

**The Lightscape of Literary London,
1880–1950**



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ABSTRACT**The Lightscape of Literary London, 1880–1950**

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From the first electric lights in London along Pall Mall, and in the Holborn Viaduct in 1878 to the nationalisation of National Grid in 1947, the narrative of the simple ascendancy of a new technology over its outdated predecessor is essential to the way we have imagined electric light in London at the end of the nineteenth century. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, the interplay between gas and electric light—two co-existing and competing illuminary technologies—created a particular and peculiar landscape of light, a ‘lightscape’, setting London apart from its contemporaries throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, this narrative forms the basis of many assertions made in critical discussions of artificial illumination and technology in the late-twentieth century; however, this was not how electric light was understood at the time nor does it capture how electric light both captivated and eluded the imagination of contemporary Londoners.

The influence of the electric light in the representations of London is certainly a literary question, as many of those writing during this period of electrification are particularly attentive to the city’s rich and diverse lightscape. Though this has yet to be made explicit in existing scholarship, electric lights are the nexus of several important and ongoing discourses in the study of Victorian, Post-Victorian, Modernist, and twentieth-century literature. This thesis will address how the literary influence of the electric light and its relationship with its illuminary predecessors transcends the widespread electrification of London to engage with an imaginary London, providing not only a connection with our past experiences and conceptions of the city, modernity, and technology but also an understanding of what Frank Mort describes as the ‘long cultural reach of the nineteenth century into the post-war period’ (218).

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NOTE TO THE READER

The reader should note that all emphasis in quotations are original unless otherwise stated. Except where indicated, all translations of texts are my own.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a literary study with concrete historical boundaries: on the one side, the first electric lights in London in 1878 and, on the other side, the nationalisation of the National Grid in 1947. And while these two events and dates may appear to suggest a simple narrative of technological progress—from innovation and introduction, to adoption and ascendancy—this is far from being the case. In this sense, the study that follows belongs to the project of resisting narratives of technological determinism or narratives that focus on invention or innovation, which rely on assumptions of progress and inevitability.¹ However, this is only one aspect of my study. For, despite the strong historical boundaries and conditions that inform this study, above all, it remains a literary study in its material and its method.

The purpose of this study is not to consider literature in order to better inform our understanding of history, whether in general or in the instance of a particular technology, though literature may certainly be very informative to students of history. Rather, I am interested in considering literature and its engagement with the material world. Thus, we might reframe the question of whether E. M. Forster's depiction of electric lights in *Howards End* (1910) gives us a better understanding of how electric light was employed at the time as the rather more salient question of whether Forster's description of the electric lights as 'sizzl[ing]' and 'jagged' and the gas lamps as 'glimmer[ing] a canary gold or green' reinforces the association of electric lights with modernity. Or, we might ask how his portrayal of electric lights alongside gas lamps when 'London was beginning to illuminate herself against the night' can inform our understanding of his representation of the city (128–129).

¹ This is a project that was begun nearly three decades ago by historians of science, technology, and medicine. My own understanding of this project has been informed by David Edgerton's 'From Innovation to Use: Ten Eclectic Theses on the Historiography of Technology' (1999), which attempts to refocus the historiography of technology from innovation to the technology itself. Edgerton also offers a useful reconsideration of the field in 'Innovation, Technology, or History: What is the Historiography of Technology About?' (2010). More directly related to my own study, Graeme Gooday discusses this project in the first chapter of *Domesticating Electricity* (2008), especially as it relates to the narrative of 'domestication' (Gooday 9–35).

There is a danger of relying too much on what is historically contingent to inform our reading of electric light in literature, since this might lead us to ask the wrong questions, or to form questions that overlook what is most interesting about a passage, its language, its form, and its thematic associations. Reading Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, when we encounter the 'powerful oil lamp' in Mrs Pearce's front room at the beginning of the novel ('Jacob's Room' 10–13), we might consider why that part of the country was not electrified, or what type of oil Mrs Pearce used in her lamps. Such questions are, however, ill-suited to the study of literary texts. For, though pursuing such lines of inquiry might prove interesting, they avoid engaging with the question of what the light is doing in this particular passage, where it creates and transcends physical and thematic boundaries in parallel to the way Woolf's narrative voice(s) transcend the boundaries of individual consciousness in an early iteration of the free indirect discourse she continues to experiment with in her later novels.

The consideration of literature and its engagement with the material world runs the risk of being too broad an approach. At the same time, it has the advantage of being inclusive and flexible enough to consider topics as diverse as genre, technology, the city, modernity and modernism, the body, the individual and society, and language. By its very nature, the potential scope of this study is larger than can be contained in this single thesis. I have, therefore, endeavoured to place certain limitations on the study. Nearly a hundred texts were considered in the early stages of gathering data for this project. Though not an exhaustive list, the novels which comprise it are primarily set in London and were published between 1880 and 1950. Due to their prolificness, several authors appeared on the list more frequently than others, notably Arthur Conan Doyle, George Gissing, H.G. Wells, and Arnold Bennett. There is a noticeable trend towards gender parity as the twentieth century progresses, as writers such as May Sinclair, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Jean Rhys, and Elizabeth Bowen begin to bring out novels. Another noticeable characteristic of the list is that it tends towards middle-brow and genre fiction. When I first conceived this project, I intended to focus on electric lights in high modernist texts, to include both poetry and prose and to consider the way in which these texts represented electric light as an object of modernity. However, as my research progressed, it became apparent that depictions of electric light in literature

challenged the way in which modernity and technology are understood. Moreover, the texts that most challenged this understanding were, more often than not, genre fiction. For this reason, I have endeavoured to structure my project using a radial approach in order to explore trajectories in multiple directions, always returning to the central question of how literature responded to London's distinctive illuminary landscape, or 'lightscape'.

While I will go on to discuss London's lightscape in greater detail, as it relates to methodological approach to this study, the concept of a lightscape presents itself as a useful way of thinking about the interplay between two co-existing and competing illuminary technologies—gas and electric light—that, in addition to the continued use of candles and a variety of oil and spirit lamps, created a particular and peculiar landscape of light that set London apart from its metropolitan contemporaries throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This lightscape also consists of the bureaucratic complications involved in implementing a supplementary lighting system that was directly in competition with an immensely successful and entrenched one. Though these complications contributed to the electric light's struggle for widespread public acceptance, they were also responsible for the city's rich and diverse lightscape.

Offering uniform lighting in the city was a concern to electrical engineers and urban planners during the period of London's gradual electrification.² Alexander Pelham Trotter, founder of the Illuminating Engineering Society, was the 'first to tackle the problem of obtaining uniform illumination from lamps suspended at intervals along the road' (Bowers, *Lengthening the Day* 195). His interest in the subject was fuelled by his attendance of the International Electrical Exhibition in Paris in 1881, where amongst other displays, were the early incandescent bulbs developed by Thomas Edison, Joseph Swan, and their competitors were first demonstrated (Bazerman 200–215). According to Bowers's account, Trotter

noted that a simple lamp suspended above a street had three disadvantages: firstly, much light goes upwards, but that is easily dealt with by a reflector above the lamp to redirect all the light down; secondly, the illumination on the ground is not uniform but brightest close to the lamp-post, resulting in alternate lighter and darker patches along

² This is a subject explored at length by Chris Otter in *The Victorian Eye* (2008), 192–204.

the road; thirdly, there is a problem with glare, since people at the edge of the lit area have the light shining in their eyes. A diffusing shade will reduce the glare, but it does not solve the real problem: the light needs to be redistributed, not wastefully shaded [...] Trotter's solution was to arrange the light source in a clear glass vessel shaped to include a large number of either lenses or prisms which would redirect some of the light away from the area nearest the lamp. He patented the idea in 1883 and worked hard to get light fittings manufactured that incorporated his concept. (*Lengthening the Day* 195–196)

It is in such a manner that I have envisioned the radial approach. However, in formulating this approach, I also considered three illuminary analogies used in literature, two by Woolf and one adjacent to Woolf.

Much has been made of the analogies Woolf creates in her essay 'Modern Fiction'—the 'series of gig lamps' and the 'luminous halo'—and of their connection to the image of the concentric circle of 'distinct lamps' lighting 'with all due intensity one of [the central object of his novel's] aspects' in Henry James's preface to his 1899 novel, *The Awkward Age* (Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' 160–161; James, *The Awkward Age*; Novak 31; Scott 21–24; Curtin 27–28; Goldman 14; Quigley 87–88).³ The placement and rhetorical construction of the analogy—'Life is not [...] life is'—parallels the dichotomy Woolf seeks to establish between the new generation of novelists with which she identifies and the generation she views as their failed predecessors, specifically H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett. The juxtaposition of the 'gig lamps' with the 'luminous halo' serves as a visual analogue reinforcing her new order of fiction. Woolf aligns Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett with an increasingly outmoded and materialist historical past by evoking an illuminary past that mingles with her illuminary present. The gig lamps hung on the outside of horse-drawn carriages and cabs represent an established, consistent, and ordered—if outmoded—system of lighting. Like the lights individual householders were required by law to hang outside the door nightly, these lamps belonged to earlier endeavours to illuminate the city by artificial means; they represented preliminary efforts of governing institutions to regulate individual behaviour. At the same time, as I have noted above, these 'gig lamps' allude to Woolf's rich literary heritage, as they evoke the analogy Henry James employed in his preface to *The*

³ Steve Ellis has argued that the metaphor of the 'light of day' or 'searchlight' from Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* is of equal importance to Woolf, especially in *Night and Day* (Ellis 16–17).

Awkward Age to explain the organisational structure and compositional process he used in the novel.⁴ James refers to a diagram he made, describing the ‘neat figure of a circle consisting of a number of small rounds disposed at equal distance about a central object’ (*The Awkward Age* xvi). As he explains:

[the] central object was my situation, my subject in itself, to which the thing would owe its title, and the small rounds represented so many distinct lamps, as I liked to call them, the function of each of which would be to light with all due intensity one of its aspects. (*The Awkward Age* xvi)

Whereas Woolf disfavours the symmetrical arrangement of the gig lamps, James lauds the proportional structure of his creations, for the ‘aspects’ illuminated by the ‘distinct lamps’ to which he refers would permit his readers the opportunity to perceive the so-called subject of his novel equally and from a number of uniformly positioned or constructed perspectives (*The Awkward Age* xvi–xvii). Like the pairs of gig lamps on carriages, the concentric placement of the lamps displays a preference for what is ordered and discrete; the ‘luminous halo’ is directly at odds with both of these qualities.

Even though both Woolf and James are more concerned with how light is perceived or received at a distance from its source than how it is cast or dispersed from this source, they express these concerns differently. James’s lamps each illuminate a single aspect, while Woolf’s light is simply something ‘surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end’. Indeed, her light has no distinct source and there is a difference between her halo

⁴ According to Jane Novak and Mark Fogel, Woolf would have been familiar with James’s illuminary analogy in the preface. In her review of Joseph Warren Beach’s *The Method of Henry James*, which appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 26 December 1918, she confesses that ‘[o]ne had almost rather read what he meant to do than read what he actually did do’ (Woolf, ‘The Method of Henry James’, 348). She concludes by quoting directly from Beach’s own quotation from James’s preface, contending that James’s ‘important side is suggested by the design which he made in order to explain his conception of *The Awkward Age*’. She finds that ‘[o]ne has to look for something like that in the later books—not a plot, or a collection of characters, or a view of life, but something more abstract, more difficult to grasp, the weaving together of many themes into one theme, the making out of a design’ (‘The Method of Henry James’ 348).

James also uses an illuminary metaphor in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), referring to the ‘light in which Isabel Archer had originally dawned’ and to the ‘other lights, contending, conflicting lights, and of as many different colours, if possible, as the rockets, the Roman candles and Catherine-wheels of a “pyrotechnic display, [which] would be employable to attest to that she was [complex]’ (‘The Portrait of a Lady’ 13–14). This reference is less relevant to Woolf’s metaphor but helps to establish James’s propensity to understand narrative in illuminary terms. It is interesting to note that Beach, in his exploration of James’s method, draws a connection between the language James’s uses in the preface to *The Awkward Age* and that in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* (23, n. 14).

and James's lamp. And yet Woolf is quite specific, in her own way, about the quality of the light, as the halo is easily visualised as a circle of light that is either holy or cosmic in origin. Yet, though Woolf's 'luminous halo' may be indicative of London's diverse landscape, it is too insubstantial as an organising structure for a study of this scale and nature. Thus, I turned to a third analogy, offered by Woolf in *Night and Day* (1919).

As Mary Datchet sits in Russell Square, she contemplates the importance of her relationship with the city to her life and to her identity:

She thought of her clerical father in his country parsonage, and of her mother's death, and of her own determination to obtain education, and of her college life, which had merged, not so very long ago, in the wonderful maze of London, which still seemed to her, in spite of her constitutional level-headedness, like a vast electric light, casting radiance upon the myriads of men and women who crowded round it. And here she was at the very center of it all, that center which was constantly in the minds of people in remote Canadian forests and on the plains of India, when their thoughts turned to England. (49)

Reading this passage, we experience Mary's inner processes at the same time as we can visualise her sitting on the bench, thinking. We flit from image to image at the same time as we are caught up in the rays of Woolf's metaphor; the 'vast electric light' irradiates all of London, illuminating the entire empire. This metaphor serves to focus our attention on London, mirroring the process of selective observation she employs in her writing to highlight certain experiences above others. Under this 'vast electric light' we see everything beneath, yet nothing beyond, the rays cast by the lamp.⁵

While it is evident from this passage that Woolf (via Mary) contributes to the portrayal of London as having an unparalleled importance and of the modern urban experience as being the most desirable experience, her metaphor of the 'vast electric light' is not without problems. It betrays the undesirability of total illumination and acknowledges the epistemological inevitability of accentuation. A rich illuminary landscape is complementary

⁵ Woolf's image of the 'vast electric light' brings to mind the 'Colonne-Soleil' ('Sun Tower') with which Schivelbusch opens *Disenchanted Night* (1995). In Jules Bourdais's technical description of the proposed building project, he describes using a single source of light: a 'foyer'. Schivelbusch translates 'foyer' as source (128), though the French noun 'foyer', however, has two relevant meanings (128). First, it can designate the hearth or area of a fire. Second, it can designate the point where rays of light converge in order to project themselves across greater distances in multiple directions ('Foyer').

to our perceptual processes, for, though shadows can fall only when light is cast, too much light extinguishes the particularity, the nuances, and variegation produced by the interplay of light and shadows. Should everything be illuminated at once or equally, the delight of such a chiaroscuro would be lost.

It is quite fitting that I complete this study in 2015, which UNESCO has designated as the ‘International Year of Light’. Though UNESCO’s recognition of the importance of light is focussed on ‘the topic of lighting science and its applications’ and originates from the recognition of ‘the importance of raising global awareness about how light-based technologies promote sustainable development and provide solutions to global challenges in energy, education, agriculture and health’, this focus overlooks cultural engagement with and representations of light (‘About the Year of Light’). This is even more explicit when we consider the five reasons UNESCO gives for ‘why light matters’: photonics, energy, economic impact, light in the built environment, connecting the world (‘Why Light Matters’). And yet, while UNESCO does directly address the importance of light to art and culture, proving a page of ‘resources to allow you to see the many different ways in which light impacts on art and culture’, and which ‘describe how the scientific uses of light provide new insights into the study of our past’, such a description suggests a lack of understanding of the way in which art and culture engage with light, rather than being impacted by it (‘Learn About Light: Art and Culture’). There is, I argue, a clear need for a humanities-based, literary-focussed approach to understanding and communicating the role of light in culture.

The completion of the study also coincides with the publication of two important volumes that take such an approach: Matthew Beaumont’s *Nightwalking* (2015) and *Dark Nights, Bright Lights: Night, Darkness, and Illumination in Literature* (2015), edited by Susanne Bach and Folkert Degenring.⁶ Though the former is not explicitly about light, both volumes are invested in linking light and night to a literary tradition that extends beyond the

⁶ This second volume is forthcoming in October 2015. While I have not been able to see an advanced copy of the whole volume, I was given the opportunity to read the introduction. Also, a significant part of my final chapter, ‘Social Lights’ is published therein as ‘Public and Private Light in Virginia Woolf’s *Night and Day*’ (91–110).

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In their overview of recent literary studies of light and dark, Bach and Degenring note that it is ‘a little surprising that light and nocturnal illumination in literature have received so little attention to date, given their prevalence in culture and society’ (7). In making an argument for why there should be more literary studies, they cast literature as ‘a medium that allows a deeper understanding of extraliterary phenomena’ (8). And, while this is most certainly the case, I would hesitate to rest my own study exclusively on such a foundation. In order to articulate the way in which the focus of my study diverges from that expressed in Bach and Degenring’s introduction, I need to turn to a reading of the electric light in Marshall McLuhan’s seminal text, ‘The Medium is the Message’ (1967), offered by Richard Leahy in his essay for *Dark Nights, Bright Lights*, ‘The Literary Realisation of Electric Light in the Early 20th Century: Artificial Illumination in H.G. Wells and E.M. Forster’.⁷ Leahy contextualises his reading of McLuhan by observing that the electric light ‘evolved from something that was perceived as a “symbol” of the modern—it was a fantastical presence in the literature of Jules Verne many years before its realisation, for example—to something that solidified a sense of modern life’ (71). Looking only at how McLuhan might understand the ‘quality’ of the light produced by electric light, Leahy concludes that it was ‘a catalyst of the late 19th-century emergence of the truly modern world of capitalism and mass society’. There is, I will argue, more at stake in McLuhan’s essay than the way in which the electric light was ‘a catalyst’ for ‘capitalism and mass society’.

According to McLuhan, ‘[t]he electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message’ (8). Using the electric light to explicate his titular statement, McLuhan proposes that, as a technology, the ‘electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no “content”’, unless it is used to form letters and words (9). When decipherable, its message ‘is like the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive, and decentralized’ (9). Unlike other mediums, the electric light ‘eliminates

⁷ I have also had an advanced reading copy of Leahy’s essay, which will appear on pages 71 to 88 of the collection.

time and space factors in human association' (9). And while other electrical technologies like the telegraph and telephone have a similar effect, it is the electric light's perceived lack of content that distinguishes it from its contemporaries.

To illustrate his point McLuhan turns to literature, misquoting a well-known passage from *Romeo and Juliet* (the passage should read 'But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? [...] She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?', but in McLuhan it reads 'But soft what light through yonder window breaks? / It speaks, and says nothing' [Shakespeare 2.2.2, 12; qtd. in McLuhan 9]). While his example is intended as a jocular commentary about the banality of television, his insistence that the electric light has no message is at odds with the literary allusion he makes. For his transposition of light with Juliet ('It' instead of 'She') not only reflects the metonymic association Shakespeare himself makes more explicitly between Juliet and light in the following line—'It is the east, and Juliet is the sun'—by alluding to her luminous quality but also suggests that light can indeed communicate, if only metaphorically (2.2:3). Thus, though in Shakespeare Juliet's light is certainly not an electric one, it is curious that McLuhan, whose interest in electric light lies in its connection to other electrical technologies that emerged in the late nineteenth century, assumes it—the form of illumination most like other mediums of communication—does not have a message.

To understand why this is the case, we need only look to Umberto Eco's critique of McLuhan in *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays* (1987).⁸ Eco writes:

Light can be a Signal of information (I use electricity to transmit impulses that, in Morse code, mean particular messages); light can be a Message (if my girlfriend puts a light in the window, it means her husband has gone out); and light can be a Channel (if I have the light on in my room I can read the message book). In each of these cases the impact of a phenomenon on the social body varies according to the role it plays in the communication chain. (qtd. in Cubitt 310)

While Eco identifies three ways in which light communicates—the signal, the message, and as a channel—he too overlooks the language of light which develops in literature: its

⁸ Sean Cubitt identifies this connection in 'Electric Light and Electricity' (2013), 310.

message.⁹ This language, however, is more than the metaphoric or symbolic one with which we are familiar—a vocabulary comprised of words and phrases related to light: ‘to illuminate’, ‘to elucidate’, ‘in light of’, ‘to bring to light’, ‘to light up’, or ‘light bulb moment’. It is a language in which light as a visual phenomenon or a technology of illumination becomes associated with experiences, emotions, and places. This is not, then, a language that develops exclusively in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; however, it is during this period that this language, much like London’s lightscape, becomes more diverse and complex. And yet, if, as Marshall McLuhan proposes, the electric light is ‘pure information’—a ‘medium without a message’—what and how does it communicate, if anything (8)? This is the question that underlies this project: determining the influence of artificial light on the literature of London over the period of the city’s electrification.

Though this is only beginning to be made explicit in existing scholarship, electric lights are the nexus of several important and ongoing discourses in the study of Victorian, Post-Victorian, Edwardian, Modernist, and twentieth-century literature.¹⁰ In my understanding of artificial light, in particular electric light, in relation to technology and modernity, and the city, I am indebted to several important studies. In *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910* (2008), Chris Otter challenges two of the most dominant tropes of perception in the twentieth century—the panopticon and the flâneur—by insisting that ‘the political history of light and vision’ is ‘the history of multiple, overlapping perceptual patterns and practices rather than singular paradigms’ (10). He also encourages his readers to reconsider the presumptive predominance of electric light at the end of the nineteenth century and makes explicit what Wolfgang Schivelbusch only gestures towards in his discussion of ‘technical mimicry’ in *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialisation of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (1995). Though Schivelbusch’s study

⁹This is a reality Carolyn Marvin develops in her discussion of the use of electric light as spectacles in the 1880s and 1890s in *When Old Technologies Were New* (1988), 153–175.

¹⁰See, in particular, the forthcoming *Dark Nights, Bright Lights*, edited by Susanne Bach and Folkert Degenring; Elisabeth Bronfen’s *Night Passages* (2013); Stella Pratt-Smith’s ‘The Poetic Science of Nineteenth-Century Electricity’ (2012); and Lara Vetter’s chapter, “[T]he electric incitement of Eros”: Electromagnetism, Sexuality, and Modernism’ in *Modernist Writings and Religio-Scientific Discourse: H.D., Loy, and Toomer* (2010).

appeared in the same year as Carolyn Marvin's *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1988), it was not translated in to English until 1995. The electric light is only one aspect of Marvin's study of the "technical prehistory" of mass media'; however, in closely considering the 'communicative possibilities' of adjacent and interconnected technologies— 'the telegraph, the telephone, and the incandescent lamp'—in terms of their 'communicative possibilities', she is able to gesture towards larger concerns related to modernity and technology (4, 3). What is more, in exploring these technologies through their representation in the 'literature of professional societies', the 'literature of popular science', and the literature of 'lay audiences', Marvin draws attention to the importance of technical literature in communicating and, even more importantly, in framing the reception of new technologies. Though *When Old Technologies Were New* remains influential, likely due to the comprehensive and focussed nature of Marvin's project, many scholars have begun to rethink the conclusions Schivelbusch reaches about illuminary technologies. One such scholar is the historian of science Graeme Gooday. In *Domesticating Electricity: Technology, Uncertainty, and Gender, 1880–1914* (2008), Gooday presents the 'domestication' of electricity 'as a haphazard, accident-prone and controversial business', wherein 'the assimilation of electricity into the home was marked by mystery, conflicting interests, a marked gendering of roles and iconographic culture' (9). He also challenges the 'linear tale of modernization' presented by Schivelbusch as well as many of the assumptions his predecessor makes about the preference of electric light over the incandescent gas mantel and about the pervasiveness of electric lights in domestic environments in England (15–16). Otter also criticises Schivelbusch's narrative, albeit less directly so, noting that 'twentieth-century cultural historians have created a powerful, influential narrative that depicts "Western modernity" in terms of the relentless expansion of illumination' (2).

In *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (2000), Linda Nead makes an explicit connection between the shape of the city and its bureaucracy, in particular the Metropolitan Board of Works, by focusing on the way in which the city was mapped and managed. Her reading of the differences between gas and electric

light helped to form my understanding of London's lightscape. In *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (2000), Deborah Parsons revisits the literary construction of urban modernity, particularly in the form of the flâneur. In de-mythologising the urban observer, she opens up the possibility for a more nuanced reading of literary representations of the city in terms of gender and class. Finally, Elisabeth Bronfen convincingly argues in *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature, and Film* (2013) that 'night, functioning as a trope for the unthought and the unthinkable, is constantly being rediscovered, not only so that the alterity it represents can repeatedly be contained, but also that it can incessantly be recalled'; literary modernism is only one place offering resistance to the Enlightenment dialectic (19).

Following from these studies, this thesis will address how the literary influence of the electric light and its relationship with its illuminary predecessors transcends the widespread electrification of London to engage with an imaginary London, providing not only a connection with our past experiences and conceptions of modernity, technology, and the city but also an understanding of what Frank Mort describes as the 'long cultural reach of the nineteenth century into the post-war period' (218).

Modernity

Electric light is caught up in the concept of modernity. In its relationship with London, it engages in the discourse of modernity and the city; in relation to other emerging technologies, such as the telegraph, the automobile, and photography/cinematography, it is further involved in the discourse of modernity and technology. At the same time, the texts I will explore in this thesis challenge and, in some cases, subvert this association of electric light and electricity with modernity. Most recently, Graeme Gooday has demonstrated that this is partly due to the deterministic narrative associated with electricity and its technologies (14–15). As he explains, '[i]t is often assumed that electrification and modernization are integral features of the same phenomenon, and thus that electricity is synonymous with modernity'; however, as his study of the domestication of electricity has revealed, this process was neither assured nor easily accomplished (15). Indeed, the

association with modernity was a later function of this process; the electric light needed first to be romanticised (19).

This association of electric light with modernity is one also identified by Raymond Williams, Carolyn Marvin, and Chris Otter. To begin with, in *The Country and the City* (1973), Williams argues that it is an association that has been constructed over time. Because the city is a place we have come to equate with ‘the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light’(1), it is also an association that only increases over time. Williams uses the example of Richard Le Gallienne’s 1895 poem, ‘A Ballad of London’, to explain that the poem’s depiction of gas-lighting represented ‘an obvious image for the impressive civilization of the capital’, for, in the late nineteenth century, this ‘version of a glittering and dominant metropolitan culture had enough reality to support a traditional idea of the city, as a centre of light and learning, but now on an unprecedented scale’ (228, 229). Williams’s observation raises the important question of scale, as street lighting was not a new concept at the end of the nineteenth century.

Indeed, what we refer to as the ‘modern period of London street lighting’ can be dated as far back as the early eighteenth century, before the period of the industrial revolution commonly associated with rapid technological changes and the rise of ‘modernity’. As E.S. de Beer notes in ‘The Early History of London Street-lighting’, this ‘modern period’ begins with that moment in 1736 when an act of parliament abolished the pre-existing ‘system of individual light and voluntary contracting’ to establish ‘a principle, universal rate-paid lighting’ system (311–314, 315; Schivelbusch 97). While not quite a public utility, this change marks the beginning of public lighting for the public good. Equally, the advent of gas lighting at the close of the eighteenth century and its implementation for domestic illumination and as a system of public lighting in the early 1800s further troubles the association of artificial light and modernity, as by the interwar period, gas lighting remained as much a fixture of London life as public and private electric lighting. These dynamics will be discussed in greater detail later in the thesis.

Marvin contextualises the association of electric light with modernity by remarking that ‘electricity was frequently characterized as revolutionary [in order] to compare it to the

steam revolution that had preceded it' (206). She is careful to emphasise that such a 'comparison reversed the usual meaning of *revolution* as a decisive break with the past' such that the 'work of electricity was presented as continuing the work of the past, and the past with all its difficulties was justified as a necessary prologue to the present and the future' (206). Building on Williams' and Marvin's explorations of the association, in *The Victorian Eye*, Otter asserts that, '[a]t the beginning of the twentieth century artificial light was routinely viewed as the supreme sign of "modernity" or "civilization"' (1). And yet, this association is contingent on what is meant by 'modernity' here.

According to Charles Baudelaire, 'modernity' is not something confined to the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries but is a condition of the present. Indeed, in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), where he describes the act of 'represent[ing] the present' in visual and literary arts, he insists that 'modernity' is a component part of these representations of the present—a definitional move that aligns modernity with the now (13).¹¹ In turn, this 'modernity' is comprised of 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable' (13). If, as Baudelaire suggests, art is half eternal and half ephemeral, then art representing the present is predicated on a balance of those two elements: past and present, the recurrent and the innovative.

In *Passagen-Werk*, his fragmented and sprawling account of nineteenth-century Parisian arcades, Walter Benjamin expands Baudelaire's definition of modernity by invoking a dialectics of 'continuity/discontinuity' (Buck-Morss 210).¹² In this dialectic, what is modern is what is 'new in connection with that which has always already been there' (Benjamin 1010 [G, 8]). The city thus becomes a complex equation in which 'new'—the unprecedented or previously unknown—are more likely to indicate the ephemeral and 'newer' or 'newest'—the latest in an incremental progression—is more likely to gesture

¹¹ All quotations are from Jonathan Mayne's edition of *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon Press, 1964).

¹² The text known as *Passagen-Werk* is a collection of notes, observations, and quotations prepared by Benjamin between 1927 and 1940. It was first published in Germany in 1983 as *Das Passagen-Werk* in an edition compiled and edited by Rolf Tiedemann for Suhrkamp Verlag. In 1999 an English translation—*The Arcades Project*, prepared by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, was published by Harvard Belknap Press. All quotations are from this edition.

towards the eternal. In representations of the future city, wherein the future city is a cipher for the present, modernity is an indiscriminate mingling of recurrence/continuity and innovation/discontinuity. Recurrence manifests as the persistence of present ideas and repeated imagery despite the futurity of the narratives; innovation occurs when the present are disrupted, defamiliarised, fragmented.

This idea of modernity as change—whether social, cultural, economic, and/or technological—put into motion here by two of the most important thinkers on the subject of modernity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Baudelaire and Benjamin, is one that was increasingly investigated from a critical perspective in the early 1980s, in works such as Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space* (1983) and Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1983). These investigations developed alongside a renewed (or continued, depending on who one reads) interest in modernism in reaction to the rise of post-modern and post-structuralist criticism in the 1980s and 1990s and it is useful to briefly consider them here as they have helped to shape how modernity and modernism are viewed from the perspective of the twenty-first century.

Both Kern and Berman identify technology as being particularly central not only to the forces behind of modernity but also subsequent understandings of it. Berman, on the one hand, positions 'the industrialization of production' as one of the primary sources of the 'maelstrom of modern life', for it 'transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life, generates new forms of corporate power and class struggle' (Berman 16). On the other hand, for Kern, '[t]echnology offers a compelling way to explain cultural change' between 1880 and 1918 (xxiii). However, though technology has long been the catalyst for change, Kern insists that it is the particular technologies and their roles in society (he gives the example of the telephone and the possibility of long-distance communication) that make the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century period so significant in relation to the idea of modernity. Though both Kern and Berman make brief reference to the electric light and its influence, neither considers its status within their conceptions of modernity. For Berman, electric light is only one in a list of technologies that transform the locations of modernity (Paris, St Petersburg, New York)

explored in his book; for Kern, electric light is one of two technologies (the other is the cinema) which transform the linear nature of time. He insists that electric light was the first artificial light to blur ‘the division of day and night’ (Kern 29).

Admittedly, their projects endeavour to present an overview of modernity by focussing their approaches—in Berman’s case, on ‘the dialectics of modernization and modernity’ and, in Kern’s, on the themes of time and space. They do not, consequently, have the scope to consider every technology in detail. However, what we can learn from them is that we have come to conceive of technologies, such as the electric light, as being caught up in the concept of modernity, which in itself is often associated with the city and with progress. This is an association, however, that should not be taken for granted, in the way that it has contributed to the construction of narrative discourses of the relationship of technology to the body, culture, and history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Following on from Kern and Berman’s investigations, subsequent critics have attempted to revise our understanding of modernity, though not all have addressed its relationship with technology. As these revisions further enlighten our readings of electric light in the dystopian novel, I would like to consider two recent revisions of modernity. The first is offered by David Punter in *Modernity* (2007) and the second by Jonathan Crary in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013). Punter’s approach to the concept of modernity has a variety of influences ranging from Hegel and Freud to Yeats and Pound, though he includes neither Baudelaire nor Benjamin, and locates the tendency towards ‘the modern’/‘modernity’ as originating alongside the Enlightenment (13). For Punter, the project of the Enlightenment, to bring light to the darker corners of society, the mind, and human knowledge, works in tandem (and in succession) to that of modernity, which he insists ‘stands as that which resists the holding of the secret’ (18).

While Bronfen does not substantially contribute to critical discussions of modernity, it would be negligent to pass over her discussion of the Enlightenment project as it relates to Punter’s characterisation of it as adjacent to the development of our conception of modernity. In addition to articulating the Enlightenment project in terms of ‘the victory of a will to reason condemning, all embodiments of magical illusion’, which includes the night, she

identifies a ‘*different* Enlightenment project: one that explicitly gives voice to the alterity it seeks to contain, not to repress nocturnal knowledge, but to give it its due and to acknowledge its legitimacy’ (15, 3). The existence of this parallel project troubles the way in which Punter imagines the goals of Enlightenment and introduces the possibility of a binary or contradictory Enlightenment—one that also accounts for ‘nocturnal knowledge’ and the enchantment of night.

Beginning with the belaboured question of what relationship modernity can have with a worldview that values a progressive account of history, Punter proposes that the ‘moment of modernity [...] is not merely the present, the here-and-now; rather, it is deeply embroiled in the “succession” of states, it is an always temporary term which asserts both the onset of a condition of things and simultaneously the passing-away of other things’ (6). Borrowing the term *aufheben* from Hegel’s own account of modernity, Punter returns throughout the text to the idea of modernity as suspended in a moment between ‘a certain kind of nostalgia’ that is ‘superseded [...] with the onset of the new’ (6, 8, 22, 28, 70).¹³ In this way, Punter realises Baudelaire’s composite modernity while also gesturing towards Benjamin’s dialectics of ‘continuity/discontinuity’ in a way that both Kern and Berman seem to eschew.

Like Punter, though more explicitly so, Crary considers modernity as something where the past and present co-exist, something that is both intermittent and protracted. Crary contends that we have mischaracterised modernity as ‘the world in a sweepingly transformed state’. Rather, it is ‘the hybrid and dissonant experience of living intermittently within modernized spaces and speeds, and yet simultaneously inhabiting the remnants of pre-capitalist life-worlds, whether social or natural’ (65–66). Drawing from Marx’s analysis of the ‘large-scale restructuring of labour and production in the 1800s’ and the associated projects which facilitate ‘the acceleration and control of both circulation time and communication time’, Crary’s revision arises from an understanding of the intersection of capitalism and technology as a process of ““constant continuity”” (Crary 64; Marx 535). For

¹³ It is noteworthy that Marshall Berman, in *All that is solid melts into air*, begins with a definition of modernity—‘a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish’—that also arises from Hegel’s *aufheben* (15).

him, this process of modernisation results in a ‘technology of power’ and a de-temporalisation of the experience of time that, ultimately, have facilitated the superintendence of the individual by society, the state, and the self in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—concerns I address more fully in the chapter ‘Dystopian Lights’ (Crary 67). In an attempt to separate out ‘modernity’ from ‘modernising’, I now turn to discussing the electric light as it relates to technology.

Technology

In *Literature, Technology, and Modernity* (2004), Nicholas Daly offers a consideration of ‘the relation of modernization and culture from the 1860s to the later twentieth century’ in which he focuses on ‘the mechanization of everyday life’ (1, 3). Arguing that ‘literature, and later film, play a part in facilitating that modernizing process’, Daly begins with the premise that modernisation comprises a familiarisation, naturalisation, or, as Gooday posits, a domestication of technology (Gooday 9–35). He cautions, however, against the assumption that the association of literature and culture (or, technology) is one which ‘seems to confine the text to a sort of prison-house of culture’, for the relationship is more an interrelationship (Daly 3). As Daly acknowledges, ‘the response to new technology’ is only one aspect of what he calls ‘industrial modernity’ and, while he lists a ‘myriad’ of other aspects by which one might consider modernity, he overlooks the problems associated with what David Edgerton refers to as ‘innovation-centric’ histories of technology and how this, in turn, informs the interrelationship between literature and culture (Daly 4–5).

The narrative of technology is always one of continual advancement and progress. This latter premise is addressed by David Edgerton in his article ‘Innovation, Technology, or History: What is the Historiography of Technology About?’ (2010), where he warns that an ‘innovation-centric conflation of innovation and use’ can lead to a very limited understanding of technology and its history, but points to the practice of ‘historiography from below’ and writing the ‘history of content and context together’, by emphasizing ‘co-production’, as possible ways forward (689, 692, 694).

The narrative of the simple ascendancy of a new technology over its outdated predecessor is essential to the way we imagine electric light in London at the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, this narrative forms the basis of many assertions made in critical discussions of artificial illumination and technology in the late-twentieth century; however, this was not how electric light was understood at the time nor does it capture how electric light both captivated and eluded the imagination of Londoners at the close of the nineteenth century. Unlike in the other metropolises of this period—Paris, Berlin, New York, Chicago—the electrification of London was a gradual and, at times, regressive process. Though the first electric lights—Jablokoff arc lamps on the Waterloo Bridge, along Pall Mall, and in the Holborn Viaduct—were installed to great public excitement in 1878, by the late 1890s, interest in and patience with this emerging technology was already fading. Indeed, the new, unreliable lights were being reconverted to gas lighting, though these gas lamps were not those commonly associated with Dickens's London. In the intervening years, gas lighting technology had improved, becoming not only brighter, cleaner, and more efficient, but also more affordable.

Despite this, the electric light persevered; its technology advanced and its advantages were commercialised. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, the ubiquity of the electric light was not certain—not until the creation of the National Grid in 1926 would electric light begin to emerge as the prevailing artificial illuminant. But even those measures adopted to regulate and standardize the electric light were disrupted by the realities of life in wartime: blackout restrictions and the Blitz dominated the illuminary discourses of the 1940s and 1950s. After the restrictions were lifted, during the period of rationing following the war, the return of a reliable and efficient light was most welcome—its dominance confirmed by the nationalisation of National Grid in 1948. Indeed, electric light and other electric technologies (cooking, refrigeration, radio, television) were increasingly inherent to the idea of a modern, post-war Britain.

One of the most important questions to emerge in challenging this narrative is whether electric light is only an incremental improvement over its illuminary predecessor? Consider 'A Peep at the Gas-lights in Pall Mall' (1809), an engraving made by Thomas

Rowlandson after a drawing by Woodward (See Figure 1.1). After the first demonstration of public street lighting by gas on Pall Mall at the end of January 1807—a spectacle arranged to celebrate the birthday of George III by the German inventor Friedrich Albert Winzer (later Winsor). Winsor was an important proponent of early gas light, establishing the Chartered Gas Light and Coke Company in 1812 (Bowers, *Lengthening the Day* 44–45; Nead 88). This association of gas light with spectacle and display is an important one, as I will discuss in greater detail in subsequent chapters. For now, however, I want to focus on the perceived differences between gas and electric light. As Nead notes, since gaslight is ‘created through the projection or transmission of illumination’, it ‘differs from all earlier methods of lighting’ (87). Thus, though electric light is differentiated from gas light in that it is the first form of illumination not to have a flame, it also shares the need for a network of supply with gas lighting. Moreover, in this way electric light has more in common with candle and oil lamps, which burn (or produce) light at their source.

One of the difficulties with considering light as a technology is that it is also a visual phenomenon. This is evident when we consider two important visual depictions of electric light: a technical drawing of Thomas Edison’s incandescent bulb from the second volume of the French journal *La Lumière électrique: journal universel d’électricité* (see Figure 1.2), which appeared in 1880, and Giacomo Balla’s painting ‘Street Light’ (see Figure 1.3).¹⁴ Perhaps less visually exciting than Balla’s painting, the technical drawing accompanies an article on Edison’s recent invention, predating the Futurist painting by 30 years. The illustration of the light is accompanied by a brief review of the product, the majority of which is given over to a press release from Edison itemising its component parts—the glass globe (a), the wooden foot (b), the fastening buttons for the circuit wires (d), the platinum blades (g), and the carbon filament (f)—and explaining how it works.

The illustration depicts the electric light as an object, a source of illumination. Without the rays of light—the ‘electromagnetic radiation whose wavelength falls within the range to which the human retina responds’—produced by the light bulb within the lamp, the

¹⁴ Balla’s painting is dated 1909, though completed between 1910 and 1911 (Humphreys 20).

electric light cannot be that agent which ‘stimulates sight and makes things visible’ (‘ray, n.’, *OED*). Devoid of any energy, potential and excitement, the illustration is a functional representation of the object (or at least, the plan of the object); though Edison’s lamp has been ‘recently much-discussed’, the review exists only for the benefit of the seriously interested reader. What the review makes clear for us, however, is that the electric light is not new. Edison’s lamp is just its most recent and, ultimately commercially viable iteration as of 1880. Balla’s painting embodies the Futurists’ interests in concepts of speed, technology, violence, and the industrial city. It exalts light and electricity as dynamic manifestations of speed and technology. Richard Humphreys identifies two possible inspirations for the painting, the first of which, the ‘first electric street lamps to be installed in Rome’, where Balla was working at the time, is more difficult to verify and the second of which, Fillippo Marinetti’s prose poem of April 1909, ‘Uccidiamo il Chiaro di Luna!’ (Let’s Murder the Moonlight!)—a second futurist manifesto—is more evident if somewhat more oblique (Humphreys 20). The following passage from it, to which Humphreys refers, makes clear the triumph of humanity and its technology over nature.

A cry went up in the airy solitude of the high plains: ‘Let’s Murder the moonlight!’ Some ran to nearby cascades; gigantic wheels were raised, and turbines transformed the rushing waters into magnetic pulses that rushed up wires, up high poles, up to shining, humming globes.

So it was that three hundred electric moons canceled with their rays of blinding mineral whiteness the ancient green queen of loves. (qtd. in Humphreys 20)

Humphreys goes on to describe the rays as being ‘violently discharged in multicolored darts’ and the juxtaposition between the lamp and the moon as evoking ‘a man-made or masculine light source the overcomes the feminine power of the moon’; however, this either/or binary in which artificial light eclipses the moon, does not figure in Balla’s own description of his painting in the ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting’, which he co-authored with Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Gino Severini and was published in *Poesia* in April 1910 (Boccioni et al., n.pag.). Rather, he is interested in the way in which light creates boundaries, for ‘[s]pace no longer exists: the street pavement, soaked by rain



Figure 1.1: Thomas Rowlandson, 'A Peep at the Gas-light in Pall Mall' (1809). Used with permission of the British Museum under a Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license. BM: 1868.0808.7894, AN1004001.

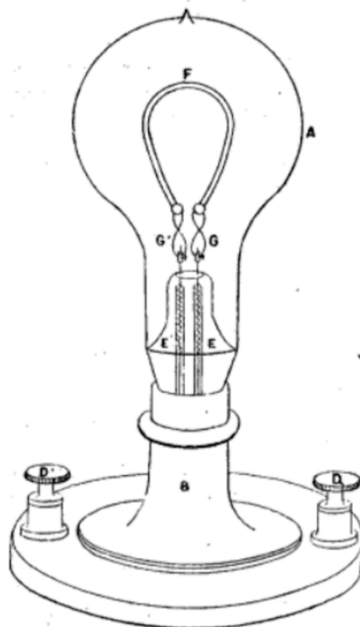


Figure 1.2: 'La nouvelle lampe de M. Edison', *La Lumière électrique* 1.2. n. 1-24, 1880, p.29. Used with permission of the Conservatoire numérique des Arts et Métiers (CNAM), <http://cnum.cnam.fr>

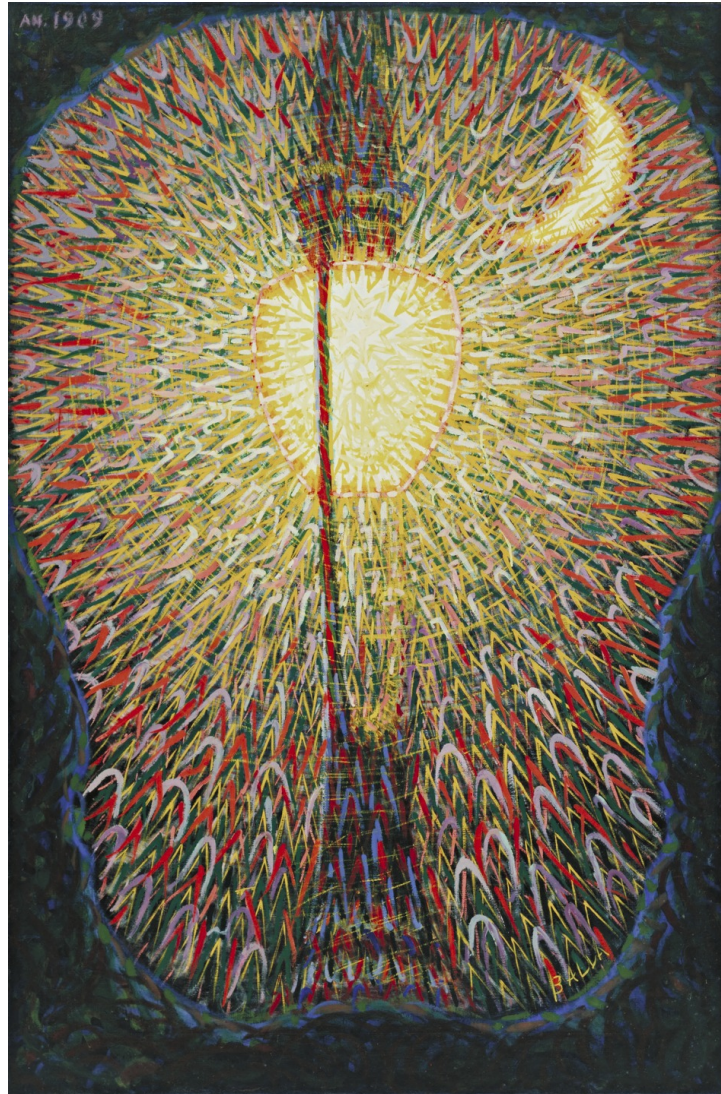


Figure 1.3: Giacomo Balla, *Street Light* (1910/1911). Museum of Modern Art, New York. Item 7.1954.

beneath the glare of electric lamps, becomes immensely deep and gapes to the very cent[re] of the earth' (qtd. in Apollonio 90).

The image of 'pavement, soaked by rain beneath the glare of electric lamps' is only an example of the Futurists' larger artistic and poetic project: 'universal dynamism'. What Balla and his fellow Milanese Futurists describe in their technical manifesto strikes to the heart of what we might call 'modernity', but it also exemplifies the imbrication of light as a technology and a visual phenomenon:

The gesture which we would reproduce on canvas shall no longer be a fixed moment in universal dynamism. It shall simply be the dynamic sensation itself.

[...] all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing. (qtd. in Apollonio 90)

Though a decade after Balla's *Street Light*, Aldous Huxley's depiction in *Antic Hay* of the '[a]dorable lights' and 'sky signs dancing their unceasing St Vitus's dance above the monument to the Earl of Shaftesbury' in Piccadilly Circus on the taxi ride Theodore Gumbriel makes with Mrs Viveash at the novel's close evoke this imbrication (267–268). That these lights simultaneously excite Mrs Viveash and revolt Theodore Gumbriel—they give her 'temporarily the illusion of being cheerful' and are for him 'the epileptic symbol of all that's most bestial and idiotic in contemporary life'—positions the city at the centre of discussion of modernity and technology in relation to artificial light in London (274, 268).

The City

This study is one informed by and defined according to the geographical and political boundaries as well as cultural, social, historic, and economic relationships of the urban space roughly and aggregately defined as London. To explore this, I would like to turn to Virginia Woolf, whose diaries, essays, and fiction provide a well-rounded and consistent glimpse into the city from the late 1890s, when she first began making diary entries, to 28 March 1941, when she drowned herself in the river Ouse. In her diaries in particular, Woolf exercises diligence in her recording of her urban experience, which she connects with her social interactions as a subset of her London experiences. Many of her early diary entries—collected by Mitchell Alexander Leaska in *A Passionate Apprentice* (1990)—record forays into the city to purchase various writing supplies and art materials, clothing, and present for special occasions. Other entries record happy excursions around Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park. Sometimes, Virginia documents the city in its more festive moments, such as the celebrations which marked Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. On this occasion she writes:

We had dinner at 7, & at 8, the bus, a red Hammersmith, came round. We drove to the Stanleys in Harley St, & then through the streets with them. A most wonderful dreamlike sight—the streets as bright as day—crowded—with stands full of people. St James St—hung from side to side with electric lamps, & festoons of stuff. Home

about 11.30. The night w[ould] have been most red letter—if it were not for Stella. (Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice*, 104)¹⁵

In this passage, almost a reverie with its long dashes and fragmentary syntax, Woolf moves from image to ‘wonderful’ image. Electric light is here exceptional, extraordinary, not a part of daily life, not even for Woolf who lived in the wealthy borough of Kensington. We might be tempted to claim the ‘red Hammersmith’ omnibus, the crowded streets, and the electric lights as emblems of modernity, but this is an anachronistic or latter-day interpretation, and it is difficult to separate pageantry from modernity here. Her excitement for ‘streets as bright as day’ and ‘stands full of people’ translates into a vibrancy and movement concomitant with the newness and the ephemerality of modern urban experience.

London in 1897 was a city in transition, experimenting with new lighting systems and underground public transport. Here the electric lights are special, as the city’s streets were still predominantly lit by an extensive and pervasive gas lighting network, and, those who could afford to, took horse-drawn omnibuses rather than the underground. There is a disjunction between what we might consider ‘Victorian’ and what we might consider ‘Modern’ in this passage, which can be resolved if we consider these experiences in terms of the ‘history-of-technology-in-use’. The extraordinariness of the occasion, matched by its spectacle, is what makes this event unlike any previous event. Only plans for Edward VII’s coronation that never happened, which I discuss in a later chapter, rival Victoria’s Jubilee in its use of light. The ‘electric lamps’ are not there to illuminate, necessarily, but to delight. They do not serve as evidence that London was an electrified, modern city. They are as much a part of the decorative pageantry as the Chinese lanterns Woolf describes seeing the next day. While instances of electric light and motorised omnibuses become more common, they are here exceptional. The Jubilee is a marriage of past, present, and future: a celebration of the past and the achievements of Victoria’s reign marked by the presence of technological innovations that herald the future. It is a liminal moment, as the Diamond Jubilee often marks the nearing of an end, that also gestures towards the beginning of a new era. Woolf’s

¹⁵ Virginia’s older half-sister and primary caregiver since the death of her mother, Stella, was suffering from peritonitis, which soon proved fatal.

representation of this occasion also underscores how one effect of reading London's lightscape is to become more attuned to light in every aspect, in every avenue.

Chapters and Parts

In the critical reading I have developed during this project I approach texts both thematically—in terms of uncertainty, control, and surveillance—and generically—the gothic, science fiction, spy fiction, and literary modernism. Where appropriate (or, relevant), I have endeavoured to situate each text or groups of texts in their historical context. Several of the texts in question were published in close proximity; Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), H.G. Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes* (1899) and *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1899) were published in close succession. This does not mean that the imaginative engagement with London and its lights these four novels represent has any further connective tissues beyond their setting and time of publication.

In the first chapter, 'Reading London's Lightscapes', I outline my methodological approaches in this project and ground them in the cultural history of London's electrification. In the second chapter, 'Gothic Lights', I consider the question of whether the electric light can be gothic in terms of the connections made between electricity and mesmerism in late-Victorian gothic fiction. In the third chapter, 'Dystopian Lights', I detail the centrality of the electric light to imagining the future city and to the superintendence of the individual in authoritarian states. In the fourth chapter, 'Surveilling Lights', I explore the connections between electric light and surveillance during periods of heightened ideological uncertainty, especially during the anarchist bomb plots of the 1890s and the London Blitz in 1941. In the final chapter, 'Social Lights', I elucidate the problematic association of electric light with *fin-de-siècle* modernity perpetuated by interwar fiction.

READING LONDON'S LIGHTSCAPE

In *The Soul of London* (1905), Ford Madox Hueffer wonders whether the 'London that comes to one at a distance' might not be what is seen 'in the glare of kerosene lamps, the diffused blaze of shop front, the slowly moving faces revealed for a moment, then, as it were, washed out, of the serried, marketing crowds' (17). In setting out the principles of his 'record' of London, he avers that he has 'tried to make it anything other than encyclopaedic, topographical, or archaeological' but, rather, 'tried to "get the atmosphere" of modern London' (xi–xii). It is for this reason that he begins his account by approaching its subject from the remote position of the 'mind's eye', moving on to the aerial and then the street perspective (3). In 'seeing things with the eye of a bird', Hueffer is aware that that we are 'seeking for minute fragments [...] for things that are the constituents of our mental or visual pabula' (18). He goes on to explain that one's experience of the city is defined by one's class and, to a greater extent, one's individual circumstances, since the city is comprised of 'an infinity of individual variants' (19). Moreover, very few, if any, people are endowed with the 'certain qualities of temperament' that would enable them to 'see London steadily and see it whole' (21).¹⁶ For London is, above all else, 'illimitable' (16). This is not to say that London is an intangible or ineffable subject, but merely that a single, universal perspective is not possible. In his meandering and often digressive manner, Hueffer anticipates many of the difficulties expressed by scholars studying London from the perspective of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries already discussed in the introduction to this study. At the same time, his method serves as a model for my approach to striking a balance between detail and whole in reading London's lightscapes. Indeed, many accounts of London, whether literary or scholarly in nature, begin by examining it from the perspective of its streets. Following from Hueffer's example, I wish to begin by gesturing towards the whole before considering the

¹⁶It is uncertain who, if anyone, Hueffer had in mind that fit such a description, although one might imagine social reformers such as Charles Booth or Henry Mayhew being such persons, both of whom were interested in documenting and studying the working and living conditions of Londoners across the social scale, though especially the poor and working poor.

relevant historical details that inform the vision(s) of literary London in question in this study.

In 1881, London had a population of 4,709,960; by 1891 it had grown to 5,565,856. In the year of Queen Victoria's death, there were three quarters of a million more people living in London than there had been a decade earlier and, by 1911, there were 7,157,875. In 1951, the census records the highest number of people living in London—just over 8 million people.¹⁷ Between the years 1880 and 1950 London underwent considerable change in terms of its infrastructure and appearance. As John Richardson records in *The Annals of London* (2000), this period saw the construction of a generating station at the Holborn Viaduct by Edison in 1883, the construction of the Grosvenor Gallery Station at New Bond Street designed by Sebastian de Ferranti in 1885, the opening of the Tower Bridge in 1894, the opening of the Blackwall Tunnel in 1897, the construction of Waterloo & City line in 1898 and the Central line in 1900, the formation of the Metropolitan Water Board from eight existing companies in 1902, the completion of the reconstruction of Regent Street in 1927, and the construction of the Battersea Power Station in 1934 (J. Richardson 305–344). While many of these changes related to how people moved about the city, they were changes which necessitated an increase in the administrative role from the Metropolitan Board of Works and, later, the London County Council.

