as for its introductory essay. Excerpted in an American periodical in 1811, an editor describing the merits of Barbauld's work writes that her essay "made an admirable

apology for the writers of novels; an apology which, by the bye, they in some degree wanted” (205). If such a defense is wanted, it is because the genre continually needed defenders to express its benefits (cheap entertainment and morally instructive) in response to its detractors, in addition to the fact that a story of the novel had yet to be adequately related. In this introduction Barbauld returns to the reality-test as an underlying feature that distinguishes the novel and romance forms. But she also extends this conversation by casting it in “evolutionary terms,” suggesting that over time cultures naturally move from romance and tales of magic to the novel, fictional narratives that reflect and depict contemporary matters realistically (Clery and Miles 269). For so many commentators and critics, as Ruskin’s 1836 essay suggests, the novel and romance remain bound together, interlocked in generic overlaps that still need to be sorted out when Dickens writes his novel.

While Congreve as early as 1692 distinguishes between the romance and the novel forms,²⁰ the latter’s eventual, and for some, begrudging acceptance remains a function of its newness, its differences from, and the challenges it poses to the historically canonized and already-theorized forms of drama and poetry that can trace their emergence back to antiquity. A latecomer of a genre such as the novel can never lay claim to such a rich past, nor can it overcome the way in which literary criticism remained inextricably tied to drama and poetry. Founded in order to estimate by judgment and taste the relative quality of dramas and poems, eighteenth-century (and earlier) practitioners who doubled as the codifiers of high literary criticism left the task of considering novels mainly to periodical reviewers, until works such as Barbauld’s began to appear on the scene. Even so, the familial affinity the novel maintains with the less-

than-esteemed form of romance and its association with a reading public of the lower orders that novelists begin to depict more regularly and with greater intensity emerge as stumbling blocks preventing the novel from reaching wider critical acceptance sooner.²¹

A central development to the maturation of the novel and its eventual acceptance as a legitimate genre is the conversation that develops in periodicals among critics, reviewers, and authors during the early decades of the nineteenth century. In this dialogue we witness the wrangling with what makes fiction, and by extension, the novel, tick. If concerns of judgment and taste guided earlier manifestations of British literary criticism, the emergent class of critics/reviewers that matures with the novel turns to formal and structural concerns, in part, to come to terms with the upstart genre. The emergence of this formal discourse signifies a shift in the way, for instance, Fielding in *Tom Jones* (1749) discusses the novel, or for him, the history contra the romance.

Less interested in rehearsing the finer points of his distinction (possibility vs. probability, truth vs. untruth, natural vs. unnatural), more important to note is that his observations suggest a trajectory of discourses about the novel when viewed in light of emergent nineteenth-century discourses of criticism. Much of the well-documented novel debate of the 1740s falls under a general rubric of what the novel is and any inherent moral merits it may claim. But the advent of reviews and criticisms of the novel addressing matters of form announces a shift in emphasis, for some, from a preoccupation and need to describe what the novel is in the attempt to come to terms with how the form works.²² Edward Bulwar-Lytton emerges as an important voice in this development in literary criticism unfolding in the periodicals.

A successful novelist in his own right, Bulwer-Lytton achieved success and popularity for such novels as *Paul Clifford* (1830) and *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) in the late twenties and thirties. But over time his reputation as a first-rate critic surpassed the status he may have once held as a writer of fiction, a situation that holds true today. His 1838 essay “On Art in Fiction” demonstrates the way in which some reviewers and critics begin to expand the terrain of criticism as a function of the increased critical attention novels receive in print. Bulwer-Lytton’s reliance on a discourse of aesthetic machinery and mechanism to propel such sections of his essay as “The Conception” and “Mechanism and Conduct” demonstrates his engagement with formal and structural matters of fiction and the novel. For Bulwer-Lytton,²³ Walter Scott expresses his “genius” not as an “artist” but as a “mechanist” whose “execution” of his aesthetic of fiction “infinitely” exceeds his “conception” of it (23).²⁴

His observations on fiction range from the use of character, description, and terror and horror. A discussion of narrative plotting, however, stands as Bulwer-Lytton’s most recognizable commitment to formal concerns in fiction. In order to explain the operations of plot at work in fiction, he resorts to a generic comparison between the drama and the novel, which is not surprising since he also writes drama in addition to fiction. The points of this contrast, according to the essay, do not at first appear so easily perceptible. But what comes into view for Bulwar-Lytton is the way in which a dramatic narrative necessarily must “grow, progressively,” in which one scene naturally arises as the logical “consequence of the one that precedes it.” The plot of a novel, on the contrary, may have recourse “to go back instead of forward – to wind, to vary, to shift interest from person to person – to keep even your principal hero, your principal actor, in the background” (31).

A passage from Goethe further animates the differences between dramatic and fictional plots for Bulwar-Lytton: “The novel allows accident, the drama never” (32). We are free to disagree with the particulars fueling this contrast, as the more important point here is to consider the oppositional relation he sets up between the drama and the novel.²⁵

This comparison at once validates his critical enterprise as it implicitly raises the validity of the novel in a way that the genre’s continued relation to the romance does not. Thus we should consider his and other similar considerations of the novel form and fiction during the early decades of the nineteenth century as a retooling or refining of an ongoing dialogue that unfolds diachronically and synchronically.²⁶ Less a new critical conversation than marking an emerging development in a historically saturated dialogue, Bulwar-Lytton apparently does not remain unaware of the generic implications guiding his readings.

A defense of the French picaresque novel *Gil Blas* (1715-1735) becomes the occasion for him to argue for the need to understand novels according to the demands of their own generic laws. The terms of his defense respond to misguided readings of digressive fictions by critics who read novels according to the laws of drama. Bulwar-Lytton makes the case that the episodic turns of a novel such as *Gil Blas* “complete” its design or “conception.” He further states that such apparent digressions “are not passages which lead to nothing, but conduce to many purposes we can never comprehend, unless we consider well for what end the building was planned” (34). His point is that novels and dramas progress in different manners as a result of a different “order of interest.”

For Bulwer-Lytton, episodic constructions of plot productively contribute to the overall design of a novel, even if it remains unclear at first glance how they exactly do so.

They may simply form an aspect of the novel's conception to amuse, instruct, work toward generating readerly desire by establishing the traits of a character, or operate as an expression underscoring a novel's attempt to generate interest based on a convoluted plot. In one sense, Bulwer-Lytton's brief reading of narrative digressions (or digressive narratives) positions such expressions as a productive formal characteristic of the novel form. J. Paul Hunter reinforces such a sentiment in his examination of the contexts that lay the groundwork for the rise of the novel.²⁷

As Hunter understands it, manufacturing a literary form that differentiated itself from dramas and poems led novelists to embrace and produce the novel as a curious, surprising, and new literary expression. A functional dynamic of this expression, according to Hunter, is the production of a formal self-consciousness, in which authors often resorted to revealing the novelty of the novel by reveling in the reflexive digressions that Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* takes to the extreme. Digressions, as well as fragmentation and the "the ability to parenthesize," also help produce the "looseness" that Hunter locates as a formal trait of the novel: "if there is a peculiar unity in the novel, there is also a peculiar looseness and shapelessness" (24).

This formal laxity, when viewed as a process of narrative plotting and the role digressions play in its production, expresses more than a historical marker of the novel's formalization as a genre contra drama or poetry. It also implicitly expresses the play driving the possibility of this literary form, the way in which any author has at his or her disposal the ability to play with the formal conventions of the novel as primary creative aim. This prospect is built into the creative possibilities the form affords: using formal conventions as novelistic content, which Sterne uses to format his narrative. However,

what *Tristram Shandy* highlights is a conspicuous and conscious ludism, not the nonconscious play driving form and content that is my primary concern. Recognizing the role of history and ideology as a conditioning agent of discourse in general and thus, by extension aesthetic discourse in particular, conscious and nonconscious expressions of play driving the production of form and content in a given novel remain conditioned even as they condition more dominant and conscious expressions of concurrent discourses disseminated at or through various ISAs.

The refining of narrative technique and the development of literary realism, I contend, does not merely coincide with an increased concern for more edifying, rational, and tamed expressions of recreation and leisure during the long nineteenth century. Rather, as a set of distinct discourses comprising different cultural fields, the novel, like forms of recreation, yet work together as expressions of a culture becoming more concerned with notions of the proper, propriety, and respectability, in part, as a function of the professionalization of vocations, or the creation and maintenance of discursive formations (madness or sexuality) at a time when industrial capitalism asserts its dominance. In other words, the development of the novel and the reorganization of recreational rubrics during this time bear the marks of the more encompassing yet disparate emergence of the instantiation of social habits and practices invested in establishing new codes and patterns of behavior affecting many spheres of culture (public-domestic spaces, schools, entertainments, sports, media, writing) in different ways.

We see the way in which discourses of rational recreation situate “acceptable” forms of play as obvious allies and extensions of a wider dissemination of dominant

cultural values. The concomitant because necessary devaluing of traditional forms of play, pegging others as improper, reflects a shift in this particular discursive formation (recreation and leisure) that at the same time expresses, in its field-specific way, a larger discursive network whose gravitational center remains the proper itself. Where the novel fits into this network and how it does so is less certain and conspicuous as a result of the central but inconspicuous role of play in it, despite the very fact that fictions and novels become an increasingly popular leisure choice for recreating Victorians. However, there are traces of the differentiation, partitioning, and categorizing of kinds of writing that emerge as a result of the proliferation of periodicals and a keener sense of what a novel is and how one works as the century unfolds.

For instance, a critic at the *Athenaeum* associates Thackeray's style in *Vanity Fair* with the author's tenure as a magazine writer.²⁸ As an example of Thackeray's "old magazine manner," the *Athenaeum* article cites how he "postponed the continuation of his narrative to imitations of some of his contemporary writers of fiction." While the *Athenaeum* critic fails to consider at length or in detail the differences between magazine and novel writing, this observation suggests that Thackeray's aesthetic of plotting suffers by incorporating the former into the latter. What is important to note is that according to this critic, a line has been crossed by Thackeray, one that at once comprises his novel as it points to the emergence of the line dividing writing styles and practices belonging to different genres.

However, unlike the set of discourses informing rational recreation that openly embrace and reproduce the values underpinning the proper, those that shape the novel form, guide the honing of narrative technique, and condition the aesthetics of literary

realism, remain obscured by the working through and working out genre-specific jargon (plot, character, romance, history) by writers of varied ilk, or they become lost in the overt questioning of the genre itself: is the novel a legitimate genre? Does it have merit? What sort of underlying assumptions and values scaffold such questions?²⁹

If the novel can positively affect readers as Ruskin and Trollope claim in their defense of the novel and fiction (see note 21), it is because the fictional and the aesthetic remain intimately a part of the “real” world inhabited by readers despite a fiction being set off from the life of this world by the very fact of being a work of art. A fundamental concern of various strains of New Formalism takes seriously the productive relations subtending fiction and reality to consider anew those that arise among author, the aesthetic, the social, the ethical, the reader, and the practice of reading itself. These relationships become the means to rethink the very activity of form and the ways that it is activated without retreating into an isolated and de-politicized zone of interpretation and criticism that continues to plague formal and structurally inflected readings. Canonical novels of the nineteenth century, it would appear, invite readers to position the fictional in relation to “reality” rather than offering the means to escape or retreat from it.

Middlemarch and *Oliver Twist*, for example, grapple head on with questions of propriety and impropriety through recreational and leisure practices: Featherstone’s card-playing ways come under question, while Brownlow’s rehabilitation of Oliver is expressed, in part, in terms of the leisurely pursuits offered in the countryside with the Maylies (music, gardening, reading). More than content adding a reality effect to the fictionality of each novel, such representations fictionally reproduce real-world positions, issues, and concerns fueling the reorganization of Victorian recreation and leisure

practices. When Brooke suggests that Causabon read some Smollet (“light” reading) or go fishing to recuperate from his illness, Eliot’s novel captures a certain mode of recreating that emerges as an expression of the middle-class experience as it manifests in a country town. Moments such as these invite us to consider to what degree a novel remains invested in the models of play with which it sympathizes, or how consistently one divests itself from those it critiques. Doing so requires moving back and forth between a novel’s content and form and the play conditioning this relationship in order to gauge the quality and quantity of this play. Such a project allows for establishing a genealogy of novels based on the kind and intensity of play particular novels deploy and what relationship it maintains with similarly aligned novels, as well as with dominant values of play it expresses aesthetically.

Generally speaking, with such a rubric, we can begin to group novels such as *Tristram Shandy* and *Vanity Fair* as works invested in a conspicuous/*paidian* play-drive that runs counter to the more muted/inconspicuous/*ludus* play driving novels such as *Oliver Twist*, *Middlemarch*, and *Emma*. This latter group represents a novel aesthetic that cultivates a relationship between content and form that the first does not (and vice versa), in which form becomes a subsidiary for the drive to produce content that is more consistently representative of various spheres of life in ‘reality.’ Whereas the first group of novels plays with formal conventions of fiction (or language) as a part of the stories each tells, the others tend to favor narratives that preserve the integrity of the fictional illusions each produces by treating form as a more neutralized conduit for content.³⁰ Play, as the conditioning agent of these varied form-content relations, needs to be localized and qualified to demonstrate its role in these different productions.

With such a starting point, the very idea of the novel form becomes a new question, a genre open to new routes of investigation. A particular novel's unique expression of the generic constraints binding it doubles as that which binds it to the external world through the values it assimilates as a function of the work of play endemic to aesthetic production. This dual relationship troubles the distinction between the literary and the extraliterary, inside and outside. Reference to the outside – to the social values of play – becomes the only way to illuminate the play-drive itself, the way in which it conditions form and content in a novel as the reciprocating ground of their mutual production. To locate play, then, is not to only locate play at work, but in one and the same gesture it is to recognize that what we are locating is a particular expression of play.

The reading of *Emma* closing this introductory chapter suggests the way in which this novel generates a consistent aesthetic that reproduces the logistics of late eighteenth-century expressions of rational recreation it represents. In other words, the play driving demands of form and content in Austen's novel emerges as an aesthetic expression that doubly reinforces middle-class ideologies of recreation and leisure. Even so, subsequent chapters explore more contradictory relationships that arise in a number of novels as a result of the possibilities inherent in the form-play-content relationship. Paying keen attention to the role play plays as a formalizing dynamic of the novel form underscores how problematic it is to conceive of the genre as operating as a literary outpost for a single class, however dominant one may be. Briefly mapping the way in which *Emma* becomes an exemplary expression of a literary form that so consistently reproduces the logistics of middle-class formations of play serves as an occasion to highlight the

novelistic and extra-novelistic terrain that produces a more inconsistent aesthetic that concerns much of the later chapters.



Letter Games in *Emma*

“We had great amusement with those letters one morning. I want to puzzle you again.”

Jane Austen, *Emma*.

Austen clearly marks a shift in an aesthetic of the novel, even if she does not necessarily inaugurate it. In his *History of English Literature: 1780 -1895* (1896), George Saintsbury refers to Austen as “the mother of the nineteenth century novel,” whose particular gifts as an author emerge under a rubric of “formal criticism” (128 -129). Her use of irony and innovative technique of narration, free indirect discourse, for instance, has been discussed at great length as an important milestone in the maturation of the novel’s aesthetic. But there is more to consider in Austen’s work, a collection that bridges the end of the eighteenth century and the opening decades of the nineteenth: her novels embody the structural and ideological (economic, political, social) changes of this period from the perspective of a leisured class that we can trace through the play managing the form and content of *Emma*.

With all apologies to Saintsbury, who locates a virtue in Austen’s writing in her depiction of “ordinary life” and her ignoring of “popular or passing fashions, amusements, politics” (131), the intensive retreat indoors to the domestic in *Emma* imagines the sort of domesticated recreational rubric called for by the likes of Wilberforce and other Evangelicals at the turn of the century (see note 33). This relation

suggests that Austen, even if she does ignore “passing fashion, amusements, politics” (I don’t think she does³¹), yet reproduces a politicized recreational program in step with the values of the leisured classes, as well as those that find support among Evangelicals among these ranks and in others.³² Just as important in noting the politics of the novel’s program of domestic recreations is that the novel embodies an aesthetic sympathetic to the recreations it depicts by domesticating the play driving this aesthetic. The contours of this domestication of play occur only in light of a novel tradition that precedes Austen.³³

It is not that the fictions of Sterne, Fielding, Edgeworth, or Haywood do not spend time representing the domestic; it is what occurs in *Emma*’s domestic spaces, who readers see occupying the domestic, and whose domestic spaces readers are allowed to access that I want to underscore by way of Raymond Williams’s cogent observations of her work in *The Country and the City*. His brief but suggestive remarks contextualizing Austen’s novels within a matrix of agrarian and urban political and social economies opens up a reading of the domestic recreations depicted in *Emma*. In this novel, drawing, acrostics, and music, while producing the edifying hearthside leisure occupations favored by a growing number of the middle and leisured classes concurrently emblemizes the domestication of previous novelists’ willingness to indulge in and access the capacity of narrative to play as a productive and acceptable storytelling drive.

Such literary maneuvers, whether of form or content, Williams reminds us, do not occur within a vacuum but rather as literary expressions of more seismic cultural renovations. The domestic amusements depicted in Austen’s novel coincides with growing anxiety about popular recreations and crowds, the lauding of home as a repository of safe and healthy recreation, which becomes entangled in a conservative,

nationalist project intent on quashing reformist sentiments. R.W. Malcolmson writes the following concerning middle-class unease attached to public assemblies during this time: “The only safe course was to avoid such assemblies and to confine one’s recreation, so much as it was necessary, to domestic pleasures. The home was a refuge from the world; here amusement could be ‘rational’, regulated, uplifting and subservient to the laws of religion” (104).³⁴ What contributes to this discomfort with crowds and idealizing the home as a refuge in addition to their association with social unrest?

It is the changing tastes, manners, habits, customs, and practices that accompanies the following as expressions of altered or new social formations: the eventual shift from an agrarian to industrial economy, the movement of country laborers to the city, the movement of new wealth from the city to the country, the rise of Evangelicalism, revising worker-employee relations in the country, the retreat of the landed gentry from traditional obligations (patronage), enclosure, and a growing conservatism that plays on the fears and dangers of revolution and reform, among other political, economic, and societal dynamics. It is not that each of these concerns is explicitly played out in Austen’s novel. Rather the particularities of the leisure class she depicts, because it is a leisure class, cannot so easily be divested from such a plethora of micro and macro concerns, even if Austen, in taking readers into her insulated communities, invites readers to think otherwise. If Grossman is right to suggest that *Emma* represents a community of the leisured organized by structures and practices of etiquette,³⁵ it seems only logical to consider the novel’s aesthetic etiquette: what structures it? What relations does it maintain with the imagined community it works to produce at Austen’s direction? What ethos of aesthetic production does Austen forge in relation to previous novelists? To

answer such questions requires not so much a reconsideration of Grossman's supposition. Rather it involves a survey of the leisure practices and recreational forms practiced by this leisure class, which as set of expressions, emblemize the novel's ludic yet relatively tamed aesthetic.

There is a history of leisure embedded within the forms of recreations that a novel such as *Emma* elides in naturalizing its hearthside leisure occupations, as if these modes of recreating always existed for all the classes to access and enjoy and that there were no other ways of recreating, for young women or anyone else. Such pastimes cannot be understood historically without understanding that the move to them and into domestic spaces in which they are enjoyed at the same time is the move away from popular and traditional recreations such as fairs, wakes, and festivals that begin to wane in popularity as the nineteenth century progresses with the emergence of a new entertainment industry that is part of the rise of urban culture. Indeed, the Great Exhibition and the Crystal Palace in 1851 signify the merging of science and entertainment as a dominant and "improved" form of leisure that supplants an ethos buttressing the kinds of diversions offered at traditional fairs as much as they announce the centrality of urban culture at mid-century.³⁶ It is more than coincidence that Bartholomew Fair ends its annual summer run in 1855, a few years after the Great Exhibition, in part, as a result of growing concerns for the unruly behavior associated with the fair.

The crowds at Bartholomew and similar fairs, often raucous gatherings and complicated social formations in their own right, became a place where violence, gambling, and drinking, often to excess, emerged as one of the expected or recognizably valid ludic expressions one would expect to encounter there, even if such conduct was

not universally accepted and perhaps unfairly attached to the lower orders. Proponents of more enlightening modes of recreation attempted to curb and reroute such behavior, by arguing for the limiting of bodily excesses in favor of promoting spiritual, moral, and intellectual growth.³⁷ Austen's novel does not directly grapple with this reformation of recreational practices through its depiction of leisurely pursuits; however, a fear of crowds is mapped onto the possibility of a band of gypsies disturbing and threatening the community, an episode continues to attract critical attention.³⁸

The gypsies, at first, only tangentially relate to an economy of leisure, as a threat to the memory of the ball at the Crown. Once the story begins to circulate among "those who talk most, the young and the low," we are told that the ball itself "seemed lost in the gypsies" (262). The fate befalling the gypsies, however, is an aesthetic one, which highlights their role in the novel's aesthetic. After accosting Harriet, the gypsies "did not wait for the operations of justice; they took themselves off in a hurry" (262). We could easily write that Austen removes them from the story in a hurry, at least as characters occupying the same diegetic plane as Emma and her Highbury community. The event of the gypsies' incursion soon thereafter becomes "a matter of little importance but to Emma and her nephews: – in her imagination it maintained its ground, and Henry and John were still asking every day for the story of Harriet and the gypsies, and still tenaciously setting her right if she varied in the slightest particular from the original recital" (263). The story of the gypsies, then, is that they are turned into a story, a tale told for the entertainment of two young boys, which lives in her imagination and in theirs. But there is also a curious story that supplements this one, which precedes the transformation of the gypsies into story-fodder. Emma, upon hearing of Harriet's

adventure, spurs her mind into activity, which evolves into an observation of her thoughts by the narrator:

Such an adventure as this, – a fine young man and a lovely young woman thrown together in such a way, could hardly fail of suggesting certain ideas to the coldest heart and the steadiest brain. So Emma thought at least. Could a linguist, could a grammarian, could even a mathematician have seen what she did, have witnessed their appearance together, and heard their history of it, without feeling that circumstances had been at work to make them peculiarly interesting to each other? – How much more must an imaginalist like herself, be on fire with speculation and foresight! – especially with such ground-work of anticipation as her mind had already made (261).

This passage retains a double valence – it refers to the represented content, to the event of the gypsies and that, in one sense, they are responsible for throwing Harriet and Frank together. But invoking the linguist, grammarian, and mathematician – scientific fields invested in the general and abstract rules, systems, theorems, and maxims of languages and disinvested in the imaginalist world of Emma – invites readers to consider the glaring absence of the novelist's response to this list. Perhaps it is because this moment implicitly implicates the novelist in general and Austen in particular: she is the author working this circumstance in order to make readers more interested in the Harriet-Frank-Emma love triangle. As the consequence of the gypsy-presence (the gypsy as present or gift for this subplot and the plot of the novel), as the end for which the gypsies

become means, the gypsy becomes expendable and thus reduced to a story themselves within the novel.

The transformation of the gypsies into story-material for Emma's nephews emblemizes Austen's transformation of the gypsies into material for the novel of her plot.³⁹ If they do not wait "for the operations of justice," their not doing so betrays that Austen's aesthetic prevents the possibility of ever giving them justice. Since they are enfolded back into the Romantic imagination from which they originate, what justice could be given them? From the moment of their introduction, the gypsies, as a constellation of already-completed images and associations that Austen inherits from a literary tradition, have been the means to aesthetic ends. They are brought to the attention of readers at Austen's hand only to draw attention to their imagined and re-imagined status, which *Emma* suggests, is their site and function of the proper in Highbury. The home of the gypsies and gypsy culture in *Emma* is the aesthetic, which allows their production, reproduction, and consumption as commodities of a Romantic imagination. If they cannot be tamed or civilized in life, if they come to represent a way of life and values anathema to those of Highbury, they can yet be absorbed into Highbury via the imagination, which colonizes the nomadic and that which is beyond and outside Emma's community. Closed to any other possible relations with gypsies, they remain open as source-material for imaginations such as Emma's.

Emma's imagination, or more accurately, Austen's describing Emma as an "imaginist,"⁴⁰ situates this eponymous character in analogous relation with the author. Both emplot the lives of others in narratives of their own designs. Eugene Goodheart goes so far as to suggest that Emma's active imagination positions her as the novel's

“narrative force,” suggesting that the “field of Emma’s imagination, like Austen’s is the social world” (597). True, but it is not so much *the* social world as *a* particular social world, that of Highbury’s leisure class, which is the field of Emma’s imagination. This is the particular field that she attempts to shape with her imagination by matchmaking. In turn, her imagination has been shaped by the same social field over time, which is what makes it so easy for her to transform gypsies into fodder for stories, the stuff of leisure for children of the leisured class.

Grossman is right to emphasize the importance of the Box Hill episode, in which Frank Churchill confronts and exposes the etiquette driving Highbury culture. Frank’s production begins with his announcing that Emma desires to know each party member’s thought, which he then revises into the more modest demand that each individual say something or entertaining, or even dull.⁴¹ According to Grossman, here “Frank underscores that he is not just asking for entertainment but also describing the contract of etiquette, a contract ultimately ratified in a promise, nondiscursive bodily reaction of hearty laughter” (155). At the same time, this moment reinforces Emma as the novel’s narrative force. The origin of Frank’s production at Box Hill, as he announces, comes from Emma: he is “ordered” to do so by her. His ordering takes the shape of narration in his claim that he speaks on her behalf and for her designs, much in the way that Emma and other characters in the novel “speak” at the direction of Austen.

But rather than *the* narrative force, the Box Hill episode suggests that Emma tends to share this energetic with others as a result of her being ordered by Frank: “Emma is caught up in Frank’s expose of the production of politeness, and so she cannot ‘resist’ turning etiquette inside-out” by insulting Miss Bates” (Grossman 156). Frank jokes that

Emma “orders” him to elicit the thoughts of others, but he, in turn, orders Emma in a much more subtle way, by enfolding her in his scheme. In essence, he emplots her into it, but not by ordering or commanding her, which he quips is what she does to force him into action. His ordering is more of the order of organizing and managing her, nudging her into being his accomplice.⁴²

As a result, Grossman notes that Emma confronts Frank’s outsider status, highlighting the lack of responsibility he shoulders in reproducing Highbury’s etiquette. Emma subsequently realizes that momentarily joining him outside this economy of polite society “means abandoning her identification with her society’s efforts of civility” (156).⁴³ But she is able to find herself in this outside position only as a result of her being “caught up” as an actor in Frank’s performance. If she cannot help insulting Miss Bates, it is because she cannot help being Frank’s co-conspirator by following his lead. Her conversation with Knightley, which concludes the Box-Hill escapade, also establishes Knightley as a narrative force of his own.

His chastisement of Emma’s treatment of Miss Bates reminds readers of his own scheme to gently reform or mold Emma into a better person and potential life-partner. As a primary advice-giver to Emma, Knightley, ironically, attempts to fashion her all the while she is busy meddling in the affairs of others. Much of the tenor of this particular conversation mobilizes around Emma’s transgressions of propriety, compassion, and civility. Her lack of forethought becomes the occasion for Knightly to humble Emma into self-analysis and criticism, in which she cannot deny the “truth of his representation” (295). Emma as the imaginist who over-relies on fancy to fuel her social schemes and marriages plots, also fails to self-regulate her imagination’s influence and reach. It is also

apt to think of her imagination getting the best of her at times. Knightley, however, wields domesticating pressure to her imaginings from without that Emma lacks from within, an influence that makes its way into the Box-Hill performance.

Mr. Weston begins the awkward procession of not-so-entertaining, dull witticisms with a conundrum. He asks, “What two letters of the alphabet are there that express perfection?” His answer, he explains to Emma, is Emma herself: “M. and A. – Em – ma. Do you understand?” While Emma, Frank, and Harriet laugh, Knightley responds differently: “*Perfection* should not have come quite so soon” (291). On the one hand, this comment refers to Mr. Weston’s witty observation as commencing the proceedings. Knightley, with a witticism of his own, suggests that beginning with perfection leaves the rest of the group with the unenviable task of subsequently attempting to trump perfection with their contributions to the game. But on the other hand it is clear that Knightley’s comment also refers to the absurd notion of Emma being perfect in her young age. Along with Knightley, readers have witnessed a number of Emma’s false steps and mis-readings that culminates in her public ridiculing of Miss Bates. Knightley indirectly hints as Emma’s imperfections here, a subject that he tackles head-on when he talks to her in private prior to leaving Box Hill in order to rein in her behavior and etiquette.

The Box-Hill gathering at which Emma is productive as an author or authorizing agent as well as an authored or produced subject (in the short-term by Frank and as part of Knightley’s longer-term project of her refashioning) suggests a distribution of narrative force in the novel. This force may coalesce around Emma, but she does not order it alone or in isolation. Rather she shares it as a consequence of the schemes and plots of others that concurrently emplot her while plotting out her own designs for others.

These mutually productive relationships, while not etiquettes of narrative, do open a path to a consideration of Austen's aesthetic etiquette that requires similar contextualization. Historicizing the novel aesthetic of *Emma* reveals a dual process in which Austen draws on and departs from previous authors' more explicit playfulness. In short, if *Emma* is a narrative force of the novel and concomitantly is forced into the narratives of others, the force of *Emma*'s ludic aesthetic does not take shape without appreciating its domesticating impulse, one that models its play on the edifying ends of the domestic recreations enjoyed at Highbury.⁴⁴

What does *Emma* actually domesticate as a function of its tamed novel aesthetic? To risk being too general and lax with play, the often bawdy theatricality underpinning the adventures and mishaps of *Tom Jones* is missing in *Emma*, where modesty and restraint prevails; the digressions and self reflexivity of *Tristram Shandy* is missing in favor of a tightly woven plot scaffolded by the precision of her technique of narration; the logic of chance meetings moving the plot of *Camilla* if not absent, is muted, limited and confined; and the playfulness of Edgeworth's cast of characters in *Belinda* taking a final bow at the end novel is more a gesture of Thackeray than Austen. Such novelistic aesthetics express the drive for play at work, to borrow from Thorsten Veblen, as a "conspicuous" mode of narrative production.

The self-reflexive maneuvers of Sterne and Edgeworth highlight the fictionality of their respective fictions by allowing the formal demands of the genre to become subjects of the story we read (conventions of narrative and creation and maintenance of fictional illusions). Such an avenue remains open to any author who opts to exploit the play driving fiction beyond its minimal role of negotiating formal demands with original

content. While Sterne obviously does so to a more consistent and excessive degree in *Tristram Shandy*, Edgeworth's reflexive ending in *Belinda*, by reminding readers of its own fictionality, cultivates a more expansive role for play as a productive drive of fiction. Not only the narrative process by which a fiction expresses the merging of form and content, in these novels, play becomes a novelistic product or content at the same time.

But *Emma* works by playing in a less noticeable register. While not limiting its play to that which activates the demands of content and form, the novel eschews the overt ludism of Sterne and Edgeworth that bares conventions of fiction in favor of a more disciplined play-drive modeled on that of the domestic recreations it depicts. The novel's more subtle mode of play becomes apparent in the novel's return to letters and letter writing, as this network of concerns harnesses the logistics of more rational modes of recreation. An idea of letters in this novel becomes an extended pun the astute reader can enjoy with the clever author who creates it.

Mr. Weston's phonetically punning on the "M" and "A" constituting Emma's name at Box Hill extends a play with letters previously broached in the novel. Before the Box-Hill picnic Jane, Emma, and Frank Churchill play a game of acrostics with a box of letters. At one point the word 'blunder' is played by Frank. Not only is this an inside communication to Jane; it also recalls how after learning of Mr. Elton's marriage Emma realizes that her intended match for Harriet was never the viable possibility she imagined it was. In preparation to paying respects to Mrs. Elton's engagement to Mr. Elton we are told that Emma could not help but recollect "Compliments, charades and horrible blunders," references to her ill-advised attempt at pairing Mr. Elton and Harriet (208). In addition, prior to leaving the dance at the Crown, she explains to Knightley the

“unpardonable rudeness” imparted to her by Mr. Elton: “I was fully convinced of his being in love with Harriet. It was through a series of strange blunders!” (258). The word “blunder,” then, become a general term marking miscues of judgment as they relate to various relationships at Highbury (Frank-Jane, Emma-Mr. Elton, and Emma-Harriet).⁴⁵

Furthermore, the discourse of blunders and letters overlap in a conversation between Knightley and Jane Fairfax about the efficacy of the post-office.⁴⁶ Responding to his observation that the post-office is “very well-regulated,” she remarks that rarely can it be accused of “negligence or blunder” (229). The game of acrostics casts new meaning onto the blunder-letter relationship: “blunder” becomes a play in this game, while the repeated use of this word in the novel becomes a game of its own, part of a language game that Austen inaugurates and regulates in *Emma*. In effect, her game of letters becomes analogous with the post-office as described by Knightley, as Austen, in or through *Emma* (*Em Ma* or *M A*) distributes letters with the precision of the post-office. But in this case, her game aesthetically traffics and distributes letters, playfully ordering letters of various orders in such a way that to appreciate this network, requires a disciplined practice of reading. The lines of this network, while productive and available to readers, do not ostensibly produce themselves. They are in place for readers as formatted content, but it is up to them to formalize the connections and relations that Austen makes but does not actively reveal or conceal. Similar to acrostics, the playful use of letters in the novel assumes the status of puzzle, a word-game that potentially becomes its own conundrum. To “solve” this puzzle requires readers to employ the sort of mental acumen used to play acrostics. It is apt, perhaps, to suggest that Austen does not revel in her making of this puzzle, a subtlety that reveals the tamed ludic of her aesthetic. One

conversation between Knightley and Emma concerning letters of business and letters of friendship expands the reach of letterness in the novel the game of acrostics and letter-writing establishes.

When the marriage of Emma and Knightley is all but settled, the former uses the letters M and N as stand-ins for the couple's names in reference to their wedding day, recalling Mr. Weston's pun on Emma's name. In contrast to the "elegant terseness of Mrs. Elton," Emma tells Knightley that she will refrain from calling him Mr. K. She does, however, promise to call Knightley by his Christian name once: "I do not say when, but perhaps you may guess where; -- in the building in which N. takes M. for better, for worse" (364). The last phrase of the passage, "for better, for worse," contextualizes the relation this phonetic synecdoche maintains with Mr. Weston's earlier witticism. If Knightley previously grumbles at the suggestion of Emma's perfection earlier because of her obvious errors and flaws, here Emma's letter game rewrites the very rules of perfection. It is not M. A. (Emma) or the individual subject that is perfect. Rather is it N. + M. (the Knightley-Emma dyad) that stands for perfection, not only because Emma has become more "perfect" or less flawed by the novel's end. It is because this moment suggests that perfection is completion, that Emma, perhaps, would be less perfect and thus incomplete without officially making Knightley her husband, who unofficially has been her life-partner from the start, for better or for worse.

While this is one message Austen's letter play summons, the form and formality of this play concurrently embodies a message of its own. Coming to terms with this message necessitates returning to the idea of Emma, Frank, and Knightley as mutually productive narrative forces. A closer look at this assemblage of narrative productivity

clears a path to the expression of the novel's play-drive, the quality of play driving its aesthetic. It is not only that this triad of characters, each in his or her way, doubles as narrative force. Each particularizes an aspect of the ludic driving this novel's narrative force by staging the agonistic relations underpinning its production.

As I suggest above, Emma's life is written even as she (attempts to) write the lives of others. To be sure, Emma emerges as the primary agent of narrative in the novel, with Knightley, and to a lesser degree because less consistently, Frank, as supplementing her as co-producers of narrativity. But this is not a situation in which everyone simply writes and in turn is written. On the contrary, the force of narrative each represents is contested, which endows each a distinctive relation to narrative production. Frank, by encouraging Emma to overstep the boundaries of politeness expresses the excesses associated with Caillois's rubric of *paidia*. In contrast, Knightley's program to discipline Emma draws on the logistics of *ludus*. This is not to say that Frank and Knightley represent play, either. Rather such designations suggest the production of the proper in the diegetic world of Highbury and in the aesthetic that Austen uses to represent this community in her novel.

Emma, then, is not so much a figure for play; these relationships indicate that she is in play, as an object of desire (or a decoy for a real desire in Frank's case) or as an irritation that brings a narrative into being: "deviance, detour, an intention that is irritation: these are characteristics of the narratable 'life.'" (Brooks 104). The Box-Hill scene reflects Knightley's irritation with the idea of Emma as perfect, and the production that mocks Highbury civility springs from Frank's irritation with Jane. But it is another observation from Peter Brooks that crystallizes Emma's particular role as the ground for

Knightley's and Frank's respective expressions of the proper and improper. For Brooks, the narrative middle is "a highly charged field of force," and a text is "a system of internal energies and tensions, compulsions, resistances, and desires" (xiv). Emma, in the middle of Knightley's and Frank's competing narratives becomes analogous with such a highly charged field of force, but one that is fueled as much as it is from without as it is from within: her cavalier sense of the proper, which is ironic considering her privileged position within Highbury, leaves her open to suggestion by both Knightley and Frank.

Emma's marriage to Knightley, the intense process of self-reflection that she undergoes preceding the awareness that of course she has always loved him in that way clearly suggests the propriety associated with Knightley is one and the same with the novel itself. This allegiance can be traced in the novel's aesthetic, which draws on a *paidian* ethos driving Knightley's concern to instill in Emma a more consistent practice of decorum. This aesthetic practice, unlike Knightley's *paidian* impulse, is emblemized through a ludic discourse, that of the novel's play with letters. Like Emma, this aesthetic remains driven from within and without.

As a discursive network of overlapping connotations and denotations, Austen's acrostic aesthetic remains invested in discourses of amusement, business, and marriage by the novel's end. In so doing, the novel invites readers to participate in the play of letters by decoding its extension beyond the game of acrostics as a practice of reading. Such a rubric complements the way in which the younger generation of characters decodes jumbled words and Emma deploys her game of phonetics when referring to her future wedding day. The deployment of letters in the novel, then, operates as an identifiable discourse of rational recreation (acrostics/letter play) and functions as an

intensive conduit for Austen's investment in her controlled, well-ordered, and disciplined aesthetic. But this aesthetic, which appears autonomous as a function of the particular demands exacted by Austen to fashion and complete her novel, yet cannot be completely isolated from the world outside of it since it stands in productive relation to this world.

Like *Emma*, it, too, maintains an obvious relationship with the imagination and the imaginary. But unlike *Emma*'s "imaginist" proclivities that lead her astray, the novel's re-imagining of a particular field of the social lead us back to the social through the use of aestheticized language that sets it off from social discourse and its utterances. The break the novel instantiates with the social illuminates both aesthetic and social discourses and their mutually productive relations. This relationship, for instance, is what allows Grossman to identify *Emma* as a meditation of the leisure class. But more than simply content, Austen relies on the ideological discourses forming the contents of the leisure classes to fashion *Emma*. The novel, which draws on the domestic (domesticated) and rational entertainment of acrostics as an aesthetic drive reflects a wider novelistic practice on the part of Austen. Her aestheticization of acrostics as both content and formal impulsion that formats content means that *Emma* not only represents, it re-presents this amusement in different form. If word-puzzles edify by increasing one's wit and facility with language, they also help to produce a certain kind of subject, one that will reinforce the values of the class to which he or she belongs, not mock it as Frank does. But *Emma* suggests that such recreations retain production values in the realm of the aesthetic. In addition to expressing the play that negotiates form and content, in *Emma*, they illuminate the particular structures and rules of production that Austen undertakes to format her novel. At the same time, rational leisure rubrics form the

groundwork for establishing the rules of engagement the novel instantiates with the particular slice of the world it re-imagines.

It is not a coincidence that Austen's tamed novel aesthetic emerges when influential figures such as Hannah More extol the wholesome virtues attached to domestic recreations, to which Austen was not adverse.⁴⁷ Austen's novelistic ethos, which enacts the restraint and reproduces the edifying impulse guiding forms of improving entertainments, complements leisure models forwarded by More and others as an exemplary because consistent aesthetic expression (consciously or unconsciously) of the ideology guiding them. The absence of more pronounced and visible expressions of novelistic play in conjunction with the forms of recreations represented in *Emma* suggests a comparatively restrained aesthetic that practices the kinds of play it preaches. Such an aesthetic closes down novelistic possibilities (theatricality, reflexivity) in favor of creating and maintaining with greater intensity and consistency the possibility of a morally sound community for Austen's eponymous heroine. For Williams, the rural estates in Austen's fiction emerge as the locale for the author's exploration of class-driven codes of conduct, which opens up and shuts down social relations and possibilities for characters based on their position in society.

As a function of the novel's content, the network of domestic interiors enclosing scenes in *Emma* reflects the conduct of compartmentalizing classes of people separating the world of Emma Woodhouse from that of Robert Martin. Inhabiting and occupying the domestic becomes associated with Emma's class of people, while exteriors become synonymous with the Robert Martins of the world and the threat of gypsies. A relation to the domestic, then, marks individuals as belonging to a certain class as it protects them

from others outside of their ranks. Despite Emma's best efforts to move Harriet up the social ranks through marriage, the latter eventually marries Robert Martin, who originates from a similarly modest station. In the end, notwithstanding the novel's lauding of gentility as a quality of each individual rather than deriving from one's origins or class, *Emma* adheres to a conservatism that shuts down the possibility of inter-class marriage. Even the marriage of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax retains the trappings of class homogeneity; despite Jane's status as an orphan and having no inheritance, she yet acts and performs as if she were reared as a member of the landed gentry. At the same time Austen creates a class-driven community determined by inside/outside relations to domestic spaces, she develops and adheres to more rigid boundaries that separate narrative processes (drives) and products (representations, illusions) that Sterne repeatedly crosses in *Tristram Shandy* to propel his (sub)plot about the conventions of fiction and narrative plotting.

The manner in which the game of acrostics expands into the formalization of *Emma* signifies Austen's infusing into the novel form a mode of recreating, one that remains sympathetic to the values of the propertied/leisured class comprising Emma's community. *Emma's* letter game surfaces as the most visible through line by which this novel negotiates the formal demands guiding domestic fiction (interior setting, marriage plots, education, discipline) with new but familiar content particular to it (Emma as this novel's flawed heroine who redeems herself). The game emblemizes the play at work driving the story we read that only crystallizes when Austen's narrative techniques and aesthetic is seen within an earlier history of the novel and the reorganization of recreational practices that occurs during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Enclosing the novel form by excising from *Emma* a range of novelistic expressions deployed by earlier authors, however, opens up the novel to new possibilities at the same time, as such an ethos becomes the basis for a tradition of literary realism crystallizes during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

Play, Recreations, and Re-creations in *Oliver Twist*

“To define play is at the same time and in the same movement to define reality and to define culture. As each term is a way to apprehend the two others, they are elaborated, constructed through and on the basis of the two others.” Jacques Ehrmann, “Homo ludens Revisited”

This chapter charts representations of play in *Oliver Twist*. Images of recreation (what is played) and leisure (the time of play) in this novel cohere to characterize Oliver’s journey through the respective spheres of life inhabited by Fagin and Brownlow.⁴⁸ Proper forms of play, broadly conceived, re-work Oliver into an upstanding subject by promoting a healthier inner life that expands the powers of his imagination, intellect, and moral sympathies.⁴⁹ The novel’s aesthetic, I argue, requires it to play in its own proper way, which allows Dickens to fulfill his project of representing certain “truths” of London life.⁵⁰ As a primary aesthetic drive of *Oliver Twist*, this heightened concern for content of a certain type exerts substantial pressure on the form the novel takes. This means that the play driving the novel’s aesthetic, which negotiates its form and content, is in turn driven into an expression of a certain type by the content it concurrently formats into representation: the “truths” of this content, as a stated aesthetic end, conditions the play that conditions it.

In contrast, the forms of play conditioning Oliver act as a means to the child’s development into a middle-class subject. The ideology associated with these leisure pursuits, as an end in Oliver’s life, also become the means by which we can determine the quality of play driving the novel’s aesthetic. As a group of safe and edifying activities, reading, gardening, music, and cricket target the child’s inner development, whether of a

spiritual or intellectual tenor. These calming and disciplining pursuits, unlike those that Fagin teaches him through the game of pickpocketing, help to refashion the child into an upright citizen that learns to value orders, rules, and fair play, which counter the impulse to cheat and steal his way through life. This ideology of play, at the same time, finds expression in the aesthetic of the novel, a recreational form itself, through a disciplined play-drive that fashions the novel's form and content into a particular kind of aesthetic utterance that suits Dickens's own drive to depict London truths. Ideological ends and aesthetic means of play come together in *Oliver Twist* by expressing in different ways and in different aesthetic terrains a commitment to a program of restraint and discipline. The novel, then, in producing discipline, is in turn produced by it, which is to say that I will be discussing *Oliver Twist* in two ways that are fundamentally bound: the novel is a cultural product and an arena of aesthetic activity that is produced by complementary rubrics of disciplined play.

This is a familiar sounding claim, one that D. A. Miller and Nancy Armstrong broach in their canonical studies that position the nineteenth century novel as a disciplining agent for Victorian readers. But if novels, according to such Foucauldian readings, help to produce liberal-minded subjects of a certain ilk, we have yet to sufficiently account for aesthetic regimes that pressure the novel into such efficient agents of discipline. Practices of discipline and discourses of sexuality tell an important part of the novel's history. But at the same time, questions of the aesthetic remain inseparable from this history: it is the aesthetic, a novelist's mobilization of drives for form, play, and content that together act as a nonconscious locus and expression of discipline in contrast to the more conscious production of disciplinary regimes, that is the

traditional focus of Foucauldian readings that I am concerned with in this chapter. As I suggest, *Oliver Twist*, to the degree that it is an agent of discipline, becomes so, in part, because of the reverse demand such a project puts on its aesthetic: to speak discipline requires it to be disciplined, otherwise it risks complicating or undercutting its own message.⁵¹ This very relationship is played out through discourses of play, as in this novel the proper forms of play practiced by Oliver become emblems for the play driving the novel's aesthetic.

In a passing remark in *The Novel and the Police* Miller notes the inherent disciplinary impulses of play: "at least since the eighteenth century play usually trains us for work" (89). This chapter positions *Oliver Twist* as an aesthetic utterance of what social historians loosely have termed as the institution of "play discipline" accompanying the well-known work ethic of the nineteenth-century. Peter Bailey, for instance, suggests that "leisure constituted a problem whose solution required the building of a new social conformity – a play discipline to complement the work discipline that was the principal means of social control in an industrial capitalist society" (5). Bailey's references to Thackeray and Dickens in his opening chapters not only invite us to consider representations of play discipline as content in works of fiction. They also invite us to consider the degree to which a novel such as *Oliver Twist* embodies a similar ethos as a productive aesthetic of Dickens's commitment to a nascent literary realism.