One approach to reading historical London during this period is to look at it in terms of the way in which it embodies contemporary 'urban problems', as W. Eric Jackson does in his history of the London County Council (LCC), *Achievement: A Short History of the London County Council* (1965). The primary problems outlined by Jackson were sanitation and the use of space; however, underlining these problems was the central concern of administration and the structure of such an administration. As this plays such an important role in giving shape not only to the city, but to its lightscape, it is worth briefly considering London's administrative bodies here.

¹⁷ In using the term London, I am here referring to the area known as Inner London, as defined by the Local Government Act of 1855. All demographic information is from GB Historical GIS and University of Portsmouth, 'London GovOf: Total Population'. (GIS and Portsmouth)

Jackson explains that before the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW) was formed in 1855, there was no single body or authority who ‘had any real power to deal with [these urban problems]’, with the exception of the City of London (4). As such, ‘[t]here was no ‘coordination, no consistency, and a great deal of negligence’ (4).¹⁸ While the MBW was productive and transformative—they oversaw the construction of 82 miles worth of new sewer, they refurbished 165 miles of existing sewers, they built the Victorian and Albert Embankments, they created new streets that came to define the modern city (such as QV Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, and Charing Cross Road), they widened existing streets, they established the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, and initiated the renaming of over 3,000 streets—as a centralised authority it accrued a long history of corruption, inefficiency, and, perhaps most gallingly, a lack of accountability (Jackson 4; Gibbon and Bell 52). When the Local Government Act of 1888 established directly elected county councils, including one for London, which was not a county, the MBW was dismantled and replaced by the LCC in 1889 (Jackson 5; Gibbon and Bell 78-79). The efforts of the MBW were important, in the way that they altered and added to the physical structure of the city and its infrastructure as well as the way in which people interacted with this structure; the failures of the MBW are as instructive as they were significant. And yet, the most significant challenges presented by the city’s infrastructure during this period were not caused by the MBW or the LCC, but arose from the lack of centralisation and oversight accorded to these bodies and, even more so, from the government’s preference for undertakings that were effectively public utilities run as private enterprises. This state of affairs resulted in significant inequality in modernisation across the city, giving London its distinct lightscape. Thus, reading London’s lightscape must begin by considering how it came to be in greater detail. In so doing, it is helpful to keep in mind Gooday’s proposal in *Domesticating Electricity* that ‘it is historiographically more productive to suspend belief in the inevitability of electricity’s pre-eminence in all aspects of modern culture’ (10).

¹⁸This observation is particularly evident the decision to give district (local) authorities additional functions in the 1855 Act, including ‘paving, lighting, watering, and cleansing streets’ (Gibbon and Bell 55). This is a division of labour that continues to this day.

Though what is considered the ‘modern period of London street lighting’, as I discussed in the introduction to this study, begins in the early eighteenth-century, London’s modern lightscape begins with the introduction of gas light to the city’s streets (de Beer 311). The first public demonstration of gas street lighting took place in Pall Mall in June 1807 (Nead 88; Bowers, *Lengthening the Day*, 44).¹⁹ The occasion marked the birthday of George III; the lighting spectacle was arranged by the German inventor Friedrich Albert Winzer (later Winsor), who was an important proponent of early gas light, establishing the Chartered Gas Light and Coke Company in 1812 (Bowers, *Lengthening the Day*, 44–45; Nead 88). This association of gas light with spectacle and display is later echoed in the adoption of electric lighting—another point of commonality between the two modes of illumination. For now, however, I want to focus on the way in which gas light shaped the troubled conception of public utilities in London in the late nineteenth century. By the late 1890s, gaslight, which had been used domestically, in commercial and public buildings, and as street lighting for nearly eighty years, had become the predominant model for public utilities.

By the mid-1800s, there were almost 1,000 gas companies in London (London Metropolitan Archives, ‘Administrative History’). There were no standards by which any authority could regulate the supply, quality, and price of gas produced by these companies. In an attempt to co-ordinate London’s modernisation, the Metropolis Local Management Act, 1855 (18 & 19 Vict. Ch. 120) was passed. It created the MBW as well as thirty-eight parish vestries and districts. This pull between centralisation and localisation was a trend that continued throughout the nineteenth century, the vestiges of which are still present in the Greater London Authority of the present day. The purview of the MBW was limited to sewers, streets and bridges, and parks and open spaces but was later expanded to include the construction of the Thames Embankment, built in three sections between 1862 and 1874, and the newly formed fire brigade in 1865 (Nead 19; Owen and MacLeod 37–38). Frustratingly, at least from the point of view of administration, co-ordination, and momentum, local

¹⁹ The actual date is disputed, as Nead gives 1805 and others 1807. I have here adopted the date of 1807, based on Bowers’s account of the event (*Lengthening the Day*, 44), which is supported by the entry on Winsor in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (T. I. Williams, n.pag.).

authorities and vestries were given authority over the ‘paving, lighting, watering and cleansing’ of streets (Gibbon and Bell 55). Gas lighting did not fall under the purview of the MBW but the local authorities and vestries, and it soon became apparent that some legislation was needed to improve its regulation.

The 1860 Metropolitan (also Metropolis) Gas Act (23 & 24 Vict. Ch. 125) introduced a limited restructuring of the license to supply gas, such that the companies no longer were able to compete but could form regional monopolies across the city (Nead 88). It also introduced the regulation of the quality of supply of gas, mandating that consumers received at least ‘twelve candles’—the standard unit of measurement at the time—of gas, and set a maximum price companies could charge for it (Otter 162; Nead 90). A series of Acts passed between 1866 and 1871 attempted to further regulate the industry, but with little success (Nead 92). By 1 January 1879, when the article ‘London Gas’ appeared in *The British Quarterly Review*, the gas industry was in dire need of regulation and the ‘Gas Question’ was ingrained in the minds of most Londoners.

In ‘London Gas’, the author outlines the many ‘defects’ of gaslight, including the inconsistency of its light, its tendency to damage interiors, and the belief that it ‘vitiates the atmosphere’ (‘London Gas’ 1). At the centre of the article’s concerns is whether the city’s many municipal authorities could be given the power to restrict the monopolies and malefactions of the many gas companies, power which previous legislation had failed to substantiate (2). It identified the main problem with the 1860 Act as being that ‘it abolished the healthy system of competition without taking any effective measures for regulating the monopoly which it conferred upon the Companies’ (3–4). Furthermore, though it introduced standards of supply and price, the Act ‘established no machinery or arrangements for testing the gas, whether for purity or for illuminating power’, effectively rendering these standards unenforceable (4).

That this reconsideration of the period of corporate monopolies, high shareholder dividends, and low quality supply should come at the dawn of a new age of illumination, as its publication follows shortly from the first demonstration of public electric street lighting in London in 1878, is not surprising. Indeed, the author of ‘London Gas’ anticipates this very

possibility, referencing a lecture delivered to the Glasgow Science Lecture Association by the German engineer C. W. Siemens and attended by the already esteemed mathematical physicist William Thompson, later Lord Kelvin (36). Already electric light was being discussed in terms of its ‘practical application’ and its potential: the claim ‘[t]hat electricity will be the light of the future is already manifest’ followed closely by William Thompson’s proclamation that ‘[w]e live in an age of scientific wonders’ (Siemens, qtd. in ‘London Gas’, 36, 37; Thompson, qtd. in ‘London Gas’, 37). As the author reports, electric light will quickly supersede gaslight, as people ‘will not remain satisfied with gas-light when they can have their rooms better lighted’ (36). This language plays into the rhetoric Gooday identifies as assuming ‘that electricity offered a “natural” or “progressive” solution to past cultures’ needs for power and light, albeit appearing much earlier than the instances he identifies, suggesting that this tendency is not anachronistic, but present from the very start (1). Or, perhaps, it is suggested that such rhetoric arose from the frustration with a broken system. For, in 1879, electric light remained an unfulfilled potential that, if properly legislated, could escape the administrative and bureaucratic quagmire then associated with the gas industry. Admittedly, much was done during the 1870s to regulate that industry: many companies were amalgamated into a few and by the end of the decade, only six metropolitan gas companies remained (Nead 91–92).²⁰ By the end of the century, there were only three (London County Council, *London Statistics, 1897–1898* lxx). However, a similar model to that initially adopted with regards to gas lighting was set out in the Electric Lighting Act of 1882 (45 & 46 Vict. Ch. 56).

About this time, another change was occurring that further influenced London’s lighting concerns. After the 1888 Local Government Act (51 & 52 Vict. Ch. 41) was passed, the MBW was replaced with the directly elected London County Council (LCC) in 1889 (Jackson 5). Despite reshaping the city, the MBW had been generally regarded as ineffectual (Owen and MacLeod 16, 193, 205; Jackson 4–5; Gibbon and Bell 78–79). And, while the

²⁰ As the cynical author of *London Statistics* points out, amalgamation was quickly implemented because ‘it has been highly advantageous to the directors and to a few of the leading officials’ (London County Council, *London Statistics, 1897–1898* 32).

LCC had no authority over lighting, its advent meant more restructuring of the second-tier of municipal authority. The thirty-eight parish vestries and districts created in 1855 were eventually transformed into 28 metropolitan boroughs in 1900.

Gibbon and Bell describe the trajectory of public utilities as follows:

With the nineteenth century belief in the virtues of unrestricted competition, the same cycle is to be observed in all of them. The new supply is first in the hands of companies which multiply and undercut each other. Then, finding that they are destroying each other's profits, they combine, dividing areas among themselves and establishing a private monopoly. Expense and often inefficiency lead to an outcry; then public control is imposed. (608)

One important proviso was made, in the 1882 Act though it took nearly seventy years to fully enact: the licensing of local authorities with the right to supply electricity. This clause had 'the aim of strengthening local authorities against the growth of private monopolies'—an attempt to learn from the mistakes made with gas. Of course private companies could still be granted licenses to supply; however, they had to 'accept price controls and were made subject to compulsory purchase by local authorities after twenty-one years' (Inwood 285). London, in general, was slow to adopt electric lighting for both public and private purposes; it was more expensive and less reliable than the new incandescent gas mantle developed by Carl Auer von Welsbach in the late 1880s and introduced to the commercial market in 1892 (Schivelbusch 48–49; Bowers, *A History of Electric Light & Power*, 221). Stephen Inwood explains, this 'piecemeal growth of electricity supply since the 1880s left London with an unusually fragmented and illogical system, in which most consumers had to buy their supply from an inefficient local generator' (292).

Another important factor to consider is that, though there were nearly a million gas street lamps in London in the early 1880s, with gas being used in domestic spaces as well as in shops, galleries, train stations and other public buildings, the most popular and accessible forms of illumination remained oil or spirit lamps (Dennis 131). The high level of poverty and precarity in certain areas of London meant that older technologies were often more prevalent there and that these areas had more disparate illumination in their streets and public spaces. These were the conditions that engendered the distinctive lightscape which distinguished London from its metropolitan contemporaries—Paris, Berlin, Chicago, New

York—at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. As the twentieth century progressed, however, this was a lightscape that became increasingly homogenous, though the disparity persisted.²¹

By 1911, because of a reluctance to adopt new technologies and the companies' preference of profit over improving their lighting and electricity supply systems, London was burdened with seventy-two electrical authorities and as many as sixty-six generating stations which were poorly located or badly integrated into the community (Inwood 292). The map of London below, published in early 1890 by Edward Stanford (see Figure 2.1), the most prominent map-maker of the nineteenth century, helps to visualise the disarray of London's electricity supply in the 1880s. The map lists the companies responsible for various areas of the city, though noticeably absent from the companies' supply are the large swathes of East London, left uncoloured on the map.²² These were the areas where the local authorities were granted license to supply, though many did not begin to do so until the mid-1890s or early 1900s (London County Council Statistical Department, *Electricity Supply Returns*, 5).

During the interwar period, the LCC began to think about London's future more explicitly, but it was only after the 1925 London Electricity Acts (1 & 2) that they developed a concern for 'the general protection of the interests of consumers and ratepayers'. This coincided with a movement towards establishing the National Grid and thinking in terms of the supply of not only a whole city or county but the entire country (Gibbon and Bell 630–631). By 1947, the electrification of the city was complete (or as complete as it would be,

²¹ In 1911 there were only 90,000 gas street lamps and just over 32,000 electric ones (Inwood 292). Though an average of £187 per mile was spent in the Greater London area, darker boroughs like Stoke Newington, Bethnal Green, Deptford, and Lambeth, spend about £90 per mile of lighting, where as brighter ones, like Westminster and the City (though not technically a borough), spend upwards of £400 per mile (Inwood 292).

²² The following companies were granted licenses to supply: Chelsea Electric Lighting Order; Chelsea Supply Company, Limited (South Kensington Electric Lighting); Electricity Supply Corporation Limited (St. Martin in the Fields); Fulham District Electric Lighting Order; House to House Electric Light Supply Company Limited; Kensington and Knightsbridge Electric Lighting Company Limited; London Electric Supply Corporation Limited; Metropolitan Electric Supply Company Limited; Metropolitan Electric Supply Company Limited (Mid London); Metropolitan Electric Supply Company Limited (West London); Notting Hill Electric Lighting Company Limited; St. James and Pall Mall Electric Lighting Order; St. Pancras Electric Lighting Order; and Westminster Electric Supply Corporation Limited.

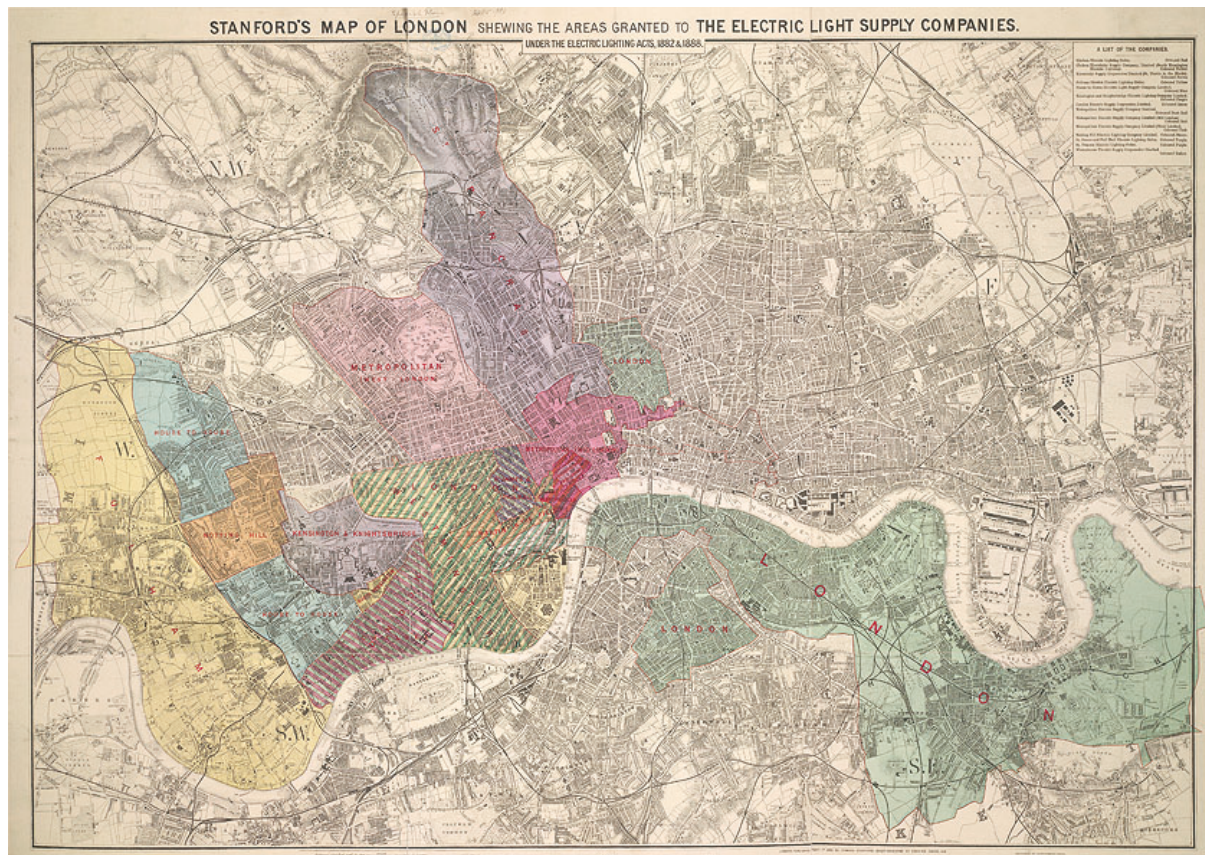


Figure 2.1.: 'Stanford's Map of London shewing the areas granted to the electric light supply companies under the Electric Lighting Acts, 1882 & 1888'. Used with permission from the British Library under a Creative Commons license. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/maps/uk/004880101.html>

since a preference for candles and gaslight still remains in some circumstances) and the National Grid, finished in 1938, was nationalised by the 1947 Electricity Act (10 & 11 Geo. 6. Ch. 54). Yet, as this overview has suggested, both the way in which light became a public utility in London and the development of the city's distinctive lightscape were shaped by a series of decisions made by parliament, by bureaucrats, local administrators, and company directors. Given the contingent nature of these circumstances, it is easier to understand not only the disparity of light in *fin-de-siècle* London but also the administrative and bureaucratic obstacles that brought about a distinctive lightscape that continued well into the twentieth century.

Many Londoners thought that electric light changed the way they saw the city. Lynda Nead explains this change in terms of the effect each light source had on darkness: 'Gas lights darkness; whereas electricity annihilates it' (84). Nead's treatment of gaslight in Victorian Babylon is a sort of encomium to a technology that has come to dominate the

twentieth- and twenty-first-century vision of night in the Victorian city. Gas, she writes ‘does not destroy the night; it illuminates it. Its unsteady flame flares and wanes, giving objects and places an aura of perceptibility, without total, destructive visibility’ (83). Gaslight, she insists, ‘never fully conquered the night city, however, but was also absorbed by its poetry, evil and irrationality’; it ‘seemed at times to display rather than to eradicate the threat of urban space’ (83, 84).²³ This sentiment is echoed by Stephen Inwood in *City of Cities: The Birth of Modern London*, who explains that the ‘early gas lamps [of the 1810s] created patches of brightness in the surrounding darkness rather than turning night into day’ (278). It should be noted that Nead’s dichotomy applies as equally to electric arc light as it would have to incandescent gas light, as both would have ‘annihilate[d]’ darkness. Yet only electric light was considered intolerable and gas continued to be thought of as ‘light[ing] darkness’—an inconsistency of which I consider in the next section of this chapter.

Literary Light

For what is knowable is not only a function of objects—of what there is to be known. It is also a function of subjects, of observers—of what is desired and what needs to be known. (R. Williams 165)

Coming events cast light. (D. M. Richardson 14)

The notion that light is a narrative subject is not particular to British fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From the very first instance of *יְהי אור* (‘Let there be light’) in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 1:3), light has insinuated itself into narrative. In *Night Passages*, Elisabeth Bronfen aligns light with *logos*, in which myths of creation, when simplified, recount our emergence from darkness. In such stories ‘the horror of a primordial night can be overcome by the virtue of the light that the act of telling a story about it sheds on primordial darkness’ (1). And, while Bronfen argues in favour of a realignment of night as ‘the site and embodiment of an epistemological alterity’, exposing the banishment of night as

²³ Nead is likely here referring to either the arc light or the ultimate achievements of electric light, since early electric light was neither reliable nor bright enough to ‘annihilate darkness’.

a problematic dialectic of the Enlightenment project, I am here interested in how the implementation of a comprehensive system of public street lighting in London influences this association of light—and its absence—with narrative and how, in turn, this realignment results in the development of light as a narrative subject (7). For, as I argue, light—especially artificial light—does not come into its fullness as a narrative subject in literary texts until after the establishment of a systemised network of artificial light in urban spaces.

To illustrate what I mean by a narrative subject, I turn to Rosemarie Bodenheimer's observation that, in *Bleak House*, Charles Dickens developed 'his own way of turning [light] to fictional purpose' (146). In the serial novel, published over 20 monthly instalments between 1852 and 1853, Dickens used the unique 'chiaroscuro effect of gas light' to create 'what he called in his preface to *Bleak House* "the romantic side of familiar things", often in scenes where lamp-light struggles helplessly against the darkness of fog, soot and rain' (Bodenheimer 151; Dickens 7). This is evident in the opening chapter, 'In Chancery', where Dickens casts gas light as a protagonist against the increasingly pervasive fog:

Gas looming through the fog in diverse places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time—as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look. (14)

Dickens's anthropomorphic treatment of gas light as a subject that has a physical presence, with its 'looming through the fog', with an apparent intellect as it 'seems to know' and a certain character—its 'haggard and unwilling look'—is significant. For light is no longer just an element of the physical world or the material reality of characters in the novel but an active agent in the narrative.

As this passage from Dickens demonstrates, the potential for light to become a narrative subject arises from the interplay between light and dark. Following from Bronfen's exploration of the tenuity of the opposition between day/night, light/dark, and reason/irrationality constructed by the Enlightenment dialectic, I contend that the literary responses to the electrification of London enact a return of an enchantment of night, just at

the very moment when disenchantment seems to be complete. For, just as light renders things knowable or known, where it is in excess or in proximity to darkness and to night so it can render things unfamiliar or unknowable. Thus, though the narrative of enlightenment is often one of control—Bronfen points to the necessity of ‘discipline and control’ in enforcing the ‘freedom promised by this project of an all-encompassing rationality’—light, especially artificial light, can be disruptive to this control and can result in uncertainty (16–17).

Yet, it is not necessary that the light in question be artificial light. Turning to another example of light as a narrative subject in Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), here the interplay of daylight and shadow observed by Septimus appears to have greater agency than he does. For

[g]oing and coming, beckoning, signalling, so the light and shadow which now made the wall grey, now the bananas bright yellow, now made the Strand grey, now made the omnibuses bright yellow, seemed to Septimus Warren Smith lying on the sofa in the sitting-room; watching the watery gold glow and fade with the astonishing sensibility of some live creature on the roses, on the wall-paper. (*Mrs. Dalloway*, 118)

In this passage, the abundance of active participles—‘going’, ‘coming’, ‘beckoning’, ‘signalling’, the repetition of the colours yellow and grey, and the anaphoric ‘now made’, ‘now made’, which reinforce the effect of the ‘light and shadow’, serves to underscore light as the active subject of the main clause, whereas the passive construction of the subordinate clause ‘[it] seemed to Septimus [...] lying on the sofa’ not only establishes Septimus as the passive observer but also further emphasises the agency of the light. And yet, despite its agency and status as the subject of the clause, in this passage, the light is disembodied, so to speak. It has no obvious source. It has no physical apparatus, no specificity. It is a vague light, albeit one concomitant with its counterpart shadow.

In Woolf (as in literature in general), this is often the case, for her narratives are not always conducive to specificity, nor is specificity necessary to her understanding of what fiction should be doing. In *Mrs Dalloway*, for instance, Woolf is only explicit about the source of light in three instances, discounting those instances where she employs light as a metaphor, such as when she describes the ‘little red and yellow flowers’ at Hampton Court as being ‘like floating lamps’ (56). She refers to ‘arc lamps’, glaring ‘electric lights’, and ‘fairy

lamps' in the 'back garden' (139, 140, 162). Yet, there is no single, common treatment of light in literature, especially not where it is a narrative subject.

As I have suggested in the introduction to this study, light is both a phenomenon and a technology. One of the difficulties of reading light in fiction is the gestural way in which the apparatuses of illuminary technology—the candle, the wick, the lamp, the switch, the gas jet, the mains, and so forth—are often elided with the visual phenomena of electromagnetic radiation, a discovery made by Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell. Charles Bazerman in his re-reading of the 'story of how Edison and the people around him represented light and power', *The Languages of Edison's Light* (1999), explains that '[e]lectricity and incandescent light are more than words, numbers, and pictures: they are the material results of a material technology. Engines, dynamos, wires, transformers, insulators, and other components that can be seen and touched produce light that is visible and power that will shock the unwary' (159). This reality, however, is not one often represented in fiction. The majority of authors I considered tend to be more inclined to depict artificial illumination as removed from its infrastructure: the subterranean mains, the pipes and wires hidden behind walls, the gas-works and generating stations. Woolf, for instance, refers to the lighting of the lamps in *Night and Day*, a daily occurrence that would not have been out of place to post-Great War readers in London, since the predominance of gas street lighting meant it was a task that still required individual lamplighters as it had in early Edwardian period she depicts in the novel (*Night and Day* 82, 407, 528). Indeed, the lamp-post is the most ubiquitous representation of illuminary technology—or, more precisely, of street furniture associated with illuminary technology—present in almost every narrative; the only reminder of a complex network of public illumination.

It is worth briefly considering the great variety of sources to which authors refer in their novels. Artificial light in Dorothy Richardson's *The Tunnel* takes the form of 'a small globeless gas bracket', 'candlelight', a 'spirit lamp', an 'oil-lamp', a 'single five candle power bulb', 'a bright incandescent light', a 'three-armed dim-globed chandelier', and a 'shaded lamp' (14, 19, 22, 45, 72, 147, 286, 287). Dorothy Sayers describes a 'pocket torch' in *Whose Body?* (279). Light in Arnold Bennett's *Imperial Palace* is varied, profuse, and

specialised, as befits the titular luxury hotel: ‘chandeliers—sixteen lamps apiece’, ‘floodlighting’, ‘corridor lamps’, ‘ceiling lights’, ‘pendant lamps each enclosed in a very small globe of paper’, ‘bed-lamps’, and ‘toilet-lights’ (3, 92, 320, 347, 485, 519, 640). Woolf is equally as various, if less lavish. In *Jacob’s Room* there is a ‘lantern’ and an ‘arc lamp’ (38, 127); in *Night and Day*, ‘a candle’, ‘an unshaded electric light’, and ‘a green reading-lamp’ (23, 83, 108). In *Antic Hay*, Aldous Huxley describes light with an insistent, albeit impressionistic specificity: ‘gas-lamps around the square’, a ‘little electric reading-lamp’, ‘mauve electric moons’, ‘lines of beaded-lamps’, ‘the green gas-lamp underneath the arch’, ‘a pair of candles’ (15, 25–26, 72, 74, 77, 174). Though there are hundreds more examples such as these, the purpose of considering these particular examples is to demonstrate the frequency with which the particular source of light (gas/electric, shaded/unshaded, globed/unglobed, single/plural) is explicitly mentioned.

This particularity is something Roland Barthes explores in his essay ‘The Reality Effect’ (1968). In this essay, Barthes distinguishes between two types of descriptive details in narrative, which he designates as either ‘significant’ or ‘insignificant notations’ (141, 142). The majority of instances mentioned above could be categorised as ‘insignificant notations’, as they have no ‘predictive function in the structure of the narrative’ (142). This does not mean that they have no purpose, but in structural readings of a text, they are ‘a kind of narrative luxury’ (141). As it is not my attention in this study to offer structural readings, I propose to consider, as Barthes himself does, ‘what [...] ultimately, so to speak, the insignificance’ of such detail in narratives might be (143). One such place we might explore this insignificance occurs in Woolf’s *Night and Day*, when she describes how Katharine undertakes the simple act of turning on the lights:

As she touched different spots, lights sprang here and there, and revealed a square mass of red-and-gold books, and then a long skirt in blue-and-white paint lustrous behind glass and then a mahogany writing-table, with its orderly equipment, and, finally, a square picture above the table, to which special illumination was accorded. When Katharine had touched these lights, she stood back, as much as to say, ‘There!’ (9)

Woolf’s language is here deliberately vague, which is at odds with her description of other technology in the novel. Despite the awkwardness with which everyone answers the

telephone, as a technology it is, at least for Mary, the manifestation ‘all the subterranean wires of thought and progress [coming] together’ (277). So why does Woolf describe Katharine as ‘touch[ing] different spots’ when there is an established convention for talking about how one turns on the lights: the ‘switch’?²⁴

Though the term ‘switch’ had originated with the advent of the railway in the late eighteenth century to designate the moveable rail that enabled the train to change from one line to another, it came to mean the device used for interrupting the circuit in electrical technology, such as the telegraph, in the 1860s. As it was not until the 1890s that ‘switch’ came to designate the ‘turning on’, ‘turning off’, or, as was more common, ‘turning out’ of an electrical device it is possible that Woolf is deliberately vague to recall the linguistic uncertainty of lighting technology of the period (‘switch, n,’ *OED*, 1.3a, 1.3b, and 8a.). However, it is also possible to read her resistance to using the precise technological language of the ‘switch’ here, in a passage replete with detail, as a narrative strategy to align her readers with Ralph who is bedazzled by the spectacle of the varied treasures of the Hilberys’ careful reliquary.

Writing in the 1880s and 1890s, George Gissing is one of the first novelists to represent electric light in fiction. His descriptions of electric light in *New Grub Street*, which was published in 1891 but is set in the 1880s, approach what Barthes describes as the ‘new verisimilitude’ in that the practicalities and failures of technology are laid bare for readers to experience as though they were ‘real’ (147). The electric light is striking in the way it explicitly depicts the uncertainty of light offered by the new technology: it ‘flashed forth the sputtering whiteness of [its] light’ and ‘its ceaseless hum was henceforth a new source of headache’ as a depressed Marian worked away in the depths of the Museum on a dark, foggy day (Gissing 108). The light ‘reminded her how little work she had done to-day’ and, likening herself to a machine, she resolved to ‘think of the task in hand’. However, as ‘the

²⁴ 4As Steve Ellis notes, Woolf also uses the term ‘to touch’ to indicate turning on lights in *Orlando*, where ‘[a]t a touch, a whole room was lit; hundreds of rooms were lit; and one was precisely the same as the other’ (Woolf 283). Ellis discusses the possibility that both of these passages describe the use of electric light in terms of Woolf’s ‘instanc[ing] the development of strong, usually, electric, lighting as a feature of an alienating modernity that contrasts with the lights and shadows of the past’ (26–27).

pages were blue and green and yellow before her eyes; the uncertainty of the light was intolerable' (108). Gissing's decision to represent dissatisfaction with or weariness towards technology is significant here, as it provides an alternative narrative to contemporary reports in newspapers and the periodical press.

Indeed, the account of the introduction of electric light into the British Museum was reported positively in an article that appeared in *The Times* on 24 November 1879 ('Electric Light at the British Museum', 9). The Museum had installed electric light in the form of arc lighting to the Front Hall, the Round Reading Room, and in the Forecourt in 1879 on a trial basis. As this was several years before a reliable incandescent bulb and lighting system had been developed, the arc lighting would have been both unreliable and ill-suited to the space.²⁵ The article investigates both the 'utility' and the safety of the installation, finding it to be an improvement on the previous illuminary provisions. For, since the fear of fire damage meant candles, oil and spirit lamps, and gas lighting could not be used, electric light would have increased the number of hours libraries and galleries could be open after dark, especially in the winter.

To get a better sense of the contrast between Gissing's account of the uncertainty of Marian's experience of the Museum lighting and the account in *The Times*, it is worth quoting at length from the account here. The author begins by describing how '[t]he practical utility of electric lighting was fairly tested on Saturday morning during the heavy fog which shrouded the metropolis':

For more than a century[,] readers at the British Museum were forced to suspend work on the occasion of a fog, and to leave the reading room; but on Saturday morning, shortly after 10 o'clock, when many readers, unmindful of the improvements of the age, were about to quit with their papers, the electric light was turned on, and, without any apparent preparations, the spacious room was suddenly

²⁵ Though it is not clear from Gissing's description whether the electric light is an arc light or early incandescent lighting, both forms of lighting could prove problematic. While arc lighting was more appropriate to industrial or outdoor settings, the certainty and stability of early incandescent lighting was not assured until the 'problem of incandescences', for the filament burnt out too quickly, was solved (Bazerman 38). This only occurred in 1880, when Thomas Edison and Joseph Swan concurrently experimented with using carbon filaments (Bazerman 186). As Bazerman explains, the 'issue was no longer whether incandescent lighting could be made to work [...] At question now were the system's efficiency and longevity, measured with scientific devices, represented in numbers and judgements, and evaluated by the technically knowledgeable' (190).

illuminated as by a magic ray of sunshine, to the great satisfaction of all present. There was a murmur of applause. [...] It is reported that one of the staff—Mr. Nichols—has worked closely for two hours a fortnight by the light with a view to try the effect on the sight, and finds that there is not only no inconvenience, but that the optic nerve is strengthened and that glasses are quite unnecessary as a protection. (9)

The overall conclusion proffered by the author is that the test proves a practical triumph of technology over circumstance, wherein electric light is used to counteract the adverse effects of other technological advances: the fog caused by pollution from increased industrial production. In contrast with the uncertainty and unease Marian is seen to experience in *New Grub Street*, the account participates in the narrative of technological ascendancy often associated with new technologies and, in particular, with the electric light. Though the author does express some concern for the potential consequences of prolonged exposure to electric light, these are quickly allayed.

For Marian, however, the uncertainty of the light was ‘a new source of headache’ and ‘intolerable’. At the same time, the utility of the light is an extension of the mechanised life she longs to leave (‘how intolerably it weighed upon the spirit!’ [107]). She is reduced to a ‘machine’ doing its duty, disheartened at the prospect of the further exploitation of her labour for ‘the paltry pretence of intellectual dignity’ (107). Indeed, seeing an advertisement in a newspaper for a ‘Literary Machine’, she fantasises about the potential of ‘some automaton to supply the place of such poor creatures as herself to turn out books and articles’. In truth, however, the ‘machine was only one for holding volumes conveniently’ (108). As a depiction of technology in fiction, in particular a technological failure, Gissing’s electric light with its ‘sputtering’ and ‘ceaseless hum’ is somewhat anomalous.

Yet Gissing is not alone in his depiction of the early failures of electric light. In *The City of Pleasure* (1907), Arnold Bennett captures technology in the city at an intersection between the past and present, as ‘the sole signs of life in the great thoroughfare [of the Central Way] were a lamp-lighter extinguishing the gas-lamps which were provided in case of a sudden failure of electricity, and a road-sweeper in charge of a complicated machine with two horses’ (184). Of those writing novels set in London between 1880 and 1950, Bennett is the most detailed in his depictions of the technology of electric lighting. In *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902) he makes 12 references to electric light. In *The Regent: A Five*

Towns Story of Adventure in London (1913), *Riceyman Steps* (1923), and *Imperial Palace* (1931), he makes over 20 direct references to electric light in each novel. To contextualise this frequency, the texts containing the next most numerous references are H.G. Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes* (1899), Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), and John Cournos's *Babel*, which each contain 10 explicit references to electric light, and Wells's *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1899), which contains six, and *Tono-Bungay* (1909), which contains nine.

The frequency and specificity with which Bennett depicts electric lights in his novels is indicative of his approach to what we might term the role of 'insignificant notations' in fiction. A brief excursus to explore its significance is warranted here, especially as Bennett and his texts loom large over this study without making much of an appearance due to limitations of space and time. In his two hotel novels, Bennett's depictions of electric light oscillate between the opulent and the functional, as he depicts the luxury hotel in terms of its shimmering facade and its inner workings. And, while I hesitate to characterise Bennett's writing in general according to these observations and statistics, there is a strong case to be made for aligning this concern for detail with observations others have made about Bennett's works as well as his own reflections on writing.

Newman Flower, editor of the three-volume *The Journals of Arnold Bennett* (1932–1933) wrote that Bennett had a 'dutiful habit of recording even the minor details of the average day' (I: v). He had a compulsion to record '[w]hat he saw—the drama or the humour of a little episode in [modern] Life—[...] usually in the form of a perfect pen-picture in miniature' (I: vi). In an entry dated 11 January 1897, Bennett himself expresses his insistence that the 'novelist should cherish and burnish this faculty of seeing crudely, simply, artlessly, ignorantly; of seeing like a baby or a lunatic, who lives each moment by itself [...]' (I: 28). Though Bennett announced his fatigue for "'realism", for "naturalism"' in a journal entry dated 3 January 1899, a change brought about by his visit to the Exhibition of the Works of Sir Edward Burne-Jones at the New Gallery in London, he revises the role of the writer to be

one of locating an immanent beauty (I: 84–85).²⁶ As in the earlier entry, what is ‘modern’—here ‘modern work’ and ‘modern life’—is what is at stake. ‘Realism’ is equated with the ‘superficial facts’ of fiction, which remain ‘of some importance’. Now, however, rather than showing the raw impression ‘in its right authentic colours; without making comparisons’, the author must ‘depict the deeper beauty while abiding by the envelope of facts’, balancing the superficial with the profound (I: 85).

In *The Author's Craft* (1915), Bennett further develops his approach to narrative, especially as it relates to the role of observation, which ‘is not passive but active’ (16).²⁷ Observation, Bennett explains, ‘consists not in multiplicity of details, but in co-ordination of detail according to a true perspective of relative importance’; ‘[n]othing in it is to be neglected. Everything in it is valuable, if the perspective is to be maintained’ (19, 26–27). Doing just this becomes increasingly important to Bennett over the next decade, as is evident in his criticisms of Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* in his essay ‘Is the Novel Decaying?’ (1923). Without descending into the critical disagreement between Woolf and Bennett about the nature of fiction, I will simply propose that the reason Bennett found Woolf’s ability to create compelling characters lacking is because he was unable to find a consistent Jacob in her novel (‘Is the Novel Decaying?’, 113). Unlike Woolf, who asserts that the role of observation in fiction should be to relate the inner processes of an individual’s consciousness (‘Modern Fiction’, 160–161), Bennett hopes that ‘by obtaining a broad notion of the whole, [an individual can] determine with some accuracy the position and relative importance of the particular series of phenomena to which his instincts draw him’ (*The Author's Craft*, 22–23).

²⁶ Two memorial exhibitions were mounted in the year after Burne-Jones’s death on 17 June 1898. The first, at the New Gallery, ran from 31 December 1898 to 8 April 1899 and the second, at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, in 1899 (Wildman 319, 501). While Bennett may have visited both, his mention of *The Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi* (a triptych commissioned for the Church of St Paul’s, Brighton, and completed in 1861, not to be confused with Burne-Jones’s similarly titled *The Annunciation* from 1879) suggests he is referring to the earlier exhibition.

²⁷ While both the English edition by Hodder & Stoughton and the American edition by George H. Doran Company give the publication date of 1914, in *Arnold Bennett: The Critical Heritage*, James Hepburn gives the publication date of October 1915. Hepburn notes that ‘the English edition of the book [...], and bearing the date 1914, was held up by the war’ (73). All four essays which comprise *The Author's Craft* were published in English Review, starting in April 1913; the last three were first published by the American periodical *Metropolitan Magazine*, starting in June 1913 (Hepburn 73). All quotations are from the Hodder & Stoughton edition.

As a part of providing this ‘broad notion’ the author must address ‘the question of getting the semblance of life on to the page before the eyes of the reader—the daily and hourly texture of existence’ (60). This is evident in Bennett’s own description of Evelyn Orchard’s room, the director of the titular hotel in *Imperial Palace*. Bennett attentively describes how Evelyn ‘turned on the electric radiator’ and notes that ‘[s]team-heating was good enough for the visitors to the Palace, but not for its Director’. Evelyn also ‘turned on all the lights, for he liked the fullest illumination, saying that whatever he was doing he preferred to see clearly what it was. He beheld the room, and the tidiness of the room provided fresh satisfaction every morning’ (195). In this passage, only Evelyn’s actions and motivations are rendered; the room’s external details come to stand in for Evelyn’s character and his character is contingent on these details.

There is, however, a clear tension between how Bennett articulates and executes observation in fiction and how they were received by his contemporaries, which perhaps explains why Bennett’s work is less-well represented in scholarship about this period. Bennett’s discussion of observation in *The Author’s Craft* is not an abstract peregrination on the nature of observation, but a defence of the author’s craft, or *technê*, a defence that perhaps Bennett felt was necessary at this point in his career. By 1915, Bennett was already an established novelist, having produced two dozen novels since 1900, notably *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902), *The Old Wives’ Tale* (1908), *Clayhanger* (1910), and *Hilda Lessways* (1911).

He was also established enough to feature in Henry James’s critical essay ‘The New Novel,’ published in *Notes on Novelists, With Some Other Notes* (1914). In this highly opaque essay, James asserted that a host of ‘young novelists’ including Bennett, Joseph Conrad, Maurice Hewlett, John Galsworthy, and H.G. Wells, were influential to the current generation of younger novelists—Hugh Walpole, Gilbert Cannan, Compton Mackenzie and D.H. Lawrence—because they had saturated the literary market (318-319; Parsons, *Theorists of the Modernist Novel*, 24–25). James’s attack on Bennett’s materialism took the form of an architectural analogy of a rubble heap, bringing to mind the analogy of the well-constructed house in which life refuses to live, later employed by Woolf in her essays ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’ and ‘Modern Fiction’. Bennett rightly may have felt that, given James’s

uncharitable reading of his novels and the purpose of his fiction, he needed to more explicitly lay out his authorial principles. Whether or not we are persuaded by Bennett's defence of his craft or by James's evaluation of its practice, this consideration of the role detail plays in his fiction provides valuable insight into how one might make sense of light as an 'insignificant notation' in narrative.

To return to the question of depictions of hesitancy and caution underlying the city's decision to keep gas-lighting technology in case of 'a sudden failure of electricity' in Bennett's novel *The City of Pleasure*, such instances are often under-represented in fiction but are important to resisting the narrative of technological ascendancy often associated with the early history of the electrification of London. Two important failures in this history demonstrate the complex dynamic of interpenetrating existing and emerging technologies. Often cited as the birth of an electrified London, the electrification of the Thames Embankment and the Waterloo Bridge by Jablochhoff candles in 1878 was short-lived. Frequent technical failures led to an inability to provide consistent illumination and resulted in a permanent return to gaslight by 1885 (Otter 180).²⁸ The closure of the power supply station at the Holborn Viaduct in 1885, built only three years earlier, and its subsequent abandonment, is further indicative of the initial difficulty in implementing a system for the widespread distribution of electricity in the city. According to Otter, in the 1880s and 1890s, London 'operated as something of a laboratory for electric lighting', falling back on gas lighting when electric light wavered or completely failed (244).

This was, in fact, the main difficulty with the success of electric light. For, aside from its early technological deficiencies, a functional network of illumination had been in place since the early 1800s. This difficulty was further exasperated by the fact that the advent of electric light pushed gaslight technologies to become more effective, efficient, and economical. This interplay between contemporary technologies, where two or more competing technologies develop in relation to each other, is known as 'technical mimicry'

²⁸ Contemporary accounts of these events are related in *Plumber and Sanitary Engineer* 1 (February 1878): 44 and *Electrician* 11 (13 October 1883): 526.

(Schivelbusch 229; Bazerman 142). In fact, early electric ‘on-off switches’ for the secondary circuit branches that controlled electric lights were designed ‘to resemble gas valves, even though rotary switches were not the most effective kind for electrical circuits’ (Bazerman 151). This was only one aspect of early electric lighting systems designed to reproduce the structure and appearance of gas lighting. Not only were the fixtures and the production and delivery system designed to imitate gas lighting but the appearance of the incandescent lamp itself ‘was reminiscent of the glass chimney surrounding a gas lamp, which in turn followed the model of the oil lamp’ (151).²⁹

It is important to re-state the limitations of the ways in which we might consider fiction as a historical document of any given period. However, fiction can serve as a record of what David Edgerton calls the ‘history of technology-in-use’ (xii-xiv). In *Shock of the Old: Technology Since 1900* (2006), Edgerton advances a convincing argument in favour of ‘a history which does not fit the usual schemes of modernity’ and confirms that ‘modern time [...] has never existed’ (xi). Edgerton, like Crary, understands the present moment in terms of an intermingling of old and new. Indeed, much of the technology upon which we rely today is so old that we have ceased to consider it technology such that the past seamlessly coexists with the present. This is a trajectory of thought Edgerton continues in his more recent article, ‘Innovation, Technology, or History: What is the Historiography of Technology About?’, in which he outlines his vision for the future of the study of the history of technology. In general, the field has been ‘concerned with illustrations, through historical examples, of the nature of technological change’—a concept that seems to date to an understanding of technology that coalesced in the interwar period (683). As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Edgerton suggests that the practice of ‘historiography from below’ and writing ‘the “history of content and context together”, by emphasizing “co-production”’ are a means of broadening our understanding of technology and its history beyond merely an ‘innovation-centric’ narrative (689, 692, 694). Applying these methods to a literary study of technology in

²⁹ Though incidental here, such mimicry could account for the impossibility in determining whether the switch Katharine uses in *Night and Day* is for gas or electric light.

fiction, it can be useful to resist the tendency towards technological determinism and accounts that focus solely on innovation or triumphs. In this sense, the vagueness of the ‘switch’ in *Night and Day* and the ‘uncertainty’ of the Museum’s electric light in *New Grub Street* can serve to remind us that the advent of the electric light was not a single, revolutionary moment, but a series of small developments and complications that took place over a number of years. At the same time, the imperfections or, as has been discussed above, the failures that arose from implementing such a system in an urban environment as idiosyncratic as the city of London created the rich lightscape that distinguishes London from other cities of the period.

One of the ways in which we may explore this transition is to consider whether light is described as a visual phenomenon any differently after the advent of the electric light. Such an exploration coincides with the tendency of many novelists to eschew articulating the technological aspect of light as a narrative subject in favour of depicting it as a phenomenon. To do so, we will need to make use of the very precise illuminary paradigm of close/open light, general/local illumination, distance/detail perception that emerged as a way of measuring and representing London’s complex lightscape. In *Disenchanted Night*, Schivelbusch refers to ‘close’ and ‘open’ light in order to account for the way in which increased illumination can be obtained either by multiplying the number of individual lights (close), such as with a chandelier, or intensifying an individual light (open), such as by increasing the wattage of a bulb or by changing from gaslight to incandescent gaslight (9, 181). This division of light corresponds to the differentiation Otter proposes between ‘local illumination’, which prioritises ‘detail perception’, and ‘general illumination’, which prioritises ‘distance perception’ and is concerned with more diffuse lighting (192–194; Trotter, ‘The Distribution and Measurement of Illumination’, 99). This paradigm is further supplemented by the aerial/street perspectives proposed by Nead. She elucidates how different types of illumination facilitated various forms of representing perspectives of the city by creating a dichotomy between the flâneur as omniscient author and streetwalker as mapmaker (7). She explains that the ‘aerial view’ provides ‘mastery of urban space; it renders

the city legible and comprehensible', whereas 'at street level, however, space cannot be controlled in a single gaze, but is apprehended through a rhetoric of walking' (7).

As much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were spent trying to find the appropriate amount of illumination, to determine the ideal intensity of light, and to implement the necessary infrastructure for such a mixed illuminary network, the paradigm set out above is particularly useful as an evaluative apparatus in the fiction of this period. The Victorian fondness for vision (Otter refers to it as 'ocularphilia'), mingled with a desire for precision, consistency, and efficiency, led to the development both of a deliberate system of illumination as well as a precise paradigm describing the effects of that system. The Victorians came to associate vision with 'attention to detail, character reading, concentration, silent reading, the use of scientific instruments, social observation, efficient motility, and so on' (Otter 61). Indeed, over the nineteenth century in particular, most progress in the field of artificial illumination manifests as technological and methodological innovations for measuring and inspecting light (23). Since many objects and interior spaces had been designed to be seen in gaslight, as a result of the introduction of incandescent gaslight and electric light into domestic and other interior spaces, 'new perceptual habits had to be slowly learned' (185). This resulted in 'numerous chromatic problems', as the new forms (and qualities) of illumination disrupted established standards and conventions of colour, saturation, and tone. Otter notes that this was particularly the case in the theatre and recounts that the actress Ellen Terry 'contrasted "the thick softness of gaslight", with its "lovely specks and motes", with the "naked trashiness" of electricity' (185). The experiences of this disruption are difficult to extrapolate from depictions of light in fiction, let alone to recover retrospectively, but it is important to acknowledge, as Otter does, that '[r]ather than simply replacing one stabilized set of nocturnal chromatic norms with another, electricity simply made decorative calculations more complex' (185; Dillon 30).

With this in mind, it is important that we get a broader historical sense of any changes in the way in which artificial light is represented. Returning to Gissing, though in this instance his novel *The Nether World* (1889), an example of open light/general illumination and one of close light/local illumination demonstrates the way in which the illuminary

paradigm can be useful for understanding different lighting conditions. These conditions can be, especially in these instances, indicative of and even supplementary to the larger social conditions on display in Gissing's novel: abject poverty and slum living. The first example, where the 'lamp, placed on a side-table, barely disclosed all the objects within the four walls; it illumined Sidney's face, but Clara moved so that she was in shadow', reveals a paucity of light (Gissin 283). The lamp, likely an oil or spirit lamp, is the only source of illumination but is insufficient. In the second example, where '[a] single lamp existed for the purpose of giving light to the alley, and at no time did this serve much more than to make darkness visible', the limits of open light and general illumination are explicit (344).

Though the advent of street lighting was meant to standardise conditions of visibility, there were places in London where, even in the early twentieth century, those standards were not achieved. *The Nether World*, set in Clerkenwell, in Islington, reveals this illuminary disparity between "darkest London" and the lights of the West End. The supply of electricity in Islington only commenced in 1896 and by 1918/1919 had 4,006 subscribers and 869,714 electric street lights. Compared with well-illuminated local authorities like St Marylebone, with 11,362 subscribers and 994,214 street lights, and Hampstead, with 9,036 subscribers and 587,242 street lights, or, by contrast, poorly illuminated authorities such as Bermondsey, with 106 subscribers and 222,362 street lights, and Stoke Newington, with 792 subscribers and 3,598 street lights, by the interwar period, Islington was no longer 'darkest London' (LCC, *Electricity Supply Returns: 1904-1905 to 1924-1925*, 17-23).

The starkness of this disparity is evident when read alongside instances from Arnold Bennett's *The City of Pleasure* and *Imperial Palace* (1930), and E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910). In *The City of Pleasure* there is never a paucity of illumination. Rather, conditions of abundance—as in 'the large, low room, with its concrete lining and its half- dozen sixteen candle-power electric lights burning in the ceiling'—abound (162). Even the solitary man standing 'at the entrance to the vaults, underneath a solitary jet of electric light', has sufficient illumination (174). In *Howards End* the 'electric-light globes blossoming in triplets' in Mr Wilcox's sumptuous office are indicative of his wealth and position, but even

Margaret and Helen, living on a fixed income, and the impoverished clerk Leonard Bast do not want for light (196).

In *Imperial Palace* Bennett uses illuminary extravagance as a commentary on the exploitative conditions of luxury and modern convenience. The lighting conditions of hotel employees, while not inadequate, are more practical and austere than those accorded to hotel guests. This extravagance reaches its apogee when Evelyn, the manager of the titular luxury hotel, and Gracie, the daughter of a wealthy industrialist and member of the hotel's managing board, escape to Paris for a romantic weekend. At the Opera, '[h]undreds of lamps glowed together, changing twilight into dazzling day' (478); in the Lovely Milkmaid, a loosely veiled imitation of the famous Parisian department store, Le Bon Marché:

Electricity was festooned everywhere [...] In the centre a monumental stairway, all balustraded with lamps, rose in curves from storey to storey till it ended at the sixth. Above the stairway, in the roof, an incredible chandelier of a thousand lamps. (549)

While here the profuseness of electric light is part of Bennett's ironic portrayal of uninhibited consumerism, it is also a part of his tendency towards mountains of detail, or what Henry James called his 'promiscuous constituents of every sort': we are also told, for instance, that there were '[i]ncalculable heaps of commodities in tins', '[l]ifts on every side'; the Lovely Milkmaid 'was measureless, infinite' ('The New Novel', 319, 549). What the contrast between novels like *The Nether World* and *Imperial Palace* makes clear is the illuminary disparity that existed between the slums and tenements of 'darkest London' and the warm and richly-appointed residences of boroughs such as Mayfair, Chelsea, and Kensington. And, while these disparities are due to the social demographics reproduced in London's geography, the dialectics of economy and abundance disappear as electricity is increasingly viewed as a public utility and access to constant and consistent illumination becomes more standardised nearer to the middle of the twentieth century.

GOTHIC LIGHTS

*'A lamp for a nightmare!'*³⁰

[A] new sort of urban star now shines out nightly, horrible, unearthly, obnoxious to the human eye; a lamp for a nightmare! Such a light as this should shine only on murders and public crime, or along the corridors of lunatic asylums, a horror to heighten horror. (Stevenson, 'A Plea for Gas Lamps', 231)

Can the electric light be Gothic? Putting aside the question of 'what Gothic is' for the moment—a term that warrants further investigation—if we adhere to Robert Louis Stevenson's prescription, the electric light is 'a lamp for a nightmare' (231). Stevenson's 'A Plea for Gas Lamps' (1878) is concerned with the introduction of electric lighting into cities—a very contemporary concern, as he references the recent 'experiment in Pall Mall', one of the first electric light installations in London (230).³¹ He describes '[s]tar-rise by electricity, the most romantic flight in civilisation', in ironic terms, emphasising the undesirability of its adoption by describing how a 'sedate electrician somewhere in a back office touches a spring—and behold! from one end to another of the city, from the Alexandra to the Crystal Palace, there is light! *Fiat Lux*, says the sedate electrician' (229–230). For Stevenson, while the electric light is 'a new sort of urban star [that] now shines out nightly, horrible, unearthly, obnoxious to the human eye' (231), it also the sort of light that 'should shine only on murders and public crime, or along the corridors of lunatic asylums, a horror to heighten horror' (231). And yet, when it comes to depicting that 'dismal corner of Soho' inhabited by Hyde in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), it is not the dreaded electric light that mingles with the 'great chocolate-covered pall' to imbue the streets with 'a glow of a rich, lurid brown, like the light of some strange conflagration', but gas (23). Likening the atmosphere of Stevenson's London to that of James Thomson's urban poem

³⁰ Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Plea for Gas Lamps', 231.

³¹ Stevenson's essay was first published in the 27 April 1878 edition of W. E. Henley's periodical *London* and republished in *Virginibus Puerisque* (London: Kegan Paul, 1881). All quotations are from the 1928 Collins' Clear-Type Press edition of *Virginibus Puerisque*.