An additional observation by Bailey introduces the specific aesthetic terrain that we must prod to make this determination. He notes that active reform movements in the 1830s of an evangelical and middle-class bent campaigned "against certain abuses in public life [that] threatened the form and content of much popular recreation" (31). As I

hope to demonstrate, new patterns of play, and new relationships between work and play that emerge during the middle decades of the nineteenth-century, while they may not determine a novel's aesthetic, do, however, express an analogous development in the novel's aesthetic that makes possible something like literary realism.

In effect, at Dickens's direction the drive for play in *Oliver Twist*, like the forms of play it represents, simply becomes an expression of work, one that works in the service of other aesthetic ends at the same time he denies play a more pronounced expression in the process. Austen's domesticated ludic aesthetic performs a discourse of rational play (acrostics) that demonstrates its commitment to the ideology of domestic recreations. But Dickens's aesthetic appears to be driven by a greater desire to depict content rather than actively recreate or perform this content at the same time. His disappearing of the play-drive as an aesthetic product in *Oliver Twist*, however, opens up questions of value, propriety, and excess with regard to this novel's process of formatting. Similar questions, as we shall see, also drive the reformation of the "excesses" of popular recreations around the time his novel is published. If Dickens does not consciously shape his novel according to such a rubric, his novel unfolds as an aesthetic expression that embodies the ideological tenets driving the revision of play, one that excises what come to be ludic excesses in *Oliver Twist*.

Coming to terms with play's newer and less active role in the burgeoning school of literary realism means "socializing" Dickens's realist aesthetic. The aesthetic labor that Dickens undertakes to compose *Oliver Twist* with such a realist end in mind, which his 1858 introduction highlights, positions his novel as a very different working example of the work-play dialectic. As such, Dickens brings this set of ideological discourses into it

his novel via his use of the play-drive. The work-play relation that undergoes revision and re-evaluation during the 18th and 19th centuries in political and social arenas finds an assuming accomplice in his novel aesthetic. The triadic assemblage of drives scaffolding novel productivity, like the forms and contents of extraliterary recreational forms, changes over time; but not randomly or merely by the whim of an author. Rather it does so as a result of the convergence of dominant aesthetic and social demands. Considering *Oliver Twist* in this light will help locate not only what novelistic practices explicitly or implicitly Dickens devalues; it will help in understanding why he makes such choices at all.

In essence, *Oliver Twist* becomes a microcosm of the novel form during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a younger genre that lacks the rich and canonized history of poetry and drama at this point in time. Like Oliver the novel form must discover its history, or more accurately, it must participate in writing this history. This particular novel bears the marks of a young author attempting to work in and through a genre that is itself in its relative youth. Lacking a codified set of rules to guide his implicit wrangling with the aesthetic demands of a nascent literary realism, *Oliver Twist* emerges as a map that highlights Dickens's dual labor: representing London while working out an aesthetic rubric most conducive for this project. This second dimension of his project opens the novel to implicit questions about what aesthetic is best suited or proper for it. The novel's explicit representational schematic of good and bad forms of play becomes instrumental in coming to terms with this concern.

The novel's aesthetic and the content it produces, I contend, conjoin in a consistent *ludian* expression, one that is tamed even as it tames Oliver in its representing

for readers “proper” leisure pastimes. The novel associates forms of “improper” play with Fagin’s seedy underworld and criminality, while associating forms of “proper” play with Brownlow and the Maylies and their middle-class practices. Readers are expected to recoil at Fagin’s attempt to indoctrinate Oliver through games of pickpocketing; however, we are expected to sympathize with Brownlow’s more successful indoctrinating influence on the child, who learns to practice such middle-class leisure activities as gardening and cricket under his guidance. Brownlow’s rehabilitation of Oliver doubles as a disciplinary regime effected, in part, through a network of safe and edifying recreations aligned with middle-class values.

Tracing the dialectic between “good” and “bad” forms of recreations in *Oliver Twist*, however, requires installing another novel into the equation to underscore a dimension to this already complicated relationship Dickens’s novel elides: proper forms of play, by emerging as a crucial dimension of Oliver’s recuperation in the country, become respective facets of Dickens’s representations of the middle-classes *and* rural life, two separate but not unrelated concerns. While the discourse of proper-improper play scaffolding what initially appears as a class conflict broadens to include the regional clash of city-country interests, the novel uncritically mutes this latter dialectic, enfolding it as another dimension of class strife. By portraying proper forms of recreation as historically completed, Dickens naturalizes their middle-class urban and rural expressions, as if they equally applied to members of every class of every region. But Thomas Hughes presents a countryside in transition in *Tom Brown’s School Days*, in which traditional ludic expressions practiced at a local “veast” (feast) are being abandoned by the younger generation in favor of urban habits and practices. This literary

exchange illuminates the way in which *Oliver Twist* collapses two distinct but related extraliterary struggles informing its representational scheme of play: class and regional conflict.

Hedged in by the middle-class values of Brownlow and the Maylies with which it sympathizes, the novel presents a schematic of play that flattens the multi-tiered interests that it actually broaches into a falsely simplified vision hinging on unexamined conceptions of propriety and impropriety. Hughes's novel challenges the assumptions about play that Dickens's novel makes by bringing to light what Dickens causes to be absent in his presentation of recreational forms. More an intercontextual than intertextual relation, *Tom Brown's School Days* complicates *Oliver Twist's* coherent vision of play. It illuminates a historical reality that Dickens's fictional truths omit. As an absent yet contemporary presence (Hughes's novel takes place in the late 1830s though it was published in 1857) *Tom Brown's School Days* dissolves *Oliver Twist's* imaginary landscape by exposing the truths of the ideological underpinnings driving this fiction. At the same time, this dialectic helps illuminate Dickens's naturalization of the restrained play-drive that helps to produce a schematic of disciplined forms of recreation and leisure that appears less complicated than it actually is.

Oliver's Playground

In Oliver's first visit to Fagin's den, in search of a surrogate home and family, he witnesses Charley Bates and the Artful Dodger stealthily remove objects from Fagin's body in a game of pickpocketing. The novel describes Fagin's exaggerated mannerisms as he pats his pockets to make sure that his belongings are still there. His hyperbolic

movements elicit laughter from Oliver, who becomes an amused spectator in a mini-stage production skillfully directed by Fagin. By practicing and repeating these games, in which Oliver eventually becomes a player, Fagin's protégés perfect the art of pickpocketing. The work of Fagin and his gang, then, is described in ludic terms: to steal is a game, and practicing this game improves their skills, which the following account emphasizes: "All this time the boys followed [Fagin] closely about, getting out of his sight, so nimbly, every time he turned round, that it was impossible to follow their motions" (110).

When the Dodger steps on Fagin's foot and Charlie bumps up against him from behind they take "with the most extraordinary rapidity, snuff-box, note-case, watch-guard, chain, shirt-pin, pocket-handkerchief, even the spectacle- case" (110-111). The game effectively ends whenever Fagin feels his young charges removing objects from his person. To thief, this game, suggests, is to work in the manner of the conjurer by cultivating sleight hands, if not a version of sleight of hand.⁵² The influential nineteenth-century illusionist, Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin, reminds us that the etymology *prestidigitateur* derives from *prestidigiti*, meaning nimble fingers (33). While prestidigitator becomes synonymous with magic and illusion, it also accounts for the technique employed by The Artful Dodger and Charley Bates when playing the pickpocketing game; it is their nimble fingers that allow them to pilfer objects from Fagin's pockets successfully.⁵³

Neither pickpocket nor magician, however, solely depends upon dexterous fingers for a successful performance: they also must not let others detect the totality of their nimbleness in action. In other words, pickpockets, like magicians, must direct attention

away from how they make objects disappear. In order to remove a gentleman's scarfpin from under the nose of a mark,⁵⁴ for instance, Victorian pickpockets could use a similar logic of misdirection by using a familiar magician's prop: a handkerchief.⁵⁵ To casually remove an object such as a scarfpin from a mark requires a complicated if swift series of concomitant motions: showing the handkerchief in a "normal" fashion, performing the act of wiping one's nose as anyone else would and removing the scarfpin ever so dexterously. Producing and using the handkerchief becomes central to the theft, signaling to the surrounding crowd that the pickpocket is more concerned with his own body than with any other body. The pickpocket's body, then, as a combination of visible and invisible motions becomes the most important prop in this performance, requiring precise, swift, and calculated movements.

While putting the boy at ease in his new surroundings, the pickpocketing game also highlights for him the micromanaging of the body on which the Dodger and others depend for a successful theft,⁵⁶ the rules of the game, so to speak. In one sense, it is through such games that Fagin attempts to mold Oliver's identity, instilling in him the necessary skills a thief must hone. As an orphan without a family and an obscured history that remains unknown to the child, Fagin extends an invitation to join a makeshift family that offers the child security and a sense of self he lacks upon entering London.⁵⁷ At the same time, this game of micromanagement reflects Dickens's own micromanaging of the play driving his aesthetic.

The pickpocketing game becomes the means to criminal ends in Fagin's world, a point of entry and a rite of passage. As a regime of discipline masquerading as a game, Fagin teaches his protégés a dual lesson: the art of stealing, the necessary techniques and

movements that allow one to steal, while also teaching the novice how to obscure the same actions at the same time. Only after a child reaches a degree of facility in this game does a delinquent-in-the making take to London's streets to pilfer unsuspecting victims. While Dickens does not play a game, his aesthetic remains driven by disciplining the play intrinsic to it. In essence, his realist impulsion obscures the play driving the interaction of form and content so that it is less demonstrable and detectable.

The lesson modeled by the pickpocketing game is that play is a useful training tool that simulates real-world situations for young thieves. But for Dickens-as-author, it is less a matter of practicing for reality as it is a matter of the aesthetic practice that determines his particular representations of reality. For George Levine, any account of realism needs "to take into account the way particular novels radically change, in style and in 'content,' the conventions of the past and present that realism is frequently said to affirm" (617). This is a reckoning of the way in which authors produce a work of literary realism, which necessitates accounting for the interplay of aesthetic drives. In *Oliver Twist*, the pickpocketing game becomes the first significant image of play marking Oliver's position in life (in this case it is the criminal class). But it also reflects the novel's own relation to reality; it is an approximation of life in language.

Like the game, it stands in place of the absent real for which it stands in. Attaining a more intensive approximation through realistic content means limiting the drive for play, limiting the potential interference it might introduce into this project. If playing at stealing disciplines Oliver, Dickens disciplines play's activity in *Oliver Twist*. If the game, in part, teaches Oliver to conceal that he is stealing, Dickens conceals that his novel works by playing. Overindulging in a novelistic ludic would only increase the gap

between the real and its aesthetic approximation. But if producing a criminal disposition in the child requires Fagin to use additional amusements, we need to examine subsequent representations of play in the novel to further locate the quality of its disciplined play-drive. Because if Oliver's history is reflected in the games, play, and recreations foisted upon him, they also unveil the story of the novel's drive for play.

Despite being a captive during the iterations of his stay⁵⁸ with Fagin, the child occasionally laughs and apparently enjoys himself while he desires nothing less than a reunion with Brownlow. Seldom left alone after his recapture, Oliver watches his young companions play the "old" pickpocketing game on a daily basis, but Fagin supplements this exercise with storytelling sessions about "robberies he committed in his younger days." A skillful schemer, it is also clear that he can artfully weave a story together, as Fagin's tales are "mixed up with so much that was droll and curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that he was amused in spite of all his bitter feelings" (185). Storytelling and the game of pickpocketing, then, productively work to refashion the child into a criminal. Although Fagin obviously perverts some of the basic tenets underlying forms of recreation by using games and play to create prepubescent criminals, he does so in the name of increasing the productivity of his young syndicate.⁵⁹

Like so many others during the century, Fagin envisions a workforce, in his case, of pickpockets, that plays so that it can work more efficiently. This play-as-work rubric also contributes to his charges' character formation, de-sensitizing them to their criminal acts by making stealing a fun game. The game, then, in producing a child with certain physical skills concurrently instills in the orphans a state of mind most conducive to thieving. It would seem that Fagin's devious intentions do not preclude him from

harnessing play for particular ends. Publications such as the *Saturday Magazine*, the advent of Mechanics Institutes, and the influence of the RSPCA are just some examples of disparate literary and extraliterary formations that yet share an interest in rerouting a popular ludic ethos⁶⁰ to more productive and disciplined ends. Such formations mark the ability of various interest groups to harness forms of play to drive religious, political, and social agendas. While Fagin may not participate in the revising of traditional leisure habits and practices, it appears that he is all too aware of the potential inherent in games, play, and recreation to work as a driving force to enact his plots and schemes. One other example is worth lingering over a bit longer: prior to handing Oliver over to Bill Sikes so he can participate in a robbery, Fagin gives the child a book to read about the lives and deeds of criminals.

In this book, Oliver reads tales of “dreadful crimes that made the blood run cold, of secret murders” and deeds of “such dreadful bloodshed” that “made the flesh creep” (196). The “terrible descriptions” that “were so real and vivid” incite in the boy “a paroxysm of fear,” and he eventually puts the book down. Since we are reading early Dickens, a melodramatic moment ensues, as Oliver, on his knees, prays for “Heaven to spare him from such deeds” as those that he has just read (197). Complementing the stories of his illicit past that he narrates to Oliver, Fagin uses this collection of narratives sensationalizing criminality to portray criminals as if not heroic than as accomplished models for the thief the boy is to become in Fagin’s mind. In his own way and for his own conniving ends, Fagin as narrator of stories and provider of books adopts the role of corrupted and corrupting father figure to Oliver.

While he may not attempt to cultivate a traditional familial unit among and with his den of delinquents, Fagin does attempt to “father” or architect the birth of Oliver as criminal. An author of 1848 article in *Reynold’s Miscellany* writes that “One of the most charming recreations that can be fostered in the family is that of NARRATIVE” (capitals in original). In order to best instill the “affections” that narrative can generate, the article suggests positioning the father as a narrator of stories, who can be particularly effective if he wields the following traits: “a tolerable flow of speech, certain pretty little gestures, and artifices which belong to the art of recitation or delivery.” Some of the best narratives to share, we are told, are those that “contain the elements of instruction which he has witnessed during his career” (59). Fagin’s charismatic narrating skills, the gestures he uses to narrate by acting and directing the game of pickpocketing, the entertaining stories he tells about his history, these function as artifices that directly and indirectly instruct Oliver and the other adolescents, but with goal of making them more accepting to a life of crime. With Fagin’s cunning, it would appear that narrative has the potential to instill bad habits as well as good affections.

But Oliver’s recoiling from the book Fagin gives him doubles as an attempt to allay fears that this novel sensationalizes or promotes deviancy or criminality for its readers. This scene suggests that like the good-hearted Oliver, readers of Dickens’s fiction, even if it contains true-to-life depictions of London’s underworld, will soundly reject the lifestyle and exploits of Fagin and Bill Sikes. However, like Oliver, who despite himself can still enjoy stories narrated to him by Fagin, there yet remains a virtue in cataloging the lives of such characters: as a form of safe entertainment for readers or as a facet of exposing the limitations of the Poor Laws as they exist when Dickens writes the

novel, or simply because as he states in the preface, figures like Nancy, Fagin, and Bill Sikes really do exist and offer themselves as fodder for fiction-writers.⁶¹ This moment of resistance on Oliver's part stands out as a firm rejection of the life Fagin offers him.

While forms of play and recreation tell us a story about the way in which Fagin binds his young charges to him and to crime, they also form a running dialogue with a model of leisure Oliver learns under the guidance of Brownlow and the Maylies. As a heightened arena of contrast to emphasize Oliver's improved status with these more genuinely parental figures who have the boy's best interest in mind, representations of play work as conduit for the novel's plot that necessarily emplots ideologies as a function of this plot's rendering of London's truths. The game of pickpocketing inaugurates this discourse. It is a bad form of play because it teaches Oliver how to steal; it is unfair, a violation of an idea of fair play that becomes so important during the century⁶², because it situates thieves at an unfair advantage when they pilfer the unassuming pockets of their victims. It becomes dangerous by functioning as the gateway experience that expands into a full-fledged life of crime, as evidenced by the Dodger and Charley Bates.

But during Oliver's initial brief stay at Brownlow's, prior to his recapture by Nancy and Sikes, he learns to play cribbage, a game that garnered a substantial following during the nineteenth-century, as evidenced by the running letters to editors, questions and informational blurbs concerning the game in various periodicals.⁶³ The game of cribbage, more than operating as another game and the return of a monolithic kind of play in the novel, complements the ideology that Brownlow represents and even becomes a primary expression of it by countering the life of deception Fagin offers Oliver. At the same time cribbage teaches Oliver to play fairly, it also cultivates in him a different set of

skills. Cribbage necessitates facility with addition and multiplication, as players form clusters of playing cards to make runs and combinations that generate points (the quickest to 121 wins). While not explicitly a mathematic recreation,⁶⁴ the play of the game depends upon a sympathetic rubric. Rather than becoming more facile with his body so he can deceive others, a game such as cribbage, usually played in stationary fashion at a table under relaxing conditions (if not for money or if not as part of a tournament), relies more on the acumen and agility of the mind. In so doing, cribbage encourages the sort of edifying and entertaining ludic experience that is the hallmark of nineteenth-century forms of rational recreation.

As a byproduct of learning how to play cribbage, Oliver learns that the game depends up observing a set of codified rules that remain transparent at all time to those who are playing the game. While Oliver and Sikes's crew bungle a burglary attempt, the Dodger, Bates and Fagin's acquaintance Chitling play a game of whist, which enjoyed great popularity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries much like cribbage. But the play of this game degenerates into a session on how to cheat one's opponent.⁶⁵ Whist generally requires four players, but the Dodger goes solo in this contest, ostensibly pitting his wits against the tandem of Bates and Chitling. But it soon becomes clear that Bates works to undermine his own team in order to facilitate the Dodger's play. Despite being opponents, the duo yet engages in curious conversations, "all unbecoming of scientific rubber" (229). After forking over the money to the Dodger upon losing the game, Chitling remarks upon the winner's run of luck. The lesson readers take away from this scenario is that Fagin's thieves easily translate the deceptions on which the game of pickpocketing depends to the card table.

To play whist for the Dodger and Bates, or most any game we are lead to believe, becomes synonymous with cheating, an approach that upends the integrity of any game by ignoring codified rules of play and by taking advantage of those who play by them. Whereas the progression of the nineteenth-century increasingly witnessed an educational system that used sports such as rugby and football to instill masculinity, discipline, and an appreciation of healthy exercise that implicitly taught young boys and men the importance of adhering to rules of the game, the education of the Dodger and Bates depicts a different curriculum at work. The games they play serve as forums to circumvent fair play by teaching them how to cheat and deceive, the process of which help molds them into criminals in contradistinction to how sports and games of secondary education in the latter half of the century help to form model English citizens.

Prior to Oliver's permanent reunion with Brownlow later in the novel, he experiences a three-month vacation in the country at a cottage with the Maylies. There Oliver spends his time gardening, playing cricket and listening to Rose play the piano and read or talk about books, decidedly different forms of recreations than those available to him under the watchful eye of Fagin. These countryside amusements offers him allows him to refresh his body and mind and encourages in him a safer and less spiritually riotous life. Additionally, Oliver begins his formal education there, learning to read and write better from an elderly man in the village, as well as performing his own lessons at the cottage. At the end of his time in the country, we are told that "Oliver Twist had become completely domesticated" by the Maylies (292).

Such domestication implies the purification of city life from Oliver. The novel emphasizes how important nature's beauty and peaceful surroundings become in Oliver's

transformation, as the “lovely spot” in the country to which Oliver “repaired” is described in terms of what the city is not: “Oliver, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling, seemed to enter on a new existence there . . . The days were peaceful and serene; the nights brought with them neither fear nor care; no languishing in a wretched prison, or associating with wretched men; nothing but pleasant and happy thoughts” (290-291). This passage suggests that part of what “repairs” Oliver is the very place to which he repairs or journeys.

Life at the cottage with the Maylies in the midst of the country becomes the antidote to the poisonous path with which Fagin tempts Oliver and his other charges. Rather than consuming servings of gin that pollutes the body and behavior of Charley Bates, Oliver ingests the purity and cleansing atmosphere of the countryside under the guidance of the motherly duo of the Maylies. As de facto foster parents they encourage the growth of the boy’s intellectual and moral development in a setting that becomes the perfect supplement and backdrop to the number of respectable and wholesome forms of recreations in which Oliver engages there. It is easy, perhaps too easy to consider the leisure pursuits offered to Oliver in the country as a simple counter to those to which the child is introduced in the city when with Fagin. But to do so would be to grasp only a part of this relationship.

The novel offers the dialectic between play in the city and play in the country as natural and self-evident when in fact it unfolds as a particular middle-class expression of leisure. In other words, this dialectic underpinning the shaping of Oliver’s character remains hedged in and framed by a vision that is ideologically in tune with the values, tastes, and expressions of the middle-classes. As social historians have observed,

recreational practices emerge as vital cog in the creation of a distinct middle-class identity and ideology during the early decades of the Victorian period.

The recreations in which Oliver engages under the direction of Brownlow and the Maylies reinforce the values scaffolding the leisured class to which the child's guardians belong. At the same time, cricket, cribbage, gardening, and music instill these same leisure values – edification, education, discipline – in Oliver. Because “they were rational, not morally corrupting, and not recklessly extravagant” such recreations become hallmarks of the middle-class leisure experience for which the child is being groomed (Thompson 257). In the novel, the morality and rationality of Oliver's leisure expressions as practiced with Brownlow and the Maylies remains a function of their marked departure from the corrupting games and pastimes that Fagin presses upon the boy. While the novel invites us to ground the contrasts of play marking Oliver's life in terms of family dynamics and geography, it is less forthright about the middle-class underpinnings of this relationship. Indeed, the pronounced familial and geographic points of contrast, upfront as they are, obscure the middle-class vision of play that Dickens maps through them.

Clearly Dickens only offers readers glimpses of certain modes of leisure as expressions of particular classes of people in the city and the country. The deviant play associated with London remains a function of the criminal underclass on which the novel focuses, such as the likes of Fagin and Sikes, as well as those habits and practices of the young children who are roped into this class as a result of being homeless and/or orphaned. It is this aspect of London that Dickens represents most saliently for readers with its labyrinthine back alleys, winding passageways, and secretive dens that constitute

its backdrop. But like the London Dickens offers his readers in the novel, the countryside he portrays is incomplete and underrepresented.

During Oliver's brief residence in the country, he spends most of his time with the Maylies enjoying the luxuries of a middle-class jaunt from the city. But an important distinction arises at the same time, namely that for the Maylies the country itself becomes a leisure site; it is where they vacation with Oliver. Whereas Fagin and Sikes simultaneously remain products of a deviant London underworld that they help to reproduce through their crimes, the Maylies lack a similar relationship to the country. It is not their home, as London is to Fagin and Sikes. Rather the cottage becomes a temporary home away from the Maylies' permanent home in Chertsey. This sort of country-city dynamic fictionally reproduces a leisure formation that positions the country as vacation destination for middle-class city dwellers, a place to relax, recuperate, and otherwise escape the rigors, pace, and crowds of urban life.

In reproducing this relationship Dickens does not depict the country equivalent to Fagin and Sikes, those who inhabit the country, who work to produce it and who are its products. The experience of the rural worker, one who is entrenched in the rhythms of country life, the novel omits. What it does include is a gloss of the country filtered through a distinctively middle-class lens. Such wholesome hearthside leisure practices as reading and piano playing, Oliver complements with safe and tranquil outdoor recreations such as cricket and gardening. These forms of play tame the energies that can lead to enlivening the child's bodily spirits or that encourage the gamester ethos, the sort of lewd and drunken behavior in which the Dodger and Bates engage when playing whist. The domestication of Oliver, then, occurs within a representation of the country that is itself a

domesticated playground: it is without the traces of the popular recreations associated with the village green, wakes, and fairs, which have a history of their own.

(Re)creating (in) the Country

By sympathizing with the middle-class forms of recreation that domesticate Oliver, Dickens emerges as accomplice to the disparate project of reforming a popular ludic ethos at odds with middle-class values. As a function of telling the child's story and history, it would appear that a history of play and recreation remain unspoken. In order to legitimize the transformation of Oliver through forms of play, and in order to avoid confusing the oppositional forms of play the novel produces, Dickens casts the city as the repository of improper play and the country as embodying the proper. *Tom Brown's School Days* by Thomas Hughes, a novel charting the development of the eponymous boy's character while at school does provide a glimpse of the sort of rural entertainments that *Oliver Twist* does not.

As aforementioned, although published in 1857, Hughes sets his novel in the 1830s, the decade when Dickens publishes his novel. But the dialogue in which these two novels engage does not simply rest on the temporal proximity of their respective represented material; the official education of Tom acts as a counter-experience to the unofficial education that Oliver receives. Both fictions chart the development of the boys through the use of games and play, but in vastly different spheres of culture. There is the geography to consider, Oliver's primarily urban and Tom's rural education. But more to the point is the way in which Oliver's domestication occurs primarily outside an official system of education (he does remain under the tutelage of a teacher in the country)

whereas Tom's unfolds within the official system of boarding school. The workhouse system, urban hovels, dens, backrooms, streets, and middle-class drawing rooms in the city and the country emerge as Oliver's unofficial classrooms. Tom's education primarily transpires on the rugby field, the dormitory, in the classroom, within the fagging system, and in the dining hall.

Despite such contrary schooling experiences, both children emerge as upstanding middle-class subjects. Oliver may lack the masculinity and the overt sense of fair play that rugby instills in Tom, but like his rural counterpart, Oliver's education does purify him of undesirable character traits that threaten his moral fiber. A vital facet of Oliver's experience, I have argued, unfolds as a dialectic of leisure formations defined by urban and rural practices that is hedged in by a middle-class vision of ludic propriety to which Dickens's novel remains sympathetic. Institutionalized games such as rugby and cricket comprise an official boarding-school ludic rubric that helps shape Tom's character and offer him alternate modes and expressions of playing to those that he takes in prior to his leaving for school, the sort of leisure formations that Dickens leaves out of his novel.

The second chapter of Hughes's novel describes a young Tom attending a "Veast" with Benjy, his elder companion or "dry nurse." Benjy, long connected with the Browns, comes from a family known for its physical prowess, whether in actual battles or in feats of wrestling. With the narrator, Benjy serves as Tom's and a reader's guide to the Veast they attend. Not a statute feasts, or one that is part of the official Calendar Act of 1750, the particular celebration depicted dates back to the founding of the church it recognizes. The novel emphasizes the history of this veast, and others like it in the Vale the Browns inhabit. Such celebrations are an "ancient business." Even if locals do not recall the

reason for this feast or others, it yet retains its importance by acting as the impetus that gathers and binds the community in its present formation as well as diachronically linking it to its past via its celebration through/of popular recreations historically practiced in the Vale.

The novel spends a number of pages describing the sorts of entertainments that attendees watch and often join: wrestling bouts, cudgeling or back-swording, Punch-and-Judy performances, jingling-matches, peep-shows, dwarves, exotic animals, and wild Indians. Two sorts of veast activities appear to dominate the leisure offerings here, physical contests and spectating. Benjy and young Tom spend a great deal of time watching a local back-swording champion, Joe Willis, defeat a “dark” gypsy in a match. Willis draws an inch of blood from his opponent’s head by repeatedly hitting the gypsy with a heavy ash stick while skillfully protecting himself from similar attacks. This match and other feats of physical skill, the narrator lauds while touring the veast. It would appear that Tom’s education, officially beginning upon his entrance at Rugby, receives an unofficial and complementary jumpstart with Benjy’s aid.

Many of the veast games, like the games of rugby and cricket Tom plays at school instill in the boy an ideal of masculinity and self-worth deriving from physical aptitude and excellence in sporting contests. Competition and fair play emerge as important values that are driven home by the codification of the games that are played at Rugby campus: cheating cheats oneself of a noble victory achieved only by defeating an adversary fair and square. But the veast games are not lacking in rules generally acknowledged by the community. The narrator, in his leisurely jaunt through the veast, makes sure to describe back-swording and jingling matches – how each is played and the rules informing them –

for readers of any historical period who may not be familiar with such popular rural games. Back-swording, then, emerges as the unofficial equivalent to the official dose of athleticism Tom receives at school: a game that teaches boys how to play by the rules as it becomes a model of manliness for them.

In addition to preparing young boys and eventually young men to enter the workforce in a world increasingly defined by regional and global confrontations, interests, and economies, the games of the feast and of Rugby equip the Toms of the countryside with the prowess to navigate such an agonistic landscape. Indeed, it is difficult not to read Joe Willis's defeat of the "dark" gypsy (written during the 1850s) as a statement of the more nationalistic imperative to colonize, to emerge victorious in the "great game" that was the nineteenth-century race for empire. The competitive mindset that is such a part of the unofficial and official education that Tom receives may build a more Christian male character. But it also makes them predisposed and willing to participate as players in the great game of empire: it becomes easier to fight the good fight in the name of the nation when fighting of a certain sort and within limits is instilled as a virtue or necessary character trait.

But if unofficial and official forms of recreation complement each other to lay the foundation for the upstanding middle-class subject Tom becomes, the narrator also laments the passing of leisure formations such as the veast. We are told that farmers and "gentlefolk" increasingly withdraw their support from such celebrations, what social historians have described as the retreat from the traditional practice of patronage generally observed by the ruling classes of rural regions until the later decades of the eighteenth century. Following the lead of their parents, according to the narrator, the

children of squires and farmers in rural communities turn away from popular leisure forms. Rather they tend to adopt the habits and mannerisms of their urban counterparts. Neglecting local (rural) social practices in favor of joining society clubs of the cities, or as a symptom of their doing so, “farmers’ sons are apeing fine gentlemen, and farmers’ daughters caring more to make bad foreign music than good English cheeses” (46). Such a synopsis pits the country vs. city as it promulgates a conception of Englishness that finds its purest expression in rural communities such as the Vale.

The account of the Vale, the games, recreations, and entertainments offered there, as well as the narrator’s mourning the passing of similar expressions of rural leisure formations, emphasize its role in the country over time. Benjy not only serves as Tom’s guide at the veast: he catches up with friends and acquaintances that he has not seen in some time. The veast, as a community-wide celebration, gathers together members of the community who might not otherwise have the opportunity to socialize, catch-up, and maintain relationships. As it entertains, this veast also acts as a way to form and forge communal bonds. Indeed, “the rush of the crowd” here does not have the negative connotations that the “squalid crowds” in Dickens’s novel does. The crowd forming at the Vale suggests a vibrant community congregating in harmony, while the crowd in Dickens’s London suggests torpor, poverty, and sickness. It becomes a divisive image for Dickens, a wedge marking classes of people such as laborers or the poor as it separates them from other more respectable classes in the city. Benjy and Tom do not attempt or need to escape from the assembled crowd at the veast; they are willing participants in its formation.

While supplementing the picture of rural recreation that *Oliver Twist* elides, the narrator's lamenting the feast as a leisure expression on the decline highlights the historical process of reorganizing rural values and customs. The portrayal of Oliver's retreat and recuperation from the ills of the city occurs in a peaceful tract of country replete with forms of recreations naturally appearing as part of the cultural landscape that helps cure the child. But the narrator's historicizing of the feast in Hughes's novel and the lack of support and popularity it receives among the landed gentry underscores the way in which notions of leisure remained contested in the country during the long nineteenth century. In opposition to the appearance of a history of play in the country that is completed as an expression of the middle-classes, Hughes's novel wrangles with history as it unfolds from the nostalgic perspective of a narrator with obvious stakes invested in popular, rural traditions. Through forms of recreations this narrator tells a story of the country as a site of conflict in which a popular tradition of leisure is being supplanted by emergent formations attached to urban and middle-class interests. Without the support of the landed gentry, including their children who are more interested in the leisure activities available in cities, the days of feasts in the form as they are described by the narrator remain numbered.

Dreaming the Truth

More than competing representations of recreation in a literary-specific dialogue, the attendant depictions and comments (or lack thereof) of recreation and leisure formations in these two novels participate as literary expressions of larger philosophical, historical, and ideological discourses of play that unfold during the long nineteenth century.

Despite Dickens's adherence to representing life as it is, his allegiance to a realist ethos yet relies on a concurrent reimagining of the reality he depicts, including those forms of recreation and leisure so important to Oliver's development. Prior to Fagin and Monks's appearance at the cottage, the narrator to Dickens's novel muses upon a kind of sleep in which imagination and reality commingle, suggesting more accurately the sort of "truth" a novelist such as himself manufactures.⁶⁶

The narrator describes a sleep that we experience "as an overpowering heaviness." When we dream in such a state, the sensory world of our immediate surroundings yet remains alive to us. We are able to hear people speaking and sounds that "exist at the moment" of our slumber, which "accommodate themselves with surprising readiness to our visions, until reality and imagination becomes so strangely blended that it is afterwards almost a matter of impossibility to separate the two" (309). The narrator emphasizes this curious situation by concluding that "the visionary scenes that pass before us" while sleeping in such a state "will be influenced, and materially influenced, by the mere silent presence of some external object" (309). The external objects directly referenced here are Fagin and Monks, whose material presence and whispering at a window in the cottage room startles Oliver from his sleep. Additionally, this meditation upon dreams models for readers how to track the way in which Dickens weaves and negotiates imagination and reality to produce his novel. To understand ideology's role in this dynamic is at the same time to acknowledge the work of play that functions as its conduit. In one sense, this very account of the imagination-reality dyad emerges as a form of play.

Consider psychotherapist D. W. Winnicott's definition of play, which scaffolds his theory of the transitional object:⁶⁷ "playing is an experience, always a creative experience, and it is an experience in the space-time continuum, a basic form of living . . . it is always on the theoretical line between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived" (50). The narrator describes a similar line blurring the subjective and the objective when imagination and reality merge, a line that Dickens negotiates as an aesthetic process. Jeffery Franklin deploys a kindred logic as a facet of his reading of discourses of play in nineteenth century realist novels. He argues that sympathy emerges as an expression of play, "the very same play that characterizes the realist novel's own mimetic oscillation between the inside and the outside of the text, fictional and factual, ideal truth and empirical reality. Analysis of the function of the figure of sympathy in nineteenth century novels yields this equation: realism = (truth = sympathy) = play" (27).

While pitting the quest for truth as primary over pursuit of the real as an aesthetic of realist novels, Franklin suggests the ideology inherent to the truth Victorian novels hoped to achieve cannot be pinned down "by a formulaic notion of "bourgeois ideology"" (27). This may be so. However, perhaps Franklin's equation of literary realism in relation to representations of play does not adequately account for the active role ideology maintains in it. Eagleton reminds us that any fiction "negotiates a particular ideological experience of real history" "as a necessity of ideology" (77). Here Eagleton posits that fiction most accurately expresses the form that ideology assumes: to trace the way in which a society represents itself requires "the need to cut" such "self-representations" "loose from particular 'reals' and mobilize them in the form of situations" that are "imaginary" (77). Such an account, a narrative of ideology, highlights the logistics of

narrative scaffolding ideology: the mobilization of particular content, imagining situations for this content, giving them a form. It is not only fiction, then, but narrative and narrativity that become a necessity of ideology: an author such as Dickens participates in the authorization of an ideology of middle-class play by reproducing ideological representations of it in his novel as these same reproductions authorize his production of them as products already envisioned and filtered through an ideology that colors the author's creative vision.

As a specific and sympathetic literary expression of the values underpinning the leisured class represented by Brownlow and the Maylies, *Oliver Twist* articulates its alignment with such an ideology through the various games and amusements the orphan encounters in his journey, as well as through those that it conspicuously omits. It is in this way that Dickens reformats and repackages a vision of play according to an improper-and-proper binary that falls in line within a larger middle-class code of manners, habits, and practices. This novel, whether consciously or otherwise, functions as an apology and authorization for such a system of values by positioning Brownlow and the Maylies as counters to Fagin and as model caregivers for Oliver. But as the child's saviors, they also reshape and rehabilitate his identity. Whereas previously Oliver only donned the clothes and trappings of the leisured classes,⁶⁸ by the novel's end Oliver emerges as a legitimate member-to-be of this class. The boy, then, like the novel's content, is deformed and/or reformed, much in the way that ideology deforms reality, as Eagleton suggests.

The terms Eagleton uses to describe this deformation is worth quoting at length: ideology "so produces and constructs the real as to cast the shadow of its absence over the perception of its presence. It is not merely that certain aspects of the real are

illuminated and others obscured; it is rather that the presence of the real is a presence constituted by its absences, and vice versa” (69). Such an appraisal speaks in the terms used by Dickens’s narrator, who describes an object external to a dreamscape that yet influences the visions comprising it. A vision of dreams, a vision of fiction, a vision of ideology. All three narratives tell a story about external, material objects influencing if not determining the respective contents to each: an external object penetrating the dream, the truthful images of a fiction that inspire the faithful reconstruction of reality, and the absent real as an overlay to the ideological reproduction of reality. Each of these narratives recruits an economy in which an interior is pierced by something exterior to it.

According to Dickens’s narrator, words that are spoken near us while sleeping “accommodate themselves with surprising readiness to our visions” (309). The word “accommodate” is an interesting choice in this context. It seems more accurate to position the sleeper not the words spoken near the bedside of the sleeper as possessing some agency – conscious or otherwise – that allows the dreamer to accommodate by absorbing such words into a dreamscape, which in turn influences the dream that absorbs it. But this word also momentarily takes us outside of *Oliver Twist* and the nineteenth century to the work of Jean Piaget, whose theories of play in children depend upon the distinction between accommodation and assimilation.

In short, Piaget claims that a child accommodates reality by learning to imitate it and by playing by its rules. Assimilation occurs when the child at play uses objects, words, and signs in a symbolic order of his or her own making. According to Piaget, a child learns to negotiate accommodative and assimilative impulses by establishing an equilibrium between them, an interplay marking two distinct experiential worlds in the

child's life: the world external to a child's imagination and the internal world of self-actuated imagination. By arguing that his novel depicts the truths of reality Dickens highlights the accommodative-assimilative interplay negotiating the fictional-real relation in *Oliver Twist*. While he may claim to accommodate reality, his novel yet readily assimilates reality to fiction by re-imagining a recreational order that is produced and disseminated by the middle classes.⁶⁹

For Wolfgang Iser, the negotiation of assimilative and accommodative practices on the part of the novelist becomes the textual site and process of the imaginary,⁷⁰ which he inserts into his theory of text to complicate the real-fictional dyad. He invokes Piaget and others to open textuality to an interplay informed by semiotics and "the play of the split signifier" (250). While informed, Iser's reading of Piaget, as does the larger work of which it is a part, necessarily de-emphasizes historical contexts and contents in order to work out the ludic mechanisms of textuality. As a result, such extra-textual realities silently crystallize as the equivalent to the voice heard by the dreamer as described by Dickens's narrator with this difference: the imaginary apparently is not so ready to accommodate or at least acknowledge the reality outside itself.

Dickens's novel remains subject to a similar critique that Hughes's chapter on the veast illuminates. A competing image of play in the country, one that complicates the vision offered in *Oliver Twist*, functions as a literary expression of very "real" forms of recreation in the 1830s outside the narrative of the pan-middle-class leisure model the novel imagines enveloping city and country. The absence of the recreations Hughes depicts yet girds Dickens's re-imagination of a middle-class rubric of play as a "silent presence," the fictional equivalent to the material object that "materially influence(s)"

Dickens's dreamer. But *Oliver Twist* becomes only one of a number of expressions, fictional or otherwise, working to naturalize the attendant values of the middle classes. The ideology of play the novel buttresses gathers and coheres in conjunction with other novels, essays, articles, and conduct books offering a sympathetic ideology, which work to solidify the expression of the middle classes' vision of society.

It is difficult not to read the narrator's musing upon dreams as a model for the novel when viewed in light of Dickens's introduction. This moment works as an apology of sorts, an unconscious admission about this novel's aesthetic, one the author so passionately defends as depicting truth. But the real truth, the one that this moment reveals, is the novel's untruthfulness. The truth of the matter is that Dickens inadequately accounts for his own re-imaginings of the material conditions informing his novel. As his preface suggests, Dickens would like his readers to think that his novel corresponds to an actual reality and history of 1830s London. But readers of today realize the flaws of such thinking and can no longer accept such naïve realism without question. Dickens's passionate defense of his novel's aesthetic, in a way a misdirection of its own, concurrently aligns the author's fiction with the logistics of Fagin's storytelling skills.

When indoctrinating Noah Claypole into his band of delinquents, Fagin explains to his latest recruit "the magnitude and extent of his operations[,] blending truth and fiction together, as best served his purpose" (389). By blending his narrative of fact and fiction "with so much art" Fagin visibly increases Claypole's respect for and fear of him. The cunning use of his artistic, if not artful ability, to tell stories, as we have seen, is a skill that Fagin uses to promote his own agenda in an underhanded manner. It is not so much that Dickens is just as underhanded. But it is our responsibility to consider the

particularities that prevent his fiction from attaining the truth he mistakenly believes to achieve. This means taking Dickens's claim seriously as a starting point in order to penetrate the historical and material realities scaffolding his representations of play, as well as the aesthetic processes subtending such representations. In order to do so, we necessarily wrangle with the way in which he formats his novel.

Thus far, I have focused on the novel's content, the way in which Dickens re-imagines the recreational landscape that Oliver inhabits and which, in part, marks his journey into a middle-class life. By formatting representations of play that sympathize with middle-class notions of propriety, another truth of Dickens's aesthetic emerges: formatted content originates not from within the novel but from without. Dickens does not manipulate already-created or fixed representations of recreation and leisure in his novel. Rather he infuses such images with real-world values that exist outside his novel but which find new expression in it. While this may sound like the familiar Marxist approach to content that is always ideological, the concept of formatting equally emphasizes the pressures such a process exerts on *Oliver Twist* as a condition of the activity inherent to the formation of a novel form.

The general aesthetic theory of Bakhtin suggests that a novelist must overcome the materiality of language, which is the artistic matter/medium that Dickens organizes, shapes, and wields as a writer of fiction. At the same time, such an overcoming necessarily exerts demands on the particular form in which such content finds expression. In order for the "truth" of Dickens's representations of London to resonate most effectively, it is in his best interest to limit the amount of interference that could possibly disrupt its transmission. To do so requires Dickens to make aesthetic choices that impact

the form and content of his novel and their productive interaction, as the play driving their meeting emerges as the immaterial expression in which the demands of both form and content find an outlet. Although immaterial, this productive ludic yet materializes through the aesthetic effects it instantiates, most saliently in what it represses as a function of what it actively articulates as the form-content union that conditions the novel that we read.

If representations of play and recreation originate from a middle-class value center, we need to consider whether the novel's form, as well as the play tempering the form-content relation, is similarly aligned to gauge the consistency of the politics inherent to this novel's aesthetic. To do so requires situating the novel in relation to extraliterary forms and values outside of it. But we would do well to begin with a comparison, specifically, that in one sense, *Oliver Twist* the novel, like Oliver Twist the child, is purged of possible expressions as a condition of possibility central to the formation of each. In reference to the latter, the boy's subjectivity is at stake, while in the former, it is the form of the novel that is in question.

Formal Playgrounds

Oliver's development, because it emerges as historical trajectory (he begins with Fagin and ends with Brownlow) and because his bio-journey is expressed materially and intensively through improper and proper forms of recreation, presents readers with tangible moments, returns, and thematic clusters that make his development more or less traceable and locatable. As such, this recreational rubric is readily accessible for readers as content they help to produce in individuated readings: for modern readers, this

formatted content of the novel operates as points of departure to productively negotiate Dickens's London with notions of nineteenth-century London encountered in other texts, images, and imaginings. Such images and associations are what readers use to formalize the formatted content the novel presents to them.

The novel's plot certainly centers on the various plots surrounding the contest for Oliver's history, life, and identity. But a similar struggle emerges as an element of the novel's own identity when it becomes clear that Brownlow and the Maylies have finally secured the boy from Fagin's clutches. After Oliver's domestication in the country, the boy shifts from central to secondary character, as the plot of the third volume of the novel, which begins with Chapter 38, gravitates around the pursuit, capture, and deaths of Fagin and Sikes. This last third of the story finds the novel grappling with its own identity crisis that hinges on generic and formal concerns.

Part social critique, part Newgate, part realist, each exerts aesthetic and generic demands on *Oliver Twist* that can only be expressed through particular content: the lampooning of Bumble, Poor Laws, and workhouse system; the sensationalism of Fagin's and Sikes's criminality; and the adherence to depicting London's underworld and the figures who occupy it truthfully. As is well-known, Dickens was criticized for his melodramatic tale by the likes of Thackeray, as the Newgate genre itself was considered suspect as a legitimate and proper form of fiction.⁷¹ Despite such criticism, after Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford* surged the genre into greater popularity in 1830, Newgate fiction did not decline until the 1840s with satires and the supposed copycat murder involving an English Lord who was killed by a valet allegedly drawing inspiration and/or influence from a William Ainsworth novel cataloging a similar event.

But even so, to delimit *Oliver Twist* to the Newgate novel is to fail to appreciate that it also belongs to the burgeoning genre of social critique that *Mary Barton* realizes more fully a few years later, and which Dickens's *Hard Times* echoes. In one sense, *Oliver Twist* straddles Newgate and social critique fiction, incorporating both, as does *Paul Clifford*, a seminal Newgate work that criticizes the penal code while celebrating the criminal exploits of an English gentleman living a dual life. Here we have two novels of the 1830s using the content of the Newgate Calendar as fodder for fiction that doubles as the means to expose the failures of social institutions and laws. It is in this sense that such novels turn more intensively toward real-world and contemporary social problems that literary realism takes up in subsequent decades, even if these Newgate novels do so by sensationalizing criminality.

From a generic standpoint, the last volume cements *Oliver Twist* as a kin to the Newgate novel by departing from the way in which the criminal element previously was emplotted as story material. In the previous two volumes, the novel deploys the deviant actions of Fagin, Monks, and Sikes to color Oliver as a causality of the revised Poor Laws of 1834. But in this last volume, Oliver is relatively safe; it is his (his)story that Brownlow, the Maylies and others aim to protect, which impels them to track down Monks, for instance. Sikes's brutal murder of Nancy most saliently announces the novel's shift from social critique in which criminality serves a supporting role to the more blatant sensationalism of the escapades of this plot's criminal cast.⁷²

Dickens's narrator prepares readers for such a shift earlier in Chapter 17. In the first paragraphs of this chapter the narrator briefly considers aesthetics of the stage and those of the novel. A "good murderous melodrama," readers are told, depends upon a

“regular alternation” between tragic and comic scenes. While such an interplay may often appear “absurd” and “unnatural” when performed on stage, the narrator suggests that on the contrary, a similar rhythmic informs the “transitions of real life.” This confident narrator, without citing literary (or other) authorities to support such claims, boldly asserts that “sudden shifting of the scene, and rapid changes of time and place” “are by many considered as the great art of authorship.” Apparently the most effective authors exploit this technique by skillfully crafting “dilemmas” for characters at the end of chapters.