‘City of Dreadful Night’ (1874), Linda Dryden finds that the gas street lighting ‘here compounds the nightmarish quality and danger’ (260).³²

Taken together, Stevenson’s preference for gas in the novel and Dryden’s reading of artificial light in terms of its ‘effects’ suggests that electric light cannot be Gothic. However, such a reading is only possible in a world in which the electric light is yet to become an inevitable standard of modern life. In the mid-1880s, when Stevenson was writing *The Strange Case*, this was very much the case in London, where, as I have outlined in the previous chapter, technical failures in the early history of electric light led to a reversion to gas street lighting in the city by 1885. And, though the extent to which Stevenson was influenced by these failures is unknown, his choice of artificial light in the novel coincides with the palpable uncertainty surrounding the new technology. Furthermore, that there is electric light in subsequent Gothic novels, notably Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897), suggests a possible relationship between the certainty (or uncertainty) of electric light and its presence in such fiction. The gradual and contingent domestication of electricity identified by Graeme Gooday in *Domesticating Electricity* and the protracted electrification of London coincide with the Gothic colonisation of the urban and, in some instances, the domestic. Thus, a study of electric light’s adoption by Gothic fiction can reveal the extent and nature of popular literature’s participation in its domestication.

The texts considered in this chapter—Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*, Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) and, to a lesser extent, Stoker’s *Dracula*—are on the cusp of Gothic fiction’s transition towards the scientific, which is often articulated in terms of an encounter between science and the occult. In Marsh’s *The Beetle*, this encounter takes the form of a duel between the experimental scientist, Sydney Atherton, and a foreign, shape-shifting mesmerist, the eponymous Beetle. According to Roger Luckhurst, this scene can be

³² Dryden’s article, “‘City of Dreadful Night’: Stevenson’s Gothic London’ in *Robert Louis Stevenson: Writer of Boundaries*, edited by Richard Ambrosini and Richard Dury (2006), should not be confused with her longer chapter of the same title in her own monograph, *Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde, and Wells* (2003). I refer to the later chapter from Ambrosini and Dury’s collection.

read as a ‘generally “comic” colonial encounter, in which the native’s primitive superstition is exploited by the Westerner’; however, as he also notes, ‘[w]hat is perhaps more surreptitiously acknowledged is the proximity of mesmeric and electrical forces, both of which were discussed in “occult” frameworks well into the late nineteenth century’ (‘Trance-Gothic’, 160–161).³³ This is significant, as the novel’s ‘electrical forces’ tend to be aligned with science, for not only is Atherton’s private laboratory ‘electrically lit’, but it is fitted with an ‘electrical machine, giving an eighteen inch spark’ (Marsh 138, 145). At the same time, in several instances in the novel, mesmeric power and the presence of strong electric light are connected in a way that suggests the latter is not simply adjacent to the former, but somehow involved in its influence over the individual. Together with the uncertainty of the electric light as a source of light in Marsh’s London, this facilitates the precariousness of the novel’s mesmeric victims, suggesting that the electric light can also be seen as a destabilising force in the novel.

Though Luckhurst does not expand on what this ‘proximity’ between ‘mesmeric and electrical forces’ might mean for our reading of Marsh’s novel, he directs readers to ‘(Touching on) Tele-Technology’, his contribution to the anthology *Applying: To Derrida* (1996), which is concerned with ‘the paradoxes attendant to touch’ in Derrida’s essay ‘Le Toucher’ in Jean-Luc Nancy’s ‘Touch Touches Upon Everything’ (177). Reflecting on what it means ‘to touch, to touch on, the question of technology’, he proposes that we consider that ‘Derrida’s approach to the destining of technology combines the senses of *toucher* à, both to touch and to meddle with’, in our approach (177). Thus, in reading technology in Gothic fiction, we should consider not only that on which technology borders, but that which transgresses or collapses these borders. Luckhurst returns to this ‘proximity’ in *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870–1901* (2002), which considers the ‘imbrication’ of psychical research and scientific naturalism (82). Proponents of ““marginal sciences””, such as telepathy and certain trance-states, adopted models of ‘inter-phenomena’ used to account for ‘tele-effects’ and

³³ Roy Porter observes that the British people’s inclination towards mesmerism was facilitated by their ‘insatiable fascination from mid-century for electrical display and medical electricity’ (25), marking an early intersection between electricity and mesmerism.

‘inter-communication’ (76–82). Thus, the luminiferous ether, transmitting light across distances, becomes the mesmeric fluid. In revisiting the encounter between Atherton and the Beetle in *The Invention of Telepathy*, Luckhurst identifies a need for more critical work exploring the intersection between the ‘somnambolic, mesmeric, and hypnotic states’ and science in late-Victorian Gothic fiction (208). One such area, overlooked by Luckhurst himself, is the possibility that ‘the link of mesmeric and electrical forces’ might trouble rather than reinforce the ‘trope of the comic colonial encounter’ (209).

This chapter is concerned with the two contradictory roles of electric light and electricity that develop in Gothic fictions: as a civilising force against the threat of the Egyptian ‘Other’ and as a destabilising force responsible for perceptual difficulty in the city. I consider how Gothic fiction’s colonisation of science and domestic/urban spaces extends to the trope of the domestication of electricity. As a part of this trope, electricity and electric light are often understood as civilising forces; in Gothic ideology, lights serve to protect against the dark, the unseen, and the uncanny. However, as I demonstrate, since the electric light was powered by an invisible force or substance, together with London’s poor illuminary conditions and the instability of early electric lighting technology, electric lights were also seen as a destabilising force in Gothic fiction. The use of science and technology against the threat of what is foreign/ancient/other sometimes coincides with a belief in the sophistication of ancient, occult, or Eastern forms of knowledge, a desire to recover ancient science and practices.

A Gothic, or Scientific Romance?

‘We must keep our eyes fixed on the scientific side, and wait for the development on the psychical side’. (Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, 181)

In *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* (2012), Nick Groom observes that ‘various critical theorists have fixated on certain sensational aspects of the Gothic, such as the workings of the unconscious and subconscious, the influence of unseen agencies, and trespass, abjection, sacrifice, and extinction’ (xv). The ‘influence of unseen agencies’ to which Groom refers need not be of one individual over another, since in Gothic fiction anxieties about new

technologies manifest in a loss of control over machines or a scientific experiment gone wrong. In the study of the development of the late-Gothic genre, some scholars have identified this direction of development as the moment when the Gothic transitions into science fiction or, in other accounts, when the scientific romance diverges from the supernatural romance (Brantlinger, 'Imperial Gothic', 233; Wilt 618; Pykett 211; Groom 86). Judith Wilt's observation, that the close publication of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* and Stoker's *Dracula* in 1897 signals this transition and serves as the 'Great Counter-Attack' against British imperialism, opens up two avenues of approach to the question of what the 'Gothic' is: form and theme (618). The former produces a generic aetiology addressing the question of whether the late-Victorian Gothic emerged as a continuation of a Gothic literary tradition that began in the late eighteenth century or as a revival of the earlier 'romance' tradition. The latter is an extension of the important reconsideration of literature's relationship with contemporary attitudes towards race, gender, and sexuality—a re-evaluation that also considers the contingent influence of geography, politics, and science, technology, and medicine on literature that has been ongoing since the 1980s.

One critical study that broaches both approaches is Kathleen Spencer's 'Purity and Danger: *Dracula*, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis' (1992). She begins by locating Stoker's *Dracula* as coming out of the "romance revival" of the 1880s and 1890s—more explicitly, that species of romance called "the fantastic" (193). The 'fantastic', she argues, is distinct from the Gothic of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, though rather confusingly she proposes that we refer to it as the "Urban Gothic" (199–200). Spencer's aetiology is adapted by other scholars, such as Lyn Pykett, who traces the origins of both romance and science fiction—replacing the Gothic with 'sensation fiction'—to 'the fantastic', and Patrick Brantlinger, who finds that the texts he identifies as belonging to an 'imperial Gothic'—a 'blend of adventure story with Gothic elements'—are 'related to several other forms of romance writing which flourished between 1880 and 1914', especially the 'Gothic romance' and science fiction (227, 233). There is, it seems, an adjacent relationship between 'romance' and the 'Gothic' that, at times, appears parallel and, at others, convergent.

While Brantlinger does not specifically refer to the ‘fantastic’, both Spencer and Pykett are working from Tzvetan Todorov’s formalist definition of ‘the fantastic’. Following from Andrzej Zgorzelski’s interpretation of Todorov’s definition, Spencer explains that ‘the fantastic as a genre is signalled by the “breaching of the internal laws which are initially assumed in the text to govern the fictional world”’ (199). A text proposes a “mimetic world model” that ‘is violently breached by the entrance of the fantastic element and changed into a different world, one in which the fantastic element does not violate the laws of reality’ (199). Such a description could certainly be applied to a wide range of fin de siècle popular fiction, including Haggard’s *She*, Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Stoker’s *Dracula* and *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, and Marsh’s *The Beetle*.

The limitations of Spencer’s formalist approach are evident in her insistence that the ending of the ‘Urban Gothic’ (romance or fantastic) novel usually features the expulsion or elimination of ‘the violating element’, so that ‘the mimetic world, the status quo, is reestablished’ (208). This is certainly the case in *Dracula*, where the Crew of Light not only discover Count Dracula’s true nature, but defeat him decisively. But, what do we make of novels that have open endings or ‘weak closure’, such as Marsh’s *The Beetle*, where the Beetle is presumed dead in the train crash, but likely eludes capture, and the cult of Isis is destroyed in an explosion in Dongola during an ‘expeditionary advance’, but only reportedly so (319, 320)?³⁴ If we adhere to Spencer’s model, *Dracula* would be Urban Gothic but *The Beetle* would be Gothic. And yet, if we consider factors other than their closure, these two novels have more in common than not.

The Beetle first appeared as a serialised novel in Alfred Harmsworth’s *Answers: A Weekly Journal of Instruction and Jokes* in early March 1897. Originally titled ‘The Perils of Paul Lessingham: The Story of a Haunted Man’, Minna Vuohelainen speculates that the new

³⁴ I am indebted to Eyal Segal’s use of Barbara Hernstein Smith’s approach to poetic closure in ‘Closure in Detective Fiction’ (2010) in my interpretation of Spencer’s proposal. Segal explains that ‘[c]losure in the detective story is typically created by the successful conclusion of the investigation in uncovering all the important facts relating to the crime mystery and thus filling in all the important curiosity gaps’ (168). Unsolved or uncertain solutions result in openness or ‘weak closure’ (171; 211). To adapt Segal’s definition to the topic at hand, closure in Gothic fiction is achieved when the occult element is demystified, the mystery discovered, and the malevolent force defeated.

title, adopted when it was published in the early autumn of that same year, ‘emphasises the importance of the supernatural element within the story’ (‘Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*’, 92). *Dracula*, published in May 1897, was ‘a modest critical success’, and given that Marsh’s publishers ‘were eager to emphasise the similarities between *Dracula* and *The Beetle*’ when advertising the novel, it seems likely that they hoped to ‘benefit from a vogue for occult horror fiction’ (Luckhurst, ‘Introduction’, xi; Vuohelainen 94). *The Beetle* is less known today than its contemporary rival and has only recently experienced a recovery in critical studies.³⁵ The intersecting motifs of crime, horror, romance, and the occult endow it with a mass-appeal and a curious cultural currency equal to that of *Dracula*, which has endured as a cultural touchstone primarily because of, amongst other elements, a persistent interest in the vampire. Whereas *Dracula* sets science against the occult as the members of the Crew of Light attempt to uncover the nature of and, later, eradicate the ostensibly immortal and vampiric Count Dracula, *The Beetle* depicts the foiling of a revenge plot enacted by a member of the cult of Isis against a prominent member of parliament by a scientist and a ‘confidential agent’.³⁶

Beyond the proximity in their publication, the novels are marked by numerous similarities, notably their urban settings, the use of multiple narrators, albeit to different effects, and the use of hypnotism—or mesmerism—as a threat against a white, Western woman by a mysterious, malevolent Eastern figure (Luckhurst 208). Indeed, both Marsh and Stoker exploited a renewed interest in and uncertainty relating to hypnotism that arose from a

³⁵ Interest in *The Beetle* was regenerated when it was included by Hugh and Graham Greene in their anthology *Victorian Villainies* in 1984. According to Minna Vuohelainen, who has done the most extensive studies of the novel’s publication history and has excavated a great deal of significant information about Marsh’s other publications, links renewed interest in the novel with the emergence of cultural studies at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s (‘Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*: a Late-Victorian Popular Novel’, 98). In 2002, Roger Luckhurst’s *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870–1901* drew scholarly attention to the novel’s use of mesmerism and its links with *Dracula* (208–209). Julian Wolfreys’s Broadview edition of *The Beetle*, first appearing in 2004, made the novel more accessible to scholars and the general reading public. Before Vuohelainen and Wolfreys’s investigations, many of the advances in scholarship on the novel and its elusive author tended to be informal and to exist outside the domains of traditional literary criticism, notably in Richard Dalby’s articles on Marsh in *Antique Book Monthly Review* (April 1986) and *Book and Magazine Collector* (October 1997). Subsequently, the number and caliber of scholarly publications on *The Beetle* has increased greatly.

³⁶ All quotations from these two texts will be from Roger Luckhurst’s edition of *Dracula* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Julian Wolfreys’s edition of *The Beetle* (Peterborough, Ont.; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2004).

report on hypnotism issued by the French neurologist Jean-Marie Charcot in 1882 to explore the limits of and threats to autonomy and subjectivity in a fictional context (Luckhurst, ‘Trance-Gothic’, 148). Both novels also demonstrated an interest in advances in electrical science, albeit indirectly so. For Abraham Van Helsing, the eminent scientist and physician, these advances are the pinnacle of scientific discovery and a means of probing the expanding boundaries of science. For Sydney Atherton, the polymath scientist and inventor of weapons of potentially mass destruction, the equipment of electrical science—his ‘electrical machine, giving an eighteen-inch spark’—is a component part of his extensive, private laboratory, located in the basement of his central-London home; he ‘treats’ the Beetle to ‘a little exhibition of electricity’ in order to subdue the uninvited visitor (145). This interest in electrical science, in addition to their status as scientists, increases their alignment with modernity, for as Iwan Rhys Morus avers, electricity had become ‘a symbol of Victorian progress’ (3). And, as an emblem of modernity, electricity—especially in the form of the electric light—was used to fight against the threat of the uncanny, foreign ‘Other’.

These thematic connections are not lost on Spencer, who suggests that the ‘modernity of the setting’ and the ‘reduction of ambiguity and the preservation of boundaries’ further differentiates the Urban Gothic from the Gothic (200, 203). Inherent to her understanding of this ‘modernity’ is a ‘modern’, ‘urban’ place, where ‘science is the metaphor that rules human interactions with the universe’ (200). Setting aside her somewhat problematic conflation of ‘modern’ with ‘modernity’, this is a useful way of thinking about how novels such as *Dracula* and *The Beetle* frame the encounter between science and the occult or supernatural as taking place in the city. It does not, however, take into account novels such as *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, in which the city is deemed too disruptive a place to undertake the ‘Great Experiment’ (190).

At the same time, though these novels often privilege scientific approaches to the occult, the scientists therein often prove receptive to occult or supernatural possibilities and, in some cases, look to Eastern practices and ancient sciences as viable directions in which to expand human knowledge. This is because, as Brantlinger explains, belief in the occult and adherence to the principles of scientific materialism were not mutually exclusive in ‘Imperial

Gothic'. Rather, in such fictions, there was a 'fusion' of imperialism—of which science was one proponent—and occultism that probed the fragility of the empire, particularly vis-à-vis the extreme possibilities of atavistic science (228–229). In such narratives, 'western science discovers or triggers supernatural effects associated with the "mysterious Orient"' (231). This permeability works against Spencer's insistence that the Urban Gothic participates in the 'reduction of ambiguity and the preservation of boundaries', as it exposes the limits of both scientific knowledge and the ability of science to make known the unknown (203). The collapsing of boundaries is exemplified by the shape-shifting, androgynous Beetle in Marsh's novel, who defies definition in multiple ways.

Though Spencer ultimately understands the Urban Gothic in terms of the interaction of the modern world and 'fantastic intrusion', she overlooks the disruptive potential inherent to this world. Other critics position the 'fantastic' (or, in some cases, the 'gothic') as a fundamentally transgressive mode. For Pykett, the 'irruption of sensation and fantastic into novels' is something that 'cannot easily be assigned to a single generic category' and insists that 'the fantastic is [...] concerned with moving between borderlands and boundaries' (94). Luckhurst invests the genre with more agency, contending that it 'investigates transgression, seizing opportunistically on anxiously insecure borders' ('Trance-Gothic', 155). Another way of looking at this transgression is in terms of the potential for science, as 'a set of potentially disturbing discourses', 'take[ing] us into new realms and open[ing] up shadowy arenas in which confronting categories and accepted truths begin to dissolve', as Byron Glennis proposes (para. 5). What this definitional excursion has made clear is that, whatever the preferred term, the Gothic is an imbricated genre, comprising a nexus of textual influences that elude containment. Moreover, since the Gothic is not a stable category, one way forward is to define it in relation to some other cultural phenomenon or historical period: hence 'Trance-Gothic', 'Imperial Gothic', 'Urban Gothic', and 'late-Victorian Gothic'. In this sense, as Nicholas Daly observes, the Gothic is 'quite colonizing' (15). This nature has led not only to a profusion of critical reconsiderations of *The Beetle* and *Dracula* but also to studies recovering lesser-known texts, such as Marie Corelli's *A Romance of Two Worlds*

(1886).³⁷ Adding to this discourse, this chapter considers a set of texts not bound by any one thematic concern, but united by a convergence of several important cultural moments: a renewed literary interest in mesmerism, advances in understanding the nature of electricity, an increase in the adoption of electric lights in London, and the Madhist War in Egypt and Sudan. At the same time, though these texts are marked by the ‘irruption of the fantastic’ described by both Spencer and Pykett, they are also involved in the domestication of electricity as part of the genre’s colonisation of science and urban spaces. For this reason, I use the term late-Victorian Gothic in this chapter, as it allows these various connections to speak for themselves.

‘Added terrors’: A Gothic Electric Light

I had hoped that by shutting out the light, I might regain my senses. That in the darkness I might have opportunity for sane reflection. But I had made a grievous error. I had exchanged bad for worse. The darkness lent added terrors. (Richard Marsh, *The Beetle*, 206)

Just now the eyes of all Europe are fixed on our conduct of affairs in Egypt, and especially in its outlying dependencies grouped under the generic term ‘the Soudan’. (‘Egypt’, *London Quarterly Review* 2.3 (April 1884): 136)

Shortly after its advent, the electric arc light was adopted for use in military campaigns. The light produced by the arc light was so strong that it could illuminate the battlefield and aid in

³⁷ I am thinking of Kelly Hurley’s ‘Science and the Gothic’ in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 170–185; W. C. Harris and Dawn Vernoooy’s “‘Orgies of Nameless Horrors’: Gender, Orientalism, and the Queering of Violence in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*” in *Papers on Language and Literature* 48.4 (2012), 339–381; Anne Stiles’s *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ailise Bulfin’s ‘The Fiction of Gothic Egypt and British Imperial Paranoia: The Curse of the Suez Canal’ in *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 54.4 (2011), 411–443; Anna Maria Jones’s ‘Conservation of Energy, Individual Agency, and Gothic Terror in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*, or, What’s Scariest than an Ancient, Evil, Shape-Shifting Bug?’ in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39.1 (2011), 65–85; Marilena Parlatti’s ‘Ghostly Traces, Occult Clues: Tales of Detection in Victorian and Edwardian Fiction’ in *Journal of English Studies* 15.3 (2011), 211–220; Minna Vuohelainen’s “‘Cribb’d, Cabined, and Confined’: Fear, Claustrophobia, and Modernity in Richard Marsh’s Urban Gothic Fiction’ in *Journal of Literature and Science* 3.1 (2010), 23–36; Aviva Briefel’s ‘Hands of Beauty, Hands of Horror: Fear and Egyptian Art at the Fin de Siècle’ in *Victorian Studies* 50.2 (2008), 263–271; Bradley Deane’s ‘Mummy Fiction and the Occupation of Egypt: Imperial Striptease’ in *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 51.4 (2008), 391–410; Sarah Willburn’s ‘The Savage Magnet: Racializing of the Occult Body in Late Victorian Fiction’ in *Women’s Writing* 15.3 (2008), 436–453; Julian Wolfreys’s ‘The Hieroglyphic Other: *The Beetle*, London, and the Abyssal Subject’ in *A Mighty Mass of Brick and Smoke: Victorian and Edwardian Representations of London* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2007), 169–192; Victoria Margree’s “‘Both in men’s clothing’: Gender, Sovereignty, and Insecurity in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*” in *Critical Survey* 19.2 (2007), 63–82; Alisha Siebers’s ‘Marie Corelli’s Magnetic Revitalizing Power’ in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2006), 1–16.

reconnaissance of the enemy. It could also, as was reported in some instances, be used as a defensive measure to disorient enemy combatants. To supplement his discussion of street lighting and the nightmare of total illumination in *Disenchanted Night*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch refers to an instance where electric lights were used against Egyptian soldiers in Alexandria (134, n. 122). In his account, the tactic is not only successful but a common occurrence in ‘colonial wars’, equivalent to the use of ‘European firearms [...] in the sixteenth century’ (134, n. 122). In positioning the electric light as a civilising force—a technological extension of British imperialism—Schivelbusch overlooks the incidental nature of this relationship suggested by his primary source material. In fact, the article is more concerned with the impracticalities of using a technology requiring a horse- or mule-drawn generator to power it (Soulages 568). However, Schivelbusch’s focus on the reaction of the Egyptian soldiers to the electric light—a reaction classing them as inferior to the ‘English fleet’ who are using the technology—warrants further consideration, as it suggests that such a use of electric light was a deliberate demonstration of technological superiority in ‘colonial wars’ and not incidental to its primary military applications: illumination and reconnaissance. Schivelbusch’s source is ‘Applications de la lumière électrique à l’art militaire’, an article on military applications of the electric light which appeared in the 17 June 1882 issue of the French technical publication *La Lumière électrique* (566–568). The article discusses the use of electrical communication technologies—the telegraph, the telephone, and the electric light—in military campaigns, tracing the development of the use of electric lights in particular. Its author, C. C. Soulages, observes that the first attempts to use this technology were made by the navy in 1855 on the *Jérôme-Napoléon*; later, in 1859, the electric light was used by the French army against Italy (566). This latter attempt was unsuccessful because the power from the batteries used in the place of generators were insufficient. The practicability of military applications of the electric light, Soulages contends, is entirely due to the development of a successful, portable generator; as the generator was quite cumbersome and needed to be drawn by horses, the practicability would be limited (566).

In this account, Soulages makes two references to the use of electric light. The first occurred during the last Tunisian war, where ‘nos cuirassés ont éclairé l’objectif d’un

débarquement ou qu'il fallait bombarder' ('our battleships lit an objective that was to be shelled on landing', 566). The second took place during similar incident with the Franco-English naval forces at Alexandria, where lights from the ships were directed at the city and the surrounding shoreline (566). This use of the electric light appeared to have frightened the Egyptian resistance forces, who 'croient voir dans ces manifestations, toutes nouvelles pour eux, l'intervention de puissances surnaturelles' ('believed they saw the intervention of supernatural forces in the demonstration of something unfamiliar to them', 566). This is the incident to which Schivelbusch refers, though his translation imprecisely renders 'grand effroi' as 'dismay' rather than 'fear' or 'terror', 'croient voir' as 'assumed' rather than 'believed to have seen', and 'ces manifestations, toutes nouvelles pour eux' as 'totally puzzling phenomenon' rather than 'a spectacle, totally new or unfamiliar to them' (Schivelbusch 134, n. 122; Soulages 566). Soulages's language is charged with an elitism Carolyn Marvin demonstrates was inherent to technical experts writing in trade publication (15–19). By reproducing this rhetoric in the service of his observations about the 'nightmare' of total illumination without challenging its implications, Schivelbusch perpetuates rather than investigates the trope of electric light as a civilising force.

Discussing the establishment of authority and technical literacy in trade publications, Marvin notes that '*Electrical World* picked up a report from *La Lumière Électrique* [sic] of a "triumph of science over superstition" during British attempts to suppress the rebel leader Madhi and his "wild followers" in the Sudan in 1884' (36). The report describes an incident similar to that which took place in Alexandria two years earlier, though here electric light appears to be used for defensive purposes, not to support an attack on the enemy.³⁸ For Marvin, '[a] significant story element was the Arab failure to offer effective resistance' to 'a superior technological, therefore civilized, order' (37). Here, however, the reaction of the Arab soldiers to the lights is subordinate to the impression their attack makes on the British:

³⁸ As both Marvin's and Schivelbusch's studies were published in 1988, it seems unlikely that either would have been aware of the other's discussion of the same subject. It remains unclear why Schivelbusch was not aware of this later incident.

Darkness fell, and the Arabs came on in hordes, shouting when they arrived within a few hundred yards of the walls, firing their guns at random and waving their spears defiantly. At the right moment, the electric light plant was put in motion, the long beams of dazzling white lights shot out suddenly upon the howling, rushing mass of Arabs, and in a few seconds the attack had by this means been turned into one of the strangest routs imaginable. ('Science Against Superstition', *Electrical World* [2 August 1884], 37)

Despite the threat of the 'hordes' and the 'howling, rushing mass', the attack is characterised as uncoordinated and easily defeated. The electric lights, by contrast function effortlessly; their effect is immediate, demonstrating the technological superiority of the British forces. At the same time, Marvin proposes this encounter conveys 'a more subtle theme': 'the superior morality attributed to civilized communication over savage violence' (37). Yet, the deliberate use of the electric lights to frighten the Arab insurgents, suggested by its timely and directed nature, is a development from the earlier instance in Alexandria, where the same result was incidental. Perhaps this application of electric light was adopted as official military and naval strategy, and it is worth briefly considering this possibility by looking at other reports of the incident at Suakin.

The use of electric searchlights aboard naval vessels—more practical than horse-drawn light plants—was a part of British defensive strategy at the time of the Suakin campaign.³⁹ In February 1884, the Secretary to the Admiralty was asked whether 'any of Her Majesty's ships on the East India Station [were] provided with the electric light; and, if not, whether prompt steps will be taken to remedy so serious a defect'. At that time, the only ship suitable to be fitted with electric light in that area, the *Euryalus*, was not. Though the *HMS Hecla*, stationed in the Red Sea, was equipped with an electric light, the Admiralty had no reports of its use (HC Deb 25 February 1884 vol 1284 a1870). British troops had withdrawn from the Sudan in the first half of 1884, this was only a temporary measure; British naval vessels could supplement the outposts held by allied Egyptian soldiers. By early June of that same year, Madhist soldiers were raiding the outposts by night (HC Deb 6 June 1884 vol. 288 cc1682–7). On Tuesday, 10 June 1884, an article in *The Times* reports that two days previous '[t]here was some firing on the forts [...], which was answered from the adjacent posts and

³⁹ Suakin (also Souakim) is a port town in Sudan.

the [HMS] *Albacore*, aided by the electric light' ('The Proposed Egyptian Conference', 5). Later that month, in *The Illustrated London News*, a brief account of 'the recent operations at Souakim for the defence of that port town against the remaining hostile force at Osman Digna'⁴⁰ is accompanied by two illustrations, one depicting the *Albacore*'s use of the searchlight (see Figure 3.1), the other depicting the 'landing of the naval brigade' ('An Alarm in Souakim', 593–594).



Figure 3.1: 'H. M. S. *Albacore* Searching the Shore with the Electric Light' from 'An Alarm in Souakim', *The Illustrated London News* (21 June 1884), 593. British Library. MFM.MLD47.

While reassuring readers that the *HMS Albacore* was dispatched from its station at Alexandria to support the troops at Suakin, the article emphasises the fact that there were 'no English troops' there, only the 'Egyptians, who are considered thoroughly untrustworthy, and likely to bolt at the first sign of an enemy's approach' (594). In an article from 12 July 1884 following up on the 'brief campaign of General Sir Gerald Grahams forces' that were brought in to end the raids on Suakin, *The Illustrated London News* reports that a subsequent attack

⁴⁰ It is not clear from this sentence that Osma Digna is actually a person, not a place.

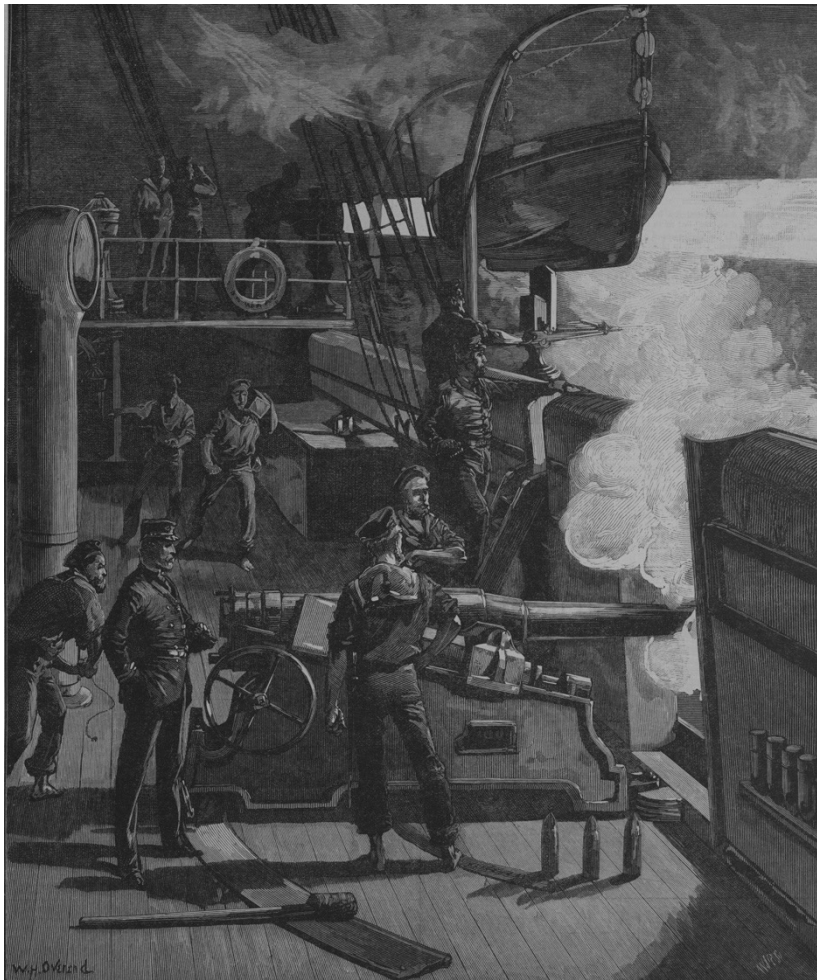


Figure 3.2: ‘The Situation at Souakim: H. M. S. Albacore Shelling Osman Digna’s Forces by the Electric Light’ from ‘Defences of Souakim’, *The Illustrated London News* (12 July 1884), 45. British Library. MFM.MLD47.

was ‘repulsed’ with the help of the Albacore. In this instance, the electric light served to ‘search for the ground occupied by Osman Digna’s forces’ (‘Defences of Souakim’, 44; see Figure 3.2). Noticeably absent from these accounts is any suggestion that the electric lights were used to subdue the attacking, Arab forces. Even the 17 June report in *La Lumière électrique* on which the *Electrical World* report is based focuses on the utility of the electric light, describing how ‘[l]a lumière électrique a rendu de bon services à Souakim, en démasquant les rebelles qui se sont approchés de la ville’ (‘the electric light served Souakim well in revealing the rebels approaching the town’, Soulages 339).

So where does the idea of the electric light as a civilising force originate and what purpose does it serve? As I noted above, Marvin identifies this trope as belonging to the early

culture of professionalization in electrical communication technologies. To electricians who prided themselves on the superiority of their ‘technological literacy’, for instance, ‘other social groups were contemptible’ and often portrayed as ignorant or inept in specialist literature (17–22). The colonial encounter offers an opportunity in which to confirm this ignorance. Depicting Osman Digna’s forces at Suakin in this manner reaffirms the legitimacy of British imperialism, since a fear of technology is indicative of racial or cultural inferiority and justifies the need for colonial superintendence. At the same time, it attempts to mitigate the threat the Madhist rebellion represents to British interests in the Sudan by depicting the rebel forces as primitive and easily defeated. Moreover, it engages with a dynamic Marvin identifies, wherein the ‘appearance of sensational stories about the occult at the fringes of scientific and professional literature was usually legitimized by the suggestion that science was absorbing and taking over disreputable magical modes and replacing them with benign scientific ones’ (59). Though Marvin locates this dynamic in ‘scientific and professional literature’, the ‘heroic encounter with the unknown’ and the ‘contest of power against power’ are tropes explored in late-Victorian Gothic fiction (59).

In *Dracula*, small, portable electric lights (“for aid in all”) are amongst the more traditional provisions Van Helsing prepares for the Crew of Light in their fight against the vampire—the ‘silver crucifix’, the ‘wreath of withered garlic blossoms’, ‘the portion of sacred wafer’, as well as a knife and revolver for use against ‘other enemies more mundane’ (232).⁴¹ Though it is unclear what the actual effect of electric light is on the Count, he appears to have an aversion to sunlight that arises from his affinity to or association with moonlight and his ability to “see in the dark” (223). Later, during their pursuit of Dracula down the river Sereth towards the Bistritza, every time Jonathan Harker and Lord Goldaming ‘turn [their] electric lamp’ on passing boats in order to determine whether they are carrying ‘any box or package of anything like the size of the one [they] seek’, the boats’ crews ‘fell on their knees and prayed’ (332). Regardless of whether this reaction to the electric light is one

⁴¹ All quotations will be from Roger Luckhurst’s edition of *Dracula* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

of fear or veneration, it recalls Harker's earlier characterisation of 'the horseshoe of the Carpathians' as gathering 'every known superstition in the world [...] as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool' (6). In this way, Stoker sets the electric light in opposition to the forces of the occult.

Though less explicitly, electric lights are used to safeguard against the potential dangers arising from the 'Great Experiment' in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*.⁴² In anticipation of the experiment, Trelawny had "'the old house at Kyllion [in Cornwall] made ready"' by fitting it "'with electric light all over"' (191). Even the ancient cavern beneath, used by smugglers and as a hiding place during the Bloody Assize, is electrified, though as Trelawny notes, they "'could not join the wires to the mains lest [his] secret should become known"' (200). Everything is powered "'by a set of turbines, moved by the flowing and ebbing tide, after the manner of the turbines at Niagara"', ensuring there would be "'a full supply ready at any time'". The electrification of the cave is thus a precaution "'against any disaster that human thought could foresee"' (221). During the experiment, Ross is "'to stand by the taps of the electric light, ready to turn them off or on as Mr Trelawny should direct"', since "'death to any or all of us might come from any error or neglect on [his] part"' (239–240). Trelawny believes the electric lights will protect against whatever might result from the success or failure of his 'Great Experiment', but this plan cannot account for what 'human thought' cannot foresee. It is relevant here to consider the effect the electric lights in the cavern have on this outcome.

In the original ending from the 1903 edition of *The Jewel*, a 'faint greenish vapour' emanating from the successfully opened coffer fills the cavern and obscures Ross's view of the experiment with a 'Stygian gloom' (241, 242). As the last lamp goes out Ross attempts to turn on the lights to no avail: 'something had gone wrong with the electric light' (243). In the dark, he removes what he assumes is Margaret's body from beside the sarcophagus, but returns to find she and the others did not survive the experiment. They 'had sunk down on the

⁴² All quotations will be from Kate Hebblethwaite's edition of *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2008). Hebblethwaite uses the 1903 version, but includes the second part of the final chapter, 'The Great Experiment', from the 1912 version. Unless otherwise stated, quotations are from the 1903 version.

floor, and were gazing upwards with fixed eyes of unspeakable terror' (244). Though it is unclear whether trying the electric lights earlier would have prevented this result, Ross attributes their failure to the wicked storm that coincided with the experiment. This sequence of events is completely reversed in the 1912 edition of the text and Ross is not only able to turn on the lights but to open the windows of the cave, dissipating the noxious smoke that appears to be the cause of his friends' demise in the 1903 edition (248).⁴³ Since, as Kate Hebblethwaite observes in her introduction to the 1912 edition of 'The Great Experiment', it is uncertain whether or to what extent Stoker was involved in the revised edition, it is important that we not invest too much significance in the role the electric lights play in averting disaster in the later version (245). It is clear from other instances in the narrative that electric lights are aligned with the pursuit of scientific knowledge and often safeguard against the uncertainties caused by darkness and the unknown.⁴⁴

This is made most explicit in the encounter between Atherton and the foreign, shape-shifting mesmerist in Marsh's *The Beetle*. Though I have already alluded to this moment in the introduction to this chapter, it warrants further consideration here in relation to the way in which late-Victorian Gothic fiction adopts the tropes of the 'heroic encounter with the unknown' and the 'contest of power against power'. In addition to being a scene in which a British scientist defeats a foreign threat, it is also one in which science, in the form of electricity, comes up against an occult force: mesmerism. Electricity is ostensibly aligned with science in this encounter, though the unstable identity of electricity during the late nineteenth century brings this association into question.⁴⁵ Here I consider this instability in terms of its colonial elements.

⁴³ The 1912 version of 'The Great Experiment' is included as an appendix in Hebblethwaite's edition of *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, beginning from where the two texts diverge (on page 238). She notes a number of inconsistencies between the two versions, leaving her readers 'to decide whether these are actual inconsistencies or another example of Queen Tera's wizardry at play' (245).

⁴⁴ I am thinking of the moment at the beginning of the novel when Ross first enters Trelawny's bedroom to discover whether he still lives and quickly 'switch[e]s on the electric light' to counteract the feeling that 'there might be some dreadful thing behind [the door] ready to pounce out on [him]!' (12–13).

⁴⁵ This is discussed extensively by Gooday in his chapter 'The Uncertainty of Electricity' in *Domesticating Electricity* (37–59). See also Chapter 2 of Luckhurst's *The Invention of Telepathy* (71–114).

To begin with, rather than taking place in a remote or contested part of the Empire, Marsh relocates the colonial encounter to its heart, in a private, basement laboratory in London. Paying a second visit to Atherton's lab, the mesmerist makes another attempt to involve Atherton in his plot against Paul Lessingham, a rising politician and Atherton's rival for the affections of Marjorie Lindon.⁴⁶ In the first encounter, Atherton notices a 'mesmeric quality' in the stranger's eyes and proposes, "'with [his] permission—or without!—to try an experiment or two on [him]'" (105). The stranger attempts to establish a common ground with Atherton, asking whether he too, is "'a magician'", and proposing that they "'try experiments together [...] on Paul Lessingham'", but Atherton can only frame their encounter as a conflict between East and West, the occult and science (104, 106). This is evident in the emphasis placed on Atherton's observations in the narrative and the inferences he makes from them. From this, he concludes that he belongs to 'one of those morbid organisations which are oftener found [...] in the east than in the west, and which are apt to exercise an uncanny influence over the weak and foolish folk with whom they come in contact' (105). Thus, Atherton believes he is superior not only to the mesmerist but to those who are by their nature susceptible to the mesmerist's gaze. As a scientist, he lacks the 'sensitive something which is found in the hypnotic subjects' (105). When the stranger attempts to intimidate Atherton by revealing that he is "'of the children of Isis!'", Atherton reminds the stranger that "'this is London, not a dog-hole in the desert'" (106).

This dichotomy intensifies in the second encounter, as Atherton's observations confirm his earlier evaluation of the stranger's character and intentions. Employing his 'unusual tenacity of vision', Atherton attempts to reconcile contradictory elements in the stranger's appearance: though the stranger is 'oriental to the finger-tips', his precise ethnicity is indeterminate; he is 'distinctly not Mussulmanic', but has a large, 'beak-like nose' and 'more than a streak of negro blood'; he gives 'the semblance of great age' as well as a 'juvenescence of [the] eyes' (140–141). With these crude, racialised descriptions, Atherton

⁴⁶ My use of the masculine, singular pronoun here to designate the Beetle reflects Atherton's assumption that the burnoose-wearing stranger is a man (Marsh 103–105).

constructs a chimerical ‘Other’ worthy of his animosity. Here, as in the previous encounter, the feature he finds most disconcerting is the stranger’s gaze, for his eyes are at once singular, ineffable, and ‘uncanny’ (141). Marsh emphasises the unique quality of the stranger’s eyes throughout the narrative, but in this instance their power to influence presents a direct challenge to Atherton’s status as scientific observer. For, though he gives a scientific explanation for the feeling, ‘as one met his gaze, that he was looking right through you’ (‘some peculiar formation of the optic-nerve’), he is unable to resist the ‘baleful something which seemed to be passing from his eyes to him’ (141).

Continuing in a discourse suspended between repudiating and advancing the supernatural and sensational elements of the encounter, Atherton constructs a narrative of tension between the empirical and the occult, the rational and the irrational. He dismisses the ‘baleful something’ as a trick of the imagination, for ‘in that sense, [he was] not an imaginative man’; he entertains the possibility that the stranger’s gaze might be ‘an influence of a most disastrous sort’, but only in ‘the case of a nervous, or a sensitive temperament’, which he does not possess; and he suggests that the stranger is likely ‘endowed with the traditional evil eye’ while condemning belief in such as things as folkloric and superstitious (141). However, though Atherton believes he is able to resist the stranger’s influence ‘by an effort of will’, this resistance falters as their proximity increases (143–144). Insinuating that he might be able to fulfil Atherton’s romantic desire for Marjorie, the stranger uses this promise to disarm the scientist’s rational mind and to attempt to exploit his ensuing weakness to gain control of his body, confirming Atherton’s earlier, instinctive apprehensions. Though only briefly under the mesmerist’s control, Atherton’s fear of the irrational and of losing his autonomy is aroused. Acknowledging that he ‘had made the dangerous mistake of underrating the enemy’s strength’, he ‘resolve[s] to do something which should make [him] equal to this gentleman of many talents’—something distinctly scientific (144–5).

Warning the stranger that he will ‘burn [him] into ashes’, Atherton turns to the ‘electrical machine’ behind him, a machine capable of generating a remarkable ‘eighteen-inch spark’ and performs ‘a little exhibition of electricity’ (145). This exhibition fills the

stranger with terror and subdues him to the extent that he ‘sh[akes] with terror’, ‘salaam[s] down to the ground’, and begs for mercy (145). This reaction fits into the paradigm of the

‘colonial encounter’ suggested above, as Atherton knowingly exploits his technological advantage and the stranger’s obvious discomfort with it to extract information about his dark and criminal intentions in a second ‘exhibition of electricity’ (149). And yet, the boundaries between science and the occult are more permeable than this interchange suggests, as Atherton’s appeal to the spectacle of his exhibition and the quasi-magical elements in his laboratory gesture towards a more complex relationship (cf., Jones 104). Moreover, in revealing the threat the Beetle poses to Paul Lessingham, the exhibition poses its own threat since the mesmerist’s fear of electricity can also be understood as a rational fear of high frequency and high potential electrical currents.⁴⁷

In between his two ‘exhibitions’, Atherton reveals he has some proficiency with magic, claiming that he is ““a trifle better at the game”” than his foe. Up until this point, his laboratory has been a bastion of science, though he here describes it as a ““stronghold, which contains magic enough to make a show of a hundred thousand such as you”” (145). While not quite magic, the demonstration that follows could appear thus to someone not conversant in chemistry. Atherton performs ‘a sufficiently simple illustration of one of the qualities of phosphorous-bromide’, creating flames and ‘a blinding vapour’ (145). This demonstration, however, seems to cause the stranger to disappear:

in his place, where he had been standing, there seemed to be a dim object of some sort in a state of frenzied agitation on the floor. The phosphorescent vapour was confusing; the lights appeared to be suddenly burning low; before I had sense enough to go and see if there was anything there, and, if so, what, the flames had vanished, the man himself had reappeared. (145)

⁴⁷ The dangers associated with electricity were widely misunderstood (Otter 240–243; Gooday 61–89). While early experiments with electricity, such as those performed by Luigi Galvani, investigated electricity’s life-giving powers, in the mid-nineteenth century experiments turned towards its destructive potential (Otter 241–242). Nikola Tesla was interested in educating the public about the safety of and possibilities offered by high frequency, high potential electrical currents. An advertisement in *The Times*, promoting Tesla’s lecture at the Royal Institution in London in 1892, specifically mentions that his paper would be illustrated ‘by experiments, with alternate currents of high potential and high frequency’ ([10 February 1892], 8).

Atherton is uncertain whether he has been ‘the victim of an ocular delusion’, causing the stranger to seem to suddenly disappear and reappear; in his mind, the possibility that the stranger has this ability is as unlikely as the possibility that he ‘could have imagined his disappearance’ (146). Unfazed by the epistemological uncertainties this dilemma introduces, Atherton immediately considers the possibility that the stranger’s ability represents ‘something new in scientific marvels’ from which he can learn. And, though this desire gestures towards the permeability of the boundaries between science and the occult in late-Victorian Gothic fiction, it is also a part of the colonising nature of science identified by Marvin, according to which ‘science was absorbing and taking over disreputable magical modes and replacing them with benign scientific ones’ (59). Thus, the encounter between Atherton and the Beetle need not only be understood as a display of technological and moral superiority, but as a sortie and redrawing of the boundaries.

Atherton’s description of the Beetle’s astonishing transformation before his very eyes also challenges the superiority of science. Even though his opponent seems to be subdued by the ‘exhibition of electricity’ and the chemical demonstration:

he vanished,—or rather, I saw him taking a different shape before my eyes. His loose draperies all fell off him, and, as they were in the very act of falling, there issued, or there seemed to issue out of them, a monstrous creature of the beetle tribe,—the man himself was gone. (150)

The language of visual encounter abounds in the paragraphs that follow, as Atherton recounts his ‘impression, when [he] saw it first’; how ‘it appeared to be’; what he ‘could distinctly see’; how he ‘could do nothing but stare’; how he ‘kept [his] glance riveted on the creature, with the idea of photographing it on [his] brain’; and how ‘it resented [his] inspection, the more [he] looked’—and all of this with ‘the light full on, so that it was difficult to suppose that [he] could make a mistake as to what took place in front of [him]’ (150–151). Though Atherton is disconcerted by the man’s transformation into what ‘was a truly astonishing example of the coleoptera’, a beetle, this is less disturbing to him than the transformation that follows: ‘My visitor was not a man, but a woman, and judging from the brief glimpse which I had of her [naked] body, by no means old or ill-shaped either’ (152). The emphasis on

precision, clarity, and objectivity throughout the passage underscores the limitations of empirical observation when apprehending the supernatural.

The threat posed by Atherton's 'exhibition of electricity' extends to the threat posed by Atherton himself (Harris and Vernooy 350). Both times the Beetle visits Atherton's lab, Atherton is working on his prototype weapon of mass destruction. In the first instance, he interrupts Atherton while he is 'regulating the valve of a cylinder in which [he] was fusing some oxides' (103). Since he was 'dealing with gases a sniff of which meant death', he must wear a 'mask of his own invention, a thing that covered ears and head and everything something like a diver's helmet' (102). This is a necessary precaution, as he has already nearly killed himself by 'doing some fool's trick with a couple of acids—sulphuric and cyanide of potassium' (102).

In the second instance, the Beetle arrives at the lab just as an accidental discharge of a pellet containing 'Atherton's Magic Vapour' almost kills Atherton's friend Percy (133, 137–138). The Beetle uses his mesmeric skills—though Atherton refers to them as 'hypnotic' here—to treat Percy, 'a victim of modern science', 'as if by magic' (139). Impressed by the stranger's skills, Atherton lauded him as an 'impromptu physician', though his attitude quickly changes when he discovers the stranger's criminal intentions (140). Though the dangers of Atherton's experiments have been limited to himself and his friend, he intends the weapon he is developing to amount to 'murder—legalised murder—on the biggest scale it ever has been planned'. Once perfected, it 'would make war not only an affair of a single campaign, but of a single half-hour' (102). It would also eliminate the need for an army, as a small contingent could easily destroy an exponentially larger force (102).⁴⁸ Harris and Vernooy's proposal that the explosion at Dongola reported at the close of Champnell's narrative may have been caused by Atherton's weapon of mass destruction supports Anna

⁴⁸It is difficult to read of Atherton's experiments with 'carbon-monoxide, chlorine-trioxide, mercuric-oxide, conine, potassium-carboxide, cyanogens' without being reminded of the unprecedented horror wrought by the use of poisonous gasses in the Great War. Though the sulfur mustard (also known as mustard gas) compound was developed as early as 1822 by the chemist César-Mansuète Despretz (Feister et al. 1–2) and chemical warfare was proposed in 1854 by the British chemist Lyon Playfair for use during the Crimean War (Hilmas, Smart, and Hill 11) the first instance of gas warfare was the German's unsuccessful use of disanisidine chlorosulphonate-filled artillery shells against British troops at Neuve-Chapelle (Hammond 9).

Maria Jones's observation that Marsh's 'treatment of British civilization is much more troubling than its representation of degenerate monstrosity', for 'civilized England is capable of unleashing forces far more terrifying than one monster on a quest for personal vengeance' (Harris and Vernooy 369; Jones 66). Though Atherton is a representative of this destructive potential, there is a far more pervasive destabilising force at work in the novel: London itself.

'Darkness visible'

For Victoria Margree, *The Beetle* offers a 'vision of the uncivilised at the heart of "civilisation" since it establishes that the threat of civilisation comes not solely from the archaic and the foreign but already exists in the centre of modernity itself' (Margree, para. 4). Margree groups Marsh's novel with Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Stoker's *Dracula*, and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, which she identifies as 'texts that portray London as a place in which the figures of modernity and progress are uncannily doubled by the vagrant, the criminal, and the "monster"' (note 7). For Julian Wolfreys, the figure of the Beetle in particular 'offers the reader a concentrated figure of everything in late-Victorian London that serves to focus the anxieties and fears expressed in much fin-de-siècle literature' ('The Hieroglyphic Other', 169). Linda Dryden argues that such '[m]etropolitan anxiety about criminal activity goes to the heart of the domestic sphere in the modern gothic novel' (258). This contention is further explored by Vuohelainen, who explains that 'Marsh articulated a sense of spatial fear in his urban Gothic fiction that is intimately connected to late-Victorian medicine's diagnosis of the mental dangers inherent in the experience of urban modernity' ('Cribb'd, Cabined, and Confined', 32).

Marsh articulated these dangers 'inherent in the experience of urban modernity' in his representation of the city's poor illuminary conditions. *The Beetle* begins with a description of London—Hammersmith, to be precise—that exemplifies what the social reformer William Booth referred to as 'Darkest London'—not only in its want for illumination but in the

vastness of its disease and despair.⁴⁹ For Vuohelainen, who also notes this commonality, Marsh's novel 'links urban crime and poverty with the fear of racial degeneration, literally placing the North African Other in the heart of London' ('Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*', 97). However, while Vuohelainen is interested in the popular analogy that links England with Africa in terms of its implications for race and sexuality, I am more interested in the social and historical factors that establish the premise that London—the centre of civilisation and the heart of the Empire—is more dangerous and threatening than the novel's ostensible 'Other'.

Robert Holt, the Beetle's first victim, is an unemployed clerk who comes to Hammersmith looking for a bed in one of London's overcrowded 'casual wards' (41). Casual wards, also known as District Asylums, were built to house vagrants, the homeless, and the poor. Destitute and despairing, Holt is turned away from an already full ward and is subsequently approached by 'a man slouch[ing] towards [him] out of the shadow of the wall' (41). The man advises Holt try St George's, the infirmary attached to a workhouse on the east side of Fulham Palace Road—a place that sometimes offers a bed for the night in exchange for labour. Though desperate, Holt does not find this appealing, so he continues to wander through the 'badly lighted' area in the hopes that his situation will improve. Disoriented, he finds himself down a street which appears deserted and in front of a house that seems abandoned. He enters through a half-opened window and settles himself on a pile of disused rugs in the corner of a darkened room, wherein he encounters the Beetle. The city's uncertain illuminary conditions as well as the social and historical factors that have led to these conditions are a precondition to Holt's vulnerability. Indeed, this uncertainty permeates

⁴⁹ Booth, in *In Darkest England and The Way Out* (1890), compares 'Darkest England' to the 'Equatorial Forest' of Africa 'traversed by Stanley':

alike in its vast extent—both stretch, in Stanley's phrase, 'as far as from Plymouth to Peterhead;' its monotonous darkness, its malaria and its gloom, its dwarfish de-humanized inhabitants, the slavery to which they are subjected, their privations and their misery. That which sickens the stoutest heart, and causes many of our bravest and best to fold their hands in despair, is the apparent impossibility of doing more than merely to peck at the outside of the endless tangle of monotonous undergrowth; to let light into it, to make a road clear through it, that shall not be immediately choked up by the ooze of the morass and the luxuriant parasitical growth of the forest—who dare hope for that? At present, alas, it would seem as though no one dares even to hope! It is the great Slough of Despond of our time. (12–13)

encounters with the city throughout the novel, as the confidential agent August Champnell observes when he, Atherton, and Paul Lessingham are pursuing the Beetle and the kidnapped Marjorie Lindon across London: ‘An occasional light seemed to make the darkness still more visible’ (311).

The desolate labyrinth in which Holt finds himself is difficult to imagine, even with an intimate familiarity with contemporary Hammersmith. Edward Stanford’s *Map of Central London*, published in 1897, is useful here, as it can place Marsh’s description of that part of the city in its historical context. According to Simon Foxell in *Mapping London: Making Sense of the City* (2007), Stanford’s map is known for its ‘accuracy and high levels of detail’, as it ‘does not seek to use graphic devices to emphasise or exaggerate particular features or types of information’ (47). Nead’s discussion of maps in *Victorian Babylon* is helpful for thinking about how maps make sense of the city. She suggests that maps not only ‘made the modern city legible and comprehensible’ but they ‘froze the passage of people and things, the loitering, walking and rushing of the streets, and transformed them into the abstract and orderly signs of cartography’ (13). Though she contends that ‘maps could never capture or contain the growth of and changes in London’, it is precisely for this reason that Stanford’s 1897 map can serve as a visual referent for the London with which readers of Marsh’s novels would have been familiar. This is even more so the case, as Wolfreys has argued, since Holt’s description of London—first as he wanders through Hammersmith and later as he travels from Walham Green to Paul Lessingham’s house in Lowndes Square—consists entirely of ‘street names [that] provide the reader with very precise mappable locations’; it is a form of ‘textual mapping’ (‘The Hieroglyphic Other’, 173). And, though I am not suggesting we look for a direct correspondence between the London of Stanford’s map and that in Marsh’s novel, a closer reading of their correspondences reveals how Marsh reconfigures the realities of the late-nineteenth city as ‘the threat of civilisation’ (Margree, para. 4).

For Foxell, Stanford’s 1897 map reveals how London’s present ‘haphazard form’ has ‘grown from a combination of historical accident and frequently from the pursuit of political or commercial advantage’, articulating ‘its powerful rivalries, relatively impotent governance, lack of any obvious centre and its idiosyncratic and conflicting street patterns’ in

spatial terms (90). The map depicts London as a densely populated urban space with small un- or underdeveloped pockets east of the District Line in the districts of Fulham, Walham Green, and Hammersmith; south of the Thames, in Battersea, Wandsworth, Lambeth, and Camberwell. In the map's representation of Fulham and Putney—the area Holt covers before his encounter with the Beetle—the idiosyncratic shape of the city is evident in the sparseness of urban development, the mixture of industrial and residential spaces, and the way in which institutions interrupt and interconnect the district (see Figure 3.3). This helps to contextualise Holt's sense that 'the locality which [he] was entering appeared unfinished', that he was 'leaving civilisation behind' (45). For:

[t]he path was unpaved; the road rough and uneven, as if it had never been properly made. Houses were few and far between. Those which I did encounter, seemed, in the imperfect light, amid the general desolation, to be cottages which were crumbling to decay. (45)

What is most striking in this passage is how the absence of light facilitates the precariousness of Holt's situation. As I have outlined in the introduction to this project, street lighting was by no means uniform at the end of the nineteenth century. However, certain factors converge in the area Holt describes to facilitate his susceptibility to the Beetle's advances. For, in addition to being under development, at the time when Marsh was writing *The Beetle*, the Hammersmith vestry had yet to begin supplying electricity and electric light in the area (London County Council, *London Statistics*, 1897–1898, lxxxiii), which meant that any public street lighting would have been supplied by one of the three main Metropolitan gas companies (LCC lxx). It is uncertain the extent to which Marsh (and his readers) would have been aware of these factors; however, in *The Beetle*, the city is complicit in the threat posed to individual autonomy by the occult and the 'Other'.

These historical and social factors establish the condition of darkness Holt encounters in the street; his desperation drives him to take refuge in a seemingly deserted house in Walham Green, wherein he discovers how deceptive light can be. In the darkness of the



Figure 3.3: Fulham and Putney from Edward Stanford's *Map of Central London* (1897). Bodleian Library C17:70 London.

desolate suburban house, Holt can only assume the house is empty; however, he soon becomes aware ‘that something was with [him] in the room’—a feeling he attributes to his ‘faculties’ being ‘unnaturally keen’ (49). Holt’s sense that he is being watched, and the accompanying ‘unreasoning fear’ are suddenly confirmed by the luminous presence of ‘two specks of light’—eyes that ‘had not been there a moment before’ (50). The eyes, belonging to an indiscernible creature, move across the room towards Holt, the creature becoming more tangible, more visible as it approaches. Paralysed with dread, Holt feels the arthropod-type creature ascending his leg. Its eyes become ‘two small lamps’, emitting ‘rays of light’ until, by their light, he can ‘perceive faint outlines of its body’, a body which ‘gleamed in the darkness’ (51).

Just as Holt is overcome by the creature—‘it enveloped [his] face with its huge, slimy, evil-smelling body, and embraced [him] with its myriad legs’—he regains control of his body and is able to shake off the creature, squishing it against the carpet (52). Yet, when

he attempts to escape, Holt is incapacitated by the sudden illumination of a lamp and a command issued from an unidentified voice to ““Keep still!”” (52). The ‘most brilliant’ light, having ‘such a blinding effect that for some seconds [he] could see nothing’ and the ‘dazzling glare caus[ing] dancing specks to obscure [his] vision’, disorients him and leaves him open to the voice’s suggestion. Together, these forces render him ‘like an automaton’, ‘invertebrate’ (52); their concurrence, however, is not a coincidence, for the lamp’s light punctuate’s Holt’s trance-states. When the light is on, he is susceptible to the creature’s suggestions, when it is off, he is in a form of catalepsy—still under the creature’s control, but not actively suggestible (52–53, 60–61, and 68). In this tangle of influences, it is difficult to discern whether it is solely the eyes and voice or the eyes and voice in conjunction with the lights which influence Holt. Yet, while the power of the gaze is an important trope in this genre—consider how Svengali uses his gaze to control Trilby in George Du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1894)—this is a singular representation of mesmeric control as imbued with illuminary properties, the creature’s glowing eyes not only amplify the mesmeric quality of its gaze but also distort Holt’s perception of its body. This scene suggests that electric light is not only adjacent to mesmeric power, but correlates with it.

Holt is not the only individual whose vulnerability is caused by the precariousness of electric light, as the electric light is central to Marjorie Lindon’s encounter with the Beetle. Unlike Holt, Marjorie is overcome by the Beetle in the safety of her own bedroom. After taking Holt into her care, but before he relates the story of his attack, Marjorie becomes susceptible to the horrors of the Beetle suggested by Holt’s insensible mutterings: ““Be warned, Paul Lessingham—be warned!”” (197). Though she initially dismisses them as ‘the melodramatic utterance’ of a strange man, upon going to bed the persistent ‘ringing in [her] ears’ coincides with her ‘illogical dislike’ of beetles to produce in her the sensation of continually hearing ‘a buzzing sound behind [her]’ (205). Though it is not perceptible, the threat of what cannot be preoccupies her; nevertheless, she ‘leaped upon the bed, switched off the electric light, hurried into bed, burying [her]self, over head and all, deep down between the sheets’ (206). As she reasons to herself, she ‘had hoped that by shutting out the light, [she] might regain [her] senses’ and that ‘in the darkness [she] might have opportunity

for sane reflection'; however, she soon realises she has 'made a grievous error' and 'had exchanged bad for worse. The darkness lent added terrors' (206). Though it is unlikely her bedside electric light could have prevented the Beetle's assault, the absence of its light intensifies her own anxieties and the heighten the sensational threat presented by the buzzing, creeping thing she can only hear and feel.

Knowing Electricity Through Spectacles

The examples I have discussed in this chapter suggest that the electric light has a more diverse, nuanced, and uneasy relationship with the Gothic than that proposed by Stevenson in 'A Plea for Gas Lamps', and that electric light has a greater influence on literature than the 'effects' Dryden considers in *Dr Jekyll*. Moreover, though electric light is often associated with modernity in the fight against the threat of an uncanny, foreign, occult 'Other', it is complicit in the uncertainties raised by this threat. This problematises Anna Maria Jones's observation that, in both *The Beetle* and *Dracula*, the 'technical tools of modernity are arrayed against the occult magic of Eastern enemies who infiltrate London and prey on innocent women' (66), since these tools are also complicit in this infiltration and destabilisation. However, it is possible to read the power struggle between the scientist and the mesmerist as dramatisation of an important yet emerging theoretical conflict between electricity and magnetism as misunderstood, controlling forces in the universe.⁵⁰

The question of what electricity was dominated discussions at many registers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as there was 'so *little* common understanding of electricity [...] among contemporary householders, engineers and electrical promoters' (Gooday 37). On the one hand, potential consumers 'wanted to know what kind of *commodity* they would be paying for if they installed electrical lighting in their homes', and on the other hand, there 'was a profound disagreement about even its most basic attributes'

⁵⁰ Anthony Enns articulates this possibility in his article, 'Mesmerism and the Electric Age: From Poe to Edison' in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism* (2006), when he discusses the way in which mesmerism 'introduced a new conception of materiality, which suggested that the body and consciousness were both bound together and material' and that, in its 'conception of the "imponderable medium"', mesmerism 'shares many connections with electricity' (64).

amongst authorities (Gooday 37, 40). The most virulent disagreement, due to its ‘personalised’ and ‘public’ nature, was that which took place between the engineer William Preece, who held that electricity was an energy, and the physicist Oliver Lodge, who was a proponent of the ether theory (Gooday 53–56). According to Gooday, the rhetoric of the ‘uncertain identity of electricity’ persisted in academic and popular discussions of the topic because, ‘at least in some cases, [experts] sought to cultivate interest in their subjects by casting themselves as quasi-alchemical masters of a hidden mystery, most notably in Edison’s and Nikola Tesla’s self-fashioning as wizards’ (58). The duel that takes place between Atherton and the Beetle engages in this rhetoric, wherein the scientist is as much a magician as the mesmerist. In Gooday’s understanding, ‘burgeoning “Romance” literature [...] emphasized the almost supernatural *wonder* associated with electricity’; he singles out Tesla as someone who ‘became a figure of awe for the theatrical displays with electricity that were as death-defying as they were magical’ (58).⁵¹ And, though Atherton’s ‘little exhibition’ may have reminded readers of recent Tesla’s ‘theatrical displays’, the nature of his encounter with the Beetle is not merely one of spectacle, but also one of demonstration and exposure.⁵²

In their discussion of the relationship between spectacles and scientific exhibitions in the nineteenth century, Kember, Plunkett, and Sullivan identify a ‘two-way exchange’ between science demonstrators who ‘borrowed exhibition practices from spectacular entertainment formats’ and ‘popular exhibitions [... which] often employed the respectable rhetoric of science and medicine’, effecting an exchange of ideas and methods (5).⁵³ They also note that ‘nineteenth-century cultures of science made powerful use of both visual and

⁵¹ Gooday refers to A. R. Hope’s *Electricity and Its Wonders* (1881); W. J. Stead’s ‘Looking Forward: A Romance of the Electrical Age’ (1890); J. M. Munro’s *The Romance of Electricity* (1893); Charles Gibson’s *The Romance of Electricity* (1906); and W. L. Randell’s *The Romance of Electricity* (1931) (Gooday 233, n.58).

⁵² Tesla’s Lectures at the Royal Institution and the London Institute of Electrical Engineers in early February 1892 were widely reported and reviewed in contemporary periodicals ranging from specialist trade journals, such as *The Electrical Engineer*, to popular science magazines like *Scientific American* and weekly magazines like *The Spectator*.

⁵³ I adopt my use of the term ‘spectacle’ here from Kember, Plunkett, and Sullivan, who have arrived at their definition by looking to a number of twentieth century theorists on the subject, notably theorists associated with the Frankfurt School, such as Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer; cultural theorists such as Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard; and, more recently, Jonathan Crary’s redefinition of ‘spectacle’ to indicate ‘an organization of appearances that are simultaneously enticing, deceptive, distracting, and superficial’ (‘Spectacle’, 335).

verbal techniques to fascinate the public' (10; Marvin 6). Whether or not Marsh is explicitly drawing on such an exchange, Atherton uses this rhetoric in describing his actions. Not only is he "something of a magician", but his lab ("stronghold") "contains magic enough to make a show of a hundred thousand such as you [(the Beetle)]" (145). After the 'little exhibition' to which he 'treats' his 'visitor', he 'sprinkle[s] a drop or two of [an unnamed substance] on the floor' such that '[i]mmmediately flames arose, accompanied by a blinding vapour' (145). While the reader might be tempted to read it as his Magic Vapour, Atherton describes it as 'a sufficiently simple illustration of one of the qualities of phosphorous-bromide' (145). The Beetle is also involved in this exchange of knowledge, as Atherton speaks of his 'apotheosis' using the language of spectacle: it was a 'performance [that] was realistic enough at the time', but on reflection 'was not clever juggling,—superhumanly clever juggling, if you will; that, and nothing more' (149).

To understand the effect this representation of the intersection between electricity and mesmerism has in the late-Victorian Gothic novel, I would like to turn to Robert Daly's contention that 'though its narratives and figures popular fiction provides its readers with a working knowledge of Britain as a modernizing imperial society' (25). Though, as a scientist, Atherton is incredibly secretive, he nevertheless delights in demonstrating his inventions and methods to his friends and enemies alike. His electrical machine—a part of his well-equipped private laboratory—is related to his identity as a scientist, but it also serves the purpose of familiarising readers of Marsh's novel with the apparatuses associated with electricity. For, through the rhetoric and behaviour associated with both demonstration and spectacles, Atherton is participating in the domestication of electricity. Indeed, as Iwan Morus observes, electricity 'was made sense of through its display as spectacle' in a way that reinforced the demonstrator's 'mastery over nature' (12). And yet, as the 'Great Experiment' in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* seems to suggest, this 'mastery' proves elusive. Thus, if Marsh's representation of electricity in *The Beetle* reconfigures the relationship between science and the occult, then the relation of electric lights to atavistic science in Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* further destabilises the orthodoxy of science, troubling the domestication of electricity.

DYSTOPIAN LIGHTS

Every now and then faint flashes illuminated the bleak shadows. (H.G. Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, 113)

Out of an experience of the cities came an experience of the future.
(Raymond William, *The City and the Country*, 272)

The world into which H.G. Wells's narrator wakes in *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) is an unsettlingly familiar one.⁵⁴ Though two hundred years have passed since Graham fell into a cataleptic trance before Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, the future is not so strange that the Sleeper is unable to perceive the differences and to comprehend the implications and consequences of the many changes and developments which have taken place (Wells 20). The extended slumber—a narratological device which finds literary precedent in Washington Irving's short story 'Rip Van Winkle' (1819) and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1880)—allows readers to experience an unfamiliar future from the perspective of someone closer to their own time. The Sleeper's concerns, ranging from "Is there England still?..." to "Is there a mill or a dynamo near here? [...] Things have changed tremendously, I suppose?" and "How are you governed? Have you still a police?" (34, 36, 47), guide those of the reader. Our alignment with the narrator has decreased as we, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, have seen how many of Wells's anticipated technologies have come into being only to be surpassed. Nevertheless, the device of the visitor from the past exploring a strange future is a powerful one, unique to utopian fiction and science fiction, giving readers the opportunity to learn about themselves through projected advances in technology.

Drawing on themes introduced to the genre by its utopian predecessors, including Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627), Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and William Morris' *News From Nowhere* (1890), as well as the lesser known

⁵⁴ First published in the UK as an illustrated serial in the *Graphic* from January to May 1899, *When the Sleeper Wakes* was then published by Harper in May 1899 (Parrinder, 'Note on the Text', *The Sleeper Awakes*, xxiv' Wells, 'Preface' to the Atlantic Edition, *The Sleeper Awakes*, 3). Wells revised the novel and it was republished in 1910 in the UK by Nelson as *The Sleeper Awakes* (Parrinder xxix, Wells 3). This chapter refers to the novel as *The Sleeper Awakes* and takes as its text that presented in Parrinder's Penguin Classics edition (2005).

influence of Camille Flammarion's *La Fin du Monde* (1893), Wells's novel is concerned with what George O'Hare considers the three pillars of utopian fiction in 'Technology and Its Discontents' (2004): the social, the scientific, and the technological (O'Hare 482).⁵⁵ However, unlike the worlds depicted in its utopian predecessors, improved through the proliferation of technological advances and scientific ideals, the world of *The Sleeper Awakes* is a darkly dystopic one, a future world where the power of electric lights is inextricable from the predominant political forces. In this novel, Wells's detailed observations of science and technology overshadow those he makes about the future world's social aspects, a focus which appears to be more typical of his other novels of this period: *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

The aura of popularity surrounding Wells's 'scientific romances' of the late 1890s increased the influence of the explicit shift in the utopian genre—from depictions of worlds improved by technology, science, and society to depictions of technology, science, and society gone wrong—he had initiated. Though several of Wells's novels enact this shift, I focus here on *The Sleeper Awakes* because the novel's depiction of a corrupted plutocratic utopia not only articulates this shift most explicitly but also serves as a model for the most influential and haunting dystopian novels of the last century: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948). In the novel, Wells imagines a world in which the state, its resources, and its services are owned and controlled by a single individual; the city's modern marvels and luxuries come at the expense of exploited and disenfranchised workers living in the outer parts of the city (suburbs, slums, gargantuan workhouses); individuals are denied their autonomy and agency in exchange for oppressive political stability and superficial entertainment; the body's biological rhythms were disrupted by new technologies meant to improve the standard of living; and the individual's perceptual experiences are distorted in order to perpetuate the status quo.

⁵⁵Published in English as *Omega: the Last Days of the World* (1894).

While *The Sleeper Awakes* is not as well regarded as some of his other ‘scientific romances’—a term first used in the 1840s to describe what would later be known as science fiction—Wells’s vision in the novel was quite influential. Orwell, for instance, writes in his review of the novel’s 1940 reprinting that ‘[e]veryone who has ever read *The Sleeper Awakes* remembers it’ (*The Complete Works*, Vol. 12, 211).⁵⁶ Though the review appeared 8 years before Orwell’s own *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it elucidates a genealogy of dystopian fiction that originates with Wells’s disturbing and prophetic novel published half a century earlier. Although critics frequently attribute the particular characteristics of the futuristic dystopia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the strands of the dangers of technology, the absoluteness of science, and a centralised, ordered society originate in Wells’s novel (Varricho 98–114; Posner 1–33; Moylan 14).

The most overt connective thread between the three novels is that of the structure(s) of power within the societies depicted therein. Beginning with *The Sleeper Awakes*, it is clear that those in the nexus of political power are also in control of the location of the production of electrical power. Wells establishes this collocation between authoritarian power structures and electrical power (infra)structures. Though he is its most explicit proponent, this power/power relationship underpins the authoritarian societies represented by Huxley and Orwell. That Huxley and Orwell are less explicit about this power/power relationship only demonstrates how endemic it has become.

⁵⁶ As I have discussed in the previous chapter, scholars have argued that science fiction emerged during the *fin de siècle* as a divergence from Gothic fiction of the supernatural romance. The term ‘romance’ was used by authors and their contemporaries to describe their works; terms such as Gothic fiction and science fiction came later.

The term ‘romances of science’ was used as early as the mid 1840s in William North’s *The Imposter: or, Born Without a Conscience* (1845) and Joseph Bullar’s essay, ‘Systematizing Divines’ in *Evening Thoughts, by a Physician* (1850), a review of Robert Hunt’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844)—a speculative pre-*Origin of Species* natural history. While the term ‘romance of science’ was first applied in reviews of Hunt’s work, the introduction to its second edition (1845) specifically refers to it as ‘a scientific romance’. In North, the interlocutor explains that, in a ‘romance of science’, ‘works of fiction affect to describe what probably would happen under certain circumstances’ and finds that Hunt’s history ‘do[es] no more’ than this (287). Bullar equates ‘the romances of science’ with ‘the ingenious air-castles of a scientific bookwork, or the day-dreams of an imaginative mind, which has chosen science instead of history’ (90-91).

As a part of his dystopian project, Wells effected a sophisticated comparison and contrast between the future world he represented and the present, subtly encouraging his readers to reflect on the implications of various aspects of contemporary society by directing their experiences of his projected future. He insisted that the social, technological, and ideological foundations upon which he constructs the future city depicted in the novel ‘amount to a prolongation of the lines of tendency that were most conspicuous in the last decade of the nineteenth century’ (Wells, ‘Preface to the Atlantic Edition’, 5) but, in so doing, projected his current fears and anxieties into this future. His object was to transform our conception of the future as well as the future itself. As Paul Ricoeur explains, the ‘result of reading a utopia is that it puts into question what presently exists; it makes the actual world seem strange’ (299). Prakash Gyan expands on this idea in *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City* (2010) and makes an important distinction between the treatment of reality, or the present, in utopian and dystopian texts:

unlike utopian texts, which transport us to an imaginary future that indicts the present, the dystopic imagination places us directly in a terrifying world to alert us of the danger that the future holds if we do not recognize its symptoms in the present. In this sense, a utopian desire animates dystopic texts. (2)

Indeed, this relationship between present and imagined futures lies at the heart of both utopian fiction and science fiction. According to Fredric Jameson, authors structure the ‘realism, or representationality’ of their future narratives in order to ‘defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own present’ (151; Moylan 26; Ruppert 77). In simpler terms, readers are encouraged to reconsider present concerns from the vantage point of a potential, yet often extreme, future and to extrapolate criticisms of the present day from these observations.

Wells elucidates the nature of the relationship between the present and imagined futures in the series of power struggles that do not result in a shift in the location of political power. Though control of the city (and, therefore, of the world) passes from the Council to Ostrog and from Ostrog to Graham, the structure of society ensures that the masses—workers responsible for producing food, goods, technology, and power itself—will never be in control of public utilities. In this scenario, the structure of the future society quite explicitly depends

on the continued stability and sustainability of electric lighting. The majority of city-dwellers are too far separated from the means of production to survive in a world without electric light and power and their products; those working to supply the power and produce the goods consumed by those in the city have little purpose or subsistence beyond that function. The city would lose its glamour; its technologies rendered useless, for in darkness lies chaos and confusion. Such a state had implications for Londoners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the supply and provision of electricity to private householders was not widespread and was controlled by a handful of private companies rather than local parish vestries, the same proprietary power structure established 70 years earlier when gas was made a 'public utility'.

Huxley expands and complicates the dangers of these structures in *Brave New World*.⁵⁷ He represents an entirely consumer-driven society where the absolute stratification of production is perpetuated by an extreme division of labour and pervasive social conditioning to consume without restraint. By further distancing the means of production, especially biological (re)production, Huxley creates the condition of absolute dependency on technology and on the stratification of society, so that 'even epsilons are useful' (Huxley 10-11, 63-64). While the locations of power are more diffuse in Huxley's novel, instances of powerful illumination and strategic darkness collocate with reinforcements of consumer society. This is evident when John and Lenina are at the feelies and the audience is plunged into 'complete darkness' so that the 'stereoscopic images' on the screen can become 'dazzling and incomparably more solid-looking than they would have seemed in actual flesh and blood, far more real than reality' (146). Huxley employs these sensual overloads to emphasise how individuals who are too concerned with being happy (and 'free') and too busy seeking out pleasure and leisure become incapable of questioning the structure of society or considering the source(s) and cost of its power. Given the increasingly consumer-driven society developing in interwar Britain, this was a poignant warning.

⁵⁷All quotations are from the Vintage Books edition of *Brave New World* (2007).

The world of Airstrip One, created by Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is a most cruel and brutal dystopia.⁵⁸ future of society, the novel extends and revises many of the themes and concerns first introduced by Wells and Huxley earlier in the twentieth century. Here, power is centralised and located in the individual authority of Big Brother, supported and propagated by his fellow party members. While everyone in this society appears to be equal, beneath this facade of equality there is an entrenched self-reinforcing and self-oppressing surveillance society.⁵⁹ Though the people in Airstrip One live in a consumer culture similar to that in Huxley's *Brave New World*, they are kept in a perpetual, albeit imperceptible, servitude through a false and orchestrated scarcity of resources. The reality of rationing and shortages would have resonated in post-war Britain; however, Winston Smith's loss of autonomy in the novel is a powerful exhortation to question the motives and authority of political parties and governments.

As Orwell explains, individuals in such a society 'had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised' (5). While this surveillance is dependent on daylight and artificial illumination, the party members are further controlled through a rationing of electric power during certain parts of the day (or night), a rationing which is imposed rather than voluntary, and which is ultimately unnecessary. The abundance of artificial light is reserved for those traitors held in the Ministry of Love and, in particular, in Room 101, where an individual's worst fears are enacted as a form of torture and retraining. The Proles, however, are not reliant on electric light and power and are consequently unaffected by such 'shortages', remaining outside the novel's power/power dynamic. In Orwell's disturbing future, the administration of resources and the control of society are thus intentionally, if less explicitly, connected.

⁵⁸ All quotations are from the Penguin Books edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (2013).

⁵⁹ Much scholarship has addressed the relationship between Benthamite and Foucauldian aspects of Orwell's novel, notably William Steinhoff's *The Road to 1984* (1975); Jenni Calder's *Huxley and Orwell: Brave New World and 1984* (1976); Philip Zimbardo's 'Mind Control: Political Fiction and Psychological Reality' in *On Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1983); Harry Strubb's 'The Theory of Panoptical Control: Bentham's Panopticon and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*' (1989); Richard Posner's 'Orwell Versus Huxley: Economics, Technology, Privacy, and Satire' (2000); George O'Har's 'Technology and Its Discontents' (2004), amongst others.

In this chapter, I will examine the power/power relationships depicted in the dystopian fictions of H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell. Electric lights gradually become a metonym for power itself: first as an emerging technology imagined by Wells to dominate the future lightscape of the city, then as an established public utility by Huxley to foster dependency in a consumer culture replete with sensual experiences, and, finally, as a scarce resource by Orwell to simulate a state of uncertainty in an already oppressed people. In the first part, I will consider depictions of electric lights in the future city, looking at conceptions of modernity in relation to science fiction. In the second part, I will be concerned with the relationship between authoritarian power and artificial illumination as a public utility, looking at Michel Foucault's revision of Bentham's panoptic principle in terms of the individual in a self-surveilling society. In the third part, I will explore ways in which illuminary technologies employed by dystopian authors disrupt the body's experience of biological rhythms as well as influence the individual's perception of reality, modernity, and the self. Building on my assertions about the centrality of the uncertainties about electricity and the emerging technology of electric lighting in the previous chapter, I will argue that, in dystopian fiction, these uncertainties are recast as possibilities allowing for the exploration and, in some instances, the resolution of contemporary anxieties about the organisation and structure of society, about the role of the individual in society, and about the relationship between these individuals and technology from the unsettling distance of a remote future.

Glowing Lamps, Modernity, and the Future City

What was a Pleasure City? A dream, surely, the fancy of a fantastic, voluptuous writer. (Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, 58)

We will sing of the great crowds agitated by work, pleasure and revolt; the multi-coloured and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals: the nocturnal vibration of the arsenals and the workshops beneath their violent electric moons. (Marinetti, 'Manifeste du futurisme', *Le Figaro* [20 February 1909]: n. pag.)

For Victorians like H.G. Wells, modernity often manifested itself in the image of a gleaming future city, a place replete with staggering progress and fantastic technology. Writing in 1902 in relation to George Gissing's *The Whirlpool*, Wells observed that his friend's depiction of

the ‘maëlstrom’ of ‘the Great City’ was as somewhere ‘attractive, tumultuous, and spinning down to death’ (Anticipations, 44). This ‘maëlstrom’ was the ultimate consequence of nineteenth-century industrialisation (44). Yet, the city remained a place where the solution to the present ills of society could be solved, where the ‘promise of a centrifugal application that may be finally equal to the complete reduction of all our present congestions’ would manifest (44). The city embodies Wells’s vision(s) of the future in many of his novels, including *The Time Machine*, *War of the Worlds*, and *The Sleeper Awakes*, allowing him to explore the trajectories of current capitalist tendencies within society, extending the exploitation of the labourers to its extreme conclusion. In *The Time Machine*, the city exasperates the increasing disparity between ‘Haves’ and ‘Have-nots’, where the sites of production are located beneath the city and those of consumption above it. In London itself, ‘there are new electric railways, there are subways, there are underground workrooms and restaurants, and they increase and multiply’ (48). In *War of the Worlds*, London is the greatest city on earth, with a population of six million, once alive with lights but made still and spectral by a Martian attack (92, 152, 163, 167). By the early 1930s when Huxley is writing *Brave New World*, in the realm of science fiction, the city has become synonymous with the future.

Wells’s vision of the future city, however, is not entirely original. Ingvald Raknem has identified Camille Flammarion’s 1893 novel, *La Fin du Monde*, as an important literary precursor to Wells’s *The Sleeper Awakes*, especially in its representation of social changes such as the intellectual development of man, state-raised children, and the end of marriage (Wells 408; Flammarion 27, 304).⁶⁰ Wells, however, never mentioned Flammarion, and early reviews of Wells’s novel attributed the inspiration of his vision of the ‘highly mechanised future civilisation’ to Jules Verne, an influence he himself acknowledged (‘The Week’s Books’, *Observer* [21 May 1899], 7). Looking more closely at Flammarion’s novel, there is a striking resemblance between his description of the rediscovered ruins of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Paris and the future city Wells extrapolates from present-day London: ‘it

⁶⁰First published in 1893, *La Fin du Monde* was serialised under the title ‘Omega: The Last Days of the World’ in English in *The Cosmopolitan; a Monthly Illustrated Magazine* from April to August 1893 and republished in 1894. Flammarion also notes the prevalence of electric airships [aeronef] in the future (116, 336, 351-3).

was illuminated at night by a hundred artificial moons, electric lights [*phares*] hung from towers a thousand meters high'; 'chimneys and smoke had disappeared, as heat was taken from the earth or from electric sources'; and 'all the big cities had progressed from the destruction of the country; agriculture had been exploited by the power stations' (250). In the time that has elapsed since Flammarion's nineteenth century, the traditional relationship between city and country—wherein the city is supplied with food and other natural resources by the country—has undergone a considerable change: agricultural production had been supplanted by power generating factories (Flammarion 250; Raknem 408). While in Flammarion's, this transformation is presented as the natural course of modernisation, in Wells, it is indicative of technology's role in the exploitation of the country by the city and of the many by the few.

While the exploitation of the country by the city is not a new phenomenon, as Raymond Williams has demonstrated, the hegemony of electric power anticipated by both Flammarion and Wells is significant (48). The ways in which they envisioned this hegemony speak a great deal to the way in which power was being generated and distributed in the late 1890s—in particular the concentration of power stations near cities, as electric current could not be conveyed long distances—and the proliferation of an 'electric consumer culture' resonates well into the digital age of the twenty-first century.⁶¹ In Wells's twenty-second century London, where the whole earth has become a vast and continuous city, the electricity powering the city is generated by wind-vane technology. These wind-vanes, concentrated away from but collocated with locations of political power within the city, supply it with a constant flow of electricity.

Graham's initial question about the location of the nearest power-generating source signals how remarkable such a system would have seemed from the perspective of someone accustomed to a less centralised and more idiosyncratic network of artificial illumination. Though Graham is constantly impressed by the efficiency and abundance of the city's

⁶¹This is a proliferation Jonathan Crary addresses in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013). Graeme Gooday devotes an entire chapter of *Domesticating Electricity*, 'Electricity as Future', to delineating the importance of the future to this process.

electricity, in the future cities of subsequent dystopian novels, the city of the future is an electric city. Equally, state-controlled public utilities become a fact of science fiction. While *Brave New London* is very much an ‘electric city’, with its electric sky-signs and electro-magnetic golf, Huxley takes the city’s centralised infrastructure for granted. In the capital of Oceania, where access to and supply of electric current is controlled by the Party, the relationship between public utilities and the state has become a trope of Orwell’s anti-communist narrative. Thus, in dystopian fiction in particular, the city as a vision of the future is very much shaped by the way in which the writer conceives of that city’s electrical infrastructure. Following from a discussion of how modernity and the future are associated with the city as well as definitions of and approaches to modernity, this section will explore how authors of dystopian fiction variously use urban settings to represent the ongoing struggle between what is recurrent and what is innovative in the narrative of human history. In particular, it will examine the role of electric lights in the long-established dialectical relationship between the city and the country and the alignment of the city with progress and the adoption of technological innovations in dystopian fiction. As Lewis Mumford explained, ‘[i]t is at the very beginning of urban civilization that one encounters not only the archetypal form of the city as utopia but also another coordinate utopian institution essential to any system of communal regimentation: the machine’ (11). Further, this section will consider the future city as a locus for the criticism of this tradition of utopian ideals, particularly by Orwell, and its lights as vestiges of the past and beacons of the future.

Associating the city with modernity is not confined to dystopian and science fiction. For Wells’s contemporary, the German sociologist Georg Simmel, the city was a place in which ‘the individual has become a mere cog in an enormous organization of things and powers which tear from his hands all progress, and value in order to transform them from their subjective form into the form of a purely objective life’ (*‘The Metropolis and Modern Life’*, 184). More recently, Raymond Williams has argued that ‘there are decisive links between the practices and ideas of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth-century and the specific conditions and relationship of the twentieth-century metropolis’ (*‘The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism’*, 83). Indeed, as Williams contends in his influential study,

The Country and the City, the idea of the city as ‘an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light’ arose in contrast and in concert with the idea of the country as ‘a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue’, creating a dichotomy between city as dynamic and progressive and country as static and regressive (1). From this evolved the antithetical state in which the city is both the locus of modernity and of reactions to it—particularly in the form of modernism. In this paradigm, on account of the role technology plays in dystopian fiction and its frequent association with modernity, such fiction is an ideal vehicle by which authors can explore their conceptions of and reactions to modernity. This is because the dystopian novel ‘parallels, reflects, and warns against the growing potentialities of modern technology’ (Beauchamp 53). In this paradigm of utopia/dystopia, wherein utopia represents stasis and perfection, dystopias combine ‘the fear of utopia and the fear of technology’ in order to explore the ‘nature of technology’ (53, 56–57, 53, 54). Technologies in future cities, then, are an important aspect of the way in which an author envisages modernity. To understand the way in which authors of dystopian fiction envisage modernity, it is important to consider these dystopian modernities in terms of the wider discussion of modernity in this dissertation.

From Baudelaire’s alignment of modernity with the present and the present with what is both recurrent and innovative to Benjamin’s dialectics of ‘continuity/discontinuity’, the concept of modernity as a suspended tension between old and new or as something intermittent and protracted, as I outlined in my introduction, can be usefully applied here to Wells’s future London, where the technologies and structures therein are not necessarily ‘new’, just ‘newer’ or the ‘newest’. This conceptualisation of ‘modernity’ helps to uncover the structures behind Wells’ representation of a city which is replete with continuities and discontinuities. Applied to dystopian fiction, the experience of a modernity that is fluctuating between ‘modernised spaces and speeds’ and ‘the remnants of pre-capitalist life-worlds’—in Crary’s words—is particularly disjunctive.

Wells is explicit about the struggle between recurrence/continuity and innovation/discontinuity in the Sleeper’s initial ‘kaleidoscopic impressions’ of the dream-like future city (53). His ‘first impression’ is

of overwhelming architecture. The place into which he looked was an aisle of Titanic buildings, curving spaciouly in either direction. Overhead mighty cantilevers sprang together across the huge width of the place, and a tracery of translucent material shut out the sky. Gigantic gloves of cool white light shamed the pale sunbeams that filtered down through the girders and wires. Here and there a gossamer suspension bridge dotted with foot passengers flung across the chasm and the air was webbed with slender cables. (42)

Later, Graham 'saw he had come out upon the roof of the vast city structure which had replaced the miscellaneous houses, streets and open spaces of 'Victorian London' (69). In these passages, Graham's perceptual process functions disjointedly and comparatively, flickering from image to image and between his memory of 'Victorian London' and the overwhelming visual impact of the new: the 'Titanic', 'mighty', 'huge', and 'gigantic'. His disorienting impressions of the city, with their emphasis on what can be seen and the effect of light on the city, leave him feeling 'strange', 'small and ineffectual' (54). By these fragmented perceptions, a descriptive Wells employs himself, there is an apparent disjunction between what Graham considers the vestiges of 'Victorian London' and what he considers part of the modern city (69). This disjunction is indicative of the struggle between the recurrent and the innovative, between 'continuity/discontinuity' in Wells's dystopian representations of modernity.

While overwhelming sensory impressions dominate our understanding of the city in *The Sleeper Awakes*, these sensations become inherent to the city itself in *Brave New World*. Though there are many major cities around the globe, Huxley's London is the capital of civilisation and stands in contrast to the uncivilised 'Reservation' Bernard and Lenina visit in New Mexico (86-8). Moreover, the pockets of suburban entertainment— 'Electro-magnetic golf at St Andrews'— and industry— 'the majestic buildings of the Slough Crematorium [...] its four tall chimneys were flood-lighted and tipped with crimson danger signals. It was a landmark'—are places of pleasure and leisure where people can go to escape the city (76, 63).

The relationship between city and country in Huxley's novel falls into the dialectical paradigm outlined by Williams in *The Country and the City*, wherein a polarised and oppositional relationship between an idealised country and an idealised city has emerged over time. Representations of this relationship are a combined product of this dialectic and of

present concerns and experiences. Cast into a remote future, such representations follow trajectories of current tendencies within society. Thus, the relationship between city and country conceived by Huxley in *Brave New World*, can be seen as an amplification of the escapist Arcadianism prevalent in British culture between the wars (Rae, 'Double Sorrow', 251-4). Huxley's use of lights in his 'electric city' also recalls the early use of electric lights in commercial advertising in London in the 1890s. Carolyn Marvin describes how, '[t]o attract crowds patrolling the streets of large cities, advertisers often used electric lights and magic lanterns in combination. [...] In London "diverting and artistic" displays were found in the Strand and Leicester Square as early as 1890' (Marvin 182; 'Smart Advertising Booms', *Answers*, [2 August 1890], 150). These lights become associated not only with the city but with its consumer culture. The recurrent divide between city and country is further exasperated in Huxley's novel by the way in which individuals, depending on their caste, are conditioned to experience, consume, and, in some instances, even enjoy their environment. This is particularly evident in the way Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons were once conditioned to 'like flowers—flowers in particular and wild nature in general [...] to compel them to consume transport' until it was discovered that '[a] love of nature keeps no factories busy'—an instance of innovation and discontinuity. From then on 'children were made to scream at the sight of a rose' (18).

Living in an 'electric city' has its advantages—conveniences are positively collocated; all the best entertainment can be found there—though Huxley is careful to compromise these advantages by underscoring the disconnect individuals have with the natural world. When Lenina and Henry take in a show at the Westminster Abbey Cabaret, the 'electric sky-signs effectively shut out the darkness' (65). Immune to the beauty of night and unaware of this 'whole depressing fact', all they can see is how from 'the façade of the new Abbey the giant letters invitingly glared' (65). Even when the electric signs are turned off, the naturalness of night goes unnoticed: 'the two young people still retained their happy ignorance of the night' (67). For Huxley, this 'happy ignorance' is ironic; the extravagances of the future city have not only rendered the beauties of the natural world redundant but imperceptible.

Orwell is critical of the way in which cities of the future are idealised in utopias in his depiction of the future city in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As Winston learns by reading Emmanuel Goldstein's subversive treatise, 'The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism', utopias were 'part of the consciousness of nearly every literate person' at the beginning of the twentieth century. These utopias represented 'the vision of a future society unbelievably rich, leisured, orderly and efficient—a glittering antiseptic world of glass and steel and snow-white concrete' (218). Goldstein goes on to explain that these utopias were built on the assumption that science and technology would continue to progress with 'prodigious speed' but that they failed to materialise 'partly because of the impoverishment caused by a long series of wars and revolutions, partly because scientific and technical progress depend on the empirical habit of thought, which would not survive in a strictly regimented society' (218). That a totalitarian state should arise in the aftermath of a succession of wars and revolutions is not a given, though Orwell via Goldstein intimates that '[i]n the long run, a hierarchical society was only possible on the basis of poverty and ignorance' (219). Nor does it follow logically for developments in science and technology to be completely compromised by such a state. Orwell understood the relationship between technology and society to be such that 'ideology controls technology' (Clarke 55). For this reason, in his future society, the state inevitably suppresses certain technologies while using other technologies in order to reinforce its continued dominance.

The practicalities of these circumstances—the political and social realities of the Orwellian state—are refracted in the images of urban decay observed by Winston. Though his vision of the utopian city is mythologized as 'something huge, terrible, and glittering', he is resigned to the manifestation of this ideal in 'decaying, dingy cities where underfed people shuffled to and fro in leaky shoes, in patched-up nineteenth-century houses that smelt always of cabbage and bad lavatories' (84-5). Winston can only perceive this utopia and its history of decay through a continuity of ills carried over from the past—the 'leaky shoes' and 'patched-up nineteenth-century houses' that are not fit for purpose—in a way that engages with the recurrence/continuity and innovation/discontinuity paradigm proposed by Baudelaire's and Benjamin's conceptions of modernity.

What is ‘newer’ or ‘newest’ in the city is also the most discontinuous in its architecture and the most continuous in terms of the trajectory towards a totalitarian state: the Ministries of Truth, Peace, Love, and Plenty (6). The Ministry of Truth ‘was startlingly different from any other object in sight. It was an enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete, soaring up, terrace after terrace, three hundred metres into the air’ (6). This is in stark contrast to Winston’s own block of flats—the Victory Mansions, the exterior of which is slowly being eroded by the detritus of the city—or to the ‘vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with baulks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron, their crazy garden walls sagging in all directions’ (5). For Winston, the predominant ‘vision of London’ was ‘vast and ruinous, a city of a million dustbins’, a rubbish heap where all the best ideas and the most brilliant bits of culture have either faded or been broken and thrown away (85).

Unlike the future cities in Wells’s or Huxley’s dystopian novels, pockets of the past still exist in Orwellian London. This is mainly due to the fact that where the Proles lived was overlooked by the Party members and authorities. Winston’s forays into the Prole parts of the city lead him to Mr. Charrington’s junk shop, the premises above which he eventually leases the (not-so) secret bedroom he shares with Julia.⁶² It is in Mr. Charrington’s shop and in the yard of the woman hanging out her washing that the past survives mostly uninterrupted by the restrictions of the future (113, 250). Mr Charrington uses an oil or spirit lamp to show Winston the upstairs flat: ‘in the warm dim light the place looked curiously inviting’ (107, 110). As a liminal space between the past and the present, preserving elements of what is long-forgotten, ‘the room had awakened in [Winston] a sort of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory’ (110–111). Orwell uses the illusionary atmosphere of the shop and the room’s ‘warm dim light’ given off by the proprietor’s ‘hanging oil lamp’ to draw attention to the differences between the physical remainders of this ‘ancestral memory’ and the ‘brightly-lit

⁶²For more on the place of rubbish and nostalgia in the novel, see Patricia Rae’s article ‘Mr. Charrington’s Junk Shop: T. S. Eliot and Modernist Poetics in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’ (1997).

corridors' of the Ministry of Truth, the 'luridly floodlit' public spaces during Hate Week, and the 'harsh white light' of his cell (110, 107, 123, 209, 312).

Accordingly, reflecting on the one 'truly characteristic thing about modern life', Winston finds that 'its bareness, its dinginess, its listlessness' affects him the most. Indeed, the threat of a listless metropolis strikes at the heart of the vitality so central to our idea(l) of the city. The importance of illumination, however, would have resonated most strongly with the novel's post-war readers. Though restricted access to electric power and the rationing of electricity recalls the black-out regulations and air-raid precautions taken in London during WWII, it is more indicative of the post-war shortages experienced in Britain as well as in Communist states. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this regulation takes on a more sinister quality, as the shortages are manufactured. For, not only was access to electric light and power restricted during certain hours, but it was also being rationed as 'part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week' (4). These periods of darkness not only impose limits on the hours of an individual's activities but also give individuals a misleading sense of privacy so that they will assume they are not being surveilled. Moreover, the 'economy drive' provides them with a sense of contributing to the 'prosperity', for lack of a better term, of the state. Curiously, though the electric lights, power, and heating are rationed or restricted, the telescreens continue to function throughout these enforced blackouts.

Through Winston's minatory vision of London as 'vast and ruinous, a city of a million dustbins' and the representation of an illuminary atmosphere reminiscent of a bombed-out city, Orwell highlights the dangerous consequences of the corruption of capitalist infrastructure by totalitarian oligarchy. In circumstances where the production, consumption, and enforced scarcity of goods are orchestrated by Party authorities, where 'technological progress only happens when its products can in some way be used for the diminution of human society', it follows that 'ideology controls technology' (Wells 222;

Clarke 55). Indeed, disappointment and decay are the inevitable results of the utopian dream. The few surviving technological advances of pre-revolutionary Oceania are used to ensure the city remains grey and gloomy and to further reinforce the subjugation of its people.

Though in *The Sleeper Awakes*, Graham eventually realises that ‘the city had swallowed up humanity’, that ‘[e]very city now is a prison’, the conditions required to ensure the city remains a prison have not been fulfilled: the city is on the verge of revolt (128, 160). In Airstrip One, the city-as-prison is a foregone conclusion. There is no clear progression in dystopian representations of the future city from Wells’s deeply-flawed capitalist utopia to Orwell’s nightmarish postlapsarian collective; however, the chronology of these fictions represents how present ‘fears of utopia’ and ‘fears of technology’ changed in relation to the present itself. Indeed, the diverse ways in which Wells, Huxley, and Orwell represent the influence of technology—in particular, the electric light—on the city in the future are indicative of the uncertainty of their positions in relation to modernity. Dystopias, which challenge utopian dreams of the future, are reliant upon modernity, its continuity with the past, and its discontinuity with the present. This is also the case for the electric light, which represents both a technical innovation and a continuation.

History, Technology, and the Authoritarian State

Despotism, which by its nature is suspicious, sees in the separation among men the surest guarantee of its continuance, and it usually makes every effort to keep them separate. [... A despot] does not ask them to assist him in governing the state; it is enough that they do not aspire to govern it themselves. (Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* II.2.210)

Then it was seen that all past history, with the exception of its primitive stages, was the history of class struggles. (Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, 91)

Without the past, there can be no real dream of the future.⁶³ In the dystopian fictions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conditions of ‘pastlessness’ arose from a variety of circumstances that ranged from wilful negligence and careful dissuasion to calculated falsification. Admittedly, the possibility of eradicating the past in order to deconstruct traditional and oppressive narratives as well as the social and political structures they support, or to efface the foregone injustices and wrongdoings of society, has its utopian appeals.

⁶³ For more on the importance of the past to science fiction, see Michael Page’s *The Literary Imagination from Erasmus Darwin to H.G. Wells: Science, Evolution, and Ecology* (2012). In my review of Page’s book, I note that the discovery of deep geological time ‘created the possibility of science fiction and encouraged the exploration of evolutionary ideas through narrative form’ (Ludtke, para. 3).

However, as Paul Ricoeur theorises, '[w]e should also ask whether utopias deinstitutionalize relationships in order to leave them deinstitutionalized or in order to reinstitutionalize them in a supposedly more humane way' ('Saint-Simon', 299). This is a question at the heart of dystopian fiction, for, when coupled with an absence of individual autonomy and the paucity of collective memory and shared histories, 'pastlessness' reinforces the systematic oppression and tyranny encouraging it.

In dystopian fiction, there is a parallel between the way in which the past is easily and adeptly manipulated by the authoritarian state in order to supplement the exploitation of the individual and the way in which technology is often depicted as a tool of the authoritarian state or as a force beyond the control of its human creators (Beauchamp 54–55). This dynamic culminates in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where 'ideology controls technology'—an ideology that explicitly distorts and destroys the past (Beauchamp 55).

Such a control over the individual became more possible after the social, political, and technological changes of the 1920s for, as I. F. Clarke explains, 'it had become easy to imagine how a despotic government could employ the technologies of the telephone, wireless, motor car and aeroplane in order to control an entire nation' (6). At the same time, this need for control was, as Arthur O. Lewis has argued, the product of the growth and increasing complexity of industrialised, urbanised societies (162). In other words, technology both facilitated control and created a need for it. In its most abstract sense, control both operates extensively on the everyday aspects of an individual's life (their living conditions, privacy, nutrition, family, work) and on the overarching structure and infrastructures of society (the government, access to public utilities). However, in the twentieth century, these two forms of control coincided, which Lewis explains in terms of a 'perceived loss of individuality' facilitated by a 'necessity for greater control' of society and its individuals by the state, 'exacerbated' by technological developments (Lewis 162). Though Lewis has the totalitarian regimes of Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Maoist China in mind, this dynamic is central to dystopian fictions where authoritarian states use technology to suppress individual autonomy and perpetuate the status quo.

In this section, I am concerned with the state's exploitation of the past to represent its own interest, particularly in the way it promotes the hegemony of technology to achieve total subjugation over the individual. It should be no surprise that the authors of these dystopian fictions adopt the electric light to exemplify this hegemony since, as Gooday explains, electricity was 'closely associated with futurity' (121). While this choice coincides with the narrative of technological ascendancy constructed around the electric light over the course of its gradual adoption in the early twentieth century, it is not complicit in its construction, as I contend. I consider the interconnectedness of history, the past, and memory in terms of historical materialism and the representation of progress as antithetical to history in dystopian fiction. I then explore the association of the past with technology, focussing on the technological developments that initially facilitate the social and historical changes that ultimately bring about the future state in dystopian fiction and how the ultimate consequences of technology in a dystopian world tends towards the darkly totalitarian.

The past cannot be sundered, to borrow a metaphor from Walter Benjamin, from either history or memory.⁶⁴ On the surface, history and memory appear related to the past in that they are, respectively collective and individual experiences of it. Though in practice memory can be influenced by collective experience, in a theoretical sense, it remains both personal and private. In determining the relation of the past to the future, and of history to technology, it is necessary to articulate the interconnectedness of history, memory, and the past. Just as the progress of humankind and technology is increasingly unravelled, so are the concerns with memory, its processes, and conceptions of the past. However, a theoretical framework is needed in order to examine the hypothetical representations of these relationships in the dystopian fictions of Wells, Huxley, and Orwell. This framework is not intended to suggest that these authors would have been conversant with these ideas or the texts that express them, but to establish a contextual approach to understanding history, the

⁶⁴ Benjamin writes that the 'concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time' (*Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 252).

past, and memory that is coherent if not coincident with emerging conceptions of these topics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the publication of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1837) and the emergence of the theory of historical materialism proposed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The German Ideology* (1845) challenged the existing understanding of 'history' as a record of progress to the extent that it began to fall away. For philosophers and political theorists like Hegel, Marx, and Engels, it was important that history be considered not just a series of events but in terms of the economic and social conditions that underpin those events. Engels, for instance, observed that 'all past history, with the exception of its primitive stages, was the history of class struggles' (*Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, 91). The efforts of these philosophers and theorists exposed these conditions as the material of history—conditions presented in dystopian fiction as inevitable but ultimately contrived and reinforced. Indeed, when an individual's autonomy is compromised, as is the effect of the eugenic and social conditioning that takes place in *Brave New World*, or when the exploitative social and economic conditions are obscured, as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, history is distorted or destroyed in order to maintain the status quo. As the Director explains in *Brave New World*, "that is the secret of happiness and virtue—liking what you've got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny" (Huxley 12). Given this, if certain outcomes and conditions are unescapable, or even predestined, progress becomes antithetical to history.

In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940), Benjamin complicates Hegel's and Marx's antithetical construction of history and progress. He asserts that 'a critique of [historical] progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself' (252). By questioning the progress of progress, as it were, Benjamin raises an important concern that recurs in dystopian fiction: how much of our understanding and experience of the past and, consequently, of ourselves is based on an erroneous reading of a history that is, in turn, based on a false conception of progress? In Benjamin's paradigm, the past is 'the concern of history' (245). His 'Angelus Novus'—whose 'face is turned towards the past', whose wings are obstructed by the 'storm of progress'—offers a memorable and fecund

correlative for this relationship (249). The figure of the ‘angel of history’ is torn between what has happened and what is to come. Progress is not only antithetical to history but a violent process acting upon its existence.

We, the readers-as-observers—transformed by what ‘we perceive’—are distinguished from the angel by our limited perceptual capabilities when it comes to the past: ‘where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet’ (249). These issues of perception are, in effect, issues of recognition. In perceptual processes, while we tend to differentiate between things, the angel does not; where we see a multitude, the angel sees the singular, the continuous. Benjamin is quite explicit about how an individual experiences the past. The past is a brief and insubstantial visual experience: it ‘can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again’ (247). This structure of memory as a fleeting impression resonates with the feeling Winston experiences during his visit to Mr. Charrington’s junk shop and the apartment above it, which ‘had awakened in him a sort of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory’ (Orwell 243), and of the wine in O’Brien’s office, which ‘aroused in Winston dim memories of something seen long ago on a wall or hoarding—a vast bottle composed of electric lights’ (Orwell 197–198). The memory briefly surfaces from the recesses of his mind, which, if recognised, stirs in Winston an uncommon disaffection, allowing him to briefly withdraw from the otherwise continuous pastlessness to which he and the majority of inhabitants of Oceania are condemned.

Each novel treats the interrelationships between history, the past, and memory differently. While the past is still somewhat accessible to the citizens of London in *The Sleeper Awakes*, Graham’s only experiences of this past—the future of which he was deprived by his long slumber—are restricted to those relayed by others. He learns that past social, political, and economic conditions are kept from the labouring classes in order to encourage a belief in an improved present. For him, the past is a place where all the promises of the future remain idealised possibilities; the future has become a place where the dreams of the past have gone wrong. Conversely, this future city is built on the ashes of all past knowledge, as the ‘old man who knew everything’ explains to Graham. Assuming he will not

have seen books, the old man explains that ‘the Sanitary Company burns them to make ashlarite’, which is then used as a building material. For him, books ‘were convenient in their dirty way. One learnt a lot’, especially when compared with the ‘new-fangled Babble Machines’, which are ‘easy to hear, easy to forget’—a dynamic which anticipates Orwell’s treatment of history and memory (98). In the hyper-consumer culture of *Brave New World*, where Our Ford declares that ‘History is bunk’, individuals are discouraged from loving the past—particularly ‘old things’, with an emphasis on the ‘things’—lest this interest encourage a decline in consumption (Huxley 29, 192-3). The past is a place where ‘scientific progress’ was thought to ‘go on indefinitely, regardless of everything else’ (200). Knowledge of the past—or history—is a corrupting influence; history is not something lost but a scarcity allocated in proportion to the social and political hierarchy (30). Select history is disseminated tactically and is explained as something which ‘may sound incredible’ because ‘when you’re not accustomed to history, most facts about the past do sound incredible’ (27). In Huxley’s dystopia, without history—the collective experience of the past—the past becomes disquieting rather than comforting or unifying.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the past is being consciously re-written and often completely obliterated, primarily at the Ministry of Truth, where Winston Smith and his co-workers are tasked with bringing the past up-to-date with the Party’s present positions (Orwell 47). As Winston explains to Julia, ‘the past, starting from yesterday, has been actually abolished’ such that ‘[h]istory has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right’ (178). Winston makes the small caveat that, if the past ‘survives anywhere, it’s in a few solid objects with no words attached to them’, indicating that the shortage of ‘things’, such as razor blades, can extend even to memories and records of past human experience (178). What is more, the Party enforces a system—on others and upon themselves—wherein the individual’s autonomy of memory is continually being compromised. This exasperates the fact that, in Oceania, ‘[p]ast events [...] have no objective existence, but survive only in written records and in human memories’ (243). In such a system, ‘both the past and the external world exist only in the mind’ and ‘the mind itself is

controllable' (92). Thus, it becomes possible for 'all history [to be] a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as necessary' (47).