The shift of *Oliver Twist* into full-blown “Newgate” mode may not embody the alternation from comedy to tragedy described by the narrator. But it does create an aesthetic dilemma in the novel, one that intensifies the drive to re-format the plot in Newgate terms. As long as there is the potential for Oliver to fall back into Fagin’s hands, this evolution cannot occur. In Volume III of the novel, when Oliver’s protectors effectively shield him from Fagin and the boy continues on his path to becoming a middle-class subject, the plot’s scheme of alternation oscillates among criminal elements that center on Fagin’s circle and the Sikes-Nancy pair. Guarding Oliver’s history from himself becomes the focal point for the Maylies and Brownlow as they work to apprehend Monks. But the child himself remains a secondary facet of their plots as well as the novel’s. It is the content of Oliver’s story that Nancy shares with Rose Maylie, that the boy is Monks’s half-brother, which eventually usurps concern for the actual child since no immediate danger threatens the boy after Fagin and Monks appear at the cottage.

The content of Oliver’s history, then, demands attention of a certain type from those protecting the child. It calls them to action, to mobilize and organize in his name

and in the name of the orphan's story, to create, in fact, a new story for him. In similar fashion, the content of Dickens's novel as well as the nature of this content demands its own attention in order to be formatted, which the shift in the plot accommodates. To depict a faithful or "true" rendering of the criminal Sikes, his murder of Nancy and his capture necessitates that the plot deviate from its concern for Oliver. This scenario invites reconsidering an earlier moment in the novel, when Fagin exposes Oliver to Newgate literature in the hopes that it will inspire the child to willingly pursue a life of crime.

Recall that Oliver recoils from what he reads, as his innate better judgment naturally rejects such unsavory material. We cannot say the same for Dickens in relationship to his novel, since he actively cultivates a Newgate aesthetic. However, in his introduction he does suggest that like Oliver, the novel that bears the child's name remains untainted by its association with the Newgate genre. His defense for including characters such as Sikes and Nancy in his fiction appeals to precedents set by previous novelists: "Fielding, Defoe, Goldsmith, Smollett, Richardson, Mackenzie; all these for wise purposes, especially the two first, brought upon the scene the very scum and refuse of the land" (35). Slyly implicating himself as an heir in the tradition of the notable authors he lists, Dickens claims that the history of the novel cannot be separated from questionable Newgate content, yet it can be recuperated for moral or "wise purposes."

Questionable content, accordingly, is not the exclusive domain of the Newgate novel; questionable content is part and parcel with the history of the novel form itself, which Dickens reminds his readers and detractors. In the same observation, he implicitly refers to authors who format this questionable content for "wise purposes." This is what

he does with regard to his representation of play in *Oliver Twist*. The message he sends readers is that it is “wise” for Oliver to recreate in certain ways because they are middle-class ways of recreating. Brownlow and the Maylies domesticate and “save” Oliver in two ways: together they work to mold his subjectivity and remove him from the dangers of the public streets of London’s underworld by confining him to their private and respectable residences.

In opposition to Fagin and Sikes, who keep the boy confined in secreted hovels to force him into criminal acts, the second pair offers the child asylum that doubles as indoctrination. The recreations he practices with them highlights the domesticating process this change of locales has in Oliver as the means to edification, legitimacy, and propriety that a middle-class life offers him. The regime of domestication enacted by Brownlow and the Maylies is successful because it infiltrates and formalizes Oliver’s interior life, his subjectivity, while situating him in a different geographic exterior, a new social setting in which live. Dickens redeploys this strategy of relocating the child to refuel his plot. Despite suggesting that the antidote for deviants/deviance is middle-class approved recreations, the novel itself deviates into a Newgate plot in its last volume.

The dual move of taming the initial narrative arc (Oliver’s story) and permanently relegating it to secondary status in order to launch another narrative (that which was previously secondary, i.e., criminality) suggests two related concerns regarding this novel. Its original serialized form encourages breaks in narratives in order to generate desire for the next installment; at the same time it suggests Dickens’s unskillful negotiation of the generic impulses he formats (Newgate, social critique, realist) in his pursuit of representing truths of London life. As such, his novel participates as praxis in

the working out of a code for the unwritten aesthetic that eventually will be referred to as literary realism. But in so doing, Dickens violates the code of propriety he establishes via representations of play with the slapdash deviation that concludes his novel even if it clumsily expresses a property of narrative plotting: this deviation performs a dynamic of plot identified by Peter Brooks as a fundamental economy of narrative.⁷³

Deviance and deviation, associated with Fagin and impropriety in the novel, here assumes the curious status of embodying the proper and improper in *Oliver Twist*. As a productive dynamic of the novel's plot this deviation is proper, but the swerve into the Newgate plot, though not unmotivated, evolves into a heightened pitch of genre-bound melodrama that yet retains the sense of the improper within the overall arc of this plot. It does so because the deviation is so apparent and noticeable; it makes readers all too aware of its status as deviation. We are led to believe that Oliver, in discovering his history, finding a home with Brownlow and reconnecting with family in the Maylies, emerges at the end of the novel by adopting a middle-class identity that naturally belongs to him. But the last chapters of the novel suggest that it really never does come to terms with its own identity. The shift in plot the last volume takes invites reader to ask what this novel really is about. Oliver-like orphans? Criminality? Suspense? Poor Laws? Or we might approach this turn of plot another way, not by what of what this novel is about, but what it suggests about itself in coming about in such a fashion. Here returning to a previously mentioned passage will be instructive: At the end of his time in the country, "Oliver Twist had become completely domesticated" by the Maylies (292).

Such a pronouncement speaks to the child's effective rehabilitation; he heals in body from the gunshot wound inflicted in the botched burglary attempt, and he is

seemingly purged of Fagin's influence during his time in the country. But this observation also reminds us of the title of the book that we read. On the one hand, in so doing, Dickens risks suspending his desired reality effect by highlighting for readers that they are reading a fiction. On the other hand, this passage reflects the status of the novel, that it too, has been domesticated, most intensively through Dickens's limiting of the play-drive. But if leisure activities reflect Oliver's re-creation into a middle-class subject, the novel's domestication of play as aesthetic process unfolds differently. Unlike the montage in the country or the game of pickpocketing, readers do not confront directly the novel's drive for play. We can only locate its work through its effects, which is why it is necessary to underscore Dickens's aesthetic as literary expression of work-play discourses: what drives extraliterary ideologies commingling work-play values are ends: individual, communal, and political in nature. Briefly touching upon such ends and how they are effected in the reformation of popular recreations provides the means to specify Dickens's domestication of play in *Oliver Twist*, despite the plot's ending in a Newgate register.

As we know, the rise of literary realism in the nineteenth-century novel is an outgrowth and intensification of an aesthetic historically inherent to the novel form, what early critics and historians of the genre argue that the romance sufficiently lacks: a faithful depiction of contemporary life. But an underlying facet of literary realism also emerges within the crossroads of additional aesthetic discourses of the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century. To take one example, in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846) Ruskin considers what differentiates works of imaginative and unimaginative art. According to Ruskin, the imaginative work appears as if it is gathered

from nature without any mediating presence that we can trace back to the artist who creates it. But the unimaginative work reveals its “joints,” form, and/or structure, what Ruskin associates with a too-obvious and apparent logistic of composition in which the relation of parts to each other and to the artistic whole reminds us that the work under consideration is the production of human endeavor. The digression into Newgate mode in *Oliver Twist* opens up the novel to such a critique by revealing the joints of its composition. But instead of positing that this moment seals the novel’s fate as unimaginative, I would rather suggest that it encourages readers to imagine what this moment reveals about *Oliver Twist*’s identity as a particular utterance of the novel form at a particular point in time. In other words, the novel may reveal the joints of its own composition, but in so doing, it concurrently becomes a joint itself in the story of the novel form in the nineteenth century. Through this moment, the novel reveals the concomitant *paidian* and *ludian* impulses guiding its formatting of form and content, the same expressions of the play helping to shape the (his)story of the novel form itself.

Recall that a *ludian* drive relies on regimes of discipline, restraint, and edification as described by Roger Caillois in his anthropological account of types of games and play. Such a constellation readily describes the hows and whys informing the games and recreations Oliver plays while with Brownlow and the Maylies. A *paidian* drive, in contrast, cultivates undisciplined modes of game-play (drinking/cheating) practiced by The Artful Dodger and Charley Bates. While a novel certainly is not a game, by way of activating the play driving form and content to and for different ends, a novelist may produce a *ludian* or *paidian* effect to varying degrees of intensity. It would be wrong to suggest that Sterne, in composing *Tristram Shandy*, wrote it and organized it only

spontaneously, without any sense of what kind of parodic/reflexive work he was producing. To be able to refer to his novel this way, suggests that it maintains a generic affinity with other similar works, which means that it shares certain organizational principles with them, even if these include exposing narrative and novelistic aesthetics.

Sterne, then, relies on a *ludian* drive, even if only to organize the disorganized narrative that his novel becomes. Clearly, to be successful cheaters at cards, the Dodger and Bates must be disciplined and organized from the perspective of cheating as a goal. But when considered in light of fair play, such a practice assumes the quality of undisciplined and improper behavior. We might even say that Sterne, too, edifies his readership by denuding the novel form for it, allowing readers to see the structures that condition the fiction they read, a fact the Russian Formalists celebrated. But the overall effect produced by the novel is *paidian* – it appears in a form that appears undisciplined, an effect that yet remains conditioned by its opposing drive.

The play driving Sterne's novel, then, is double: a *ludian* drive conditions a *paidian* atmosphere, the coherence endemic to the incoherent effect creates. Such a relation reveals the play conditioning the dual play of *Tristram Shandy*, a play that allows *ludus* and *paidia* to productively work together. But if Sterne's aesthetic deemphasizes the *ludian* underpinnings of his novel as a function of intensifying its *paidian* overtones, it appears that Dickens more readily cultivates a *ludian* ethos as a function of truthfully and wisely rendering London culture as formatted content. But, as I suggest at the conclusion of this chapter, perhaps Dickens overproduces *ludus*, which makes his novel susceptible, ironically, to the excesses associated with *paidia*.

The transition in the novel from Oliver's narrative to the capture and death of Fagin and Sikes, is an operation that the diachronic story of the novel, in order to have a (his)story at all, needs to replicate. The Newgate genre, for instance, eventually yields to the sensation novel in the 1840s and 1850s, with the latter using the suspense, intrigue, and mystery that the Newgate novel uses but without the overt reliance on the Newgate Calendar for content. In similar fashion, literary realism, as an aesthetic practice, comes to dominate the landscape of fiction during the middle decades of the century, with Eliot often cited as the apex of the expression. It overrides the gothic, romance/historical romance, and sensation novels of this period, not by supplanting them, but rather by becoming a primary conduit for the expression of each, by working through these genres from within.

In short, a realist aesthetic demands a certain mode of creation or production or even a kind of disciplined industry on the part of the author that digresses from earlier traditions of novelistic industry as a function of the particular aims and goals inherent to this burgeoning school of thought. The point of emphasis here is the varying centers of gravity (or play of the center) for a novel aesthetic at different points of time. It is not that novelists of the 18th century lack disciplined industry; on the contrary, their practices reveal the loose formalization of a general aesthetic according to unique historically-conditioned demands. The rise and maturation of literary realism is conditioned by a set of historical demands of another order, or more precisely a re-ordering of aesthetic priorities: the new emphasis on "real" content imposes upon novelists a new work-play dynamic in the aesthetic that reproduces revised extraliterary discourses positioning play as an extension of work, a means to ends.

One economic pressure reshaping recreational forms and leisure time, often hard-fought by laborers and unions, is the standardization of work-play relations. Central to this process is the regularization of the workweek that transpires in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Various institutional changes disciplined patterns of leisure through revised schedules of work; the period saw the gradual decline of “St. Monday,” an unofficial and unsanctioned working-class holiday that could extend a laborer’s weekend into Tuesday; the Ten Hours Act of 1847, which officially limited the work day; and the push for the “short Saturday,” which decreased the workday in half for many trades by 1870. This regularization of the workweek was not unrelated to leisure time during these decades: “it seems plain that a substantial section of the working class was by now distributing its leisure time and energies to a more disciplined pattern, in closer correspondence than before with the parameters of a standardized industrial workweek” (Bailey 45).

The aesthetic of the novel form, on the other hand, establishes a different work-play relation driving the standardization of literary realism. Rather than new leisure forms and practices emerging from a reorganized workweek, the codification of a novel aesthetic reworks the productions of play to suit its ends. Unlike an earlier tradition of the novel that celebrates the novelty of the genre by expressing its formal possibilities and uniqueness, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Dickens, writing in the late 1830s, does not need to express the novelty of the novel form. By the time he writes *Oliver Twist*, there are genres and subgenres which, if not universally accepted as acceptable, are at least acknowledged as existing, for better or for worse. These do not require celebrating,

but they do become the grounds for novelistic innovation and refinement of narrative technique, an essential condition for new expressions of novelistic productivity.

If J. Paul Hunter suggests that eighteenth-century novelists consciously pursue an aesthetic of form, they do so by as a result of intensifying the drive for form. *Tristram Shandy* and *Northanger Abbey* as parodies of different orders (the first of narrative and the art of fiction and the second of the gothic), necessarily need to underscore the forms that each targets. This is necessary to transmit to readers, as individuals bring to each text a sense, idea, experience, value, or previous knowledge of literature to formalize the relationship (parody and what is parodied) undertaken by an author. Without cuing readers in such a fashion, an author risks parodic failure.

But for Dickens, as I have suggested all along, the drive for content becomes of the utmost importance in *Oliver Twist*. The demand to produce content that approximates reality assumes aesthetic priority. This kind of content becomes a new, dominant novelty of the novel during the middle decades of the nineteenth century as the determining drive for expressions of literary realism: in it the drive for form is reduced as an accomplice to drive for real content. By the time of Dickens, the form-drive is less the opportunity to express the particularities of the novel form as it becomes the means to give form to content. As the relay that gives form its content and content its form, play is likewise determined, disciplined as a means to an end from which it is ostensibly barred from attaining for itself. Play, in this aesthetic, maintains a triple duty: ensuring that it, along with the form drive, does not interfere while producing realistic content. In such a rubric an overactive drive for form and play, as unnecessary and potential threat, assume the status of aesthetic excess.

As workweeks and leisure time become more regimented, a related battle takes place over the status of popular recreations. Reformers and newly established police forces, for different reasons, help to refashion popular recreations and attitudes toward them. If the “animality, excess, and boisterousness” (Bailey 98) of traditional recreations draws the ire of social, political, and religious figures, constables begin to target working-class crowds gathered for popular street games, festivals, or street performers under such charges as obstruction, trespass and disturbing the peace (Bailey 36). Such developments speak to disparate middle-class programs that aim at reshaping play for the working classes, whether for moral, political, or economic ends.

Popular recreations, as has been noted by Golby and Purdue, do not simply go away, and as Peter Mangan suggests, the working classes were not helplessly dominated from stations above them. But there is little room for debate that a discourse of excess helps to qualify traditional recreations. Casting them and the laborers who enjoyed them as outside a value system of productivity, restraint, modesty, and respectability generated by the middle classes helps to define this increasingly complicated network of economic designations. It also suggests the codification of play as a means to an end. While at the direction of various middle-class interests regimes of recreation indoctrinate laboring classes into new behavioral patterns, this process also endeavors to phase out devalued play-forms.

Oliver Twist similarly phases out traditional ludic activity, that which is inherent to a novel tradition of the eighteenth century. For instance, a central component to the rational and edifying rubric adopted by a great number of Victorian middle classes saw the devaluing of “recklessly extravagant” expressions of play (Thompson 257). A similar

devaluing of reckless extravagance finds an aesthetic analogue in *Oliver Twist*'s realist impulsion. In order to present its truthful content most effectively, Dickens must not be reckless when formatting both form and content; he must rather be calculating when playing the one through the other. With regard to content, if he is not cautious, then the truthfulness of what he depicts can be called into question, as false, unreal, fictional, etc. With regard to form, if he is reckless, then he risks losing the impact of the truthfulness of his content through heedless forays that could distract readers and lead their attention elsewhere. To work form and content in such a fashion is to generate a *ludian* play-drive that acts as a disciplining agent for both, the guarantor for his desired aesthetic.

Since the terms and stakes of this novel reformation are less obvious and not policed or enforced from without, we have to make manifest the inherent self-policing that an aesthetic imposes upon authors by way of discourses exterior to it. Teasing out the ideological implications of Dickens's aesthetic, then, necessitates materializing it through contemporary discourses of social values of play, those that give his *ludian* aesthetic its unique expression, which mark it as belonging also to a larger group of social discourses. These latter discourses are more easily traceable because uttered and documented by the members of variously interested groups seeking to impose their values upon others (religious, political, class, masculinist, nationalist). The activity of formatting content and form by forging a *ludian* play drive that comprises Dickens's unique aesthetic in *Oliver Twist*, however, emerges as an immaterial utterance of a different order that establishes an interdependence with more concrete extra-aesthetic utterances. Dickens may put it to work in different ways (immaterial) and in a different setting (aesthetic) but, in so doing, he puts his aesthetic to work for ends that remain aligned with dominant ideologies of

play that others utter in varying realms of society and which are disseminated through a number of cultural institutions (schools, church, the press, the family).

If, as, F.M.L Thompson suggests, that Victorians learned to embrace “the notion of fun” by abiding to “strict adherence to the secular rules of etiquette governing social relationships rather than by religious scruple” (260), Dickens’s *ludian* etiquette governs aesthetic relations of his novel, implicitly abiding by dominant secular mores and values, if inconsistently. Comparing the work of *ludian* expressions of play in Oliver’s life with that used by Dickens to format his novel reveals the inherent ideological affinities his aesthetic of form maintains with the content that it conditions by refraining from expressions of recklessness. The representations of improper and proper forms of play in the novel, as detailed above, emerge from a middle-class value center that determines the terms of impropriety and propriety. The indoctrination of Oliver highlighted by the types of recreations he practices with Browlow and the Maylies is a double process: it ejects forms of play outside a value-system at the same time it cultivates forms of play that reinforce the same system. This particular middle-class system of values, it would appear, has much in common with the principles of *ludian* play.

Both necessarily devalue excess as a valid expressions; it threatens and diverges from the order that a middle-class ideology establishes in Oliver and a *ludian* ludic works to format form and content in *Oliver Twist*. The most telling moment of excess specifically expressed through a leisure activity the novel depicts is when The Artful Dodger and Charley Bates overindulge in gin when cheating at cards. Drinking, as has been well-documented by social historians, is a most if not the most traditional form of recreating for the working classes. However, from the sixteenth century onward, due in

part to an initial Puritan influence, drinking and the alehouse had been linked with idleness and profanity among the lower and working classes (Holt 29). This scene in the novel reinforces the devaluation of traditional and popular modes of recreating that continues well into the nineteenth century. The successful dissemination of more rational and edifying leisure habits that gains such currency during the century depends upon such a concomitant devaluing of previous practices, which extended to animal sports and blood sports, for instance.

While drinking at such an age is questionable for the children in and of itself, it is that they do so without moderation that signifies here. In particular, readers are told that Charley Bates more liberally “applied himself to the gin-and-water” (229), which results in him eventually tumbling from his chair in a moment of exuberance. The depiction of this scene, the way this moment presents drinking as part and parcel with cheating, captures a concern for more temperate-mind sectors of society that equates drinking with idleness and gambling, specifically, and non-productivity in general. Further, a core belief of the game-ethic that begins in earnest with Cotton and takes shape in the 1850s, is that a healthy and good boy are synonymous.⁷⁴ Not only does the thieving duo pervert an ethos of fair play by cheating, their drinking and smoking, signs of unhealth, according to such a rubric, reinforces the pickpockets’ impropriety. Their industry, more than engaging in the illegal activity of stealing, actively cultivates patterns of behavior that remain at odds with the *ludian* model later adopted by Oliver.

This model’s domesticating drive expels excessive and deviant influences from Oliver’s life. As a consequence he learns to equate leisure with learning itself as a form of edification. By improving himself while at play, the child keeps himself out danger,

maintains a healthy body and mind, and adopts a regime, that by virtue of expunging the possibility of deviant behavior from him, normalizes him according to a middle-class conception of norms, or, as the novel suggests, what comes to be the proper itself. We might even say that his new recreational program suggests the child's own process of (re)formatting at the hands of his benefactors, a sort of willing industriousness to improve himself – by play and by other means – undertaken by the prompting of his guardians.

In a similar fashion, *Oliver Twist* enacts a reformatting or realignment of the novel form during the 1830s in which it participates but does not in any way inaugurate. But much like the novel's city-country dialectic that elides class expressions in its naturalization of middle-class values of play, recreation, and leisure, the performance of Dickens's aesthetic does not reveal the dialectic of historically-driven novelistic expressions in which it participates. Dickens uses a realist ethos – the portrayal of contemporary society – that historically has been part of novel practice and criticism prior to the time he writes *Oliver Twist* and social critique of the contemporary society it represents as the occasion for his fictional narrative. The success of such a project requires Dickens to adopt a novelistic regime of his own, which expunges dangers, excesses, and deviations to the integrity of his aims. Encompassing the form-content relation, this regime emerges from the *ludian* play he uses to negotiate this relation, which finds unnecessary the play of form, the denuding of the fictional illusions, and the practice of reflexivity. Not specified by him literally as improper, Dickens yet practices an aesthetic that suggests as much in relation to this aesthetic cluster as a consequence of the demands of his specific aims.

It might be remiss to argue that by virtue of the historic relation *Oliver Twist* maintains with earlier expressions of novelness Dickens levels an explicit value judgment on the more expressive novel ludic cultivated by a number of 18th century authors. Such a criticism is not to be found in his novel; it does not accompany his critique of deviant behavior central to Oliver's middle-class rearing. But this lack suggests not so much an absence or an unconscious presence, but rather a nonconscious ludic practice, one that is not buried beneath content in a surface-depth model perpetuated by an understanding of narrative inherited from structuralism and narratology. Rather it is there alongside this content as an active drive, which as a condition of its activity, must work inconspicuously to format this content. This is a central aesthetic relation used by Dickens to make more present and conscious the truths he thinks he depicts, which also positions his novel in relation to an aesthetic and social history that we can trace and make more conscious. The *ludian* play of his novel opens up its implicit relations with an earlier novel aesthetic at the same time his novel utters its support for contemporary middle-class social values that it formats as content. Considering the labor or industry undertaken by Dickens in this way, by emphasizing its historical relations, then, casts his aesthetic, in particular his *ludian* ludic, in terms of use value, or the particular values inherent to the aesthetic of play that he uses to produce his novel.

Such an account brings this reading of Dickens's aesthetic in contact with Marx's theory of use-value. This is not the standard scenario or occasion to do so. Marx speaks of use-value in relation to commodities, material things, objects that are consumed. While novels are aesthetic products that are ultimately consumed by readers, there is a difference to consider here. For Marx, use-value emerges as a physical property of a

commodity, while I am speaking of the activity undertaken by Dickens inherent to his novel aesthetic. Use-value, in relation to Dickens's aesthetic is not so much a material itself, but what materializes as a function of creating his novel, the formatted product that becomes a commodity subsequently consumed by reader when it is finalized by them. It is on the production side of the novel, the pole of the creator/author (format), not on the reader/consumer side (formalization), however, in which a use-value emerges as part of Dickens's aesthetic activity. As such, it is just as proper to think about the values – aesthetic and extra-aesthetic – consumed by Dickens prior to or while he writes his novel (or those condition the range, quality, and politics of what he expresses) that condition the use-value driving the form-content dyad of his novel. As suggested above, the particularities of the formatted content reveal his allegiances, the middle-class origins of the values subtending his aesthetic.

There are two sets of aesthetic economies positioning *Oliver Twist* as an aesthetic accomplice to an ideology of restrained and edifying play endemic to the Victorian middle classes. Both arise as nodes of narrative productivity and ideological reproduction: one emerges through the material shaped by Dickens the novelist, the particular matter of his art form, language. The other is less a material itself, but operates as a process by which this material is materialized. On the one hand, the disciplined recreational rubric the boy practices as formatted content shaped by Dickens suggests the transformation of the child and the novel's support of this change. His benefactors steer the orphan from a life of uselessness, a potentially unproductive drag upon hard-working citizens and legitimate businesses as a thief or productive criminal that leeches off the legal economies of the city. By the novel's end he is molded into a more useful because

potentially productive and industrious citizen that can contribute to middle class life and reinforce its values by practicing them. On the other hand, there is the complementary *ludian* play deployed by Dickens to best format the child's transformation. This aesthetic, which regulates the form-content relation to feature this formatted content instead of the form in which it arises, establishes a complementary economy of usefulness and utility to the extra-aesthetic system of values Dickens uses to format his linguistic material into content as a function of maximizing his productive goals. In so doing, this novel expresses and utters a nonconscious allegiance for middle-class values as aesthetic practice that supplements the more conscious rubric of rational recreation it represents.

It is also important to note another diachronic dialectic inherent to Dickens's *ludian* play-drive. Not only does it tame a previously more unruly aesthetic (from the perspective a certain value system), as a consequence of doing so decades later, this *ludian* impulse marks *Oliver Twist* as belonging to a certain moment in the novel form's history. The event of this novel, then, cannot be separated as occurring after a certain novel tradition, one that celebrated a more *paidian* drive, that suggests, if not a youthfulness exactly, then at least a genre closer to its more formative years, one celebrating its novelty through a more expressive ludic. Like Oliver, who matures under a certain program of values, *Oliver Twist* the novel, through its *ludian* rubric, reveals a certain maturation of the novel, not toward an ideal, but in terms of narrative technique demanded of a program such as literary realism that the next chapter takes up with greater scrutiny.

George Levine demonstrates his commitment tracking the elusiveness of realisms with his varied accounts of this aesthetic. One of them describes realism as "defin[ing]

itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literatures” (614). It can do so only by managing style and narrative, content and form, by limiting the role of play that is the conduit for the novelistic excess. The next chapter examines the way in which George Henry Lewes posits limiting the excesses of narrative plotting by an author’s use of “easy play.” But for now, I would like to conclude by suggesting that Levine’s observation that a realist aesthetic is a “middling condition” (5) results from an author keeping the play-drive at bay, minimizing its productive role as the guarantor for approximating life. Dickens, however, complicates his *ludian* aesthetic by ending in a decidedly Newgate register.

A reinvigorated drive for this aesthetic form fuels the novel’s concluding episodes. But if it interrupts and overtakes Oliver’s story, detailing the chase for Sikes and Fagin does not dispense with *ludus*. As with his realist drive, Dickens needs a *ludian* ethos to ensure the integrity of his intensified Newgate plot. What this plot trajectory suggests is that Dickens’s novel finds itself in the middle of two different novelistic expressions that remain guided by *ludian* and realist impulses. The last volume does not dispense with either drive; Dickens uses both of them to re-format his realist content as Newgate material. This is another point at which Dickens and Fagin, two storytellers with very different ends in mind, come together. Under the latter’s “guidance” young thieves, though they learn how to discipline their bodies to pick pockets, also engage in excessive and unruly behavior when not at work. This relationship emblemizes (in atypical fashion) the traditional work-play relationship that nineteenth-century reformers attempt to revise with rational leisure occupations, the sort enjoyed by Oliver.

But Dickens performs excesses of his own in *Oliver Twist* by expressing his *ludian* and realist drives in seemingly two different plots. It is not so much that his plot is in play. Rather he organizes his split plot according a similar logistic of *ludian* play that still conditions his novel's evolution into a Newgate novel. The "artifices which belong to the art of recitation or delivery" of this novel, because of its disciplined play, actually produces an effect of an undisciplined aesthetic.

“[O]ne can ‘define’ play by what it does, by its function, rather than what it means. Indeed, Wittgenstein would argue that a word’s meaning coincides with its use; this is to say, one can examine play as a concept or as a speculative tool that has been put to certain uses and has filled certain functions in Western thought.” Mihai Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn*

“A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game.” Jacques Derrida, “Differance”

The previous chapter frequently alludes to the plot of *Oliver Twist*, the way in which various plots entwine Oliver and those interested in him and his story. The following reading traces the play driving the production of narrative plotting. This play, I argue, emerges as an intensive site of aesthetic production; it mediates a novel’s concurrent drives for form and content while operating as a conduit for ideological expressions of play at the same time. In plot, then, I find an intensive locus of ludic and ideological activity that orders and materializes the utterance a novel becomes as a conditioning if more immaterial expression of this very aesthetic utterance. By establishing this relationship, I will begin to specify the particular regions of novel productivity that express the play conditioning it. The taxonomic impulse necessary for such a mapping should not be equated with a project of totalization. Rather, my aim is to suggest that the play-drive is multi-faceted, diverse, and is put to work in the service of aesthetic goals, one of which, at a bare minimum, is to format unique content through a particular expression of form. As such, the ludic economies I mine in plot do not remain freely floating, drift out of play, or emerge as ways to circumvent the event of the aesthetic or of narrative. Rather, they are put to work simultaneously as a condition of the production of

formatting a novel's plot, a process that in turn, remains conditioned by extra-novelistic and extra-aesthetic discourses that a novelist, consciously or otherwise, draws into this process.

The trajectory of this chapter unfolds in two parts. At the center of my reading is a short essay by George Henry Lewes in which he counters his era's prevailing sentiment by suggesting that *Pride and Prejudice* by Austen, not Fielding's *Tom Jones*, cultivates the finest working fictional plot in English letters. While his rationale for doing so spans aesthetics of unity, harmony, and distraction, what most interests me is that Lewes's 1860 "A Word About *Tom Jones*" emphasizes that an exemplary plot plays in a certain way. To tease out the aesthetic and ideological implications of the "easy play" underpinning his theory of narrative plotting, I marshal a sampling of aesthetic and extra-aesthetic discourses from the middle decades of the century to gauge the sympathy or antipathy it maintains with them. Additionally, I reconsider Peter Brooks's classic formula of plot centralized in his essay "Freud's Masterplot" to underscore the repercussions of the work performed by Lewes's "easy play." While Brooks uses Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a model for the concurrent and complicating dynamics of plot, he also exemplifies his theory through readings of various nineteenth-century fictions. His psychoanalytic-driven narrative of plot, however, instantiates a ludic discourse and economy in which plot assumes the character of a vacillating "space of play."

But similar to Lewes, Brooks, invested in other matters, remains less interested in play as a subject considered in and of itself as a result of it serving as the means to other aesthetic ends. Lewes's and Brooks's essays, then, though more than a century apart, mutually illuminate the vital role of play in plot. But in so doing, each only gestures

toward the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic concerns such play opens up by virtue of the co-productive relations it establishes with drives for form and content. Rather than attempting to solve *the* problematic of narrative plotting or to offer a Causabon-like key that would unlock the masterplot of all plots in this chapter, I hope to complement (complicate) dominant models by bringing them closer to the concreteness of life that is quite often the source for the formatted material we read in fictional plots of the nineteenth century.

Locating and thus generalizing a schematic of play inherent to plot becomes a means rather than an end in itself. In one sense, then, I put play to work much like Lewes and Brooks, with the primary difference being that play arises as a means that doubles as an explicit subject of scrutiny. Negotiating this double play clears a path that allows me to begin accounting for the specificity of responses to the very concept of narrative plotting on the author/production/creation side of a novel as well as the critic/theorist on the reader/consumer pole that is no less productive, creative, or recreative. As we shall see, a network of familiar abstractions formalizes Lewes's readings of the plots of Fielding and Austen, which positions him as a certain class of reader in two senses: middle-class and a professional reader of texts, a relation that hardly remains unrelated.

Lewes's career as novelist, critic, philosopher, and editor spans too many topics and covers too much ground to summarize in a brief paragraph. In short, his contribution to the intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century was encyclopedic. Having written on subjects as varied as acting, the philosophy of Comte, and Goethe, to just name a few that fell under his consideration, Lewes also emerged as an important voice in the burgeoning field of literary criticism that crystallizes around the theorization of the genre of the novel

during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. His *Principles for Success in Literature*, collected posthumously in 1885 from a selection of articles written while editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, doubles as a theory of fiction and a how-to guide for would-be authors. The volume remains true to its title, as in early in this tract Lewes professes his belief in the “principles which underlie” all successful literature. Lewes dedicates much of the volume to elucidating such principles, which include Vision, Sincerity, and Beauty, and emphasizes the seriousness and sincerity of his project in his castigation of those writers who earn a living by making transforming literature into a “plaything for display.” Lewes’s essay on *Tom Jones*, which appears twenty-five years prior to the publication of this collection, works on and works out a methodology and theory of fiction upon which *Principles* expands, including his allegiance to a realist aesthetic. Examining Lewes’s few but revealing words about Fielding’s novel offers itself as a template as to how an aesthetic of realism fashions the play driving plot as a condition of narrative possibility, as well as the ideological implications of its formulation.

By the time articles such as Lewes’s begin to appear in journals of the early 1860s, a literary movement that aspired to a true-to-life quality had already been adopted by British writers. The previous chapter suggests as much with regard to *Oliver Twist*. Thackeray’s allegiance to producing a “sentiment of reality” in his fiction positions him as an early sympathizer, as well. According to David Skilton the term realism was imported from France in the late 1850s, while Ian Watt dates the movement to “the French School of Realists” of the 1830s (88). An article on German Realism by Lewes appears in the *Westminster Review* in 1858 in which he claims that “Art always aims at

the representation of Reality, i.e. Truth,” situates him as a leading voice of the burgeoning realist aesthetic (102). Although not explicitly pursuing realism or “Reality” in his essay on *Tom Jones*, the route by which Lewes grapples with his understanding of the truths of narrative plotting imposes questions of the real onto his project.

He begins his inquiry with a causal observation: *Tom Jones* undeservedly merits its praise and accolades. Admitting to previously extolling this work’s virtues, he claims this earlier appraisal was based on “impressions” of “memory,” as well by the “exaggerated respect” endowed upon it by a chorus of admirers over time. The advent of this essay marks Lewes’s return to the novel with a pronounced critical vision in which he distinguishes between taste and criticism. While he refers to taste as “individual likings,” criticism is grounded in the “application” of “definite” “principles.” The former will not do for his enterprise, as he seeks to locate a more objective and logical assessment of the novel’s worth. In order to proceed with his more principled because objective criticism, Lewes announces the rejection of all his prejudices, which amounts to approaching Fielding’s novel as “if it had been written by Bulwer or Thackeray, Brontë or Dickens.” It would appear that prejudices are cleared as a result of historically re-situating *Tom Jones*, by making the novel a contemporary, a recent event rather than a novel with a certain history that Lewes, to some degree, aims at stemming, if not reversing.

It is the “construction” of *Tom Jones* that occupies Lewes’s renewed attention to the novel. According to Lewes, despite the “praise” “lavished” upon the construction of the novel, critics yet remain “unable to say *in what* construction consists.” Lewes rectifies this lack for his readers: “The object of construction is to free the story from all

superfluity. Whatever is superfluous – whatever lies outside the real feeling and purpose of the work, either in incident, dialogue, description, or character – whatever may be omitted without in any degree lessening the effect--is a defect in construction.” Lewes relies on two principles to conceptualize a plot free of superfluities, those of economy and selection. When properly used by an author, the former ejects unnecessary moments from a plot, while the latter secures a plot’s commitment to the probable rather than the possible.

Authors violate the principle of selection, according to Lewes, when they introduce into a plot too many “coincidences” that, in effect, detract from a plot, even though an author may use them to wiggle “out of a difficulty.” Lewes contends that novelists violate this principle most often. Prefiguring Bakhtin’s critique of monological narratives, Lewes suggests a typical violation occurs when characters speak the words of an author rather than those that “spring from their minds.” For Lewes, such moments become expressions of an economy of plot that reveals rather than conceals its own processes, a symptom that attracts the wrong kind of attention on the part of a reader. While an author’s “comments and reflections,” when used judiciously, can help portray a character’s inner life, too often Lewes sees such opportunities devolve into needless “wandering” and “digression.” Novelists engaging in such unproductive turns of plot, accordingly, become “guilty of a fault of construction,” and risk readers skipping over them. The following extended passage marshals the most important tenets of his observations upon the construction of plot, reinforcing his thoughts about the discriminating principles of economy and selection by adding to them a principle of play:

The construction must not seem mechanical, but natural, organical. Hence, in

scenes and in speeches there must be an easy play and fluctuation of various elements, all secretly and inevitably tending towards the one point, but never ostentatiously tending towards it. The artist must be careful in his selection, yet never suffer us to feel that there has been a selection; he must not permit us to see the strings and pulleys of his puppets; he must not betray his intention. Directly the machine creaks, our illusion vanishes. (333)

It is easy to overlook the productive role that Lewes attaches to the “easy play” underpinning scenes and dialogue in a fiction in this passage, especially since its introduction into his calculus of plot is so casual. Such an introduction of play, perhaps, performs the sort of easiness he describes it should maintain in fictional plots. But easing into the implications of this principle of play by way of reviewing the robust passage of which it is a part sets up the synchronic and diachronic relations this easy play instantiates. Because, with all apologies to Lewes, we risk losing the sense of his principle of play without establishing those *actual* and *real* historical relations with aesthetic and extra-aesthetic discourses that give this principle the specificity it lacks here.

In addition to a principle of easy play, Lewes introduces the natural and organical to the narrative “machine” he describes. The machinery of plot, apparently, assumes qualities of the natural and the organic – goals to be attained – when an author constructs plotted material, what Lewes refers to as illusions, what I have been referring to thus far as formatted content. At the same time such a process prevents the easy play of plot’s elements from revealing the acts of selection undertaken by an author to organize their relations. A central action of plot, then, is to plot itself out of the illusions it emplots into

a novel. A secret plot, one that prevents its own secretion establishes the sense of the natural and organic for Lewes. When the construction of a plot no longer remains a secret, when a reader notices its architecture (architexture), the plot becomes more machine-like and unnatural.

Revealing the “strings and pulleys” of a plot, not only betrays an intention that must remain secret; it also risks drawing a reader’s attention to the way in which the fictional world was created in addition to or instead of concentrating on the fictional world itself. Lewes does not hide the risks in not obscuring plot’s machinations: “directly the machine creaks, our illusion vanishes.” To allow plot’s processes to surface in the story so that it becomes part of the story risks disappearing the fictional illusion that should comprise the story’s entirety. Johann Huizinga reminds us of the etymology of “illusion” in *Homo Ludens*, his anthropological and sociological inquiry of play: it is “a pregnant word which means literally ‘in-play’ (from *inlusio*, *illudere* or *inludere*)” (11). A discourse of illusions in works of fiction, according to this definition becomes implicated in a discourse of play: an illusion plays; it is ‘in-play.’ This recasting of “illusion” highlights the need to understand both sides of content: after it is formatted by a reader an illusion or content is in play for a reader to determine and finalize.

Lewes’s conceptualization of the way in which illusions should work (play) in a fiction and his use of them extends ideas forwarded by Coleridge almost a half century earlier. In *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge distinguishes illusion from delusion as a central tenet of his discussion of aesthetic defects. He argues the former results when works of art cultivate an imitative process that acknowledges its own artificiality and “permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or

affirmation of their real existence by the judgment” (107). Such an aesthetic results in “negative faith,” which allows the work of art to be experienced pleurably in the terms in which it unfolds rather than according to the dictates of external truths found in nature or history, for instance.

In contrast, the pains an artist undergoes in sculpting the biography of a literary character whose life conjoins chimney sweeping with that of a philosopher, as Coleridge suggests, leads to experiencing the artwork’s “false” status rather than a “fictitious” one (107) because we eventually cannot help but realize the artistry involved in creating such a biography. While we can find pleasure in a work of art constructed according to such a rubric, this pleasure is fleeting and will last only as long as we forget or ignore how an artist attempts to make the improbable – a chimney sweep becoming a philosopher – appear probable. Once we realize how unlikely it is that a chimney sweep can become a philosopher of any merit, in Coleridge’s estimation, we interrupt the work of negative faith, or rather suggest how such a work of art prevents an audience from experiencing negative faith at all. This scenario becomes a delusion, an artistic failure because in attempting to naturalize what cannot be naturalized or be made to seem natural, the work of art reveals its own artistry, thereby disrupting the illusion it attempts to produce.

Distinguishing illusions from delusions in such a manner situates an economy of play at the center of the Coleridgean aesthetic experience: illusions themselves remain a form of play that when properly produced, allow for the perpetuation of the play of negative faith.⁷⁵ In other words, in order to be productive, to produce a valuable experience of art and to exact worthwhile pleasure for an audience, a work of art should encourage an audience to cultivate a negative faith that allows for and calls for a willing

suspension of disbelief, whereas an aesthetic delusion invites an audience to question the believability of the work of art. What Coleridge outlines here is his understanding of what type of illusion allows for an aesthetic of illusionism, although he does not explicitly cast his discussion under this conceptual umbrella. W.J.T Mitchell considers the concept of illusionism in a recent work and defines it as “playing with illusions, the self-conscious exploitation of illusion as a cultural practice for social ends (343). Mitchell differentiates illusions from illusionism by suggesting how the former remain an undeniable aspect of “sentience,” associated with delusion and error while the latter, as an aesthetic mode of Western culture has the “capacity to deceive, delight, astonish, amaze or otherwise take power over a beholder” (325). More concerned with “pictures of power and the power of pictures” (323), developing the role of illusionism in novels remains outside the scope of Mitchell’s work.⁷⁶

As an aesthetic mode illusionism overpowers an individual by amazing and delighting a reader with its play of illusions, according to Mitchell. Coleridge suggests that well-crafted illusions activate within us a negative faith that overpowers or limits the power of the judgment to interfere with a reading of a fictional narrative. Mitchell and Coleridge, it appears, speak to different dynamics of a similar process: Mitchell differentiates the aesthetic terrain of illusionism from illusions of sentience, and Coleridge theorizes, at least in part, what makes us receptive to illusionism as an aesthetic mode, how through it an individual and a fictional narrative, for instance, work together to foster a negative faith without interference from the faculty of judgment. Lewes’s essay acts as an implicit mid-Victorian expression of an aesthetic of illusionism underlying expressions of literary realism, an antecedent to Maupassant’s subsequent

(1888) and more explicit formulation that pits effective realists as “illusionists” (47).

How does an aesthetic of illusionism impact Lewes’s model of plot, in particular his reading of *Tom Jones*? The episodic plot of *Tom Jones* becomes defective, according to Lewes, because it continually calls attention to the logistics and patterns of selections undertaken by Fielding to construct it. This kind of plot all too easily betrays the existence of its machinery, its aesthetic of illusionism that Fielding carelessly does not conceal. With such a critique, Lewes marshals a theory of plot that actually becomes a theory of narrative parceled into two primary terrains, those of process (plot and illusionism) and those of products (illusions or content). It is clear that Lewes privileges a narrative process of a certain type in order to mobilize a totalized fictional product that strives toward organic unity. Fielding’s digressions and coincidences become symptomatic of his failure to establish principles of economy and selection that would reign in the faults of his plot’s de-unifying construction. Lewes is quick to point out its over-the-top coincidences, superfluities, and excesses, such as when Sophia quits working at the inn and just happens to run into her cousin, a Mrs. Fitzpatrick with whom she travels to London. Such developments are not motivated by any previous plot developments, as the novel never mentions Sophia’s cousin previously.

Lewes refers to this moment as a “clumsy coincidence” that “leads to a further superfluity in the digression occupied by Mrs. Fitzpatrick’s story, which has nothing whatever to do with the action” (336). The arrival of Tom Jones and Partridge at the inn where they witness a puppet-show, for Lewes, becomes an occasion for “a description of the performance and a digression on puppet-shows” as well as the impetus for the “usual scenes of quarrel and uproar which constitute the uniform variety of this work” (336).

Such moments become emblematic of the “superfluous scenes” that plague the novel by violating what Lewes terms “the most elementary rules of construction” (336). Reveling in these narrative excesses, which leads to further digressions and coincidences, establishes a principle of an all-too-obvious mechanism of fragmentation as a plotting logistic.

At the same time, if Lewes’s illusionism prevents narrative machinery from disorganizing a fictional totality, as an aesthetic regime it concurrently orders itself in relation to extra-literary expressions of the art of illusion-making. Simon During describes the magic assemblage as “the historically developing sector of leisure enterprises which began to consolidate during the seventeenth century, at first alongside traditional and ritual festivals and revelries” (66). Citing passages by Samuel Butler, During informs us that “economic imperatives” drove entertainers to align with less savory characters, including criminals (68). The aesthetic economies (play, selection, and economy) underpinning Lewes’s theory of plot may not situate it within During’s magic assemblage; but the illusionism inherent to Lewes’s theory of plot does position novelists as practicing a literary version of an art of illusions.

The nineteenth-century illusionist Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin begins a section titled “The Art of Conjuring” in his *Secrets of Conjuring and Magic* (1878) with the following epigraph: “To succeed as a conjuror, three things are essential—first, dexterity; second, dexterity; and third, dexterity” (22). For Robert-Houdin, the namesake of Harry Houdini, in addition to mental subtleties and a familiarity with recent advancements in science, “manual dexterity” forms the core requisites for the successful conjurer.⁷⁷ The chronicler of London street life, Henry Mayhew, observes how pickpockets cultivate a

similar dexterity. In classifying the numerous types of people who do not work for a living as a part of his massive three volume expose of London street culture, Mayhew creates the category of “Those who Plunder by Manual Dexterity, Stealth or by Breach of Trust.” Included in this group of thieves are “the light-fingered gentry,” and “buzzers,” who pilfer handkerchiefs from the pockets of gentlemen, much how the Dodger and Charley Bates do to the preoccupied Brownlow in *Oliver Twist*. The importance of and reliance on manual dexterity for magicians and pickpockets speaks to a shared skill necessary for the performances of both groups of individuals, but what of this skill set? How does each use manual dexterity to make objects disappear and/or return?⁷⁸

A vital component of these dexterous and misdirecting performances makes the effort to totalize, track, and configure their motions nearly impossible for a spectator or mark. Susan Stewart describes how an art of misdirection reframes the text and context informing the performance of a repertoire of magic tricks: “To play a trick has to do with misdirection, with shifting boundaries, with reframing a universe while the tricked-upon is not looking” (89). For Stewart, a watch-trick by Houdini becomes emblematic of the way in which magicians redefine the boundaries of a performance by altering “the conventions of context that the audience has brought to the game” (93).⁷⁹ Such a feat becomes successful, in part, as a result of audience members focusing on the narrative Houdini actively shapes on stage, which becomes synonymous with the “text” of the trick, the illusion itself. As a corollary, an audience can easily overlook Bess Houdini’s role in the production, marginalizing her presence on stage during the trick as mere context, supplemental to the trick itself that becomes equated with what Houdini does. Here, Bess Houdini, apparently only contextual from the audience’s perspective, yet

participates as a vital cog in the illusionist stage machinery, the processes that produce the illusion without explicitly reproducing their actual role in its production. Harry Houdini encourages such a dynamic by inviting an audience to look over too intently his role in producing the trick, directing a crowd into “reading” or “framing” his performance as the entire narrative of the illusion. In so doing, he positions his wife’s narrative as separate and outside the frame of the trick, a contextual presence even though she functions as an integral component to it.