While in dystopian fiction the consequences of 'pastlessness' generally manifest in an explicit connection between individual autonomy (or lack thereof) and the nature of the relationship between the past, the present, and the future, this is particularly so in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. O'Brien explains to Winston that "[w]ho controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past", implying that this control extends to the individual as well as the state (284–285). By discouraging an individual's ability and liberty to recall past events, the Party authorities destabilise his or her experience in the present. This is particularly disturbing to Winston, who feels 'alone in the possession of a memory' (68). He can remember, he insists, the name of the enemy changing during the culmination of Hate Week (209). Most, however, are like Julia and do not appear to register these contradictions or *lacunae* even though they are witness to them; they have been conditioned to forget. However, since only Winston's experience is represented in the narrative, it is possible that he is unable to perceive the capacity for memory in others. They may, in fact, be more adept at concealing their memories or at resisting influence than he. Nevertheless, the objective of this conditioning is to exert a comprehensive domination over its subjects, engendering a population that controls itself. Thus even if individuals resist their conditioning on a wider scale, their resistance is not significant because they cannot or choose not to share it with one another. And even if they did acknowledge the existence of memory, the Party authorities continue to isolate and destabilise their members by bringing the existence of the past into question: 'If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is controllable—what then?' (92).

Though at odds with the objective of Orwell's behavioural conditioning, which is to exert a comprehensive domination over its subjects and engender a population that controls itself, this question challenges the very Cartesian ontology of the past. In this way, O'Brien and all who compromise the autonomy of memory ensure that individuals within the Party experience continual instability and uncertainty. This, in turn, renders them incapable of questioning their state of 'pastlessness' and of resisting the various methods of control being

practiced on them. Once they succumb to the inevitability of ‘pastlessness’ and to the relentless conditioning associated with it, the individual in the Orwellian dystopia has little resilience against the state’s technological means of control. Together, ‘pastlessness’ and the hegemony of technology work in concert to achieve total subjugation.

Though Hegel, Engels, and Marx did much to dissolve the contract between history and progress, this contract and the hegemony of technology, which is predicated on an unwavering confidence in progress, persist in dystopian fiction. This is because technology and progress are often depicted as interchangeable concepts, regardless of whether they actually are. Though technology can stand in for an idealised or perverted form of progress, technology is never fully elided with progress. Rather, authors of dystopian fiction make explicit the claim progress makes on technology in a totalitarian state: when a state is intolerant to ‘technological progress’, whatever innovations are still possible in such a barren environment ‘can in some way be used for the diminution of human society’ (Orwell 222). Thus, though technology is prevalent and predominant in the authoritarian states of dystopian fiction, technology is no longer aligned with progress. Rather, technologies perpetuate the status quo, for where there is no way to express innovation, no space to explore new possibilities, there can be little, if any, individual autonomy.

It is significant, given this dynamic, that Wells adopted the electric light as an emblem of the status quo in future London in *The Sleeper Awakes*, for even in the last years of the nineteenth century, its status was far from certain. As I have explored in the introduction to this thesis, the adoption of electric light as the primary form of illumination in London was not a historical inevitability, nor was its association with the rather nebulous concepts of ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’ established (Gooday 1). There were also appreciable ideological obstacles that needed to be overcome in order to achieve a ubiquity of electric lighting—approaching the condition of total illumination—that would effectively supplement large-scale surveillance in an urban environment. These obstacles accompanied the administrative and bureaucratic difficulties faced by proponents of electrification that I have previously outlined: the existing gas lighting and heating network, the prohibitive costs associated with installing a system of electric lighting and power, the inadequate legislation

regarding private companies' rights to the license to supply electricity, and London's unwieldy bureaucracy. And yet, dystopian fiction appears to present the ubiquity of the electric light as the conclusion of a progressive, if unsettling, narrative of technological ascendancy in a way that is at odds with the complexities and uncertainties that mark London's early relationship with electric light. Nonetheless, a reconsideration of this relationship will provide a heuristic approach to reading dystopian fiction's resistance to this narrative as well as its exposure of the role technology plays in the power/knowledge paradigm employed by the authoritarian state.

Total Illumination

The utopian dream of nights lit up as bright as day was transformed into the nightmare of light from which there was no escape. (Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, 134)

The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 302)

Though public utilities such as water, gas, and sewerage existed at the end of the nineteenth century and Londoners would have been familiar with the city-wide infrastructure necessary for gaslight, the possibility that they could be centralised or state-controlled was a foreign concept.⁶⁵ As I discuss in the introduction to this thesis, Gibbon and Bell explain that, 'the nineteenth century belief in the virtues of unrestricted competition' meant that 'the same cycle is to be observed in all' of London's public utilities and electricity was no exception (608).

With the advent of electric lighting and power, the same model was adopted for its supply, despite the obvious shortcomings. This profit-driven model created a disparity of light across the city as certain districts accrued more illumination than others, making it difficult to imagine a city that was constantly, let alone consistently, illuminated. Though it was eventually redressed as local authorities and parishes increasingly bought up the electricity supplies for their boroughs, this disparity was exasperated by the 'piecemeal

⁶⁵In 1896, London was 'supplied with water by eight companies', gas was supplied by 'the three chief London gas companies', and electricity by 12 local authorities and 15 companies (London County Council, *London Statistics, 1897-1898*, lxiv, lxx, lxxiv).

growth of electricity supply since the 1880s', leaving the city 'with an unusually fragmented and illogical system, in which most consumers had to buy their supply from an inefficient local generator' (Inwood 292). Given this disparity in illumination, it is easier to understand why *fin-de-siècle* readers may have had difficulty envisioning the circumstances of total illumination of the city.

Most significantly, however, gas and electric light were understood to illuminate the city at night in significantly different ways, as each source was thought to have a different effect on darkness. Indeed, when electric lighting was gradually adopted as street lighting, it began to change the way in which the city was seen at night. Dystopian fiction exploits this change in order to foreground the necessity of electric lighting to the conception of total illumination. To understand why, it is worth revisiting the distinction Lynda Nead articulates between perceptions of gas and electric light—that '[g]as lights darkness; whereas electricity annihilates it'—because it elucidates the disjunction between reality and fiction as one between realist and fantastic representations of the city (83). This disjunction, as I will demonstrate, informs the resistance to total illumination during the *fin de siècle*.

In 1900, Wells published a novel he had been working on since the autumn of 1896: *Love and Mr Lewisham*.⁶⁶ Though vastly different from *The Sleeper Awakes* and his earlier 'scientific romances', this novel was also set in London, albeit one with which his readers would have been familiar. It follows the career of Lewisham, a young man enrolled at the Normal School of Science in South Kensington, and his ill-advised marriage to Ethel Henderson. Of interest here is the difference in Wells's depiction of street lighting in the two novels, *The Sleeper Awakes* and *Love and Mr Lewisham*, which were drafted and received contemporaneously. In the former, from the windows of his private apartment, Graham wonders whether the windows were 'for light' or whether 'the whole city [was] lit day and night for evermore, so that there was no night there' (Wells, *The Sleeper*, 55). The city, he learns, is lit by 'vast masts carrying globes of livid light', which 'receded in illimitable vistas

⁶⁶ *Love and Mr Lewisham* was first serialised in *The Weekly Times*, starting in November 1899 (Beer xiii, xxix). All quotations are from Simon J. James and Gillian Beer's Penguin Classics edition (2005).

in every direction' (71). From a lofty vantage point above the moving platforms, Graham is able to see 'the people of the unsleeping city in their perpetual daylight' (70–71). In the latter novel, by contrast, Wells describes the nightly walks from Chelsea to Clapham that mark Ethel and Lewisham's courtship in very different terms. This city is more congested, as the nights of 'damp and drizzle, and then thick fogs, beautiful, isolating, grey-white veils' turned 'every yard of pavement into a private room' (Wells, *Love*, 87). The effect does not necessarily create intimacy. Rather it is claustrophobic. For, the 'street lamps, blurred smoky orange at one's nearest, and vanishing at twenty yards into dim haze', underscore the sense of isolation individuals feel in the city (87).

The gloomy aspect of the city evoked by Wells would have been familiar to readers of novels such as George Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889), Israel Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto* (1892), Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1896), W. Somerset Maugham's *Liza of Lambeth* (1897), and Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* (1903), which addressed contemporary social problems such as poverty, overcrowding, and hazardous sanitary conditions in a realist or naturalist manner. W. Somerset Maugham's depiction of the impoverished, working class parish of Lambeth in *Liza of Lambeth* exemplifies the trope of 'darkest London' common to many of the late-Victorian novels on which Wells draws in *Love and Mr Lewisham*. The following passage contrasts the street's diurnal activity and its nocturnal desolation—a dichotomy absent in Wells's future London. Returning from an excursion to Chingford, Liza walks alone down the street towards the flat she shares with her mother:

The street was perfectly silent, and the lamp-posts, far apart, threw a dim light which only served to make Liza realise her solitude. There was such a difference between the street at midday, with its swarms of people, and now, when there was neither sound nor soul besides herself, that even she was struck by it. The regular line of houses on either side, with the even pavements and straight, cemented road, seemed to her like some desert place, as if everyone were dead, or a fire had raged and left it all desolate. (78)⁶⁷

⁶⁷ All quotations are from the 1921 George H. Doran edition of *Liza of Lambeth*.

In Maugham's sensitive portrait of Lambeth, the inhabitants of the fictional Vere Street are rarely nocturnal. Those who did work were employed in factories, as Liza and her friend Sally are, or were in the service of wealthier households, as Liza's mother is (Maugham 21). This clear division between night and day is marked by the uncertain illuminary conditions of Vere Street, where street lamps are 'far apart', their lights 'dim' (78). Comparing Maugham's portrayal of street lighting in Lambeth, south of the Thames and directly across from Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, to that of the slums of George Gissing's Clerkenwell, on the edge of East London, in *The Nether World* (1889), Nead's characterisation of gaslight, which 'seemed at times to display rather than to eradicate the threat of urban space', becomes more evident here (84). Walking through 'The Court'—an alley off the fictional Shooter's Gardens—the young Pennyloaf Candy encounters a 'cluster of people' around the itinerant preacher, Mad Jack. The claustrophobia Wells evokes in Lewisham's London is even more overwhelming here, where, as Mad Jack proclaims, [t]here is no escape for you' (345; Allen 160–161). Referring to the economic circumstances of the Gardens's inhabitants, the description equally applies to the Gardens's labyrinthine structure, in which there is often only one entrance and exit to its inner parts. The 'dark passage' Pennyloaf must take to her mother's house renders the streets more like a tomb and the city, in turn, like a crypt. For, though a 'single lamp existed for the purpose of giving light to the alley, and at no time did this serve much more than to make darkness visible' (344).

This contrast between 'illimitable' vision of the 'unsleeping city' in *The Sleeper Awakes* and the fog-filled London with its 'dim haze' and 'dark passages' in contemporaneous novels underscores the disparity between the depiction of artificial illumination in dystopian and realist or naturalist fiction as well as between gas and electric lighting. It further illustrates a difference in the treatment of the city in these fictions. For, in dystopian fiction, the city can be fully illuminated and, from the right perspective, more fully apprehended. This perspective, as both Wells and Huxley confirm, must be an aerial one. In *The Sleeper Awakes*, Graham understands the city only when he sees its vastness from the 'roof of the vast city structure which had replaced the miscellaneous houses, streets, and open spaces of Victorian London' (69). From this vantage point, he can see for some distance in

every direction and, although what he sees is only ‘appreciated in a fragmentary manner’, it is a more comprehensive image of the city than that afforded at street level (69). In *Brave New World*, Henry and Lenina can see London through the floor of Henry’s helicopter as they whizz up to Stoke Poges for a game of Obstacle Golf (53–54). Though the city below is visible in some detail, the city fails to capture Lenina’s imagination. Having been conditioned to be uninterested in such things, she appears more interested in the colour of the clothes worn by the Deltas performing gymnastics in Ealing or of the workers during the ‘changing of the shift’ at the Television Centre in Brentford (53–54).

Admittedly, the aerial perspective is not exclusive to dystopian fiction, nor is it the only perspective used therein. However, in dystopian fiction, the use of aerial perspective as a way of apprehending the city renders total illumination more comprehensible to the reading public. The aerial perspective demonstrated the improvements in society which could follow from the implementation of total illumination; it also exposed the potential consequences of such an influence, especially the control of the individual by the state, likely confirming existing reservations about total illumination. In many instances, these improvements condition people for subjugation, as is the case in *The Sleeper Awakes*. Wishing to learn about the world now under his control, Graham visits the wind-vane keeper’s crow’s nest to get ‘a bird’s-eye-view of the city’. From there he is able to comprehend the relationship between the city and the country wherein the wealth, splendour, and illumination of the city came at the cost of ‘the fierce, inglorious, economic struggle that went on in the glaring labyrinth below’ (Wells 129). All this is, ostensibly, the consequence of a rise in the ‘standard in comfort’ which led to an increased ‘complexity in the mechanism of living’ (127). As this example from Wells’s novel suggests, the control of the individual by the state need not be directly exerted, nor must it manifest in the form of a surveillance society.

Another concern raised by dystopian fiction about the effect of total illumination on society is the question of what drives social change and technological development: does a certain society necessitate the development of a system of total illumination, or did the advent of total illumination beget such a society? In his account of the development of street lighting, Wolfgang Schivelbusch proposes that technological development drives social

change. The twentieth century, he argues, is marked by a progression towards total illumination, which is the culmination of the expansion and improvement of street lighting begun in the nineteenth century. Thus, he concludes, '[t]he utopian dream of nights lit up as bright as day was transformed into the nightmare of light from which there was no escape' (134). However, in arriving at this conclusion, Schivelbusch not only overlooks the historical contingencies that inform *fin-de-siècle* resistance to total illumination, but he perpetuates the narrative of technological ascendancy dystopian fiction seeks to expose. Yet, his assertion that total illumination is a 'nightmare' need not be entirely discounted, as it speaks to the potential for technology to be used to control the individual, especially where the authoritarian state is concerned. However, a reconsideration of the examples Schivelbusch uses demonstrates that his narrative of social change as driven by technological development is not a foregone conclusion.

In the final section of his chapter on street lighting, Schivelbusch draws a connection between three literary instances of total illumination and the 'Colonne-Soleil' (or 'Sun Tower'), an ambitious tower proposed by an electrical engineer, Amédée Sébillot, and an architect, Jules Bourdais, to commemorate the 1889 Paris Exhibition and the centenary of the revolution that aimed to illuminate all of Paris with a single light (128–134). The 'Colonne-Soleil', though it was never constructed, serves to exemplify early aspirations for total illumination associated with the electric light (Sébillot 73; Schivelbusch 128–129; Otter 222). Louis Sebastien Mercier's depiction of street lights in his popular utopian novel, *Paris l'an 2440, rêve s'il en fut jamais* (1770), serves as the literary antecedent to the 'Colonne-Soleil' and establishes the narrative of total illumination bringing about improvements to society. Jules Michelet's description of factories 'flooded by brilliant light' in *Le Peuple* (1845) introduces the threat total illumination posed to the individual. Finally, the 'glaring and shadowless light that illuminates H.G. Wells's negative utopias', in particular *The Sleeper Awakes*, relates total illumination to the state's surveillance of the individual (134). Taken together, these examples suggest a strong correspondence between improvements to street lighting, total illumination, and surveillance.

While I may have reservations about Schivelbusch's arguments, his example of the 'Colonne-Soleil' is relevant to my reading of the importance of aerial illumination to dystopian fiction. The idea that an entire city could be illuminated with a single light—a light that was not the sun—suspended from above or mounted atop a tower sounds more like fiction than reality. This was, however, precisely what Sébillot and Bourdais, proposed to do with their 360-metre tall 'Colonne-Soleil' (Bourdais 54; Sébillot 73; Schivelbusch 128–130). The concept of lighting the city from above first emerged in the early eighteenth century, though it was more fully developed at the end of the century when Dondey-Dupré was inspired by the lighthouse at Alexandria in his plans for a proposed series of towers that would illuminate Paris, the main tower of which would be in the Place de la Revolution (Schivelbusch 121–123). Such towers were not practicable until the advent of the arc light, which was convenient as they could make the most of its intense illumination (Schivelbusch 120).

The use of electric lights on towers to fully illuminate cities was briefly popular in America, though in Britain there was 'much resistance to, and almost no support for, the idea of a totally illuminated society' and no such towers were built for this purpose (Otter 9). Practically speaking, however, tower lighting 'did not produce total transparency' for it 'tended to produce unsatisfying, concentric rings of glare and shadow' (222). In Schivelbusch's account of street lighting, however, tower lighting was a distinctly American experiment and was part of the country's westward expansion (Schivelbusch 124–126). Though they produced a uniformity of illumination and, thus, of vision, such towers were ultimately disconnected from the conditions of the street (126–127). As Schivelbusch observes, they 'represented a technical solution to the problem of lighting that was appropriate to the specific conditions of America' (127). In their proposal, Sébillot and Bourdais anticipated that over a thousand spectators would enjoy a 'coup d'oeil féérique de tout Paris à vol d'oiseau' ('a fairy-like glance of all of Paris from a bird's-eye-view', Bourdais 71). While they were inspired by Egyptian obelisks, they intended their tower to be an emblem of the modern age, crowning it with a monumental statue of the 'Genie de la science' (Prometheus) and a single electric light 'due au génie du dix-neuvième siècle, qui a

su reproduire la foudre et l'asservir aux besoins de l'humanité' ('thanks to the genius of the nineteenth century, who knew how to reproduce lightning and enslave it for the benefit of humanity', Bourdais 70–71; Schivelbusch 130) .

The tower proposed by Sébillot and Bourdais proved controversial for more than one reason. On one side, there were fears it might “become the target of attacks by rebels” as the gas-works had been during the February Revolution of 1848 (Schivelbusch 132). On the other side, the tower was thought to be ‘nothing but an attempt to prevent any further revolutions [...] by flooding the city with light’, , as there were fears it might “become the target of attacks by rebels” in subsequent revolutions (132). Discussions of Sébillot and Bourdais’s tower often focus on its application to surveillance, overlooking the fact that it was conceived as a monument to commemorate the 1889 Paris Exhibition. The ‘Colonne-Soleil’ is just one example of a lighting tower that was designed to display electric lights to the public. Such towers did serve as spectacles during exhibitions and public holidays—one of many forms of electric lighting displays developed in the 1880s and 1890s (Marvin 166).

Lights themselves were the spectacle: ‘[t]owers of light that demonstrated the adaptability of electricity to decorative and theatrical effects were among the displays essential to any ambitious exhibition featuring electrical inventions’ (Marvin 166). Indeed, outside of dystopian fiction, as Marvin explains,

[the electric light] was present in exhibitions, fairs, city streets, department stores, and recreation areas. It was physically and symbolically associated with whatever was already monumental and spectacular. It appeared in grand displays, processions, buildings, and performances. It borrowed from every mode of dramatic cultural self-promotion. (158)

As the twentieth century progressed, the focus turned from the spectacle of the lights themselves to what they illuminated, as floodlighting became de rigueur for landmarks and public buildings in the 1930s (Bowers, *Lengthening the Day*, 197). As Brian Bowers recounts, ‘[m]any central London buildings were floodlit for the first time in September 1931’ in honour of ‘the annual meeting of the International Illumination Congress, held that year in London’ (198). *The Daily Mail* reported, with some exaggeration, that ‘that ten thousand floodlights turned London into the brightest city in the world, a “new and beautiful”

London' (Bowers 198). Bowers notes that 'the next occasion for large-scale floodlighting in London was the coronation of King George VI in 1937', though '[n]o technical record of the lighting seems to have survived' (199).⁶⁸

Spectacles of electric light are quickly subverted by dystopian fiction, so that delight becomes dread, and community celebrations become collective oppression. In *Brave New World*, the flood-lit Slough Crematorium is considered 'a landmark' (63). During the Hate Week celebrations in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the 'white faces and scarlet banners' of those demonstrating in 'one of the London squares' are 'luridly floodlit' (209). These spectacles supplement the state's use of total illumination in order to eliminate night and supersede natural light—an extreme form of exerting control over the individual.

Electric Lights and the 'Carceral Archipelago'

Tout ce qui brille voit. ('Everything that casts a light sees', Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de L'espace*, 60).

The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 302)

Orwell's dystopian society is as much about self-control as it is about the control of the individual by the state, or of the many by the few. Though there is no evidence to suggest Orwell read Jeremy Bentham's 'Panopticon' (Strubb 40), it is difficult to believe that he was unaware of the principles behind Bentham's seminal text. First published under the title 'Panopticon; or, Inspection-House' in 1791 as a collection of letters written five years earlier

⁶⁸ We can get a sense of what the lighting was like at the coronation of George VI from the lighting displays suggested by G.E.C. Electrical Illuminations for the prospective coronation of Edward VIII. In November 1936, they distributed a booklet, *Coronation Celebrations*, which contained detailed proposals for 'illuminating devices' and 'floodlighting' in honour of the special occasion. As they speculatively explain, '[d]ecorative illuminations will play an important part in the Coronation celebrations of His Majesty King Edward VIII., and it is certain that electricity will again provide the most brilliant and most spectacular lighting effects' (2). Illustrated with black and white photos with some added colour for effect, the authors of the booklet explicitly connect electric lighting with patriotism and imperialism, noting the 'effectiveness of floodlighting as a means of expressing popular rejoicing and as a permanent memento of a great event in the life of the nation' and that '[n]o more fitting way of recording the importance of the Coronation to the people of the British Commonwealth of Nations can be imagined than by making visible by night, as well as by day, the many architectural and natural beauties of our Empire' (25). G.E.C. Electrical Illuminations even offered an extensive list of 'subjects suitable for such treatment', ranging from royal palaces and the BBC to the Wolverhampton Public Library and the River Dee, from London to Calcutta and Cape Town (26). *Coronation Celebrations* is in *The John Johnson Collection* in the Bodleian Library.

and two postscripts, Bentham's work lays out the tenets of a surveillance society. The Panopticon, evoking the image of an 'all-seeing eye', was a design for a prison in which the inmates would be under the illusion of constant surveillance by their guards (Strubb 41). Acknowledging that it was impossible for everyone to be watched at every given moment—this would necessitate a Shandean increment of observation—the inmates could never be certain whether or not they were being watched. Expedient and consistent punishment for transgressions were necessary to work against this uncertainty and to reinforce the illusion of constant surveillance (Strubb 55, n. 15).

Harry Strub outlines many similarities and differences between Bentham's Panoptical carceral system and the police state of Orwell's novel, though the most important difference lies in the way in which transgressions are punished. According to Strub, '[d]espite the extensive surveillance and police resources of the [Orwellian] State, arrests appeared to occur capriciously, with an unpredictable delay following the real or imagined transgressions, *thereby generating some uncertainty about the completeness of surveillance at any specific instant*' (44). This inconsistency was exasperated by the 'larger uncertainty stemming from the incomplete specification of which behaviors and thoughts were prohibited' (44). In Emmanuel Goldstein's manifesto, 'The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism', this is because an individual's 'actions are not regulated by law or by any clearly formulated code of behaviour. In Oceania there is no law' (Orwell 241). Thus, in a strict surveillance society, there becomes no need for explicit laws or regulations; everyone is always already surveilling the self.

When introducing the 'habit[s] that become instinct[s]' in the Orwellian police state, Winston makes an assumption about observation that reveals a significant exception to the way surveillance functions in this society. The large poster of Big Brother on the landing of the Victory apartments where he lives, 'with the enormous face [that] gazed from the wall', is 'so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move'. The surveilling trope is here made manifest by the message: 'BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU' (3). Though he admits that '[t]here was no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment' because '[i]t was conceivable that they watched everybody all the time', he

nevertheless assumes that the enforced darkness of the electricity saving measures exempts individuals from observation and disrupts the continuity and constancy of surveillance (5). Such thoughts break down the habits he forms to protect himself from the Thought Police, leaving him susceptible to thoughtcrime as well as actual transgressions. Together with the inconsistency in punishment for such transgressions, this assumption introduces the possibility of freedom to an otherwise self-oppressing person, leading to the cruel and unusual torture methods used by inner Party members to assure total compliance with and belief in Big Brother, such as that of Room 101.

Winston's assumption is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it illustrates the centrality of artificial illumination to surveillance. Secondly, as a correlative to the first reason, Winston's assumption demonstrates that electric light and power need to be public utilities in such a surveillance state. In order to understand how this came to be the case, I will explore how Orwell's surveillance society is predicated on Wells's and Huxley's depiction of future cities devoid of darkness and natural light. As a theory of vision, though the Foucault's Panopticon can offer limited readings of surveillance in fiction, his discussion of the role of artificial light in the Bentham's Panopticon and his argument that it can extend beyond the walls of the prison in the form of a 'carceral archipelago' are useful here in articulating the relationship between light and surveillance, vision and control (*Discipline and Punish*, 297). Then, focussing on the power/power structure in *The Sleeper Awakes* and the technologies of sensory pleasure in *Brave New World*, I will consider how this relationship is exploited by the authoritarian state, limiting access to and control of public utilities in order to further diminish the autonomy of the individual.

In the dystopian fictions of Wells, Huxley, and Orwell, lighting as a public utility supplements the power of the authoritarian state in three distinct ways. In *The Sleeper Awakes*, control of electric light and power is aligned with the shifting political power structures in the novel. In *Brave New World*, electric light and electrical entertainments are used to subdue individuals with leisure and pleasure; light is further understood to have conditioning effects on humans, particularly influencing their early development. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, electric lights facilitate the extension of Bentham's Panopticon across the whole

of society, participating in Foucault's power/knowledge paradigm by assisting with the production of knowledge through visibility. For, without constant and consistent artificial illumination, those observing would be limited in their surveillance.

Foucault articulates this dynamic in his exploration of the disciplinary and punitive innovations of Bentham's Panopticon.⁶⁹ The backlighting of inmates in their cells increased visibility, so that 'one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery' (200). The inmates were deprived of light but, as Foucault insists, '[f]ull lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap' (200). Gaston Bachelard's proposition, that 'tout ce qui brille voit' ('everything that casts a light sees'), supplements Foucault's articulation of this reciprocal relationship between light and surveillance (60). For light permits individuals to see as well as be seen. In dystopian fiction, the extension of the 'carceral archipelago' is achieved with public utilities, the extinction of night, and the supersession of artificial light.

It is useful here to briefly outline Otter's reservations to the Panopticon as a theory of vision here, for the limitations he identifies go a long way to account for the relationship of artificial light and surveillance therein. Firstly, the Panopticon 'produced total asymmetry of vision', in which light is 'used as a direct, coercive instrument of power' (3–4). Moreover, though 'vision and power have often operated in forms that were both asymmetrical and disciplinary', Otter finds that a more 'expansive vocabulary' is needed in order to 'capture multiple modalities or patterns of vision' (5). Foucault's reading of the Panopticon presents a 'fantasy of omniscience' that neither corresponds with the actual infrastructure or development of cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nor with the literary representations of such cities. However, as I have argued, the use of light to control individuals, whether directly or indirectly, is an explicit feature of these novels. Not only do

⁶⁹The importance of artificial illumination in connection with visibility and surveillance has not been made explicit by scholars in their application of the theories of Foucault and Bentham to the society of Orwell's *Big Brother* (Varrichio 98–114; Posner, 1–33; Moylan 99).

they engage in the ‘fantasy of omniscience’, but they represent cities and societies that facilitate it.

Historically, the generalised illumination necessary for surveillance—an illumination that ‘exposed actions to public vision, legibility, recognition, or shame, extending to oligoptic visual and moral norms’—was not always possible (Otter 194). It is not surprising, then, that such generalised conditions are more prevalent in dystopian fiction. As I have discussed in the previous section, this marks a noticeable disjunction between how artificial illumination was conceived and was achieved in real and imaginary London at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

In Wells’s future London, the lack of natural light is noticeable in domestic settings and throughout the city. Graham, the nineteenth-century man, begins to wonder whether ‘the whole city [was] lit day and night for evermore, so that there was no night there’ (55). He associates constant illumination with a vision of the future city wherein the technology that facilitates this illumination has improved and shaped the urban environment: ‘[f]ar below, mere stirring specks and dots, went the people of the unsleeping city in their perpetual daylight, and the moving platforms ran on their incessant journey’ (71). In theory, this ‘perpetual daylight’ could make society more productive.

The review of Nikola Tesla’s experiments at the Royal Institution, appearing in *The Spectator* on 6 February 1892, is indicative of such an optimistic desire. The reviewer proclaims that ‘[w]hat mankind wants during the waking hours of the night is not a glow in the darkness, however intense, but a suffusing, pervading illumination. They want, in fact, sunshine at night’ (‘Electric Light and Electric Force’, 193). Furthermore, the reviewer is excited by the possibility that continual daylight will transform conditions of labour, since the ‘presence of darkness compels a cessation of human labour, and so imposes a certain amount of rest on the poorest of mankind. But if night can be turned into day, men will be tempted to forego their rest, and thus the new discovery will only bind men more closely than ever to the chariot-wheels of toil’ (193). However aware the reviewer is of the exploitative tendencies inherent within human nature, he or she is not so naive as to suggest that people have never worked through the night. Indeed, better illumination would only improve what already

transpires, for '[i]f factories and workshops could be made as light as day by electricity, not a few of the physical ills from which our operatives suffer would be put and end to' (193). In *The Sleeper Awakes*, the illuminary conditions of the 'unsleeping city' also inform the conditions of its labouring class; the glamorous luxuries of the city dwellers are made possible by the exploitation of those millions in the Labour Department. In this way, the facade of this utopian dream is exposed as such, the nightmares of dystopian made real.

In Huxley's *Brave New World*, individuals are conditioned to be unaware of the effects of natural light and are distracted by the overwhelming sensory impressions of city's nightlife. Henry and Lenina are unmoved by the 'night almost without clouds, moonless and starry' in the face of the 'electric sky-signs' which 'effectively shut off the outer darkness' (65). Once inside the Westminster Abbey Cabaret, the two lovers were 'safely inside with the fine weather, the perennially blue sky' (66). So, not only are they unable to recognise night but they adorn interior spaces with what is at best an ersatz day. This development—the result of technological innovation—is a both warning to and a satire of those working towards the triumph of humans over nature. This near-extinction of night, though sinister, can be seen as a fulfilment of the desire to banish night from human experience, which Bronfen identifies as belonging to the Enlightenment project's 'disenchantment of the world' (15). By framing this loss in cosmic terms ('[t]he depressing stars had travelled quite some way across the heavens'), Huxley positions night as a phenomenon distinct from human experience. In human terms, however, the scale of the loss is incalculable, for 'though the separating screen of the sky-signs had now to a great extent dissolved, the two young people still retained their happy ignorance to the night' (67). Night poses no threat to the uninitiated; those living in a state of continuous illumination are both remote from and susceptible to its unseeable and unknowable dangers. Fear of the dark is supplanted by the increased consumption of light. Night and all of its possibilities also offers no threat to the authority of the state. At the same time, night, with all of its creative possibilities and uncertainties, can no longer serve as an escape from the realities of day, from the pressure to consume and to produce. In this way, conditioning an ignorance of night is a far more effective means of exerting control over the individual than actually extinguishing it.

In dystopian fiction, the authoritarian state uses lighting as a public utility in various ways to inculcate the individual's subservient relation to the state. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, electric lights participate in Foucault's power/knowledge paradigm by assisting with the production of knowledge by securing visibility. The rationing of electric light and power also serves as a poignant criticism of post-war rationing and the false scarcity of resources orchestrated under communism. In *The Sleeper Awakes*, control of electric light and power is aligned with the shifting political power structures in the novel. In *Brave New World*, as I will discuss in the next section, electric lights and entertainments are used to subdue individuals with leisure and pleasure; light is further understood to have conditioning effects on humans, particularly their early development.

During his interrogation of Winston, O'Brien makes a number of observations about the way power functions under Big Brother. First, he asserts that the "object of power is power", just as the "object of persecution is persecution" and the "object of torture is torture" (202). In this tautological paradigm, the power/power relationships at play begin to emerge. Second, he then explains that "power is collective" and that the "individual only has power in so far as he ceases to be an individual" (203). For the Party, their object is not only authority over the individual but authority over all individuals. The best way to do this is to condition individuals to control themselves. This is evident in Winston's own admission that one 'had to live [...] in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every moment scrutinized' (5). Third, O'Brien details the multiplication and diffusion of power in society as well as in the individual, saying that "power is power of human beings. Over the body—but, above all, over the mind. Power over matter—external reality, as you call it—is not important. Already our control over matter is absolute" (303). Here, the matter to which O'Brien is referring is history, the significance and manipulation of which has been detailed above. Finally, he reveals the ultimate objective of the Party, to achieve total control over nature by controlling man: "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever" (304).

Foucault explains that in such a power structure, the exercise of authority is devoted to controlling the individual's body, though the exertion of this control can be reduced to the

production of knowledge (27). Further to this, since ‘power and knowledge directly imply one another’ we must acknowledge ‘that there is no power relation with the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations’ (27). In Orwell’s novel, power/knowledge supplements the carceral and its extension from a prison into an archipelago of total illumination, even where the self is concerned. Winston, for instance, must wait until the lights go out at ‘twenty-three hours, when he was home in bed’ before ‘he was able to think continuously’ and thus, by thinking, be himself (Orwell 125). Yet, even in those moments of darkness and silence, by assuming he is exempt from the ‘body politic’ of power, Winston continues to produce knowledge about his self (Foucault 29).

Wells explores a different type of power dynamic in *The Sleeper Awakes*, where Graham’s unique position of authority derives from his power as proprietor. Through a series of fortunate purchases and investments, his heirs and executors have accumulated the entire world. His government (and the governing by the council as his proxies), as it were, derives from his commercial control of property. When Ostrog, the leader of those city dwellers opposing the Council, instigates a revolution in The Sleeper’s name—ostensibly in order to free him from the control of the Council, but actually to gain control of Graham for his own purposes—it becomes clear that the way in which political power is distributed and accumulated is closely aligned with the infrastructure for generating and supplying electrical power. At the heart of this network of power/power stands the wind-vane, the technology by which Wells imagines the electrically-lighted city of the future would be powered. However, even though Graham understands the importance of the wind-vanes, for him they are symbols of power rather than the mechanisms of it. Indeed, he is oblivious to the way in which infrastructure has developed as supplementary to political power.

The wondrous image of the city that confronts Graham at the beginning of the narrative quickly deteriorates as he begins to discover the sinister but necessary infrastructure lying beneath the city’s glimmering facade. Learning of the systematic oppression of those members of society relegated to ‘Labour Department’ that supply and sustain the city’s electrical power and feeds its people’s continual consumption of opulent and luxurious

material goods and food, the extent to which the technological advances of the last two hundred years have facilitated these circumstances becomes clear. The power/power structure in Wells's future London is a deeply exploitative one.

Though the Labour Department—owned by the Sleeper and administrated by the Council—claims to have ‘abolished destitution’ (‘It is engraved upon the Department’s checks!’), over a third of the world’s population are its slaves (161–162). As Helen Wotton explains to Graham, these ‘men and women and children in pale-blue canvas, with their thin yellow faces and dull eyes’ ensure that the cities are supplied with food, goods and electricity; the fortunate city-dwellers want for nothing (161). Graham experiences their working conditions for himself when he visits one of the underground ‘working places’ and finds conditions that were appalling by even late-Victorian standards (193–5).

Wells contrasts his description of the subterranean factories quarter with those from the space above. The glamour of the city has no place in the deep. As Graham notices, ‘[e]ven the pretence of architectural ornament disappeared, the lights diminished in number and size, the architecture became more and more massive in proportion to the spaces as the factory quarters were reached’ (Wells 192). While this contrast between the domestic and the manufacturing quarters of the city is quite sensitive to the functionality of each different place, it is quite insensitive to the fact that the luxury and glowing illumination of the city remains inaccessible to the workers responsible for producing it.

Descending deep below the surface of the earth by elevator, Graham sees that the ‘factories that were not working were sparsely lighted; to Graham they and their shrouded aisles of giant machines seemed plunged in gloom, and even where work was going on the illumination was far less brilliant than upon the public ways’ (Wells 194). Though he does not realise it, such underground factories could not exist without the network of power linking the wind-vanes on the surface, the cables that hang throughout the cities, and the glaring electric lights in the deep caverns of the earth.

Graham’s exploration of the subterranean workhouses leaves him with the impression that a present (or, indeed, a future) where the ‘the city had swallowed up humanity’ was in fact a nightmare. What is more, though he is the ‘owner of [this] world’, Ostrog is its ‘boss’

(128, 77, 202). Though supplementary to power/power, the infrastructure of the city is so far removed from his control that, without killing himself, thereby annihilating the corrupt plutocracy that has arisen in his name, he is unable to disentangle it and wake the people up from the nightmare in which they live. At the end of the novel, before taking on the entirety of the black troops from Africa sent against him by Ostrog in his proto-airplane, Graham realises that he must relinquish his proprietary power over the world and gifts the world, the city, and the prospect of autonomy back to its people. Graham's promise is unresolved; he neither lives nor dies at the novel's close. This leaves open the possibility that he might return to London to right the wrongs of the Council, to govern the earth for the good of his people. For, though in *The Sleeper Awakes*, Graham comes to realise that 'the city had swallowed up humanity', that '[e]very city now is a prison', his realisation precipitates the 'carceral archipelago' by which the city truly does become a prison (128, 160).

In *The Sleeper Awakes*, increased productivity wrought by increased illumination prevents the workers from rising up against the oppressive plutocratic system the Council, Ostrog, and Graham all represent. This exploitation of the working class is transformed in *Brave New World* into a system of self-exploitation where the 'electric city' is indicative of the consumer culture in which individuals seek pleasure rather than knowledge. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the presumption of total illumination facilitates the surveillance society that enables individuals to self-oppress themselves through scarcity and fear.

*Was 'there no night there?': Enforced Illumination and the Body*⁷⁰

[I]n our societies, the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain 'political economy' of the body: even if they do not make use of the violent or bloody punishments, even when they use 'lenient' methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue—the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission. (Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 25)

'We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness'. (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 29)

⁷⁰ H.G. Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes*, 55.

As a description of the state of maximum artificial illumination, which sounds more Orwellian: ‘pluslight’ or ‘undark’? Both conform to the tenets of Newspeak for ‘A vocabulary’, according to which ‘any word [...] could be negated by adding the affix *un-*, or could be strengthened by the affix *plus-*, or for still greater emphasis, *doubleplus-*’ (345–346). According to Orwell, ‘[b]y such methods it was found possible to bring about the enormous diminution of vocabulary’, and thus in concepts and understanding bring about a state in which “IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH” (346, 6). Using a similar example to the one above, Orwell notes that ‘[*d*]ark, for example, could be replaced by *unlight*, or *light* by *undark*, according to preference’ (346). The ultimate goal was to suppress one of the ‘two words [that] formed a natural pair of opposites’ and to ‘diminish the range of thought’ (346, 344). Linking the diminution of vocabulary to the diminution of thought, the ‘strength’ achieved through the propagation of Newspeak is that of the state over the individual.

Orwell does not indicate a preference for either light and ‘unlight’ or dark and ‘undark’ and it may be that, perhaps, the light/dark binary is too strong to be collapsed. In terms of his own treatment of light in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, however, it is an important exercise to consider the difference between the two and the range therein as well as their relation to the illuminary circumstances and implications in other dystopian fictions. Though he is the most explicit about the effects of total illumination on the individual, Orwell is certainly not the first to depict the use of artificial illumination to control individuals in authoritarian states. Indeed, both Wells and Huxley experiment with such an influence, though Wells does so in the infancy of electrical lighting technologies, when the success of electric lights was uncertain (Otter 177-9). In a chapter entitled ‘The Battle of the Darkness’, which depicts the rebellion led by Ostrog under the auspices of freeing the Sleeper and his people, the Council uses their total control of the public utilities to disrupt the skirmishes taking place all over the city, throwing the combatants into a chaos of intermittent and unreliable illumination. As discussed in the previous section, such a feat might have seemed

quite impossible to London dwellers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.⁷¹ In Huxley's novel, in the 1930s, constant artificial illumination plays a vital role in the chemical and behavioural conditioning undergone by individuals in a post-Fordian world.

Returning to Orwell's *Newspeak*, both possible designations to express illuminary conditions contain within their modifications latent valences. 'Pluslight' implies an amplification of existing conditions, whereas 'undark' evokes an absence of dark in a way that is un-sinister and, almost, appealing. The latter, however, better conveys a diminished capacity to understand these conditions; it reflects the haunting prophecy dream-O'Brien offers to Winston, that they 'shall meet in the place where there is no darkness' (29). In the world of Airstrip One, where there was limited access to electric power at certain times of the day (the 'lights would be switched off at the main at twenty-three thirty'), it is difficult to fathom a place defined by the quality of 'doublepluslight' (116). And yet, the most haunting aspect of the 'oligarchical collectivism' of Big Brother is not just the rats of Room 101 but the way in which artificial illumination is employed in dystopian fictions to compromise the autonomy of the individual. This section will explore the way in which the deployment of total, constant, or pervasive artificial illumination affects the individual, both physically and mentally, through conditioning, interference, and torture.

Artificial light, especially electric light, is often charged with disrupting 'natural rhythms' (Schivelbusch 91). However, when the first electric arc lamps were introduced to city streets in the 1880s, they needed their carbon rods changed nearly every day and, like the gas lamps before them, only reinforced a divide between day and night that predated any system of artificial illumination (Bowers 101; Otter 223, 247). This divide was preserved because the lights required daily maintenance and did not burn throughout the night. With the

⁷¹To compare the Council's use of tactical blackouts with those that were planned at a time when street lighting and the provision of electrical power had become a public concern, the disruptive potential of total illumination becomes more remote. As Terence O'Brien recalls in *Civil Defence* (1955), his account of Britain's defensive preparations in advance of and during the Second World War, during the Munich Crisis of 1938, 'lighting concerns had had to employ large staffs on continuous stand-by for telephone instructions and prepare, since central disconnection would usually interfere with household lighting, to go round the streets removing the bulbs' (707). At a strategy meeting in early 1939, it was 'concluded that 5-6 hours was the minimum time required for effective reduction of street lighting' (707).

eventual introduction of a reliable incandescent bulb, electric lights did not need this continual maintenance; they could be operated by a mechanical, centralised process (Bowers 125–128). But by the late 1890s, the introduction of electric lights in major cities had begun to alter this divide, these natural rhythms.

In Schivelbusch's paradigm, artificial illuminants such as oil, candle, and gas lighting, are considered less artificial than electric light both because they are less powerful, their technologies are less complex, and their influence was deemed to have less of an effect on the body. Of course, as scholars including Brian Bowers, Chris Otter, and Wolfgang Schivelbusch have pointed out, light from the incandescent gas mantel was brighter than its contemporary electric lights; the system of wires and generators that accompanied the electric lighting network was as invasive as the pipes and refineries associated with the pre-existing system of gas lighting.

The conclusion that electric light is the most artificial of the artificial illuminants coincides with Schivelbusch's narrative of the ascendancy of electric lighting technologies. This assumes that what is 'natural' is slowly being supplanted as humans continue to distance themselves from their less technological origins. This is only the case if one believes that humans' tendency towards technology is 'unnatural' and that the narrative of technology is always one of continual advancement and progress, as David Edgerton has addressed in his studies of the 'history of technology-in-use'. Following from Edgerton's approach, in which we consider the factors that contribute to the natural/artificial dichotomy, it is possible to offer a reading of the effect of electric light on the body in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that resists the convenient and constructed narratives of innovation, disruption, and ascendancy often associated with modernity and the history of technology (xii–xiv, xi).

To begin with, circadian rhythms were observed early in human history, though they were not studied in humans until G. T. W. Patrick and J. Allen Gilbert undertook to study the

sleep deprivation of humans in 1896.⁷² While the primary focus of their study was to test and examine the effect of keeping their ‘subjects awake continuously for about 90 hours’, their findings, measuring how prolonged lack of sleep affected ‘reaction-time, discrimination-time, motor ability, memory, attention’, motivated further studies in this field (471; Dijk and von Schantz 280). As twenty-first-century chronobiologists Derk-Jan Dijk and Malcolm von Schantz note, Patrick and Gilbert’s observations that ‘during a prolonged period of sleep deprivation, sleep propensity waxes and wanes with a period of approximately 24 h[ours]’ influenced the study of ‘how and why sleep and waking performance oscillate’ as well as ‘how many oscillators contribute to this phenomenology’ (280). Patrick and Gilbert were not alone in their interest in how sleep was influenced by a combination of biological processes and external factors. Indeed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many studies focussed on the influence of new technologies on the human body and its biological processes.

Furthermore, as contemporary critical examinations of the relationship between technology and the body—the most influential of which are Anson Rabinbach’s *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (1992) and Tim Armstrong’s *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (1998)—suggest, interest in the body’s relationship to technology, which itself is a manifestation of modernity in as much as modernity is the product of technology related to a shift in the ‘perception of the body’ that took place in the nineteenth century (Armstrong 2; Rabinbach 5). This relationship is particularly notable in the emergence of the diagnosis of neurasthenia in the 1880s and 1890s, as those studying and treating the disease were concerned by the increasing influence technological advances were having on the body.

Neurasthenia, or nervous exhaustion, was initially diagnosed and treated by the American neurologist, George Miller Beard in the late 1880s. Physicians believed the somatic cause of the condition was, as Beard described in *A Practical Treatise on Nervous*

⁷² The term ‘circadian rhythm’ was introduced in the 1960s by the chronobiologist Franz Halberg (Halberg and Ungar 1058).

Exhaustion (1880), a ‘chronic, functional disease of the nervous system’ (115). The lesion was precipitated by the increasing demands of the ‘modern world’. Indeed, it was understood that the advances of the modern world requisite to this period of rapid innovation threatened an individual’s life energy; thus, modern life depleted an individual’s limited reserves of energy with its chaos, speed, and excitement. Certain elements were believed to contribute more to this increased pace. Beard, for instance, identifies several of the most consequential technological (and social) advances of the period as such elements, including ‘the steam engine, the press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women’ (Beard 176).

In *American Nervousness, Its Causes and Consequences* (1881), Beard singled out Thomas Edison as the individual ‘most responsible for neurasthenia’ in the way his ‘experiments, inventions, and discoveries’ have ‘made and are now making constant and exhausting draughts on the nervous forces of American and Europe’ (114).⁷³ As Armstrong explains, Beard was concerned about how these ‘marvellous inventions imposed numerous demands of “change, speed, and complexity” on the nervous system’ (18). For Beard, Edison’s electric light gave ‘the best possible illustration of the effects of modern civilization on the nervous system’ (98). Using the ‘analogy of the electric light’ to explain the limited amount of energy in the human body, he asserted that the force of the nervous system is ‘limited’ and can be ‘increased or diminished by good or evil influences, medicine or hygienic, or by the natural evolutions—growth, disease and decline’ (99). When exposed to new influences, when ‘new functions are interposed in the circuit, as modern civilization is constantly requiring us to do[...], the amount of force is insufficient to keep all the lamps actively burning’ (99).⁷⁴ And, though Beard does not explicitly include the electric light

⁷³ According to some scholars, the history of neurasthenia in Britain, especially its early reception in the 1890s, is somewhat distinct from that in America and other European countries. Mathew Thomson finds that, in Britain, the diagnosis of neurasthenia ‘offered a somatic location—the nerves—for a vast range of conditions which had no other obvious organic origin, from lethargy to insomnia, depression, headache, and bodily aches and pains’ (79). Chandak Sengoopta identifies the early support of the physician Sir Thomas Clifford Allbutt in introducing the diagnosis to Britain in the early 1890s as important to its acceptance as a nervous disease rather than a somatic condition (98). While impact of electric light has not specifically been addressed in relation to discussions of technology and neurasthenia in recent critical studies, Janet Oppenheim notes that the diagnosis of neurasthenia was caught up in wider concern for ‘the impact of modern technology on human health’ (99).

⁷⁴ For a more contemporary discussion of the limited energy of the human body, see Rabinbach on the concept of *Kraft*, or energy, in terms of William Thompson’s first law of thermodynamics (45–50).

among the advances leading to increasing diagnoses of neurasthenia, because he makes explicit the association between Edison and nervous exhaustion and because of its status as the defining technology of Edison's career, one can reasonably infer that the electric light was believed to have a somatic, if sometimes pathological, effect.⁷⁵

Finally, the influence of electric light on the body was of great concern to scientists at the close of the nineteenth century, as indeed gas and candle lighting had been in the previous decades, though their experiments and findings were still developing in their sophistication (Otter 204–212).⁷⁶ Adjacent to this direction of investigation are C. W. Siemens's experiments on whether 'solar energy can be artificially reproduced' to encourage the growth of plants which determined that photosynthesis was possible with energy from electric lights. Siemens study, which was one of the first to explore the effect of electric light on biological organisms, was indicative of the desire to find new uses for electric light and explore the boundaries of these applications. The results of his experiments, that photoautotrophic plants could convert the energy from electric lights into a chemical energy as well as that from the sun, meant that electric lights could function as effective substitutes for sunlight (Siemens 212–213).⁷⁷ While these findings in no way offer conclusions regarding the effect of electric and other artificial illuminants on the human body, they complicate Schivelbusch's hierarchy of artificial illumination. Implicit in this conception of artificial light as supplementary but not necessarily inferior to natural light is the suggestion that the strength, complexity, and influence of electric light could have a positive effect on the natural world—a natural world which includes humans in its equation.

⁷⁵It is ironic, given Beard's insistence on the deleterious effects of electric light that electrotherapy was a common treatment for neurasthenia, as Janet Oppenheim discusses in her chapter 'Nerve Tonics and Treatments' in *"Shattered Nerves": Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (111–140).

⁷⁶Carolyn Marvin has extensively detailed the scientific and popular concerns of the influence of electricity on the body in her chapter 'Locating the Body in Electrical Space and Time' in *When Old Technologies Were New* (1988), pp. 109–151. In particular, she contends that 'a deep inquisitiveness about the relationship between electricity and the human body was a part of the process of becoming socially acquainted with that novel and mysterious force [(electricity)] in the nineteenth century' (110).

⁷⁷Siemens remarks, 'On the Influence of Electric Light upon Vegetation, and on Certain Physical Principles Involved', were published in Volume 30 *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, Volume 5 of the *Electrician* (13 March 1880), and Volume 21, Issue 541 of *Nature* (11 March 1880). I am quoting here from the *Proceedings*.

One of the ways in which we can see this inclusive relationship is to consider how electric lights influenced individuals in their general environment, the most extensive and public example of which is street lighting. For Otter, the question of ‘when exactly to light and extinguish streetlights’ was related to questions of individual autonomy, the control or centralisation of public utilities, and a balance between ‘freedom and security’ particular to British cities (222). Drawing on a range of contemporary sources including W. J. Didbin’s *Public Lighting by Gas and Electricity* (1902) and the archives of the Metropolitan Board of Works, Otter explains how establishing a schedule for street lighting was a matter of negotiating between the “‘regular laws of nature’” and the ‘local circumstances’ of the place being illuminated (Didbin 289, qtd. in Otter 222; Otter 222). As mentioned above, gas and electric lighting systems in London still required daily, manual maintenance at the beginning of the twentieth century: gas lamps needed to be lit by hand and the carbon rods in arc lamps needed to be replaced (223).

Taking into consideration the ‘local circumstances’, the engineers responsible for London’s system of electric lighting were careful to design and install lamps that would achieve a standard of ‘optimum perception’ in the densely populated city (Otter 224–225; Bowers 194–195). One such standard, as suggested by André Blondel in November 1895, was that ‘a passenger, or an object that moves along a line joining two lanterns [should] remain illuminated in the most consistent manner possible’ (39–40; qtd. in Otter 224). While Otter goes on to describe the technology required for ensuring such standards, it becomes clear that those implementing the electric street lighting were not interested in disrupting the ‘laws of nature’ but in augmenting the vision of individuals in their ‘local circumstances’ (226–228). Improved vision, in this arrangement, is equated with an improvement in safety and in freedom (Otter 19).

Under these circumstances, electric lights seem to facilitate what T. E. Hulme, in his essay ‘The Philosophy of Intensive Manifolds’, refers to as Henri Bergson’s ‘mechanised living’ inherent to the ‘superficial self’ as well as what Armstrong later considers ‘prosthetic thinking’ (Hulme 175, 196; Armstrong 18). These concepts are seemingly at odds, for on the one hand, Armstrong’s metaphor of technology as a prosthesis for the body extends the

influence of the electric light on the body in such a way that the electric light becomes an extension of the body and, on the other hand, the mechanical mode of thinking identified by Bergson abets the distortion of vital phenomena by the senses and makes ‘a complete picture of reality’ inaccessible to the individual intellect (Hulme 174). However, it is not necessary to reconcile these two perspectives with one another in order to understand that there is a tension inherent in the conceptualisation of the relationship between electric light and the body in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For, as the electric light proved to be an incremental improvement from and therefore a connection to previous sources of artificial light, particularly incandescent gas, it also represented an entirely new and forward-looking way of thinking about perception and artificial illumination.

Indeed, the bidirectional vision of modernity offered by this re-reading of the relationship of electric light to the body recalls Crary’s conception of modernity as intermittent and protracted. Building on Marx’s analysis of the ‘large-scale restructuring of labour and production in the 1800s’ and the associated projects which facilitate ‘the acceleration and control of both circulation time and communication time’, Crary’s revision of modernity arises from an understanding of the intersection of capitalism and technology as a process of “‘*constant continuity*’” (64). For him, this process of modernisation results in a ‘technology of power’ and a de-temporalisation of the experience of time which, ultimately, have facilitated the superintendence of the individual by society, the state, and the self in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (67).

In dystopian fiction, Crary’s concept of a disjunctive modernity can serve to alert the reader to these possible perils. In Orwell, it accounts for the continued use of candlelight by the proles, despite the technological advances available to party members, even though they are ruled by artificial scarcity. In Huxley, it is exemplified by the shock Lenina experiences when she and Bernard visit the Reservation in New Mexico. As Bernard explains, “‘they’ve been doing it for the last five or six thousand years [...] they aren’t civilized’” (94). These tensions can be a useful way to approach how humans position themselves in relation to nature and to their own constructions, how they understand their bodily processes and the influence of external reality on them, and how they view the processes of perception. To

explore this further, I will consider three examples from Huxley, Wells, and Orwell, respectively, as ways into understanding the relationship of electric light with the body of the individual—both physically and mentally, through conditioning, interference, and torture—in terms of stasis and dynamism.

The most extreme influence of the electric light on the human body comes in Huxley's *Brave New World*, where Bergson's mechanical way of life is reinforced by the constant conditioning of individuals beginning in the incubators of the hatcheries via a process known as 'bokanovskification'. Though individuals are conditioned differently according to their castes (Alpha, Beta ... double Epsilon), all babies are 'decanted' outside the human womb. The metaphor which Huxley uses to explain the effects of this conditioning is that of the photographic negative, which initially relies on exposure to light to capture images and on chemicals for its development.⁷⁸ Light is further employed in the process of making prints from the film. Mr Forester, the director of the Central Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, explains to his new students that "“Embryos are like photographic film [...] They can only stand red lights”" (8). In the simile, Forester, and perhaps Huxley himself, focusses on the importance of the illuminary atmosphere to the development of the individual (person or negative); however, embryos and photographic film have more in common than just their sensitivities to particular wavelengths of light.