Cultivating an art of natural and easy movements allows magician, pickpocket and author alike to frame their illusions without making it easier for audiences to detect their processes of production. Novelists may not rely on all the techniques of the illusionist to exact the easy play of illusions as outlined by Lewes, but according to him, they do not need to. His praise of the plot of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* explains as much: “The ease and naturalness of the evolution of the story are so perfect, that only very critical readers are aware of its skill in selection” (335). In effect, Lewes suggests that Austen’s superior novel results from her ability to craft a plot that minimizes a reader’s awareness of her skill of selection guiding the narrative’s construction. A plot constructed with such expertise, it seems, becomes the guarantor that eliminates the threat of plot’s machinery “creaking”: by binding itself to a virtually undetectable yet productive role – productive because undetectable – Austen’s plot grounds the play of *Pride and Prejudice*, limiting to the easy play and fluctuations that leads to a seamless illusion. In effect, Lewes suggests that Austen decontextualizes the construction of her plot; it becomes an absent context as a function of her making more present the illusory context as the only text. Not quite like Bess, who remains onstage and part of the

production of a trick despite appearing otherwise, Austen's plot remains out of sight for a reader of her novel.

Like the magician whose "simple" and "natural" movements make the art of a trick or illusion more difficult to detect, Austen's "naturalness" is what makes her plot exemplary for Lewes. If we take Lewes at his word, by virtue of Austen's superior plot we cannot help but focus on it, unless we approach the novel as one of those "very critical readers" who can piece together the logistics underpinning this plot, its particular aesthetic of illusionism. This skilled class of reader, which obviously includes Lewes, can make appear what the plot invites us to not see or read but which is there as part of the text that we do read and help produce as formatted content, namely the story of its production, the story of the principles of selection and economy that make Austen's illusionist aesthetic so effective for Lewes. While Austen's novel remains outside the purview of David Goldknopf's essay "The Failure of Plot in *Tom Jones*," his remarks crystallize Lewes's reading of both novels. In this essay Goldknopf also finds fault with the plot of Fielding's novel because of a too strict adherence to concerns with form: "Again and again balance, reciprocation, and intermediate closures are used to drain plot-tensions, or intellectual or narrative digressions to dissipate propulsive energy" (802).

By observing with such rigor a compulsion for symmetry, the novel, according to Goldknopf, relies on an ethos of composition rather than dynamism (802). Such a rubric prevents the plot from becoming anything but the means to achieve such formal harmony at the same time it prevents the novel from achieving "organic form" (803). Goldknopf suggests that the incidents comprising *Tom Jones* fail to achieve an organic state because they lack symbolism, which is necessary in order for them to reach an "afterlife" of

“polyphonic effect” that is “organic form.” While Goldknopf fails to clarify what exactly is an “organic form” here, it is clear that the compositional and symmetrical drive for form prevents Fielding’s novel from achieving it. Echoing Lewes’s reading of *Tom Jones*, Goldknopf implies that the novel makes too visible its logic of construction. What prevents the novel’s plot from playing in an easy manner is that it remains in the service of the novel’s drive for symmetrical form. Privileging form as the means to achieve structural unity relegates plot to the mechanistic movements described by Lewes and Goldknopf. Unable to establish a dynamic that moves beyond or outside the demands of form, the novel’s plot becomes a matter of narrative rhythmic, a this-and-then patterning over and over again that becomes repetitive and all too obvious. Despite Tom’s adventures, despite the illusions the plot works to create, the narrative arc remains less adventurous because predictable as plot itself remains bound to the drive for formal unity.

Recall that Schiller’s play-drive productively negotiates the interplay of two drives that condition its possibility as it conditions theirs: the drive for form and the drive for sense or matter, the story-material comprising a fiction under the auspices of plot. Letter XV of Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* describes the play-drive as a “living form; a term that serves to describe all aesthetic qualities of phenomena, and what people style, in the widest sense, beauty” (76). While Lewes and Goldknopf ostensibly are not concerned with identifying what makes *Tom Jones* beautiful or what prevents it from becoming so, they do offer readings of the novel’s plot that locate its mechanistic qualities, which prevent it from achieving a state of organicism. For all of Tom’s liveliness, the novel does not achieve the status of a “living form,” in part, because its formal drive overrides and determines the material drive, which is what causes the plot to

creak and to betray itself. Lewes clearly states how the drive for form becomes too determinate – it absorbs the play-drive into itself, as a way to ensure a commitment to unity and organicism.

Whereas a magician relies on techniques of sleight of hand to effect an illusion that masks the art of illusionism, Austen fosters a plot that unfurls as the “ease of nature, which looks so like life of every day,” which is to say that she conceals the efforts of her labors (Lewes 338). But it is not only that Austen crafts a believable narrative that corresponds to a concept of “real life.” Here Lewes praises her novel for embodying the ease of nature itself, that which moves and exists as a matter of course, seemingly without the machinery of plot, without being authored at all. Such is the “trick,” the sleight of hand, or rather Austen’s sleight hand that makes *Pride and Prejudice* a novel of the first rank for Lewes – its organicism and apparent absence of construction and lack of dependence on any visible machinations of narrative plotting that plagues Fielding’s novel and its demands for form.

A brief reading of the character of Raffles in *Middlemarch*, however, puts pressure on Lewes’s model of plot by suggesting the obviously unreal pretensions underpinning his realist rubric. As my reading of Raffles shows, plot’s activity as delineated by Lewes (easy) cannot be so easily disappeared. Rather it is always there, available to readers as part of the content that is read and formalized by readers. To suggest that this devious figure, who plots and schemes, emblemizes the dynamics of narrative plotting, requires easing into Peter Brooks’s observations on narrative plotting, as well, to which I will attend in greater detail to close this chapter.

Chancing Realities: The Play Test

Lewes's life-partner, Mary Ann Evans/George Eliot shared his views on the virtues of a realist ethos. But even so, Eliot understood the innate limitations of the aesthetic. Her often-referred-to consideration of the inherent restrictions inhibiting an author's truthful depiction of reality appears in chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*: "Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult. The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin – the longer the claws, and the larger the wings, the better; but that marvelous facility which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion." This admission in her 1859 novel underscores the difficulty in surpassing the subjective frame of reference that becomes the lens through which any writer attempts to portray a truth or reality. Her opus *Middlemarch*, the first installment of which appeared in *Blackwood's* in 1871, contains an acknowledgment and confession of a different order: a writer of fiction or "historian" in the last three decades of the nineteenth century can no longer weave a narrative in the fashion of Fielding, whose capacious fictive landscape more comfortably finds a home during a time "when the days were longer . . . when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings" (141).

On the one hand, Eliot offers a trajectory of the novel form from the middle of the eighteenth century to the closing decades of the nineteenth century in chronotopic terms: industrialism, urban culture, and codified daily and weekly schedules that clearly defined work and play times for laborers, are just a few of the developments that distinguish Eliot's material and historical milieu from that of Fielding's, in which the ebb-and-flow rhythms of agrarian culture contributed to a less urgent sense of time and a grander sense

of space. Eliot suggests that a writer from one period will necessarily incorporate the temporal and spatial sensibilities into a work of fiction, which leads her to consider the complexities and interweaving of “certain human lots” at a much more localized level than Fielding’s more enlarged stage. But on the other hand, Eliot invites readers to consider how she maintains her focus in *Middlemarch*, how she structures the narrative without veering outside the limited frame she constructs for herself. In the chapter (15) that opens with a gloss of Fielding’s artistry, Eliot also highlights her own concern with structures.

The narrator explains Lydgate’s interest in “the fundamental knowledge of structure” as a way to color his relationship to science and medicine, which recalls Casaubon’s own life-long pursuit in unlocking the narrative structures and patterns holding the key to all mythological traditions. A brief reading of the blackmailer John Raffles, an underappreciated object of critical interest in the body of work considering the novel, reveals that *Middlemarch* inadvertently exposes an integral ludic economy of its plot. Raffles, despite Eliot’s masterful juggling of the intricacies of her realist novel’s plot, reveals the author’s hand, rendering it more than slightly visible during moments when her narrator does not explicitly break away from the fictional world, to discuss Fielding, for instance. If Casaubon seeks in vain for his mythical key, Raffles emerges as the inherent and unavoidable risk of any realist endeavor: the unintended exposure of its own manufacture.

Raffles is formally introduced in chapter 41, in the second paragraph of which the narrator asks the following question regarding the exchange of letters between Bulstrode and Featherstone regarding Stone Court: “who shall tell what may be the effect of

writing?” (412). Ostensibly this question refers to the exchange of letters concerning Stone Court. But as the story of Raffles unfolds, a similar question gathers around him: what effect does his characterization have on the effect of the novel’s plot? What initially appears to garner weight as the novel introduces him is the nature of his appearance in the novel when he saunters up Stone Court to chat with Rigg Featherstone, whose mother Raffles married when Rigg was a child. From the conversation two issues become apparent: that Raffles was an absent stepfather that scammed the family clean and that Rigg wants nothing to do with the man. The narrator also describes the idiosyncratic nature of Raffles in motion; he possesses the “air of a swagger,” so much so that he would be “noticeable even at a show of fireworks” (413). His first appearance in the novel, then, is about his appearance, how he appears to others, a theme the narrator develops further. In addition to his obvious swagger, Raffles suffers from “a complaint that makes [him] a little dilatory” (528).

Movement and mobility, as well as his blackmailing of Bulstrode, become the defining traits of Raffles; the narrator’s repeated emphasis of the way his body moves (his trademark “swing of the leg”) complements his own itinerant life. To Bulstrode’s horror, Raffles explains that he has “no attachment to any spot” and “would as soon settle hereabout as anywhere,” which apparently includes traveling as far as America for a ten-year excursion funded by Bulstrode under the condition that it would be a permanent relocation (526). As a figure in Bulstrode’s shady past, Raffles’s appearance in Middlemarch threatens the former’s position as a wealthy pillar of the community and his identity as a practitioner of Methodism, the very notion of which elicits a knowing wink from Raffles: “Still in the Dissenting line, eh? Still godly?” he asks Bulstrode (528).

Bulstrode knows that Raffles intends to blackmail him by using information that if circulated in public would ruin him, even though Bulstrode does not know the exactly what Raffles is threatening to reveal during this initial encounter.

During the course of their conversation Raffles hints at desiring an independence and enjoying his “freedom.” To this end he asks two hundred pounds from Bulstrode and promises to “go away” (529). He does, for a time. But he returns seeking more money and reopens a past that Bulstrode would repress so as to banish “the tinglings of a merited shame,” a shame warranted by inheriting a fortune that Sarah Dunkirk and her son, Will Ladislaw, stood to inherit when it was believed that she did not want to be found by her family, thereby reneging on her claim to any property rights (615). Only Bulstrode and Raffles know the true story, how Bulstrode claims an inheritance that should not be his by marrying Sarah’s mother. The re-emergence of Raffles in Bulstrode’s life, then, as it injects more intensity and complications to the novel’s plot by adding heretofore unknown associations and relations among established characters and their sociality, crystallizes around a plot to marry into a family and to claim its fortune under false pretenses. Raffles becomes doubly associated with plotting by returning to Bulstrode for what amounts to payments for remaining silent, a process in which the former finds great amusement: he plots and schemes in order to keep open Bulstrode as a lucrative source of income.

Upon returning to Middlemarch to hit up Bulstrode for more money, Raffles “amus[es] himself with the annoyance he was causing this decent and highly prosperous fellow-sinner, an amusement which he facetiously expressed as sympathy with his friend’s pleasure in entertaining a man who had been serviceable to him, and who had not

had all his earning” (686). Such an observation adds to the valence of Raffles’s story and the part he plays in the narrative of *Middlemarch*. The accumulation of the most intensive descriptors associated with him, the story they begin to tell, is that his character becomes synonymous with narrative plotting. His admission of suffering from a “dilatory” “complaint” is to admit that his appearance in the narrative cannot be divorced from the very movements of plot.

In one of his accounts of plot, Peter Brooks describes the narrative middle as “the ‘dilatory space’ of narrative, as Barthes calls it—the space of retard, postponement, error, and partial revelation—is the place of transformation: where the problems posed to and by initiatory desire are worked out and worked through” (92). The character of Raffles becomes a partial revelation by emerging as a pivot or relay that manifests as plotted material that concurrently works as a window to how plot works: he becomes the impetus for the revelation of Bulstrode’s greatest error, what he most desires and attempts to work out and through by meeting with Will Ladislaw, confessing his sin and offering the latter five hundred pounds a year for life, which Ladislaw refuses. At the same time, the work Raffles exacts in the narrative moves beyond his role in the plot; he becomes not so much an error of Eliot’s artistry but a lingering reminder of the labors, by author and plot, needed to sculpt the narrative into what Gillian Beer refers to as the novel’s “web of affinities.”⁸⁰ If Raffles’s business is to extort Bulstrode, he also illuminates the busyness and activity of narrative plotting, what, according to Lewes’s rubric of fiction, a novel should take great pains to conceal.

As the consummate nuisance in Bulstrode’s life Raffles operates as an equivalent to the irritant that Brooks associates with plot and the narratable, the “life” and “material

of narrative” (104). While not the original irritation that causes the narrative to come into being, Raffles does alter its trajectory. His motility and pattern of returning and disappearing and returning again materializes as another rehearsal of the ludic economy modeled by Oliver’s returning and disappearing in Dickens’s novel. But the amusement Raffles garners by toying with Bulstrode, by playing with his life and with his guilt, coupled with the ludism inherent in his name, aligns the character with the improper playground that narrative plotting becomes for Peter Brooks. Raffles’s name evokes lotteries, gambling and chance (*alea*), his actions denote waste, unproductivity and unboundedness, apparently the opposite of what plot produces.

While Jeffrey Franklin argues that “any narrative form, but especially that of novelistic realism, must work against chance and coincidence” (44), the character of Raffles suggests the contrary. Through him *Middlemarch* works with chance and coincidence to weave its tapestry of social affinities. Plotting, as the character of Raffles suggests, involves calculating risks. Determined “not to be played” by Raffles anymore, Bulstrode tries to explain “the fact that he had shown the risks of bribing him to be quite equal to the risks of defying him” (688). Unable to convince the man, Raffles later shows up at Stone Court very ill, which occasions another risky venture by Bulstrode; he authorizes Raffles’s death by allowing the continued administering of opium to him in the absence of more specific instructions by Lydgate. The “risk” of the semiconscious and muttering patient to expose Bulstrode and the “probability” of anyone learning of his role in Raffles’s death underscore that chance and risk intensify this death-bed scene.

Bulstrode’s complicity in Raffles’s death performs what the novel cannot: control Raffles and limit his influence. Whereas as the nomadicism of Raffles suggests a pattern

of unpredictable returns and disappearances as a facet of the novel's plot, the same unboundedness allows for his character to emerge as a figure for narrative processes as an emplotted narrative product: in him a reader can see illusion and illusionism working concomitantly. The story of Raffles, then, is not only that he is a figure on the move; his story is synonymous with the play of narrative movement itself. With his old acquaintance's passing Bulstode can secret away his past and attempt to rectify his errors in the present. But the novel itself fails to firmly locate Raffles only as a fictional illusion. Prior to his death, he experiences a delusion while under Bulstrode's care. Imagining a doctor present, Raffles declares to the fictional caretaker "that Bulstrode wanted to starve him to death out of revenge for tellings, when he never had told" (704). The risk the novel takes is that Raffles tells more than he should by exposing the novel's narrative machinery. His death, then, signifies its need to silence him and the additional story of the story that he carries with him, that of its production.

Reading Reality

An attentive reader, one most likely attuned to discourses of narrative and play or interested in realism or in the minor characters of literature, or a "critical reader" of the type described by Lewes in his essay, might begin to negotiate the complicated figure that Raffles becomes in *Middlemarch* after one or a series of readings. By the same token, a careful reader of Lewes's narrative of plot realizes that more is at stake in his praise for Austen: fictions should not only resemble everyday life, but that fictions should work according to the logistics of industrial capitalism's commodity culture.

Marx's well-known theory of commodity fetishism notes that labor divorced from

its product leads to a situation in which this product assumes a life separate from the labor that produces it and subsequently confronts a worker as something hostile.⁸¹ Lewes reproduces such a relationship by pitting narrative product (illusions) against the process that produces it (narrative plotting/illusionism) by privileging the former over the latter as the end of how a fiction should achieve its appearance of unity. The forces of narrative production and its product should work together as they do in *Pride and Prejudice*, but in a way that eliminates the traces of production in the fiction, much in the way that an illusionist attempts to conceal the techniques and artistry that produce an illusion. When a fiction functions accordingly, it does not explicitly pit the story of its production against the produced illusions as competitors vying for our attention as they do in *Tom Jones*. Rather, the dominance of the illusion is already a foregone conclusion for Lewes; a fiction simply must continue to maintain its command by preventing the forces of production from emerging in it. In other words, an author's formatting the construction of a plot remains an absent cause in the fiction it produces. Although the author and the creativity, energy, and labor that produce a fiction remain a part of the life of an illusion, readers ideally should experience only the illusion itself to propagate system of narrative that appears to self-generate. Such an aesthetic grants agency to the products or effects of a fiction without acknowledging what causes them into being. This stated goal is not only unrealistic, it also comes with risks.

The construction of plot emerges as an essential process of an author's formatting form and content. As the previous chapter mentions, Dickens does not simply select scenes and characters from life as already finished products and insert them in his novel. Rather, the content of *Oliver Twist*, though drawing from the reality of 1830s life in

London, is nevertheless formatted and presented to readers in a particular way that they in turn formalize by drawing on their own experiences, images, values, and associations. Lewes clearly formats the story of narrative plotting in a much less objective manner than he proposes to do. But the model of reading accompanying his program of plot presents its own obstacles by suggesting that readers should participate in the disappearance of the production of the stories they read. In other words, Lewes sees most readers as accomplices to his theory of plot – not those “skilled” readers that can penetrate the workings of Austen’s novel despite its natural-seeming plot – but that larger class of not-so-skilled readers that are unable to do so. As a function of this class of readers reading only for illusions/formatted content, the formalization of the illusions/content that are read simultaneously formalizes the absence of their process of formatting on the author side of production.

The ideal reader for Lewes, it would seem, becomes synonymous with the Victorian consumer of commodities who, under the power and spell of objects and entertainments on display, assumes the role of a spectator to the spectacle capitalism becomes. In a discussion of commodity culture, Walter Benjamin invokes Theodor Adorno, who writes that phantasmagoria is “a consumer item in which there is no longer anything that is supposed to remind us how it came into being. It becomes a magical object, insofar as the labor stored up in it comes to seem supernatural and sacred at the very moment when it can no longer be recognized as labor” (669). By positioning illusions as having no cause or giving the appearance that they cause themselves, Lewes expresses an aesthetic of narrative that commodifies illusions with the expectation that readers will consume them without considering their origin, history or production, and in

so doing reproduce the absence of the production that they do not even notice.

This disconnection between a reader and an author's aesthetics of production/formatting of a plot also, if it does not completely sever a reader from the latter, makes it more difficult for a reader to establish the aesthetic/extra-aesthetic relations inherent to the particularities involved in the process of formatting a novel's plot. While the character of Raffles reveals a particular ludic logistic of narrative plotting, this relationship remains an aesthetic concern. But at the same time, Raffles becomes an imaginary solution to very real social problems of the 1830s, the setting of *Middlemarch*.⁸² The character's portrayal as unattached to a particular locale, the way in which the novel enfolds illicit behavior and mobility of a certain sort into the identity of Raffles, cannot be divested from a wandering-settled dialectic that takes into consideration a population of laborers unmoored by enclosure and the privatization of property during the late eighteenth century and early decades of the nineteenth century.

While Raffles clearly is defined as a drifting criminal, the novel naturalizes wandering as deviance in him. He deviates not only from the settled lives of those inhabiting Middlemarch; Raffles is at odds with the very idea with settling and settlement which, as Raymond Williams has shown, becomes a value in and of itself, one that becomes entangled in ideas of paternalism, community, vagrancy, and the revision of Poor Laws.⁸³ In short, more value is placed on restricting mobility within burgeoning and revised economic structures and labor relations to the point where wandering itself becomes suspicious. Thus, it is not only the novel's narrative machinery that Raffles brings to light. He also illuminates *Middlemarch's* complicity in imagining mobility, wandering, and portability as inherently negative. This novel complements Lewes's

negative valuation of narrative wandering in plot by casting wandering as formatted content/illusion as equally negative. Both become markers of unproductivity, the former in the aesthetics of plotting the latter as reproducing a cultural narrative about the unproductive role of displaced laborers who no longer have a place in the new agrarian economy.

With its depiction of Raffles *Middlemarch* becomes an aesthetic cog that emplots itself within a more encompassing historical narrative machinery drawing from various arenas of culture. As a literary expression of a larger, extra-literary and historical conversation, Eliot's novel naturalizes a certain system of values that coalesce around wandering and settling. To extol that *Pride and Prejudice* looks so like the life of every day, then, takes on greater meaning. The particularities of Lewes's brand of naturalism cannot help but pull into it extra-aesthetic values when put to work. His understanding of illusionism encourages readers to practice the disappearance of the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic productive processes of formatting undertaken by authors. At the same time, it places extra demands on readers to make more apparent those extra-aesthetic relationships and values that Lewes's own essay elides, which includes the status of the professional and the professionalization of vocations that occurs during the long nineteenth century, including but not limited to that of the literary critic.⁸⁴ The important role of plot's "easy play," for instance, becomes an analog to and an extension of expressions of play that buttress habits and practices that distinguish the professional from the amateur athlete.

In tracing the development of the sporting culture or cult of athleticism that materializes in the last decades of the Victorian period, social historians often turn to the

influence of the muscular Christians, the game ethic of the boarding schools attributed to Cotton's headmastership at Marlborough that soon became an educational matter-of-fact for school boys and young men at university by the 1880s, and the tension between the amateur and professional sportsmen, for instance. The discourse informing this last example remains pertinent here. Amateur sportsmen of the later decades of the century most likely had been exposed to a game ethic at school, which instilled in the young men notions of fair play, an ideal of manliness, a competitive spirit that prepared them for the competition that awaited them upon their entry into an commercial and industrial economy that was expanding, as well as reinforcing the importance of individualism at the same time it instilled discipline and order by emphasizing teamwork when playing rugby or other sports (Holt 87).

The amateur sportsmen, products of the middle-classes or the cultural elite, also were expected to play in a certain way. Holt describes how "the complete amateur" "could play several games extremely well without giving the impression of strain . . . Practicing too much undermined natural grace and talent. For amateurs were all gentlemen, and gentlemen were not supposed to toil and sweat for their laurels" (99-100). Sweating and toiling while at play, it would seem, is reserved for the professional sportsman, whose ranks are filled by members of the working classes. Such a distinction leaves the impression that the amateur athlete at play does not have to work for his successes, that he achieves them naturally, as a matter of course, without effort or strain, perhaps even without practice. Lewes's essay becomes a tract that argues for an aesthetic of play that lends the appearance of a fiction not having to work to achieve its successes. His dissection of the deficiencies of Fielding's novel gravitates to this very center, how

the novel clumsily and excessively reveals the work and strain of its plot. While predating the rise of the ideological wedge that separates the amateur and the professional sportsman, Lewes's essay yet operates along the lines of this separation, favoring the organicism of *Pride and Prejudice* over the all-too-obvious toil of *Tom Jones*, which reveals the predisposition for an ideology of play that works to justify and naturalize middle-class ideologies as it works to bind his theory of fiction.

Additionally, a facet of Lewes's aesthetics of illusionism re-dresses the novel form by attempting to order the construction of narrative plotting along lines of the acceptable and unacceptable. Simon During and James W. Cook have noted the shift the nineteenth-century entertainment industry experiences when magicians and illusionists, previously on the fringes of acceptability, become a staple of urban venues visited by the middle-classes during the later decades of the period. Robert-Houdin, in particular, emerges as pivotal figure in this regard. He helps glean the mystical, eccentric, occultish, and superstitious aura surrounding earlier magic performances that prevented them from garnering larger audiences and the sanction of popular sentiment. Crafting a recognizably middle-class persona onstage, including a familiar style of dress that shed the exorbitant fashions preferred by earlier magicians and adopting a manner of speaking that was more direct and less reliant on "puns and play on words" (Robert-Houdin, qtd in Cook 192) which was complemented by a decidedly more explicit scientific program than previously witnessed, helped Robert-Houdin court a respectable order of spectator from the middle-classes. (Cook 191-192). Robert-Houdin, then, emerges as a performer who helped repackage the illusionist as a safe form of entertainment for the Victorian public at large.

To suggest that Lewes repackages fiction for Victorians would be too bold of an assumption and grant too wide an influence to his essay and theory. What he does, however, is to forge a link between the art of the fiction writer and the illusionist, in part, by appealing to middle-class values as Robert-Houdin does. The fundamental difference between the two projects – reinventing the magic show and theorizing fiction – is that fictions and novels were already a part of middle-class entertainments at the time Lewes writes his essay. He simply expresses an affinity and sympathy for middle-class values in order to elucidate the implications of a plot that plays easily, which becomes synonymous with the *ludian* drive of disciplined play discussed in the previous chapter.

But we cannot divorce the implications of his essay from the profession and the professionalization of the critical enterprise itself. If Dickens as an author of fiction reveals his middle-class pretensions, Lewes does so as a critic. Although Watt's thesis of the novel has undergone revision and review as my opening chapter suggests, perhaps his calculus – the novel's rise emerges as one and the same with the rise of the middle classes – remains limited because of the inherently self-imposed frame he uses to consider the ways in which a novel or essay – consciously or nonconsciously – utters its ideological pretensions.

Far from suggesting that Watt was right in the first place, I rather am suggesting that his appraisal could never be all right from the get go because of his insubstantial inattention to the relationship a novel, as an utterance comprised of smaller utterances, maintains with extra-literary utterances. My focus has been on extra-literary discourses of play, recreation, and leisure to show the way in which writers harness the play driving form and content by expressing its particularities that only come to light through the extra-

literary expressions. These latter utterances, as doubly extra, as apparently outside yet also re-appearing as aesthetic counterparts that particularize expressions of the play-drive from within, remain essential in coming to terms with the very idea of the novel form and the processes informing one's unique process of formatting. Lewes is not exempt from uttering his ideological leanings as a critic. The profession of the critic, his essay suggests, is to value those novels that adhere to standards of productivity that do not violate dominant cultural values. To be a critic is to formulate an easy criticism by targeting those novels, however canonical, that fail to aesthetically reinforce prevailing values and ideologies. A brief survey of nineteenth-century aesthetic tracts suggests that Lewes is not alone in resorting to play to consider varied aesthetic concerns.

Reading for the Play

Lewes's model of fiction maintains a sympathetic bond with Ruskin's thoughts on imaginative and unimaginative works of art. In the second volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin describes the operations of the imagination banishing from it "all that is extraneous" so "its works look as pure and true as nature itself." He adds that the truly imaginative work appears "as if it had been gathered straight from nature." As mentioned in the previous chapter an unimaginative work, however, reveals its "joints and knots," which in Lewes's lingo is equivalent to plot's creaking machinery. Lewes also reveals his inheritance for the value of unity, which becomes more explicit when he praises Austen's novel. Suggesting that the construction of plot should tend "towards the one point," however, marks – not necessarily instantiates – a shift in a historical discourse of beauty in the British tradition. Lord Shaftesbury, for instance, writes that a painter with "genius"

“understands the truth and unity of design” when considering the moral character of beauty. He also argues for the importance of a “general design” that ensure that “particulars” establish “a certain easiness of sight, a simple, clear, and united view, which would be broken and disturbed by the expression of any thing peculiar or distinct”⁸⁵ (17). It is not so much beauty but a concern for utility of a certain quality that drives Lewes’s program of plot.

The ends of easy play, it would appear, prevent the emergence of Ruskinian joints from creaking in a fiction – the appearance of naturalism, organicism, of a plot not being constructed – not the easy play that establishes relations among a plot’s unspecified elements functions is what concerns Lewes. But it is clear that play operates as a hinge, as a vital connective tissue that conjoins the elements of plot that he names (scenes and speeches) and those that he does not (incident, dialogue, description, and character). Lewes fails to specify exactly how this “easy play” works despite its seeming centrality to plot. At the very least, we can say with some assurance that this easy play performs real work, that it is a necessary operation of narrative plotting. And further, this easy play, despite having the burden of negotiating elements of plot named and unnamed, yet remains inherently limited.

The connotations of “an easy play and fluctuation of various elements” become clearer when considered in relation to the way in which an author establishes “real feeling and purpose” in a work. On the one hand “easy” refers to an effortlessness, a facility of expression that is not jarring or abrupt. On the other, it is yet intimately related to those superfluities that threaten a work’s feeling and purpose by denying them a place in the construction of plot. Such a principle of easy play, then, becomes the combined

expression of principles of economy and selection at work, effectively because correctly omitting the excessive and unnecessary from a plot. Easy play as a muted principle that yet is put to work in the name of, or as the combined name of economy and selection, becomes the secret toward which Lewes's own narrative of plot gravitates.

Easily missed because embedded within the principles of selection and economy that form the explicit core of Lewes's musings in this essay, is the important but limited role of this easy play as narrative binding. As a double binding agent, that which combines principles of economy and selection and accounts for the instantiation of the proper relations among plotted material, easy play, as a term, does not adequately reflect the complicated nature of the operations that Lewes associates with it. In this way he prefigures the way in which Peter Brooks, over a century later, posits the play of repetition as a fundamental process of plot that binds a narrative. Lewes's unexamined easy play looks forward to and in a way anticipates a work such as Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot*, while both works underestimate the serious work of play in their respective analyses of narrative.

But prior to moving into a reading of Brooks's essay, there are contemporaries to Lewes with which he is also in conversation regarding the relationship between play and plot that necessitate mentioning. For instance, recall Bulwer-Lytton's observation about plot, quoted in the introduction: a plot may have "to go back instead of forward – to wind, to vary, to shift interest from person to person – to keep even your principal hero, your principal actor, in the background" (31). On the verge of an explicit account of plot's ludism here, Bulwer yet gestures toward plot's play by emphasizing its fluctuations and varied movements and foci, which is to suggest the dynamics that Brooks will

describe in ludic terms. Additionally, Alexander Bain theorizes a model of plot that remains in debt to play, albeit in a vastly different arena. Consider the following footnote accompanying his discussion of why humans remain keenly interested in plots in *The Emotions and the Will* (1859): “The attractions of plot, in its narrowest sense, is due, largely, to the play of intellect and of will in curiosity and imaginative anticipation” (222).

While Lewes suggests that plot works by the easy play of its parts, Bain suggests that a plot creates an economy of pleasure that “plays” in the minds of readers, which negotiates terrains of subjective experience. Bain broaches phenomenological concerns here that echo Kant while anticipating Wolfgang Iser’s ludic theories of textuality. Negotiating the work of play in Lewes’s and Brooks’s models of plot reveals their respective if unavoidable blindspots, what an argument or theory carries with it but what may not be seen until later, by another, perhaps, because of what it most intensely pursues. Lewes and Brooks may fail to appreciate the work of play in plot, but at the same time, Brooks’s inadequate attention to the contributions of Bulwer-Lytton and Lewes to conceptions of plot during the nineteenth century reveals the historical holes in his theory. Lewes, Bulwer-Lytton, and Bain suggest that a loss of providential narratives not only spawned new narratives of origins and beginnings in the nineteenth century; the consideration of the mechanisms of fictional plots during this time enriches this loss by attempting to come to terms with narrative itself: how it works, what work it exacts upon us, and why we begin to consume them with greater frequency.

While Lewes strives for objectivity in his reading of narrative plotting, his principle of easy play here is less an objective reality as it is another expression of the

Victorian harnessing of play for productive ends.⁸⁶ He is not alone in so doing in the realm of the aesthetic. Ruskin's consideration of the "Grotesque Renaissance" finds him wrestling with the most appropriate forms of play for "noble art and for the nobleness of humanity" (127). Focusing on play "that incites laughter or recreation" rather than physical or intellectual forms, Ruskin hones in on the higher concerns of wit, humor, and fancy rather than the "sportiveness" that we share with animals. He also hits that familiar Victorian refrain, that a "healthy manner of play is necessary for a healthy manner of work." Echoing the Schillerian observation that humans have an instinct for playfulness, Ruskin uses this notion to class individuals into four general groups based on the degree that this instinct is indulged or repressed: those who play wisely, necessarily, inordinately and those who do not play at all (128).

Playing wisely is limited to those who have time and the means to train their minds to reach this ideal condition of mind. Shedding the disposition for "childish play," individuals who learn to play wisely "attain closeness with God" and "open themselves to the heavenly doctrines" (128). In contrast, those who play necessarily do so as a result of toiling away at "labors that exhaust the energies of the system" (129). Lacking the time and resources of the privileged who can dedicate themselves to more lofty and edifying regimes of play, the laborer seeks play where it may be found most easily and without any purpose or end except in this play itself. This play becomes a caesura in an endless cycle of work from which the laborer will not be able to escape. Despite realizing the plight of this sort of laborer, Ruskin observes that the "perfect" society revolves around those who think and those who work. Perhaps realizing the unreality of this ideal, he concludes his meditation on play by marking out those who play "inordinately" and those

who never play. If this last group of laborer are so oppressed that they neither possess the time or the will to play, the former class makes “amusement their only object” in life. For Ruskin, this means that their work remains “unfinished,” and further, that such individuals remain a drain on a community’s productivity by ceaselessly engaging in such unprofitable patterns of behavior.

In Ruskin’s catalog, not surprisingly, play becomes a means to various ends: edification, productivity, spirituality, and responsibility, as well as emerging as a program underpinning a political and social economy that bars a laboring class from the luxuries enjoyed by those benefiting from this laboring class. In such a program, play loses its potential as a disruptive force, a site of excess that might trouble such a regime, much in the way that Lewes prevents play from doing so as an economy of plot by formatting it only as “easy” play. Both the intellectual milieu – utilitarianism, Comtean positivism, industry, productivity, work – and recent political realities home and abroad – revolutionary instability on the continent, Chartism, and corn-law demonstrations – authorize Ruskin and Lewes to hem in the possibility of play, to secure its expressions to stable ends that do not upset the dominant social order and the values underpinning it. Ruskin’s organization of play may be more explicitly politicized, but Lewes’s easy play cultivates similar principles that do not necessarily arise from within plot’s order as they emerge as an ordering principle that Lewes imposes onto both play and plot to order both in a particular way for particular ends.

Eneas Sweetland Dallas, on the other hand, finds in the German aesthetic tradition a history of play celebrated as an end in itself, not as the means to ends outside of it. Calling for a science of criticism in *The Gay Science* (1866), which echoes Lewes’s

advocating for a more rigorous criticism driven by principles, Dallas forges a comparative analysis of European aesthetics as an opening gambit to creating such a system. The “systematic” thought of German aestheticians such as Schelling and Hegel appeals to him as thinkers who work downward from the hypothetical into the factual. Rather than remaining rooted in a British aesthetic tradition that privileges the idea of the imagination and its processes, the vital role of pleasure and play in German aesthetic theory offers Dallas to “balance the formal approaches of Renaissance tradition with the pursuit of ideas that defines German philosophy (31). Dispelling classic Aristotelian and Platonic philosophies of art, he rejects an aesthetics grounded purely in the former’s mimeticism and the latter’s ideality. Rather, Dallas boldly claims that “the immediate goal of art is to give pleasure” (89).

To support the maxim “the production of pleasure as the first principle of art” (93), Dallas makes a distinction between philosophy and art: conscious effort results in philosophy while unconscious activity results in art (69). While acknowledging the role of conscious thought in forwarding knowledge and the sciences, he also suggests an underappreciation of “unconscious life.” For Dallas, art becomes a repository that opens the unconscious to conscious life, as it reaches to “something beyond science, beyond knowledge.” Pleasure is the most approximate idea that expresses the unconscious life of art that exceeds the understanding of science and knowledge. But yet Dallas maintains that we need science to understand art, as criticism functions as the science of the laws and conditions under which pleasure is produced (91). The historical absence of such a science occurs, according to Dallas, “because of a moral contempt of it,” of pleasure itself (92).

While Dallas may be overstating his case, one only has to consider Ruskin's classification of play or even Mill's philosophy of utilitarianism to see what might make him make such a claim. Mill, for instance, may not have a moral contempt for all kinds of pleasure; however, his preference for certain kinds of pleasure serves as grounding principles for his brand of utilitarianism. The "superiority," "uncostliness," and "permanence" of "mental over bodily pleasures," according to Mill, have been proven time and again, obviously making such pleasures more "valuable" and more "desirable" than the bodily sort. But rather than seeking common ground with the Mills of the world in the realm of the political and the social with regard to principles of pleasure, Dallas carves out an undermined region of aesthetics. Admitting that pleasure is an "indefinite term that it is "easily misunderstood," he also accentuates that aesthetic pleasure "is not impure" (118). Not of the body or beyond consciousness as an unconsciousness or "under-consciousness," pleasure emerges as an aesthetic economy of spontaneity in which "art comes of pleasure as well as goes to it." If there is an impurity to Dallas's economy of pleasure, it is that pleasure and play appear as synonymous terms and/or processes. Casually summing up the work of German philosophers, Dallas writes that the likes of Schiller and Kant theorize art as encouraging "the play or pleasure of the mind, embodied for the sake of pleasure" (160). A double pleasure for Dallas, then, conditions his aesthetic theory: pleasure as play becomes the means for pleasure as an end. Here, play as pleasure becomes a principle of work, the production end of pleasure that allows it to be experienced and enjoyed concurrently as its own product.

To be sure, Dallas's reading does not forward or complicate the German tradition on which he draws in any way. *The Gay Science*, instead, risks simplifying some of the

abstruseness and suggestiveness plaguing German idealist philosophy that Kant's transcendental method instantiates. For instance the particularities of the play-as-pleasure formulation that interests Kant in his third critique unfold as a relation among the imagination, understanding, reason, and judgment, each of which respectively arises as a complicated and multi-faceted intellectual economy comprising intuitions, representations, appearances, and sensibility. Aesthetic experience, for Kant, occurs in-between understanding and reason, freeing itself from the concepts of the former and the dictates of the latter. In this middling space, the powers of the mind enjoy a freedom of play that otherwise remain bound to rational ends and goals. While Kant suggests that the aesthetic may lack purpose in its freedom, it yet is productive: it produces new relations among the faculties, yields pleasure, and becomes the only expression of absolute freedom available to human subjects. It is the conception of such freedom inherent to the aesthetic that spurs Schiller often-quoted passage (paraphrased here) that man is most himself when at play, which opens up the possibility of his reconnecting a moral purpose to aesthetics by using the latter as an educational and social rubric to re-envision the conception of the political state.

But in Dallas's re-visioning of aesthetics through a principle of pleasure for a British reading public, he also reinforces a principle of play: play is that which establishes or accounts for the productive relations in an aesthetic object and/or those informing the subjective experience of an aesthetic object, which as the last chapter suggests, also maintains a productive/creative relation to the aesthetic object that is contemplated, read, or consumed. The observations of Schiller, Kant, Dallas, as well as Lewes, suggest as much about play as they do about a theory of aesthetics dependent

upon the work of play. While an aesthetic object or an aesthetic experience, as events, may not be knowable without recourse to play, at the same time, play cannot be understood except as a conduit that establishes architectonic relations necessary to conceptualize and build aesthetic systems forwarded by those above. Lewes, then, contributes to a certain history of aesthetics by employing play, in his case, easy play, to account for plot's systematic relations.

Embedded within the principles of selection and economy that form the explicit core of Lewes's musings in this essay is the important but limited role of this easy play as narrative binding. As a double binding agent, that which combines principles of economy and selection and accounts for the instantiation of the proper relations among plotted material, easy play, as a concept, does not adequately reflect the complicated nature of the operations that Lewes associates with it. While the occasion – resituating the historical appraisal of *Tom Jones* – becomes his ostensible motivation, his principle of play, which architectonically conditions the construction of his theory of the properly constructed plot, also opens up his essay to more extensive nineteenth-century aesthetic and extra-aesthetic relations, architectonic, too, encompassing a much more expansive aesthetic and social field of utterances. Both fields, the interrelated and productive terrains of plot and those larger questions of the aesthetic and the social that such an easy play broaches, yield historical utterances that Peter Brooks's foray into nineteenth century texts fails to bring into his inquiry of narrative plotting. Lewes, then, prefigures the way in which Peter Brooks, over a century later, posits the play of repetition as a fundamental process of plot that binds a narrative. Lewes's unexamined easy play looks forward to and in a way anticipates a work such as Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot*,

while both works underestimate the serious work of play in their respective analyses of narrative.

While Lewes's essay helps construct a story of literary realism in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Peter Brooks revitalizes our conception of what plot is during the middle years of the 1980s in a compelling series of readings of nineteenth-century narratives. Like Lewes, who turns to novels of an earlier tradition to exemplify his organic model of fiction, Brooks looks to novelists such as Dickens to formulate the operations of plot. Each writer has his reasons for doing so. Lewes's essay, in part, works against the conception continuing into the 1860s that positioned *Tom Jones* as a standard of comparison "which is to give law in art." It is clear he finds much fault in such a sentiment, given the litany of faults he finds in the novel. Brooks, too, mines an earlier narrative tradition to exemplify his theory of plot, while not acknowledging a critical tradition that he unwittingly echoes.

Brooks refers to plot as an "activity of shaping" that directs a "line of intention and portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning." Recall that for Lewes, a plot must not "betray" an author's "intention." Brooks also echoes Lewes's observation concerning the importance of the interplay between scenes and passages a plot establishes in a fiction, by suggesting a principle of plot is its "interconnectedness and intention" that moves through the incidents, episodes and actions of a narrative, which in turn creates readerly desire. But it is the finer details of plot's operations that occupy Brooks. To this end he turns to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

This short work by Freud outlines a process of life from beginning to end, and accounts for the way in which each individual life becomes an expression of what Brooks

refers to as the masterplot of life: the return of a life to quiescence or death. Brooks understands a fictional plot working in a similar fashion. It, too, like a living organism is born to die. A centerpiece to Brooks's larger examination of plot is the essay "Freud's Masterplot." In this selection Brooks considers the drives for life and death, for instance, that concurrently work to generate tension and meaning in a narrative. The middle of a plot is the space in which returns and repetitions work to produce such textual significance, tension, and energetics that delay the inevitable ending. Concomitantly, theses dynamics make an ending more pleasurable by preventing its premature arrival and by accumulating more desire for it in a reader.

Attenuating ourselves to the plot of narrative plotting in Brooks's essay, we find that a vital nexus of its textual energetics unfolds through the return to play. The work of plotting as play becomes most apparent in Brooks's discussion of the play of repetition: "As with the play of repetition and the pleasure principle, forward and back, advance and return interact to create the vacillating and apparently deviating middle" (105). Here as elsewhere, Brooks often returns to a discourse of play in order to elucidate his own narrative of plot. "Play" and the family of related terms and concepts he deploys ("playground," "space of play," "instinctual play") becomes the means by which he attempts to make us understand the complex because coterminous operations of plot enveloping drives for life and death and the production of detours, delays, and postponements that allow for the accruing of meaning and pleasure that an ending releases. In so doing, as with Lewes, Brooks invites us to consider the possibility that play does not only function as an effective way to express the working of narrative's

drives, but rather that play itself emerges as a productive drive and functional dynamic of plot.

By turning to psychoanalysis as a model for plot, Brooks forges new connections between the work of Freud and aesthetics, moving beyond the cruder psychoanalyzing of author/reader/character that was still common in Anglo-American criticism when he wrote his work on plot. Much in the vein of Dallas, Brooks turns to a principle of pleasure to ground his theory of plot, but one the latter inherits from a Freudian narrative of life. According to Freud, the pleasure principle maintains a psychic equilibrium that works to keep excitation in the mental apparatus as low as possible or in a constant state. While protecting us from external influences that would endanger our lives, the pleasure principle simultaneously prevents our most fundamental instinct – to return to inanimacy – from overtaking or influencing so decidedly our life's narrative by ending it prematurely. Maintaining such a psychic economy, the balancing act performed by the pleasure principle and how it guides our path to our originary state, however, is complicated by what Freud terms our sexual instincts. These instincts seek to prolong life and renew it at the same time that our death instincts steer us toward that original inanimate state that precedes life and doubles as death. With this plot of life from Freud's *Beyond*, Brooks begins to re-conceptualize the movements and work of narrative plotting as the more dynamic structuration rather than static structure.

One of his opening strategies in moving beyond structuralism and formalism into a more dynamic model of plot is to quote a passage from Derrida's essay "Force and Signification," which undertakes to show that forms and structures – and thus formalisms and structuralisms – are formalized from without, by a subject that actively shapes them

in their pursuit: "Form fascinates when we no longer have force to understand force from within" (xiv). Underappreciated dynamics of temporality and desire, for Brooks, open the study of plot to a model of drives, energetics, and textual desire through Freud's economic model of the psyche.⁸⁷

However, Derrida's essay equates Freudianisms and Marxisms as potentially limiting the possibility of tapping a literary form's force by determining beforehand the values and meaning of a work of art: "if 'literary history' (even when its techniques and its 'philosophy' are renewed by 'Marxism,' 'Freudianism,' etc.) is only a restraint on the internal criticism of the work, then the structuralist moment of this criticism has the counterpart role of being the restraint on an internal geneticism, in which value and meaning are reconstituted and reawakened in their proper historicity and temporality" (14). Later in this essay Derrida equates force as the opposite of language to suggest the need of critics to use language against itself, in order to resist its ability to overcome force (28-29). Perhaps Derrida is right to say that language and force are opposites. But perhaps it is more accurate to suggest that language becomes the necessary medium by which textual force is organized by an author or reader according to the discourse of a philosophical or critical model each brings to bear upon a particular work. Brooks's dependence upon the language (and structure) of psychoanalysis and his reformatting it as the language of plot (which is a reformatting, too), despite its dynamism, is a dynamism of a certain order, the imposition of an ordering and pattern of organization.

As is well known, the early Derrida wields a conceptual apparatus to resist an onto-theological ordering of Western philosophy from within this tradition. Writing, the trace, and play, for instance, emerge as concepts and tools to rethink fundamental binaric

relations (absence/presence, being/becoming, writing/speech, center/supplement, etc.), as well as the occasion to coin philosophical neologisms (pharmakon, hymen, economimesis, hauntology, etc.). His canonical essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences" builds on the observations of "Force and Signification" by illuminating that the center of a structure remains a function of a ludic economy that authorizes a certain kind of play among its elements, while concurrently disallowing others. Derrida describes a centered structure as relying on "a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is itself beyond the reach of play" (279). Lewes immobilizes the construction of plot according to such a model by instantiating the easy play that reassures a novel aesthetic will not violate his principles of economy and selection. As Derrida suggests of positivist essays of Lewes's ilk, the gravitational pull of the latter's easy play already contains within it principles, organizational strategies, and logics prior to its introduction into the plot of narrative plotting. The latter's use of play in this way and in this setting suggests just as much about the structures and ideology structuring this play as it does about this play's structuring work in plot.

In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida deconstructs a history of privileging speech over writing in the Western philosophic tradition that originates with Plato.⁸⁸ According to Derrida, who begins by announcing a recourse to the "force of play" in his readings, Plato limits the play of the pharmakon, an overdetermined concept that resonates as both poison and cure until Plato restricts its dual meanings. Derrida emphasizes how the pharmakon operates as "the movement, the locus and the play: (the production of) difference" (127) and equates it with a distinct type of writing that for Plato is "a going or

leading astray” (71). Positing that the pharmakon’s sur-logical and ambivalent status “constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.)” (127), Derrida situates the pharmakos constellation as the condition of possibility that lends Western metaphysics its most important philosophical binaries through Plato’s decision to interrupt or block its oscillations.

We would do well to read Derrida through Derrida here, because if the pharmakos is the play that links opposites could not play also link form and content and make the one cross into the other as their conditioning relation? Derrida does not take up this question in his reading of Plato, but he does in passing refer to this relation in “Force and Signification.” He mentions the “empathy between form and content, which makes possible the work and the access to its unity” when summarizing varied expressions of a default conception of totality wielded by philosophers and literary critics in relation to questions of aesthetics and criticism of works of art (7). Less empathetic and more a productive ludic, the form and content relation arises in a play that may not “escape metaphysical oppositions” as Derrida proposes that any resistance to structuralism must. Rather such a ludic energetic opens up the very idea of what lends a literary work its sense of being total, not so much as a function of being out of sight, but of not being seen or appreciated in spite of its presence as a primary agent of totalization. While the following chapter takes up this issue with regard to the impossibility of systematically resisting narrative structure in favor of establishing lines of flight from it, we need to consider the implications of a Derridean architectonic ludic in relation to Brooks’s work

on plot. As with any meditation of play, there is a risk of going astray, of perhaps, being played by play in its consideration.

If Brooks can claim that Freud plots *Beyond* in ways “that have little to do with its original intention,” (97), his reading of Freud makes Brooks susceptible to a similar observation. Because what Brooks implicitly plots at the center of his reading of *Beyond* is how narrative plotting becomes synonymous with playing. The return of play in this chapter and in the larger work of which it is a part, describes the ludic economy on which plot depends to shape a narrative, in other words, its play-drive.

Brooks begins his essay on Freud’s masterplot by revisiting child’s play and Freud’s account of the game of *fort da* in *Beyond*. He sees the machinations of plot establishing a form of narrative mastery that parallels the way in which repeating the game helps Freud’s grandson master feelings of abandonment felt when the child helplessly watches his mother leave him. Such repetition, according to Brooks, becomes a suggestive schematic by which a plot binds a narrative into meaningful units. Freud’s model of repetition as mastery allows Brooks to theorize that a narrative generates meaning, in part, by returning to or by the return of scenes, moments, and images, for example, in which repetition “hovers ambiguously between the idea of reproduction and of change” (100). Such a model of repetition as a mastering agent of plot complicates Lewes’s reading of narrative plotting.

Remember that his model suggests a faulty plot results when an authors “wanders into mere reflection and digression.” Regarding *Tom Jones* in particular, Lewes’s critique rests on the mechanical repetition of superfluities, those moments that he defines as excessive according to the demands of easy play he imposes on plot. But read through

Brooks's model, one might suggest that these supposed moments of excess still work to bind the novel in their repetition, which is what allows Lewes to state his case. Such binding, however, amounts to an economy of waste and distraction for Lewes. His easy play, a center of the type critiqued by Derrida, puts itself out of play while functioning as the means to push novelistic expressions from the realm of meaning under conceptual umbrellas of unproductivity such as excessive, exaggeration, and superfluity. If we continued to follow a Derridean trajectory, the wasteful in this novel would be shown to be the center, not the extraneous supplement as offered by Lewes, because it does still organize and order Fielding's plot, even if in violation to Lewes's liking. But Brooks's model does this work for us: "the energy generated by deviance, extravagance, excess . . . maintains the plot in its movement through the vacillating play of the middle, where repetition as binding works toward the generation of significance" (108). Excess and other transgressive economies do not threaten plot; their energetics bolster plot's machinations.

An essential movement of Brooks's own narrative is the productive bond that emerges between middles and play: "the vacillating play of the middle" (108) and previously quoted "As with the play of repetition and the pleasure principle, forward and back, advance and return interact to create the vacillating and apparently deviating middle" (105). Terms such as "vacillate" and constructions such as "forward and back" and "advance and return" emphasize the play of the middle as synonyms for play.

Gadamer's hermeneutic of the aesthetic and aesthetic experience helps to clarify:

If we examine how the word 'play' is used and concentrate on its so-called transferred meanings we find talk of the play of light, the play of

waves, the play of component in a bearing-case, the inter-play of limbs, the play of forces, the play of gnats, even a play on words. In each case what is intended is the to-and-fro movement which is not tied to any goal which would bring it to an end. (93)

Prior to this passage Gadamer contends that play refers to “neither to the attitude nor even to the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor to the freedom of a subjectivity expressed in play, but to the mode of being of the work of art itself” (91). If play does belong to the work of art itself, one of its expressions in the aesthetics of narrative plotting in a novel is the to-and-fro movement identified by Brooks. It would appear that the middle is defined by its oscillating activity. According to Brooks the “Aristotelian middle” is a “state of tension” that prevents a narrative from returning too quickly the quiescence that spawns its journey toward its own ending. It is also “the space of retard, postponement, error, and partial revelation—is the place of transformation” (92). The “middle as detour” prolongs this process in a plot to secure the proper ending that elicits the most desire along the way and the most effective ending that releases the tension that it has accrued. The work of this detour, which prevents a plot from short-circuiting or ending too soon, complicates the middle-play relationship established by Brooks.⁸⁹ The psychoanalytic model of plot he uses, which accounts for an organism’s life-trajectory in terms of delaying the impending if proper death at the inception of its birth, “necessitates the middle as detour” (107).

However, soon hereafter the play of the middle is itself destabilized and put into play. The Freudian bio-narrative that thrusts life and death drives into constant tension in a fictional plot (we are born to die but we must live in order to delay the inevitable death-

in-waiting) “re-establishes the necessary distance between beginning and end, maintained through the play of those drives that connect them yet prevent the one collapsing back into the other . . . crucial to the space of this play are the repetitions serving to bind the energy of the text so as to make its final discharge more effective” (108). If the playing-middle as detour creates the distance that prohibits beginnings from collapsing into endings and vice versa, Brooks’s description divides the middle’s play into two: it concurrently maintains the drives for life and death, which suggests the active role play assumes in plot at the same time play emerges as a space in which this/its activity occurs. As a productive drive and terrain of plot play becomes a, if not the, regulating and determining structural center of narrative activity. An essential dimension of play’s ordering imperative also demands that it reproduce itself.

This surplus of play colors Brooks’s account of the way in which an “excessive” energetic helps to maintain the movements of plot. On the one hand, it speaks to his own narrative, the way in which his plot of plot cannot be written without recourse to a ludic discourse, a strategic rhetorical center that accrues with significance as his essay progresses toward its ending. On the other hand, play, as an excessive because double economy, establishes a relationship with itself in order to negotiate the demands of other drives and energetics: it is a drive that territorializes other drives of plot while emerging as a territory of plot itself. In his introduction Brooks suggests that plot “cuts across” the story/discourse opposition. A function of this cutting across is that play cuts across itself, cutting over and into its twin expressions as drive and space. More than giving life to plot, however, I want to suggest that this double play gives a fictional narrative the sense that it is a living form by establishing relations between drives for form and content.

Brooks demonstrates the complications involved in plot's necessary adherence to the demands of beginnings, middles, and endings. This tripartite relationship so vital to theorizing the ludic dynamics of plot, however, only begins to accumulate significance outside of the theoretical models imposed upon it when it is read through particular novels. For instance, when Brooks discusses the plot of *Great Expectations*, his psychoanalytic discourse and models, while never disappearing, are exemplified through the returns and repetitions of the unique form and content the play of the novel's plot helps to instantiate. The idea of Schiller's living form and Brooks's life and death drives of narrative assume new possibilities when considered outside of the former's expressing ideal beauty and the latter's interrogation of plot. Each project reinforces the work of play that contributes to the uniqueness of a particular work of art. To describe a novel as a living form, rather than to suggest the way it concretizes the beautiful, might more accurately reflect the particular activity of its architectonic relations that establish the appearance of totality, an appearance that often obscures the intense dynamisms lending literary forms their unity. As Brooks depicts, narrative plotting becomes its own complicated field of relations. But at the same time, this field becomes a productive terrain in the larger architectonics of a novel as an expression of the relationship between form and content.

For plot to shape a narrative, for it to become synonymous with design and intention, it becomes a ludic process and terrain that negotiates the productive tensions of form and content. Plot, which works by playing drives off one another, also replicates the story of play that Brooks writes by becoming double. When considered as an architectonic process of narrative, it is essentially a productive if complicated dynamic.

But when considered as part of a novel form, plot can also be seen as a space (in-play/as-play), an active territory through which form and content meet as the conditioning agent of the other. From this perspective, at the direction of an author, plot emplots unique content into a narrative by giving it a particular form.

By furnishing content a form for expression, plot simultaneously uses content as the means by which an author formalizes the form embodying a plot's beginning, middle, and end. Plot, in the middle of story and discourse, in the middle of beginning and ending, cannot avoid playing the particularizing middle between form and content at the same time. The life of a novel, not just its plot, then, depends upon the play of content and form that plot generates and negotiates most intensively. As we shall see, two novels, *Vanity Fair* and *Wuthering Heights*, productively use alternate rubrics to Lewes's easy play in different narrative terrains. Thackeray's instantiates a network of sympathetic relations among author, characters, and readers with his reflexive ludic, while Brontë's novel mobilizes an excessive narratorial logic that productively reformulates the game of *fort da*.

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FORMAL RECREATIONS: PLAY AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

Volume 2

By

Brian Olszewski

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„Sympathetic Inter-Lude: *Vanity Fair*’s Sym-aesthetic

“To ‘render’ the simplest surface, to produce the most momentary illusion, is a very complicated business.” Henry James, *The Art of Fiction*

“Who will be open where there is no sympathy, or has call to speak to those who never can understand?” William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*

The business of producing illusions and the aesthetic of illusionism in *Vanity Fair* becomes a bit more complicated than Lewes’s realist model of fiction allows: we never forget that Thackeray’s characters are fictional because the novel repeatedly reminds readers of the fictionality of Amelia, Becky and the rest of *Vanity Fair*’s population. By harnessing a ludic potential that Lewes denies plot in his illusory economy, *Vanity Fair* explicitly carries into the story the story of its own aesthetic of illusionism. For the novel’s narrator, to tell the life-stories of Amelia and Becky is concurrently tell of the art(fulness) that underpins the telling. While Thackeray may not instantiate the easy because inconspicuous play of its elements as Lewes suggests any plot should, he does suggest how easily he can format his fictional narrative to another narrative economy by revealing rather than concealing his novel’s artifice.

Vanity Fair explicitly breaks down a number of aesthetic terrains of novelistic production: the separation between aesthetic production in general and the material conditions of production for fiction writers of the era, the distance between authorial and readerly production (the formatting – formalization distinction), and the boundary between narrative process (illusionism) and narrative product (illusion). In Thackeray’s hands, the world of his novel becomes a puppet/show/spectacle, an ostentatious theatre that becomes synonymous with Becky Sharpe’s own performative aesthetic. Teasing out

the implications of Thackeray's formatting his novel around these architectonic relations turns Lewes's model of construction inside out, in part, by destabilizing the interior-exterior binary underpinning the dominant notions of sympathy. Not only does Thackeray hope to establish a network of sympathy that circulates among author-narrator-character-reader. Sympathy, as a Victorian expression of good play reflecting an inner generosity and nature, works as a driving force behind the creation of a novel such as *Vanity Fair*, as the serialized nature of its original publication allowed for readers to commune with an author during its composition. However, at the same time, the theatricality of the novel, a trait that it shares with *Becky Sharp*, suggests another sort of sympathetic relation that troubles the first as an expression of dubious play that is fleeting and illusory.⁹⁰

At the core of this novel, then, is a dialectic if not performance of the proper and the improper: Thackeray's organizing his novel around sympathy and theatricality is less a contradictory aesthetic as much as a feat of showmanship highlighting that relationships among people and those architectonic relations of his novel aesthetic abide by different ludic rubrics of production and thus require alternative modes of evaluation. The improper-as-theatricality, in short, assumes the status of the proper as a guiding logic of the novel's aesthetic.

Showing the Mechanisms: The Entertaining Arts of the Business/Busyness

Early in the novel Jos Sedley takes Becky to "the panorama of Moscow." Nothing more is said about the panorama itself. However, the theatrics of Thackeray's novel cultivate an aesthetic that draws upon the art/artifice of such optic attractions. Richard Altick's description of the recurring if diminishing appeal of Victorian iterations of the

Eidophusikon suggests that outlandish titles of such ingenious and complicated feats of visual artistry were used to “to divert attention from the staleness of the show” (217). These displays of mechanical dexterity that often represented a complex scenario or morphed from one scene to another to form a narrative series, however, may have suffered from taking on too much.

For instance, The Akolouthorama, which had a run in 1844 at 213 Piccadilly promised a “‘Novel Mechanical and Pictorial Exhibition’ entitled ‘The Shipwreck, Depicting the various Perils in the Adventurous Life of a Sailor’” (217). The Alethorama, which ran a year later at the Princess’s Concert Room “advertised ‘Animated Illusions’ in five scenes: the Palace of Santa Felice, the Maas at Rotterdam, St. Martin’s Dyke in Iceland, the Castle of Doornwerd, and the S - - - at S - -” (217). It seems, however, that its “2,000 figures” did not perform without complication. Altick includes the following description of the Alethorama reported by *The Times*: “the eye” “was continually annoyed by seeing the machinery which worked it” (217). In other words, the functioning of the machinery that produced the Alethorama’s illusions was too obvious, too apparent and thus a distraction to the show, at least for one *The Times* reporter. Altick’s gloss casts the Alethorama’s failures as resulting from the presence of too much show for an audience to negotiate.

A recurring metaphor used by Wolfgang Iser in his reading of the novel, however, suggests that its particular aesthetic emerges as a fictional “panorama.” This metaphor reveals a commonality of aesthetic production linking *Vanity Fair* and other forms of nineteenth-century visual entertainments invested in illusions. For Iser, *Vanity Fair* “not only offers a panorama of contemporary reality but also reveals the way in which the

abundance of details has been organized, so that the reader can participate in the organization of events and thus gain the ‘sentiment of reality’” (104). He also writes that “the reader can only view the social panorama in the constantly shifting perspectives which are opened up for him by” the “Protean narrator” (106).

Perhaps Thackeray would object to Iser’s word choice here, given his adverse reaction to his own visit to the Diorama in 1850, which he christens the “Tenebroama.”⁹¹ But Altick suggests that within years of the rise in popularity of the panorama in the late eighteenth century and the diorama in the early nineteenth, the terms, in addition to meaning “whatever exhibitors wanted them to mean” (173) spawned a “craze” of other entertainments that incorporated the suffix “orama.” Altick even notes that a monthly appeared on the stands in 1806 titled the *Literary Panorama* (173). Thackeray’s novel may not explicitly announce itself as a literary panorama, even though it inspires such a reading in Iser. But presenting itself as an “exhibition” (as “Before the Curtain” does), at the very least, situates *Vanity Fair* as participating in the aesthetic of popular, visual entertainments that includes the family of “oramas.”

An 1843 article appearing in *The Penny Magazine* titled “Portable Diorama. – Dissolving Views,” describes how to make a diorama out of a small box, linen and transparent paper, among other items. The article concludes, however, with an account of a “superior kind or phantasmagoric exhibition or ‘magic-lantern,’” that opens up new possibilities in the field of optical entertainments.⁹² The process is simple enough: images on two separate lantern slides occupy the same space on a wall or reflective surface “in such a manner that one shall gradually disappear while the other comes into sight” (3). Using a cover or shutter allows a showman to exhibit one image with the other remaining

hidden until it is ready for its appearance. At the same time, the disappearance of the first is staged.

The narrative machinery of *Vanity Fair* does not use any such shutter. But it does establish if not a dissolving view, then the dissolving of its content/illusions for a reader when the narrator digresses into a commentary that underscores the fictionality of the fiction he tells. For instance, describing Becky's carriage ride with Sir Pitt (during which she is made to sit outside of the coach) impels "the writer of these pages" to reminisce about taking "the same remarkable journey" (73). Here readers are reminded that the story being read fluctuates according to the whim of the master of ceremonies. The content of the novel is at his mercy. In this way he operates as the narratorial pivot or conduit that manages whether the fictional world inhabited by Amelia and Becky remains in "sight" or whether it recedes in favor of an aside about the fiction (or supposed reality). While this is not a new or unique aesthetic of the novel form, Thackeray's expression of this technique becomes a central marker of his novel-as-theatre.⁹³

According to Iser, Amelia and Becky lack "awareness" that "illusions" continue to be a driving force in their lives. But as a consequence of the narrator's interrupting the "life" of the narrative's illusions, the novel, in part, remains driven by a self-awareness of its own fictionality. Thackeray the novelist-illusionist, then, remains keenly aware of the potential for his novel to transform an illusion, the end-product in Lewes's theory, as the means to produce additional ends, such as actively cultivating sympathy among readers by activating the novel's machinery as an explicit story-element. The "play-acting" that Iser understands as being synonymous with the novel's characterization of the way in which inhabitants of *Vanity Fair* interact with one another, (111) then, can be extended to

the novel, via Thackeray's string-pulling, as acting a part in the drama of its own making.

It does so not so much by creating an impassable divide between illusion and reality as Iser suggests, in which reality refers to an approximation of the real world. Instead the novel forges a relationship between them that only appears to instantiate such a gulf. Part of the gamesmanship of the novel's play-acting is to be deceptive in another way, to mobilize as part of its illusory economy only the appearance, not the reality, of the chasm between illusion and reality. A guiding aesthetic here is the reality of the illusion-as-illusion. This aesthetic of illusionism becomes just as real, if not more real for a reader, than the world Thackeray mocks. The illusion-as-illusion aesthetic, then, puts pressure on our understanding of the real in this novel, which is an issue that readers must judge for themselves: is the real of the novel tied to the world it represents, or is it located in the activity of undercutting this reality? Or more accurately, how should we understand this relationship that pits two realities in seeming opposition?

Richard Altick suggests audiences contended with a similar quandary when witnessing the mechanical ingenuity on display in Jacquet-Droz's *Spectacle Mechanique* (1776). The skill in which Jacquet-Droz brought together "living beings" and inanimate objects in his show of automatons, which "were less mechanical and more 'realistic,' gave his productions the 'the illusion of life.' His exhibition inspired admiration for its mimetic quality and its technical wizardry, but posed a hurdle that some spectators found difficult to overcome, according to Altick, who asks: "Which was the spectator to admire more, the illusive representation of life or the sheer gadgetry involved in producing that illusion?" (65). The exhibition that *Vanity Fair* becomes might impel some to ask: what should a reader admire about a novel that put so much life into revealing the production

of its illusions?

Not hiding the fact that its illusions are illusions allows the novel to “act” as though the gulf between illusion and reality is greater than it seems. Because in reality, part of the novel’s act, performance, or exhibition can be seen as forging a different bond between an illusory world that professes to reproduce the foils of society’s ills and the requisite aesthetic activity by a novelist to do so. In *Vanity Fair* trafficking to and fro between the illusion-as-reproduction-of-reality and producing the reality of the illusion-as-illusion ultimately emerges as the novel’s reality. One comment by the narrator becomes emblematic of the various ludic economies conditioning the novel’s aesthetic effect that is Iser’s focus. This comment appears when the characters migrate to Belgium under the command of Wellington for the campaign against Napoleon. The move to such a world-stage impels the narrator to reflect the movement of his own story: “Our history is destined in this chapter to go backwards and forwards in a very irresolute manner seemingly” (234).

Echoing a rubric of play that underpins Gadamer’s theory of aesthetic experience, Iser reminds us that “a to-and-fro movement” “is basic to play,” (208). The narrator’s revelation, that the chapter moves “backwards and forwards,” works as a double confession: the chapter unfolds in terms of Brooks’s play of plot, and in turn, it further aligns the novel’s aesthetic of illusionism with the productive machinery of the era’s optical entertainments. The essay “Optical Magic Of Our Age” (1849) describes a hypothetical production of a magic-lantern show in which one or more lanterns are manipulated by one or a number of people, often with the aid of a “little railway.” Such an apparatus allows for moving more fluidly a magic lantern closer and further away

from the screen on which it projects an image, depending upon a desired effect. Moving a lantern backwards, for instance, creates an image of a specter that grows larger in size and “appears rapidly to approach the spectators,” while inching the lantern toward the screen creates the opposite effect. The “astonishing effect of advancing and receding images,” then, works by manipulating the to-and-fro movement of the lanterns to produce an illusion.

Vanity Fair relies on a similar underpinning dynamic to produce the illusions of its fiction, which often also undoes them in the same moment. Thus Peter Brooks’s formula for plot requires supplementing to account for the work of a plot that not only moves forward and backward to produce meaning within a fictional world; this dynamic also suggests the trafficking between the worlds that Thackeray builds in his novel, the fiction and the commentary about the fiction from which his musings springs. This is not an oscillation between different “levels” of narrativity. Such a surface-depth model of narrative implicitly reinforces the value of one of the binaric terms over the other. Rather this is a matter of productive terrains that are simultaneously put into play as complementary novelistic dimensions, which format the particular form that *Vanity Fair* assumes.

The stage-theater as playful but productive design formats a much more extensive domain than plot; plot becomes only one of the architectonic relations drawn into its formatting field, which includes the production, maintenance, and violation of plot’s illusions, as well as the master of ceremonies’ performance of narration. By acknowledging his own status as storyteller/narrator, by highlighting the transaction that he instantiates with readers, by adopting a guise in which he characterizes himself as a

character that knows figures known by fictional characters or having been places they have and/or seen what they have, this narrator embraces a heightened self-awareness and sense of self-importance that yet, for him, does not overstep any boundaries of propriety, aesthetic or otherwise. In other words, the stage-theater composite expresses most intensively the play driving this novel's aesthetic; it does so to the point that it concurrently assumes the status of fictional content by doubly working as an illusion and as that which troubles them.⁹⁴ What helps bind this novel's theatrical play, in part, is the circulation of sympathy that cuts across reader-narrator-author lines. While the narrator's running commentary disrupts the play of illusions, at the same time, it inaugurates the play of sympathy.

Producing Sympathy

Kathleen Tillotson's *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* details the relationship that many authors developed with their reading audiences that evolved through different modes of serialized publication. For instance, novels were more frequently published in three "post octavo" volumes after 1830 than rather than in the in two-volumes format as *Mary Barton* was. The rarity of the single-volume novel at this time, Tillotson suggests, resulted from how cheap reprints of earlier multi-part novels often appeared in a single volume a few years after their initial publication. Additionally, she writes that the single-volume novel was often associated with religious novels and narratives targeted for younger and older audiences (22-24).

But for Tillotson, the emergence of the magazine and part-issue mode of publication that increases the popularity of the novel encouraged "a kind of contact

between author and reader unknown today” (26). Serializing novels in magazine installments or in stand-alone monthlies available at bookstalls for one shilling apiece induced in readers a prolonged suspense for the next part of the story and enacted a prolonged relationship between reader and author that often took a personal turn.⁹⁵ Tillotson quotes Thackeray on this very subject, whose *Vanity Fair* was published in serial form in *Cornhill Magazine* from 1847 - 1848. Thackeray describes how, as a result of publishing an extended narrative serially, the author-reader relationship emerges as a “communion between the writer and the public . . . something continual, confidential, something like personal affection” (Tillotson 33). What contributes to such a communion between author and reader in Tillotson’s words, is “the sense of long familiar association” that often reached eighteen months or more for longer narratives (33). She also suggests that this prolonged association reinvested the art of storytelling with its original performative context by establishing an audience that not only receives a story; it also becomes part of the creative apparatus or textual situation, in which an audience participates in the creation of the story that is told to it (Tillotson 36).

Here Tillotson reveals a unique situation in which members of a reading audience potentially help to format the story matter they will subsequently formalize when read in print. More than lending suggestions to an author, this relationship that emerges from the material conditions of production positions readers as active participants at both ends of aesthetic production. The authorial role of formatting and the readerly task of formalization is not actually blurred to the point where they are indistinguishable; however, the serialized form of publication that allowed an author such as Thackeray to write between published installments and commune with readers positioned the latter as

associates with the capacity to produce the fiction they are actually reading. This personal relationship is reflected in the writing-reading dynamic conditioning the part-issue publishing rubric: “while his reading public is reading, the novelist is writing; each number comes to the reader fresh from the author’s mind, glistening with baptismal ink” (Tillotson 37). Whether an author wrote with the overall design of the narrative in mind as Dickens did, or whether one wrote without knowing the exact fate that would befall a story’s characters as Thackeray often did not, writers produced new installments to an ongoing narrative under the strain of a monthly deadline for an eager reading public that might influence the contours of the story: authors could track the sales of particular installments and gauge the success of plot terms, and readers even wrote letters to the authors to express their opinions on what they had read (Tillotson 34). Thackeray appears to draw upon this productive bond that could develop between an author and reader during the process of serializing a narrative to generate his reflexive aesthetic.

In the opening of the second monthly installment, or chapter six of the single-volume edition of the novel, the master of ceremonies begs “the good-natured reader to remember that we are only discoursing at present about a stockbroker’s family in Russell Square, who are taking walks, or luncheon, or dinner, or talking and making love as people do in common life” (54). Such direct and explicit addresses to readers becomes commonplace as the narrative unfolds. But in Thackeray’s case, doing so brings into the story he is writing the readership for whom he writes. The personal relationship with readers, which may double as a productive relationship over a two-year serial, becomes fictional content in more ways than one: such addresses become content that must be negotiated in conjunction with the lives of the fictional characters of the novel, and at the

same time, Thackeray uses his very real relationship with readers as the occasion for such addresses, which is to fictionalize this relationship, in a sense. Such addresses, then, become another kind of utterance that reveals the ongoing relationship, if not conversation, that Thackeray maintains with readers. From this point of view, this conversation itself assumes an importance and privilege that does not remain confined to the paratextual. It becomes part of the text itself.

While the novel portrays the stories of Amelia and Becky and the cadre of characters that orbit them through an aesthetic of realism, the narrator cultivates an ethos of sympathetic communion with readers that strives for its own reality. His conversational tone is the ultimate and most salient mark of the very real relationship that he fosters with his readership. Even if for a twenty-first century reader much of his discourse is jarring or humorous because marked by conventions of speech and writing of the middle of the nineteenth century, it is not difficult to hear or read the assumed familiarity and sense of genuine interest in the reader's interest during the narrator's anecdotal deviations. Additionally, it is clear that the narrator is quite cognizant of his observations and musings, which appear to operate according to a territorial logic. For instance, during a moment of weakness when Amelia kneels to pray, the narrator refuses to divulge the specifics of her heart and mind. Such "secrets," we are told, exist "out of the domain of *Vanity Fair*, in which our story lies" (251). Later, after describing the Sedley family's lot post-bankruptcy, the narrator cautions readers that "our luck may fail," too. This comment spurs a meditation that he cuts short because "we are wandering out of the domain of the story" (374).

The duality of *Vanity Fair* – as a represented world and the novel that represents

this world – unfolds as an aesthetic terrain with boundaries that limit its possible expressions. If we are unable to configure with certitude the shape and logistics of this domain, at the very least we know that the master of ceremonies remains beholden to it and is aware when he verges on overstepping its bounds. Based on the two examples above, the proper domain, if not some domain of the proper, keeps the narrator from relating Amelia's thoughts and emotions. At the same time, a sense of moving beyond the confines of the story reins in the narrator's wanderings: he can wander from his duty of relating the goings-on of the Sedleys, Crawleys, Osbornes, and Sharps of *Vanity Fair*, as long as he does not stray too far or for too long. Also note that invoking these terrains – the private, inner life of Amelia and the sense of the proper that shields him from emplotting the inconsequential into the story – implicates the reader, as well. It is not the singular "I" but the collective "we" that must abide by and respect these respective domains, those that remain off limits, for narrator and reader alike. A sense of collective responsibility cuts across narrator and reader, suggesting that a shared system of values scaffolds the production and integrity of this represented world. We also should point out that the Sedleys are the family specifically mentioned when the narrator makes us aware of our novelistic zones of accessibility. Perhaps it is because we are encouraged to sympathize with their experiences, as they, more than any family in the novel, demonstrate the values and/or the realities to which Thackeray's readership could most relate. A brief account of the tale of the Naples storyteller opens up the situation in which the Thackeray's storyteller finds himself.

He begins this short story after reminding readers that *Vanity Fair* is a "very vain, wicked and foolish place" in preparation for what they will encounter in the near future.

Since he is “bound to speak the truth as far as [he] knows it,” he cannot refrain from including “a deal of disagreeable matter” that will eventually “come out” in the story. The anecdote of the Italian storyteller works to turn a potential disadvantage for the narrator – the revelation of material at odds with the sensibilities of a majority of *Vanity’s Fair’s* readers – into an advantage that will strengthen their bond to him and to the fiction they read. The Naples storyteller, so we are told, narrates a story that details the wickedness of its villains. He becomes so animated with “rage and passion” while “describing” and “inventing” these vile characters that story-teller and audience “together would burst into a roar of oaths and execrations against the fictitious monster of the tale . . . in the midst of a perfect storm of sympathy” (81).

This brief story describes how “poet” and his audience come together in a shared creative and sympathetic experience, not in spite of, but rather because of the “disagreeable matter” at the center of the narrative. As a “perfect storm of sympathy,” this relationship emerges an obstreperous moment of bonding that coalesces around the sharing of a value system. The “wicked deeds” of the villains operate as a connective that brings teller and, in this case, listener together in a sympathetic bond built upon expressing the communal outrage at these fictional scoundrels. Articulating the indignation the villains inspire in narrator and audience positions the latter as co-creator of the narrative it hears, as doing so reinforces the implied system of values, mores and/or ethics scaffolding the textual divide between teller and listener. The universal condemnation of the villains’ actions makes manifest what sort of behavior transgresses or at least moves outside of what teller and listener tacitly agree upon as the limits of proper conduct. Additional comments by the master of ceremonies that follow the

anecdote of the Naples storyteller suggest that *Vanity Fair*'s narrator seeks a similar kind of sympathy from his reading audience.

When the narrator explains that introducing and discussing characters will necessitate his talking about them, he also encourages readers to “love” those characters who deserve it and to “abuse” those that merit such a response “in the strongest terms which politeness admits of” (81). While serving as an apology of sorts that authorizes the digressive commentary that so irritates Van Ghent, these remarks, at the same time, authorize readers of *Vanity Fair* to model themselves after the listeners to the Italian storyteller, who react to what they hear according to this very rubric. But if the narrator urges readers in so many words how readers should respond to and thus read the story of *Vanity Fair*, this moment also emerges as a telling exchange that forces us to consider the novel's theatricality with Becky Sharp's performances, as she becomes embroiled in much of the novel's disagreeable moments, if she does not instigate them. Iser's reading of the type of reader the novel produces will be helpful in this regard.

For Iser the question of reading the novel becomes an issue that emerges in the wake of the novel's art of illusionism. The “gulf between ‘illusion’ and ‘reality’” in *Vanity Fair*, shapes “the aesthetic effect of the novel,” and how a reader experiences it; this divide, Iser continues, prevents readers from “identifying” with its characters. In so doing, readers are encouraged to read “the social reality of the novel as a confusing array of sham attitudes, and experience the exposure of the sham as the true reality” (113). Arriving at such a conclusion with the help of the narrator, Iser suggests, readers cultivate a “heightened faculty of judgment” that eventually asks readers “to reflect on [their] own situation” by seeing themselves “reflected” in the characters they know to be fictions

(114-116). However, it seems just as vital for a reader to reflect upon and judge what it means for the novel to embody as an aesthetic Becky's theatrical trappings, which characterize her ludic artfulness.

Describing the relationship that the nineteenth-century British realist novel forges with play, Jeffrey Franklin concludes that "the modus operandi of these novels is to expose and then correct the excesses of play as a means of prescribing something that they suggest is the opposite" (8). The figure of play in such novels, representations of play and characters defined as players, such as gamblers or actors/performers form the primary lines of inquiry in Franklin's book. He cites as examples of excessive play, for instance, those "characters and actions associated" with "aesthetic play" or those that are "illusory." Franklin argues that such figures and actions work as "foils to privileged characters and tropes that are portrayed as" "authentic," "real," and "sympathetic," among others (8). He punctuates his discussion of *Daniel Deronda* by concluding that the eponymous character's theatricality reveals that "sympathy is internalized theatricality," a mingling of good and bad forms of play (122).

Franklin premises his observation on a reading of Adam Smith's theory of sympathy that splits the sympathizing subject "externally between the self as simultaneous spectator of others' actions and performer before society, and internally between the monitoring gaze or voice and the part of the self that is aware of performing its motives and feelings before this gaze or voice" (Franklin 121). If, as Franklin suggests, everyday life positions citizens in theatrical situations that require them to watch themselves act morally as a consequence of being social human beings, he finds that the character of Daniel Deronda emerges as an intensive expression of the

“incestuous” balancing act informing the relationship between theatricality and sympathy. Theatricality, as a marker of bad play, duplicity and superficiality, among other negative traits associated with exteriority, conditions the interiority that extends to sympathy by virtue of the way in which the act of sympathizing becomes a spectacle that includes, according to Smith’s formulation, the act of a subject watching herself. As “the most thoroughly theatricalized character,” Daniel evokes the reality of life, thereby becoming an emblem for realism itself when contrasted to Gwendolen’s propensity to call attention to her performances (Franklin 123).

But does this formula translate to an aesthetic object such as a novel, which at the hands of Thackeray includes representing itself? To begin with, this novel does not correct itself in the way that it represents Becky taming her excesses by the novel’s end. On the contrary, *Vanity Fair* ends as it begins with references to the stage/performances, as well as dolls/puppets in a chest of toys : “Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?—come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out” (666). Thackeray does not feel the same need to adjust, reflect, or reconsider his own narrative theatrics in the same way that our last image of Becky humbles her legacy of performativity. Unlike *Deronda* and more like Gwendolyn and Becky, this novel announces its theatricality, making it visible, opening its processes for the world to witness and experience. In a word, it becomes a conduit to “know” the novel that we are reading, just as the theatrics of Gwendolyn and Becky serve as a primary means that suggests their relationship to the world, as well as what others must negotiate in knowing them.

This applies equally for those characters inhabiting the fiction as well as for those readers of it. But if Gwendolyn is Deronda's foil, just as Becky is Amelia's in an illusory/theatrical/bad vs. authentic/sympathetic/good economy, we have to ask what *Vanity Fair* is in an equivalent rubric. Is it a foil? Or the ideal? The terms of this dialectic break down, it would appear, as the novel intermingles the bad and the good, the theatrical and the sympathetic. Stated more accurately, the novel circulates sympathy by means of its theatrics, which suggests that Franklin's model does not seamlessly translate to an aesthetic object invested in these same concerns.

Clearly Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* does not dispense with notions of good and bad play. Becky's duplicity, manipulative ways, gambling, and general propensity to play, these traits combine into a profile that readers of any period will associate with the dubious, if not the inappropriate. But while previously defending her preference for playing backgammon and "other worldly amusements" (91) to a solemn Mr. Crawley, she yet understands the limitations of her own proclivity to play. When married to Rawdon Crawley, an officer in the army without an income who "had a great aptitude with all games of chance," she realizes the dangers of subsisting only on the winnings of his bets. Gambling, she tells him, "is good to help your income, but not as an income itself. Some day people may be tired of play, and then where are we?" (353). Becky's observation anticipates the days when she tires of play, becomes a regular at church, embraces a life of piety, and hits the charity circuit. While the demure smile she offers Amelia and her family in their final and random encounter is difficult to parse – is it genuine? more acting on her part? – we have learned by now that with Becky, the performance is the thing itself. At the very least, in performing this role later in her life

among a sympathetic circle of “excellent people” who “consider her to be a most injured woman” (666), Becky has chosen, or has been forced into, playing the part of a sedate and tamed woman.

In contrast, the novel gets a free pass in spite of (or because of) its own performative history. Not so much embroiled in an interior/good vs. exterior/bad binary, Thackeray dissolves the inside/outside difference, so important to Lewes’s model of realism, by opening *Vanity Fair* to the reality of communing with readers. As an aesthetic end, Thackeray in this way is more concerned with what others bring to his novel, as opposed to suggesting that his novel brings an inner truth, ideal, or sense of aesthetic or historical authenticity to his readers.⁹⁶ This relationship itself, by virtue of its repetition, becomes the site or transaction of something authentic and real. Remember that the full title of the novel is *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero*.⁹⁷ If we are to take seriously that this novel lacks a hero, it is, in part, a result of the novel assuming the role and position of its own hero. But the novel’s hero-status arises not in isolation, as already realized and complete, but in productive relation to the readers that help bring it into being. A facet of this communion results in Thackeray novelizing his readers.

Chapter 12 (*Quite a Sentimental Chapter*) begins with what we are led to believe is actually correspondence to the novelist regarding the character of Amelia at this early stage in the narrative. This reader writes that “We don’t care a fig for her,” and that she is “*fade and insipid*” (108). However, by including this exchange (whether real or imagined), Thackeray reveals that he does care a fig about his readers and what they think. His response, encompassing two lengthy paragraphs, meditates upon the implications of such remarks as they circulate in society, which takes him to such

subjects as beauty and virtue. Including these remarks and responding to them in his fiction, which makes for the inclusion of another kind of fictional content, suggests the interactive and co-productive relation Thackeray maintains with his readership. Here is an asynchronous exchange that marks the author-reader bond Tillotson describes as emerging from the part-issue mode of publication. Such exchanges suggest more than representing this relationship; this moment suggests that readers potentially issue parts of the fiction they eventually will read to Thackeray in their correspondence to him about what they have already read. In writing to Thackeray, then, readers also may be co-writing a narrative in which they, too, may play a part as content formatted for his particular aesthetic ends. But at the same time, this side of Thackeray's aesthetic draws upon a distinctive German aesthetic, Romantic irony.

State(s) of Play

The importance of the novel's Germanic episodes, as well as Thackeray's aesthetic emerging as an expression of Romantic irony have been previously acknowledged.⁹⁸ Returning to Thackeray's rehearsal of core principles inherent to Romantic irony situates *Vanity Fair's* aesthetic as engaging in a particular kind of novelistic ludic, one that cannot be separated from its sympathetic and even ethical underpinnings. Decades before the time Thackeray begins writing his novel, the world of English letters, to varying degrees, had been exposed to the works of Schiller and Goethe. After Madame de Stael's celebrated three-volume history of Germanic literary achievements (1813), literary figures such as Thomas Carlyle become vital conduits and defenders of German Romanticism in an intellectual landscape more in tune with the pragmatics of

Benthamism. Like Carlyle and Coleridge, Thackeray spent time in Germany, visiting Weimer and studying the language, and like other admirers of German literature, he learns to appreciate the dramas of Schiller, even comparing Schiller to Shakespeare.⁹⁹ But *Vanity Fair*'s theatrics suggests less an affinity with *Sturm* and *Drang* or with Schiller's and Goethe's Weimer Classicism¹⁰⁰ than it does with the work of such Ironists as Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and Jean Paul Richter.

Clyde de L. Ryles's study, *A World of Possibilities: Romantic Irony in Victorian Literature* sets the groundwork for this relationship. His reading of *Vanity Fair* locates the novel's propensity to digress, comment, address readers, and otherwise problematize the fictional world it simultaneously creates as evolving from a Romantic ironist paradigm. In brief, in the hands of various figures, the project of Romantic Irony probes such epistemological and metaphysical questions as the relation between becoming and being, the individual ego with that of the world-as-ego, the eternal with the fleeting, and transcendence with immanence. Operating in the wake of Kant's crowning of reason, the Romantic Ironists attempted to reconcile reason with feeling, as Kant's intellectualization of the aesthetic deemphasizes the role of feeling, even while clearing the way to a more subjective rather than objective framing of the aesthetic.

Additionally, Kathleen Wheeler notes that Friedrich Schlegel, the figurehead of the disparate movement, reorients the term "romantic" for just such endeavors. Whereas Schiller's previous use of the concept denotes a duality that accounts for the differences between classic and modern art,¹⁰¹ Schlegel uses the romantic "to signify the characteristic synthesis of these pairs of opposites common to all great art" (7-8).¹⁰² This is not the occasion to rehearse the various expressions of German Romantic irony, as it

encompasses a number of key suppositions such as destructive creativity, self-criticism/self consciousness, fragmentation, and prioritizing readers.¹⁰³ But Thackeray's practice of the Romantic ironist aesthetic of *Illusionstörung* (illusion disturbance), which grounds his novel's reflexive aesthetic, illuminates the kinship *Vanity Fair* shares with linchpin concepts of the Romantic irony tradition.

The shared aesthetic of making and un-making illusions concurrently points to an investment in play that cuts across and unites both aesthetic discourses. A cursory survey of the work of Romantic ironists reveals a reliance on discourses of play to fuel their reaction to the limitations of classicism and to reconceptualize the aesthetic. In his proto-Bakhtinian theorization of the novel as a "mixture of storytelling, song and other forms," Schlegel notes that "not to speak of one's ability to give himself up to his humor and play with it" is to the disadvantage of the genre and artist (Wheeler 78). He also suggests that "poetic illusion is a game of impressions, and the game, an illusion of actions" in *Atheneum Fragment* 100 (29). Novalis, in his "Monologue," claims that "true conversation is just a game of words," and that most of us fail to appreciate that language "constitutes a world unto itself – its play is self-sufficient" (Wheeler 92). To Karl Solger, an aesthetic theorist who favored the Socratic dialogue to consider such traditional subjects as wit and humor, art is an ongoing process of destruction and re-creation. This process results from the interplay of play and earnestness (Wheeler 20).

While Ryles notes the ludism inherent to Romantic irony in his introduction, his reading of *Vanity Fair* suggests the novel's ludic results from Thackeray's redeployment of a German aesthetic. I would rather emphasize that Romantic irony gives particular expression to and allows for the mobilization of the theatrical play driving this novel's

form-content relation, which in turn, is Thackeray's unique expression of this triadic relation. Romantic irony may not give the novel its aesthetic. For Ludwig Tieck, a jack of all trades who wrote novels, poems, dramas and studied Shakespeare, an essential aesthetic of the theatre "is that it can make fun of itself" (qtd in Wheeler 8). As we have seen, it is not the theatre, but the trappings of the theatre, the theatrical by which Thackeray lampoons society, which also marks the gamesmanship of his novel. The serious work of play and *Illusionstörung* in Romantic Irony, however, helps us come to terms with Thackeray's art, and will further the relationship between play and sympathy that is so important to *Vanity Fair*'s aesthetic.

With Solger, Richter and others propagated the loose program of *Illusionstörung*, which coalesces around the destruction of illusions, an aesthetic of illusionism that de-creates what it creates. Such an aesthetic suggests the power an artist maintains over aesthetic material, allowing for its recreation as a facet of its creation by transcending its own limitations. Although Richter celebrates the manner in which the performers of a play by Tieck bring the audience upon the stage to share in the actors' performance, the concept of *Illusionstörung* equally translates to the aesthetic of the novel. Richter refers to the novel aesthetics of Tieck and Sterne as performing a similar disturbance of illusions (Wheeler 19). Denuding illusions in this way allows the ironists to privilege not the finite formal unity of an aesthetic object, which becomes associated with classicism. Rather, *Illusionstörung*, by exploiting a work's drive for content, gestures toward the impossibility of accessing the infinite by overcoming the finiteness conditioning a particular play or novel through the inclusion of more, often seemingly extraneous, material. By rounding up members of the performance's audience Tieck's cast members,

much like the correspondent that Thackeray brings into his fiction, become part of the aesthetic object and moment of the aesthetic. Each situation brings to the aesthetic work members of the audience as participants in the performance, which productively reconfigures the boundaries of the play and the novel. More specifically, Tieck and Thackeray call into question the very idea of the aesthetic border by participating in an aesthetic that overcomes and disturbs boundaries and the relationship between illusions and the practice of violating them. At least to a degree.

Like Thackeray, Schlegel favors an aesthetic that knows boundaries. Although Schlegel lauds the status of the artist that hovers above the aesthetic object to self-consciously reflect upon the created work of art (which, in turn, potentially can lead to a reflection upon the reflection, *ad infinitum*), Ryles notes his concurrent concern for restraint. For Schlegel, such moments of reflection or addresses to the audience in a modern work of art, employ an aesthetic of parabasis. The parabasis in Greek drama is both a pause and a continuation, a redirection, when the chorus assumes the stage to address the audience in the absence of the actors. Schlegel suggests that irony is parabasis, in which creator and/or the work of art that is created can hover in an in-between state of contemplation. As a moment of deconstruction and reconstruction, parabasis opens up the work to further lines of creativity, possibility, and multiplicity, whether through parody, self-criticism, digression, or the like.

Yet despite this emphasis on various expressions of creative destruction, Schlegel remains keenly aware of the value and necessity for “self-restriction,” which is a “most necessary and the highest duty” for the artist and the man: “because wherever one does not restrict oneself, one is restricted by the world and that makes one a slave. The highest

because one can only restrict oneself at those points and places where one possesses infinite power, self-creation, and self-destruction” (41). Ryles glosses this passage by suggesting the ironic artist must restrain his tendency to conquer, overcome, and in effect violate his audience by forcing his own will, his own sense of self, on an other (10). He is right in suggesting so, as Thackeray, as mentioned above, remains cognizant of overstepping boundaries. In the case of not divulging Amelia’s secret thoughts and prayers, however, it is less a matter of imposing his will upon an audience as much as it is preventing himself and his audience from accessing Amelia’s inner world. This prohibition marks a limit, a line the author will not cross in order to preserve in the perception of his character a sense of self, a sense of privacy. The stage of *Vanity Fair*’s performance ends here, at the point at which Amelia’s innermost thoughts begin.