The concept of film as negative waiting to be developed arises from Locke's philosophy of the *tabula rasa*, according to which all individuals are conceived to be the same, diverging from this innocent beginning as they grow up under the influence of their families and society. Outside of the womb, the individual's development can be manipulated, just as that of the photographic film can be in the development chamber or laboratory. Furthermore, the final image product is determined by two exposures to light. First, the amount of light to which the negative is initially exposed (when the picture is taken) determines the image on the film. Then the amount of light to which the negative is exposed after it has been developed by chemical processes determines, to a certain extent, the

⁷⁸ Photographic film is referred to as 'negatives', even after it has been developed.

appearance and quality of the final printed image of the photographic exposure. As a metaphor for the development of the individual, with particular attention to the illuminary atmosphere of that conditioning, the embryo as negative is indicative of the way in which light infiltrates that process, infiltrating the nature of that individual as well, and anticipates the way in which the ignorance of night is naturalised and reinforced by the screen of sky-signs that block out the darkness of the sky. It also offers a striking image of technology at its most disruptive.

In Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes*, the subtext of 'The Battle of the Darkness' is an unsettling uncertainty about the future of electric light which manifests itself in the intermittent flickering of the electric current during the skirmishes that take place across the city in the name of liberating the Sleeper and his people. Recounted primarily through Graham's sensory perceptions during the battle, Wells's syntactical style coincides with the literary impressionist techniques employed by Joseph Conrad in *The Heart of Darkness* (1899) to describe Marlow's confused, initial encounters with the 'black shapes' populating the depths of the Congo (19-20). Impressions function in Wells very much in the same way as the 'flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality' (195) described by Walter Pater in *The Renaissance* (1874) or the 'stream of consciousness' with its 'accentuation' and 'emphasis' identified by William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) (Pater 26, 37).⁷⁹ Consider, for instance, Wells's description of Graham's first unmitigated experience of his future city: 'Far away, high up, seemed the mouth of a huge passage full of struggling humanity. The whole multitude was swaying in congested masses. Individual figures sprang out of the tumult, impressed him momentarily, and lost definition again' (81). This image of the 'individual figure' emerging from a 'congested

⁷⁹ Walter Pater was one of the first to use the term 'impressions' in the context of sensory perception (*The Renaissance*, 195–196; Matz 13, 30, 48). As Jesse Matz notes, Louis Leroy 'coined the term [Impressionism] in his satirical review of Monet's *Impression: Soleil Levant* (1872)' (12). For more on the history of literary impressionism, see Carolyn Williams, 'Walter Pater's Impressionism and the Form of Historical Revival' in Suzy Anger, ed., *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture* (2001), 77–99; Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (2001); and Adam Parkes, *A Sense of Shock: The Impact of Impressionism on Modern British and Irish Writing* (2011).

mass' only to suddenly disappear recurs throughout the passage, repeated, distorted, and unresolved.

Wells himself underscores the importance of such impressions in the prelude to the battle. For Graham, '[a]ll his impressions were vague save the massive emotion of that trampling song. The multitude were beating time with the feet—marking time, tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp. The green weapons waved, flashed, and slanted' (81). Like the image of the emerging and retreating figure, Wells employs the repetitive 'tramp, tramp' as a resonant device that demarcates the long passages of sensory description (80, 81, 82, 83). Once the battle begins, the 'tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp' is replaced with the flickering of the lights as one 'blinding star' of a flare after another is replaced in intermittent succession. Before the battle, the city was marked by the consistency of its illumination, its artificial daylight, but in order to ensure control of the city and its people, the Council thrusts them into a sudden, pervasive darkness. For Graham, this manifests as 'a curious emotion—throbbing—very fast!' (83). The throbbing, he realises, 'had something to do with the lights' (83). Looking up, he realises that the relationship between the lights and this throbbing is more complex:

At first it seemed to him a thing that affected the lights simply, an isolated phenomenon having no bearing on the things below. Each huge globe of blinding whiteness was as it were clutched, compressed in a systole that was followed by a transitory diastole, and again a systole like a tightening grip, darkness, light, darkness, in rapid alternation. (84)

As Graham's perceptions and impressions continue, his understanding of this 'phenomenon' expands. Not only do the lights influence his perception of the events, but they influence the events themselves. For as the 'huge white globes became purple-white, purple with a reddish glow, flickered, flickered faster and faster, fluttered between light and extinction, ceased to flicker and became mere fading specks of glowing red in vast obscurity' in the immediate darkness which follows, 'this roaring darkness, a black monstrosity [...] had suddenly swallowed up those glittering myriads of men' (84).

Though order is eventually restored to the city when Ostrog takes control of the wind-vanes and thus of the supply of electric current, Graham's impressions of the battle remain fragmented and dreamlike (92). At the close of the chapter, in order to reconcile what he

witnessed with his reckoning of the events, he tells himself that ‘the awakening, the shouting multitudes, the darkness and the fighting’ must have been ‘a phantasmagoria, a new and more vivid sort of dream’ (92). This is because, as he explains, ‘it was so inconsecutive, so reasonless’ (93). And yet, as Graham and the reader realise, when faced with the uncertainty that follows, “[i]t is no dream”; this struggle between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the solid and the fragmented is a dream-like struggle embodied in conceptions and representations of modernity scrawled across the surface of reality (93).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston dreams of ‘the place where there is no darkness’ (29). While it is difficult for him to imagine what place there could be that is defined solely by its absence of darkness, the portentousness of such a place fills him with a pervasive anxiety. When Winston is apprehended for his thoughtcrimes and seditious actions, he is taken to a room where the lighting is unrelenting: the ‘humming sound and the unvarying white light induced a sort of faintness, an empty feeling inside his head’ (278). In addition to making him feel ill, the constant illumination deprives Winston of any connection to the world outside the Ministry of Love and of any awareness of the passing of time: ‘[h]e did not know how long he had been there; some hours, at any rate; with no clocks and no daylight it was hard to gauge the time’ (260). His co-worker Ampleforth, also imprisoned there and giving the impression that imprisonment was not exceptional but inevitable, confesses to

Winston that “[t]here is no difference between night and day in this place. I do not see how one can calculate the time” (266). But time is not necessary in the carceral state. Indeed, the atemporality of the prison lends a timelessness to the entire dystopia: a gloomy greyness that extends beyond the span of the individual life, forever.

The conditions of his imprisonment are meant to intimidate him, degrade him: ‘[t]hey slapped his face, wrung his ears, pulled his hair, made him stand on one leg, refused him leave to urinate, shone glaring lights into his face until his eyes ran with water’ (277). As Orwell explains, ‘the aim of this was to simply humiliate him and destroy his power of arguing and reason’ (277). The space Winston had made for himself in the darkness and silence of his room—the space where he could rebel against the Party and ideals—is gradually annihilated. The incoherence of this surveillance society infiltrates his mind, for

‘[s]ince the moment when they arrested him he had not seen darkness or daylight’ and ‘his memories [thenceforth] were not continuous’ (275). Though Winston had earlier established that he needed the darkness and quiet of his bed after the current had been switched off at twenty-three hours to ‘think continuously’, the discontinuity of his mental processes is here exasperated and amplified by the constant illumination which troubles his sleep (125). Indeed, he also had ‘memories of another kind’ that ‘stood out in his mind disconnected, like pictures with blackness all round them’ (278).

It is in such moments that the carceral conditions of the surveillance society are made as explicit as possible and that Winston is the least resistant to them—‘[h]e was in a cell which might have been either dark or light, because he could see nothing except a pair of eyes’—and the synecdochical eyes of Big Brother begin to haunt his sleep, his most private and unconscious moments (278). Having accessed and eradicated the resistant aspects of Winston’s self, Big Brother has asserted the ultimate control over the individual. When Winston emerges from the Ministry of Love, he is no longer himself. He does not see himself as the true believer that O’Brien hoped to make him and he is reassured that, for the first time in his memory, he is able to sleep and dream more coherently, more happily (316). Though he experiences some nostalgia, it is no longer painful, he is able to drift listlessly through his daily life, wilfully ignorant to the ways in which the torture has reprogrammed him, until that ultimate moment when he learns to love Big Brother, having unknowingly extirpated the self. While this is an extreme instance of the influence of artificial illumination on the body, it is also indicative of the power/power relationship at work in Orwell’s novel. For, the use of artificial light by the totalitarian state (or individuals) to reduce and, in some cases, annihilate individual autonomy illuminates one of the central concerns of dystopian fiction: the disruptive and destructive potential of technology.

The Dystopian Power/Power Dynamic

The power/power relationship proposed by dystopian fiction at the close of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century dramatises contemporary anxieties about the role technology and science may play in the life of the individual and in the way in which

society is structured. While Wells, Huxley, and Orwell explore this relationship in an anticipated, fictional future, much of the way in which they depict technology, in particular the electric light and its influence on the body, is informed by historical concerns and contemporary observations. Indeed, their anticipations have proved eerily prescient, as, in the twenty-first century, the individual has become complicit in technology's superintendence over the body.

As this chapter has considered, in Wells, though electric light supplements the power of the authoritarian state as an exciting and emerging technology, the electric light is also imagined as dominating the future lightscape of the city—a lightscape that informs subsequent dystopian depictions of the city. And yet, while questions of lighting and autonomy were prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the depiction of electric light in dystopian fiction is more than an ostensible extension of the political control exerted over individuals in totalitarian states, for it serves to question the association of electric light with modernity and the dominant narratives associated with technology. This is particularly the case in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where the threat of total illumination and its consequent atemporality—disrupting the connection between past and present inherent in the concept of modernity—is typified by the idea of the ‘undark’. By considering how this power/power relationship manifests in these novels, it is possible to recover an understanding of how the relationship between the individual and electric light, the state, and the city were conceived in a very limited sense—in dystopian fiction—and how these relationships can be exploited.

SURVEILLING LIGHTS

In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,
On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,
And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,
Risking enchantment. (T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker', ll. 90–94)

The above passage from T. S. Eliot's 'East Coker' sets the speaker in a liminal, primordial space, between the real and the imagined, between what can be known and what escapes understanding. This image of the 'dark wood' succeeds a passage in the poem addressing the 'limited value' found in 'the knowledge derived from experience' such that this 'knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies' (ll. 83-85). Concerned with deception of the 'wisdom of age', the speaker redresses the knowledge-light binary, offering this bleak conclusion: 'the knowledge of dead secrets / Useless in the darkness into which they peered / Or from which they turned their eye' (l. 76, ll. 80-82).

Returning to this binary in the next stanza, the speaker emphasises the precariousness of his position by multiplying the dangers of the 'dark wood' into the 'bramble' and the 'grimpen' (ll. 91-92). The dangers of this place, reminiscent of the archetypal threats common to fairy tales such as Sleeping Beauty or Hansel and Gretel, are themselves rendered both more tangible by the lack of 'secure foothold' and more tenuous, being 'menaced by monsters' (l. 92, l. 93). To be here, '[i]n the middle', is to be vulnerable, '[r]isking enchantment', but also open to the possibility of the uncertain (l. 94). The 'fancy lights' in line 93 have variously been read as ignis fatuus, fairy lights, and imagined lights and understood as an image further connecting the passage to the world of fairy tales, calling to mind the St. Elmo's fire, will-o'-the-wisp, and hobby lantern of nineteenth-century European folklore (Moody 215; Scofield 219; Cameron 147–148).

Taken together with the 'grimpen', Eliot's 'fancy lights' direct the reader to make connections in an entirely different literary tradition: that of detective fiction. The word 'grimpen' appears in only one other text, though it is there a proper rather than a common noun: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), where it is the name of a

hamlet in Dartmoor and home to the novel's Dr Mortimer. Indeed, the 'dark cliff, with ferns and brambles growing in its niches' visible from Baskerville Hall is none other than the 'great Grimpen Mire', where "[a] false step yonder means death to man or beast" (Conan Doyle 67; Baring-Gould 47; 'Grimpen, n.', *OED*). Relevant here is Watson's observation that '[l]ife has become like that great Grimpen Mire, with little green patches everywhere into which one may sink and with no guide to point the track' (73). In his use of 'grimpen', Eliot draws on the ready analogy Watson makes between the mire and the epistemological uncertainty he faces, to reaffirm the themes of the poem. While there is no clear way out of the 'grimpen' of Eliot's poem—only the 'wisdom of humility'—, in Conan Doyle's novel, a concealed candle is used by Selden, an escaped convict living on the moor, to guide him safely to and from his hiding place (l. 99).

Even following the 'tiny point of yellow light', the way across the mire is uncertain: 'sometimes the glimmer seemed to be far away upon the horizon and sometimes it might have been within a few yards' of Watson and Sir Henry (94). They discover a 'single candle burning there in the middle of the moor, with no sign of life near it—just the one straight yellow flame and the gleam of the rock on each side of it' (95). As the candle is only visible 'in the direction of Baskerville Hall', Watson surmises that the candle served as a 'signal light'. Long a sign of the clandestine from tales of smugglers, highwaymen, and runaways, the light in the darkened window and, its interlocutor, the light in the darkness beyond, the signal light was also used for naval and military communications. The fire from torches and the flames from candles had been used in lighthouses to communicate the boundaries of harbours from ancient times. In the eighteenth century, as seafaring became commercialised, lighthouses were increasingly used to warn ships away from treacherous rocks and reefs, illuminating rough waters during bad weather.⁸⁰ By the late nineteenth-century, however, signal lights were an established method of communication during military engagements or

⁸⁰ The Pharos of Alexandria, built during the reigns of Ptolemy I Soter and Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt, marked the mouths of the harbour and is, perhaps, the most iconic lighthouse in history (Beaver 9–13; Brox 49).

covert operations—a technology of intelligence supplemental to telegraphy, heliography, and flag semaphore.⁸¹

With exceptions like the solitary candle in Conan Doyle's mire, the predominant literary representation of the signal light in the late nineteenth century is as a means of military communication. Invasion fiction, in particular, progressively establishes the signal light as a literary trope. In the novels of William Le Queux, for instance, the signal light comes to be associated with the threat of enemy invasion, as the invading forces use lights to convey the movement of troops and information. The signal light is a relatively discrete form of communication; though its messages are visible, open to interception and interpretation, they are accessible only to those able to decipher them. Thus, though the signal light communicates information, it also has the potential to destabilise the association between light, vision, and knowledge, for what can be seen is not necessarily understood.

In the spy fictions with which this chapter is concerned, the destabilisation of the association between light, vision, and knowledge is extended to the street light, which is often an aid to surveillance. In this sense, spy fiction represents a departure from its literary precursor, invasion fiction (Hepburn, *Intrigue*, 10, 11). For, in Le Queux's novels, as I will discuss in greater detail below, light tends to be decipherable and knowledge is treated as accessible and definite. However, in the narrative world of double agents, fifth columnists, *agents provocateur*, and anarchist nightmares, nothing is what it seems and little can be known with any certainty—even where the reader is concerned. Reading spy fiction (and reading in spy fiction) is a act of deciphering; an understanding of the genre's development and conventions can help to process the epistemological uncertainties introduced by the

⁸¹ Karl Gauss in Hanover in 1821 and the British Royal Engineers in 1822 were the first to use mirrors or polished metal to direct rays from sunlight as a means of communicating geographical and geological surveying; in 1862, Major Francis John Bolton (Army) and Lieutenant Phillip Colomb (Royal Navy) developed Morse code for signal lamps, borrowing the burning lime lights of theatre—in Colomb's words, 'the best for distant signals'—and adding a shutter to create the short and long flashes. From 1880 until 1915, Begbie lamps, using the light from burning kerosene and paraffin augmented by a lens, were used in British military and naval campaigns; the Aldis lamp, using carbon arc lighting technology was so bright that it could be used to signal in daylight, was first used during WWI; the Lucas signal lamp, adapted from Joseph Lucas Ltd.'s oil and acetylene lamps for bicycles—the very popular 'King of the Road' came out in 1905—was first used in 1916 (Colomb 374; Woods 208–211; Marvin 185–187).

novel's intricate plots and ambiguous characters. As we shall see, in Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), during his amnesia, Arthur Rowe's persistent knowledge of spy fiction and its conventions helps him to correctly interpret the evidence that will reveal his true identity and to uncover the plot in which he has become entangled. Spy fiction, perhaps more than any other genre, relies on a system of codes and ciphers.

In considering the signal light, the street light, and the light in the window in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), Greene's *The Ministry of Fear*, and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948), I will explore light's resistance to epistemological certainty. However, since these are novels that often resist definition, it is worth also examining the ways in which they transgress the genre of spy fiction. In this chapter, I will identify two ways in which light is used in these novels: light as a signal and light as an aid to surveillance. I will begin with the development of the genre of spy fiction at the end of nineteenth century and an overview of the signal light in invasion fiction. Building on my discussion of surveillance in the previous chapter, I will reconsider the association of light with social order, examining how Conrad and Chesterton problematise surveillance. Then, turning to Bowen's representation of the Blitz, I will look at the way in which light becomes a symbol of individual autonomy in the context of state-imposed lighting restrictions during the Second World War, when the boundaries between self and other were particularly permeable. Finally, returning to *The Ministry of Fear*, I will detail how Greene's re-reading of Le Queux's influence on spy fiction and British policy reveals a convergence of fiction and reality.

From a single flicker of light, the reader extrapolates an intelligible system, a world dazzling with meanings so plentiful that is impossible to know what degree of interpretation will prove adequate to organise those meanings. (Allan Hepburn, *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture*, 61)⁸²

Though the first novel to feature a spy is James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy* (1821), according to Allan Hepburn, '[e]spionage is not strictly a novelistic phenomenon, nor a twentieth-century one. Literature and spying have a long intertwined lineage' (*Intrigue*, 18).

Drawing on examples as various as the Bible, *The Iliad*, *Hamlet*, Jonson's *Volpone*, Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*, *Harriet the Spy*, and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, he divides literary espionage into the generous categories of 'politically motivated spying' and 'domestic surveillance', explaining that '[s]tate secrets motivate the former, curiosity the latter' (18–19). Indeed, in fiction, many narratives are defined and driven by the watching of certain persons by another individual. Lucy Snowe's constant watching of M. Paul in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and Mr Guppy's and John Jarndyce's watching of Esther in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* most definitely define and drive their respective narratives. But watching alone does not make an individual a spy: he or she must also gather information on the subject being observed. If one considers the deliberate monitoring of movements and unwanted prying into family history to be information gathering, however benign and romantically motivated, then Lucy Snowe, Mr Guppy, and John Jarndyce perform a kind of spying that might qualify as Hepburn's 'domestic surveillance'.

Spying, espionage, and surveillance all have distinct meanings, though they are related and are sometimes used interchangeably. As these terms underpin the definitions of spy fiction I will outline, it is worth briefly considering them here. 'To spy' (from the Old French *espier*) was in use as early as the mid-fourteenth century. The most common usages of 'spying'— 'to watch (a person, etc.) in a secret or stealthy manner' or 'to keep under observation with hostile intent' and 'to (seek to) discover or ascertain by stealthy observation'—have not significantly altered over the last six hundred years ('spy, v.', *OED*).

⁸² Hepburn is referring to John le Carré's novel *A Perfect Spy* (1986), in which the main character, Magus Pym is a double agent.

‘Espionage’—‘the practice of playing the spy, or of employing spies’—was adopted as an English term before the 1790s (‘espionage, n.’, *OED*). Though coeval to ‘spying’, the concept of ‘surveillance’ is far more nuanced and less-widely applicable. It can designate the ‘watch or guard kept over a person’, especially ‘over a suspected person, a prisoner, or the like’; ‘spying’; ‘supervision’; and, more narrowly, ‘supervision for the purpose of direction or control’ or ‘superintendence’. As a concept, ‘surveillance’ emerged from the post-revolutionary ‘surveillance committees’ established during the Terror in France, though it is also closely connected to the rise of the police in early nineteenth-century England (‘surveillance, n.’, *OED*). While the role of surveillance in spy fiction is considered more fully later in this chapter, for now it suffices to further distinguish it from acts of ‘spying’ or ‘espionage’, wherein the former is made possible by a careful balance between observation and control not present in the latter two.

I would like to introduce a fourth term, not yet used in other critical literature on spy fiction, that amplifies the association between observation and control already inherent to surveillance. ‘To surveil’ (from the Old French verb *surveiller*), meaning to ‘exercise surveillance over (someone)’ or to ‘subject (someone) to surveillance’, the term ‘surveilling’, did not emerge until the 1960s and is primarily used in an American context (‘surveil, v.’, *OED*). Inherent to the idea of surveilling is an intensified relationship between observation and control and, consequently, between the subject of surveillance (who or what is seen) and the surveilling subject (who is seeing). This is evident in the way that, as a gerund, ‘surveilling’ functions as either a present participle, emphasising the ongoing nature of the act, or as a verbal noun, transforming the act into the grammatical subject of the sentence. Taken together, these definitions will serve to inform my reading of the many attempts to define spy fiction based on structure, themes, historical contexts, as well as its relation to other genres of literature.⁸³

⁸³ Notable critical overviews of spy fiction include David Stafford’s ‘Spies and Gentlemen: The Birth of the British Spy Novel’ (1981), Michael Denning’s *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (1987); Allan Hepburn’s *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (2005); H. R. F. Keating’s *Whodunit?: A Guide to Crime, Suspense, and Spy Fiction* (1982), and Bruce Merry’s *Anatomy of the Spy Thriller* (1977), as well as David Seed’s ‘Spy Fiction’ (2003).

John Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg's proposal, that spy fiction must be 'a story whose protagonist has some primary connection with espionage' (5), yokes the genre's definition to plot. This opens up a range of narrative possibilities involving amateur secret agents, double agents, *agents provocateur*, informants, spymasters, cryptographers and cryptanalysts, traitors, and fifth columnists. They trace the 'evolution of the secret agent genre in fiction' from the 'nineteenth-century colonial adventure story' to 'an increasingly complex exploration of the psychological, philosophical, and cultural significance of clandestinity' (22, 25). Also interested in the genre's evolution, David Stafford identifies 'the changing state of international law and order in the dying days of Victoria's reign' and the subsequent development of 'overt and covert intelligence' as the two external factors motivating the differentiation of spy fiction from its predecessors: detective, sensation, adventure, and invasion fictions (492, 493).

For David Seed, the most significant differentiation is that between spy fiction and detective fiction, as both narratives often involve some form of investigation. Detective fiction, he explains, hopes to solve 'a discrete crime', whereas the investigation in spy fiction hopes to uncover some 'covert action', such as espionage by a foreign power, a double agent leaking intelligence to the enemy, or a bomb or other terror plot by domestic anarchists, revolutionaries, or terrorists (121). In spy fiction, the intelligence agent must gather information and decipher codes in order to unravel the clandestine threats from a complex web of international relations in hopes of protecting the nation. The discovery of covert action can either affirm the authority of the agency, group, or nation for which the agent is working or it can subvert or challenge it.

In *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (2005), Hepburn proposes that spy fiction be further distinguished from detective fiction according to the type of reading and interpretation each genre requires. Whereas detective fiction is 'about exegesis (clues, typically objects and instruments, require literal reading in a literal order as realism)', spy fiction is 'about

hermeneusis (codes, typically numbers or words, require decipherment as allegory)' (25).⁸⁴

An allegorical reading is needed, as Hepburn suggests, because thrillers 'inculcate the impossibility of truth and commitment within ideology'; the 'objects for examination and analysis' in such narratives are not the 'motives and crimes' of detective fiction but the 'betrayal and doubleness' of espionage (25). In using the literary analogy of *hermeneusis* and *exegesis* to make this distinction, he places the emphasis of determining the genre of a novel on the act of reading. Hepburn does not suggest, however, how an allegorical reading might be performed and whether such a reading takes place on a diegetic level (within the narrative) or on an extra-diegetic level (outside the narrative). Other critics have made this connection between modes of reading and determining genre and, together with Hepburn's codes/clues binary, they will inform my approach to reading spy fiction.

Robert Snyder's reading of 'espionage fiction' in *The Art of Indirection in British Espionage Fiction* (2011) can help to make sense of the allegorical reading Hepburn prescribes. Though Snyder makes a strong case for distinguishing espionage fiction from spy fiction according to the former's 'reflexivity', his description of espionage fiction corresponds more closely to Hepburn's definition of spy fiction (or, intermittently, intrigue narratives), as both articulate their genres' concerns in terms of the code or enigma and its decipherment. In espionage fiction, Snyder explains, 'the protagonist struggles to decipher some central enigma while authorial concealment and protraction defer its resolution'. Consequently, readers of such fiction 'become accomplices in a metatextual drama of interpretation' (7). Extrapolating these observations to texts where an allegorical reading is required, it follows that such a reading is invited at both the diegetic and extra-diegetic level.

⁸⁴ Hepburn gives little indication of how he uses the term 'hermeneusis'. His first use of the term, quoted above, aligns it with codes that 'require decipherment as allegory' (25). He later uses the term in the context of his extended allegory of the Engima machine and patterns in narrative (proposing a mathematics of intrigue narratives), explaining that '[c]onstant adjustment of expectations during the act of interpretation constitutes hermeneusis' and that '[h]ermeneusis, like decoding, begins at nodes of repetition' (68, 70). From these references, it is difficult to determine from which tradition of criticism (Biblical, literary, Heideggerian) he borrows this term. It is more useful to substitute 'codes' and allegorical reading for hermeneusis and 'clues' and literal reading for exegesis, as Hepburn parenthetically directs us to.

Despite aligning the protagonist's struggle with that of the reader, Snyder gives no indication of how one might go about resolving it.

In 'Under Suspicion: The Plotting of Britain in World War II' (2009), Phyllis Lassner considers how the act of reading takes on a different inflection in spy fiction where a double agent is concerned. Since the double agent must adopt another identity in order to infiltrate the enemy, reading becomes integral to the spy's mission, which depends on uncovering 'double meanings in his experiences and discoveries' (123). Using the example of the double agent Michael Hearne in Helen MacInne's *Assignment in Brittany* (1942), Lassner identifies two types of reading: '[r]eading with the grain', which allows Hearne to 'decipher' the enemy's plans, on the one hand, and 'reading against the grain', which allows him to uncover his ally's collaboration, on the other (123). While the former involves a type of reading that involves comprehending, correctly interpreting, and successfully applying knowledge from the official spy book, the latter demands a reading of cultural and historical context. Arguably, both would prove useful in an allegorical reading of spy fiction, especially texts that transgress the boundaries of the genre. 'Reading with the grain' would entail an awareness of the genre's conventions and limitations; 'reading against the grain' would allow the reader to make connections beyond the genre. Thus, the allegorical reading is a means of deciphering an encoded narrative.

William Le Queux's invasion fictions tend to establish, rather than to transgress, the boundaries of genre. His presentation of the signal light as a coded form of communication that is both interceptable and decipherable, however, destabilises the association between light, vision, and knowledge and introduces light's resistance to epistemological certainty. For this reason, an allegorical reading of the signal light would contextualise this resistance not only in terms of the development of the invasion fiction genre but also in terms of Le Queux's conception of spying, espionage, and surveillance in his novels.

As I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, Marshall McLuhan's proposition that the electric light 'was a medium without a message' overlooks the language of light that develops in literature (8). Even Umberto Eco's response, that the ways in which electric light can communicate—the signal, the message, and the channel—are more sophisticated than the

light bulb letters McLuhan devises, does not take into account the possibility that light can communicate in more sophisticated terms. Le Queux's signal light, for instance, may appear to be an example of Eco's category of light as 'a Signal of information'; however, by reading allegorically, the signal light becomes an example of a light which communicates on both diegetic and extra-diegetic levels (310). While Le Queux does not explicitly address the nature of this coded communication, the following paradigm is a useful way of thinking about the different ways in which the signal light can be read. A communication can be either *specific* (an intended recipient, a predetermined meaning) or *general* (no intended recipient, meaning common knowledge or universally significant), *sophisticated* (Morse code or similar systems) or *simple* (a limited number of variations, variants of yes/no), and *indexical* (directly relates to reality, requires no or little interpretation) or *symbolic* (does not directly relate to reality, requires significant interpretation).⁸⁵

Le Queux first uses the signal light in *The Great War in England in 1897*, published in 1894.⁸⁶ The novel tells the story of the invasion of Britain by allied Russian and French forces, blaming the success of these foreign forces on Britain's refusal to militarise and conscript soldiers (79–80). Anarchists and socialists then descend upon the capital, attacking the police, looting shops, exploding bombs in Downing Street and Westminster Abbey, and burning down the National Gallery. These actions hasten an effective mobilisation and supply scheme (84–86). After the massacre at Eastbourne, the British fleet moves up the Channel to engage the Russian naval forces and intercepts a signal light, which 'flashed twice' in order to signal 'the approach of the defenders'. They are able to alter their course and take the enemy by surprise (Le Queux 148–149).

⁸⁵My terminology is here, is informed by Charles S. Peirce's discussion of index, symbol, and icon in 'Division of Signs'. Peirce defines these terms as follows: 'the most frequently useful division of signs is by trichotomy into firstly Likenesses, or, as I prefer to say, Icons, which serve to represent their objects only in so far as they resemble them in themselves; secondly, Indices, which represent their objects independently of any resemblance to them, only by virtue of real connections with them, and thirdly, Symbols, which represent their objects, independently alike of any resemblance or any real connection, because dispositions or factitious habits of their interpreters insure their being so understood' ('A Sketch of Logical Criticism', *The Essential Peirce*, 460-1).

⁸⁶The Great War first ran as a serial in Alfred Harmsworth's periodical *Answers* in 1893 (Stafford 497). All quotations are from William Le Queux, *The Great War in England in 1897*, (London: Tower Publishing Company, 1894).

While this communication is quite rudimentary (a light is used to signal position), a more sophisticated means of signalling with lights is used later in the novel. The narrator describes how, during the French forces' march towards London, the British forces use 'flags in day and lamps in night' to pass messages across long distances. These, however, are only supplementary to their use of the 'field telegraph', which, though under threat of being cut by the enemy, is still considered less interceptable than flags and signal lamps (Le Queux 494). Whether straightforward or clandestine, the visibility of lights by both allied and enemy forces renders such communications precarious, as is made more explicit by the use of searchlights both at sea and during the land invasion. The searchlights used by Russian carriers and battleships at Eastbourne, for instance, 'serve[...] only to show the [British ships] the exact position of the enemy' (151). Later, the '[l]ong bright beams of the [Russian] search-lights swept the town and neighbouring country, lighting up the turbulent streets like day' (198). Thus, though an aid to vision, the searchlight becomes a signal light in the way it communicates the presence of invading forces. Though the British later acquire search-lights of their own ('it was about quarter to two o'clock when [they ...] discovered the great dark masses advancing upon them'), the searchlight initially communicates the presence of invasion forces (277).

This interceptability of signals is a (dis)advantage on which Le Queux's invasion plots often turn. *The Invasion of 1910*, co-authored with the naval historian Herbert Wrigley Wilson, returns to the themes of *The Great War*, substituting Germans for Russians and the French as the invading forces.⁸⁷ Written as a work of 'military history', the novel details a German invasion of Britain from the east coast brought to a stalemate by the resistance force that eventually liberates London. The German invading force establishes a headquarters at Beccles in Sussex, using the 'high tower of Beccles Church' as a 'signal station' to communicate 'constantly with Lowestoft by helio by day, and acetylene lamps by night' (72).

⁸⁷ *The Invasion* appeared as a serial in *The Daily Mail* starting in March 1906 (Eby 33). All quotations are from Le Queux and Herbert Wrigley Wilson, *The Invasion of 1910* (London: E. Nash, 1906).

Beccles is only one of many church towers across the east coast being used by the Germans as a part of their signal network. Mr Alexander, the Mayor of Maldon, relates how he discovered ‘a little winking, blinking light at the very summit of the tower’ of the church (143). Le Queux’s description of the ‘winking’ and ‘blinking’ signal light inflects it with the human agency of the signal party operating the light; the wink becomes a conspiratorial communication, the blink a biological function. However, just as a wink may be understood as significant, even though its meaning may not be comprehended by an unintended recipient, so the flashes are unintelligible to someone intercepting the communication who is not conversant in the language of the flashes.⁸⁸ Thus, the signal lights in *The Invasion of 1910* prove interceptable if unintelligible, giving away the presence of a robust German communication network. The presence of signal lights, however, is not always so informative.

In *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England* (1909), a novel detailing the discovery of German espionage in Britain, the signal lights once again are used to imply and expose a network of spies.⁸⁹ Though the ‘Government refuse[s] to admit that German spies are at work in England’, despite the fact that the plans for the Rosyth naval base ‘have already been secured by Germany’, John James Jacox (‘Jack’) and his friend Ray Raymond set out to uncover the spies they are certain are at work (10–11). To do so, they travel to North Queensferry, north of Edinburgh across the Firth of Forth, near the Rosyth Admiralty offices, naval base, and dockyards. Because of the relative remoteness of the town, Raymond begins his investigation at the Post Office, the nexus of postal and telegraphic communication (16, 22).

Employing the simple subterfuge of a telegram written in German to a recipient in Berlin to avoid arousing suspicion, Jack and Raymond learn that a German working as a

⁸⁸ International Morse Code was adopted at International Telegraph Conference in Paris in 1865, two years before Bolton and Colomb developed the code for use with the signal lamp (Sauer v). Le Queux does not indicate whether the Germans are using such a system; however, even if they are using a less sophisticated system, Mr Alexander’s use of metaphor to describe the flashing of the light seems to indicate his ignorance of it.

⁸⁹ All quotations are from Le Queux, *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England* (London, 1909).

waiter at the local golf course sends frequent telegrams to Germany. While following the waiter, Heinrich Klauber, across the golf course, Jack observes him operate an improvised signal clandestinely: he lights ‘a small acetylene lamp, apparently a bicycle-lamp, with a green glass’ and places ‘it in such a position on the grass that it could be seen from far across the waters’ (23–24). From his position on the hill, Jack can see the ‘flashing white and red’ light of the Oxcars and the ‘white brilliance’ streaming at a distance from Inchkeith. While these lights are undoubtedly means of communication, Le Queux distinguishes ‘the light of Heinrich Klauber’ as ‘a signal’ that is explicitly indicative of ‘[t]he enemy [...] in our midst’, even though the identity of the recipient remains unknown (24–25).⁹⁰

Repeating Klauber’s signal light the next night, Jack and Raymond do not attempt to discover the meaning of the message but its effect. The light is a predetermined signal giving the all-clear to infiltrate the naval offices. Lying in wait there, they discover Klauber and a second operative, Josef Scholtz, making tracings of plans for the new naval base at Rosyth, which they intend to pass on to Germany (28). They also thwart the German plot to detonate the Bridge of Forth and preemptively destroy the British naval forces there. Importantly, Raymond is only able to anticipate Klauber and Scholtz’s movements because of intelligence he gathered recently in London about the leaked naval base plans and about the chief of the German Secret Service in England, not because of his knowledge of the language of the flashing light. Indeed, it is this inductive reasoning—Raymond uses the term ‘surmises’ and Jack refers to their investigations as ‘detective work’—that renders Klauber’s simple signal light decipherable (32, 15). Thus, as is often the case with signal lights as with symbols, knowing the cipher or having fluency in the coded language is not sufficient; the astute interceptor must also be a proficient assembler of contextual clues.

What makes Raymond’s success in uncovering Klauber and Scholtz’s actions so compelling is the fact that they are not agents employed by the state but amateur ‘detectives’—to use Jack’s term—operating in the best interest of the state. Their amateur

⁹⁰ Oxcars is a small rock off Granton in the River Forth. The light on Oxcars was automated as early as 1894. The lighthouse at Inchkeith, built by Thomas Smith and Robert Stevenson, has been in operation since 1804. For more information, see Northern Lighthouse Board, ‘Automation of Lighthouses’ and ‘Inchkeith’.

status was not unusual in the early years of spy fiction, for, until the 1911 Official Secrets Act, Britain had no official intelligence services (Stafford 494, 499; Cawleti and Rosenberg 42). Ray Raymond, like his gentlemanly predecessors Duckworth Drew, Jack Jardine, and Cuthbert Croom, embodied a moral patriotism and individualism that was essential to early iterations of the British spy (and counter-spy) in literature.⁹¹ For the most part, the success of the amateur spy thrust into an espionage plot by accident or careful coincidence is the result of his exercise of his exceptional character and status as a gentleman.

The two concepts of the ‘gentleman’ and the ‘spy’ may seem antithetical, but it is a contradiction identified by David Stafford as helping to address public’s antipathy towards the necessity (or even existence) of the nascent intelligence services. In literature, this contradiction manifests as the need to distinguish British spies from foreign ones by using the relatively benign designation ‘secret agent’ (Stafford 507). Thus, while the gentlemanly ‘agent’ served as ‘a symbol of stability’—the ideal individual who would never ‘be tempted by the lures of the city, vice or socialism, or be other than deeply loyal to class, country, and king’—the ‘negative connotations of espionage’ could be safely attributed ‘to the figure of the foreign spy’ (491, 501).

Unlike his contemporary Sherlock Holmes, whose reasoning skills as an amateur detective are more acute than those of Scotland Yard, the espionage skills of the amateur spy are incidental. Where Raymond is concerned, his ability to deduce the actions of the German spies is predicated on the duty he feels to ‘render his King and country signal service’ by ‘watching and unmasking the spies’ they refuse to acknowledge (Le Queux 13). Even though Raymond is not a spy in the strictest sense—we might consider him a counter-spy—his involvement in espionage marks a movement away from the speculative threats of Le Queux’s earlier invasion fictions towards more tangible and imminent ones. It also marks a move away from espionage as a theme in invasion fiction to the development of spy fiction

⁹¹ Stafford identifies Duckworth Drew, the titular character in Le Queux’s *Secrets of the Foreign Office: Describing the Doings of the Secret Service* (1903), as the first gentleman spy; Jack Jardine and Cuthbert Croom, appear in *The Man from Downing Street* (1904) and *Confessions of a Ladies’ Man: Being the Adventures of Cuthbert Croom, of His Majesty’s Diplomatic Service* (1905), respectively (Stafford 490–401).

as a discrete genre (Cawleti and Rosenberg 40). These are trajectories that are also evident in the use of signal lights as a technology of intelligence in his novels. From the directness of the lights signalling the movement of ships and unspecified communications by flag, lamp, and telegraph in *The Great War* to the ‘winking’ and ‘blinking’ of the church tower signal lights of the network of invading German forces in *The Invasion of 1910* or the improvised signal light used by Klauber in *Spies of the Kaiser*, there is a marked increase in the specificity and sophistication of intelligence being communicated, intercepted, and interpreted.

As the method of communication becomes more complex, arguably, what is communicated becomes less decipherable. This is also true of the spy in fiction itself, for rather than being seen as a prelude to invasion or representative of a foreign threat to Britain that, if discovered, can be used to Britain’s advantage, in narratives where the political and ideological motivations for espionage are less tangible or completely ambiguous, the spy becomes increasingly unknowable. As I will discuss in the next section, this unknowability is a product of the way in which light challenges social order, disrupting rather than aiding surveillance, in Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* and Chesterton’s *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

Chaos and Order

‘There is your precious order, that lean, iron lamp, ugly and barren; and there is anarchy, rich, living, reproducing itself—there is anarchy, spending in green and gold.’

‘All the same,’ replied Syme patiently, ‘just at present you only see the tree by the light of the lamp. I wonder when you would ever see the lamp by the light of the tree.’ (G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 9)

Through a seemingly coincidental encounter in the opening pages of *The Secret Agent*, Joseph Conrad suggests a relationship between street lighting and the police that informs the nature of surveillance in his novel. The encounter occurs as Adolf Verloc, the eponymous secret agent, wends his way towards the unspecified foreign embassy in Belgravia where he is to report to his employers:

A guilty-looking cat issuing from under the stones ran for a while in front of Mr Verloc, then dived into another basement; and a thick police constable, looking a

stranger to every emotion, as if he too were part of inorganic nature, surging apparently out of a lamp-post, took not the slightest notice of Mr Verloc. (11)⁹²

While the encounter described, though curious, may seem rather incidental, the connections it suggests between its incongruous elements raise a number of questions that are both immediate to the narrative and important to the larger concern of surveillance in fiction. Why, for instance, is the cat ‘guilty-looking’? Why does the police constable look ‘a stranger to every emotion’? What does Conrad mean by ‘inorganic nature’? Why does the constable only ‘apparently’ surge out of the lamp-post? What is the nature of the relationship between the constable and the lamp-post? And why does Verloc go unnoticed? These questions all arise from perceptual concerns, as Conrad’s peculiar syntax, his repetition of ‘looking’, and his use of ‘apparently’ to modify the way in which the constable surges from the lamp-post all draw attention to what is visible.

Yet, little in this scene is as it first appears: Verloc not only works as a secret agent but also as an occasional informant for the police’s Special Crimes section; the constable’s disinterest in Verloc is not because he is unobservant but because Verloc is not the type of criminal in which he is interested. In fact, the assumption that the constable *should* notice Verloc derives from a misapprehension of the way in which surveillance operates in the novel, a misapprehension Conrad gradually corrects. However, even a better understanding of this does not address the concerns that arise from Conrad’s unusual description of the constable ‘surging apparently out of a lamp-post’. Is it literal or figurative? What is the relationship between the constable and the lamp-post?

To understand the connection Conrad is drawing here, it is helpful to start by asking how the constable can appear to surge from the lamp-post. The advantages of being beside, behind, or near a lamp-post are obvious: a well-positioned lamp-post provides an excellent vantage point from which to observe something or someone on the street. At night, the observer could obscure the details of his or her figure by standing beneath the intense, concentrated brightness of the cone of light while making the most of the full radius of the

⁹²All quotations are from John Lyon’s edition of *The Secret Agent* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

light from the lamp to see some distance down the street. In darkness, the constable might thus appear to emerge from behind the lamp-post. Verloc's journey to the embassy, however, takes place in daylight, under 'a peculiarly London sun [...] in which neither wall, nor tree, nor beast, nor man cast a shadow' (9). There would be few advantages to being adjacent to a lamp-post in daylight. Thus, we must consider the possibility that the constable's connection to the lamp-post is not literal but allegorical.

Using the principles for the allegorical reading of spy fiction I set out above, of 'reading with the grain' and 'reading against the grain', on both a diegetic and extra-diegetic level, several possible readings of this scene present themselves. Firstly, there is the possibility that every incongruous detail might operate on a symbolic level. What do the cat, Verloc, the constable, and the lamp-post signify, if anything? Do the modifiers applied to these subjects—'guilty-looking', 'inorganic', 'thick'—give clues to their greater significance? If these details are significant, do they refer back to the text itself or do they point elsewhere? Looking within the text, Conrad's association of the constable with the lamp-post is qualified in several ways: he surges from it, not from behind it, though he only does so 'apparently'; and he is 'part of inorganic nature', a phrase Conrad uses earlier in the same passage, to describe the street, which had 'the majesty of inorganic nature, of matter that never dies' (11). This qualifier points towards the second possible reading, that Conrad is gesturing towards a metonymic relationship between the police and street lighting. In such a metonymic relationship, the police and street lighting are not equivalent but interchangeable, such that one can stand in for the other in its absence. In this way, a constable on a street with little or no illumination or a street light where there is no constable would have a similar effect. In theory, increased illumination would improve visibility in the streets, which could, in turn, deter criminal and liminal behaviour and improve social order.

It is possible that Conrad is drawing on a longer literary tradition of associating the police with the lamp-post, of which I will consider two examples here. One is suggested by Conrad's interest in Dickens and his portrayal of London (Ackroyd 93); the other is

suggested by Conrad's essay on Anatole France's novel *Crainquebille*.⁹³ The ardent reader of Dickens might already have connected Conrad's description of the coincidental constable emerging from behind a lamp post with the following scene from Charles Dickens's 'The Streets—Morning' in his *Sketches by Boz*:

An occasional policeman may alone be seen at the street corners, listlessly gazing on the deserted prospect before him; and now and then a rakish-looking cat runs stealthily across the road and descends his own area with as much caution and slyness—bounding first on the water-butt, then on the dust-hole, and then alighting on the flag-stones—as if he were conscious that his character depended on his gallantry of the preceding night escaping public observation. (36)

While Conrad does not reproduce this scene directly, his 'thick police constable' and 'guilty-looking cat' could be interchangeable with Dickens' 'occasional policeman' and 'rakish-looking cat'. Significantly, in the passage above and in 'The Streets—Night', the succeeding sketch, the police and policemen are mentioned four times, primarily in association with the street corner (Dickens 55, 61). What is not explicitly mentioned, but what one might expect to find, is the lamp post: it is conspicuously absent in the text, but not from the paratext. Indeed, the illustration by George Cruikshank which accompanies 'The Streets—Morning' (see Figure 4.1), depicts a woman serving tea to a man on the street under a street lamp; in the foreground, a soot-covered boy reaches into his pocket; in the distance, a man in a great coat and top hat lingers on a street corner. Though not directly beneath the nearby street lamp, this position on the corner affords him a view of the whole street. Though it is not made explicit, it is possible to read this man as the 'occasional policeman', 'listlessly gazing on the deserted prospect before him' (55).

⁹³Peter Ackroyd insists that Conrad's description of 'the city "half lost in night"' in *The Secret Agent* 'was echoing Charles Dickens's remark seventy years before in *Sketches of Boz* that "'the streets of London, to be beheld in the very height of their glory, should be seen on a dark dull murky winter's night"' (111). At best, this suggests that Conrad was aware of *Sketches*, but Ackroyd's observation is not conclusive enough to suggest a direct influence. Conrad's familiarity with Dickens's work, however, is more definite, as his father translated *Hard Times* into Polish, which introduced him to *Bleak House* (Meyers 7–8).



Figure 4.1: George Cruikshank, 'The Streets—Morning', from Chapman and Hall's edition of *Sketches by Boz* by Charles Dickens (1839), 54. Used with permission from the Victoria & Albert Museum.

In the light of this imagery, it is possible that the ubiquity of the police on the corner or beneath the street light suggested by Conrad's 'thick police constable' not only further thematises a relationship between illumination and the police extending back to the early-Victorian London depicted by Dickens, but also develops a depiction of London that is very particular to *The Secret Agent*. There is, however, another literary precedent upon which Conrad might be drawing here. In his essay on Anatole France's *Crainquebille*—a story concerned with a question of law and justice—Conrad observes that the 'description of the policeman in his short cape and hood, who stands quite still, under the light of a street lamp [...] is a perfect piece of imaginative precision' (36). Conrad's interest in the scene is in its 'imaginative precision', a quality he praises earlier, remarking on how 'the introductory chapter of the story' is 'a masterpiece of insight and simplicity'. Turning to the passage to which Conrad refers, the correspondence with Conrad's constable 'looking a stranger to every emotion, as if he too were part of inorganic nature' becomes more apparent:

He looked chilled to the bone; but, either because he preferred to be in the light or because he was tired of walking he stayed under the lamp, and perhaps it seemed to

him a friend, a companion. In the loneliness of the night the flickering flame was his only entertainment. In his immobility he appeared hardly human. (43)

Since, in France's novel this 'guardian of the peace' is very closely associated with law, arresting the vagrant Crainquebille for shouting an insult at him, the nature of the relationship between the police and the lamp-post, between the lamp-post and social order, is more definite here. Moreover, we might also connect Conrad's description of his constable as 'looking a stranger to every emotion' and being 'part of inorganic nature' with the 'immobility' of France's 'hardly human' figure.

Interestingly, this relationship between illumination and the police was one reinforced by contemporary technologies of surveillance. In *Science, Time and Space in the Late Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press*, James Mussell describes a new technology reported on in the *Electrical Review* on 7 March 1890: 'Morgan's Automatic Electric Police Signalling System' (190). Mussell explains that the system, '[a]ddressing the heightened anxiety in [the] public mind' caused by the 'gradual accumulation of undetected crime throughout the country', made use of 'the ability of electricity to bridge the space between the crime scene and the authorities, or the policeman and his superiors' (Mussell 190; de Vere Hill 259–264). The system was designed to function by connecting lamp-posts by either telegraphic or telephonic means, so that the police officer could use the nearest lamp post to call for assistance. Equally, each lamp-post would be 'fitted with a different coloured light' that would signify what type of assistance was needed. Given the limitations of the police officer at the end of the nineteenth century, what Ernest de Vere Hill describes as 'the same capabilities and powers of locomotion as the fugitive', the technology of the lamp-post 'does no more than allow the existing police force to transcend the spatial limits of the human body' (de Vere Hill 260; Mussell 191). As Mussell concludes, 'a safe space is produced, subject of course to constant police surveillance' (191). Thus the lamp-post is not only affiliated with police and with surveillance but becomes, quite literally, a symbol of order.

These suggestive connections serve to contextualise the seemingly coincidental encounter between Verloc and the police constable as one between chaos and order. Yet, such a reading is troubled by the way in which Conrad depicts the conditions of surveillance

in the novel. For, as he makes clear in the novel, pockets of darkness exist throughout the city and police constables, though a visible presence in the city, seem to exist only for the sake of appearance. As a precautionary measure after the Greenwich explosion, additional police officers have been brought in so that “[t]here’s a constable stuck by every lamp-post, and every second person we meet between this [the Home Secretary’s Office] and Palace Yard is an obvious ‘tec’” (106). Yet, though there is an increased police presence in the city, it is only in the most superficial way. Though the desired effect of the attack was to ‘stimulate [police] vigilance’, especially towards political criminals and foreign spies, this does not translate into an improved enforcement of law and order and none of the individuals involved in the plot are prosecuted (15). What is more, the explosion’s intended message fails to resonate, at least where the intelligentsia are concerned. Michaelis’s patron “‘had no idea [it] was such a grave affair’” (164). Rather, the attack destabilises the novel’s surveillance network, resulting in Verloc’s death at the hands of his wife. This leads to the third possible reading of the relationship between the police constable and the lamp-post, wherein the encounter challenges the association between light, vision, and surveillance.

Located off Brett Street in Soho, Brett Place is one such pocket of darkness. Without the ‘violent blaze of light and colour’ from the ‘fruiter’s stall at the corner’, it is ‘all darkness, interspersed with the misty halos of the few lamps defining its triangular shape’ and ‘a cluster of three lights on one stand in the middle’ (110, 200). These poor illuminary conditions, though they create perceptual difficulties, make Brett Place the ideal location for Verloc’s shop and its clandestine trade. Selling sundries as well as ‘nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines’ and ‘closed yellow paper envelopes, very flimsy, and marked two-and-six in heavy black figures’—likely condoms and other contraceptives—and contraband books and subversive pamphlets, the shop acts as a cover for more illicit activities. For, not only did the shop serve as a meeting place for London’s anarchist circle—Michaelis, the Professor, and Ossipon—but it attracted the interest of the police in a way that allowed Verloc to conceal the ‘unconfessed relations which made him familiar with yet careless of the police’ (40). For Verloc has an informal understanding with Chief Inspector Heat allowing him to be undisturbed by the police as long as he ‘didn’t go in for anything obviously outrageous’ (96).

Heat, who is responsible for surveilling London's anarchists, supplements the information Verloc occasionally passes him by placing Verloc under surveillance (72, 97). Thus, though Verloc's shop is a locus for both the criminal and liminal elements of the city, it is also complicit in their surveillance.

This balance is disrupted when the Assistant Commissioner pays a visit to Verloc in order to determine his involvement in the Greenwich plot. Several factors motivate this visit: the Assistant Commissioner's concern that Heat is protecting Verloc for his own benefit; his belief that 'the existence of secret agents should not be tolerated, as tending to augment the positive dangers of the evil against which they are used' (102); and his 'suspicion of police methods (unless the police happened to be a semi-military body organised by himself', which leads him to 'exercise his considerable gifts for the detection of incriminating truth upon his own subordinates' (86). Yet, though he disapproves of Heat's 'private affair' with Verloc ('do you think that sort of private knowledge [is] consistent with the official position you occupy?'), the Assistant Commissioner makes this visit without informing Heat (94). In order to avoid detection by the 'policeman on the beat', he must behave 'as though he were a member of the criminal classes' and 'linger[...] out of sight' (110). Though Heat and the Assistant Commissioner are working towards the same end—protecting London from foreign and domestic acts of terrorism—they have different ideas about how to achieve this. On the one hand, the Assistant Commissioner wants to expel 'all the foreign political spies, police, and that sort of— of— dogs' by making 'their employment unpleasant to their employers' (166). Heat, on the other, hopes to use Verloc to expose the involvement of foreign governments in domestic plots (154). To understand why the Assistant Commissioner's covert intervention in Heat's operation is so disruptive, it is worthwhile to briefly reconsider the role of surveillance in fiction.

As I have previously discussed, surveillance is made possible by a careful balance between observation and control. In the dystopian fictions of Wells, Huxley, and Orwell, Foucault's concept of the 'carceral archipelago'—an extension of the Panopticon beyond the prison—is a useful way of conceptualising the importance of conditions of total illumination to the authoritarian state's surveillance of the individual. However, though Foucault's

discussion of the tenets of the surveillance society established by Bentham are relevant to reading surveillance in spy fiction, the Panopticon does not account for localised surveillance. In his discussion of the failure to reorganise and totalise urban space in the nineteenth century, Otter introduces the idea of ‘oligoptic space’ to describe space that ‘lacks a central, dominant vantage point’ (Otter 74). Otter derives his understanding of the ‘oligoptic’ as a ‘multiplicity of interconnected visual spaces’ from Bruno Latour’s ‘oligoptica’—a term he developed as an alternative site of vision to the Panopticon in *Reassembling the Social* (2005). For Latour, oligoptica privilege vision that is both localised and concentrated, though they permit vision of ‘sturdy but extremely narrow views of the (connected) whole’ by the joining up of multiple discrete locations (Latour 181). However, as Otter points out, some direction or, indeed, supervision was needed in order to ensure that the characteristics of urban, oligoptic space—the ‘freedom to look and be looked at, the mobility of gaze, and the capacity to withdraw into utter privacy’—were maintained (75).

Thus, by reading Conrad’s London as an oligoptic space, it becomes evident that the city-wide information-gathering network is a fiction designed to give the appearance that information is being gathered in a comprehensive and centralised manner. What information is gathered by Heat and his constables is done through hard work, close coordination, and a strategic deployment of resources. The Assistant Commissioner, as the head of the Special Crimes division of the police, is the ostensible supervisor of several discrete units of surveillance, of which Heat’s is only one. However, any interference with the organisation of a unit could disrupt its connection to the larger whole. Heat, for instance, fears that the Assistant Commissioner’s desire that Verloc confess to his role in the bomb outrage, would ‘disorganise the whole system of supervision’ (Conrad 154). And, while the Assistant Commissioner’s actions do not directly instigate the series of events that lead to the disintegration of Heat’s system, the consequence is the same. His visit to Verloc’s shop and Heat’s subsequent visit inquiring after Verloc entangle Winnie Verloc in the complex world of surveillance. Unaware of this and unable to make sense of its conventions, she panics when she realises the contingent nature of justice and order.