But Ryles’s gloss of the relation between self-restriction and being conquered by the world requires tweaking. It is not so much that an individual is “unheeded” or “cast off” from the world when failing to restrain. Rather, an individual gives oneself to the materiality of the world, which in turn, prevents one from asserting one’s own ego into it. Here Schlegel is echoing a Schillerian doctrine, that the drive for sensuous materials in humans, the concrete things that gives us pleasure, what feeds our desires, what grounds us in the matter of life, potentially can limit the activity or the domain of the form-drive within each of us. Giving in to the demands of the sense-drive and muting the form-drive, the repository of reason, what drives us to strive for ideality in the flesh can lead individuals down a dangerous path in which we are led blindly by our passions.

This, I think, more accurately reflects Schlegel’s warning of becoming a slave to the world: the world and all its enticements can make slaves of each of us, artist or not, if

we do not restrict its access to us, even while we open ourselves to its infiniteness. But by refusing to enter or reveal Amelia's thoughts during her moment of weakness, Thackeray suggests that an individual's inner world, though it may not make us slaves, may lead us to want and desire the wrong kind of material in a fiction. At the same time, when he prevents himself from wandering too far away from the domain from his story, Thackeray prevents himself from becoming a slave to an aesthetic process of including more and more digressive material just because he can. Engaging in such an aesthetic, but showing restraint while doing so, allows Thackeray to remain master of his novel and his particular brand of disturbing illusions.

This restraint also reflects a relationship with his readers, one that is a communicative model that doubles as a productive aesthetic relationship. I have already broached the latter above, suggesting that readers form a productive assemblage with Thackeray, not necessarily as equals, but as limited co-producers, nonetheless. This complementary relationship instantiated by Thackeray's aesthetic become analogous to Schlegel's notion of "symphilosophy" or "sympoetry." Such concepts designate the joint creative endeavors undertaken by artists and their audience as a condition of the aesthetic itself, as the "sym" prefix here draws upon a sympathetic impulsion central to Schlegel's theory. Ryles notes Schlegel's concern for imagining art as a forum in which an artist not only or monologically expresses one view but emerges as a site and process of communication in which ideas are shared. For Schlegel, sympathy is a concern for the freedom of the other: "Real sympathy concerns itself with furthering the freedom of others, not merely with personal satisfaction" (28). A work of art, then, becomes less a matter of the personal and more an occasion of the social in which a Thackeray, for

instance, must allow a role for readers to be creators themselves. While Schlegel encourages this co-productive relationship, Novalis tempers his enthusiasm even as he acknowledges that “the true reader must be an expanded author” (qtd in Wheeler 12). But as Wheeler notes, Novalis only means to suggest the demands of art on the reader not to glorify the reader’s activity as greater than or equal to the poet’s” (12).

As Schlegel understands it, a “synthetic” artist, in envisioning a work of art, anticipates a certain kind of response from an audience. A work of art such as a novel becomes less a product and more a medium of transaction in which author and reader actively recruit the other to produce the shared aesthetic object. In this relationship, an author writes a novel with the understanding that readers need to actively piece together its parts, threads, and fragments, not necessarily into a whole, but in order to produce its meaning. A reader, though given “preworked” material to negotiate as Novalis observes, which becomes analogous to an author formatting content and form, yet finalizes or formalizes this “preworked” material by re-working it into meaning. Schlegel refers to this dynamic as a “philosophy of friendship” that is akin to a “dialogue,” a complementary relation that is at once the grounds for an ethics and aesthetics. Although as noted above he claims that illusions are games, for Schlegel as for Thackeray, playing with illusions does not mean the disinvestment of real ethical and sympathetic relations. For a reader of the dialogue or fragments of Romantic Irony or *Vanity Fair*, reworking this “pre-worked” or formatted material arises as an aesthetic expression itself: imagining ways to formalize the fragmentation of poetic or novelistic illusions of a single work into meaningful relationships.

For David Hume the faculty of imagination fuels sympathy and the actions it

encourages a subject to take, whether as a gesture of benevolence or not acting at all. Although the aesthetic is not a central concern of his consideration of sympathy, he cannot account for it without recourse to the aesthetic. His model of sympathy suggests the other side of the sympathetic-ludic-aesthetic relationship, that to sympathize is to aestheticize. As Hume sees it, the faculty of imagination allows a person to enter into the sentiments of the other in a complicated psychological operation that allows a sympathizer to form a general idea of another's sentiments, which morphs into an impression after gaining force and momentum as it acts upon the faculty of imagination. The example of the beggar used by Hume in Book II of his *Treatise of Human Nature* demonstrates that a person enters into the beggar's sentiments by first recognizing his external trappings, the ragged clothes and his general state of decrepitude. The general idea of the beggar's sentiments gains strength and traction as an impression when a person recognizes the beggar's human form and characteristics, that they are deficient and lacking in contrast to the sympathizer's. When a person attempts to make sensible the beggar's life by imagining more his actual condition, the impression of sympathy becomes even greater.¹⁰⁴

By imagining future scenarios that may possibly come to inform a beggar's present condition or what might happen to a sleeping man if he does not wake up in time to avoid an oncoming plow,¹⁰⁵ a sympathizing individual must create a narrative that mobilizes the immediate text and context of the sympathizing moment as a point of departure to speculate how they might take a turn for the worse, which is then narrated to the sympathizing self. In addition to the psychological theatrics underpinning Franklin's gloss of Smith's theory of sympathy, Hume's account of sympathy emerges as a theater

of narrative as well. Emplotting the misfortunes of an individual into an imaginative narrative of one's own making or mapping a currently harmless scenario into an imaginative narrative in which the scenario becomes tragic situates the processes and operations of sympathy depends upon a narrative impulse.

Furthermore, this impulse requires that a sympathizing subject narrate the imaginative narrative to oneself – to enter into the sentiments of another, then, depends upon the concomitant positioning of the sympathizer into an intra-subjective narrative situation in which the sympathizer emerges as author-narrator-audience of the narrative comprised of the present and possible future. In other words, the resulting sympathetic narrative fragments into real and part unreal, the latter of which might not be an illusion, but what to call it then? An imaginary or sympathetic figment, fragment, daydream, vision or fiction? When Thackeray decides not to reveal Amelia's thoughts and prayers, he forces readers to produce this sympathetic economy in order to imagine her inner experience of the heartache that is kept from us. But this explanation (that he will not reveal her thoughts), by disturbing the illusion of Amelia, suggests that the fracturing of this illusion with an aesthetic of illusionism positions the novel as drawing on a narrative economy similar to the sympathizing subject as outlined by Hume.

Like the sympathizing individual who stages an intrasubjective meeting between the authoring, narrating and listening self that fashions the real/unreal/potentially real story as the psychological activity underpinning sympathy, Thackeray's novel and its patterns of self-revelation become a running, intra-textual conversation between illusions and their disturbance. The terms or meanings of this dialogue may be left for a reader to piece together, but the process of doing so links reader with author in a network of

sympathy that spans intra and interaesthetic dynamics. It is up to a reader to negotiate the real (illusions) and the reality of the unreal (illusion disturbance). In and of itself, the relation does not produce sympathy; it rather seems antipathetic. But remember Schlegel's lesson: sympathy is about the freedom of the other, not about personal satisfaction. *Vanity Fair* suggests the complication and paradoxical nature of this maxim as a novel aesthetic at the hands of Thackeray: his expression of illusion disturbance, at first glance, appears as an inward-focused aesthetic, one that turns the fiction inside out to fictionalize its fictionality. At the same time this apparent self-reflexive aesthetic, the fragmentation it instantiates, yet opens the novel to readers, who because of this fragmentation, have more freedom to rework this preworked material. In this way, Thackeray's production of the novel's fictionality potentially invites readers as productive and sympathetic agents further into the unfolding story, to forge connections the novel does not.

Iser's discussion of what he terms the novel's "split-level" technique of illusion disturbance accumulates another charge in light of the novel's sympathetic economy. Such a technique for Iser prevents readers from becoming too attached to the fictional characters; the interrupting narrator prohibits an audience from identifying so readily and easily with Amelia and Becky since they continually recede from the story and return to it at the narrator's discretion, who manipulates them as would an exhibitor controlling the size of an image of a magic lantern. Accordingly, this dynamic impels readers to judge the world and its inhabitants by denying them the ability to immerse themselves into this fictional world. Rather than partaking in the development of the characters, a reader's outsider status encourages one to analyze them or, based on Iser's own language, to

become a pseudo analyst “who work[s] out all that is wrong with their behavior” (112). But Schlegel’s aesthetic suggests otherwise, that such judgment is not a necessary consequence of *Illusionstörung*.

Clearly for Iser this aesthetic produces a certain kind of discriminating and productive reader. But focusing on reactions and judgments the novel elicits from readers prevents him from being more open to Schlegel’s model of aesthetic sympathy. Iser’s preference for phenomenological readings, which are more inclined to the personal rather than the social, precludes a more inclusive response to *Vanity Fair*. His call for readers to judge the characters they read equally applies to his reading. To judge is to move away from the unfolding of narrative event and their production in which Thackeray invites readers to participate in various ways. Iser, then, seeks to create more distance between author-novel-reader, not to collapse as the Romantic Ironists and Thackeray appear to do, ironically, by fragmenting illusions. With such an aesthetic, Iserian, as well as Freudian models, reach their limitations.

Peter Brooks deploys Freud’s theory of transference to account for the narrative situation as a transaction between author and reader, much in the way an analyst helps an analysand contend with a past desire that continues to erupt in the present. The transference, according to Freud, “creates an intermediate region between illness and real life, through which the transition from one to the other is made” (qtd in Brooks 228). Brooks grounds his reading of the transference as a model of narrative transaction between teller and listener through *Le Colonel Chabert*. But *Vanity Fair* recodes the terms of the narrative transference it stages. There is the circulation of desire, as there is sympathy in this transaction between narrator (analysand) and reader (analyst); however,

Thackeray's novel does not negotiate the emergence of the past in the present so much as it unfolds as a story that creates an intermediate region between its present "selves" as a function of its telling that does not attempt to resolve the disjunction it creates, even if, as Iser suggests, it encourages readers to treat characters as objects of analysis. But if we remember the etymological roots of "analysis" – to loosen or break apart, to separate into component parts – the fragmentation of *Vanity Fair* suggests that Thackeray, to some degree, has already analyzed his material, that he has broken the illusions apart.

Thackeray's novel, by virtue of the transaction it instantiates with itself through its maintenance and unveiling of illusions, prevents a reader/analyst of a certain ilk from realizing a desire to immerse into the fictional universe. The forcefulness of the desire to tell the story of the story's fictionality, ironically, sends the fiction into the background. Brooks describes how the very act of reading acts as a textual intervention by "interpreting" "handling" and "shaping it to our ends," which is to say that reading remains informed by our own desires (234). A novel such as *Vanity Fair*, however, as a result of Thackeray's intervention into his own novel, suggests that he actively interprets, handles, and shapes his narrative. This intervention in turn, informs the kind of desire generated in readers, the production of which, like the concomitant sympathy generated, remains a shared process and product. In the end, this novel aestheticizes and makes manifest a productive relationship that all novelists maintain with readers. The former not only pre-work matters of form and content; Thackeray exploits the ways in which novelists pre-work readers, too. Formatting material, even by fragmenting it, conditions readerly responses to this material, which will not be monolithic, but which will depend upon the desires, politics, and ideologies that readers use to formalize it.

In “addressing itself” as “the scene of its own setting, namely a playground of distractions within the satirized world at large” (278), as Garret Stewart writes, *Vanity Fair* puts a version of the Brooks’s short-circuit into play with every interruption of its illusory world. In this novel, the short-circuit is not so much the danger of the improper ending. It rather materializes as an impropriety for some readers, what the Van Ghents of the world interpret as a repeated disturbances as irritations, not invitations as envisioned by Schlegel. The novel harnesses a type of short-circuit into a productive operation of narrative each time the narrator digresses into a subject outside the frame of the fictional world. It is what informs the vacillating *fort-da* of the novel, the gone-there interplay between maintaining illusions and making them disappear. This dynamic also instantiates an intermediate zone of aesthetic interaction between author and reader. Potentially blocking readerly desire at the same time it attracts readers into the story, the narrator’s digressions act as a relay for the circulation of sympathy, as much a reality of the text as is the historically real fiction he relates.

But this related business of distraction-attraction arising from the novel’s aesthetic of *Illusionstörung*, is not necessarily driven by the assumption of finality or a proper ending at all. The closing remarks of the novel bear repeating here: “Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?—come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out” (666). It would appear that Thackeray pegs those readers that are able to walk away from the novel with their desires satisfied as lucky. The onus for such satisfaction clearly depends upon the reader; it is not provided by the author, nor does it appear to be easily found a novel such as *Vanity Fair*, which asks readers to become puppeteers so as

to manipulate illusion and their disturbances into some meaningful block of text. It is in this sense that the novel's aesthetic vanity is unfair.

By novelizing his readership and making them characters in his fiction, Thackeray necessarily implicates them as part and parcel of the communities and societies he satirizes. This process, novelizing the reader, adds another layer to Bakhtin's notion of novelization. In Bakhtin's oeuvre, novelization refers to the capacity of the novel, as a genre, to absorb other genres. Prosifying poetry or drama, for instance, makes both more novel-like, while the novel morphs and reconfigures itself by taking in other genres, adopting new rubrics of expression to refuel its particular trait of being the unfinalized genre. But Thackeray suggests that readers, not just genres, can be novelized which re-accentuates their relationship to the novel they read. Morson and Emerson suggest that to novelize a genre is to alter the way "it 'sounds' owing to a revision in its sense of the world" (304). Thackeray's novelization of his readers changes what they read because they are, in part, literally reading themselves into the novel.

As pseudo puppets themselves, readers occupy a liminal position between the fragmenting illusions they read, both in and out of the world of *Vanity Fair*. But because of this privileged position, readers maintain the ability to transcend their emplotment within the fiction by re-working the content as masters of ceremony as a function of reading it. Building into the structure of his novel the freedom for readers to overcome their portrayal as citizens of *Vanity Fair* adds another sympathetic dimension to the novel that emerges from Thackeray's play with illusions.

Ludic Transgressions in *Wuthering Heights*

“I have said nothing about *Wuthering Heights* because that astonishing work seems to me a kind of sport.” R. F. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*

In explaining why he says “nothing” about *Wuthering Heights* in *The Great Tradition*, Leavis actually gestures toward saying much more than he supposes. While the novel may become a sport by breaking with Victorian novelistic conventions as he suggests, Leavis encroaches upon a reading of the novel that has yet to receive serious attention in its critical tradition, namely that play becomes central to an aesthetic that coalesces around its transgressions. The turn to *Wuthering Heights* in this last chapter, then, departs from the previous chapters of the dissertation at the same time that it continues to locate novel terrains in which expressions of the play-drive are most prominent. Mapping the particularities of the form-play-content triad thus far has located what I take to be a conditioning productive relationship to the novel form, which is to say, that an author negotiates this relationship in different ways and for different ends. As a force of novelistic structuration, play remains a productive agent in the structure a novel ultimately takes, which implicitly positions play as providing stability and even a sort of equilibrium to a novel’s form. Such a fact certainly limits the possibility and potential of play as an aesthetic drive in that its expressions cannot be divorced or isolated from the work it does to produce and format a novel.

As an aesthetic object, a novel, as an obvious condition of possibility, begins and ends. A novel not only abides by various structural demands thrusting part in relation to whole, and beginning, middle, and end into complicated relations spanning various

terrains of production. A novel is also an enclosure, set off from the world as an apparent completed project, but one that always discloses the unique terms of its activity of self-enclosure. The play-drive, I argue, becomes this sort of disclosing discourse in the aesthetics of the nineteenth-century novel. Its expressions maintain ideological relations with discourses of play in extra-aesthetic discourses of the period that pierce the novel from within, thereby troubling the integrity of the borders a novelist yet must preserve. Even though Thackeray instantiates a network of sympathy through a theatrical ludic that fractures *Vanity Fair*, he understands that there must be a final word, a formal closure, and the end of play to his novel. His *illusionstörung*, to work at all, must perform its turbulence repeatedly between the novel's opening and closing of the curtains, which is to say that in this novel *illusionstörung*, despite its disturbances never can overturn the novel form or ultimately escape the fundamental aesthetic demands of the opening and closing word hemming it in.

What we can posit, however, is that Thackeray's theatricality expresses the malleability of the novel form by exploiting the play-drive inherent to it, allowing it more freedom over content and form even while it formats their relationship. In similar fashion, Brontë in *Wuthering Heights* puts the play-drive in play to push the possibilities of narration into a new register, a move that concurrently disrupts the novel and re-establishes an aesthetic logic. Violent sport and play and sporting with play excessively become repeated expressions of cruelty and communicate malevolence to others at the Heights under Heathcliff's despotic rule. But in depicting the devolution of this community, Brontë uses a sympathetic aesthetic to instantiate a narratorial ethos that relies on a version of excessive play, which finds analogs in the transgressions of

Heathcliff, Hindley, and Catherine. While the latter violently or maliciously play to hurt another or themselves, the novel's aesthetic of narration confusingly exceeds the bounds of the singular narrator to establish a block of excessive narration encompassing iterations of the story of the Heights as related by Nelly and Lockwood.

In sporting with narratorial conventions and borders/boundaries, Brontë does not do violence to narration so much as she violates our narratorial expectations through her excessive narration. The violence plaguing the community of the Heights, however, results from excessive play that Hindley, Heathcliff, and Catherine take to extremes. Such patterns of behavior, while running counter to the more rational modes of amusement disseminated by the middle classes, find an analog in traditional rural expressions historically associated with the fairs and wakes described by the narrator of *Tom Brown's School Days*. However, despite the violence associated with some of these recreations, in particular, blood sports and animal baiting, such amusements were regulated by rules. The violence at the Heights, in contrast, becomes excessive and dangerous because it is allowed unfettered expression. Brontë's excessive narration does not nor can it access such violent freedom since it remains contained and condemned to produce and format the novel that gives it expression. Rather the Nelly-Lockwood narrating dyad expresses Brontë's formatting mastery over her own aesthetic.

I will argue that the narratorial interplay between Lockwood and Nelly emerges as respective expressions and alterations of *fort-da*, the rhythmic game of disappearance and return as described by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but clearly in a quite different context. While the story of Heights is marked by the returns and disappearances of Heathcliff and Catherine (in life and in death), the Nelly-Lockwood narrating-dyad

draws on the play of *fort-da* only to reproduce it in different form. Less a product of the way in which the novel remains in a state of transition between acts of narrating the same story, this interplay expresses the novel's production of a shared final product, a merging of focalizations, temporalities and rhetorical positions (teller/listener) of those who narrate it.¹⁰⁶

While Thackeray novelizes readers and brings them into the story we read, and while the Master of Ceremonies describes himself in various ways that suggest his varied roles, the narrator ultimately remains a singular figure. Brontë's novel, on the other hand, doubles the narrating duties, but refrains from keeping Lockwood and Nelly, as well as the iterations of the story they share, completely separate. This narratorial technique also varies from the split focalization of *Bleak House*, which moves back and forth between Esther's first person narrative and a third person perspective. Not simply one iteration or the other, then, Brontë's novel periodically erupts as a simultaneous narration of Nelly's and Lockwood's version of the Heights' story.

By oscillating between two iterations of a story the novel yet formalizes these two separate but inseparable iterations into a block of narration, *fortda* rather than the *fort-da* informing the novel's plot. Such an aesthetic, in one and the same move, transcends a default mode of narration (singular) only to reformat it as a shared process. This move to another aesthetic order complements the move made by the second generation of inhabitants of the Heights – Catherine and Hareton. These two young lovers and survivors, who outlive Hindley and Heathcliff and their regimes of revenge, violence, and excess, establish a new era at Wuthering Heights, one that is civil, respectful, and tame, which is suggested by their most modest form of recreation: reading. Brontë's novel,

however, maintains a curious relationship with such forms of rational recreation, since its aesthetic remains so invested in the irrational and sur-rational.

Brontë's narratorial ethos, transgressing the default narrating practice of the singular focalized perspective of one narrator, allows us to see and consider an aesthetic of narration from another angle to observe what it usually obscures. Since narration is so often the means of transmitting information, events, and stories, it is less likely to participate and circulate itself as part of the knowledge that it disseminates. But *Wuthering Heights* reminds us that narration, too, at the intersection between content and form, as that which relates formatted content and conversely formats the form a novel assumes, is not immune from the play that establishes form-content relations. In particular, the Nelly-Lockwood narrating block forges a larger block of excessive play by joining the novel's depictions of unfettered play in a mutually complementary relationship.

The Playgrounds

Early in *Wuthering Heights* Lockwood attempts to leave the Heights with a lantern to help him navigate his way back to Thrushcross Grange because his appeals for assistance are ignored. Joseph sets the dogs on him after accusing Lockwood of stealing a lantern despite the latter's assurance of returning it. Although the dogs do not harm him, they pin him to the ground. While horrifying enough, Lockwood's obvious mortification stems from Heathcliff and Hareton's reaction to the assault: the "mingled guffaw of Heathcliff and Hareton put the copestone on [his] rage and humiliation" (13). While pinned under the animals "hatless and trembling with wrath" (14), Lockwood spits out "incoherent

threats of retaliation” (14). He describes how “the vehemence of [his] agitation brought on a copious bleeding of the nose, and still Heathcliff laughed” (14). Witnessing Lockwood’s inability to free himself from the dogs and the violent rage that he generates while trapped beneath the animals inspires Heathcliff and Hareton to laugh rather than to help him.

Their “combined guffaw” marks a cultural trait shared by members of this community to various degrees – the brazen expression of hostility, often with the intent to hurt others. Playing violently and/or excessively becomes if not an accepted form of interaction at the Heights, then an expected one because, like the passionate intensity fueling Heathcliff and Catherine’s love, it lacks a disciplining corrective. Exceeding boundaries of civility and propriety, the violent and excessive ludic at the Heights frustrates attempts to limit it and becomes a behavioral pattern to which individuals fall prey, whether to gain attention (Catherine), to reinforce one’s power (Hindley and Heathcliff) or as a means to exact revenge (Heathcliff). Unable to laugh at himself in a demeaning moment that reduces him to an object, Lockwood trembles, bleeds and shouts threats instead. His body performs as if it had been subjected to physical violence even though the dogs were “more bent on stretching their paws and yawning, and flourishing their tails, than devouring” him (13). While breaking up Heathcliff and Hareton’s fun, Zillah wonders if they “had been laying violent hands” on Lockwood based on his appearance and demeanor (14). But it is the mingled guffaw and Lockwood’s reaction to this laughter that produces his agitated state.

While Heathcliff and Hareton laugh at Lockwood’s misfortune, earlier Lockwood suppresses the desire to laugh at Hareton’s indignant response to his misguided

assumption that Cathy and Hareton are married. Lockwood “laugh[s] internally” at how Hareton defiantly growls his name to establish his own identity. Shortly thereafter Lockwood represses the impulse to box Hareton’s ears. The suppression of any hostile response to Hareton’s extended stare — ear-boxing or audible laughter — models how Lockwood’s sense of decorum mutes a violent impulse that is allowed free expression at the Heights. The dissolution of Lockwood’s sophistication and his loss of control over the ability to suppress his aggression is his, and the reader’s, indoctrination to the palpable violence underpinning much of the social interaction at Wuthering Heights to which his bleeding nose attests.¹⁰⁷

By relegating him to bloody spectacle for their own amusement, Heathcliff and Hareton announce their filiation to a strain of bloody entertainment that subsisted until well into the Victorian era despite attempts to limit it.¹⁰⁸ Describing the culture of popular entertainments of rural, preindustrial England, J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue write of the “bowdy and boisterous” pastimes that “were often, to our eyes at least, violent and cruel. They involved not only hard knocks and bloody heads for human participants but a great deal of cruelty to animals . . . Sport throughout the country was violent, crude and usually involved betting and blood” (22-23). Much of Brontë’s novel unfolds during the late stages of the eighteenth century in a remote and rural region, which Lockwood describes as he approaches the Heights for the first time: “In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society” (1). The community’s insulation and isolation from the stir of society and the influence of urban culture offers a rationale for the violence that circulates there: the Heights, as a rural culture, expresses the violent sentiment associated with popular recreation of the

countryside, but does not contain this violence to traditional holidays, wakes, fairs or yearly sporting events that served to bring communities together. For instance, Malcolmson writes that popular recreations of the countryside served as “outlets for hostile feelings,” while engendering “social cohesiveness and group unity. Competitive team sports, for instance, often reinforced the sense of solidarity of the communities from which opposing players were drawn” (84).¹⁰⁹

But rather than binding the community, the violent spectacle of Lockwood’s degradation marks how playing unbinds social relations and prevents deep-rooted connections from forming at the Heights. This moment pits Heathcliff and Hareton as aggressors who take advantage of Lockwood’s weakness to humiliate him. Targeting him in such a fashion and turning him into a bloody entertainment for a few chuckles becomes one episode among many in which playing degenerates into a forum that unleashes agonistic impulses upon the weak or weaker. Because playing acts as a conduit to inflict pain and discomfort on the other, the only way this culture “bonds” is by playing the same game of hurting others.

Although Heathcliff and Hareton momentarily bond through their joint reduction of Lockwood, their connection is fleeting. Heathcliff’s hatred for the Earnshaw family supersedes any other temporary or long-lasting relationship he may have for Hareton. Recall how moments earlier Heathcliff pokes fun at Hareton, embarrassing him in front of Lockwood. Heathcliff is the only one of the three who leaves this scenario without being degraded to some degree, suggesting his privileged status in relation to the violence circulating at the Heights: he is the subject of it and relegates those around him to the objects of his hostility. While Heathcliff does not monopolize the use of violence or

cruelty, rarely is it used against him once he solidifies his position as de facto tyrant of the community: his immunity from the violence that befalls Lockwood suggests how he uses his elevated status and his physical strength to harm and to take advantage of the weak that often is expressed in violent play.

Circulating at the Heights, then, is a brand of social interaction that undercuts the traditional work of social mores by sanctioning the free expression of hostility and violence. Rather than restraining the impulse to laugh or attempting to help Lockwood, Heathcliff and Hareton's guffaw suggests how another code takes its place, one that if not encourages, then certainly authorizes cruelty to others. Such a code reinforces Weissman's observation that the Heights becomes "another kind of culture" (385). Preying on the vulnerable as Heathcliff and Hareton do to Lockwood marks this culture's difference from egalitarian societies that limit open and public humiliation. Even the blood sports of popular recreation such as cudgelling had rules of engagement designed to limit the extent and violence of the play. Malcolmson includes the following quote about cudgelling in his survey of blood sports: "No Head to be deemed broke unless the Blood runs an Inch" (43). He culls this information from a 1753 advertisement, which indicates how codified a violent entertainment such as cudgelling could become. A broken head is determined by an inch of blood that trickles from a head wound incurred during the contest, which effectively ends the match and determines a winner. Such determinate boundaries limit the play of violence in cudgelling but remain absent in Lockwood's degradation. It only ends when Zillah appears and interrupts the pleasure Heathcliff and Hareton enjoy in the spectacle Lockwood becomes.

Additionally, the fairs or community celebrations that would serve as traditional outlets to grievances and hostilities are absent at *Wuthering Heights*, as are sports such as football (soccer) or rugby that use a codified and controlled form of violent play that becomes an important building block of British identity and masculinity, for instance. Rather than the exception, demeaning others via violent play becomes the frequent rule at the Heights, one that forces others to play by this set of strictures on a daily basis. The violent laughter of Heathcliff and Hareton not only elicits a violent verbal rejoinder by Lockwood; it also elicits the uncontrollable and violent bodily reactions of trembling and bleeding. Lockwood's trauma suggests how he unwittingly is forced to participate in a societal discourse that cultivates the erosion of civility rather than maintaining or protecting it; if he does not return the violence that wracks his body, he violently directs his displeasure to Heathcliff and Hareton.

If Lockwood loses a sense of his innocent infallibility as a result of his degradation, it results from Heathcliff and Hareton's not-so-innocent laughter and their all-too-eager desire to express their hostility. Hindley demonstrates a similar propensity to violent expression when he threatens Nelly with a knife. While this moment foregrounds Johann Huizinga's observation that "the contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid ... Play turns to seriousness and seriousness to play" (8), it is equally apt to discuss how this moment wavers between or rather as both play and violence. As I have mentioned throughout this project, play was a serious business during the nineteenth century, connected to such issues as national identity, industry, idleness, progress, education and edification. In *Wuthering Heights* play is no less a serious concern, as Nelly's deft handling of Hindley's attack suggests.

The scene begins with Hindley entering the house in a rage. Prior to his entering the house Nelly unloads Hindley's gun "which he was fond of playing with in his insane excitement to the hazard of the lives of any who provoked, or even attracted his attention too much" (61). Fearing for Hareton's safety, she tries to hide the child in a cupboard, but Hindley catches her in the act. After cursing Heaven and Hell Hindley threatens Nelly with a knife: "But with the help of Satan, I shall make you swallow the carving knife, Nelly! You needn't laugh" (62). Surprisingly, Nelly laughs at what appears to readers at the threat of the knife in her mouth. Hindley reacts to her laughter by remarking how he left the local doctor floating in the marsh, reiterating his propensity and ability at inflicting pain. However, Hindley fails at emphasizing how the knife thrust in Nelly's mouth is not a laughing matter, at least for her. The conclusion of the scene demonstrates the juxtaposition of the playful with the violent that Hindley's habit of playing with a loaded gun already announces.

"But I don't like the carving-knife, Mr. Hindley," I answered, "it has been cutting red herrings—I'd rather be shot if you please."

"You'd rather be damned!" he said, "and so you shall—No law in England can hinder a man from keeping his house decent, and mine's abominable! Open your mouth."

He held the knife in his hand, and pushed its point between my teeth: but for my part I was never much afraid of his vagaries. I spat out, and affirmed it tasted detestably—I would not take it on any account. (62)

Judging by her cool demeanor during this episode, one can assume that how Nelly was "never much afraid of his vagaries" reveals that Hindley's outburst is not an isolated

event, and even, perhaps, that he has threatened her in a similar fashion previously. This failure to unsettle Nelly suggests that she has learned to negotiate Hindley's "vagaries" despite their obvious violence. She even jokes about her own death, preferring to be shot rather than stabbed or cut. Her laughter and joking response to Hindley's threat indicates her superiority here despite her obvious disadvantage. Although Hindley often resorts to physical violence to reinforce his dominion over the house, in this case, it fails. Rather Nelly demonstrates her superior position over Hindley by turning him into what amounts to be the equivalent of the butt of her joke. Discussing the hostile purposes of jokes, Freud writes that by "making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him" (103). Nelly's joke overcomes Hindley's threat by making it more comic than serious and less menacing than he wishes it to be. Like Freud's tendentious joke that has a purpose, Nelly uses her joke to aggressively defend herself by altering the tonality of the situation and her role in it.¹¹⁰

By joking about her preference for being shot, Nelly not only reduces Hindley's threat; she also establishes her authority as Hindley attempts but fails to establish his. Because Hindley's position of power in the house prohibits a more direct response, Nelly must reroute her violent retort through her joke, which "evade[s] restrictions and open[s] sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible" (Freud 103). Her joke allows her access to a form of aggressive pleasure that is not restricted in the house but one that Hindley tries unsuccessfully to monopolize. After Earnshaw's death, Hindley uses his position in the house to abuse others and firmly establishes himself as the subject, not the object, of direct hostility, just as Heathcliff does later. But Nelly's joke allows her to level her own violence back at Hindley despite his authority. If her joke exposes "something

ridiculous” in Hindley that she would otherwise not “bring forward openly” (Freud 103), it is because his status in the house protects him from such direct attacks. However, her joke “represents a rebellion against” his superior position and offers her temporary “liberation” from his oppression (Freud 105). Knoepfelmacher rightly suggests that Nelly reduces Hindley into a “harmless fool,” but he overlooks the hostility underpinning this reduction (96).

Compared to Hindley’s attack, which is wild and dependent on brute force, Nelly’s violent retort is much more controlled and contained. She maintains her calm in the face of Hindley’s aggression, relying on her mental acumen to defray his assault. In one sense, Nelly’s reduction of Hindley, though violent in its own way, is much more rational than his. She reduces him by making light of this dangerous situation, by asserting her mastery through her quick wit and facility with language. Stated another way, she “plays” rationally to offset his irrational violence against her. Nelly offers a safer and more civilized approach to ridicule or overcome another. While Heathcliff and Hareton establish their dominance over Lockwood by taking a comic moment too far, and while Hindley resorts to physical dominance and violence in his attempt to minimize Nelly, she employs her wit to reduce Hindley.

It is important to remember that both Nelly and Hindley occupy multiple positions and roles in two different but simultaneous violent economies. If Hindley is the object to Nelly’s joke, she is the object to his physical violence. The concurrent circulation of competing expressions of aggression ultimately confuses and diffuses both. Just as Hindley’s violent intents falls short, Nelly’s does as well, failing to elicit the laughter that would complete her joke. But the cancellation of both violent impulses suggests not so

much failure on Nelly's behalf as it does a road not taken by Hindley and others. This confrontation situates Nelly, Earnshaw's servant, as the repository of polite and rational play at the Heights, a community that otherwise expresses a more crude and violent ludic. Nelly momentarily can defer and deflect his violence. But as an employee at the Heights and Grange, her ability to institute less vicious forms of play in her community remain limited. However, her closest confidant at the Heights, Catherine, exhibits a similar trait of reducing others with her witty banter. If Nelly jokes to defend herself from immediate danger, Catherine does so as a defensive ploy to hurt her father who previously has wounded her.

The joke-work, for Freud, becomes one way that a culture accesses and enjoys the violent impulses that individuals have but which tend to become repressed as individuals and cultures advance. But at the Heights, jokes or even cruel witticisms supplement the tangible violence already in circulation; jokes in this community do not become signs of the detouring or re-routing of a violence that cannot be expressed more immediately. Instead jokes become a part of a larger network of violent play that seeks to do real violence to others, reminding us of how this community marks itself "as another kind of culture." For instance, consider the following witticism Catherine wields against her father after Earnshaw breeds "bad feeling" in the house for favoring Heathcliff over his own children. We learn from Nelly how Catherine "was too mischievous and wayward" to become a favorite of Earnshaw's (31). At one point Earnshaw admits that he cannot love Catherine, which makes her cry. But Nelly explains eventually that Catherine "hardens" and learns to laugh at the continual rejections from her father (35). During one exchange between father and daughter, Earnshaw asks: "Why canst thou not always be a

good lass, Cathy?" After laughing, she responds, "Why cannot you always be a good man, father?" (36). In this repartee Catherine reduces her father by answering his question with a question of her own, using his language and sentence structure.

Her laughter not only manifests as the spiteful rebuttal to Earnshaw's refusal to love her; it represents the cry of a child starving for attention and approval from her father. But when Catherine discovers how upset Earnshaw becomes after this conversation, she kisses him and sings him to sleep (36). The inability to forge a close bond with Earnshaw does not preclude Catherine from caring for him, as evidenced by her grief when he dies later that same evening. While there is no indication in the novel that Catherine's reply to her father's question kills him, the fact that he dies the same evening that she mocks him associates his death with her response. Her wordplay, while apparently innocent of any wrongdoing with regard to his death, nonetheless becomes a circumstantial detail to it. On the one hand, this moment encapsulates Catherine's unruly nature, what makes her unlovable to Earnshaw. But on the other hand, this moment functions as more than a medium that establishes Catherine's character. It also invites readers to consider the very real stakes that are involved in playing at the Heights, even in wordplay. At the very least, this moment foreshadows her own death that arises from a game that spins out of her control.

What facilitates the circulation of violent play at the Heights is that the community does not engage in rule-governed forms of recreation until Heathcliff's rule ends. Although I am not suggesting that rationality is absent at the Heights, I am arguing that for much of the novel examples of rational recreation are, as evidenced by the dearth of more rational and rule-oriented forms of play.¹¹¹ If the middle of the nineteenth

century witnessed the proliferation of forms of recreation and leisure designed to improve and edify the population, *Wuthering Heights* gives voice to a mode of playing that acknowledges no such goals or objectives. Various studies of nineteenth-century recreation outline how an over-exuberant or misplaced ludic ethos threatens the century's productive and industrious spirit as envisioned by the middle-classes. But in this novel, violent play becomes an impediment to social cohesion.¹¹²

Returning Games

The game of *fort-da* may not figure prominently in Brooks's reading of plot. But as a dynamic playground plot establishes a form of narrative mastery that parallels the way in which repeating the game of *fort-da* helps Freud's grandson overcoming the feelings of abandonment and helplessness he feels when watching his mother leave him. Freud's model of repetition-as-mastery allows Brooks to theorize that a narrative generates meaning by returning to or by the return of scenes, moments and images that work to bind a story together. As we have seen, Brooks invites us to consider the possibility that play does not only function as an effective way to express the working of narrative's drives, but rather that play itself emerges as a productive drive and functional dynamic of plot. To read the plots of nineteenth-century novels, is for Brooks to emplot a version of work-play in the process, one that is strikingly similar to the actual play of *fort-da*: its means, not the end of the game that so interests Freud.

In one sense, Brooks repeats Freud's loosening of *fort-da* from its ludic context, as in *Beyond* the game evolves as an expression of mastery, of overcoming trauma. In addition, the "economic motives" of *fort-da* lead Freud into a discussion of the pleasure

the game generates, which becomes a springboard for his consideration of the pleasure principle. In so doing, he produces an economy of the game in which his discussion makes “gone” the play of the game by emphasizing the work it performs. For if Freud describes his grandson “staging the disappearance and return of objects within his reach” (14), Freud stages the disappearance of the ludic charge of this game as a consequence of how his “interest” in it “is directed to another point” (15). This point is the end of the game, what the game comes to mean and represent for Freud, which is the starting point for its redeployment in Brooks’s narrative of plot: “Freud’s Masterplot” stages its own disappearance of *fort-da* when Brooks uses the game as the means to move into a discussion of repetition and mastery that simultaneously launches his discourse of play.

But does Brooks really disappear the game? Or does it remain therein as an operational dynamic of plot, if in different form? The back-and-forth movements underpinning narrative plotting for Brooks, it would appear, emerge as a correlate to the rhythmic alternations of *fort-da*. Despite the minimized role the game plays in his model of plot, *fort-da* yet remains a powerful if implicit emblem for the playground that plot becomes: its means express the play driving plot even if Brooks applies its psychoanalytic ends to the workings of narrative. Part of the gambit in returning to Brooks to suggest the play underpinning narrative plotting is not to focus so much on what the play of *fort-da* means, but rather how the game works and what dynamics inform the actual play of the game.

In one sense, *Wuthering Heights* unfolds in the discourse of narrative plotting: Heathcliff returns to the Heights after a prolonged absence, Catherine returns from the grave to haunt Heathcliff and Lockwood (in his dream), and Lockwood returns to the

Grange after his own absence. In addition, members of the second generation of this community become the namesakes of the first – Catherine/Cathy, Edgar Linton/Heathcliff’s son Linton. Heathcliff’s name, the name given to him by Earnshaw is the name of the latter’s son who dies. Ultimately, the novel performs its crowning delay by withholding what happens to Heathcliff between the years that he runs away and then returns as a young man, what Nelly refers to as a “cuckoo’s story.” The workings of the novel’s plot, then, surface as part of the story it works to tell, emerging in the playground the Heights becomes in which agonisms and cruel impulses freely circulate and are played out.¹¹³ Patricia Yaeger writes that the novel evolves as a “‘field of force,’ an arena for the display or warring social formations” (209). For Brooks, the energetics of plot produce its own network of force: “in the motors and engines I have glanced at, including Eros as motor and motor as erotic, we find representations of the dynamics of the narrative text, connecting beginning and end across the middle and making of that middle—what we read through—a field of force”(47). In my earlier reading of Brooks (see chapter 3) I suggest that play becomes a field of force within plot.

If the movement of to-and-fro is equated with play, as I contend, the game of *fort-da*, of making an object disappear and then reappear, depends upon a similar motility. The game described by Freud is one in which his grandson makes a spool disappear by moving it away from his person, in his case by throwing it. The child or another person makes the spool reappear by returning it, either by retracting the string attached to it, or by picking it up or by taking it back to the child’s bed, which Freud describes as “quite a business” (13). Much of the business of the play of the complete game, of disappearance and return, however, Freud describes as a movement of the spool moving to-and-fro from

the child: "What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skillfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it" (14). The disappearance of the spool is accompanied by the child's "o-o-o-o-," or what Freud interprets as *fort*. The act of pulling the spool into the bed, its reappearance is greeted with a "joyful da," or there (14). While this moment very well may be the child working out the unpleasure of his mother's leaving through the pleasure of a game, Freud's account of this moment implies how the game depends on a to-and-fro movement of its own.

In Freud's own words, the game works by an act of disappearance defined as the object moving away from the child (fro) and its eventual return (to). Freud may not invoke these exact terms, but the terms that he does use to describe the play of the game depend upon this very alternation, suggesting that the play of this game unfolds as the ludic movement described by Gadamer, Iser, and Huizinga, among others. Perhaps at the same time that Freud's grandson masters his trauma, he also masters a simple game, or at least learns that playing with the simple alternation of to-and-fro could lead to new and different games or variations of the same game. The game of revenge staged by Catherine in her bedroom becomes such a variation as an intense expression of *fort-da*, but one that ultimately masters her.

Suggesting that in Brontë's novel boundaries remain in a state of flux, Steven Vine writes the following of "wuthering": "Trembling between internality and externality, wuthering becomes a movement of othering: a passing of boundaries that takes the outside in and the inside out, where the familiar is made strange (the domestic interior Lockwood encounters is riven by the storms it should exclude) and the strange comes to inhabit the familiar" (340). In Vine's reading of "wuthering" there is not so

much a movement or passing through boundaries as there is a passing of them into another arrangement: we become aware of how inside and outside inhabit each other in the novel. Catherine's self-imposed illness suggests how it "wuthers," not as an "othering" but as an "anothering" by oscillating as play and seriousness, fiction and fact, "real" and performance at the same time. Embodying the back-and-forth movements of *fort-da*, Catherine's episode also emerges as a variant of the game that channels an overwhelming trauma that she cannot contain or bind.

After the confrontation between the recently returned Heathcliff and her now-husband Edgar, Catherine finds herself emotionally torn between the two rivals and her inability to negotiate their hate for each other. Frustrated, Catherine tells Nelly, "I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own" (100) after mentioning how she is "in danger of being seriously ill" (99). Despite Catherine's "ghastly countenance, and strange exaggerated manner" and how she locks herself in her room for three days, Nelly still "could not get rid of the notion that [Catherine] acted a part of her disorder" (103). When Nelly lies and tells Catherine that Linton acts composed among his books when she is locked in her room for three days, Catherine responds, "he imagines me in a pet—in play, perhaps" (103).

What readers can be sure of is that Catherine cultivates a scenario without knowing to what degree it is genuine or "played" by her. While Nelly clues us in to her doubts about the authenticity of Catherine's malady, the novel never conclusively clarifies this issue. The confluence of the numerous possibilities informing her condition – she is sick, she plays at being sick and/or both – puts the actuality of her condition and the role she "plays" in its making beyond a reader's ability to localize it because it

emerges as the merging of these possibilities.¹¹⁴ Nelly's confusion as a participant of the diegesis becomes the confusion of one who reads the diegesis. If Susan Rubinow Gorsky claims that medical professionals could not adequately diagnose Catherine's illness, neither can readers of the novel. Riddled with potentials and possibilities, the "wuthering" of which denies any one more precedence or relevance than the other, her condition eludes¹¹⁵ the attempt to definitively bind it to a singularity.¹¹⁶ But what is striking about the "text" of Catherine's "illness" is how its touchstone moments are expressed as *fort* if not as *fort-da*.

Substituting the spool for his mother, Freud's grandson plays a game of disappearance (*fort*) and return (*da*) that stands in for how he powerlessly experiences her leaving and returning to him. The game transforms what was once unpleasurable for the child – his mother leaving – into a source of pleasure, in part, by becoming active and mastering a situation in which he was previously passive and powerless. Catherine is hardly a child when she has her episode. But Nelly remarks that Catherine finds "childish diversion" in pulling feathers from a pillow, which soon progresses into her removing them "by handfuls" (104-105). After imploring Catherine to sit still, Nelly moves around the room "here and there collecting" the feathers (105). It is Nelly's gathering of the feathers that secures this moment's analogue as *fort*, not by her performing its back-and-forth/to-and-fro movements (here and there), but in how her collecting of the feathers becomes part of this moment's play.

Nelly's collecting of the feathers reinforces this moment's infantilization of Catherine, as she assumes the role of the adult in this drama by picking up the playthings of the child, or in this case the feathers thrown about by the childlike Catherine. The

actions that separate the roles performed by Catherine and Nelly here into those of child and adult emerge as an expression of the division of labor in the game of *fort*, of disappearance, the game described by Freud prior to his discussion of what he calls the “complete game” of *fort-da*. Derrida writes how the game of *fort*, which Freud admits to witnessing more often than *fort-da*, unfolds as a divided process. In this game labor is divided between the play of the child who disperses manipulated objects or playthings, and the work of an adult who reassembles the playthings (309). While she may not reassemble the pillow, Nelly does assemble the feathers strewn about the room, a version of the work referred to by Derrida.¹¹⁷ These collected feathers concomitantly suggest the anxiety spurred by the possible disappearance of Heathcliff from Catherine’s life as they intimate her own oncoming disappearances, namely how she temporally and spatially disappears herself from herself and her ultimate disappearance as death.

During her ravings she becomes a much younger Catherine who beckons her childhood companion Heathcliff to join her in a romp on the moors by directly addressing him in his absence: “But Heathcliff, if I dare you, will you venture?” (108). Earlier she claims to have thought she was home, her childhood home of Wuthering Heights, because, she relates, “my brain got confused” (106). But the most compelling example of how Catherine becomes dislocated from herself is when she does not recognize her own reflection. Despite Nelly’s attempts to convince Catherine that she sees her own reflection on the wall, “she was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own” (105), which impels Nelly to cover it up, to make what is unrecognizable for Catherine, her own image, disappear. Ironically, Catherine “anxiously” hopes that “the image will not come out when [Nelly] [is] gone” (105), when she has already “gone” herself. The

disappearance of the childlike Catherine's reflection staged in front of a mirror intensifies this moment's analogous relation to *fort*.