Learning of her husband's involvement in the near-Greenwich explosion indirectly ('ear to the keyhole'), she neither understands the nature or extent of the relationship between Verloc and Heat nor cares what is at stake for her husband. Moreover, in not understanding Verloc's involvement in the plot and intentions for her brother, she assumes Verloc will not be pursued for his involvement in the bomb outrage and the death of her brother, leading her to end his life (192–193). Yet, until she was driven to commit this crime, Winnie was oblivious to the benign presence of police in the city. Altered by her guilt, she immediately begins to assume she has been discovered by 'the constable on the beat' who happens to peer into the Verloc's shop shortly after the murder as a part of his regular patrol (209). While waiting for Comrade Ossipon to turn out the light still burning in the parlour, Winnie believes she has been seen by the police and suddenly rushes back into the shop. She and Ossipon cower behind the shop door as the constable's 'footsteps approached'; theirs was 'the attitude of deadly fear' (209). The focus of the narrative shifts away from Winnie and Ossipon in order to corroborate these fears:

The constable on the beat had in truth seen something of Mrs Verloc; only coming from the lighted thoroughfare at the other end of Brett Street, she had been no more to him than a flutter in the darkness. And he was not even quite sure that there had been a flutter. He had no reason to hurry up. On coming abreast of the shop he observed that it had been closed early. There was nothing very unusual in that. The men on duty had special instructions about the shop: what went on about there was not to be meddled with unless absolutely disorderly, but any observations made were to be reported. There were no observations to make; but from a sense of duty and for the peace of his conscience, owing to that doubtful flutter of the darkness, the constable crossed the road, and tried the door. (209–210)

Here, light is disruptive to the possibility of order in Brett Place, as perceptual uncertainties created by the street's deficient illuminary conditions are an impediment to vision: Winnie becomes 'a flutter in the darkness', a trick of the light and of the constable's mind. This is emphasised by the fact that the constable feels '[t]here were no observations to make' (209–210).

As an outsider to surveillance, Winnie is not aware of these conditions. Rather, she is working from the assumption that there is a near-omniscient network of surveillance in the city and that the appearance of this constable at such an inconvenient moment is not a

coincidence. Indeed, the mere feeling of being watched and of being caught up in some larger plot from which there seems to be no escape is enough drive Winnie to suicide. What she does not realise is that the light visible through the shop window, a signal of her presence in the shop or its dwelling, would be a deterrent to a constable with orders to report but not to interfere; the distance of the constable from the shop and the poor street lighting contribute to his perceptual uncertainty. And yet, the constable's very presence in the road alarms Winnie: "If he comes in kill me—kill me, Tom", she says. Her concerns, however, are proved false when '[t]he constable moved away, flashing as he passed the light of his dark lantern, merely for form's sake, at the shop window' (210). By demonstrating that though light often facilitates surveillance it is not always an aid to it, Conrad effectively destabilises the relationship between light, surveillance, and order. Thus, we might read the relationship between the lamp-post and 'thick police constable' as being one of contingency.

This contingent relationship is one explored by G. K. Chesterton in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Chesterton conceived his novel as a satire of fin-de-siècle Decadence and as an allegorical revision of a moment of religious and personal enlightenment. Published in the year following Conrad's novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday* is a spy novel gone wrong, with a byzantine plot that defies comprehension, let alone summary. In the novel, Gabriel Syme, 'a poet who had become a detective', infiltrates the Anarchist Council at the behest of the diabolic poet Lucian Gregory, adopting the codename Thursday (Chesterton 33).⁹⁴ Syme is then recruited to join a covert anti-anarchist police unit known as the 'New Detective Corps'. Over the course of the novel, five of the other six council members are gradually revealed to be members of this same unit, each employed in similar circumstances by 'the man in the dark room', each operating with the same mission and without knowledge of one another's true identities (146). This subterfuge has only been a distraction from uncovering the only true anarchist amongst them: Lucian Gregory (Monday), 'the destroyer' (171). As the double agents close in on the anarchist, all pretension to reality within the novel begins to fall away;

⁹⁴All quotations are from the Atlantic edition of *The Man Who Was Thursday* (2008).

a chase through the London Zoo devolves into a highly chaotic carnival, complete with allegorical costumes. There is a reason Chesterton gave the novel the subtitle *A Nightmare*.

In the novel, Gregory reduces the whole of human existence to the simple binary of the lamp-post and the tree: ‘There is your precious order, that lean, iron lamp, ugly and barren; and there is anarchy, rich, living, reproducing itself—there is anarchy, spending in green and gold’ (9). Syme’s reply—‘just at present you only see the tree by the light of the lamp. I wonder when you would ever see the lamp by the light of the tree’—presents an absurd challenge to the assumptions this binary makes (9). Does the lamp-post really represent order? And is the tree, arguably a part of the order of nature, really indicative of anarchy? While this conversation continues on from an earlier one about the relationship between the artist and the anarchist and whether they are really the same thing (“‘An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything’”), the two are operating on a symbolic level. Gregory’s observation might seem a bit facile, associating an inorganic, man-made object with order and an organic, natural object with anarchy. However, in a single, poetic interchange, Chesterton is able to suggest that the lamp-post (and, consequently, light) can be subverted as a symbol of order, for it brings with it the threat of epistemological uncertainty. Chesterton never fully addresses the concerns these questions raise, though, over the course of the narrative, he effectively destabilises the association between light and order.

Yet, in the chapter ‘The Criminals Chase the Police’, the threat of epistemological uncertainty is made real by a complete inversion of the world order. Having followed the Marquis de St Eustache (Wednesday) to Calais in order to prevent the assassination of the Czar in Paris (the Marquis is revealed to be a member of the ‘New Detective Corps’), the coterie of detectives pretending to be anarchists realises that they are being pursued by a mob led by men wearing ‘black half-masks almost down to their mouths’ (115). During their escape, they find themselves in a wood ‘full of shattered sunlight and shaken shadows’, which ‘made a sort of shuddering veil, almost recalling the dizziness of a cinematograph’ (117). The ‘patterns of sun and shade’ impair vision and leave Syme unable to determine friend from foe:

Was anyone anything? This wood of witchery, in which men's faces turned black and white by turns, in which their figures first swelled into sunlight and then faded into formless night, this mere chaos of chiaroscuro (after the clear daylight outside) seemed to Syme a perfect symbol of the world in which he had been moving for three days, this world where men took off their beards and their spectacles and their noses, and turned into other people. [...] Was there anything that was apart from what it seemed? [...] Was not everything, after all, like this bewildering woodland, this dance of dark and light? (117–118)

The epistemological uncertainty brought about by 'this mere chaos of chiaroscuro' is also emblematic of it. For, when everything is something other than it seems, it becomes difficult to separate what can be known from what cannot. What separates Syme and the other detectives from Gregory, the true anarchist, or Verloc from the police with whom he cooperates and the anarchists with whom he associates are boundaries which themselves are enforced by a relationship between self-knowledge and moderation. Since, in spy fiction, so much relies on what is seen or what is assumed to be seen that, when vision and perception are compromised, what can be known is rendered uncertain, almost obsolete. To make sense of this relationship, however, we must take a further definitional turn and consider how the concepts of moderation and self-knowledge impact uncertainty in fiction.

Self and Other

γνώθι σεαυτόν.⁹⁵

It was a time of opening street doors conspiratorially: light must not escape on to steps. (Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 46)

On 3 September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany and emergency lighting restrictions were put in place across Britain as a measure of defensive precaution against a 'knock-out blow' by the Luftwaffe. It was not the first time cities across the country had gone dark during war-time, for in the early days of the Great War, a series of emergency lighting restrictions were authorised by the Defence of the Realm Act. These related to the extinction or dimming of lights on naval and military premises, as well as in London.⁹⁶ In the two

⁹⁵ 'Know thyself!' The inscription is recorded by the Greek geographer and travel writer Pausanias in Ἑλλάδος περιήγησις (*Descriptions of Greece*, 10.24.1) in the second century AD and preserved in the *Suda*, a Byzantine encyclopaedic lexicon from the tenth century AD.

⁹⁶ Restrictions relating to lighting were first introduced to the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) in June 1915, though they were revised and supplemented until June 1918 (O'Brien 101–103). The two main regulations related to the 'Power of Secretary of State or Secretary of Scotland to require extinguishment of lights' and the

decades following the resolution of the Great War, there was an increasing awareness that the next conflict would be one determined by aerial bombardment—a conflict that seemed imminent as early as the mid-1930s. These lighting restrictions, though ostensibly for the public good, transform the individual's relationship with the state, defamiliarise the city, and establish perceptual precarity.

As early as 1935, proponents of the Air Raid Precautions department (ARP) began calling for the adoption of strict lighting restrictions in the city. Subsequent discussions regarding the restrictions were of an ideological, not tactical, nature: should the restrictions be imposed on the British people or could they be voluntarily adopted? Concerns about the lighting restrictions were framed in terms of what was at stake for democracy and individual liberty. In an article that appeared in *The Times* on 12 January 1938 reporting on the preparations of the ARP, 'Our Special Correspondent' observed that embarking on the preparations for the coming conflict would be a 'vast experiment' for the country:

The balance has to be found between central planning and leadership, on the one hand, and local authority and individual effort on the other. There is a chance to show that a democratic nation is capable of creating the discipline for defence which other nations have imposed from above through party organisations, propaganda, and uniforms. (11)⁹⁷

By framing the argument in favour of the restrictions in terms of 'organisation' and the necessity of instilling a 'discipline for defence' in the people of a democratic and putatively un-militarised state, ARP precautions become a matter of patriotism. It would be essential to the war preparations effort to get the people to support these measures, as they would be in place every day from the outset of the war for an indefinite length of time, otherwise any potential benefit from a partial implementation would be negligible.

'Power of Minister of Munitions to restrict use of light so as to increase war material production'. The act made it an offence to uncover 'any light which has been obscured or shaded', whether 'by the raising of blinds, removal of shades, or in any other way' (102). It is interesting to note that these restrictions were separate from air-raid precautions also given in DORA (114–115).

⁹⁷ Retrospectively, this comment is particularly ironic, given that both Britain and Germany used similar methods for testing and implementing the blackout. Marc Wiggan explores this more comprehensively in his thesis 'The Blackout in Britain and Germany during the Second World War' (2011).

The division in implementation between the ‘central planning’ and the ‘individual effort’ identified in *The Times* article was just as important to the precautionary strategy’s success. In order to prepare, the Home Office, the division of the government responsible for ARP measures, needed to ensure that infrastructural and technological problems relating to the implementation of the precautions were resolved and to inform the public about the precautionary measures. The local authorities were in charge of implementing and enforcing the measures in streets and public places. Individual householders, shopkeepers, and the proprietors of entertainment establishments were accountable for adopting the measures in their properties. Working together, the central, the local and the individual came to represent a nation at war—the home front—without the feeling that discipline was being ‘imposed from above’. Nevertheless, as Marc Wiggan argues, the blackout, ‘more than other ARP measures of this period was a form of social control’ (77).

Another factor to consider, though not mentioned in *The Times* article, was that significant technological and infrastructural difficulties needed to be addressed before these restrictions could be implemented on so large a scale. As gas streets lights were still widely used in many towns, the extinction of individual street lamps by hand would have to be coordinated. By this time, public and private electric lighting were supplied by the same networks, which meant that in the case of a surprise air attack, the electricity could not be centrally turned off. Staff from lighting concerns would need to remove bulbs from street lights by hand in order not to interfere with domestic lighting. A strategy meeting in early 1939 ‘concluded that 5-6 hours was the minimum time required for effective reduction of street lighting’. This was a problem that warranted further attention and, as a result, the Joint Committee on ARP Lighting Problems was formed in June 1939, comprising representatives from the Home Office, the Metropolitan Police, the Electricity Commissioners, the gas industry and the Chiefs of Staff (O’Brien 227, 227–228, 230).

By early 1938, the ARP had officially adopted the policy of ‘the severest lighting restrictions practicable in war’; illumination of 0.0002 foot-candles would provide ‘the lowest degree of visibility to hostile aircraft while providing for the safety and movement of citizens and traffic’ (Otter 170; ‘War-Time Street Lighting and Aids to Movement in Street’,

125, 128; O'Brien 91).⁹⁸ This meant that street lights would have to be completely extinguished while the restrictions were in place. In January 1938, experiments with the implementation of emergency lighting restrictions were carried out in Leicester and local authorities were informed of these restrictions and practicalities in February of that year (O'Brien 137, n. 5). As a part of the Home Defence Exercises in July of that same year, several local authorities staged further trials; on 9–10 August, London had its first experimental 'black-out' (O'Brien 211).⁹⁹

By 7 September 1940, when the first Luftwaffe aircraft began their aerial bombardment campaign against Britain, dropping bombs on London and other industrial cities, the British people had been living with black-out restrictions for 12 months. Initially conceived of as a standard of emergency lighting during wartime, the black-out became an event that, interchangeably with the term 'Blitz', came to define the experience of war on the home front. While the lighting restrictions imposed in 1915 had required the dimming of visible illumination, those in 1939 required a full 'blacking out'. Once imposed, the black-out was maintained through encouragement and enforcement. The ARP information campaign, which included the ARP handbook series as well as posters and leaflets, was one of indoctrination.

Numerous authorities, including British Railways, London Transport, the Ministry of War Transport, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the National Safety First Association, produced posters instructing the general public as to what was proper, moral, and polite behaviour: wear or carry white, let your eyes adjust to the darkness, eat carrots to improve your vision, pay attention in traffic, don't wave torches to flag buses, and most

⁹⁸ A foot-candle is defined as unit of illumination equal to that given by a source of one candela at the distance of a foot. One foot-candle is equal to one lumen per square foot (10.764 lux).

⁹⁹ Trial black-outs had been held as early as 1935 (O'Brien 91, 162, 138, 211). The term 'black-out' had already been in limited use by those working on the policy as early as 1935, though it did not become common parlance until the beginning of the war (O'Brien 137, esp. n. 3.). The first use of the term 'black-out' in publication appears to be in the 'Parliamentary Intelligence' column in *The Lancet* reporting on questions relating to air-raid prevention exercises in the House of Commons on 24 July 1935 ('blackout, n.', *OED*; 'Precautions Against Air Attacks' 281; HC Deb 10 July 1935 vol. 304 cc326-7).

directly, look out!¹⁰⁰ The most iconic of these (see Figure 4.2), produced by the cartoonist Fougasse for the Ministry of War Transport's Road Safety Campaign, features a black square filled with exclamations—OUCH! ooph!! x—x! sorry!!! OY!! LOOK OUT—to suggest the consequences of a collision during the black-out. Together with the ARP materials, these posters made it clear that leaving lights on was a sign of moral defect, ranging from carelessness to wanton betrayal of the nation. ARP Wardens were responsible for enforcing the restrictions and reporting offences; individuals found responsible for these offences would be fined (Department of Defence, *Air Raid Precautions Handbook No. 8: The Duties of Air Raid Wardens*, 10–14; O'Brien 125). According to Angus Calder, in 1943 '[t]here were over 110,000 cases involving lighting offences', though he adds that a total of '925,000 people—a rate of something like one person in fifty, though many no doubt offended more than once—were judged culpable for infringing the blackout regulations' (337).

Though this public information campaign was a form of superintendence over the individual's behaviour, public safety was a valid concern while the lighting restrictions were in place. Jane Brox reports that 'in the first four months of the blackout, 2,657 pedestrians were killed in road accidents, twice the number as during the same months the year before' (219). 'War-Time Street Lighting and Aids to Movement in Street', an article in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology* in 1941, advised readers to take precautionary measures when transitioning from 'the brightness of indoors to the relative obscurity of outside' (127). The adoption of the 'severest lighting restrictions practicable during war' caused what the authors refer to as an extended 'twilight vision' (125; O'Brien 137). In order to encourage the safety of individuals, they recommend the use of 'light traps', places such as porches, passage ways, and ante-rooms designed to prevent 'the escape of light from within', in order to allow for 'a period of adaptation' for the eye. They advise that, '[i]n any case, a wait of a few minutes is desirable before movement is made' ('War-Time Street Lighting', 125). In twilight vision,

¹⁰⁰ Many of these posters can be found in the archives of the Imperial War Museum in London. The posters I consulted include British Railways' 'Blackout—Look Out!' (Art.IWM PST 15282), The Ministry of Food's 'Carrots Keep You Healthy and Help You to See in the Blackout' (Art.IWM PST 6015), and The Ministry of War Transport's 'Why Not Wear Something White Instead?' (Art.IWM PST 3751).

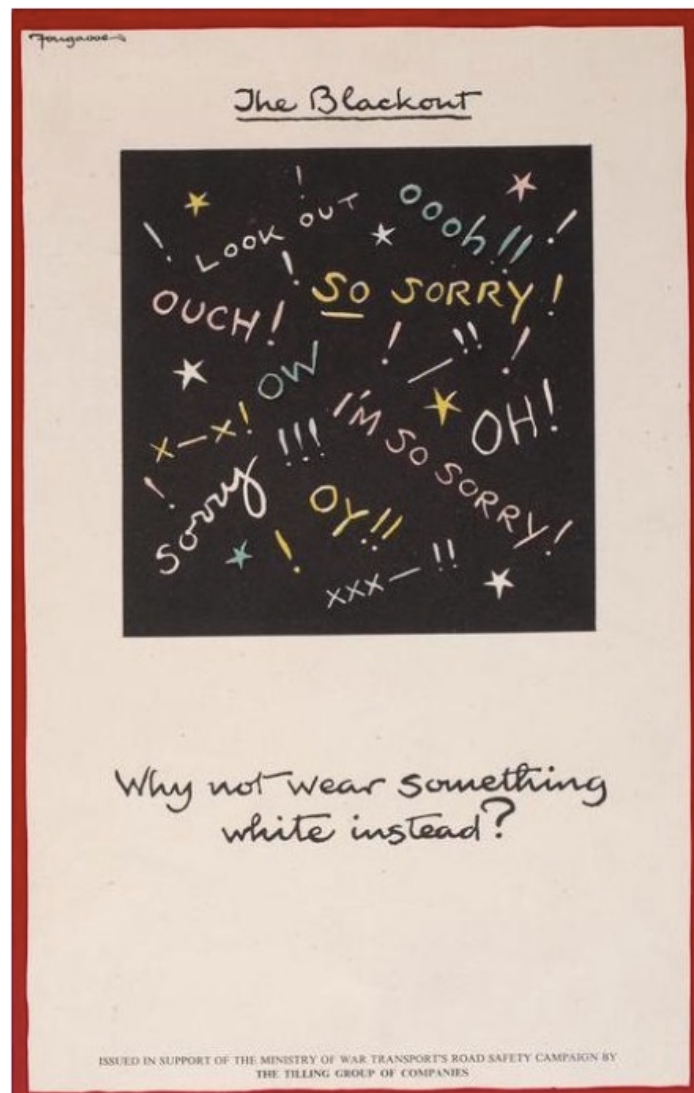


Figure 4.2: 'Why Not Wear Something White Instead?' (Art.IWM PST 3751). Used with permission from the Imperial War Museum. <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/9855>

the authors explain, '[o]bjects are no longer perceived by direct vision, but "out of the tail of the eye"' and the 'outlines of objects are never seen with the same clarity as by normal vision; they seem to appear as masses, the limits of which are less clearly defined' (125). These conditions, though restrictive and repetitive, were supplemented by the threat of air raids and were often punctuated by the raids themselves.

Though the experience of black-out vision could be unique, it affected individuals in London on a collective scale. Arguably, the absence of light in the city by night, and the threat of light escaping through a crack in the curtains were the predominant illuminary experiences of life during wartime. Yet, the black-out is an experience inflected with the state's superintendence over the individual. As Wiggan contends, '[a]dherence to the

blackout by civilians, by business, and indeed by the state, was a visible measure of wartime discipline':

[It] played an ambiguous role in reifying the wartime community by emphasising collective security, and also undermining it through the tensions it brought out between the people and the state, and between people themselves. (98)

These factors—collective experience, the superintendence of the individual, and 'twilight vision'—converge in spy fiction to demonstrate the permeability of the boundaries between the self and other. The concepts of moderation and self-knowledge are important to reading this permeability in spy fiction.¹⁰¹

On the one hand, moderation can be understood as the setting of boundaries between the self and the other, between the criminal and the detective, between the spy and the counter-spy, as well as between the reader and the narrative or, indeed, the reader and the text. On the other, self-knowledge can be as simple as knowing where you end and someone else begins, whether somatically, affectively, or ideologically. Self-knowledge can become complicated when the boundaries between the self and the other are contaminated or are blurred. This is the case when, as Petra Rau explains, the self comes into contact with a 'common frontier' (a space that brings the self into contact with the other). The necessary barriers between 'ipseity and alterity (self-sameness and otherness)' tend to disintegrate to the extent that 'a frontier [...] once crossed collapses opposition into sameness' (Rau 33, 45). The implication here is that without moderation, the power of self-knowledge can be compromised.

For these reasons, moderation and self-knowledge are very central to surveillance in fiction, but not necessarily in a straightforward manner. One might assume, for instance, that

¹⁰¹ My reading of the concepts of moderation and self-knowledge are here influenced by the Delphic maxim, 'know thyself!', allegedly inscribed on the *pronaos* of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in the fourth century BC. γνῶθι σεαυτὸν is best known today from its use in several of Plato's *Dialogues*, notably *Charmides*, *Phaedrus*, *Protagoras* and *Philebus*. In *Charmides*, the phrase arises during Critias' attempt to the Ancient Greek concept of *sophrosyne* (σωφροσύνη, a 'moderation in desires', 'self-control', 'temperance') ('Σωφροσύνη', *Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, 1751). He concludes that the dictum to 'know thyself!' instructs the moderate person (following the dictum), 'one should know what one knows and what one does not know' (167a). What I have inferred from Critias's interpretation is that the dictum serves as both an inwards directive as well as a self-reflexive directive and it is from this reading that I define moderation as setting boundaries for the self and self-knowledge as the enforcement of these boundaries.

the moderate person becomes the disentangler of mysteries, whether detective, counter-spy, or reader. In the narrative world of double agents, the fifth column, agent provocateurs, and anarchist nightmares, not only one's ability to disentangle but also whether anything or anyone can be *discrete* (or discreet) are challenged. This in-discretion or immoderation is due in part to Petra Rau's assertion that conflict itself facilitates the familiarisation of the other and the defamiliarisation of the self (38). In Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*, the dynamic between uncertainty, moderation, and self-knowledge manifests as a general inability to ascertain the truth.

The central conflict in Bowen's novel is driven by Harrison's revelation to Stella that her lover, Robert Kelway, is 'being watched' as a suspected fifth columnist and that he is the one watching Robert. Though Harrison is unable to provide Stella with any proof of Robert's betrayal, the possibility that he may be telling the truth leads her to question what she knows about her lover and about herself (36). Moreover, Harrison compromises Stella's alliances to her lover and her country by proposing she become his mistress in exchange for his silence on the matter, as he has been 'holding quite a bit of stuff on him' (36). Though it is never established whether Harrison is 'officially employed', Stella is alarmed at his readiness to 'blackmail' her (39–40). If his behaviour is tolerated, or simply overlooked, by his employers and if he is 'on to or working around the edge of, something exceedingly dangerous to this country and our conduct of war', what distinguishes him from those actually passing information to the Germans? His indiscretion directly contravenes efforts by his ostensible employers to discourage 'careless talk' and 'keep mum', for if what they have "'traced, or are tracing, a leakage of information in which x number of people may be involved. If that *is* true, it's vital—and if it's vital surely the pre-essential should be absolute secrecy, silence'" (39).¹⁰² In rebuking him, she attempts to distance herself from Harrison and the implications of his proposition: "'You've bludgeoned me with your perpetual 'we'—your 'we' is my

¹⁰² At Winston Churchill's behest, the Ministry of Information ran propaganda campaign, using the catch phrase 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' (Fox 936–934).

‘they’: what view would *they* take to your attempts to make use, for amorous reasons, of official secrets at a most crucial time” (40).

Stella also feels compromised because Harrison is constantly surveilling her. Throughout the novel, but especially when Harrison is in her flat, she is aware of the intrusive, incessant, indiscriminate nature of his gaze:

She lit up the dressing table, hummed a tune, tranquilly touched her hair. Harrison could not but be drawn to the doorway, in which he remained standing—he searched, with his eyes, the room, the built-in cupboards, the satin low bed, her face reflected in the dazzling mirror. (44)

His observations infiltrate her personal space and transcend the traditional, public locations of espionage in order to transform the domestic—the home front—into a combat zone. This infiltration is intensified by the unevenness of his sight (‘one of his eyes either was or behaved as being just perceptibly higher than the other’), as ‘[t]his lag or inequality in his vision gave her the feeling of being looked at twice—being viewed then checked over again in the same moment’ (12). For Stella, this doubled gaze prevents her from being able to read his already questionable character or to understand his motivations: his ‘uneven eyes met her, across the hoops of lamplight, the more intently for showing no change of expression’ (29). Though Harrison introduces a great deal of uncertainty to Stella’s life, collapsing the boundaries between self and other and destabilising her relationship with the state, in so doing he is only exposing the disquietude subtending life on the home front during wartime.

One such concern was with the lighting restrictions. Stella’s experience of the war, like that of most Londoners would have been, is marked by a continual blacking-out of windows. The curtains and blinds establish a boundary between the inside of her flat and the city beyond, between light and dark:

The day had gone from the moment Stella had drawn down the fitted blinds and drawn across them the deadening curtains: now nothing took its place. Every crack was stopped; not a mote of darkness could enter—the room, sealed up in its artificial light, remained exaggerated and cerebral. (56)

The curtains, enforcing the veil of darkness protecting the city from the enemy in the sky, reconfigure light as a threat to public safety. The habits formed by adhering to the restrictions—every illumination necessitated a blackening out—changed patterns of

behaviour and of association. Many Londoners were concerned that the restrictions were an unwelcome imposition on individual autonomy. As Jo Fox has demonstrated, this concern was characteristic of the struggle to define British identity during the war: 'Britons articulated their collective identity by expressing their opposition to authoritarian behavior and their skepticism of a centralized state' (949). The 'authoritarian and intrusive' imposition of lighting restrictions as well as the propaganda campaigns encouraging or discouraging certain behaviours were considered "'un-British'" (Fox 948–949). What is more, as the German air raids thought to be the most imminent threat to Britain did not occur in the first year of the war, Londoners grew tired of living in black-out conditions. In August 1940, Winston Churchill requested that the 'black-out' policy be reviewed and 'modified into one of "blackable-out" in the approaching winter' (O' Brien 365).¹⁰³

The concern that the British government were being too intrusive resonates in the reasoning Robert uses to justify why he gives information to the enemy: "'[w]e are all under orders; what is there new in that?'" (273). Though Robert favours the simplicity and authority of the Nationalist Socialist regime in Germany over what he sees as the quagmire of modern Britain and, though he is offering a critique of British democracy, there is a certain irony in the way he highlights the nuanced ideological difference between a belief in 'voluntary participation' in the restrictions and the presumption of state enforcement. At the same time, these lighting restrictions represent a single, glaringly obvious 'order' that dominates the narrative of the revelation of Robert's espionage.

The tension between individual autonomy and the authority of the state converge in the moment when Stella confronts Robert about his espionage and betrayal of their country. She is caught between the desire to signal her lover's betrayal to the world and her fear of the threat associated with that act:

She switched on a lamp, but then stood recoiling from it, fingers over her eyes. She had then to turn and the door shut behind her, so that the lamplight from here would not travel through to the bedroom window Robert had uncurtained. In her infestation

¹⁰³ O'Brien notes that Churchill had been in favour of 'substantial relaxations' when he was First Lord of the Admiralty in the early weeks of the war, though these were not introduced until 1944 (320).

by all ideas of delinquency any offence against the black-out seemed to her punishable by death: it could be the signal moment for which Harrison had been waiting—posted as he could be, as she pictured him, by some multiplication of his personality all round the house. (276–277)

Concerned that light from inside her flat not escape into the street, Stella is caught in a bind between betraying her lover for the good of her country, and jeopardising the safety of her city by signalling to Harrison with the delinquent light escaping her flat. The un-curtained window stands in a precarious parallel to Stella's potential betrayal of Robert to Harrison. Here more than anything, the outcome is contingent on the relation of illumination and perception, as well as Stella's self-knowledge and moderation.

It is interesting, therefore, that Stella understands her world as sometimes operating 'by the rules of fiction'. Indeed, during one of her encounters with Harrison, she insists to herself that these are rules 'with which life to be credibly must comply' and by these rules Harrison 'was as a character impossible', for 'each time they met, for instance, he showed no shred or trace of having been continuous since they last met' (140). Stella's assessment of his character is based, at least in part, in her assumption that he is a spy. (In fact, Harrison never confirms this, though he does encourage it. As a consequence, the reader must decide whether or not to trust Stella's inference.) She speaks of their encounters in terms of 'appearance'—a ghost or actor, as though he were a figment of her narrative. And yet, what individual is completely continuous outside the self—this is something that even Bowen, in her portrayal of Stella (and Louie, the novel's alternative protagonist), cannot achieve.

Perhaps this is the point: life as a fiction, or life understood by fiction, is only useful for moments one has difficulty understanding. In Robert's case, he uses fiction as an excuse for actions he has difficulty explaining. Responding to Stella's inquiry of whether he has leaked information to the enemy, he responds with incredulity:

'What you're asking isn't the point—it's immaterial, crazy, brainspun, out of a thriller. Am I passing stuff across? No, of course not: how could I be, why should I, what do you take me for? What do you take me for?' (190)

Robert's deflection, that her accusation belongs in a thriller, quickly reverses the accusation, claiming he has always been honest with her and wondering how long she has been acting

with him. In such a moment, there is no resolution, there is no exit, not even through fiction: for with such uncertainty, ‘there is no scale’—at least not on the individual level (190–192).

From the very moment Harrison suggested that Robert was passing on information from the War Office, Stella has struggled with the urge to betray him (35). Setting an incredibly high burden of proof—his confession, his reasoning—she finds herself unable to betray him. She hesitates, uncertain of whether she is right to signal to Harrison (who may or may not be outside the door, outside the building, waiting). This is both the consequence of

Harrison’s method of controlling her and the reality of the moment in which it becomes possible:

‘Stella! Don’t touch the curtain!’

‘I wasn’t going to—was I?’

‘I thought you were.’

‘I wanted to. Wanted to crash the window open and blaze the lights on. To think of him makes me angry—I wanted to say: “Yes, here we are, together: what else do you suppose?”’ (286)

Again, Stella is caught in a double-bind of indecision, for if she makes a signal to Harrison, she risks letting light from the lamp-lit room escape onto the street, signalling an even greater enemy, taking an even greater risk. In the end, she does not act and is unable to extricate herself from the relationship she has formed with the narrative’s true spy. The light that could have been a sign remains un-cast.

Fiction and Reality

Life has become like that great Grimpen Mire, with little green patches everywhere into which one may sink and with no guide to point the track.
(Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, 73)

The world has been remade by William Le Queux. (Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear*, 65)

In Graham Greene’s *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), Arthur Rowe declares that ‘[t]he world has been remade by William Le Queux’ (65). From Greene’s vantage point, Le Queux had indeed remade the world, both in literary and historical terms. For, the influence of Le Queux’s novels on all subsequent literature which may be classed as spy fiction is evident in the convergence of fiction and reality that occurred in the first decade of the twentieth

century. To begin with, as David Stafford explains, the publication of Le Queux's *Spies of the Kaiser* (1908) 'fuelled the spy panic of 1908–9' and incited an official government inquiry into the presence of German spies in Britain, which 'culminated in the 1911 Official Secrets Act' (498–499). In 'If England Knew', his introduction to the novel, Le Queux claims he revealed the presence of German spies in Britain. Like the fictive hero of *Spies*, he 'made personal inquiry into the presence and work of these spies' with the help of 'a well-known detective officer' and claims to have 'before [him] a file of amazing documents, which plainly show the feverish activity with which this advance guard of our enemy is working to secure for their employers the most detailed information' (6, 5). He also calls for the establishment of 'some system of contra-espionage [...] as has been done in France'. It is no coincidence that in 1909, the same year in which *Spies of the Kaiser* was published, the Secret Service Bureau was founded as a joint initiative of the Admiralty and the War Office, from which MI5 (Military Intelligence, Section 5, or, the Security Service) and MI6 (Military Intelligence, Section 6, or, the Secret Intelligence Service) were formed (Stafford 493–493, 507). Thus, the influence of fiction on reality suggested by Le Queux's role in both the foundation of the Secret Service Bureau and the 1911 Official Secrets Act, which repealed the first Official Secrets Act of 1889 and introduced sterner provisions against espionage, is indicative of such a convergence between fiction and reality (Stafford, 494, 498–499).¹⁰⁴

The binary of domestic (threats from within) and foreign (threats from without) created by the MI5/MI6 designations in the Secret Service Bureau provides further evidence of this convergence, as fictional depictions of spies informed this early ideology of 'intelligence' in Britain. Le Queux's spies tended to be foreigners who had infiltrated (or were living openly in) the country. Though instances of British spies abroad begin to develop after the Great War, as the bifurcated intelligence agencies opened up the potential for counter espionage against those foreign agents as well as the possibility of British agents

¹⁰⁴ In the 1889 Act, espionage, or the (attempted) communication of information not 'in the interest of the state, or otherwise in the public interest', was made a 'breach of official trust'; the 1911 act distinguished the act of spying (a felony) from the wrongful communication of information (a misdemeanour) (52 & 52 Vict. Ch. 52 and 1 & 2 Geo. 5. Ch. 28).

going abroad to gather information about foreign plots, to prevent such plots, or to incite their own plots against foreign states, such instances were less common in early spy fiction. Indeed, the literature with which this chapter is concerned primarily depicts foreign spies, double agents, or fifth columnists—groups sympathetic to a country's enemy during wartime. Exceptions to the focus of domestic espionage include W. Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden, or the British Agent*, a collection of short stories published in 1928. Taking inspiration from Maugham's involvement in the intelligence services between 1916-1918, *Ashenden* is thought to be the first "real" spy story (Cawleti and Rosenberg 44–45). Thus, from Le Queux to Maugham, we can begin to see an influence with transit in both directions between the realities of espionage—its practicalities and public perception—and its fictional depictions. By the time Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* was published in 1943, two years after the London Blitz, Le Queux's influence had reached an intertextual level. Greene's novel deftly plays with the conventions of spy fiction that had developed in the interwar period but gestures towards its archetypal predecessor with three significant similarities. In the first instance, Greene's enemy spies descend directly from Heinrich Klauber and his compatriots in Le Queux's *Spies*. Rather than invading an under-militarised Britain, however, the Austrian expatriates working in aid of the Nazis have infiltrated Britain by adopting British mannerisms; they betray their nationality by a slight, overly-formal use of the English language. In the second instance, the spies's covert action of stealing intelligence documents from a Minister mirrors the pre-emptive method of espionage in *Spies*, where the attempt to steal the naval plans would put Britain even further behind in its attempt to strengthen its naval forces. In the third instance, the covert action is not uncovered or interrupted by British agents but by an unwitting bystander. In Greene's novel, Arthur Rowe receives a coded message intended for an undercover agent when he guesses the correct weight of the prize cake while at the borough fête.

Rowe is less willing a protagonist than his counterpart, Ray Raymond, in Le Queux's *Spies*, though his need to unravel the plot with his somewhat fragmentary investigations is driven by his need to save his own life. However, the same duty impelling Raymond to uncover the presence of German spies in Britain has been inculcated in Rowe to a certain

extent through ‘the books of adventure [he] read as a boy’ (Greene 176). Indeed, his awareness of the conventions of adventure stories, invasion fiction, and spy novels, allows him to become an astute reader in a world that reads increasingly like a thriller. For Rowe, this change is first noticeable when he is released from the asylum to which he had been sentenced for euthanising his terminally ill wife. He describes emerging ‘into quite a different world—a secret world of assumed names, of knowing nobody, of avoiding faces, of men who leave a bar unobtrusively when other people enter’ (Greene 47). While he no longer sees the world as someone idealistic and naive, the world itself has changed, albeit not in the way Le Queux anticipated.

That the world has changed is most certainly the case when Rowe’s flat is destroyed in an air raid and he is forced to stay overnight in an underground shelter. He dreams of his mother, long dead since before the Great War, ‘when aeroplanes—strange crates of wood—just staggered across the Channel’ (64–65). Describing a pre-war world of “[t]ea on the lawn, evensong, croquet, the old ladies calling, the gentle unmalicious gossip, the gardener trundling the wheelbarrow full of leaves and grass” and evoking an interwar Arcadia (later alluded to in the chapter entitled ‘Conversations in Arcady’, when Rowe suffers from extensive memory loss), he asserts that “[t]his isn’t real life any more” (65). His awareness of this ‘fact’ is unsettling as it realises a mingling of the clandestine plots of fiction with the accounts of life in London during the Blitz that punctuate the novel.¹⁰⁵

One might even argue that Le Queux’s influence in *The Ministry of Fear* is metafictional, given the number of instances in which life is explicitly likened to thrillers (or vice versa). Indeed the convergence of fiction and reality instigated by Le Queux occurs within the narrative frame of Green’s novel, on a diegetic level. The first instance of this convergence takes the form of a self-conscious reference made by Mr Rennit, the private detective Rowe engages to discover who attempted to kill him. Boasting of his experience to his new client, he says: “I know all the beginnings. I’ve been in this line of business for

¹⁰⁵ In particular, Greene’s descriptions of the air raid and the underground shelter are incredibly realistic and sensitive accounts of life during the Blitz (28–29, 63–65).

thirty years. Thirty years. Every client thinks he's a unique case. He's nothing of the kind. He's just a repetition" (31). These "beginnings" and "repetitions" suggest Rennit's awareness of the conventions of genre fiction that define his very role in the narrative. However, despite his extensive work experience, he is only somewhat self-aware, as he ironically insists that life "'isn't like a detective story'" because murderers (such as Rowe) "'are rare people to meet'" (35). That Rowe is a murderer should not only be read in terms of irony and coincidence, as the narrative is not driven by the investigation of his discrete crime. Rather, the fact that he considers himself a murderer is incidental to the narrative, informing his character and permitting him entrance into the demi-monde of the espionage plot.

As in other novels that begin from an extra-diegetic point of reference (outside the narrative frame)—in this case the Second World War and the Blitz—there is a certain amount of interaction between the representations of reality in fiction (Rowe's experience of the Blitz) and reality external to that fiction (Greene's experience of the Blitz) as well as between the representations of fiction in that fiction (Rowe's reading of *Le Queux*) and fiction external to that fiction (Greene's reading of *Le Queux*). In Greene's novel, this interaction becomes more of an entanglement, as extra-diegetic fictions and realities collide with their diegetic counterparts. We might ask ourselves, for instance, whether we are able to read *Le Queux* other than through Greene's and Rowe's reading of his novels. This entanglement is most certainly the case when, in a most desperate moment, Rowe asserts his own readerly knowledge while trying equally to reconcile the changed world with the plot against his life to his dead mother:

People want to kill me because I know too much. I'm hiding underground, and up above me the Germans are methodically smashing London to bits all around me[...] It sounds like a thriller, doesn't it, but the thrillers are like life—more like life than you are, this lawn, your sandwiches, that pine—about spies, and murders, and violence, and wild motor-car chases, but dear, that's real life: it's what we've all made of the world since you died. I'm your little Arthur who wouldn't hurt a beetle and I'm a murderer too. The world has been remade by William Le Queux. (Greene 65)

By contrasting the realities of the Blitz with the vague conventions of thrillers ('spies, and murders, and violence, and wild motor-car chases'), Greene makes possible a metafictional reading of his novel. At the same time, he makes the case for reading spy fiction as more than

just genre fiction. This is significant beyond the immediate implications for our reading of *The Ministry of Fear*, as it offers a model for reading other novels that present themselves as unconventional spy fictions or as completely transcending classification as spy fiction.

In *The Ministry of Fear*, Rowe's familiarity with the structural conventions and genealogy of spy fiction allows him to read his way out of the morass in which he becomes entangled. He also demonstrates his ability read outside the boundaries of genre when he imagines 'the History of Contemporary Society', a collection of books 'in hundreds of volumes', mostly 'sold in cheap editions'. The collection includes clever imaginary titles—'*Death in Piccadilly*, *The Ambassador's Diamonds*, *The Theft of the Naval Papers*, *Diplomacy*, *Seven Days' Leave*, *The Four Just Men*'—each displaying a profound if sardonic awareness of the genre and its publishing conventions (66). This awareness of the resemblance of his situation to other novels extends beyond Mr Rennit's 'beginnings' and 'repetitions'. For, while these titles are Greene's invention, he attributes them to Rowe in order to demonstrate that the profundity of the character's (diegetic) readerly knowledge approaches that of the (extra-diegetic) readers.

The titles of these faux-thrillers, however, are more than mere generic allusions; they point beyond the narrative frame of the novel into the world of its reader. Marina MacKay points to such instances where life and fiction converge on or inform one another in order to argue that Greene's novel overturns that which 'differentiates literary fiction from the genre novel', (literary fiction 'resembles life'; the genre novel 'resembles only other novels' [144]). Rowe's observation, that '[l]ife has been remade by William Le Queux', is an apt one, though he is not the first to remark that fiction no longer resembles life when he writes, "[t]his isn't real life any more". His charge—that the Edwardian idylls and interwar Arcadias described by 'lady novelists [...] in books the month' were disjunctive and outdated—frames his authorial identity in terms of a generational shift, of a divergence in literary conventions and gestures towards the differentiation made by Greene himself. For Greene is indicating that not only has life been 'remade by William Le Queux' but fiction must now account for this transformation. In *The Ministry of Fear*, this transformation is enacted on a metafictional register, with references to the un-reality of the adventure stories

of Rowe's youth ('none of the books of adventure one read as a boy had an unhappy ending [...] they had no more reality than the photographs in a propaganda album') and hints that he might be better suited to being a 'detective writer' than to being a detective (176, 123).

This detection culminates in 'The Happy Man', where Rowe is convalescing in a 'shell-shock clinic in the country' under the direction of Dr Forester (109). Suffering from amnesia, Rowe is told he is Richard Digby—an identity that allows him, rather conveniently, to forget the Nazi plots he was trying to uncover and to become the eponymous 'Happy Man', something his past experiences prevented him from doing. Contained within the clinic, however, are fragments and clues from his former life and identity: Johns, one of the clinic's attendants, is really the Orthotex agent Jones (also known as A.2), who goes missing shortly after he is put on Rowe's case (110, 38, 72); the head of the clinic, Dr Forester, attended the séance at Mrs Bellair's house when Rowe was accused of stabbing Mr Cost (51); the clinic's keeper, Poole is the same man who attempted to kill Rowe by lacing his tea with hyoscine to retrieve whatever was hidden in the prize cake Rowe had won at the fête (7); when Anna Hilfe visits him, she calls him Arthur and makes reference to "'how [he] should have been'" (22–28, 34); articles in the morning paper feature stories about fifth columnists and an M.P.'s questions about plans 'stolen from the Ministry of Home Security' (119–121); the 'rubbed-out pencil marks' from Dr Forester's copy of Tolstoy's *What I Believe* beside passages expressing anti-nationalist sentiments (135); and, finally, an article in the paper about the missing Rowe being wanted by the police for an interview, accompanied by a photograph of 'a lean shabby clean-shaven man' (143).

While none of these instances, alone, might raise suspicion, taken together they give Rowe-as-Digby an unsettled, disjunctive feeling. Investigating the off-limit sick bay, where the sinister Poole makes his home, Rowe is haunted by 'a feeling of sadness and disquiet and dangers he couldn't place [...] as though something were disappointing his expectations' (138). Memories of a 'lawn and afternoon tea' come to mind, memories similar to those he associated with his now-forgotten mother and the Edwardian 'lady novelists' he no longer remembers excoriating. Rowe begins to wonder whether '[t]he nursing home was something artificial, hidden in a garden' and whether 'it [was] possible that ordinary life was like this'

(139). These feelings impel Rowe-as-Digby to assemble the unsettling fragments around him, a task that is much more like the work of a reader of detective fiction than a detective or a detective writer, as the equally amnesiac Johns suggests. It is, however, only by standing in front of a looking glass that Rowe is able to put himself back together again:

He shut his eyes and thought of Poole, and an odd medley of impressions fought at the gateway of his unconsciousness to be let out: a book called *The Little Duke* and the word Naples—see Naples and die—and Poole again, Poole sitting crouched in a chair in a little dark dingy room eating cake, and Dr Forester, Dr Forester stooping over something dark and bleeding. . . . (Greene 148)

Despite recovering from his amnesia and regaining his former identity, Rowe remains disoriented by his experiences, and not just those at the shell-shock clinic. Despite this, Rowe's experience as a reader of Le Queux enables him to penetrate the fiction of assembled identity (nationalism, enemy, collaborators) to correctly identify who has leaked the information and how. With the help of Mr Prentice, a detective from Scotland Yard, he is able to uncover the web of connections that drew him into the blackmailing plot by performing a double reading of his uncanny experiences and of the hidden connections between events and people.

Writing on a similar instance of amnesia experienced by Albert Campion, a British double agent, in Margery Allingham's *Traitor's Purse* (1940), Lassner remarks that Campion, 'in his amnesiac state [...] must learn how to spy on himself in order to detect the crime that threatens the nation from within' (118). For, though he is in an 'epistemological limbo', it is his freedom from his past identity and ideologies that allows him to 'navigate through an unknown personal, classed and political topography that conceals collaboration with the enemy' (118, 119). Like Allingham's *Traitor's Purse*, *The Ministry of Fear* far from being a conventional spy fiction. With its metafictional register and emphasis on reading, the novel cannot be reduced to its thrills, its intrigue, or its espionage.

As Rowe explains to his mother, '[l]ife has been remade by William Le Queux'. While this is certainly the case on the extra-diegetic level, on the diegetic Rowe's readerly knowledge and his generic self-consciousness do not protect him from the epistemological uncertainties brought about by this transformation. Life, he finds, is very unlike fiction. For:

none of the books of adventure one read as a boy had an unhappy ending. And none of them was disturbed by a sense of pity for the beaten side. The ruins from which they emerged were only a heroic back-cloth to his personal adventure; they had no more reality than the photographs in a propaganda album. (Greene 176)

Returning to the grimpen with which this chapter began, life, as Conan Doyle writes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, ‘has become like that great Grimpen Mire, with little green patches everywhere into which one may sink and with no guide to point the track’ (73). By problematising fiction as a metaphor for life, Greene presents reading as a way of processing epistemological difficulty.

Deciphering the ‘Three little red lights’¹⁰⁶

As this chapter has explored, the conditions of surveillance in spy fiction are very different than those in dystopian fiction. This is, in part, because of the way in which surveillance in spy fiction challenges the association of light with social order. It is also due to the way in which the texts represent and create uncertain lighting conditions. These two factors coincide with permeable genre boundaries and the collapse of the ‘common frontier’, between the self and the other. In such circumstances, reading becomes not only an act of deciphering but of self-decipherment and self-recovery. And yet, light often intensifies uncertainties of vision, which disrupts the status of knowledge in the narrative. In the end, the signal light which was intended as a straightforward means of military communication becomes a signal of uncertainty. This is most certainly the case in *The Ministry of Fear*, where ‘three little red lights’, ‘the kind of lanterns which are strung at night where roads were broken’ give away the position of the ‘[t]hree policemen [who] were digging in the centre of the tiny island’ to Arthur Rowe (184–185). Though ‘[t]he dark scene reminded him of something dark: something distant in a book his mother had taken away from him: men in cloaks digging at night in a graveyard from the moonlight glinting on a spade’, to understand the significance of this memory, Rowe must perform the ultimate act of hermeneusis and break free from his amnesiac state (185).

¹⁰⁶ Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear*, 184.

SOCIAL LIGHTS¹⁰⁷

In Darkness and in Light

‘It was the present moment’, writes Virginia Woolf of the final movement of her gender- and genre-bending novel, *Orlando*, published on 11 October 1928, a date coinciding with the very present moment to which the narrative refers (284). In *Orlando*, Woolf offers a striking representation of an historical London beginning in the sixteenth century, continuing through to the late 1920s. While waiting for his Russian lover, Sasha, outside St Paul’s, Orlando remarks that ‘[a]bove and around this brilliant circle [(the dome)] like a bowl of darkness pressed the deep black of a winter’s night’ (53). Here, night is marked by an absence of light: the ‘night was dark; it was pitch dark’ (55); the ‘night was so inky a blackness that a man was on you before he could be seen’ (56); the ‘darkness then became even deeper than before’ (56); the ‘darkness was more compassionate to his swollen and violent heart’ (57); ‘he waited in darkness’ (57).

For Woolf, darkness seems to be the watchword for the Elizabethan experience of night. What is also striking about this experience, from the perspective of the twenty-first century, is the inherent fallibility of light. What few lights were burning, ‘one by one, were extinguished’ and in the poorer quarters of the city the ‘negligence of the night watchman often suffered [the street lanterns] to expire long before dawn’ (56). In contrast, the novel’s representation of night in the twentieth century is one marked by a plenitude of artificial light. Indeed, Orlando’s reaction to the many changes that take place over the interval between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries culminates in her description of London at night: ‘[a]t a touch, the whole room was bright. And the sky was bright all night long; and pavements were bright; everything was bright’ (283).¹⁰⁸ Darkness seems to be no longer a

¹⁰⁷ Some of the material in this chapter, especially in the latter two parts, appears in ‘Public and Private Light in Virginia Woolf’s *Night and Day*’, a chapter I have contributed to *Dark Nights, Bright Lights*, ed. Susanne Bach and Folkert Degenring (De Gruyter Mouton, forthcoming in October 2015).

¹⁰⁸ As I discuss above, on page 43, Woolf’s omitted reference to a light ‘switch’ is significant in this passage. See also Steve Ellis’s discussion in *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians* (26–27).

part of this night. Yet the proliferation of light suggests a consistency that is at odds with the diverse lightscape of London in the early twentieth century, for candles and a variety of oil and spirit lamps were used well into the interwar period, setting London apart from its fully-electrified metropolitan contemporaries.

Woolf had long been interested in representing illumination, from Ralph Denham's impression of 'a room full of deep shadows, firelight, unwavering silver candle flames, and empty spaces' in Katharine Hilbery's drawing room in *Night and Day* (1919) to the 'lights of London'—the 'hard electric lights', the 'street lamps laced along dry pavements', and the 'flares roaring above street markets')—that mark Bernard's return to the city at the close of *The Waves* (1931) (*Night and Day*, 148; *The Waves*, 225). In her writing, she is attentive not only to the interplay of various sources of light but also to the gradual developments in the technology of artificial light as it was adopted in the public and private spaces of London during her life time. Woolf, however, is not alone in her exploration of such a lightscape, as its detailed and persistent representation in other novels of the period indicates. Indeed, in many interwar novels set in London, the prevalence of artificial light, especially electric light, was increasingly becoming a shorthand for the city and its association with modernity, an association the literature of the interwar period adopts and perpetuates.

I will argue that the longevity of this association is due, in part, to what Deborah Parsons refers to as the modern novel's 'preoccupation with the relation of lived reality and aesthetic form' (*Theorists of the Modernist Novel*, 16, 21), as the interwar novel in particular offers a new way of seeing the city and its illumination. Looking back to the instances of artificial light in discussed in the chapter 'Reading London's Lighscapes', it is possible to identify distinct ways in which this new way of seeing is articulated in terms of subjectivity, boundaries, connections, epistemologies, and metaphors. In this chapter, I am concerned with how light creates and transcends boundaries, how light generates and illuminates connections, how light can be a way of knowing the city, and how light becomes both a metaphor for a new way of knowing and for an evolving understanding of modernity.

The novels though which I have chosen to explore these articulations—Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day* and Dorothy Richardson's *The Tunnel* (1919), with contextual

references to E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) and John Cournos' *Babel* (1922)—are novels which are significantly occupied with representing artificial light, London, and modernity. While each of these novels are indicative of the different approaches to representing reality that define the modern or modernist novel, I have chosen to focus on *Night and Day* and *The Tunnel* because they endeavour to recapture and articulate their understanding of the past through the present moment and the act of reading.¹⁰⁹ In this way, they capture what Crary describes as an intermittent modernity. In so doing, I offer a reconsideration of how we understand the representation of artificial light in relation to London's intermittent modernity.

Temporal and Spatial Boundaries

It was a Sunday evening in October.... (Woolf, *Night and Day*, 3)

Her day scrolled up behind her. (Richardson, *The Tunnel*, 86)

In the interwar novel, boundaries are multifarious. There are boundaries in physical space as in imagined space; demographic boundaries between classes, genders, races; temporal boundaries; boundaries between the public and the private; boundaries between the individual and the mass. Light, however, permeates and pervades; it can rarely be contained. This is a fact made painfully clear when, in E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (not an interwar novel, but too pertinent to overlook), Mrs Munt warns her niece Margaret of the inevitable difficulties of the Wilcoxes moving across the way:

‘But imagine the evenings,’ exclaimed her aunt, pointing to the Mansions with the spout of the watering-can. ‘Turn the electric light on here or there, and it’s almost the same room. One evening they may forget to draw their blinds down, and you’ll see them; and the next, you yours, and they’ll see you. Impossible to sit out on the balconies. Impossible to water the plants, or even speak. Imagine going out of the

¹⁰⁹ To supplement my understanding of how light is represented in interwar fiction as well as to develop how this representation is a continuation as well as a departure from previous representations of London's lightscape in literary fiction, I draw upon (but do not necessarily refer to) George Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889), *New Grub Street* (1891), and *The Whirlpool* (1897); Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1896); W. Somerset Maugham's *Liza of Lambeth* (1897) and *Of Human Bondage* (1915); H.G. Wells's *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1899); Ford Madox Hueffer's *The Soul of London* (1905); Arnold Bennett's *The Grand Babylon Hotel* (1902) and *The City of Pleasure* (1907); E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910); Leonard Woolf's *The Wise Virgins* (1914); Joseph Conrad's *Chance* (1914); Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and *The Waves* (1931); Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay* (1923); and Henry Green's *Party Going* (1938).

front door, and they come out opposite at the same moment. And yet you tell me that plans are unnecessary, and you'd rather risk it.' (71)

Thus, just as the light escapes an un-curtained or lightly-curtained room, so the unwanted proximity and unrelenting presence of the Wilcoxes might remind Helen of her earlier romantic rejection.