In a footnote to his discussion of *fort*, Freud writes how Ernst plays a game of disappearance in front of the mirror by making his own image disappear (14), suggesting how the child taps into the potential of the gone-there/to-fro dynamic to expand into different spheres of play, different playgrounds. The game moves from the child's bed to in front of a mirror, and the child transforms from the player who plays with an object (spool and thread), to a player who plays with himself; his image becomes the object with which he plays (self as subject and object) in front of the mirror. *Fort-da* and its variations, it appears, is subject to the rules that guide its play; it does not appear and disappear, but it does move from the bed to the mirror – here and there or to and fro – displaying its versatility as motility. While Samuel Weber's cogent reading of Freud's footnote is used to disrupt Lacan's rewriting of the game as the emergence of the subject into the symbolic and the realm of language, his observations bear repeating here. Weber suggests the game the child plays in making himself disappear becomes a formulation of the Lacanian mirror-stage, the process in which the subject's ego consolidates itself in the attempt to replace the ideal image of the self-as-other represented by the reflection in the mirror. Making the image of himself disappear suggests that Ernst's conception of selfhood enters a stage of development in which the child attempts to attain for itself the apparent unity possessed by his image.

What is important to consider is how the game marks the development of a normal or healthy subject. For Freud the game serves as the subject's assertion of control and mastery of trauma, while for Lacan, the game suggests the subject's entering the

symbolic and the emergence of the narcissistic ego. The health of a subject in psychoanalytic terms, in part, depends upon a child moving through such stages as one's life narrative unfolds. Weber concludes his discussion of Freud's footnote by reinforcing the notion that the subject/child who expresses the absence of the mother through *fort-da* seeks to "remain (itself) in spite of the other" (97). But Catherine absents herself from herself by not recognizing her own reflection, a sign of her unhealth and instability: she is both there and not there. She is there, the seeing subject that disappears her own reflection, but not by moving out of the mirror's frame, as Ernst does when he plays *fort*. She cannot or does not see the image of herself that remains right in front of her. While this moment is rife with possibilities for readings indebted to the Lacanian mirror-stage,¹¹⁸ it also reinforces how the novel expresses Catherine's selfhood and the bond that she shares with Heathcliff as *fort-da*. Robin DeRosa suggests that only in death can Catherine merge with Heathcliff. This may be so, perhaps, because in life the duo forges a relationship that undulates and then erupts as gone and there, to and fro, in which one experiences the other as an intense absence. But is this game bound by the absolute separateness of life and death as DeRosa implies? At the very least it certainly unfolds in terms of life and death.

Unable to be Heathcliff's friend and unwilling to tolerate Edgar's jealousy of her relationship with him (Brontë 100) plunges Catherine's life on a course toward death inaugurated by her out-of-control theatrics. The edict Edgar levels at Catherine, that she cannot be friends with Heathcliff, repeats a command issued by her brother Hindley to her when she was a child. She remembers this moment during her delirium, and the "misery" that "arose" from "the separation" (107). Alone for the first time in her life at

that point, without Heathcliff and with her father recently dead, Catherine falls into a “paroxysm of despair” (107). Facing a similar separation, a life without Heathcliff so recently after his return, Catherine harnesses the intensity his separation generated in her previously to hurt those who cause her distress before Heathcliff disappears from her life again. Dispersing feathers in the room becomes less a sign of her mastering trauma; while it expresses her anxiety, this display, like her inability to recognize her own reflection, instead of containing and binding her anxiety becomes a forum that allows for its fomentation and dissemination as anger and rage. It is through such acute moments that Catherine actively and assertively laments and protests her frustrated relationship with Heathcliff, as he appears destined to move in and out of her life without her being able to control his disappearances and the unpleasure they generate, which is why, perhaps, her episode levels her displeasure at those around her with such vehemence.

Catherine’s attempt to harness the intensity of the trauma caused by her separation from Heathcliff doubles as her attempt to control the rhythm of their there-and-not-there relationship, an attempt that assumes a life of its own beyond her control. While the novel repeatedly references the intricate if frustrated bond Catherine and Heathcliff share,¹¹⁹ for much of the novel the duo appears doomed to a relation articulated as *fort-da* and its variations, but one that transcends the boundaries of life and death with the advent of her demise: Heathcliff returns after his three-year disappearance. Edgar repeats the injunction of Hindley that seeks to disappear Heathcliff again. But the ghostly presence Catherine becomes in death that returns to Wuthering Heights in Lockwood’s dream does not remain bound to the realm of dreams, or seemingly even to that of death. Heathcliff’s pleading for her to return to him one more time after Lockwood relates his dream

suggests how Catherine remains a presence at the Heights, one that is yet not there or has not fully returned.

Prior to her death, she tells Heathcliff, who holds her in his arms, that he has killed her and asks him, “How many years are you to live after I am gone?” (135). As part of their melodramatic dialog as Catherine verges on death, she insists on their never being parted, and should what she say now “distress” him later, she would “feel the same distress underground” (136). Later Heathcliff desperately exclaims, “oh God! Would you like to live with your soul in the grave?” (138). After her death, Heathcliff meets with Nelly, who wishes that Catherine wakes in the other world as gently as she passes into it. Heathcliff responds by wishing that Catherine “not rest” as long as he lives, urging her to haunt him, to be with him always in “any form” because he cannot live without his “life” and “soul” (143). But it is Lockwood who best captures how the *fort-da* of this relationship transcends the absolute separateness of life and death and recruits death as another ground for its play. After his dream Lockwood refers to Catherine as a “spectre that showed a spectre’s ordinary caprice”(23). A spectre, both there and not there, gone and there, which moves to-and-fro the realms of life and death or even existing in a sort of life-in-death, suggests not only the thwarted story of love that is their union: their relationship becomes symptomatic of a narratorial interplay materializes as an altered expression of *fort-da*.

Narrating Play

The overlapping iterations of the story of the Heights that Nelly tells and Lockwood retells exceeds attempts to frame them, just as Catherine’s illness exceeds the attempts of

diagnosis and just as she becomes a figure that refuses to be framed or contained by death. Rather than providing clear and distinct narrative “levels” or “frames,” narration thrusts the novel into an overdetermined state that carries the charge of multiple frames at once. The novel produces such a state by harnessing the play of narrative plotting, the ludic alternations implied by Brooks’s theory of plot. But in the process, Brontë collapses the alternating logistics informing the movements of *fort-da* into a singular block of narration that elides the iterations of the story we read. Nancy Armstrong suggests that all the frames in the novel – the frames that enclose the story, as well as the frames represented in the story – “are violated” (430). Perhaps the narrative framework violates our expectation of what constitutes a narrative frame by putting into play as a result of its play another kind of narrative framework.

The basic scheme of narration in the novel is as follows:¹²⁰ Lockwood records the story of the Heights and his experience there, but within this narrative, narratorial roles fluctuate among various characters. Although narrating duties revolve around Lockwood and Nelly, other figures temporarily displace them as primary narrators when they narrate. This back-and-forth pattern of narration gravitating around Nelly and Lockwood becomes apparent soon after the ill and bedridden Lockwood urges Nelly to tell him more about the history of Wuthering Heights. At this moment Lockwood relinquishes the narrating duties that have been his since the novel’s opening. Nelly begins narrating her portion of the story at a point when Catherine and Heathcliff are children. But while telling her tale, she briefly adopts the focalization of Heathcliff to relate the adventure that befalls he and Catherine at the Grange. In so doing, Heathcliff’s embedded narrative encodes Nelly as a narratee to the narrative that she tells to Lockwood.

Twice during the telling of the embedded narrative is Nelly marked as a listener to it. When explaining to Nelly how the Lintons' dog Skulker attacked Catherine, Heathcliff remarks, "the Devil had seized her ankle, Nelly" (41). After the Lintons bring the children inside to care for Catherine, the family cannot help but abhor Heathcliff's appearance and his vulgar manners, which fails to dissuade Heathcliff to alter his behavior. He interrupts his story to make the following comment: "I recommenced cursing, Nelly – don't be angry" (42). Such direct addresses to Nelly situate her as a listener of Heathcliff's story when she actually re-narrates it to Lockwood. While narrating the embedded narrative to Lockwood, Nelly refrains from offering any commentary or her own interjections to him, as Heathcliff does to her during his rendition of it. The lack of such asides or direct addresses further inscribes Nelly's narratee status at moment when she actually re-narrates this story. Although Nelly narrates to Lockwood what has been narrated to her by Heathcliff, it remains clear that she preserves his narrative when she re-narrates it, refusing to alter it in her re-narration to the point that she recreates her original role of listener to it.¹²¹

Such a peculiar process of narration, in part, depends upon Nelly returning to a prior relationship and role to the incident she tells as a process of telling it to a new audience, namely Lockwood. This return, however, is accompanied by a disappearance as well. In returning to the story Heathcliff tells her, Nelly, when narrating it to Lockwood, re-positions herself as narratee, thereby producing an effect that makes her present relation to the story disappear. In other words, the very act of narrating a past event makes her present relation to the story, that of narrator, of one who has already heard the story and who now tells it to another, at least momentarily, appear to be gone.

But not completely. We know that Nelly narrates this episode and that she returns to her original relationship to it when narrating. In leaving an opening for such a return as a process of narrating, she must at least disappear a part of her narrating self or not make herself appear as the only narrator of this episode.

A similar dynamic occurs when Lockwood re-tells the story of the Heights that Nelly narrates to him in her own words. What ostensibly is Nelly narrating for much of the novel is actually Lockwood repeating Nelly's narrative, but in so doing, he maintains her focalization. For instance, beginning in Chapter 15, as he nears full recovery from his sickness, Lockwood begins narrating again, briefly assuming the role previously adopted by Nelly. But he does so by reporting what Nelly has told him in the days prior, which includes the entirety of Catherine's history. Since she is a "fair narrator," Lockwood decides to preserve the narrative Nelly has told him as he retells it by maintaining her focalization. The only adjustment he admits to making is that he condenses her story "a little" (132), a move toward "narrative efficiency," according to Jeffrey Williams. Lockwood refers to what Nelly says in the third person—"she said"—but soon after, the narrative adopts the voice and focalization of Nelly again as he virtually disappears as narrator despite how he re-narrates what has been narrated to him. Repeating Nelly's curious narratorial technique, Lockwood returns to Nelly's focalization when he narrates the story of the Heights that she narrated to him.

By re-presenting Nelly's narrative in "her own words," Lockwood de-presences himself as narrator, but never entirely; he reminds us of his role in editing and narrating the story of the Heights explicitly and implicitly throughout the novel. One particular exchange emphasizes the fluidity that binds together the narrative frames of Lockwood

and Nelly. When Dr. Kenneth arrives and interrupts the story Nelly tells to the bed-ridden Lockwood, she says, “My history is dree, as we say, and will serve to wile away another morning” (132). Lockwood begins narrating as she takes her leave: “Dree and dreary! I reflected as the good woman descended to greet the doctor” (132). By respeaking “dree” Lockwood reminds us of the words just spoken by Nelly to him. The shared word choice here figures their shared narrational duties and how their separate but inseparable narrative frames coexists as a result of Lockwood re-narrating Nelly’s narrative from her point of view. “Dree,” then, offers an instance of how the novel’s narrational framework “wuthers”; it at once marks the overlapping of narrative frames while serving as a concrete marker that is at once inside Lockwood’s frame but outside of it as well, since it carries the charge of Nelly’s frame into Lockwood’s.¹²²

A subsequent editorial comment further launches the novel into a state of overdetermined narration. In relating Cathy’s first meeting with her cousin Hareton, the narrator(s) reminisces about Heathcliff’s reign at the Heights. But this episode is interrupted by the following remark: “This, however, is not making progress with my story” (168). The narration then picks up where it left off, detailing the fallout of the encounter between Cathy and Hareton. The “my” here apparently references Nelly, who admits to relying on hearsay for any news of Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights since her relocation to Thrushcross Grange. Additionally the next sentence in the paragraph references “Miss Cathy,” which more than likely indicates the discourse of Nelly. But at the same time the “my” could mark Lockwood’s reproduction of this story as told to him by Nelly. Is this a moment in which Lockwood’s “narrative efficiency” surfaces in his iteration of the story? We cannot be sure either way. While Nelly’s history may be

“dree,” the context of her admission invites a number of possibilities. In addition to “worrisome” and “tedious,” the *OED* lists “difficult to surmount or get over” as an additional meaning to the word. The editorial interjection about making progress with the story assumes a dreeness of its own as an emblem for narration in the novel, as readers cannot attribute it to solely Nelly or Lockwood. Both remain viable options here and elsewhere.

Narration and narrative, then, become an important bundle of textual energies in this novel’s plot. But more than acting as a complication to the novel’s plot, the act of narrating - of producing narrative, reproducing it and transmitting it - becomes its own complicated process by overinvesting in the ludic dynamics informing the operations of plot. In particular, the narratorial interplay of the novel, its investment in simultaneous processes of returning and disappearing as a logic of narration can be understood as an extension and alteration of *fort-da* that underpins the machinations of plot for Peter Brooks. Nelly’s narration of Heathcliff’s recounting of what happens to him at Thrushcross returns her to the position of listener to it, just as Lockwood’s narration of what Nelly first narrates to him returns him to similar position, as well as positioning readers to an earlier iteration of the story that is being narrated. To bring forth a story for an audience is to “make gone” its narrator.

While Brooks emphasizes the role of repetitions and returns in his theory of plot (“repetition creates a return in the text, a doubling back” (100) and “repetition and return are perverse and difficult, interrupting simple movement forward” (100)), and in the process, as these passages suggests, conflates them, he underappreciates the dynamic that arises between returns and disappearances, how what returns must first be disappeared:

what allows the play of repetition is the play of what first disappears so that it can return again. He opens up the possibility of considering this very relation by briefly mentioning the game of *fort* Ernst plays, how the child stages “disappearance alone” (97). But this observation functions as a relay for a longer discussion of repetition that Brooks explicitly grounds in returns: “Repetition creates a return in the text, a doubling back. We cannot say whether this return is a return to or a return of,” whether origins or the repressed is under consideration (100). One might claim that Brooks over-invests in a game of *da* in his reading and application of *Beyond* to narrative plotting in which he effects a rhetorical strategy that effectively disappears the dynamic of disappearance from plot.

Brontë’s novel articulates how returning is dependent upon disappearing first. Heathcliff’s return changes the course of life at the Heights, and the success of his plotting and vengeful designs instantiates the devolution of the community and the constitution of the Earnshaw and Linton families. But his return to the Heights depends upon his disappearing from it first, *fort* and then *da*. But as noted above, the narratorial interplay between Nelly and Lockwood establishes a different dynamic, an economy of returning as disappearing. After Hindley’s death Nelly contrasts his life with Edgar’s. She makes the following direct address to Lockwood when she concludes: “But you’ll not want to hear my moralizing, Mr. Lockwood: you’ll judge as well as I can, all these things; at least, you’ll think you will and that’s the same” (157). Nelly then continues with her narrative, as retold by Lockwood. But before doing so, her address to Lockwood reinscribes him as narratee when he actually narrates this passage.¹²³

Adhering to Nelly's narrative so closely that he preserves her as the focalizer and refuses additional commentary on what he (re)narrates creates a situation in which Lockwood refers to himself in the third person as he narrates. It is not "me," or "I," but "Mr. Lockwood" who will not hear of Nelly's moralizing. This moment emphasizes the role Lockwood performs in relation to the narrative the first time he hears it, that of listener or narratee to Nelly's narration, while it de-emphasizes his role as re-teller of the tale. Such a move returns the story to an earlier iteration of it and returns Lockwood to a position of listener, which makes his status as narrator of the story less certain, less there, and more "gone." The repetition of such a narratorial economy implicitly invests in what Jean-Francois Lyotard terms a heteronomical narrative ethos.

For Lyotard, heteronomical narrative involves an etiquette in which every "narrator presents himself as having first been a narratee" (32). By emphasizing the pole of the narratee, heteronomy recuperates what the default mode of Western narrative – autonomy – erases in its privileging of speakers/narrators. Rather than offering himself as the creator of the story he tells, Lockwood moves away from such an autonomous position by explicitly and implicitly reminding us how he retells the story Nelly tells him. In a brief conversation occurring after Catherine's death and Cathy's birth that is set off from the rest of the story of the Heights by white space, Nelly asks Lockwood whether he thinks "people are happy in the other world" (141). He does not respond to her question because it strikes him as "heterodox." His non-response to her address to him or not sharing the reasons that prevent him from responding to it fuels this exchange's own heterodoxical quality; his narrator and narratee roles conflate and overlap. By

foregrounding his role as a narratee when he narrates, Lockwood suggests that telling a story does not mean forgetting how he first was a listener to it.¹²⁴

Because narrating reinscribes Lockwood and Nelly as narratees, their respective focalizations fold into each other, which refashions their narratorial *fort-da*, their give and take or their back and forth, but also their returning and disappearing, into a block of narration. The Lockwood/Nelly block of narration oscillates not only from one to the other but also as one and the other in a singular ludic movement. Such a relationship recasts their back-and-forth movement as backforth; the game of narration becomes one of *fortda* rather than *fort da*.¹²⁵ The terms of the play of narration remain the same as the play of plot, but the rules of the game change. Consider the following remark by Brooks concerning the forces at work in the middle of plot, which enact “the necessary distance between beginning and end, maintained through the play of those drives that connect them yet prevent the one collapsing back into the other (108). If the play of plot connects but prevents beginnings from collapsing into endings, the play of narration in *Wuthering Heights* results in the collapse of the distinction between iterations of the story; we do not know for certain where Nelly’s version ends and Lockwood’s begins. Their iterations come to occupy shared narrative territory in which one cannot be extracted fully from the other because the very idea of distinct and separate stories is thwarted by their ludic block of narration.

In his classic reading of the novel, Walter Allen claims that Catherine and Heathcliff exist as two rivers or two territories “that flow into each other,” but whose courses “are diverted, their proper channels dammed” (196).¹²⁶ The narratorial interplay between Nelly and Lockwood experiences no such damming. Rather each flows into the

other without encumbrance or blockage in a process akin to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as deterritorialization and reterritorialization in which each iteration occupies distinct narratorial terrain or territories that converge into a new relation. Underpinning this dynamic is how a pair of distinct objects or singularities, in this case, Nelly's and Lockwood's iterations of the story of the Heights, become a composition of both when the novel carries one into the other. For Deleuze and Guattari, such an operation depends upon on a dual movement in which one iteration reterritorializes the other at the same time that the process of reterritorialization happens to it. The movement of each iteration into the other occurs at the same time each diminishes the integrity of its own territory, which instantiates a narratorial zone that oscillates as both. To move into the other, which is to move with and as the other, the novel establishes a relation between narrations of the story that remains in-between one and the other, a block that moves and shifts as a nebulous coexistence that relies on the terms and interplay of *fort-da* to establish a new arrangement, *fortda*.

There is never not a Nelly or Lockwood iteration, but the novel makes it difficult to say where the one begins and the other ends. While for Catherine separation from Heathcliff becomes the trauma that she cannot overcome and which masters her, the novel's narratorial *fortda* emerges as a sort of traumatic shock to nineteenth-century novelistic conventions that yet paradoxically stabilizes the novel. It does so because it can harness and exploit the resources needed to move beyond a threshold of an order that Catherine cannot in her life. She succumbs to the excessive expenditure of energy that takes her mind and body to heights from which it never recovers. For instance, Catherine reminds Nelly of her "passionate temper," which verges on "frenzy" (100). She is

“delirious” and in a “delirium” and in a “tempest of passion with a kind of fit” (111). Such terms suggests a violent and unstable subjectivity, even if in play, since her game ultimately overcomes her in the end. But the novel, in expending energy that upends a narratorial order, expands the very possibility of narratorial order in the process: *fortda* as the condition of narration in *Wuthering Heights* results from harnessing a transgressive impulsion that reshapes narration into a complex or assemblage of voices and iterations of a singular story. Paradoxically, this excessive state of narration actually produces stability, when at the Heights institutionalized excesses only produce disorder and instability.¹²⁷

The repeated and intensive shuttling between the narrations of the story of the Heights – intensive because repetitive in the sense of how Lockwood repeats what Nelly tells him – instantiates a situation not so much in which the inside of Lockwood’s iteration never fully moves outside of Nelly’s. Rather the concepts of inside and outside become destabilized or deterritorialized through the assemblage their interplay becomes in a *fortda* that takes narration to another narrative order.

This re-formed novelistic order is summed up in Catherine’s often-quoted description of her bond with Heathcliff: “Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff – he’s always, always in my mind – not as pleasure . . . but as my own being – so don’t talk of our separation again – it is impracticable” (70). If Catherine makes the case for her inseparable existence with Heathcliff, the novel presents Lockwood and Nelly as an inseparable block of narration whose respective stories practically cannot be extracted from the other’s. Blocks and assemblages, then, emerge as a pan-narrative repetition, what the novel returns to as a matter of content and a logistic of form in order to bind the story of the

Heights. The inseparability of Heathcliff-Catherine, however this union is parsed, and the shared narrations that become the Nelly-Lockwood iteration suggest that *Wuthering Heights* holds itself together not only through repetition, but by repeatedly returning to *fortda* as a refrain, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs” (323). *Fortda* becomes such a narrative refrain by drawing the relationship of Catherine and Heathcliff as well as the telling of their story into its domain; it emerges as an organizing because repeated locus of different terrains of the novel, those of narration and the subjects that are narrated. *Fortda*, then, territorializes the form and content of *Wuthering Heights* even as the novel re-territorializes it as part of the larger story it tells.

By virtue of this narratorial block, *Wuthering Heights* works in concert with depictions of violent and excessive play that move beyond “acceptable” ludic expressions during the mid-Victorian era, which expands the scope of the “sport” the novel becomes. Coupled with the overdetermined logistics underpinning how the novel represents, the violence and excesses represented in the novel form a complementary block, a sporting whole in which form and content and/or form as content undoes by redoing the genre. D.A. Miller writes that “the narrative that seems to resist a novel’s control becomes a means of achieving it” (27). The Nelly/Lockwood blocks of narration, by virtue of their repetition, bind the structure of the novel as instances of excessive play at the Heights bind the novel’s plot: as a traumatic force that unbinds a familiar expression of narratorial mastery in the novel form *fortda* concomitantly emerges as another kind of mastery that effectively rebinds *Wuthering Heights*.

Endgame.1

It is only proper, then, that the conclusion of the novel lingers in a moment that gestures toward an order of life that transcends the frames that birth and death give it. At the graves of Heathcliff, Catherine and Linton Lockwood muses, “I watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth” (287). Despite his attempt to diffuse the possibility of life after death, he cannot do so – others still imagine unquiet slumber for the Catherine and Heathcliff. But it is the fluttering of the moths that suggests how the duo yet persists in some form of life-in-death. Gadamer writes that when the word play is examined, “we find talk of the play of light, the play of waves, the play of component in a bearing-case, the inter-play of limbs, the play of forces, the play of gnats, even a play on words. In each case what is intended is the to-and-fro movement which is not tied to any goal which would bring it to an end” (93). Much of this chapter navigates the novel’s to-and-fro movements, plot’s *fort-da* that becomes *fortda* as a narratorial dynamic. But here, the fluttering moths, like the play of gnats described by Gadamer, announce a to-and-fro ludic that refuses the goal that would end it. Are Catherine and Heathcliff really, finally gone (*fort*)? Have they returned to the Heights in different form? Are they yet there (*da*)? Of course, the novel cannot refuse to conclude, but at the same time, we should not expect it to end with a finality that attempts to limit the play in which it revels for so long. The fluttering moths more than suggest the lingering presence of Catherine and Heathcliff at the Heights; such fluttering rehearses the novel’s propensity to play, to be in play even after it concludes.

This final moment suggests that Brontë wants to have it both ways with regard to play at the Heights. Cathy and Hareton's sharing a tender moment while reading a book suggests the emergence of a newly tamed *Wuthering Heights* that will learn how to communicate without violence. But the suggestion that the spirits of Heathcliff and Catherine still roam the moors opens up the possibility of their living in death, that as both *fort* and *da* or *fortda*, the duo emblemizes the novel's narratorial block that is both Nelly and Heathcliff. In refusing absolute categorization, denying a quiet and final death, the tandem suggests that the excessive play each represents at the Heights, perhaps has not totally been disciplined. This situation invites us to reconsider the aesthetic of the novel, but not to question whether or not its excessive narratorial play remains tamed. As suggested above, as part of what produces *Wuthering Heights* as unique expression of the novel form, Brontë's ethos of narration, unlike the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine, cannot escape its inherent boundedness. Recognizing this limitation is necessary in order to not conflate the formalizing process with textualizing.

But whereas Iserian and similar phenomenological theories of text retreat from the activity of the aesthetic object to aestheticize the inner world of the reading subject, formalization highlights the other side of this transaction. This is the side of the encounter between novel and reader that opens a novel such as *Wuthering Heights* to its continual textualization. It underscores the finalization of the aesthetic object, what complements an author's aesthetic of formatting, which at once re-opens a work to the process of its textualization. These are not separate or contrary projects, but necessary facets of reading, producing, and experiencing a novel, which are all connected.

Both actions, formalization and textualization, however, spring from a process of productive reading, which helps to produce the work that is read. Barthes, some years ago, made the following distinction between the work and the text. The work, so it goes, is found on library shelves. It becomes synonymous with its physical existence as a published product, tangible and solid as a static and lifeless object. The text, in contrast, is ephemeral, on the move, constantly being produced and reproduced: “The work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field . . . the one is displayed, the other demonstrated; likewise, the work can be seen . . . the text is a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules,” and “the Text is experienced only in an activity of production” (157). Although Barthes acknowledges that we can see a work, it yet lacks the verve and life of the text as methodological field. What we end up seeing in this picture is the aesthetic object as a lifeless corpse lacking the invisible but productive energy of the text, which it spawns. Curiously, though the work is displayed as object to be seen, and thus consumed and perhaps even fetishized, it is the invisible text that becomes the object of fetishization in this early essay. With such an estimation of the work-text relationship, one that draws on the body-spirit/soul dichotomy, we are actually left with two images of death: the lifeless body of the work and overactive but disembodied life of the text detached from the work entombed in libraries.

The gap separating work from text is not as extreme as Barthes suggests here. The activity of formalization can help suture this fissure as a way to reconceptualize the inherent dynamism of the novel form. New formalist criticism, in order to move beyond a formalist legacy that inherits the premises of Barthes’s account of the lifeless work,

aesthetic object, or literary form, must return to the study of genres with an architectonic paradigm spanning the form-play-content relation, as well as the extra-aesthetic discourses an artist brings into a work as a result of formatting the form-play-content triad. Without the architectonic relation, a formalist reading risks rehearsing only the structure of a novel – its form, its content/illusions, its plot, its narration – without highlighting that each alone does not format or constitute a novel, nor can we understand any novelistic terrains in isolation, from each other, or from the social discourses that give such terrains expression.

We certainly cannot dispense with the language of structure to come to terms with a novel's architectonics. But the language of structuralism is not absolutely necessary to do so and neither is a language of literary forms that derives from the structure, grammar, or systematicity of language. Over-reliance on such models risks the danger of re-investing and re-producing theories of literary forms that become the equivalent of x-rays. They have the capacity to reveal the bones and architecture of a particular work or even a genre. But as in Barthes's work, such an image is static and lifeless. This is a starting point, an important one, but one that requires supplementation. Equal critical attention, if not more must be routed to the way that aesthetic structures emerge as the grounds for the aestheticization of language.

This occurs in two ways: by importing words, phrases, slogans, dialect, discourse etc. directly into the work, via a narrator or character. But an author's formatting the form-play-content triad, I argue, also unfolds as a unique "language" of the aesthetic. Positioning the play-drive in relation to the drives for form and content that it conditions, as we have seen, is not a monolithic operation. This process of formatting opens the

aesthetic to ideologies from without, whether consciously or not. Such ideologies, as we have seen with regard to George Henry Lewes's model of plot, easily translate into aesthetic policy. The "easy play" formatting his model of plot, that which establishes relations among various novelistic terrains and drives, qualifies the activity shaping this architectonic system. In so naming it, Lewes, in one and the same move, points to the ludic energetic driving the novel and binds this play to working in a particular manner as a result of his ideological leanings (unity, organicism, and the natural). He also reminds us that those of us interested in literary forms have yet to mine the implications of play as a vital productive novel, not only textual, economy.

The excessive narratorial ludic of *Wuthering Heights*, however, makes the novel novel again. In his 1859 study *British Novelists and Their Styles*, literary historian David Masson notes that the "Metropolitan Comic Fiction," or the "Novel of Cockney Fun," which he associates with Dickens and Thackeray, yields to another aesthetic. According to Masson, in beginning in 1848, British novelists, as a facet of the growth of "Realism," begin to represent the tumult of the Continent with increasing intensity. He observes that the French Revolution of 1848, and the Crimean War, for instance, "served as definite events with which to associate fictitious incidents." In addition to Thackeray, novelists such as Bulwer-Lytton, Kingsley, Gaskell, and C. Brontë depict "historically recent" incidents: "political conspiracies, club-meetings, strikes in manufacturing districts, mill riots, etc." (266). These contemporary events, Masson suggests, become "photographs in Novels" (267).

However, he cautions that this hemispheric and political realism remains diluted by another very real demand encountered by the novelist: "All creations of poetic art,

nay, even all transcripts from nature by the historian, inasmuch as they are actuated by some mood or state of mind, have doctrine or purpose worked into them, and may, on due analysis, be made to yield it.” Representing one scene or image over others, for Masson, “is a manifestation of purposes, of preference, of moral intention” (268). Here he refers to what I have referred to as the process of formatting, what guides an author’s unique expression of Realism(s), as the real collides with the reality of an individual’s values, ethics, and politics. The representation of reality, as Masson suggests, is the concomitant representation of an author’s “moral intention.” The reality of this observation, astute as it is, yet clings to the faith that an author controls this intention because he or she remains conscious of it. Whether or not this is actually possible, Masson clears a path to the reality that ideology and the aesthetic combine when representing reality or any un-reality, which my earlier chapter on *Oliver Twist* considers in greater detail.

But *Wuthering Heights*, published in 1848, counters Masson’s account of a new political and hemispheric realist aesthetic. In depicting the fall and rebirth of the Heights, Brontë does mingle realism with her own personal history, as at Haworth, the Brontë family lived in isolation. Gaskell notes in sensationalist fashion in her biography of Charlotte Brontë that Emily preferred the company of animals to humans. Gaskell even devotes a chapter of her biography to Emily’s relationship with the animal world and her pets (“Emily Brontë’s Affection for Animals.”) At one point in this chapter Gaskell distinguishes Charlotte’s pension for “affection” in contrast to Emily’s “passion.” Such passion, taken to excessive extremes, as we have seen, results in the dissolution of the first generation of the Heights’ community.

It would be a stretch, then, to suggest that *Wuthering Heights* participates in the evolution of literary realism during the middle-decades of the nineteenth century based on Brontë's mingling of her biography with the reality of rural life. However, it will be less of a stretch to suggest that her "preference" for passion, rather than compassion, perhaps informs, in part at least, her excessive narratorial aesthetic. With this impulse, however, Brontë yet participates in renewing the novel. She does so by making the novel novel again; whether by design or by accident, her narratorial aesthetic, transcending one expression of narration, introduces readers to another. In so doing, Brontë also highlights play's potential as a productive novel aesthetic, one that may not ever transcend the generic constraints binding it. Yet play makes the novel, to return to Schiller, a "living form," by emerging as a connective tissue, that force of aesthetic production that conjoins terrains, structures, and drives in coterminous and interdependent relation.

Is the play driving the novel's narration both like the play of moths and disciplined play? Life and death of a form of narration? To retell this story, is to retell the story of the story's telling – to relate that the Nelly-Lockwood narrating block tells the story in its unique way, which is implicate readers as potential supplements to it. Never unbind but rebinds. What is narrated to us, including the narratorial aesthetic itself, is re-narrated by readers, who first, as readers are narrates. Working out the narratorial scheme is to re-position oneself from narrate to narrator, to insert oneself into play of narration.

Endgame.2

Brontë, however, gives us another moment of closure that is cast in a discourse of play prior to Lockwood's visit to the gravestones. What ultimately saves this community,

readers are led to believe, is Cathy and Hareton's innocent laughter and play, which announces a new era at the Heights. Late in the novel when Lockwood returns to the Heights after an absence of a year, Nelly relates to him what has transpired in the interim. She describes a meal during which Hareton's "smothered laugh," prompted by Catherine playing with his food at dinner, enrages Heathcliff. He yells, "I thought I cured you of laughing!" (270).

A confrontation ensues in which Cathy proclaims that the Grange is hers and the Heights is Hareton's. Just before Heathcliff strikes Cathy, he stops. Heathcliff restrains himself, but only before warning her that he is liable to kill her for raising his passion (272). Hareton will not hear a disparaging word about Heathcliff from Cathy, and although not pleased, "she found means to hold her tongue" (272). Soon after Heathcliff realizes his reign is over by admitting to Nelly that he no longer "care(s) for striking. I can't take the trouble to raise my hand," he tells her (274).

Unable "to destroy for nothing" (274), Heathcliff's realizes his game is finally played out at the end of the novel. A smothered laughter of real love—not "love in play" (198), which is how Heathcliff refers to the exchange of letters between Cathy and Linton that he orchestrates as part of his ploy to gain control of the Grange — topples the rule of a tyrant, one who loves so passionately and violently that he nearly destroys two houses, but one who also knows all too well to what the smothering of such love leads. Their innocent laughter and play serves as a marked point of departure from the aggressive laughter that opens the novel at Lockwood's expense. Thus ends what appears to be at first glance a most un-Victorian novel, one in which violent and excessive play leads to societal confusion, disorder and even death. But the ending of *Wuthering Heights*

suggests its allegiance to the very Victorian project of reforming and rationalizing play. The cultural stability that ensues after the death of Heathcliff and the union of Cathy and Hareton is spelled out in their cooperative rather than overtly hostile and competitive play; they play with each other teasingly rather than attempting to hurt – physically or emotionally – the other.

In his 1886 essay “On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement,” as mentioned in the first chapter, Anthony Trollope positions novels and the act of reading them as a legitimate form of recreation. He argues that novels teach and edify readers rather than leading readers astray down the road to impropriety as so many of its detractors claim. *Wuthering Heights* stages the contours of this conversation nearly forty years earlier when Lockwood returns to the Heights and witnesses Cathy teaching Hareton how to read. If earlier in the novel books operate as a source of shame for the illiterate Hareton, or weapons to be thrown at others, Cathy’s reading lesson instills in him a ludic ethos that tames Heathcliff’s influence on him as it “improves” him. Cathy and Hareton’s relationship not only fulfills the promise of love denied to Heathcliff and Catherine. The terms in which the novel’s conclusion casts this love suggests the promise of cultural stability and order that rational play provides, even if so much of the novel revels in a violent, excessive and combinatory ludic that frustrates the very idea of order that Cathy and Hareton’s union brings to the Heights.

The scene, which precedes Lockwood’s visiting of the graves, stands in opposition to the latter’s hint of transcendent play that is untamed and liberating, free of intention, and of design. The dialectic that emerges between these two images of play stages the opposing drives that productive fashion Brontë’s novel – her transcendent

narratorial ethos is necessarily bound and tamed as a facet of aesthetic production. But there is another story here, a larger one. *Wuthering Heights*, in spite of its excesses and violence that are expressed in discourses of play, or because of them, acts as a microcosm for a trajectory of play, recreation, and leisure during the nineteenth century. Hareton and Cathy's moment aligns the novel with such a project. But at the same time, which is such an apt phrase that captures so much of what happens in this novel, Brontë pushes against this very impulse. The play of fluttering moths witnessed by Lockwood at the headstones, in countering rational play and its ends and rational play as an end, yet also counters the violence and excesses that reading disciplines. This, then, is play of a different order, not a synthesis or an antithesis, but one that finally "wuthers," passing into another register of meaning, discourse, and narrative beyond that of the poles of *ludus* and *paidia* organizing the Heights and her novel. Brontë offers nothing definite here, nothing specific, not a program, only the hint of a suggestion that is not directly available to Lockwood or to readers. With this last image, then, Brontë challenges her readers to rethink play in the way that she does, by putting play back into play.

Endnotes

¹ What I refer to here as New Formalisms is less a united critical movement and more a disparate pastiche of texts reconsidering the form and formal elements in the study of literature. "What is New Formalism," by Marjorie Levinson is a good place to begin a foray into the field she divides into two camps: one seeks to counter what have become reductive historical readings of the literary through renewed consideration of form, while another seeks to reclaim art from history through the celebration of an aesthetic of literary forms. Levinson's essay also includes a useful bibliography, which I do not claim to revise or duplicate here. What follows is only a sample of a much richer conversation that has developed in recent years, which Levinson adroitly summarizes: "Reading for Form," Susan J. Wolfson; "Form and Content," Ellen Rooney; "The Return of Form," Alison James; "Fiction as Restriction" and *Social Formalism*, Dorothy J. Hale; "Formalism and its Malcontents," Jim Hansen; "Classical and/or Postclassical Narratology," Gerald Prince; "The Commitment to Form," W. J. T. Mitchell; and "Strategic Formalism," Caroline Levine.

² The larger body of Angenot's work has yet to be translated into English. In 2004, *The Yale Journal of Criticism* introduced Angenot's work to an English-reading audience it has yet to reach more extensively. Angenot's project of Social Discourse, as he describes it, is meant to bring literary production into the realm of social discourse (199). This task is part of a larger consideration of connecting the discourses in various fields of study "without neglecting the stakes, constraints, and traditions of these individual fields, to extrapolate transdiscursive rules, to extrapolate vectors of exchange, and set up a global topology of the prevailing *sayable*" for a society at a particular point in time (199). Angenot emphasizes that his project is not simply a "juxtaposition of genres, disciplines, and local cognitive strategies (200). Rather, he seeks those points of contact between discourses and discursive fields that generate rubrics guiding the possibilities of what can be said.

³ This tradition of criticism, rather than emerging from within literary studies, comes at the literary from a sociological perspective. His particular brand of sociocriticism extends the genre's repertoire in his deft wielding of structural, deconstructive, and semiotic strategies. Lukacs's *Theory of the Novel* and Lucien Goldmann's *Toward a Sociology of the Novel* remain representative works in this tradition as they pertain to the novel form, along with the work of Bakhtin, I would suggest.

⁴ Although the idea of discursive formations remains a vital hinge in Cros's theory, he notes that Foucault develops this concept most intensively as it relates to the axis of the division of labor: the work of people, disciplines, institutions, practices, and regimes that together parse and identify the objects of what a discourse speaks. To complicate the Foucauldian model of discursive formations, Cros wields conceptions of ideological formations in the tradition of Althusser's ISAs that explicitly consider the politics inherent to discursive formations that Foucault omits. Critics of Foucault claim that he is content to speak of the more neutral juxtaposition of nondiscursive and discursive formations. However, Cros notes that Foucault is most concerned with a history of discourses in the sense that he seeks out the moment of a discourse's emergence, which does not necessarily reflect what Foucault calls the interaction between two realms of relations, primary and secondary. Primary relations or "real" are those that emerge among ISAs, which for Foucault, "are not necessarily expressed in the formation of relations that makes discursive objects possible" (45). Relations between psychiatry, illness, and criminality suggest this secondary set of formations that more directly brings objects of discourse into being. Cros, however, actively seeks out the roles and (re)productions of dominant orders, hierarchies, and hegemonies in which discursive formations emerge.

⁵ In one sense, E. S. Dallas's *The Gay Science* attempts to make more conscious the role of play in aesthetics for a Victorian readership steeped in a distinctive British conception of art lacking this appreciation. Dallas draws on a German tradition emphasizing a ludic dimension to art that a history of British aesthetic theory fails to appreciate in its lauding of concepts such as the imagination. Whereas German schools of aesthetics celebrate the play of pleasure (or the pleasure of play) as an end of art, Dallas finds that in thinkers such as Bacon and Coleridge, pleasure works in the service of imagination, a means and no longer an end in itself. Dallas's study reminds us, as it did nineteenth-century readers, of the role of play in aesthetics in an informative study of European traditions in a comparative context. While his tract offers much to consider in this regard, its intensive investment in the aesthetic leaves little room for the role of the social in relation to the aesthetic.

⁶ I am not looking to rewrite the author-implied author and reader-implied reader relations or to tackle the Bakhtinian notion of the superaddressee. But I do understand that the act of writing a particular novel undertaken by someone like Dickens, for instance, remains determined, in part, by his unique because individuated "reading" of the nineteenth-century world that he uses as the basis for his fictions. My chapter on *Oliver Twist* examines the implications of his claim that this novel retells "truths" of London's underworld. But we know that such "truths," whatever they may be, as representations, re-creations, and re-imaginings of a fictional order, underscore the ineffability of something such as "truth" as opposed to testifying to the ability of an author to capture it in a faithful reproduction. It seems rather that what Dickens should acknowledge is not the "truth" of his rendering of London's underworld. Instead, addressing the nature of his fiction as drawing on his knowledge, experience, and reading of this world seems more appropriate. At the same time, a reader of this same novel does not simply or passively digest and consume words on a page or the "truths" such words purport to import into the fiction.

⁷ As noted in the introduction, I take up this subject in greater detail in my reading of *Vanity Fair*.

⁸ Herbert Marcuse presents a similar idea in *The Aesthetic Dimension*: "Under the law of the aesthetic form, the given reality is necessarily sublimated: the immediate content is stylized, the data are reshaped and ordered in accordance with the demands of the art form" (51.)

⁹ I borrow this phraseology from Jean Laplanche, who borrows it from Lacan. Tim Dean's "Art as Symptom" describes Laplanche's redeployment of Lacan's "enigmatic signifier" to mark the futility of attempting to reach a signified. Laplanche suggests that analysis only discovers that one signifier yields to another under the pressure of hermeneutical analysis. My use of "enigmatic" here, suggests a similar resistance inherent to the concept of literary or aesthetic form, which yields less a signified than a series of signifiers that can never absolutely immobilize it.

¹⁰ This is his "Classical and/or Postclassical Narratology" essay.

¹¹ Despite forging a stronger bond between the aesthetic and the social in various terrains, we cannot yet turn to recent works in the New Formalist vein for new insights concerning the triadic form-play-content relation. But we can return briefly to a Marxist literary tradition to better understand how the form-content relation has been conceived as a point of entry for considering the lack of consideration of the play subtending it. Jameson's *Marxism and Form*, for instance, reaffirms content's dominance over form, arguing that content determines form, as the latter is the expression of content "seeking its adequate expression" in its coming into being (328). He also observes that that matters of literary form "dissolve into problems of content," as a function of a literary form's dependence upon content as the connective tissue to the historical context that preconditions this content (352). Jameson returns to the form-content problematic in *The Political Unconscious*. Despite his penetrating reconsideration of narrative forms in this seminal work, the form-content relationship remains locked in its binary arrangement. To be sure, Jameson complicates this binary by reproducing its logic according to Hjelmslev's division of the form and substance of speech (147). And to be fair, Jameson does not forward a theory of narrative that proposes to move past this relationship in his complication of it. Less interested in the story of the formalization of the

novel form, Jameson's readings more intensively invest in the novel form's capacity to formalize ideology as content.

¹² Deleuze and Guattari use the example of a wasp forming an "assemblage" with the orchid from which it removes pollen. The interaction between a wasp and an orchid, according to this paradigm, necessitates that the bodily borders of the wasp and the orchid simultaneously and respectively relax and reaffirm the integrity of their boundaries in order for the wasp to extract nectar from the orchid. To take what is in the orchid, what is part of the orchid but not part of itself, the wasp deterritorializes its own body, making it able to receive what is outside of it and then reterritorializes its body to include the region of the orchid it penetrates to extract nectar. At the same time, the orchid undergoes a similar process to allow the wasp to take the nectar from it. The orchid must make itself receptive for the taking of its nectar by the wasp, requiring the flower to reorganize its boundaries in a similar manner.

¹³ This subject receives extended attention in his essay "Freud's Masterplot," the centerpiece to his influential *Reading for the Plot*.

¹⁴ See Ellen Griffin's historical reading of recreation and leisure that maps the significance of play-spaces, geography, and regional specificity in *England's Revelry* (2005).

¹⁵ Raymond Williams's *The Country and City* is still a standard in this area. *The Country and The City Revisited*, a more recent collection of essays, revisits and expands the scope of Williams's foundational observations, but curiously, does not take up recreation or leisure.

¹⁶ In making the case for the "social" necessity of recreation of a certain ilk, the author of "The Use and Abuse of Social Recreations" (1873) suggests "the best interests of our commercial and social life" demand "pure and wholesome recreations" (634).

¹⁷ In *Truth and Method*, his foundational work on hermeneutics, Gadamer locates in play a conditioning dynamic of the aesthetic object. See the section "The ontology of the work of art and its hermeneutical experience."

¹⁸ While I trace Victorian discourses of play circulating in novels, criticism, aesthetics, and philosophy, such a catalog in and of itself gives us only a partial picture of the dissertation's stakes: to get further inside this arena of the period's social discourse (SD) requires taking advantage of my historical distance and position outside of it, which allows for the mobilization of the subsequent scrutiny that play and the novel form have received in various disciplines over the years. Finessing the relations that emerge between aesthetic and social forms of play that occur during the nineteenth century, would otherwise significantly be restricted. Like formalism(s), play continues to attract attention from literary scholars. For instance, a 2009 issue of *New Literary History* (40.1) reconsiders anew the subject of play from a variety of perspectives, and continues a literary conversation that, for all intents and purposes in the Anglo critical tradition, traces back to the Jacques-Ehrmann edited volume of *Yale French Studies* 41 (1968). This volume was subsequently re-published by Beacon Press in 1971 as *Game, Play, Literature*.

¹⁹ Jacques Ehrmann's takes both Caillois and Huizinga to task for beginning with the assumption that play, culture, and reality are separate entities. His essay "Homo ludens revisited" argues that one cannot talk about one without drawing the other two into the conversation.

²⁰ In contrast to the fantastic elements inherent to the romance genre, the novel, for Congreve, is "of a more familiar nature . . . [with incidents] not such as are wholly unusual or unpresided [unprecedented], such which not being so distant from our Belief, bring also the pleasure nearer to us" (qtd. In Hunter 26).

²¹ In a manner of speaking, then, the novel form during the early decades of the nineteenth century enters its formative years that I will compare to *Oliver Twist*'s search for his identity in the next chapter. The same might be said of criticism itself. Coleridge does much to further the cause of literary criticism with his *Biographia*. But the novel and fiction take a secondary role in this project. Of more relevance to the development of the novel form is the conversation that develops in periodicals among critics, reviewers, and authors in their wrangling with what makes fiction, and by extension, the novel, tick during the nineteenth century. The emphasis of judgment and taste in earlier manifestations of British literary criticism left little room for critics to consider formal and structural concerns driving the dramatic or poetic works under question.

²² A generation of detractors questioned the novel's moral worth as a leisure form, its standing as a legitimate genre in comparison to poetry and drama, and classed it as a pursuit only suitable for the lower orders, for instance. However, the novel also found its defenders, including a young John Ruskin. He incredulously responds to statements by "flinty numskull(s)" who find it "shocking" to read fictions that are generated by a series of falsehoods in an 1836 essay. Since falsehoods are not true and are closer to lies, which are immoral, a fiction cannot be inherently good, so the argument goes. Ruskin, however, argues for the benefits of fiction as a form of "mental recreation" that frees the mind "from the severity of confinement" without launching it into "useless reverie" or "unthinking inanity." More than amusement, reading fiction according to such a rubric, productively engages the mind, preventing it from stagnating. Anthony Trollope echoes such sentiments five decades later in an essay that also firmly establishes fiction as a form of rational recreation. In "On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement," (1886) Anthony Trollope legitimizes novels and the act of reading them by arguing that fictions teach and edify readers rather than leading them astray down the road to impropriety as so many of its detractors claim.

These two essays, published fifty years apart, emphasize the benefits of fictions, and by extension novels, by underscoring the positive effects of reading. On the one hand, these essays suggest a continuing need to defend fiction and novels even as the next century drew nearer in the face of lingering attacks and concerns. Far from being a repository of immorality, for Ruskin and Trollope novels embody a morality that makes our minds properly active while cuing readers to take the proper path to life, even if doing so exposes readers to unsavory characters and scenes of life. These essays suggest that the life of a novel remains very much attached and invested in the life of the world exterior to it. If the novel can positively affect readers as Ruskin and Trollope claim, it is because the fictional and the aesthetic remain intimately a part of the "real" world inhabited by readers despite a fiction being set off from the life of this world by the very fact of being a work of art.

²³ I should note that I am not suggesting that Bulwer-Lytton spawns the dawn of a new era of novel criticism. Privileging his essay serves as the specific means to localize the terms guiding the examination of narrative and fictional forms via the novel at this time, an interest that becomes less a formalized movement itself or marshaled by a single individual than it signifies a growing need to understand how stories work. Whether it is as Peter Brooks suggests that previous master narratives fail to resonate, what he refers to as the "loss of providential plots" as the nineteenth century unfolds, Brooks is right to mark the "nineteenth century's obsessions with questions of origin, evolution, progress, genealogy" (6). Perhaps an obsession with the novel form fails to emerge during the Victorian years, although persistent detractors of the genre continue to suggest otherwise in later decades. But Bulwar-Lytton's essay does suggest the evolution, progress, or maturation of literary criticism as it relates to the rise of a more penetrating formal discourse in relation to fiction and the novel.

²⁴ The *OED* notes the propensity of 18th century (and earlier) thinkers in the fields of theology and philosophy, for instance, to use a discourse of mechanism to penetrate the functionality and processes of systems of nature. The chemist Sir Humphry Davy's "Parallels Between Art and Science" (1807) makes the case for an experiential affinity bonding scientists pursuing natural laws with practitioners of the "refined" arts by suggesting a Keatsian sentiment a decade before "Ode to a Grecian Urn" is published: "perception of truth is as simple a feeling as the perception of beauty" (159). In turn, this sentiment echoes Shaftesbury's observation that "all beauty is truth," which he makes in an *Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (1709). For writers and critics of Bulwer-Lytton's ilk who deploy terms such as "mechanism" as a

rhetorical strategy of the critical endeavor, uncovering the "truth" of fiction or the genre of the novel at the same time legitimizes this project. Critically approaching fiction through this lens opens up nineteenth-century considerations of narrative and the novel to new possibilities as it expresses how functional or transportable this mechanistic discourse proves to be, a discourse that carries the echoes of its own history into that of the developing story of the novel.

²⁵ Henry Fielding, as we know, relies on his own rubric of generic distinctions to outline the new way of writing he supposedly founds with *Tom Jones*: "For as I am, in reality, the founder of a new province of writing, so I am liberty to make what laws I please therein" (88). Much of this province he carves out based on the novel's differences from the romance. In the process, he, like other novelists of this time, equates his fictions with histories: "As truth distinguishes our writings from those of idle romances which are filled with monsters, the productions not of nature, but of distempered brains . . . we would avoid any resemblance to that kind of history which a celebrated poet seems to think is no less calculated for the emolument of the brewer, as the reading it should be always attended with a tankard of good ale" (151).

²⁶ For instance, George Muir's 1842 essay "Modern Romance and Novel" inserts the "tale" into the romance-novel generic discussion, as a "middle term between the others," which allows for the "mixture of the novel and romance in the same composition" (42-43). He cites Walter Scott as exemplifying such an aesthetic.

²⁷ In *Before Novels* (1990), Hunter lists a number of features that become associated with the novel form in the eighteenth century, including concerns such as contemporaneity, probability, and the move away from traditional plots, the latter of which restates a fundamental thesis of Ian Watt. But Hunter's reading of the way in which early novelists expressed novelty as part of the aesthetic of the burgeoning novel form underscores by restating what a Bulwar-Lytton begins to outline a century and a half earlier.

²⁸ This is the British journal, a weekly first published 1822, not the German journal founded by the Schlegels in 1798.

²⁹ Quite frequently, authors, reviewers, and critics deployed a moralistic rubric to catalog fiction's shoulds and should nots in relation to what subjects were acceptable to write about as well as how to go about doing so. As such, the criticism of the "craft" of fiction arising as a genre of periodical writing during the period, to borrow from Percy Lubbock, initially crystallizes around how an author should go about producing the fictional products deemed worthy by a given critic. In other words, generally speaking, such criticism considers to varying degrees of intensity and insight matters of fictional forms and contents as the novel consolidates into the form familiar to us today.

³⁰ Dickens and Eliot do not refrain from briefly commenting upon their fictional worlds of matters pertaining to them in their novels. But their interruptions remain less intrusive because they do not become a facet of a novel's overall aesthetic as they do in the work of Sterne or Thackeray.

³¹ Essays such as Robert Miles's "A Fall in Bread: Speculation and the Real in *Emma*, suggest that Austen was acutely aware of goings-on of the world outside of her sedate fictions. Miles argues that "*Emma* provides a deep and complex meditation on the nature of value, one that was only possible within the period of its composition" (67). The real-life backdrop for the moral economy of value in circulation at Highbury is the rise and fall of "high farming," the movement of new money into rural areas, and the subsequent constriction of money by banks when the conflict with Napoleon reaches its final stages. Miles hinges his reading on the fact that Austen's brother, like a great many during this time, lost his fortune as a result of a volatile marketplace, which coincides with the fall of bread prices.

³² Class designations are problematic and tricky, as we have learned that there are subtleties marking their difference, not necessarily great chasms that separate one class from those neighboring it from above or below. Miles refers to Austen's ideology as "pseudo-gentry," but repeats Lionel Trilling's observation that

the great number of ranks and the movement of people among them make the project of a definitive class schematic difficult, which certainly applies to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, as volatile corn markets made and unmade it's a generation of speculators. In referring to the Highbury community as a leisure class, Jonathan H. Grossman observes that Emma and her circle of family and friends engage in the work of maintaining a society scaffolded by the production of etiquette, politeness, and manners. I will have more to say about Grossman's essay "The Labor of the Leisured in *Emma*."

³³ For Nancy Armstrong conduct books remain essential in coming to terms with the sexual politics of domestic fictions. I am suggesting that Austen domesticates her fiction through a restrained aesthetic of play.

³⁴ John Plotz's *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* remains a standard in the field.

³⁵ It is not only the conspicuous production and work of etiquette in this society that marks it as a leisured class. A concurrent absence of laborers and workers accompany it, as Raymond Williams observes with regard to Austen's larger body of fiction: "The land is seen primarily as an index of revenue and position; its visible order and control are a valued product, while the process of working is hardly seen at all" (115). The novel, for instance, does not depict Robert Martin or Knightley (or his laborers) working their plots of land. Obviously, Mrs. Weston is more a family member than employee to the Woodhouse family.

³⁶ By some estimations, at the exhibition, the working-classes improved their standing with their betters by their civil and respectful behavior.

³⁷ The rise of Evangelicalism becomes an epicenter for the dissemination of a program of domestic recreations as part of a larger conservative program to perverse the existing political and social order in England in the wake of the French Revolution. William Wilberforce, who becomes a leading figure in this movement, found a vice squad in 1787 called The Proclamation Society, which sought a reformation of manners at all ranks. In 1797 he publishes *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious Systems*, a tract that accounts for the moral decline of England, which includes repeated references to the dangers of idleness and engaging in improper leisure activities. A life of "shapeless idleness," we are told, is one in which recreations becomes "its chief business. Watering-places, the sports of the field, cards! Never-failing cards! The assembly, the theatre, all contribute their aid; amusements are multiplied, and combined, and varied, 'to fill up the void of a listless and languid life;' and by the regulated use of these resources, there is often a kind of sober settled plan of domestic dissipation, in which, with all imaginable decency, year after year wears away in unprofitable vacancy" (131). The late 1790s witnessed the publication of a number of similar tracts, such as John Bowdler's (yes, that one) *Reform or Ruin* (1798) and Arthur Young's *An Enquiry into the State of the Public Mind among the Lower Classes* (1798). Maurice J. Quinlin's *Victorian Prelude*, particularly the chapter "Reform or Ruin" is a good historical introduction to Evangelicalism and its societies during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

³⁸ Recent examples include "Emma: Jane Austen's Errant Heroine" by Eugene Goodheart and "Beyond the Romantic Gypsy" by Laura Mooneyham White, which begins with an informative summary of representations of gypsies in Romantic literature.

³⁹ As Mooneyham White notes, the gypsies do not resolve the novel's plot, but they provide a new red herring (the Harriet-Frank Churchill pairing) that complicates this plot.

⁴⁰ Wendy S. Jones notes that Austen's use of the word "imaginist" to designate "Emma as a fanciful thinker" is a curious one, as "iminator," a word commonly used in Austen's time suggests the same idea. For Jones, Austen "call[s] our attention to Emma's association with the image, the visual, and to Emma's imagination as that which perceives and shapes according to a model of artistic creation. It is no accident that the adjective that most often describes Harriet, a character who does not create, and who is shaped by the ideas of others, is "artless" (321).

⁴¹ Frank announces the following to the party: “Ladies and gentlemen, I am ordered by Miss Woodhouse (who, wherever she is, presides.) to say, that she desires to know what you are all thinking of” (289). He subsequently revises his proclamation, saying that Emma “only requires something very entertaining from each of you, in a general way” (290). Miss Bates’s response to this new request, that she will say “three dull things,” elicits a biting response from Emma: “Ah! But ma’am, there may be a difficulty. Pardon me! – but you will be limited as to number – only three at once (290). Miss Bates does not immediately realize the insult, but when she does, she uncomfortably attempts to brush it off.

⁴² The letter Frank subsequently writes in which he confesses all to Mrs. Weston includes the following line: “In order to assist a concealment so essential to me, I was led on to make more than an allowable use of the sort of intimacy into which we were immediately thrown” (344). Concealing his engagement to Jane Fairfax is analogous with Austen’s need to conceal the twists and turns of her novel’s plot.

⁴³ Grossman also observes that post-Box Hill, Emma dedicates herself to the work of etiquette.

⁴⁴ These forms of domestic recreations unquestionably reinforce larger societal trends in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that position leisure as a practice that installs edification as a necessary facet of hearthside entertainments. The history of competing forms of recreation during this time period may be absent in the novel, but the novel’s allegiance to emergent models of play remains obvious.

⁴⁵ In his letter to Mrs. Weston, Frank explains that he wrote a letter to Jane, one that gets lost in the shuffle of other business. It remains in his desk. When she doesn’t answer, he initially blames the post-office: “Imagine the shock; imagine how, till I had mutually detected my own blunder, I raved at the blunders of the post” (347).

⁴⁶ Additionally, the novel returns to letters received and sent, moving beyond their contents and into a consideration of style: Emma and Knightley, for instance, debate the penmanship of Frank. Knightley finds his writing less than manly: “It is too small – wants strength. It is like a woman’s writing.” Emma, however, claims ignorance on the issue, as she “never saw any gentleman’s handwriting” (230). A concern for style arises in relation to Knightley earlier, when Emma sees him across the floor, not dancing at the ball at the Crown. Though not dancing, he moves closer to her, “and those few steps were enough to prove in how gentlemanlike a manner, with natural grace, he must have danced, would he but take the trouble” (254). D.A. Miller’s *Jane Austen, or, The Secret of Style* does not dedicate much attention to Emma’s concern with style. Perhaps this is because in this novel, style becomes associated with taste and aesthetics rather than the extra-territorialities that preoccupy Miller.

⁴⁷ Hannah More, an ardent Evangelist and one of the more influential figures of the movement during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, suggests that “the amusements of a Christian must have nothing in them to excite the passions which it is his duty to subdue; they must not obstruct spiritual-mindedness; nor inflame ‘the lust of the flesh, lust of the eye and pride of life’” (qtd. in Malcolmson 103). Her influence was such that she was encouraged to “counteract” the influence of Paine’s *The Age of Reason*, a work that gained traction among the poor. With her sister Sarah, she published *Cheap Repository*, an affordable monthly with more class-suitable material for the less fortunate (Quinlan 83). Laura Mooneyham White notes Austen’s approval of Evangelicalism. In a letter to her niece, Austen writes that “I am by no means convinced that we not all be Evangelicals & am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason and Feeling, must be happiest and safest” (312). Although as an Anglican, Austen, as Mooneyham White notes, would be most interested in Anglican Evangelicalism, and less inclined to Methodist and other branches.

⁴⁸ A slippery subject, play has the inherent potential to elude those who attempt definitively to locate or define it. To avoid this pitfall I follow Peter Bailey’s distinction that recreation and leisure function as

complementary aspects of play: recreation refers to what is played, while leisure marks the time of play (2). Recreation and leisure, then, mark particular dimensions of the more encompassing experience that is play. I further limit my working definition of play by focusing on its productive potential as a shaper of subjectivity.

⁴⁹ Mihai Spărișu's *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Modern Discourse* charts the shifts in ludic paradigms along rational and pre-rational lines and provides a useful and informed analysis of the way in which play has been conceived and used in various disciplines over the centuries.

⁵⁰ In the preface to the Library Edition (1858) of *Oliver Twist* Charles Dickens defends himself from charges that his novel romanticizes the criminal life. Documenting the lives of Nancy and the young thieves so candidly, Dickens argues, becomes a necessity for a fiction that draws upon a London underworld populated with adolescent prostitutes and delinquents in all its "unattractive and repulsive truth." Addressing the believability of Nancy's commitment to a man such as the vicious Sikes, Dickens writes that it "is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. It is true." Such devotion to the truth on the part of Dickens means that the quality of the content of the novel becomes of utmost importance: according to the underlying premises of his preface, any potential content is excluded from the novel if it fails the test of "truth." Essays such as "Oliver Twist, Dickens's Nancy, and the 'Truth' of Victorian Prostitution" and "Truth and Persuasion: the Language of Realism and Ideology in *Oliver Twist*" tackle the novel's commitment to truths that remain outside the scope of my essay. The former is closer to the ethos of my reading of the novel in its probing of the middle-class trappings that Dickens uses to characterize Nancy, who appears to have more in common with Rose Maylie than with actual prostitutes from the era. The latter essay investigates the speech patterns used by various figures in the novel.

⁵¹ Miller notes as much in his reading of *Bleak House*: "the novel trains us to abide in Chancery-like structures – by getting us to wait, as it were, in its very long lines – it does this insofar as it is organized as a *reformed* Chancery" (92-93).

⁵² In *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* Simon During discusses the magic assemblage, or "the historically developing sector of leisure enterprises which began to consolidate during the seventeenth century, at first alongside traditional and ritual festivals and revelries" (66), which includes magic shows, optical illusions, ventriloquism, magic lantern shows, juggling and other like spectatorial entertainments. Citing passages by Samuel Butler, During informs us that "economic imperatives" drove entertainers to align with less savory characters, including criminals (68). During also writes that "Butler reminds us in his characterization of a conjurer, sleight of hand would also spill out of the magic assemblage when used for non-entertainment purposes. Gamblers frequently used sleight-of-techniques; pickpockets sometimes allied themselves with showmen" (72).

⁵³ Robert-Houdin begins a description on the art of conjuring with the following epigraph: "To succeed as a conjuror, three things are essential—first, dexterity; second, dexterity; and third, dexterity." The journalist and cataloguer of London's 1850s street life, Henry Mayhew, recognized how much pickpockets also depended upon dexterity for their art. In classifying the numerous types of people who do not work for a living as a part of his massive three volume expose of London street culture, Mayhew creates the category of "Those who Plunder by Manual Dexterity, Stealth or by Breach of Trust." Included in this group of thieves are "the light-fingered gentry," and "buzzers," who pilfer handkerchiefs from the pockets of gentlemen.

⁵⁴ Such a process required as much boldness as stealthy posturing as described by Donald Thomas: "An accomplished thief need only to walk boldly towards his prey, taking an expensive handkerchief from his pocket as if to wipe his nose. This was done with a brazen horizontal flourish and with the arm passing

almost across the breast of his quarry. Under the cover of the flourish, the pickpocket's other hand moved up unobserved to draw the pin clear of the scarf" (69).

⁵⁵ The pickpocketing demonstration in Roman Polanski's adaptation of Dickens's novel (2005) emphasizes the theatricality of the game with a sequence in which the young thieves demonstrate their skills with a performance that includes an adroit and colorful aerial display of handkerchiefs.

⁵⁶ The game that Oliver watches unfold his first evening at Fagin's is not just a game or harmless fun; it is work that must be practiced, the repetition of which transforms a helpless, homeless and perhaps useless (by certain standards) child into a productive member of an illicit economy. This is the first in a series of carefully crafted exercises and amusements by which Fagin attempts to transform the child into a thief. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* describes a regime of micromanagement that compartmentalizes the human body, particularly in the section "Docile Bodies."

⁵⁷ The essay "Capitalism and Compassion in *Oliver Twist*" rightly reads this moment as indoctrinating the orphan into an efficient capitalist enterprise.

⁵⁸ For much of the novel Oliver moves in and out of the spheres of London life and London itself under the watchful eyes or forceful hands of parish beadies, employers, criminals and the middle-class likes of the Maylies and Mr. Brownlow, with whom he ultimately finds a permanent home. Oliver's dilemma and his transitory life functions as the primary plotline of the novel until the novel shifts focus. When Oliver is finally secure from Fagin and his half-brother Monks, the last third of the novel describes the pursuit and capture of the criminals. My essay focuses on the movements of the first two books, since they concentrate on Oliver's story and his development.

⁵⁹ The Christian parenting tract *The Book for Training Children* written by James Abbott and first published in 1834, offers a warning to parents about the wrong kinds of amusements: "all the pastimes and diversions of children should be directed toward good and useful habits, or else they will cultivate ill ones" (92). Fagin obviously understands this possibility keenly and takes it a step further by actively recruiting play to cultivate ill habits in his young charges.

⁶⁰ See Purdue and Golby's *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England 1750 – 1900* for a history of popular entertainments. The more recent *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes 1660-1830* uses *The Civilisation of the Crowd*, along with other foundational texts in the field such as *Popular Recreations* (Malcolmson) and *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (Cunningham) as points of departure in a reconsideration of popular pastimes in terms of the cultural functionality of ludic places and spaces in various communities.

⁶¹ Fagin's character, in all probability, was based on Ikey Solomon, a Jewish fence who employed child pickpockets prior to his arrest in 1829. Oliver remains acutely aware of Fagin's ethnicity: "Oliver wondered what picking the old man's pocket in play, had to do with his chances of being a great man. But, thinking that the Jew, being so much his senior, must know best, he followed him quietly to the table, and was soon deeply involved in his new study" (112). In overtly announcing Fagin's Jewishness, which serves at once as the mark of criminality and of cultural difference, this passage unites the plights of Fagin and Oliver, as both bear the burden of being outsiders in 1830s London, the former for his Jewishness the latter for being an orphan

⁶² J. A. Mangan's work in this area cannot be overlooked. For instance, see his *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*.

⁶³ *Metropolitan Magazine* favorably reviews the short tract *The Cribbage Player's Text-Book* in 1837, while the game was a recurring topic of the Letters pages in *Kaleidoscope* during the 1820s. Dickens also lampoons the popularity of the game in *Household Words*. The 1852 article "The Sporting World"

proposes to read an issue of *Bell's Life*, a weekly publication, from a decidedly unsporting point of view. In the first paragraph of his article, Dickens light-heartedly refers to the contributors of the correspondence columns who wait for a reply to a question asked about cribbage that ran in the previous edition. The jab at cribbage aficionados forms the slightest of digs Dickens takes at the world of sports in his larger article, but it nonetheless suggests the popularity of the game at mid-century.

⁶⁴ *The Mirror of literature, amusement and instruction* printed a running column titled "Scientific Amusements." An 1825 edition printed a series of "Arithmetical Recreations" based on sequences of equations and word problems. Here is a short example, Recreation 3 of the column: "Any amount being named, by adding a figure to that amount, it shall be divisible by 9, without any remaining. – On the number being presented to you, add the different numbers together, and casting out the nines, observe what remains; then what that figure is deficient of 9, is the number to be added to make the amount divisible by nine. Should it so happen that the figures presented form an equal quantity of nines, then ad a cipher: the figure or cipher may be placed between any of the figures" (141).

⁶⁵ Dickens castigates gambling in articles such as "Gambling" (1854) and "Play" (1855), both of which appeared in *Household Words*. Charles Lamb, however, shows a lighter side of whist in his 1821 essay "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist." Interestingly, in this essay Mrs. Battle reverses the observations of Jones of Nayland by suggesting that she bends her mind by playing whist and unbends it by reading a book. Such a reversal underscores her awareness of the mental energy, strategy, and concentration, or simply work, that is required of her to play whist.

⁶⁶ See "*Order and Disorder: Surrealism in Oliver Twist*" for a reading that positions this moment as a marker of Dickens's surrealist aesthetic.

⁶⁷ Winnicott outlines the transitional object's role in helping a young child formulate the boundaries between the self and the external world in *Playing and Reality* (1971).

⁶⁸ After nursing him back to health, Brownlow charges Oliver with an errand to return books and to pay the bookseller at which Bates and the Dodger attempted to pick his pocket. Brownlow furnishes Oliver with a new suit a few days before the latter embarks on his errand, during which he Nancy and Sikes recapture him. Returning to Fagin's dressed in different clothes becomes a seemingly endless source of humor for Charley Bates because, to him, Oliver remains the same child he and the Dodger picked up off the streets a few weeks prior. Upon seeing Oliver in his new suit Master Bates explodes in laughter. Unable to contain his boisterous reaction to this sight of Oliver, Charley exclaims, "here he is! Oh, Fagin, look at him! Fagin, do look at him! I can't bear it; it is such a jolly game. I can't bear it" (161). Not quite finished expressing himself, Master Bates continues, "Look at his togs! Superfine cloth, and the heavy swell cut! Oh, my eye, what a game! And his books, too! Nothing but a gentleman, Fagin!" (163). For these two, Oliver's clothes and his books becomes nothing more than the important props to a performance of middle-class pretensions, a game of acting and performing, a skill that Oliver is encouraged to learn by watching and partaking in the game of pickpocketing orchestrated by Fagin. Perhaps what inspires such vociferous laughter in Charley is the irony of Oliver's appearing as a middle-class subject who acts the part he adopts. Because for Charley acting becomes a means to an end and forms a vital aspect of the deception that allows him to steal from others without them knowing he does so.

⁶⁹ Nancy Armstrong gestures toward the role accommodation plays in the formation of the novel and the modern subject, which she argues are "one in the same." In *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900*, she describes the portrayal of restless characters that exceed the confines of the social position of the communities into which they are born. According to Armstrong, the picaresque allows such characters to enter new social situations where they can find "a place that accommodates their needs and abilities" (5). What interests Armstrong here is the content of the novel form and how such content imagines and produces the modern subject rather than the accommodative-assimilative dynamic at work in a novel such as *Oliver Twist*.

⁷⁰ Iser suggests the imaginary is less a faculty of the human condition and more a program of ludic possibility. Discourses indebted to concepts such as fancy, fantasy, and imagination, according to Iser, fail to capture or essentialize the imaginary, which eludes and resists such totalization as a potentiality that is only determined "in response to historically conditioned needs for understanding and deployment" (xvii). Much of *The Fictive and the Imaginary* probes the productive lines of the triadic relation among the imaginary, fictive, and reality.

⁷¹ Thackeray's anti-Newgate novel *Catherine* begins its serialization in 1839 in *Fraser's*.

⁷² Charley Bates even mentions the Newgate Calendar (the inspiration for the novels it spawns) after the Dodger is apprehended by the authorities. He laments the possibility of his partner's possible omission from the calendar, a remark that reflects the novel's own investment in the concentrated attention the calendar gives to criminals and the apprehension of them by an official and unofficial police force (390). Such attention digresses from a plotline previously dominated by Oliver's story, supplanting it by relaxing it, only to reproduce this plot with a different design and intention. Dickens may not necessarily introduce an entire spectrum of new content in his novel's last volume. He does, however, treat familiar content in a new or different way in this last volume, which drives the plot's obvious Newgate trappings.

⁷³ His essay "Freud's Masterplot" hinges on the productive dynamic of narrative deviance, which assumes the status of the proper in plot: "Deviance, detour, an intention that is irritation: these characteristics of the narratable, of 'life' as it is the material of narrative, of *fabula* become *sjuzet*" (104).

⁷⁴ Mangan's work on the game ethic in the nineteenth century is a good place to begin an inquiry into this topic.

⁷⁵ Immanuel Kant, however, warns us of the danger of blindly following "the power of imagination in its free play" which, he claims, remains free of reason's edicts. He specifically attaches this danger to novel reading, which may incite fragmentary trains of thought that frustrates the unity of understanding: "Reading novels, in addition to causing many other mental discords, also has the result that it makes distraction habitual. For although through the description of characters who actually can be found among human beings, (even if with some exaggeration) thoughts are given a coherence as in a true story, whose presentation must always be systematic in a certain way, the mind is nevertheless at the same time allowed to insert digressions (namely, to insert still other events as inventions) while reading. And the train of thought becomes fragmentary, so that one lets representations of one and the same object play in the mind in a scattered way (sparsim), not combined (conjunction) in accordance with the unity of understanding" (102). Lewes's essay attempts to prevent such waywardness from occurring in a novel's plot by clipping play, binding it only to "easy" expression.

⁷⁶ Mitchell does define illusionism contra realism on different occasions: If the aim of illusionism is to "delight astonish, amaze or otherwise take power over a beholder . . . Realism, by contrast, is associated with the capacity of pictures to show the truth about things." For Mitchell the difference is a matter of power. Illusionism overpowers a reader or spectator, but realism allows a spectator "to take power over the world" (325). He goes on to suggest that illusionism "involves power over subjects," while realism's power is "directed at objects." The latter may "include representations of subjects, but it addresses them (and its beholders), as it were, 'objectively'" (326).

⁷⁷ In his description of how to "pass a card," a basic technique that allows the magician to keep track of a card drawn by an audience member once it is placed back into the deck, Louis Hoffmann writes in his *Modern Magic* (1876) that "apparently obvious movements may be executed under the very noses of an audience, if only their attention is diverted at the right moment" (24). Articles and essays about the art of conjuring appearing in journals of the day reinforce Hoffmann's observation that obvious movements can be performed in front of an audience without it noticing them. The article "Natural Magic," appearing in

Chambers's Journal (1876) describes how by using a "light flexibility of fingers, and immense tact in distracting observation by amusing talk," magicians can "make things disappear in a manner so extraordinary and mysterious as to baffle comprehension" (321).

⁷⁸ While Hoffmann and others suggest that the dexterous use of the eye and voice help a magician divert an audience, a Victorian pickpocket might use a familiar magician's prop to perform a theft under the nose of a victim, namely a handkerchief. Such a process required as much boldness as posturing as described by Donald Thomas: "An accomplished thief need only to walk boldly towards his prey, taking an expensive handkerchief from his pocket as if to wipe his nose. This was done with a brazen horizontal flourish and with the arm passing almost across the breast of his quarry. Under the cover of the flourish, the pickpocket's other hand moved up unobserved to draw the pin clear of the scarf" (69). Like the magician, the pickpocket uses the distracting motions of one hand while the other performs another task, not out of eyesight, but remaining unobserved nonetheless. To remove the scarfpin requires a complicated if swift series of concomitant motions: showing the handkerchief in a "normal" fashion, performing the act of wiping one's nose as anyone else would and removing the scarfpin ever so dexterously. Producing and using the handkerchief becomes central to the theft, signaling to the surrounding crowd that the pickpocket is more concerned with his own body than with any other body and what it may contain.

The pickpocket's body, as a combination of visible and invisible motions becomes the most important prop in this performance by acting as someone wiping his nose, lulling potential targets into a false sense of security, or at least not drawing undue attention to himself. Fagin performs as such an unsuspecting London civilian in the game that Oliver watches and then participates in. This game that doubles as a teaching tool also mimics, even if in exaggerated form, the possible real-life scenarios in which his young pickpockets might participate and help to create by picking pockets. Stealing the handkerchief from Brownlow does not require the Dodger or Charley Bates visibly to adopt the guise of anyone except a sneaking thief, as Cruikshank's illustration suggests. But the pickpocketing games Fagin oversees trains the young delinquents how to steal under different circumstances, how to perform in less obvious and visible ways to avoid detection. Even if he does not explicitly explain to his charges the importance of performing, his own exaggerated performance does this work for him.

⁷⁹ Houdini does so by switching a watch given to him by an audience member with a broken watch secreted into the trick with the aid of his wife and on-stage assistant, Bess. The performance of the trick, according to Stewart, depends upon two simultaneous narratives that do not appear to commingle: Houdini apparently shoots a broken watch from a gun that is whole again when it hits the target because Bess Houdini has already secretly switched watches with Harry and then attaches the audience member's watch to the target in a timely and furtive fashion.

⁸⁰ See Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narratives in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, which holds up well today.

⁸¹ See Marx's *Capital Volume 1*, "The Two Factors of a Commodity: Use-Value and Value"

⁸² The phrase and concept "imaginary solution" is obviously borrowed from Fredric Jameson.

⁸³ "Nature's Threads" in Williams's *The Country and the City* considers the dialectic of mobility and wandering.

⁸⁴ Jennifer Ruth's *Novel Professions: Interested Disinterest and the Making of the Professional in the Victorian Novel* tracks discourses of the professional and professionalism.

⁸⁵ See Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, specifically the section "Freedom of Wit and Humour."

⁸⁶ Recently, Jeffrey Franklin has written about how, through discourses of play, an ideology of domesticity

and bourgeois hegemony overlap and unfold into the formal concerns of realist novels by formulating a “precariously reflexive dialogue about their own formal projects and social functions. The mimetic play of nineteenth-century realist novels links the issue of the real in fictional form to the issue of the real (the true, true value) in society” (5). What Lewes does in his essay is to write as if the positivist ideology – progress, synthesis, totality, unity – informing the “science” of his reading of *Tom Jones* exists as a/the true value(s) that should guide the criticism of this and other fictions. The “easy play” of “scenes and passages” manufactures a desired narrative order for Lewes that he imposes upon the structure of narrative plotting.

⁸⁷ Note Brooks’s observation of the three psychic models proposed by Freud.

⁸⁸ We do not need reproduce or recite Derrida’s ludic if dazzling rehearsal of Plato’s logic for devaluing writing. For Plato writing is artificial and diminishes knowledge by causing forgetfulness; it mimes knowledge.

⁸⁹ Brooks is just one in a chorus that establishes a bond between middles and play in various discourses. Mihai Spărosu describes Schiller’s play-drive situated in a middle position working in the service of Reason: “The play-drive occupies the same middle position in Schiller that the aesthetic judgment does in Kant, and for the same reason: while it is itself devoid of any cognitive value, it nevertheless help Reason mediate between the realm of the concept of nature and that of freedom” (55). Winnicott understands the process of psychotherapy as overlapping “two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together (38). This therapeutic play, it seems, plays out from a position between objectivity and subjectivity: “playing is an experience, always a creative experience . . . it is always on the theoretical line between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived” (50). For Derrida, difference operates as a “middle voice” that precedes binaries, functioning as “the origin or production of differences and the differences between differences, the play of differences” (130), and he describes its operations as “neither simply active or passive,” as “it announces or rather recalls something like the middle voice, that it speaks of an operation which is not an operation” (137). Deleuze and Guattari situate the rhizome in the middles as well: “A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (25), while Huizinga writes how play initially suggests itself “as an intermezzo, an interlude in our daily lives” (9).

⁹⁰ Here I am drawing on a rubric Jeffrey Franklin outlines in *Serious Play* that I return to later in my reading.

⁹¹ Altick’s *The Shows of London* contains Thackeray’s account of his visit to the Diorama, which was published in *Punch*. Here is a short excerpt: “I have been in churches. I have thought the sermon too long. I never thought the real service so long as that painted one which I witnessed at the Tenebrorama. My dear children whispered, ‘Take us out of this place, Grandpa.’” What causes such fright? The scene begins with a “ghastly view” of the Cathedral of Saint Sepulchre’s. Thackeray explains, “As we looked at the picture, the dreary church became more dreary; the shadows of night (by means of curtains and contrivances, which I heard in the back part of the mystery making an awful flapping and pulling) fell deeply and more terribly on the scene” (171).

⁹² Terry Castle’s “Phantasmagoria and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie” is still a valuable introduction to the emergence of a phantasmagoric discourse.

⁹³ Despite suggestive readings, Garret Stewart’s observations on canonical nineteenth-century novels in *Dear Reader* do not extend to the copious review literature and criticism of the era.

⁹⁴ Although outside the domain of Joseph Litvak’s analysis of theatricality in the nineteenth-century novel, *Vanity Fair*’s conspicuous stage-theatre ludic, at the same time that it structures the novel, threatens its “smooth functioning” (xi) by revealing the literary conventions that produce such smoothness. Litvak’s project positions theatricality as a complication to Foucauldian readings of the nineteenth-century novel.

Theatricality for Litvak helps account for the novel's "unpredictability, for its tendency not to accomplish – or not to accomplish quite as faithfully as might have been expected – the cultural task assigned to it" (xi).

⁹⁵ Peter Brooks's chapter "The Mark of the Beast: Prostitution, Serialization, and Narrative" considers the pressures part-issue publication maintains on fictions. In addition to Tillotson's study, J. A. Sutherland's *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* is a valuable source on the topic of serialization.

⁹⁶ Thackeray admits to a cavalier attitude toward historical authenticity. A sketch early in the novel depicts "an officer and lady" garbed in the fashions "at the commencement of the century." But he lacks "the heart to disfigure" his "heroes" "by costumes so hideous." Instead, Thackeray styles his characters according to the "present fashion" of the later years of the 1840s (65).

⁹⁷ This is an alteration of the original title, *Vanity Fair: Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society*.

⁹⁸ I discuss Clyde de L. Ryles's reading of *Vanity Fair* in relation to Romantic Irony below. His *A World of Possibilities: Romantic Irony in Victorian Literature* is a good introduction for those interested in tracing Romantic Irony in a British literary tradition. John K. Mathison considers the novel's German scenes in the essays "*The German Sections of Vanity Fair*." Though outdated by the standards of literary criticism today, it remains notable for highlighting the importance of the German episodes in the novel's plot.

⁹⁹ Thackeray reads Shakespeare in German during his visit, and sometime after witnessing a performance of Schiller's *Die Rauber*, he remarks that "I do believe him to be, after Shakespeare, the Poet."

¹⁰⁰ Schiller makes a famous distinction between his aesthetic and that of Goethe's: the latter is a naïve poet because Goethe is one with nature, which he loves. Schiller, in contrast, is a sentimental poet and loves nature, but loves it as a lack. Schiller's canonical essay "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" demarcates these differences.

¹⁰¹ He makes this distinction in "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry." The classical poet is naïve as result of idealizing nature without attenuating to the differences between the ideal and reality. The modern poet becomes sentimental by understanding the discrepancy between reality and its idealization.

¹⁰² Wheeler's *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe*, remains an invaluable introduction and source text.

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert's recent *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* is an encyclopedic account of this disparate movement. It seeks to reclaim the philosophic drive of Schlegel's romantic project, which she claims has been lost in readings that have limited the movement to a literary or aesthetic concern. *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, equally concerned with the philosophy scaffolding the writings of Schlegel and others, finds the literary/aesthetic as the means to philosophical transcendence. According to their line of thought, poetry completes the project of philosophy through a transcendence that philosophy cannot attain without it. Friedrich Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) emerges as an important statement that expresses art's ability to reconcile the gulfs between mind and nature and spirit and matter that philosophy, on its own, cannot.

¹⁰⁴ Rico Vitz breaks down Hume's mechanism of sympathy into three categories: first sympathy, extensive sympathy and limited sympathy. First sympathy is the initial if general form of sympathy that either becomes stronger and develops into a highly charged impression or fails to develop any further in what Vitz terms "limited sympathy." The second category, extensive sympathy accounts for an initial form of sympathy gathering force as it works upon the faculty of imagination. Vitz's term here is appropriate, as his description of extensive sympathy accounts for a sympathizer's imagining future ill-scenarios befalling a beggar or a man asleep in a field who is in danger of becoming maimed or killed by a plow in the distance

heading his way. What Vitz locates here is that sympathy, in order to motivate one to act benevolently, relies not only on the faculty of imagination, but an imagining of a distinct quality, namely narrative imagining.

¹⁰⁵ Hume presents this scenario in Section IX of Book II of his *Treatise*. Suggesting that the present moment does not confine sympathy, Hume posits: "For supposing I saw a person perfectly unknown to me, who while asleep in the fields, was in danger of being trod under foot by horses, I shou'd immediately run to his assistance; and in this I should be actuated by the same principle of sympathy, which makes me concern'd for the present sorrows of a stranger. The bare mention of this is sufficient. Sympathy being nothing but a lively idea converted into an impression, 'tis evident, that, in considering the future possible or probable condition of any person, we may enter into it with so vivid a conception as to make it our own concern" (385-386).

¹⁰⁶ In one sense, the following essay reverses the relationship between liminality and play outlined by Mark Hennelly's two-part essay "*Wuthering Heights*: The Initiatory Step," which establishes the Heights as a liminal culture in which members of the community pass through societal boundaries and rites of passage, in part, by playing. But a number of questions remain concerning the quality, repetition and significance of the play depicted there and how the novel form itself incorporates a similar logic as a feature of its narration. One of my major claims is that *Wuthering Heights* exacts an overdetermined narratorial state that is in between iterations as much as it is the coming together of these iterations.

¹⁰⁷ Lockwood's bleeding nose suggests that he has become the equivalent of a blood sport for Heathcliff and Hareton. Although the action of the novel unfolds in the later decades of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth, when the novel appeared in 1847, traditional blood sports had been on the wane from much of the Victorian recreational landscape, at least in urban regions. Bull-baiting and cock throwing had come under scrutiny for their cruelty to animals during the early third of the century. Additionally, "sports" that required participants to draw first blood from an opponent with a club or similar instrument frequently found at fairs or festivals lost support from much of the population as the nineteenth century progressed. Despite arguments that such violent spectacles served to cohere and instill order among the working class in rural regions, contests of cudgelling began less and less common and can be attributed to such social dynamics as various societal-interest groups forwarding rational recreation and the withdrawal of the ruling class's patronage of such violent displays.

¹⁰⁸ Hugh Cunningham writes that bull-running continued in Stamford until 1840 (22).

¹⁰⁹ Neil Tranter discusses how organized sports later in the nineteenth century bind and unify a sense of British national identity that extends to the colonies of the empire (54).

¹¹⁰ In his survey of Victorian wit and humor, Ronald Pearsall writes how domestic humor during the period relies on time-honored traditions that date back to the works of Chaucer. He cites ill-behaved children and domestic servants who talk back to superiors as familiar figures in Victorian humor. While the Nelly-Hindley confrontation certainly depicts Nelly talking back to her employer, this moment is not simply an example of servantgalism. Nelly lacks the familiar markings of the swelled servant who imitates her betters that inform the lessers in servantgalism humor. More importantly, Hindley's threat raises the stakes of the exchange to one of life and death, despite Nelly's assurance otherwise. Servantgalism humor lacks the violence this scene contains and often remains concerned with day-to-day occurrences in the domestic sphere that become unnecessarily complicated as a result of servants acting as if they were better than their station, for instance. Obviously Nelly's situation finds her in immediate danger that forces her to defend herself the only way she really can facing an unpredictable and much stronger physical opponent.

¹¹¹ Mihai Spariosu repeatedly relates that philosophers equate violent play with a process of Becoming that derives from the writings of prerational philosophers. For instance, he describes Kant's theory of the

sublime as “a highly rational one,” in which “Power as the irrational, violent play of Becoming can be experienced ... only indirectly, from a safe distance, within the rule-governed and well-marked play ground of culture” (43).

¹¹² Malcolmson writes, “Recreation was commonly seen as an impediment, a threat of substantial proportions, to steady and productive labor ... The characteristic attitude was to view most, if not all, traditional diversions with suspicion and irritation” (94).

¹¹³ Heathcliff and Hareton’s degrading of Lockwood early in the novel suggests the violence and cruelty that could erupt at any moment when this community plays. When they laugh at his inability to free himself from under the dogs that pin him to the ground, this moment becomes Lockwood’s and a reader’s indoctrination to the palpable violence underpinning much of the social interaction at Wuthering Heights. His bleeding nose attests as much and becomes the first indication of the way in which this community remains grounded in a cycle of vicious play. By relegating Lockwood to a bloody spectacle, Heathcliff and Hareton obviously exceed boundaries of civility; he becomes an object of amusing spectacle for them, as the tandem exacts much visible and audible pleasure from his predicament. His demeaning situation makes clear that in this novel playing too much, using the misfortune of another as entertainment, becomes an impediment to social cohesion, an irritant that often erupts into violence and a reminder of what a cruel playground the community becomes, which reinforces how the Heights becomes “another kind of culture” (Weissman 385).

¹¹⁴ Susan Rubinow Gorsky writes the way in which Catherine’s illness, “with its mixture of volition and helplessness, its physical and psychological elements, was far beyond Nelly’s or the doctor’s comprehension, and would have been beyond the comprehension of most nineteenth-century physicians” (182). Her reading examines how a culture of disease and unhealth must be overcome at an individual and societal level in order to establish a culture of well-being and happiness at the Heights. Most interesting is how Rubinow Gorsky describes Catherine’s condition by twice using the word “beyond” in the quoted passage above, which not only emphasizes how ill-equipped doctors of the Victorian era may have been in diagnosing cases such as Catherine’s. The repeated use of “beyond” suggests how Catherine’s complicated condition escapes attempts to define or frame it adequately. I am interested in how Catherine’s illness becomes a symptom of unpleasure associated with Heathcliff’s departure(s) that she cannot overcome because it is too overwhelming.

¹¹⁵ Ross Chambers uses this construction in *Loiterature* in his discussion of ludic evasions in narrative (89).

¹¹⁶ To interpret or diagnose her illness requires the negotiation of the various possibilities informing it, a process that mirrors the interpretation of a text, which for Roland Barthes involves appreciating a text’s plurality as “a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds . . . we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one” (5).

¹¹⁷ The union of the play and work in *fort-da* (which may not be so cleanly or clearly divided in *fort*, as Derrida suggests) is what allows Derrida to read the work-play of *fort-da* as the apparatus to a game that dislocates itself in a family drama of the child attempting to separate himself from a family that would return him to it, as well as how the child becomes separated from himself in the process (310).

¹¹⁸ For instance, Robin DeRosa writes that the black press, or “printing press” that Catherine sees in the mirror rather than her own image “is the symbolic order that both allows Catherine access to the death drive and which simultaneously allows her to mourn the loss of her childhood innocence” (34).

¹¹⁹ Philip K. Wion reads their relationship “as a displaced version of the symbiotic relation between mother and child” in a culture that lacks mother and over-relies on Nelly as a mother figure (146-148).

¹²⁰ For a narratological mapping of the narrative frames, see Jeffrey Williams's chapter on *Wuthering Heights* in *Theory and the Novel*. His reading of dispossession in/as the novel is quite suggestive, as is John T. Mathews's essay "Framing in *Wuthering Heights*," which argues the story of the Heights becomes "the only mode of being in a world of instabilities" (4). Both essays serve as exemplary readings of the narrative frames in the novel. My reading takes a different approach by looking at the way in which the conflation of iterations of the story of the Heights emerges as a result of a ludic impulse that instantiates a narratorial block that is not so much dispossession as a co-possession, and at the same time, emerges as a force that destabilizes as it stabilizes the form of the novel.

¹²¹ Isabella twice displaces Nelly in a similar manner. The first instance occurs when Isabella writes a letter to Nelly in Chapter 13 after eloping with Heathcliff and returning to the Heights. Shortly after at the Grange she narrates in great detail to Nelly her pitiful life in Chapter 17 after escaping from Heathcliff. Both extended narratives are reported by Nelly but in Isabella's words. Later in the novel Zillah becomes the narrator when she explains to Nelly how Cathy adjusts to life at Wuthering Heights for five pages in Chapter 30.

¹²² See Jeffrey Williams's essay for an extended discussion of this dynamic.

¹²³ In "*Wuthering Heights* and The Rhetoric of Interpretation" Michael S. Macovski writes how a "vital structure of the novel" is "an epistemological disjunction between listeners and speakers" (367). While Macovski makes the case for the importance of interpretation as a necessity in the novel, but situating narration as simultaneously telling and listening falls outside of his reading. He does emphasize how Nelly is both a teller and listener of narratives, but does not examine how she occupies both positions at the same time. His discussion of how Heathcliff projects himself into the position of another character as form of self-analysis comes closer to the point I am making.

¹²⁴ Walter Ong describes the orality informing the bard/storyteller's performance in the following manner: "The oral song (or other narrative) is the result of interaction between the singer, the present audience, and the singer's memories of the song sung" (146). Lockwood's heteronomical narrative additionally remembers and acknowledges specifically who first tells him the story of the Heights he then tells. I suspect there is more to say about an oral logistics informing the contours of the novel's narrative structure.

¹²⁵ I borrow the idea of *fortda* from Deleuze and Guattari. In *One Thousand Plateaus*, they write that *fort-da* is not oppositional. Rather they suggest how *fort-da* works in unison as a block or assemblage (299-300).

¹²⁶ See Michael Macovski's discussion of how Catherine and Heathcliff's union emerges by moving beyond "one's contained existence, to establish creation and being through another," which brings together Freudian and Bakhtinian paradigms (375).

¹²⁷ Henri Lefebvre remarks how the trafficking back and forth of information and energy at the level of an organism's membranes leads to further "diversification and intensification of the interaction between inside and outside" (176). Such an account applies to the dynamics informing the emergence of narratorial *fortda* in *Wuthering Heights*.

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