From the opening sequence of *Night and Day*, describing Katharine's inner process on that early October evening, as her stray thoughts 'leapt over the little barrier of day which interposed between Monday morning and this rather subdued moment, and played with the things one does voluntarily and normally in daylight', Woolf pays close attention to the relationship of light with social conventions (3). In daylight, Katharine and the others escape into daydreams and dream worlds, keep their innermost selves secret from one another, and feel the most isolated in the crowded streets of the city. At night, the characters become more self-aware and self-reflective, feel part of a compelling intellectual community, and come to realise that the complexities revealed by these artificial lights correspond more accurately to the reality to which they ascribe than to what is seen in the 'cold light of day' (413). This is because, as Elisabeth Bronfen contends, Woolf's 'texts perfect a refusal to ban the night from the concerns of the day, even as they resist the temptation to remain in the night so as to refuse the responsibility posed by the day' (26). According to Bronfen, this a challenge inherent to the Enlightenment project itself, as 'the night—with all the fears, promises, desires, and fantasies it evokes—always contains elements of the day that precedes and succeeds it' (15). By challenging the traditional associations of night and darkness with dream, solitude, illusion, the clandestine, obscurity, autonomy, and the private and of day and (natural) light with reality, community, perception, surveillance, observation, authority, and the public, she invites her readers to question what is 'normal' during daylight hours and what is 'normal' after dark.

Light also marks transitions in time and states of mind. Richardson engages in an interplay of light with the other sensations and with memory. Consider the following passage, where Richardson collapses the entire summer into a series of sensations, of illuminations:

Before her eyes the summer unrolled—concerts with Miss Szigmondy, going in the cooling daylight into electric light and music, taking off the zouave inside and feeling cool at once, the electric light mixing with the daylight, the cool darkness to walk home in alone, full of music that would last on into the next day. (191)

Here Miriam's new experiences of the city and its pleasure (the concerts, her new clothing, the streets at night) contrast with the starkly light dental practice where she passes her working days, yet these experiences are facilitated by an increased independence brought about by the wage she earns through working. In this way, the light in Richardson's narrative subject is not just part of the aesthetics of the world she is representing, but also charged with contemporary social and political valences.

Boundaries also play an important role in the opening scenes of *The Tunnel*, which returns to elements from the opening scene of *Pointed Roofs*. As Kristin Bluemel notes, at the beginning of the first chapter-novel, '[a]ll [the readers] know is that someone called Miriam is at the center of our narrative world' and that 'she is conscious of light and shadow and her immediate physical surroundings' (4). It is worth revisiting and reproducing the passage where Miriam first reflects on her arrival to the room on Mornington Road in full here to get a sense of Richardson's narrative style, her syntax, and her punctuation:

She was surprised now at her familiarity with the details of the room . . . that idea of visiting places in dreams. It was something more than that . . . all the real part of your life has a real dream in it; some of the real dream part of you coming true. You know in advance when you are really following your life. These things are familiar because reality is here. Coming events cast *light*. It is like dropping everything and walking backwards to something you know is there. However far you go out, you come back. . . I am back now where I was before I began trying to do things like other people. I left home to get here. None of those things can touch me here. (13)

Several scholars have tried to divine what Richardson means here by the pronouncement 'Coming events cast *light*', including Woolf in her review of *The Tunnel*. She equates light with 'narrative' in its loosest sense, she gives us a hint of the direction in which we may go. For her, 'the figures of other people on whom Miriam casts her capricious light are vivid enough, but their sayings and doings never reach that degree of significance which we, perhaps unreasonably, expect' (Woolf, *Essays* II, 12). Woolf here is alluding to her own preference to free indirect discourse, best used in *Mrs Dalloway*, but already starting to appear, at least experimentally, in *Night and Day*. But there is an alignment between Richardson's use of 'interior monologue'—to use the term she preferred over Sinclair's 'stream of consciousness, which Sinclair borrowed from William James—and this casting of

the light.¹¹⁰ Rachel Potter, in *Modernist Literature* (2012) takes account of the temporal and spatial aspects of Richardson's narrative style and suggests that this passage depicts a competition between the 'self as an entity defined in and through time—Miriam's lived part, dream part, future part', and 'the self as something realised through objects' (90). Potter contends that '[r]eality is both connected to that which is familiar—the room, the streets of the city—and to forms of self-understanding which involve an ability to see the history and the trajectory of one's life clearly' (90-91). While she does not go as far as to suggest that the glow cast by the light is a form of 'presentiment', Potter does not consider how light transcends the temporal and the spatial.

Deborah Parsons examines this passage in *Theorists of the Modernist Novel* (2007) in terms of the 'layers of conscious awareness' which 'are interwoven' in it: the 'intuitive', the 'perceptual' and the 'intentional' (59). Though she is here concerned with Richardson's narrative strategies rather than with the effect of the light in the narrative, she returns to this topic at length in 'Subject, Object and the Nature of Reality: Metaphysics in Dorothy Richardson's *Deadlock*' (2009).¹¹¹ Noting that '[m]etaphysical questions about the nature of being and of reality pervade *Pilgrimage* as a whole', Parsons is interested in the 'historical fold' in Richardson's perception between the novel's diegetic and extradiegetic times (8). This 'historical fold results in the drawing together of these different moments; the representations of Miriam's exploration of the nature of self and reality through her exploration of Idealist philosophies in the early 1900s with the narration of that process in the 1920s' (13). She turns to Emerson's philosophy of transcendentalism, with which Richardson (and Miriam) were familiar, to account for the interpenetration of perception and the external world of sense data (materialism) and the inner world of consciousness (Idealism) in the passage from *The Tunnel*.

¹¹⁰ May Sinclair is the first to apply the term 'stream of consciousness' to literature in her April 1918 review, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson' in *The Egoist*. See Suzanne Raitt's *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), where she observes how the term, borrowed from William James's *Principles of Psychology*, was used 'as a matter of course' at that time and that Sinclair simply associated it with a new strand of fiction increasingly focusing on psychological realism and interiority (219).

¹¹¹ As I note in the bibliography, Parsons has also published under the name Longworth.

According to Emerson, Parsons finds that ‘there are certain aspects of knowledge that the mind can directly perceive, unmediated by the senses’ (22). This knowledge takes the form of the light cast by Richardson’s ‘coming events’, where the ‘intuitive sense of an ultimate and original inner self [is] at one with rather than separate from conscious experience’ (22). In this way, objects are ‘the correlates of [the Idealist’s] consciousness’; the ‘sensory *and* spiritual oneness of consciousness and its objects is reflected in Miriam’s sudden sense of self-illumination’ (22, 23). Parsons’s conclusion, that the ‘apparent familiarity of the room is something more than the mental trick of *déjà vu*’ is quite convincing and leads me to conclude that in Richardson, light can serve to shape the readers’ temporal and spatial experiences (23). Details become, as it were, expressions of the fugitive (or fluid) self and, unlike with Bennett, as discussed in the earlier chapter of this study—‘Reading London’s Lightscape’—are not incidental to character but contingencies of individual consciousness. In this way, Richardson pushes the boundaries of what Woolf would describe as the ‘semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end’, between the self and the other (160–161).

Woolf, too considers the social implications of the boundaries between public and domestic spaces established by different modes of illumination, though in a very different manner to that employed by Richardson. Ralph’s ingress to the intimate drawing room of the Hilbery’s well-appointed house on Cheyne Walk in Chelsea marks the crossing of another boundary, between public and private, domestic space. This transgression of sorts is accompanied by a change in lighting, for the room is ‘all silver where the candles were grouped on the tea-table, and ruddy again in the firelight’ (4). Not only is the paradigm of lighting different, but so are the sources of illumination. Street lighting, for instance, is designed for general, distance perception. Instead of multiplying the number of lights at each source, the intensity of each individual light is increased. The drawing room, on the other hand, is lit with numerous candles, supplemented by the light from the fire which also provided heat in the intimate, social space. At the same time, what Woolf makes clear in this passage is how light also permeates these boundaries, if only in an individual’s experience of them. Though Ralph is escaping from the public space of urban modernity, of omnibuses,

cabs, and crowded streets, when he departs from Cheyne Walk, he carries the memory of the silver and ruddy light back out onto the street with him at the end of the passage.

And yet, light also creates or reaffirms boundaries, for the brighter the light, the deeper the shadow. This is most definitely the case in *The Tunnel*, the fourth chapter-novel of Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, which was published in the same year as Woolf's *Night and Day*, and represents a similarly distant historical moment: London in the 1890s. From the opening chapter of *The Tunnel*, when Miriam Henderson first arrives in London, Richardson uses light to define Miriam's spaces. In her representation of Miriam's room in Mrs Bailey's house on Mornington Road, Richardson introduces it as 'half dark shadow and half brilliant light' (13). Further along in the chapter, she goes into more detail, capturing Miriam's perceptual process:

But the dark yellow graining of the wall-paper was warm. It shone warmly in the stream of light pouring through the barred lattice window. In the further part of the room, darkened by the steep slope of the roof, it gleamed like stained wood. The window space was a little square wooden room, the long low double lattice breaking the roof, the ceiling and the walls warmly reflecting its oblong of bright light. (13)

Here, both the light and the shadow define the room; the latticed window separates Miriam from the outside world, yet throughout the novel, the lights from the city and its streets beyond the pane pour in, always uninvited but not unwelcome. Indeed, throughout *The Tunnel*, Richardson draws her readers' attention to light in a way that is consistent with her distinctive narrative technique, focusing on Miriam's unfiltered sensory perceptions and her thought processes.

Richardson's attention to space in the novel suggests light can also transcend boundaries in a way that parallels narrative style. In *Dorothy Richardson's Art of Memory: Space, Identity, Text* (2011), Bronfen notes that 'if one records the concrete spaces which Miriam experiences, places she sometimes recalls while located in a different site, a clear trajectory of the stations in her pilgrimage emerges' (10). For Richardson, 'London consists of three interior spaces', though I only consider the first two are more relevant here: 'firstly, Miriam's living space, the private space to which she always returns; secondly, the islands, that is, sites which, though initially unfamiliar to Miriam, are semantically encoded [...]'

(Bronfen 18). This is particularly evident in the way in which we return again and again throughout *The Tunnel* to her room in Mrs Bailey's house and her bed, beneath the naked gas jet.

There is a fourth space in Bronfen's paradigm, a 'subspace' which 'encompasses the exterior localities of London, the streets and parks which are situated between the significant interior spaces' (18). One such instance of this occurs early in the novel, when Miriam 'turned out the gas' and 'the window spaces remained faintly alight with a soft light like moonlight'. Richardson describes how '[a]t the window she found a soft bluish radiance cast up from below upon the opposite walls and windows. It went up into the clear blue darkness of the sky' (Richardson 22). At the same time, the pervasiveness of London and its lights, which 'could come freely in day and night through the unscreened happy little panes; light and darkness and darkness and light' facilitates Miriam's growing familiarity with the city (17). In one instance, returning home 'towards midnight', she notices how Tottenham Court Road 'had lost its first terrifying impression and had become part of her home'. Indeed, she feels that '[t]here was nothing in the world that could come nearer to her than the curious half twilight half moonlight effect of lamplit Endsleigh Gardens opening out of Gower Place' (33).

While Woolf treats space quite differently in her novels, it is also possible to read an alignment of light and narrative style in her fiction. Consider how Woolf describes the light from the 'powerful oil lamp' in Mrs Pearce's front room at the beginning of *Jacob's Room* first discussed in the introduction to this thesis: 'The harsh light fell on the garden; cut straight across the lawn; lit up a child's bucket and a purple aster and reached the hedge' (10). A few pages later, this same light 'blazed out across the patch of grass; fell on the child's green bucket with the gold line round it, and upon the aster which trembled violently beside it' (12). Then the light is extinguished and '[t]he garden went out. It was but a dark patch' (12-13). Not only is the light escaping from Mrs Pearce's front room, but its movement repeatedly draws the reader's attention to the image of the bucket and the aster in the coming storm. Just as narrative voice(s) in the novel transcend the boundaries of individual consciousness, an early iteration of the free indirect discourse Woolf continues to

experiment with in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Waves* (1931), so here the light creates and transcends physical and thematic boundaries.

(Inter)Personal Boundaries

‘[W]e see each other only now and then—’

‘Like lights in a storm’. (Woolf, *Night and Day*, 447)

In *Night and Day*, Woolf explores the boundaries between self and other as well as those between public and private space. She is acutely aware of the differences between light and darkness, the light of day and the light of night, and how public and private space(s) are conceived. Indeed, she captures a moment when the division between what is conceived as public and what is conceived as private is shifting in terms of generational conflict, gender roles, and an increasing sense of individual autonomy. This moment coincides with an increase in illumination in public spaces, due to the adoption and increased regulation of gas and electric street lighting throughout the city and, while this increased illumination made the streets safer, it also heightened the visibility of transgressive behaviour, creating a conflict between safety and privacy or intimacy.¹¹² At the same time the fact that ‘wartime controls had increased the efficiency of the supply industry’ was challenging the principle of the competitive supply of electricity by corporations and local authorities to autonomous consumers, as electricity was gradually being considered a public utility (Bowers, *A History*, 161). Yet, while this shift was welcomed by domestic, commercial, and industrial consumers, ‘regulation of electrical distribution [...] provided a more contentious topic’ for the corporations themselves, as ‘their priority was the preservation of the value of their existing investments, confining public control of the generation and co-ordination of bulk electrical supply’ (Gillespie 114). Of course, the autonomy of consumers was preserved in the way in which they consumed electricity and had their houses fit with electricity. But, taken together, these changes signal both a conflict of progressive and conservative values, and a

¹¹² As I have already discussed, up until the Great War, gas remained the predominant form of street lighting in London; approximately one in four of London’s ‘public gas and electric street lamps’ were electric (Inwood 292; see Bowers, *A History of Electric Light*, 108, 112, 158; Gillespie 114; Inwood 285, 201–292; and Otter 250–251).

clash between the politics of individualism and localisation on the one hand and collectivism and centralisation on the other. Though Woolf is writing about an earlier period, the conflict that marked London's early interwar lightscape is evident in her association of artificial light with themes of watching, looking, observing, overseeing, and surveillance in the novel. The concerns for propriety of the older generation coincide with a certain prurient interest in the relationships that are being negotiated amongst the younger generation, between Katharine and Ralph, William and Cassandra, as well as between Katharine's cousin Cyril and the mother of his two children. As part of this, the double bind of visibility is that artificial illumination increases such connections and creates a possibility for the 'chance encounter', described by Parsons as being essential to the experience of the modern city (21).

Light, often in the concentrated form of the lantern but also in the pools of light cast from a succession of street lamps or the dazzling light emitted from shop windows at night, permits individuals to see as well as be seen. Darkness carries with it the threat of that which cannot be seen and may conceal nefarious or transgressive individuals in the shadows created by the increased street lighting. This is because, as Foucault figures it, night resists order, control, and reason (Bronfen 66). Darkness also gives the impression that whatever transpires at night, regardless of actuality or circumstances, is criminal or immoral. The increased illumination in streets and other public spaces, however, carries its own social consequences for those who are seen at night. Light neither translates into an increased clarity of understanding of what is observed, often at a distance, nor accompanies an immediate reconsideration of acceptable nocturnal behaviour. In *Night and Day*, this disjunction is particularly evident in the conflicting attitudes regarding visibility, propriety, privacy, and comprehensibility.

After leaving a social gathering at Mary's flat, Katharine and William walk along the Embankment—a recurrent location in literary representations of nocturnal London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to being one of the first public spaces to adopt electric lighting, the Embankment is perhaps the most visible example of London's modernisation in the second half of the nineteenth century (Nead 29). Constructed in three stages between 1862 and 1874, the Embankment was initially conceived as a part of Sir

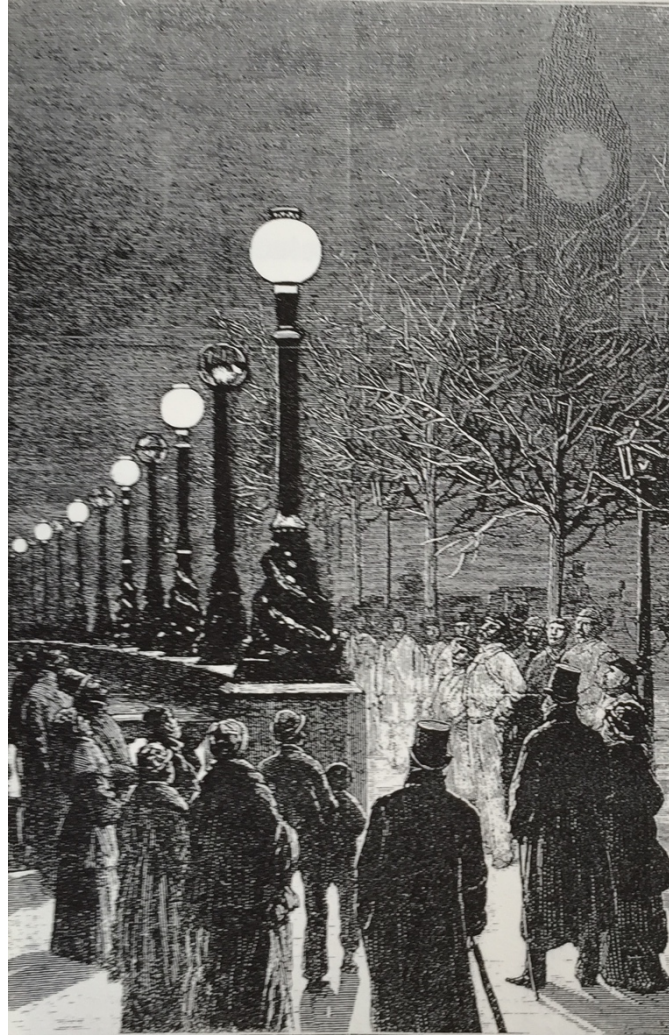


Figure 5.1: ‘Jablochkoff Candles on the Victorian Embankment, December 1878’ from Brian Bowers’s *Lengthening the Day: A History of Lighting Technology* (1998), 81.

Christopher Wren’s plan for London after the Great Fire of 1666 (Gibbon and Bell 32–33). At a cost of more than £2,400,000, the project was undertaken by the newly-formed MBW in order to ‘put an end to rotting waste on the mud banks of the Thames’ and ‘unblock the traffic congestion in the nearby main streets’ (Nead 53). As Nead explains, the Embankment wrought more than superficial changes; its construction included improvements to the city’s subterranean infrastructure—the provision of water and gas, sewerage, and transportation—that effectively altered ‘the historical relationship between the city and the river’ (54, 53). In literary representations of the Embankment, the experience is often conceived in terms of the iconic cast-iron lamp standards featuring two intertwined sturgeons, designed by George



Figure 5.2: Rose Barton, *The Last Lamp, Thames Embankment* from *Familiar London* (1904).

John Vulliamy (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2).¹¹³ By building the lamps into their design, the MBW ensured that the Embankments would become a place where people would come to walk, to see and be seen.

In *Liza of Lambeth*, Maugham describes ‘night on the Embankment’ as ‘cold and dreary’; though the ‘light fog covered the river-bank, and made the lamps glow out dim and large’ (45). Wells too includes the ‘desolate Embankment’—an escape from ‘the shops and crowds’—as the final stop on Lewisham and Ethel’s romantic Christmas ramble across the city in *Love and Mr Lewisham* (90). In Forster’s *Howards End*, with its ‘lamps and plane trees’ and ‘gentlefolk in evening dress, who had strolled out from the houses behind to enjoy fresh air and the whisper of the rising tide’, the Embankment was ‘an open space used

¹¹³ In *Familiar London*, from which this image is taken, Barton describes the experience of walking along the Chelsea Embankment at dusk: ‘The lights were just being lit; all outlines were lost in mysterious beauty; and as I walked along I meditated on how truly Whistler had interpreted the scene’ (91–92). Barton quotes the following passage from Whistler’s ‘Ten O’Clock’ lecture (1885): ‘And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairyland is before us [...]’ (Whistler, qtd. in Barton 92).

rightly'; it 'struck a note of dignity that is rare in English cities' (*Howards End*, 135). For Margaret and Helen, the Embankment proves a perfect vantage point from which to watch the 'vast theatre' of the city, which for Margaret, seemed in 'continual flux' (135, 184). It also stages their chance encounter with Mr Wilcox, who seems to disapprove of their 'sit[ting] out on Chelsea Embankment without a male escort' (137). In John Cournos's *Babel*, Gombarov's experience of London is marked by 'a wall of impenetrable fog' that 'brooded over London like an immense yet gentle fowl' (276). On such days the view of London Bridge from the Thames Embankment comforts him with its 'beautiful unreality' (276). Thus, though the Embankment promotes movement, it also provides a fixed location to which characters can return, or from which they can look out onto the city.

Alone together, William and Katharine are visible in a public space. The moonlight invokes the trope of illicit love while increasing visibility and, in theory, safety. Their public aloneness makes William uncomfortable, as he is in love with her, and is, for this reason, more concerned about appearances. Concerned they are contravening the standards of conduct in which he believes, he misreads Katharine's eagerness to return home as her being conscious of her reputation (Woolf 66). In turn, she derides his outmoded concern for her reputation, and though William's concerns are made to appear thus for comedic and thematic effect, they are not without merit, as what others have observed later threatens his relationship with Katharine's cousin Cassandra as well as Katharine's relationship with Ralph. While Katharine may not have understood the possible consequences of being seen with William on the Embankment at the time, her family's reaction to the discovery that her cousin Cyril is cohabiting with the mother of his children presages their reaction to her decision to end her engagement with William and enter into a relationship of sorts with Ralph. Their reaction also galvanises her ideas about relationships and the importance of her autonomy.

As the family's ostensible patriarch, Katharine's father should be responsible for addressing the situation which he considers a matter of Cyril 'behaving in a very foolish manner' (109). When Katharine wonders whether her father should force Cyril to get married, though he replies that 'it's none of our affair', what he means is that it should be

none of 'his' affair (110). For, by having his daughter report it to her mother on his behalf, he simply transfers his responsibility, relying on his wife's meddlesome nature and her obligation to interfere and protect the family name. While Woolf's portrayal of Mrs Hilbery and her sister-in-law, Mrs Milvain, in the subsequent scenes is an unflattering caricature of the meddlesome, middle-aged upper-middle-class woman, it nevertheless reveals the burden placed on women to maintain the reputation of their families. Katharine's indecision about 'what she thought of Cyril's misbehaviour' turns to disillusionment when she learns her aunt has been spying on Cyril and his 'wife', and when she hears her aunt and mother conspiring against her cousin, his lover, and their children as though they were not autonomous beings: 'How they talked and moralised and made up stories to suit their own versions of the becoming, and secretly praised their own devotion and tact!' (113, 122, 125).

Throughout the novel, Katharine's aunts act as proxies for her parents, not only as receptors for gossip but as active agents of surveillance. Later in the novel, Mrs Milvain pays another call to the house on Cheyne Walk to dutifully report and confirm what others have seen the two almost-couples doing:

People are saying that William goes everywhere with you and Cassandra, and that he is al-ways paying her attentions. [...] At the Zoo they were seen alone together. [...] They say his manner is very marked—he is quite different when she is there. (428)

Mrs Milvain essentially admits she has 'been spying upon [them, ...] following [them] about London, overhearing what people are saying' (432). Mrs Milvain's confrontation of her niece culminates when Katharine rejects her advice about 'married love' and asks her aunt to leave, declaring: 'We don't understand each other' (430, 429). This lack of understanding recurs with William ('You've never understood each other', Cassandra explains), with her father, who admits that he is 'completely in the dark' about Cassandra's relationship with William, with her mother ('we're different') and with herself, as 'gaining upon [her] clearness or sight against her will, and to her dislike, was a flood of confusion, of relief, of certainty, of humility, of desire [...]' (436, 488, 509 476). This series of misunderstandings demonstrates the importance of comprehension and the prominence of surveillance in the novel. Indeed, many instances of not only observation but surveillance are made possible by street

lighting—as I will discuss below—so that the reader becomes complicit with the surveilling gaze of the undetected observer. And, while Woolf is not explicit that Mrs Milvain and her proxies conduct their surveillance with the aid of artificial light, nor that they are encouraged by improved illuminary conditions, she has established that consequences of improved visibility and the disjunctive attitudes towards what behaviour is acceptable in public at night.

The conflict between visibility and privacy culminates when her father discovers she has broken her engagement to William Rodney—‘you’ve very strange ideas of the proper way to behave People have drawn certain conclusions [...]’—and, when she refuses to disclose the nature of her relationship with Ralph Denham, he prohibits the latter from entering the family home (500). Mr Hilbery cannot stand not-knowing, seeing only in a half-light, so to speak, something which Katharine and Ralph themselves proclaim nearly impossible to express in words. This is, however, precisely the point of Woolf’s fiction here: to write around the ineffable and experiences of it. Yet, the position from which Mr Hilbery and his sister are operating rests on the assumption that light should equal knowledge or comprehension and that complete comprehension is not only desirable but achievable. Woolf’s free indirect discourse, supplemented by the city’s fragmentary illuminary conditions, disrupts these assumptions, as social propriety—the polite manifestation of control—gives way to individual autonomy. This effect is particularly apparent in Woolf’s description of Katharine’s visits to Lincoln’s Inn Fields in search of Ralph, a passage which recalls the passage in ‘Street Haunting’ in which she develops the relationship between urban observer and visual phenomenon:

The blend of daylight and lamplight made her an invisible spectator, just as it gave the people who passed her a semi-transparent quality, and left the faces pale ivory ovals in which the eyes alone were dark. They tended the enormous rush of the current—the great flow, the deep stream, the unquenchable tide. She stood unobserved and absorbed, glorying openly in the rapture that had run subterraneously all day. (463)

Not quite reduced to an eye/I, Katharine’s perceptions are interpenetrated with those of the crowd; her autonomy as urban observer takes the form of ‘glorying’ in the experience.

What is often cast as a generational conflict is, in fact, also an ideological one, as is evident from the way in which Mrs Hilbery approaches Katharine’s decision to break her

engagement with William. For, the certainty of Mrs Hilbery's romantic ideals deflates the misinformed speculations of her sister-in-law as well as her daughter's equivocations. In her attempt to convince Katharine that marriage is the only way forward, Mrs Hilbery uses terms her daughter can understand—the language of light—to articulate the certainty she felt in the moment when she saw the play of light on the water's surface during her honeymoon on an ocean steamer (508–509). Yet, the language of light is not universal, as the lights that confirm her mother's certainty, for Katherine, come to represent the 'fragmentary nature of their relationship': "we see each other only now and then—" / "Like lights in a storm" (498, 447). For Katharine, her mother's dream, recalled from the not-so-distant past, is just an 'ancient fairy tale', one of the many she has heard while working with her mother on her late grandfather's biography: her mother 'knew [she] was in love; but we're different' (508, 509). The 'dream' recalls Woolf's analogy for Mrs Hilbery's 'spells of inspiration' being akin to 'will-o'-the wisp' (508, 37). However, as inherited familial mythology, the 'fairy tale' helps Katharine approach that 'enchanted region' described at the close of the novel. This 'enchanted region' is a place where daydream and reality can interpenetrate to create a new reality: 'Moments, fragments, a second vision, and then the flying waters, the winds dissipating and dissolving; then, too, the recollection from chaos, the return of security, the earth firm, superb and brilliant in the sun' (534).

Public street lighting is what permits Katharine and William, William and Cassandra, and Katharine and Ralph to be surveilled. As I've suggested above, the overhead glow cast by lights hung from lamp posts also allows them to surveil others. When Ralph follows William and Katharine from Mary's flat on the Strand to and along the Embankment, despite his distance, he can see them well enough in the lights from the street to recognise them, though 'the effect of light and shadow, which seemed to increase their height, was to make them mysterious and significant' (63). His surveillance, while benign, is deliberate, not coincidental, but the experience is uncanny, and what he sees lacks context, rendering any observations he might make inconclusive, and potentially erroneous. It also realises William's worries that a friend might see him and Katharine together, though the

consequences he fears are not so much destructive as transformative, for they serve as a catalyst for Ralph's desire for Katharine.

In the developing language of public space, street lighting, especially the lamp post, is associated with the 'chance encounter', as it allows those who would otherwise be strangers in the night to recognise each other (and their common purpose) upon a chance meeting. This is the case when, later that same night, Ralph encounters William 'beneath a lamp-post' (68). After a brief conversation on the street, 'with his eye on the lamp-post' and passing under a series of 'monitory lamp-post[s]', he returns with William to the latter's rooms (68, 69). Yet, despite this familiarity, the cone of light created beneath the lamp post is a common meeting place to which Ralph and William return throughout the novel, as its light creates a sense of familiarity and the conditions of recognition in a way that both counters and accompanies the strangeness of the night. At the same time, there is a double standard by which William and Ralph's nocturnal encounters and interactions are treated, especially when compared to those of Mary or Katharine, for the two men can be alone, or rather alone together, without eliciting much suspicion. This suggests that, as yet, the 'chance encounter' is not an urban experience accessible to women, whether or not they possess the burgeoning autonomy of the urban observer.

For this reason, it is important to read the lamp post not merely as a place of encounter but also of realisation, since the concentration of light from its lamp focuses the narrative and isolates the individuals from that which lies beyond its light. It is not only the place in which Katharine becomes most certain of her love for Ralph, looking 'at his face isolated in the little circle of light', but also that where William realises that Ralph aspires to marry Katharine (329). In this latter instance, Woolf is most explicit about the lamp post's epiphanic potential:

[William and Ralph] looked at each other, queerly, in the light of the lamp. Fools! They seemed to confess to each other the extreme depths of their folly. For the moment, under the lamp-post, they seemed to be aware of some common knowledge [...]. (420)

The two men, illuminated by light from above, are at their most visible, most vulnerable.

They are made 'common' by the light, but they are also strangers ('Fools!') to each other and

themselves for what they cannot know and are unable to express. This light makes visible a connection that exists between them—a sort of homosocial bond, to borrow Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's term—as their relationship with each other is defined by a shared romantic interest towards Katharine. Thus, we might understand public light as not only that which connects individuals but also that which exposes these connections. And yet, this a moment in which what is overseen or experienced can only be approximated, for they only 'seem to confess' and they only 'seem to be aware of some common knowledge'—the interactions between the two men and their significance can only be presented as speculation. Even under the maximum illumination possible at night in the street, a complete and total comprehension of the scene remains unattainable; this ineffability becomes a condition for experiences of and in the modern metropolis.

These fictions can be read in terms of the re-configuration of boundaries between public and private, between generations and genders, between self and other, as well as between day and night, natural and artificial illumination. This is a re-configuration Woolf frames at the close of her novel, when Ralph and Katharine establish their precepts of 'friendship'—an action which gesturally eschews the illusory conceptions they have developed of each other during the day. In this moment, they risk divulging their innermost selves to each other because of the sincerity they insist this 'friendship' requires. Katharine frames the considerations of the novel most perceptively:

Why, she reflected, should there be this perpetual disparity between thought and action, between the life of solitude and the life of society, this astonishing precipice on one side of which the soul was active and in broad daylight, on the other side of which it was contemplative and dark as night? Was it not possible to step from one to the other, erect, and without essential change? Was this not the chance he offered her—the rare and wonderful chance of friendship? (365)

For Woolf, the 'astonishing precipice' Katharine imagines to describe the conflicting realms of night and day, of dreams and realities, can only be bridged by her 'friendship' with Ralph. This solution is puzzling, as it suggests that, by succumbing to the heteronormative values such a relationship could represent (i.e. marriage), Katharine can resolve the confusion created by the 'perceptual disparity' she perceives. The 'wonderful chance' Ralph offers Katharine is the subversive possibility of a life together 'without essential change', in which

Ralph supports rather than suppresses Katharine's existential, perceptual, and experiential autonomy. She is excited by the possibilities for creativity, collaboration, and companionship such a relationship can offer her. Yet she struggles with the fear of losing control of her own life, of losing particularity, of losing distinctness: of becoming lost in the unending parade of lights and sights and sounds in the great mass of the city that might be her relationship with Ralph Denham (529). At the same time, however, the precepts the two lovers establish represent the possibility of a new way of experiencing the city, revising the status of its streets and public spaces as male-only places to include those of women such as Katharine and Mary who were increasingly defining the urban on their own terms—a change that was furthered by increased illumination in the city.

Gender

How beautiful a London street is then, with its islands of light, and its long groves of darkness. (Woolf, 'Street Haunting', 187)

In 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', Virginia Woolf reflects that an evening of 'rambling the streets of London' is the 'greatest pleasure' (187).¹¹⁴ Though her representations of characters walking the city streets in novels like *Mrs Dalloway* and *Jacob's Room* might be more familiar, Woolf's essay is significant because it solidifies the association of what she calls 'street haunting' with one's sensual, emotional, and intellectual experience of the city. Part encomium to the city at night, part meditation on the relationship between consumerism, women's urban autonomy, and the city's illumination, 'Street Haunting' belongs to a longer literary tradition of depicting walking the streets of London by night and radiates from the nineteenth century tradition of the *flâneur*.¹¹⁵ In her essay, 'street haunting' is transgressive because she feels the need for an 'excuse' or to use a 'pretext' to justify her deeper desire for 'rambling the streets of London'; her urban experiences are

¹¹⁴ Woolf's essay was first published in the *Yale Review*, NS 17 (Oct. 1927). The version quoted here is from David Bradshaw's edition of *Selected Essays* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹¹⁵ For a recent and extensive discussion of such representations, see Matthew Beaumont's *Nightwalking* (2015).

mitigated by a sense that '[o]ne must, one always must, do something or other; it is not allowed one simply to enjoy oneself' (177, 185).

Despite the similarities in the way she explores the sensual delights of the city by night, characterising her pleasure as a desire to be anonymous in a crowd and to be delighted by the stimulation of urban culture, implicit in the above sentiment is that her experience will always be less autonomous than that of the *flâneur*, whose gender is male by default. And, though the existence of the *flâneuse*—the female equivalent of the *flâneur*—is a critically contested concept, Woolf's description of 'street haunting' proposes an alternative mode of experiencing and representing the city to that offered by the *flâneur*, a mode that is aware of and engages with the Baudelairian figure but is neither derivative of nor equivalent to it.¹¹⁶ Other scholars have argued convincingly for treating the term *flâneur* as both an ideologically and historically contingent term, for an understanding of the 'urban observer' that extends into the early twentieth century and thus includes more female experiences, and for understanding the *flâneuse* as more than just a female *flâneur*.¹¹⁷ Deborah Parsons, for instance, proposes that we reconsider walking 'as extending into thinking and writing in terms of aesthetic engagement with its spatial, situational surroundings', arguing that this connection manifests differently in the male and female urban observers, as the former's interaction with the city is characterised by its detachment and the latter by its 'aesthetic engagement' (72). While I am indebted to these findings, I am here more interested in the connections Woolf draws in the essay between her experience of, and imaginative engagement with London and its unique lightscape. For Woolf, the city's sensual delights are predicated on its illuminary conditions:

How beautiful a street is in winter! It is at once revealed and obscured. Here vaguely one can trace symmetrical straight avenues of doors and windows; here under the lamps are floating islands of pale light through which pass quickly bright men and women, who, for all their poverty and shabbiness, wear a certain look of unreality, an

¹¹⁶ A number of excellent studies have approached this topic from different perspectives, notably Janet Wolff's 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity' (1985), Griselda Pollock's *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (2012), and Elizabeth Wilson's 'The Invisible Flâneur' (1992). More recently, in *Streetwalking in the Metropolis* (2000), Deborah Parsons has demythologised the *flâneur*.

¹¹⁷ I am thinking here of Nead's *Victorian Babylon* and Parsons's *Streetwalking*.

air of triumph, as if they had given life the slip, so that life, deceived of her prey, blunders on without them. But, after all, we are only gliding smoothly on the surface. The eye is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure. It floats us smoothly down a stream, resting, pausing, the brain sleeps perhaps as it looks.

How beautiful a London street is then, with its islands of light, and its long groves of darkness [...]. ('Street Haunting', 178)

This passage is significant for a number of reasons, not in the least as it offers a critical apparatus for approaching the relationship between urban observer and visual phenomenon. Firstly, it demonstrates how essential light is to Woolf's ideal urban observer, as she aligns the eye with illumination so that illumination subtends vision. In the chiaroscuro of the 'islands of light and long groves of darkness', the eye 'floats' from island to island, taking in a series of seemingly disconnected images. In this way light also indirectly subtends narration, though the eye cannot 'compose [images] in such a way as to bring out their more obscure angles and relationships' and make a unified or coherent whole out of their fragments (179). Light may elide the experiences of the urban observer but it does not necessarily connect them. Secondly, in this passage, Woolf engages with three experiences Parsons identifies in her re-reading of Baudelaire as significant to the modern city: 'ephemerality, transience, and the chance encounter' (1). Woolf treats beauty as something that is 'at once revealed and obscured'; figures 'pass quickly' through 'floating island[s] of pale light', and one can only 'vaguely [...] trace' the shapes of the sensory world. Because of the way the eye moves, images seem impermanent, though in this passage, as in the mind, they are superimposed, rendering one's experience of light in the city like a palimpsest.

Thirdly, this passage—taken in the context of the essay as a whole—suggests that, for Woolf, urban observing can be a dissociative process, as the observer is separated both from the subjects of her gaze—the 'bright men and women' who 'wear a certain look of unreality'—and from herself, reduced only to her 'eye', her 'brain'.¹¹⁸ This is a process

¹¹⁸ Both Parsons and Lee also comment on this passage, respectively noting that it 'epitomizes the perspective of the woman amidst the crowds, empathizing to the point of identification with strangers glimpsed in passing in the city' (Parsons 27). In it Woolf 'becomes "an enormous eye" which can leave "I" behind, leave the "tether" or a "single mind" and "the straight lines of personality", and deviate into the "bodies and minds of others"' (Lee 413). Parsons also draws on the work of Georg Simmel, for whom, in *The Philosophy of Money*, the 'artistic gaze [...] needs this detachment in order to find formalized beauty in the city, which "becomes aesthetic only as a result of increasing distance, abstraction and sublimation"' (Parsons 30).

informed by the street's illuminary conditions. Yet, 'street haunting' can also be a way of writing the self across the city, as in her urban reverie, facilitated by her use of free indirect discourse and memory, Woolf becomes others in her narrative imagination, and encounters past selves (186–187). The city, then, is the ultimate locus of the interpenetration of past and present, temporal boundaries which are delimited by the larger chiaroscuro of night/day.

Finally, though Woolf privileges the visual in this passage, 'street haunting' is not only a visual experience essential to her imaginative engagement with the city but supplementary to the movements of her 'floating', 'gliding' eye. Thus, if walking the city by night is a bodily experience, walking is a way of knowing.¹¹⁹ On 31 May 1928, Woolf observed in her diary that 'London, itself perpetually attracts, stimulates, gives me a play & a story & a poem, without any trouble, save that of moving my legs through the streets' (*Diaries* IV, 186). Discussing Woolf's notebooks, Hermione Lee remarks that

[s]he [(Woolf)] wanted boundaries to overlap: it was a form of cross-fertilisation. Above all, she wanted reading and writing to infiltrate each other. In [her essay] 'How Should One Read a Book?', both reading and writing are compared to walking through city streets. (413)

'Street Haunting' revisits and formalises ideas Woolf first articulated in *Night and Day*, where she explores the relationship between the urban observer and London's distinctive lightscape. *Night and Day* is often regarded as Woolf's most traditional and least experimental work, in part due to how Woolf herself later conceived it (*Letters* IV, 231). Despite its status as work-in-practice, the novel is important not only because of the way it prefigures the experimentation of her later novels but also, in its own right, because of Woolf's privileging the experience of the female observer and her representation of the city's light. Provisionally entitled 'Dreams and Realities', the novel traces the lives, aspirations, and relationships of four intertwined characters: Katharine Hilbery, the daughter of a respected bourgeois family; Ralph Denham, a solicitor from a large family in Highgate; William Rodney, a poet and a bureaucrat with a good name and an overbearing concern with

¹¹⁹ I am here indebted to the observation Marvin makes in *When Old Technologies Were New* that the 'body is the most familiar of all communicative modes, as well as the sensible center of human experience' (109). See also Beaumont (11), Parsons (41), and Nead (7).

appearing the gentleman; and Mary Datchet, a suffragist from a rural parsonage now living and working in London. Though each one is driven by their own dreams and realities, their nocturnal and diurnal perambulations are at the heart of their relationships with one another and of the narrative itself. Together, Katharine, Ralph, William, and Mary represent the possibilities available to individuals in a society on the cusp of great social change, in the ways in which they adopt or eschew the traditions and mores that typify their parents' generation.

This was a liminal moment Woolf herself experienced—the seven years after the death of her mother, Julia Stephen, in 1895 until the death of her father, Leslie Stephen, in 1904 in which she lived at 22 Hyde Park Gate. Reflecting on this experience in 'A Sketch of the Past', written in the last two years of her life, she remarks that '[t]wo different ages confronted each other in the drawing room at Hyde Park Gate. The Victorian age and the Edwardian age' (160). In her mind, her father and her two half-brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth, 'were living say in 1910' and she and her sister, Vanessa, 'were living in 1860' (161). Describing her childhood home as 'the cage', it is clear where Woolf stood on the society to which she was expected to belong and why she felt it was so important to revisit this period in fiction (128).

Until the end of the Edwardian period, the dominant representations of women in the city had been as objects of the male gaze—whether as subversive, transgressive, or exceptional—and were based on perceptions of the urban woman's lack of respectability and lower social status.¹²⁰ Though it was not acceptable for women of certain social positions to be unaccompanied in the city, especially at night, working class and impoverished women could not afford such scruples.¹²¹ Both Woolf's predecessors—female authors, artists, and urban observers such as Amy Levy, Berthe Morisot, Edith Wharton, Kate Chopin, and Olive Schreiner—as well as the New Women types represented in fiction—Miss Heydinger in

¹²⁰ According to Humphreys, 'women began to feel freer about moving out in to the public spaces of the city and speaking out about sexual desire and against their own sexualization and objectification in the public, specifically urban sphere' in the 1880s (608).

¹²¹ For more on this, see Leonore Davidoff's *The Best Social Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

Wells's *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1899), and Marian Yule in Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), to name a few—are often considered exceptions to the virtual nonexistence of a 'female urban expression' or cited as proof of the impossibility of the *flâneuse* in a world where women lacked the 'freedom to walk and gaze in public spaces' (Parsons 4–5, 6). This is not to say that women did not have urban experiences, rather that such experiences were rarely recorded by men and, even more rarely, by women themselves. Where Woolf is concerned, she offers not only the possibility of a female urban observer, but two possible models, contrasting the experiences of Katharine and Mary. While her use of free indirect discourse may not be as established and finessed as it is in her later novels, especially in *Mrs Dalloway*, she uses it to move between multiple perspectives. Woolf's use of this narrative technique 'acknowledges the variety, fragmentation, and sense of being situated that are inherent within subjectivity', as well as the multiplicity of the female urban experience (Snaith 138). She does not portray the city 'as a monolithic, fixed realm, but as the meeting of the empirical fact and private interpretation and response' and, in giving a 'voice to many', as the 'narrator is continually surrendering the story to the various characters', she establishes an experience of the city as diverse as her characters (Snaith 146). For, with no fixed perspective, no single voice or experience has more authority than the others, allowing the female urban experience to flourish, to be discordant.

Katharine and Mary represent different ways in which women of diverse circumstances interact with, and relate to, the city. Whereas Katharine, aged twenty-seven, lives with her parents in a very affluent part of Chelsea, Mary, who is a few years younger than Katharine, works for a suffragist organisation in their office in Russell Square and has lived in London semi-independently for six months. While Mary is autonomous in terms of how she spends her time, where she lives, and with whom she associates, she is nevertheless financially dependent on her father, a country cleric. At this time, very few middle-class women earned money from their work, which was primarily voluntary. Woolf, for instance, gave classes at Morley College in 1905, but was not paid for her work (Whitworth 10–11). While both women are relatively young and technically spinsters, Mary's experience of the city is more indicative of the New Woman's relationship with the city than that of Katharine.

The Hilbery's liberal values afford Katharine a certain degree of autonomy, though their social prominence and literary pedigree mean she is nevertheless obliged to participate in the 'tea-parties of elderly distinguished people' hosted by her mother and to pay social calls to family friends (3). Mary, lacking these social and class connections, has no such obligations and, as a result, has greater autonomy in the city and in her daily life. This contrast is particularly evident in the reasons for which both Mary and Katharine walk about the city; for the former it is part of the pattern of her workday, while for the latter it is a form of leisure, of escape.

Katharine's primary occupation, helping her mother prepare her grandfather's biography, does not permit her interactions with the city. Mary's at-homes—informal social occasions where friends and acquaintances meet up to participate in passionate political and intellectual debate and to give papers, as William does—offer Katharine a greater opportunity to engage with those outside her class and neighbourhood than her 'employment' or family life permit.¹²² As such, Mary is arguably a bigger influence in expanding Katharine's world than any of the novel's male characters. These interactions also tend to occur at night, though some of Katharine's solitary forays into the city involve running errands, but many are just to wander. These forays elicit experiences she has difficulty expressing. For, though walking the city streets provides an escape from the confines of her domestic life as well as a location for autonomous thinking, the streets also coincide with a desire she cannot quite articulate. In one such instance, while walking with Ralph after taking tea with Mary, Katharine shuts out her confused thoughts about Ralph and Mary 'from all share in the crowded street, with its pendant necklace of lamps, its lighted windows, and its throng of men and women, which exhilarated her to such an extent that she very nearly forgot her companion' (97). Not only does this passage produce the first of the novel's two most significant illuminary metaphors—'the pendant necklace of lamps'—but it also demonstrates the way in which the

¹²²These at-homes are reminiscent of those hosted by Thoby Stephen shortly after he, Virginia and Vanessa moved to 46 Gordon Square in 1904 (Lee 208–215; Whitworth 10–11). It was from this group of young men—many of whom Thoby and his brother Adrian had met while at Cambridge—and women that the Bloomsbury Group later coalesced.

urban environment can serve as an extinction of the self, and the sensual experience of the streets as a distraction from present concerns. A similar distraction occurs later in the novel, when, after an afternoon of paying calls with her mother and before a dinner commitment with William, Katharine decides to wander from Bond Street to Temple: the ‘flow of faces streaming on either side of her had hypnotised her into a mood of profound despondency, to which her expectation of an evening alone with Rodney contributed’ (288).

For Woolf, night is an essential condition of such an experience—a sentiment she more fully articulates in ‘Street Haunting’, wherein at night ‘the champagne brightness of the air and the sociability of the streets are grateful’ and the ‘evening hour, too, gives us the irresponsibility which darkness and lamplight bestow’ (177).¹²³ In another instance, following an afternoon of paying social calls with her mother, when Katharine decides to wander from Bond Street to Temple rather than to visit William, the indecision and emotional crisis prompted by her wanderings bring her to visit Mary, whom she both admires and envies for ‘living alone and having [her] own things’ (291). The city strengthens connections between the two women and the anonymity of the street allows her the solitude necessary to process existential questions, while the association of private space with private thoughts is inverted.

Mary, on the other hand, conceives of her experience of the city in a manner more similar to what Woolf describes in ‘Street Haunting’. She has a greater imaginative engagement with the city and, unlike Katharine, finds the anonymity offered by the crowd to be unifying rather than dissociative. For, in the city, ‘she liked to think herself one of the workers [...] [;] she liked to pretend that she was indistinguishable from the rest’ (76). Mary is, of course, not ‘indistinguishable’, as her inner processes are distinct from those she

¹²³ In *Night Passages*, Bronfen explores the importance of night to Woolf, arguing that the author is ‘equally concerned with counting life in nights as much as in days’ because she ‘thinks of the day in relation to and in terms of the night’ (404). As the culmination of her study on the relationship of night to the Enlightenment project, which attempted to extinguish the night and its clandestine associations, Bronfen proposes that Woolf’s ‘nocturnal scenes’ offer a conclusive revision of the Enlightenment project, as they ‘ultimately always lead back into a day’ (404).

imagines herself among. Rather, her observations and reflections upon these urban experiences make her exceptional.

Moreover, Mary's imaginative engagement with the city produces not only the second of the novel's most significant illuminary metaphors—the 'vast electric light, casting radiance upon the myriads of men and women who crowded round it'—but also addresses a number of tropes associated with urban modernity: the city versus the country, the relationship between London and Empire, and the influence of technology on daily life (46). Working with wool in her rooms near the Strand while waiting for her guests to arrive for her Wednesday at-home, she conjures up images of past experiences, each of which 'had merged [...] in the wonderful maze of London' in which she is 'at the very center' (46). Framing her progress as the move from somewhat rustic beginnings to the 'wonderful maze' of civilisation, Woolf perpetuates the association of modernity and civilisation with the city Williams identified in *The Country and the City* as having been constructed by writers and artists over time. In *Night and Day*, the metaphor of the city as 'a vast electric light' updates the metonymic association of civilisation with the city's lights for the Edwardian imagination.

And yet while it is evident from this passage that Woolf contributes to the portrayal of London as having an unparalleled importance and of the modern urban experience as being the most desirable experience, this metaphor is not without its problems. For the 'vast electric light' is the product of a single, intense source of illumination. Its purpose is to cast a general, yet overwhelming beam (i.e. the collection of many rays) or light, thereby illuminating the whole city, perhaps even the Empire, at once. The concept behind it makes a case for the undesirability of over-illumination. As the editor of *The Electrician*, a popular technical journal, wrote, 'to light a whole city with a huge electrical sun is a great scientific achievement; but it is not the sort of light that any body wants' (qtd. in Otter 9). Taken as a metaphor for narration, it further betrays the undesirability of total narrative omniscience, especially when compared with the Katharine's 'pendant necklace of lamps' or 'the islands of light and long groves of darkness' from 'Street Haunting', which more accurately portray Woolf's preference for free indirect discourse. Indeed, throughout the novel, Woolf depicts a

rich illuminary lightscape which complements perceptual processes, for, though shadows can only fall when light is cast, too much light extinguishes particularity, nuances, and variegation produced by the interplay of light and dark. As a representation of artificial light in the novel, however, the image of the ‘vast electric light’ is at odds with Woolf’s careful depiction of a rich, diverse lightscape. For though the light ‘cast[s] radiance upon the myriads of men and women who crowded round it’, the crowds are attracted to the light, to the city like moths and the light, like London itself, extends its influence like rays beyond the city, to the ends of the Empire. Ultimately, however, the ‘vast electric light’ is confined to Mary’s imaginative engagement with the city; she is brought back to the present moment by the ‘nine mellow strokes [...] from the great clock at Westminster itself’ (46). Yet for both women, though they use different illuminary metaphors to articulate their engagement with the city, light remains an important and perceptive way of comprehending the city.

With these metaphors in mind, the comparison Woolf invites by contrasting Mary’s and Katharine’s urban experiences is important because of the way it promotes a plurality of female experiences in the city, privileging their female scopic authority. Though both women are friends, each, at times, appears resentful of the autonomy or advantages they perceive the other to possess and each desires the happiness for which they feel they must compete. This false competition is indicative of the limited scope for female autonomy and for the fulfilment of female desire during the Edwardian period—a limitation which contributes to the prevention of the widespread emancipation of the female experience, urban or otherwise—as well as a tendency to categorise non-transgressive, non-subversive female urban experiences as exceptional. And yet, by privileging alternative, female urban experiences, in which women interact with London in new and sometimes transgressive ways, Woolf is writing modern London—and its distinct lightscape—into being.

Casting a Glow

In both Woolf and Richardson’s novels, lights can often be read as what Leo Mellor refers to as mere ‘sensations in the city’ (205). They are, however, shared sensations that, over time and after successive readings, form a palimpsest of illuminary experiences. And, though

Philip Tew and Alex Murray propose that we see London as a ‘rapidly changing space of movement, crowds, consumerism, technology, architecture, and a dizzying vortex of novel experiences’ that ‘transformed modern writing by placing great demands on the means of representation’, London’s lights offer a still point in this ‘dizzying vortex’, gesturing towards both the ephemeral and the eternal (113).

CONCLUSION

A New Light?

There are, as we have seen, small and general changes in the way that light is described as a visual phenomenon after the advent of the electric light, most of all in its role as an indicator of social conditions. While there continues to be a depiction of existing technology alongside emerging technology, these changes are especially visible in the way in which incremental advances are portrayed. Moreover, the control over lighting in fiction becomes increasingly prevalent as the century progresses. Elizabeth Bowen exemplifies this when, in ‘New Waves of the Future’ (1969), she writes that

How light affects us, primitively sometimes, and sometimes subtly, we are beginning to learn. Our century is light-conscious, as was no other. We react more knowingly than our forefathers to light’s dramas, variations, and possibilities’. (42)

What is interesting about what Bowen proposes here is that the particular lightscape that evolved out of the administrative and bureaucratic difficulties of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as the reluctant adoption of electric light in London has conditioned Londoners as well as those interested in the history of London and its literary representations, to be more receptive. We have become, to reframe Bowen’s observation, more receptive to a developing language of light and to the way in which light informs and shapes physical (and imagined) locations.

In coming to the end of this study, I must acknowledge that I realise that not enough has been done on the history of the electrification of London. Even after my tactical forays into the records of the London Electricity Boards at the London Metropolitan Archives in Islington much remains to be done to explore the idiosyncratic and, indeed, contingent way in which London adopted electricity in its streets, its houses, its galleries, its churches, its museums—its public and private spaces. In this study, I have attempted to identify areas in which texts directly engage with and challenge the traditional associations of electric light with modernity and modernity and the city. For, if modernity depends on seeing, and seeing

depends on light, then the content of the novels that deal with modernity is dictated by the parameters outlined by light and its rays. However, it is not simply true that the novels I have discussed privilege the relationship between light and knowledge because darkness is just as important; rather it is the darkness that now becomes more accentuated as it is contrast with a brighter and more exciting artificial light. In concluding, I would like to turn to a moment in Woolf's *The Waves*, in which Bernard describes the way in which '[l]ight floods the room and drives shadow beyond shadow to where they hang in the folds inscrutable' (243). Mediating on the nature of the shadows, Bernard draws together his thoughts on the way in which his life, his identity, and his consciousness have been structured: 'What does the central shadow hold? Something? Nothing? I do not know' (243). Here the movement of the light is aligned with epistemological uncertainty and Bernard's growing interest in 'the mystery of things'—that which can never be completely resolved.

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¹²⁴ The reader should note that Longworth has also published under the name Deborah Parsons.

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